

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF A SPECIAL KIND

Recent writings by and on the police in South Africa¹

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The occupational culture of police organisations has long fascinated policing scholars. In the Anglo-American world ethnographic enquiries have contributed much to our understanding of police perceptions, beliefs and actions. This article takes a closer look at efforts to describe and analyse police culture in South Africa. Three genres of writings are considered. Structural accounts of police culture and ethnographic accounts of the police are briefly discussed before turning to a more detailed consideration of a third and emerging genre: police autobiographies. Two recent autobiographies written by former policemen are explored in some detail with the view to considering the contribution of the autobiography to our understanding of the complex occupational dynamics of police and policing in South Africa.

POLICE CULTURE AND ETHNOGRAPHIC ENQUIRIES

The quest for understanding the occupational culture of police organisations has been one of the defining features of the field of police studies. Here the tradition of ethnographic research has been particularly important. In fact, it is difficult to imagine policing studies without a body of ethnographic work. In a recent comprehensive overview of the ethnographic tradition of the police as occupation and organisation, Peter Manning takes the reader through 60 years of ethnographic research.² He demonstrates how critical it has been for our understanding of how police organisations function and how the occupation of policing takes shape through a complex interaction between perceptions, beliefs and actions. Police organisations are complex and the social constructions of that world vary among

those situated at different points. Organisational specialisation means that functionaries attached to different divisions such as the uniform, detective or intelligence branches, for example, may engender distinct sub-cultural characteristics. Given this diversity, Manning suggests that it is best to think of the organisation 'as peopled by segments' each confronting its own set of 'contingencies'.³ Police culture, it turns out, is best conceptualised in plural terms.

Well established in Anglo-American research circles, the ethnographic tradition has a limited presence in the developing world. Take the case of African police. There is almost no body (except in the case of South Africa) of ethnographic enquiries into the organisational dynamics and subcultural tendencies of police in Africa. One recent exception is the work of Bruce Baker.⁴ His ethnographic explorations of policing in Uganda, Rwanda and Sierra Leone bring home, if not in great depth, the impact of civil strife on police culture and how it ends up shaping post-conflict reconstruction of the organisation.

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EXPLORATIONS OF POLICE CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Explorations of the occupational dynamics of the police in South Africa have evolved in response to new opportunities for research. Prior to the 1990s, given the restrictions on research into the police (as with regard to prison conditions), those interested in police culture relied on structural analyses of the wider political imperatives that shaped police actions on the ground. Only after 1994 did the space for ethnographic enquiries really open up. In the section below we briefly take stock of structural and ethnographic accounts before focusing on the genre of police autobiography in more detail.

Genre 1: Structural accounts in police historiographies

Structural analyses of the police contributed much to our understanding of the context (socio-historically, as well as organisationally) within which the police operated. Three such accounts appeared in quick succession just as monumental political changes got underway in the early 1990s. Each in turn emphasised the occupational dynamics associated with the policing of the colony, the policing of the racial state and the policing of counter-insurgency.

In *Black and Blue* John Brewer⁵ provided a detailed account of the origins and development of the state police in modern, twentieth century South Africa. Here the emphasis is on the *colonial* origins of the police, designed as a political tool to defend the regime's interests and to control resistance among the subjugated population. Brewer's generic depiction of colonial police is one where the police institution is centralised in structure and paramilitary in orientation. Police-community relations are at heart hostile. In the context of public order policing the police rely on coercive tactics to control 'unruly mobs'. Such structural features (centralisation, paramilitarism, partisanship, the routinisation of coercion) shaped police habits of mind.

In *Policing for a New South Africa* Brogden and Shearing⁶ explored more closely the cultural aspects of police and policing the racial state. In their analysis an intimate link is drawn between the Afrikaner Nationalist state and the cultural values, habits and practices of the police. Religious doctrine guided the police as they battled the forces of 'communism' in the defence of white Christian civilisation. From such analysis the police rank and file emerges as an integral part of the solidarity project of the racial state. In their ways of thinking and doing, the police embraced a deeply sectarian project defined by the nationalist ideology of their ethnic leaders.

In *Policing South Africa* Gavin Cawthra⁷ focused on post-1976 developments in South African politics and their impact on policing strategies. The securitisation of the state further fed the engine of militarism in police thinking and tactics. Covert and auxiliary units – bound by a cult of secrecy – proliferated. The ideological justification of fighting a 'just war' served as a powerful legitimating device for street level operatives to resort to dirty tactics in their quest to contain and silence political opposition. In this context police abuse of power, including torture, became routine.

Structural accounts of the colonial character of policing, the impact of racial politics on the organisation after 1948, and imperatives associated with counter-insurgency go some way to demarcating broad features of the occupational culture of the South African police. However, for those interested in the specifics of the occupational culture – its micro dynamics, if you wish – ethnographic-type explorations reveal, at times, surprising counter-narratives to the standard model sketched above.

Genre 2: South African police ethnography in recent years

Compared to the rest of the continent, ethnographic-type police studies in South Africa are relatively well developed, albeit of recent origin. In this tradition (loosely defined), there are a fair number of book-length and article publications that have appeared in the last decade

or so. While varying in the extent and quality of the ethnographic fieldwork involved, each of these texts lifts some of the veils with which police often disguise what they are actually up to.

So, for example, in *Transforming the Robocops*, Monique Marks explores the impact of radical changes since the early 1990s in the rules regarding the deployment of police in public order situations.⁸ She brings to life the perceptions and experiences of public order police personnel (foot soldiers and managers, old guard and newcomers) to a rapidly changing political and organisational environment. For a year, Antony Altbeker followed South Africa's police officers around as they traversed the spaces of urban and rural South Africa.⁹ In *The Dirty Work of Democracy*, he brings personae and context alive, as a good ethnographer should. He shows us ordinary cops intervening in a multitude of difficult spaces which demand that they be 'tough and uncompromising'.¹⁰ A third text is Jonny Steinberg's *Thin Blue*, which focuses on the policing of congested areas of poor urban settlements, where trust in the police is tangential and consent to be policed still needs to be developed.¹¹ What Steinberg brings to life are the creative ways in which the police engage with a hostile environment and how such operational responses reflect the occupational mindset of the police. Lastly, Julia Hornberger's anthropological enquiry into the way in which the police engage with human rights principles and practices in the inner-city policing field of Johannesburg makes a critical contribution to our understanding of how the normative rules associated with human rights are received, twisted, sabotaged and transformed within the everyday operational space occupied by the police.¹²

Each of these works was produced by an academic. There are others, for instance, like Andrew Brown, who produced an engaging account of his time as a police reservist, but claim no academic pretensions, and write solely from a desire to enlighten the public about what years of police work meant to them – or at least to justify themselves in their own and others' eyes.¹³ Andrew Faull's compilation of police 'stories' also deserves

mention here, as each of the stories – in raw form – reflects the experiences and views of ordinary police on a wide range of topics.¹⁴

Genre 3: Police autobiographies and police culture

While ethnographies of a scholarly kind cast indispensable light on police culture, what then of 'insider' autobiographies and memoirs from the belly of the beast? The use of biographies as source material and as suitable objects of enquiry has been the subject of some sociological debate. Liz Stanley, for example, explores the genre of biography and memoirs in knowledge production and engages with them as sources from the point of view of 'facticity', 'veracity' and 'validity'.¹⁵ Others have considered the utility of police biographies more specifically.¹⁶ For Howe et al., police autobiographies deserve attention for their glimpse into the workings of police cultures.¹⁷ Others again have warned that that while (auto)biographies routinely assert the aim to 'tell it like it was', these claims are always mediated through historical context, social location, and personal ideology.¹⁸ This means of course that for academic purposes police memoirs need to be subjected to critical scrutiny.

The recent South African police biographies of concern differ in terms of style, focus and objective. Not all are autobiographies in the true sense of the word. But all profess to tell a story from the inside of the *actual* work of policing – as opposed to various outsider accounts of a generally condemnatory nature. At least six publications of quite recent vintage deserve mention.

The first four publications are perhaps the least revealing but deserve some minimal attention as they do add information which is not generally public. Thus, for example, there is the work by Pierre Wessels, *Uit Nood Gebore* ('Born out of need').¹⁹ Wessels was a senior officer of the Counter-Insurgency and Riot Units of the South African Police (SAP). His book provides an overview of the evolution of these units from the 1970s onwards. Photographs of force deployment in the 'theatre' of counter-insurgency capture

unusual police tools such as armoured vehicles and heavy artillery. The story told through these images is one of policeman-as-soldier exposed to the nasty ravages of war on the borders and then inside the country itself. A detailed account is provided of contacts with the 'enemy', of being caught in cross-fire, of being led into ambushes, of landmines going off, of endless skirmishes between protagonists and of the many injuries suffered by the police during the post-1976 period of counter-insurgent policing. This is an account written not only by an insider but also from the particularistic vantage point of the insider, partisan, and celebratory of the 'successes' of these units.

A second text published in 1997 comes from a former general of the SAP, Herman Stadler. Titled *The Other Side of the Story: A True Perspective*, it offers a police version of the truth based on 'facts' or, in the words of the author, 'an honest attempt to put things into proper perspective', of policing a revolutionary onslaught aimed at making the country ungovernable.²⁰ Take into account, says Stadler, that between 1976 and 1990 the police had to respond to 1 400 acts of terrorism.²¹ The police confronted physical danger day after day. Thousands of police were 'maimed leaving widows and orphans behind' in their attempt to contain the 'monster' that had been created in the 'name of freedom.'²² In this version of the history, it is the police who are at the receiving end of 'endless intimidation' – through propaganda onslaughts, sabotage and mass mobilisation – part of a strategy, the author claims, to 'discredit' the police and make the country 'ungovernable'.

A third text within this genre is that of a former Commissioner of Police. Johan van der Merwe's autobiography, *Trou tot die Dood toe* ('Loyal unto Death') is an account of how the South African police maintained 'law and order' amid terror and decades of political conflict with the view 'to protect and to serve.'²³ Given the author's almost unparalleled access to the innermost secrets of the old SAP, it is a somewhat disappointing work. Nevertheless, it illustrates a recurring mindset among the old guard of the SAP. As such the text, as cultural artefact, reveals a fair amount about the political assumptions and the ideological

viewpoints that shaped a cadre of senior police's views of themselves and their role vis-à-vis the apartheid order.²⁴ The accounts of both Stadler and Van der Merwe, we need to remember, were compiled at a time when the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were underway. Both accounts reconstruct police history in the shadow of hearings into human rights violations by the security forces.

These three books attempt to put across the case for the old SAP. By and large they are rather dull. The prose is mostly leaden and stereotyped. A very different account of that history comes from a much decorated (but eventually discarded) covert operative, Eugene de Kock. The biography *A Long Night's Damage – Working for the Apartheid State*, written together with Jeremy Gordin, follows De Kock's career within the police from 1968 to 1993.²⁵ It is a career marked by hands-on counter-insurgency training in the Rhodesian bush. Later, as founder member of the anti-terrorist police unit *Koevoet* 'who became entangled in the madness of Ovamboland', it was his job to 'hunt' terrorists by the hundreds.²⁶ He did so with considerable conviction and much success. After six years of 'hunting terrorists' he was transferred to the police terrain of Vlakplaas, where he eventually became the commanding officer of the notorious CI covert unit. The confessions of two colleagues about the death squads that operated from the Vlakplaas base changed his fortunes. In May 1994 he was arrested and charged with 129 offences, and in 1996 was sentenced to prison for 212 years. This biography then brings to full circle the rise and decline of a three-times decorated counter-insurgent operator with all the details of the excesses involved in doing the job.

The professional biographies of Van der Merwe (2010) and Stadler (1997) represent the histories of a cadre of senior officers whose later careers were spent in the luxury of their police headquarters' offices. In contrast, the biography of De Kock (1998) presents the murky world of the executioner and the dirty hands of the covert operative, offered, in the end, on the altar of truth and reconciliation in exchange for the amnesty enjoyed by others.

TWO RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE GENRE OF SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

A senior detective's life in the old SAP

In 2012 two further texts written by former policemen, distinct in terms of generational cohort, location within the police organisation and historical period, appeared. The first is General Wouter Grové's rendition of his career as a detective (and member of the security branch) in the SAP.²⁷ The second is Nic Howarth's account of nine years as a sergeant stationed with a riot unit on the East Rand.²⁸

In *The Roadmap of a Detective* Grové describes his professional career as a detective over 36 years. The story unfolds, slowly and methodically, over 400 pages.²⁹ On the cover the boyish face of Grové sporting a 1960s hairstyle is superimposed on a detailed map of the former Eastern Transvaal and Natal provinces where he spent much of his career. The language utilised in the biography is an old-fashioned Afrikaans. The tone of the conversation is serious. The story is told in slow and chronological order. The personal milieu that is described is tangibly shaped by the cultural outlook and practices of a poor rural Afrikaner community, from which many members of the old SAP sprang.

Grové left school in Standard 9. In 1961 he underwent basic police training. The latter was characterised by military discipline. There is reference at an early phase of field training to the proverbial *klopjagte* in search of drugs, liquor and guns in Pretoria.³⁰ This exposure to the sins of the city left a deep impression on the rural Grové. His first station deployment was Plessilaer, a black community situated outside Pietermaritzburg, with a few Indian and white families. After a couple of years Grové left Plessilaer with a deep sense of satisfaction in having delivered a service to the dispossessed. It is an observation he takes care to emphasise. Conventional depictions of the overtly political role of apartheid police, he notes, make no reference to ordinary police work that

benefited the subordinates of the racial state. At Plessilaer he developed his 'approach' to policing – a form of community-based policing which entailed establishing contact with community leaders and developing good working relationships. In pursuing the latter he claims to have been ever mindful of local cultural customs. In his account of the social environment in Plessilaer it is the micro politics that is emphasised. There is only passing reference to the wider macro imperatives of apartheid regulations and the police's role in enforcing discriminatory statutes. As a detective responsible for the investigation of crime in an area inhabited by the racial underclass, for Grové at least, it would seem the politics of race took a backseat. In fact, he takes care to describe himself as a professional policeman responsible for the consistent application of criminal law and procedure.³¹ This depiction challenges the overtly structural depictions of apartheid police as mere 'storm troopers' of apartheid – a viewpoint which, incidentally, John Brewer himself challenged as too neat to do justice to the ambiguities and ambivalence of policing as it happened on the ground.³²

Grové's training as a detective and thereafter his rapid move through the ranks of the organisation is discussed in detail. One is left with an impression of an orderly process of upward mobility characteristic of a rule-bound bureaucracy that provided opportunity for further education. In Grové's case he matriculated and went on to complete a number of in-service training courses. Later still, he pursued tertiary qualifications through UNISA. His career trajectory as detective was a rewarding one. Without flourish, and indeed without great style, the subculture of the professional detective is brought to life. Grové portrays a subculture with an entrenched work ethic, deep loyalty to the division, making the most of limited resources, taking pride in thorough investigations, measured by successful convictions in court, and of the resulting job satisfaction. (He also frequently reiterates his firm religious convictions.)

By the mid-1960s Grové's career path as a promising detective was interrupted by a call to

'higher' duty. He was drawn into the specialist ranks of the security police and posted to Nkandla as branch commander. From here onwards he became part of what he describes as 'a totally new subculture of the South African Police' with access to the kinds of resources which the detective branch could only dream of.³³ His specialised training exposed him to the SAP's (and indeed the National Party's) interpretation of communist ideology. As a religious man he found communist antipathy toward religious beliefs deeply worrying. As the story unfolds, the 1960s provided opportunities for the security branch to grow exponentially. Grové was posted to Pietermaritzburg. His commanding officer (Hans Dreyer) demanded knowledge about every 'terrorist' in the area.³⁴ In pursuit of this security objective Grové put his own strategy – an early variation on the theme of 'winning hearts and minds' – to work. His objective was to build an informer network through establishing relationships with local tribal authorities.³⁵ But it was a strategy not necessarily valued by his superiors.

In 1970 Grové was sent to join the SAP's contingent in Rhodesia at Victoria Falls where he worked in close cooperation with Rhodesian security forces. He writes that their operational strategy was the antithesis of his own, as they moved like an occupying force through areas of settlement, kicking down doors and demanding information. In 1972 came a transfer back to Middelburg, Transvaal, as head of the regional Security Branch. A difference of opinion (the nature of which Grové does not disclose) with the new commander led to his re-entry into the detective service. From 1976 onwards as senior detective he oversaw the investigation of serious crime. Monthly inspections at 13 police stations, involving arduous docket analysis, consumed much of his time. Again the image of the police organisation that emerges from these descriptions is of one tightly supervised and operating in a quite rigid bureaucratic fashion.

Finally, Grové's biography also reflects on the dynamics of political transition and the dislocating effects on the organisation. In 1992 he was appointed as national head of Detective Services, overseeing various specialist divisions. It was then

that allegations of dirty tricks involving the Murder and Robbery squads were made public – and he considers the difficulties which he confronted as manager at the time. He reports on the complicated internal process of restructuring – of amalgamation and rationalisation – which had to be managed, and the widespread feelings of insecurity that accompanied it. After a gruelling interview, Grové was re-appointed as head of the detective division. He was quickly confronted by a range of challenges. His plea for investing resources into the detective division went unheeded. The drive towards rationalisation resulted in a flight of specialised policing skills to the private sector. The introduction of a new tier of government and the appointment of provincial commissioners posed further challenges for coordination. But above all deep mistrust between ANC politicians and senior police meant that the old protocols were no longer adhered to. Lateral entrants utilised their direct lines to ANC politicians to bypass old routines, and in this context, as head of the detective division, he was no longer sure of his decision-making role.

Amid the complicated internal processes of restructuring, however, new opportunities for internationalisation and regionalisation opened up. When the regional police body, the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation (SARPPCO), was established, travel into the regional and the wider continent became common. In 1993 Grové successfully presented the South African case for re-entry into Interpol. At the next meeting of Interpol he stood for vice president, but lost with a small margin to an Egyptian colleague. Upon his return to South Africa he – like many of his senior colleagues – opted out of the police force and received a golden handshake. He was relatively young for retirement. Somewhere in the unfolding of a story about his career he states that during 36 years of service he had 'never shot anyone fatally'.³⁷

A riot cop on the East Rand

For a sharp contrast in style and substance to Grové's, there is Nick Howarth's autobiographical account as a member of an East Rand 'Riot Squad'

unit.³⁸ The professional world of the detective could not be more different than that of Howarth's as riot policeman. Howarth's book comprises a lively account of nine years as a sergeant stationed with a Riot Squad Unit (of some notoriety) in a volatile space (the East Rand), at the high point of political conflict (1986 through to 1994).

For one academic description of the lay of this piece of land we turn to the historians Bonner and Ndima:

Between July 1990 and the first national democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994, the Witwatersrand experienced the most sustained bloodletting in its brief 100 year existence. From July 1990 to April 1992 alone, 1 207 people died and 3 697 suffered injuries in a sequence of attacks, reprisals and counter reprisals between hostel dwellers, squatter populations and township residents. The East Rand was the epicentre of violence in this phase as it was in later ones, accounting for 36.3% of total deaths and 67.6% of total injuries. The preponderance of these occurred in the Katorus region (Kathelong, Thokoza and Vosloorus) of the near East Rand.³⁹

Howarth writes in a lively personal way that none of the other works considered remotely approaches. The author's appeal to a particular audience is direct. This book is written as a tribute to all riot cops 'who left their souls and their sanity in townships in South Africa', to colleagues who died on the East Rand, and to the wives of all riot police. Howarth is vehement in his truth claims: he aims at 'setting the record straight' and 'challenging the propaganda' that discredited the work of the riot units.⁴⁰

As a 17-year-old English-speaking white South African, Howarth landed up joining the SAP in 1986 as an alternative to the military. What is interesting here is that he is an outsider within the culturally hegemonic institution at the time. In the insular Afrikaner-dominated world of basic training, Howarth as a *soutie* was considered 'easy meat', a target for endless harassment. Howarth in fact appears very much as a sceptic within an

organisation where the fit between political ideology and religious belief was not questioned. One afternoon, as an exercise in field training, Howarth and others were thrown into the turmoil of a strike organised by COSATU on the East Rand. They were told to disperse a 300-strong 'mob'. The confrontation was violent, and for Howarth the event was cataclysmic – 'something snapped' and he came out a 'changed man', a 'monster' perhaps.⁴¹ Then he was assigned to elite reaction unit training at Grootvlei police base. The physically demanding six-week course consisted of drill, training in weapons, shooting, grenade attacks and overall survival skills. They were being prepared for war, he comments, by ex-Rhodesian and Angolan veterans. At the end of the training only three out of 47 passed out. As successful trainee, Howarth then joined the East Rand Reaction Unit deployed on the East Rand (at the time generally referred to by the white public as the Riot Squad).

In his account of policing on the East Rand political turmoil is upfront, and the police are locked into daily skirmishes, attacks and counter-attacks in the Katorus complex with its mix of hostels and a resident population containing many ANC activists. The conflict is complex and deadly, involving a diverse set of actors (political groupings, trade unions, squatters, township residents, hostels dwellers, militias, security forces). Fatal shootings are daily occurrences. This is a world far removed from the one inhabited by Grové during his 36 years of service. Are the police heroes or villains? This is a question not easily answered. One is struck by Howarth's description of the ever-changing role of the police – at one moment an intervention force for the greater good, at another mere bystanders looking on as the skirmishes between competing militias take its course, then again as provocateurs and active participants in the wider conflict. The rules on the ground are murky at best. Bureaucratic procedures and tight systems of oversight do not define this kind of policing. Improvisation is the name of the game and survival is very much at stake. In the initial phase of deployment, Howarth recalls, he was involved in house penetrations in support of the work of other specialist divisions.

Dangerous work at best. During Operation Vula, he elaborates, 15 house penetrations a day were common. The heady mix of adrenalin and fear experienced helped to forge a sacred brotherhood. As warriors operating on the killing field they too developed the illusion of being 'bullet proof', yet injury and death also stalked the security forces.⁴²

The unit worked and played equally hard. Off duty, large amounts of alcohol brought relief. Night after night brawls broke out. Of the routinised order of Grové's professional world there was little to be seen. This is an account much closer to that of De Kock, but in contrast Howarth does not emerge as a bad guy, just one whose fortune (or fate) was inserted onto a pre-existing stage.

The professional world of which Howarth writes has a tactile presence. There are graphic descriptions of the stench of burnt bodies smelling like 'sweet and sour sosaties'. The memory of a burnt body being picked up, breaking in half, the innards slipping out onto the ground, is sketched in detail. Howarth records how a fellow policeman turns sideways to vomit.⁴³ Another scene is dragged from memory: of three dogs ripping a body apart on the streets of Kathelong. The reader is not spared the smell of body fluids oozing from the hundreds of corpses which are collected from the frontiers of the urban war. In fact, the subtext is very much one of routine banality and the loss of innocence induced along the way. In this world, which the riot unit on the East Rand inhabited at the tail end of the 1980s, peace accords and political negotiations only had an ephemeral presence. From their vantage point war was the intimate companion of the delicate peace that was being chiselled in the boardrooms of CODESA.

Howarth's account of the policing of the East Rand between 1987 and 1994 is of course neither sober nor impassionate. His depiction of cops being 'piggy-in-the middle' is far removed from the conventional (critical) depictions of security conduct during these times. This attempt at 'setting the record straight' has to contend with long-standing views of apartheid security force complicity in either orchestrating or fomenting

political violence and aiding Inkatha-linked militias. But Howarth's insider account comes at a time where the nature of the violence that accompanied the transition has become the subject of re-interpretation. What is being questioned now is the old, neat distinction between brutal perpetrators (the apartheid state and its security forces in collaboration with Zulu conservatives in Inkatha) and hapless (ANC) victims. Complicity in the turmoil and violence is now more readily recognised. In the words of the historian Gary Kynoch:

... the narrative that casts the ANC as victims of a state orchestrated onslaught versus the Inkatha sell outs who opportunistically sided with the white government (and its security forces) does not accurately capture events on the ground in Thokoza and Kathelong ... A more fractured, less partisan picture emerges from the voices of those who survived the township wars.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

Finally, what contributions do these two autobiographies make to our grasp of the realities of policing under apartheid? Grové and Howarth's biographies bring very different tales from the field of apartheid policing. They suggest forcibly the importance of time and place more generally and organisational location more specifically in the construction of memoirs. There are very few places where the world of the professional detective responsible for the investigation of crime through three decades intersects with the routine realities of the riot cop deployed in a context of urban insurgency. This disjuncture between the professional worlds of Grové and Howarth is a function of many factors: the cult of the personality involved (deeply religious man versus wayward rebel); the distinction between senior officer removed from the action and foot soldier patrolling in Katorus; the differences between two specialised divisions (the detective and public order divisions), and the certainty versus ambivalence of the political spaces they occupied respectively. If Grové's story is pedestrian and mundane, Howarth's is 'remarkable' and full of excesses. If the former captures organisational

stability and moral certainty, the latter in contrast speaks to institutional flux and deep ambiguities.

These two biographies provide rather different views of the same organisation. In a way the two accounts demonstrate what Peter Manning had in mind when he spoke of the occupational culture peopled by 'segments,' each with their own 'idiosyncracies'.⁴⁵ In contrast to structural accounts of police that remind us of the macro dynamics which shaped the institutional mindset, police autobiographies insert human agency into the equation and bring both personalities and micro dynamics to life. From the account of Grové we are reminded that, as under other perverse regimes, honest and/or diligent people went about their work with a certain integrity in an organisation that was partially rule-bound. From the account of Howarth the deadly monotony of war-time policing is described from the perspective of those who inhabited the frontlines on the East Rand in the dying days of white hegemonic rule.

Structural accounts, as John Brewer warned, run the risk of depicting the police as mere 'storm troopers' of the apartheid state. Like ethnographies, autobiographical accounts too have the potential to bring to life the nuances of policing, the ambiguities and compromises forged along the way as reconstructed by those who live to tell their stories. Unlike ethnographies, autobiographies lay no claim to the methodological or analytical strictures of academia. However, as South Africans in search of a textured understanding of our changing police culture, as enacted by human agents in challenging contexts, we would do well to consider the genre of police autobiographies more carefully, even as we try to subject them to critical analysis.



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NOTES

1. Thank you to Jeffrey Lever and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
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23. J Van der Merwe, *Trou tot die Dood toe: Die Suid-Afrikaanse Polisiemag*, Dainfern: Praag, 2010, 5.
24. This reminds one of the tone and substance of the official history of the South African Police, which appeared during the 75th centenary celebrations of the organisation. See M Dippenaar, *The History of the South African Police, 1913-1988*, Pretoria: South African Police, 1988.

25. E de Kock (as told to Jeremy Gordin), *A Long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State*, Contra Press, 1998.
26. De Kock, *A Long Night's Damage*, 30.
27. W Grové, *Die Padkaart van 'n Speurder: My Storie*, Paarl: Naledi, 2012.
28. N Howarth, *War in Peace: The truth about the South Africa Police's East Rand Riot Unit 1986-1994*, Alberton: Galago Books, 2012.
29. Grové, *Die Padkaart van 'n Speurder*.
30. Grové, *Die Padkaart van 'n Speurder*, 79.
31. Grové, *Die Padkaart van 'n Speurder*, 85.
32. Brewer, *Black and Blue*, 5.
33. Grové, *Die Padkaart van 'n Speurder*, 133.
34. Between 1979 and 1990 Major General 'Sterk' Hans Dreyer was commanding officer of the notorious counter-insurgency structure Koevoet, which was deployed in the operational area of South West Africa.
35. Grové, *Die Padkaart van 'n Speurder*, 142.
36. Grové, *Die Padkaart van 'n Speurder*, 155.
37. Grové, *Die Padkaart van 'n Speurder*, 104.
38. N Howarth, *War in Peace*.
39. P Bonner and V Ndima, The roots of violence on the East Rand, 1980-1990, Seminar Paper, Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, 18 October 1999.
40. Howarth, *War in Peace*.
41. Howarth, *War in Peace*, 24.
42. Howarth, *War in Peace*, 14.
43. Howarth, *War in Peace*, 79.
44. G Kynoch, Reassessing transition violence: voices from South Africa's township wars, 1990-1994, *African Affairs* 11(447) (2013), 28.
45. Manning, *Ethnographies of policing*.