Bibliography on police and policing research in South Africa, 2000–2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

South African police studies coming of age?

The idea of developing a bibliography on police and policing research emerged from discussions among a small group of South African researchers who convened in early 2012 to take stock of recent developments within the police. At the time of the meeting the evidence of an institution in crisis could no longer be ignored. The factors which have contributed to this state of affairs, so the discussions recognised, were complex. Since the late 1990s increasing public concern about high levels of violent crime had created an environment within which a much more punitive approach to crime control had taken root. During this period the decline in investigative capacity and public order policing skills had undermined the capacity of the police organisation to respond to the demands associated with a high-crime and increasingly volatile political environment. Policy decisions relating to the closure of specialist divisions and en-masse recruitment have had further debilitating consequences. Corruption – big and small – would have further corrosive effects. By 2010 the growing deficit in command and control within the organisation was widely acknowledged – even in senior police circles. And at the time the discussions took place there was much speculation about a trend towards increasing political interference in the operational mandate of the police. In the last half of 2012 no fewer than two Commissions of Inquiry were established. In the Western Cape Premier Helen Zille established a commission to investigate the alleged breakdown of relations between the community and the police in the informal settlement Khayelitsha. In August 2012 a strike at a platinum mine outside Rustenburg turned violent as police fired on a large group of striking mine workers. This event became known as the Marikana ‘massacre’ and the Farlam Commission of Inquiry was established to investigate the event.

It is against this background that we thought that taking stock of the focus areas of research over the past decade would allow us to identify trends and gaps in police research. The Centre of Criminology offered to develop a bibliography of research on police and policing focusing on the post-2000 period. John-Paul Banchani, an intern who came our way through a six-month exchange agreement between the Centre and the African Leadership Centre at Kings College in London where he completed his Masters, took on the responsibility to develop the bibliography under the guidance of Elrena van der Spuy. Once completed, the idea was to distribute this as a resource to researchers and practitioners as widely as possible. Many others have assisted in updating the bibliography. Particular thanks to Elaine Atkins, Suzall Timm, Nadia Smit and Theresa Hume for their respective contributions.

A few remarks on the bibliography itself:

Data collection: The bibliography was pieced together using a combination of the following...
data collection methods: the use of electronically based search engines; scanning of a select number of South African journals; accessing the curriculum vitae of prominent policing researchers; and through personal contact with key policing researchers.

Contemporary focus: The bibliography focuses on academic research on the police that has been published between 2000 and 2012.

Research themes: The sources are organised thematically. This required us to make decisions about where to place articles, which was not always easy as articles often straddle more than one topic.

Unpublished research: We decided to exclude unpublished theses from the bibliography as we were not confident enough about the comprehensive nature of the databases at our disposal and of the quality of such research. The search revealed that a fair amount of unpublished research for degree purposes exists.

South African police studies and policing research have evolved rapidly over a period of 20 years. From very modest beginnings as far back as 1990 this area of research has 'come of age'. It is currently characterised by considerable diversity in terms of substantive focus, which includes the following:

- Issues relating to democratic models of policing in transitional contexts (police reform, human rights and policing, police accountability, police use of force, police unions and rights etc)
- Generic police organisational dynamics (police culture, police corruption, management, work-related conditions [stress, trauma etc.])
- Contemporary policing approaches (community policing, sector policing, problem-orientated policing, crime prevention)
- Specialised policing concerns (public order, violent crime, organised crime, gender-based violence, terrorism, gangs, victims)
- Multi-agency policing (municipal policing, private policing, informal policing)
- Regionalisation of policing
- In-house police biographies – a new genre of ‘publication’ which also deserves attention in a bibliography on, for and by police

We trust that this resource will serve a useful purpose in providing a preview of existing research. We invite users to assist us in updating the bibliography. The research community has an important contribution to make to the future of the police organisation. Policy needs to be informed by sound research. Research needs to contribute to our understanding of the social, political and organisational dynamics which shape police actions at both the micro and macro levels. Being knowledgeable about the current state of police research is one pre-requisite for engaging – responsibly, innovatively and provocatively – with future police research.

Elrena van der Spuy
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