

Media representations of gratuitous violence in South Africa

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*Our hard-won political freedom will mean nothing unless
we have freedom from violence, freedom from fear.*

(Nelson Mandela, 1918 –)

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION, RATIONALE AND AIMS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Violence has been understood as inherent to humanity, whether as a fundamental element of the human psyche; social interaction; inter-nation hostility; or religiously motivated. However, over the last twenty years the public health approach to the study of violence has shown that violence is preventable (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002; Mercy & O'Carroll, 1988; Mercy, Rosenberg, Powell, Broome & Roper, 1993). Concerned with violence as the product of a combination of socio-ecological relationships and risk factors that impact on a person's tendency for violence (Butchart, Hamber, Terre Blanche & Seedat, 1997), the main goal of this approach is the analysis of scientific evidence to improve injury prevention and reduce violence (Pridemore, 2003).

In strong contrast to this evidence-based discourse, the media has been accused of portraying acts of violence as random events – often brutal in nature – motivated by unpredictable reasons lodged within individual actors. It is this kind of violence that is often described as gratuitous – violence committed for no reason, or for its own sake (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation [CSVSR], 2007). Gratuitous violence can also be described as violence which occurs at a level that goes beyond what is necessary to accomplish the final goal, be it instrumental or expressive (Wieviorka, 2006). In colloquial terms it can be described as 'senseless' or 'pointless' – that violence which the general public finds difficult to rationalise and understand.

Therefore, from the outset of this study, an undeniable epistemological tension exists between the evidence-based public health approach to violence and the social constructions of violence by the media. While the public health approach proposes that all acts of violence are preventable and therefore *any* act of violence is gratuitous, the media constructs violence as uncritically scalable, where particularly horrendous and/or 'senseless' acts of violence are deemed to be gratuitous.

Possibly due to this seemingly irreconcilable tension, there appears to be little academic literature concerning 'gratuitous violence', both generally and in a South African context. Despite the conceptual problem surrounding gratuitous violence, and its absence in scientific discourse, gratuitous violence is often described and reified in the news media.

Therefore the media makes gratuitous violence a real and, arguably, even finite term despite academia's blurred definitions of the concept. Consequently, the media has the ability to construct parameters across the violence spectrum – from justified to gratuitous violence. Hence, while there clearly are certain cases of extreme violence that should, and do, capture the public's imagination because of the level of brutality, the media has also been criticised for the generally sensationalised manner in which stories concerning violence are reported (Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006; Fulton, 2005; Sacco, 1995).

However, this relaying of brutality and fear – 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, 2002a as cited in Altheide, 2009, p. 81) – sells newspapers. This media imperative to sell does, however, result in the construction of a particular kind of violence, and explanations for it. As such, the news media has been censured for simplifying and decontextualising complex events of violence to reflect narratives that demonise certain parties, and simplify explanations (Altheide, 2009). The media has also been criticised for over-representing sensationalist violent crime at the expense of other crimes of violence, such as domestic abuse, gender-based violence, and child abuse, which might not be considered as commercially newsworthy (Fine, 2007; Dowler et al., 2006; Sacco, 1995).

Studies in the United States have demonstrated that, rather than reflecting violence in society, the news media is over-emphasising it (Potter, 2003), both in terms of its frequency, and in terms of its importance and prevalence relative to other social issues. This is borne out by the example of murder rates decreasing by 33% in the US from 1990 to 1998, while the news coverage of murders on network television increased by 473% (Texeira, 2001 as cited in Potter, 2003). This separation of prevalence, incidence

and representation means that violence is “experienced as both a private trouble and a public issue” (Sacco, 1995, p. 142). It is the media that plays a significant role in transitioning private troubles to broader social issues, and this ability implies a form of social power.

In short, the media, directly or indirectly, provides a significant share of our knowledge and beliefs concerning life beyond our direct experience, with violence being no exception (Elliott, 1996 as cited in Media Monitoring Project, 1999). This influence suggests that the media is in a position, if it so desires, to give voice to marginalised groups, and to be used for the public good (MacRitchie & Seedat, 2008). Alternatively, the media can represent dominant social and political discourses in biased ways (Seedat, 1999). This power carries with it a moral responsibility regarding the impact of news reporting on its audience (Media Monitoring Project, 1999). This responsibility implies, in the view of many violence prevention researchers, that the media should promote prevention messaging and action by drawing on evidence to contextualise acts, and causes, of violence, rather than focusing on sensationalised tabloid styles of writing (Kobusingye, Butchart & Bowman, 2010).

This said, the *raison d'être* of the media is undeniably commercial, where the market is advertisers and the product is audiences (Fairclough, 1995; Fulton, 2005). Fulton (2005) goes so far as to comment that “the core business of newspapers is less about providing news than about attracting advertising (both commercial and classified) via a promised mass market of demographically diverse readers” (p. 224). This juxtaposition of moral responsibility and economic viability inevitably creates a tension, where newspaper reporting walks a fine line between accurate reporting, and representing a version of reality that reflects the dominant discourses advantageous to the media’s vested political and commercial interests (MacRitchie & Seedat, 2008).

The media has influence and power in shaping both public opinion and action due to its audience reach, and its constructions of violence. Therefore an important way to understand how gratuity is constructed in the popular imagination is to use data from newspapers where gratuitous violence is most emphasised. In this way it becomes possible to critically analyse *what* the media says about gratuitous violence and *how* it

says it. This focus can then inform further understandings of what marks violence as gratuitous or excessive. It can also illustrate when evidence-based arguments are used to explain, justify and counter these markers and when they are abandoned in favour of other forms of argument.

1.2 RATIONALE

Gratuitous acts of violence probably represent a minority of incidents. However, it is impossible to estimate the actual prevalence in South Africa as forms of violence are not categorised beyond ‘assaults related to arguments, domestic violence and other circumstances’; ‘robbery and other violent property crime’ and ‘rape and sexual assault’ (CSVR, 2007).

Yet it is these cases of gratuitous violence which provoke particular horror, alarm and fear in the South African public. For, contained in these acts, is a seeming indifference to the terrible suffering inflicted on victims; torture over a prolonged period of time; and victims who are shot despite offering no resistance, or even while begging for mercy (CSVR, 2007).

Indeed, fear of victimisation and personal safety – as measured in terms of perceived likelihood of victimisation – has been shown to have a greater negative influence on life satisfaction than *actual* victimisation (Møller, 2005) and, because people can relate to the victims as ‘someone like me’ or ‘it happened a few streets away from my home’, these incidents serve to shape the climate of fear in the country (CSVR, 2007).

This perceived threat of crime becomes very real in the imagination of communities, and none more so than the threat of gratuitous violence. It is this potential threat – rather than the actual violence – which results in significant social fallout, such as the intensification of regional segregation of population groups; and citizens adopting harsh punishment attitudes while putting pressure on politicians to do the same. Consequently, people move away from areas they believe to be unsafe (Naudé, Prinsloo & Ladikos, 2006); potential for investment decreases (CSVR, 2007); and emigration

levels increase. On a personal level there is an emotional, psychological, and often financial, impact for victims of crime (CSVR, 2007).

The emotiveness of the subject matter is undeniably open to sensationalism, particularly in the media, with the phrase “if it bleeds, it leads” being used as a shorthand term to illustrate the effect of violence, newsworthy or not, on newspaper sales (Buvinić & Morrison, 2000, p. 58). However, in line with a public health approach, research has shown that when risk factors and causal information on crime is included in news stories, readers are less fearful, particularly regarding local crimes (Chiricos, Padgett & Gertz, 2000; Heath, 1984 as cited in Coleman & Thorsen, 2002). Conversely, there is a large body of evidence that relates exposure to mass media and the fear of crime, although the strength of that relationship is undetermined (Sacco, 1995). In particular “saturating readers with consistent and constant reports of violence provokes a siege mentality, especially when violence is depicted as an uncontrollable and faceless occurrence” (Gerbner, 1992 as cited in Seedat, 1999, p. 119).

Given the potential social and economic fallout implied by foregrounding representations of violence that are understood as gratuitous, understanding the way that this gratuity is constructed against, or sometimes within, the evidence-based claims of violence prevention science is important. Such an understanding will go some way to addressing the seemingly irreconcilable gap between violence as object of study and violence as object of media reporting.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS

Because of the power of the media to shape the opinions and actions of their audience, with the associated potential to influence social issues either positively or negatively, the primary aims of this study are to explore the ways in which gratuitous violence is represented in the print news media in South Africa. Specifically, the study is guided by three primary questions:

1. What marks violence as gratuitous in the South African print news media?

2. How are these markers constructed by newspapers in South Africa?
3. How is gratuitous violence explained and/or understood in South African newspapers?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE

2.1.1 Definitions and interpretations

2.1.1.1 Violence

Violence is defined by The World Health Organisation (WHO) as

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (Krug et al., 2002, p. 5).

Violence is one of the leading causes of death worldwide for people between the ages of 15 and 44 (Krug et al., 2002). Apart from the emotional consequences of violence for victims, their significant others and the families of the incarcerated (Pridemore, 2003), the financial cost of violence translates into billions of dollars worldwide in health care expenditure (Krug et al., 2002).

In South Africa violence and injuries are acknowledged as being the second leading cause of deaths after HIV-AIDS, with an overall injury death rate of 157.8 per 100 000 population. This is nearly twice the global average, with violence accounting for 36% of all non-natural deaths in South Africa (Donson, 2007). Interpersonal violence in general is four and a half times more prevalent in South Africa than the global average (Seedat, van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla & Ratele, 2009).

The WHO report on violence and health (Krug et al., 2002) categorises violence into three broad areas: self-directed violence such as suicide; interpersonal violence; and collective violence which pertains to social, political and economic violence. Violence can take the form of physical; sexual; psychological and/or that involving deprivation or neglect.

Interpersonal violence, the main focus of this study, is further divided by the WHO into two sub-categories: firstly, family and partner violence which primarily, although not exclusively, takes place in the home between family members and/or intimate partners; and secondly, community violence, which is violence that occurs between individuals who are not family members. They may be either acquaintances or strangers.

Collective violence suggests possible motives for violence committed by larger groups of individuals or by states, usually to advance a particular social agenda. Although the WHO acknowledges that the dividing line between different types of violence is not always as clear as shown in the figure below (Krug et al., 2002), it appears that gratuitous violence causes a potential conflation between collective and interpersonal violence (as denoted in blue). For example, forms of violence such as torture have long been considered a tool of the state rather than of interpersonal violence. However, torture is increasingly being used in interpersonal violence.

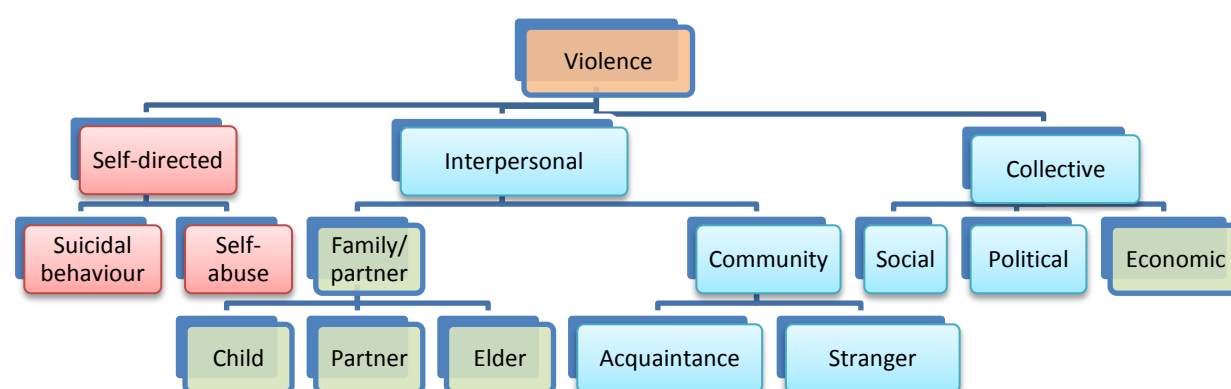


Figure One: Typologies of Violence Krug, E.G., Dahlberg, L.L., Mercy, J.A., Zwi, A.B. & Lozano, R. (Eds.), (2002). *World report on violence and health*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

In South Africa crimes involving what public health typologies regard as interpersonal violence are known as contact crimes: murder, rape, attempted murder, assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, common assault, indecent assault, robbery with

aggravating circumstances and common robbery (SAPS, 2008 as cited in Stevens, 2009). Here violence may be a primary outcome of a confrontation, for example with premeditated homicide, or a secondary outcome as in a car hijacking that unintentionally leads to violence (Stevens, 2009).

Assaults related to domestic violence and arguments; robberies; rape and sexual assault account for most of the violent crime (CSVSR, 2007) in South Africa. Violent property crime accounts for 15% of all property crimes in South Africa. In addition many perpetrators of burglaries and vehicle thefts may be armed and may use violence if confronted or pursued, resulting in possibly unintended violence or murder. Therefore while many property crimes or vehicle thefts are not violent, many more have the potential to be (Seedat et al., 2009).

Violence can be considered gratuitous both when judged in terms of its severity, and its motivation. However, the broad categories of crimes described above make it difficult to assess the severity of the violence used in any reported incident; or the motivation behind the violence. Consequently, this lack of statistical information leads to a reliance by the general public on anecdotal information, and vehicles such as the media, to garner information pertaining to incidents of gratuitous violence.

In addition, the accuracy of South African crime statistics is debatable. Crimes across the spectrum are notoriously under-reported by victims and under-recorded by the South African police (Altbeker, 2005; Shaw & Camerer, 1996); the South African government has, in the past, experienced various difficulties in delivering credible research statistics (Van der Spuy, 2000; Shaw, 2000); and classification of official crime statistics has changed post-democracy. For example, statistics no longer include the race of the victim or the perpetrator, making it impossible to accurately follow trends historically.

That said, existing statistics indicate that robberies are generally pre-meditated and, unlike rape and assault, overwhelmingly involve strangers. As compared to robberies in the mid-1990s there is a tendency for robberies to involve larger, and sometimes more sophisticated, groups of perpetrators. It is also widely believed that there has

been an increase in the degree of violence associated with robberies in recent years (CSVR, 2007).

The perception of an increase in the rise of violent crime has resulted in:

...an accelerating retreat of the middle class communities behind high walls and private security, prompting a withdrawal from public space and precluding the possibility of relationship-building...Ironically, the construction of high walls, intended to protect, tends to fuel the cycle of fear and crime. Walls and fences have become the visible face of exclusion; a barrier between the haves and the have-nots (Valji, Harris & Simpson as cited in Harris, 2006, p. 16).

The increasing sophistication of security systems has contributed to 'target hardening' (CSVR, 2007), making penetration of homes more difficult. Therefore the modus operandi of criminals has changed over the last few years. Burglars are now more likely to target homes when the occupants are there rather than when they are away. This allows the occupants to point out where the valuables are situated, and allows the criminals to move around the house more freely without tripping burglar alarms (Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2009). With the probability of violence dramatically increased when criminals and occupants come face-to-face, some incidents of housebreaking can, and do, result in murder. Consequently the factors driving property crime can be seen to be contributing to the prevalence of violent crime. In South Africa most murders are not premeditated, but rather occur either as an extreme outcome of an assault or argument of some kind; or take place in the context of a robbery or burglary, rape or other crime (CSVR, 2007).

2.1.1.2 Gratuitous violence

Most incidents of violence have some practical and/or emotional purpose for the perpetrator. Where violence is carried out towards a *practical* purpose it can be called *instrumental*; and where it is carried out towards an *emotional* purpose it can be called *expressive* (Bruce, 2010). However, "An incident of violence that is low on both instrumental and expressive motivation can possibly be classified as 'gratuitous'" (CSVR, 2007, p. 106).

Yet, despite this succinct description, there is no united definition of gratuitous violence in the literature. Foreman-Peck and Moore (2009) define gratuitous violence as unprovoked violence, whereas Wieviorka (2003) describes it as “disconnected from any meaning other than the enjoyment that it procures; it can only be understood in reference to itself” (p. 45). Potentially, both definitions are lacking because gratuitous violence can be provoked *and* be gratuitous and, arguably, gratuitous violence does not have to be enjoyable.

The CSVr report (2007), a South African study that attempts to understand gratuitous violence, comments that:

Describing violence as gratuitous implies that it is carried out ‘for nothing’ or ‘purely for its own sake’. It may also be called ‘unnecessary’ violence. When people describe violence as gratuitous or unnecessary this is often a moral judgement or reflects their feelings that much of the violence defies comprehension (p. 105).

In addition, if people resort to violence for little purpose, and with indifference to its consequences, often for a relatively small amount of money or low value of property, then this can also be called gratuitous violence (CSVr, 2007).

Possibly the most satisfactory definition of gratuitous violence is that of Juodis, Woodworth, Porter and Ten Brinke (2009), who define gratuitous violence as “excessive violence, that goes above and beyond the level necessary to accomplish the homicide [or act of violence] – or causes the victim unnecessary pain and suffering” (p. 828).

The difference between the *level* and the *degree* of violence requires some elaboration. The level of violence refers to the *number of incidents* of victimisation where violence is used, whereas the degree of violence refers to the *amount of violence* used in individual criminal incidents (CSVr, 2007). Degrees of gratuitous violence fall on a continuum. As depicted in the diagram below, at the low end of the continuum there is evidence of a brief single incident of excessive violence in a brief period. At a moderate level there is evidence of excessive violence over a short period, possibly using a method such as

torture, or of violence being used in more than one incident. Finally, at the highest end, gratuitous violence is a central component of the crime, with evidence of excessive violence spanning multiple incidents within the course of a lengthy, drawn-out act of violence, often culminating in homicide (Juodis et al., 2009).

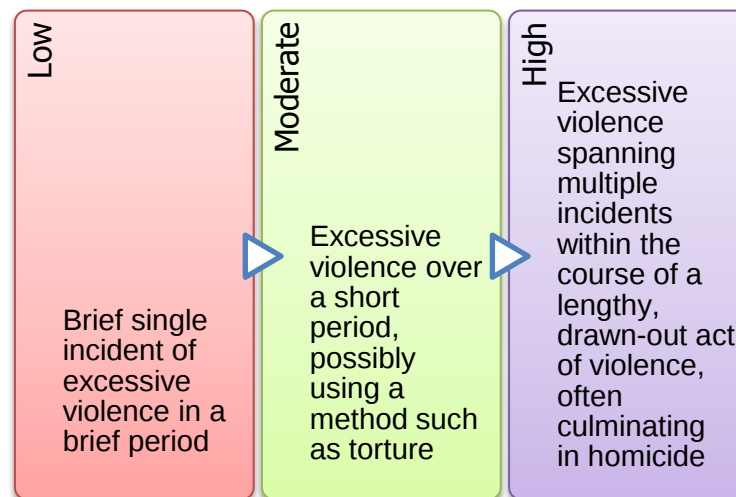


Figure Two: The Continuum of Gratuitous Violence

Adapted from Juodis, M., Woodworth, M., Porter, S. & Ten Brinke, L. (2009). Partners in crime: A comparison of individual and multi-perpetrator homicides. *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 36, 824 – 839.

Juodis et al. (2009), while not referring directly to *gratuitous* violence in their article, define two different offences, reactive and instrumental, where violence is more likely to occur. Reactive offences are where the offence is clearly goal oriented with no evidence of provocation – either emotional or situational – on the part of the victim. Here the act of violence is intentional, premeditated, non-impulsive, and motivated by an external goal such as money, drugs, sex or revenge. This offence might even have been carefully planned and executed. Instrumental offences are committed for external gain without the express purpose of hurting anyone in the process but, due to agitation on the part of the victim, violence occurs.

As should now be evident, gratuitous violence is a difficult concept to elucidate. Consequently, while social science has theorised violence and violent crime in many

ways, little research has focused on understanding violence as 'gratuitous'. Researchers admit to "grappling with gratuitous violence" (Bruce, 2010, p. 14), with descriptions ranging from "sociologically absurd" (Mucchielli, 2010, p. 6) to gratuitous violence being an observable and measurable type of violence. Despite this conceptual difficulty, accounts and descriptions of seemingly 'gratuitous' violence are key stories in the news media, with little attention paid to the complexity of the issue acknowledged by academia. Yet, because these stories enjoy widespread consumption by the general public, they are valuable sources of data for exploring how gratuitous violence is represented in South African newspapers.

2.1.2 Placing violence in historical context

"Violence...exists not above but within history, and not merely as an object of attention but also as a strategy of perception by which the psychological and the social are made visible and rendered manageable" (Butchart et al., 1997, p. 236). Therefore, violence can be said to be represented differently at different points in history. For example, terms such as 'wife rape' and 'date rape' did not exist forty years ago (Loseke, 1989 as cited in Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999); while violence generally was conceptualised as occurring between strangers rather than in the home (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). Women were rarely, if ever, represented as sexual offenders (Kramer, 2009), and, even today, violent women are most often portrayed as either a 'victim', 'mad' or 'bad', largely because

When women commit violent crimes they are seen to have breached two laws: the law of the land, which forbids violence, and the much more fundamental 'natural' law, which says women are passive carers, not active aggressors (Lloyd, 1995 as cited in Cormack & Brickey, 2007, p. 2).

The situation of violence in its historical context dictates how both people and the media see, think and act regarding violence (Butchart et al., 1997). Therefore theorising of, or response to, violence (and gratuitous violence) is shaped by time and place.

2.1.2.1 The historical context of violence in South Africa

In South Africa specifically, the historical contextualisation of violence has followed a varied but prevailing trajectory that has woven violence into the very fabric of South African society. Consequently physical violence has become a solution for some people when resolving conflict or seeking dominance (Simpson, 1991 as cited in Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana, 2002).

In the late 1890s, for the first time, violence in South Africa was investigated as a socio-medical phenomenon, primarily understood in psychodynamic and ethnopsychiatric terms until as late as the 1960s. Violence was pathologised through the investigation of the values, and traditional tribal structures, associated with the “African mind” (Butchart et al., 1997, p. 238). However, in the 1960s the emphasis on violence changed from psychopathological to political, where violence was viewed as a legitimate tool of political struggle for both the apartheid state and its opponents. Political violence then became deligitimised in the 1980s as apartheid began to fall, and South Africa started its move towards democracy. With this third shift, the emphasis moved to the *consequences* of this political violence for the individual, the family, the community and society; and how these groups could be healed of their physical, psychological and social wounds. From there it was a short step, post-1994, to the introduction of the public health approach which will be discussed in more detail under approaches to violence and violence risk (Butchart et al., 1997).

2.1.3 Theories of violence and approaches to its management and prevention

Different approaches and theories regarding violence originate from diverse assumptions about its nature. Biological assumptions may emphasise hormones, genes and innate levels of aggression (Hearn & Whitehead, 2006). Psychology may favour personality disorders; while psychoanalysis, specifically, might refer to a ‘dyscontrol’ of the ego function, or violence as a course of self-destruction that transfers pain from oneself to others (Menninger, 2007). Sociology, anthropology, political science and economics, on the other hand, tend to use concepts grounded in interpersonal, collective, institutional, structural or societal processes (Hearn & Whitehead, 2006).

2.1.3.1 Violence as a criminal act

A criminalised view of violence revolves around notions of culpability and victimisation, mediated by interpretations of what is deemed appropriate behaviour given the circumstances (May, 1999). Diamond (2006) contends that what the criminal justice system is trying to do through the legislative process – from instituting laws to prosecuting offenders – is the following:

What the attorneys, judges, juries, and the public really wish to know, whether consciously or unconsciously is...What caused this particular person to commit this brutal crime? Is he or she evil? What is evil? Where does evil originate? Is the defendant mentally ill? If she or he is not evil, but rather mentally ill, what causes such illness? Can it be treated or cured and if so, how? What is the likelihood of this individual's destructive behaviour recurring in the future? Should this person be held fully responsible for his or her violent behaviour? And if so what is the appropriate punishment? (p. 180)

In effect, forensic evaluations seek to answer these questions to establish culpability of each defendant by drawing on the expertise of mental health practitioners and criminologists. Epidemiologists, in contrast, are rarely called upon. The focus here is on managing the inevitable, rather than preventing the controllable, as is the primary objective of the public health approach to violence prevention.

2.1.3.2 The ecological model and the public health approach to violence

The ecological model provides a popular framework in the public health arena to explain how the interplay of individual, relationship, social, cultural and environmental factors work, at multiple levels, to influence violent behaviour (Krug et al., 2002). Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the model comprises four levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The individual level explores the biological and personal history that a person brings to their violent behaviour including factors such as low impulsivity, educational levels, substance abuse and a prior history of aggression. The relationship level looks at how relationships with peers, family members and intimate

partners can increase the perpetration of violence and the risk of victimisation. The community level explores the community contexts – schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces – within which these aforementioned social relationships are embedded, and assesses their potential influence on violent behaviour. The final level, the so-called societal level, examines the larger societal factors that influence rates of violence such as those that compound, or reduce, an acceptable climate for violence; and those that create, or sustain, gaps between different societal groups. These gaps can relate to health, educational, economic and social policies that either maintain, or exacerbate, high levels of social or economic inequality between groups in society (Krug et al., 2002).

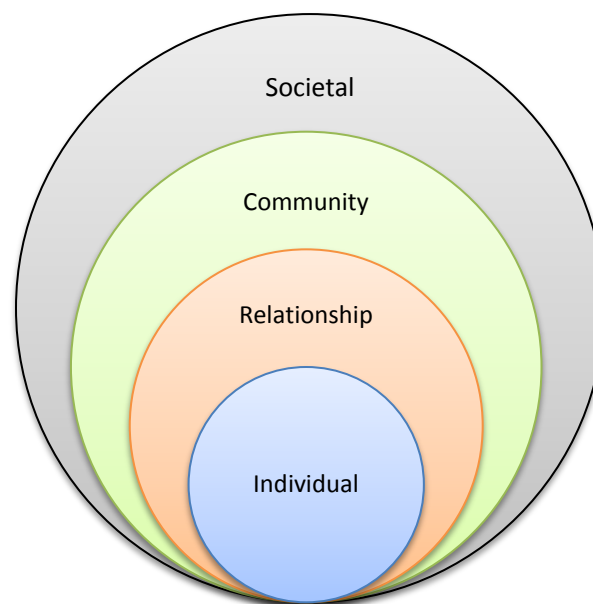


Figure Three: The Ecological Model as a Framework for Explaining Violent Behaviour

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In *International Encyclopaedia of Education*, Vol. 3, 2nd Ed. Oxford: Elsevier.

Within this ecological framework the public health approach provides a widely-used and highly regarded means of approaching violence and its potential causes, both internationally and in South Africa (Krug et al., 2002; Mercy et al., 1993; Mercy & O'Carroll, 1988). This approach contends that no single factor explains violence or why it is more prevalent in some communities than in others (Krug et al., 2002; Stevens,

2009). As concerned with the *prevention* of violence as with *remediation*, it views violence as:

The product of a vast web of socio-ecological relationships and risk factors that impinge upon people to increase or decrease their proclivity for violence, and which through adequate identification by way of epidemiological and social research can be manipulated to prevent the problem (Butchart et al., 1997, p. 239).

Over time, the public health approach to violence has become increasingly sophisticated in its provision of a comprehensive framework which can identify risk factors, and risk behaviours, that can influence the prevalence and incidence of violence (Donovan, 2011). However, while it is widely acknowledged that issues such as gender, race and social class are significant risk factors for becoming either a victim or a perpetrator of violence (Rogers, 2006), the public health approach is unable to determine *which* members of these groups are most at risk and why. Yet, despite this limitation, it remains a neat, and plausible, framework for the root causes of violence in general, and fits very well with the scenario of violence and gratuitous violence in South Africa, as it addresses many of the risk factors that are considered relevant to the South African context.

2.1.4 Risk factors for violence

2.1.4.1 Individual factors

2.1.4.1.1 Psychological motivators

Research concerning the contribution of psychological factors for violence at an intrapsychic, cognitive and moral level, has been criticised for being “fundamentally essentialist in nature, reducing the genesis of homicidal violence to intrinsic physical or constitutional factors” (Stevens, 2008, p. 74), and consequently ignoring environmental and societal factors. However a sizeable amount of evidence suggests that psychological

factors play a role in the perpetration of violence. Both angry temperaments (Stevens, 2008) and low intelligence (Louw, Strydom & Esterhuyse, 2005), have independently been positively correlated with a propensity to violence, as has delayed moral development in children (Stevens, 2008).

High levels of gratuitous violence beg the question as to how perpetrators can bring themselves to commit such heinous acts. However Baumeister and Campbell (1999) compellingly argue that this is the wrong question to ask, as it assumes that the offender recognises the act as heinous, and therefore must force themselves to overcome revulsion before committing it. When relating this kind of pathology to gratuitous violence, the CSVr report (2007) describes three possible kinds of pathological perpetrators. Firstly, a perpetrator strongly invested in achieving their goal – be it material, self-gratification or recognition from others – may exclude the consideration of the harm done to others, justifying their actions through their own self-gratification or enrichment. Alternatively, strong vindictive or sadistic qualities could cloud a perpetrator's interaction with other people and prevent them from refraining from violence. Finally, the third kind of person is possibly largely unaware of their own emotions as well as those of others. This might lead to an indifference to the consequences of violence for both parties, and an inability to distinguish right from wrong. Violence here might be carried out because an opportunity happens to present itself rather than due to any instrumental or emotional motivation.

However, it is more likely that a pathological perpetrator will have some attributes of all three of the above, which then combine with the social context to result in an incident of gratuitous violence. The CSVr report (2007) cites the following example:

For instance, where torture is resorted to during the course of a robbery, this is frequently to force the victims to divulge information on where goods such as money, guns or jewellery are to be found. This type of incident fits in with the pattern of instrumental uses of violence for purposes of self-enrichment. However, in this type of situation or others, torture is unlikely to be purely instrumental. The torturers must either dissociate themselves from the situation, or rationalise the torture in some way, or else have vindictive or sadistic motives,

or there must be some other reason why the perpetrator is unmoved by the violence which he or she is inflicting (p. 108).

Certain personality disorders such as anti-social personality disorder, and the paranoid and passive-aggressive personality disorders, are exemplified by a lack of the very characteristics that normally inhibit antisocial and violent behaviour: empathy, close emotional bonds, fear of punishment, and guilt (Hare & Neumann, 2009). While these disorders foretell a higher risk for violent behaviour, Louw et al. (2005) correctly point out that affected individuals represent a small percentage of the population, and most people with a personality disorder do not commit either violent or criminal acts. If anything, it is active psychotic symptoms, and not the diagnostic category itself, which predict violence.

2.1.4.1.2 Substance abuse

Many theories have been used to explain the effect of alcohol on violence, such as 'alcohol expectancies' where, if people believe that drinking will make them violent, it does. 'Deviance disavowal' suggests that alcohol is used as an excuse for pre-mediated deviant behaviours and social learning theory proposes that people will act in accordance with what they have been taught. Arguably the most influential, 'disinhibition theory', suggests that alcohol affects the brain centres that impair inhibition which leads to conflict that would not have occurred if the person had been sober. However, as Galvani (2004) points out, "conflict is not a universal result of alcohol's effects on cognition which suggests its disinhibiting properties are insufficient as an explanation for conflict" (p. 359).

Yet, despite many investigations concerning the abuse of alcohol as a direct cause of violent behaviour there is, in fact, very little conclusive evidence. Existing research points rather to an *association*, with an increased risk of violence and injury, when the perpetrator has been drinking. On the other hand, there is also evidence that most perpetrators were violent and abusive even before the consumption of alcohol (Galvani, 2004).

In South Africa however, alcohol misuse and, in some parts of the country, drug abuse, are seen as major factors underlying violence (Seedat et al., 2009), with Leoschut and Bonora (2007) arguing that substance abuse can, and often does, lead to addictions which require large amounts of money to maintain. Regardless of the degree of risk of substance abuse on violence, it does appear that contextual factors such as the situation; who is involved and their relationship; and the social cues that would normally illicit an aggressive response also need to be present (Parker & Auerhahn, 1998).

There is even less evidence to suggest that drug use is uniquely associated with violent crime (Parker & Auerhahn, 1998), although it is acknowledged as a predictor of violence (Seedat et al., 2009). Therefore while both alcohol and drugs can be contributors to violence, there are numerous people who abuse substances but do not commit violent acts while, conversely, there are many violent acts committed by sober people (Louw et al., 2005).

2.1.4.1.3 Child maladjustment, maltreatment and the cycle of violence

Given South Africa's long history of various forms of violence, the cycle of violence as a risk factor is particularly salient as an explanation for the perpetration of violence itself. It suggests that children exposed to violence through abuse and maltreatment are more likely to commit antisocial acts when they are adults (Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2003). In South Africa this can refer to exposure to both family and/or community violence. People who grow up in communities where they are frequently exposed to violence can come to see it as normal and, therefore, an acceptable tool for achieving their goals (CSV, 2007).

However, the cycle of violence has been difficult to justify as an isolated cause for violence in later life, and has mainly given way to the ecological perspective discussed earlier, where the consequences of child maltreatment are understood within the context of a broad range of factors (Grogan-Kaylor & Otis, 2003).

Maladjustment in childhood, such as conduct disorder; early antisocial behaviour; hostility towards authority and impulsive, restless and reckless behaviour during

adolescence, have also been found to correlate with violent behaviour in adulthood (Louw et al., 2005).

2.1.4.1.4 Emotional predictors of violence: infrahumanisation, envy, humiliation and degradation

Despite the importance of the concepts that have been discussed, “individuals, not sociological concepts, commit and are victims of murder” (Pridemore, 2003, p. 193). However it is these concepts which give rise to the human emotions that result in violence, gratuitous or otherwise.

Gratuitous violence can be possible because of dehumanisation. Here the perpetrator feels no moral obligation to apply human standards to the victim. If a person is perceived as human, then empathetic reactions are activated that make it difficult to mistreat them without risking personal distress (Bandura, 1990). However, if a person is dehumanised then they can be mistreated with no feelings of guilt. In this way the perpetrator can distance themselves from moral feelings regarding the violent act and feel no remorse or shame.

Unlike dehumanisation which views people as non-human, infrahumanisation refers to denying an individual, or group, some of the characteristics that make us human. While primary emotions such as pleasure, fear, anger and attraction are considered primary emotions experienced by animals and humans alike, it is secondary emotions – love, guilt, humiliation and hope – that are ostensibly uniquely human (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). It has been found that violence triggers an infrahumanisation process through exposure to violent behaviour, which encourages further violent behaviour; ambiguous stimuli are interpreted in a more negative light than they should be and people come to believe that violence is acceptable in certain situations (Delgado, Rodríguez-Pérez, Vaes, Leyens & Betancor, 2009). In this way gratuitous violence becomes justifiable in the mind of the perpetrator.

2.1.4.2 Environmental factors

2.1.4.2.1 When poverty, materialism and relative deprivation collide

Post-democracy the situation of South Africa's very poor is not improving. Currently, the poorest 20% of the population earns less than 4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the richest 10% of the population earns nearly 45% (Altbeker, 2008). Although the redistribution of wealth in South Africa has been government policy since 1994, income inequality since that time has grown, with 60% of the population earning less than R42 000 annually (Seedat et al., 2009). Indeed, South Africa is arguably the most inequitable country in the world with the highest rating of income inequality of 63 countries studied (Seedat et al., 2009). International research shows that high rates of inequality and high rates of violence are strongly correlated (Bruce & Kirsten, 2010), which is borne out by South Africa's standing as the country with the highest homicide rate of the same 63 countries (Jewkes et al., 2009). Studies have also shown that low income and gender inequality, combined with low economic development, are strong positive predictors of rates of violence.

While poverty undoubtedly plays a role in violence levels, a study by Kennedy, Kawachi, Prothrow-Stith, Lochner and Gupta (1998a as cited in Emmett, 2003), found that levels of *absolute poverty* do not account for crime as much as *income inequality* as a measure of relative deprivation. In addition, in Leoschut and Bonora's (2007) study of youth attitudes to crime, poverty was often presented as a justification. However in reality, it transpired that the desire for material items was the more dominant motive, with money being spent on designer clothing, modern and expensive cellular phones and motor cars – basic necessities such as food were rarely mentioned.

Indeed, South Africa is a materialistic nation. Thabo Mbeki (as cited in Bruce, 2007, p. 60) publicly declared, during his term as president, that “personal wealth, and the public communication of the message that we are people of wealth [has become] the means by which we communicate the message that we are worthy citizens of our community”. Rampant consumerism, at the expense of personal attributes, has become the means by which many South Africans, black and white alike, value their status

(Bruce, 2007). Ironically it is the need for conspicuous consumption that feeds the pools of both perpetrators and victims. The more conspicuous the status symbols, the more likely one will become a victim of violent crime, and the more feelings of relative deprivation of the perpetrator are enhanced.

Relative deprivation can be described as a situation in which a person is deprived of something which they think they are entitled to, while another person possesses it. It can be divided into egoistical and fraternal relative deprivation. With egoistical deprivation a person feels deprived because they are less well-off than others, whereas fraternal relative deprivation refers to people who feel that their in-group is relatively deprived compared to an out-group regardless of their own personal deprivation (Guimond & Dambrun, 2002).

Relative deprivation provides a strong argument for assessing the synthesis between emotion and culture in criminology, while also helping explain the motivation (Webber, 2007):

The key distinction of relative deprivation versus common-sense notions of envy, greed and lust is between *expectation* and *aspiration*. If we *expect* something to happen then we are likely to feel discontented if it does not materialise. If we *aspire* to something then we may feel less discontent if it does not materialise (p. 99, *emphasis in original*).

Since the birth of democracy in South Africa, there has been an expectation, realistic or not, that everyone can become an economic player in the new market economy (Bruce, 2007). Yet, seventeen years later, very little has changed with regard to the average person's quality of life and therefore it can be postulated that feelings of relative deprivation, both egoistic and fraternal, are high. With inequality increasing rather than abating, the argument for relative deprivation as a positive predictor for violence of any kind in South Africa is arguably strengthened (Seedat et al., 2009).

If one follows the work of Lea and Young (1993 as cited in Webber, 2007), the policy of apartheid, and its high level of injustice, has contributed significantly to feelings of relative deprivation because:

Discontent occurs when comparisons between comparable groups are made which suggest that unnecessary injustices are occurring. If the distribution of wealth is seen as natural and just – however disparate it is – it will be accepted. An objective history of exploitation, or even a history of increased exploitation, does not explain disturbances. Exploitative cultures have existed for generations without friction: it is the perception of injustice – *relative deprivation* – which counts (p. 102, *emphasis in original*).

Because uncontrolled consumerism has become normalised, frustration at the lack of material ownership, coupled with issues of aspiration, group membership and comparison results in deviancy becoming more understandable, and intelligible, rather than pathological. This goes some way to explaining relative deprivation as a *tendency* towards crime rather than as a *cause* of crime (Webber, 2007).

2.1.4.2.2 Group dynamics and notoriety

When a group is involved in the perpetration of violence, relationships and dynamics within the group come into play. Some groups frown on unprovoked violence, while other may see acts of domination and gratuitous violence as positive. Subordinate members may also be influenced by stronger group members, which can lead to another motivation for gratuitous violence, notoriety. Here violence may be carried out in such a way as to receive media attention or achieve recognition (CSV, 2007).

2.1.4.3 Societal factors

2.1.4.3.1 South Africa's socio-historic context

Violence, crime and violent crime have always been a part of South Africa's history (Stevens, 2008; Stevens, 2009; Seedat et al., 2009). In recent history, the 1980s was one of South Africa's most violent periods, characterised by extensive use of force by the South African government, and those opposing it. Violence was socially sanctioned by the state and therefore came to be seen, in the broader community, as a means to solve problems (Hamber, 1999). The townships were ablaze, while apartheid policies directly

contributed to crippling poverty and unemployment in these black communities (Seedat et al., 2009). By the 1990s “cycle of violence” described the pervasive nature of the violence that had enveloped South African society, undermining its social, moral and interpersonal fabric. This was marked by incidents such as the justification of property theft as a redistribution of wealth, and a general resistance to abiding by laws (Seedat et al., 2009).

Paradoxically, at a time when the nation was moving towards an egalitarian and democratic state, political and criminal violence escalated, threatening the vision of a united nation (Hamber, 1999; Stevens, 2008). Overall the legacy of apartheid has resulted in a mistrust of citizens, not just between the state and communities, but also among themselves, resulting in political tensions that have spread horizontally among communities.

In this way constructions of violence have been “fundamentally shaped by socio-historical contexts, and...these constructions [have] become diffused into widely held public discourses” (Stevens, 2008, p. 27). Consequently violence has become normalised as a means of problem-solving in South Africa.

2.1.4.3.2 Status, gender and constructions of masculinity

There are two powerful gender norms that contribute to high levels of violence-related crime in South Africa. Firstly, aggression is a societal expectation for men. Men are expected to be more aggressive than women, with societies generally encouraging men to fight for what they believe in. Secondly, masculinity is equated with success and achievement, with the ability to financially look after one’s family seen as a masculine ideal (Leoschut & Bonora, 2007). Men are highly competitive about power, respect and status yet, with nearly one third of the population unemployed, poverty has become an obstacle to achievement that can result in feelings of shame and humiliation. Violence has therefore become a potential means to achieving wellbeing, status and respect (Seedat et al., 2009).

When self-respect and self-esteem are fatally wounded, concern for others is of no consequence, for the only way to re-affirm one's own victimised self is by destroying those who were witness to its demise. The extremity of violence, the excessiveness of the transgression, and the emphatic guilt are essential since they are persuasive evidence of something regained: control, freedom, self-esteem (Nauta, 2009, p. 67-68).

Bruce (2007) argues that various social factors in South Africa have coalesced to place a premium on status in a socioeconomic context where most people are unable to prove, or improve, their social station. With South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy has come a relatively rapid transition from traditional society to market economy, where freedom and autonomy of the individual has become prized over the social fabric that binds communities. The consequent insecurities play an important role in violent crime in South Africa by compelling people, for various reasons, to get involved in crimes of acquisition.

Stevens (2008) argues that masculine violence has become a normative gendered response, and an act of resistance against hegemonic masculinities. However he also proposes that masculine violence is fundamentally influenced by the material, social and political conditions that prevail in certain contexts. He cites Xaba (2001), who argues that the perception of violence has shifted from being seen as liberatory, even noble, during the South African struggle, to delegitimised and criminalised in contemporary South Africa. This has led to an inversion in the views of masculinity which resulted in some men, unable to make the transition, recasting their violence into criminalised masculinity.

2.1.4.3.3. Social capital, social disintegration and the impact of democratisation

Classical social disorganisation theory contends that crime results from weak informal social controls, where a lack of social control results in a breakdown in civic engagement and trust which, in turn, precipitates violence and crime (Rosenfeld, Messner & Baumer, 2001). The social disintegration of primarily black communities – due to colonialism, apartheid and racial oppression – has long been documented. The

causes, including familial, environmental and societal factors, all contributed to a breakdown of communities and the consequent entrenchment of violence as a means of settling disputes. Today, despite democratisation, these situations persist. Social capital allows goals to be achieved, using common resources, which might not have been otherwise possible (Emmett, 2003). Social disintegration is what erodes social capital, which can be described as the cooperative social relationships that help realise collective goals (Rosenfeld et al., 2001). Social disorganisation creates a social vacuum where criminals can build up their own private stocks of social capital, imposing their own 'laws' on communities (Emmett, 2003). Consequently low social capital has been directly linked with socially disorganised communities (Rosenfeld et al., 2001).

Strain theory views a low stock of social capital as another form of deprivation along with poverty, unemployment and a lack of education. Because people draw on social capital in the same way they would physical and human capital resources to achieve their goals, a lack of it positively predicts a higher rate of crime and violence (Rosenfeld et al., 2001).

A lack of social capital and high levels of social disorganisation make the shift from autocracy to democracy difficult. When, as in South Africa, it is coupled with shortcomings in the criminal justice system and police keeping, as well as high levels of social inequality, it becomes even more difficult. These deficiencies in the transition *towards* democracy can be coupled with transitions *away* from autocracy and authoritarianism, where crime and violence can be seen as a legacy both of the past and the result of a not yet fully developed democracy (Karstedt, 2006).

De Tocqueville (as cited in Wieviorska, 2003) examined tensions that existed between inclusion and individual autonomy in the first modern democracy, the USA. He observed that when egalitarian values coexist with envy, status difference and social inequality, pressure is created that can result in crime and violence.

It is well-known that South Africa has the most liberal, and inclusive, constitution in the world (Harris, 2006), with strong egalitarian values. However, the country is also characterised by high levels of social inequality that the government, in the years since

democracy, has not been able to rectify to any significant degree. It is Karstedt's (2006) view that if democracies do not make good on their promises, it might elicit violent reaction among those who feel themselves to be victims of discrimination. This is borne out by Ramphela (as cited in Emmett, 2003) who predicted in 1991 that:

A democratically elected government will have greater difficulties dealing with lawlessness, criminality and irresponsibility, because it is likely to have a greater responsiveness to populist demands and critiques. It is a problem which requires an investment in time and resources, if we are to avoid a downward spiral. There may well be a point of no return in the escalating violence, which will engulf whole communities (pg. 9).

2.2 THE MEDIA AS A VEHICLE OF REPRESENTATION OF GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE

Undoubtedly then, violence and violent crime in South Africa are serious problems. However, statistics indicate that violent crime and murder figures, although still very high, have decreased and stabilised (National Injury Mortality Surveillance System 2001 – 2005 as cited in CSV, 2007). Yet despite this decline, research indicates that feelings of safety in 2008 were lower than in 1998 (Pharoah, 2008). It can be argued that this perception is due to South Africans being heavily swayed by media reports which emphasise stories which play to people's fears – fatal and gratuitous violence (Seedat, 1999).

2.2.1 Problem framing

"Largely unspoken and unacknowledged" (Gitlin, 1980 as cited in Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992, p. 384), frames are "a central organising idea, suggesting what is at issue" (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993, p. 118). They are the focus for discussing a particular event looking at "*what* will be discussed, *how* it will be discussed, and above all, how it will *not* be discussed" (Altheide, 1997, p. 651, emphasis added). Within this study, an example of a frame would be the 'gratuitous violence as public health' issue, as compared to the 'gratuitous violence as random acts by pathological individuals' issue.

From a social constructionist point of view, media framing leads the public to adopt particular beliefs by linking and integrating otherwise detached events. In this way meaning is constructed, which has significance for the causes and consequences of events, and the perceived available solutions (Kupchik & Bracy, 2009; Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff, 2008).

The economic pressures of operating in a fiercely competitive market has shifted the function of the media from *information* provision to *entertainment* provision (Fairclough, 1995). The entertainment format of news encourages journalists to tell a story briefly, in a format that readers can recognise. Altheide (1997) has coined the expression the ‘problem frame’, which problematises an issue in a way that satisfies the entertainment dimension of news by being structured as a narrative. It contains universal meanings; uses specific times and places; is unambiguous; focuses on disorder and is culturally resonant. This then has an impact on the *kind* of stories that get reported, and *how* they get reported, which in turn influences *what* we think about and *how* we think about it (Herda-Rapp, 2003).

Thorson and Dorfman (2003, p. 53), proponents of the so-called “public health model of news”, suggest that typical crime reports frame violence as the sole problem of criminal justice and law enforcement. In addition, these reports tend to exaggerate and sensationalise crime; ignore causal and contextual processes; promote stereotypes; represent crime as random and inevitable; and *misrepresent* the frequency of gratuitously violent crime (Dorfman et al. 2001; Reiner, 1997; Thorson & Dorfman, 2003). Consequently, crime news is relayed in “sketchy dramatic capsules that make it difficult to see the connections across issues or even to follow the development of a particular issue over time” (Bennett, 1998 as cited in Gamson et al., 1992, p. 387). In other words, the media fundamentally disrupts any epidemiology of violence.

The public health approach argues that the media should include risk factors and prevention strategies for violence in its reporting, to work towards altering the basic conditions in society that give rise to, and sustain, the problem (Coleman & Thorson, 2002; Mercy, et al., 1993). However research shows that media coverage of violence centres on individualistic causes rather than societal ones. In addition, base rate

information, which provides the context to a violent crime, is often ignored while exemplars, which involve limited individual cases, are used in preference because of the 'human interest' angle (Coleman & Thorsen, 2002).

To this end, Iyengar (as cited in Coleman & Thorson, 2002), differentiates between two ways of framing a crime news story. The first way, or thematic framing, is where responsibility for the crime is attributed to societal causes. In the second way, or episodic framing, responsibility is attributed to individualistic causes and punitive treatment is advocated. With regards to crime reporting specifically, Iyengar found that the vast majority of stories use episodic framing. This in turn can impact on the reasoning of the public regarding the causes of violence, because the media provides consistent social acceptance (Bandura, 1999). By extension, the more frequently the cause of an issue or social problem is framed in a certain way, the more readily the public will accept that causation as 'truth' (Gamson, 1992).

2.2.2 Social actors, and the media, as generators of discourse

Newspapers are a form of public discourse because they produce articles, or stories, which construct an object of enquiry from a particular point of view (Fairclough, 1995). Indeed, Fairclough comments that "truth is a slippery business" (1995, p. 47) and Gergen (1999) also cautions that when claims are made to 'truth' or 'accuracy in reporting', these claims are really "truths by convention" (p. 26), privileged by certain groups of people. In this regard, MacRitchie and Seedat (2008) argue that, in South Africa, although the individuals of the ruling elite have changed post-apartheid, the media is still owned and controlled by the dominant economic classes who wish to advocate their own economic, political and social agendas.

These players, in the social space in which discourse about violent crime is produced, range from government departments to pressure groups, each pursuing their own goal (Schlesinger, Tumber & Murdock, 1991). Habermas calls this social space the 'public sphere', which finds social actors seeking contexts for their messages that may shape public opinion (Schlesinger et al., 1991).

Within the public sphere, a constructionist orientation argues that these messages, and the over-arching social problems which garner the public's attention, do not remain constant but rather emerge, metamorphose, disappear or re-appear independent of any change in actual conditions (Conrad, 1997). However, the waxing and waning of social problems, and the social constructions of these problems, are rarely seen as such by the reader or, arguably, even by the news producer (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992). Rather, social constructions "appear as transparent descriptions of reality, not as interpretations, and are apparently devoid of political content" (Gamson et al, 1997, p. 382). This becomes particularly important when considering the theoretical framework of this study. For, while critical realism, in line with the scientific discourse of the public health approach, acknowledges that violence exists outside of our constructions of it, it also acknowledges that our interpretations of it are shaped by the lens through which we view the world – and that the media is a powerful vehicle for shaping that lens.

Gamson and Modigliani (1989:2 as cited in Conrad, 1997, p. 140) see media discourse and public opinion functioning as parallel and complementary systems, rather than media discourse *causing* public opinion. They advocate that "media discourse is part of the process by which individuals construct meaning, and public opinion is part of the process by which journalists and other cultural entrepreneurs develop and crystallise meaning in public discourse". However, Gamson et al. (1997. p. 382) argue that the prominence of a message in media discourse "does not ensure dominance in the meaning constructed in readers".

In this regard, Innes (2004) proposes that news discourse takes abstract knowledge about the social world and gives it form and meaning by personalising and dramatising particular events. Because of this, a small number of serious, and gratuitous, crimes can generate a high media profile and imprint on the public consciousness. Such cases then provide focal points for the formulation of popular and political discourses concerned with crime, and can even influence legislative and policy reforms.

2.2.3 Why gratuitous violence is particularly newsworthy

Newsworthy stories are those that audiences want to know about, and often contain the core elements of immediacy, dramatisation, personalisation, titillation and novelty (Bird, 2007; Reiner 1997). Galtung and Ruge (as cited in Fulton, 2005) identified twelve factors that influence the inclusion of a story in a news bulletin including unambiguity, familiarity, predictability, surprise, negativity, the elite status of people or nations, continuing interest, and magnitude.

These 'factors of newsworthiness' in a news report, and the news reports themselves, are often brought into play as if they exist outside of the news itself and are therefore, by extension, impartial. Yet, Fulton (2005) suggests that any text can be restated in the discourse of 'news' and, because this is more likely to lead to inclusion in the newspaper, it is therefore more likely that this is how 'real world' stories will be written. Hence, "Our expectation of what is 'news' and how we can recognise it are...constantly reinforced by what we read in the paper, a process of naturalisation that elides the constructedness of news as manufactured stories" (Fulton, 2005, p. 221). And what reaches publication, particularly at a national level, are the 'mega cases', those stories that contain elements of extreme violence or special-interest issues that evoke a response from a broad range of readers (Dowler & Fleming, 2006).

Of all the influential factors it is deviancy that is seen as *the* defining characteristic of what journalists regard as newsworthy (Reiner, 1997). Because stories relating to violence, and particularly gratuitous violence, fulfil not only the deviancy element, but so many of the core elements that make a story newsworthy, they are often included in newspaper reports in proportions that outweigh those of the crime statistics (Potter, 2003; Dorfman et al, 2003). Indeed the observation made over thirty years ago by Hall et al. (1978 as cited in Greer, 2007, p. 26) remains valid today:

One special point about crime as news is the special status of violence as a news value. Any crime can be lifted into news visibility if violence becomes associated with it...violence represents a basic violation of the person; the greatest personal

crime is 'murder'...Violence is also the ultimate crime against property, and against the State. It thus represents a fundamental rupture in the social order.

Clearly then, news values are impacted by many and varied factors: the number of people affected by the story; the readers' proximity to the event; relevance to the newspaper's readership; the prominence of those involved; human interest; the newspaper's agenda and the journalist's own ideas (Morrison, 2006 as cited in MacRitchie & Seedat, 2008). These factors problematise the idea of the media merely 'giving information', for journalists don't only recount events, they interpret and explain them, try to change people's actions and influence their opinions, as well as try and entertain them (Fairclough, 1995). These are all important issues when critically analysing media representations of gratuitous violence in South Africa.

2.2.4 Lack of context in media representations

As suggested by the public health model of news, two positive effects are achieved when including risk factors and causal information in news reports concerning violent crime: research has shown that readers are less fearful, particularly concerning local crimes; and violence can be viewed as preventable and resolvable, rather than inevitable (Coleman & Thorson, 2002). However, for a number of reasons, it is difficult to alter the way that journalists cover violent crime. Firstly, the way that news is structured has gained acceptance with both audiences and journalists (Grabe, 1996 as cited in Coleman & Thorson, 2002). Secondly, Western culture places more importance on the individual than the collective and this is reflected in news reporting. Therefore journalists risk failure if they offer a new point of view that challenges this belief. Finally, as already discussed, a newspaper's primary purpose is commercial gain. Profits are made by selling audiences to advertisers. Therefore newspapers need the highest readerships for the least financial outlay, and this is achieved by offering the most newsworthy stories, as discussed above (Fairclough, 1995). With the modern emphasis on the 'entertainment frame' and all its associated consequences (Altheide, 1997), human interest stories which simply pit good against evil – that is innocent victims against psychopathic murderers – remain more appealing and therefore, by extension, more newsworthy than the socio-economic risk factors for violence.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is an arguably inescapable tension in this study between the scientific standpoint of the public health approach on the one hand, and the constructionist approach implied in engaging media discourse on the other. As such, a naive appeal to strong constructionism would pit media constructions of violence against science-based constructions of the same object. Caught in this constructionist impasse, many critical social science studies cannot move beyond a textual analysis which, while interesting, does not, and cannot, engage in any meaningful way with claims to evidence beyond these texts. On the other hand, naive realism is prone to losing sight of the perspectival side of knowledge production. It is often blind to the way that social features sculpt the nature of the evidence and the definition of the object of study in the first place. Therefore, in order to negotiate this paradox, it becomes necessary to find a theory that will straddle both realist ontology and social constructionist epistemology.

Ray Bhaskar's critical realism lays claim to being able to negotiate this juxtaposition. It makes an important distinction between the way things are (the intransitive dimension) – real, material things and structures with their own causal mechanisms – and our knowledge claims about those objects of knowledge (the transitive dimension) (Carolan, 2005; Baehr, 1990; Sims-Schouten, Riley & Willig, 2007). In other words:

...material practices are given an ontological status that is independent of, but in relation with discursive practices...critical realism combines constructionist and realist positions to argue that while meaning is made in interaction, non-discursive elements also impact on that meaning (Sims-Schouten et al., p. 102).

Critical realism's ontological claim to *realism* is that a knowledge-producing action only makes sense when there is an assumption of the existence of an independent material reality. In this study it is violence that is materially real – if a person is hit there is an underlying biological substratum that reacts as pain (Carolan, 2005). Yet, critical realism's claim to a *relativist* epistemology is that the relationship between material and social structures is not object-like and concrete, but rather is shaped by the cultural and practical lens through which we view the world (Carolan, 2005; Baehr, 1990).

Therefore, in line with the scientific discourse of the public health approach, this study acknowledges that violence exists outside of our constructions of it. However, this study also proposes that what counts as gratuitous, the *causes* and *manifestations* of violence, are varied and embedded in a diversity of social relationships and historical contexts. Critical realism allows for a blend of these propositions by recognising that, while gratuitous violence cannot escape the complex web of biological, chemical and physical interactions, its manifestations are shaped by the practical and cultural lens through which we view the world. The news media provide one such viewpoint.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

While violence in general, and violence in South Africa, has been extensively researched both qualitatively and quantitatively, across a number of disciplines, paradigms and theoretical frameworks, research that explores representations of *gratuitous violence in South Africa* is limited. This study is interested in how the media represents gratuitous violence, the themes that emerge and the kind of discourses that the media is using. For these reasons this study is best suited to the qualitative approach.

3.2 CORPUS

Thirty-eight articles from English language newspapers in South Africa were used. To ensure relevance regarding *gratuitous* violence, the article's headline needed to contain any of the words used in the online media search, which are listed below. The sample articles pertain to the 2009–2010 timeframe. This period was selected because it is important that what counts – and does not count – as gratuity in the perpetration of violence, is understood within the temporal dimensions that framed its context in the first place. Without an accompanying historical analysis, a focus on the distant past would implicate the error of 'presentism' (Bowman & Hook, 2010) in the study. As no historical analysis was undertaken in relation to the data, the selection of the corpus in the present was therefore methodologically imperative.

Clearly, it was also important that the chosen timeframe also provided evidence that the chosen articles described high levels of gratuitous violence. There is speculation among academics that high levels of gratuity are more acceptable in contemporary times and therefore instances of gratuity are more easily, and readily, reported by the media. In this regard Sacco (1995) suggests that:

Changes in mores relating to public discussion of sex and violence have allowed respectable media outlets to report crimes that would have previously been seen

as taboo and to do so at a level of detail that would once have been considered lurid (p. 145).

Mucchielli (2010) argues that when modern societies get more intolerant of violence, the definition of what counts as gratuitous becomes ever broader. The analysis must therefore take account of both of these possible effects in its selection of data in the present.

Alternatively, given that there are no statistics that categorise 'gratuitous violence', it cannot be ruled out that levels of gratuity in violent acts *are* indeed increasing and are not merely being *reported* as increasing.

While it is difficult to compare the level of gratuity used in 2009–2010 to previous years, other than through subjective comparison, this timeframe did independently provide very rich data in terms of the levels of gratuity described, and therefore proved to be suitable for this study.

3.3 PROCEDURE OF DATA GATHERING OR OBSERVATION

Data have been collected from SA Media's online collection of South African newspaper articles which depict examples of gratuitous violence. Search criteria were arrived at in two primary ways. Initially, commonly used words and phrases describing gratuitous violence were found in the academic literature which were used to conduct searches in the newspaper articles.

In addition, when searching for articles, it became apparent that the media uses certain, arguably sensationalist, catchphrases when referring to incidents of gratuitous violence, in a possible attempt to appeal to the public's fear of this kind of violence. Therefore, in addition to the use of 'gratuitous', search criteria also included a comprehensive list of these catchphrases such as 'brutal', 'random', 'senseless', 'bloody', 'gruesome', 'tortured' and 'bloodbath'.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

A mode of analysis should be well aligned to the paradigm that frames the study. Critical realism sees the world as essentially real, with real material and social structures. Yet actors apply their social constructions and their meaning-making activity to their experience when confronted by these structures (Houston, 2010).

Effectively, critical realism is a *philosophy* which has contributed to the philosophy of the social sciences in general, but has left the theoretical and methodological work to each individual social science. Because of the contrasting roots of the philosophy, researchers can struggle to find an appropriate research method (Yeung, 1997) or method of analysis.

It has been said that “intense methodological awareness, if engaged in too seriously, can create anxieties that hinder practice, but if taken in small doses can help to guard against more obvious errors” (Seale, 1999, p. 475). This study, in the hope of guarding against ‘more obvious errors’, requires a research method that is generalist enough to span the ontological and epistemological possibilities and challenges of critical realism, while still meeting the research aims of this study.

Because the study assumes that violence has an ontology which is independent of our constructions of it and that, in this sense, gratuitous violence exists as one of its forms, the project is informed in some way by an interpretivist orientation. Therefore one of the analytic aims of the study is to identify what counts – or does not count – as gratuitous violence in a corpus of media articles.

On the other hand, the project is as committed to exploring just how these ‘themes’ are communicated within a media discourse. These parallel aims require a method of analysis that is attuned to the identification of themes while equally sensitive to the way that these themes are mediatised. A critical thematic content analysis was deemed appropriate for this requisite blend of analytic approaches.

Some theorists (Braun & Clarke, 2006) argue that thematic content analysis is essentially independent of theory and epistemology and can therefore be used across a

range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. Importantly for this study, its broad spectrum makes it compatible across both realist and constructionist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method identifies, analyses and reports patterns or themes within the data; and it can both describe the data, and interpret various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis typically focuses exclusively on one of two levels: either on the semantic level, which is concerned with the surface meaning and description of the data, or the latent level, which looks at the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations which shape the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However this study has combined the two because there is an interest in firstly determining *what* the media says about gratuitous violence (the surface meaning and description of the reports), and secondly *how* the media reports on gratuitous violence. As the latent form of analysis stems from a constructionist paradigm it is well suited to the critical realism framework of this study.

That said, a critical realist epistemological position needs to combine “both the role of human agency in constituting the social world and an understanding that people’s actions will be influenced by personal and societal mechanisms that are independent of our thoughts or impressions” (Sims-Schouten et al., 2007, p. 102).

While thematic content analysis goes some way to achieving this, it does not profess to critically examine the discourses that may be present because of the underlying political, social and commercial agendas of the media. Therefore, while arguably unorthodox, this study has extended the analysis of the latent level of thematic content analysis to include certain elements of Parker’s (1992) version of discourse analysis. Parker’s discourse analysis is well suited to media discourse, as it views discourse as supporting institutions, reproducing power relationships and having ideological effects (Parker, 1992).

Given the topic at hand, and as suggested by Parker (1992), this research has considered how people are made to fit into certain categories and are marked as different from others. Parker also proposes that language not only describes the world,

but has the power to maintain banal, yet dominant, forms of cultural identity which is also explored in this research.

3.4.1 Data analysis process

Thirty eight English-medium South African mainstream newspaper articles from the 2009–2010 timeframe were selected, based on the search criteria outlined above. Initially any information in the articles that appeared to be interesting was highlighted for possible inclusion in the analysis. The articles were reread a number of times to ensure that nothing of value had been missed.

As suggested by Leininger (1985 as cited in Aronson, 1994, p. 1), themes were then identified by “bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experience, which often are meaningless when viewed alone”. Once the themes in the corpus had been identified, they were then categorised into main themes and sub-themes.

According to Parker (2008), discourse is not a massive observable collection of statements. Rather, discourse operates through certain powerful words, signs and images which speak of what is not spoken everywhere else. As such, discourse is “the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 60). With this as a backdrop, words, markers and imagery in the corpus that could be interpreted as discourse were then identified and classified as main or sub-discourses.

In this way, overarching themes and discourses were tracked across the articles and collated to form a comprehensive picture. While certain themes existed without related discourses, with others there was an overlap between the theme and the discourse. Once the themes and discourses were categorised they were then analysed.

3.5 REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity in qualitative research speaks to honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience (Tracy, 2010). It should permeate the entire research process by focusing on “how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am,

and how I feel affect data collection and analysis?” (Pillow, 2003, p. 176). A reflexive researcher then, is one who is able to step back and take a critical look at *their* role in the research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Yet self-reflexivity is a deceptively simple concept, and is not without its critics. Patai (1994 as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 177) controversially asks, “Does self-reflexivity produce better research?”, while observing that, “We do not escape from the consequences of our positions by talking about them endlessly”. Although I agree both with this, and her rather scathing comment that belabouring reflexivity can lead to “academics engage[ing] in the erotics of their own language games” (as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 177), the importance of putting *some* focus on ‘what I know’, and ‘how I know it’ cannot be under-estimated (Hertz, 1997 as cited in Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

That said, it is clear that, as a researcher, I cannot escape my background when looking critically at my role in this research on gratuitous violence in South Africa. To be brought up as a white, middle class female in the heart of the apartheid years was considered, to a large extent, a passport to institutionalised privilege and hegemony. Therefore while the discourses that appear in the following analysis are not truth claims, there is an element of my social and political location – in essence, my whiteness – which affects the research.

Gratuitous violence in South Africa is an emotionally charged and ubiquitous issue. Many anecdotal tales, news reports and dinner conversations in South Africa revolve around the levels and extremity of violence that seem to pervade our society. In the same way as I have argued of the ability of the media to sway audience opinion, I too cannot claim to be immune to the influence of the above-mentioned vehicles of discourse on my thinking in the past, and the present analysis. I attempted to remain cognisant of these throughout my data collection and analysis process.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As this study involves analysing texts, and does not include any human subjects, no ethical clearance is required by the Human Research Ethics Committee. The data is

available in the public domain on SA Media, a comprehensive press cutting service of South African newspaper reports and periodical articles, administered by the University of the Free State. SA Media is accessible on the following link:
<http://www.samedia.uovs.ac.za/>.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following figure outlines a framework of themes and mediatised discourses that will be analysed in this chapter.

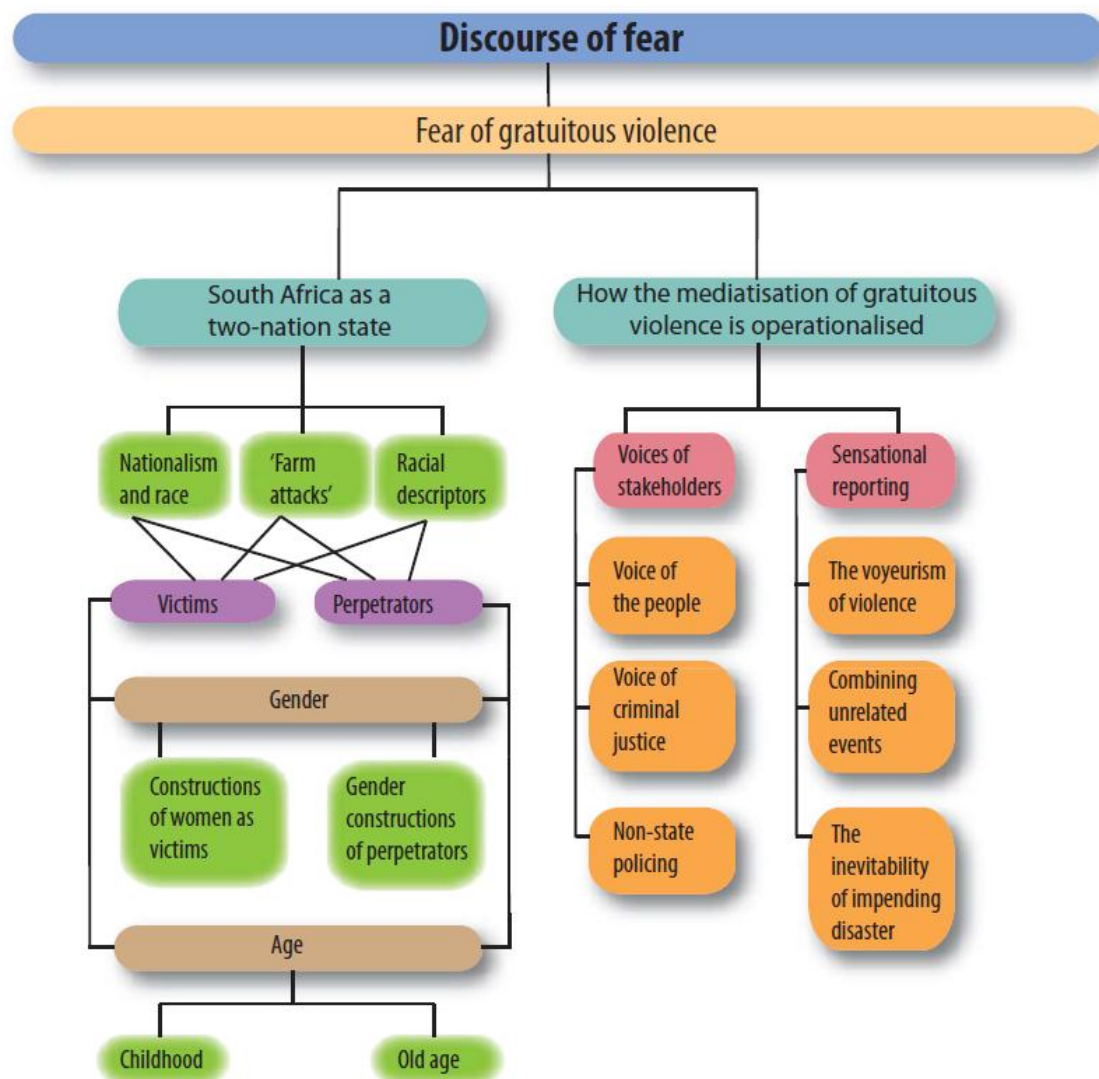


Figure Four: Framework of Discourses and Themes for Analysis

4.1 INTRODUCTION: FOREGROUNDING FEAR OF CRIME

An overarching 'discourse of fear', and the associated discourse of 'fear of crime', pervades media representations of gratuitous violence in South Africa. It therefore becomes important to foreground these concepts as a precursor to this analysis. In addition, while the literature under review in this initial section refers mainly to the fear of all types of crime, it is certainly possible to extrapolate this, particularly in a South African context, to the 'fear of gratuitous violence'. However, because of the previously acknowledged conceptual vacuum, and dearth of literature regarding gratuitous violence, it becomes necessary to consider the more generalist literature.

Historically, risk was seen to be neutral – neither negative nor positive in connotation. Participation in a risky act could result in gain or loss. Yet today risk nearly always has a negative connotation and is synonymous with danger (Schehr, 2005). This contemporary interpretation of risk has led to an ever broadening perpetuation of fear, to the point that fear is now implied as part of a general framework through which many events are cast. When fear is used in this way it becomes a matter of discourse (Van Dijk, 1988). This 'fear narrative' or 'discourse of fear' is defined by Altheide (2002a as cited in Altheide, 2009, p. 81) 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". Therefore, whether there is real cause or not, people perceive that there is much to fear about life in general, ranging from paedophiles, to the fear of contracting cancer and other dread diseases, or of growing old. It is Altheide's view (1999) that the public increasingly shares understandings of what to fear and how to manage risk. Interestingly, Schehr (2005) contends that contemporary articulations of risk lay the responsibility of non-normative behaviour firmly with the individual, rather than with the risks normally considered by public health advocates – those risk factors associated with being poor. By blaming the individual, risk discourse, which goes hand-in-hand with fear discourse, serves the ideological purpose of marginalising undesirable groups.

Ferraro (1995 as cited in Altheide & Michalowski, 1999) distinguishes between perceiving risk and experiencing fear by suggesting that fear is an emotional response that is potentially made to perceived risk. While people in everyday life continuously

take precautions to avoid risk, rather than fighting fear, the media seldom makes this distinction, relying instead on the use of 'fear' in news reports.

One powerful vehicle for these articulations of fear is the mass media, which tends to offer simplistic and decontextualised accounts of complex situations of gratuitous violence. In this manner the media can reflect narratives that both demonise certain groups, and offer simplistic explanations for complex situations (Altheide, 2009).

Fear of *crime* is an important and pervasive discourse which forms part of the broader fear narrative. While the generalised 'fear discourse' is concerned with the fear of *anything* that overly alarms the public – for example, a drop in education standards or an untenable increase in the cost of living – fear of *crime* refers to anxiety directly associated with *all* aspects of crime: its seeming increase; becoming a victim oneself; or the apparent inefficiency of the State to get crime levels under control.

'Fear of crime' is commonly used as a general term to cover the broad range of responses linked to the anxiety caused by *anticipating* crime rather than the direct fear of some imminent threat of it (Banks, 2005). This is particularly true in South Africa where the *threat* of crime and violence, and the threat of becoming a victim of *gratuitous violence* in particular, has become a ubiquitous discourse. Widespread fear is the consequence of this discourse. In fact, one of Altheide's (2003) central arguments is that fear in general, and of crime and gratuitous violence specifically, is insidiously and cumulatively integrated into topics over time, until an "invisible hyphen" joins fear and the topic in question (p. 37). Therefore, eventually the term fear is so powerfully linked to certain issues that it no longer needs to be stated, but is simply implied.

Fear of crime and gratuitous violence can have far-reaching effects. Apart from the persistent anxiety experienced by individuals, damage is done to trust and social integration between cultural groups; strangers are considered dangerous; the streets unsafe and government is put under pressure to provide more control and surveillance (Reiner, 1997; Altheide & Michalowski, 1999). On a personal level, individuals curb the activities they get involved in, and practice avoidance behaviours (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999). As a result, "There is the actual crime rate and the fear of crime

rate” (Archer, 1994 as cited in Altheide & Michalowski, 1999, p. 481). Consequently, prevention strategies can be implemented where “the treatments are worse than the disease” (Phillips, 1994 as cited in Altheide, 2009, p. 87). These consequences are potentially intensified with gratuitous violence as there is not only the fear that violent crime *in general* is on the increase but, in addition, new *kinds* of crimes are appearing, namely gratuitous or ‘senseless’ crimes (Schinkel, 2008).

South Africa has a relatively unique situation regarding the fear of crime. Unlike a lot of other countries which do not have high crime rates but still have high *fear of crime* rates, South Africa has both, with South Africa widely acknowledged as one of the most dangerous countries in the world (Silber & Geffen, 2009; Shaw & Gastrow, 2001). However, fear in South Africa is not based solely on the violent nature of crime, but also on broader fears regarding the future of western lifestyles and practices post-apartheid – be they economic, social, cultural or political (Ballard, 2004a, 2004b as cited in Lemanski, 2006). Specifically, these broader fears address issues such as the close proximity of other races¹; a fear of widespread change at a national and local level; and a subsequent fear of an uncertain future for oneself and one’s family. According to Scheerer (1978 as cited in Huhn, Oettler & Peetz, 2009), in periods of crisis and social change, crime is used as a meta-symbol for social problems. In South Africa specifically, the label ‘fear of crime’ is often used as an acceptable explanation for deeper fears of change and racial difference (Lemanski, 2006).

This study indicates that the media constructs a sense of an omnipresent violence that should be, and therefore by extension is, feared. Consequently the public fears the apparent randomness of crime and violence, and of gratuitous violence in particular; its seemingly rampant and out-of-control nature giving rise to the concern that no-one is safe. This fear is often articulated through moral panics, and indicated by signal crimes. While these elements of this construction of fear are not mutually exclusive and intersect in complex ways, they constitute a thematic network. The themes that constitute discernibly clustered sets of meanings within this network are explored in the sections that follow.

¹ Throughout this report terms such as ‘black’, ‘coloured’, ‘Indian’ and ‘white’ are used as social categories that in no way reflect essential differences. They are instead used as proxy terms to indicate the way in which apartheid had an impact, and continues to have an impact, on the construction of violence in South Africa.

4.1.1 The randomness of crime

By claiming that individual criminal acts reflect random violence, the media generalises the dangers of a particular crime. Best (2000) suggests that, “Typifying a problem with frightening examples, and then...defining the threat as universal...is a recipe for mobilising maximum social concern” (as cited in Filler, 2001, p. 1102). Random acts suggest unpredictability – if a crime could happen to anyone, everyone is at risk. And if everyone is at risk, everyone must take the underlying problem seriously. In essence, this is how fear is formed. Consequently, what might otherwise be viewed as a crime that affects other people in other neighbourhoods becomes a threat to every citizen. Additionally, advocates and legislators can organise a broader constituency for social change if a large segment of the public shares a concern (Best, 2000 as cited in Filler, 2001).

This construction of gratuitous violence as random serves the media well, as news stories about random crimes have great dramatic value which, in turn, makes a story highly newsworthy (Sacco, 1995; Reiner, 1997). Incidents of random gratuitous or senseless violence are threatening to the public because they involve situations where the victim cannot be blamed for his or her violent fate. Moreover, the randomness implies that everyone is a potential victim, which makes the problem more urgent and therefore more compelling, both for the media and the audience (Sacco, 1995). This is reflected in the excerpt below where a pregnant woman was murdered:

Nonpumelo Ndlovu, 21, who was believed to be seven months pregnant, was walking along Boom Street with her friend, Nokuthula Mohloun, when they were attacked by the middle-aged man...“We were just innocently walking along the road...how could this happen?” she cried (Peters, 2009, p. 5).

Inherent in the concept of randomness are two sub-concepts that have emerged as themes. Firstly, no-one is safe regardless of who you are, where you live or what day-to-day activities you may engage in. Secondly, perpetrators can be people who are known to you and therefore become difficult to identify.

4.1.1.1 No-one is safe

Despite murder rates in South Africa having decreased over the past few years from a rate of 60 per 100 000 in the late 1990s to 39 per 100 000 in 2007–2008 (Records, 2009), a national crime victim survey in 2007 indicated that only 21% of respondents felt safe walking in their neighbourhood after dark as compared to 56% in 1998 (Pharoah, 2007). The same survey conducted in 2003 indicated that only 25% of South Africans felt ‘very safe’ in their day-time residential area (as compared with 66% in 1998) and well over half felt ‘very unsafe’ in their night-time residential area (as compared to 25% in 1998) (Lemanski, 2006). This is significant because gratuitous and random violence are often presented in the media as happening in the home.

Anika “Tikkie” Smit, 17...was found half-naked on her bed by her father, Johan, when he got home from work on Wednesday night (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

...murdered in their home...(Van Schie, 2010, p. 6).

The gang who invaded her house fled empty-handed...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

...the men walked into the house, grabbed the elderly woman and forced her downstairs where they demanded money and valuables (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

In addition the reporting of perpetrators overcoming strong fortification and security systems to enter the property exaggerate readers’ fear and feelings of reduced safety:

The gunmen got into the heavily fortified double-storey home, which is surrounded by security surveillance cameras and high walls (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

The gunmen had gained access to the complex by cutting a hole through a palisade-and-wire fence (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

Secondly, the perceived safety of living in a secure estate (Lemanski, 2006) is shattered by representations that these too are not safe:

The suspects...are believed to use security complexes in Centurion as bases...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

The attack took place less than 1km from where the German pensioner Ute Maria Wiing, 70, was found murdered in her Silver Mists security estate home earlier this month (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

[The victims]...were asleep in their home in Manor Place security estate in Willow Park Manor when they were woken by a noise (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

Thirdly, attacks are reported as happening outside of the home, yet close to home, in a neighbourhood that is therefore familiar and, by extension, should feel safe:

Passers-by found Marinda's body hidden in the bushes not far from her Timothy Valley home...(Mphande, 2009, p. 4).

Minnie Dutton was last seen alive shortly after midday on Sunday April 4, walking home from the Liberty Midlands Mall...She was last seen at 12.30pm a short way from home (Saville, 2010, p. 3).

Altheide and Michalowski (1999) define a pro-active fear where individuals evade becoming a target or a victim by avoiding any activity already associated with fear. However there remains a sense that one's home – and activities undertaken in it – should be safe. The following representations of everyday activities therefore further heightens fear and anxiety because the victims, once again, are being portrayed as 'everyman' going about activities that everybody participates in on a regular basis. Therefore the insinuation is that if this happened to 'people like us', it is as possible that it *actually* happens to us.

It is believed she was washing the morning dishes when she was attacked...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2)

[Anika]...was off school with an earache when she was killed (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

The three, who had to beg for their lives before they were shot, were having a braai when five men attacked them...The suspect was caught an hour after allegedly attacking a cyclist in Equestria...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

The ubiquity of violent crime in the country also takes the form of a logic of inevitability and inescapability – not only will *strangers* randomly attack victims in their homes but *familiar* people that mark those homes as safe are also reported as potential perpetrators.

4.1.1.2 No-one can be trusted

It is clear that people fear a home invasion by strangers who will harm them, possibly fatally. However, an arguably equally frightening premise is that one cannot trust people whom you know, or people who pose as trustworthy figures of authority. By extension it becomes impossible to discern a perpetrator as everyone around you is potentially violent. In combination, this becomes a powerful discourse because it deals not only with breaking the imagined impregnability of one's home – one's sanctuary – as discussed above, but also that it is not possible to trust anyone.

The first robber – the domestic worker...(Bailey, 2009, p. 1).

...apparently killed by a man who was carrying out maintenance work on her property
...detectives were looking for a man who had been doing maintenance work at the home, as well as the family's gardener (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

...trying to save her mother-in-law from a gang of armed robbers posing as policemen
...two men wearing police uniforms walked onto the Steenberg's smallholding as workers offloaded poles at the premises (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

Sekhu [the domestic and one of two victims] reportedly was visited by a man she befriended earlier in the year when he was part of a building crew working on renovations at the home. He had visited her the day before and returned on the Thursday (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

Seven people, including a security guard, were arrested in connection with Wiing's murder (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

4.1.1.3 Personalising articles: the naming of names

Consistent throughout the corpus is the presentation of the reports as hard fact, which gives the impression of a 'realistic' report focused on real people and events (Altheide, 1997). However, 'hard' news is not distinguished from 'soft' news by content or the event. Rather it is the *format* and the *discourse of reporting* that differs (Fulton, 2005). By reporting a story as news, the saliency of the report is increased, as the audience relates to the story as 'fact' (Atheide, 1997). Local news creates more fear of crime than national or international news which, regardless of random or sensational attributes, creates lower levels of fear of crime (Dorfman, Thorson & Stevens, 2001). This is because readers consider themselves closer to the actual event (Atheide, 1997) – be it demographically (i.e. of the same gender or socio-economic status) or geographically.

This salience is achieved in the media through personalisation. Personalisation, or the naming of names, is a marker of news discourse which invites us to understand news events through the perspective of individuals affected by those events (Fulton, 2005). This increases the sense of 'it could have happened to me' and, consequently, the fear of crime increases. This is particularly true of gratuitous violence both because of its extremity and its potentially fatal nature. In addition, the details paint a picture for the reader. Surname analysis, which uses an individual's last name to estimate the likelihood that the individual belongs to a particular racial or ethnic group (Fiscella & Fremont, 2006), is relatively easy to use in South Africa, given the difference in names of different races, and even different groups within races, for example the difference between Afrikaans and English names. While treating surnames as unproblematic markers of race is clearly neither appropriate nor scientifically sound, the press assumes that readers will indeed use names as racial markers, and therefore make extensive use of this proxy for race.

While there is no mention of perpetrators in the examples below it will be shown later that perpetrators are generally reported as black (through inferential markers for popular consumption) while victims are commonly highlighted as white.

Jan Benjamin Brits Smith, 62 and Elizabeth Ann Smith, 57 (Garden fork used in brutal murder of couple, 2010, p. 10).

Katrina Hendrika van den Berg, 65, was found murdered in her Daspoort home (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

Marzanne Kruger, the baby girl bludgeoned by a house robber who attacked her and her minder Francina Sekhu, is said to be breathing on her own (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

...the final moments of Marinda Wessels, 15, who was gang-raped, her body wrapped in a blanket and then set alight (Mphande, 2009, p. 4).

Although there are black victims in the following example, it appears that they were unfortunate bystanders in the targeted attack of white farmers from whom the perpetrators wanted to steal.

Dairy farmer Lorraine Karg, 58, and two farmworkers, Hilda Linyane, 34, a domestic worker, and Zachues Mhlono, 65, a gardener, were murdered at Karg's Sherwood Farm in Rosetta on Wednesday evening (Mbuyazi [b], 2010, p. 5).

An exception in the corpus is the following excerpt where all four victims are black.

[Gladys] Mthembu and two children, Thabiso Mthiyane, 6, and Ntando Mthiyane, 2, died as a result of their injuries. The third child, three-year-old Nhlanhla Mthiyane is in a serious condition in a local hospital (Louw, 2010, p. 6).

Cheaper and more accessible than guns, pangas, in South Africa specifically, and in Africa at large, have long been associated with tribal violence (James, 2001; Ottoway, 1991). Against this background the discourse relayed in the beginning of the article is very clear – this black-on-black violence was inflicted for tribal reasons and therefore is something we can name and consequently not fear:

...panga-wielding men...(Louw, 2010, p. 6).

The implication then is that white South Africans get attacked for different reasons than do black South Africans. Although in reality black people are the main victims of instrumental violent crime in South Africa (Altbeker, 2008), the discourse here is that black people are victims of black-on-black 'cultural crime' which manifests in things such as tribal violence. In contrast white people are constructed as predominantly the victims of black-on-white crime – both instrumental and expressive. Additionally, if black-on-black violence is constructed as happening 'somewhere out there', it carries less import for white readers than black-on-white gratuitous violence. These are ways in which the – predominantly white – media places less value on black lives than on white. Furthermore, news reports concerning white victims tend to contain more in-depth background information, and a greater provision of detail, than those involving black victims (Mtwana & Bird, 2006).

Wasserman (2007) suggests that this racial bias is understandable as the mainstream media operates as a business, and therefore obeys market logic. As such it has a bias towards lucrative audiences (Wasserman, 2007), and will therefore report on a population demographic that the reader relates to, and in a way that makes them feel closer to the victims (Fulton, 2005).

Certain techniques are employed by the media to encourage this familiarity. Due to the legacy of racial segregation of residential areas enforced by the Group Areas Act during apartheid, a person's address can help identify race of the perpetrators and the victims which can then be decoded along racial lines.

...Booyesen Park High School Grade 8 pupil...(Mphande, 2009, p. 4).

A 35-year-old man from Riversdale was brought in by the investigating group for questioning...(Garden fork used in brutal murder of couple, 2010, p. 10).

Often victims, after the initial introduction, are then addressed by their first name only, or a nickname, in an attempt to create further affinity, familiarisation and empathy between the reader and the victim.

Julie, who was in her early 50s, was a housewife (Eliseev, 2009, p. 2)

Catherina “Kitty” Botha, 83, who lived alone for the past 27 years...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

Anika, who returned to her father’s Theresa Park home...(Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

Suna Steenberg, who runs Montana Pale and Lapa’s [sic] with her husband, Jurie, was shot when she opened fire on gunmen who were attacking her mother-in-law, “Tannie Poppie”, in their Leeufontein smallholding yesterday (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

...Vanessa’s body...(Masemola, 2009, p. 1)

One of Van Deventer’s daughters, Liza, a former Pretoria News photographer [this is a Pretoria News article] took a picture of her father and his grandchild only weeks before his death...According to Liza, her parents moved to the game farm...(Otto, 2010, p. 5).

A source said that while Morné parked the car, Erica went to open the front door of their house (Saville and Hans, 2010, p. 3).

...the [murdered] siblings’ mother, nicknamed “Gummy” by her grandchildren...(Van Schie, 2010, p. 6).

4.1.2 Rampant crime

Media rhetoric concerning the frequency of crime, and the substance of it, impress upon the readers both the gravity of the problem, and the necessity for a solution. “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 & Michalowski, 1997, p. 479). The more frequently the problems are reported, the more convinced the public becomes that the problem exists and is widespread (Sacco, 1995). Statements and terminology, such as the following examples, refer to this frequency and thus contribute to entrenching this belief.

The mother of two became another statistic yesterday...(Molosankwe, 2010, p. 2).

...evidence of yet another mall robbery...This time two security guards were shot in the head...(Mtshali and Smillie, 2009, p. 3).

Another resident said: “You hear about it every day. It’s sad when it comes to your area. This is a quiet area. You hardly see people here. We thought it was a wedding.” (Bailey, 2009, p. 1).

“It’s just crime – senseless crime, and one incident among many” (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

...the North West town has been forced to deal with another brutal farm attack (Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

In this following comment mall robberies are perceived as being so common that a phrase “heist season” has been coined:

Mall robberies are unusual for this time of year – they usually occur during the “heist season” over Christmas (Mtshali and Smillie, 2009, p. 3).

Because of their newsworthiness, stories involving gratuitous violence get repeated by newspapers; tend to make front page news and get reported over an extended period of time. This repetition, coupled with exposure to stories concerning political, judicial and police incompetence, and social breakdown, leaves readers feeling helpless and disempowered (Fulton, 2005).

4.1.3 Moral panics and signal crimes

Moral panics occur when a condition, episode, person, or group of people, emerges as a perceived threat to society, generally out of proportion to the actual threat (Cohen, 1972 as cited in Garland, 2008). The narrative structure of the moral panic suggests that the social fabric is under threat and needs to be resolved, often by official intervention (Fulton, 2005). The threat’s nature is presented in a highly stylised and stereotyped way by the mass media, and ‘experts’ talk of it in ‘one voice’ (Cohen, 1972 as cited in Garland, 2008):

“This incident should be a reminder to all criminals of what the consequences would be should they continue to terrorise our communities and continue to attack and kill our colleagues. Enough is enough. We will stop at nothing and we will continue to fight fire

with fire to make our communities safer,” said Naidoo [a police spokesman] (Tau, 2009, p. 1).

But more often than not it is the person on the street – victims, friends and family of victims, and neighbours – who is quoted as voicing the moral panic regarding gratuitous violence. It is these ‘ordinary people’ who offer typifications of reactions to news:

“This is enough. For how long must we South Africans continue to be murdered and raped? When will steps be taken to ensure crime does not pay?” ... “Crime is destroying us. Stop it now before more innocent lives are lost.” (Hosken, 2010, p. 3).

Grobler [a family friend] said people were outraged by the brutality of the attack and the viciousness perpetrated against a child. He said that judging from the many phone calls received by the Krugers [parents of the victim], South Africans across the political spectrum were deeply depressed about crime (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

Moral panics can be characterised by certain key features which are illustrated below (Garland, 2008).

Firstly, there is concern regarding some reported behaviour or event which sparks anxiety.

Business Against Crime (BAC) has been reported as saying that the robberies were “relatively sporadic” and that the public should not panic (Mtshali and Smillie, 2009, p. 3).

Secondly, in addition there tends to be hostility towards the perpetrators as a homogenous group.

“I can’t believe it, I can’t believe they have killed her,” said a family friend. [There was only one perpetrator] (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

I’m praying that we get them now. [The victim’s son – the number of perpetrators is unknown.] (Saville and Hans, 2010, p. 3).

Mokonyane [Gauteng Premier] said she was sick and tired of violent criminals, and Mosunkutu [Gauteng MEC for Community Safety] added: "These criminals act outside normal human values to an extent that they do not hesitate to batter a mere infant who cannot testify against them." (Ndaba, 2010, p. 1).

Moral panics are also characterised by a consensus that the behaviour, or condition, is widespread.

"It affects everyone, everywhere whether you are black or white" (Hosken, 2010, p. 3).

In addition, the perception of the extent of the perceived threat is disproportionate to the reality of the actual threat.

"It has been out of hand. I am very concerned about it"...Another resident said: "...It's sad when it comes to your area" (Bailey, 2009, p. 1).

"We're dealing with a [sic] genocide here..." (Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

They told one horror story after another of farm murders and farms being disowned (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

Finally, there is a fear on the part of the public that this aberrant situation will result in a cherished way of life being jeopardised.

Borchers [the judge] said the life of two of the rape victims "have been ruined" and that some of his house robbery victims, who awoke to find Mathe pointing a gun at them, have emigrated because they could not handle the trauma (McLea, 2009, p. 6).

By using these key features, stories become newsworthy through their construction as moral panics (Schinkel, 2008). Each new incident becomes another proverbial 'nail in the coffin' of the public's safety and security, as media coverage increases around that event.

The emphasis on the inevitable social decay that will result from these incidents implies that these events are not isolated but are part of a broader ever-threatening issue that

will worsen if ‘nothing is done’ (Schinkel, 2008). However the nature of the problem is often such that nothing *can* be done. For these reasons the moral panic gains impetus because of the link to associated problems and the wider implications, for example between violent crime and the state of governance in general (Garland, 2008).

“We are tired of crime...The government needs to show us they are serious about fighting crime by putting murderers behind bars.” (Hosken, 2010, p. 3).

Cohen laid particular stress on the importance of the media as an “especially important carrier *and producer* of moral panics” (Hunt, 1997, p. 631, emphasis added). Indeed, effective media attention can allow the moral panic to have such a considerable life-span that an “institutionalisation of anxiety” develops regarding that particular issue (Schinkel, 2008, p. 738).

However, Innes (2004) argues that when anxiety becomes institutionalised in this way it can no longer be considered moral panic as panic, by definition, rises and subsides quickly. Rather, he argues that when we live in a society of fairly diffuse, but pervasive, anxiety and fear, this anxiety is perpetuated by signal crimes rather than ongoing moral panics. Signal crimes are those crimes which “impact not only on the immediate participants (victims, offenders, witnesses) but also on wider society, resulting in some reconfiguration of behaviours or beliefs” (Greer, 2007, p. 28). A signal crime then, elicits fewer social repercussions than a moral panic but more than an ‘ordinary’ crime. In essence it provides a lens through which certain problems, issues or events – rather than others – become the embodiment of people’s fears and anxieties regarding fear of crime. Therefore a signal crime can be said to be “an incident that, because of how it is interpreted, functions as a warning signal to people about the distribution of risk throughout social space” (Innes, 2004, p. 15). Consequently, fear “is perceived as real to a few of us and virtually real to most of us” (Altheide, 1997, p. 649).

Stories are considered more newsworthy if the subject has a high profile or if they are considered to be vulnerable. With signal crimes, risk is focused on both ‘everyman’ and the celebrity, because celebrities are used to signal crimes while the reporting of ‘everyman victims’ reminds the reader that everybody is at risk. This reminder serves to perpetuate and diffuse the fear evoked in the reporting of a signal event. In South

Africa, examples of signal crimes include high-profile cases such as David Rattray, the internationally renowned Anglo-Zulu War historian, murdered at his farm in KwaZulu-Natal; Lucky Dube, an internationally famous South African reggae artist murdered in a hijacking in Rosettenville, Johannesburg; and baby Marzanne Kruger – used in this research – beaten and blinded in her home in Johannesburg.

4.2 SOUTH AFRICA AS A TWO-NATION STATE

4.2.1 Preface

The discourse of nationalism and race is extremely important in this study as it offers insights into the nature and mediatization of gratuitous violence in South Africa, while also encompassing so many other issues pertinent to the subject, such as the media's portrayal of victims and perpetrators along racial lines; and discourses of gender and age. It is important to bear in mind that while these themes are extracted from the corpus and examined individually, they ultimately weave together in complex ways in the ongoing construction of gratuitous violence in South African news reports.

4.2.2 Nationalism and race

The apartheid structure in South Africa allowed racial advantage or privilege to be structurally given and culturally defended (Schutte, 2000). While white South Africans enjoyed a position of power and privilege, black South Africans were legally, structurally and economically excluded from the majority of, if not all, societal benefits enjoyed by whites.

The transformation of power to a non-racial but predominantly black government not only meant that white privilege was delegitimised, but that legislated identities were demolished (Schutte, 2000; Moodley & Adam, 2000). Yet South Africans, encouraged by politicians, envisioned a 'non-racial', 'rainbow nation' driven by 'ubuntu' – an African philosophy which speaks of human interconnectedness, where people cannot exist in isolation.

In contrast to the previously imposed separation and inter-racial antagonisms of apartheid, the language of political transformation was of compromise, with an emphasis on reconciliation rather than justice and retribution. The slogan “one nation, many cultures” demonstrated the intention of a previously divided South Africa to now become a nation with equal rights for all citizens, and to exhibit a common loyalty to a shared state (Moodley & Adam, 2000).

Yet, time has demonstrated that the realisation of this Utopian ideal is not without its problems. Politicians have had difficulty explaining what they mean by ‘non-racial’, and what the ramifications of a ‘non-racial’ nation would actually be. There have been accusations that whites are attempting to maintain a Eurocentric capitalist system, while blacks have been accused of promoting an Afrocentricity which whites fear will lead to the same backwardness, violence and corruption of other African states (Schutte, 2000). In addition, although apartheid has been legally dismantled, this has not translated into the racialised identities of South Africans being equally transformed (Schutte, 2000).

Hence, while white hegemony is no longer the rule, “racial reasoning and thinking draw[s] heavily on the collective memory of the racial domination era” (Schutte, 2000, p. 217). Thus the racial divide is, arguably, as strong as ever (Bond, 2006) although it now presents with different problems. Post-apartheid, in the face of confusing political rhetoric, there is uncertainty regarding what it means to be white and, equally, what it means to be black. For whites, the new political dispensation – realised though issues such as black empowerment, affirmative action, and constitutionalised economic redress – has called their place as privileged South Africans into question. Equally, blacks, now theoretically fully participating South African citizens, are finding that the shackles of apartheid continue to impede their progress in a democratic South Africa.

The legacy of apartheid has resulted in the current South African economy excluding millions of people, despite the implementation of inclusive policies post-democracy. The majority of these excluded people are unskilled and, for historical reasons, predominantly black. Altbeker (2008) contends that three factors in particular conspire

to perpetuate the situation: the lack of skills among the poor; their physical distribution in the economy; and their lack of social networks to assist in finding employment.

While apartheid legislated certain forms of – usually lucrative – economic activity for white South Africans, black South Africans primarily had access to jobs at the bottom of the income ladder. In addition, not only was the standard of education far superior for whites, but many blacks had only a few years of (inferior) schooling before abandoning their education altogether. Altbeker (2008) argues that these factors, combined with the psychosocial consequences of hopelessness, exclusion and deprivation, have led black South Africans to the realisation that most of the factors which govern one's life chances are almost entirely beyond one's control. It is this insight, says Altbeker (2008), which has led to South Africa having such high levels of gratuitously violent crime.

In short, a white population that considers itself 'vulnerable', combined with an economically excluded black population, has resulted in new forms of inter-racial tension being created, as the questions regarding what it means to be black or white deepen. Whites now perceive the threat of the previously politicised 'swart gevaar' (black danger) under a new guise, one where instrumental violence has tipped over the edge into gratuitous violence; where black perpetrators are not only interested in *robbing* from white people but are also 'out to get' them. This thinking has resulted in a siege mentality amongst white South Africans where violence – specifically black-on-white violence – is constructed as existing to a greater degree, and in a more extreme form, than ever before. Undoubtedly, the media are important protagonists in this construction, as it is the media that:

Construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the "problem of race" is understood to be. They help to classify out the world in terms of the categories of race. The media are not only a powerful source of ideas about race. They are also one place where these ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed, and elaborated (Hall, 2003 as cited in Welch, 2007, p. 283).

When viewed in broad strokes, it can be argued that to be white in South Africa is to be seen as privileged, yet potentially socially disenfranchised, scared and under siege; while black people are excluded, economically disadvantaged and, due to historical structures, powerless to improve their future. It is the construction of this racial divide between whites under siege, and blacks as excluded and consequently violent, that offers the perfect platform for the news media to portray whites as victims, and blacks as perpetrators.

In addition, and most importantly, this juxtaposition allows violence to be construed as gratuitous for, against this backdrop, violence can be constructed as extreme and, seemingly, committed for no reason. It is also constructed as being perpetrated against 'good', innocent, (white) people who are often women, children or the elderly. This is combined with a sense of impending disaster, where the violence is arguably unstoppable, inevitable and will ultimately be cataclysmic for South Africa.

The use of race in the reporting of gratuitous violence is nowhere more apparent than with news reports of farm attacks.

4.2.3 'Farm attacks'

Farm attacks are no longer classified as a separate crime in violence statistics in South Africa, which makes it difficult to evaluate the number of farm attacks as a percentage of overall violence (Institute for Security Studies, 2003). However, while farm attacks occur on commercial farms elsewhere in the world, the scale locally seems to be unique to South Africa (Mistry, 2003). In fact, farm attacks increased dramatically in the 1990s, to the extent that, in 1998, the government afforded it status as a 'priority crime' (Kruger & Ladikos, 2008). Since then farm attacks have garnered significant media and political attention (Manby, 2001).

'Farm attacks' is a politically and emotionally-charged phrase that is eschewed by experts and academics.

The idea of farm attacks has support from conservative whites and the media, but I don't agree with that. It sounds as if you're talking of an organised military force

or crime syndicates or a terrorist war. I prefer to call it rather violent crime on farms and smallholdings, since we have no evidence that it is organised in any way...We have been saying to the farmers who say there is an organised campaign 'bring us the evidence' but, since 1996, we have found nothing (Northern Province Department of Safety and Security official as cited in Manby, 2001).

Yet, many farm owners continue to believe that the motive behind the violent crime committed against farm owners is explicitly racial or political, a conspiracy aimed at driving white people off commercial farmland. It can be argued that these white farmers see these attacks as a continuation of the previously politicised 'swart gevaar'. This view is exacerbated by the use of political slogans such as "one settler, one bullet" and "kill the boer" (kill the farmer) sanctioned by many government officials and ANC members. This fear is reflected in the media.

They told one horror story after another of farm murders and farms being disowned...The nervousness of farmers in the area was palpable, she said (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

Conversely, many (black) farm workers attribute the violence to longstanding ill treatment of farm labourers by farm owners. More accurately than either of the above views, research has indicated that the motive for farm attacks is overwhelmingly criminal. While perpetrators might have no qualms in injuring or murdering their victims, the primary motive is robbery.

Yet, despite the evidence of an instrumental motive, reporting on farm attacks seem to be the exemplar for gratuitous violence in South Africa, for farm attacks draw on much historical and contemporary rhetoric which combine to perpetuate this fear. Farm attacks merge historical ideas of early Afrikaner settlers pioneering through the hinterland, and farmers becoming the food providers of the nation with contemporary situations of assumed disenfranchisement in the new regime, and the threat of gratuitous violence from dangerous black perpetrators committing gratuitous acts of *expressive* violence in retaliation for past wrongs committed against them. This reporting raises, and then transmits, the discourse of a white nation under siege in an out-of-control situation which, it is perceived can, and will, spiral into chaos and the destruction of South Africa.

Because this apocalyptic discourse is arguably present in the minds of many readers, it is possible to conflate the discourse of farm attacks with other incidents of interpersonal violence to receive the maximum impact from them. This is true in the case of Eugene Terre'Blanche, head of the extreme right-wing political organisation, the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) who, although a farmer, was murdered by two farm workers whom he had not paid for work done on his farm. Therefore, while the press report makes this attack sound like a random farm attack perpetrated by strangers, the crime clearly had instrumental components.

With emotions still running high in Ventersdorp in the wake of the murder of AWB kingpin, Eugene Terre'Blanche...the North West town has been forced to deal with another brutal farm attack (Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

Because of the strength of the farm attacks discourse, it serves the media to exploit it. As is evident below, farmers will always be identified as important (perhaps racially targeted) victims.

Dairy farmer Lorraine Karg, 58, and two farmworkers, Hilda Linyane, 34, a domestic worker, and Zachues Mhlongo, 65, a gardener, were murdered at Karg's Sherwood Farm in Rosetta on Wednesday evening (Mbuyazi [b], 2010, p. 5).

The 50-year-old farmer, who was attacked at his farm near Ventersdorp...(Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

To add to the impression that farm attacks are omnipresent, different incidents, in different parts of the country, are reported in the same article. At the end of an article concerning the murder of a game farmer and the assault of his wife, the following 'nibs' (news in brief) concerning additional and separate incidents, have been added:

1. Meanwhile police are also searching for four men who shot dead the 64-year-old wife of a farmer in Colenso on Sunday night. The farmer, 70, was shot twice but survived, police said. The farmer and staff were milking the cows when they were approached by men who demanded money. The police spokesman said the attackers left with nothing.

2. ...and on Saturday night a farmer was shot while sleeping on his farm near Potchefstroom. He is in critical condition (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

In fact, the discourse is so strong that incidents are reported to suggest that the victim is a farmer by association, even though it is not explicitly stated – as is evident in the following excerpt where the first incident is smoothly segued into the second.

On Friday, 65-year old Jan Wheeler was murdered outside Marble Hall in Limpopo and on Saturday night a farmer was shot while sleeping on his farm near Potchefstroom. He is in critical condition (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

4.2.4 Racial descriptors

Despite this powerful discourse, the reality of crime in South Africa is that the vast majority of it is black-on-black and poor-on-poor (Pharoah, 2008; Silber & Geffen, 2009). Yet, when reporting on *gratuitous violence*, the newspaper media appears to overwhelmingly report incidents concerning black perpetrators and white victims. In addition, descriptors of economic status – from residential suburb to financial rewards – are used to differentiate white victims and black perpetrators:

A married couple was found brutally murdered in their home on a smallholding outside Still Bay, Western Cape...A 35-year-old man from Riversdale was brought in by the investigating group for questioning...(Garden fork used in brutal murder of couple, 2010, p. 10).

...neighbours were unable to raise her on the phone or by calling her name outside her Herman Street property (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

...upmarket suburb...Kelvin Ludidi is believed to be behind more than 60 driveway robberies in the leafy suburbs of the country's commercial capital (Bailey, 2009, p. 1).

The bodies...were found in their [the victims'] crashed Volvo sedan (Mbuyazi [a], 2010, p. 5).

When he retired, it was Albert van Deventer's dream to build a house for himself and his wife on a game farm (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

The family of Chase valley woman Mimmie Dutton are offering a reward of R50 000 for information that leads to the successful conviction of the persons responsible for her brutal murder (Saville, 2010, p. 3).

The man [the perpetrator], who was said to have been gathering scrap metal on the side of the road...(Peters, 2009, p. 5).

They had needed money, he said [the perpetrator] (Oellerman, 2010, p. 3).

The next two examples are a particularly vivid example of socio-economic division based on place (and by inference, according to the legacy of the Group Areas Act, race). The case concerns Marzanne Kruger, a one year-old child who, together with the family's domestic worker, Francina Sekhu, was attacked. Marzanne was left beaten and blinded.

The little girl...is still in a serious but stable condition at Sandton Clinic [a private hospital]...Sekhu was moved from Helen Joseph Hospital's ICU to a ward, where she is recovering [a government hospital] (Ndaba, 2010, p. 1).

Once again, local readers are most likely aware of the classification of each hospital and the associated level of health care. Apart from the 'race-as-socio-economic status discourse' present in the above examples, another article in the Star regarding the same incident states that:

A neighbour, who found Madelein [Marzanne Kruger's mother] in a state of distress [after finding her assaulted baby], contacted Piranha Security, who rushed Madelein to hospital with her baby and arranged for an ambulance for Sekhu (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

Clearly then, whether it was pre-meditation on the part of the neighbour, the security response officers or Madelein Kruger, the suggestion is made in the reporting that Francina Sekhu would not accompany the family in the security vehicle to the private

Sandton hospital, but would rather wait for an ambulance to take her to a government sector facility.

The article goes on to say that:

Grobler [a family friend] said Madelein had been extremely worried about Sekhu, and had contacted her mother to tell her what had happened and that she had been taken to hospital. "It's not a race thing. In this instance a black woman and a white child were attacked" (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

The headline of this article is "Marzanne breathing on her own". One line in the report, "She [Sekhu] sustained serious injuries" refers to the domestic worker's condition. Other than that the article talks only of Marzanne, and her parents Bertus and Madelein. While they are called by their first names the domestic worker is referred to by her surname only.

Historically it was common for the media to include the race of a person in crime stories, yet today it is necessary to employ the above techniques, if the media has an agenda to identify the race of victims and perpetrators in their reports. In past reports, black skin was used as an explanation for criminal behaviour, further perpetuating stereotypes about blacks as criminals. This supported the apartheid "swart gevaar" (black danger) propaganda, that blacks were dangerous and a threat to the social order. While blacks were portrayed as criminals, whites were portrayed as victims (Bird, 2010; Media Monitoring Project, 1999).

Following the South African Human Rights Commission's (SAHRC) inquiry into racism in the media post-democracy, a number of substantial changes occurred. It is now highly unlikely that a person's race will be mentioned in a news report unless it is clearly relevant to the story. It is equally unlikely that the media would break the law by being openly racist (Bird, 2010).

Yet, "Racism is endemic in South African society. There is no reason to believe that the media are somehow insulated from the prevailing racism in our society" (SAHRC, 1999 as cited in Fine & Bird, 2007). Therefore, racism and the perpetuation of racist

stereotypes in the media still occurs, albeit more subtly. Van Dijk (2000) refers to this form of racism as 'new' racism – the avoidance of explicitly racist labels in favour of negative words as descriptors. With 'new' racism much of the racial information and meanings in the media are merely implied or presupposed and not explicitly stated (Van Dijk, 2000).

This subtlety is arguably not necessary when reporting on victims of gratuitous violence, as victims are mentioned by name in virtually every report in this corpus. Surname analysis is used to infer race or ethnicity from surnames that are distinctive to those groups (Elliot, Morrison, Fremont, McCaffrey, Pantoja & Lurie, 2009; Elliott, Fremont, Morrison, Pantoja & Lurie, 2008). However, surname analysis does have recognised limitations. For example it tends to exclude surnames with intermediate specificity to a racial group (Elliot et al., 2008). Therefore, in South Africa, it would be difficult to distinguish the so-called 'coloured' racial group from Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans as many of the surnames are similar. However, when used informally by the reading public, it becomes possible to draw conclusions (accurate or not) of victims' and perpetrators' identities by racial category, and even language group, for example, Afrikaans versus English victims (Fiscella & Fremont, 2006).

...Friday night's attack left Gerhard van Jaarsveld dead and his friends, Rudolph Terblanche paralysed and Elrene Jones injured (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

Jan Benjamin Brits Smith, 62, and Elizabeth Ann Smith, 57 (Garden fork used in brutal murder of couple, 2010, p. 10).

Catherina "Kitty" Botha, 83, who lived alone for the past 27 years...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

Katrina Hendrika van den Berg, 65, was found murdered in her Daspoort home (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

Suna Steenberg, who runs Montana Pale and Lapa's [sic] with her husband, Jurie, was shot when she opened fire on gunmen who were attacking her mother-in-law, "Tannie Poppie", on their Leeufontein smallholding yesterday (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

[Gladys] Mthembu and two children, Thabiso Mthiyane, 6, and Ntando Mthiyane, 2, died as a result of their injuries. The third child, three-year-old Nhlanhla Mthiyane, is in a serious condition in a local hospital (Louw, 2010, p. 6).

Marzanne Kruger, the baby girl bludgeoned by a house robber who attacked her and her minder Francina Sekhu, is said to be breathing on her own (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

Dairy farmer Lorraine Karg, 58, and two farmworkers, Hilda Linyane, 34, a domestic worker, and Zachues Mhlongo, 65, a gardener, were murdered at Karg's Sherwood Farm in Rosetta on Wednesday evening (Mbuyazi [b], 2010, p. 5).

In contrast to the victims, it is more difficult to 'mark' perpetrators as their identities are generally not known until an arrest has been made, and therefore they are less commonly used. However, once identified, it is then equally possible to identify the perpetrators' race:

...the main suspect, Chakhoma Machaba, of Mozambique, remains on the run (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

Denver Beeton, 26, Gregory Terreblanche, 24, and Abrany Derries, 26, are accused of her murder and rape (Mphande, 2009, p. 4).

Judge Herbert Msimang convicted Msiko Malinga, 27, and Felakuphi Zondi, 22, yesterday of murder and robbery with aggravating circumstances (Peters, 2009, p. 3).

Pietermaritzburg regional court magistrate Bheki Khumalo sentenced Lungani Khumalo (22) to 15 years imprisonment for murder...(Oellerman, 2010, p. 3).

This was the evidence of Tajuddin Mohammed whose family was among the first victims to be attacked, allegedly by Mzwandile Vincent Thomas Twala (32), of Soweto, and his accomplice (Ndaba, 2009, p. 2).

Because of the elimination of blatant racial categorisation in news reporting, it becomes necessary for racial profiling to take on "a more guarded, subtle character; it forms part of the underlying discourse and subtext of reporting, rather than evident as an obvious,

clearly identifiable characteristic” (Mtwana & Bird, 2006, p. 8). As is evident from the racial markers in the following examples, perceptions about the presumed racial identity of criminals can be so ingrained in public consciousness that race does not need to be specifically mentioned for a connection to be made between the two, because it seems that “talking about crime *is* talking about race” (Barlow, 1998 as cited in Welch, 2007, p. 276).

This is especially true when talking about gratuitous violence because people already hold embedded ideas of the circumstances surrounding acts of gratuitous violence. Firstly, accounts of gratuitous violence are sensational, and therefore memorable and worth repeating. The senselessness and extremity of it makes gratuitous violence the ideal platform for moral panic and therefore the public is exposed to even further accounts. In addition, a significant proportion of the South African population grew up in the apartheid era and therefore potentially harbour racist views, both white versus black and black versus white. This is exacerbated by the media as they perpetuate a bias towards white victims and black perpetrators. All these reasons then combine to entrench the idea that gratuitous violence is black-on-white violence. Therefore while there are racial markers in the following excerpts there arguably needn’t be.

...fitting the description of one of the robbery suspects, as he got into a taxi near Hans Strijdom Drive (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

...panga-wielding men...(Louw, 2010, p. 6).

...arrested the men at Imbali Farm near Hibberdene...(Mbuyazi [a], 2010, p. 5).

The court yesterday used Wapad’s traditional name, Ngugu Letty Baapata (Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

Five robbers died...after the Absa Bank in KwaDwesi’s Siyabunga shopping complex was robbed...the robbers were believed to be from Zwide and Kwazakhele (Wilson, 2010, p. 1).

We are here to rob you. When we ask for jobs, you tell us that we must go and ask for jobs from [Nelson] Mandela (Ndaba, 2009, p. 2).

By employing techniques such as the use of racial markers, journalists can encode a message into a news article, while the audience decodes it based on their previous stereotypes – either accepting the dominant code, negotiating the code or selecting an oppositional code (Ullman, 2005 as cited in Lerner, Roberts & Mtlala, 2009). In the case of South Africans' exposure to the news, similar reported events reflect prior examples of gratuitous black-on-white violent crime. Therefore, if a racist message is encoded into a media item, the audience will interpret it through their own biases (Lerner, Roberts & Mtlala, 2009). Because of the power afforded the media, Van Dijk (1992) suggests that these encoded racist messages might be taken as 'proof' of the negative attitudes readers have about other races.

Yet, in the context of any democratic, human-rights oriented system, the media has a responsibility to ensure transparent, accurate and ethical messaging on race and racial identities (Mtwana & Bird, 2006), arguably even more so with issues that are as emotive as gratuitous violence. However, this is a complex task given "the difficulty in South Africa of assessing what race signifies, when it is relevant and when it entails racism in the media" (Berger, 2004 as cited in Lerner, Roberts & Mtlala, 2009, p. 13). In addition race needs to be related to the plethora of other social challenges that face South Africa, and reported in an understandable, balanced, fair and accurate manner (Mtwana & Bird, 2006).

Nevertheless, the analysis of this corpus does not indicate that the media is fulfilling the above challenges concerning gratuitous violence, nor do they appear to be trying to do so. Rather the media appears to be perpetuating stereotypes around gratuitous violence or, at best, are not challenging them sufficiently, by using only a limited amount of detail and analysis in coverage (Lerner, Roberts & Mtlala, 2009). Certainly, victims and perpetrators are polarised along racial lines with dramatic contrasts between 'good' victims and 'evil' perpetrators. Reporting is sensationalised, and contextual information – which would assist in making the reporting transparent, accurate and ethical – is noteworthy by its absence.

The rest of this section's analysis will focus on the media representations of victims and perpetrators, which are divided not only along racial lines but also through the discourses of innocence and vulnerability associated with gender and age.

4. 3 REPRESENTATIONS OF THE VICTIMS OF GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE

4.3.1 Victims at centre stage

Victims receive more focus than perpetrators, both in the public space and in the media (Wilcox, 2005). Victims are a by-product of both fear and the *discourse* of fear (Altheide, 2003), often constructed by the media as a social group that has to be protected (Huhn, Oettler & Peetz, 2009). Melodramatic rhetoric is used to pit the forces of good (the victims) against the forces of evil (the perpetrators). "By defining social issues as straightforward struggles between good and evil, melodrama compels our attention and enlists our emotions" (Best, 2000 as cited in Filler, 2000, p. 1104). In the first two examples below there is a very clear line between the victims as good and the perpetrators as evil. In the third example, where the perpetrators are not even mentioned, the use of melodramatic language helps create the 'victim discourse'.

"I just feel upset, she was such a happy child. With the way we found her, no clothes, raped, handcuffed...I hope they give him a life sentence." [Spoken by the mother of the nine-year-old victim] (Serrao, 2010, p. 2).

Ndlovu's three-week crime spree began with the murder of a father and son, then a priest, and ended on Monday with the shooting dead of crime intelligence officer Abraham Niki Sikgwele and former police reservist Vusimuzi Mbuyisa (Tau, 2009, p. 1).

"Mom managed to untie herself and went outside into the dark to find Dad. He was dead. She walked to the neighbours for help, barefoot with her little Jack Russell, fearing for her life," Liza said (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

For Altheide (2003, p. 42), "Victims are but the personal side of a crisis; a crisis is where victims reside". Victims have, questionably, now become so important in crime reporting that they reside in the forefront of crime narratives with their suffering

constituting the subject position of the story (Reiner et al., 2001 as cited in Smolej, 2010). Among other things, the positioning of the victim is used to portray the violation of justice in the world because something bad has undeservedly happened to a good person (Van Zomeren and Lodewijkx, 2009). In fact, gratuity is created precisely *because* it is a gross injustice against a good person which, in turn, gives rise to the rhetoric described below. This is a particularly strong discourse in the South African news media where victims are commonly portrayed as undeserving, good, defenceless and blameless.

Rashid, 56, was a “gentle person” (Eliseev, 2009, p. 2)

“...an incredibly strong woman who loved the community” [victim’s grandson] (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

Van den Berg had been extremely kind and caring. “She never said a bad word about anyone. She had so much time for people and was very loving towards everyone”...his stepmother was full of love and kindness. “She would do anything to help someone and always had time for people. What happened is beyond belief.” (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

“She was loved by so many people and had lots of friends” (Mphande, 2009, p. 4).

While his father did not have many friends he was hugely loyal to those he did have. “He was very family oriented and always put us first. To him, family was extremely important and he loved us dearly” (Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

“She was such a jolly person and everyone knew her in Eersterus and she was so happy yesterday,” Franks wept (Masemola, 2009, p. 1).

[He]...asked why anyone would want to kill the elderly couple, describing them as the most generous people he had ever known. “They didn’t deserve to die like that,” he said...they were the nicest people in the neighbourhood (Mbuyazi [a], 2010, p. 5).

“He was our rock,” she said on behalf of her mother and two sisters...She described her father as a kind and fair person, who put his family first but also did a lot for others (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

“My mother would not have hurt a flea.” He said his mother would help anyone in need, but added that he fears this may have contributed to her being murdered (Saville, 2010, p. 3).

Arguably, victims have become so key that Altheide et al. (2001) suggests that the media seem to proclaim that everybody is a victim of something, even without knowing it. In fact, the public has become so obsessed with fear and victims that “we even use the term victim when we don’t have a victim, for example, ‘victimless crime’” (p. 305) which implies that we cannot think about a crime without a victim.

4.3.2 The construction of ‘ideal’ or ‘ultra’ victims

Despite the importance given to victims in general, the definition of *who* may legitimately claim victim status is profoundly influenced by social divisions including race, ethnicity, gender, age and sexuality (Greer, 2007) and this is mirrored in the media. Ferraro (2005 as cited in Greer, 2007) points out that news media representations highlight the criminal victimisation of strangers over domestic or family conflict even though, in South Africa, violence between people known to each other – in the form of domestic violence – is potentially a larger problem, with one in four women in certain areas reporting instances of abuse (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana, Levin, Ratsaka & Schreiber, 1999 as cited in Dissel & Ngubeni, 2003). Sacco (1995) suggests that news coverage privileges the random character of victimisation over the true social distribution of it. Therefore, in the same way that news reporting on crime, and types of crime, can be selective and unrepresentative, so can news on crime *victims* (Greer, 2007).

Garland (1999) argues that a victim of crime is no longer portrayed as an unfortunate citizen but rather as ‘everyman’, whose experiences are expected to be general and collective instead of individual and atypical. Through this portrayal, audiences are actively encouraged to identify and empathise with victims of crime (Smolej, 2010) through their portrayal of ordinariness, innocence and vulnerability (Reiner et al., 2003 as cited in Wilcox, 2005). The following excerpts encourage empathy for victims as ‘people like us’. The connection between the readers and the victim further heightens readers’ fear of crime as they too are ‘everyman’.

The three...were having a braai when five men attacked them...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

[The victim]...did not phone on Saturday to arrange their usual date to watch rugby...
(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

Van Deventer was shot at about 7pm, when he went outside to move the sprinkler after watching the Bulls' Super 14 game (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

...Cliffdale husband and father Marc Pohlman...(Peters, 2009, p. 3).

"She [the victim] operated a guest lodge from home and ran two beauty salons locally"
(Saville, 2010, p. 3).

Booyesen worked for the past five years at Hancor, a supplier of dairy products, in the city
(Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

According to Greer (2004 as cited in Smolej, 2010) identification and empathy is also achieved by making news consumers see what the victims are seeing, and feel what the victims are feeling. The audience is seduced into becoming emotionally involved with the narrative, and symbolically joining in with the punishment of the offender, who is portrayed as evil and beyond redemption. The presentation of the victim's suffering in the media appeals to feelings of fear and anger among the public, strengthens these feelings and generates identification (Garland, 1999 as cited in Smolej, 2010).

"Marzanne [a baby girl] could not speak, she was only crawling. What could she have done against her attackers?" Kobus Grobler [a close family friend] asked (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

A policeman said the damage to the weapons, the carnage and amount of blood splattered around the house showed the extent of the struggle Pretorius put up..."This man was butchered. He was literally hacked and beaten to death," he said (Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

Botha's body was discovered tied up, her hands bound behind her back, close to her dachshund...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

Often these emotions, responses and thoughts are voiced in the media by friends, neighbours and family of the victims as the voice of 'everyman', to generate identification in the readership and feelings of fear and anger. It is understood that the readers, themselves fearful and disheartened by gratuitous violence, can empathise with the emotions expressed in the comments below.

When Lourens presented the court with photographs of the badly bruised face of the deceased, one of Wapad's sisters gasped and lowered her head in tears (Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

"The mother is speechless with grief. I understand they went to the mortuary today and saw that the child had been tortured" (Serrao, 2010, p. 2).

Daniel Mbonani said the family was at a loss over Elijah's death. "Why did they have to kill him? Why did they have to do this? What did he do to them? Surely they could have taken what they wanted without shooting Elijah? He was the sole breadwinner for the family and now he is dead. How are his four children and his family going to survive?" (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

"We are heartsore. We don't know what to do. It is like a bad dream. I keep on thinking we are going to wake up, but in the end we are not," he said (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

While it might be a truism that violent crime requires a victim, it can be said that for violence to be constructed as *gratuitous*, the victim should be an 'ideal' or 'ultra victim' such as a child, an older person or a woman. 'Ideal' victims can be described as "a person or category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim" (Christie, 1986 as cited in Greer, 2007, p. 22). Ideal victims include those who are perceived to be innocent (Greer, 2007; Altheide et al., 2001), vulnerable and defenceless (be it old, young, ill or handicapped). The ideal victim should also be worthy of sympathy and compassion. Elderly women and young children are typical ideal victims (Greer, 2007) as are white, young, stereotypically pretty, virginal women, or married mothers of small children; all of whom should preferably be murdered by strangers (Greer, 2007; Thorson, Dorfman & Stevens, 2001). The media is more likely to play to readers' emotions when reporting on victims who can be portrayed as 'ideal', as is demonstrated below:

One of his alleged assault victims was a quadriplegic boy and his parents who were attacked in their home in Ridgeway...Mohammed said Twala went to the rooms where his younger boys were sleeping and brought them to their bedroom. "The boys were tied up in the same way" (Ndaba, 2009, p. 2).

[His] grandmother [the victim] helped raise him after his mother died when he was young...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

A friendly, outgoing and popular Pretoria schoolgirl has been found hacked to death in her bed, her body mutilated (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

...beating little Marzanne Kruger and her nanny, Francina Sekhu...(Molosankwe, 2010, p. 2).

In addition, if possible, ideal victims should be carrying out a respectable activity when the crime occurs, with no possibility of blame for being where they were when the crime was committed (Greer, 2007).

She was a devout Christian and attended church as usual that Sunday morning (Saville, 2010, p. 3).

It is believed she was washing the morning dishes when she was attacked...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

[Anika]...was off school with an earache when she was killed (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

The three, who had to beg for their lives before they were shot, were having a braai when five men attacked them...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

"We were just innocently walking along the road...how could this happen?" she cried (Peters, 2009, p. 5).

On the opposite side of the spectrum, young men, the homeless, those with drug problems and others existing on the margins of society may find it difficult to achieve legitimate victim status. Certainly in the corpus under analysis, all the victims can be classified as 'ideal' rather than on the 'lower' end of the spectrum. As such, a hierarchy

of victimisation does seem to exist which is both reflected and reinforced in the media. At one extreme those who achieve the status of ideal victim may attract high levels of media attention, generate collective mourning, and drive change to social practice and criminal policy; while those at the bottom of the hierarchy are more likely to receive little or no media attention (Valier, 2004 as cited in Greer, 2007).

4.4 THE PORTRAYAL OF PERPETRATORS OF GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE

4.4.1 The homogeneity of the portrayal of perpetrators

In this corpus, the perpetrators of gratuitous violence are presented as a homogenous, stereotyped group who exhibit similar, and ultimately 'evil', characteristics. These stereotypical portrayals are in line with research which shows that stereotypes in general tend to arise from the blaming of the outsider (MacLin & Herrera, 2006). Blaming the outsider builds loyalty which, in turn, assists social cohesion (Holloway & Jefferson, 1997).

The literature on criminal stereotypes supports the assertion that individuals hold well-formed ideas about what types of people commit crime, and who looks like a criminal. There tends to be consensus regarding both criminal and non-criminal appearances, and matching faces to crimes (MacLin & Herrera, 2006).

Specifically, research regarding criminal stereotypes across the United States and Australia, show that criminals are perceived as, among other things, psychologically maladjusted, evil, strangers to victims, attacking randomly in the streets, violent predators, dangerous, male, black, poor, big, immoral, cruel, undeserving, inhuman, irrational, violent, out of control, insane, murderers and sexual criminals (MacLin and Herrera, 2006).

While these terms refer to criminals in general, this corpus demonstrates that offenders of *gratuitous violence* are portrayed as markedly *more* evil, inhuman and psychopathic than these generalised terms of criminality. This is clear in the following examples which are exemplars of the kind of terms used to describe perpetrators. The overriding

sense in these excerpts is that the perpetrators of gratuitous violence are *particularly* heinous and, as such, are portrayed as animals; pitiless and unconscionable; arrogant and brazen; cold and unemotional. There is an overwhelming sense of brutality and ruthlessness about the perpetrators, even to the point where it appears that they receive enjoyment from their acts. Once again, this perpetrator discourse confirms and entrenches the larger belief surrounding gratuitous violence – that there is a highly expressive element to the violence and a sense of ‘getting back’ at the (largely white) victims.

“What we have here is a bunch of animals. They have no mercy in them” [family of the victim] (Eliseev, 2009, p. 2)

“Instead of fleeing, these thugs waited for them and shot them in cold blood the moment they stepped out of their house. It is unbelievable. It is barbaric and heartless.” (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

The three, who had to beg for their lives before they were shot...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

Her mother was assaulted and threatened until the attackers left her tied up, laughing at her (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

...ruthless criminal...(Tau, 2009, p. 1).

He was shot in the face, apparently from close range (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

A policeman said the damage to the weapons, the carnage and amount of blood splattered around the house showed...the viciousness of his attackers in their attempt to subdue him...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

...one disarmed her and grabbed her around the neck. He shot her at point blank range, striking her through the temple and back of the head and she fell to the ground (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

...her assailants suffocated the Booysen Park High School Grade 8 pupil with a scarf and threw her body near a dump site (Mphande, 2009, p. 4).

...robbers were brazen because they knew their chances of being caught were slim...Mall robbers had become 'arrogant'. "In one incident, the robber was so arrogant he even went to a shop to buy a cool drink and chocolate during the robbery", Willie van Rooyen, an insurance company investigator, said (Bailey, 2009, p. 3).

The four accused...who are facing charges of murder, rape, indecent assault and the violation of a corpse sat motionless in the dock...(Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

One of South Africa's most notorious criminals showed no emotion as he was sentenced to 54 years behind bars yesterday...The Mozambican sat stone-faced in chains (McLea, 2009, p. 6).

It is therefore clear that, as with many social issues, the perpetrators – the out-group – of gratuitous violence tend to be viewed more negatively, and as more homogenous, than the *victims* of gratuitous violence – the in-group – which is perceived more positively and as more heterogeneous (Kunda, 1999 as cited in MacLin & Herrera, 2006). This is confirmed by Schinkel (2008) who reports that cases of senseless – and by extension, gratuitous – violence are remembered by the names of their victims; while the names of perpetrators don't live on in public memory.

4.4.2 'Collective Threat'

A lot of coverage is given to the 'collective threat' discourse where more than one perpetrator is involved in an act of gratuitous violence. Feelings of fear increase dramatically as it is unlikely that the victims will be able to overpower perpetrators who attack in numbers, and it is more likely that the victim will be hurt. In addition, these gratuitous acts are a threat to justice as 'ganging up' is perceived by the public as both unfair and unnecessary.

...five men entered a car dealership, held the staff at gunpoint and demanded cash and cellphones (Wicks and Moolla, 2009, p. 1).

The four accused...(Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

Eight alleged gang members were arrested...(Tau, 2009, p. 1)

The five-man gang...several gunmen...a motorist who spotted five men cocking their guns while driving...the robbers, who had split up into two groups...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

One robber was shot dead and four others – two men and two women – were arrested (Bailey, 2009, p. 3).

Five robbers died in a shoot-out with police...(Wilson, 2010, p. 1).

...a gang of armed robbers posing as policemen...Two men wearing police uniforms...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4)

...five men attacked them...Seven people...were arrested in connection with Wiings murder...five men...robbed a cyclist...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

Gangs of armed would-be robbers fled empty-handed...in two separate attacks...Three men...opened fire on a Pretoria East couple...10 would-be robbers shot and killed [two victims: one dead, one wounded] (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

Police have arrested three men in connection with the murder of former Joburg residents Christopher and Jennifer Early...(Mbuyazi [a], 2010, p. 5).

...he was confronted by three armed men in his kitchen...(Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

...the guards were attacked by four heavily armed men inside the mall. Four other men waited in a vehicle outside the shopping centre...The gangs – sometimes numbering as many as 18 members...(Mtshali and Smillie, 2009, p. 3).

“The safe is heavy. We believe there had to be between four to six men involved in the attack, as fewer wouldn’t have been able to carry it,” Liza said (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

Two intruders...pounced on her (Saville and Hans, 2010, p. 3).

4.4.3 The senselessness of the violence: They came for something and left with nothing

Acts of violence are arguably more understandable to the public when there is a motive for the attack. An instrumental motive – such as robbery – is most common, and therefore possibly most understandable. Certainly the media appears to tie the motive for gratuitous violence to the instrumental in the examples below. While the discourse of farm attacks draws on historical hatreds from the apartheid legacy, thereby talking strongly to *expressive* violence, this discourse, in contrast, appears to foreclose the expressive dimensions of motive entirely. Rather there is almost a denial of anything but materiality, madness and/or badness as drivers for violence.

However, this violence can appear to be senseless, as perpetrators can be circumstantially thwarted in their attempts to steal, and therefore can leave the crime scene empty-handed – although often not before inflicting severe injury, or death, on the victims. The media subsequently portrays this violence as motiveless – neither instrumental nor expressive in nature. This seeming lack of motive then further emphasises the image of the perpetrators as inhuman, psychopathic and unconscionable.

“I can’t understand it. It was an extremely brutal murder, but they did not pinch her car and nothing was missing. It is senseless and there appears to be no motive.” (Saville, 2010, p. 3).

“We cannot understand. These guys did not take anything. They left jewellery, money and all her electrical appliances, including the television and the CD player. It does not make any sense,” he said (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

The gang who invaded her house fled empty-handed...He [police spokesman Inspector Louis de Bruin] said it appeared as though only Van den Berg’s cellphone had been stolen in the attack (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

...while the house had been ransacked, nothing appeared to have been taken (Mbuyazi [b], 2010, p. 5).

The police spokesman said the attackers left with nothing (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

She said police have been told that nothing was taken during the attack (Saville and Hans, 2010, p. 3).

Gangs of armed would-be robbers fled empty-handed...in two separate attacks...[1st victims]...opened fire shooting the couple repeatedly before fleeing empty-handed...[2nd victim]...fleeing empty handed (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

4.5 THE DISCOURSE OF GENDER IN MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE

4.5.1 The construction of women as ultra-victims

In media discourse women tend to lack complexity, and are rather reduced to ‘good’ (innocent) or ‘evil’ (guilty). Good women, according to the media, should be “pure, passive, caring, maternal, monogamous, house-proud, dependent, fragile and fair...women who do not conform to that model attract labels outside of the range available for ‘good’ women” (Wykes, 2001 as cited in Wilcox, 2005, p. 528).

Clearly then, in the eyes of the media, not all women are created equal. Women in general are overwhelmingly portrayed as victims by the media (Madriz, 1997); with female victims considered more newsworthy than male victims, and therefore over-represented in media reports (Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006). However, certain *types* of women are considered more newsworthy than others. This newsworthiness is generally contingent on the victim’s social status: female victims must be judged innocent, virtuous, and honourable (Dowler, Fleming & Muzzatti, 2006). They must be decent and respectable (Wilcox, 2005), and look ‘normal’, small and tiny (Madriz, 1997). A paradox therefore exists between victims who are ‘innocent’, and those who are ‘blameworthy’, a paradox, Wilcox (2005) argues, that is rooted in patriarchal notions of femininity and gender stereotypes as demonstrated below.

Both Wilcox (2005) and Madriz (1997) further argue that rather than being race-neutral, the media predominantly portrays ideal victims as white middle-class women. In fact “the white, heterosexual, able-bodied, irrational or arational, middle-class, sexed-female body, has become a metaphor for ‘innocence’” (Wilcox, 2005, p. 521), with Wilcox (2005) suggesting that such metaphors are incredibly powerful in dividing the social world into the acceptable and the non-acceptable. “The meaning systems that we apply to the category ‘crime’ are metaphoric systems; the coherence and consistency of their application operates to sustain certain relations: relationships of similarity/otherness and inclusion/exclusion most commonly” (Brown, 2003 as cited in Wilcox, 2005, p. 521).

During the last 20 minutes of Lettie Wapad’s life, she desperately tried to fend off her attackers’ relentless blows while the life slowly drained out of her mutilated body...she was still alive for some time after being gang raped and stabbed 16 times...[Evidence] showed that the fragile woman of 1,61 metres, and approximately 53kgs, tried desperately to fight off her attackers (Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

Julie, who was in her early 50s, was a housewife (Eliseev, 2009, p. 2).

Bertus and Madelein had battled to have a child...Marzanne’s arrival caused huge excitement, and the baby [the victim], an only child, was seen as a gift (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

The following excerpt has all the elements of a newsworthy gendered discourse. The victim is white, female, elderly and frail. The attack occurred at her (fortified) home. She was participating in not only a blameless activity, but one that ‘house-proud’ women ‘should’ be doing – so admirably, in fact, that she never even relinquished hold of her dishcloth. In addition it is reported that she is a ‘good’ person and therefore the implication is that she is an ‘innocent’ victim. The male hegemony of her husband is undeniable in his attempts to protect her – phoning the neighbours for help, racing home and scaling the garden wall.

Unable to reach his wife on her cellphone, Van den Berg phoned neighbours and asked them to go and see if they could help his frail wife [65] in the garden. When they called him back and said they could not see her, he raced home. Unable to unlock the gate, and

seeing the kitchen security door standing open, Van Den Berg scaled the garden wall. He walked through his ransacked home and found his wife's body sprawled in the lounge, a kitchen dishcloth clasped tightly in her hands. It is believed she was washing the morning dishes when she was attacked...Van den Berg had been extremely kind and caring. "She never said a bad word about anyone. She had so much time for people and was very loving towards everyone"...his stepmother was full of love and kindness. "She would do anything to help someone and always had time for people" (Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

4.5.2 The gendered construction of perpetrators

Statistics show that male perpetrators in South Africa are primarily young and black (Shaw & Louw, n.d.). Debatably, as a consequence, dominant ideas exist concerning black masculinity as violent and dangerous, with black men constructed as "always-already guilty" (Wilcox, 2005, p. 523).

Certainly, constructions of masculinity – and femininity – are said to be responsible for the perpetration of crime and violence. Social norms construct boys and men as macho, strong, virile, and dominant (Burton, 2007). However, Jeftas and Artz (as cited in Burton, 2007) suggest that South African males experience discord between their expected and realised roles of 'maleness'. Burton (2007) further asserts that men are expected to be socially and physically powerful and provide for their families. However, exclusion from the formal economy, combined with unemployment and poverty, does not allow this to happen.

Altbeker (2008) submits that gratuitous violence then becomes an opportunity for these emasculated men to reassert their masculinity; as well as a response to the consequences of exclusion – disrespect, humiliation and despair at a situation that is beyond the control of the individual and unlikely to change. Altbeker (2008) further suggests that this level of inequality, combined with feelings of emasculation, then provides the emotional fuel that appears to drive much of the gratuitous and extreme levels of violence in South Africa.

In South African media reports, the perpetrators are identified as young and black and are identified as such where possible.

...the main suspect, Chakhoma Machaba...(Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

...convicted Msiko Malinga, 27, and Felakuphi Zondi, 22, yesterday of murder and robbery with aggravating circumstances (Peters, 2009, p. 3).

...sentenced Lungani Khumalo (22)...for murder...(Oellerman, 2010, p. 3).

...attacked, allegedly by Mzwandile Vincent Thomas Twala (32), of Soweto, and his accomplice (Ndaba, 2009, p. 2).

4.6 THE DISCOURSE OF AGE

Age is considered to have both a biological and a socially constructed element (Zao, 2011). Every human being who lives into old age biologically transitions from immaturity to old age. However, the ideas that exist around the “specific sets of ideas and philosophies, attitudes and practices” of this transition are socially constructed (James & Prout, 2007 as cited in Zhao, 2011, p. 241). Discourses allied to this always have implications for social relations and access to power (Wilinska, 2010).

The categorisation of people by others into race, gender and age, is so entrenched that these categories are referred to as ‘primitive’ or ‘automatic’ (Nelson, 2005). There is an intersection between them which creates different meanings. So, for example, ‘black’ is not unaffected by its intersection with gender and age or, equally, its intersection with other social issues such as class, nationality or sexuality (Søndergaard, 2005).

4.6.1 Childhood

In western cultures the child, and childhood, tend to be conceptualised through three main discourses: the discourse of innocence, the discourse of evil and the discourse of rights (James et al., 1998 as cited in Meyer, 2007). Different social issues are marked by different discourses. Child crime and violence is often understood through the discourse of innocence when children are victims (Kitzinger, 1997 as cited in Meyer,

2007), and through the discourse of evil when children are perpetrators (Valentine, 1996 as cited in Meyer, 2007).

The discourse of the innocent child constructs children as “inherently virtuous, pure, angelic and innocent” (Meyer, 2007, p. 87). By association this makes children immature, ignorant, weak and vulnerable which, in turn, constructs them as victims in need of protection, primarily from adults. Yet, vulnerability *is* a key feature of childhood, as children are physically vulnerable because of their size; socially vulnerable because of their lack of social skills; and structurally vulnerable because of the asymmetrical power relations between children and adults (Meyer, 2007). The media plays to this discourse of innocence and vulnerability of young victims, by always reporting the victims’ age – or markers to their age – in either the headline, or the body of the story, if the victim is young. For example, the following headlines all make some reference to the youth of the victim.

Builders bludgeoned baby (Ndaba, 2010, p. 1).

Outrage after schoolgirl’s brutal murder (Hosken, 2010, p. 3)

Parents shattered by brutal killing of schoolgirl (Hosken, 2010, p.1)

Body found in dump after girl raped and tortured (Serrao, 2010, p.2)

Court told of gruesome rape, murder of girl, 15 (Mphande, 2009, p. 4)

These headlines foreground the information in the main body of the article, which also make reference to the victims’ youth, with an underlying message that the innocence and vulnerability of childhood has been violated by these acts of violence.

Nine-year-old Banele Precious Khumalo was raped and killed on Thursday, allegedly by a neighbour (Serrao, 2010, p. 2).

...beating little Marzanne Kruger and her nanny, Francina Sekhu...(Molosankwe, 2010, p. 2).

Marzanne Kruger, the baby girl bludgeoned by a house robber who attacked her and her minder Francina Sekhu, is said to be breathing on her own...“Marzanne could not speak, she was only crawling. What could she have done against her attackers?” Kobus Grobler [a close family friend] asked?...little Marzanne, who had celebrated her first birthday two days earlier...(Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

She said their children, aged three and four, were with them [during the attack and murder] (Peters, 2009, p. 3).

The couple’s two young daughters, aged six and 10, were staying with their grandmother [at the time of the attack] (Saville and Hans, 2010, p. 3).

...the final moments of Marinda Wessels, 15, who was gang-raped, her body wrapped in a blanket and then set alight...Booyesen Park High School Grade 8 pupil...(Mphande, 2009, p. 4).

Emotive language has clearly been employed in the above descriptions of the events that afflicted these young victims – made all the more poignant because of their age and vulnerability. In direct contrast to this, the discourse associated with violent youthful offenders gives these youths no quarter, and becomes, in the broadest sense, a metaphor for the supposed moral decline of a society (James & Jenks, 1996).

The four accused, the brothers Archibold Itumuleng Chweu, 26, and Moleko Chweu, 21, Thabiso Majama, 20, and a 16-year-old minor, who are facing charges of murder, rape, indecent assault and the violation of a corpse sat motionless in the dock of court B yesterday (Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

The suspects, aged 23 and 25, were due to appear in a Joburg court today to answer to allegations of battering the child and her minder (Ndaba, 2010, p. 1).

Pietermaritzburg regional court magistrate Bheki Khumalo sentenced Lungani Khumalo (22) to 15 years imprisonment for murder...Khumalo’s co-accused Mzwandile Dlomo (22), was found not guilty...(Oellerman, 2010, p. 3).

Judge Herbert Msimang convicted Msiko Malinga, 27, and Felakuphi Zondi, 22, yesterday of murder and robbery with aggravating circumstances (Peters, 2009, p. 3).

4.6.2 Old age

As with childhood, old age has been associated with a range of values, virtues and/or vulnerabilities throughout history (Wilinska, 2010). Older people are, to varying degrees, understood to be passive and dependent and therefore, like children, are vulnerable. In this way old people are infantilised and therefore need to be protected, preferably by capable, able-bodied younger adults. Therefore, while the discourse of *innocence* associated with childhood is understandably absent, the discourse of *vulnerability* that exists around the child also exists around old people and is, equally, considered a newsworthy discourse to be used in headlines.

Pensioner tortured and butchered in his home (Hosken, 2009, p.1)

Elderly woman strangled then left in burning Centurion home (Hosken, 2010, p. 2)

Another pensioner meets brutal death in her home (Hosken, 2010, p. 2)

Retirement dream ends in brutal killing (Otto, 2010, p. 5)

Although the use of the discourse of vulnerability is not as common for old people as for children, it is interesting to see how it is used to heighten the newsworthiness of a story. As is evident in the examples below, when a victim is undisputedly old, their age is more likely to be stated as a matter of fact. When the victim is middle-aged, or perceived to be on the cusp of old age, then the victims are more likely to be referred to as elderly. In this way the newsworthiness of the discourse associated with vulnerability can be employed for a larger number of stories.

“Their mother still hasn’t told him [an elderly father] the details of how his children were murdered. “We wanted to protect him from that,” she explained (Van Schie, 2010, p. 6).

...The 50-year-old farmer...they found the elderly man...(Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

The murder of an elderly Tshwane woman...Catherina “Kitty” Botha, 83, who lived alone for the past 27 years...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

The five-man gang, believed to be behind the murder of Pretoria pensioner, Frans Swemmer, 89, who was beaten to death in his Waterkloof home last week...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

...elderly couple...The bodies of Christopher, 69 and his wife Jennifer, 62...(Mbuyazi [a], 2010, p. 5).

Police believe Dutton (78) was murdered on Easter Sunday, April 4...Mimmie Dutton is survived by six sons, a daughter, 20 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren (Saville, 2010, p. 3).

A Pretoria pensioner was found butchered in his ransacked and bloodstained city home...Andries "Willie" Pretorius, 64...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

4.7 HOW THE MEDIATISATION OF GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE IS OPERATIONALISED

Different social groups experience crime in varying degrees of victimisation and risk, and have different beliefs regarding its causes and solutions (Garland, 2000). Yet despite these differences, Garland proposes that a cultural formation, which he refers to as "the 'crime complex' of late modernity" (p. 367), has occurred in the public at large. This, "has grown up around the phenomena of high crime rates and increased insecurity and...this formation now gives the experience of crime a settled institutional form...characterised by a distinct cluster of attitudes, beliefs and assumptions" (p. 367). As a result of this 'crime complex', the public has developed a greatly increased social and psychological investment in issues of crime and punishment. Dissatisfaction with the status quo has led the public to express their fear of crime, and their disapproval at having to change their lifestyles. They are also more likely to verbalise their dissatisfaction at a system that has failed them. Powerlessness around crime reduction has led to a sense that 'something must be done' and 'someone is to blame', which ultimately prompts a demand for action.

In South Africa specifically, the public perceives that the state has weakened at a time when state institutions, such as the police and the judiciary, are most needed to safeguard the social order (Ran-Rubin, 2008), leading South Africans to cite 'crime and

lawlessness' as their top priority in opinion polls (Schönteich, 2002 as cited in Ran-Rubin, 2008).

The press has echoed this by becoming "the voices and the mouthpieces of the disaffected South African public, presenting the angry perspective of those who are fed up with the supposed lack of government's progress in curbing high levels of crime in South Africa" (Fine, 2007, p. 2).

In order to balance news reports otherwise dominated by voices of authority, journalists need to find substitute 'voices of the people' to comment on the event, despite these rarely adding meaningful information to the story. These so-called 'react quotes', used to show the devastation caused by crime are often referred to as 'fear and loathing' (Wallace, 2008). They can represent the journalists' "perceptions of audience morality" (Cerulo, 1998 as cited in Wallace, 2008, p. 398) through 'disbelief' and the unlikelihood of the crime having taken place. They also serve as both supporting evidence, and claims to truth, regarding 'the state of crime' (Tuchman, 1972 as cited in Wallace, 2008).

In this corpus the two most important truth claims portrayed by news reports are that the police do not provide adequate protection of the public against the perpetration of crime; and that the government cannot control the spiralling crime situation, and does not care sufficiently to do so. This is particularly important because in any democratic society the public look to two important groups of authority to maintain law and order – the police and the government. While the police are the public's protection on the street, the government ultimately controls the direction and degree of crime control, the budget and the resources that are employed to protect the public. It is therefore crucial to the public that they and the government are in sync over this issue.

Yet, many South Africans – both white and black – do not believe that the government is doing enough to combat crime and violence. White South Africans, as a voting minority, believe their voices are not being heard. They fear that this lack of government control and concern breeds a sense of primitivism, animalism and immorality which manifests,

in the minds of the public, as increasing amounts of gratuitous violence at ever more extreme levels targeted, for historical reasons, against white people.

“The police do not protect us”

Relatives and neighbours who gathered at the house yesterday lashed out at the local police, saying that they were unable to control violent attacks. At least two other houses in the neighbourhood have been hit in recent weeks (Eliseev, 2009, p. 2).

“We need more visible policing” (Michael Broughton, head of the Consumer Good [sic] Council of South Africa and the Shopping Centre Security Council)...[He said] robbers were brazen because they knew their chances of being caught were slim (Bailey, 2009, p. 3).

Buys [the victim’s mother] said she had also lost faith in the police because they did nothing about crime. “Whenever we call the police, they either do not answer their phone or they tell us there are no vans that can come to the scene” (Masemola, 2009, p. 1).

As a consequence of the perceived inefficiency of the police, the South African public turned to non-state policing, ranging from commercial security firms to informal vigilante groups (Baker, 2002). This phenomenon increased post-apartheid in an attempt to guarantee a type of ‘order’ that seems to have existed in the past, but no longer does (Nina, 2000).

Said Franks: “We had night watchers early this year and the police disbanded them saying the community took the law into their own hands. During that time crime died down for a while because our fathers used to patrol at night. With police in control it is chaos; we are not safe in the neighbourhood we grew up in. Why should we be scared to walk around at night near our own homes?” she asked (Masemola, 2009, p. 1).

The public wants justice for criminals that are either not being apprehended, or are perceived to be protected by the criminal justice system (Nina, 2000). The desire to have justice served has resulted in increased levels of vigilantism.

...community members bayed for the blood of the three suspects, who later handed themselves over to the police...Beeton’s family [the perpetrator], including children, had

to be taken to a place of safety after irate community members pelted them with stones (Mphande, 2009, p. 4).

...police had come to the man's rescue because community members wanted to kill him...Community members burnt down the suspect's house after his arrest (Serrao, 2010, p. 2).

The development of private policing, in its many forms, is a response to the real needs and concerns of the public regarding crime and violence, solutions to which many communities believe are not being delivered by the police. The media – as a mouthpiece for the public – seems to reflect this view.

"I went to the police station at Vosloorus [because his daughter was missing and was subsequently found murdered] but they told me Phumula falls under the Alberton police station and I must go there," Bongani said. He then phoned the Alberton police station... "They should have helped us look for her and moved the docket later," the angry father said (Serrao, 2010, p. 2).

A neighbour, Paul Thato, who is also a member of the local community policing forum, heard about the missing child on Friday morning. He set off with the other residents to see if he could find her (Serrao, 2010, p. 2).

Evident in the data is a complete disconnect between the concerns that are being raised by the community at large, and the 'ink bites' that are delivered by the police and government. Given South Africa's continuing high levels of violent crime, a certain cynicism is experienced by readers when faced with statements such as the following:

If anything happens the police will know what to do," he said [Police spokesman Lesego Metsi] (Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

[Police spokesman Inspector Mike Mbewa]...said the community needed to work with the police. "There are people who are in the habit of complaining without doing anything about it and expect the media to mediate" (Masemola, 2009, p. 1).

In the following example it becomes clear that when a case is high profile because of its repugnance to the public, as in the case of Marzanne Kruger, the one-year-old baby who was beaten and blinded by perpetrators, the police *can* make arrests if they want to. This only leads to an increased level of cynicism regarding the police's performance, or lack thereof, in other situations.

The gruesome attack propelled Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokonyane, Gauteng MEC for Community Safety and the police to act swiftly and get two suspects behind bars in less than 24 hours (Ndaba, 2010, p. 1).

“The government doesn’t care about crime”

“I hope we can do something to bring the problem [violent crime] under control. It has a negative impact on our country”. [Ismail Cachalia, father of Gauteng Community Safety MEC Firoz Cachalia, who is related by marriage to the victims] (Eliseev, 2009, p. 2)

The butchering of 17-year old Anika Smit...has sparked outrage with many South Africans calling for government to step up its fight against crime...Her murder...has caused outrage among her friends and South Africans sick and tired of crime with many postings on social websites such as Facebook calling for government to step up its fight against crime...A posting by Gerhard Fourie read: “This is enough. For how long must we South Africans continue to be murdered and raped? When will steps be taken to ensure crime does not pay?” Another posting by Sandile Ndlovu said: “We are tired of crime. It affects everyone, everywhere whether you are black or white. The government needs to show us they are serious about fighting crime by putting murderers behind bars.” Tracey Delpont on her blog wrote: “Crime is destroying us. Stop it now before more innocent lives are lost.” (Hosken, 2010, p. 3).

The brutal killing comes as the country marks 16 Days of Activism For No Violence Against Women and Children (Masemola, 2009, p. 1).

The two discourses discussed above are further interpreted by the media as inefficiency on the part of the police and the judiciary, and are reported as such on a regular basis:

...police have had very little success in the past with mall robberies (Bailey, 2009, p. 3).

The matter was postponed...because their lawyer, Isabel Ramos, was not available, and nor was a Portuguese interpreter. The stenographer was also not available as many court staff had abandoned their duties and gone to picket (Molosankwe, 2010, p. 2).

Police spokeswoman Aveline Hardaker said it was still not known when the attack took place or who the attackers were (Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

Police seemed to be making some headway when a suspect was arrested in 2008, but witnesses failed to identify him in an identification parade. The case was subsequently degraded to an inquest (Van Schie, 2010, p. 6).

In fact, a very common, almost 'throw away' remark, in a large number of the articles is "no arrests have been made", which is included regardless of the amount of time that has passed since the crime. This further reinforces the idea that the police are inefficient.

No arrests have been made (Mtshali and Smillie, 2009, p. 3).

No arrests have been made yet (Otto, 2010, p. 5).

She said no arrests had been made and police were appealing for information on the identity and whereabouts of the gunmen (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

Jeevan said police had not made an arrest yesterday (Saville and Hans, 2010, p. 3).

...the suspect was out on parole when the incident occurred...No arrests have been made yet (Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

In the following story the victim had been killed 48 hours prior to the story yet the police are being castigated, albeit in a very 'factual' manner, as to their inefficiency:

...police are still nowhere near to tracking down and arresting her killers...Police last night said no breakthrough had been made in the investigation and that detectives were still searching for clues to the identities and whereabouts of the killers (Hosken, 2010, p. 3).

Even private security companies are not exempt from the criticism:

Madelein [the baby's mother] made an emergency call to her security company, but, they failed to respond, and so far have not contacted the Krugers (Marzanne breathing on her own, 2010, p. 3).

However, it is not all bad news for the police. While not as common, there is a theme that presents the police as capable and even victorious:

More than 20 shots were fired but in the end the police won...It was the police's third victory over dangerous criminals this week (Bailey, 2009, p. 1).

The suspect was caught an hour after allegedly attacking a cyclist...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

Caizack [a friend of the victims] applauded the police for the speedy arrests (Mbuyazi [a], 2010, p. 5).

Police pounced on the suspects at their homes in Alexandra...And the premier said: "It is very good work we expected from our law-enforcing agency. Their work is highly commendable and it is an action that needs to be replicated in all other criminal cases committed by heartless criminals" (Ndaba, 2010, p. 1).

Eight alleged gang members were arrested after police pounced on a shack..."Police ordered the occupants out, warning that the shack was surrounded, and called for them to surrender," said police spokesman Superintendent Vishnu Naidoo (Tau, 2009, p. 1).

Five robbers died in a shootout with police...(Wilson, 2010, p. 1).

Representatives of the criminal justice system are also shown by the media to have a voice regarding the levels of gratuitous violence present in South Africa. In the following examples, the judges, and the police spokesman, are representing themselves as agents and advocates of the interests of society, and as neutral, objective overseers of the public's welfare (Ran-Rubin, 2008). However, perhaps more importantly, their comments mirror the public's desire for justice – all too often seen as not happening in the South African judicial system. It can be argued that the public is buoyed when seeing that the judiciary understands what violent crime is doing, both to South Africa

as a country, and to individual victims. They therefore feel vindicated when judges mete out justice in accordance with the perpetrators' crimes.

Borchers [the South Gauteng High Court judge] slapped him with 18-year sentences, which she ruled were to be 'served separately and consecutively, one by one' ...Borchers said the life of two of the rape victims "have been ruined" and that some of his house robbery victims, who awoke to find Mathe pointing a gun at them, have emigrated because they could not handle the trauma. "This kind of behaviour terrifies people," said Borchers. "We have forgotten about our right to feel safe inside our home." Borchers said home owners installed extensive security systems to avoid becoming victims, but "there is a pervasive feeling of nervousness and downright fear on a continual basis" (McLea, 2009, p. 6).

...the magistrate said the court had to have regard for the interests of society which views murder with "revulsion and indignation". If sentences were too lenient communities would take the law into their own hands (Oellerman, 2010, p. 3).

...[The] defence counsel of Malinga and Zondi conceded that there were no substantial and compelling circumstances present to deviate from the prescribed minimum sentence of life imprisonment on the murder charge...[Judge] Msimang agreed with this submission, adding that the duo had showed no mercy to the Pohlman family. "They could have simply taken what they wanted and left the family intact. However, they decided to attack this young family and leave them without a husband and father," he said...Prosecutor Dalene Barnard labelled the murder a 'senseless' killing. "The family were vulnerable targets that posed no threat to their assailants" (Peters, 2009, p. 3).

"This incident should be a reminder to all criminals of what the consequences would be should they continue to terrorise our communities and continue to attack and kill our colleagues. Enough is enough. We will stop at nothing and we will continue to fight fire with fire to make our communities safer," said Naidoo [police spokesman] (Tau, 2009, p. 1).

4.8 SENSATIONAL REPORTING

The word "sensationalism" was coined in the nineteenth century as a pejorative term, to denounce literature or journalism that aimed at arousing strong emotional reactions in the public. Sensationalism focuses on the senses as the key site of stimulation, and emphasises bodily and non-rational reactions (Wiltenburg, 2004). Therefore, 'sensational' news can arouse emotions and generate empathy in audiences (Uribe & Gunter, 2007).

Sensationalist crime accounts build their emotional potency on both a visceral response to violence itself and the quasi-religious dilemma posed by transgression of core values. These representations of crime mark a unique point of intersection between public order and the interior life of the individual...Crime texts are powerful even though they may not be cast or intended as propaganda; in fact, their typical avoidance of explicit argumentation and reliance on unanalyzed emotional response has served to enhance their effect. Its emotion arousing features make it powerfully persuasive, even as it presents itself as noncontroversial and thus deserving of the same emotional response from all right-thinking people who disapprove of criminal violence (Wiltenburg, 2004, p. 1379).

However, news items, irrespective of the topic, can be packaged with or without emotion-laden information, and therefore it is often the *news packaging process*, rather than the news itself, that places emphasis upon the elements that provoke emotion (Uribe & Gunter, 2007). Yet, in order to deliver news that is informative rather than merely colourful, journalists have a responsibility "to take what's important and make it interesting", as opposed to 'merely taking what's interesting and making it more interesting'" (Jurkowitz, 2000 as cited in Peters, 2011, p. 309). Consequently, much debate exists around whether the development of a more consumer-orientated style of news packaging has resulted in news items becoming more 'sensational' or 'tabloid-like' over time. Criticisms include arguments that the civic role of journalism is compromised; and that the more dramatized style of coverage undermines the role of the press to enlighten in democratic societies (Peters, 2011). Certainly there is a strong

argument that sensationalised reports of gratuitous violence both over-report, and exaggerate, accounts of these crimes, resulting in heightened fear with all its ensuing consequences.

On the other hand, defenders of the presence of more sensational styles of news coverage suggest that dramatic or sensational stories are not necessarily synonymous with low quality journalism. 'Sensational' news stories help the public draw the line between what is, and what is not, morally acceptable (Stevens, 1985 as cited in Peters, 2011). In addition, this form of news may be more in tune with popular culture than the traditional approaches represented by the elite press; and can provide rich background information to issues. Finally, these sensational stories have high audience appeal and engagement and – whether good or bad – high memorability with the public.

4.8.1 The voyeurism of violence

While voyeurism usually has a sexual connotation, the heading for this theme has been chosen to illustrate the illicitness, although not sexual, of the viewing by the public of the gruesome, intimate and seemingly private details of these violent crimes. As previously discussed, the deviancy associated with these descriptions, and descriptors, makes news stories particularly newsworthy as they appeal “to a basic though depraved human taste for gore” (Wiltenburg, 2004, p. 1378). Many excerpts have been included below, which speaks not only to the level of gratuity that is used in these articles, but also to the large number of articles that describe this level of gratuity.

During the last 20 minutes of Lettie Wapad's life, she desperately tried to fend off her attackers' relentless blows while the life slowly drained out of her mutilated body...she was still alive for some time after being gang-raped and stabbed 16 times...Doctor Denise Lourens [forensic pathologist] testified the rape and murder of Wapad was the most gruesome case she had come across in her career of 10 000-plus autopsies...“These stabbings [four to the chest area] were individually fatal blows,” she said...[Apart from countless stab wounds and broken bones]...a stone was pushed into the genitals of the deceased causing internal bleeding. Wapad was still alive at this stage...the only way to remove the stone was through a surgical procedure during the autopsy. After Wapad

died, her killers cut her open and removed her intestine. Some of her organs were drapped [sic] over a tombstone (Van Wyk, 2010, p. 3).

She had been handcuffed, cut and burnt before her body was wrapped in a duvet and dumped in a field [9 year-old victim] (Serrao, 2010, p. 2).

...bloodbath...her head soaked in blood...beaten over the head and left for dead with a fractured skull and broken jaw...tortured...ears sliced...the floor, carpet, walls, sink and bath were smeared in blood (Eliseev, 2009, p. 2).

...brutally murdered...the body of a lady with a garden fork stuck in her chest (Garden fork used in brutal murder of couple, 2010, p. 10).

A Pretoria pensioner was found butchered in his ransacked and bloodstained city home by his daughter and police days after he was hacked and beaten to death with kitchen and okapi knives and a hunting rifle...tortured...one of his fingers was cut off with a pair of garden pruning secateurs...riddled with stab wounds...The bludgeoning and stabbing was so severe that the butt of the rifle and the blade of the okapi knife were broken off. The blade of the kitchen knife was bent to nearly 90 degrees...carnage...“This man was butchered. He was literally hacked and beaten to death,” he [a policeman] said (Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

According to police, Anika’s killers had raped and assaulted her repeatedly in the throat and hacked off her lower arms. The killers took her arms (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

“It looks like a slaughterhouse.” ...bloodbath...horrifying...“Her eyes were bulging out of her head and there was blood all over her face. I could barely recognise her,” he said (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

...bludgeoned to death...The bodies...were found bludgeoned in their crashed Volvo sedan...It is believed they had been attacked, robbed and killed at their home, before their bodies were stashed in the car’s boot...gruesome case...(Mbuyazi [a], 2010, p. 5).

Armed robbers used a hot clothing iron to torture a gagged and bound Joburg family into revealing where cash was hidden in their home...He told how the robbers switched on the

iron and used it on his legs in an attempt to force him to show them where he kept his money (Ndaba, 2009, p. 2).

...slain...His wife Joan was found to have been stabbed 13 times all over her body. Her wounds required stitching and she had testified that her ear was “hanging” from a cut (Oellerman, 2010, p. 3).

...gruesome death...Falling to the ground with her head split open...“He was bludgeoning her with the pipe with such force. There was blood everywhere and her head and body were broken” (Peters, 2009, p. 5).

Paramedics found the knife still lodged in the man’s stomach after the attack at about 2am. The scene was described as “very, very gory”...“The customers have also expressed shock and fear over the gruesome murder. They keep asking if the murder really happened and if it was that gruesome,” said one employee (Saville and Hans, 2010, p. 3).

...brutally tortured and murdered...At the time, police described it as one of the most horrific crime scenes they had ever seen. The two victims were tied up. Their teeth were pulled. And when their torturers had had enough, the 44-year-old man and his sister, 46, were each shot in the head (Van Schie, 2010, p. 6).

4.8.2 Combining different incidents for increased sensationalism

The press further sensationalises violence as gratuitous by combining different events in the same story or relating stories that are actually unrelated. Van Dijk (1988 as cited in Bell, 1999) makes the point that getting coherence out of the discontinuous nature of news can be a demanding comprehension task. In the following examples, it is often difficult to separate out the events and the time lines which, while arguably adding to the drama, does make comprehension difficult. What is clear however is that the articles make it appear as if gratuitous violence is rampant and pervasive, and as if certain locations are being targeted.

This discourse is therefore paradoxically juxtaposed with the previously discussed discourse concerning random crime. However, as has already been established, fear sells newspapers, and these two parallel discourses can both be used to create fear in

readers in different ways and in different stories. It is possible that the public can fear that gratuitous violence is happening randomly but that certain suburbs, or socio-economic groups, are also being targeted. This is the case in the following excerpt:

The attack comes 10 days after matriculant, Ernest Hoon, 18, was shot dead in an armed robbery on his parents' smallholding less than 3km away from the Steenberg's home. In the latest attack...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

In the following example the article revolves around an incident where one man was murdered and his two friends assaulted. The perpetrator involved in this incident was subsequently arrested after being involved in a second incident involving an attack on a cyclist. However, the article introduces a third – but completely unrelated incident – concerning a German pensioner, and also gives details of that case. Consequently, together with the sheer confusion of events and timelines, the impression created by combining the events is one of chaos and mayhem.

Police have arrested a man suspected of killing a Pretoria home-owner and leaving his close friend paralysed and his girlfriend injured during a robbery at his house. The suspect was caught an hour after allegedly attacking a cyclist in Equestria several hundred metres from Friday night's bloody attack...The attack took place less than 1km from where the German pensioner Ute Maria Wiing, 70, was found murdered in her Silver Mists security estate home earlier this month...Seven people, including a security guard, were arrested in connection with Wiing's murder (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

The same is true in the following instance, where the 'bloody crime spree' actually involved different perpetrators, unrelated victims and occurred in separate places. The only connection is that the incidents happened on the same night in the same city – which can be said for a lot of violent crime anywhere.

The bloody crime spree began at 9.30pm on Sunday when three men...opened fire on a Pretoria East couple...It ended four hours later...10km away, when 10 would-be robbers shot and killed milk-truck driver and father of four Elijah Mbonani and critically injured his co-driver Philemon Sithole as they stopped outside a dairy farm (Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

4.8.3 The inevitability of pending disaster

Sensationalism is seen as essentially a commercial product, built on the exploitation of modern mass media (Wiltenburg, 2004). It has been argued that, as a consequence of this exploitation, many of the traditional dichotomies associated with journalism, such as hard/soft, fact/opinion, and information/entertainment are becoming progressively blurred (Peters, 2011). This forms part of a broader social trend towards 'informalisation' or 'conversationalisation' where "most forms of public discourse now work hard to avoid the formality and distance that were once important markers of its identity as 'public'" (Cameron, 2004 as cited in Peters, 2011, p. 298). Yet there is still a strongly-held view that the Cartesian dualism of emotion and rationality still exists when discussing 'quality' journalism, although Peters (2011) argues that "hard, self-styled objective, 'just the facts' journalism is not *unemotional*, just as soft, so-called tabloid news is not *irrational*" (p. 303).

There are two very strong discourses of sensationalised reporting that concern gratuitous violence. In the first, South Africa is depicted as a country under siege, at war with itself and moving inevitably towards pending disaster. As can be seen in the excerpts below, militaristic language is used to liken crime control to a war which requires both sacrifice and military precision.

The body of a Dog Unit constable, who had not been named, could be seen lying at the entrance to the dealership. He had sustained a single gunshot wound to the chest, with the high-calibre bullet piercing his bullet-proof vest...A police officer who did not want to be named, hailed the slain policemen as heroes. "These guys were such good workers, and the fact that they laid down their lives in the line of duty is a testament to their characters. They are heroes," he said (Wicks and Moolla, 2009, p. 1).

Heavily armed officers could be seen moving cautiously into the building. Several more were posted on the rooftops of adjacent buildings (Wicks and Moolla, 2009, p. 1).

This week South Africa declared war on mall robbers...Gauteng Community Safety MEC Khabisi Mosunkutu...said the police would have high powered weapons and be told to "shoot to kill" (Bailey, 2009, p. 3).

...police had been forced to open fire on the man...(Peters, 2009, p. 5).

Perpetrators of gratuitous violence are described as either strategically using military precision in the planning and the execution of the attack or, in direct contrast, as forming part of the disorder and anarchy experienced in war.

They planned their attack meticulously. The first robber – the domestic worker – was already at the Lenasia house. Two more would enter the house's adjoining surgery under the guise that their female accomplice, dressed in a purdah, was ill and needed medical treatment. And that's when they would strike...More than 20 shots were fired but in the end the police won (Bailey, 2009, p. 1).

...ran riot...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

...resembled a "war zone" ...the woman...grabbed her gun...and opened fire on the robbers, who returned fire and shot Steenberg in the head before they fled...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

But the gangs targeting malls were usually heavily armed with assault rifles and they were not afraid to use them. "Their plan is to shoot the security guards and take them out straight away," said Minnaar. The gangs – sometimes numbering as many as 18 members – also operated using military tactics. They used outriders who guarded the perimeter to fight off police or security guards. Other gang members then went in and gathered the cash (Mtshali and Smillie, 2009, p. 3).

...a dramatic shootout...battle...(Wicks and Moolla, 2009, p. 1).

The image of war is intensified by the prevalence of weapons as it is these encounters of armed violence which give gratuitous violence in South Africa "its most malevolent edge" (Bruce, 2010b, p. 56), and are most likely to create fear in South Africans. It therefore becomes simple for the South African media to play to these fears in news reports of gratuitous violence and, accordingly, a high degree of emotive language is used when referring to weapons.

...he was hacked and beaten to death with kitchen and okapi knives and a hunting rifle...riddled with stab wounds...beaten repeatedly over the head with butt [sic] of his .303 hunting rifle...bludgeoning and stabbing...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

...pistol-whipping them before tying them up and looting the store...also wielded a sledgehammer...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

They were attacked by panga-wielding men (Louw, 2010, p. 6).

...had their ears sliced (Eliseev, 2009, p. 2).

...had her throat slit with a knife that was also used to stab her...husband...in the stomach (Saville and Hans, 2010, p. 3).

...a garden fork stuck in her chest...(Garden fork used in brutal murder of couple, 2010, p. 10).

...gagged and strangled...setting her home alight...(Hosken, 2010, p. 2).

It is also clear that an assortment of different types of weapons, or an 'arsenal' of one type of weapon, is particularly terrifying, and therefore tends to be described in a lot of detail. This ties in well with the 'collective threat' discourse discussed previously, where many perpetrators can have many weapons – the most terrifying situation of all.

...police gunned down a robber...armed with an assortment of handguns...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

Three men, armed with an assortment of handguns, opened fire on a Pretoria East couple...the men, who were armed with handguns...(Hosken, 2010, p. 1).

Nine-year-old Banele Precious Khumalo was raped...handcuffed, cut and burnt...(Serrao, 2010, p. 2).

When Karg arrived at the farmhouse, she was attacked by two men who stabbed her and slit her throat. Mhlongo [the gardener] was also stabbed to death, while Linyane [the domestic worker] was shot dead (Mbuyazi [b], 2010, p. 5).

...they found the elderly man with multiple stab wounds to his leg and a serious fracture of his upper leg. He was also treated for multiple other bruises...three armed men...a shootout ensued...(Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

She had been pistol whipped, and there was growing speculation that her attackers had used the same weapon to attack the child (Ndaba, 2010, p. 1).

...he and his companion entered the De Lange's flat with a tomahawk and a knife (Oellerman, 2010, p. 3).

In contrast to images of war, but equally surreal, even fantastical, is the portrayal of gratuitous violence as a scene from an action film. While there is a level of entertainment implicit in this discourse, there is once again a sense that violence in South Africa has moved irretrievably to the brink of disaster. In these portrayals there is an overriding sense of havoc and pandemonium which is intensified by bystanders' comments to this effect.

"There were screeching tyres and then lots of gunshots. It was incredible. It was like a movie," he said [a witness] (Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

...high-speed chase...shootout...Residents...say the road sounded like a scene from the "Wild, Wild West" as they ducked for cover in their homes....a shootout occurred...bullet-riddled getaway car...(Bailey, 2009, p. 1).

...a shootout occurred...[the suspects] fled and were still at large...(Mtshali, 2010, p. 2).

...the woman...grabbed her gun...and opened fire on the robbers, who returned fire and shot Steenberg in the head before they fled...(Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

"As police chased after the suspects, the men opened fire shooting at the police vehicle and forcing the officers to return fire,"...(Hosken, 2009, p. 1).

A brief gunbattle...then silence...fierce shootout...three-week crime spree (Tau, 2009, p. 1).

...bloody bank heist...a shoot-out...a high-speed car chase...(Wilson, 2010, p. 1).

A policeman said that no matter where one looked there were bullet casings and blood (Hosken, 2010, p. 4).

In this chapter the analysis has shown that discourses of fear – around life in general, crime and violent crime – have flourished, both internationally and in South Africa, and that the news industry is a major purveyor of these discourses. However, what is possibly unique to South Africa is not only the ‘fear of *gratuitous violence*’ discourse, but also the discourse that surrounds its causation. As such this analysis examined the different discourses that prevail in the media as a consequence of South Africa’s racially divided history, and the effects of South Africa as a two-nation state. In addition, the analysis also investigated *how* the media operationalises the mediatization of gratuitous violence to further perpetuate this racial divide – to the point that South African is portrayed as a country, ravaged by brutal and extreme acts of gratuitous violence, teetering on the brink of inevitable catastrophe.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This study has investigated media representations of gratuitous violence in the South African press by looking not only at *what* newspaper reports say, but *why* and *how* they say it. However, despite research offering various interpretations of the meaning of 'gratuitous violence', it remains a fluid concept. Understandings of gratuitous violence range from incidents of violence that are low on both instrumental and expressive motivation (CSV, 2007), through 'violence for nothing' or unprovoked violence that is enjoyed for its own sake (Foreman-Peck and Moore, 2009; Wieviorka, 2003), to excessive violence, that causes the victim unnecessary pain and suffering. Bruce (2010a) grapples with the concept of gratuitous violence, and arrives at the conclusion that it needs to be understood subjectively, in relation to both instrumental and expressive violence. Therefore, a universally acceptable definition of gratuitous violence is elusive. This study, however, has gone some way to highlighting those characteristics, tones and registers that appear to mark the reporting of gratuitous violence by the South African media. In some ways then, these are the properties of a popularly transmitted definition of the nature of the gratuity that separates 'normal' violence from gratuitous versions of it.

As an important origin of, and conduit for, public messaging, the mass media is widely acknowledged as having a significant effect on an inordinate number of issues, and can consequently shape culture, reformulate policies and affect the way people live their everyday lives (Altheide, 2000). Despite this power, the media does not seem to embrace calls for evidence-based reporting consistently articulated by, for example, the public health movement.

Consequently, a very real tension exists between the way gratuitous violence is understood in the public health arena, and the way that gratuitous violence is represented in the press. The public health model argues that the media in general misrepresents the frequency of gratuitous violence while exaggerating and sensationalising it. Crime news is also said to inappropriately frame violent crime stories; ignore causal and contextual processes which produce crime patterns; and foster stereotypes around race, gender and age (Thorson et al., 2003). The public health

model of news advocates a number of approaches that should rather be employed in the press when reporting on violence. Amongst other things, it suggests that information should be provided regarding the status of different types of violence in a community; and about the economic and psychological consequences of different types of violence. In addition, violence put in context can help with what is usual and can be prevented, and what is unusual and cannot be prevented (Thorson et al., 2003). However, the media is under pressure to sell advertising and newspapers, which is achieved by reporting newsworthy stories. And seemingly newsworthy stories privilege the individual over the communal.

While this tension does present some very real problems, stronger cooperation between the media and other stakeholders in violence reporting could result in a better picture of the proportion of violence that may be considered gratuitous in the country. This would ultimately bring some perspective to the context of what the press constructs as the scourge of gratuitous violence in South Africa. This cooperation is perhaps most important in the way that reporting on gratuitous violence appears to both draw on, and ultimately sustain, the legacy of racism in crime reporting in South Africa. In this study victims and perpetrators were clearly stratified by race. This racialisation often produces personalised white, middle-class female, blameless victims and homogenous young, black, poor, gratuitously violent male perpetrators. However, public health surveillance systems have clearly shown that young black males are disproportionately victims of homicide, and that violent crime is prevalent in environments characterised by marked social inequality and poverty. The widespread, popular dissemination of this data in newspapers is imperative in offsetting the dangerous racisms bred in the sensationalist mode of the reporting of gratuitous violence. This is also true for gender. For example, while females only account for 11% of all violent deaths in South Africa, an overwhelming majority of the reports in this study concerned female victims of gratuitous violence.

Because of reports which so frequently mention the perpetrators leaving with nothing from a scene of a crime after murdering and attacking the victims, there is a sense that gratuitous violence is committed for no reason. This appears nonsensical to a media audience as a person would not engage in violence for nothing (Bruce, 2010a).

Therefore the impression is created that there must be a hidden motive to the level of gratuity. Although no evidence has been found to substantiate the claim in reality, there is a powerful discourse in the press that suggests, particularly in the case of farm attacks, that these are revenge attacks of black people against whites.

This study also found that the South African press, in line with international newspapers, portrays violence in a way that maximises fear of crime. Gratuitous violence is portrayed as random, rampant and out-of-control which makes everybody a potential victim. The public consequently feels disempowered and despairing, as these portrayals are exacerbated by representations of the police as inefficient, and the government as unconcerned by gratuitous crime.

Fear of crime is arguably greatly increased by the strong portrayals of South Africa as a war zone or even a Hollywood action film. These themes serve to increase the sense that South Africa is lawless, anarchistic, and on the brink of cataclysmic and permanent disaster. This sense is intensified by the portrayal of *many* perpetrators against a *few* victims using an assortment of weapons, often against victims who have *no* weapons.

Newspapers clearly have commercial motives for portraying the news in specific ways. However, what is open to further discussion is whether the South African print media is catalysing, and then sustaining, gratuity as an easily digestible but highly reductionist explanation for the complex interplay of factors that produce the types of extreme violence too frequently accepted as characteristic of contemporary South Africa.

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Appendix A: Quick reference of corpus

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