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The *Cape Times*'s portrayal of school violence

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This study explores the *Cape Times*'s portrayal of school violence in the Western Cape (WC), South Africa, reporting on findings from a qualitative content analysis of 41 news articles retrieved from the SA Media database. The findings shed light on the victims and their victimisation, the perpetrators, as well as the context of the violence, identifying gangsterism, as well as school administrative and community factors as the reasons for violence in WC schools. It is argued that school violence and gangsterism are inextricably linked to the Cape Flats in particular, and that the interaction of forms of inequality and oppression such as racism, class privilege and gender oppression are structural root causes for school violence in this area of the WC. The study highlights the negative consequences of school violence on teaching and learning and on the economy. It is concluded that even if the *Cape Times* paints an exaggerated and atypical picture of violence in the gang-riddled parts of the WC, the detrimental effects thereof on the regions cannot be denied. The study therefore recommends a holistic approach to addressing the structural root causes of school violence where it takes place in the WC.

Keywords: Cape Flats; *Cape Times*; content analysis; education; gangsterism, South Africa

Introduction

The escalation of violence in South African schools has led researchers to conclude that schools are rapidly and increasingly becoming arenas for violence, not only between learners, but also between educators and learners, through interschool rivalries and gangs (Burton, 2008; Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). The Department of Basic Education's General Household Survey, 2012 Report: Focus on Schooling (Department of Basic Education (DBE), Republic of South Africa, 2014) found that over 18% of the close to 14 million learners who attended school across the country in 2012 experienced violence, corporal punishment or verbal abuse at school. Burton and Leoschut's (2013) study reveals that 22.2% of South African learners were subjected to some form of violence (any violent crime, threats of violence, assault, sexual assault, robbery and theft). Whereas the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Republic of South Africa (2014) found that WC learners recorded the second lowest exposure to violence of the nine provinces at 10.7%, the WC emerged as the province with the second highest rate of learner exposure to violence (28.7%) in Burton and Leoschut's (2013) study.¹ Whereas these contradictory statistics may cast doubt on the seriousness of the problem in the WC, when looking at the problem in the media, the *Cape Times* frequently conveys the message to the general public that school violence is a serious problem (Jones, 2013a, 2013b; Mthembu, 2012). Violence in schools is not a new phenomenon and is of great concern worldwide, especially in emerging economies such as South Africa, where children are vulnerable, due to challenges such as racism and poverty (Themane & Osher, 2014).

Violence in the school context can range from psychological to physical forms of violence, including hazing or initiation, assault (physical or sexual), robberies, rape, murder, sexual harassment, intimidation, bullying, shootings, stabbings, gangsterism, drug trafficking, theft of property and vandalism, racially motivated violence and learner protests that turn violent (South African Council for Educators (SACE), 2011). In their study on school violence, Harber and Muthukrishna (2000:424) link school violence with gangsterism, noting that "schools in urban areas, particularly townships are regularly prey to gangsterism. Poverty, unemployment, rural-urban-drift, the availability of guns and general legacy of violence has created a context where gangsters rob schools and kill and rape teachers and students in the process."

Researchers in the USA (Wood & Alleyne, 2010), Russia (Salagaev & Shashkin, 2005), Britain (Fraser, 2013) and South Africa (Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000; Reckson & Becker, 2005) found that youth gang membership has a profound negative influence on school and community safety. Wood and Alleyne (2010:109) write in this regard that gang membership give youths "opportunities for criminal learning".

There is a growing body of research on whether or not, and how school climate and school violence are meaningfully related (cf. e.g., Barnes, Brynard & De Wet, 2012; Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam & Johnson, 2014; Steffgen, Recchia & Viechtbauer, 2013; Zaykowski & Gunter, 2012). A meta-analysis by Steffgen et al. (2013) reviewed studies reporting a relationship between school climate and school violence, in order to summarise the total effect and the direction of these research findings. This meta-analysis of the 36 studies showed a moderate negative relationship between learners' perception of school climate and violence. Attempts to identify factors explaining this relation were not successful. Learners' characteristics (age, gender) and school characteristics (school size, school grade) could not be identified as clear moderators. In addition, subdividing studies' measures into categories did not provide more information of greater effect size between relational, cognitive, affective or organisational school climate, neither did differentiations between committed, experienced or perceptions of violence. Steffgen et al. (2013:308) concluded that even if there are large differences in the theoretical and methodological aspects of school climate and school violence, the overall

effect of the studies included in their meta-analysis “underlined the impact of environmental factors on violent behaviours in schools”. Environmental factors include, but are not limited to, rules and consequences, physical comfort/cleanliness, emotional support and disorder (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009). This study provides an important contribution to the literature on school violence and school climate in highlighting environmental factors – within the school and community contexts – that may contribute to school violence in the WC in general, and the Cape Flats in particular.

Violence in schools accounts for more than a quarter of international school-related news. Within the South African context, crime and violence represent more than 10% of news on schools; and 15% of school-related news on public television focuses on school violence (Janse van Rensburg, 2010). The regularity with which the media reports on school violence confirms that school violence is a newsworthy problem. According to Carlyle, Slater and Chakroff (2008) the media has the power to shape the views of the public regarding what is of importance. Du Plessis (2008) suggests that the media sensationalise incidents of school violence. Jacobs (2014) moreover, argues that due to the unbalanced coverage of school violence in South African newspapers, the public is misinformed. The media’s presentation of atypical events, such as school violence as stereotypical (symptomatic of a culture of violence and the disintegration of schooling) (Muncie, 2012), may well create the perception that school violence is out of control. Privately owned news media’s dual role; namely that of acting as a watchdog in a democracy and being the guardian of the financial interests of its owners and shareholders (Johnson, 2014), necessitate a critical stance towards newspapers as a source of scientific information. Privately owned newspapers such as the *Cape Times* not only disseminate information about school violence, but may also use sensationalism to increase circulation figures (Vettehen, Nuijten & Beentjes, 2005).

Media studies play an important role in raising national awareness and provide context for international comparative studies on school violence. Although lethal shootings in the United States of America (USA) have attracted most of the international media converge and media studies on school violence, the public and researchers in countries such as Japan, Norway and Israel were also made aware of act of violence by means of the news media (Astor, Benbenishty & Marachi, 2006). There is a small, but growing body of research on the incidence of school violence that has attracted the attention of the media (Muschert, 2007). These research studies predominantly focus on a single event, for example, the Columbine (Muschert, 2007), Virginia Tech (Kwon & Moon, 2009) or

Toronto (O’Grady, Parnaby & Schikschneit, 2010) killings, the rape of an Australian girl during a school excursion in Europe (Gannon, 2007) and the ‘samurai sword killing’ in South Africa (De Wet, 2011). De Wet’s media studies (2009, 2013) draw attention to numerous incidents of school violence within specific time frames. Despite the growing research interest in the media’s portrayal of school violence, only a few studies explore the way specific newspapers, namely *Rapport* (De Wet, 2013) and the *New York Times* (Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006), report on school violence. The aforementioned three studies looked into school violence in South Africa, the Columbine massacre, and nine school shootings in the USA, respectively. The current study aims to shed light on a local newspaper’s portrayal of school violence, specifically in the Cape Flats.

The overarching aim of this study is to gain insight into the *Cape Times*’s portrayal of school violence in the WC in general, and the Cape Flats in particular utilising intersectionality as a conceptual approach. In this paper, I argue that the *Cape Times* portrays gangsterism as all-encompassing in schools on the Cape Flats. I argue that school violence and gangsterism are perpetually linked: gang violence is not only a specific manifestation of school violence, gangsterism is also the reason for the high levels of violence inside and outside the school grounds, and gang and “turf” wars define learners and schools on the Cape Flats. I furthermore argue that the *Cape Times*’s portrayal of school violence in the Cape Flats can be understood through the lens of intersectionality theory. Macionis and Gerber (2011:310) define intersectionality theory as “the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantage”. The intersections of race, class and gender are an accepted reality in the fields of womens studies, feminist theory and literary criticism. Black women have become the preferred representative of gender and race intersections in the USA (Holvino, 2010). Kaufman, Hall and Zagura’s (2012) study sheds light on the intersectionality between sex, race/ethnicity and geographical context on incidents of school-associated homicide in the USA. They found that the majority of the incidents occurred in urban areas, involved male victims with male offenders, black and latino offenders and victims living in conditions where the median of youth in poverty is more than 33%, and dispute or gang-related motives. Peguero and Popp’s (2012) study among 12,030 public school learners in the USA suggests that gender intersects with race and ethnicity to produce group-specific relationships between school activities and youth violence. The current study will show that violence in the Cape Flats is fundamentally associated with race, class (poverty stricken Cape Flats) and gender

(gangsterism and gender violence – sexual abuse of female learners by their fellow-learners and educators – as manifestations of masculinity).

Research Methodology

I used articles published in the *Cape Times* as textual data to explore school violence in the WC in general and the Cape Flats in particular. The first edition of the *Cape Times* was published on 27 March 1876. It was the first daily paper in Southern Africa and soon become one of the principal newspapers in the Cape (Shaw, 1999). The newspaper had 200,000 average issue readers during June to September 2014, of whom 90% live within the Cape Peninsula. The daily circulation was 31,548 during the above mentioned period (Cape Times, 2014). The *Cape Times* is one of the top ten daily newspapers in South Africa, as well as the top selling English daily paper in the WC (Manson, 2014).

In order to convey an extensive and current picture of school violence in WC in general, and the Cape Flats in particular, news and in-depth informative articles on violence in South African schools that were published in the *Cape Times* over a period of two-and-a-half years (1 January 2012 to 31 June 2014) were retrieved from the SA Media database (http://reference.sabinet.co.za/sa_media). Only one keyword, namely 'violence', was used to search for articles in the education section of the databases. SA Media classify newspaper articles that make reference to physical injuries, weapons and/or police intervention under the keyword 'violence' (De Wet, 2009).

The full-text keyword search yielded 41 items on violence published during the abovementioned period. Among the 41 items, 32 were news articles and nine in-depth articles, six of which were written by community leaders and academics. In line with the aim of this study, i.e. to gain insight into the *Cape Times*'s portrayal of school violence in the WC in general and the Cape Flats in particular, my data set was the written text of these 41 items.

Content analysis, a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis, is used in various types of communication research (Du Plooy, 2009). According to MacNamara (2005), the precise method for qualitative content analysis in media research is poorly defined and lacks specific guidelines. MacNamara (2005) accordingly, suggests that researchers use the research procedures given by established qualitative researchers. Subsequently, I followed Nieuwenhuis's (2007) guidelines for qualitative content analysis in order to reduce, condense and group the content of all the articles. A coding frame was drawn up, also providing for verbatim reporting where applicable. I used preset codes (a priori coding) that I

identified while doing the literature review for the study. I worked through all data sources and coded all the data. Related codes were thereafter organised into preset categories identified while doing the literature review. After I had completed categorisation, I reread the news articles to check whether I had captured all the important insights that emerged from the data. Categories, patterns and themes were identified and described. The identification of emergent themes allowed the information to be analysed and related to the literature.

To enhance the integrity of the study, I used authentic documents (scanned-in, unedited versions of the original newspaper clippings, the publication date and the page on which the article appeared) and left an audit trail, by giving the website address of SA Media, and the word used for the electronic search. I also described the research process in relative detail, linked the data to the existing literature on the topic, and gave rich, thick descriptions to allow transferability (Jacobs, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

It is important to note that the WC is one of the most unequal provinces in South Africa. While the WC is one of the richest and fastest growing provinces in South Africa, the Cape Flats is one of the poorest and violent areas in the country. The Cape Flats is the area bounded by the Cape Town – Muizenberg, Cape Town – Bellville – Kraaifontein and Bellville – Eerste River – Strand railway lines and the False Bay coast, with a narrow strip of sand along the western coast, extending northwards from Cape Town and Bellville through Bloubergstrand up until Atlantis (Adelana, Xu & Vrbka, 2010). It is therefore important not to extrapolate violence in the Cape Flats to the rest of the WC. In the ensuing discussion care is thus taken to distinguish between violence the gang infested Cape Flats and the rest of the province.

Findings and Discussion

The ensuing presentation of findings emanating from the data analysis of the retrieved newspaper articles will firstly focus on the *Cape Times*'s portrayal of the nature, extent and context of school violence. The presentation will secondly shed light on the perpetrators and victims of school violence. Attention will then be given to the *Cape Times*'s account of the reasons for school violence. Consideration will, lastly, be given to the newspaper's reporting on the consequences of school violence. In the discussion of the abovementioned themes, I will integrate my findings with prior research. The juxtaposing of prior research and findings from the content analysis is essential to gain insight into school violence in the WC in general and the Cape Flats in particular, because researchers assert that media reports on school

violence are often unbalanced (Jacobs, 2014), sensationalised (Du Plessis, 2008) and stereotypical (Muncie, 2012).

The Nature, Extent and Context of School Violence
Street gangs have been a feature of South African cities since the beginning of the 20th century. Cape Town's Cape Flats, and to a lesser extent, Johannesburg's Westbury and Eldorado Park – to name the most prominent areas – are notorious for being under the domination of gangster elements (Kynoch, 1999). In the WC there is an estimated 100,000 gang members in 137 gangs. Between 40% and 60% of serious violent crimes in the WC can be attributed to gang activity (Reckson & Becker, 2005). A study on the effects of community violence on children in Cape Town, based on face-to-face interviews with 185 children between the ages of 8 to 13 from five township schools, found that almost half of the participants had seen someone hit (57.4%), kicked (51.9%) or pushed or shoved (49.2%) by a member of a gang (it should be noted that these statistics refer to participants witnessing incidence of gang-related violence inside and outside the school grounds) (Shields, Nadasen & Pierce, 2008).

The literature identifies gang violence as one of the many forms of violence in South African schools (Burton, 2008; De Wet & Van Huyssteen, 2005; Du Plessis, 2008; Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014; Morrell, 1998; Ngqela & Lewis, 2012). A study by Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) on school violence in the Eastern Cape Province found, for example, that 37.5% of the 80 participants identified gangsterism as a serious problem in their schools. Morrell (1998) found, during a study in 10 secondary schools in Durban, that 90% of the schools experience gang violence. In line with the aforementioned research findings, media analysis shows that violence in schools on the Cape Flats is predominately gang-related (e.g., Dolley, 2012a; Felix, 2013; Hartley, 2013; Jones, 2012d; Mthembu, 2012). The perception is moreover created in the newspaper articles that learners and educators are powerless 'puppets' at the mercy of the gangs. Reference is for example made to "hot spots" near schools (Maregele, 2013a:5) and schools in "gang-infested areas" (Maregele, 2013b:5). The notion of a territorial space or "turf" – understood as a "static, geographically delimited and defended space, in which control is extended over activity and access" has formed a central component of criminologists' definitions of gangs since the earliest research on gangs (Fraser, 2013:972). Central to these definitions is the idea of an organised, cohesive criminal organisation, exerting violent territorial supremacy for the purposes of economic gain (Fraser, 2013). The influence of territorial space ("turf") on school violence on the Cape Flats is

corroborated by Lambrechts (2012), and aptly illustrated in newspaper articles (Boulle, 2012; Butana, 2012a). Boulle (2012:9) argues, for example, that school closures will inadvertently intensify gang violence: learners told her that they "fear the violence that would break out between rival gangs (at school and on the walk to school) if they are to be relocated to high schools in neighbouring Bishop Lavis". The comprehensive nature of the gang violence is aptly illustrated in a news article by Notywala (2012). He writes about the desire of some youngsters to break their ties with the gangs, who expressed: "I want to be a normal child again and focus on my future, or go to jail". It seems to be easier said than done, as attested to by youths who want to change: "it is still difficult when they have to go to school because they get attacked" (Notywala, 2012:9).

Despite the foregoing emphasis on gang violence, it ought to be noted that gangsterism – as indicated earlier – is one of many forms of school violence in the WC (cf. Burton, 2008; Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Department of Basic Education (DBE), Republic of South Africa, 2014; Shields et al., 2008). While the majority of the analysed newspaper articles focus on gang violence (65.8%), attention will be given to two news reports that shed light on other forms of school violence in the WC. An article by Jones (2012b) focuses on the work of the WCDBE's "Safe Schools"-hotline, and gives insight into a variety of safety issues faced by schools. The majority of the calls made to the hotline during the first semester of 2012 were in the following categories: burglaries and vandalism (29%); crime (17%); and abuse, including bullying (15%). The statistics for 2011 were as follows: burglaries and vandalism (25%); crime (21%); and enquiries regarding governing body issues, i.e. issues dealing with disciplinary matters, such as misconduct (19%). An article published on 26 July 2012, Jones (2012d) additionally reports that there were 30 stabbing attacks at schools in the WC during the first semester of 2012.

Researchers (Burton, 2008; Burton & Leoschut, 2013; De Wet, 2007; Mncube & Harber, 2013; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013) identify physical abuse (especially corporal punishment) and sexual assault as the two primary abusive actions that define the way in which educators violate learners. These findings support information disseminated in an in-depth newspaper article (Jones, 2013a).

Newspaper articles give insight into where different acts of school violence take place. Reports on acts of violence on the school grounds, make mention of (1) vandalism, e.g. "violent protests at the school, during which pupils set bins and tyres alight, broke windows, doors and furniture and damaged teachers' cars" (Butana, 2012a:4); (2) sexual violence against schoolgirls (Heywood, 2012; Jones, 2013c); (3) the fatal stabbings of boys

(Felix, 2013; Notywala, 2012); and (4) violence directed at a principal, who was “chased off the school grounds” by learners who claimed he did nothing to stop the alleged assault of a learner by two volunteer security guards (Butana, 2012a:4). Articles reporting on acts of school violence occurring outside the school grounds centre on: (1) learners joining violent protest marches (Jones, 2012c; Mtyala, 2012); (2) violent attacks on learners on their way to and from school, where a Kasselsvlei High School learner was, for example, fatally stabbed when walking from the school (Jones, 2012a, 2012d, 2013c for more reports of stabbings of learners on their way to and from school); (3) stabbings at a taxi rank (Jones, 2013c); (4) racial violence between black and coloured parents (Mtyala, 2012); and (5) gang wars (Boulle, 2012; Butana, 2012b; Maregele, 2013b).

The newspaper reports give information regarding the wide array of weapons used during incidents of school violence, for example axes, clubs, screwdrivers and pangas (Mthembu, 2012; Notywala, 2012), knives (Damba, 2012; Felix, 2013; Luhanga, 2013), butterfly knives (Dolley, 2012a), sharpened pencils (Luhanga, 2013), rocks (Jones, 2012c; Notywala, 2012), sticks (Damba, 2012) and guns (Butana, 2012b; Notywala, 2012). It furthermore seems, from surveying the newspaper articles, that not only conventional commercial and homemade weapons, but also ‘paranormal’ means may be utilised to level an attack: during a school search “various sharp weapons, as well as ‘special armbands and dolls’ which were used in the gang attacks” were found (Butana, 2012b:7). In an insightful article on “teen blood culture”, Dolley (2012a:6) quotes a 15-year-old boy as saying: “I used to have a 9mm pistol, but I got rid of it, because the police always search us”. This boy told Dolley (2012a:6) that he had stabbed rival gangsters before: “in the last one I got him in the back and the shoulder. I walked past him and so he whistled and made for me like this, signal[ing] that I must ‘uitkyk’ [watch out]. So my friend gave me a knife. I just flipped it open and stabbed him.” During Dolley’s (2012a:6) interview with “reformed gangsters” from Manenberg, it came to light that it is “very easy to obtain a firearm”. The literature concurs with the above findings, emanating from the analysis of the newspaper articles, namely that learners use a variety of weapons during and after school hours to attack one another (Burton, 2008; De Wet & Van Huyssteen, 2005; Janse van Rensburg, 2010; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Mncube and Harber (2013) found that the carrying of weapons is seen as a symbol of power among schoolchildren in the WC.

The commonness of gender and gang violence in the poverty stricken Cape Flats – as reported in the *Cape Times* – feeds into Messerschmidt’s (Krienert, 2003:5) hypothesis that, if a man does

poorly at school or at his job, or in his family life, he must seek out other, alternative ‘masculine-validating resources’. Criminal behaviour has thus become an acceptable, alternative way to accomplish or project masculinity (Krienert, 2003).

This study gives insight into the *Cape Times*’s coverage of the nature, extent and context of school violence in the WC in general and the Cape Flats in particular: learners, especially those attending schools on the Cape Flats, are exposed to different forms of violence inside and outside the school grounds. A wide variety of weapons, which was easy to come by, are used in these attacks. The *Cape Times* often portrays the learners and educators as helpless puppets who are struggling for survival amid the turf wars. In the next section, attention will be given to the victims and perpetrators of school violence. Emphasis will be placed on the reasons why youngsters become part of the gang culture in the Cape Flats.

Perpetrators and Victims of School Violence

Research (De Wet, 2007; SACE, 2011), as well as newspaper articles (Butana, 2012a, 2012b; Damba, 2012; Felix, 2013; Jones, 2012d, 2013c) show that learners are the key role-players in school violence.

The *Cape Times* often focuses on the gang affiliation of learners involved in school violence. The youthfulness of these gang members is often emphasised, e.g. children “some as young as 13” are members of gangs (Notywala, 2012:9) and 9-year-old boys are recruited and “are trained to become gangsters” (Maregele, 2013b:5). Research by Esbensen and Carson (2012) on gangsterism in the USA reveals that gang membership varies across time, with the peak of gang membership occurring when learners are aged between 12 and 14 years. A finding from the current study, namely that children as young as nine form part of the gangs on the Cape Flats, is in line with findings from Lambrechts’s (2012) study on gangsterism in Manenberg. She found that 10-year-old boys participate in gang-related activities.

By using phrases such as “groups of school going teenagers”, and “about 100 gang members aged 12 to 19 were fighting”, Damba (2012:5) gives insight into the ordinariness of gang membership among youths on the Cape Flats. Notywala (2012:9) attributes the growth of gangsterism to a lack of facilities for extramural activities. Two boys told Dolley (2012a) that they became gang members at age 12, because they became involved in fights at school and wanted the backing of a group. A 14-year-old boy from Lavender Hill additionally told Dolley (2012a:6): “if we don’t join, we [are] going to be slaughtered”. These utterances by gang members are in line with research findings that learners often join gangs in an effort to gain “protection” (De Wet & Van Huyssteen, 2005). Morrell (1998) moreover argues that boys become

members of gangs in a quest for (male) dominance rooted in a desire for recognition. Walsh and Mitchell (2006), in their study on violence in the WC, additionally argue that gang membership can be seen to represent opportunities for young men to gain social status, a sense of security and community, and the potential for economic gain. Mncube and Harber (2013:5) likewise contend that learners who see themselves as “losers” in the academic setting are easily assimilated into youth gangs. Here they “become ‘someone’, part of an organisation of kids like themselves” (Mncube & Harber, 2013:43). Through the *Cape Times*’s references to specific gangs, e.g. Stoepa Boys and 28 (Dolley, 2012b), honorary gang names, such as Pangaman (Butana, 2012b), gang culture, e.g. a ranka – gang tattoo (Dolley, 2012a), callousness, e.g. “I just flipped [the knife] open and stabbed him” (Dolley, 2012a:6), boys attending schools on the Cape Flats are depicted as fearless, pitiless perpetrators who will stop at nothing to assert their power over fellow-learners who have no gang affiliation or are members of rival gangs. In casting gang members as deviant, journalists set them apart from ‘normal’ boys in society. According to Consalvo (2003) this is a common discursive shift journalists make when portraying men who kill or batter victims whom journalists regard as blameless. The journalists thus set the readers apart from the gang ‘turfs’, where chaos and mayhem rules. This creates a divide between ‘them’ and ‘us’ and creates a (often false) sense of security for the readers. This line of argument is not only supported by, but also expanded on by Carlyle et al. (2008), who write that by denying the normalcy of negative behaviour (in our case gangsterism), media representation of the negative behaviour may allow the public to distance themselves from the issue, while simultaneously reproducing popular assumptions about, among other things, race, gender and social class. Mahiri and Conner (2003:121) furthermore found that the representation of youth as “dangerous others” has become a popular discourse in the media worldwide.

The plight of non-affiliated learners (cf. Dolley, 2012a), alluded to in the previous paragraph, is also verbalised by parents, who told Butana (2012b:7) that “their children might die at the Bulumko Secondary School as teenage gangs are clashing in and outside the school, terrorising their schoolmates in the process”. Research by De Wet and Van Huyssteen (2005) too highlights the plight of non-gang members.

This study furthermore found that perpetrators (and victims) are mostly portrayed by journalists as faceless and nameless members of specific gangs, e.g. Vatos, Italians (Butana, 2012b), Fancy Boys, Americans, Junky Funky Kids and Mongrels (Dolley, 2012a). Butana (2012b:7) refers to the pseudonym of a Grade 10 gang member (Pangaman), who

is believed to have “supernatural strength because of his ‘special armband’”. As is the case with the perpetrators of school violence, the victims are mostly portrayed as nameless and faceless members of opposing gangs and/or non-affiliated learners (Butana, 2012b; Dolley, 2012a). Only in one of the analysed articles was the victim identified (Jones, 2012a:6).

Apart from the learners, educators are also identified as victims and perpetrators of school violence. The *Cape Times*’s portrayal of educators as perpetrators of school violence, as well as research findings in this regard, has been presented in the discussion of the physical abuse and sexual assault of learners at the hands of their educators. Newspaper articles however also create empathy for educators who are trying to do their job amidst gang violence: “teachers and principals became emotional as they told of their struggles to keep pupils safe amid daily shootings and gangsters at their schools” (Jones, 2013a:5). An educator told Jones (2013a:5): “yes, we want to be there (at school). But we are human. We also have families.” Whereas Notywala (2012:9) writes about educators who tried to help children by giving them lifts home when schools close early due to gang fights, “now live in fear as their cars have been stoned”, Jones (2013a:5) reports on her interview with the deputy principal of a school in Manenberg, who told her that she was “running for her life, ducking from bullets, during a shooting”. Mncube and Harber (2013) likewise found educators to be terrified to be caught in the crossfire at school and on their way to school and back home. According to Muschert (2007:353) the media often focus on victims and their stories because “this part of news events is often a dramatic element that generates or maintains the salience of the news event”.

News articles and prior research focus on learners and educators as mostly faceless and nameless perpetrators and victims of school violence, as well as the plight of non-gang members in the gang-riddled Cape Flats. This study found that the lack of extramural facilities, the need for acceptance, social status and protection, as well as a lust for power and male dominance are reasons why children become part of the youth gang culture. As a result of the culture of violence and poverty on the Cape Flats, boys are mostly portrayed as callous individuals, who value physical strength, aggressive behaviour, and dominance over girls and non-gang members. The discussion also highlighted the way the media create a divide between ‘them’ – the ruthless, lawless perpetrators of school violence – and ‘us’, thus creating a false sense of security. Whereas the perpetrators of school violence are portrayed as callous, journalists write with compassion about the struggle for survival of learners and educators amidst the gang war.

Reasons for School Violence

In his study on violence in South African schools, Burton (2008:25) writes that “the prevalence of violence within Western Cape schools might be expected given the activities of gangs in many of the communities in which schools are located”. Burton’s view that gangsterism is the most important reason for school violence in the WC, is in line with the message conveyed in the *Cape Times*. Whereas Burton (2008) identifies gangsterism holistically as a reason for school violence, an analysis of the newspaper articles revealed several gang-related reasons for violence, namely retaliations for the death of gang members (Damba, 2012; Felix, 2013), a revenge attack where a member from an opposing gang (outsider) attended a party in an area outside his gang’s “turf” (Butana, 2012b), or the relocation of learners due to school closures, may result in fighting when and if the reallocated learners attend schools situated in an area dominated by an opposing gang (Boulle, 2012). These findings on the importance of the “turf” as a space for likeminded youths, is supported by Fraser’s (2013:976) research. He argues that the “street” represents a space in which young people can gain some degree of autonomy and create “rules of engagement” on their own terms, away from both home and school. Away from adult control “young people are free to engage in creative play in the urban environment”.

Only a few reasons for school violence, which cannot be linked to gangsterism, but to school administration and community factors, were identified while doing the media analysis: school overcrowding (Mtyala, 2012); a lack of action by a principal after a learner was allegedly assaulted by volunteer security guards (Butana, 2012a); the frustration of “youths [who] struggle with the peer pressure and economic barriers they face every day” (Maregele, 2013b:5); racism (Mtyala, 2012); and learners’ participation in protest marches (e.g. against allegedly corrupt politicians) (Jones, 2012c). Researchers also found that community factors such as poverty, racial inequality and tension (Burton, 2008; Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Mncube & Harber, 2013; SACE, 2011; Van Jaarsveld, 2008), as well as school administrative problems, such as weak or indecisive leadership (Du Plessis, 2008; Mncube & Harber, 2013; Van Jaarsveld, 2008) may result in school violence.

My grouping of the reasons for school violence as gang and non-gang related may be seen as somewhat simplistic. The pervasive condition of poverty in the WC townships, which can among other things, be attributed to the country’s apartheid past, is a breeding ground for gangsterism. According to Ngqela and Lewis (2012) impoverished people in the WC who seek social and economic survival through selling alcohol and drugs, become the role models for dejected youths.

Ngqela and Lewis (2012) additionally believe that this modelling results in violent behaviour, such as using weapons and joining gangs. This kind of behaviour often spills over into schools. Ngqela and Lewis’s (2012) view, as well as the suggestion in the analysed newspaper articles that school violence is predominantly a problem in schools located in the gang infested areas of the Cape Flats, feeds into O’Grady et al.’s (2010:70) argument that the media stereotypically portray improvised youths as belonging to the “underclass”. Note should therefore be taken of O’Grady et al.’s (2010:70) view that individuals can react differently to apparently similar environments. According to them, the media often “ignores the complex and changing life experiences of people who find themselves in difficult circumstances”.

Informed by intersectionality theory, it may be argued that the *Cape Times* portrays the victims and perpetrators of school violence in the WC as people with multiple subordinate-group identities that are subjected to powerful forces of oppression and forms of inequality, namely race, class and gender (cf. Veenstra, 2013). School violence in the WC is predominantly portrayed as a problem in schools located in the gang infested, impoverished areas of the Cape Flats. The majority of the articles analysed did not associate White South African youths with violence. Instead, black and coloured youths were associated with school violence (cf. Peguero & Popp, 2012). In accordance with the intersectionalist perspective WC youths social and physical location, as it relates to race, class and gender leads to different schooling experiences. Historic reasons for the disparities experienced by and the risk of exposure to school violence between different genders, racial groups and social/economic classes cannot be denied.

Steffgen et al.’s (2013) finding that there might be a link between environmental factors (as a key component of school climate) and school violence, is supported by the preceding discussion of possible reasons for school violence in the WC in general and the Cape Flats in particular.

The Consequences of School Violence

The media analysis illustrates the negative impact of school violence on learners, educators, parents, authorities and the community at large. Numerous examples of the negative impact of school violence – especially gang hostilities – on teaching and learning, are apparent. Absenteeism is widespread on the Cape Flats due to gang fighting. Learners are kept at home, because parents fear for their safety (Maregele, 2013a; Mtyala, 2012; Notywala, 2012). “[G]ang shootings” in the vicinity of schools often lead to the closure of schools (Maregele, 2013a; Maregele & Jones, 2013). Learners, who were interviewed by Felix (2013) after the death of a fellow-learner, acknowledged that they are afraid to

attend school. One of them told Felix (2013:3) “we all fear coming to school”. The negative impact of gangsterism on teaching and learning is not only emotional (fear), but also physical, where a learner who was attacked with a panga found it “very difficult to write” during the examination, and has subsequently left school (Notywala, 2012:9). In one of the newspaper articles, the possible impact of gangsterism on the reputation of a school was mentioned by a learner from Eisleben High School. In her interview with Felix (2013:3), after the death of a fellow-learner during an encounter between opposing gangs, the learner said: “they are embarrassing our school. Every school should make a newspaper for their good academic results, not for fellow-learners who kill each other”. The newspaper articles abound with examples of the negative impact of school violence on the emotional (Dolley, 2012a; Felix, 2013) and physical wellbeing of learners (Hartley, 2013; Maregele, 2013a; Notywala, 2012) (cf. discussion of the nature and extent of the violence).

Dolley’s (2012a:6) article provides insight into the impact of gangsterism on children’s plans for the future. A 15-year-old boy told the author that he “will take [a ranka or gang tattoo] in jail. When I go to jail I want to go when I’m weak and I want to get strong in jail. That is how other gangsters will respect me.” His younger friend told Dolley (2012a:6): “when I go to jail I want to be a brother (well-embedded in a gang) already so they won’t hurt me”. Ironically, incarceration is not the only future these two boys envisage for themselves. While the 15-year-old Grade Nine boy tells Dolley (2012a) that he wants to become an architect, the 14-year-old Grade Seven boy wants to become a soccer star. This insight into the dreams of the two gang members is in line with research findings by Wood and Alleyne (2010:104), namely that “far from rebelling against middle-class norms, many gang members actually endorse middle-class values”.

The *Cape Times* paints a bleak picture of educators who try to teach in warlike situations. According to Jones (2013a:5), principals and educators told her “of their struggles to keep pupils safe amid daily shootings and gangsters at their schools”. Hartley (2013:5) writes about educators and learners who “were forced to take cover when gunfire erupted outside”. Notywala (2012:9), when reporting on gang violence, writes that “the disease is spreading and getting out of hand very fast”. The hopelessness educators and learners have to face is emphasised by the use of emotionally laden words when reporting on racial, e.g. the “town exploded” (Mtyala, 2012:5); sexual, e.g. “sexual violence and abuse in and out of our schools are making the lives of tens of thousands of young girls a misery” (Heywood, 2012:9); and gang violence, e.g. “gang-infested areas” (Maregele, 2013b:5). Heywood’s

(2012:9) depiction of girls in schools reads as follows: “how tragic that for many of our girls going to school must feel like walking alone through a dark alley in the deep of night. If young girls could give a voice to their experience, we would be shocked.” The emphasis on the language of gangs, such as “we [are] going to be slaughtered” (Dolley, 2012a:6) and “it is all about the bavana (blood)” (Dolley, 2012a:6), form part of the discourse of fear, hopelessness and a situation out of control. The *Cape Times* inadvertently shed light on the intersection between gender oppression, and the plight of the unprivileged and poor in a racially segregated society. The media analysis hence exposes racism, class and economic differences and gender oppression as fundamental root causes of school violence in the WC in general and the Cape Flats in particular.

The *Cape Times*’s suggestion that school violence may have a negative effect on teaching and learning is supported by research. Whereas Reckson and Becker (2005) focus on the detrimental psychological effects of gang violence on learners and educators, Burton (2008) and Du Plessis (2008) find that violence per se has a negative influence on teaching and learning. International (Perezniato, Harper, Clench & Coarasa, 2010) and national (Burton & Leoschut, 2013; Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014) studies find that school violence discourages children from attending school, parents from sending their children to school, children dropping out of school altogether, and educator absenteeism.

Articles also allude to the emotional influence of school violence on parents, e.g. “parents despair as gang fights keep claiming lives” (Damba, 2012:5; cf. also Maregele, 2013a; Mtyala, 2012). Newspaper articles, furthermore, refer to the financial implications of the gang violence for Cape Town, the province and the WCDBE: to increase security at schools in Manenberg, R6 million was transferred from the WCDBE to the city of Cape Town to cover the costs of metropolitan police patrolling schools (Maregele & Jones, 2013). The financial impact of gang violence on an emerging economy should not be underestimated: money that could have been earmarked for community projects, such as much needed extramural facilities, is redirected towards intervening to ensure school safety.

Conclusion

Findings from this qualitative content analysis of news articles published in the *Cape Times* over a period of two-and-a-half years creates the impression that school violence is a serious problem in the WC in general and the Cape Flats in particular. The study reveals that learners, educators, parents and members of the community are exposed to a wide range of emotionally and physi-

cally destructive behaviour within and outside the school yard. Owing to the ominous presence of gangs on the Cape Flats, schools learners and educators are portrayed as helpless puppets struggling for survival amidst relentless turf and retribution wars. Previous and current research highlights the reasons for gang membership among youths, namely a hunger for power and male dominance, callousness, boredom, a need to belong and the necessity to have “protection” in unsafe gang infested communities. The *Cape Times* paints a grim picture of an escalation of violence in schools, youths’ inability to sever ties with gangs and the breakdown of teaching and learning on the Cape Flats, with gang violence extending from the surrounding community and streets into the schools. Even if the *Cape Times* unintentionally paints an exaggerated and atypical picture of violence in the gang-riddled Cape Flats, the detrimental effects thereof on schooling on the Cape Flats cannot be denied. The effects of school violence on teaching and learning and on the economy of the province, necessitate a holistic approach to this problem. This calls for an acknowledgement that the intersectionality of forms of inequality and oppression such as gender, race and class may be structural root causes of school violence on the Cape Flats. Politicians, educationists, economists, law enforcers and healthcare workers should work together to address gangsterism, poverty, as well as racial and gender violence on the Cape Flats. According to Peguero and Popp (2012:8) many anti-violence school policies failed, because they did not consider the “unique vulnerabilities that affect marginalized populations”. They therefore suggest that school administrators ought to pay special attention to the vulnerable youth populations “since research suggests that vulnerable and marginalised youth populations are less likely to seek out help and report their victimisation”. It is also imperative that public and education policies address the structural root causes of school violence on the Cape Flats, namely racial, gender, social and economic oppression and inequalities. Teaching and learning will only prevail in emerging economies if educators and learners feel safe inside and outside the school yard.

The evidence presented in this study indicates that the *Cape Times* does a fairly good job in its role as public watchdog and lobbyist for the fight against school violence. Articles published in *Cape Times* shed light on the seriousness and commonness of school violence in the WC in general and the Cape Flats in particular, explain who the victims and perpetrators of the violence are, and give details of the reasons for and the consequences of the violence. The *Cape Times* may however also be guilty of using attention-grabbing sensational-

ism (e.g., Butana, 2012b; Dolley, 2012a) in order to improve circulation figures and thus satisfy the demands of shareholders. It is therefore important that reports on school violence move beyond “tabloid packaging” (Vettehen et al., 2005:284). Reports on school violence should bear evidence of high-quality, nuanced research.

Lack of contextualisation and the emphasis on the sensational could lead to a twisted view of school violence and panic among readers. Readers and researchers should, therefore, display a critical attitude towards the media as sources of information. Although one could assume that *Cape Times* will not wilfully publish false or distorted information, news reports ultimately represent the editor’s and/or journalist’s subjective, interpreted version of events (De Wet, 2013).

Notwithstanding critique against the use of the media as a source of information, this multidisciplinary study (Education, Criminology and Media Studies) presents a multidimensional perspective on school violence by combining the insights of the general public (journalists, editors and interviewees) and members of the academe. Whilst recognising the news media’s dual role, namely to act as watchdog for public interest in a democracy, and to protect the financial interests of its owners and shareholders, it is hoped that this study presents a possible method by means of which educationists can cautiously utilise the media as an information source.

Whilst the current study sheds light on a local newspaper’s portrayal of school violence in a specific province, findings from this study can also be used in cross-country comparisons on the news media’s portrayal of school violence. Cross-country comparisons of the media’s portrayal of school violence will show both the similarities across diverse cultures, and many different patterns that reflect the unique characteristics of cultural and national contexts (Astor et al., 2006). I argue that issues such as the news media’s portrayal of gender-based violence, gangsterism, lack of hope among educators and learners and the vulnerability of poverty stricken and marginalised youths, can be the focus point of comparative studies.

Notes

- i. Both large scale surveys were conducted in 2012.

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