

# When Relevance Decenters Criticality: The Case of the South African National Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme

*Cuando la relevancia desplaza a la crítica: el caso del Programa  
Nacional sobre Crimen, Violencia y Lesiones en Sudáfrica*

MOHAMED SEEDAT\*

Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa  
&  
MRC-UNISA Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme  
Johannesburg, South Africa

---

## Abstract

Following the formal demise of political apartheid in South Africa in 1994, critical and community-centred psychologists have tended to obtain relevance through alignment with the tenets of social justice and the larger democratic project. This article draws on the experiences of the Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI) to illustrate how particular formulations of scientific and social relevance function to marginalize criticality and critical scholarship. The author suggests that relevance without criticality produces forms of intellectual activity that privilege empiricist traditions, perpetuate a binary between research and research translation, and reproduce the myth that intervention work is atheoretical. The review of the CVI serves as a reminder of the challenges inherent in enactments of critical psychology. Among the many issues that critical psychology oriented initiatives like CVI have to contend with is the task of developing theoretical and other resources to move between co-operation and critique in the service of democratic development.

**Keywords:** community psychology, criticality, relevance.

## Resumen

Tras la desaparición formal las políticas de segregación (*apartheid*) en Sudáfrica, en 1994, los psicólogos críticos y comunitarios han tendido a ganar relevancia a través del alineamiento con principios democráticos y de justicia social. Este artículo recurre a las experiencias del Programa sobre Crimen, Violencia y Lesiones (CVI) para ilustrar cómo determinadas formulaciones de relevancia científica y social marginan la criticidad y la erudición crítica. El autor sugiere que la relevancia sin crítica produce formas de actividad intelectual que privilegian tradiciones empiristas que incurren en la disociación entre investigación y práctica y, así mismo, reproducen el mito de que el trabajo de intervención es ateórico. La revisión del CVI sirve para recordar los retos inherentes a las proclamas de la psicología crítica. Entre los muchos problemas a los que tienen que enfrentarse las iniciativas orientadas a la psicología crítica, como el CVI, se encuentra la tarea de desarrollar, entre otros, recursos teóricos para moverse entre la co-operación y la crítica en el servicio al desarrollo democrático.

**Palabras claves:** crítica, psicología comunitaria, relevancia.

---

RECIBIDO: 16 DE ABRIL DE 2010 - ACEPTADO: 04 DE AGOSTO DE 2010

\* Correspondencia: Mohamed Seedat, Director Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa. UNISA ISHS PO Box 1087, 1820 Lenasia, Johannesburg, South Africa. Email: seedama@unisa.ac.za

APRIL 1994 ushered in significant changes into the South African social and political landscape. So roused by the constitutional vision of a non-racial and non-sexist society and a “better life for all”, critical psychologists, alongside other socially-minded academics and practitioners, sought relevance by aligning their respective missions and roles with the imperatives of democratic development and the ideals of the new society. Critical and community-minded psychologists participated in policy reform and development processes, mobilised resources to continue providing services in under-resourced communities, supported the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, undertook curricula reform exercises, and engaged in research and development work. Research-oriented work placed the accent on the psycho-social, health, and development priorities of the emergent democracy and its people, as well as on the challenges that arose from the country’s adoption of market-oriented economic policies (Seedat & Lazarus, 2010). Many of these roles were intended to transform the gendered and racially-skewed systems of knowledge creation and service provision inherited from South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past. The research and development work aimed to centre blacks and women explicitly as architects of knowledge systems (Franchi & Duncan, 2003; Lazarus & Donald, 1995; Ratele, 2008; Seedat, Duncan, & Lazarus, 2001). Thus in the post-1994 era South Africa has witnessed multiple manifestations of critical psychology.

In this article I aim to review the Presidential Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI) as one particular manifestation of critical psychology. The CVI, which strives to commit science and compassion to community (Institute for Social and Health Sciences, 2009), offers a good vehicle through which to examine the issues and challenges inherent to engaging in socially-conscious research. The review of the CVI helps to understand how formulations of social and academic relevance may serve to

privilege dominant traditions of knowledge creation, de-centre reflexivity and theoretical work, and reproduce the misconception that intervention work is theory free. In this sense the article is inclined towards Burman’s (2003) caution that “relevance is not always a good thing”, especially when it is assumed, or operates to mask the thorny questions of power relations in knowledge production and decentre politically important work arising from reflexivity and theoretically-oriented scholarship (see Burman, 2003).

Below I begin by situating the CVI within South Africa’s broad democratic imperatives and the key tenets of critical psychology. Thereafter, I trace the origins of the CVI, its formulation of relevance and associated research foci, which privileged certain forms of intellectual labour over others. I then examine the influence of relevance on notions of research, knowledge and action and describe the influences of institutional scripts on writing. I also give some consideration to how the emphasis on intervention development and research may create a false binary between theory and intervention work. By way of conclusion, I suggest that relevance and criticality are both central to advancing enactments of critical psychology.

### **South Africa's Democratic Imperatives**

South Africa’s democracy embodies a project to liberate the country from the twin legacies of colonialism and apartheid and a vision to develop as an African modernity (Posel, 2002). The country’s modernist and developmental vision is founded on a constitution that embraces the doctrine of democracy and the ideals of human rights, justice, equality, freedom, unity in diversity and reconciliation (South African Constitution, 1996; Waghid, 2004). The new society, envisioned as a safe, peaceful, moral and well-governed society, was to commit its resources, systems and people towards a “better life for all” (see Waghid, 2004).

Accordingly, the post-1994 government introduced a number of mechanisms to drive democratic development and social reform processes. These included institutions like the Human Rights Commission, the Gender Commission and the Independent Complaints Directorate responsible for supporting a human rights culture, gender equality and police accountability respectively in the country. Likewise, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was mandated to foster national unity and reconciliation (The TRC Act N°. 34, 1995). The Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM) was initiated to rekindle morality and ethical conduct that were supposedly undermined by the preceding systems of apartheid and colonialism. Moral regeneration was considered vital during the early years of the “new” South Africa, when the country’s democratic development path and morality were threatened by persistent violence, crime and wide-spread corruption in the public and private sectors (Mandela, 1998; Rauch, 2005; Swartz, 2006). Echoing the spirit of the MRM and the accent on developing socially-oriented citizenship, initiatives such as the Race and Values in Education (RVE) also sought to nurture co-mmon values to inform the new school curriculum (Waghid, 2004).

Initially, economic reforms were instituted through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that defined the state as a developmental entity focused on actively redressing the legacies of colonialism and apartheid-exploitation. By the end of Nelson Mandela’s Presidency the RDP was substituted by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy that adopted the logic of liberal market-driven economics, and championed the supposed benefits of privatization, limited social spending and lifting trade tariffs. Thus, critics argue that despite the many achievements South Africa’s democratic development has been constrained by the encroaching influences of globalization and the adoption of liberal

economic strategies through GEAR (Miraftab, 2006; Swartz, 2006).

Twenty years after Nelson Mandela’s release from prison (he was released on 11 February 1990), South Africa enjoys the benefits of the rule of law, a constitution that assures all citizens the freedom of speech, movement and association and a de-racialized public service sector. Economic and social reform measures like affirmative action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) have produced many benefits for the black middle and upper-middle classes. Such changes make South Africa a stable democracy. However, the country remains among the most unequal societies in the world in that approximately sixty-percent of the population earns less than R42 000 (US\$ 5,085) annually. South Africa’s Gini coefficient climbed from .56 in 1995 to .73 in 2005. The African majority population continues to experience joblessness, poverty, crime and violence and other deleterious conditions that undermine their well being and health status (Bhalia, 2007; Statistics South Africa, 2003, 2008; Wood, 2006).

### **Tenets of Critical Psychology**

Within this context of socio-political transformation and increasing social inequality, critical psychology, aligned with the spirit and imperatives of the national democratic project, has tended to frame its relevance through a commitment to social justice. Social justice encompasses what Gordon (1988) termed “distributive equality” and “distributive sufficiency”. Distributive equality is focused on redressing the legacies of apartheid exclusion and promoting equal opportunities for all sectors of society. Distributive equality places the accent on transforming the gendered and racially skewed systems of knowledge production, training, and service provision. The quest for distributive equality embodies attempts to rally intellectual and material support for the psychosocial and development priorities of the historically unenfranchised

and poor majority. Distributive sufficiency moves the focus beyond the issues of political representation and inclusion to the relationship between knowledge claims, knowledge creation and democratic development and critiques of the assumptions, theories and methodologies of psychology itself. In this respect distributive sufficiency is concerned with the more substantive matter of appropriateness of psychological theories, methodologies and interventions for democratic development (Foster, 2008).

Following such tenets in democratic South Africa, critical psychology has tended to adopt co-operative and supportive forms of engagement with government and state institutions. As such, relevance is partially obtained through work that is fashioned according to the principles of civil society-government partnership and inter-sectorial collaboration. In contrast, in the pre 1994 era critical psychology gained relevance through oppositional and resistance politics and activities. During the mid 1980s those who defined themselves as “progressive” psychologists, including black and white radical and liberal psychologists, focused on the colonial, sexist, classist and racist roots of the discipline, challenged the racialized and gendered organisation of the profession, and questioned the appropriateness of interventions produced by the applied fields of clinical and counselling psychologies. Critical psychology in apartheid South Africa exposed the deliberate and unwitting complicity of psychology with oppressive social formations and provided insights into the emergence, global proliferation and dominance of Euro-American psychology as well as its intimate links to missionary discourses of conquests, conversion and occupation and the precepts of scientific racism (Cooper, 1990; Duncan, Van Niekerk, De la Rey, & Seedat, 2001; Seedat, 1993).

Thus during the apartheid era, critical psychology tended to function primarily (but not exclusively) within invented spaces that are characterised by resistance, confrontation and

acts of defiance (Miraftab, 2006). Critical psychologists used these invented spaces that were supported by the larger anti-apartheid movement and international donors—who held a moral abhorrence for apartheid—to expose the deliberate and unwitting complicity of psychology with oppressive social formations; examine the intimate links to missionary discourses of conquests, conversion and occupation and the precepts of scientific racism; and offer insights into the emergence, global proliferation and dominance of Euro-American psychology (Duncan et al., 2001; Seedat, 1993). In the shift from apartheid resistance towards support for democratic development, critical psychology has tended to work mainly within invited spaces that are legitimated by donors and state interventions. In a young democracy such as South Africa invited spaces are deemed to be the appropriate vehicles for civil society participation in that they place the emphasis on co-operative state-civil society relations (Miraftab, 2006). In post-1994 South Africa critical psychology, inspired by its dedication to the large scale human rights and democratic project, employs invited spaces within tertiary, research and other state institutions to establish relevance and utility for itself. One way of obtaining relevance has been to engage in socially-conscious research that contributes to the human welfare and development trajectory of the country (Foster, 2008). We now turn to the critical review of the CVI, which is presented as a socially-conscious research and development initiative that emerged in democratic South Africa within an invited space sanctioned by a university-research council partnership.

### **The Presidential Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme**

#### ***Background and Origins***

The idea of the Presidential Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI) emerged in the context of a restructuring exercise at the

Medical Research Council (MRC). In 1999, as part of its restructuring process, the MRC leadership decided to cluster the agency's research around six national programmes. A national programme included a national consortium of research units internal and external to the MRC, lead programmes, university-based groups and research centres. Within the restructuring exercise crime, violence and injury was identified as a national priority alongside HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and genetics and genomics. As such, the CVI lead programme was to be located within the National Programme for non-communicable diseases, and relevant research projects and researchers from the MRC's National Trauma Research Programme (NTRP) were to be incorporated into the lead programme. Other national programmes were clustered around health systems policy, women and child health, infection and immunity, and environment and development (MRC, 1999).

The CVI was only formalised as a lead programme after workshops with key stakeholders and written and oral submissions from the author and his colleagues who represented a university institute. So the Presidential Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme (CVI)—established in 2001—formalised a long-standing collaboration between a unit of a science council dedicated to research in support of the population's health and an institute located in an open and distance learning (ODL) tertiary institution that brands itself as an "African university serving humanity". The collaboration sought to harness the two groups' intellectual interests and expertise. Members of the former NTRP, schooled in the bio-medical sciences and public health, reflected expertise in epidemiology, trauma management and quantitative research methodologies. The university-based researchers, affiliated to the Institute for Social and Health Sciences (ISHS) that was committed to the tenets of critical community psychology, held expertise on community-centred modalities of

prevention and safety promotion, the processes of knowledge creation, psychological trauma and qualitative approaches to research and development. For the psychologists the CVI embodied an invited space that offered opportunities for the enactment of critical psychology in a young democracy.

### ***Formulation of Relevance***

The CVI, embodying the collaborating partners' respective institutional cultures, vision, and strategic orientation, obtained its academic, scientific and social relevance through the articulation of multiple rational arguments. First, the scientific and academic relevance was pegged on the view that there was a lack of adequate African continental data on injury and violence magnitude, occurrence and determinants. Consequently the control and prevention of crime, violence and injury tended to be influenced primarily by public anxiety about crime and an over-reliance on police generated statistics and criminal justice measures. This line of argument helped build a case for the development of an Africa-centred science base to support injury prevention and safety promotion efforts.

Second, following the priorities identified by the MRC's restructuring process, the leadership of the Programme employed limited available data and burden of disease estimates to cast the Programme as an empirically located entity and to gain empirical legitimation for the call to have violence and injury prioritized as public health issues alongside HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and other diseases of poverty. In this sense the Programme, resonating with research priorities identified by the institutional leadership of the MRC, utilised a rational-empirical logic for its existence and for the formulation of its brief and objectives.

Third, the CVI's founding documents called on ISHS's status as a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre on Injury and

Violence Prevention Research and association with international partners to invoke international credibility. The reference to international bodies was used to suggest that the CVI's strategic focus was consistent with global developments.

Fourth, in resonance with the two host institutions' commitments to community up-liftment and academic citizenship the CVI assumed a deliberate research development and wider academic and public engagement focus. Thus, the CVI adopted activities that were relevant to the national system of innovation, which emphasized research capacity development. Research capacity development entailed the creation of opportunities for staff members, post-graduate students and interns to acquire higher degrees or advanced methodological training. Other kinds of training placed the accent on the development of community research infrastructure and supporting the capacities of communities to participate in neighbourhood-based research projects. Academic citizenship was to be exercised through specialist training involving scientists and practitioners from the wider fraternity, including other African countries; thesis examination and co-supervision of students affiliated to other institutions; editing of journals; reviewing of journal submissions; and serving on expert panels. All such activities were deemed relevant in so far as they supported the development of research expertise and a research culture that was sensitive to the historical exclusions of blacks and women from the systems of knowledge creation.

The CVI Programme also sought to coin social relevance by focusing on the economic, social-welfare and health consequences of violence. Data were used to make empirical pronouncements about the magnitude and social, health and economic consequences of violence. The Programme's founding and subsequent documents indicated interpersonal violence as the leading risk factor, after unsafe sex, for loss of Daily Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). South

Africa's homicide rate was estimated to be more than seven times the global average, and that the country was categorized among other high gun violence countries like the United States of America (USA), Mexico, Colombia, Estonia and Brazil (Alpers, 2002; Krug, Powell, & Dahlberg, 1998; WHO, 2000). The gendered nature of violence, including the disproportionate representation of males in violence, both as victims and perpetrators, was also emphasized (Jewkes, 2000; Peden & Butchart, 1999). Such a line of argument, that defined violence and injuries as phenomena that threatened to derail the country's democratic development, served as an instrument for obtaining social relevance.

The preceding analysis suggests that the CVI Programme, established within an invited space as a university-science council collaboration, formulated relevance for itself by taking cognisance of specific scientific, research, development and social issues arising from South Africa's democratic imperatives as well as the continent's regeneration priorities. Thus, as we attempt to elucidate below, the CVI Programme's objectives and associated main activities were shaped by its ideas and formulation of relevance.

## **Agenda and Activities**

### ***Intellectual Focus***

Influenced by the specific formulations of relevance and adoption of the public health emphasis on evidence-led decision making, the objectives of the CVI Programme were to: determine the magnitude, occurrence, risks and determinants of injuries and violence; identify and support evidence led injury prevention and safety promotion initiatives; and develop and strengthen research, methodological and intervention capacities especially among the historically marginalized including blacks and women. In the first cycle (2001-2005) the CVI was thus centred around developing systems for registering the magnitude and occurrence of fatal and

non-fatal injuries and creating community-based safety promotion infrastructure in underserved communities and implementing a range of psycho-educational interventions that were subjected to formative evaluation measures.

During its second cycle (2006-2010) the accent shifted towards studies on injury determinants and randomised control trials for the reduction of risks for childhood unintentional injuries alongside the on-going development of the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS), and enhancement of community safety promotion infrastructure and research capacities across the continent. The NIMSS, which started off as collaboration between three academic institutions, namely the University of South Africa (UNISA), the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Centre for Industrial and Scientific Research (CSIR), was located as the first step in the four phase logic of public health: assessing magnitude; determination of risks and causes; development and evaluation of prevention initiatives; and large scale implementation of initiatives that once evaluated show positive reductions in injuries and their risks. So working with forensic laboratories and using a single data collection sheet, NIMSS aimed to register the demographics (e.g., age, sex, population group); circumstances (time, day of week and month of year, blood alcohol level) and location (suburb/town, home/road/place of employment, etc.) associated with the injury deaths in different regions of the country (Matzopoulos, Norman, & Bradshaw, 2004). Within the public health oriented injury prevention and safety promotion sector surveillance is considered vital for: tracing changes in injury profiles, evaluating the outcome of intervention actions, obtaining public prioritisation of injuries, and securing political and financial support (Matzopoulos et al., 2004; Van Niekerk, Suffla, & Seedat, 2004).

The intellectual accent on registering the magnitude and occurrence of injuries through

the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS), household community-based surveys, randomised control intervention studies, development of community based injury prevention infrastructure, the promotion of research and intervention capacities, and small scale psycho-educational oriented community interventions, inscribed very specific notions of knowledge, research and action into CVI's academic template.

### *Meanings of Research*

In the public health empiricist logic data from surveillance and randomised studies are forms of knowledge that provide an independent and objective empirical source for rational and informed decision making processes. Information obtained from forensic laboratories is categorized through the use of the International Classification of Disease 10 (ICD) system and other techniques to provide data about the epidemiology of injury deaths. In this sense surveillance information is transformed into evidence through the use of the ICD 10 classification system and other statistical and mathematical applications. Such evidence forms the "empirical case" for marshalling political, financial and intellectual resources towards injury prevention and safety promotion. Likewise interventions tested through randomised control trials are held up as providing empirical evidence for specific safety promotion choices and actions.

Within such a frame data, once transformed into evidence, acquires the status of knowledge as objective, instrumental and goal-directed. The objectivity of such knowledge arises from what is assumed to be the data's reliable and valid character. A multitude of technologies, including data collection, registration, cleaning and report writing systems, were deployed by the CVI to assure the data their "valid" and "reliable" character. Instrumentality is borne out of its assumed utility for policy and programming decisions (see Bendlow, 2006; Chambers & Gillespie, 2000; Krause, 2005 for critiques on positivism).

While there is growing recognition of the influences of multiple sources of information on decision making and programming, empirical data as evidence and instrumental knowledge tended to be elevated as a mediating influence to encourage rational choices. In this regard the critical psychologists, focussed on the social and scientific relevance of the CVI's research, paid insufficient attention to the assumptions underlying the application of empirically derived data. The application of empirically derived data was therefore unwittingly and uncritically assumed to be scientifically objective, and politically and culturally neutral (see Burman, 2003). Such an assumption overlooked the constructionist dimension of knowledge. The positivist tradition of knowledge creation uses specific logic, analytical tools and methodological techniques to construct knowledge as neutral and objective. This is a conscious and value-driven process. Yet, adopting the myth of science as neutral, such a construction creates a binary between the supposed objective character of empirical data and the "subjective" quality of the influences of ideology, political and economic priorities and community demands on policy formulation and program decisions (see Burman, 2003).

Ensnared within the university and the MRC's respective dominant scripts and missions that differentiate research from community engagement, the CVI constructed research as a specialized intellectual activity involving the use of mathematical tools, statistical devices and empirical techniques. In contrast, research translation was concerned with dissemination of empirical data, through conferences, workshops and reports, with a view to influencing the decisions and behaviours of multiple end-user groups such as policy-makers, intervention workers and service-provision agencies. Thus, the "sophisticated" high-order intellectual labour was cast as research and as the purview of the scientists in the Programme. In contrast, research-translation work, defined as action,

was defined as the function of the intervention workers, including community-minded psychologists with expertise in reading community process, social marketing and communication.

In 2006 the CVI adopted a slogan, "from data to action" for an international conference on safety promotion that it hosted along with other agencies. This slogan is perhaps the best example of the dichotomy between research and research translation that the CVI uncritically and unreflectively produced. Such separations between research, research translation and action—that are deliberately and actively promoted by institutional funding policies and practices—also sets up a hierarchy of intellectual activities that formulates research very narrowly and as a premium intellectual activity. However, the concept of praxis that critical psychologists in CVI subscribe to suggest otherwise: research has a motivated character and so action is both the outcome and generator of research. Research constitutes action (Burman, 2003; Fryer, 2009).

### ***Research Presentation and Writing***

Within the institutions within which the CVI Programme is located, research is further elevated as a premium activity in that it finds representation in peer-reviewed academic publications that mint significant financial currency in both institutions to which the CVI is affiliated. Although research translation and innovation are integral to the respective UNISA 2015 and MRC visions, the criteria used to allocate budgets for research in both the university and science council place very high value on peer-reviewed journal publications. The University, for very good funding reasons, closely follows the National Department of Education's (DOE) definitions of research outputs that are narrowly defined and primarily as peer reviewed accredited publications. The University earns subsidy through the DOE for such publications. Other forms of research outputs that are subsidised by DOE include books for the specialist, conference

proceedings, patents and completed masters degrees and doctorates. Research driven technological innovations in the form of ICT systems and other knowledge outputs that inform community and policy development are not factored into the research financing models. These include policy briefs, new research techniques, diagnostic tools, new therapies, protocols or intervention programmes implemented or introduced; participation in health or science policy development processes such as consultancies, workshops, and public hearings; patents or innovations; software and similar outputs; and guidelines and technical fact sheets.

This hierarchical differentiation privileges certain forms of writing. Whereas writings that appear in peer reviewed accredited journals are held up as outcomes of research, writings related to what is defined as research translation are formulated as activities arising from another sphere of engagement and knowledge. When particular forms of the written texts are associated with research, the review of the CVI shows that they come to earn currency through an interpretive and financing process that works to frame the relationship between research and writing in particular desired ways. The experience of the CVI reveals that the interpretive and financing process works to discourage experimentation with diverse genres of representation, especially if we accept that different genre such as plays, policy-briefs, field work-dairies, public submissions, cinema, and photography elicit different perspectives (Burman, 2003) in the knowledge creation process. Likewise the dominant forms of representation—sanctioned by the institutions in which the CVI functions—places the academic writer as the most significant producer of knowledge. Film makers, artists and play-writers are, at best, social commentators and entertainers. Likewise, those who engage in research translation are practitioners.

### ***Intervention Work is Theory-Free?***

The major investment in the forms of intellectual labour highlighted above, the accent on empiricist modes of application, the privileging of positivist science and knowledge as instrumental and scientifically neutral, and the distinction between research and research translation has worked to produce a subtle effect. It perpetuated the myth that intervention work is theory-free. While critical psychologists associated with the CVI sometimes attempted to highlight the underlying theoretical and epistemological assumptions of the public health model adopted by some aspects of the Programme (see Stevens, Seedat, Swart, & Van der Walt, 2003), these critiques were not understood—by the public health oriented researchers—as a call for interrogating the empiricist logic exemplified by the surveillance work in particular. Such work was relegated to a secondary or marginal activity in the context of the inordinate focus on developing relevant and “scientifically” tested systems of data collection and injury registration systems, evidence-led interventions and technical tools in the form of handbooks and training manuals. Thus, a hierarchical order was implicitly created within the CVI: While reflexive and critical work that raised questions about the theoretical assumptions of injury surveillance and other such empiricist projects were subtly denoted as the work of the social sciences, like psychologist concern about process, the “true” scientists, namely the public health empiricists, produced the most valuable knowledge to help drive prevention policy and intervention actions. Public and political demands for technical tools and information on “what works” to reduce and control violence and crime served to entrench the theory-practice duality, and the persistent view that theoretical and reflective work did not help to cost, design, monitor and evaluate interventions. The demand for technical tools and hands-on approaches to crime and violence

prevention and management gained particular momentum during the Thabo Mbeki Presidency that emphasised service delivery, economic growth and social development. During the Mbeki era, deaths and disabilities arising from violence and crime were seen, by both the public and the state as depleting scarce resources and threatening the national development trajectory.

### **Conclusions: Making the Circle Bigger**

When considered against its own formulations of relevance, the CVI may be viewed as a university-science council partnership initiative engaged in socially-conscious research and research development work. The provision of injury epidemiology data through the NIMSS, randomised controlled studies on the reduction of injury risks, the promotion of expertise among young emerging researchers, and the development of community prevention infrastructure, all helps to develop the injury prevention and safety promotion science base in different parts of the country. Such intellectual activities, including the active engagement of blacks and women in knowledge creation, helps build a research culture and assures the CVI on-going scientific and social relevance. Such work resonates with critical psychology's focus on distributive equality.

The focus on crime, violence and injuries, development of infrastructure in under-served communities, and the participation of blacks and women in knowledge creation, are insufficient for a meaningful enactment of critical psychology and articulation of distributive sufficiency. Instead, the formulations of relevance adopted by the CVI mobilised its members into forms of intellectual activities that privileged the dominant empiricist traditions of research and knowledge creation and cast research as a premium form of intellectual labour separate from research translation. In this sense the

CVI's intellectual work reproduced the institutional scripts that distinguish research from research translation, and the uncritical adoption of knowledge as instrumental and the unreflexive engagement in actions. This research translation activities intended to influence policy and programmatic choices, served to de-centre theoretical work. The rare attempts to focus on distributive sufficiency and introduce reflexivity and critical reflections about the knowledge claims underlying surveillance and other public-health oriented research, was over-shadowed by data quality and availability issues and the public and political demands for "what works" for prevention of crime, violence and injuries.

At the time of writing this article the CVI was preparing to enter its third phase and so this article and the analysis contained herein will serve to inform discussions about its future intellectual activities, definitions of relevance, and deployment of criticality. The CVI Programme is poised to assume a name change that encompasses an explicit commitment to praxis and theoretical work. The CVI, which is to re-brand itself as the Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPPRU), plans to adopt trans-disciplinary approaches that embrace *health promotion* and *peace-building* perspectives and that place the accent on safety and peace promotion rather than just injuries. SAPPRU now explicitly conceptualises safety and peace to include physical, psychological, social, environmental and spiritual dimensions. So the emphasis will be extended to generate knowledge focused on the reduction, control and prevention of crime, violence and injuries as well as the determinants of peace and safety. Within a trans-disciplinary and promotive approach, factors such as crime, violence, injuries, militarised cultures, masculinities and social inequality are viewed as threats to safety and peace. Dynamic factors like distributive justice, equality, participatory democracy, active citizenship and generative identity are, therefore

re, to be examined for their supportive roles in promoting safety and peace.

Following Fryer (2009), the assumption of criticality will focus SAPPRU on developing knowledge to support the democratic project with a specific gaze on the struggle for peace and safety among the marginalised and excluded sections of this society. In order to avoid the pitfalls of relevance, as described above, SAPPRU will constantly reflect on the interests and ideological implications underlying its research, knowledge creation processes, and ways of presenting and sharing its research. SAPPRU is to adopt a vigorous criticality in its new approach. So, consistent with the tenets of critical psychology, the SAPPRU has now explicitly re-aligned itself to the values of justice, human rights, accountability, and committing to produce knowledge for the service of both democratic governments and social movements. Such an alignment has been enabled by changes in the composition of the research team that now includes a significant mass of critically-minded scholars who adopt an active reflexive approach and who consciously subscribe to Burman's (2003) view that "research is the place where new theory is made; theory is both the outcome of research and where it is put to work (and so generates more)" (p. 110). Such a critical stance is likely to generate both support and contestation for SAPPRU within the institutions that it continues to work.

The challenges and constraining influences, that SAPPRU will need to respond to, partially arise from a location in academic disciplines that place a high premium on the development of evidence-led interventions and institutions that make arbitrary distinctions between research and research translation, and research, community engagement and academic citizenship. Thus SAPPRU may want to develop resources and strategies —within the invited spaces in which it works— to counter the limits imposed on criticality, and to capitalize on opportunities to grow relevant and critical scholarship. In

this respect SAPPRU faces the task of creating theoretical and other resources to challenge restrictions on praxis emerging from dominant institutional scripts related to funding, research accreditation systems and knowledge management. Like critical psychologists elsewhere, SAPPRU is to consider strategies to both resist limits on criticality and to grow the circle of critical scholarship within invited spaces. SAPPRU also faces the task of inventing its own spaces to interrogate dominant notions of research and knowledge and enact critical forms of praxis at this liberal democratic moment. A review of the CVI suggests that the adoption of relevance and criticality requires enactments of critical scholarship in both invited and invented spaces so as to embrace both co-operative and disruptive practices (see Burman, 2003; Miraftab, 2006) in the service of democratic and inclusive development in South Africa and beyond.

### Acknowledgements

This article benefited substantially from the on-going conversation I enjoy with colleagues in CVI /SAPPRU and so I recognize the contradiction in writing such a piece as a single author.

I thank the reviewers for their incisive and constructive comments.

### References

- Alpers, P. (2002). Yes, Americans are often shot - and so are many others. *Injury Prevention*, 8, 208.
- Bendelow, G. A. (2006). Pain, suffering and risk. *Health, risk and society*, 8, 59-70.
- Bhalia, M. (2007). *Economic policy post-1994: From GEAR to ASGISA*. Honours dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Burman, E. (2003). Narratives of challenging research: Stirring tales of politics and practice. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6, 101-119.
- Chambers, D. W. & Gillespie, R. (2000). Locality in the history of science: Colonial science, technoscience and indigenous knowledge. *Nature and*

- Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise*, 15, 221-240.
- Cooper, S. (1990). Social control or social empowerment? Psychologist as political activist. In L. Nicholas & S. Cooper (Eds.), *Psychology and apartheid* (pp. 60-65). Cape Town, South Africa: Vision Press.
- Duncan, N., van Niekerk, A., de la Rey, C., & Seedat, M. (Eds.). (2001). *'Race', racism, knowledge production and psychology in South Africa*. New York, U.S.: Nova Science.
- Foster, D. (2008). Critical psychology: A historical overview. In C. van Ommen & D. Painter (Eds.), *Interiors: A history of psychology in South Africa* (pp. 92-124). Pretoria, South Africa: UNISA Press.
- Franchi, V., & Duncan, N. (Eds.). (2003). *Prevention and intervention practice in post-apartheid South Africa*. New York, U.S.: Haworth Press.
- Fryer, D. (2009). International manifestations of community critical psychology. *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 9(2), 59-65.
- Gordon, E. W., & Shipman, S. (1988). Human diversity and pedagogy. Introduction. In E. Gordon & Associates (Eds.), *Human diversity and pedagogy* (pp. I-XXI). New Haven, U.S.: Yale University.
- Institute for Social and Health Sciences. (2009). *Annual report*. Johannesburg, South Africa: author
- Jewkes, R. (2000). Violence against women: An emerging health problem. *International Clinical Psychopharmacol*, 15(3), 37-45.
- Krausse, E. S. (2005). Research paradigms and meaning making: A premier. *The Qualitative Report*, 10, 758-770.
- Krug, E. G., Powell, K. E., & Dhalberg, L. L. (1998). Fire-arm-related deaths in the United States and 35 other high- and upper-middle-income countries. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 27, 214-221.
- Lazarus, S., & Donald, D. (1995). The development of education support services in South Africa: Basic principles and a proposed model. *South African Journal of Education*, 15, 45-52.
- Mandela, N. (1998). *Address by President Nelson Mandela at the opening of the Morals Summit on 22 October*. Retrieved from <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mandela/1998/nm1022.htm>.
- Matzopoulos, R., Norman, R., & Bradshaw, D. (2004). The burden of injury in South Africa: Fatal injury trends and international comparisons. In S. Suffla, A. van Niekerk & N. Duncan (Eds.), *Crime, violence and injury prevention in South Africa: Developments and challenges*. (pp. 9-21). Cape Town, South Africa: Medical Research Council.
- Medical Research Council. (1999). *Minutes from meeting on re-structuring the MRC's research into clusters*. Diemersfontein, Wellington.
- Miraftab, F. (2006). Feminist praxis, citizenship and informal politics. Reflections on South Africa's anti-eviction campaign. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 8, 194-218.
- Peden, M., & Butchart, A. (1999). Trauma and injury. In N. Crisp & A. Ntuli (Eds.), *South African Health Review 1999* (pp. 331-334). Durban, South Africa: Health Systems Trust.
- Posel, D. (2002). *A matter of life and death: Revisiting 'modernity' from the vantage point of the 'new' South Africa*. Draft manuscript. Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research.
- Ratele, K. (2008). Analysing males in Africa: Certain useful elements in considering ruling masculinities. *Asian and African Studies*, 7, 515-536.
- Rauch, J. (2005). Crime prevention and morality. The campaign for moral regeneration in South Africa. *ISS Monograph Series*, 114, 2-59.
- Seedat, M. (1993). *Topics, trends and silences in South African psychology 1948-1988: Ethnocentrism, crisis and liberatory echoes*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Seedat, M., Duncan, N., & Lazarus, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Community psychology: Theory, method and practice. South African and other perspectives*. Cape Town, South Africa: Oxford University Press.
- Seedat, M., & Lazarus, S. (2010). Community psychology in South Africa. Origins, development and

- manifestations. Unpublished manuscript. Institute for Social and Health Sciences. University of South Africa.
- Stevens, G., Seedat, M., Swart, T. M., & Van der Walt, C. (2003). Promoting methodological pluralism, theoretical diversity and interdisciplinarity through a multi-levelled violence prevention initiative in South Africa. In V. Franchi & N. Duncan (Eds.), *Prevention and intervention practice in post-apartheid South Africa* (pp. 11-29). New York, U.S.: Haworth Press.
- Statistics South Africa. (2003). *Statistics South Africa Annual Report 2002/2003*. Pretoria, South Africa: Author.
- Statistics South Africa. (2008). *South Africa Annual Report 2007/2008*. Pretoria, South Africa.
- Swartz, S. (2006). A long walk to citizenship: Morality, justice and faith in the aftermath of apartheid. *Journal of Moral Education*, 35, 551-570.
- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Annotated Version*. (1996). Cape Town, South Africa: Constitutional Assembly.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Act No. 34*. (1995). Cape Town, South Africa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- Van Niekerk, A., Suffla, S. & Seedat, M. (2004). Crime, violence and injury prevention in South Africa: Trends, emerging issues and opportunities. In S. Suffla, A. van Niekerk & N. Duncan (Eds.), *Crime, violence and injury prevention in South Africa: Developments and challenges* (pp. 1-8). Cape Town, South Africa: Medical Research Council.
- Waghid, Y. (2004). Compassion, citizenship and education in South Africa: An opportunity for transformation. *International Review of Education*, 50(5-6), 525-542.
- Wood, A. (2006). Correlating violence and socio-economic inequality: An empirical analysis. In T. E. McCarthy (Ed.), *Attacking the root causes of torture, poverty, inequality and violence* (pp. 23-93). Geneva: World Organization Against Torture. Retrieved from [http://omct.org/pdf/ESCR/2006/omct\\_desc\\_study\\_2006\\_cd/read\\_me\\_first.html?PHPSESSID=a8c3a9d95b6c8b2459b5a6dcoda76387](http://omct.org/pdf/ESCR/2006/omct_desc_study_2006_cd/read_me_first.html?PHPSESSID=a8c3a9d95b6c8b2459b5a6dcoda76387)
- World Health Organization. (2000). *World Health Organization Report Database*. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO.