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# Femicide in South Africa: Ideal Victims, Visible Bodies, and Invisible Perpetrators

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*Femicide in South Africa: Ideal Victims, Visible Bodies, and Invisible Perpetrators*

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**Abstract**

South Africa's femicide rate is five times the global average (Statistics South Africa 2018). In recent years, we have seen increased scholarly attention examining media reporting of femicide. These studies have been critical the way South African media have and continue to cover femicide. This study seeks to add to this existing knowledge by exploring the media coverage of three sexual violence murders. This study explores the online news media coverage of three case studies. These case studies are the rape and murder of University of Cape Town student Uyinene Mrwetyana, the rape and murder of Lynette Volschenk, and the rape and murder of grade 7 pupil Janika Mallo. All these murders happened in Cape Town in August 2019 and received prominent media coverage. This study utilizes thematic analytic tools to explore dominant patterns in the data through the framework of representation and intersectionality. The study aims to do a close reading and identify discourses embedded in news media texts to highlight their functions, effects, and social and ideological implications for society. The findings reveal an increased focus on the visible bodily injuries of victims and media used spectacular language to present this. The focus on the bodily injuries resulted in making perpetrators invisible. The analysis confirmed that certain victims matter to media more than others. Furthermore, media represented femicide as a current crisis and ignored the historical structures that enable the prevalence of sexual violence. Although, this study is not comparative media analysis and does not provide media to show that some murders are under reported, because it is only looking at three cases the analysis does demonstrate that other murders matter more than others. The study concludes that the way media cover femicide does not present the 'true reality' of sexual violence in South Africa and we are still far from finding long lasting solutions to the rampant violence.

**Key terms:** Femicide, sexual violence, victims, perpetrator, representation, gender-based violence, construct, coverage, portrayal.

## ‘Chapter 1: Background, Rationale and Scope’

### 1.1. Sexual Violence and Femicide in South Africa

South Africa has one of the highest levels of sexual violence in world. The late former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela describes the continuing legacy of violence this way: “It is a legacy that reproduces itself, as new generations learn from the violence of generations past, as victims learn from victimizers, as the social conditions that nurture violence are allowed to continue” (Mandela 2002:2). Because violence crosses throughout generations of violence (Hamby and Grych 2013), for example in the South African context violence crossed from colonialism to apartheid and to post-apartheid era. South Africa is known for having one of the highest rates of femicide in the world, hardly a day passes without another case highlighted in the media (South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) (2022).

It is important to define the term ‘femicide’ that this study operates on. There is no universal version of what constitutes crimes against women, nor most countries even include femicide as a category of crime other than possibly murder (Brodie 2020:21). As a result, there is ‘very little data on femicide this is because this information is simply not collected, but it is also because femicide is not recognised as a specific crime category, and because there is no consensus on its definition (ibid:21). The definition might vary with regions and countries and how they define and capture the killing of women. In the South African context, the South African Medical Research Council definition of femicide (which is also the one used in this thesis) is the killing of women and female children aged fourteen years and older (2022). The definition is similar to the one provided the United Nations Vienna Declaration (2013). In this definition, the Vienna Declaration provides several categories, which include intimate partner femicide and non-intimate partner femicide (2013). This study focuses on non-intimate partner femicide, defined as the killing of women by someone other than an intimate partner (UN Vienna Declaration 2013:2). This person can be a ‘stranger, family member, acquaintance’ (Brodie 2020:22). What this study aims to do is explore how media portrays non-intimate femicide.

Sexual violence is a local and global phenomenon. According to the United Nations Children’s fund (UNICEF) (2009), gender-based violence (GBV) is experienced by about one-third of women globally. World Health Organization’ (2011) findings reveal that between 15 and 71% of women

have reported experiencing GBV with an intimate partner. UNICEF (2009) has found that a third of adolescent girls worldwide report that they did not give consent for their first sexual encounter and most of all sexual assaults are against girls 15 years or younger. United Nation Women (2011) reports that globally approximately "100 to 140 million girls have experienced female genital mutilation with more than 3 million girls at risk in Africa". In Sub-Saharan Africa, 14.1 million girls are child brides, married before the age of 18 and sexually violated (United Nation Women 2011). Women and children also experience sexual violence during wars or in war-torn countries (Pevehouse and Goldstein 2017).

South Africa has an alarming rate of violence, and it is reported that every three hours a woman is murdered (SAMRC) (2022). There are many different reasons why men kill women, and this might vary with communities, countries and region in the world. In the South African context Andrews summarizes some of the causes of this violence as stemming from a "peculiar flavour of South African patriarchy" stems from "three interlinked political and cultural origins": (1) "a masculinist culture emanating from an authoritarian and militaristic apartheid state"; (2) "the masculinist cultural remnants of a violent anti-apartheid struggle"; and (3) "aspects of indigenous customary law that continue to subordinate women" (1990:450-451).

Rape culture was embedded in the system of colonialism and patriarchy. The colonial system in South Africa enabled the routine rape of enslaved and other Black women and they were unable to receive justice because it was legalised (Gqola 2021). "Slowly, as the rape of Black women became institutionalized, normalised and mythologized, these women were constructed as unrapeable" (Gqola 2021:3). To be unrapeable, Gqola explains, does not mean impossible to be raped, it means the category of humans constructed and marked as free to rape without consequence (2021:4). This was further seen by the court system at that time refusing to arrest and convict men for the rape of slave women throughout the slavery period in the Cape (ibid). Furthermore, during colonial warfare, British soldiers routinely celebrated wins in battle by raping "native women", effectively cementing the relationship between warfare and large-scale rape, and normalizing rape as part of warfare (Armstrong 1994).

Similarly, during the apartheid system, when Black women were still seen as unrapeable and only the rape of White women was prosecuted, and "gender and race issues could diffuse the Black struggle, there were difficulties in mobilizing support to end violence against Black women"

(Armstrong 1994). There was social acceptance that rape of Black women was part of life (ibid). In post-apartheid South Africa, the legacy of sexual violence has continued. Almost 3000 women are murdered in South Africa every year, with an average of eight murders per day (Brodie 2020:190). Thus, Brodie argues, "both rape and femicide need to be seen and understood as parts of a continuum or a continuity of violence against women, where killing is the final act, and rape is one of many weapons" (2020:128). Many researchers conclude that South Africa's persisting violence is caused by amongst others; a historical culture of "might is right", an economic gap that makes men feel weak, and inequality between men and women (Haupt 2014). Men who feel weak reassert their manliness at home protected by patriarchy and even by dominance in the street.

According to the South African Police Service (SAPS) (2020a) there was an increase in the reporting of rape and sexual assault by 20% from 1994-1999 and there were more than 51249 cases of rape in 1999. The inclusion of this data shows a pattern sexual violence that continued from post-apartheid. This is also not a complete picture of sexual violence against women because some cases do not get reported. After all, some women have little faith in the justice system, or that they will be taken "seriously" (Brodie 2020:124). Some women wish to avoid the emotional burden that comes with a court trial. And while some women in society are believed when they report rape, some are not, which commonly has to do with the myth that a real rape looks or happens a certain way (Gqola 2015:5). Gqola notes that this is because society continues to frame rape as inappropriate sex (2015). "Under-reporting of rape cases to police is a well-established global issue" (Abrahams et al 20101).

The SAMRC in their 2008 publication "*Tracking Justice: The Attrition of Rape Cases through the Criminal Justice System in Gauteng"*, reports that one in nine women who are raped in South Africa report it to the police (2008). Furthermore, the low conviction of rape in this country might also be a factor in why some women choose not to report rape. For instance, the SAMRC found that 50.5% of the 2064 reported cases of rape resulted in an arrest (2008). To make matters worse, only 42.8% of those arrested were charged in court and trials started in less than one in five of these cases, while the conviction rate was 6.2%, which is equivalent to one in twenty cases (SAMRC 2008). All of this contributes to women not being hopeful that justice will be done if and when they report rape.

Rape studies have consistently told us that most women or girls are sexually violated by men they are familiar with (Brodie 2020, Abrahams et al 2010 Gqola 2015). According to Gqola, this research has been pushed forward to "debunk the notion of rapists as strangers" (2015:96). For instance, according to the SAPS crime stats for 2021, out of a sample of 5439 rapes, 3766 were committed at a victim or the rapist's home (O'Regan 2021).

Every day, we hear and learn about sexual violence and murder in South Africa through the media. Some of these murders receive extensive media reporting and others less attention. Newsmakers use social constructions to regard some victims of femicide as newsworthy and others as not newsworthy and "only specific victims are therefore considered worthy of public outrage and response" (Langa et al 2018:11). Therefore, the increase in coverage of GBV by the media has the potential to have an impact on the way we think, understand, and talk about GBV in society (Flood and Pease 2009). Media studies has been critical of how media continue to cover sexual violence. News media consist of diverse views and contradictory attitudes about rape (Gqola 2015). These range from media reports about the death penalty when there are spectacular cases (Brodie 2020); the criminal justice system portrayed as not working or coping and the low conviction of rape offenders (Gqola 2015); media reports with an increased focus on the visible injuries of victims (Boonzaier 2017); reports obscuring the role of perpetrators (Buiten and Salo 2011); and victim-blaming tendencies (Buiten and Salo 2011).

Against this backdrop, research on media representations of gendered violence is an important task (Van Niekerk and Boonzaier 2015), because news coverage shapes public discourse (Boonzaier 2017). "Contemporary mass media operate as a normalizing forum for the social construction of reality" (Fursich 2010:113), and some discourses within media if not challenged appear natural to the audience. Discourse analysis of sexual violence allows us to describe and assess its meaning. Studying media coverage is important because it tell us about the societal context and the time it emerges from. Studying media representations of femicide tells us why some victims appear to matter more than others. In general, studying the media portrayal of sexual violence helps us understand "how the story of femicide is being told, how it is received, and ultimately how we go about changing the problem" (Taylor 2009:28). Studying media coverage helps us understand that "How these crimes are reported are important for shaping public consciousness about crimes

against women, gendered violence and the sexist, misogynistic and patriarchal contexts that produce it" (Boonzaier 2022:1). Studying media coverage highlights the ever-changing discourses of crime. This study seeks to contribute to this existing literature and examine the media reporting of the cases of the rape and murder of University of Cape Town (UCT) student Uyinene Mrwetyana, the rape and murder of Lynette Volschenk, and the rape and murder of grade 7 pupil Janika Mallo. A motivation the selection of these cases is provided in the next section.

### 1.2. Research Question

How did the South African online news media represent the murders of Uyinene Mrwetyana, Lynette Volschenk and Janika Mallo in Cape Town in late 2019?

The following subsidiary questions will help address the main research question:

- What are the media discourses about the victims and perpetrators of non-intimate femicide?
- What do these portrayals reveal about South African society and its attitudes toward sexual violence?

### 1.3. Motivation for the Cases and Period Selected

"Despite being in the second-most violent province in South Africa, Cape Town consistently has the highest murder rate in the country, and one of the highest in the world" (SAPS 2020a). The Western Cape recorded the second-highest count of crimes against women, 36726, behind Gauteng at 45238, and the highest count of crimes against children, at 9366, for the period April 2018 to March 2019 (SAPS 2020a). In the period April 2019 to March 2020, the Western Cape recorded a total of 4877 reported rapes (SAPS 2020b). Moreover, of the top 30 GBV hotspots released by SAPS, six are in Cape Town (Delft, Mitchells Plain, Nyanga, Khayelitsha, Gugulethu and Bellville) (SAPS 2020b). In this context, Cape Town is an important location for the study of violence against women.

In sum, I used two key criteria to select the cases for the study. National interest resulted in protests, petitions, and online movements. The second criteria I used is cases that received widespread media coverage from when the story broke, and where reporting continued to their funeral and court cases.

I am going to look at three femicide cases, all of which happened in one week (24 August 2019 to 31 August 2019) in Cape Town and received a volume of media coverage. The coverage period is from 24 August 2019 to 12 October 2019. August is celebrated in South Africa as Women's Month, with the 9th being a public holiday, Women's Day. This day is dedicated to celebrating the women who marched to the Union Buildings in 1956 against apartheid pass laws. Consequently, it is used to highlight the plight of women and girls in South Africa. The selected three cases all received a significant amount of media coverage in South Africa. Brodie (2020:188) notes that "murders that receive the most prominent coverage and eventually come to represent our knowledge of femicide". The three murder cases selected are:

- "The rape and murder of University of Cape Town student Uyinene Mrwetyana on 24 August 2019" (Meyer 2019)
- "The rape and murder of Lynette Volschenk on 26 August 2019" (Lindwa 2019)
- "The rape and murder of grade 7 pupil Janika Mallo on 31 August 2019" (Saafia February 2019a)

These gruesome murders left the country outraged. Although the crisis of GBV has always been there, this period was specifically represented by the media as a national crisis of violence against women, which makes it a particularly useful period for my analysis. There was a protest by female students and civil society groups from 4 to 6 September 2019, and President Cyril Ramaphosa had to step out of the World Economic Forum, being held in Cape Town, to receive the memorandum from protesters (Marten 2019). This was followed by the #Am I Next campaign, which started trending on social media, highlighting the country's alarming femicide rates amid the surge in cases in September 2019 (Sicetsha 2019). Universities such as UCT cancelled the academic programme for two days and marched to parliament (UCT News 2019). There was also a protest by women to the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) dubbed #ShutdownSandton, which was organised by civil society groups (Madolo 2019). This protest demanded that all JSE-listed companies donate to the national strategic plan to fight GBV and address gender inequality in their companies, especially in management (Postman 2019).

The rape and murder of Janika Mallo also received prominent media reporting. As Brodie writes, stories of femicide that involve children tend to receive prominent media coverage (Brodie 2019). Consequently, fear of crime, especially sexual violence, amongst women in the country was

heightened during this period by the media. Sexual violence was represented as a crisis during this period. “The greater the consumption, the greater the likelihood that consumers’ perceptions of the real world will align with what is represented in the media” (Silva and Guedes 2022:5). Women were told to walk with pepper sprays and safety kits to protect themselves (Evans 2019).

When there is a spike in gender-based violence, calls for the death penalty usually increase. However, President Ramaphosa reiterated in parliament that it is not the state’s place to take the life of someone and that it is in direct conflict with the Constitution of the country (staff reporter, Business Tech 2019). In addition, these marches forced President Ramaphosa to call a special sitting of parliament, in Cape Town, to present the government’s plan to fight GBV (Ramaphosa 2019). Studying news reports of specific and different periods, we can understand how “societal and legal change was expressed in news reports” (Brodie 2020b: online). In this context, 24 August to 12 October 2019 was a significant period in South Africa's GBV narrative and may have an impact on the way we think and understand GBV in South Africa.

### 1.4. Background of the Cases

#### 1.4.1. Janika Mallo [1](14 years old), Heinz Park, Cape Town

The murder of Janika Mallo became one of the biggest femicide stories of the year 2019, and in September 2019. Janika Mallo was a 14-year-old Coloured girl and lived with her mother (Janine Mallo) and grandmother (Pauline Butler) in Heinz Park (Hicks 2019). “Coloured refers to a phenotypically diverse group of people descended largely from Cape slaves, the indigenous Khoisan population and other people of African and Asian descent who had been assimilated into Cape colonial society by the late nineteenth century” (Adhikari 2006:469). They are regarded as being of “mixed race” and “have held an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy” (ibid:469). Put simply, Coloured is a "contested but common South African term for mixed racial heritage" (Falkof 2019:159). Heinz Park is a low-income sub-township in Mitchells Plain (Census 2011). The population of Mitchells Plain is made up of 91% Coloured and 7% Black African population (Census 2011).

[1] Janika Mallo’s name is spelt two ways in media, Mallo and Mello. In this study I have standadised to Mallo even in quotations.

Mallo was in grade 7 at Northwood Primary School (February 2019a). Her half-naked body was found in her grandmother's backyard on Sunday morning, 1 September 2019 (Saafia February 2019a). Mallo had gone to karaoke to support the local soccer club the previous night (Hlati 2019). "Horrified family members say they found Janika Mallo with her head bashed in and 'her brain leaking' from the left side of her face shortly after 8 am," (Saafia February 2019a). Mallo's "dungarees had been pulled down, and it is understood she had been raped before being bashed with a concrete block over the head and used condoms were also found at the scene" (ibid).

Her mother said her last interaction with Janika was when they argued on Saturday, 31 August 2019, at about 6 pm: "I smacked her in her face and told her she cannot go to the soccer club's event in Portland, and that was the last time I saw her alive" (Saafia February 2019a). It later emerged that the perpetrators were Janika's 16-year-old cousin (who was not named because he was a minor in 2019) and 18-year-old Allister Allester Abrams (ibid)

On 13 September 2019, the community of Mallo protested at the Wynberg Magistrate's Court during the appearance of the two accused (Hlati and Maqhina 2019). The two teenagers were from the same area as Mallo, and it is alleged that they were part of a gang in Heinz Park called Hard Livings (ibid). Gang violence has been raging for many years in Cape Town, in places such as the Cape Flats (Kinnes 2000). The Cape Flats includes places such as Manenberg, Mitchells Plain and Philippi (Census 2011). These gangs are "vehicles for making meaning for young people" even though they are led by older men (Kinnes 2014:21). Gangs fight with other gangs and commit other crimes such as rape and robbery in Cape Town. In many respects, Mallo is a victim of a complex issue of violence in Cape Town that spans many years. The two accused are in police custody and are yet to be convicted of the crime (Saafia February 2019a).

### 1.4.2. Uyinene Mrwetyana (19 years old), Cape Town

The rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana on 24 August 2019 is arguably one of the most reported on non-intimate femicides in South Africa. Mrwetyana went to study film and media at the University of Cape Town in 2019 (Serra 2020). On Saturday, 24 August, in the afternoon, Mrwetyana went to the Claremont Post Office to collect a parcel. A post office worker named Luyanda Botha told Mrwetyana the credit card machine was not working, and she should come

back later (Nombembe 2019). “She did so shortly after 2 pm when all other workers had left and Botha locked the door behind her, raping her, and when Mrwetyana did not stop screaming, Botha beat her with a set of post-office scales, then putting her body in the trunk of his car, burning it, and dumping it at Khayelitsha township, near where he lived” (Lyster 2019: online). It is believed Mrwetyana fought back (Peterson 2019). The police were joined by a team of private investigators, two hired by the University of Cape Town, three hired by the family (Dayimani and Kretzmaan 2019). The search and investigations by private investigators led the police to Claremont Post Office, where blood was discovered in Botha’s car and shoes, and he confessed to the murder and led the police to where he had hidden Mrwetyana’s body (Meyer 2019). He confessed that he had gone to consume alcohol at a nearby bar after raping and murdering Mrwetyana (Nombembe 2019). Botha was 42 years old at the time of the crime and a father of two (ibid). Botha had been handed a previous conviction for car hijacking in 1999, being sentenced to eight years for that crime (Nombembe 2019), of which five years was served and three years suspended (Evans 2019. Botha also had an attempted rape case filed against him which was later withdrawn (ibid).

The story of Mrwetyana undoubtedly had an impact on all South Africans. The story broke before her body was discovered. When she went missing her friends at UCT took to social media to report about her disappearance using her photographs. The campaign was called #bringNenehome, and it was joined by various organizations such as the Pink Ladies Organization (Bhengu 2019). Social media spread her image and the story was known to the whole country before the news broke of her death. She was described by friends as a “holistic person”, “very focused”, and a helpful person (Meyer 2019). On 2 September 2019, news of Mrwetyana’s death was revealed for the first time when Botha made his first appearance at the Wynberg Magistrate’s Court and was charged with murder, rape and defeating the ends of justice (ibid). The story sent shockwaves and outrage throughout the country and internationally. Mrwetyana undoubtedly became the poster child for femicide in South Africa. Speaking in parliament, President Ramaphosa described it as a "a crime against our common humanity " for South Africa and further said that "we are reviewing laws on sexual offences to prioritise the needs of survivors; we are going to overhaul the national register of sexual offenders and it will list all the men who are convicted of violence against women and children" (Sowetan Live 2019). He further stated that cases of sexual violence that were prematurely closed and not properly investigated would be re-opened (Sowetan Live 2019). A

petition calling for the death penalty to be reinstated in South Africa was established in the wake of the murder of Mrwetyana and others in September, more than 300,000 South Africans signed this petition (staff reporter, Business Tech 2019).

President Ramaphosa also visited the family of Mrwetyana in the Eastern Cape with the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services Ronald Lamola (Isaac 2019). The funeral of Mrwetyana was held on 8 September 2019, at East London's Abbotsford Christian Centre, and it was attended by thousands of mourners, including government ministers and UCT Vice-Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng (Mlambo and Velaphi 2019). The Uyinene Mrwetyana Humanities Scholarship was established by UCT to fund female students pursuing studies at UCT in the faculty of humanities (UCT, 2021). The Uyinene Mrwetyana Foundation was also established in celebration of her life, focusing on women's empowerment initiatives, fighting GBV, amongst others (Uyinene Mrwetyana Foundation 2020). Luyanda Botha was handed three life sentences in November 2019 for the rape and murder of Mrwetyana (BBC News 2019). When handing over the judgment, Judge Gayaat Salie-Hlophe said that "though it may be cold comfort to you today, it is not without significance that she was a fighter and had a fighting spirit for her life" (ibid).

Uyinene Mrwetyana's case is undoubtedly one that can be referred to as a 'mega case' (Soothill et al 2004:1). Almost everything around this case was covered, from the memorial and the funeral to the court case and sentencing. During this period there were similar murders, such as Durban student Natasha Conabeer and University of the Western Cape student Jesse Hess. However, the case of Mrwetyana drowned out these cases in the news media. Murders that receive this volume of reporting eventually come to represent what we consider to be general knowledge about femicide (Brodie 2020:188). Beautiful photographs of Mrwetyana accompanied all articles in the media. The anniversary of her killing was also covered significantly by the media and used to highlight GBV (Thebus 2020).

### 1.4.3. Lynette Volschenk (32 years old), Bellville, Cape Town

The murder of Lynette Volschenk was horrific and brutal. Volschenk was 32 years old and lived in Seesig apartment building in Bellville (Evans 2019). She was a White South African woman.

According to Census (2011), the population group in Bellville is made up of 52% White people, 29% Coloured, 16% Black African and 3% other.

Volschenk worked as a draughtsman for an engineering firm in Cape Town (staff reporter, #TheWC.co.za 2019). She had last updated her Facebook status on Wednesday, 21 August 2019, with a motivational poster with the Frida Kahlo quote "at the end of the day, we can endure much more than we think we can" (Etheridge 2019a). Volschenk's body was discovered when colleagues went to check on her, when she did not arrive at work on 22 August 2019 (ibid). Volschenk died after allegedly being stabbed in the temple (ibid). Her dismembered body parts were found stuffed in refuse bags in her apartment (Evans 2019a). Other body parts were allegedly found in the apartment of the accused (staff reporter, Cape Times 2019). The accused, Kyle Ruiters (24 years old), was arrested on the day her body parts were discovered and appeared in the Bellville Magistrate's Court on 26 August 2019 and chose not to apply for bail and remained in police custody (Evans 2019a).

It is also alleged that the accused was found painting walls in her flat after the incident (staff reporter, Cape Times 2019) and told Volschenk's colleagues that she hired him to paint the apartment (Evans 2019). There was also a trail of blood from the 9$^{th}$ floor, where Volschenk's flat was situated, to Ruiters' flat on the 10$^{th}$ floor, and blood was found on his hand (Lindwa 2019). According to CCTV footage, Ruiters allegedly walked about half a kilometre with the victim's head the next morning, wrapped in a plastic shopping bag, and hid it on Bate Street in Bellville (Staff reporter Cape Times, 2019). Ruiters allegedly had bought a knife and hacksaw at a nearby hardware store a week before and used these to cut Volschenk into pieces (ibid). It is alleged the murderer used a Bible and pretended to want to give it to Volschenk as a gift and this allowed him to gain access to her apartment (ibid).

Ruiters lived with his aunt, Theresa Ruiters (Etheridge 2019a). He had no criminal against him and or any protection orders against him (ibid). During his court appearance, there were lobby groups such as SA Women Fight Back who held placards calling for Ruiters to be denied bail and for the criminal justice system to be changed because it was "failing ordinary citizens" (Etheridge 2019a). The group obtained 9100 petition signatures for Ruiters to be denied bail (ibid). There was

also a high level of public support for this case. Ruiters is yet to be convicted of the murder, the trial is continuing.

Like the two cases above, Volschenk's murder garnered prominent media coverage and turned into one of the biggest stories of the year between August and September 2019. The case received a lot of attention from the media probably because of the location and because she was White. "Given the privileging of Whiteness and its ideals in South Africa, it is unsurprising that femicide in White suburbs is considered exceptional and newsworthy" (Langa et al 2018:11).

### 1.5. Chapter Organization

This chapter concludes with the brief mapping of the dissertation. Chapter 2 focuses on qualitative literature that is pertinent to the study of sexual violence. In this chapter I locate this study in the broader body of media portrayals of femicide. This section concentrates on the dominant themes in news media reporting of femicide highlighted by previous research. This chapter will help us make sense of media coverage of femicide. Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical constructs underpinning this study. That is, representation theory and intersectionality theory. These two theoretical concepts are defined and summarized and their relation to the study is discussed. Chapter 4 has been devoted to the methodological procedures undertaken in this study. In this chapter, motivation for the use of a qualitative study is provided, and the motivation for the three murder cases selected is discussed. Thematic analysis is discussed as the analytical approach for this study of sexual violence in news media. Thereafter, the data is analysed in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. The four themes are: Ideal Victim, Visible Bodies and Invisible Perpetrators, Fear of Crime, and The Crisis of Femicide. This chapter attempts to explore the data in explaining that femicide does not happen in isolation and that reporting is influenced by several societal factors that construct a particular narrative. Finally, Chapter 9 provides the conclusion of the study, highlighting key points in the data.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1. Introduction

Everyday South African news media are awash with heart-breaking stories of sexual violence against women (Gouws 2015). There is a large and expanding body of research examining sexual violence discourses in news media across many disciplines. This chapter highlights some of the qualitative research studies that looked at the coverage of sexual violence and femicide. It is critical to review such studies as they will provide us with the foundation of the state of violence in South Africa and lead to an understanding of sexual violence, especially from a media perspective and the relationship between victims, perpetrators and the environment of violence.

This literature review highlights some of the dominant patterns that give a backdrop against which to view and analyse media representations of sexual violence. These patterns include: the newsworthiness of murders, how certain discourses in media normalize sexual violence, the intersectionality of race and class in reporting, and how media prioritize murders with extreme violence.

### 2.2. Media Representations of Femicide

Various studies have examined how media continue to cover sexual violence against women and have highlighted dominant themes in media representations and their implications. As a point of departure, many studies have consistently demonstrated that not all murders are equally newsworthy, and some are not even considered newsworthy at all (Brodie 2020, Meyers 1997). “Like it or not, we are equally fickle and frequently hypocritical when it comes to which victims matter to us, which bodies count, and we show this year after year, by deciding that some cases matter more than others” (Brodie 2020:190). This means some murders are selected to be in the news while others are made into major news (Lundman 2003). Murders that receive a volume of media coverage are often referred to as “mega-cases” (Brodie 2020:188). The best example of a mega-case in South Africa is the murder of model and paralegal Reeva Steenkamp, who was shot and killed by her boyfriend, Oscar Pistorius (Langa et al 2018); Anene Booysen, who was “violently raped, severely assaulted, mutilated, and disembowelled” (Falkof 2019:159); and Anni Hindocha, who went missing and was found dead from a gunshot wound (Brodie 2020). These murders turned into some of the biggest news stories in South Africa, receiving a volume of

coverage. Mega-cases such as these also have the potential to increase the media's focus on other cases in a specific period. There are certain societal factors that determine greater media coverage of femicide cases. Whiteness, class and celebrity status have been shown to make one a "newsworthy victim" (Brodie 2020, Langa et al 2018). This is reflected in the ways that the media reports sexual violence. For instance, the reporting of the murder of Reeva Steenkamp showed that race, class, and celebrity status made her newsworthy.

Jiwani defines newsworthiness as "what makes a story worth telling" (2006:38). Stories that are selected as newsworthy are characterised by "drama, action, and conflict and are aimed at keeping audiences captivated" (Gilchrist 2010:23). From a media perspective, studies have found that newsworthiness is linked to reporting that is intended to shock readers or sensationalize sexual violence against women (Watson and Lalu, 2015). Furthermore, Judge demonstrates that the worthiness of the victim in the reporting of gendered violence is derived from "problematic meanings" attached to violence and "intersecting positionality" (2017:78). Therefore, newsmakers use these social constructions to regard some victims of femicide as newsworthy and others as not newsworthy: "only specific victims are therefore considered worthy of public outrage and response" (Langa et al 2018:11). Writing and reading about violence in the Global South requires an understanding or at least an acknowledgement of these phenomena (Brodie 2020), as interpreted against this historical background.

It is not a coincidence that these patterns are reflected in media coverage of sexual violence in a South African context. For example, Brodie in her book *Femicide in South Africa* indicates that during the "2012/2013 period 56% of news stories about femicide were of White victims, while news stories of Black and Coloured victims made about 26% and 15% of news coverage respectively" (2020:194). These figures provide insight into the role of race in news coverage in a South African context. There is little space for an in-depth picture of sexual violence in the country because of the low reportage of certain cases. Such reporting serves to maintain the racial hierarchies of power that exist in South Africa. News media's emphasis of particular types of homicides and neglect of others could affect public perceptions and fear of crime, and in turn, lead the public to support punitive criminal justice policy alternatives (Gruenewald, Pizarro, Chermak 2009:262).

Occurrences are considered newsworthy by news media when they are unusual and different (Meyers 1997) Murders that are considered brutal, and shocking are most likely to be selected as newsworthy. Research conducted by The Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre found that court proceedings of GBV received widespread coverage from media if they met the requirements of "brutal and shocking" (Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre 2011). Murders that are considered "common" by the media receive less coverage or are not selected at all. Consequently, the media's focus exclusively on the most gruesome cases leads the audience to believe that GBV is a physical act rather than a continuing act that includes emotional and psychological abuse and male power (Wilcox 2008). For instance, Kitzinger notes that there has been a declining interest in coverage of abuse against women and the focus is only on the final act, the murder (2008).

Buiten and Salo have studied how certain kinds of news media discourses normalize gendered violence (2011). Specifically, Buiten and Salo argue that certain news discourses normalize GBV, "by sidestepping the highly gendered nature of incidences of misogynistic violence in favour of a discourse that tacitly accepts that men commit violent crimes against women" (2011:115). The role of the perpetrator is invisible in such media reports and the focus is on the circumstances in which the violence occurred (Buiten and Salo 2011:115).

For instance, Gouws presents an example where *Die Burger* newspaper focused on the circumstances of where the rape of Jessica Wheeler happened instead of the role of the perpetrator (2005). The newspaper report attributed "Wheeler's death to suffocation through soil inhalation when her attackers forced her face into the ground while sodomising her" (Gouws 2005: online). "The forensic criminologist was quoted by the newspaper as saying that the rapists had not attempted to kill her and that her death had been a 'rape gone wrong'. The reader is then informed that "Wheeler was wearing a G-string and that her blood would be tested for alcohol and drugs" (Gouws 2005: online). This kind of reporting places the responsibility on the women to avoid "provocative dresses, immodest behaviour, being too assertive, or not assertive enough, or simply going out for a drink with a man" (Weaver 1998:262). Meyers found similar patterns of reporting and indirect victim-blaming (1997). This suggests that women are forced to "modify their behaviours" so that they can be safe (Gqola 2007:120), and the actions of the perpetrator are not questioned. Ormarjee found similar trends in her study into the representation of rape by news media and revealed that media reporting reinforced the myth that the woman is responsible for her

rape (2001). This sends a horrible message to survivors and victims' that your claim of sexual violence can only be legitimate if you did all the right things to be considered "safe". To add to this, victims of sexual violence have to face an overwhelmed justice system that is used as a yardstick in determining their believability.

Gouws argues that "this type of reporting normalises violence and makes it seem that rape is simply another daily occurrence in the lives of women in South Africa. If the case of Wheeler is described as 'rape gone wrong' then surely there must be cases where 'rape goes right', implying that women in South Africa have to put up with rape and be glad that they are not killed when they are raped" (2005: online). Buiten and Salo contend that this type of reporting normalises the actions of perpetrators while the behaviour of the victim on the day of the violence is questioned (2011). Sadly, most of these victims are not there to give their accounts of the incident.

Thirdly, other studies have looked at how media focus on the injuries of the victim. The more extreme the violence is, the more it receives a volume of coverage (Gqola 2015). Because we have become complacent, to be outraged by the increasing levels of sexual violence there must be extremely violent acts. Boonzaier examined the media reporting of the rape and murder of Anene Booysen and found similar patterns of reporting (2017). Readers were "confronted – pornographically and repeatedly" by the horror of her injuries (Boonzaier 2017:477). Coverage focused more on her dead body than on Booysen's "the lived and imagined life", and almost all news reports repeated the gruesome details (ibid: 477). Boonzaier argues that the state of Booysen's body became a "spectacle" and this kind of reporting was repeated even later during the trial (2017:477). Consequently, there were little or no details about Booysen that would acknowledge her "subjectivity" (2017:477). Therefore, she "is constantly spoken of but herself remains inaudible or inexpressible; she is displayed as a spectacle but remains unpresentable" (Moorti 2002:110). The media lack sensitivity because of the sharp focus on the brutality of the incident rather than the victim, and instead of questioning "the contexts that contour violence and moral orders that sustain or constrain its everyday enactments" (Bowman 2021), they report the violence as if it is a new phenomenon.

Research studies on sexual violence have shown the growing tendency to depart from the act and look at the social problems associated with where it happened (Boonzaier 2017). Boonzaier argues

that some media representations of GBV focus on social problems such as poverty and high unemployment in place of the victim, which depoliticizes GBV and excludes "misogyny and sexism" (2017:475). For example, in media coverage of Anene Booysen, the social problems of her town, Bredasdorp, such as teenage pregnancy, high unemployment, high school dropout rates and drug abuse were linked to her murder (ibid). “These crimes are reported on as ‘genderless’ crimes and even when there appears to be an opportunity to reflect on gendered power, it is not taken up” (ibid: 475). Falkof found a similar trend in the reporting of Booysen’s murder and argues that news media failed to analyse gendered violence and to confront the question of why South African men are violent to the women in their communities (2019).

An element of male power in news media is almost always absent. In this way, coverage ignores the manifestation of male power and how this is expressed in South African society every day. This creates a disconnection from the perpetrator of the crime, and he remains invisible because male power is not questioned. Meyers argues that this kind of reporting fails to associate sexual violence against women with male-dominated social structures and needs to be examined from a feminist perspective (1994). If the news media were to include acknowledgement of male power in their reporting rather than focusing on social problems associated with the area, this could contribute to our understanding of femicide. Consequently, the news media's focus on social problems "implicitly presents sexual violence as a taken-for-granted fact of life" and affects society in attaining broader social solutions (Kitzinger 2008).

### 2.3. Conclusion

This chapter attempted to highlight the key trends and patterns in media coverage of sexual violence. The reporting shows that victims are “othered” based on class and race. The intersectionality of these issues shapes how sexual violence is defined and understood. These studies have shown how media "failed to promote transformative understanding" of sexual violence (Isaacs 2016:493). This kind of reporting illustrates the long-lasting hierarchies of power that exist within the country. These notions affect how society understands sexual violence. At most, the media only reinforced existing values, attitudes, and opinions about violence. As a result, in a country that has the highest sexual violence rate, media reporting presents an inaccurate picture of sexual violence in the country.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

### 3.1. Introduction

This study draws from two interrelated theories, intersectionality, and representation theory. Representation theory as a framework gives researchers the ability to examine ideologies within media texts, narratives, and how media construct reality, as well as to explore possible alternative representations (Reid 2013). Intersectionality allows researchers to explore how race, gender and class intersect and how this influences how media represent identities and events in society. The combination of representation theory and intersectionality allows for a nuanced and thorough analysis of the corpus of selected media texts. I will draw from these two theories to explore how South African online news media present sexual violence. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the theoretical definitions employed in this study and the theoretical constructs that framed much of the analysis.

### 3.2. Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality as a framework is increasingly used in gender studies, sociology, economics, and other disciplines (Gouws 2017). Intersectionality theory was introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to investigate identity politics in jurisprudence (1991). Intersectionality theory focuses on "intersectional identities" (Winer 2021:1). Examples of these identities include gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality. These social identities overlap and can be used to marginalize people. For this study, I explore how gender and class intersect and influence the decisions that newsmakers make when they select cases of sexual violence.

This theory arose as part of the critique of radical feminism and is vital to sociologists because it addresses the experience of people who are subjected to multiple forms of subordination within society (McCall 2005). That is, women of colour experience various kinds of racial and sexual discrimination (Crenshaw 1991) in the workplace, in the street, and even in their households. With gendered violence, physical abuse is “merely the most immediate manifestation of subordination they experience” (Crenshaw 1991:1245). Crenshaw argues that the intersectionality of race and gender act as overlapping forms of oppression (1991). As an analytical approach, it enables

researchers to see the deep inequalities that exist in society. That is, to explain oppression and privilege at the same time (Winer 2021). Furthermore, it helps to investigate the internal power dynamics and hierarchy that shape media texts and the producers of media texts.

In the context of this study, intersectionality is fundamentally viewed as a tool to understand certain kinds of power relations that are operant in society through media coverage. In this study, applying intersectionality as an analytical framework means analysing how intersectionality shapes how victims of femicide are represented by media, and how this in turn shapes how readers think and perceive femicide. Instead of seeing intersectionality as just a theory that addresses intersecting identities, it should also be seen as a theory that addresses the power relations that exist within societies (Crenshaw 1991).

Against this backdrop, power dynamics are central to representations of gendered violence. Consequently, the way media cover femicide has in many ways exacerbated existing gender and racial inequalities. The theory shows who is affected by the system of power and privilege. “Given that systemized forms of domination and asymmetrical power relations are major features of contemporary societies within the epoch of globalisation, it is safe to assume that these discourses will reveal certain ideological effects that are operational" (Stevens 2008:150). For instance, in this study, we will see how media texts work to maintain relations of power in society. The way media cover events is shaped by these systems of domination.

In the context of South Africa, it is important to examine such power relations and intersecting identities because of the legacy of apartheid and colonialism. “It is therefore very difficult to make generalisations about women’s experience. In South Africa, the racially defined categories, as well as class, sexuality, and sexual orientation, locate women differently in different communities and very often determine their life chances and opportunities, depending on where they find themselves in the matrix of domination” (Jansen and Walters 2020:184). Furthermore, intersectionality theory explores the racial inequalities that exist within the category of sex and the gender disparities within one race (Nash 2008). This means that White women may not face racism but do have to deal with sexism in the household and workplace, while Black women have to deal with sexism and racism at the same time. Black heterosexual men, meanwhile, are likely to face racism but not sexism.

hooks summarize it this way: “White women and Black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or be oppressed. Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women. White women may be victimized by sexism, but racism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of Black people” (hooks in Bhavnani, 2001:39).

Cullen et al (2021) used intersectionality to examine femicide and intimate partner violence and found that when victims are viewed through the lens of intersectionality some are more visible (White), while others are less visible (Black). Nevertheless, critics of intersectionality as an analytic tool argue that it exclusively focuses on Black women and leaves out other marginalized groups in society (Carbado 2013). Consequently, it creates the “implicit assumption” that some identities are not affected by systems of power (Winer 2021:1). Despite this criticism, this theory continues to be applied in many studies that examine the plight of women. It is a significant contribution to scholarship that examines power relations in society.

Finally, intersectionality is a more inclusive approach with regards to gender and is suitable for the study of sexual violence because it is able to highlight the place of power, class, and race in media coverage. Any study, especially in a South African context, that examines coverage of violence should consider issues of race and gender. Using this theory will potentially reveal how the intersectionality of social categories such as race and class are at play in the media reporting of femicide.

### 3.3. Representation Theory

Stuart Hall is regarded as the pioneer in the field of representation theory and is credited with advancing this theory in media studies (Devereaux 2007). Hall (1997a:16) broadly defines representation as the production of meaning through language (Hall 1997a:16). "Language and the media are both systems of representation" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler 2002:76). The task for media scholars is to examine the accuracy of media representations (Rayner and Wall 2008). Finally, the definition more relevant for this study, according to Hall (1997b:16): "representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people". These representations are constitutive of culture, meaning, and knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. “Beyond just mirroring reality”, representations in the media such as in film, television and news create reality and normalize specific worldviews or ideologies (Fursich 2010:115).

Representation is an inclusive approach that is used widely to analyse media texts or media coverage. In this study, representation theory will be used to evaluate how media represent sexual violence. Representation theory as a framework gives researchers the ability to examine ideologies within media texts and narratives, and how media construct reality, as well as to explore possible alternative representations (Reid 2013, Devereaux 2007). It is important to note that there is no specific guideline in the application of representation theory. However, most analyses of representation look at the meaning constructed by language. The power that comes with this meaning in media texts is symbolic and persuasive (Van Dijk 1996). Representation theory contends that meaning is not fixed, or neutral, but changes over time (Hall 1997, Reid 2013). As such, mediated reality changes depending on the specific period; who is represented, and how; who wins from that representation (Hall 1997, Devereux 2007); and how the audience interprets it. This enables the reader to see "whose version of reality" these representations promote (Devereux 2007:187). Similarly, this study will also use representation to explore the meaning behind the text. That is, how the media talks about sexual violence, and how the media talks about victims and perpetrators of femicide. Representation theory applies to this study as it allows discourse on sexual violence to be examined.

Previous studies of representation have explored different forms of violence against women, including sexual violence and physical and intimate partner violence (Sutherland 2016). Other studies specifically selected and analysed media coverage of interpersonal violence generally to look at styles of reporting and the media message (Sutherland 2015). Against this backdrop, this study uses representation theory to examine the way media portray sexual violence against women by exploring the dominance of particular themes in online news media articles.

Media representation of events shapes societal perceptions and attitudes and reveals new insights about South African society. Furthermore, "the media does not simply reflect societal dynamics for the same society's consumption, media choices about representation, what to highlight, what to omit and so forth are connected to how gendered and other identities are negotiated in the society such media both addresses and forms part of" (Gqola 2015:105). Although news media readers are not simply passive recipients of information, who or what is selected to be covered in the news and how those individuals and events are represented may have an impact on people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours (Flood and Pease, 2009). The central argument of this theory is that media

representation is a reflection or distortion of reality and is produced within certain positions of power and the audience may interpret these meanings differently. In answering the research question, this theory will be used to explain how media representation may reinforce, legitimise, or fragment certain views.

The framework will allow for an extensive exploration of the implications of news media coverage on femicide. For example, news media representation of sexual violence might challenge or maintain societal attitudes about violence against women. That is, create meanings that either perpetuate violence against women or that help combat it. In this way, one can see the significance of news media discourses and the impact they have on public perception. This is the reality that this study is grappling with.

### 3.4. Conclusion

This section highlighted the theoretical point of departure that informs this study. Media scholars have always been concerned with how the media represent societies. Intersectionality and representation theory provide a way to understand how contemporary news media portray sexual violence against women and femicide in general in South Africa. The two analytical approaches of this study argue that reporting of violence by media is influenced by a historical context and other existing inequalities and/or reflects the kind of society that these media texts are produced in. Using these two interrelated theories as a tool will show that media representations are not produced in a vacuum and that these representations have an impact on how societies understand sexual violence.

## Chapter 4: Research Methods and Procedures

### 4.1. Introduction

The previous chapters have provided the scope, broad rationale, and significance of the present study, and have outlined the extant literature and the theoretical framework of this research. This chapter aims to provide the methodical procedure of the present study and the rationale for such a choice. This chapter focuses on the research methods employed, and explains the broad research aims and questions, and data collection procedures. This chapter further elaborates on the analytical framework of the present study. This study utilizes thematic analysis, which involves patterns that are prevalent in the media texts. These prevalent patterns can contribute to larger arguments about media reporting of events, in this instance sexual violence. In addition, how media choose to cover social issues can influence how readers "perceive the dynamics of the problem" and their solutions (Richards et al 2011:179), and studying, analysing, and challenging the media's portrayal of femicide is an important step in understanding public perception and shaping intervention efforts (Taylor 2009). There is an urgent need for research that explores this kind of news media (Schroder, Drotner, Kline and Murray 2003), especially in a South African social context. Furthermore, this study employs purposive sampling. This section outlines how articles were selected from a large pool of online news media articles to create a manageable sample size. Finally, it is important to highlight that this study does not do comparison.

### 4.2. Qualitative Research Approach

"Qualitative approach is embedded in the philosophy of empiricism and follows an open, flexible and unstructured approach to enquiry" (Kumar 2014:14).

> "The approach aims to explore diversity rather than quantify, it further emphasizes the description and narration of feelings, perceptions and experiences rather than their measurements and communicates findings in a descriptive and narrative rather than analytical manner, placing no or less emphasis on generalisation" (ibid:14)".

The present study chose a qualitative research approach. The goal of this approach is to support the researcher in the attempt to arrive at a constructive conclusion from the patterns found in the

cases that are being examined (Wageman and Schneider 2010). The goal of this approach in this study is to provide “a deepening of understanding” (Queiros, Faria and Almeida 2017:370) of femicide. This is because the qualitative research approach focuses more on issues of reality "that cannot be quantified" and provides an explanation of complex social relations (ibid: 370).

This research approach has been used in studies that have focused “on deconstructing meaning system within the uneven social relations and systemized forms of domination” (Schroder et al 2003). This research approach suggests that all “meanings are socially determined and constructed” (Schroder et al 2003:274), and applying this approach help us to trace the manifestations of these meanings. Therefore, this research approach allows the researcher to deconstruct the meaning system and the impact on society. In addition, the benefit of using this approach is that it provides the ability to understand the context of news media production, the meanings that accompany the text.

The present study also aims to look for recurring patterns in the data by analysing the language (choice of words), which has implications on how society understands femicide or violence in general. It is through critical textual analysis that we are able to identify the social meaning of the text (Hall 1997). Nevertheless, there are limitations with this approach. Firstly, the analysis of the case study can take time and the researcher can only generalise the results to the larger population in a limited way (Flick 2011). Secondly, researchers such as Lam (2015) and Thompson (2011) argue that qualitative research methods with smaller sample sizes should not claim wider generalization to other contexts. Lastly, qualitative research is “a long, hard road, with elusive data on one side and stringent requirements for analysis on the other” (Berg and Lune 2012:4). However, despite these limitations, qualitative research is still prominent in studies of meaning and language (Rahman 2017). Darlington and Scott argue that generalisability should not be a problem, as if the researcher “considers the unit of the attention as the phenomenon under investigation, rather than the number of individuals, then the sample is often much larger than first appears” (2003:18). Against this backdrop, it is prudent for this study to use this approach, to examine how sexual violence is presented and how it is understood by society by exploring patterns in the coverage. The qualitative method selected by this study is thematic analysis, which is discussed below.

### 4.3. Selection of Media

This study chose four online news sites. These are *News24*, *Daily Voice*, *Times Live*, and *Daily Maverick*. These online publications were selected because of their large readership. Media platforms with large readership have the potential to set the agenda to society and drive public discourse. According to the 2021 Narrative and IAB South Africa website traffic report, *News24*, *Independent Online* (*IOL*), and *Times Live* were the biggest news publications in South Africa (2021). The Narrative report revealed that *News24* was South Africa's most popular online publication, with a readership of "12,5 million unique monthly browsers", while *IOL* was the second largest, with "5,88 million unique browsers". *Daily Voice*, which was used in this study, is a publication of *IOL*. This was followed by *Times Live* on 5,58 million (Narrative Report 2021), while *Daily Maverick* was sitting at 2,1 million monthly unique browsers (Narrative Report 2021). These publications also cater for diverse constituents, have a national footprint, and cover stories across the country. The aim was to draw a sample that represents the diversity of online news media in the South African context.

### 4.4. Data Collection

The selected period for the collection of data was from 24 August 2019 till 30 November 2019 (84 days of coverage), from the first reporting of the cases, and covering the continuing reportage around them throughout this period. Data was collected from the online news media sites selected above. Purposive sampling was employed to collect data. This "type of sampling procedure is useful when you want to construct a historical reality, describe a phenomenon, or investigate something only little is known about" (Kumar 2014:244).

The articles were searched by (1) the names and surnames of the victims (2) paired with the keywords "GBV, murder, and rape". The articles that were included were those that reported exclusively about the case, from when the murder happened and throughout the selected period. Following this search, opinion pieces and editorials that provided commentary about the three cases, and that specifically mentioned the names of the victims to highlight gender-based violence, were included in the analysis. The selection also includes opinion pieces and editorial that used specifically these cases to highlight femicide or/and GBV. Articles from this time frame that highlighted femicide and GBV but did not mention the names of these victims were excluded. Articles that had only audio or video and did not have text were also excluded because they cannot

be searched by the criteria highlighted above. All articles that satisfied the criteria were collected and examined. The aim of the data collection was "to identify the discourses deployed to contextualize and describe the events" (Boonzaier 2017:473), and to identify how femicide victims and perpetrators are portrayed. All searches were done through the Google search function. Articles about Uyinene Mrwetyana that were published before she was declared dead (when she was still missing) were also included in the data. The search produced 60 articles about the cases and these articles were all logged and saved as PDFs for analysis.

Summary of Data Collection

| **Publication** | **Articles: Period 24 August 2019- 30 November 2019** |
|---|---|
| **News24** | **22** |
| **Daily Voice** | **18** |
| **Times Live** | **9** |
| **Daily Maverick** | **5** |
| **Total:** | **54** |

### 4.5. Method of Analysis: Thematic Analysis

This present study conducts content analysis through thematic analysis from a sample of 54 collected articles. The initial step is to look for a possible pattern or theme in the data. “A theme captures something important about the data about the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:82). Themes are specific patterns that the researcher is interested in (Joffe and Yardley 2004). Thematic analysis is used in this study as "a way of seeing" (Boyatzis 1998:4). Articles were selected by reading each article carefully and identifying dominant themes in the selected data (Braun and Clarke 2006). That is, “finding repeated meanings in texts across the data” (Braun and Clarke 2006:9) or as Boyatzis (1998:5) calls it, "pattern recognition". Therefore, the aim is to explore themes that come up repeatedly in the articles to describe and contextualise femicide across the data.

“A further distinction in terms of what constitutes a theme” (or coding category) lies in whether it is drawn from existing theoretical ideas that the researcher brings to the data (deductive coding) or from the raw information itself (inductive coding)” (Joffe and Yardley 2004:57). In this present study, I use the deductive method for selecting my themes. The deductive analysis is usually influenced by the researcher's theoretical or analytical interest in the area and is "more explicitly analyst-driven” (Braun and Clarke 2006:12). Deductive thematic analysis allows the researcher to add, extend or argue previous findings (Boyatzis 1998). "Theoretical sensitivity" gives the researcher the ability to identify what is important and give it meaning (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Against this backdrop, the themes that have emerged from the data have been influenced by the literature and the research question. For example, the themes that I have selected focus explicitly on issues of media representation of sexual violence.

An important consideration when doing thematic analysis is whether the researcher is providing a rich description of the data or a detailed account of one particular aspect (Braun and Clarke 2006). When the researcher conducts a rich thematic description of the entire data set, “in this case, the themes you identify, code, and analyse would need to be an accurate reflection of the content of the entire data set” (Braun and Clarke 2006:11). The other method is to conduct a more detailed and "nuanced account" of one or several themes within the data that relate to the research question or an area of interest within the data (ibid: 11). This study chooses the latter. As such, my approach is to conduct a detailed analysis of four themes in the data. My analysis is concerned with the representation of femicide across the data, not a description of each article. Thus, not all articles will be discussed, but only prevalent themes across the data from the sample using quotes and headlines. The “analysis involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that I am analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing" (Braun and Clarke 2006:15). The analysis starts from the article title and the contents of the articles.

### 4.6. Ethical Considerations

This study does not use human participants. There was no ethical clearance required. The study uses online news articles which could be openly accessed by the public. As such, there was no permission required to use the data from these online news sites. These are public platforms, and the data is available to everyone. Suffice to say that this study involves three lived lives, those of Mrwetyana, Mallo, and Volschenk. This study will ensure that these lives are respected when writing about them. Lastly, there were no limitations encountered in the collecting of data or accessing of information.

## Chapter 5: Ideal Victim

### 5.1. Introduction

The first theme is titled ‘ideal victim’ and explores which victims of femicide matter to the media. That is, what kind of victims are considered newsworthy and receive greater media attention across different publications. In the following analysis, I present the ways in which femicide victims are nominated to be ideal victims due to various intersecting social issues. This chapter begins with a discussion of Nils Christie’s ‘ideal victim’. This chapter describes the socio-economic issues that are an integral part of the making of an ideal victim. It highlights that not all sexual violence victims matter to media. This analysis suggests that the murders of Uyinene Mrwetyana, Janika Mallo, Lynette Volschenk were exceptionalised and covered outside the scope of the broader picture of sexual violence. This portrayal results in a skewed understanding of femicide, undermining the severity of this problem. This representation reinforces or reproduces the existing inequalities in South Africa and stereotypes about femicide.

The analysis in this study reveals that media is also shaped directly or indirectly by complex factors when it reports about sexual violence. The “analysis reveals conspicuous differences between how the “problem” of femicide is reported and understood depending on the status of the victim and her relationship with the perpetrator, and how this distorts the reality of who is at risk of becoming a victim and who is to be feared as a perpetrator” (Brodie 2021).The media’s coverage of Mrwetyana, Mallo and Volschenk shows who is valued as the ideal victim in society and who is not valued.

### The ‘Ideal Victim’

I will rely on the Norwegian criminologist and sociologist Nils Christie’s tool of the ideal victim (1986) to explain the portrayal of femicide . Christie’s theoretical tool of the ideal victim is widely known and has been used to examine how crime or violence is covered (1986). Christie’s tool provides a framework of how victims are granted ideal victim status (ibid). Christie explains the concept of the ideal victim:

> With the term "ideal victim" I do not think of the person or category most perceiving herself or himself as a victim. Nor do I think of those in the

> greatest danger of being victimized or most often victimized. These might or might not be included. By "ideal victim" I have instead in mind a person or a category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim (1986:18).

Christie was interested in the social level of a victim; what society might consider as a victim (1986). Christie contends that the weaker the victim is perceived to be, the easier society will grant her/him victim status (1986:19). For instance, "the old, sick and very young people" are given ideal victim status (Christie 1986:19). In the context of sexual violence, society gets more outraged when very old women and children get raped and murdered. Therefore, the younger and weaker the victim of sexual violence is, the greater the news coverage. Christie's hypothetical victim involved six requirements: "first the victim should be weak, which typically includes elderly woman, pregnant women and young children; second , the victim should be involved in a respectable activity (so , not a sex worker, for example); and, third, at the time of the crime, she should be at or en route to a place that is beyond reproach-she cannot be at or heading to or from a bar ; fourth , the perpetrator must be able physically to dominate the victim and be able to be described in negative terms, fifth , the victim must not know the perpetrator and must be no relationship between them; and, finally, the victim should have enough status or influence to assert her victim status without threatening society's vested interest" (1986:18). Christie focused on the 'sociology of phenomena' of victims and argued that being a victim was not a 'thing, an objective phenomenon (1986). 'It has to do with the participants' definition of the situation' (Christie 1986:19). According to Van Wijk Christie's tool is an explorative way to try think through how it can serve as tool to possibly understand society's views and perspectives" (2013:2). The main characteristic of ideal victimhood is vulnerability and innocence (Christie 1986). "An ideal victim, then, reflects not only ideals of vulnerability and innocence, but also of value: whose bodies matter" (Brodie 2019:191). That is, who matters most in our society (Brodie 2020). This means news media might have an interest and becomes a proxy for some victims and asserts their power. "With media's focus on women as victims of violence, the stereotype of the 'ideal victim' is also entrenched" (Spies 2020:42). Another problem with ideal victimhood is that it requires women to be ideal victims and 'good' women (Gilchrist 2010: 375 in Spies 2020:42). 'Good' women are worth protecting and seen as moral, passive and dependant, whereas 'bad women' are to blame for what happens (Garcia and McManimon 2011: 16 in Spies 2020:42). Issues of class and race are

also tied to the ideal victim-hood status. Gilchrist argues that the 'media has established a hierarchy with heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class, attractive white women, as 'the metaphor of 'innocence and goodness' (2010:375 in Spies 2020:42). Reporters and editors are shaped by the societies in which they live and "they internalise many of those societal values" including their "personal biases" and bring them into the newsroom (Brodie 2020:186). As a result, stories that get selected in news media are shaped and filtered by these factors amongst others (ibid). This analysis aims to reveals "how communities understood or felt about certain types of crimes and it tells us how communities felt about certain types of victims and perpetrators" (Brodie 2020:186).

### 5.2. Analysis

It is worth noting that this analysis does not have the intention to test or prove whether Christie's concept of the ideal victim is true or not. Rather, the aim is to understand recent media coverage of femicide in South Africa and to highlight why certain victims of femicide receive prominent coverage and granted victimhood status.

Christie provided six requirements of how an ideal victim can be considered. Firstly, the ideal victim typically includes the elderly, pregnant women, and young children (1986). Essentially this means those who are vulnerable and cannot defend themselves.

The case of Mallo demonstrates how her ideal victim status was determined based on Christie's first requirement (the young). There is a significant relationship between reporting and age (Schildkraut and Donley 2012). In early reports of the murder of Mallo, we see an emphasis on her age to highlight her youth from *Daily Voice*, *News24*, and *Times Live*. The headline of 2 September 2019 on *Daily Voice* read, "Horror as raped teen's body found in grandmother's yard with head bashed in" (Saafia February 2019a).[2] "The half-naked body of a 14-year-old girl from Heinz Park was found in her grandmother's backyard on Sunday morning" (Saafia February 2019a). The second last paragraph reads: "The circumstances surrounding the death of a 14-year-old girl whose body was found on Sunday at 8.17 am, lying in the backyard of premises in Chapini Street, Heinz Park, Samora Machel is under investigation" (Saafia February 2019a). For the

[2] Saafia February is a news reporter of Daily Voice, I have decided to reference here this way to avoid confusion since I am working with corpus that involves dates and months.

*News24* article published on 2 September 2019, the headline reads: "Body of murdered Cape Town girl, 14, found in the backyard" and the lead paragraph also repeats the age: "14-year-old girl was found murdered in the backyard" (Etheridge 2019b). Similarly, *Times Live* on 3 September 2019 led with the headline: "Girl, 14, found murdered in granny's backyard in Cape Town" (Pijoos 2019) and the lead paragraph: "The body of a 14-year-old girl was found in her grandmother's backyard" (ibid). This article also had a photograph caption that read: "The body of a 14-year-old found in a backyard" (Pijoos 2019).

The use of the word "teen" shows the youth and vulnerability of the victim. Vulnerability is a significant feature of childhood as children are physically vulnerable because of their size and structurally vulnerable because of the asymmetrical power relationship between children and adults (Meyer 2007). Children's and babies' "rape cases are often presented as spectacular or most horrendous forms of rape" (Gqola 2015:141). Kitzinger argues that stories of crime and violence involving children as victims are perceived through the discourse of innocence (2008). Mallo's age was mentioned across the three news reports, which underscores that she was defenceless. This in turn contributes to which victims matter to society.

The same trend of mentioning Mallo's age appeared in *Daily Maverick* when she was reported alongside other victims. A report was published on 5 September 2019 titled "Women protest against rape and femicide – SAPS arrest marchers, use stun grenades and turn water cannon on crowds" (Thamm 2019). The article's second paragraph states*:* "The raped, murdered, butchered, and battered include UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana, UWC student Jess Hess, boxing champion Leighandre Jegels, 14-year-old Janika Mallo, Lynette Volschenk, and Meghan Cremer" (Thamm 2019). This article mentioned other victims without their age and only specified the age of Mallo. Including her age alongside other victims creates a different meaning for her even though they are all femicide victims. It suggests that the impact of a younger victim is greater than others. All this shows the extent to which age is used to represent femicide of younger victims as abnormal, unexpected, and aberrant. Mallo can be considered "weak and defenceless" as outlined by Christie's ideal victim theory (1986). This coverage suggests that there is a "moral decay" in society when younger victims are sexually violated and murdered in this way. This portrayal implies that there was little or no protection for Mallo.

The same trend emerged in articles from *Daily Voice*. For example, in an article of 3 September 2019, the titled, "The news that 14-year-old Janika Mallo was raped and found with her head bashed in her grandmother's yard had many online saying, 'I can't handle this anymore'" (, *Daily Voice* Staff reporter 2019a). The sentence "I can't handle this anymore" portrays shock and incomprehensibility at the incident. The phrase implies that we are a society that has failed and is collapsing. Through this representation of the crime, readers tend to identify and empathize with the victims (Smolej 2010). Victims of a younger age make people declare "what a sick society we are" (Gqola 2015:125). That we need to go back and follow the "ethics, or humanity or morality" (ibid: 125).

In contrast to Mallo, in media reporting of Uyinene Mrwetyana (19) and Lynette Volschenk (32), little attention was paid to their age. Mrwetyana was also a teen at the time of her death, but media reporting did not focus on her age as compared to the reporting of Mallo. For instance, the early reporting of Mrwetyana's murder was fascinated by how Mrwetyana that fought back against her 42-year-old attacker and did not emphasise her age. For instance, an article on *News24* published on 2 September 2019 titled "Man arrested for UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana's disappearance charged with murder, rape" (Peterson 2019) focused on how she fought back and did not mention she was a teenager. This was the common trend in the data collected.

The article collected from *Daily Maverick* quoted above mentioned their names without their age. Furthermore, of all the articles included in the present study about Volschenk and Mrwetyana, no headline mentioned their age. This shows that news media considered Mallo's case to be a rare incident; her age was factored in to grant her ideal victim status, while Mrwetyana and Volschenk's age was not a factor in granting them victim status. With Mrwetyana and Volschenk, their victimhood was influenced by the vulnerability that is associated with femininity in patriarchal societies like South Africa, where men exercise dominance over women through various means.

Christie's second requirement for the ideal victim is that they need to carry out a respectable project (1986). Christie argues that taking care of a sick sister is a respectable activity and being at a bar is not (1986). For instance, a sex worker who might become a victim of femicide or GBV might not be perceived as being involved in a respectable project. "Those who fail to meet the respectability criterion are thought to have permanent consent to sexual violation written into their

behaviour" (Phipps 2009:674). I examine two articles from *Daily Voice* and *News24* to illustrate this point with regards to the Mrwetyana case.

Firstly, a headline on the *Daily Voice* of 2 September 2019 reads: "Uyinene Mrwetyana was ripped from her family, community – UCT" (Daily Voice staff reporter, 2019b). The phrase "ripped" denotes something that was taken away forcefully and that was not supposed to be taken away. The headline gives value to the victim through using her full name and by mentioning the university she attended. Higher education in South Africa is highly valued and thus Mrwetyana can be said to have been in a respectable project at UCT, which according to its website is a prominent university ranked number one on the African continent (uct.ac.za). Studying at a university can be considered a respectable project because it means an individual achieved good enough grades at high school (in matric) to be accepted at university. Secondly, university is viewed as a gateway to employment and other opportunities. It is also a platform where students can participate in various extra-curricular activities such as sport and the arts, which are also respectable projects especially at university level.

Mrwetyana is given human status and value by the news report. We are told that she is mourned not only by her family and UCT but by the entire nation. She is not referred as a "girl" or "woman" or "student" but by her full name. In contrast to Mallo, who was referred to as a "girl" or "teen" above. To a large extent, she was not just Uyinene Mrwetyana, she was a student of UCT. When news media spoke about her the word "UCT" was consistently mentioned together with her name in both headlines and in the body of the article.

The lead paragraph of the news report above states that "The rape and murder of first-year film and media studies Uyinene 'Nene' Mrwetyana has left the University of Cape Town (UCT) 'shocked to the core'" (*Daily Voice* Staff reporter, 2019b). Here we are told that her family, community, and the university are shocked that she was ripped from them, and that she was young and beautiful. The news report suggests that in a country that has high levels of sexual violence, it is shocking to see it happening to victims that are "respectable". She was granted community status. Even though she was not known before, her murder rallied the community behind her and that makes her respectable. In addition, the "shocked to the core" indicates great suffering for society, because she attended UCT, which is one of the elite universities in South Africa.

Mrwetyana was represented as someone with a certain class position in society, thereby furthering the idea of the ideal victim.

An article from another publication reported within the same pattern. A headline from *News24* of 2 September 2019 reads, "#RIPUyinene: Anger, anguish over news of UCT student's death" (News24 Reporter, 2019a). Similar to the *Daily Voice* report, the article's lead paragraph states that Mrwetyana was a student at the University of Cape Town (*News24* Reporter, 2019).

The news report uses the words "anger" and "anguish" which suggest that the whole country is saddened and outraged. This portrayal implies that violence is close to us because it has happened to someone who attends a prominent university. This phrasing further suggests that people are not really shocked by Mrwetyana's murder but by the murder of a "UCT student". This constructs the narrative that a crime against someone who is a student at UCT is a very serious crime, it matters and warrants a response from the public.

Mrwetyana's death is represented as a huge loss for the entire country. For example, an article on *News24* of 10 September 2019 titled "Nation mourns Uyinene" (Yuku and Viljoen 2019) shows how media coverage perceived Mrwetyana as someone who had celebrity status. Countries mourn prominent people or people with "celebrity status" who are usually involved in "respectable duties". If the media had not nominated her as an ideal victim, it could have been one of those murders that are reported on only once and with less shock, what Soothill et al call a "routine case" (2002).

Another victim who is also doing the same respectable project (studying), but at a less prominent institution might receive less media attention or go unnoticed. For instance, during the same period of Mrwetyana's murder there were two student femicide cases that did not receive prominent coverage: Jesse Hess, a student at the University of the Western Cape, who was killed along with her grandfather (Franke 2020), and Natasha Conabeer at Durban University of Technology who died in hospital after being kidnapped and attacked (Naidoo et al 2019). This demonstrates that Mrwetyana's status was elevated by the prominence of UCT.

The personal histories of victims are shown to have an impact on which murders matter to media with respect to coverage. Moreover, the mega-case also tends to drown out other cases happening

at the same time (Brodie 2020). Mrwetyana's case drowned out the two cases of Hess and Conabeer.

To return to the case of Mallo, as we have seen above her tender age played a significant role in making her an ideal victim, even at Christie's second requirement her age plays another role in making her an ideal victim. That is, based on a respectable project she is involved in, which is attending school. For example, if Mallo was not attending school at the age of 14, was a homeless girl in the street alone at night it could be argued that she was not involved in a respectable project and the media and society could potentially assign fault to her for 'inviting harm' or at a 'dangerous place'. This shows that Christie's assertions regarding the "respectable project" fall short to accommodate children. This means media consider younger victims ideal regardless of their personal history. Media reporting recognizes the case of Mallo or other younger victims of femicide as distinct crimes, outside other crimes. Because every time there is the rape and murder of a child the entire country goes into shock (Gqola 2015). Mallo and other young victims are most likely to receive increased media coverage and do not have to be involved in any kind of activity. Unless they are homeless, part of a gang, drug addicts or immigrants, or the children of any of the above, they might not be respectable in some way. Younger victims who are ill-disciplined at home and are giving their parents problems might not pass the test of "respectability". This could be applied to Mallo who before her death fought with her mother about going to a party. For example, *Daily Voice* reported on 2 September that her mother had said "I smacked her in her face and told her she cannot go to the soccer club's event in Portland, and that was the last I saw her alive." (Safiaa February 2019a). For example, being in the night alone heading or heading to or from a party elicits rape myth that assign blame to the victim. Christie calls this a 'a place that is beyond reproach' (1986:19). Mallo was from a party and the incident happened when she just arrived at home but interestingly the media coverage did not assign blame to across the data that this study collected. The media's focus on her injuries, and age and that her murder happened at the same time with that of Mrwetyana and where the country where there was outrage made the media overlook this point and Mallo was granted victim status. The incident happened when she came back at karaoke event that her mother refused her to go.

I now examine the reporting of Volschenk under Christie's second requirement of "respectability". Volschenk worked as a draughtsman at Lyners and Associates Consulting Engineers and Project Managers (Grbich 2019). Most of the articles collected about Volschenk did not mention where she was employed and not much was said about her personal history. We know little about what she was doing with her life, her dreams, and her background. Similarly, to Mallo, most articles did not refer to Volschenk by name in headlines and she was referred to as a "Cape Town woman". For instance, a news report of 23 August 2019 ran with the headline: "Family in shock after finding Cape Town women's dismembered body" (Grbich 2019). Many of the articles that this study collected also focused on her injuries both in the headline and in the article. She was represented as a lifeless body and less as human being A body that is made spectacle of due to injuries. The media here shows itself to be more concerned with creating a public response to the "dismembered" body than in her personal history.

Another article of 22 August 2019 titled "Cape Town woman's body found chopped up at apartment building" (Etheridge 2019a) does not mention which "respectable project" Volschenk was involved in. Volschenk was not represented as an ideal victim by virtue of her respectable project, even though she had one. The article mentioned her age (32) and focused on the circumstances of her death and her injuries. It seems that her injuries made her ideal and anything else about her was largely ignored.

The third requirement of Christie's ideal victim is that the victim should not be blamed (1986). Christie argues that those victims that cannot be blamed for the crime stand a chance to be nominated as ideal victims while those that are perceived to be responsible for the crime stand little or no chance of being given ideal victim status (1986). This is associated with societal attitudes and stereotypes that exist about certain victims. For instance, we have seen how certain women's behaviour and attire can be used to blame them for their actions. Gqola calls these rape myths that are "at the heart of what is keeping rape culture intact" (2015).

There are two types of victim-blaming tactics, these are direct victim-blaming tactics, "these include highlighting the victim's infidelity" (Richards et al 2011:187), and indirect victim-blaming, which is when reporting highlights, the perpetrator's circumstances such as alcohol abuse and mental health (Richards et al 2011). There have been blaming attitudes when it comes to rape in

South Africa, where a woman who is raped is asked what she was wearing, where she was and what time of day it was (Gqola 2013). If a woman was wearing a short skirt and had consumed alcohol (Gqola 2013), she is blamed for inviting harm or putting herself at risk. “The media can be a particularly harsh source of such victim blame, leading to the further perpetuation of harmful social perception about sexual violence against women” (Meyers, 1997:111).

In this study, all three victims appeared not to be blamed. All three femicide cases happened at different locations, both urban and township. Reporting of the cases did not utilize blaming tactics and focused on public outrage. Public outrage at the very least shows that media and society do not blame the victims. For example, an article of 4 September 2019 on *Times Live* titled "‘We want Cyril’, gender-violence protesters chant at WEF” (Hyman and Meyer 2019) was focused on the public response. The phrase “we” denotes the outrage and the anger society had over the murders. It also shows that the media is also part of society, and this increases the public outrage. It also activates the emotion of the reader and their involvement in the story. This reporting makes the audience feel part of condemning sexual violence in these cases and not blaming the victims. The outrage is covered in ways that eliminate any chance of blaming the victims.

Another article on *News 24* on 5 September 2019 titled “Union calls for harsh sentence to set ‘example’ in Uyinene case” (Van der Merwe 2019) represented Mrwetyana in a way that achieves her victimhood. The news report focused on where the incident happened, the “post office” (Merwe 2019). This narrative directly takes blame away from the victim and places it on the perpetrator. The place that Mrwetyana was attacked, raped, and murdered is a public space that is assumed to be safe; no one could have possibly thought that a sexual violence incident could take place there. She cannot be blamed for being there as it provides a service to the public. Moreover, the news report mentioned a “call for Post Office crackdown” (Van der Merwe 2019). Media reporting asked how and why an ex-convict (Luyanda Botha) was employed by a state-owned enterprise.

Similarly, the reporting of Mallo’s murder also did not consist of “victim blaming patterns” and ticks the box of Christie’s category of a victim who cannot be blamed. For instance, a news report on *Daily Voice* on 16 September 2019 titled “Outpouring of grief from pupils, family at Janika

Mallo's funeral" (Hlati 2019) uses the public response of the case to represent her as ideal. Similar to the above coverage of Mrwetyana, the news report focused on the impact her death had on the community and pupils. In general, the article focused on the mood of the people that came to the funeral. The use of the word "outpouring" means that it was a lot to take in and overwhelming to the pupils and the family. It further shows that this was a highly painful and traumatic experience for everyone who attended. Also, it is represented in a way that needs society to be outraged and sympathize with the victim. Because we are a society that reacts differently to children and older victims when they are sexually violated. We do not react with the same outrage. Media reporting also used the phrase "pupils" to show that her death touched the hearts of her fellow schoolmates who it can be assumed are of the same age range of 10 to 14 years old.

News media did not blame her because the incident took place at her home. The news report states that "she had gone to karaoke to support a local soccer club the previous night" (Hlati 2019). She was where she could not possibly be blamed for being – at home. The only area that it could be contested that Mallo would not be an ideal victim and could be blamed is if she was not home. She was not involved in any activity that can be seen as misbehaving. For example, being in the street at night, which elicits the rape myth that when a woman is out at night, she is putting herself at risk of being sexually violated.

More significantly, media coverage gave voice to those who were affected. For instance, the news report quoted Janika Mallo's aunt, who said, "If it hurts like this for us, I can't imagine how her parents are feeling, they have been robbed of an opportunity to see their little girl grow up into a wonderful woman" (Hlati 2019), and in another article titled "Janika Mallo's killers 'live in the community'", on *Daily Voice* on 3 September 2019, her mother is quoted as saying "She wanted to be an air hostess one day. She spoke of it often and I told her to go for it" (Saafia February 2019d). Both articles represent her as a good girl with big dreams and someone who was going to contribute positively to society. This contributes to her being an ideal victim. The overall tone of the sentences is sympathetic to the victim and honours the victim. The language used shows that the ideal victim is a product of "external circumstance and susceptible some way in becoming the target of misfortune" (Lewis, Hamilton and Elmore 2019:2). The focus on Mallo, her family, the

murder scene, pupils, her tender age, and giving voice to the affected make her out to be an ideal victim.

Previous studies have argued that the way the media reports on the victim determines how society will interpret the murder (Brodie 2018, Gillespie et al 2013). The description of how the victim died can contribute to victim-blaming and excusing the perpetrator of the crime (Taylor 2009). In this case, news media focused on the scene to show the onslaught that the defenceless Mallo faced. It also shows the intensity of the pain and suffering she endured before she eventually died. This can be seen by the phrases the news report used such as "bashed in with a concrete brick". This makes her a victim that cannot be blamed.

The coverage of Volschenk did not blame her for the incident and most of the reporting seemed to direct blame onto the perpetrator Kyle Ruiters and suggest that the family was blaming themselves. For instance, an article of 3 September 2019 on *Daily Voice* titled "Brother-in-law of Bellville woman butchered to death wishes he 'had done more'" (*Daily Voice* Staff reporter, 2019h). The inclusion of this quote also takes out the blame out on the real perpetrator. This could create an impression that she was violated because her family did not provide enough security for her or did not take care.

The news report continued and stated that "On both occasions the slightly built accused has attended court proceedings, he had insults hurled at him" (ibid: online). On the one hand, the characteristics that the media describes the perpetrator with could make him out to be a victim too. The phrase "slightly built" portrays him as someone who is not capable of committing the extreme sexual violence he did. The characteristics provided by the news report could make some people in society sympathize with the perpetrator because he does not look "strong". The societal construction of a criminal is someone who has a threatening body (Moorti 2002). Also, this portrayal makes him seem vulnerable and makes him look like he is abnormal. On the other hand, by choosing to tell us that insults were directed at Ruiters, the media report shows us who needs to be blamed for this murder. In many news reports about sexual violence the perpetrators seem to be invisible (this is discussed further in the following chapter). His visibility in this news report makes Volschenk a victim that cannot be blamed.

Furthermore, the place where the murder took place also played a significant role in why the article did not include victim-blaming language. She was at her apartment where she lived, a place she trusted and possibly felt safe. Volschenk was also not romantically involved with Ruiters. This is another factor that usually results in victims being blamed in intimate partner sexual violence. Here it is non-intimate partner sexual violence, which works in favour for Volschenk not to be blamed.

The fourth requirement for Christie's ideal victim status is that "the offender is big and bad" (Christie, 1986:19). Schwöbel-Patel agrees with this notion and argues that it is impossible to isolate the construction of the victim from the perpetrator (2018). "The victim cannot appear weak and vulnerable unless the perpetrator is strong, and the representative is rational" (Schwöbel-Patel 2018:718). The victim and the offender are interdependent (Christie 1986:19). As Christie puts it, "the more ideal the victim is, the more ideal becomes the offender" (ibid: 25). This means that the victim is weak, defenceless, and vulnerable and is facing a perpetrator who is going to defeat her even if she attempts to fight. Thus, the offender cannot be big without a weaker, defenceless victim (Van Wijk 2013). From this, it seems there is no consensus on what characteristics are to be found in the "big and bad offender" requirement of Christie's theoretical tool. Because all murders are bad and brutal regardless of how they happen.

To illustrate this, I begin with the murder of Mallo, in which the "big and bad" status of the perpetrators can be seen by the way the media describes the gruesome details of her death. The article of 2 September 2019 on *News24* titled "Body of murdered Cape Town girl, 14, found in backyard" (Etheridge 2019b) focused on the brutality of the murder and showed the "big and bad" status of Mallo's offenders. For instance, the article described the scene of the incident this way: "family members found Janika Mallo's body with a serious head wound, believed to have been caused by a concrete block or big brick, and her dungarees around her ankles" (Etheridge 2019b). This description shows that the offenders physically dominated the 14-year-old Mallo. They were two men against the defenceless and young Mallo. Moreover, this description in the news report, in particular the phrase "concrete block", shows how cruel, heartless, and brutal they were to Mallo.

An article on *Daily Voice* on 13 September 2019 with the headline "Protest at trial of teens who allegedly raped, killed Janika Mallo" (Hlati and Maqhina 2019) stated that "They both allegedly belong to Hard Livings gang and we know there are more" (ibid). Gang members are also

experienced in committing extreme acts of sexual violence and are known to be dangerous, involving drugs, territorial battles, dominance in a particular area, and intimidation, and are mostly young (Alleyne 2015). While this inclusion shows that Mallo's attackers were big and bad it also makes clear the everyday nature of violence in the area. It represents the murder of Mallo as a "genderless" crime because of the association with gangs. These social problems "explicitly exclude sexism and misogyny" (Boonzaier 2017). Consequently, this representation of her attackers being "big and bad" contributed to making her an ideal victim.

Mallo faced two gang members alone. The article notes that one of the offenders, a minor, was a re-offender, which means he had committed a crime before (Hlati and Maqhina 2019). This undoubtedly adds to the construction of being "big and bad". Although the headline above referred to the perpetrators as "teens", which could potentially undermine the idea of big and bad, I argue that the excessive sexual violence they subjected Mallo to still puts them in the big and bad category. The details the news report included represented them as experienced criminals who were capable of anything and were known as bad teenagers in the community. This makes Mallo an ideal victim and creates sympathy for her. It shows she was faced with dangerous offenders that she could not possibly fight.

The article also repeated the same trends of re-emphasizing the gruesome details of how Mallo died. It stated that Mallo was repeatedly bashed with a concrete block (Hlati and Maqhina 2019). This repetition of the details of how she died portrays the offenders as dangerous, violent offenders who physically dominated Mallo. The gruesome details in the news report construct the perpetrators as monsters. These gruesome details represent the perpetrators as brutal and aggressive. It suggests that they committed an extreme act of violence just because they could. This representation assigns Mallo ideal victim status.

Reporting that demonstrates that Mrwetyana's perpetrator is a big and bad offender is the news report of 8 September 2019 on *News24* titled "Uyinene's alleged killer drank alcohol, then burnt her body and buried her in a shallow grave – Cele" (Raborife 2019). The article's headline quotes Minister of Police Bheki Cele describing what the offender did to Mrwetyana. The phrases "burnt her body" and "buried her in a shallow grave" pass the test of indicating a very "bad", heartless offender with disregard for human life. The phrases suggest that the offender had time and freedom to commit this crime and it seems not to have occurred to him to stop. These phrases show that the

offender was very determined and wanted to get away with the crime by burning and hiding the evidence so that Mrwetyana could not be found. This implies that this was deliberate. Some offenders who have committed such crimes just leave and dump the body so that it can be found. In this case, it required six private investigators and a high level of SAPS detectives to find Mrwetyana's body (Dayimani and Kretzmaan 2019). The article indicated that Botha was convicted of car hijacking and served five years in prison and that he also had an attempted rape case opened against him that was withdrawn Raborife 2019). This shows that he was a seasoned criminal who had committed similar offences previously and had seemingly got away with them. He had an intention to rape and kill, because it was not the first time he was being accused of the same offences. He had some experience of committing acts of sexual violence, showing the kind of violent person Mrwetyana faced. Thus, Mrwetyana passes the test of victimhood and Botha undoubtedly passes the test of a "big and bad" offender.

Another article, of 9 September 2019 on *Times Live*, entitled "Five shocking revelations in Uyinene Mrwetyana's murder case" (Nkanjeni 2019), is consistent with the overall media reporting of Mrwetyana, the headline using the attribution "shocking" to highlight the brutal circumstances in which she died. Importantly, the article provides five points that are regarded as shocking. Namely, 1. "Known criminal record", 2. "False information", 3. "Gruesome event", 4. "She fought back" and 5. "His *modus operandi*" (Nkanjeni 2019). In number one, there was a retrospective association between his previous conviction and the present murder to construct a specific narrative about him. That is, he is a dangerous person, who has spent time in prison, someone who is a danger to society and probably should not have been released back into society. We know that society treats ex-offenders who are released from prison as still "dangerous". When offenders are released from prison they face challenges that make it difficult for them to rehabilitate and increase their chances of reoffending (Shinkfield and Graffam 2009). There is some stigma associated with accepting offenders back into society and they mostly get rejected, even by their families (Chikadzi 2017).

In number two, the offender lied that he did not have a criminal record, while a report from the intelligence department confirmed the criminal record (Nkanjeni 2019). This description portrays Botha as bad because he lied to the public institution and even took an oath. Thirdly, the article details the extreme act of violence that the offender committed in order to make him look more

brutal and violent. The more brutal the offender, the more the victim is granted ideal status. Therefore, the ideal offender is the antithesis of the ideal victim (Schwöbel-Patel 2018:718).

In number four, consistent with much of the coverage, the article acknowledged Cele as saying "She fought there heavily. She lost her footing and then he raped her. In the midst of that, she rises and fights and he bashes her to death" (Nkanjeni 2019). This reporting emphasizes the high degree of cruelty and lack of remorse even when the victim was fighting back. It portrays him as a person with a clear intent to kill. Therefore, the offender was "big" in front of a vulnerable victim. As Abrahams et al confirm, rape is not sex, rather it is an "expression of masculine power against female vulnerability" (1996:8). When Mrwetyana fought back the offender expressed this masculine power even more, to make sure he won that battle. Abrahams et al state that "vulnerability" seems to be a common characteristic in most studies about raped women (1996:8). Mrwetyana was vulnerable in a locked post office facing an ex-offender.

Finally, the article highlighted what it termed "His *modus operandi*". The article stated that "A woman identified as Alice Cropper recalled how she believed she was almost a victim of the alleged killer. [...] Cropper went on to relive an afternoon when she went to the same post office and was served by the man. She said he tried to get her to leave and come back a little later by telling her the card machine was not working" (Nkanjeni 2019). After the news broke of Mrwetyana's death, the woman recalled this day and remembered that it could have been her (Nkanjeni 2019). Here, the media was showing the audience that this was a perpetrator with intent because he planned and had methods to commit. Because he occupied a position of "power" at a post office that deals with clients every day, and he used that to his advantage. This reporting shows the predatory nature of the offender and that he is a monster, exceptional, abnormal. It repeated the retrospective association between his previous offences and this incident to construct a narrative that it could have been someone else before Mrwetyana. This shows that crime is an everyday thing to him. The use of "*modus operandi*" in this context suggests that this is a criminal who follows a distinct way of committing sexual violence. All of this contributes to his being a big and bad offender.

Similarly, the offender in the murder of Volschenk appears to be big and bad. In an article on *Times Live* on 26 August 2019, titled "Man in court after neighbour's body found chopped up in refuse bags" (Hyman 2019), the headline's choice of words already represents this murder as the

most serious and rare kind. It evokes anger and sympathy and at the same time portrays the offender as big and bad. The article in general focuses on the injuries and describes the murder scene. For instance, in the lead paragraph, the article reads, "A 24-year-old man appeared in court on Monday in connection with the brutal murder of his neighbour, whose dismembered body was found in black refuse bags" (Hyman 2019), and the fourth paragraph quotes police spokesperson Sgt Noloyiso Rwexana as saying: “Police attended to the complaint at the address and upon preliminary investigation, found black bags containing the body of the deceased cut in pieces" (Hyman 2019). The increased focus on the deceased makes 24-year-old Kyle Ruiters a big and bad offender whose intention was to cause maximum harm. The offender is bad because not only did he murder Volschenk, but he also cut her body into pieces and put it in a refuse bag. This kind of violent attack also displays a disregard for human life. Ruiters used his masculine power and took advantage of a woman staying alone who could not defend herself.

In the data collected, there was no mention of Volschenk trying to fight back or running away. There was no evidence indicating defensive wounds on Volschenk, she could not defend herself. The increased focus on her injuries contribute to making the offender bad. The trend continued, for instance, in an article on *News24* on 2 September 2019, titled "‘Rubbish!’ – Distraught man shouts at man accused of chopping up Cape Town woman's body" (Evans 2019). The headline quoted a man who screamed at Ruiters when court was adjourned (Evans 2019). The headline used the same words as *Times Live*, that is “chopped up”, which shows that the news media was focusing on the extreme act of violence which, for the most part, represented the perpetrator as bad.

In addition, the news report stated that he stood quietly throughout the proceedings and did not show any emotions (Evans 2019). This reporting pathologizes the offender as not properly human. It implies that there is something wrong with him, in particular his psychological well-being. This representation feeds into him being less like a big and bad offender. Constructions like this have the potential to make society feel sympathy for the offender. The South African justice system, and society in general, feels somewhat different about an offender who is remorseful about the crime they committed.

The fifth requirement is that "the offender is unknown" (Christie 1986:24). Christie argues that the victims of an unknown perpetrator are most likely to be given victim status (1986). Christie provided two types of "unknown offenders", that is, "the offender who has no personal relationship with the victim and secondly, the offender is not known to 'us' the potential givers of victim status" (ibid: 26). It is important to note here that an ideal victim is not required to fulfil all of Christie's criteria, especially since this often contradicts the previous point (a big and bad offender is sometimes known). The "us" refers to the media and society. Christie argues that when the "offender is unknown" it means that the offender is not a prominent figure or does not have "celebrity status" in society. Christie argues that the offender who from a distance looks dangerous and makes people fearful will make the victim ideal (1986:26–28). For example, stereotypical qualities that people associate with criminal elements.

When the offender appears strange physically, it is more likely that the victim will be granted victim status (Van Wijk 2017). When society can relate easily to the perpetrator, they are likely to have less compassion for the victims (Van Wijk 2017). Mrwetyana did not know the offender (Luyanda Botha), who was a "stranger". Botha was also not known to society. However, he was known to the criminal justice system because of a previous conviction. This means that in contrast to Christie's assertions, the big and bad offender is sometimes known by certain institutions. The previous conviction or crimes of the offender contributes to making him bad offender. This is because it means he did not fully rehabilitated when he was still in prison. When he was released, he still committed another crime. Therefore, the inclusion of his previous convictions of crimes by news media also pursued the idea of a bad offender. As an example, an article from 7 September 2019 on *News24*, entitled "'I'm sorry that I warned you about all other places but not the post office. I'm sorry I was not there to fight for you my girl' – mom" (*News24* Live coverage 2019). The headline is a quote from Mrwetyana's mother at her funeral. The headline further confirms that the victim did not know the offender and if she had not gone to the post office on that fateful day, she would not have met the offender. Mrwetyana passes the test of an ideal victim facing an unknown, dangerous offender with previous crimes.

The offender, Kyle Ruiters, was also not known to society. There was no relationship of any kind between him and Volschenk. The only thing they had in common was that they lived in the same

apartment building on different floors. As a result, this offender creates an ideal victim. Her ideal victimhood is further entrenched because he did not kill Volschenk for any reason, and this means everyone is at risk of becoming victims of this kind of violence. For instance, the article of 26 August 2019 on *Time Live*, titled "Man in court after neighbour's body found chopped up in refuse bags" (Hyman 2019). The word "man" functions to make him a stranger to Volschenk and unknown. It does not show any association he had to the victim. This article also referred to him as a "man" in the lead paragraph, and then named him and used his surname.

In the case of Mallo, coverage indicated that there was a relationship between her and one of the offenders. An article published three weeks after Mallo was discovered, on 23 September 2019, on *Daily Voice*, titled "'It makes me sick': Family reveals cousin 'confessed' to Janika's murder" (Saafia February 2019c) indicated that Mallo's 18-year-old cousin paired up with a fellow gang member, who was 16 years old, and who was not known to Mallo. The two offenders seem to be known to society. Two major factors could explain why Mallo was granted ideal victim status even if she knew one of the offenders. *Daily Voice* and *News24* broke the story on 2 September 2019. The news that Mallo's cousin had confessed to the rape and murder broke on 23 September 2019. News media treated the offender as unknown for about 20 days. Thus, Mallo had already been granted ideal victim status when her cousin confessed 20 days later. The second reason is her age. The media and society treat murders of children with condemnation and sympathy, and most of the time they receive ideal victim status even if the victim knew the offender. These two factors had already made Mallo an ideal victim and when the news broke that it was her cousin it was too late to have an impact. For the most part, it increased her victim status. For example, *Daily Voice* quoted Janika Mallo's mother as saying, "Then I saw the takkies and her dungarees and I said it's Janika. My heart left me" (ibid: online). Quoting Mallo's mother expressing disgust at the offender shows how devastating the loss of Mallo was to her. This sentence here works powerfully to construct Mallo's victimhood because it shows what the murder meant to the family.

The last requirement of Christie's ideal victim is that the victim must be powerful enough to assert her victim status and not be opposed by "strong counter powers" (1986:21). Such powers can be the perpetrator of the crime or civil society groups that work on behalf of, or parallel to, the perpetrator (Van Wijk 2017). For example, supporters of the offender, as we saw in the trial of

former President Jacob Zuma, when he was accused of raping the woman we know as Khwezi, and was later acquitted by the court, where he was supported by strong counter powers such as the African National Congress Women's League, the African National Congress Youth League, and some people within the party (Gqola 2015). In this attribute, Christie suggests that the responsibility is with the victim to claim their status (1986). In this study, the victims (Mrwetyana, Mallo, and Volschenk) were not known to society before the incidents, as shown above. That is, they were not people who had "celebrity status" or were prominent in society. Of course, women cannot claim or assert their victimhood when they are dead, it is the media that does this on their behalf (Brodie 2020:165). This means that media had an interest in "assigning and promoting" ideal victim status to a particular victim (ibid: 165). We only know about such victims when they are dead because of the prominent coverage they receive. The protest that was organized by lobby groups, students, and the public in the wake of their death, and the night vigils, functioned to make Mrwetyana, Mallo, and Volschenk powerful enough to assert ideal victim status. Therefore, in death they had more power. All of this was reported on extensively by the media and in turn generated public sympathy and public outrage. Rocks supports this in his definition of a victim, where he contends that:

> 'Victim', in other words, is an *identity*, a social artefact dependent, at the outset, on an alleged transgression and transgressor and then, directly, or indirectly, on an array of witnesses, police, prosecutors, defence counsel, jurors, the mass media and others who may not always deal with the individual case but who will nevertheless shape the larger interpretative environment in which it is lodged (2002:14).

This is consistent with Van Wijk's argument that weak, poor victims need assistance from advocacy groups to lobby on their behalf to potential givers of victimhood (2017). This study did not find any opposing strong powers in the coverage of the three victims. For example, an article from *Daily Voice* on 4 September 2019, titled "Anger and frustration grips SA over gender-based violence" (Charles and Ishmail 2019). The use of "anger and frustration" in the headline shows the mood of the public as the result of these murders and further appeals to public consciousness. The article reads, "Anger and frustration has gripped South Africans across the spectrum as outrage grows over the continued rape and murder of women across the country. Several protests and marches are planned for Wednesday, including one to Parliament, and petitions are doing rounds

calling for stiffer sentences and even bringing back the death penalty" (ibid: online). The article represented the issue of GBV, using the murders of Mrwetyana, Mallo, and Volschenk, as a national crisis. When media constructed a narrative of the crisis of femicide (this is discussed in Chapter 4), this worked to claim victimhood status for Mallo, Mrwetyana and Volschenk. When victims successfully claim victim status it may help to change the "situation of the suffering" (Christie 1986:27). In a sexual violence context, it might influence the government and the criminal justice system to make some changes or new legislation, for example, on whether sexual violence offenders should be given parole. For instance, in the wake of these murders, President Ramaphosa addressed parliament to provide what he called an "emergency action plan" to end gender-based violence (Merten 2019).

### 5.3. Conclusion

Another factor in why media coverage nominated all three of these cases as concerning an ideal victim is because this was a period in which media sharply focused on sexual violence in the country. The increased focus on femicide by the media made people outraged. Therefore, any murder during this period was generally covered in ways that the victims could not be blamed. During this period the blame was largely directed at the criminal justice system and the government. In general, Christie's assertions help us understand how the media nominates an ideal victim and how this has an impact on how society will perceive the crime. Christie's criteria are important in terms of how society understand femicide in general (Brodie 2020). This tells us that not all victims of femicide matter to the media. Although this report on its own does not demonstrate this as it provides no comparison or discussion of other coverage but the examination of these three cases reveals such patterns. What the media chooses to omit and select as news has the impact to legitimize or marginalize societal views about sexual violence in the country. On the one hand, the theory helps us understand that not everyone who has power can get prominent coverage, and on the other it reveals that victims as shown above can become powerful in their death. What is clear from the data is that younger victims are most likely to receive coverage as ideal victims. Secondly, victims associated with extreme acts of violence are also most likely to receive ideal victim status, because media reporting tends to give such cases prominent coverage. A certain social status can also make one an ideal victim. The offender also was shown to make one an ideal victim. In particular an offender who fits Christie's "big and bad" criteria and

theoretical model – one the victim could not possibly defend herself against. This chapter revealed that an ideal victim is not required to fulfil all of Christie's requirements. Nevertheless, these requirements help us understand how victims are nominated as ideal.

## Chapter 6: Visible Bodies and Invisible Perpetrators

### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter unpacks the second theme, namely, visible bodies and invisible perpetrators. In this study, visible bodies refer to the media's focus on the gruesome injuries of the victim and invisible perpetrator refers to the role of the perpetrator being obscured in the coverage. These constructions include how the murder scene and the victim's injuries were described throughout the coverage. The media repeatedly focused on the gruesome details of how Janika Mallo, Lynette Volschenk and Uyinene Mrwetyana died and the horror of their injuries. Previous studies have found that murders that consist of the most extreme acts of violence receive prominent coverage (Boonzaier 2017). This pattern was found in the reporting of the murder cases of Mallo, Mrwetyana, and Volschenk. Most of the articles selected in this study outline the gruesomeness of these murder cases in the headlines and the bodies of the articles, from when the story broke and in subsequent articles. For the media, the lives lived by Mallo and Volschenk were not newsworthy; what mattered were their bodies as the site of brutality and the courtroom drama that followed. Subsequent reporting of Mrwetyana changed the trend of focusing on the injuries and was individualized because of her socio-economic status, attractiveness, and attendance at a prominent university. This reveals that the media practices of reporting femicide reinforce intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion that assign stigma and value according to the victims' perceived social status (Fuentes 2020). The perpetrators are barely discussed in any detail, they come up as "the man", "the 42-year-old", and "the boy". We are not told much about them, and they remain invisible.

## 6.2. Analysis

In early reports and in the subsequent articles of the murders of Mallo and Volschenk, coverage emphasised the horror of their injuries. One of the articles that broke the story of the murder of Mallo reads, “Horror as raped teen’s body found in grandmother’s yard with head bashed in” (Saafia February 2019a), by *Daily Voice* on 2 September 2019. While a *News24* article that broke the story of Volschenk on 22 August 2019 reads, “Cape Town woman’s body found chopped up at apartment building” (Etheridge 2019a). While Mrwetyana was represented this way in a *Daily Voice* article: “He locked the door, assaulted her and penetrated her vagina and she fought back” (Cruywagen 2019).

From these early articles above, we see Mallo, Mrwetyana, and Volschenk's bodies becoming what Boonzaier calls a "spectacle" (2017:478). These bodies grabbed the attention of the readers through the use of extreme violence to create shock and outrage in the readers. Regarding the Mallo and Volschenk murders above, coverage did not mention the perpetrators and was written in the passive voice as though this “just happened”, rather than being actively done by someone.

Furthermore, “this focus on the dead bodies of women has a longer history and context that is deeply racialized, gendered and classed and imbricates notions about whose bodies matter (in terms of who might be afforded dignity and whose bodies do not” (Boonzaier 2022:10). In the context of South Africa, the legacy of colonialism and apartheid continually shapes the decisions that media takes about who matters and who does not. When the crime is described in excessively gruesome terms like this it becomes surreal and unrelatable to the reader (Boonzaier 2022). This shows that rapes that are considered as “more shocking and devastating than others” (Gqola 2015:27) receive more coverage.

I now return to the news report of Mallo’s murder, titled “Horror as raped teen’s body found in grandmother’s yard with head bashed in” (Saafia February 2019a), from *Daily Voice* on 2 September 2019. Mallo's full name is not used in the headline and she is only referred to as “teen's body”. This reporting dehumanizes her and does not accord her dignity.

Rape happens every day but here we see the rape of Mallo being represented as the worst kind of rape because it included extreme acts of violence. Thus, words such as “horror” and “with head bashed in” are used to portray her death as if it is a form of violence that has departed from the norm. These phrases make it an abnormal crime and it appears to be one that the media deems reportable. Furthermore, this sexual assault is framed with the context of discourse of murder (Mason, and Monkton-Smith 2008). The linking of the rape and murder in the reporting influences the way raped is received by criminal justice professional, victims and wider public (ibid).

Consequently, we also depart from the broader issue of sexual violence in the country. “They allow us to deflect responsibility and go back to the presence of normality – letting ourselves, and the everyday context of violence in which we operate, off the hook” (Boonzaier 2020: online). Boonzaier argues that when coverage makes a spectacle of extreme violence against women “we fail to acknowledge the everyday, systemic nature of misogyny, patriarchy and male entitlement in the country” (ibid: online). Further supporting Boonzaier’s assertions, the news report’s lead paragraph states, “Horrified family members say they found Janika Mallo with her head bashed in and ‘her brain leaking’ from the left side of her face shortly after 8am” (Saafia February 2019a). The media's focus on the condition of Mallo's corpse, in particular the phrase “brain leaking”, represents sexual violence as an isolated incident. The murder is clearly covered in a sensationalized way and the coverage suggests that the perpetrators who committed it are somehow not “normal”. The media acts as a filter in this kind of capacity (Surrette 2007). The emphasis of the gruesome injuries by the news report creates an impression that sexual violence looks a certain way. This phrase suggests that this incident, as Bullock and Cubert put it, happened “out-of-the-blue” (2002:98). Similarly, Boonzaier argues that when femicide is represented this way it gives the impression that the violence is “distant” and not “real” and not an ongoing social problem in South Africa (2022:9).

The lead paragraph and the entire news report, in general, are more concerned with the visible injuries and murder scene than the sexual crime. More attention is devoted to the suffering of Mallo in a sensationalized way. According to O’Hara, when rape is represented this way, the perpetrator is transformed into the “other” (2012). The perpetrators are then seen as monsters and the socio-historical context is ignored. Little attention is paid to the lived life of Mallo, we still do not know who she was, her upbringing and her dreams, her favourite food and clothes and other simple

things about her. The only thing we are told in a later paragraph is that she was in grade 7 and was well known in the community “for her friendly nature” (Saafia February 2019a). This means that she was represented as just a “nice person” and nothing else. In contrast to Mrwetyana, Mallo was not a person with a social position or a child of someone with a social position; the media ignored much about her life.

In the way the article describes the murder scene, the media is wittingly or unwittingly telling us which types of violence against women we should be outraged about. For example, words such as "brain leaking" and "bashed with a concrete block” are blood-curdling and, without a doubt, will scare and make society outraged. As a result, readers will perceive other kinds of sexual violence as not as serious because they do not consist of extreme acts of violence. Gqola argues that how we speak and respond to violence matters (2015).

The word rape is mentioned in the article but presented in a way that might create doubt, and its severity has been minimized. The article represents this rape as horrific but in a sceptical way. For instance, the article says, "it is understood she had been raped" (Saafia February 2019a), it is not presented with certainty that Mallo was raped. The words “it is understood” might imply that the rape might have indeed not taken place. Therefore, rape is loudly silent (Gqola 2015) in the article. In a country that has normalised rape culture, it is very easy to doubt the victims and/or doubt if rape has taken place when it is represented this way. Political commentator and lawyer Judith February supports this and writes that “mostly we try to ignore the whispers of violence until they become news bulletins forcing us to engage with this dark side” (Judith February 2021). Secondly, the rapist (perpetrator) is not mentioned. Consequently, this “discursively renders the perpetrator invisible” (Buiten and Salo 2011:115).

Later the same month we see a similar pattern of reporting focusing on the body of Mallo. An article from 23 September 2019, titled “It makes me sick: family reveals cousin ‘confessed’ to Janika’s murder” (Saafia February 2019c), begins with the lead paragraph: “Janika Mallo’s own cousin has allegedly confessed to the 14-year-old girl’s murder, her family has revealed. On Friday, he and a 16-year-old boy appeared at the Wynberg Magistrates’ Court, where the latter was denied bail” (Saafia February 2019c). Firstly, the article does not mention “rape” and only says “cousin ‘confessed’ to Janika’s murder”. The article ignores the rape and only focuses on the murder. When media fail to be explicit that rape took place, we move ten steps backwards from

understanding what makes rape possible and permissible (Gqola 2015). The perpetrators are also not portrayed as sexual criminals and are reported as Mallo's "cousin and a 16-year-old boy". No further information about the perpetrators is given except their age. They are portrayed in such a way that readers can easily be forgiving and understanding. The words “Janika Mallo’s own cousin” and “a 16-year-old boy” are used, where words such as perpetrators or rapist could have been used. Bonne argues that these labels are crucial in news reports because “they help create associations of blame or innocence” (2011:218). If these labels are not used attention is taken away from the role of the perpetrator (Bonne 2011). Ultimately, they become invisible in the crime.

Subsequent reporting on the Mallo case continued to exploit the graphic details of her death. Even when the case went to court the article quoted a neighbour as saying: "She was naked from her breasts down and her pants were below her knees. Her open legs and private parts were facing my window” Saafia February 2019a). The article goes on to say: “The girl’s head and face was bashed in with a huge concrete block that lay next to her and used condoms were strewn around her” (Saafia February 2019a). This representation of Mallo traps her and us, the readers, in discourses of “hypersexualisation” (Gqola 2010:99). We become captured in the thrill of focusing on her body. In this description, what the news media fails to be explicit about is the fact that Mallo was raped. The report portrays the scene as if it is a pornographic movie. The phrases “her open legs” and “private parts were facing my window” shows sexualizing of the female body. These two phrases might suggest that this position made her responsible for the attack. What is clear from this coverage is that the rape of Mallo attracted less public attention than the state of her body, because of how it was represented by the media. The article further mentions “used condoms” that were next to the scene of the attack. The phrase “used condoms” could suggest that Mallo consented to the sexual act, because of the general assumption that where a condom was used there is consent. It may perpetuate the rape myth that where there is a condom, it’s not rape (Gqola 2015). The details of Mallo’s death were portrayed in a titillating way and are insensitive to readers, family, and the deceased. Cvetkovich summarizes this kind of reporting this way: “The emphasis on spectacular examples of sexual assault, from infant rape to brutal gang rapes, tends to erase the quotidian nature of intra-communal and interracial rape, obscuring the reality that, unlike extreme social and political traumas, such as genocide, sexual violence is accompanied by an aura of taboo and largely occurs in private, intimate spaces” (2003:118). This creates problematic narratives about rape and contributes to rape myths. This kind of coverage can

potentially tamper with the sympathy reserved for Mallo. This reporting shifts accountability away from those responsible.

Media reporting of Mallo's perpetrators continued the pattern of making them invisible. An article from *Daily Voice* on 13 September 2019 titled "Janika Mallo's 'killers' in court" (Saafia February 2019b) still centres on Mallo's murder and the graphic details of the scene. For example, the article reads, "Her half-naked body was found in the backyard". The perpetrators are referred to as the "killers" and not by their names. This kind of reporting style perpetuates the public's generalizations about sexual violence perpetrators that those who commit such crimes have what Leon calls "monstrous identities" (2011:15). Throughout the article they are not named at all. Their photographs are also absent across the coverage. Therefore, they are portrayed as just evil boys who are violent. The likely reason why they are not named, or their photos are absent in the media is because at least one of the perpetrators is a minor and there are strict legal requirements in the press under the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 whereby it is a criminal offence to reveal or hint at the identity of a minor even if they are accused of crime. It would be a criminal offence for media coverage to reveal this information or to use their photographs.

The reporting on Volschenk followed a similar pattern of focusing on the body. The words "chopped up" in the headline "Cape Town woman's body found chopped up at apartment building" (Etheridge 2019a) represent this murder as frightening and brutal. The phrase is also less sympathetic to the victim and those affected by the murder. It is as if the "chopped" refers to something else and not a human being. When we think of "chopped", we do not immediately think about a person but about things. The word choice is most telling of how the media treats the bodies of victims and women's bodies. Volschenk is also not named in the headline and is referred to as a "woman". The life lived by Volschenk is missing and only her body is visible.

The lead paragraph reads: "A woman was found murdered at her apartment building in Bellville, Cape Town, on Thursday morning", and continues "The 32-year-old woman, who was identified as Lynette Volschenk, was discovered around 11:00 after police were called. Police found black bags containing [the] body of the deceased cut in pieces" (Etheridge 2019a). She is identified as a "32-year-old woman" and immediately after the report moves to the gruesome details of her murder and how she was found. We are not told anything about her background or achievements,

whom she stays with and so on. Given, the short period of coverage of this study, there is a likelihood that this information was simply not available at that time and became available later coverage after period of coverage of this study or it was available in the Afrikaans Press. The study was only looking at English Press online. Similar to the Mallo case, the "cut in pieces" is employed here to frighten the reader. This phrase renders her as an object who was hurt and vulnerable to men's violence (Boonzaier 2017). When the gruesome injuries are emphasized, it moves the attention away from the "misogynistic acts of violence by perpetrators" (Gqola 2015: 115). The phrase captures public attention and people are fixated on the injuries. The news report also included a Facebook post Volschenk had written a day before she was attacked and killed: "Volschenk had last updated her Facebook status on Wednesday morning with a motivational poster bearing a Frida Kahlo quote" (Etheridge 2019a). This was the little attempt the news report made to humanize and give Volschenk subjectivity.

Following this paragraph, the news report moves away from the Volschenk story and tells us about a man who had also been found dead in the same building a few months earlier (Etheridge 2019a). It is surprising because these murders are not related. When the article changes direction, it fails to acknowledge that an act of GBV has occurred. Instead, it is creating a narrative of violence in the building and/or a narrative of a serial killer in the building. Therefore, it is positioning the murder of Volschenk as "just" violence that happens regularly in the building. This kind of representation downplays the issue of femicide in the country. Moreover, the perpetrator was mentioned and only identified as a "24-year-old man" who "was arrested and would appear to court" (Etheridge 2019a). No further details were given about him and the article does not make it clear that this "24-year-old" is the one who is guilty. The word "man" was used where the words "alleged murderer" or "alleged killer" could have been used. This makes his role invisible. It deflects attention away from the perpetrator; it becomes a crime that happened but with a faceless perpetrator.

Subsequent articles about Volschenk continued focusing on the spectacle of her injuries when the case went to court. An article on *Times Live* on 26 August 2019 was titled "Man in court after neighbour's body found chopped up in refuse bags" (Hyman 2019). The headline is not condemning this extreme violence and in general the article says little about the perpetrator. This feeds into the culture of impunity with regards to perpetrators of violence against women in the

country. The repetition of the graphic details corresponds with Boonzaier's argument that this is done to render her visible (2017) only through her chopped up, broken body. Media only found her interesting in the brutality she suffered. Other facts about her personal history were not mentioned, media did not find them newsworthy.

The article refers to Volschenk as a "neighbour's body" and this further makes her injuries more visible than her personhood. She is not referred to as a victim of ongoing gendered violence in the country but as a neighbour who was chopped up. These graphic details function "to conceal just how very normal" (Judge 2013) acts of violence are in South Africa. In a country with high rates of violence against women, this kind of reporting makes it seem as if these murders are committed in a vacuum. This kind of coverage simplifies the issue of femicide and will prevent us from finding approaches that will lead to the cessation of gendered violence.

The media continued to focus on the injuries of Volschenk even during the court proceedings. For instance, the lead paragraph of the above article reads: "A 24-year-old man appeared in court on Monday in connection with the brutal murder of his neighbour, whose dismembered body was found in black refuse bags at an apartment building in Bellville, Cape Town" (Hyman 2019). In this description, there is no link with GBV or contextualization of masculine violence. Very little is written about her subjectivity, and she is covered as the "body of evidence" (Gqola 2010:68). The entire problem of masculine violence against women is completely lost and not addressed as the key focus in the context of the "dismembered body". Therefore, the murder of Volschenk will be seen as an isolated incident because media is fascinated by the way she died. Repeatedly covering the story as a "body in a black refuse bag" disconnects the murder from gendered violence and dehumanizes Volschenk.

The article finally introduces the perpetrator and provides this problematic description, "A small man with a slender frame" (Hyman 2019). The way the article describes the perpetrator may garner sympathy for him. This is because readers have an ideal offender in mind, and that ideal offender in the words of Christie is "big and bad" (1989). A perpetrator must have a masculine body and look powerful in a way that made Volschenk unable to defend herself. There are also no details about the perpetrator and the information that is mentioned is limited to his age. Again, given the short coverage period this study explored there was limited information provided. More information could have been provided at a later coverage or in the Afrikaans Press since this study

is looking at English articles. Ruiters was also assessed by media coverage as the potential serial killer and not just GBV case because of his behaviour at the court. He underwent psychiatric observations, and this might have influenced photographs and representation. The assessment of Ruiters being covered as a potential serial killer could imply that this murder was not only treated as GBV or femicide. This is because across the data collected over the short period of the study it was not made clear if whether there was any sexual assault in this case. The focus was mainly in the killing and the injuries. The word "small" portrays him as an unaggressive person and suggests fragility. The mention of his bodily features in the article contributes to minimizing the physical act he carried out and possibly positions him as someone who is unstable psychologically and a potential serial killer. In this way, reporting such as this can shift accountability away from the perpetrator, because media contributes to what an ideal perpetrator looks like. Furthermore, news media contributes to how society responds to the perpetrator and victim. The discourse does not condemn his violent act and disconnects him from the murder because of the way he is described in the coverage. This feeds into the tendency of some people in society to defend violent masculinity.

This is not a new phenomenon in South Africa, where some perpetrators of violence get sympathy and support. We saw this in the rape trial of former President Jacob Zuma and the murder trial of Oscar Pistorius, where both were defended received sympathy from the public. For example, Gqola notes that during the Zuma rape trial, the media covered responses that ranged from "disbelief and confusion" on the one hand to "rage and support" on the other (2015:103). Zuma was defended by various groups such as the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU), the South African Transport Allied Workers Union (SATAWU), and some within the African National Congress (ANC) (Gqola 2015). To them, rape did not matter, what mattered was their loyalty to Zuma (ibid). During the Pistorius murder trial, we saw some people grouping themselves together and supporting him online, calling themselves the "Pistorians" (*NBC News* 2014). Others created a website at supportforoscar.wordpress.com (*eNCA* 2014), while another group came to court carrying placards calling themselves the "International Group for Oscar Pistorius" (*Rise FM* 2016). Alongside this, "Pistorius was also represented as loyal to family members and as a role model for other disabled athletes and young people" (Langa et al 2018:3). When I look closely in the media coverage of Ruiters similar pattern that could garner sympathy for him emerge based on his representation by the media. The emphasis on his physical appearance

and the psychiatric observations can make him less of an offender and a figure that is not to be feared and someone who is the victim of his circumstances. Similarly, to the kind of treatment white offenders sometimes get when they get when they kill. Because popular constructions associated with crime in South Africa about white men is treated out of the norm of violence while Black men are often constructed as the perpetrators of violence.

The initial reporting of Mrwetyana's case followed the same pattern of focusing on her injuries. A *Daily Voice* article of 3 September ran with the headline "Chilling evidence of Uyinene Mrwetyana's last moments and how she fought back" (Cruywagen 2019). The article quotes prosecutor Nomnikelo Konisi: "He locked the door, assaulted her and penetrated her vagina and she fought back. When he heard her screaming, he took a scale inside the post office and hit her. He then dumped her body in Lingelethu West" (ibid: online).

As in the coverage of Mallo's case, this news article chose to not use a more graphic way when they speak about rape. Instead, the article chooses a more graphic way of putting it, that he "penetrated her vagina". Although the news report presents this incident as brutal and violent, the article misses an opportunity to dissect the issue of stranger rape (Gqola 2015) and non-intimate femicide. When we portray rape this way, we fall short of seeing rape as "more than a moment, a singular event" (ibid:22). "We also provide cover for brutal men to violence all others with impunity" (ibid: 151). The perpetrator only comes through barely as the "42-year-old post office worker". There was an attempt by the media to focus on the perpetrator who killed Mrwetyana, but the focus was on an issue that was unrelated to the rape. That is, his appointment at the post office.

An article on *News24* on 7 September titled "Probe into Uyinene Mrwetyana's alleged killer finds Post Office officials knew about his conviction" (Ismail 2019) was completely unrelated to the broader issue of GBV. The news report was concerned with the employment of the perpetrator at the post office because of his previous conviction instead of the gratuitous violence he committed to Mrwetyana.

The news report states, "The criminal record of the man who confessed to raping and killing Uyinene Mrwetyana was known to Post Office officials in 2018 already, a preliminary investigation found" (Ismail 2019). It is clear from this quote that the place this incident happened

(the post office) increased the newsworthiness of the story. The news report deviates from the issue of sexual violence and is concerned with how the perpetrator got employed at a state institution with a previous conviction. This leads to the narrative that the problem here is him being employed at a post office with a criminal conviction rather than what he committed. Here, the media report directed the blame at Post Office officials instead of at the perpetrator. The media report suggested that if he had not been employed at the post office with a criminal conviction, he would not have committed this violence to Mrwetyana. If his previous criminal record had not been ignored, he may not have had access to Mrwetyana.

For instance, an article on *News24* on 5 September 2019 titled "Uyinene murder accused allegedly tried to rape woman in hospital, says Cele as gruesome details emerge" (Van Dieman and Gerber 2019) revealed that the offender had tried to rape before. This inclusion shows that that this is a seasoned criminal. Studies of criminal stereotypes contend that individuals hold certain ideas about what type of people commit crime (MacLin and Herrera 2006). Some of these stereotypes include that criminals are poor, irrational, out of control, male, Black, dangerous, insane, big, murderers, and sexual criminals (MacLin and Herrera 2006). In this news report the perpetrator is labelled as "the suspect", "the accused", "the man", and "the 42-year-old post office worker" (Van Dieman and Gerber 2019). He is not referred to by his name and surname, which further contributes to his invisibility. His role in the murder of Mrwetyana is not emphasized in the news report and the focus is on another event.

Subsequent reporting on Mrwetyana's murder showed the existing inconsistencies in media reporting on sexual violence. She was given a sense of purpose and value, in contrast to Mallo and Volschenk, due to her class, her attendance of a prominent university, and her attractiveness. Soon after her death reporting changed the way it covered her and later treated her with respect. Mrwetyana was made visible as a person not just as a body and a collection of injuries. As Brodie states: "Like it not, we are equally fickle and frequently hypocritical when it comes to which victims matter to us, which bodies to count" (Brodie 2020:191). Her case was presented in a way that galvanized the country against GBV. Reporting became a little more sensitive towards her. The media devoted a great deal of attention to Mrwetyana as a person in her own right, with detailed stories about the life she lived, her family, her university life, her views, and even the last essay submission she wrote before she died.

For instance, an article on *News24* on 2 September 2019, which ran with the headline "Man arrested for UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana's disappearance charged with murder, rape" (Peterson 2019). In contrast to Mallo and Volschenk, where coverage referred to them as a "girl" and "woman", respectively, Mrwetyana was given an identity and value and treated with respect by the use of her full name, the mention of the university she was registered at, and a picture of her face which was included. Mrwetyana's social position made her visible as a person, in contrast to Mallo and Volschenk, who were only made visible through their bodies and injuries. This kind of reporting shows that the focus on bodily injuries intersects with race and class. Mrwetyana mattered because she was classed higher within a societal hierarchy. In addition, in her murder she was used as a martyr to rally the country behind social movements against GBV. In many ways, the murder and rape of Mrwetyana show who matters in the hierarchy of human value to the media.

On the other hand, reporting of her perpetrator seemed to change as her coverage changed. For instance, in the above article, in the early stages of coverage of the Mrwetyana murder, he is referred to as "the man". This made him remain invisible in coverage and with regards to the crime he committed. However, in later reporting his invisibility did not last. An article on *News 24* on 7 November 2019, titled "Uyinene Mrwetyana's body was hidden in Post Office safe overnight, says State" (Petersen 2019), started making him visible. The opening paragraph states "Luyanda Botha, after murdering Uyinene Mrwetyana, left her body overnight in the safe" (Petersen 2019: online). In this media report, both the perpetrator and the victim are visible, by the use of their full names. The perpetrator's surname is used throughout the article. In later paragraphs we are told his age and personal history. The article states "Botha, 42 faces charges of murder and defeating the ends of justice" (ibid: online).

Another article on *News24* on 5 November 2019 titled "Uyinene Mrwetyana murder: Alleged killer Luyanda Botha faces two rape charges" (*News24* Reporter 2019b) followed the pattern of making the perpetrator visible. For instance, the article revealed more about Botha's other rape charge. Media here attempts to show that sexual violence is an ongoing problem. On the one hand, this profile that coverage is building functions to stop the rape myth that makes excuses for perpetrators. On another hand, this reporting makes rapists and killers out as monsters who are raping all the time. "This powerful image is at the heart of why it is so hard to hold violent men accountable for their actions and why women are seldom believed" (Gqola 2021:86).

The reporting is contrary to the type which focuses on the bodily injuries of the victims in cases of extreme violence. This style of news reporting was further achieved by an article on *Times Live* on 6 November 2019 titled "State taking Hess, Cremer, Mallo, Volschenk, Mrwetyana murders very seriously" (Cruywagen 2019). This article published Botha's photograph before the lead paragraph, which meant he did not get to remain anonymous and faceless. With the inclusion of the photograph, the news report removes any doubt from the readers about the perpetrator. He was a monster from the beginning of the reporting to the end. Interestingly, the article was speaking about several murders but included only the photograph of one perpetrator, that of Mrwetyana's case (Botha).

Another article that excellently ensured that Botha is visible was published on *Time Live* on 15 November 2019, titled "In his own words | Luyanda Botha: This is how I killed Uyinene" (Nombembe 2019). The article contains his entire admission of the act unedited with his photograph. A paragraph states, "I proceeded to sexually touch the deceased against her will. I inserted my fingers into her vagina. I then inserted my penis into her vagina. The deceased fought me whilst I sexually violated her. She managed to run to the door but I caught up with her and knocked her to the ground" (ibid: online). A later paragraph states, "I took 2kg weight, used to weigh the packages received at the post office, and used it to bludgeon the deceased to death. I targeted her head" (ibid: online). This news report made the perpetrator more visible by publishing his own words. Many stories of rape are treated with doubt due to the tendency to blame victims. However, publishing Botha's version removes any doubt that could have existed that the rape happened. Also, it reflects a significant shift in the media reporting, where before more of the reporting focused on Mrwetyana's life than on the perpetrator. This quotation from Botha's admission shows that sexually violent acts are not only committed by "monsters". They are committed by all men, nice men, and often also those entrusted with providing safety, such as police. Men who rape and abuse are normal (Gqola 2015). This reporting reduces rape myths and attitudes of blaming victims. The word "I" in the admission functions to show the perpetrator taking responsibility.

The perpetrators of Mallo and Volschenk's murders were significantly under-represented and remained invisible in reportage. The media reports included in this analysis told us very little about these three perpetrators (two who murdered Mallo and one who murdered Volschenk). In contrast

to Mrwetyana, later coverage of Volschenk two months after her death still called the perpetrator "the man" and the victim the "woman" in their headlines. For instance, a *Daily Voice* article from 21 November 2019 titled "Court awaits further instruction on man accused of butchering Bellville woman" (*Daily Voice* Staff reporter, 2019d). The headline followed sensationalism tactics by using the word "butchering". The word dehumanizes Volschenk as if she were a piece of meat or an animal. This creates an image and idea of what a real femicide should look like. In this article Volschenk went from being referred to as the "butchered" "Bellville woman" to being referred to by her name. On the one hand she is individualized, and on the other she is objectified, in the same article.

The opening paragraph of the article states: "The man accused of murdering Lynette Volschenk, whose body was allegedly cut up in her apartment in Loevenstein, Bellville, appeared briefly in the Bellville Magistrate's Court" (ibid). The only way the perpetrator, Kyle Ruiters, emerges in the coverage is as a monster, with unique features, who is dangerous. His photograph was also nearly absent across the coverage, as the photograph almost always used was of the victim. A later paragraph in the above article represented him as someone with psychological problems. The article states: "It had been reported earlier that police allegedly found books pertaining to serial killing and He also allegedly wrote in notebooks that he was the master of manipulation" (ibid: online). Such coverage treats him as lesser criminal.

In addition, media reporting represented Ruiters as a fragile and broken person; as a victim of something himself. In such situations, society ends up sympathizing with the sex offender, citing psychological problems. This is especially seen when race and crime intersect in South Africa, and where the offender is a White man. "The idea of psychological problems is wide in White male criminals where they are often diagnosed as depressed, an idea that outside this depression they are not able to commit criminal offences" (Chinembiri 2015:36). For example, similar tropes were on display during the trial of Oscar Pistorius: his legal defence team presented a narrative of someone who has anxiety (Langa et al 2018) and some media coverage presented him as someone with aggression (Chinembiri 2015). Similarly, since Ruiters is a young Coloured man, we saw in the news report above that he was represented in a way that suggests someone suffering from psychological problems, and that could end up excusing him from the murder he committed. The inclusion of such information could remove the element of violent masculinity.

Constructions of violent crime in South Africa are associated with young Black men (Barker 2005), and often White perpetrators are presented as victims of something else themselves, despite the crimes they commit.

An important contribution to the subject of visible bodies is Gqola's "*What is Slavery to Me: Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa"* (2010), in which she explored the difficulty of representing Sarah Baartman. Sarah Baartman was an enslaved Khoi woman, who died under mysterious circumstances, and her remains were kept in Paris and a cast made from her body. Her skeleton was on display at the Musee de l'Homme until 1974 (Gqola 2010:63). Her brain, skeleton and sexual organs were on display until her remains were repatriated and buried in 2002 (Parkinson 2016). Gqola argues that although there have been many publications about Sarah Baartman over the years, very little is recoverable about her "subjectivity" from these writings (2010:68). This is because in most of the writings over the years "She has been the body of evidence" and not much about her life was said (Gqola 2010:68).

When I examine all three murders broadly, this study found similar patterns in the representation of Mallo and Volschenk in the coverage. Mallo, Mrwetyana, and Volschenk's bodies are what Gqola calls "paradoxically hypervisible" (2010:68). In the ways in which coverage focused on the gruesome injuries of Mallo and Volschenk, their bodies became what Gqola calls "the body of evidence" (2010:68). That is, they were made knowable but only through their gruesome injuries (Boonzaier 2017). Therefore, Mallo and Volschenk "emerge (just barely) as subjects and only through descriptions of their injuries and the state or location of their dead bodies" (Boonzaier 2017:478). "Dismembered", "chopped", "bashed" are some of the terms used to describe Mallo and Volschenk that make us learn a little about violence in South Africa. In many ways, these constructions of Mallo, Volschenk and Mrwetyana reflect the difficulties of speaking about sexual violence in South Africa. Coverage of femicide in South African media is significantly compromised. Ultimately, it is going to be difficult if not impossible to understand "what makes violence what it is in any given society" (Lotz 2015:9) and the meanings produced by media further distort our understanding of sexual violence.

To extend this argument, the reporting of the murders of Mallo, Mrwetyana and Volschenk can be linked to the journalistic principles of newsworthiness and sensationalism, due to the way the media reported on their injuries. These principles are problematic because they create a selection

bias in the coverage of murder. Those murders that do not pass these requirements gets less coverage or no coverage at all. The headlines covering Mallo and Volschenk were sensationalist. Newsworthiness and sensationalism are some of the media "laws" that govern what stories will be reported and how. According to Meyers, newsworthiness is not easy to define, and reporters are also vague about what makes them select some news events and ignore others within a large pool (1997). Reporters rely mostly on the unique qualities that certain news events consist of, such as the unusualness of the occurrence (Meyers 1997). News stories that cover extreme acts of violence receive prominent coverage because they attract the attention of the readers (Maguire et al 1999). Therefore, the injuries sustained by Mallo and Volschenk were deemed newsworthy because they were the result of extreme acts of violence. Furthermore, these murders were covered on the media principle of "if it bleeds, it leads" (Watson and Lalu 2015:201). The injuries were employed to create sensationalism to attract readership (ibid).

The cases of Mallo, Mrwetyana and Volschenk in general were represented in a way that resulted in what Judge calls the "shock and the awe" response (2013: online). "The shock and awe response that often follows reports of violence against women exposes a kind of performance of surprise, an incredulity which acts to conceal just how very normal, how every day, violence is" (Judge 2013: online). The march to court, and the calls to reinstate the death sentence by the community of Mitchells Plain and by groups elsewhere in the country (Hlati 2019) in the wake of all the three murders) may be interpreted as this performance of surprise.

### 6.3. Conclusion

The ways that femicide has been defined and covered raises several questions about thinking and talking about sexual violence. The present research demonstrated that across the case studies femicide with extreme violence received a volume of coverage, in contrast to other victims with fewer or no visible injuries. The coverage of femicide from this data was tailored in such a way that the reader only notices the victims that are "chopped up", "dismembered", or subjected to other extreme forms of violence. Coverage makes a spectacle of these discourses. However, what is clear from the data is that Mrwetyana's social position made her more visible as a person in contrast to Mallo and Volschenk. This results in femicide being perceived as a particular occurrence of violence. Secondly, the present study illustrated that when coverage of the victim changes over time, coverage of the perpetrator also changes. This reporting forces us to think about

the ways in which media can provide a greater contextual understanding of femicide while ensuring that both victims and perpetrators are present in the story. “We should be calling for dignity to be accorded to victims of crime, and sensitivity and respect for their lived lives and subjectivities as an ethical responsibility in media reporting on gendered violence” (Boonzaier 2017). This can take us closer to understanding the overarching question of “how and why” sexual violence is so prevalent in South Africa. “Recurring patterns of news tend to highlight only certain kinds of criminals and their victims, while ignoring or downplaying others, thereby transmitting messages about who matters most in society” (Gillespie 2013:227). Coverage of the three murders in this study followed a recurring pattern in the reporting about the perpetrators. The perpetrators were hardly spoken about in the news reporting of these murders. In instances where media coverage included them, they were represented in ways that either obscured their role or represented them as just strangers who have committed a crime. In addition, Ruiter’s murder which was also presented also as a potential serial killer and not just femicide. This influences how the public views a particular sex offender.

## Chapter Seven: The Crisis of Femicide

### 7.1. Introduction

The fourth theme that was dominant in the data is what I term ‘the crisis of femicide’. Here, I demonstrate how the media treated the three murders as a crisis of femicide in South Africa. The use of a word crisis does not imply immediate danger but that it is a problem. While femicide is a problem, the narrative presented by media coverage during the selected period suggests that it is only a problem when the media is paying attention as opposed to all the time. Media coverage failed to show that sexual violence is a historical issue and is interconnected to South Africa’s legacies of apartheid violence. The media utilized an episodic reporting style to create a crisis of femicide. The media selected the cases that matter based on newsroom requirements and presented them as a crisis. Every day a woman or a child is murdered and raped in South Africa, but coverage used the extreme physical violence of these mega-cases to suggest a crisis of sexual violence in the country. This extreme form of violence was referenced in headlines and accompanied by conventions of sensationalism aimed at shocking readers. Coverage represented femicide as a war that has suddenly appeared and included some strategies to combat it. The war narrative is a legacy

of apartheid South Africa where violence was a daily feature. “The apartheid police force was used to protect White people from Black people, not to protect Black communities from crime” (Di Silvio 2011:1476). There were threats of rape for Black women who were detained and sexual abuse by security forces (ibid). Against this backdrop, South Africans are familiar with this “war” and the media often uses a war narrative to present various societal issues such as this.

### 7.2. Analysis of the Coverage

In the wake of the murders this study is looking at, an article on *News24* on 5 September 2019 titled “Shocking increase of violence against women” (News 24 Reporter 2019c) is relevant. This bold title is aimed at attracting readers at first glance. The headline is in contrast to the statistics highlighted in the introductory chapter that suggest that femicide has always been high, and that the public only becomes outraged when certain cases are selected to become mega-cases. Furthermore, the word “shocking” in the headline creates astonishment and dismay about violence as if it is not an everyday occurrence in South Africa.

There is no contextualization of why violence is represented as increasing in the news report; it is only presented as “shocking”. It frightens society or women that there is an imminent attack. The phrase suggests an ever-threatening event that will worsen if not attended to. The phrasing of the headline produces a narrative of a “wake-up call” to society about a crisis that has in fact always been there, but this portrayal suggests it is a problem only now. It is covered in a way that turns it into a rallying point only. This kind of coverage downplays the common occurrence of gender-based violence in South Africa (Jewkes et al 2009).

The lead paragraph of the article states: “The brutal and calculated rape and murder on Monday of 19-year-old Uyinene Mrwetyana by a civil servant employed by the state has shocked the collective conscience of South Africans” (*News 24* 2019). The quote “brutal and calculated” shows that the murder of Mrwetyana is treated as a distinctly violent act by the media, one which needs to get all of us outraged, while other murders pass unnoticed. Gqola argues that to label any rape as particularly brutal marks some rapes as mild (2021). This portrayal exceptionalised this case. It used the case to present this period as one of violence that is different from the everyday horror that happens against women. As a result, by emphasizing the extreme nature of the murder, the news report represents femicide as something that has suddenly increased and reached crisis level. The article also referred to the perpetrator as a “civil servant”, which suggests that there is a crisis

of femicide if men employed by the state are raping and killing, even when research such as Gqola's has shown that all men rape regardless of their position or background (2015).

The article goes on to state: "A young girl was subjected to such barbaric and inhumane treatment and had her life cut short while performing a regular errand such as entering a Post Office" (*News 24*, 2019). The news report emphasizes the location of the incident when it says, "entering a Post Office". The overemphasis of the extreme nature of injuries he news report is likely to reinforce the idea that sexual violence against women is on the increase. In the extract above the news report uses words that arouse or involve strong emotions. For instance, phrases such as "barbaric and inhumane" portray the murder as having no motive and being senseless. The phrase "young girl" works to invoke sympathy, anger, and the seeming powerlessness that meant she could not have survived. In addition, when a young person is attacked like that it shows that we are in a crisis.

Subsequent coverage continued the pattern of representing femicide as a crisis. For instance, a *News24* article on 3 September 2019, "Femicide debate: ANC in Parliament calls for a national state of emergency to be declared" (Van Dieman 2019). This headline shows that the media coverage was alarmist and sensationalist. This kind of big, bold headline has the potential to incite panic and fear in society, in particular for women. The phrase "state of emergency" in the headline suggests a special response to femicide is required; it is represented as having reached epidemic proportions. Furthermore, it suggests that the country has suddenly reached a crisis level regarding the issue of gender-based violence. The media highlights this period as a moment when desperate action is needed from all of us to win the battle. This term suggests that sexual violence is an impending disaster and will result in a calamity or a state of anarchy. This construction portrays femicide as a "sudden" event that will cause great harm in the country; thus, emergency measures have to be taken. It further suggests that femicide is a sudden national issue that is increasing. But this emergency that is being highlighted seemingly ends when media coverage of femicide decreases over time and comes back when there is a similar case that matters to the media due to its brutality. News media here failed to account for the misogyny and long history of impunity in the fight against sexual violence and other contributing factors.

The crisis of femicide was also portrayed by *City Press* on 10 September 2019 in an article titled "Having a plan, teaching women's right to boys – how we can deal with violence in SA" (Mkize 2019). The lead paragraph of this article states: "In the wake of a recent spate of violence and

tragic murders of women and children, and the threat against their lives, panicked parents may be wondering how to protect their vulnerable children against the stark reality of the violence we live with daily in our country" (Mkize 2019). Firstly, this quote tells us that violence is rampant and interventions are needed. The article goes on to state that "the horrific cases of recent weeks – including the murder of East London boxer Leighandre 'Baby Lee' Jegels; the cold-blooded rape and murder of UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana; the chilling murder of four children in KwaZulu-Natal by hanging, allegedly at the hands of their father; and the abduction of six-year-old Amy 'Leigh de Jager – all present a potentially life-saving teachable moment" (Mkize 2019). The phrase "horrific cases of recent weeks" suggests that the media report is using these gratuitous murders to portray a particular period as a crisis of gender-based violence. This phrase shows that the media portrays a crisis only when it pays attention to violence. The phrase "life-saving teachable moment" constructs a period that needs everyone to pay attention and do something. In addition, it suggests to us that we need to think about how to combat this crisis. This quote suggests that something extraordinary must be done in order to avert this sudden humanitarian crisis. It presents a narrative of protecting those vulnerable to violence. It suggests that if we leave things there is going to be carnage. On the one hand, the press portrays a situation of a crisis and a need for us to do introspection in order to fight the crisis. However, the media reporting here does not say who must be changed and how. On the other hand, the coverage suggests that cases that were not horrific enough do not require "life changing teachable moments". That is, there are murders that media did not pay attention and now that it has paid attention to these murders, it is describing this period as 'important and requires everyone to be on high alert".

In the last section, the news report describes the period in which these cases took place as a "seminal moment", mentioning this word twice in the report. This representation suggests that femicide is treated as a landmark situation or a time of greater importance. The quote suggests that South Africa has reached a state of lawlessness and is a country with no order. It represents a South Africa that is under siege and in a make-or-break moment. It suggests a moment where sexual violence is uncontrollable and a problem. In a country that has nearly 3000 murders of women each year (SAPS 2020); the media chose these particular cases to portray a new discovery in the country. Furthermore, the article also lacks a condemnation of sexual violence by men. Women and children dominate the news report, but the role of men is still obscured. The frame of safety comes up in this portrayal. The responsible thing to do is framed as ensuring women and children

are safe. The coverage portrays the minimum requirement in this crisis as ensuring the safety of women, and in the process obscures the role of men.

*News24* continued the trend of portraying the crisis of femicide and published a headline on the 3 September 2021 that read: "Dark period for SA: Ramaphosa condemns Uyinene Mrwetyana and Leighandre Jegels murders" (Grobler 2019). This media report constructs an extraordinary period which is temporary and that will soon end. A period that has no safety. The news report represents the country as the epicentre of violence. It contributes to the construction of randomness of the violence. Coverage used the president's remarks to push the narrative of a crisis that needs urgent attention by using the words "dark period". This phrase makes it seem as if previously there was a period that was safe and there was no violence. It also implies that the government is reactive and not proactive on the issue of sexual violence in the country. This reactiveness functions to intensify the representation of femicide as a crisis. The news media exploits such quotes from government officials to promote the narrative of a crisis.

Another article on *News24* titled "UCT suspends academic activities for the week to allow campus community to 'heal'" states: "The news of Mrwetyana's brutal murder, at the hands of a Post Office employee in Claremont, Cape Town has gripped the country" (Somdyala 2019: online). The description of the impact of her murder on the country shows how femicide was brought to visibility. The news report uses the phrase "gripped the country", setting the femicide of Mrwetyana as unusual and new. This suggests that the murders that happened before did not matter enough to grip the country, which advances the crisis narrative. The news report went on to say that "her murder has raised the alarm on violence against women in the country" (ibid). The phrase "raised the alarm" suggests a crisis that has been imminent. It highlights danger that was unexpected. It suggests that no one is immune to this violence. This kind of reporting seeks to inspire a kind of inspiring moment to bring people together to fight gender-based violence. This kind of coverage has the potential to make femicide unrecognizable to the reader (Boonzaier 2022). The implication of this representation is that sexual violence will be understood as unusual.

The pattern of representing femicide as a crisis continued during coverage of a protest in a 5 September 2019 news report on *Daily Maverick*, which bluntly described the events of the day in headline-like words: "A collection of angry, confrontational, 'gatvol', demanding messages on

posters and shouted towards the stage and heavens added colour and voice" (Thamm 2019). The first phrases, "collection of angry, confrontational, 'gatvol'", suggest a kind of sudden breaking point in the country about femicide. This is a fascinating choice of words that both portrays a "rising" and galvanizing action from society against a crisis. This portrayal contributes to making this moment as exceptional itself. This means it makes violence seem not ordinary in South Africa but something that is now in crisis. The legacies of sexual violence that shaped current gender-based violence are completely ignored in the news report and across the sampled data. "This longer history is important for situating the ways in which racist sexualization, derogatory representations of Black bodies, notions about morality, respectability, and legitimatized suffering traces its ways into the present framing of gendered violence more broadly, and femicide specifically" (Boonzaier 2022:4). When news media present violence without referring to these legacies, it portrays femicide as happening seemingly for no reason and "out of the blue". The word 'gatvol' is an Afrikaans slang word which means fed up or very upset. These phrases, "angry, confrontational, and 'gatvol'", work to "spectacularize" violent incidences (ibid: 1). The language used continues to represent femicide as abnormal and as a phenomenon that caught all of us by surprise in the country. These kinds of phrases give femicide a drama and thriller film quality. When presented this way, it portrays femicide as a crisis that is happening only now and is going to destroy the country.

The news report continued to illustrate the pattern of the crisis of femicide in this representation: "The brutal murder of University of Cape Town student Uyinene Mrwetyana, whose body was found at the weekend, has sparked an outpouring of anger and grief, but it has also sparked a 'no more, no fucking more' and 'enough is enough' outcry" (Thamm 2019). Again, here we see the news report using phrases that spectacularize sexual violence, in particular the "'no more, no fucking more' and 'enough is enough' outcry". The language used here "desensitizes" the reader to the everyday reality of violence (Boonzaier 2022:7) and renders it as on the increase. The language portrays femicide as something that was invisible and has suddenly become visible and widespread. The phrases further represent a nation under siege and femicide as out of control and chaotic. The news report continues with the dramatization of sexual violence in which shock is the goal. Phrases like "enough is enough" used here are becoming so common in coverage of sexual violence. They portray femicide as unbearable and worsening. They suggest that sexual violence

has now suddenly reached unacceptable levels. Secondly, the phrase "enough is enough" is also used as an attempt to garner political attention or a response to what has now been represented as the "current crisis". Indeed, such phrases have the tendency to garner political reaction. Such a reaction can be either denial or condemnation of the issue or acknowledgement of the crisis. In this news report, media descended into the "simplistic dichotomous, conflict-oriented constructions that appeal to news values of drama and conflict" (Worthington 2008) to portray a crisis that has affected the country.

On 4 September 2019, *Daily Maverick* published another article that displays similar discourses that portray the crisis of femicide as something new, titled, "Official statistics prove war on women is real – and pretty words are mere lip service" (Merten 2019). This headline shows an episodic style of reporting of sexual violence and shows how femicide is often overlooked as a daily occurrence and represented as a disaster. One of the strategies that uphold the current crisis of femicide is seen in the above headline by the repetition of the statistics. In the same headline we see the "war" narrative again being used to describe gendered violence. This reinforces the idea that action is needed to tackle the current crisis. Boonzaier argues that the South African news media sustains its interest in femicide by using the spectacular language of war metaphors (2022). Such a word is associated with the expectation of violence, fights, and anarchy. This representation builds the sense of an imminent attack or of inevitable violence. This kind of reporting implies that the response of society to this "war" must be a fight. Because war metaphors used by coverage can encourage society to collectively work with state institutions to respond in whatever way to protect and defend against an 'increasing' sexual violence and protect others too. The use of "war" suggests the notion of a fight between women and men, a battle. "It relies on and reproduces the idea of women's inevitable suffering and vulnerability to violence" (Boonzaier 2022:12).

This portrayal of femicide "draws upon and reinforces militarized, hegemonically masculine responses to GBV, which at its core, is what is fundamentally at issue when needing to tackle femicide" (ibid: 12). Consequently, this portrayal shapes femicide as a deadly issue that needs an armed response now. Moreover, the use of the word "war" portrays femicide not as an ongoing issue that is interconnected to other societal issues. For example, connected to the existing patriarchal attitudes in South Africa that still see women as inferior. Because most kinds of

violence are connected and should be understood “as part of the web” of violence (Hamby and Grych 2013:9).

Within this “war” narrative, women’s everyday lived experiences of gendered violence are ignored, only the final act is highlighted, and the focus is on the current crisis. Therefore, the portrayal of “war” silences or fails to show the pattern of violence that exists in the country. It results in what Judge called a “performance of surprise” (2013). This reinforces the idea that the increase in femicide caught all of us off guard. The discourse increases the state of constant vigilance and lack of safety that women live with in this country. “This heightened vigilance requires that women give consideration of how they will fight back” (Gqola 2021:114) when they are attacked.

A later paragraph states "what is now being called a national emergency, violence against women, also involved those who are meant to protect women" (Merten 2019). In the context of the “crisis of femicide”, the use of the phrase “national emergency” suggests an unexpected event that requires an immediate response. This portrayal encourages readers to not be dismissive about the issue and suggests that there needs to be some urgent response. It suggests an escalation of an issue. Moreover, the use of “national emergency” intertwines with the previous references to “war’. It shows the emergence of a collective discourse. For instance, any “war” declaration would be followed by a “national emergency”. Therefore, these two phrases work together to portray a crisis. The news report also included the police as some of the perpetrators of violence against women. The news report states: “Of the 55 rapes by police officers, 32 were by off-duty policemen and 23 happened when the policemen were on duty, up by 5%, according to the IPID report” (Merten 2019). The inclusion of the police suggests a crisis because those who are meant to protect women are also perpetrators.

Another representation from *Daily Voice* that continued with the narrative of a crisis was published on 3 September 2019, and titled “Femicide in SA: Are these the solutions?”, states, “Amid the outrage and sadness over 19-year-old UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana’s rape and murder and the scourge of gender-based violence in South Africa, we have gone in search of solutions to the crisis” (*Daily Voice* Staff reporter, 2019f). This suggests that after the Mrwetyana case femicide became visible. This does not mean femicide is not an everyday occurrence, but that the gruesome case of

Mrwetyana has been turned into a moment of crisis. The report labels femicide as a "scourge". "This suggests a plague, a horrible inexplicable social condition" (Falkof 2019:167). The word "scourge" reinforces the idea that violence of this kind is external and unrecognizable (Boonzaier 2022) and to some extent new to society. Furthermore, the word suggests that femicide is now spreading in the country. It represents femicide as something that was in control and low previously and then developed into a "scourge".

The last news report collected in this chapter that portrayed the trend of the crisis of femicide is from *Daily Maverick* on 5 September 2019 titled, "Women protest against rape and femicide – SAPS arrest marchers, use stun grenades and turn water cannon on the crowd" (Thamm 2019). This representation contributes to late September 2019 being highlighted by the media as a crisis period for femicide in the country. The phrasing constructs police officers as responding to a crisis and once again the perpetrators remain invisible. The police here symbolize authority trying to establish order and are exercising their vested power from the state to restore order. It tells us that this is an unusual and dangerous time that needs a response from police to disperse angry women who were protesting. This links back to the previous news reports that represented this crisis as a "war" and "national emergency", which taken together with the mention of police contributes to the construction of a crisis.

The lead paragraph of the news report states that "Everything that is wrong with the official response (or rather non-response) to the war on South African women was visible at two protest marches that took place in Cape Town on Wednesday 4 September 2019." It goes on: "Both marches, and those that will take place on Thursday 5 September, have enabled women (and our allies) to once again express our fear, rage and pain in the wake of the rape and murder of several young women, a daily occurrence" (Thamm 2019). In this extract, the news report again uses spectacular language when covering the protests by women. Again, we see the "war" narrative reinforced, through words such as "fear", "rage", "pain", "protest". The political reaction in the wake of these murders also promoted the idea of perceiving femicide as a rising crisis. For example, the news report quoted Minister of Police Bheki Cele stating: "We need to work on what we do to prevent young women being abused, murdered, in their houses at school" (Thamm 2019).

Such political reaction included President Ramaphosa calling a joint sitting of parliament to address what was called a "national emergency" (Merten 2019), political parties debating femicide, as well as people calling for the death penalty and protesting in the country, and the criminal justice system being questioned (Thamm 2019). The phrase "fear, rage and pain" echoes frightening and threatening discourses: that there is a war against women in the country and that they need to be scared. The phrase suggests a sudden occurrence in the country. It feeds into the narrative of the vulnerability of women. The phrase suggests that there is a growing sense of lawlessness and anarchy in the country. It tells us to anticipate violence that will turn into pain. It suggests that the potential for violence is increasing to catastrophic levels. Readers tend to follow this kind of spectacular language when they think about what femicide is.

Another news report explicit in representing femicide as a crisis that needs an urgent response is from *Times Live* titled "MPs slammed for heckling during debate on 'national crisis' of femicide and gender-based violence" (Mokone 2019), published on 3 September 2019. The above article repeats the word "crisis" three times, which implies that this was a dangerous time. The opening paragraph paraphrases words from the Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane: "Sexual violence and the killing of women by men has reached crisis proportions" (ibid: online). The phrase "crisis proportions" suggests an unsafe period in the country and that there is a loss of faith in the authorities to provide safety. It suggests uncertainty and makes women aware of femicide as a serious issue, which feeds into the crisis narrative. This portrayal brings femicide "closer to home". Even those who thought they were safe now see that they too are at risk. This portrayal increases the level of worry about being attacked and reinforces the narrative of a crisis. What has been a crisis for decades is only presented now as a "national crisis" that requires a government response. This is a common trend in South African media reporting whereby when there is a mega case there is a call for government response. For instance, in the wake of murder of Anene Booysens and Reeva Steenkamp in 2013, and Karabo Mokoena in 2017, similar pattern of national crisis or government response was demanded. For instance, there was protest and the first GBV&F (Gender-based Violence and Femicide) summit was convened by the president in 2018, which was aimed at drafting strategies to end GBV.

Finally, an article published on 10 September 2019, on *Times Live*, titled "Poll: Femicide, child abuse and looting: how do you feel about SA right now?" (Bhengu 2019), uses two unrelated

events to strengthen the idea of a period of crisis. The headline reinforces this idea of a crisis of violence in the country by including child abuse and the looting that was happening during the same period. The questioned asked by the news report, "how do you feel about SA right now?", encourages readers to pay attention to increasing levels of violence. The question functions to ensure that readers understand the seriousness of the crisis of violence. It suggests that there is a problem of violence that is widespread. This heightens the idea that we are a country that is frustrated by the crisis. The article mentions the murder of Mrwetyana: "The killings of the four KwaZulu-Natal siblings, Ayakha Jiyane, Kuhlekonke, Khwezi and Siphesihle Mpungose, and the murder of UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana saw the past week weigh heavily on many South Africans, who took to social media to express their fears about living in crime-riddled areas" (ibid: online). This above description suggests that South Africa is a broken society in a period of violence that is increasing. The article paints a picture of an increasing trend of violence by including the three events (femicide, child abuse and looting) together, which serves to intensify a narrative of a crisis. The news report here portrays a country that is being torn apart by increasing levels of sexual violence and that is unable to manage this period of crisis.

### 7.3. Conclusion

This analysis revealed how the coverage of the murders of Mrwetyana, Mallo and Volschenk showed that media represented these murders as a sudden occurrence, and part of a crisis. Most notable was the construction of national emergency and war narratives which dominated coverage throughout the period. Media used the narrative of war to intensify the crisis of femicide as something that women needed to arm themselves against to be safe. In a country where sexual violence is an everyday occurrence, the media presented these cases as extraordinary. The media did not consider the historical patterns and trends that make violence endemic. The media presented this as a moment that everyone needed to pay attention to. A kind of watershed moment where "all hell broke loose". The theme of the crisis ultimately weaves in with the previous theme of fear. On the one hand, media continued to suggest a crisis, and on the other, this feeds into the anxieties and fear of crime increasing too. Finally, this portrayal of a crisis was not presented as a crisis of violent masculinities but as crisis in the country. Perpetrators continued to remain absent in the "problem".

## Chapter 8: Fear of Crime

### 8.1. Introduction

The fear of crime has increased for women in South Africa. This fear has become endemic because of the persistent violence in South Africa. Simply put, female fear is the fear of being sexually violated, hurt, and killed by men. This fear is perfectly understandable given the alarming statistics of crime in general in South Africa. In South Africa, "certain kinds of places" such as Johannesburg are uncomfortable for women, and women must always be on high alert of being the victims of gendered violence from men (Falkof and Van Staden 2020:10). For example, in places such as taxi ranks and the streets of townships and cities, women are never comfortable. The taxi rank space is characterized by blatant disrespect for women and misogynistic culture (Eagle and Kwele 2021). For women or girls to get home safely from school, work and other aspects of life is now a privilege (Eagle and Kwele 2021) because of how dangerous it is for women and girls in South Africa. As Gqola writes “public threats of violence against women, and widespread sexual harassment in public places are part of how women are rendered fearful because manufacture of female fear is a public phenomenon” (2015:98).

The fear of crime is a broad field. In this study, I am focusing on the ways fears and anxieties are transmitted by media coverage of violence. The “fear narrative” or “discourse of fear” is defined as “the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the symbolic environment as people define and experience it in everyday life” (Altheide 2002, cited in Altheide, 2009:81). This chapter attempts to show how the media covered the cases of Mrwetyana, Mallo, and Volschenk in ways that transmitted fear or contributed to the fear of crime. Reporting of these cases used the spectacular language of fear to tell women that they are at risk, and that they need to take responsibility for their safety. Media exploited the gratuitous violence sustained by these victims to transmit these fears. This chapter examines dominant discourses in the coverage such as “there is no safe place, everyone is at risk, and women need safety kit to help to protect themselves” and others. This study argues these meanings have an impact in heightening fear and anxiety about crime, in particular for women and girls. To

reiterate, the threat associated with female fear is real in South Africa and all women and girls do worry about sexual violence, but this study argues that the media reporting of these mega-cases consisted of panic discourses, which in turn might have increased the ever-growing fear of an attack.

### 8.2. Contextualizing Fear of Crime

In recent years the fear of crime has become an increasingly significant concern for victimology, criminologists, government, the media, and the general public (Lee 2007, Reiner et al 2000). For decades scholars have been grappling to understand the fear of crime and how to measure it (Lee 2007). The fear of crime has now become a prominent cultural theme (Garland 2001:10). There have been debates about what fear of crime means (Maxfield 1994), how it can be measured (Gray et al 2010), what causes it, and how it can be solved (Garland 2001). Maxfield defines fear as an "emotional and physical response to threat" (1984:3). This response can consist of a fight or flight response (Maxfield 1984). That is, to fight or to try to run away from the perpetrator. Similarly, Lee (2007) contends that fear of crime explains "a range of psychological and or social reactions to the perceived threat". The fear that this study is concerned with is defined by Gqola this way: “the female fear factory threatens women, mostly to remind us that nothing belongs to us – not even our bodies, neither in private nor public space. Its spectacular aspect is important because it communicates both to the target and to the audience the possibility of being the victim and teaches and enshrines power in patriarchal society” (2021:19).

Gqola provides four instances of female fear (2015) and I will use the cases of this study (Mallo, Mrwetyana, and Volschenk) to explain these four instances. The first is the fear that Mrwetyana might have felt when she was walking alone to collect a parcel from the post office. The fear that she might be attacked by men. Secondly, the fear that Mrwetyana and Mallo might have had when they realised, they were about to be raped and killed, when Mrwetyana realised she was about to be attacked with a scale and Mallo with a concrete brick. Thirdly, the fear Mrwetyana’s parents might have had when they were told their daughter is missing, the fear Volschenk’s colleagues might have felt when she did not arrive at work, the fear that the worst could or has happened to them. The fourth is the fear that Mrwetyana, Volschenk, and Mallo might have lived with, which

all women in South Africa probably live with daily; the fear that they could be raped and killed by a stranger in public or by a man they are familiar with or an intimate partner. This includes the fear that women have when they see another woman being violated by men in public, because “all of them are afraid what the man might do if they confront him” (Gqola 2015:84). As result, they watch helplessly, and the perpetrator knows that no one will intervene, and they will get away with it. That is how manufactured fear operates, the perpetrator knows that he has the "power to wound, rape and /or kill" a woman and get away with it (ibid:80). People are taught over time that the best way to respond to the violence is to look away and pretend it is not happening (Gqola 2021).

Another fear that this study adds to Gqola’s list is a woman’s fear of not being believed by either family, friends, or the police when they report rape or sexual assault. The fear that they will be told they were “not careful enough” to prevent sexual violence by their families, that they might be blamed for being there, because society has placed the responsibility of safety on women. For example, women might decide to avoid certain areas at night or during the day or to walk in groups.

Ferial Haffajee, who is currently the Associate Editor at the *Daily Maverick*, in a *News24* opinion piece, relates the fear that women live with in South Africa: “The fear of attack was like my shadow growing up. Walks to home from school were always made with an eye sharply strained, backwards, forward, backward. The flat I grew up in often had dagga-heads downstairs. When they did a mandrax pill, they moved a couple of flights up, making getting to my front door safely a little bit hazardous” (2013: online). Haffajee adds that even if now she has ADT security and an electric fence, the driving force of her fear is that when she reads about a crime of property that took place involving a woman, she is likely to be raped too (2013). This shows that fear is a big part of what it means to be a woman and a girl in South Africa. Labelling and confronting these fears is essential to combating violence against women. As we will see in the analysis below, coverage of these murders was reported in ways that remind women that their safety is at stake, and they have to be constantly vigilant of violent men.

### 8.3. Analysis

Reporting of the cases of Mallo, Mrwetyana, and Volschenk used the spectacular language of fear in headlines and the bodies of the articles, which served to reinforce or reproduce female fear and anxieties about crime. An article headline covering the murder of Volschenk on 22 August 2019 on *Daily Voice* reads, “Woman’s body found in black bags in Bellville flat” (*Daily Voice* Staff reporter, 2019E). The fears produced in this headline take multiple forms for women. Firstly, to women who live in the same area as Volschenk (Bellville flat), to those around these flats and women in the country. Since GBV is often associated with Black people in the townships (Langa et al 2018), when this kind of violence happens in White suburban areas like Bellville it is treated as out of the ordinary. Especially those with high electric fences, closed-circuit cameras, private security at the entrances, and alarms (Langa et al 2018). The crime that is perceived as only happening elsewhere might now become a concern for every woman in the country. Therefore, specifying the area in the headline – “Bellville flat” – might create more fear for those who thought that violence was distant from them due to societal constructions of certain places being considered “safe” versus “townships”. That if this crime happened to “people like us” it is likely that it will happen to us too.

Personalization or the naming of names is a marker of a discourse which creates a connection for readers to understand news events through the perspective of individuals affected by those events (Fulton 2005). The representation increases anxiety and fear because “home” is associated with connotations of safety. The insinuation is that if this happens to someone at home, we are all at risk at home. Reports of the offender overcoming strong security measures to commit this extreme violence contribute to the fears and anxiety of reduced safety. What emerges from this representation is that sexual violence can happen to anyone, regardless of where you live, and this contributes to fear.

The article’s opening paragraph reads, “The chopped-up body of a 32-year-old woman was found at a Bellville apartment building in the northern suburbs on Thursday morning” ( *Daily Voice* Staff reporter 2019) and continues “Police discovered at 11am that her body had been cut into pieces and put in black bags. A 24-year-old man from a nearby flat was arrested" (ibid: online). Media

scholars agree that “in both news and fictional representation, emphasis on the spectacular details of a crime, the monstrousness of its perpetrator or the exceptional nature of its circumstances, work to silence and ignore the pervasiveness of the everyday violence” (Falkof 2016:426). The extreme nature of violence results in moral panic for women because they are exposed to what other women are going through consistently. The repetition of gratuitous violence used in the report represents this femicide case as different from others, and this also contributes to and transmits fears that there is a new kind of extreme violence. Secondly, the spectacular words used in the article, such as “chopped-up body”, “cut into pieces”, create fear and anxiety that is commonly expressed in phrases such as “It could have been me” or “I am next”.

Across the data sampled in this study there was a repetition of descriptions of gratuitous violence in the headline and within the story. If we examine gratuitous violence in the context of fear and anxiety, it has the potential to increase the existing fear of crime. It shows a “real” threat instead of a virtual one or violence that is at a distance. The fear develops when readers start to imagine what Volschenk might have felt when she was being killed in this manner. This headline can be what Gqola refers to as the “grammar of female fear” (2021:76). The fact that the perpetrator is called the “24-year-old man” and not by his name also results in the fear of a stranger or monster who is on the loose and who kills. This contributes to the narrative of a battle of men versus women. An article on *Daily Voice* on 30 August 2019, titled, “Growing anxiety over whereabouts of missing UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana” (*Daily Voice* Staff reporter, 2019G) works to communicate how unsafe it is in the country. Readers are affected by such reporting one way or another. The phrase “growing anxiety” suggests the fear that those close to her might feel; the fear of what might have happened to Mrwetyana. The text adds to what Falkof and Van Staden (2020:7) call an "epidemic of anxiety”. This is a real epidemic of anxiety given the high rates of sexual violence in South Africa. In a country where we have seen or heard about girls and women who go missing every day, headlines such as the above will one way or another affect people and increase their fears. Because people know that when stories of this kind happen the chances of the victim coming back alive are always almost zero. The headline increases the fear that women live with and reminds them about the possibility too.

The article was accompanied by a close-up (head and shoulders) photograph of Mrwetyana (see Appendix A). In the photograph Mrwetyana has a full smile and is wearing a gold dress, with gold earrings that match the dress. She has a nose piercing. The photograph seems elegant and of someone of high class. She is smiling and looks like a person with a very bright future ahead. Those who identify with her class might feel close to her and relate to her. Photographs influence how people act or react to the news. They provide proof that the event is real and take the reader closer to the event or person. This photograph is likely to have an impact on women, especially of her age group (19 years and higher), who may identify with her. On the one hand, the photograph used highlights that it does not matter if you are young, fashionable, a student – you are as prone to rape as anyone else. It is meant to show that femicide can happen to anyone. On the other hand, this photograph also might suggest that victims that matter are young, students and fashionable. That it is normal only if it is someone without these characteristics. This results in the story carrying an emotional element. The consistent use of Mrwetyana's photograph in coverage made people feel her death very deeply, because it was personalized.

Subsequent coverage was published on *Times Live* on 2 September 2019, titled "Missing UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana was bludgeoned with a scale in post office" (Meyer 2019). Firstly, the headline emphasises the horrendous circumstances that Mrwetyana died under, the brutality that she endured. The word "bludgeoned" highlights the impact that Mrwetyana was hit with. The word is a very emotive and dramatic way of saying beaten or hit. It plays into a discourse of fear that gives chills to anyone imagining it. This word falls under a spectacular way of maintaining "fear". Of highlighting that a woman's body is a battlefield for men. When the press uses this word instead of another, "fear is fostered through exaggerated visual performance, audible cues, and other coded signs, all of which are repeated until the target audience have mastered the form of communication and have started to take fear for granted, as something inevitable" (Gqola 2021:23). The post office was also consistently mentioned in news reports. In this instance, the place heightens the fears that women have when they occupy public space. It means that they must now be extra vigilant.

Moreover, the news report stated, "As Mrwetyana's friends sat in court, waiting to see the man for the first time, hopeful remarks could be overheard, with some saying they 'had a feeling' they

would see her again. But their hopes were dashed when prosecutor Nomnikelo Konisi revealed that the suspect was accused of murder, rape and defeating the ends of justice. Gasps rang out as their worst fears were confirmed" (Meyer 2019). The language of fear is communicated in the phrase "hopes were dashed", which indicates that anything and any day could be fatal. It reminds women that if you go missing you may not come back alive. It is powerful discourse because it deals with the worst-case scenario that was probably imagined when Mrwetyana was missing (rape and murder) and was now confirmed. This confirms and heightens the fear that occurs when a woman is missing, and we immediately worry that she could be raped and murdered.

An article on *News24* published on 3 September 2019, titled "#AmINext hashtag reveals the fear and anxiety SA women have to live with and it's terrifying" (Mbude 2019), continued to increase the fears that women have. The headline tells us about the kind of society that women live in in South Africa. The news report chose to use the word "terrifying", which suggests that women live with fear every day. A later paragraph in the article states "The #AmINext conversation that has gone viral shows greatest fears women in South Africa have following the surge in reporting of femicide, not only for their loved ones but for themselves as well. Women have also come out to share shocking stories of when they were violated" (Mbude 2019). The article concluded with further discourses that heighten fear, stating "suggestions of getting pepper sprays and other self defence mechanisms are floating around but the issue remains the same, women are terrified in South Africa" (Ishmail 2019). When the article mentions pepper sprays and self-defence mechanisms it echoes the many media reports that were published during this period that placed the responsibility of safety on women. But the article seems to agree that these safety mechanisms are not enough and create a false impression of safety, because these measures fail, and women are still murdered.

Repeatedly publishing stories of women being violated might invoke feelings of fear in others. Individuals' lived experiences of crime have the potential to make others fearful. This is not to suggest that coverage invents this fear. The fear is real, but the media heightens this fear using spectacular language. Media reporting here pushes the idea that women should not feel free and that the problem is widespread, and we should all be worried. Discourses such as "greatest fears" in the news report heighten this fear, suggesting that women can be a target anytime.

The headline of an article on *Daily Voice* on 18 September 2019, “Crowdfunding drive launched to buy pepper spray for UCT students” (Ishmail 2019), also feeds into what Glasser has called a "culture of fear" (1999:3). Media reporting places the responsibility of women’s safety on themselves. This is because people “rely on shared social meanings to make sense of the world around them and to cue to how to respond to that world” (Brodie 2020:129). Brodie extends this argument and contends that people are taught whom to trust or fear (2020). This headline suggests to women that they are under siege and need material to defend themselves or to retaliate. “When women constantly modify their behaviour in pursuit of the unattainable safety, they take on the responsibility of what misogyny creates” (Gqola 2021:126).

The news report quoted the manager who launched this campaign, Samantha Perkins: “Perkins said they at least wanted to provide women with some form of safety to defend themselves. ‘We thought the most effective way this could be done in the meantime was to give pepper spray to women at the UCT campuses and around Cape Town’” (Ishmail 2019: online).

Media reporting focused on the risks and probabilities that teach women to organize themselves accordingly and be ready. The media report implies that women are on their own, and absolutely no one can help them. It further implies that the justice system, the police, and the government will not help you. It silences women and reminds them about their rapeability (Gqola 2018). This is true for most (if not all) women in the country, especially those without the means to keep buying pepper sprays or implement other safety measures such as alarms and ADT security. As Moffett points out, “rape and sexual assault are most frequent where environmental infrastructure (such as secure streets, adequate electricity, strong policing services and safe housing) are inadequate or lacking, it automatically places poor Black women at the forefront of the danger of sexual attack” (2007:25). The measures suggested by the news report make teaches them how to fight back. These measures that the news report recommends to women to use also ensures that the patriarchy continues and survives for future decades. In a patriarchal world woman needs to police themselves with the measures mentioned in the article, because men feel entitled to do anything with their bodies. This language of fear, such as “pepper spray” and “self defence mechanisms”, reminds women that “their bodies are not entirely theirs” (Gqola 2018:79). Therefore, women become more

fearful, as they always have to police themselves. As Drotner points out, fears that are invoked by media “do not serve to tackle, let alone, resolve these pertinent dilemmas, but at least with hindsight, they may serve to alert us to their existence as a cause for action” (1999:597).

Similarly, an article on *News24* published on 4 September 2021, titled "Here are 5 apps developed to help keep women safe" (Manuel 2019), continued the trend of panic discourses which heighten the fears that women have. Similar to the previous article, the headline continues the trend of suggesting women have to regulate their life and a narrative that women are under siege. When are the article says, “to help keep women safe”, it does not confront the issue of masculine violence but reminds women to heighten their own security. This is reminiscent of blaming victims when they are raped or murdered because they did not apply safety measures that they were told to. On the one hand, these “five apps” are presented by the media coverage as a promise of safety. On the other, they function to create a society where women remain fearful. It reminds women that they not only need to be safe but also need to consider their daily lives, movement, and lifestyle to ensure they are safe.

The news report intensifies this fear by stating: “In the meantime, we need to stay safe. And as unfortunate as it is, we clearly cannot, at the moment, trust men, or even the government at this stage, to help keep us alive. Which is why we've listed five apps that were designed to help women keep safe” (Manuel 2019). The report suggests to women that they either comply with safety measures or they might be attacked. While the sentiment seems to hope to keep women safe, it is also passing on fear. Phrases such as “we cannot, at the moment, trust men, or even the government” add more to the fear than the “hope of safety” that the article seemingly wants to get across. It tells women that they live in a volatile public and private space, a war-torn country. It portrays women as objects that need to be protected. This helps to keep patriarchy alive; the idea that as women you need protection from being sexually violated by men. The insinuation is that if the government, that is assumed to have the power to protect women, is now incapable of doing so, it means there is danger. The narrative of an anarchical state that has allowed the oppression of women emerges. It suggests that the government has been defeated itself or has lost the fight against the rape and killing of women. From a socio-political perspective this suggests a failed state, which is incapable of protecting women. It suggests that there is no political will to fight

GBV or meaningful progress. As a result, this feeds into fear, as safety must be part of women's daily considerations. This reporting also presents the idea that there was a time when the government was able to protect women, and now it is incapable. This is the fear that has become part of raising a girl child in a patriarchal society, especially a violent one like South Africa (Gqola 2015). Ultimately, it tells us that nothing can be done about femicide. The more frequent this representation is pushed the more the fear heightens.

The article further acknowledges: "While the apps can only do so much to help women in a nation that is currently one of the least safe places for a woman to be, they can assist in terms of letting loved ones know your location, getting in contact with emergency services and so on. But since so little is being done to ensure our safety, these apps may be our only hope. For now at least" (Manuel 2019). The phrase "for now at least" manufactures a fear and provides a warning that these are measures that need to be taken until something improves. Again, it reminds women that these measures will also fail eventually. In general, the article reinforces the idea that women need to dedicate most of their time to trying to prevent violation from men. What the coverage reinforces here is that sexual violence is inevitable and that these apps will at least let their loved ones know where to look for their body. This reinforces the discourse that if something happens to you as a girl or woman you were not careful enough.

A report was published by *News24* on 3 September 2019 titled "3 women are killed by their male partners in SA daily, and we have the world's highest rate of rape – we need more than slogans and summits" (News24 Reporter 2019d). This headline reminds women that they are not safe even with their intimate partners at home. It suggests a "final nail in the coffin" discourse with regards to the lives of women. It reminds women that an attack can happen even in their private space. The fear will then become the shadow that accompanies women (Gqola 2015:91) every time they are at home with their male partners. The common narrative that emerged across the data and in particular in this news report is that women are "vulnerable" people. That women are vulnerable even at home with those they love (or do not love anymore). It manufactures a worry that women should carry every day in a home setting. It reinforces the existing gender domination of the home. In addition, it reminds women that even if you follow all the safety measures taught by the language of fear you can still be murdered at home by your partner.

The article continues to heighten the fear, stating, "It is evident, all the hashtags in the world, summits and slogans have not been able to change the narrative that women and children's lives don't matter, we are raped, killed, and abused – everyday. Will it ever end?" (*News24* Reporter 2019d). The female fear that is reinforced here is the promise that rape is inevitable. When the report says, "We are raped, killed and abused – everyday. Will it ever end?", it indicates that rape is a daily feature of South African life and reinforces the fear that reminds women that they will soon be the victim.

The article continues with the language of fear in the last paragraph, where it states: "Sadly, we see summit after summit but the deaths and abuse of women remain a daily occurrence in this country, can we claim to be a civilized nation when our women are not safe? Who is next? Me? You?" (Ibid: online). The fear that is being reinforced here is the fear of "I could be next, it could be me soon". It means that even if you are not yet victimized you still suffer from the fear of being next. Gqola argues that "when safety becomes one of the most important considerations explicitly presented to girls, it works against the girls' confidence" (2021:77). The same is true for women: when they are consistently told that they are at risk, it transmits fear that affects their daily routines. The number of calculations they have to do about safety affects their freedom of movement. This ties into the war narrative, as people cannot move freely during wartime.

A *News24* article of 5 September 2019, titled "Uyinene's alleged killer told Cape Town woman to come back to post office later: 'It could have been me pleading, screaming and fighting for my life'" (Etheridge 2019c) continued with the narrative of vulnerability. Similar to the previous representation, the fear that is reinforced by the media here is "it could have been me", since it has already happened to Mrwetyana, Mallo, and Volschenk.

The article reads, "Lured inside by the lone employee who offered to assist her, the accused allegedly raped her. Mrwetyana fought back, and it is believed that she kicked him in the genitals. The accused allegedly knocked her out" (Etheridge 2019c). The "kicked him in the genitals" tells us that Mrwetyana did everything that the language of fear might have told her to do, that is, to fight back. It tells women that no matter how you fight back you will be defeated by male power.

As result, women will feel weak and be frightened. This reinforces the fear of force that women should all be scared of. As Schinkel puts it, “violence has everything to do with force, it is usually seen as the carrier of a certain force, or as the exertion of force" (2004:6). To be clear, the force that men exert on women. The force that the perpetrator used on Mrwetyana. It is this force that ensures that patriarchy survives. The fear that the man is dangerous and will defeat you even if you fight back. The “force” presented by this news report reinforces the constant fear of being violated.

Subsequent coverage continued the pattern of transmitting fears by generalizing and holding everyone accountable. An article of 6 September 2019 on *News24*, titled "The week South Africa failed its people" (De Villiers 2019), blamed South African society instead of directly blaming the perpetrators. This headline tells all of us that we have failed women and failed in the fight against gendered violence in the country. The perpetrator remains invisible and exonerated from the violence they subject women to. It teaches women that if the whole country has failed then "as a woman I am on my own and I have to figure new ways of survival" because an attack is imminent. This is consistent with Lee and Farral's argument that "whether someone invests in a position of being fearful and being pre-occupied with the threat of victimization depends, in part, as to how available that position is to him" (2008:9). Women know this position is available to them because they are women, living in South Africa, where they are constantly reminded by society and news media like this that the country has failed to protect them. For instance, the article included a photograph of a placard that read “I don’t want to die with my legs open” (See Appendix B). This is a powerful and sensationalist discourse that transmits fears that an attack is imminent. It reminds women about their rapeability. It reinforces the idea that their bodies are available for consumption. The phrase reinforces the notion that the media is interested in the body of femicide as a site of brutality.

The headline also misrepresents the issue of GBV because violence has been happening for years and this failure cannot be pinpointed to one week. It portrays a shock and disbelief that all of this is happening. The article continues with discourses that heighten fear and summarize the violence: “**Ongoing massacre:** The women weep. Their cries are not against the police. They are simply begging for attention because their sisters are being slaughtered on our streets, their mothers raped

in bedrooms and young girls abducted from schools" (de Villiers 2019). This kind of coverage triggers an intense feeling of worry about safety for women and a helplessness that result in fear. The phrases "ongoing massacre" and "slaughter" suggest a state of war against women and a state of lawlessness in the country. That there is war against women for being women (Gqola 2021). The spectacular language of fear suggests that women are objects that need to be kept safe and if they are not kept safe, they risk being slaughtered. It portrays an escalation of violence against women. "Because the media often distort crime by over-representing more severe, intentional, and gruesome incidents, the public overestimates its frequency and often misperceives reality" (Altheide and Michalowski 1997:479).

### 8.4. Conclusion

The analysis of this corpus reveals that media in their coverage of sexual violence perpetuate or transmit certain fears to women. They highlight a narrative of war against women and that women should police themselves. The emphasis on the suffering of the victim results in feelings of fear and panic. When we hear something repeatedly it makes us angry and heightens our fears too. The media does not attempt to critically examine colonialism, apartheid, and misogyny which are significantly contributing to the high levels of gender-based violence in the country. The contextualizing of femicide is notably absent and reportage is mostly sensationalized with fear discourses. Questioning this is one of the many steps that will break down this machinery of violence. Hearing repeatedly that you need to protect yourself makes it even harder to perform your activities freely. Ultimately, some women may choose to avoid news media or reduce their news consumption to reduce their fears.

## Chapter 9: Concluding Remarks

This study mainly focused on how media speak about women who are killed by men and what media wrote about these men and femicide in general in South Africa. The study argues that what media say about victims and perpetrators of sexual violence reflects our attitudes about crime and reflects society. Scholarly literature on media representation of violence reveals how media tend to focus more on spectacular cases and by looking at these three cases we saw the same patterns and trends emerging. Media representation of these three cases also reveals how violence can be perceived at a particular point. Femicide is not treated as an ongoing epidemic that is happening all the time but a sudden problem. This is the key narrative that emerged from the study: that femicide was represented as a crisis. In this crisis, the media represented femicide by the narratives of shock, war, and sometimes of support, as well as discourses of fear. What could be perceived as an increase in femicide was in fact an increase in media coverage of femicide. Stories of gender-based violence "trends" during that period or covered extensively in the media until one day there is absolutely nothing and you would swear that the violence has ended. We have also seen how such reporting contributes to the increasing fear and anxiety that women have of being sexually violated.

Media reporting seems to be dominated by mega-cases that become the template of murder (Brodie 2020). Factors such as class and injuries were shown to make some victims "ideal", enabling them to qualify as a mega-case. The extent to which the murder was considered out of the norm goes a long way in determining its coverage. The result: media reporting provides an inaccurate picture of the extent of femicide in South Africa. What was striking was that media tends to ignore the legacies of violence in South Africa. News stories fail to acknowledge why violence against women continues in South Africa and elsewhere. There is a lack of conceptualizing of the structures that make violence possible in the reporting. As argued throughout the study, violence needs to be traced back to the legacies of colonialism and apartheid South Africa. This makes violence as something that is "out there" and not close to home. It is imperative that coverage makes efforts to situate violence within these structures.

Large areas of the texts emphasized the gratuitous violence suffered by the victims. Most notably, extreme cases of sexual violence were presented as a crisis deserving of our outrage, anger, frustration, and sympathy. Extreme violence was covered as the true reality of crime in the country.

Extremely violent cases were presented as being close and as pervasive. These extreme injuries were exploited using spectacular language which made other forms of violence seem not as real. This generated the idea that perpetrators of such violence were not "normal" people, but "monsters". On the one hand, this reinforced the idea of women's vulnerability, and on the other, it rendered the man invisible.

The study also confirmed the pattern of media coverage whereby ideal victims are nominated. The murders of Janika Mallo, Uyinene Mrwetyana and Lynette Volschenk confirmed that the media does nominate victims to be ideal. Analysis shows that media reporting is interested in class and other socio-economic issues to determine coverage. That is some bodies matter more than others. This portrays and normalises other victims as vulnerable and others as not. Thus, many other victims fail to make headlines in the same way or even making it to news media. Also, perpetrators of sexual violence have an influence on how the media covers the victim. For example, if the victim will receive greater media coverage or not. As we have seen with the case of Mrwetyana's perpetrator, his occupation at the post office and that the incident happened there, it had a greater impact on coverage Mrwetyana.

It was also evident that the media invested time in suggesting "quick fix" solutions or temporary solutions. In particular, the narrative that women need to possess certain safety materials in order to be "safe". The media did not look at the bigger picture of legislation, the criminal justice system, and society – all these were presented as not working and failing to provide the protections they are meant to. Therefore, responsibility was placed on women, reinforcing the fears that women have using spectacular language and rhetoric.

For the purposes of this project, as a starting point the media needs to rethink the way they cover the relationship between victims and perpetrators of femicide. Reporting should give the victims of femicide dignity and not focus on the lifeless bodies found on the scene but also on victims' personal histories. News media should ensure that reporting is not tailored in way that sustains the existing levels of violence but that dismantles the orders of violence. This can be achieved by making sure the perpetrators of violence are visible in the crime they committed and not excused. Reporting of sexual violence by media shapes the way society understands violence against women. This study showed that sexual violence in South Africa is closely related to the questions of power, domination, patriarchy, and persisting masculine violence. These are some of the issues

that continue to shape the high levels of sexual violence in South Africa. Media as one of the most powerful producers of meaning must disrupt this in their coverage and ensure that in coverage of sexual violence there are fewer or no themes that defend and sustain it.

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**Appendix A**



"Growing anxiety over whereabouts of missing UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana" (Staff writer, *Daily Voice* 2019), 30 August 2019

**Appendixes B**




“The week South Africa failed its people" (De Villiers, *News24* 2019), 6 September 2019

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