
Shifting ground: making sense of context in examining HIV/AIDS and schooling

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Abstract

Research in HIV/AIDS and education has been dominated by large-scale quantitative studies which have neglected the socially embedded nature of the disease. The authors are involved in a study that is investigating how HIV/AIDS affects schooling in Richmond, and how it intersects with other barriers to schooling in a context where the prevalence of HIV infection is high. Initial analysis in this study has indicated that an understanding of the context, particularly Richmond's violent past, is central to an understanding of HIV/AIDS and schooling. This article reports on a qualitative micro-study that emerges from the larger Richmond study. It attempts to provide a contextual understanding of Richmond as a geographic and socio-historic space, as a community and as a discursive space. We discuss Richmond as geographic and community spaces by examining its recent history with a view to understanding factors underlying HIV infection and affection. This discussion focuses on problems of fractured families, alcohol abuse, commercial sex work and drugs which all seem to be connected to a history of violence. We then examine Richmond as a discursive space in terms of discourses of violence, peace and barriers to schooling. In the final section of the article we theorise context using the metaphor of 'ground' and apply this theorisation to the case of Richmond.

Introduction

The literature on HIV/AIDS is growing at a phenomenal rate and no previous epidemic has received as much research attention. However, biomedical and epidemiological interests have dominated the research agenda in Africa and abroad. Globally, the lion-share of research time and money has been consumed by the quest for vaccines and treatment regimes. The social dimension of the disease has been overshadowed. Recent studies have lamented the paucity of research attention paid to HIV/AIDS within the social sciences (Campbell, 2003). In particular, the dearth of studies in the education sector has been highlighted (Baxen and Breidlid, 2004; Hartell and Maille, 2004; Coombe, 2000a, 2000b). Too little attention has been given to understanding the important and complex interface between HIV/AIDS and education in South Africa. Where studies have tried to understand such relationships, it would seem that they have failed to properly account for the

ways in which contextual and social factors mediate the relationships between HIV/AIDS and education. Campbell (2003, p.8) also argues that, “social scientists have been slow in explaining the underlying processes and mechanisms whereby contextual factors contribute to high levels of HIV-transmission”.

As a response to these gaps identified in the literature, this article firstly reports on research that is attempting to understand how HIV/AIDS may be serving as a barrier to schooling in Richmond, a small town in KwaZulu-Natal. To do this, the article sets out how a large research project at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (hereafter referred to as the UKZN research project) is investigating intersecting barriers to basic education in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The second and more important purpose of this article is to interrogate the historical context informing the study. In doing so, we identify and discuss a range of socio-political factors which emerge as key issues or moments in the recent history of Richmond. Such a discussion illuminates the situated and localised character of HIV/AIDS in Richmond. In reviewing studies of HIV/AIDS, Baxen and Breidlid (2004, p.9) have noted that “trends in research over the last ten years neglect the situated context in which messages, knowledge, experience and practice are produced, reproduced and expressed”. In this article we intend to construct a picture of the context from which a huge and rich body of data on HIV/AIDS and schooling is emerging.

An understanding of how HIV/AIDS affects schooling in Richmond and any interventions aimed at addressing the effects of HIV/AIDS on the education sector in Richmond, will depend on an understanding of Richmond as a geographic and socio-historic space, as a community and as a discursive space. This article attempts to provide such an understanding. We begin by describing the larger research project to which our article responds.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal research project

The UKZN research project entitled, Mapping Intersecting Barriers to Basic Education for Children and Adult Learners in the Richmond District, KwaZulu-Natal, is carried out by staff and students from three university schools, namely, education, psychology and adult education. The research process was designed as two phases of data collection spanning 2004 and 2005. The National Research Foundation (NRF) and the University of

KwaZulu-Natal provided funding for both years (see also Van der Riet, Hough and Killian, 2005).

Over both phases the project entails working in the areas of Indaleni, Patheni, Richmond village, Magoda, Esimozomeni, and Inhlazuka, an even split between rural and urban areas of the Richmond Municipality. In terms of institutions across these areas, the project targets 3 high schools, 5 primary schools, 2 adult centres (offering Adult Basic Education), a School for the Deaf and two Early Childhood Development centres. Through community meetings, focus group discussions and interviews, the research has drawn on the voices of learners, educators, school governing bodies, caregivers and parents, NGOs working in district, health officials, People Living with Aids, HIV/AIDS support groups and volunteers, youth who have dropped out of school and interested community members.

With regard to methodology, the project has positioned itself strongly within a qualitative approach with a clear preference for participatory methods of data collection. In addition to focus group discussions and interviews, a range of context relevant, participatory techniques have been developed and used, including various ranking exercises, a vulnerability matrix, social mapping, photo-voice and transect walks.

The project can thus be described as a qualitative, localised study which draws on a wide range of stakeholders using participatory methods to understand how HIV/AIDS and other related barriers may affect various types of education provision in Richmond. The project is also keen to explore the epistemological value of participatory methodology. In a move away from large-scale surveys across a range of locations, the design for the UKZN project was intended to capture both depth of experience and a range of perspectives in understanding the intersections between HIV/AIDS and other barriers to schooling within a limited geographic space. Providing a textured account of this space, to serve as one lens through which to view the data, is the central intention of this article.

Methodological approach

We need to distinguish the methodology for the research for this article from the methodology employed in the larger UKZN study. As outlined earlier, the UKZN study has a large team, is targeting a wide range of participants and is

using several participatory methodologies. The authors of this article have been involved in the UKZN project and are responsible specifically for the data collection involving parents, caregivers and school governing body members. The idea for this article and the return to the field that it initiated emerged from the data already collected in the UKZN project. When looking at this data, we were struck by the frequency with which the past violence in Richmond featured as an anchor point for discussions on HIV/AIDS and a range of barriers to schooling. It occurred to us that understanding the data on barriers to schooling required a deeper understanding of the context from which the data had emerged. The violence appeared to be a central part of 'Richmond in context' thus generating a new research question: How does the historical context of violence inform HIV/AIDS and schooling in Richmond?

This set us off on a new and more focused phase of research. We examined a vast collection of secondary source data on the violence in Richmond including contemporary newspaper accounts, monitoring reports, sociological analyses and historical narratives. We re-examined transcripts in the UKZN project using the lens of violence. We also interviewed four purposefully selected key informants from Richmond; people who had lived in the area for many years and who were familiar with its history. Informants included an undertaker, a retired policeman, a retired policewoman and a school principal.

Our analysis of this data enabled us to identify key moments in the recent history of Richmond, which we present below in the form of a periodisation and a narrative. A thematic analysis of the data yielded a number of factors that were associated with Richmond's violent past and have a continuing impact on the Richmond community, and on schooling in particular. We shift from narrative to a more analytical discourse in discussing each of these in turn. Finally, employing grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), our analysis suggested a new conceptualisation of context in relation to HIV/AIDS and schooling. We theorise context in the last section of our article.

Embedding HIV and AIDS in a local context: the case of Richmond

Richmond, a small village situated between the Umkomazi and Umlazi rivers in the southern KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, was founded in 1850 by the Byrne settlers. The name derives from the town of Richmond in Hampshire, England – the region from which many of the settlers came (Shepstone, 1937). The

village featured prominently in the ‘Zulu Rebellion’ of 1906 when farm workers on the farm of Trewergie refused to pay poll tax and took up arms against the colonial government. Some colonial soldiers were killed, martial law was declared and the rebellion was suppressed with two rebels tried “on the veranda of the Trewergie homestead”, found guilty and shot (Shepstone 1937, p.47). A “loyal” local chief, Mveli, helped the colonial government in rounding up the remaining rebels. A subsequent trial of 24 rebels in the Richmond Agricultural Hall found twelve of them guilty of “murder, being under arms against the Government, and public violence”. They were executed on 2 April 1906.

The village of Richmond fell under the jurisdiction of the colonial government, and later the provincial government of Natal. It was run by a Town Board. It was surrounded by large townships housing over 70 000 people by the 1990s, including the semi-urban township areas of Ndaleni and Magoda, and the informal rural areas of Phatheni and Mkhobeni. These settlements came under the auspices of the KwaZulu administration during the apartheid era and were controlled by traditional leaders. Richmond and its surrounding settlements fell under a common jurisdiction only after 1994.

The anti-colonial resistance of the early 20th century in some ways presaged the violence which broke out eighty years later, but which far exceeded it in scale, intensity and duration. During the late 1980s and through the 1990s, Richmond featured frequently in the news as a site of chronic violence and instability. It was affected by the waves of violence that were sweeping the province at the time, but in a particularly concentrated form in which provincial and national factors combined lethally with local dynamics. This review of Richmond’s recent history begins with a broad periodisation. It then outlines the key moments in this history and discusses the effects of the violence on Richmond generally, and on schooling in particular.

The table below outlines the key periods in Richmond’s recent history. This serves as a reference point for the discussion that follows:

Figure 1: Key events in Richmond's history, 1988–2005

1988–1993:	Violent conflict between Inkatha and African National Congress supporters.
1994:	First democratic election. Inkatha/ANC peace meetings and rallies.
1995:	Sifiso Nkabinde, local ANC leader, becomes mayor of Richmond.
1997:	Sifiso Nkabinde expelled from the ANC as an apartheid spy. Nkabinde joins Bantu Holomisa in what becomes known as the United Democratic Movement (UDM).
1997–1999:	Violent conflict ensues between UDM and ANC supporters, costing over 1 200 lives.
July 1997:	ANC wins local elections: 4 out of 5 seats in the Richmond Transitional Local Council.
Sept 1997:	Sifiso Nkabinde arrested and charged with 16 counts of murder.
April 1998:	Nkabinde acquitted.
July 1998	Tavern massacre leaves 8 people dead and 13 injured.
July-August 1998:	Deployment of security force members in Richmond.
13 August 1998:	Government closes down local police station.
23 January 1999:	Sifiso Nkabinde assassinated. 11 members of the ANC-supporting Ndabezitha family killed in retaliation.
September– November 1999:	Nine men arrested for the Nkabinde assassination. Five men arrested for the Ndabezetha murders.
2000:	Local government elections held peacefully.
2004–2005:	Development back on the agenda, low cost housing project begins and property boom experienced

This article does not offer a blow-by-blow account or a comprehensive analysis of the Richmond violence, which has been done elsewhere (see Taylor, 2002; Network of Independent Monitors 1999; Helen Suzman Foundation 1998, 1999). Rather, it characterises the violence in broad strokes and discusses the immediate and long-term consequences of the violence for Richmond. It argues that an understanding of Richmond's recent history is essential for understanding the barriers to basic education that affect both children and adults in the area, and especially for analysing the social pathology of HIV/AIDS in Richmond.

The first period of violence between Inkatha, epitomised by structures of traditional leadership, and ANC supporters, often with young 'comrades' to the fore, was part of a province-wide pattern of violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Typically, it took the form of a battle for supremacy between Inkatha's self-protection units, supported by various agencies of the apartheid state, and the ANC's self-defence units, supported by Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Transkei Defence Force (The Network of Independent Monitors, 1999). The area was awash with arms. The violence manifested in assassinations, massacres, burning of homesteads, expulsion of residents from contested areas, allegations of police collusion on both sides and aborted peace talks. The Inkatha/ANC violence came to an end with the 1994 election, after which a truce prevailed. Once the dust had settled, the ANC controlled the semi-urban areas of Magoda, Ndaleneni and Smozomeni while Inkatha controlled the rural areas of Phatheni and Mkobeni.

The second phase of violence began in earnest with the expulsion of local ANC leader Sifiso Nkabinde from the ANC in 1997. Nkabinde's power base in Magoda now became a stronghold of the United Democratic Movement, while Ndaleneni and Smozomeni remained loyal to the ANC. Nkabinde had retained the operational capability of the self defence units from the first phase of violence and now unleashed them against ANC supporters. Most of the victims appeared to be on the ANC side (The Network of Independent Monitors, 1999). This included the murder of ANC councilors, leaders and activists; taxi ambushes and hand grenade attacks on houses. Various state-appointed investigations failed to get to the bottom of the violence. Although Nkabinde was arrested in 1997, the case failed partly because state witnesses retracted their statements. Nkabinde was acquitted and the violence continued. In a dramatic move, the Minister of Safety and Security closed down the Richmond police station in August 1998 and hundreds of Defence Force members were deployed in the area. Subsequent evidence before the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission indicates that both the police and army were involved in supplying weapons to the various protagonists.

On a climactic day, 23 January 1999, Sifiso Nkabinde was assassinated by ANC bodyguards who shot him 80 times and 11 ANC members were killed in a revenge attack by Nkabinde's bodyguards. Although Nkabinde's killers were arrested and convicted, many questions about the violence, its perpetrators and its sponsors remain unanswered. In 1997 the Safety and Security Portfolio Sub-committee on Richmond recommended that the provincial legislature establish an independent judicial commission of inquiry. This was never appointed. As Taylor (2002, p.19) argues "Politically speaking, every party had more to lose than to gain by probing the killings."

During the two phases of violence, schooling was severely disrupted and thousands of people experienced physical dislocation, bereavement and psychological trauma. Also, a culture of politics by violence was entrenched, as evidenced in the second outbreak of internecine warfare. Longer term consequences are difficult to quantify but possibly more devastating in their impact, and it is to these that the discussion now turns.

Fractured and displaced families

The social consequences of the violence were devastating. Immediate effects included the loss of bread-winners to the violence. The first phase of violence cost more than two thousand lives and the second phase several hundred (School Principal, 2005; Taylor, 2002). Another consequence was the disintegration of family life for many, and the massive displacement of residents. Refugees in 1991–1992 fled to the town centre as well as to Edendale, Sweetwaters, Sobantu and Imbali in Pietermaritzburg and Chesterville in Durban. In 1991, for example, there were at least 1 700 refugees from Richmond sheltering with families in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg (South African Conflict Monitor, 1991). Estimates of the number of displaced people range from 20 000 "refugees crowded into Richmond, living in tents, makeshift shelters and on the streets" (Osborn, 1991; Taylor 2002) to 39 000 (Network of Independent Monitors, 1999). In the words of an ex-policeman, "You would find vacant homes full with furniture. . . it look liked a war zone, something like what Beirut must have looked liked. . . you could not police there" (Former Policeman, 2005). Many of those who were displaced had not returned by 2005. It is reported that the

local council is planning a new housing project to cater for those residents displaced by the violence. The history of Richmond is a story of repeated displacement with each new period of violence. It is likely that those displaced will experience some apprehension and ambiguity when considering their return to homes that are also sites of situated-trauma.

How did these displacements impact on children and their schooling? Parents and caregivers interviewed as part of the UKZN project, often refer to family members who are no longer in the household because of their flight from the violence. When explaining the different sites of schooling for her son, one Richmond parent said, “He has been running away from violence. When violence started we moved him to stay with our relatives in Hammarsdale” (Parent A, 2005). As in this case, young boys were often sent away to places considered safer causing their schooling to be disrupted in the process. Poverty and unemployment are well-known displacement agents in South African communities and are well-established causes of broken families. Death and displacement caused by the violence compounded this fracturing of family life, undermining a household’s material and emotional resources.

Children growing up in Richmond during the violence have been exposed to harsh and damaging experiences; many witnessed killings, sometimes of close family members. A high proportion of children in focus group interviews reported having lost a significant person in their life (Learner Group, 2004). A teacher at a primary school pointed to the absence of any form of bereavement counselling for learners. She recounted how in one instance, a child was called to the door of her classroom, told that her parent had been killed and was sent back into the classroom to continue her lesson (School Governing Body A, 2005). The recent condition of child-headed households, is yet another stressful and debilitating experience for children in Richmond. The impact of this condition on schooling is a worry as indicated in the following statement, “There are a lot of orphans. . . There are a lot of them without parents, it’s difficult to learn. I don’t know who will give them support. . . There is no bright future to the uneducated children.” (Parent B, 2005).

The following extract from an interview with a parent reveals a context of fragility for children, and a breakdown of family and official support structures. This parent came home one day to find a child in her house left with her daughter by someone passing by. She was unable to locate the child’s mother,

I asked my granny what should I do with the child. My granny said I should inform the councillor. The councillor said he won't help me with anything, I must go to the police station. I went to the police station. They (SAPS) said I should go to the Social Welfare office. They also said I should keep the child, maybe the mother will come back. But still now she had never come back [this was six months later].

(Parent C, 2005)

Some informants have pointed to the lack of parental control caused by the violence as a reason for problems of "poor discipline", "poor morals" and "teenage pregnancy" amongst learners in Richmond (School Principal, 2005). The family as a supportive network is under threat and has already disappeared in a number of cases in Richmond. Yet it is the family that is needed to provide material, moral and spiritual support in the areas of health and education. Campbell (2003, p.33) notes that "Safe sexual behaviour is predicted more by the teenagers' perceptions of how much their parents care for them than by the frequency of health warnings, social class or parents' health status".

Alcohol abuse

The influx of security force members into Richmond in 1997 and 1998 appears to have played a significant role in the establishment of places serving alcohol. Altogether, thousands of security force members came into the area. In 1997, for example, about 600 soldiers and police from around the country were drafted into Richmond in an attempt to stabilise the situation and arrest perpetrators (Helen Suzman Foundation, 1998). These included policemen who were deployed in the area for several years and soldiers who did a three-month tour of duty. Up to 700 security force members were present in the town during the period at any one time (School Principal, 2005). One effect of this was the proliferation of shebeens, resulting in 27 illegal establishments operating in Richmond (School Principal, 2005).

In the UKZN research project, several school governing bodies identified alcohol as a serious problem affecting schooling. When identifying a school's stakeholders, one SGB included 'tavern owners' alongside more typical stakeholders such as parents, the Department of Education, and councillors. Another SGB commented that, "Shebeens and taverns are the only form of recreation". Several parents identified alcohol as a barrier to schooling. One parent noted that "Children drink too much, they stay at the tavern and they end up not going to school" (School Governing Body B, 2005).

The reported rise in alcohol abuse amongst learners is of particular concern in the context of HIV and Aids. Campbell (2003) finds that people participating in social activity associated with heavy alcohol consumption (like stokvels) show higher rates of infection. At present, alcohol abuse is reported by parents and school governors to be a barrier to schooling and can have serious consequences for the health status of learners. As a serious problem facing schools in Richmond, the social pathology of alcohol abuse is deeply embedded in the social and historical context of the town.

Commercial sex work

With the rise in shebeens, a number of young girls were attracted to these shebeens and to the well-paid security personnel who frequented them. Prostitution escalated:

Before we never heard of prostitutes in Richmond. It was a rarity. Prostitution rose with the security force deployment, especially with younger girls. Some left school. Security personnel offered protection to young girls. Many were left pregnant and HIV-positive. Council has noticed an increase in requests for child grants.

(School Principal, 2005)

During this period, many young girls left school and became pregnant. The going rate for a sex worker at one shebeen was R20 for a girl under sixteen and R10 for one older than 16. There was an increase in applications for child grants, and an increase in the number of HIV+ people and, anecdotally, in the AIDS mortality rate. An informant reports the recent death of a number of young girls in the 17–25 age group, including a twenty-two-year-old whose partner, a soldier, also died (School Principal, 2005). The links between poverty and sex work persist in Richmond. At a community meeting in 2004, one parent reported that “Poverty and unemployment leads to children sleeping with anyone to get him/herself some money” (Community Meeting A, 2004).

A further consequence is the number of HIV+ children who contracted the disease from their mothers. One school reports an increase in the prevalence of HIV among Grade 1 children – the generation born during or soon after the violence – with the care-givers of seven out of 38 children disclosing the children’s HIV+ status (School Principal, 2005). The rate of infection could be higher, given the prevailing culture of non-disclosure.

Drugs

There are indications that the second wave of violence was associated with an increase in criminal activity in the Richmond area, including a thriving trade in mandrax. One of Sifiso Nkabinde's bodyguards was Shane Patchay of the Eastwood Cash Money Brothers gang. Patchay had previously been charged with dealing in mandrax (The Network of Independent Monitors, 1999).

Research in 2005 indicates that drugs such as mandrax and dagga are a prominent barrier to schooling among the youth in Ndaleni, and that the pattern of drug distribution was associated with the period of violence, and even with some of its perpetrators. An ex-policeman indicated that there were rumours circulating during the period of violence of drugs being traded to purchase firearms.

There is a link between the increase in drugs and other crime. Parents report that their children resort to stealing money from the home and stealing household items to sell in order to fund their drug habit (Learner Group, 2004). Parents and educators also identify drugs as a barrier to schooling in the Richmond area as reflected in the following statement of a parent,

It affects us a lot because of drinking alcohol and smoking drugs. We have that in school and that is a problem.

(Parent A, 2005)

Poverty

It would be misleading to cite violence as a cause of poverty in the Richmond area, since poverty existed before the violence. However, it can be argued that the violence exacerbated poverty in a number of ways. First, it disrupted the incomes of many families directly through the death of bread-winners.

Second, the violence resulted in the dispersal of families as people fled, sometimes in different directions, in the quest for safety. They often lost their possessions in the process. Third, the violence disrupted development projects in the area and thus employment opportunities. Fourth, some businesses pulled out of Richmond during the violence resulting in increased unemployment. As two key informants explained, "...the biggest disadvantage of the violence was that there was no development in Richmond" (Former Policeman, 2005); "Richmond never progressed. . . Nothing happened here" (Undertaker, 2005).

The UKZN research in Richmond indicates that poverty is a significant barrier to schooling for many children. Many care-givers cannot afford school fees, school uniforms and transport costs. A group of parents at a community meeting in Richmond highlighted the problem of poverty and its effect on schooling when they reported that, “Some parents have many children and they like all of them to go to school but they do not have power to do that and their children end up staying at home” (Community Meeting A, 2004).

Poverty also affects the nutritional status of learners. Although primary schools have feeding schemes, this does not apply at high schools. One Richmond high school pupil, for example, was recently prevented from selling her body to boys in exchange for school lunch (School Principal, 2005).

Although it is illegal for schools to exclude children for economic reasons, this does happen as children are sent home to fetch their school fees or bring their parents to the school. Many parents keep their children at home rather than running the risk of humiliation of having to disclose their impecuniosity to the school governing body.

The devastation of violence and poverty has not come in quick blows, allowing people to view it as temporary aberrations in their lives. There have been repeated waves of violence and poverty gnaws interminably. Both of these conditions are particularly corrosive of a person’s sense of being in control of their life. Such personal control or self-efficacy is an important buffer in times of adversity. Good levels of self-efficacy are known to promote health-enabling behaviour (Campbell, 2003).

Richmond in popular imaginations

We have briefly examined the socio-historical context of the Richmond area (context as background) and, in particular, the longer term consequences of the violence (context as foreground). Besides this context, there is the discursive context, which includes the way that Richmond is represented in the public imagination. We refer to this context as ‘liftground’ since it involves a deliberate emphasis on particular aspects of Richmond’s reality and a ‘lifting’ of these aspects into the public consciousness through, for example, the media. We elaborate our conceptualisation of context in the section ‘Theorising context’ below.

A selection of headings from newspaper articles over the last six years provides a sample of the liftground discourse and its key metaphors.

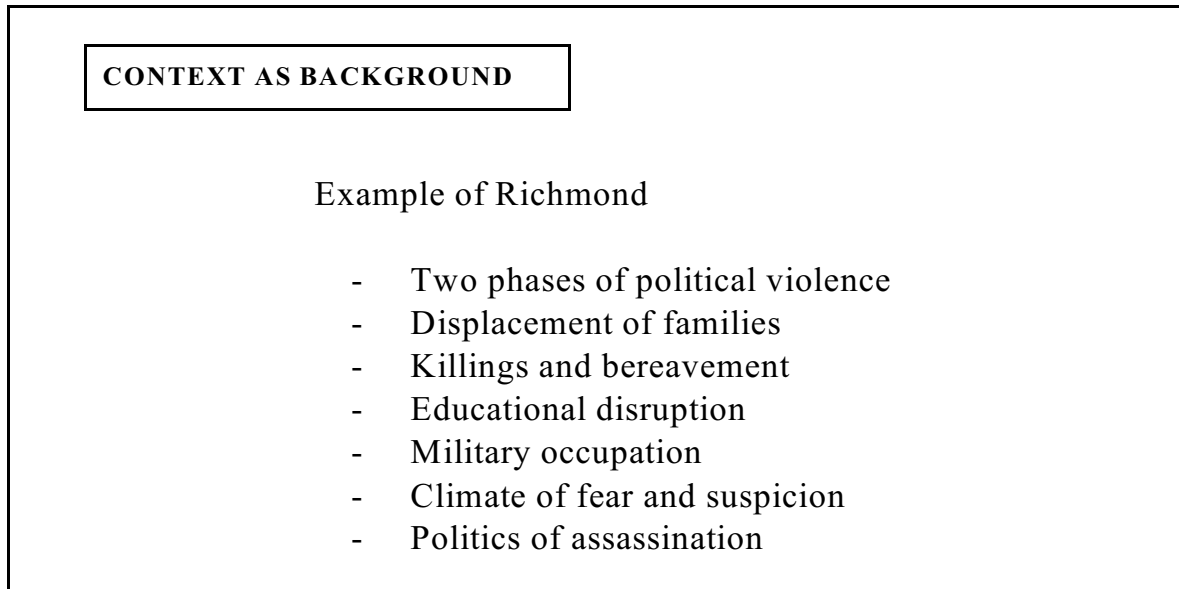
God, what next!	(<i>Tribune</i> , 24 January 1999)
The volcano that is Richmond	(<i>Tribune</i> , 24 January 1999)
Weekend of woe	(<i>Natal Witness</i> , 25 January 1999)
Richmond's time for healing	(<i>Daily News</i> , 22 March 1999)
New Richmond breakthrough	(<i>Natal Witness</i> , 26 November 1999)
A town travels back from Hell	(<i>Sunday Times</i> , 19 September 2004)
Real hope	(<i>Sunday Times</i> , 19 September 2004)

The metaphors of volcanic eruption, hell and damnation were employed to depict Richmond during the periods of violence. Subsequently, during the period of reconstruction, metaphors of healing, stability and hope have been prominent. In some ways the data emerging from the UKZN research project is tapping into this 'liftground' discursive space. The UKZN research project is, however, also revealing another more hidden discursive space. This is characterised by stories of desperation, despair and fragile livelihoods. Much of the data is pointing to conditions of extreme deprivation and serious barriers in the lives of Richmond's inhabitants. This is the current context of private life in Richmond and represents the 'underground discourse'. A comparison of these discursive spaces shows a striking contrast at present. While the public discourse is telling a story of recovery, stability and hope, the private discourse tells a story of deterioration, fragility and despair.

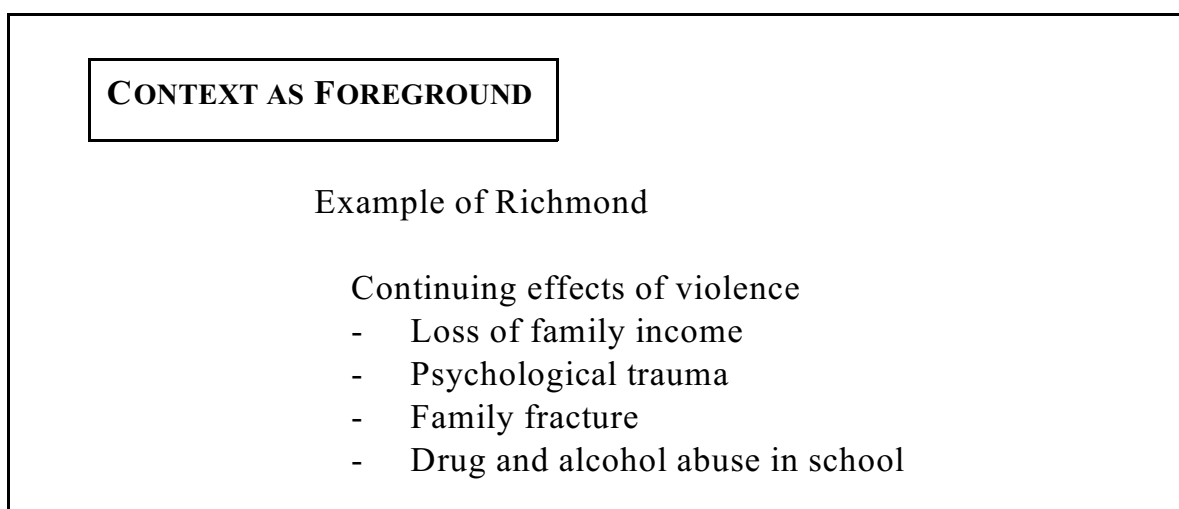
Theorising context

In our study we theorise context using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Babchuk, 1997). This approach is based on the practice of generating theory from research that is grounded in data (Babchuk, 1997). In our case, a grounded theorisation of context emerged as we shifted from investigating how the historical context of violence informed HIV/AIDS and schooling in Richmond, to interrogating the concept of context itself and reconceptualising it in relation to the data.

As suggested in the above analysis, our emergent theory of context embraces four dimensions. We use the spatial metaphor of context as **ground** to illustrate the concept. First we view context as a socio-historical **background** of processes, events and developments. This is the way that context is conventionally approached in historical studies. In the case of Richmond it includes the two phases of violence that afflicted the town, its subsequent period of reconstruction, and the complex of agencies, causes and consequences that accompanied and informed these processes.

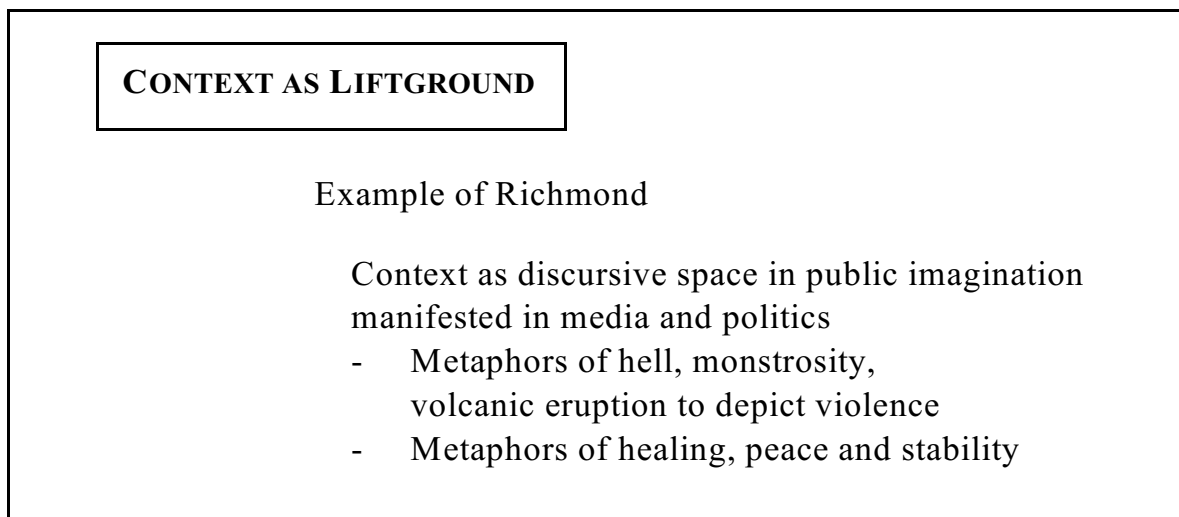
Figure 1: Context as background

Our second sense of context is as **foreground**. Here we indicate that context is not simply an inert backdrop but that it plays an active role in shaping the present and the future. For example, the killings that characterised the Richmond violence are not simply part of a historical background. They have a continuing impact on Richmond residents in multiple ways such as bereavement, changed family circumstances, loss of a breadwinner, psychological trauma and substance abuse. Context in the sense of foreground is a present reality that informs people's lives.

Figure 2: Context as foreground

Context as background and foreground draw on a spatial metaphor of proximity which has a depth dimension: context is immediate or remote. Events that form part of the remote context (background) can have a continuing formative effect in the present (foreground). Our third and fourth senses of context relate to discursive space and to the ways that people create meanings within particular situations. We characterise the public discourses employed, for example, by politicians on public platforms and the media in newspaper and television features, as **liftground**. This term draws on a process in etching which exposes the “ground” and reveals the paint beneath. This liftground context includes the genres and uses of language that are adopted to make sense of prevailing circumstances within the public imagination. With regard to Richmond, for example, the metaphors of hell, monstrosity and volcanic eruption are used in the media to describe its violent history. A new set of metaphors of reconstruction, embracing notions of hope, peace and stability, comes to the fore to describe the period of peace since 1999.

Figure 3: Context as liftground

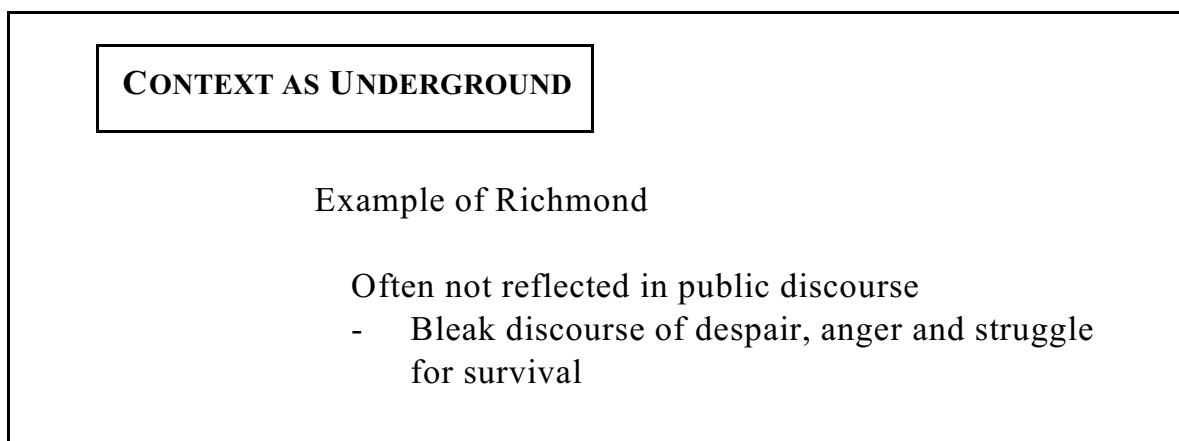


However, this public discourse is not necessarily the same as the discourse of ordinary people and does not necessarily reflect their experience of all of Richmond’s realities. We employ a fourth characterisation of context as **underground** to refer to the personal and communal discourses of ordinary Richmond residents. This discourse is often submerged within the public domain. The voices that contribute to it are often hidden or silenced. In Richmond, for example, interviews and focus group discussions with parents, care-givers, educators, students and community members indicate that a bleak

discourse of desperation, anger, resignation, and a continuing struggle to survive is evident, but that these elements do not feature prominently in Richmond's public reconstruction discourse reflected in the media and politics.

Just as the 'liftground' discourse is constructed through processes of selection, omission and emphasis, so the underground discourse reflects what informants want others, in this case outsider researchers, to hear. Evidence from the UKZN research project does suggest that social networks, such as support groups and families, play a crucial role in enabling people to survive. However, informants choose to emphasise the destructive elements of their contexts to outsiders, possibly because they feel that these are not receiving the necessary public attention.

Figure 4: Context as underground

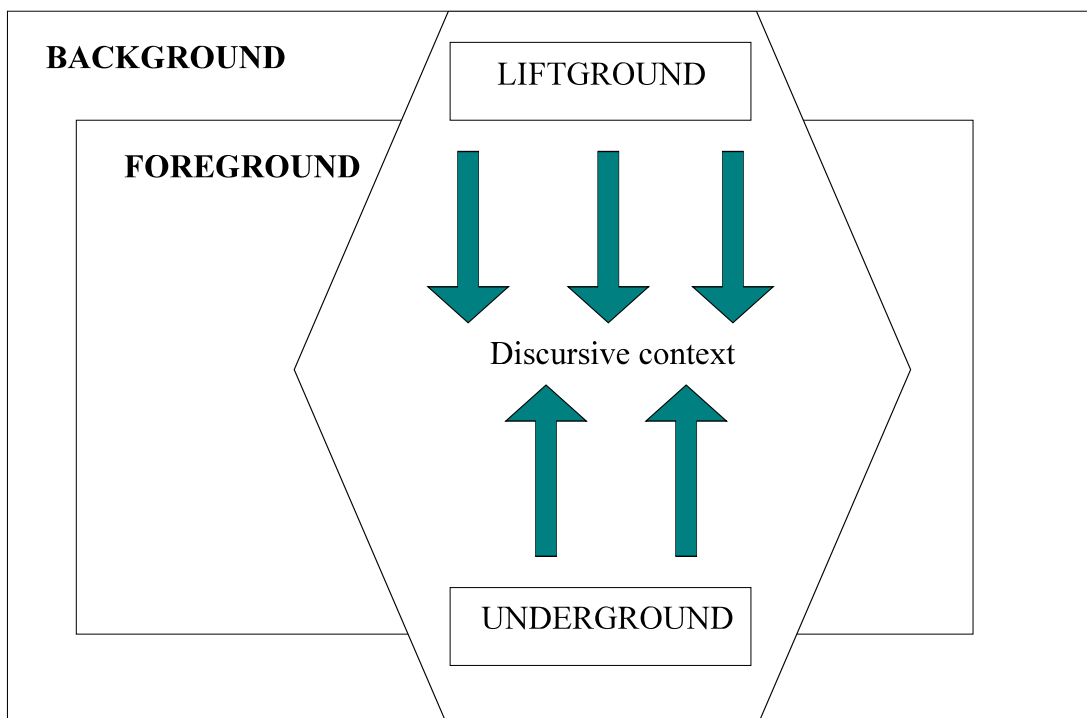


The various levels of context are intricately and politically connected. An understanding of context simply as background enables a facile liftground utopian discourse of reconstruction and universal prosperity: *the violence was bad but we have left the past behind and are building for the future*. This discourse is apparent not only with regard to Richmond but in South Africa more generally. What this view ignores is context as foreground – the continuing formative impact of the past on people's lived realities. If this is not recognised and concretely addressed, both at the level of discourse and of practical interventions, the liftground discourse of hope and reconstruction will always be coloured, and even undermined, by the submerged underground discourse: *the violence continues in the form of interconnected social pathologies such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and substance abuse*.

An application of our theorisation of context to schooling in Richmond and South Africa more broadly is suggestive and worth further investigation. One might argue that the background of apartheid neglect and inequity, although apartheid officially ended decades ago, still constitutes an active foreground that continues to affect schooling in multiple ways regarding, for example, teacher agency and preparedness, community involvement and infrastructural backlogs. The educational liftground tends to focus on matric results and new grade one intakes, whereas the underground of actual experiences of teachers and, especially, learners in the classroom is neglected. The experiences of participants in adult basic education and early childhood education, both on the periphery of the formal system, tend to have very little liftground exposure. Rural education is similarly neglected.

The diagram below shows the relations among the various levels of context. The socio-historical contexts of background and foreground operate together with the discursive dimension of liftground and underground, which reflects the ways that people make sense of their contexts, how they construct meanings through processes of selection, omission and priority. These processes of construction are ‘interested’ in the sense that they are informed, implicitly or explicitly, by social purposes and political agendas.

Figure 5: Context as ground



Conclusion

The two phases of political violence in Richmond in the 1980s and 1990s spawned a number of deadly interconnected social pathologies that continue to hinder the education of both adults and children in the area. Poverty is the primary barrier to schooling for children, and this has been exacerbated by the violence. Violence and poverty have fractured the lives of people in Richmond, both individually and collectively. Violence split up families and caused massive displacement of people. Today, poverty and unemployment are doing the same in a slow, less-dramatic fashion. HIV/AIDS acts as a barrier to education and schooling in complex ways that are accentuated by other barriers such as poverty, family fracture and substance abuse.

In developing a new theorisation of context, we move beyond the conventional understanding of context as a background of key processes, events and developments. We add the notion of context as foreground, which accommodates the continuing effects in the present of historical factors as well as new developments. We included an analysis of discursive context as liftground and underground in an attempt to capture the public discourses of the media and politics, as well as the often submerged discourses of ordinary people. This nuanced approach to context provides framing perspectives through which to explore the socially embedded nature of HIV/AIDS in education and suggests wider applications in education.

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