

EVERY CONTACT LEAVES A TRACE

IMPROVING MEDIA COVERAGE OF
FORENSIC SCIENCE



WITS CENTRE
FOR JOURNALISM





Dr Nechama Brodie

BASED AT WITS CENTRE FOR
JOURNALISM

HEAD OF WITS JUSTICE PROJECT
PROJECT LEAD: HOMICIDE MEDIA
TRACKER, MORBIID

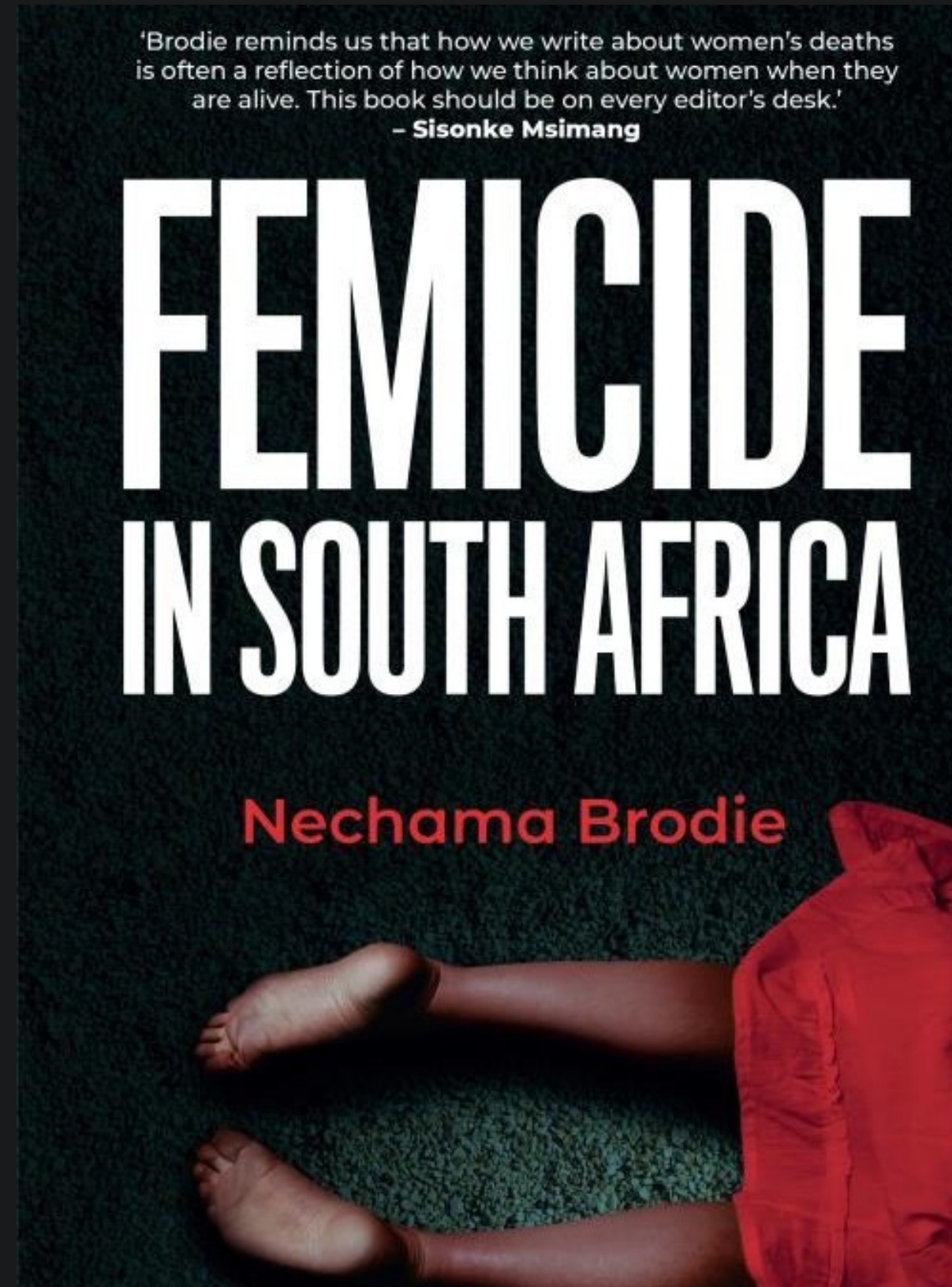
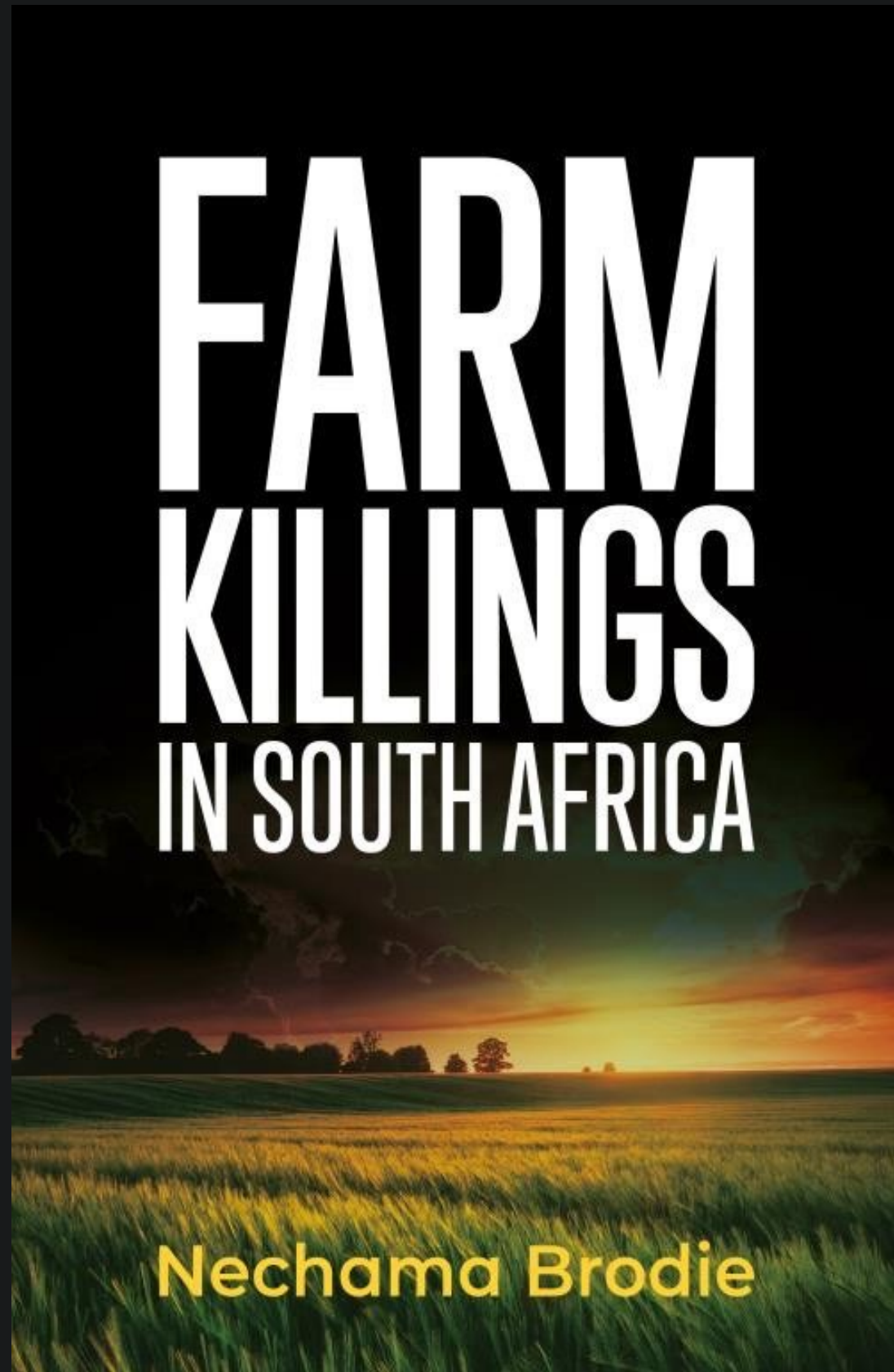
COORDINATOR: SAFETY MATTERS

RESEARCH FOCUSES:

> FATAL VIOLENCE IN THE GLOBAL
SOUTH

> PUBLIC HEALTH (VIOLENCE /
MISINFORMATION)

> DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS



Recent books

Data-based approach to headline issues, making the data intelligible and accessible

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCIENCE COMMUN- ICATION

Media coverage is often the first or only way that people 'learn' about violent crime, conflict, and mass disaster incidents.

01

Risk & Fear

Media coverage of crime and mass disaster creates false perceptions of who is most at risk and who is to be feared as a perpetrator. This applies to crime AND climate change.

03

Resources

Media coverage can put cases, incidents, events and scientific processes on the public agenda – and on the state agenda. This can prompt agencies and donors to allocate resources to a perceived problem.

02

Expectations

False representations, poor understanding of a problem can lead to mismatched expectations, or (worse) enable conspiracy theories.

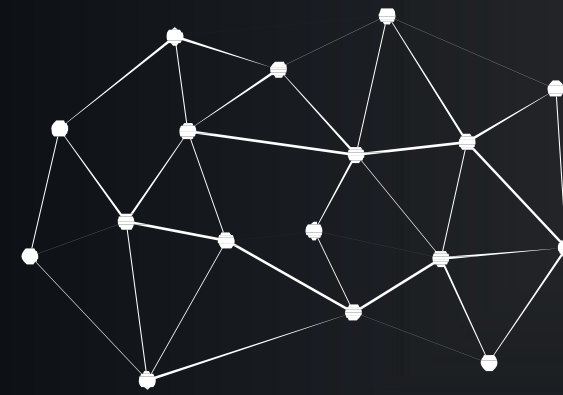
04

Strategies

A poor understanding of a problem often drives support for inappropriate solutions – at the expense of solutions that would be more impactful.

PROBABILITY VS CERTAINTY

Media headlines like certainty and sensationalism. How can you counter this without losing media/public interest?



Network

Work to develop a network of media contacts/share your organisation's details



Clear definitions

Standardise terms and explanations, learn how to communicate scientific concepts



Limitations

Be clear about what your technology/processes can and CANNOT do.



DNA

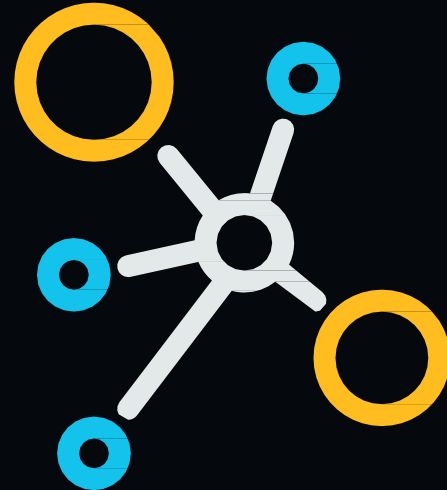
DNA is not the only forensic tool – and it may not be the right tool. Discuss ethics and safety.

WHERE CAN YOU START?



Transparency

Follow scientific/academic (best) practices about open data, corrections, etc.



Accessibility

Share your data, your studies, your challenges. Be pro-active in engagement.



Representation

What do forensic scientists look like? Whose interests do they represent?



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