

## TOWARDS A 'NEW PROFESSIONALISM' FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE

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### ABSTRACT

*South Africa faces significant challenges of violent crime. The country's national police agency, the South African Police Service (SAPS), is often rhetorically presented as the government's response to this challenge. In recent years calls have been made for the SAPS to become more 'professional'. These calls have come from the government, civil society and the SAPS itself. Yet beyond a common sense interpretation, it remains unclear what 'professional' and 'professionalism' mean in relation to police in South Africa. This article explores current articulations of police professionalism in South Africa against a backdrop of the historical development of policing here. It suggests that 'professionalising' the use of force, supporting initiatives aimed at fostering civic cultures that demand fair, polite and efficient service from police, and better defining the police role, will have a positive 'professionalising' effect on the SAPS. Furthermore, it suggests that there needs to be a continued shift of focus away from the police as the primary provider of safety in the country, towards a networked approach to safety generation that incorporates other government and community structures.\**

### KEYWORDS

Police, South Africa, South African Police Service, SAPS, professional, profession, professionalism, professionalisation, civil society, police culture

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## **INTRODUCTION**

South Africa is a notoriously crime saturated country. The South African Police Service (SAPS) is often presented as central to government's response to crime. Between 2010 and 2013, a range of stakeholders began increasing references to 'police professionalism' (eg: Bruce, 2011; South African Police Service 2010; ISS Crimehub). Quickly, the concepts 'professionalism' and 'professional', as applied to police and police work, gained prominence in related discourse. But despite the frequent use of these terms, it remains unclear what they mean with regards to policing in South Africa.

This article explores this murkiness in the hope of moving towards a clearer understanding of what police professionalism means in contemporary South Africa. It begins with a brief historical overview of formal public policing in South Africa before outlining the key ways in which government, the SAPS and civil society groups are articulating the idea of 'police professionalism' today. It ends by suggesting a minimalist interpretation of the concept.

## **EARLY POLICE PROFESSIONALISM**

Modern, some might say 'professional', police were first introduced less than two hundred years ago in London. Prior to the 1829 establishment of the London Metropolitan Police (the Met), much of the work typically understood today as that of the public police, was carried out by private watchmen and thief catchers. With London expanding rapidly in the early 1800s, Sir Robert Peel introduced the idea of a police service that was centrally controlled, uniformed, empowered by legislation and funded by the state (Emsley, 2008; Mawby, 2008). The Met's introduction coincided with a period of broad social and judicial change in Europe, marked by the rise of an ideology of judicial reform (Foucault, 1977). By 1848 there had been a shift towards a standardising of police structures across Europe, something made possible in part through a shared understanding of the police mandate (Deflem, 2004:52). This standardisation provided a foundation for the expansion of the model in various European colonies.

For most of its history police work has been considered unskilled blue collar work. Although the introduction of the Met remains thought of as the start of 'professional' policing, ideas about what 'police professionalism' means have shifted over time, abroad and in South Africa.

### **Early police professionalism in South Africa**

Twenty-three years before Sir Peel introduced his reforms, the English seized control of the Cape Colony in South Africa, a space of contested power between indigenous, slave and settler groups. English law restricted the movement of the Boer and non-European populations, and bound the latter to exploitative labour practices to the benefit of the Europeans.

Histories of early police structures in the Cape and other English and Boer territories in South Africa are uneven. Some believe there was little distinction between military and police units prior to 1913 (van der Spuy, 1989:264) and that the degree of military influence on early policing in South Africa was unique in the colonial experience (Brogden, 1989:3). And yet by the mid-1800s Cape Town's police were modelled on the London Met (Nasson, 1991:238) and its commander was appointed by Met authorities (van Onselen, 1960 in van

der Spuy, 1989:264; Brogden, 1989:7). But unlike in London, police in the Cape and other colonies were enforcers of the laws of the coloniser, rather than of the apparently shared wishes of the local population (Jefferies, 1952 in van der Spuy, 1989:264). Some frame colonial police as having employed violence to carve out the coloniser's vision of the state. In this reading, the increasingly formalised (professionalised) police structures helped the colonising powers incorporate and reconstruct local societies 'according to European notions of legitimacy' (Brogden, 1989:19). If this is accepted, 'professional' police were central to the nation building project of the English in South Africa. But not everyone agrees with this reading of police history. According to Nasson, Cape Town police in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were considered tolerant and fair (Nasson, 1991:240), while to Grundlingh (1991:170) the Constabulary of the post- South African War era were the bearers of order, trust and colonial values to the conquered Afrikaners in the north.

Following the granting of independence from Britain in 1910, the South African Police force (SAP) was formed in 1913. According to Nasson, the first three decades of policing by the SAP, at least in Cape Town, were characterised by relative liberalism. In his reading, when Africans started moving into areas restricted for whites in the 1920s, police mostly left them alone, or responded with leniency (1991:245). Although most police were white, some lived in coloured communities because they could not afford areas intended for whites (Nasson, 1991:247).

Towards mid-century, and following the formal institution of apartheid in 1948, retired English police were replaced by Afrikaners. This promoted Afrikaans nationalism and culture in the organisation. But while the SAP served as an employer for poor Afrikaans men it was by no means constituted only of white men. There was no shortage of black male applicants for whom a job in the police offered significant advantages to farm or mine work (Hornberger, 2011:32). Black police were recruited from rural areas and armed with spears and *knobkories*. They received comparatively poor pay and labour rights and held no authority over white police or civilians. Yet according to Kynoch, black police enjoyed popular support in urban townships before 1976 (Kynoch, 2003). While the evidence Kynoch's presents is not watertight, he makes a fair case that until the deadly police crackdown on student protests in 1976, township communities supported both black and white police in crime-related police work. He believes black police were viewed as symbols of progress in their communities (Kynoch, 2001:325). This is particularly feasible if one considers the limited employment prospects available to many black South Africans at the time for whom the police occupation might have been imbued with an aura of 'professional' work.

Ironically, but perhaps not unintentionally, it was in the 1970s when the SAP took its biggest legitimacy knock, that it introduced a discourse of 'police professionalism' (van der Spuy, 1989:285). The shift is ironic in that similar discourses had been adopted in the US and UK in preceding years, specifically to reframe police officers as skilled professionals and bolster civilian trust in police (Chackerian, 1974:142). In South Africa the shift coincided with the introduction of new technologies, the raising of education standards for recruits, and a focus on the 'science' of policing. New tertiary qualifications for police were introduced by the University of South Africa (a role the university continues to play today). The eighties saw a growth in managerialism and the introduction of an internal research unit. As a result it might be said that rather than building legitimacy, early police professionalism in South Africa sought to streamline an apparatus intended to suppress the civil liberties of the majority of the country's inhabitants. This would only change with the introduction of community policing in the early 1990s.

## **POLICE PROFESSIONALISM TODAY**

While community policing and its offshoots remain internationally en vogue, a discourse around a 'new professionalism' has emerged to compliment it in recent years, both in South Africa and abroad. But what is new about the ways in which the concept is being articulated today? One thing that appears clear is that there is no single definition of what 'police professionalism' means across jurisdictions, or what professional status implies.

Originally the terms 'profession' and 'professionalism' only applied to law, medicine and theology, seen as callings founded on ethical codes and focused on serving others (Roddenberry, 1953:109). But the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw their use shifting with the appeal of 'professional' status tempting a range of occupations to promote themselves as professions. In part this was attempted by developing mission statements and organisational objectives towards which employees could strive (Evettes, 2003:394). Evettes suggests that contemporary professions are knowledge based occupations usually based on training or education and dealing with risk, but that there is little importance in distinguishing professions from other occupations today because there is so much overlap among them (Evettes, 2003:397). She believes the lure of professionalism is that it allows groups to claim ownership of an area of expertise, so providing autonomy. Manning (1997:191) suggested as much with regards to American police over three decades ago, that the wave of professionalism emerging in that era was in part an attempt for police to protect themselves from external interference. But the focus on civilian accountability which accompanied the rise of community policing ensured that such appeals remained tempered.

Largely introduced by civil society, in South Africa police professionalism has been promoted as a framework through which to build police legitimacy, especially with regards to use of force and occupational integrity (corruption) (eg: ISS Crimehub; Bruce, 2011; South African Police Service, 2011a:ii). The emergent discourse here is linked to expectations about how police should behave, that they should treat all people politely and fairly, and should not abuse force or authority. In general, however, this discourse takes for granted the role police play in society. In terms of public calls for professionalism, at least, this is likely because in South Africa, as in many countries, popular conceptions of police work are considered common sense. People believe they know what police work is about. But this common sense is skewed and based on a small and dramatic slice of what police really do in an average day (Manning, 1978:196). Unless arrest quotas are in place, uniformed police seldom invoke the criminal law (arrest) in their daily work but rather spend their time performing a myriad of administrative, order maintenance and problem solving tasks (Brodeur, 2010:180).

### **Contemporary discourse around 'police professionalism' in the SAPS**

For over 10 years South Africans have been told by their leaders that the SAPS is embroiled in a 'war on crime' (eg.: Sapa, 2011a; The Presidency, 2012) resulting in mixed messages both encouraging and berating police use of force (eg: South African Police Service, 2011a; Kubheka, 2011). Related rhetoric has grown in militancy as populist politicians and police managers called for the use of greater force in tackling crime. With equally populist bravado, in 2010 the SAPS announced that it was once again a 'force' and re-adopted the military ranks of the apartheid era SAP.

It is against this bravado that the discourse of professionalism has emerged. In part this emergence has been born on the back of civil society fears that the focus on force may lead to further police criminality and illegal killings by police in an organisation already plagued by abuse of force and authority. But within the SAPS it appears it has taken a more common sense form, with leaders calling on police officials to perform their duties in the manner that any 'professional' would (however one might interpret the word).

The following are some examples of how the SAPS has employed 'professionalism' in recent years:

- 'It is time for the SAPS, and all of its members, to establish a position of professionalism, authority and respect in its policing of this country...Our conduct will bear the mark of professionalism...Service delivery at station level [is] closely aligned with the levels of professionalism of personnel...Professionalism, authority and respect [must be established] in the services that are provided to communities...The capacity and professionalism of detectives investigating crime has been a priority for some time within the SAPS.' - SAPS Strategic Plan, 2010-14 (South African Police Service, 2010:v)
- 'Increased visibility must be accompanied by enhanced levels of professionalism and integrity...[Police should] act with compassion, professionalism and integrity... [To tackle corruption we must...] develop a culture in the SAPS that is professional' SAPS Annual Performance Plan, 2011/12 (South African Police Service, 2011a:iii)
- 'Government remains committed to ensuring that policing becomes a professional activity...' - Minister of Police, 22 Feb 2012
- 'The continued development of a professional police officer and service must be addressed at all levels of the institution...[Command and control] is something we have been constantly and will continue to emphasise as a key aspect of professional policing... I expect that [sic] every member of the SAPS to espouse the values of the organisation and act with compassion, professionalism and integrity, within the scope of the law.' - SAPS Annual Performance Plan, 2012/13 (South African Police Service, 2012a:ii)

Despite its use, it remains unclear what is meant when police management talk of 'professionalism'. Perhaps the best way to interpret its use is by considering the words with which it is coupled – 'respect', 'integrity', 'authority', 'compassion' generally with regards to the public performance of police officials.

Additional insight is found elsewhere. Each month SAPS members receive salary slips onto which are printed messages intended for staff. In late 2012 the message communicated was:

'The profile of a professional police officer...respects and upholds the Constitution...does not tolerate disloyalty and ill-discipline...[enforces] the law without fear or favour...recognises that we are a developmental state and embraces effective service delivery within the police...demonstrates, through deeds, a firm commitment to ensure government policies are realised.'

As is discussed in the next section, the above discourse may have emerged in response to the manner in which civil society has employed the concept. But in that the words 'professional', 'profession' and 'professionalism' are so ubiquitous in daily talk, can police managers and officials be blamed if their use and interpretation of the words remains unclear?

Three examples of police officials employing the concept 'professionalism' while talking about unrelated aspects of their work, begin to illustrate the divergent common sense interpretations it might hold:

- 'We become so professional in our duties that we start to become abusive in our homes towards our kids. Not by beating them, but by violating their rights [when we

restrict their movement in order to keep them safe].’ – Inspector Lakay (Faull, 2010: 166)

- ‘[In the mid-nineties] only white people were given professional service. Black people came last. Many black people used to sit in the community service centre without being consulted.’ – Inspector Ramela (Faull, 2010:179)
- ‘This one lady...she wanted to serve a protection order on the tokoloshe...It’s not very professional but we all ended up laughing and she was actually quite upset with us.’ – Constable van der Merwe (Faull, 2010: 246)

In all of the above the concept of being ‘professional’ and providing ‘professional’ service is employed as if its meaning is common sense, yet in each instance its application and interpretation is slightly different. In the first quote the word is used as if to infer a kind of instinctive response to threats which is developed over time on the job. In the other quotes it appears to refer to minimum standards of service and work etiquette.

In 2010, Snyman attempted to explore interpretations of the concept with station-based officials in Gauteng (Snyman, 2010). The police she interviewed referred to seven characteristics of a ‘professional way of being,’ which they believed made them professionals. These were: (1) having a clear sense of purpose; (2) a passion for their work; (3) a willingness to go beyond the call of duty; (4) the ability to manage oneself and others well; (5) the ability to think ahead in order to timeously put systems in place; (6) teamwork; and (7) having a holistic and balanced outlook on themselves and the environment in which they functioned. The officials also identified a core value system and ‘way of being professional’, as central to professionalism in the SAPS, though this may simply be conceptual tautology.

Unfortunately Snyman’s sample consisted of only nine officials. While little can be said of such a small sample, the data still holds value. However, the attitudes expressed suggest similar personality traits and outlooks found in decades of literature on police occupational culture produced abroad (e.g. Reiner, 2010:115-137). As such, similar data might have emerged by asking very different questions, such as ‘What are the key traits of a good police officer?’ If so, the answers Snyman elicited are likely ingrained in police organisational culture rather than referring to specific notions of professionalism.

Snyman’s officials did not offer any learnable occupation specific expertise, or structural determinants in their descriptions of police professionalism. Rather their descriptions related almost exclusively to what might be called personal outlooks and personality traits, presumably inherent prior to joining the SAPS. It is likely that this common-sense type interpretation of ‘professionalism’ overlaps in many instances with the manner in which police management employs the concept in everyday discourse. If this is true, professionalism must largely be brought about through recruitment, and partially through training, something which would take many years in an organisation as large as the SAPS with almost 200 000 personnel.

### **Civil society’s calls for ‘police professionalism’**

Beyond the SAPS, ideas around police ‘professionalism’ and its interpretations have been influenced by other stakeholders. Three examples in which the concept has been employed stand out. These are: (1) David Bruce’s work on the ‘professional use of force’, (2) the Institute for Security Studies’ ‘Promote Professional Policing’ campaign, and (3) the National Planning Commission’s vision of a ‘professional’ police agency.

Together with perceptions of corruption, SAPS abuse of force remains one of the biggest threats to the organisation’s legitimacy. Most recently, and far overshadowing

anything else in recent decades, on 16 August 2012 SAPS members shot dead 34 striking mine workers in Marikane in the North-West province. Like many of South Africa's social fractures, it is unfortunate that this industrial action was allowed to degenerate to the point where armed police faced off with strikers in a dusty strip of land, ending in tragedy. Indeed, it could be said that many of the SAPS greatest challenges are the result of their being left to bear the burden of ineffective governance and service delivery. The Marikane tragedy has had negative ramifications for both the image of the SAPS and the country, which will be far reaching. It is likely that recommendations made by a judicial inquiry (on going at time of writing) will focus on training, leadership, operating protocols and use of force. In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, the professionalism discourse was largely absent.

Just over a year prior to this tragedy, Andries Tatane was beaten to death by police during a service delivery protest in Fricksburg in the Free State, an occurrence also captured by television cameras. Whereas, almost unfathomably, the miners were killed with sharp point ammunition, Tatane died under a hail of rubber bullets and baton swings.

But beyond these well-known tragedies, South Africans die at the hands of police, or in police custody, daily. The Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID, formally the ICD) reported that in the 2011/12 reporting period, 720 people died as a result of police action or in police custody (Independent Complaints Directorate, 2012:25), down from 797 the previous year (Independent Complaints Directorate, 2011:28). To many outside of South Africa these figures would be unfathomable, while for many in the SAPS, government and country more generally, they are the norm.

David Bruce, formally of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), has been advocating what he calls the 'professional use of force' by police for a number of years (eg: Bruce, 2011). Much of his focus has been on Section 49 of the Criminal Procedures Act, which provides a legal structure governing use of lethal force. Bruce believes that what the SAPS needs is a 'use of force policy' to ensure that officials use force 'professionally'. He believes that Section 49 offers only a minimum threshold for acceptable conduct and that relying on it alone is restrictive. A policy for the proper or 'professional' use of force, together with a supportive management environment, would allow police to better reflect on, and so refine, their use of force, resulting in less abuse. A 2011 pamphlet produced by Bruce on behalf of the CSVR, the ISS and the African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF), proposed a four point definition of the professional exercise of force by police:

- Guided by the law and the concern to protect human life.
- Emphasising the avoidance of unnecessary force.
- Where force is necessary, using the minimum amount of force required.
- Police service monitoring of the use of force.

Through Bruce's work, the 'professional use of force' has become central to civil society conceptualisations of a professional police agency. Bruce believes that respectful and fair treatment of civilians can undo the culture of violence that is entrenched in some South African communities (Bruce, 2011). Furthermore, he argues that many young men have developed postures that are antagonistic to official institutions like the police, encouraged by a community-wide ambivalence towards police in some high-crime areas. Fair, measured policing that employs only 'professional' and legal force, is likely to contribute to greater legitimacy for the police in the eyes of such men. In this sense, 'professionalism' relates to the measured, considered, legal and minimal use of force.

Similar thinking, backed by empirical evidence, has emerged out of the US and UK in recent years. In the US, Tyler has suggested that to impact on social order police must be widely accepted as legitimate by citizenry, together with the state authority and its laws (Tyler, 2004:85). This perspective is supported by research in the UK, which found that

civilians are more likely to comply with police because they feel they should (they perceive police and the state as legitimate), rather than because of a threat of punishment (Hough *et al.*, 2010:206). Comparable analysis by Bradford *et al.* in South Africa suggests ‘[as elsewhere,] trust in police fairness is an important influence on South African’s legitimacy judgments...unlike other contexts, the links between concerns about crime, effectiveness and legitimacy are especially strong.’ (Bradford *et al.*, forthcoming 2013:12). Similarly, focus groups conducted in three South African metropolitan areas suggested civilians want police to treat them fairly, more than they want police officials who are tough on crime (Faull, 2011).

In response to these findings, and the general theories of procedural justice, the ISS developed a Promote Professional Policing (PPP) campaign and launched it together with Crime Line in September 2011. The campaign seeks to promote a civic culture in South Africa that actively appreciates fair, polite, and efficient police service and is intolerant of corruption and other police abuses. The PPP campaign aims to accomplish this primarily by encouraging the public to report both good and bad behaviour by police. In so doing it is hoped that good, ‘professional’ police will feel supported and able to stand up to their corrupt colleagues, to feel proud of their occupation. In this sense, ‘professionalism’ is understood as customer and service-oriented, rather than necessarily crime-focused.

Finally, the National Planning Commission, located in the Office of the President presented a vision for the SAPS in its *National Development Plan* released in late 2011. The plan envisages a police service characterised by ‘professionalism and discipline’. In part, this would be accomplished by creating a ‘code of professionalism’ to complement the current code of conduct. Both codes would be linked to disciplinary procedures and promotions so that police officials who failed to comply with them would face sanctions. In theory such practices are already in place in the SAPS. According to its Annual Report, in 2011/12, 49 members were disciplined for contravening prescribed codes of conduct (South African Police Service, 2012b:230)., down from 258 in 2010/11 (South African Police Service, 2011:218).

The Plan includes a sub-section titled ‘A professional police service – a key component of the criminal justice system’ (National Planning Commission, 2011: 352). It calls for the demilitarisation of the SAPS and building a ‘civilian, professional service’. It proposes a national policing board that will set standards for police and says that professional police officials must be knowledgeable about the law and their role in society. The document itself does not present a clear definition of what this role might be but the focus on role clarity is an important one, as explained below.

## **CONSOLIDATING ‘POLICE PROFESSIONALISM’ IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A 2011 National Victim of Crime Survey suggested that 64,6% of respondents were ‘satisfied’ with the police in their area (Statistics South Africa, 2011:22), compared with only 38% in 1997 (Statistics South Africa, 1997). It is unclear whether this is linked to improved perceptions of police, or a lowering of expectations. Either way, there is little doubt that South Africans want more from their police service. Stories of rude service, lazy and incompetent officials abound, and more South Africans than ever before believe the majority of police are involved in corruption (Afrobarometer, 2012:16).

The country’s constitution states that the police will ‘prevent, combat and investigate crime...maintain public order...protect and secure the inhabitants of the Republic and their property, and...uphold and enforce the law’ (Republic of South Africa, 1996:1331) and the idea that police prevent crime has been widely embraced. .

Burger (2006) has suggested that the focus on 'crime prevention' is an unreasonable one as police alone cannot prevent crime from occurring. Ironically, though unsurprisingly, leaders within the SAPS and government more broadly promote the idea so that inevitably police will fail. Manning called this predicament the 'impossible mandate' (Manning, 1978): in order to maintain funding and political and social favour, police set themselves impossible goals. A clear example in South Africa is the annual contact crime reduction target of 7-10% set in 2004, later revised downwards to 4-7%. As in other police agencies, the impossibility that SAPS members can guarantee such a decline, and the resultant organisational pressure to do so, leads to the manipulation of appearances. In South Africa this has included the manipulation of crime and performance statistics (Faull, 2010).

In response to the pressure to reduce crime placed on police in high crime jurisdictions, it is common for police managers to employ aggressive and militant anti-crime rhetoric. In South Africa the past decade has seen police increasingly employ a rhetoric of 'war' and 'evil' in their descriptions of criminal offenders, promising to 'fight fire with fire' (eg. Sapa, 2011b)

Because South African police officials embrace and promote an image of themselves as 'crime fighters', the public expects them to perform accordingly. Unfortunately in South Africa such notions combine with militant rhetoric to bring about increased hard security, force and related budgets. The result is an image of police laden with body armour and heavy weapons, adding to cityscapes of bars, walls and locks, and dark and empty township streets, reminders of insecurity. Meanwhile they do little to address the fissures that bring that insecurity about.

Steinberg (2011) believes that filling township streets with police who often arbitrarily harass young men, has grown out of poor policy decisions made in the early nineties. Reform efforts of the transition years failed to focus on crime in their over-zealousness to foster an image of legitimacy against the backdrop of apartheid policing, he believes. As a result the SAPS failed to develop strong investigative capacity, or the ability to intervene in emergencies with efficiency, particularly in areas such as townships that were previously without their own police stations. The implication is that policing strategies now employed in township and other urban spaces undermine the development of police professionalism. Instead it encourages township residents to view police as brutal and arbitrary enforcers of law.

Loader (2006) highlighted the importance of police performing their tasks in the interests of democratic ideals. While this might appear obvious, order can be brought about in very undemocratic ways (e.g. suppressing freedom of movement, employing torture). He stresses the importance of police carrying out their duties in ways that allow individuals and groups to flourish together. He refers to this as 'deep but narrow' policing (Loader, 2006:204), and Steinberg believes it is what South Africa needs, advocating for reactive and rights-regarding South African police who are only called to intervene as a last resort.

This has been called minimalist policing, and in South Africa it has been championed by Marks, Shearing, Wood and Cartwright (Marks, Shearing & Wood 2009; Marks & Wood 2010; Cartwright & Shearing 2012). The reality is that uniformed police officials seldom invoke the criminal law in the performance of their duties. Safety is generated by building cohesive social systems rather than through threat of sanction. While police represent a threat to would-be law breakers, much of their daily work should involve working with communities to solve problems, rather than arrest 'skollies'.

By acknowledging this, one is able to move towards a clearer definition of what a new 'professional policing' might mean for South Africa. Including a minimalist function in new articulations of police work and professionalism would require restricting police officials to those tasks for which they are specifically suited, those which require rapid response and the

invocation of criminal law, possibly with the need to use coercive force. Cartwright and Shearing believe that all other policing and safety generating functions can be carried out by local-level agencies and community initiatives, but that government must identify and help sustain these, rather than concentrate excessive resources on seeking criminal justice solutions to crime. Similarly, but within the higher echelons of democratic governance, Burger (2007:89) has argued that 'crime prevention' initiatives must be forged through inter-departmental coordination, headed by the most senior of government officials.

A police service with a clearly defined mandate (which avoids ambiguous ideas such as 'crime prevention') would be better placed to avoid the Catch-22 of Manning's impossible mandate. If the expectations placed on police are realistic and achievable, they can be judged only on these parameters, and so be more realistically assessed. Police officials in a community service centre *must* provide polite, efficient, purposeful service to people seeking information or laying complaints, even if this means directing them to other community or government structures. Often this does not happen and police should be held accountable for failing their clients. But police are far more constrained when it comes to preventing husbands from beating wives, or intervening in violence meted out in the schoolyard. To address the forces behind such crimes, South Africa requires a broader approach to the building of safety, one that is focused on building communities. The criminal law cannot be expected to mend these social ills, though the justice system can play an important part in bringing different stakeholders together.

Currently, each year the SAPS detains almost 800 000 people for crimes not considered a 'priority', including loitering and public indecency. The SAPS, and government more broadly, must remain wary of criminalising poverty. There must be more functional alternatives, other than arrest and prosecution, for dealing with such offences.

Over five decades ago Bitter (1970:75) wrote that the disproportionate focus of police action against America's poor was a betrayal of democratic ideals, one that could only be addressed through the 'professionalisation' of police work. He too believed that a professional police service should be restricted to fulfilling those tasks to which they are uniquely suited, those involving rapid response and potential coercive force. While Bittner's work gave little attention to detectives, it is clear that the investigative branch of the police is vital and that the efficient and thorough investigation of crime is equally important. While this minimalist role is important, it will take time to coalesce and settle. The SAPS must work to better integrate itself with other government and community agencies to create safety, rather than simply lock people up.

And so it is promising that the National Development Plan highlights the importance of clarifying the role of the SAPS. The fact, that who police should be and what they should do has resurfaced, bodes well for the country. This is not the first time the topic has been raised. In 1996 the National Crime Prevention Strategy set out a framework for an interdepartmental network of security governance. But as crime rose, government's anti-crime rhetoric became increasingly police focused. From 1998, the SAPS budget increased by over 12% per annum for over a decade, with the personnel base of the organisation almost doubling in size (Newham & Lancaster, 2012). The 2011/12 budget vote suggests that for the first time in over a decade the organisation aims to reverse this growth. What's more, it suggests a significant bolstering of detective services, rather than the visible policing-focused strategies of recent years. This bodes well for an organisation that has significantly improved its public visibility, but struggled to foster an image as an organisation that builds prosecutable cases against every-day (rather than organised) serious criminal offenders.

South Africa has seen significant reductions in many categories of crime over the past ten years. The declining trends seen in SAPS statistics are corroborated by victim surveys. At the same time, and though inconceivable to many, South Africans appear to be feeling

slightly safer in their neighbourhoods (Statistics South Africa, 2011:8). Perhaps this will at last provide a foundation on which government can move away from its gung-ho approach to hard-edge policing, and establish a service-based capacity that compliments broader initiatives and visions in other governmental departments and community structures. Perhaps then the SAPS can be called a 'professional' police agency.

It will be important that any narrowing of the police mandate does not bring an end to the nurturing of community relations. If police appear only when things are already very bad in a community, it might be difficult to associate them with anything but disorder. Instead of force, police officials could build their image within communities as associated with community support and coordination, but also emergency response and criminal investigation. Such a change would help attract a different kind of individual to the SAPS, reserves and community structures; people who want to build safe communities rather than 'fight crime'.

## CONCLUSION

The idea of the police official as a professional has undergone a number of re-articulations over the past 170 years. While police work was once an occupation for the unskilled and under-employed, it has undergone significant revision. It should be noted that many still see the SAPS as an employer for those who cannot find work elsewhere. Many police admit that they are only in the job because they need secure employment. While this image remains, the SAPS will struggle to attract high calibre recruits, or position itself as an attractive employer to the country's educated elite. Nevertheless, attempts have been made to rearticulate police work as an occupation that requires specialist skills, and police officials as workers who should be held to professional standards. Talk of police professionalism has regained significant momentum in South Africa in recent years, and taken a central place in official rhetoric coming from government, the police, and also from civil society groups. What has been unclear, however, is what 'professionalism' means, and how to achieve it.

The driving philosophies behind policing and government's response to crime since the early nineties have changed with the political winds. Where at first policies and rhetoric focused on building community cohesion, and bridges between citizens and the police, they were replaced by promises of war and punishment to be meted out by an increasingly armed and funded police service. Today that service has again grown fond of calling itself a 'force'. Overall incidence of crime have decreased over the past decade. The latest victim survey suggests citizens feel slightly safer walking in their streets. And yet South Africa remains a country whose national consciousness is severely traumatised, a trauma brought on not only by criminal offenders, but also by the manner in which the police have responded to the societal and organisational pressure they face to produce results. At times this response has been measured, calm and civil, but at other times it has involved invasive and brutal police practices, as well as arrogance, rudeness and militant rhetoric. In many communities SAPS officials remain distrusted and feared, and are viewed as corrupt. Because police and government leadership often suggests that police are responsible for preventing crime, officials on the ground are set up to fail. They are not equipped or capable of achieving this goal alone. The socialisation effect of the SAPS, together with that of broader society, means that many police officials internalise an understanding of their job as being to strike fear into the hearts of those they deem 'criminal', believing this will reduce crime. It won't, but it will alienate police from the public.

The SAPS can help counter these negatives, contribute to the fostering of safe communities, and be more effective in how their work feeds into the criminal justice system, by embracing the different ways in which 'professionalism' has been discussed in this article.

This would include (i) professionalising the use of force as proposed by Bruce, (ii) supporting initiatives such as the 'Promote Professional Policing' campaign to help foster civic cultures that demand fair, polite and efficient service from police, and (iii) better defining the police role so that police can be better held accountable for their work, while focusing on networking more broadly with other government and community safety generating initiatives.

The South African government and police leadership need to better communicate to the nation that the SAPS will not solve the country's crime woes. Once the seed has been planted the new articulation of a professional police service can be proposed. The service would be minimal in its interventions in public life (at least with regards to heavily armed men and women and a presence of force), networked with other government and community agencies, and would have a clearly defined vision. The ISS's Promote Professional Policing campaign which encourages communities to identify and respond to 'good' police behaviour can easily be broadened to incorporate what should be a shrinking of the SAPS mandate, so that the public do not place unnecessary pressures on police but migrates those policing and safety needs that fall outside of the criminal law, to other capable structures. This will involve the SAPS, and government more broadly, communicating to the public just what can be expected from the SAPS, and what other policing or public safety related structures might be better placed to support citizens with particular challenges. It will also involve the active fostering of local level community support initiatives, and the shifting of government funds accordingly. There are already indications that moves are afoot to make this happen, including a shrinking of the overall personnel base of the SAPS.

While police professionalism remains an undefined and somewhat illusive concept in the South African context, striving for improved 'professionalism' is likely to do more good than harm. The potential changes might be small, or they could mark a revolution in public safety and policing for the country. Disseminated both within the SAPS, and communities, the concept (even if ambiguous), provides the beginning of new expectations, and new heights to which police can strive. It should be retained, honed and pursued.

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