



Article

Community Solutions for Community Problems: Reflections on a Civic Organisation Colloquium for Resolving Gangsterism in the Northern Areas of Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Theodore Petrus ^{1,*} and Desira Davids ²

¹ Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa

² Helenvale Youth Enrichment Program (HYEP), Gqeberha 6020, South Africa

* Correspondence: petruts@ufs.ac.za

Abstract: In July 2022, the authors had the opportunity to facilitate, observe and participate in a community colloquium of civic organisations based in the Northern Areas of Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), South Africa. The main purpose of the colloquium was to bring together civic organisations to discuss the challenge of gang subcultures in the Northern Areas, and how to address it. This article is a reflection on the colloquium, and the insights gained. As well as being the first time that a colloquium of this nature had taken place in the Northern Areas, it was the result of the authors' ongoing research on gang subcultures in the community since 2013. Using participant observation, an engaged participatory action research (PAR) approach, and focus group discussions, the article provides some of the results that the colloquium contributed to the study. The results revealed that community-based strategies to address gangsterism would be more sustainable and effective in the long term.



Citation: Petrus, Theodore, and Desira Davids. 2023. Community Solutions for Community Problems: Reflections on a Civic Organisation Colloquium for Resolving Gangsterism in the Northern Areas of Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Social Sciences* 12: 298. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12050298>

Academic Editors: Haorui Wu, Jeff Karabanow, Jean M. Hughes and Catherine Leviten-Reid

Received: 7 March 2023

Revised: 4 May 2023

Accepted: 7 May 2023

Published: 11 May 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords: gangsterism; gang subcultures; Gqeberha; South Africa; participatory action research (PAR)

1. Introduction

In the last few years, prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a burgeoning of international scholarship on the prevalence and challenges of gangs in various regional contexts (see, for example, [Stephenson 2015](#); [Brotherton 2015](#); [Storrod and Densley 2017](#); [Pyrooz et al. 2016](#); [Hazlehurst and Hazlehurst 2018](#); [Pyrooz and Decker 2019](#)). However, the COVID-19 era seems to have done little to diminish the proliferation and activities of gang subcultures worldwide.

South Africa is not exempt from the negative consequences wrought by gang subcultures, having had its fair share of the impact of gangs both historically and in the present context. Before the onset of COVID-19, gang violence and related criminal activities already posed serious challenges to safety and security in affected communities and exposed the inadequacies of existing punitive approaches ([Jonas 2015](#); [Davids 2017](#); [Petrus et al. 2022](#)). However, in the COVID-19 context, addressing gangs and gang subcultures has been made more complex due to the unforeseen challenges of the pandemic. As with many other countries, when the pandemic struck in 2020, the South African government's response was to initiate a nationwide lockdown, utilising both the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to enforce lockdown regulations and maintain public order ([Petrus et al. 2022](#)). However, studies on gang activity during the lockdown revealed that gang subcultures continued to thrive despite the restrictions ([Stanyard 2020](#)).

In addition to the Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province, one of the most seriously gang-affected regions in the country is the area commonly known as the Northern Areas, located in the city of Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) in the Eastern Cape Province.

Approximately a year after the onset of COVID-19, a report published in 2021 revealed that Gqeberha (Nelson Mandela Bay) was second only to Cape Town as one of the most violent cities in South Africa ([BusinessTech 2021](#)). A significant percentage of that violence was attributed to gang-related violence and homicides in the city. While the lockdown measures in the city had some impact on gang violence, throughout the lockdown period and subsequent to it, gang violence continued unabated. In the most recent case, at the time of writing in mid-January 2023, gang violence in the Northern Areas resulted in the deaths of five people in five separate gang-related shootings, over a period of two days ([Marais 2023a](#)). This, as well as other recent shootings in the city, led to the National Minister of Police, Bheki Cele, expressing his ‘concern at the spike in violent crime’ ([Marais 2023b](#)).

In this article, the authors present some insights and recommendations emanating from a community colloquium that occurred in the Northern Areas of Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), in the Nelson Mandela Bay metro in the Eastern Cape. The colloquium was one of the outcomes that grew from an ongoing investigation into gang subcultures in the community. Utilising an interdisciplinary Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, the authors contextualise and present the findings from the colloquium. These findings are then used to support the authors’ assertion that community solutions, borne from a participatory approach, are the best and most viable approach to identifying sustainable, non-punitive strategies for addressing the challenge of gangs in the identified community.

2. Gang Subcultures in Gqeberha

The phenomenon of gangsterism, and the subcultures that underpin it, remain an ongoing challenge in the Northern Areas of Gqeberha, formerly known as Port Elizabeth, in the Nelson Mandela metro in the province of the Eastern Cape. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, gang-related activities presented a serious threat to community safety and security, as suggested in several news reports about gang violence in the area (see, for example, [Capa 2018](#); [Paulse 2018](#); [Sain 2018](#); [Petrus and Uwah 2019](#)). After the emergence of COVID-19, the government mandated lockdowns seemed to have little effect on gang subcultures and activities in the Northern Areas. A study carried out by [Thomas et al. \(2020\)](#) in Nelson Mandela Bay revealed that gang violence and criminal governance continued, even under lockdown. Furthermore, in 2021, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) sent a delegation to the area to investigate the phenomenon, where it discovered that gangsterism had become a popular subculture, with many youths, particularly males, glamorising the gang lifestyle ([Daniels 2021](#)). This was supported by various media reports that suggested the thriving of gang subcultures and activities under lockdown ([Ncokazi 2020](#); [Seleka 2020](#); [TimesLive 2021](#)).

How is gangsterism understood or defined in this context? The international scholarship on gangsterism has grappled with the theoretical and methodological challenges involved in defining the phenomenon for decades. For example, [Klein and Maxson \(2006, p. 4\)](#) argued that defining gangs was ‘the stickiest one that gang scholars have had to confront . . . since Frederic Thrasher’s pioneering efforts in Chicago’. These scholars thus advocated for the use of what they called a ‘consensus nominal definition’ of gangs. In this definition, the gang is defined as ‘any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity’ ([Klein and Maxson 2006, p. 4](#)).

In the South African context, which is the one that concerns us here, defining gangs has also been varied, thereby suggesting that a uniform definition is not possible. For example, [Pinnock \(1997\)](#) defined gangs as being composed of groups of youths who lacked guidance and mentorship in making the transition from childhood to adulthood. On the other hand, [Kinnes \(2000\)](#) and [Petrus \(2013\)](#) defined South African gangs as dynamic entities, capable of transforming and adapting to changing conditions. This adaptable and dynamic character is what has enabled South African gangs to be as pervasive as they are, specifically in the communities where they are most prevalent. Perhaps the one aspect that most scholars would agree on when defining gangs is their propensity towards criminal activity. Hence,

regardless of the level of sophistication of the gang formation, it is typically defined as a gang due to its association with criminality and its negative impact on safety and security in the community.

While gangsterism in and of itself is a major challenge, it also gives rise to various other challenges that potentially threaten the safety and security of residents and communities. Sporadic incidences of gang-related violence result in an increase in crimes such as murder, attempted murder, assault with grievous bodily harm, burglaries and illegal possession of firearms and drug-related cases. Statistics on the phenomenon of gangsterism are not readily available on the statistical records system of the South African Police Service (SAPS) but are compiled at the affected police stations for operational purposes. According to a study conducted by the Helenvale Urban Renewal Programme (HURP), the first gang was formed in the Northern Areas in 1968 and named the 'Panga Boys' (HURP 2011, p. 2). Subsequent forced relocations from various Port Elizabeth suburbs declared as "Whites Only" areas to areas such as Helenvale and Schauderville in the Northern Areas further contributed to the increase in gangs. Six years after the proclamation of the first municipal housing scheme, there were already five established gangs operating in the Northern Areas (HURP 2011). Since then, gangsterism has continued to grow from generation to generation, contributing substantially to the stigmatisation of the Northern Areas, infamous for their gangs and for high levels of crime, poverty, unemployment and low levels of education (HURP 2011). The impact includes territorial constraints on certain people, such as not being able to move around in areas where rival gangs are 'in control' of those specific areas, and family members being targeted due to their siblings' involvement in particular gangs.

With most of the focus on gangsterism placed on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape, very little attention, apart from the local media in Gqeberha, has been placed on gang subcultures in the Northern Areas. However, the impact of these subcultures cannot be overestimated. In the crime statistics for the second quarter of 2022, the Eastern Cape accounted for the highest murder rate in the country at 19.7 murders per 100,000 people (BusinessTech 2022). Furthermore, most murders occurred in public spaces, such as on the street, and involved firearms as the main weapon used (Charter 2022). Given the prevalence of gang violence, the statistics strongly suggest gang-related shootings as arguably the most significant factor contributing to the province's high murder rate.

Since most of the gang-related crimes and violence are perpetrated in the Northern Areas, the question arises as to why this may be the case. There are both historical and contemporary factors that have played a role in the prevalence and proliferation of gang subcultures in the Northern Areas. Several scholars, including Olivier and Cunningham (2004), Jonas (2015), Davids (2017), Petrus and Uwah (2019) and Petrus (2021a, 2021b) have expounded on the prevailing context of gang subcultures in Gqeberha. A brief outline of the underlying contextual factors is sketched below.

2.1. The Historical Context of the Northern Areas

There are various significant historical factors that have contributed to the current social, economic and other challenges affecting the Northern Areas. It is thus necessary to provide a brief outline of this historical context.

Similar to what was the case in the other main urban centres in South Africa under the Apartheid government, the Northern Areas was formed largely as a result of the forced removals of non-White people (specifically Coloureds and Indians) from areas designated as "Whites Only". The Group Areas Act (1950) legally enabled the government to remove non-Whites from designated areas reserved for White people. In Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha), Coloured people were removed from areas such as South End, North End and Westdene, away from the urban centre to the Northern outskirts. This new 'Coloured demarcated residential area' (Napedia 2022; Petrus 2021a, p. 470; 2021b, p. 86) became known as the Northern suburbs, or Northern Areas, and it is here where most Coloured people in the Nelson Mandela Bay metro reside. Davids (2017, p. 1), citing a study done by the Helenvale Urban Renewal Programme (HURP 2011, p. 2), indicates that the first gang

formation in the Northern Areas, the 'Panga Boys', was formed in 1968. However, it was when forced removals of Coloured people to the Northern Areas increased, specifically the communities of Helenvale and Schauderville, that gangs began to significantly increase in number.

In many ways, the historical context of the Northern Areas mirrors that of many other Coloured communities created by Group Areas legislation. Many of these communities shared the same characteristics of under-development, high unemployment and various social and economic challenges. As stated by Davids (2017, p. 26) and Jonas (2015, pp. 13–14), gang subcultures find the ideal breeding ground in communities characterised by social dysfunction and disintegration. In places such as the Northern Areas in the Eastern Cape and the Cape Flats in the Western Cape, these areas of dysfunction and disintegration were the direct result of the forced removals and displacement of Coloured people. In order to understand why Coloured people were forcibly removed from their original homes and dumped in areas that lacked even the most basic infrastructural development necessary for human habitation, it is also necessary to understand the Group Areas legislation in relation to another piece of Apartheid legislation, namely the Population Registration Act of 1950. Many regard this legislation as one of the cornerstone pieces of Apartheid era social engineering. The Population Registration Act aimed to classify South African citizens according to presumed racial and/or ethnic characteristics. Consequently, the 'Coloured' category was created for persons of 'mixed race' who were not White, Black/African or Asian, as defined by the Apartheid government (Petrus 2021b, p. 86; Petrus and Isaacs-Martin 2012). This legislation had a significant impact on the symbology and meanings of Coloured identity, which had been emerging since the nineteenth century (Petrus and Isaacs-Martin 2012; Adhikari 2002, 2004, 2008). A major part of this impact could be observed in the historical Coloured identity dynamics, some of which endure into the present. Several scholars have alluded to different dimensions of these dynamics, including stigmatisation and stereotyping of Coloured identity (Du Pre 1992, 1994; Adhikari 2002, 2004, 2008; Petrus and Isaacs-Martin 2012), the liminal or ambiguous position of Coloured people from the nineteenth century, into the Apartheid period and even post-Apartheid (Du Pre 1992, 1994; Adhikari 2002; Petrus and Uwah 2022), as well as the question of belonging (Petrus and Uwah 2022).

2.2. Contemporary Factors Fuelling Gang Subcultures in the Northern Areas

The above historical factors have impacted on contemporary factors that directly and indirectly contribute to not only the emergence of gang subcultures in the Northern Areas, but also their pervasiveness and longevity. The contemporary factors affecting the prevalence of gang subcultures in the Northern Areas can be grouped into political, social, cultural and systemic issues that began in the past, but endure into the present.

We have already alluded to the impact of the colonial and Apartheid contexts on Coloured people in South Africa generally, and in the Northern Areas of Qkeberha specifically. Post-1994, regarded generally as the period succeeding the formal ending of Apartheid, some of the issues of the past have been inherited by post-Apartheid generations of Coloured communities. In places such as the Northern Areas, many Coloured people still feel that they are disadvantaged, and that while under a White government they were 'not white enough', but now, under an African led government, they are 'not black enough' (Adhikari 2004). The problems created by forced removals under the Group Areas Act (1950) still impact Northern Areas communities, including lack of adequate development and even the provision of basic services. In similar communities, such as those in the Cape Flats in Cape Town (Western Cape), gangs have become 'institutions of provision' (Petrus 2013; Kinnes 2000), filling the vacuum left by the failure of "legitimate" institutions to provide basic resources to communities. Furthermore, these communities also experience a general marginalisation and stigmatisation, both from within and from without. Most media reports of the Northern Areas tend to be negative, and focus mainly

on issues of crime, gangsterism and other social challenges affecting the community (see, for example, [Daniels 2021](#); [Sain 2018](#); [Capa 2018](#); [Paulse 2018](#)).

In addition, education and schooling also suffer from the effects of marginalisation and exclusion, even becoming fertile breeding grounds for gang recruitment activities and crime. [Petrus \(2017, 2021c\)](#), for example, has described the prevailing subcultures that facilitate the involvement of young males in gangsterism, and their recruitment into gangs. Some of the reasons for this include that the schools themselves are neglected, underfunded and unsafe ([Petrus 2021c](#)). There is also a high dropout rate of school-going youths, due in part to high incidences of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) ([Ellis 2016](#)). Consequently, some of these youths, having no other recourse to further their education, become involved in gangs. They are also attracted to the perceived lifestyle of gang leaders and members ([Daniels 2021](#)).

It is within this contemporary context of the Northern Areas that we find the underlying factors fuelling gang subcultures. The typical features found in a marginalised and vulnerable community, including substance abuse, domestic violence, fragmented families, poor living conditions, crime and violence, all contribute to gangsterism. Gangs provide protection, as well as a place of belonging for youths who have inherited the identity challenges of the past, reinforced by the continuing marginalisation and stigmatisation of their community. This also causes them to use gangs as a form of rebellion against the legitimate state institutions that not only fail to provide for them, but also reinforce their stigmatisation and marginalisation with heavy-handed, ‘iron fist’ approaches to addressing gang-related crime ([Petrus et al. 2022](#)).

3. Methodological Considerations: The Participatory Action Research (PAR) Approach

The overarching theme of this discussion is community solutions for community problems. It is based on some of the findings from the research carried out by the authors on community solutions to the challenge of gang subcultures. Hence, the most viable and effective methodological approach to achieve this data was predominantly based on a PAR approach.

According to [Babbie and Mouton \(2001, p. 314\)](#), PAR can be understood as ‘one of the most widely used research approaches that is characterized by a participatory element.’ As such, it is an approach that has become synonymous with what [Schensul \(2010\)](#) referred to as ‘engaged research’, ‘community-based research’ or ‘third sector science’. One of the key features of this approach is its value in drawing on theoretical and methodological insights from an interdisciplinary perspective. This makes PAR ideal for addressing complex social challenges that are more than merely an intellectual exercise. It enables a holistic approach that aims to address complex issues from multiple angles and incorporates both scholarly and community perspectives in addressing these issues.

PAR is a research method that involves researchers and participants working together to identify a problem and develop a research-based solution. Hence, it focuses on social change that promotes democracy and challenges inequality; is context-specific, often targeted on the needs of a particular group; is an iterative cyclical form of research, action, and reflection; and often seeks to free participants to have an increased awareness of their situation in order to take meaningful action.

The Centre for Community and Civic Engagement defines Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a framework for conducting research and generating knowledge centred on the belief that those who are most impacted by research should be the ones taking the lead in framing the questions, the design, methods, and the modes of analysis of such research projects. The framework is rooted in the belief that there is value in both traditionally recognised knowledge, such as scholarship generated by university-based researchers, and historically de-legitimised knowledge, such as knowledge generated within marginalised communities ([Centre for Community and Civic Engagement 2022](#)).

This approach is therefore ideal for this specific research project, as the study is focused on a specific phenomenon in a specific community-based context, namely the Northern

Areas of Gqeberha, and seeks to identify community-based potential solutions for how to address it. Its focus is also on the researchers and community members working together to identify the problems and challenges Northern Areas communities are grappling with and, through dialogue and research collaboration, coming up with potential research-based solutions. The Northern Areas communities are the targeted population since it is these communities that are most affected and impacted by the phenomenon under study.

There are several PAR principles, as espoused by [Babbie and Mouton \(2001\)](#), that underpinned the methodological approach used:

1. The researchers as change agents and facilitators, rather than experts.
2. The importance of participation and collaboration from, and with, the community.
3. The democratisation of the research relationship.
4. The inclusion of local experiences, assets and knowledge.
5. Empowerment.
6. Generating action-oriented knowledge (solutions).

Each of these principles is fundamental to the aims, objectives and outcomes of the study. The community dialogues and colloquium represent the physical and practical manifestation of the above PAR principles, as applied within this context. As we show below, this approach enabled the solutions for the challenges caused by gang subcultures in the Northern Areas to come from the community itself.

3.1. *The Helenvale and Community Dialogues (2018 to 2022)*

In May 2018, the authors were invited to participate in a think-tank initiative organised by the Mandela Bay Development Agency (MBDA). The initiative was called the Helenvale Dialogues, and it focused on scenario planning of what the community of Helenvale would or could look like by 2030. Helenvale was selected as the focal point because of its status as the centre of social challenges in the Northern Areas, which included it being the centre of gangsterism and related crimes. The fundamental basis of the initiative was that if viable strategies and solutions could be created to effectively address the challenges in Helenvale, then this could have an appositional knock-on effect for the rest of the Northern Areas as well. According to the CEO of the MBDA, Ashraf Adam, the think-tank

‘took on a process of scenario building informed by conversations and dialogues constituted primarily by academia, specialists and development practitioners. The meeting gave significant focus to the most challenging issues facing the community, long-term interventions in combination with short-term quick responses and actions.’ ([Mandela Bay Development Agency 2018](#), n.p.)

Of greater importance was the idea that the initiative was not envisaged to be a “talk shop” but had to generate solutions and strategies that would be sustainable, effective and have a meaningful impact on the future of Helenvale. This was supported by the statement made by Adam, who articulated that ‘The scenarios and strategies to be formulated [during the Dialogues] must make sense, foster internal consistency, be robust and informed by evidence-based research, experiences, intuitive logic as well as supported by expert opinions.’ ([Mandela Bay Development Agency 2018](#), n.p.). Hence, delegates and stakeholders who were invited to participate in the discussions included development practitioners linked to the MBDA, metro officials and policymakers, members of the South African Police Service (SAPS), the local media and academics familiar with the most pressing issues affecting the community.

The Helenvale Dialogues event was the starting point for the two community dialogues that led to the colloquium in 2022. The first community dialogue occurred in December 2021, and was held at the Helenvale Resource Centre. The event was organised as an in-person event, as well as being livestreamed via social media in an effort to reach as many people as possible, and to provide an opportunity for maximum community participation. The dialogue was attended by several community leaders and activists, as well as ordinary residents from the Helenvale community. Unfortunately, key stakeholders and role-players, including the metro leadership, as well as representatives of the South

African Police Service (SAPS) and Community Policing Forum (CPF), were absent. The panel that led the dialogue consisted of the authors, as well as two researchers familiar with the challenges facing the community.

The discussions were based on policy briefs that were presented and facilitated by the authors. The briefs outlined the context of gang subcultures both prior to and following the COVID-19 pandemic. They specifically focused on the impact of the national lockdowns on gang activities since 2020 and, through in-depth discussions with community stakeholders, the authors provided some recommendations on how the community could address the issues.

The following were some of the key findings/themes that emerged from the community dialogues:

3.2. Risks to Safety and Security Pre-Pandemic Continued to Be Risks during the Pandemic, despite the Lockdowns

The above was supported not only by literature (see [Thomas et al. 2020](#)), but also by local news reports, as well as anecdotal evidence from the community.

3.3. Continued Stigmatisation and Marginalisation of the Community Exacerbated Gang Violence and Crime

This issue emerged in relation to community perceptions about the poor socio-economic conditions in the Northern Areas, as well as the neglect of basic services. Furthermore, the negative representation of the Northern Areas in the media entrenched stigmas and negative perceptions of the community. Concerns were even raised about the incompleteness of much-needed development projects due to fears and anxieties around safety, and that gangs allegedly sabotaged development infrastructure.

3.4. Building Community Capacity, Pride and Resilience

As a counter to the previous challenge of community stigmatisation, participants raised the need to build community capacity, pride and resilience. This was closely tied to the wider context of Coloured identity and, as mentioned earlier, the need to change negative perceptions and stereotypes of Coloured identity.

3.5. The Use of Punitive Approaches to Address Gangsterism Remain Ineffective and Unsustainable

There were two reasons cited for the inadequacy of punitive anti-gang approaches. The first was that these measures inadequately addressed the symptoms of a deeper issue. The second reason was that the community felt that punitive approaches were far more reactive than proactive. Consequently, the continuation of gang violence and related crimes during the lockdown exposed the need for more holistic, community-based intervention strategies.

3.6. Factors Mitigating Gang Involvement Should Be Prioritised

A feeling was expressed that too much emphasis was placed on gang-related crimes and the factors that lead to gang involvement. This is, in part, what led to the overemphasis on punitive interventions outlined above. Hence, the community, in support of the arguments made by [Davids \(2017\)](#), indicated that more attention should be paid to the mitigating factors of gang involvement. If these factors could be identified and strengthened it could help to develop a more proactive approach, preventing youths from becoming involved in gangs in the first place.

3.7. Strengthening of Key Social Institutions

A final theme focused on the restoration and strengthening of key social institutions, such as the family and religious organisations, in order to promote moral regeneration. While the focus in the community was on gangsterism, it was also recognised that this, along with other social problems such as gender-based violence (GBV), high rates of teenage pregnancies and other issues, were indicative of the need for an overarching moral

regeneration. Thus, those social institutions traditionally responsible for moral education and socialisation needed to be strengthened and supported.

The insights and findings from the two community dialogues provided the foundation and impetus for the next step in the process, namely the community colloquium. The next part of the discussion outlines the context of the colloquium, as well as some of the main findings.

4. Background and Context of the Northern Areas Civic Organisation Colloquium (NACOC) in 2022

As alluded to earlier, the historical and contemporary factors that have created the context for gang subcultures to thrive in the Northern Areas are one of the contextual factors that led to the NACOC in 2022. The two other contextual factors were the three dialogues that took place between 2018 and 2022, as well as the authors' engaged research on gang subcultures since 2013. While the dialogues focused specifically on the community of Helenvale, due to its recognition as the centre of gang activity in the Northern Areas, the very same social and other challenges that gave rise to gangsterism in Helenvale also affect the other Northern Areas communities. This is evidenced by the occurrence of gang-related crimes in these communities as well (see, for example, [Montsho 2022](#); [McCain 2021](#)). Furthermore, with Helenvale being the centre of gangsterism, gangs are able to move from Helenvale to other sections of the Northern Areas, as well as throughout the metro.

The colloquium came to fruition based on information gathered from various sources including research articles, the ongoing research project of the researchers since 2013, as well as the MBDA's *Helenvale Dialogues* in 2018, and the two community dialogues in December 2021 and May 2022, where key stakeholders were invited to give their inputs and views on how the phenomenon of gangsterism and gang subcultures impacted their work in their various fields and professions, specifically in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. From these dialogues, it became apparent that an engagement with a broader audience was needed to capture the views and experiences on the impact of the gang phenomenon on the work done by civil organisations in the Northern Areas, especially given the prevalence and impact of gang subcultures. Thus, since the premise of the study is based on the true lived experiences of the people in the community, it became necessary to engage these community organisations and hear first-hand from them how the gang phenomenon has impacted them and the work they do. In this way, the researchers sought to acknowledge and incorporate the local knowledge and experiences of the community, recognising that the community knows best regarding what the potential solutions would be to the problems they face. Furthermore, the colloquium would also provide a platform for the community to enhance its autonomy and to take ownership in deciding what would be the best course of action when it comes to addressing community problems and challenges, a fundamental principle of PAR ([Weyers 2011](#)).

5. An Outline of the NACOC Commissions and Discussion Points

The NACOC event took place in July 2022, and was held at the Dower College of Education located in Bethelsdorp, in the Northern Areas. Despite it being the middle of the South African winter season, community members representing their civic organisations braved the cold weather to attend the colloquium. In total, more than seventy attendees representing a diversity of organisations including NGOs/NPOs, churches and educational institutions participated. The event was also attended by two representatives of the Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Community Safety (DCS). Following brief presentations by the researchers and DCS, the time came for the attendees to be divided into their commissions to deliberate and provide their feedback.

The following four commission discussion points were identified, and participants were grouped into each one accordingly:

Commission 1: How do we rebuild trust between the community and law enforcement, and form partnerships between them? What does civil society recommend ensuring active public participation and a bottom-up approach?

Commission 2: Where does civil society fit in with regard to oversight, monitoring and evaluation of government safety policy and programmes? How can our voice also be heard there to hold government accountable, and ensure that they deliver on promises made?

Commission 3: How do gangsterism and crime disrupt the work we do as civil organisations, and what can be done to alleviate this, from both our side, and from government?

Commission 4: SWOT analysis of the Anti-Gang Strategy: Addressing in particular school safety committees; strengthening the criminal justice system; allocation of police resources; the anti-gang unit; prison gang systems; the Ernest Malgas treatment centre (substance abuse treatment facility); economic development; the dysfunctionality of the local Community Police Forum (CPF); illegal taverns (liquor outlets) and the witness protection system for gang-related cases.

6. Reflections on the Feedback/Findings from the Commissions

The following is a broad summary of some of the main feedback/findings from the commissions in relation to the above-mentioned key discussion points.

6.1. Disruptions Caused by Gangsterism

Various participants stressed the disruptions that gangsterism causes for the activities of sports clubs in the Northern Areas. Mention was made of how gangs operating in specific territories would prevent fundraising activities for football clubs, or even create enough fear for residents that they would be hesitant to attend an organised sporting event. As one participant stated, 'It [gangsterism] does create a problem for development in the community. People are afraid. We cannot develop football in the whole community as a result of that.'

Much of the local and international literature on gangs supports the perception that gangs cause widespread disruption in the lives of communities. [McDaniel \(2012\)](#), for example, alluded to the impact of gangs on various aspects of community life. She referred to the fact that communities characterised by gang activity are disproportionately affected by vandalism, theft, negative economic impact, assault, gun violence and homicide. This echoes the sentiments of scholars such as [Adams \(2012\)](#) and [Adams et al. \(2021\)](#) regarding disruptions caused by gangs in urban communities in Trinidad and Tobago. Furthermore, gangs not only disrupt communities locally, but they also disrupt communities globally. [Hagedorn \(2005\)](#) has written extensively on the disruptions caused by gangs as a global phenomenon.

Disruptions were also identified in terms of the impact of gangsterism on schooling activities. A participant who was an educator in one of the local schools mentioned that

'Gangs put extra pressure, and extra stress on us as teachers, because it's not easy to teach a child to read and write. Imagine you are trying to teach a child to read and write, the child is also under a lot of pressure. Imagine if there is a shooting. While we are teaching, the teacher and the child must suddenly fall on the ground while the shooting is going on. Imagine the impact this causes on the child and the teacher. The child doesn't even have to be a gangster. It could be the child's *boeta* (a term referring to uncle or close male relative) or father. The child is already putting fear in their classmates, so they become the bullies of the school.'

The disruptions caused by gangs in the schooling environment extend beyond safety and security of learners and teachers. According to [Petrus \(2021c\)](#), schools in the Northern Areas are targeted by gangs for recruitment. In fact, schools have become integral to the gang recruitment process, as well as to the extension of illegal gang activities including drug trafficking.

6.2. *The Need for a New Culture in the Northern Areas*

A need was expressed to create a new ‘culture’ in the Northern Areas to ease the impact of gangsterism. The existing culture was one that fed gangsterism because it was based on poverty. As one participant put it,

‘Things like drugs and [illicit] substances are supplied by the gangs, and these things lead to the destruction of the community. We need to create a [new] culture in the Northern Areas. Culture means we do things in this way in this community. There’s no discipline, respect and moral values taught in the community.’

The statement above resonates strongly with a well-known concept in urban anthropological research, namely the ‘culture of poverty’, coined by anthropologist Oscar Lewis in the 1960s. In his ethnography of poor residents in a Mexico City slum, [Lewis \(1961\)](#) coined the concept ‘culture of poverty’ to explain the underlying values, beliefs and attitudes, transferred from generation to generation, that kept communities trapped in a culture of poverty. According to Lewis’ theory, the values of people living in poverty contribute to their impoverishment and maintain and sustain a never-ending cycle through socialisation (enculturation), which is difficult to escape. While there have been many arguments against Lewis’ concept and theory, some of his ideas seem to be reflected in the above-mentioned sentiments expressed by the colloquium attendee. It could be argued that either the “lack” of moral values, or the application of harmful or negative values, underpin the prevailing culture that seems to feed gangsterism in the Northern Areas.

6.3. *Causes of Gangsterism*

Amongst the causes and factors that led to young boys joining gangs, the following were listed by colloquium participants: peer pressure, unemployment, sense of belonging, validation, status, substance abuse, lack of cultural identity, challenges in accessing job opportunities, education, etc. Some of them even claimed that gangsterism was seen as a form of income to many of these young boys (as indicated previously) because they were not able to obtain formal, legal employment. Some participants even ascribed it to a lack of assistance from both the government and private sector to create alternative, positive opportunities that could prevent involvement in gangs. These factors are partly confirmed by [Owen and Greeff \(2015, pp. 13–18\)](#), who cited material gain, availability of alcohol or drugs, a position of dominance, and the ability to be able to survive financially as external factors drawing young adolescent boys into joining gangs. Among the internal factors cited were a sense of belonging, loyalty, esteem and identity ([Owen and Greeff 2015, pp. 13–18](#)).

6.4. *Impact of Gangsterism*

The participants also shared thoughts on how they perceived the impact that gangsterism, gang subcultures and crime has had on them personally, as well as on the work they do in the community on a daily basis. They said that the work they do on the ground is disrupted at any given time by rival gangs shooting at each other randomly, and that they constantly have to fear being caught in the crossfire and/or hit by stray bullets, since the warring gang members care little for who may be in the streets outside when they start shooting. Gun violence, robberies and other crime-related incidents can happen at any time of the day or night and, according to the participants, it was becoming concerning that gang-related incidents seem to have become normalised and that people run *towards* the scenes of these crimes instead of away from them.

A report by [Daniels \(2021\)](#) revealed that in its visit to the Northern Areas, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) found that gangsterism was ‘glorified’ in the community. In fact, the SAHRC found that there was an ‘entrenched gang culture in the area’ ([Daniels 2021, n.p.](#)). The notion of gangsterism being a ‘culture’, or even a subculture, does imply a certain degree of normalisation and acceptance of gangsterism, whether directly or indirectly, as a normal part of community life.

Some participants who ran and managed preschools in the community shared their fears of the small children being exposed to these criminal behaviours at an early age and,

later on, believing that it is the normal way to live. Some participants also explained that certain young males were targeted by rival gangs merely based on association because they either associated with known gangsters, or some of their family members were known gangsters, which in turn led to them also being targeted and threatened by rival gangs.

Other participants also referred to the economic impact of gangsterism. They articulated that local business opportunities were taken away from non-gangsters because the Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME's) were infiltrated by gangsters. They also felt that this enabled gangsters to gain even more power, economically and otherwise, to become even more organised in their endeavours to engage in illegal activities while the community suffered. Certain participants indicated that gangsterism had evolved in such a way that while gangsters had decent day jobs, they still participated in illegal gang activities after work hours.

6.5. Gangs Are Sources of Income and Provision

It was mentioned that gangs are a source of provision in the community. Young boys see gangs as resources that can help them to generate income. A participant linked this to the wider issues around unemployment. She explained the relationship between gangsterism, unemployment and poverty in her own context as follows:

'I stay in Helenvale with a population of about 40,000 people. We stay in two-roomed houses. Your *menswees* (dignity) *word geskend* (is harmed) because you cannot be free, you cannot go as you want to. Now this issue of my father doesn't work, my mother doesn't work, so I need to find a way [to provide]. Some of the boys in my street that are gangsters are matriculants, but they are not finding jobs. We need to look at ways of changing the notion of gangs being safe spaces for these boys.'

Another participant reinforced the above argument. She indicated that in her conversations with the young men in her neighbourhood the issue of unemployment and lack of income regularly came up: 'I asked them, why do you do this [get involved in gangs]? They said, we don't work. We finish with school, but we can't get jobs. Then I tell them that you must help yourself. You can get a solution if you prove yourself.' She added that 'We as the community must come up with ways to get this thing of crime out of the minds of our children'.

The idea of gangs being sources of income and/or provision is not new. Scholars such as [Kinnes \(2000\)](#) and [Petrus \(2013\)](#) had earlier outlined how the increasing organisation and sophistication of gangs had caused them to become integrated into the social organisation and structure of their communities. In other words, gangs have become akin to institutions, as they provide access to services and resources that community residents may not be able to find elsewhere or that they may be forced to accept, whether they want to or not. Exacerbating this situation is the failure of legitimate institutions to adequately provide for the needs of the community. Earlier mention was made of the challenges around lack of employment, poverty and many other social challenges impacting the community. In addition, the continued stigmatisation and marginalisation of the community ([Petrus and Uwah 2022](#); [Petrus et al. 2022](#)) further entrenches the dependence of the community on gangs.

6.6. Gangs Become a Haven for Other Criminal Activities, Which Has Created Distortions around What Is Meant by Gangsterism

A point was made that not all criminal activities in the community are gang related. Some, such as the robbing of people on their way to work, are often used by opportunistic criminals to feed a substance abuse habit but may not be directly linked to gangsterism. However, gangsterism can be a haven under which other criminal acts can occur. As one participant said, 'Gangs become like a hub, that becomes a home for people who aren't even gangsters. So, if you're looking for stolen goods, or sex, or drugs, it doesn't matter what it is, gangsterism becomes the hub that makes these things available.' He further elaborated the point by referring to a young man who was shot and killed in the city centre.

He said that the victim had a good job, but it was reported in the media that he was a gangster. Hence, definitions of a gangster or a gang need to be clarified.

The question of defining or clarifying what a gang is has been a common theme in gang studies literature. For example, Klein and Maxson (2006, p. 4) argued that defining what is meant by “gang” is one of the ‘stickiest’ issues in gang scholarship since the work of Thrasher in the late 1920s. Even in legislation such as the South African [Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121 of 1998 \(1998\)](#), also referred to as POCA, the definition of gang is quite rigid and does not take into account the high degree of variability that gang formations possess. Thus, the statement above that expresses the difficulty of defining gangs suggests that defining gangs is largely context specific. In other words, what constitutes a gang should be informed by contextual factors and, since contexts differ, there can be no uniform or simplistic definition of gangs and/or gangsterism. A further implication is that gangsterism should be defined by the community, rather than by outside “experts”, as the community is most aware of its own context and how that context shapes and influences perceptions of what constitutes gangsterism.

7. Proposed Recommendations/Solutions Emerging from the Colloquium

Amid all the factors listed by the commission participants that affected them and the work they do negatively, they also came up with proposed recommendations/solutions that could potentially address the scourge of gangsterism and gang subcultures. The following recommendations/solutions came to the fore.

7.1. *The Community Must Take a Stand against Gangsterism and Crime*

Most of the participants were of the view that the issue of crime and gangsterism can only be addressed if the community comes together and takes a stand against it. They also felt that the community at large must engage on possible strategies that could help to alleviate the trauma that gangsterism has caused in the community at large.

Examples of communities collaborating to address gangsterism can be found in the Western Cape, and there is much that the Northern Areas community can learn from these. In August 2016, during a Women’s Safety Outreach programme hosted by the former MEC for Safety in the Western Cape, Mr Dan Plato, at the Dulcie September Civic Centre, focus was placed on creating awareness of the dangers that women face in gang-affected communities, and exploring the role they play in stopping gang violence. Mr Plato said that mothers were the key to keeping children out of crime:

‘We try to stop the violence, but it continues. Parents need to raise the alarm when they suspect that their children are getting involved in gangsterism and drug-related activities. Many parents don’t like others to reprimand their children, but the day their child dies, they expect you to say something at their child’s grave, but then it’s too late. The solution to gangsterism could be found in the home.’ (Mohedeen 2016).

The role of inter- and intra-community collaboration is also confirmed by some specific community development principles, such as people-centredness, ownership, participation and self-reliance, where the emphasis is placed on the community’s ability to be resilient and able enough to take ownership and empower themselves to become self-reliant, and to participate in their own processes of addressing the challenges they are faced with daily (Weyers 2011). Other scholars, such as Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Petrus (2021b) echo similar views, arguing that community collaboration, participation and resourcefulness are fundamental to capacity-building, and to creating community-centred solutions to community challenges.

Another example, again from the Western Cape, of a community taking its power back and coming up with its own solutions to the problem of gangsterism, is the Hanover Park Ceasefire project. The project was officially launched in 2013 as a three-year pilot, the first of its kind in Africa. Ceasefire is akin to a prescription for safety and community health. It is a violence prevention methodology developed by epidemiologist Gary Slutkin, who noticed that the behaviour and spread of violence is very similar to that of epidemics

like HIV/AIDS, TB and Cholera. Slutkin stated that 'Violence is a learned behaviour that can be cured.' He also noted that its spread can be stopped using the same strategies for containing infectious disease (Cele 2016). This innovative approach was first demonstrated by Ceasefire Chicago, an NGO founded by Slutkin, now known as Cure Violence. It has since been adopted in various US states and in several gang-plagued countries, including Kenya, South Africa and countries in the Caribbean.

In treating the violence epidemic, the methodology draws on certain 'disease-control strategies' (Cele 2016). As with disease, prevention is better than cure. Thus, conflicts between rival gangs that have the potential to turn violent need to be identified and interrupted before they escalate. The idea is to mediate ongoing conflicts, prevent gang retaliations and keep conflicts "cool". This is done by trained Violence Interrupters and Outreach Workers who walk the streets of Hanover Park daily to pick up "hot spots" and prevent them from igniting. The aim of this project was also to change the community's perception about and normalisation of violence, by sensitising them to the fact that violence is abnormal. For many Hanover Park residents, fear had become a part of everyday life. People were used to staying indoors. Children seldom played outside for fear of being hit by stray bullets. The Ceasefire team worked to spread positive messages and keep gang-related shootings to a minimum. The aim of all this was to create a new norm wherein people could walk the streets without fear. According to Kim Hawke, Ceasefire's branding strategist, 'The first step was to make the project community owned. This is done by working with the people who are most intimately involved with, and targeted by, the project. By understanding their needs and aspirations, you can translate them into a winning brand and communication strategy.' According to the Western Cape provincial government, Ceasefire Hanover Park saw a 50% reduction in gang-related murders and attempted murders in its first six months (Cele 2016).

7.2. Participation in Sporting Activities

Participants also mentioned that sports have proven to be an effective vehicle as a possible intervention to prevent gang involvement. They based this on the success stories of soccer and rugby clubs in their respective communities that had been in existence for many years, and that served as a buffer for many young males against becoming involved in gangsterism. A study undertaken by Davids et al. (2022), which looked at the factors that protected males from involvement in gangsterism, confirmed that participation in sports could be a buffer against gang involvement and other negative activities (Davids et al. 2022). This study thus supported the views expressed by the participants.

7.3. Early/Preventative Interventions

Early interventions, preventative in nature, were also recommended, specifically to ensure that the influence and/or impact of gangsterism on small children and young boys growing up would have a less negative effect on their decisions in the future, when they would have to choose whether or not to become involved in gangs. A study by Davids (2017) revealed that in the Northern Areas there were several protective factors that mitigated against the involvement of young males in gangsterism. Some of these factors included receiving family support, having a father present in the home, the influence of the church and other faith-based or religious organisations and having positive male role models from the wider community (Davids 2017, pp. 72–86).

7.4. Churches Must Play Their Part

Some participants also felt that the church was very distant and should start playing its part in assisting with the moral regeneration of communities, to ensure that the moral fibre is restored. In doing so, they argued, gangsterism and other social ills in the community would then be addressed effectively. Participants from the study conducted by Davids et al. (2022) confirmed the role that the church has played in helping youths to desist from becoming involved in gangsterism and other negative activities (Davids et al. 2022).

A fundamental question that emerges from an overview of both the historical and contemporary context of the Northern Areas communities, as well as the insights gained from the community dialogues and colloquium, is what kind of theoretical orientation would best serve the interests of the community in carrying out the above outcomes, and why such an orientation would be effective. There are several approaches that could be effective and a combination of them would be the most ideal. The first is co-operative development. According to [Zeuli and Radel \(2005\)](#), a co-operative community development strategy is effective because it reinforces existing community development paradigms, such as self-help, asset-based and self-development theories. As indicated in the findings, there is a strong need for community organisations to make more effective use of local assets and resources, and co-operative development can help them to accomplish that. Secondly, a needs-based community approach could be effective in enhancing what is already working in the community to strengthen its alignment with the achievement of community goals. For example, [Kaplanidou \(2021\)](#) refers to the use of needs-based community theory to enable communities to achieve community development goals, such as hosting certain sports events. As alluded to earlier, the colloquium participants agreed that community sporting events were very effective in keeping the youth off the streets, but due to the effects of gangsterism and crime they were no longer as effective. By applying needs-based theory, a more strategic way of organizing and using sports events could aid the community in achieving not only the goal of minimizing the impact of gangsterism, but also achieving other community goals. The use of these approaches, along with the participatory action approach outlined earlier, could provide the ideal theoretical basis for the effective implementation of the findings and recommendations from the colloquium.

8. Conclusions

The Northern Areas in the Nelson Mandela Bay metro remains one of the most vulnerable gang-affected communities in the region. Ongoing gang-related crime and violence continue to threaten the safety and security of residents, while prevailing gang subcultures provide the only escape for disenfranchised youths searching for belonging and a way to make a living.

In this article, the authors provided some insights from the Northern Areas communities themselves about how they see the gang challenge and what, for them, would be the most viable and sustainable approaches to addressing the challenge. Some of the responses outlined suggest a holistic approach that utilises local community knowledge, resources and assets (such as the many civic organisations in the community), as well as external resources, such as those from governmental and development agencies.

The key point to hone in on from this discussion is twofold. First is the realisation and acknowledgement that punitive, top-down approaches have never worked and continue to not work. Secondly, participation, collaboration and inclusion of the community in creating its own solutions would be the most sustainable intervention for the long-term. The Colloquium revealed that there are solutions or, at the very least, steps towards solutions that the community has at its disposal. The question, however, is whether the local political and law enforcement authorities have the will to support those initiatives. This remains to be seen. In the meantime, building capacity, strategizing and implementation of the identified solutions may just be the beginning of healing the Northern Areas from the disease of gangsterism.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, T.P.; methodology, T.P. and D.D.; validation, T.P. and D.D.; formal analysis, T.P.; investigation, T.P. and D.D.; data curation, T.P. and D.D.; writing—original draft preparation, T.P. and D.D.; writing—review and editing, T.P.; funding acquisition, T.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences in South Africa, grant number CRC 21/1010.

Institutional Review Board Statement: University of the Free State, Ethics body: Research Ethics Committee (Human) Ethics approval number: UFS-HSD2021/0238/21.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Adams, Ericka, Patrice Morris, and Edward Maguire. 2021. The impact of gangs on community life in Trinidad. *Race and Justice* 11: 543–566. [CrossRef]
- Adams, Ericka. 2012. “We are like prey”: How people negotiate a violent community in Trinidad and Tobago. *Race and Justice* 2: 274–303. [CrossRef]
- Adhikari, Mohamed. 2002. Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration: Continuity and Change in the Expression of Coloured Identity in White Supremacist South Africa, 1910–1994. Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Adhikari, Mohamed. 2004. ‘Not black enough’: Changing expressions of Coloured identity in post-apartheid South Africa. *South African Historical Journal* 51: 167–78. [CrossRef]
- Adhikari, Mohamed. 2008. From narratives of miscegenation to post-modernist re-imagining: Toward a historiography of Coloured identity in South Africa. *African Historical Review* 40: 77–100. [CrossRef]
- Babbie, Earl, and Johann Mouton. 2001. *The Practice of Social Research*. South African Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brotherton, David. 2015. *Youth Street Gangs: A Critical Appraisal*. London: Routledge.
- BusinessTech. 2021. Cape Town, Joburg, Durban and Gqeberha Ranked among the Most Violent Cities in the World. June 27. Available online: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/501253/cape-town-joburg-durban-and-gqeberha-ranked-among-the-most-violent-cities-in-the-world/> (accessed on 1 February 2023).
- BusinessTech. 2022. These Are the Most Violent Areas in South Africa. November 23. Available online: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/645545/these-are-the-most-violent-areas-in-south-africa/> (accessed on 1 December 2022).
- Capa, Siyamtanda. 2018. Gang Violence torpedoes Helenvale projects. *Herald Live*. June 2. Available online: <https://www.heraldlive.co.za/news/2018-06-02-gang-violence-torpedoes-helenvale-projects/> (accessed on 1 December 2022).
- Cele, Khethiwe. 2016. Reformed Gangsters Transform a Community. Insideoutpaper.org > Reformed-Gangsters-Transform-a-Community. Available online: <http://insideoutpaper.org/reformed-gangsters-transform-a-community/> (accessed on 8 January 2022).
- Centre for Community and Civic Engagement. 2022. Available online: <https://www.centre.edu/community-engagement> (accessed on 23 January 2023).
- Charter, Luke. 2022. Eastern Cape again records highest per capita murder rate. *Dispatch Live*. August 19. Available online: <https://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2022-08-19-eastern-cape-again-records-highest-per-capita-murder-rate/> (accessed on 1 December 2022).
- Daniels, Thabo. 2021. Gangsterism glorified in Port Elizabeth: SAHRC. *SABC News*. February 4. Available online: <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/gangsterism-glorified-in-port-elizabeth-sahrc/> (accessed on 6 January 2022).
- Davids, Desira, Zoleka Soji, and Zurina Abdulla. 2022. Experience-based lessons from males in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) on factors that protected them from becoming involved in gangsterism. *South African Journal of Social Work* 58: 1–23. [CrossRef]
- Davids, Desira. 2017. Experienced Based Lessons from Males in the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth Regarding Factors Protecting Them from Becoming Involved in Gangsterism. Unpublished MA dissertation, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.
- Du Pre, Roy. 1992. *Strangers in Their Own Country: A Political History of the “Coloured” People of South Africa, 1952–1992: An Introduction*. Johannesburg: Southern History Association.
- Du Pre, Roy. 1994. *Separate But Unequal: The “Coloured” People of South Africa: A Political History*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.
- Ellis, Estelle. 2016. Shocking levels of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome in Bay. *Herald Live*. April 15. Available online: <https://www.heraldlive.co.za/news/2016-04-15-shocking-levels-of-foetal-alcohol-syndrome-in-bay/> (accessed on 13 December 2022).
- Group Areas Act. 1950. No. 41 of 1950. Available online: https://www.saha.org.za/nonracialism/group_areas_act_act_no_41_1950.htm (accessed on 6 May 2023).
- Hagedorn, John. 2005. The global impact of gangs. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 21: 153–69. [CrossRef]
- Hazlehurst, Kayleen, and Cameron Hazlehurst, eds. 2018. *Gangs and Youth Subcultures: International Explorations*. London: Routledge.
- Helenvale Urban Renewal Programme (HURP). 2011. *Helenvale Conflict Map and Street Gangs*. Port Elizabeth: Southern Africa Development, Research and Training Institute.
- Jonas, Branton. 2015. An Evaluation of Intervention Strategies Addressing Gangsterism in the Helenvale Area. Unpublished MA dissertation, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

- Kaplanidou, Kyriaki. 2021. Sport events and community development: Resident considerations and community goals. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship* 22: 53–66. [CrossRef]
- Kinnes, Irvin. 2000. *From Urban Street Gangs to Criminal Empires: The Changing Face of Gangs in the Western Cape*. ISS monograph Series, 48; Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Klein, Malcolm W., and Cheryl L. Maxson. 2006. *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, Oscar. 1961. *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family*. New York: Random House.
- Mandela Bay Development Agency. 2018. MBDA hosts Follow-up Think Tank Colloquium to Formulate Alternative Approaches to Development in Challenged Communities Such as Helenvale. *Mail & Guardian*. May 25. Available online: <https://pressoffice.mg.co.za/mandelabaydevelopment/content/O2rQGqAn9xxvd1ea> (accessed on 22 December 2022).
- Marais, Riaan. 2023a. Bloody Weekend in Nelson Mandela Bay's Northern Areas. *Herald Live*. January 16. Available online: <https://www.heraldlive.co.za/news/2023-01-16-bloody-weekend-in-nelson-mandela-bays-northern-areas/> (accessed on 1 February 2023).
- Marais, Riaan. 2023b. Surge in violent crime in Nelson Mandela Bay alarms Minister. *Herald Live*. January 31. Available online: <https://www.heraldlive.co.za/news/2023-01-31-surge-in-violent-crime-in-nelson-mandela-bay-alarms-minister/> (accessed on 1 February 2023).
- McCain, Nicole. 2021. Four found guilty of Gqeberha gang murders. *News24*. June 9. Available online: <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/four-found-guilty-of-gqeberha-gang-murders-20210609> (accessed on 5 December 2022).
- McDaniel, Dawn. 2012. Risk and protective factors associated with gang affiliation among high-risk youth: A public health approach. *Injury Prevention* 18: 253–58. [CrossRef]
- Mohedeen, Nabeelah. 2016. The solution to gangsterism is found at home. *Athlone News*. September 17. Available online: <https://www.athlonenews.co.za/news/the-solution-to-gangsterism-is-found-at-home> (accessed on 16 January 2023).
- Montsho, Molaole. 2022. Gqeberha cops probe shooting after suspected gangster allegedly shoots at woman. *IOL*. May 30. Available online: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/gqeberha-cops-probe-shooting-after-suspected-gangster-allegedly-shoots-at-woman-66ede854-bdf8-43b7-a38f-825864e4b008> (accessed on 5 December 2022).
- Napedia. 2022. What is the Northern Areas? Available online: <https://napedia.org.za/what-is-the-northern-areas/> (accessed on 5 December 2022).
- Ncokazi, Zipo-zenkosi. 2020. Port Elizabeth suburbs among province's danger spots. *Herald Live*. August 14. Available online: <https://www.heraldlive.co.za/news/2020-08-14-port-elizabeth-suburbs-among-provinces-danger-spots/> (accessed on 20 September 2021).
- Olivier, Johann, and Peter William Cunningham. 2004. Gang violence in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. *Commonwealth Youth and Development* 2: 75–105.
- Owen, Michelle A., and Abraham P. Greeff. 2015. Factors attracting and discouraging adolescent boys in high-prevalence communities from becoming involved in gangs. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice* 15: 1–32. [CrossRef]
- Paulse, Jayed-Leigh. 2018. Gang related murders spike PE. *SABC News online*. April 28. Available online: <http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/gang-related-murders-spike-pe/> (accessed on 1 December 2022).
- Petrus, Theodore, and Chijioke Uwah. 2019. Theatre of the street: Drama and performance as a potential gang intervention strategy and social development resource in affected communities in South Africa. *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 34: 89–112.
- Petrus, Theodore, and Chijioke Uwah. 2022. 'Strangers in their own country': Interpreting xenophobic symbology and gang subcultures in vulnerable coloured communities. *Acta Academica* 54: 163–78. [CrossRef]
- Petrus, Theodore, and Wendy Isaacs-Martin. 2012. The multiple meanings of Coloured identity. *African Insight* 42: 87–102.
- Petrus, Theodore, Chijioke Uwah, Desira Davids, and Branton Jonas. 2022. Softening the 'Iron Hand': Re-thinking punitive approaches to addressing gang subcultures in South Africa. *Artha Journal of Social Sciences* 21: 1–23.
- Petrus, Theodore. 2013. Social (re)organisation and identity in the 'coloured' street gangs of South Africa. *Acta Criminologica* 26: 71–85.
- Petrus, Theodore. 2017. *Die Klipgooiers* (The Stone-throwers): Gangsterism and the stone-throwing subculture in a gang-affected community in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Acta Criminologica* 30: 38–50.
- Petrus, Theodore. 2021a. Addressing crime, violence and socio-spatial deprivation in a vulnerable community: An interdisciplinary perspective on the Safety and Peace through Urban Upgrading (SPUU) initiative in Helenvale, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. *Development Southern Africa* 38: 469–83. [CrossRef]
- Petrus, Theodore. 2021b. Towards meaningful social development in the COVID-19 era: Strategies for capacity-building in a gang-affected community in Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha), South Africa. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 13: 84–90. [CrossRef]
- Petrus, Theodore. 2021c. Gangster school: The role of the school environment in gang recruitment strategies in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 41: Art. #1665. [CrossRef]
- Pinnock, Don. 1997. *Gangs, Rituals and Rites of Passage*. Cape Town: African Sun Press.
- Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121 of 1998. 1998. South African Government. Available online: <https://www.gov.za/documents/prevention-organised-crime-act> (accessed on 6 May 2023).
- Pyrooz, David C., and Scott H. Decker. 2019. *Competing for Control: Gangs and the Social Order of Prisons*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Pyrooz, David C., Jillian J. Turanovic, Scott H. Decker, and Jun Wu. 2016. Taking stock of the relationship between gang membership and offending: A meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 43: 365–397. [CrossRef]
- Sain, R. 2018. One person killed, two injured in PE gang war. *IOL News*. May 21. Available online: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/eastern-cape/one-person-killed-two-injured-in-pe-gang-war-15087138> (accessed on 1 December 2022).
- Schensul, Jean J. 2010. Engaged universities, community-based research organizations and third sector science in a global system. *Human Organization* 69: 307–20. [CrossRef]
- Seleka, Ntwaagae. 2020. Man arrested for allegedly raping and setting alight a woman in Port Elizabeth. *News 24*. December 28. Available online: <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/man-arrested-for-allegedly-raping-and-setting-alight-a-woman-in-port-elizabeth-20201228> (accessed on 16 September 2021).
- Stanyard, Julia. 2020. *Gangs in Lockdown: Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions on Gangs in East and Southern Africa*. Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
- Stephenson, Svetlana. 2015. *Gangs of Russia: From the Streets to the Corridors of Power*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Storrod, Michelle L., and James A. Densley. 2017. 'Going viral' and 'going country': The expressive and instrumental activities of street gangs on social media. *Journal of Youth Studies* 20: 677–96. [CrossRef]
- Thomas, Kim, Mark Shaw, and Mark Ronan. 2020. *A City under Siege: Gang Violence and Criminal Governance in Nelson Mandela Bay*. Geneva: The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.
- TimesLive. 2021. Five gang suspects nabbed for murder of teenager at PE drug house. *Sunday Times*. January 10. Available online: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-01-10-five-gang-suspects-nabbed-for-murder-of-teenager-at-pe-drug-house/> (accessed on 6 January 2022).
- Weyers, Mike. L. 2011. *The Theory and Practice of Community Work: A South African Perspective*. Potchefstroom: Keurkopie.
- Zeuli, Kimberly A., and Jamie Radel. 2005. Cooperatives as a community development strategy: Linking theory and practice. *Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy* 35: 1–12.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.