

CHAPTER TWO: THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE AS SPECIFIC CONTEXT IN WHICH THE RESEARCH IS CONDUCTED

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses specifically on the South African Police Service (SAPS) as the context in which the research is conducted. It discusses the historical context of the SAPS, the SAPS as organisation, the process of change and transition as well as consequences of the transition process.

2.2 The historical context of the South African Police (SAP)

The South African Police Force (SAP) was established on 1 April 1913. Between this date and its disbandment in the early nineties, the SAP was frequently called upon to aide the military to overpower opposition to the government. This role became especially prominent during the apartheid years, when South Africa was generally described as a police state (Brewer, 1994).

Although the South African Police under apartheid perhaps most clearly demonstrated this colonial legacy, according to Brogden and Shearing (1993), police forces all over the world still remain focussed on repression rather than social empowerment. The centralisation of policing as a state function, is a principal source of the problems that have confronted contemporary policing. Colonial policing is by character closely linked to the interests and structure of the colonial state: “The police are centralized under the control of the government and they serve that government, rather than the law, performing several non-police duties for government” (Van der Westhuizen, 2001, p.38). The South African government relied on the police to maintain its colonial and apartheid policies (including, notoriously, its policies of racial segregation) in defiance of internal opposition and an international environment where decolonisation had become the norm. Policing in South Africa during the past decades thus isolated the police from a large segment of the community whose security it was

supposed to protect.

The move toward greater militarisation of the South African Police is symbolised by the development of “universal riot control”, the deployment of the police in what was then Rhodesia, and the use of armoured vehicles to quell township unrest. Although rhetoric that South Africa was a “police state” was strategically useful to opposition movements at the time, in fact the South African Police remained proportionally small, understaffed, under-funded and under-equipped (Brewer, 1994).

Although the police served the interest of the apartheid state, public accountability of the police should be understood within a broad social and historical context in which the police represented only one of many oppressive state structures. According to Van der Westhuizen (2001), the development and history of policing in South Africa needs to be placed within the context of broader government racial policies: “Police work was defined primarily as the policing of race relations and policing became a political activity” (p.40). According to Steinberg (2001), policing black communities in South Africa for the better part of the twentieth century boiled down to two imperatives: “controlling the movement of people, and squashing political opposition” (p.7). Steinberg says the set of rules that govern the relationships of everyday life was missing from the policing of black communities. He ascribes much of the violent crime committed today to the fact that “in the absence of law, relationships are regulated by the private appropriation of force” (Steinberg, 2001, p.8). An example of this is the lawless violence committed in the taxi industry.

In April 1994 the previous “enemy of the State”, namely the African National Congress (ANC), became the governing party of South Africa. Given its historic contribution to the apartheid government, the South African Police has been one of the main targets for change in the new dispensation. Transformation of the South African Police as an organisation implies a total reorganisation and restructuring of management and administration, as well as the way in which services are rendered. Transition from a police force with an emphasis on authoritarian decision making to a police service with an emphasis on community policing and participatory decision

making can be seen as a important and difficult challenge the organisation has to face.

2.3 The structure of the South African Police Service as organisation

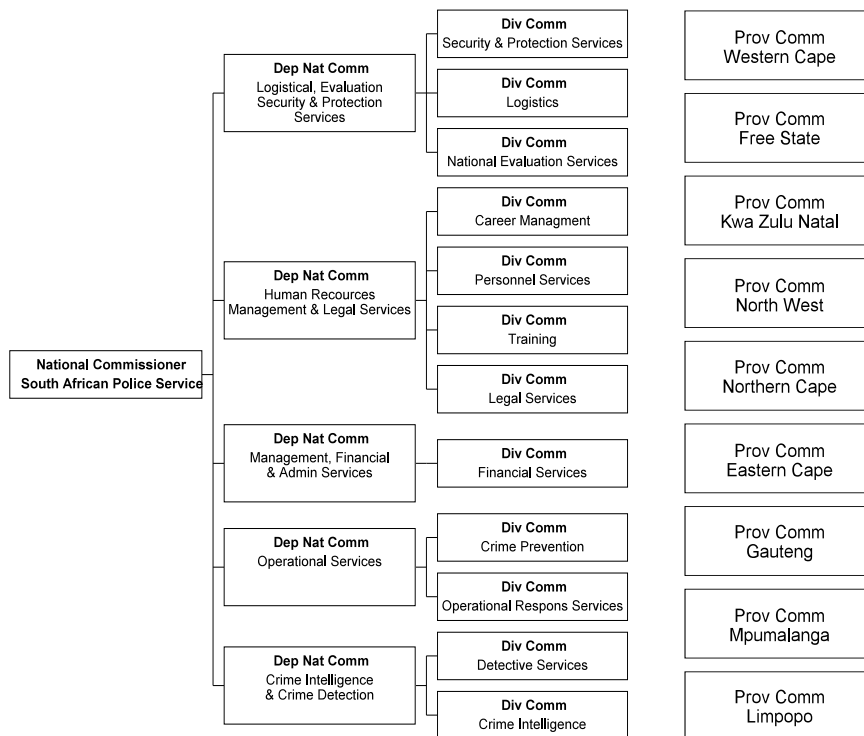
The South African Police Service (SAPS) came into being after the first democratic general election in 1994. This was done by a process of amalgamation of the South African Police (SAP) and all the homeland and self-governing territory police agencies. The South African Police Service's responsibilities and duties are regulated by the Constitution of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) and the South African Police Service Act (Act No. 68 of 1995). The South African Police Service is an extremely large organisation comprising 140 380 members (Personnel Planning Section, personal communication, July 12, 2004). The organisation has the task to "protect and serve" the community 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This means that members often work shifts and perform overtime duties. The members are often exposed to severe situations of trauma and appalling working conditions, such as a lack of basic necessities like toilet paper, vehicles or offices. The organisation is divided into national, provincial and area components with many units and stations operating within these divisions. One of the ramifications of such a large organisation and the structuring thereof is that issues of jurisdiction, command, coordination and control are constantly in question (Schärf, 2001).

It seems a daunting task to explain the complexities and sheer enormity of the organisational structure of the Police Service. This I will attempt to do, partly to indicate factors intrinsic to the organisation which greatly impact on the job of policing in South Africa. The organisational structure changes frequently. Graphic presentations of parts of the organisational structure of the SAPS are included as an aid to explaining the magnitude of this organisation. These graphic presentations are included in the text and not as addendums in order to simplify reading.

The National Commissioner heads the South African Police Service and has five Deputy National Commissioners, each heading a section. These sections each have various Divisional Commissioners heading further subsections, which are divided into

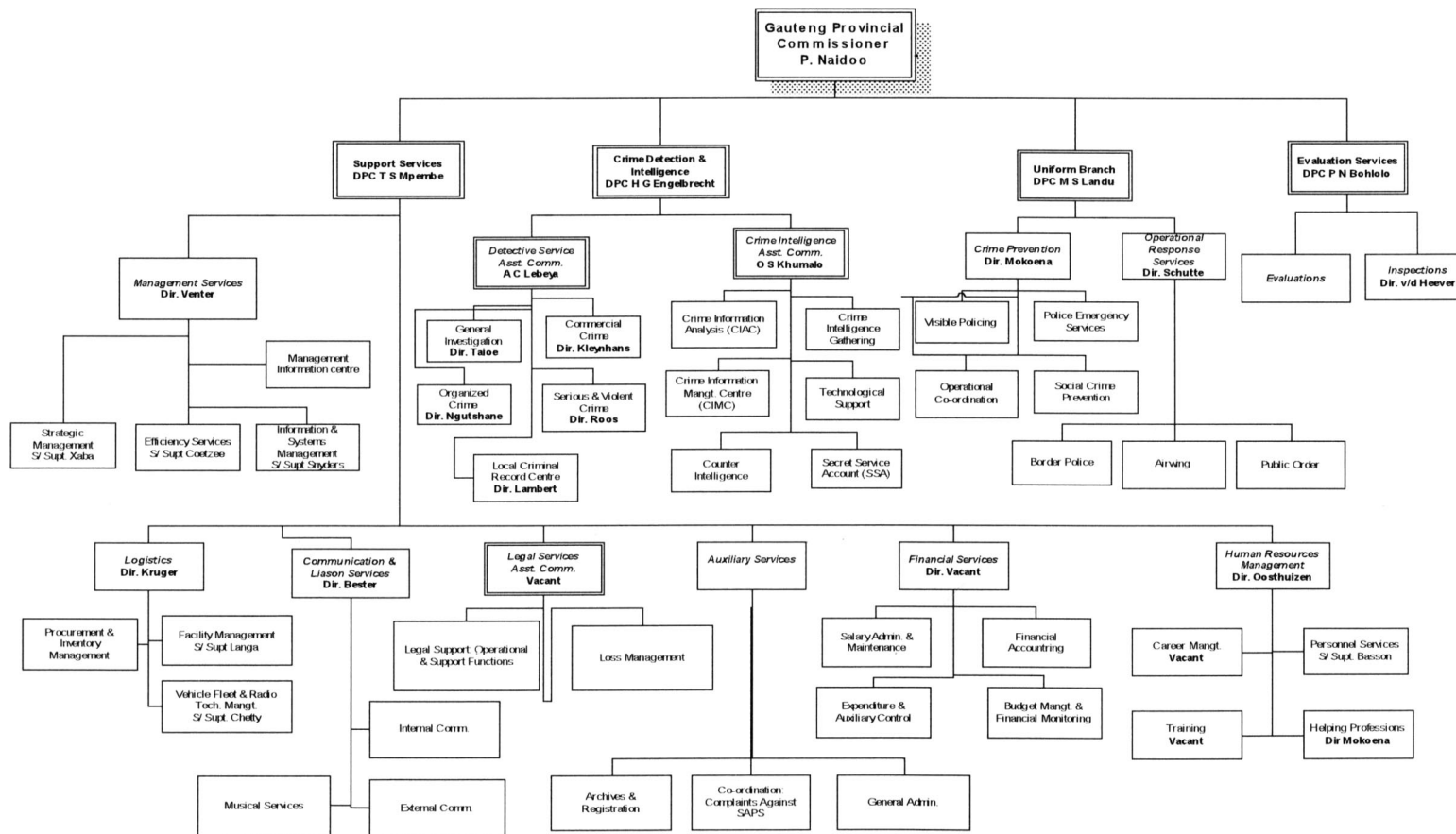
numerous other sections each with their own functions and personnel. This constitute the National Office of the South African Police Service.

NATIONAL ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



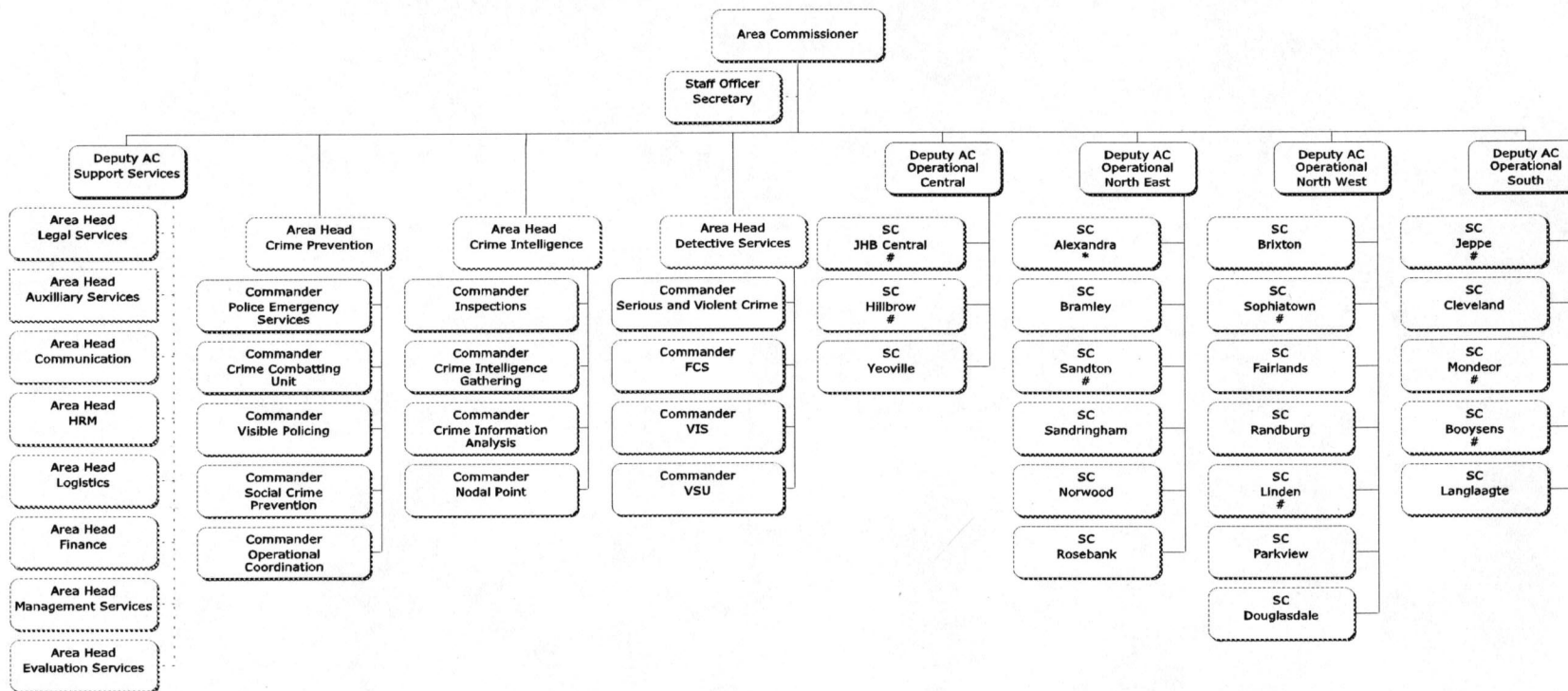
There are nine Provincial Commissioners each heading one of the provinces of South Africa. Each Provincial Office is divided into sections and subsections whose structures roughly copy that of the National Office.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE: GAUTENG PROVINCIAL OFFICE



Each province is divided into various Areas with an Area Commissioner as Commander and the process of sections and subsections are repeated again. For example, Gauteng Province is divided into seven Areas. Each Area Office is structured roughly like the Provincial Office.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AREA JOHANNESBURG



In Johannesburg Area, for example, there are 21 police stations, each with a Station Commissioner and various structures and substructures. Each police station is again structured and divided as previously mentioned. Part of the complexity of policing is the fact that members often work in shifts. This means that a Station Commissioner or Unit Commander, for example, will probably never have all his or her personnel together at the same time. This constitutes a logistical and managerial nightmare. Because of the cumbersome nature and the magnitude of the organisational structure of the SAPS, role clarity and jurisdiction are often muddled. As will be discussed in chapter five, these factors hampered the research process.

2.4 Structural and strategic changes during the transformation process

*“Now that you have broken through the wall with your head,
what will you do in the neighbouring cell?”*

(Lec in Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974, p.31).

The South African Police Service has gone through a number of strategic changes since the historic change in government in 1994. The new government moved swiftly to transform the top structure of the SAPS, to integrate elements of the former liberation movements and former homeland agencies, and to institute new policies such as community policing (SAPS, 1994; SAPS, 1995a; White Paper on Reconstruction and Development, 1994). Before 1994 the top structure comprised mainly of white males and many of the changes were focused on bringing about race and gender equality, especially in managerial positions. “The police command did much to put black faces in the front window, but in the absence of a policy of lateral recruitment from the outside, had little talent with which to work” (Steinberg, 2001, p.9). A total of eleven police forces had to be integrated, realigned towards the democratic state and retrained in the civilian approach to policing. The process of change and transition in the SAPS embraces commendable ideals. The transformation process of the police is primarily characterised by a movement toward democratic control over the Service. Values that have been accepted include accountability, transparency, community consultation and involvement, as well as an emphasis on

the quality of service delivery (Van der Westhuizen, 2001).

According to Laufer (2001), white reaction against democracy, rather than crime, was deemed to be South Africa's primary security threat when the ANC came to power. The result is that the police force was regarded as a risk to be tamed, rather than an instrument to be used. The consequence was the emergence of a police force that was stranded somewhere between the old and the new. Steinberg (2001) says that by the mid-1990s, the culture of the police was hollowed out, its moral reserves empty. He adds that "it was only in the late 1990s, when crime became one of the presiding preoccupations of South Africans and foreign observers alike, that the politics of fighting crime began to eclipse the politics of political containment" (Steinberg, 2001, p.9).

Although South Africa is searching for its own model of policing, taking into account the unique aspects of South African society, the current approach is very much in line with the British liberal model of policing (Brewer, 1994). This is a model that emphasises decentralisation, an absence of militarism and arms, and a police membership which fairly represents the social composition of society as a whole. Such a police service is perceived as a neutral arbitrator in social conflicts, is above political manipulation and control and operates on the basis of consensus and a mandate obtained from the public rather than the government of the day. This model also relies on modern management techniques, and well-trained professional officers. The problem, as noted by Brewer (1994), is that the liberal model of policing is being applied in South Africa at a time when this model is being criticised in parts of the academic police science literature as an illusion and no longer applicable to conditions in the modern world, including Britain.

Brogden and Shearing (1993) point out that the introduction of new forms of policing never happens instantaneously, but always involves a process of transition: "In policing, as in other areas of social life, there is no clean slate. We seldom - perhaps fortunately - have an opportunity to work from scratch" (p.93). This is particularly true of the SAPS where the transformation is from an authoritarian

system to a system which has to be sensitive to the needs of many different constituencies (Bellinghan, 1994). It is widely agreed that the police service needs to be reshaped to support and empower the community, but there are no packaged solutions that South Africans can simply embrace. International literature indicates that most organisational changes are ill-conceived and rarely shared with those affected, which leads to confused organisational structure, inadequate control, poor training, low motivation and poor teamwork (Woodcock & Francis, 1979). According to Steinberg (2001), the police discourse changed abruptly as the language of community policing replaced that of law and order, “but in the absence of serious organisational reform, the changing discourse only reminded police officers that the old culture was dying, the new not yet in sight”(p.9).

Some structural changes had the effect of making the organisation “top-heavy” with numerous commanders. In January 1996 there were 10284 officers out of a total of 141526 personnel (no earlier statistics are available), compared to 14613 officers in March 2004 out of a total of 140037 personnel (Personnel Planning Section, Head Office, SAPS, personal communication, July 7, 2004). In 1991 there were 41 Generals (SAP Jaarboek, 1991) in comparison to the 119 Commissioners in May 2004 (the ranks were changed: General became Commissioner). This has a negative effect on the line of command, jurisdiction and coordination of the organisation (as will be expanded on later). According to Chandler (1990) a too-rigid line on authority undoubtedly causes stress in law enforcement, but a blurring of those same lines will cause significantly more stress. In certain areas such as a tactical response team, a strict, autocratic military model is crucial for effective functioning.

The effort to demilitarise the organisation has far reaching implications, which are still not fully understood. According to Van der Westhuizen (2001), much of the SAPS’s identity was encapsulated within the power of the “Force”. Being a “Force” means playing an active and central role to the externalisation of destructiveness and identifying and responding to the traumatising environment as opposed to being passively at service and mediating the destructiveness. A mandate which support active functioning as opposed to passivity has clear implications on a person’s

experiences of helplessness. This will be expanded upon later in the discussion. However, in many respects the new SAPS still strongly resembles the old SAP. In practice the SAPS is characterised by an authoritarian culture and hierarchical structure that, among others, tends to inhibit effective devolution of decision-making processes. This pattern is repeated with change policy. It sometimes seems as if change is implemented for the sake of change alone, with little regard for the effect thereof. Nel and Steyn (1997, p.2) further note that “Another characteristic of some current policy proposals is that they are not yet sufficiently integrated within a holistic framework that takes account of, and is sensitive to the impact of these policies on the general mental health of police officials”. A study by Van der Walt (2001) reveals that the transition and traumatising context in the SAPS led to a condition of social immobilisation and paralysis, which limits social development, dialogue and communication. These processes restrict the potential of the organisation functioning as a large group (in psychoanalytic terms) to assist in integration and this, in turn, ironically inhibits growth and transformation.

Marshall (in Nel, 1994) states that the individual, the job, and the organisation are embedded in a social system. From this perspective, change will not be secured unless it is mediated on all of those levels. In order to successfully transform the SAPS into an empowering organisation, it needs to be transformed on all of those levels. Attempts at transformation are often aimed at creating change on the structural level of the organisation, and although such change is necessary, it is not enough. Van der Westhuizen (2001) believes that changes on the individual level in terms of attitudes, commitment to the new organisation, aligning individual values to those of the organisation, interpersonal effectiveness, the ability to effectively relate to the community and embracing a participatory style of policing need to take place to secure lasting change.

2.4.1 Impact of change and transformation on the police subculture

The South African Police encompassed a subculture with rigid boundaries between “us” and “them”. As Ainsworth (1995) says: “For any group whose authority, status

and role is challenged frequently, solidarity with other in-group members becomes increasingly important” (p.14). Since the inception of the South African Police, the organisation fostered a sense of “family togetherness” among its members. This police culture became enshrined in official organisational structures, policies and procedures, many of which contributed to social isolation. Although this social isolation had a protective function and provided the emotional and professional support members needed as a buffer against stress, it also contributed to an us/them mentality and to a separation between the police and the community (Nel, 1994). This divide often further entrenched the racial segregation between White and Black.

According to Botha (2002), the perception of continuous danger played an important role in the police’s alienation from the community. The constant scrutiny of the police by the public and media further contributed to the police service closing ranks and becoming more suspicious of outsiders. Evidence of this is the difficulty researchers still face in gaining access to the police (Ainsworth, 1995) and the secrecy surrounding crime statistics (Steinberg, 2001). As the South African Police removed itself from the community, a stronger in-group identity resulted (Ainsworth, 1995). The police was therefore prone to stereotyping members of the community and to defining them collectively as an out-group (Brogden & Shearing, 1993; Hagen, 1995). In turn this also lead to easy stereotyping of the police by the public. Ainsworth (1995) explains that for most members of the public the uniform itself is the most salient characteristic of a police officer, rather than the person inside it. This may further lead to a sense of dehumanisation and stereotyping.

The in-group identity of police officers is noticeable in the methods used to deal with the stress and trauma associated with the job. Trauma is mostly dealt with within the inner circle and wives or significant others are often excluded (Van der Westhuizen, 2001). This often leads to distancing and problems within intimate relationships. The methods mostly used to deal with stress and trauma include the use (and abuse) of alcohol, denial, joking and socialising - often exclusively with fellow officers. The existence of police canteens, where alcohol is sold at a cheaper rate, might contribute to this problem. Police canteens further reinforce the boundaries between “us” and

“them”, as members prefer not to socialise with the public even in their free time. Since socialisation is a process of identity transformation, police officials become socialised within the police subculture. Group dynamics are also evident in police language¹ with police officers, for example, often referring to the civilian society as “haasmanne en haasvroue” (Hagen, 1995, p.5).

The transformation process puts the identity of the SAPS under attack to a large degree. The strong in-group identity has to an extent broken up since the amalgamation of the national forces and the strong affirmative action policy enforced by government since the political transformation (Van der Westhuizen, 2001). Although this is in some ways a positive development, the decay of in-group identity has also resulted in major social and moral problems among police members (Nel & Steyn, 1997). As police officers are highly dependent on a trusting relationship with colleagues due to the potential dangers involved in policing, inter-group intolerance poses a threat to effective policing within the broader community (Ainsworth, 1995; Ministry of Safety and Security, 1995). Because of the current political stigma attached to the organisation’s in-group identity, the loss thereof may not be publicly acknowledged (let alone mourned).

Analogous to the rest of South African society, the police carries an enormous historical and cultural burden. Police officers had to uphold inhuman laws that have since been defined as unlawful, and the cultural divide was in a sense epitomised by the organisation. Police officers reflect a broader South African society historically characterised by problematic intergroup relations. Although society expects police officials to manage crime impartially, the attitudes, values and behavior of police officials mirror the broader South African community (Ainsworth, 1995; Brogden & Shearing, 1993; Ministry of Safety and Security, 1995; Nel, 1996).

The expectation that police officers should rise above the racial divisions of the

¹ Police language refers to a particular use of jargon which evolved over the years within the SAP. The terms are not understandable by non-police persons, e.g. “Blougatte” as a term for recruits.

society from which they are drawn has become particularly intense since the early 1990s. These attempts at depoliticising the police has, ironically, placed the police at the centre of intense political inquiry. The historical perception of the police as an instrument of political oppression makes any attempt at distancing itself from politics doubly difficult.

In addition, the rise in crime since the 1990s has further increased demands on the police to function impartially and effectively. Steinberg (2001) writes that crime and the fear thereof is as old as South Africa itself. He says the South African preoccupation with crime bears testimony to how this country was stitched together with violence, “to how we worry that malevolence is our most abiding pedigree” (Steinberg, 2001, p.2). In this regard, Steinberg (2001) refers to the highly acclaimed South African novelist Alan Paton, who worried that the upheavals that shaped modern-day South Africa dissolved the elusive and delicate substance that allows us to treat each other as human beings. The politics of crime in South Africa has been called a nihilistic politics - a politics emptied of all meaning (Segal, Pelo & Rampa, 2001). And it is against this meaningless force that the men and women of the SAPS find themselves as adversaries on a continual basis. The possibility might then exist that the policing of crime may also become a nihilistic politics, devoid of all meaning.

2.4.2 Impact of change and transition on individuals

Processes of change always imply uncertainty. For police officers, who place a high value on feelings of security (Chandler, 1990), as will be discussed later, this creates extra stressors (Anderson, n.d.). Strangeness and unpredictability can be a source of severe threat and stress: soldiers who know what to expect and what to do have a decreased likelihood of experiencing later psychological disorganisation (Rachman, 1978). (As will be discussed in chapter four, research on law enforcement personnel often draws on research done on military personnel). The fact that the active process of transformation in the SAPS is still incomplete after 10 years exacerbates the feelings of uncertainty. The unfortunate effect of transformation on many members is resistance against the transition process, uncertainty, negativism, low motivation,

low productivity and, ultimately, also issues relating to mental health (Karstel, 1995; Nel & Steyn, 1997).

The integration of eleven police forces through the transition process often meant combining people with a deep seated distrust and animosity towards one another in one organisation, to work toward a common goal. The nature of policing necessitates a trusting relationship between “buddies” to watch one another’s back. It thus follows that suspicion, hatred and mistrust may seriously hamper effective functioning as a police officer and contribute to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity.

Many of the changes in the SAPS are focused on bringing about race and gender equality with accompanying implications and tensions between individuals. In line with affirmative action, certain posts and positions are designated for specific race or gender groups. Individuals who do not form part of the designated groupings often feel violated, treated unfairly and discriminated against. Conversely, individuals from designated groupings sometimes feel that the perception is that they were allocated a specific post, not because of their competence, but because of affirmative action policy. Research indicates a lower job satisfaction rate among police officers from minority groups (Buzawa, 1984) and it seems that the lower satisfaction of minority police officers may be due to the friction and conflict associated with affirmative action issues (Alex, 1976; Buzawa, 1984; Jacobs & Cohen, 1978).

Mental health problems during the transition are reflected in the high and escalating turnover of personnel, an increase in medical boardings, as well as a high suicide rate compared both to the rest of society and to police services in other countries (Rothmann & Van Rensburg, 2002). Symptoms such as lack of patience, tension, aggression, moodiness, depression, alcohol abuse, emotional numbness, loss of motivation and interest in the outside world are apparent and adversely affect the ability of police officials to function in the family, social and professional worlds (Nel, 1994).

Nel and Steyn (1997) argue that the mental health of the SAPS cannot be addressed in isolation from the broader South African political context. One variable - political transformation - seems to be particularly dominant in influencing police officers' mental health. According to Nel and Steyn (1997) police officers are typically unable to deal with emotional and/or psychological ambiguity. Although police officers are often in life-threatening situations, it is not these situations themselves that cause mental health issues, but rather the fact that they occur in a context of social and organisational change, and personal and collective insecurity (Nel & Steyn, 1997). In attempting to understand why police officials previously seemed able to cope reasonably well with the demands of their profession, but now appear far less able to do so, Gioscia (in Nel, 1994) examined the role of systemic change. He suggests that within a given social system, individuals function most efficiently as a subsystem when their operations, including their social behaviour and thinking, are synchronous with the operations of that system. According to him, a state of atrophy develops if change occurs in individuals as subsystems at a slower rate than in the social system they inhabit.

As mentioned before, a strong characteristic of the SAPS is its authoritarian culture and hierarchical structure. Problems related to authoritarianism are: adaptation problems, lack of responsiveness, external locus of control, reduced levels of commitment to mission and goals, lower job satisfaction, higher levels of conflict, higher staff turnover, and lack of innovation. All of these problems were indeed found to be evident in the SAPS in a study by Nel and Steyn (1997) of police officers' mental health. The impact of human resource policies (i.e. promotions, transfers, etc) on the mental health of members does not seem to have been considered, or has been negated. This is evident in the controversial Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) Resolution 7/2002², which is aimed at match-and-placing members in posts with the overall aim of improved service delivery. The aim of improved service delivery is, however, often questioned as

² Resolution 7/2002 agrees to the transformation and restructuring of the public service and provides for the redeployment, retraining and alternative employment of excess employees.

members are sometimes placed in posts for which they have no experience or training.

The expression of personal feelings is at best extremely limited in police culture. As professionals trained to serve and protect, police officers seemingly believe they are expected to maintain a poised presence even under the most dreadful of circumstances (Anderson, n.d.; Nel & Steyn, 1997; Violanti, 1996). This “machismo” image not only contributes to further isolation of police officers, but also prevents them from seeking help from anybody outside the in-group. The powerful myth of “cowboys don’t cry” is used in various media articles with reference to the police officer and has become almost synonymous with the SAPS. This myth stems from times gone by, where the “good guys” were placed in direct opposition to the crooks, the “bad guys”. Inevitably the “good guys” always won the fight. These heroes tamed the Wild West, and brought law and order to chaos. This they did by shooting rather than crying. Within the SAPS the option of “shooting the crooks” has been eliminated to a great extent (Section 49 of the Criminal Procedure Act, 51 of 1977). The image of a cowboy being brought to trial and punished for killing a crook is quite absurd within the myth. The sad part of this myth is that the cowboys still do not cry but shoot, although their victims are often themselves or their families. This myth also holds implications for the previously so-called helping professions (Employee Assistance Services) within the SAPS; to seek help is synonymous with crying, a fate which is sometimes considered to be worse than death. Often when the option of getting help is eliminated, the only alternative that remains is resigning from the organisation.

A police officer who wishes to leave the organisation has two options, either resignation or medical boarding. Boarding is the term used when members are declared unfit for service by a medical board due to physical or emotional factors. To be medically boarded holds far better financial benefits for the individual compared to resignation. For example, members who are medically boarded continue to be a member of the service medical aid and continue to receive a percentage of their monthly salary till they die. This also has serious fiscal implications for the

organisation.

The significant elevation in the number of medical boardings due to the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder at the time of the political transition (Thom, 1996) suggests that post-traumatic stress disorder has a definite political and social intent and meaning. The international literature also indicates an increase in law enforcement worker compensation stress claims (Stratton, 1986). As we will see in chapter four, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder may surface once individuals experience loss within a political context or feel morally alienated. The Head of the previous Health Management Service of the South African Police Service was quoted in the Pretoria News (1996) as saying: “It may be that officials seeking a way out, rather than to seek help, may exaggerate or fabricate symptoms of PTSD, often in an attempt to avoid having to deal with changes in the police as a result of political changes in the country”. Moral betrayal and the destruction of social trust may result in further trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder is currently the main diagnoses for police officials opting to leave the organisation on psychiatric or mental grounds (P. Jooste, Medical Boards, SAPS, personal communication, July 23, 2003). Because of its relevance to the construction of trauma in the SAPS, the implications and difficulties of a PTSD diagnosis will be discussed in chapter four.

Within the organisation there is little sympathy for a member admitting to suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. A member admitting to having post-traumatic stress disorder is often viewed by colleagues and management alike as preparing the grounds for leaving the organisation, rather than seeking treatment for an illness. Tuohy (1968) found the group’s acceptance of a soldier returning from “stress leave” to be highly indicative of the individual’s readjustment or subsequent breakdown. The disorder is also often denied on an individual level since active police members consider admitting to post-traumatic stress disorder to be a flaw in their “armoury” which could hamper their continued efficiency. As Hamilton (1988) found, many soldiers have to rely upon their grandiose self and their harsh and high self-expectations to carry them through the dreadful aspects of war. Members often only admit to having post-traumatic stress symptoms as a means to a end, namely to get

medically boarded.

Another reason why admitting to post-traumatic stress symptoms is often denied on an individual level, except as a reason to be medically boarded, may be found in the lack of treatment options available to members. Access to psychological and psychiatric treatment by the official medical aid is severely limited (R1 617 per family per year in 2004, subject to day-to-day limits) and most members do not have access to adequate professional treatment within the organisation. No psychiatrists and few psychotherapists are employed by the organisation. In a study conducted on psychological burnout amongst psychologists in the SAPS, Van der Walt (2001) found firstly that the psychologists experienced the organisation and the social context as traumatic, and secondly that the psychologists were traumatised by working with police officials. The turnover rate for psychotherapists is high, with only a few staying for longer than five years.

Conversing about mental health issues implies that one looks at the treatment thereof or, in other words, the organisation's response to the difficulties or symptoms experienced by police officers. This dissertation argues that the official discourse of the organisation does not regard the abovementioned difficulties as originating from the processes of change and transition, but rather as a manifestation of individuals' exposure to trauma.

2.4.3 The organisation's response to the situation

Trauma debriefing and suicide prevention are two national projects which fall under the auspices of the Employee Assistance Services (EAS) of the SAPS, which include Psychological Services, Social Work Services and Spiritual Services. The EAS is supposed to fulfill a supportive function to the organisation and does not carry much weight with regard to policy making, transfers or working conditions of members (personal communication, Director Grobler, Head: Psychological Services, 21 August 2003). A reason for the existence of the EAS in the SAPS may be found in the police subculture. Police officers' social world often consists only of colleagues

as they feel they cannot relate to someone from outside the group. Help may thus only be offered and accepted from within the “inner circle”.

2.4.3.1 Trauma debriefing in the SAPS

Mitchell’s Critical Incident Stress Debriefing model (Mitchell & Everly, 1996) is used in the SAPS as the format on which trauma debriefing is based. The only national document referring to trauma in the SAPS is the National Instruction 18/1998 with the heading: “Debriefing of employees who have experienced traumatic incidents”. This document states that employees of the service are often exposed to traumatic incidents in the performance of policing functions. According to this document, if such employees do not receive timeous debriefing, a real danger exists that the employees may develop post-traumatic stress symptoms. This instruction is issued in an attempt to provide for the effective debriefing of traumatised employees. The instruction governs the process of debriefing from the designation of a coordinator for trauma management, the reporting of a traumatic incident, the training of commanders as initial debriefers, to the keeping of a trauma register. The implied message is that traumatisation is a separate, identifiable entity; something that can be handled through debriefing. The suggestion is also that debriefing can cure traumatisation or, that it can prevent symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder from occurring. Although it is not officially stated, members of the Employee Assistance Services have mentioned that a member who refuses to be debriefed may not at a later stage use that specific traumatic incident as a basis (reason) for medical boarding.

The study by Ncokazi (2003) on factors inhibiting individual participation to trauma debriefing in the SAPS found that 80.30% of the sample did not attend trauma debriefing, although 74.43% reported that they were familiar with the nature, process and purpose of the procedure. The study utilised a quantitative methodology and does not provide in-depth discussion of the various factors that inhibit members from attending trauma debriefing.

Debriefing forms part of possible treatment programmes and as such lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice to say that there is a fair amount of critique directed at debriefing *per se* (Gist, 1996; Raphael, Meldrum & McFarlane, 1995). According to the present researcher, the value of trauma debriefing does not necessarily lie in the type of model used but rather in the traumatised person's perception that someone (or the organisation) cares enough to listen to his or her trauma. Other than its debriefing policy, it seems as if the organisation disregards the effects of trauma on its members. As mentioned before, this is reflected, for example, in the extreme limits placed on psychological and psychiatric treatment by the official police service medical aid as well as in the limited number of therapists available in the organisation.

2.4.3.2 Suicide prevention programme in the SAPS

The suicide rate in the SAPS is much higher than the average rate of 18 per 100 000 of the general population (Rothmann & Van Rensburg, 2002). According to Schlebusch (2000), the suicidal rate in the SAPS stands at approximately 4 per 10 000. The prevention of suicide was designated to the EAS in the South African Police Service and a national suicide prevention programme was established. This programme focuses on presenting suicide prevention workshops to members. According to the author, such an approach reflect lateral thinking processes and seriously oversimplify relevant issues such as the impact of organisational stressors on police officers' coping abilities. A sad parody is the suicide of one of the suicide prevention coordinators in 2000, an event that was not recognised officially or publicly.

The dominant discourse and sentiment in the SAPS is often that members are provided with the necessary support and blame is apportioned to the individual. In a media statement on suicide incidents (SAPS, 2000) Assistant Commissioner Basson commented on three separate incidents of suicide by police officials over a period of 24 hours. The statement reads: "Police officials are to be seen as the protectors of the community and should not be feared because of their lack of self-control or professional conduct". She states that exposure to trauma cannot be seen as an

“excuse” (for committing suicide) and lists support structures such as Crisis Line and debriefing programmes. In a conversation with the researcher, an EAS manager commented on the high number of suicides committed in that week (a total of five) by expressing relief that the suicides had occurred in different regions so that the statistics would not be so badly affected, and so that the EAS manager “would not look so bad”.

2.5 Concluding remarks

It could be argued that many of the ideals set out in 1994 for a new South African Police Service still remain an idealistic dream in 2004. The strong in-group identity has been replaced with no identifiable identity, decentralisation with a lack of control or accountability, and militarism with a lack of discipline and respect. Although previous structures, patterns, or ways of operating were by no means altogether efficient, good or even correct, the “loss” needs to be recognised. As is widely acknowledged in psychology, an experience of loss can be linked to various mental health problems, such as anxiety, adjustment and mood disorders. The author’s personal experience is that these disorders are by far the most common mental health problems cited by members of the SAPS who seek psychological intervention³. It appears as if one of the most common fallacies about change, namely, the conclusion that if something is bad, its opposite must of necessity be good (Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974) forms part of the process of change in the SAPS.

The next chapter constitutes a theoretical overview of trauma and concentrates on psychoanalytic theories and concepts related to trauma.

³ No official mental health statistics are available within the SAPS.