The value of photovoice in researching the 2012 Marikana massacre

Abstract

Following the 2012 massacre in Marikana, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) trained a group of community members on basic trauma counselling skills, as a means of providing emotional support to the victims and their families. In an evaluative study, eight members of the support group were provided with disposable cameras and asked to take pictures under the theme 'life in Marikana pre and post the 2012 massacre'. Arrangements were made for photos to be collected and processed. In total, 98 photos were processed. A focus group meeting was held with group members, to go through their photos and discuss what these photos represented. Each group member was given an opportunity to share the story about each photo taken. The focus group meeting in this study allowed participants to share their own insights and to build upon responses of other group members, thus enriching the process of data collection and allowing the participants to share their lived experiences in Marikana. The photo-narrative method proved as a useful research tool in highlighting participants' frustration and consciousness of their prolonged poor living conditions, and exploitation, given the vast wealth of the Lonmin platinum mines. The method also proved useful in providing a space for participants to discuss how their community could possibly heal from the massacre of 2012, with continued tensions, divisions and empty promises greatly undermining healing. It is concluded in this article that photovoice is one of the effective research tools in qualitative research design to allow community members to explicitly, through visuals taken, discuss issues affecting them daily.

*Malose Langa,
 Modiegi Merafe
 and Steven Rebello

*Correspondence:
 Malose Langa,
 University of the
 Witwatersrand
 Malose.langa@wits.ac.za

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Photovoice as a qualitative research tool

Photovoice has become a popular qualitative approach in the social sciences and beyond (Evans-Agnew & Rosenberg, 2016; Suffla et al, 2012; Wang et al, 2004; Warren, 2005). Photovoice as a research methodology is located within the qualitative research paradigm. Overall, qualitative research methods challenge the key epistemological assumption of quantitative studies, which posits that research is value-free. In using photovoice as a research method, qualitative researchers argue that personal values are an integral part of research, and that no research can be truly objective or free of research influence. Taking photos is considered an integral part of reflexivity in which knowledge is constructed between the researcher and the research participants when analysing and sharing narratives about photos taken (Langa, 2020). Based on this view, Jordan and Pieterse (2020) described photovoice as a critical reflection methodology.

Photovoice as a qualitative research data collection method allows participants to represent their lived experiences through visual images, including social conditions under which they live in their communities (Greek, 2005; Wang et al, 2004). The use of photovoice has also been gaining popularity among South African researchers (Mitchelle et al, 2005; Kessi, 2013; Kessi et al, 2019; Seedat et al, 2015). In some of these studies, photovoice was used to study topical issues such as the rights of sex workers, the experiences of black lesbian women, the reflections of young people living in communities characterised by gang violence, community engagement, and promotion of violence-prevention initiatives (Kessi, 2013; Kessi et al, 2019; Seedat et al, 2015). Photographs have been used as a tool of social change, especially for marginalized communities.

Photovoice as a qualitative research method is also claimed to be participatory in nature in that it allows participants to document and reflect their daily realities (Mitchelle et al., 2005; Lykes & Scheib, 2015). It is through photovoice that the participants take a lead in data collection and storytelling about their own lived experiences (Kessi, 2013). Furthermore, Wang et al. (2004) stated that photovoice should enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussions of photographs, and reach policymakers through their visual representations to bring social change and transformation. Other researchers contend that photovoice contributes to social justice and change through photos that participants take and critically reflect on (Mitchelle et al, 2005; Lykes & Scheib, 2015; Kessi, 2013; Kessi et al, 2019). Critical social and community psychologists have used photovoice methods as tools of engagement with communities to deal with structural issues of racism, poverty,

unemployment and violence (Lykes & Scheib, 2015; Kessi, 2013; Kessi et al, 2019; Seedat et al, 2015).

This study was aimed at using photovoice to talk to selected community members about their own meanings, reflections and understanding of the violence that took place in Marikana in 2012, in which 34 mineworkers were killed.One of the key principles in photovoice research is a 'sensitivity to context', which is a sensitivity to how the ideological, historical and socio-economic climate influences the participants' talk (Kessi et al, 2019). The context in which community members lived in Marikana was also of central interest in this research study in terms of wanting to better understand the conditions in which they lived as these conditions are linked to the mine workers' strike. It is important to recognise that the context is key to appreciating the meanings that participants create about their lived experiences.

The contextual background for the community of Marikana
South Africa has a long history of mining (a topic that is beyond the scope of this article). It is important to note that platinum was first discovered in 1923 and that prices remained low until they gained momentum in the 1960s. Between 1994 and 2009, platinum prices increased substantially, until they broke through the US$2 000 an ounce mark (Capps, 2012). Despite all these increased profits in revenue, mineworkers continued to earn meagre salaries on platinum mines, including Lonmin located in Marikana.

Marikana is a small mining town located near Rustenburg, about 112 km northwest of Johannesburg, South Africa. According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA, 2019), the population size of Marikana is 26000 with the majority (62.5%) being men. Five percent of the Marikana population has no education, while 24% has completed their matric and 2.9% having higher education qualifications. Almost a sixth (15.3%) of the Marikana population has no income, and most of the people in Marikana lived on between R19,601 and R76,400 per annum (R1633,42–R6366.67 per month) in 2017. In the book, **Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer**, by Alexander, Sinwell, Lekgowa, Botsang, and Xeswi (2013), detailed historical background about factors that led to the strike with mine workers demanding a living wage of R12,500 is provided. On 16 August 2012, after a week of violence between striking mineworkers, rival unions, and the Lonmin mine crowd control security forces, the South African Police Service opened fire on a crowd of striking mineworkers at Marikana, killing 34 mineworkers, wounding 78 and more than 250 workers arrested (Alexander et al, 2013). This was described as the biggest incident of police violence since the advent of democracy in South Africa and for many people it revived memories of violence suffered by the Black communities under apartheid.

Data collection

1. Trauma Counselling

Following the 2012 massacre in Marikana, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), a non-governmental organisation with a history of working in communities affected by violence since its inception in 1989, recruited and trained a group of community members on basic trauma counselling skills to provide emotional support to the survivors of the massacre and their families.

2. Photovoice

In 2013, CSVR went to Marikana to recruit potential participants to train on basic trauma skills. An advert was circulated in the community for people who were interested to be trained on basic counselling skills. A total of 15 expressed an interest but eight people were selected for the training. Their participation in the training was voluntary. The eight participants were therefore given disposable cameras to take pictures under the theme "life in Marikana pre and post 2012 massacre". Out of the 8 participants, six were women and two were men, aged between 27 and 50 years old. Each participant was encouraged to take at least 14 photos. Some participants decided to use their smart cell phones. Arrangements were made for the photos to be collected and processed. In total, 98 photos were processed.

3. Focus group discussion

A focus group interview was held with group members to go through their photos and what these photos represented for them. Each group member was given an opportunity to share the story about each photo taken. One of the major strengths of focus groups is that they allow the participants to share their own insights and to build upon responses of other group members (Moroke & Graham, 2020; Nduna, under review), thus enriching the process of data collection (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Data analysis

All the photos were used to facilitate a focus group discussion about life pre-and post-Marikana massacre in 2012. Interviews involved giving a voice to ideas beyond simple descriptions of photos, by analysing each participant's description of photos taken and reflecting on the emotions associated with each photo. It was important to also analyse what may have compelled each participant to take certain pictures. Seedat et al (2006: 304) identified three ways of looking at photos: "(1) looking at the image to analyse information internal to it; (2), looking at the image to examine the way in which the content is presented; and (3) looking behind the image to examine the context, or the social and cultural relations that shape its production and interpretation". In this study, all these elements were considered as part of data analysis with a focus on what these photovoices represented about life in Marikana pre- and post-massacre.

Findings: Daily life and routine in Marikana

Findings from 98 photos taken by the participants were analysed and themes drawn out from the analysis. The first theme related to the daily life and routines of people living in Marikana. Linked to the predominance of mining in the community, images related to this theme highlighted the gendered nature of life in Marikana, with images capturing men catching buses to and from work, the bus stop used to travel to larger neighbouring towns, as well as the local retailer, where mostly women would purchase food and other basic household items.

It was mentioned in the interviews that it was common to see men wearing overalls and gumboots going or coming back from work in the mine. It was also mentioned that mainly men than women worked in the mines which is linked with traditional notions of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995).

Despite some noticeable gender differences in this first theme, the second theme of "inequality, exploitation and social action" as well as the third theme of "efforts towards healing" garnered great attention, both via the number of photos captured as well as the discussion or dialogue that stemmed from these photographs.

Mining, inequality and a lack of basic services

It is clear from the two photos above that besides hazardous and arduous working conditions, miners and their families lived under poor conditions in shack settlements in Marikana (Nkaneng), with no access to basic services such as water and electricity (Alexander et al, 2013). The theme of inequality and a lack of access to these services highlighted participants' views of the poor living conditions within their community as well as the psychological effect of living in such conditions. The two photos convey the sense of dismay, frustration and lack of recognition of basic services as human rights, which were not being met within the community. There was a strong feeling regarding the failure of Lonmin as a mine to address some of these basic services as expected in terms of the Mining Charter, in which mining companies are legally expected to improve employees' living conditions and surrounding communities.

Memory and memorialisation

On 16 August 2012, after what had been portrayed as a series of violent actions by miners, the South African Police Services (SAPS) prepared a so-called "tactical operation" aimed at dispersing over 1 000 mineworkers who had gathered on a small koppie (hill) in Marikana in the North-West province of South Africa. People from across the world watched as 34 miners were shot and killed by SAPS. This hill, for the people of Marikana, has become a constant reminder of how mineworkers were

Photo 1: "*This is the picture of mine workers getting out of the bus to go and work at the mine in Lonmin.*" (Elias[1], 38-year old male)

Photo 2: "*This photo shows shacks in the informal settlement called Nkaneng. Here, Lonmin mineworkers live in squalor and deplorable conditions without proper housing and running water. Poor living conditions are some of the factors that prompted the violent strike in 2012. Despite the richness of platinum in the area, people here live in poverty.*" (Thula, 45 year old female)

Photo 3: "*This is a photo of a water tank in the middle of the Nkaneng informal settlement and Lonmin Smelter in Wonderkop. Residents of Nkaneng informal settlement fetch water from this tank and others wash their clothing with it. I took this picture to show that people still lack basic services such as water in Marikana.*" (Elias, 38-year old male)
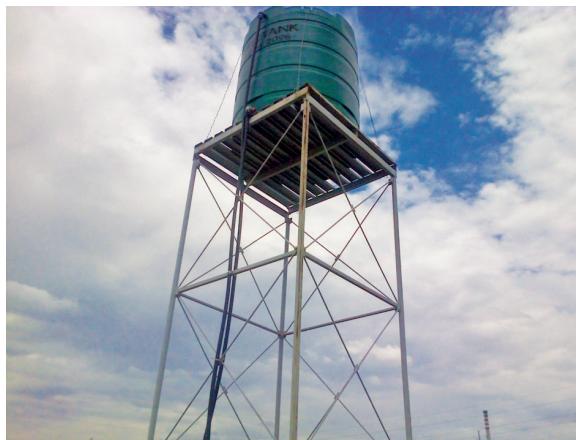
[1]   Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the person.

Photo 4: "*This is a photo of the Koppie, a place where mineworkers were killed. Now the koppie has become the symbol of pain and suffering for the people of Marikana. We (as community members) want this place to become a memorial site for the massacre.*" (Elias, 38 year old male)
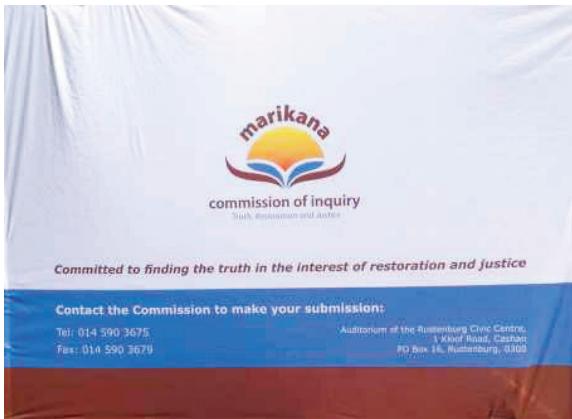

Photo 5: "*I took this picture as we worked as a counsellor for Tshepo-Themba during the Farlam Commission of Inquiry to provide emotional support and counselling to the families of the miners who were killed in the massacre. This work has had a positive impact, as many families felt supported during the Farlam Commission. We still provide emotional support to some of these families. Some people feel that the Farlam Commission has failed to provide answers that the people of the Marikana have been looking for.*" (Sophie, 45 years old female).

killed, with some residents calling and strongly proposing for the hill to become a memorial site for the massacre.

Seeking the truth and justice

While the findings from the Farlam Commission of Inquiry were released in June 2015, those affected by the massacre continue to search for justice and compensation. To date, victims and families have not received any financial compensation for their losses. This seems to have left victims and families stuck in limbo, unable to heal (Nash, 2015). The dominant feeling amongst the participants was that the Farlam Commission

failed to provide closure, as no trade union, SAPS or political party member was held accountable for the deaths of the 34 miners. The participants further stated that Cyril Ramaphosa, former deputy president and a Lonmin shareholder at that time, who stated via email that the actions of the striking mineworkers were "plainly dastardly criminal" and that the government should take "concomitant action", has not been held accountable for the killing of the mine workers in Marikana to date (Nash, 2015). Participants felt that there cannot be justice while those responsible for the killing of the mine workers have not accounted for their actions or apologized.

Value of photovoice as a research methodology

Photovoice has proven to be a participatory research tool giving voice to the research participants (Evans-Agnew & Rosenberg, 2016; Suffla et al, 2012; Warren, 2005). Through this method, it was clear that the participants were critically able to reflect about their poor living conditions and the failure of Lonmin, as expected by the mining charter, to provide basic services to its employees and surrounding communities where they mined.

While participants acted on this consciousness through their engagements within their community post the massacre, the mineworkers' strike has been viewed as a form of social action and activism following their recognition of their oppression and exclusion (Langa et al, 2019). Unfortunately, as in many oppressive contexts, such attempts to alter the status quo were met with great resistance (police violence) by the oppressor (those with economic or political interests in maintaining the status quo within the mining industry).

In the discussion of the photos, the voices of the participants further highlighted the critical socio-economic and political awareness of the gap that is widening between the rich and the poor. For instance, when they mentioned that Lonmin continues to make profits while many workers continue to live under poor conditions due to low wages. Alexander et al (2013) assert that the mineworkers' protest in Marikana must be understood as part of broader struggles of workers and communities, who often also have to protest violently for better living conditions and access to basic services. All these events are embedded within South Africa's history of racial inequality, and have been exacerbated by neo-liberal policies adopted by the ruling government post 1994 (Alexander et al, 2013; Bond & Mottair, 2013; Seekings, & Nattrass, 2002). Protests are therefore a response by communities to fight for basic services as enshrined in the Constitution (Bond & Mottiar, 2013; Naicker, 2016; von Holdt et al, 2009). It is on this point that Lykes and Scheib (2015) recognise the value of photovoice for marginalised communities in facilitating processes towards their own emancipation, especially if the discussions are used to engage in histories of colonisation, exploitation, power and privilege.

The safe spaces created in this study, through photovoice, moved beyond data collection and also contributed to lobbying and advocacy initiatives. For example, some of the female photovoice project participants went ahead, with the support of CSVR and non-governmental organisations, to form a community-based organisation called *Sikhala Sisonke* (We cry together). This organisation represented the women of Marikana and made efforts to demystify the dominant (media) narrative that only men were affected by the exploitation in the mining sector. Their argument was that women are firstly excluded from opportunities to work in the mine on the basis of gender. Secondly, the men who were killed were their relatives, brothers, husbands or partners. *Sikhala Sisonke* also organised public events on gender-based violence and interrogated the link between toxic masculinity in the mines and violence. All these initiatives started with photovoice projects, confirming the views of Lykes and Scheib (2015) and Kessi (2013) that this methodology can positively contribute to anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-sexist campaigns, where photographs have the potential to clearly and vividly show how oppression operates. The level of consciousness deepens about the underlying causes of oppression, power and authority, which may need to be challenged and overthrown (Bradbury, et al., 2012).

Questions of memory and memorialisation were also brought to the fore through the photos taken. It is acknowledged that atrocities often result in collective trauma. While for some there is a wish for painful past to be forgotten, others call for the remembrance of the past, despite the pain and suffering associated with such memories (Kgalema, 1999; Naidu, 2002, 2006). In her book **Memorializing the Past**, Grunebaum (2011) also asserts that the process of memory-making is often contested. For example, for the people of Marikana, the koppie represents a symbolic place, which they feel must be remembered and memorialised, but the state appears not to share this view. It appears that the state is worried about its complicity – namely, that the police acting on behalf of the state are to blame for the tragedy. This confirms the work of Kgalema (1999) and Naidu (2006) that memorial sites are not neutral places but highly contested politically, socially and culturally. For example, one participant asserted that "*while the families of the 34 miners killed on August 16 2012 may appreciate the gesture, the families of the 10 people who were killed in the week before the massacre may feel that the world does not care about their loss if their relatives' names are not included on the tombstones and similarly, if you include the names of their relatives, it is no longer about the koppie, and given the fact that we (as community members) want to unite the community this poses a serious challenge*". Furthermore, political lines were clearly drawn in this tragedy, with mineworkers leaving the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which is aligned to the ANC as the ruling party, to join the rival union, Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which

later became associated with opposition parties such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). Naidu (2006) and Kgalema (1999) argue that the 'politicisation' of memorial sites can be an impediment to peace and reconciliation in communities. Naidu contends that "while the politicisation of memorialisation, in most instances, may be inevitable given contexts within which they are found, it is necessary that the politicisation of public memory be mediated by other initiatives that seek to provide a multiple, critical perspective of the past" (2006: 2). It is therefore important for the sake of sustainable justice and reconciliation that all stakeholders, including government and the two unions, be consulted when the memorial site idea is conceptualised and implemented.

It is important that memorial sites ultimately serve a particular purpose concerning consciousness of the past. The theme of memorialisation echoes Grunebaum's (2011) sentiment that memory is socially conscious and should serve as an inspiration for social and political change in everyday life. It is therefore important that memory and memorialisation projects contribute positively to issues of social justice, peace, healing and reconciliation. Turning the "koppie" into a memorial site may, as Hamber argues, "plays an important part in any process of healing" by acknowledging and recognising victims' and survivors' suffering and pain (2009: 218). Naidu notes that "memory allows groups to share a sense of sameness over time and space, thereby allowing groups to develop and sustain a common collective identity through remembering the past" (2006: 1). Kgalema (1999) concurs by noting that symbols like community-based monuments contribute to the process of peace-making and reconciliation.

However, as expressed by the group members, there is a collective sense that the truth of what really happened remains elusive and that the Farlam Commission failed to provide all the expected answers. Historically, questions have always been raised about commissions of inquiry and whether they ever help to provide answers or are simply used by the state to placate its citizens (Mamdani, 2002). To date, the people of Marikana still wait for the recommendations of Farlam Commission to be implemented, including civil claims and criminal prosecutions against perpetrators. Rigby (2001) argues that to be effective in bringing justice and a sense of healing and reconciliation to communities affected by mass violence, victims/survivors of violence must feel that justice has prevailed. Given this, there was a call by some of the photovoice project members for the Farlam Commission to recommend material reparations for the victims/survivors of the massacre, which resonates with Valji's (2003) argument that there can be no justice without reparation. However, Hamber cautions that "reparations, both material and symbolic, are useful markers in the process of healing, but the lasting legacy of gross violations of human rights does not simply vanish with time or when

reparations are granted" (2009: 215). Hamber maintains that socioeconomic inequalities must be addressed in order to achieve a lasting peace and stability. Hamber takes this argument further, noting that socioeconomic development "can help ease the process of healing considerably, but it too is limited and intrinsically insufficient for addressing the plethora of personal injustice and psychological injury experienced after substantial loss" (2009: 216).

Concluding remarks

This paper has highlighted the benefits of photovoice in working with communities – and marginalised communities in particular. This method has clearly provided an opportunity for community members to give voice to their lived experiences prior to the massacre and to share their understanding of these experiences as well as to critically explore the factors that may contribute to some of the challenges that they continue to face in their lives post the massacre. Photos taken helped them to clearly enrich their narratives in terms of their levels of consciousness and possible actions for social change, transformation and empowerment; but the "real" change still remains elusive which requires continuous engagement until the status quo is transformed.

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