NAMING MY REALITY: A YOUTH NARRATIVE ON DRUG ABUSE AND GANGSTERISM IN THE CAPE FLATS

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ABSTRACT
This article provides a youth narrative on drug abuse and gangsterism in the Cape Flats suburb of Mitchell’s Plain. The narrative engages with the experiences within a single street, Shepherd Way, in one of the highest crime areas in South Africa. The account attempts to bring temporal order to what would otherwise be experienced as a series of chaotic events, given the social complexity characteristics of gangsterism and drug abuse. Narratives often run counter to expectations, making the familiar unfamiliar, and seldom does a story have a single reading or meaning. This study provided an opportunity for the researcher to engage with young persons’ lived experiences by committing to holding conversations with them using their concerns as a starting point. In this case, the focus issue being drug abuse and how it influences their quality of life. The primary purpose then of the article was to engage with the ways in which youth name their reality in high crime areas concomitant with foregrounding the voice of the youth via research into their lives. Hence, this narrative is also a commitment to valuing and attending to the here-and-now of young people’s experiences rather than just focusing on the researcher’s agenda of collecting data on drug abuse and crime. The theoretical underpinnings for the article are Bleakley’s (2005) notion of narrative inquiry and Solorzano and Yosso’s (2002) conception of counter-storytelling. The key finding emanating from this study being that the exposure of youth to anti-social learning in gang and drug subcultures, and the vacuity of economic opportunity in high poverty areas provide the ideal environment for drug abuse and violent gangs. The article demonstrates the importance of conversation and open dialogue embedded in an appreciation of the socio-economic context of vulnerable youth.

Keywords: youth and drug abuse; gangsterism; Cape Flats; criminality; narrative; voice naming reality.

INTRODUCTION
Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that takes story as either its raw data or its product (Bleakley, 2005:534). While science concerns itself with the establishment of truth, a story’s concern is to endow experience with meaning – ‘Narrative’ (Latin narrare) means to know, and storytelling involves knowledge production and sharing of experience. The ‘thinking with stories’ approach used in this article complements understanding of story as discourse and how narratives may be used rhetorically to manage both social interactions and identity. Contemporary discourse approaches see narratives as constructing social meanings. The focus on a single case can complement the dominant empirical approach that draws from large samples, is quantitative and seeks generalisability (Yin, 2012) – narrative inquiries collect soft data that can illuminate hard realities and is significant in this article with its focus on gangsterism and drug abuse in the Cape Flats.

The narrative gives dramatic insight into the lives of socially marginalised people, while the narrator is empowered through the researcher showing a genuine interest in his/her world. The aim is not only to personalise the single story, but also to engage proactively with youth...
within their own context through deliberate intervention, as research with, not on, people. It is important, when working with young people’s narratives, for a researcher to recognise that youth are not a homogeneous group and that issues of class, gender, race and sexuality remain central, especially given South Africa’s divided and racialised society. Gayatri Spivak’s (2005) caution of ‘who speaks for the subaltern’, is pertinent when working with youth from disadvantaged communities. Youth are in the best position to articulate the key components of their lives, their experiences of the street, their survival skills in high crime communities, and the values that they adhere to in spite of living in high poverty spaces.

The theoretical underpinning of this article is Bleakley’s (2005) notion of narrative inquiry and Solorzano and Yosso’s (2002) conception of counter-storytelling. Counter narratives developed as both a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told (that is, those on the margins of society) and as a tool for analysing and challenging the dominant versions and the discourse around drug abuse and gangsterism from the perspective of those in a position of power, such as academics/researchers, the press, the police and experts on crime). Unlike fictional storytelling, counter-storytelling is not about developing imaginary characters. Instead, the voices of those at the coalface of drug abuse are grounded in real life experiences and authentic empirical data, and are contextualised in real social situations (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002:36). Counter-storytelling changes the form and content of research and conversations about events, situations and societal participation. It exposes, analyses and challenges a phenomenon (like drug abuse and gangsterism). Telling their own story provides people (in this case a marginalised youth voice) an opportunity to address those circumstances where the prevailing conception of justice provides no language or means by which the excluded person can express how he or she has been victimised through injustice, inequality and poverty in terms that the system will understand (see Smith, 2013:15).

BACKGROUND
The context of the story is a single street, Shepherd Way, in Mitchell’s Plain, the largest township in the Cape Flats. Mitchell’s Plain was developed in the 1970s to alleviate housing shortages as well as create a dormitory township for coloured people who were forcefully removed from the Cape Town city centre as a result of the Group Areas Act promulgated by the apartheid regime. Other parallel large racially-based dormitory townships to relocate disposed people in the country, are Soweto (Johannesburg) and Chatsworth Durban). According to the 2011 census, the population of Mitchell’s Plain is 310,485. Amongst these figures, 48 percent of households live below the poverty line and 47 percent of the working age (15-65) population is unemployed. This poverty-stricken community is also notorious for its high levels of crime and drug abuse. Mitchell’s Plain was labelled the country’s worst police district due to its extraordinary rate of crime-related incidents. According to the South African Police Service (SAPS) 2015 report on the national levels of crime, Mitchell’s Plain police station was the country’s leading station by volume in contributing to the total of 1.8-million reported serious crimes (South African Police Service, 2015:90).

The key characteristic regarding crime that differentiates Mitchell’s Plain from other communities in the Western Cape is gang violence. The Premier of the province called on the national government in 2013 to institute a commission of inquiry into the high crime rate and deploy the army in the gang-swept Cape Flats to try and bring the gang violence under control. The then Minister of Police resisted the recommendation and indicated in his response that “this province is a 200-year-old deep-seated legacy that cannot be eradicated by police alone” (SAPS,
2015). This is cold comfort to a poor community that is considered one of the nation’s crime capitals. The Institute for Economics and Peace singled out South Africa as being in conflict internally – driven by poverty, inequality, and the slow pace of reform by government, which, in turn, fuels crime, violent strike action and political confrontation (SAPS, 2015). Data and crime statistics released by the South African Police Services (2015) indicate that in 2014 Mitchell’s Plain was the worst area in the country (25,575 cases) followed by Cape Town Central (18,369 cases), Johannesburg central (14,791 cases), Honeydew (13,561 cases) and Pretoria Central (12,682 cases). The report also reiterates that the Western Cape is known to have a serious problem with drugs and drug-related crime concomitant with the fact that it is the province with the highest number of cases (84,337). A total of 258,472 cases were opened, nationally, in 2014, with Mitchell’s Plain being the worst off by a large margin with 6044 cases followed by Manenberg with 3766 cases. The police have failed to reassure the Mitchell’s Plain community that they have the war against crime under control and it is noted that the community lives in fear and is held hostage by the dominant gangs.

GANGS AND POVERTY
Bellair and McNulty’s (2005) research on the confluence of neighbourhood disadvantage, gang membership, drug selling, and violent behaviour indicates that joining a gang is a crucial life course transition that facilitates or enhances participation in violence. Thrasher (1927) was among the first to document that gangs are inherently conflict groups, that members fight to preserve what is theirs, and that much fighting is status oriented involving members of the same gang more than competing gangs. A host of qualitative research on gang culture, conflict within the gang and high levels of violence (see Pinnock, 2016) concur with the findings of Thrasher (1927). Quantitative data collected by Burfeind and Bartusch (2015:53) support the conclusion that gang members engage in more violence than non-members. A typical characteristic of the Cape Flats gangsters is that they spend a large amount of time hanging out with other gang members on the street and getting involved in gang and drug-related activities. Anderson (1999:33) reports on the gang subculture, a pertinent aspect of gang activity and drug selling. The gang members’ attitudes and beliefs are antithetical to mainstream, conventional society, and violence among gang members reflects, in part, adherence to behavioural norms that support violence as a means of conflict resolution (Anderson, 1999:68-72). Access to full gang membership, together with respect and status, is attained through an aspiring member demonstrating courage to use violence, which in some gangs means killing a person. This severe form of violence is a sign that the member is able to protect himself, other members of the gang and even the neighbourhood from external and internal threats. Hence, it is noted that concrete evidence of violence, such as killings and stabbings, are the entry requirement and in many cases, innocent persons fall victim of this ritual. Goldstein (1989:143-174) emphasises that the nature of drug selling as a cash business at street-level without legal recourse increases the probability of violent disputes. There is, therefore, an intrinsic requirement for the drug seller to put on a tough street image with his dress, mannerisms, attitude, tattoos and threats to use retaliatory violence (Jacobs & Wright, 2006:20).

High poverty contexts are fertile grounds for drug abuse and crime. Bellair and McNulty (2009:644) rightly note that poor communities in which gang membership and drug selling take place increases the frequency of violence. A plausible explanation for variation in gang violence may lie in the relative social and economic isolation of their milieu; and violence within gangs may reflect both the marginalisation of gang members and the exclusion of the neighbourhood
The commitment to sell drugs and make a success of the venture, even in the face of death and violence has to be understood within the context of disadvantaged spaces - there are few legitimate alternatives for drug dealers in poor neighbourhoods and this is exacerbated by the low levels of schooling of gang members together with high levels of delinquency and unemployment rates (Bourgois, 1995:15).

Akers (2011:xv-xx) points accurately towards the integral relationship between social learning processes, adolescent delinquency, criminal attitudes and violent behaviour at the street and home in disadvantaged contexts. Social learning theory draws from the psychological principle of operant conditioning and explains the mechanisms by which individuals acquire certain behaviour patterns. The daily reality of youth experiences in high crime areas in the Cape Flats is characterised by drug abuse and violence. They are exposed very early to gang warfare and the drug subculture and they learn first-hand the attitudes, techniques and motives that define the meaning of violence. Bellair and McNulty (2009) note that youth who interact very early and intimately with gangs, look up to gang leaders in their neighbourhood in a favourable manner and are exposed to the drug subculture for long periods, start to internalise violent attitudes that eventually lend themselves to violent acts. Often, the only person with money, status, cars, fancy clothes, jewellery and big houses are the drug-lords in the community and these are favourable images to youth that are unemployed, unschooled and do not have opportunities for advancement out of their poor and disadvantaged lives. Bandura (1986) maintains that it is not only the outward trappings of the gang leaders that are favourable to the youth, but they also imbibe a predisposition towards the use of violence. Violent behaviour is initiated through the process of imitation and the hope of monetary rewards. Interestingly, and pertinent to the situation in the Cape Flats and the lifestyle of the youth, Akers (2011:xxiii) contends that the violent behaviour is reinforced in the individual’s psyche if repeated over a period of time, and is rewarded and goes unpunished. Young people who are economically constrained in poor communities become profoundly alienated and are more likely to seek status and respect in street gangs and to become involved with drug selling to generate subsistence income.

METHODOLOGY

From a methodological framework, the approaches of thinking about stories and thinking with stories are different. Thinking about stories requires the researcher to adopt an analytical mindset and involves deriving categories inductively from the raw data. On the other hand, a more holistic understanding of narratives is when the researcher thinks with stories by either empathetically ‘entering’ a given narrative, or creating a story as research product as a way of capturing elements otherwise lost to a structural analysis (Bleakley, 2005:535). The story in this article, captures the authentic voice of the respondent, has not been edited for language, has not been changed to follow the format of the build-up of a fictional story from introduction to conclusion, and is considered an integral part of the research product.

Due to the dangerous context of gangsterism and drug abuse in the Cape Flats, the sensitivity around the research area and the imperative of safety and security of the respondent, challenges were encountered in selecting the case study. The research unit within which the author works has for some time been active with research and data collection in the Cape Flats. Three possible respondents, who were considered rich case studies, were introduced to the author by research team members. The respondents were either rehabilitated drug addicts, current drug abusers or members of gangs. The first respondent, who was recently discharged from rehabilitation, decided to abandon the project after the first interview. The second respondent
was not available to be interviewed, but requested the questions and provided written answers. However, much of the data was irrelevant and there was no opportunity for probing pertinent aspects of his feedback. He provided copious notes about his family, and his likes and dislikes as opposed to data needed for the study. The third respondent was approached and he indicated his willingness to participate. He was a 20-year-old male from Mitchell’s Plain and it is his narrative that is used in this article.

Data was generated through a series of interviews over a seven-day period with the respondent (one hour per day). The extended form of the interview had to be employed because the researcher gave the respondent an opportunity to narrate his experiences with as little interruption as possible. The respondent was articulate in English and enjoyed narrating his story. The audio transcripts were transcribed. The respondent used the Cape Flats Afrikaans dialect for unique phrases and words, hence the need to also translate from Afrikaans into English. The researcher is fluent in both the languages. To maintain the authenticity of the Cape Flats patios, words that could not be translated into English are written within single quotation marks in the story.

The data was analysed using a holistic approach, i.e. the story was taken as a whole and was contextualised within the Cape Flats high crime and high poverty culture and history with the imperative being to grasp the overall pattern of the story. Polkinghorne’s (2005:137) four approaches to narrative guided the data analysis of the story:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holistic content</th>
<th>Holistic form</th>
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<td>What happens in a story, appreciated as an overall pattern</td>
<td>How the pattern of a story unfolds taken in context</td>
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<table>
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<th>Categorical content</th>
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<tr>
<td>What happens in a particular episode of a story, analysed for structure</td>
<td>How a particular episode of a story occurs</td>
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(Source: Polkinghorne, 2005:137).

Frank (1995:69) argues that where individuals present complicated stories of a context that is chaotic (like the ganglands in Cape Town given its social, political and economic complexity), it is difficult for researchers to sort out the threads without some kind of framework. Verghese’s (1999:1) approach to the synthesis of a narrative is termed ‘the social-realist memoir’ where the researcher provides a coherent, self-referencing, social-realist fiction enjoying the full use of narrative license. The story then does not count as ‘research’ by conventional definitions of data collection and analyses in a systematic and rigorous manner, reach conclusions or recommendations or invite validity and reliability checks. However, it is important to note that such narratives offer important witness documents explicitly addressing the moral imagination (Bleakley, 2005:538).

Narrative research demands high levels of ethical and critical engagement. The respondent was informed of the research aims, the reason for the story, that his participation is voluntary and that he may withdraw if he feels it necessary. The respondent gave written consent for his story and allowed the use of the audio recorder. Given the nature of the story and the safety of the respondent, confidentiality and anonymity was paramount in the project. Ethical clearance was received from the institution for the research project.
BRENTON’S NARRATIVE

My story is about Shepherd Way, it is the name of the road where I stay; it is off the main road in Westridge, Mitchell’s Plain. We have a Mosque and a rehab centre, Sultan Bahu, in Shepherd Way. The rehab is mostly for Muslims where they learn skills and it is open during the day only. We have five tuck shops, two owned by Somalians and three by people from Bangladesh/Pakistan. They sell chips, cigarettes, bread, milk, vegetables, fruit, groceries and all have different prices. The owners stay in the shops, sleep there, so they don’t get robbed. They have pangas [a large, broad-bladed African machete-style knife] and they not rude, they cool, if you trouble them, they will trouble you. When there is xenophobia attacks in the black townships, nothing happens here with these shops. Once this guy, an outsider, hit the Somalian shopkeeper. The guy went to jail. They come here to do their job and make money. They are helping the people, if you a few cents short, they say it is ok.

I am 20 years old, I have a baby girl who is one-year old and she stays with my girlfriend and I visit them every weekend. She lives in Eastridge, Mitchell’s Plain. I sit mostly at home and play computer games. But my friends in school took drugs, mostly when they were in Grade 9, about 14 years old. They took ‘tik’, buttons, and whoonga. You get whoonga in a straw and it is similar to brown sugar. They act funny and strange in the class, pull faces, and get aggressive. It is easy for these boys to join the gangs because the leaders give them drugs. The drugs makes them powerful and not to be scared and their minds snap and they don’t think clearly and join the gang. Then they drop out of school. They asked me once or twice to try, but I didn’t because I know what it does to other people, how can they ask me to try it. I finished school two years ago and I am still looking for a job. I was good in school and my teachers think I’m intelligent. I went to a school in Grassy Park, it’s about 20 kilometres from here, I didn’t want to go to school here, it’s too much problems, drugs and gangsters so I went to a school where I didn’t know the people. My mummy and daddy work and I sometimes get a casual job with a cleaning company, like now I am working with this company for three months.

Drug lords make their own drugs. They make their own chemicals. For ‘tik’ they use jik, rat poison, floor cleaning stuff, and a white powder. You can pull ‘tik’ up your nose, you can inject ‘tik’ in your veins and when it is ‘ice’ or like sugar grains, it can be smoked in a pipe. It is smoked in a glass pipe or broken light bulb and you start it with a lighter. When you make the crystals hot, it melts into a liquid and then it becomes steam and this is what they pull up their nose. I tell you, in three seconds flat, you get a high with tik. The rush you get is just like cocaine but more better and you stay on a high for long, sometimes half day or whole day. It also depends on the quality of the tik, because sometimes a guy can get into a high for three days. Now when you on a high, you just cannot sleep, you can stay awake all night and I know a friend who didn’t sleep for one week, he just keeps on taking it to keep the high. Sometimes they take alcohol or maybe dagga to help them to crash. Then the addict will crash, go to sleep. For how long he was on a high, that is how long he will crash.
Tik gives him a lot of energy; he gets all jumpy and wants to talk non-stop about everything. Sometimes they happy and then they get sad and quiet too. But most of the time they are relaxed and smiling. But, with different people, they get different reaction to the drug, some you can see they are very nervous, and hey, some get aggressive and all they want to do is to fight. I know some guys, they very violent and you can see all the scars in their face they get from fighting on the street. And if they have a gun and they get all agro, then someone is going to get shot and killed. We know who are the relaxed guys and who are the violent ones. You can see an addict very easy, look in their eyes, if they take tik, their eyes will jump from this side to that side. And when you see the big eyes, then you know he has just taken drugs. And they get very thin because they lose interest in food. They get thin very quickly and if someone loses weight fast, you know he is on tik. And they stink too man, you can get a certain smell from them that is from all the chemicals in the drugs, it does not smell nice. I don’t think their nose works well because they don’t know that they not smelling right. You can also make out an addict when you look at their skin, they have these bumps or lumps or this rash or sores from all the scratching and itching. Just look at their fingers and their nose or their cracked lips and you know what drugs they are taking. The fingers look a bit burnt if they smoking tik, the lips too look pink or black and if they snort tik, the signs are in the nose, it is mostly red. My neighbour, he has terrible stomach cramps with tik, you just know when he is on tik, then he holds his stomach because of the pain. These guys can’t think, the drugs made their brain dead and they walk around like zombies. All they do is stand together on the road or against a wall and wait for the next trip. Hey some of the guys are gone totally mental, they don’t know what they say or do and they belong in Valkenberg, but they are still in our street, Shepherd Way.

It is very easy to get drugs in my street, all the gangsters sell it. The leader gives the senior guys a percentage, which can be money or drugs. The leaders also look after them with clothes and a place to stay. He takes them from the street. You have the merchant or the boss and under him the ‘leadertjies’ and under them the ‘gebruiker’ [user] that sells the drugs on the street. He is called a ‘gebruiker’ [user] because he is used by the leader. Each gang has its own territory and its clients. There is always war between gangs because of territory, you just can’t go sell drugs in another gang’s territory, then someone is going to be killed. There is not a lot of shooting in our street, maybe one a week. But it’s bad in the dangerous areas, like there is a place near where I stay and even the small children get shot when there is a war.

In Shepherd Way we have the Dollar Boys (D$B) and the Hard Livings (HL) gang. There are about 55 gangsters (40 HL and about 15 D$B). Allen is the leader of the DSBs and before him his brother was the leader. They were first part of the American gang. They are not American anymore because they have a British flag now. Allen has 3 houses in Shepherd Way – for him, his parents and his aunt. The DSB are ‘cool cat lighties’, they not violent, they mostly sell drugs. They mostly 28s. They farmboys, they have not been to jail. They protect the community and the community stands by them.
The Hard Livings gang comes from Manenberg and they took over from the Americans. The Americans fled to Rocklands, they were voted out of Shepherd Way by the Hard Livings. The HL sells drugs everywhere in the Cape Flats. HL has most ‘gebruikers’ [users] in Shepherd Way. Bally-tips is the leader of HL and Helas is the ‘leaderjtie’ and their headquarters is called ‘the box’. It’s very dangerous to go there, it is a cul-de-sac off Shepherd Way. Only gangsters can sell drugs and if anyone else sells drugs, they will be attacked.

On Saturday [7 May 2016] three Hard Living gangsters robbed a girl, but it was a wrong girl, she was connected to the Nice Time Kids gang. Her boyfriend is a ‘27’, a big gangster that spent about 10 years in jail. His name is Adie. The number 27 stands for blood and they only kill. So this guy he came from Portlands and asked for his girlfriend’s ring and cell phone from the three HL gangsters from Shepherd Way. The three HL guys (Abbas, 21; Kappadien, 17; and Shafiek, 22) were sleeping in a hokkie, in the backyard of Akeem’s house. Akeem is a HL gangster too. Adie came and shot Abbas, one of the guys that robbed the girl. He was killed at about 4am. The morning after Abbas was shot, the police picked up Kappadien and Shafiek from the road and took them to the HL leader Bally-tips. They did not take them to the police station. The leader gave them a good hiding because they did not protect Abbas, that is their blood and their brother and they ran away when he was shot. The leader gives the police money to leave their block alone, maybe drugs as well and they get it free from the leader. If someone goes to jail and they are guilty, then the police throw their dockets away.

There are too many guns on the street. I can see they carry them in their holsters. That guy Shafiek has a bulletproof vest. The gang leader never walks around, he goes by car. The people are very scared. They don’t let their children play after 6pm outside. Shepherd Way does not have a battlefield so it is a bit safer than other areas. Two months ago, a guy was shot in our road. His name is Nathan. He was walking with an American gangster and he was shot in his arm from the back by mistake.

I know everything about the gangs, but I don’t associate with them. I was with the HL guys in school, we were friends. It’s not about school or home when they became gangsters. It’s about love that they get from the gangs. It’s a friend circle, they become blood brothers. Also gangsters run in the family, all the boys and the uncles join the same gang. If a boy drops out of school, he must be a ‘gebruiker’ [user]. And if he is doing a good job as a ‘gebruiker’ [user] and his family throws him out and he has no place to stay, the leader adopts him and ‘tchappie’ him [puts a tattoo on him]. The tattoo is HL, the name of the gang. He then feels very important and strong. There are now people behind him to take care of him if he gets into trouble.

Drugs and gangs is making the community corrupt, there is too much fighting with each other. But the community stands with each other against the gangs. If their children grow up, they don’t want their children to join the gangs. The gang leaders have respect for the community because if the junior gangsters rob the people, they go to the gang leader and complain. The gang leader then punishes the junior gangsters. The people are scared of the gang leaders and keep away from
them and don’t greet them when they see them. There is a neighbourhood watch that helps to protect the people, they stand in the high crime area like in Shepherd Way by the canal. They are men and women that stand up to protect the people. I know one very strong lady there and she worked in the navy and she is about 50 years old. Not everybody is scared of gangsters. There is a house around the corner by me, they are two ‘tikkies’ or ‘tikmonsters’ (they take tik) and the HL always rob them. They are easy targets because they are ‘tikkies’. ‘tik’ makes you ‘versag’ [relaxed and calm] and it is easy to take advantage of them. They buy the ‘tik’ from the gangsters, they take the ‘tik’ and then they get robbed by the gangsters.

Now the police are very confusing. One policeman stays in the road. I think the gang lords pay the police. Now there is more metro police and law enforcement which is a kind of security system that is paid by government. I feel that the police don’t do their job right. They search people that don’t do drugs. They don’t search the people that do drugs. They search me and I ask them why you don’t go to the drug merchant’s house, they get angry they say keep your mouth and give you one smack. The gangsters shoot at the police or throw stones, then the police can’t take it because the people going to kill them and they are very scared of the gangsters. When you phone the police they don’t come now, they come an hour after the gangsters had done the shooting. My mommy says she will not go to the police she rather ignore it. Once there were 6 big guys that came looking for trouble. My mommy was not at home, she went to a 50th birthday party. These guys came with baseball bats and golf-sticks. They broke my mom’s windows. They attacked us. My mommy did not go to the police but she went straight to the guys because we know the guys. We did not make a case against them because they fixed our windows.

There is sometimes 7 police vans in the street. The police do nothing and the gang-leaders buy them off. They just drive around in their vans. If the police is going to raid, someone tells the leader to hide the drugs away. They search the houses and if they find drugs they take them away but most of the time the police come and there’s nothing. But if they search us and find a knife or dagga you must pay. The sellers are sharp and keep the drugs in the ground, they make their own safe in a wall or a hole in the ground, in the roof, no one can find it. If they see the cops they hide it in their body, in their armpits, in their bum, in the sole of the shoe (a block is cut out and they hide the drugs in there). They used to put it in the flap of their caps but now the police know about that and it is easy to find it there.

Drugs is almost like taking your life. I get so sad. Why you doing this, you killing yourself. I know what it does to them. I maybe tell them why you doing it. They say its problems, family issues, they don’t get attention from their daddies, they do this to get attention. They killing themselves and you don’t feel right when you sit in their company and they doing that. The reason why he does it, is that the people don’t accept him for what he is. One that I know and that I feel sorry for is a ‘moffie’ [derogatory name for a homosexual/gay male]. They always hit him and they think he is not looking after himself. They threw him out. He is staying in a house now where everyone does drugs. He cleans the house and he gives the house people money for drugs. They always take their mommy’s stuff and daddy’s stuff
and sell it for drugs. They work as trolley boys at the shopping centre. All the crew that works there is on whoonga.

There are no girls that are gangsters in Shepherd Way, like in the other places where there are very dangerous girl gangs. The girls here do drugs and some are ‘tikkies’ for a long time and they sleep with the gangsters. Some finished school and some left school for drugs. The gangsters are violent and hit the girls and they scared of the gangsters. If she leaves him, he goes and looks for her and brings her back.

I have friends who are HL gangsters and I feel safe if I walk with them near my house. But outside Shepherd Way, I will not walk with HL gangsters because if the other gangsters see me, they will attack me or kill me. It is ok if the D$B see that I am with a HL guy. The D$B are cool guys they don’t look for trouble. D$B mostly smoke weed, they get high. They get it from Philippi – it is grown there. We have about three groups of rastas [followers of the Rastafarian religion] in Shepherd Way. Some of them are against the gangsters. They were gangsters, now they hiding under the dreads, and turn into rastas, and they don’t want to die like the gangsters on the street. They don’t eat meat, they don’t eat much salt in their food, and some do not drink. People like the rastas, they not rude to people, they respect people. Dagga makes you relaxed, your eyes go small and red and you speak slowly, everything is slow and they always hungry.

The gangsters smoke weed but they put buttons on the weed. It is like a tablet and you crash it and take a scoop and it is called ‘stick a cream’, you light it and pull. It’s called a ‘button pipe’. You make the pipe with the top of a beer bottle; they make a diamond out of paper. It is a filter for the pipe. This is smoked differently; they pull and they hold and they pull again and hold and this is held for long and then they release the smoke very slowly, then they get a feeling that the button is working. They must sit because they can’t walk or stand. Many fall. They don’t get violent after a button pipe, they get calm.

Buttons is playing a big role in Shepherd Way. They can kill you for buttons. You get different kinds of buttons, ‘lifestyle’ is the best button, because it is most expensive, about R100 or you can buy half a button. Boss is R50 but not so strong. I think they make the Boss in Shepherd Way. ‘tik’ makes you high. The buttons is a downer. You can’t sleep with tik. The button and dagga helps to make them sleep. Most people that take ‘tik’ also take button or dagga. My father used to smoke buttons and dagga, but now he only smokes dagga after he got very sick.

They get alcohol from the shebeens [illegal tavern/pub/bar], there are three in Shepherd Way. They sell mostly beers. People run the shebeen in their houses, not the gangsters. The people don’t allow the gangsters to sell drugs in the shebeen because the police can come and close them down. They have a license for the shebeen and they obey the law and have certain times to open and to close.

There is no coloured area I am going to feel safe in because it is full of gangsters and drugs. All these years there were gangsters. But the gangsters from the old school had pangas, knives, batons. No guns. Now these gangsters today they don’t protect the community. They rob their own community. It is different now. They not
like the old school gangsters. They were good. They can’t compare. They had respect, they only fight with other gangs. Now they are very young, young blood. There are boys who are 10, 11 and 12 years old in the gang. You can read all about it in The Voice and the Son. To know the story, I read both the papers. How people get killed? Who killed the people? We read there of other gangs in Mitchell’s plain like the Dixie Boys, Fancy Boys, Mongrels, Farm boys (28s), Ghetto Boys. The Dixie Boys from Mitchell’s Plain go shoot in Manenberg. No one will know them in Manenberg. HL from Manenberg come to Mitchell’s Plain to shoot. The leaders have the guns and after the gangsters shoot, they return the guns. If they shoot someone dead, they party with drinks and drugs. They can get up to R70 000 (if you shoot a leader). The gang will give you the money. We read about it in the Son/Voice. In Hanover Park last week we heard of a 13-year-old boy shot by the gangsters, they mistook him for a gangster, there was a drive-by and he was killed. Drive by is common now. Most of the killings are drive-by. It can happen anytime, if they drugged, they do it anytime.

It makes me very angry when I see how we live and how the whites are so happy. They don’t have problems. They bring up their kids well. They don’t use swearwords on their children like us. We are not ANC, we are DA. ANC is doing a lot of stuff. The government is corrupt. Like the president’s house is very expensive. He could have given the money to Shepherd Way for the poor people, who live and sleep outside. Make the place safe and close the place with electric fence so that the other gangsters can’t come in and make trouble. Maybe give us a security system to limit access. We have a park next to the mosque. Children play soccer there and there are swings. But, the gangsters are all day there, smoking drugs, drinking, selling dagga and the place is full of broken bottles. How can the children be there when it is not safe? So where can the children play? The small kids stand in the passages between the houses and some of the kids who are about 11 years old smoke dagga.

It is good that someone knows what is going on in my community. It is ‘kwaai’, cool, number 1 to give my story. I trusted you, I know you, you can do something with my story. I enjoyed telling you the story, I like you to know what is going on with the gangs in the Cape Flats. If you drive there, maybe it won’t be safe for you as an outsider. They are my friends and they won’t come to me and attack me, but you are a new face. They will rob you, they will take everything. They don’t know you. It is like you coming to see what is happening here and you will go and tell the gangsters in another area what is going on Shepherd Way.

**DISCUSSION**

Brenton’s story can be considered as a first-hand account of the experiences with drug abuse and gangsterism on the Cape Flats. It provided an opportunity for a young man to share his concerns and interests. His story, demonstrating the importance of conversation and open dialogue, is embedded in an appreciation of the importance of the Cape Flats context. The researcher provided a safe space for an ongoing conversation about what Brenton experienced in his street, Shepherd Way, Mitchell’s Plain. What helped him open up to the researcher when he had never done this before was the article the researcher wrote in 2016 for the Cape Times titled: *Gangs a tempting home to unhappy teens*, which he had read. He described the space, the university room
where the interviews took place, as relaxing and pleasant and it provided him with a sense of escape. He also noted that the researcher trusted him and assured him of confidentiality. It is important that he chose to come along and was not forced; it’s a different kind of relationship to a teacher or his parent.

The story aligns well with the contemporary debates around the drug trade in the Western Cape and Pinnock (2016) considers the Cape Flats as ‘gang town’, one of the most dangerous and noticeable across the country. A large number of drug addicts, gangs and violent incidents, especially in certain suburbs, have steadily exacerbated the seriousness of the situation, leading to international headlines, violent confrontation and mass civil society protest. The drug trade and the accompanying development of organised crime networks have been a constant problem for the government and citizens living in areas where organised crime has taken hold (Goga, 2014:1-18). One of the most reliable sources of information is The South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU); however, their data is unfortunately restricted to people that attend the drug and alcohol treatment centres nationally. SACENDU’s statistics do not include drug abusers who do not attend the treatment centres, hence, it can be deduced that the figures are far higher than those on which actually reported. According to the statistics released by SACENDU in November 2015, the profile of users seeking rehabilitation in Cape Town and their drug use can be described as follows: The highest number of patients under 20 years are in the Western Cape (3444); Methamphetamine (tik) remained the most common primary drug among patients (35%); Poly-substance abuse remains high with 44 percent of patients indicating more than one substance of abuse; 17 percent of patients have cannabis/mandrax (methaqualone) ‘white-pipe’ combination as their primary or secondary drug of abuse; Cannabis is reported as the primary substance of abuse by the majority of patients who are younger than 20 years; Approximately three percent of patients have cocaine as a drug of abuse; mostly, heroin is smoked, but five percent of patients with heroin as their primary drug of abuse report injection use; Heroin is used as a secondary substance of abuse by 13 percent of patients; and 40 percent of patients suffering from mental health problems were found in the Western Cape (SACENDU, 2015: 1-2). There remains a paucity of research on drug abuse and its influence on mental health in the Cape Flats. Brenton’s story also refers to the mental state of the gangsters and indicates that they belong to Valkenberg, a mental institution in the city.

Important words that Brenton uses for the camaraderie that the young people share with the gangsters are ‘brotherhood’ and ‘blood’. The gangs provide these youngsters with a sense of belonging in a context that lacks recreation facilities, parks, efficient public transport, nature trails and trees, coffee shops and amenities that youth in advantaged communities take for granted. Even the park in Shepherd Way is taken over as a meeting place and cannabis smoking den by the gangsters, preventing the children from using the only play space available in that street. An important factor here is the geographical spatialisation of apartheid with the Cape Flats being barren, dry and windswept. Pinnock (1996: 13) argues that a key reason for the youth to identify so easily with street gangs and to experiment with drugs is that the association fulfils the need for a rite of passage from childhood to adolescence and adulthood; “they create structures and rituals that work for them, carve their names into the ghetto walls and the language of popular culture, arm themselves with fearsome weapons and demand at gun-point what they cannot win with individual respect”. Dissel (1997: 408) agrees that the gangs provide the youth with opportunities for economic improvement and for gaining a sense of power, acceptance and purpose. It is evident in the story that the main activity of the gangs in Shepherd Way revolves around the supply and trade of drugs. Once the young members become addicted to drugs, they
turn to petty crime, such as burglaries and robbery in their community to sustain their drug habits.

Brenton articulates the injustice of the divided and racialised society in a simple, yet profound manner – ‘The whites are very happy’ and ‘there is no coloured area that is safe’. The current crisis with regard to drug abuse and gangsterism in the Cape Flats cannot be separated from the history of forced removals of settled communities, relocation according to race in areas far from the central business district (Cape Town) and dispossession. Pinnock (2016) maintains that gangs on the Cape Flats are the result of groups of young men attempting to recreate social networks or ‘brotherhoods’, after the Group Areas Act tore communities apart. The Cape Flats was not spared the brutality of the apartheid government – significant historical moments are the Trojan Horse killings in Athlone, the police behaviour in Rocklands and the internecine war in Crossroads. The ruthlessness of male hegemony under apartheid was copied in distorted patterns of masculinity in the form of gangsterism, violence against women and drug abuse. Construction of balanced and mature masculinity was imperilled: the brutality of paternalist Afrikaner Nationalist behaviour was mirrored in male gang brutality. Standing (2005: 10) sets out the emergence of this dysfunctional, unfeminine imagery of male dominance: “gangsterism is a culture of extreme masculinity and gross disregard for women, which is expressed through celebration of rape and exploitation of women for the sex industry.” Reckson and Becker (2005:114), maintain that social ills flourish in a climate of desperation and suffering. The gangster or drug lord presents an image of glamour for boys to mimic and girls to idolise. Patterns of under-age pregnancy are closely aligned to such models of violent male dominance.

Boys from such disrupted households, full of the anger and humiliation they observe in their parents’ unjust predicament and poverty, form gangs to demonstrate a degree of manly defiance and pride in their desolate communities (Chetty, 2015:58). They copy the kind of male brutality that forced their parents out of their centuries-old social habitus. An identity based on anger and cruelty invites many other aspects of criminality. This culture of anger, violence and criminal behaviour among the younger boys has been created by injustices – past and present. Hamllall (2014: 215) investigated masculinity at a violence-ridden Cape Flats high school, concluding that researchers need to develop new caring discourses and practices which counter the hegemony of violent discourses. Social and individual restitution may be a way forward for many communities where children are hungry for long hours, and where conditions make them easy prey for the drug lords who pay children to serve as ‘runners’ (the ‘gebruikers’ [users] in Brenton’s story) for the sale of drugs. Gangsters recruit poor children as novice gangsters who have to prove themselves by attacking peers or younger boys (Cooper, 2009:2).

REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION
This story provided a deeper understanding of the current discussions around drug abuse and gangsterism in the Cape Flats through Brenton’s story. A single participant narrated his experience of a society deliberately structured to deny a group of people (coloured according to the racial categorisation of apartheid) the entitlements, privileges, and opportunities for participation that are available to people from advantaged communities. The story provided an opportunity for Brenton to deconstruct the master narrative and create a counter-story. In any master narrative (such as policies, programmes or scholarly research), it is valuable to reflect on how the experience of subordinated people is represented and who speaks for the subaltern (Spivak, 2005:475). How is their experience made invisible, minimised, trivialised, and/or distorted? Love (2004:244) questions how the experience of subordinated people can be made
visible and how might the recounting of lived experience be different if done by the youth from the affected communities.

The pain and suffering experienced in the Cape Flats was structurally induced by the apartheid regime and reinforced by the capitalist democracy of the current government that has abandoned the plight of poor communities with its neoliberal agenda. It is, therefore, incumbent on social science researchers to embrace a social justice imperative by building a platform of committed and relevant research that provides traction to communities and activists together with valid data for advocacy to change conditions. An important step in this research agenda is to decolonise methods of data collection and to understand that academics cannot do research on, about or for the Cape Flats communities, but they should research and engage with the community. The story in this article highlights the fact that there is a good deal of wisdom in the community and the external researcher needs to legitimate that data. The imperative should be to listen to the voices of the disadvantaged people so that academics, criminologists and social workers can engage with the lived experiences of people living in poverty, oppression and injustice. Weis and Fine (2012:173) advise the committed researcher to engage with circuits of dispossession and resistance. Youth are pushed out of ineffective, disadvantaged and unequal schools through the flawed testing system and poor quality teaching and learning and remain vulnerable and illiterate. This has great economic consequences for them, their families and their communities. Brenton’s story revealed the criminal justice consequences he faces. Drug addiction has health and mental consequences. Weis and Fine’s (2012:173) circuit of dispossession is an appropriate lens through which to understand the circuited consequences of poor people’s lives and the fact that researchers cannot study gangsterism and drug abuse in one silo. The second kind of circuit that researchers need to further investigate is the relationship between low-income communities and wealthy communities in the divided and racialised South Africa. And the third way to use circuits, is to argue that the state, academics, researchers and privileged people need to see research with disadvantaged communities as an invitation to understand their responsibility and to get engaged in work that halts the disposition of young people from education, health care, and criminal justice.

Researchers need to start telling stories from the ground and it is these voices that must assist and support social movements and policy change. For example, there is a need for an anti-prohibition approach to drug abuse. Prohibition over the past five decades has not lessened the crisis, the jails are overflowing and the communities are suffering. Prohibition has strengthened the illegal trade of drugs and has reinforced the power of the drug merchants. The result is a great deal of suffering among young people and whole communities, such as the Cape Flats. The research agenda should be focused on a disruption of the current thinking around prohibition because it has not worked. Hari (2016:250) notes: “We don’t see a drug addict as a criminal anymore. He’s someone that needs help. And everyone thinks it. Then they consider themselves sick people – they don’t consider themselves to be against society. It’s a big change. They are not marginalised. They are similar to a traffic accident. They are not on the other side of the line. They are regular citizens. They have a problem”.

The interruption of this injustice will need a collaborative approach for research and advocacy with academics, community organisations, schools, prisons, police and the state. More stories, such as Brenton’s are needed to reveal greater clarity on how exposure of youth to antisocial learning in gang and drug subcultures and how the vacuity of economic opportunity in high poverty areas provide the ideal environment for drug abuse and violent gangs.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Hari, J. 2015. Chasing the scream: The first and last days of the war on drugs. London: Bloomsbury.


