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TESTED LOYALTIES: POLICE AND POLITICS IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1939–63*

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ABSTRACT: Well into their rule, at a time when South Africa was increasingly perceived as a police state, the Nationalists, the party of apartheid, depended for the implementation of their policies on structures and personnel inherited from previous governments. Even in the South African Police, the institution most associated with the country's authoritarian reputation, key developments of the early apartheid decades originated in and cannot properly be understood without reference to the preceding period. A legacy of conflict between pro- and anti-war white policemen after 1939 was particularly significant. Concentrating on the careers and views of illustrative officers, notably members of the Special Branch, rather than on 'the police' in abstraction, this article analyses the complexities and continuities in the South African state's handling of domestic dissent in the years before and after the apartheid election of 1948.

KEY WORDS: South Africa, police, apartheid, nationalism.

ON 20 January 1942, 320 white policemen from across the industrially important Witwatersrand area centred on Johannesburg were interned under war emergency powers, apparently to forestall a coup attempt. One of the men held that day was Hendrik Johannes van den Bergh, the future founder of the notorious apartheid-era Bureau for State Security (BOSS). The head of the country's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) claimed that the detainees' names matched those in records found in the house of a brigade leader of the Stormjaers, the brownshirt activist division of the Ossewabrandwag (OB), a militant Afrikaner republican movement opposed to South Africa's participation on Britain's side in the Second World War.¹ Only weeks earlier, a former South African policeman and boxing champion, Robey Leibbrandt, had been arrested, beginning a lengthy process against him and several of his followers on treason charges. Leibbrandt, arriving from Germany in June 1941 with a plan to raise a rebellion and possibly assassinate Prime Minister Jan Smuts, had been sheltered by several lower-ranking policemen disillusioned with the seeming gradualism of the OB.² Soon after the mass arrest of January 1942, the OB began a countrywide campaign of

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¹ Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (CAD) Secretary for Justice Archives (JUS) 1/49/39, J. J. Coetzee to Secretary for Justice (SJ), 24 January 1942, encl. lists of detainees' names and copy of undated memorandum, 'Ossewabrandwag Stormtroopers'.

² H. Strydom, *For Volk and Führer* (Johannesburg, 1982).

sabotage against strategic infrastructure.³ Within months, hundreds more Stormjaers had been arrested and the state was preparing to try another 52 men for high treason.⁴ Despite this, OB-linked sabotage and espionage continued sporadically through the remainder of the war.

Almost exactly two decades later, on 16 December 1961, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the underground African National Congress (ANC), launched a sabotage campaign of similar magnitude that largely ended when MK's high command was arrested at Rivonia, north of Johannesburg, in July 1963. New security legislation increased the government's powers to restrict organisations and individuals, broadening the definition of sabotage and raising the penalties following conviction to include the death sentence, thereby making sabotage an offence potentially equivalent in seriousness to high treason. The new legislation, under which the MK leaders were indicted and found guilty, also impeded the ANC underground's ability to regroup and helped the state to close in on smaller rival networks of saboteurs who continued to operate after the Rivonia trial.⁵

To the accusation that he should have known better than to enact punitive arbitrary powers like those he personally had experienced under Smuts's wartime administration, Justice (later Prime) Minister B. J. Vorster, a former OB general, retorted that his critics had remained silent in the 1940s.⁶ In many accounts, the identification of the political quarry of the 1940s with the pursuers of the 1960s is also personified by Van den Bergh, Vorster's fellow-internee at Koffiefontein camp south-west of Bloemfontein who at the time of the Rivonia arrests had led the Security Police for six months.⁷ Such accounts seldom note that many of Vorster and Van den Bergh's own erstwhile pursuers remained policemen during the postwar decades and observed the two men's change of role and fortune from within. Vorster later recorded that after becoming justice minister in August 1961 he encountered 'ever so many' of the officers 'involved in [his wartime] detention', but that with one exception he never 'discussed it with anyone in the police force'.⁸ The two parties therefore well understood their shared but largely unspoken history; without forgetting their differences, by the 1960s the quarry and predators of the 1940s had long joined forces in pursuing the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and other movements opposing white supremacy. This article explores how the lasting enmities that polarised the police internally during the war were managed to limit or prevent their threat to the writ of governments before and after 1948.

If the evolution of the mid-century police—and particularly its Special Branch, which to its contemporary critics exemplified apartheid's

³ C. Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel: Radical Afrikaner Nationalism and the History of the Ossewabrandwag* (Berlin, 2008), 433–4.

⁴ G. C. Visser, *OB: Traitors or Patriots?* (Johannesburg, 1976), 100–24.

⁵ S. Ellis, 'The genesis of the ANC's armed struggle in South Africa 1948–1961', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37:4 (2011), 665–6 and 673; J. D'Oliveira, *Vorster – The Man* (Johannesburg, 1977), 131–2 and 146–54.

⁶ D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 134–5 and 156–60.

⁷ Ellis, 'The genesis', 673, is a recent instance. See also M. Fullard, 'State repression in the 1960s', in South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 1 (1960–1970)* (2nd edn, Pretoria, 2010), 318–19.

⁸ D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 156–7.

menace⁹ – owed much to subsequently superseded wartime internal divisions, then this has implications for longstanding debates about continuity and change in the post-1948 South African state. Participants in these debates have engaged historical evidence at several levels – ideological, ethnic political, economic, and state institutional. Their conclusions have depended partly upon which of ‘apartheid’s primary imperatives’ they emphasise: securing ‘racial political supremacy’ for whites in general; ensuring capitalist economic development; or promoting the particular interests of Afrikaans-speaking whites.¹⁰

Which level scholars engaged or imperative they emphasised is no sure predictor of where they stood on whether apartheid differed qualitatively from pre-1948 segregation. Leftists of the 1970s contended that apartheid’s economically orthodox critics in the 1950s and 1960s had created an alibi for capitalism by insisting that capitalism possessed inherently ‘racially integrative and levelling tendencies’; by ignoring how policies of racial discrimination and repression underpinned South Africa’s entire twentieth-century economic development; and by attributing discriminatory controls to a racist Afrikaner mentality rooted in the pre-industrial frontier past that only became fully ascendant politically in 1948.¹¹ Among themselves leftists argued about whether segregation and apartheid were fundamentally different stages of capitalist order reflecting South Africa’s transition from a primarily extractive economy and rural society to a predominantly manufacturing economy and urban society.¹² Meanwhile, a Foucauldian study of South Africa’s ‘Grand Tradition’ of commissions of inquiry noted the discursive continuity in how the state spoke to and of its African ‘others’ in successive crises from the 1900s to the 1980s.¹³

Historians writing since the political upheavals of the 1980s, when apartheid’s contradictions and vulnerabilities became unmistakable, have been more receptive to the possibility that National Party (NP) policy and practice were incoherent and internally contested from the outset – shaped as much by opportunistic reaction to the contingencies of the 1940s, or by administrative overextension in the 1950s, as by longer-term structural forces, ethnic and ideological agendas, or discursive tropes. The Native Affairs Department (NAD) looms large in such studies, for the good reason that it took intellectual ownership of the apartheid project, giving legislative form to its keystone policies and direction to their implementation.¹⁴ Defence too is

⁹ L. Forman and E. S. Sachs, *The South African Treason Trial* (London, 1957), 108–12.

¹⁰ D. Posel, ‘The apartheid project, 1948–1970’, in R. Ross, A. K. Mager, and B. Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume 2, 1885–1994* (Cambridge, 2011), 321–8.

¹¹ M. Legassick, ‘Legislation, ideology and economy in post-1948 South Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1:1 (1974), 5–6.

¹² *Ibid.* 9, discussing his differences with Wolpe.

¹³ A. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁴ D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948–1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford, 1991); P. L. Bonner, P. Delius, and D. Posel (eds.), *Apartheid’s Genesis, 1935–1962* (Johannesburg, 1993); T. D. Moodie, ‘The South African state and industrial conflict in the 1940s’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 21:1 (1988), 21–61; I. T. Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*

often scrutinised for evidence of dramatic change after 1948, although more as an instance of the NP's determination rapidly to 'Afrikanerise' the state, 'both to provide jobs and to ensure a pliant bureaucracy', and at the cost, it is also implied, of its efficiency.¹⁵ The armed services were symbolically important given their recent role in a war the NP had opposed, and the strongly republican defence minister, Frans Erasmus, made an example of a military establishment he feared was too close to Smuts's pro-imperial United Party (UP), removing 'the best-trained and most-educated officers'.¹⁶

There was more, however, to 'Afrikanerisation' than the wholesale replacement of English-speakers or UP-aligned officials by Afrikaners or NP supporters. Because administration, certainly as recorded in the archives, was overwhelmingly conducted in English before 1948 and in Afrikaans afterwards, it is insufficiently recognised that Afrikaners were already preponderant in the civil service when the NP took power.¹⁷ This was graphically conveyed to me by the daughters of the commissioner of police at the time:

Before the end of the war we were in Pretoria, which is civil service completely. . . . It was to my mind an English town, and I was in Johannesburg studying art when the Nats got in. And I used to go home every weekend. And you know that, overnight, it turned into an Afrik . . . there must have been thousands of closet Afrikaners, because overnight, in the shops, wherever you went, it was all Afrikaans. It was literally overnight. . . . Everybody suddenly started to speak Afrikaans.¹⁸

Some of this chameleon-like behaviour may have been opportunistic identification with the Nationalists. Mostly, however, it reflected a truth about performance, discipline, and ethnic and political identification at different levels of the civil service that Lord Harlech, Britain's high commissioner in South Africa, had observed in 1941:

but for the loyalty and capacity of a dozen senior civil servants, about half of them of English, and the [other] half of Afrikaner, descent, accustomed to co-operation with the British after the Boer War, it is very doubtful if General Smuts and his Cabinet could have harnessed the administrative machine to the war effort without a degree of opposition or passive obstruction which could not have been tolerated,

(Berkeley, 1997); K. Breckenridge, 'Verwoerd's bureau of proof: total information in the making of apartheid', *History Workshop Journal*, 59:1 (2005), 83–108.

¹⁵ W. Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (2nd edn, Oxford, 2001), 148; Posel, 'The apartheid', 354; D. Posel, 'Whiteness and power in the South African civil service: paradoxes of the apartheid state', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25:1 (1999), 102–5.

¹⁶ I. van der Waag, 'Smuts's generals: towards a first portrait of the South African high command, 1912–1948', *War in History*, 18:1 (2011), 61.

¹⁷ A. Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa* (London, 1996), 93, on the military and the police, while Evans notes that 'Afrikaner names already heavily dominated [NAD personnel] listings for 1947', Evans, *Bureaucracy*, 87. Names are only roughly indicative of their bearers' first language and are no key to party political affiliation.

¹⁸ Interview with A. M. Marais and C. McLennan, Bedfordview, 23 Sept. 1994.

but the suppression of which would probably have brought the whole machine to a standstill.¹⁹

Harlech clearly thought the state was already substantially composed of anti-war Afrikaners. His assessment that senior officers could steer the 'administrative machine' was premature, for the OB's police Stormjaer brigade would seriously test their leadership. But many other Afrikaners in the police and wider public service were indeed willing to wait, and governments on both sides of 1948 settled for at least an appearance of politically neutral professionalism among state officials.

Erasmus aside, if ministers after 1948 largely 'abided by the rules of seniority' in retaining or promoting senior officials who, although possibly unobtrusively UP-inclined, showed sufficient commitment to the new government's policies, or maintained the conceit that they were primarily professionals serving the state rather than any particular government, was 'Afrikanerisation' for the NP not then more about directing the existing bureaucracy than its qualitative transformation?²⁰ Certainly in the South African Police (SAP), unlike the military, the Nationalists interfered little with the top ranks and mostly observed Smuts's 1945 precedent in handing the commissionership to the most senior officer in line. This accounts for the rapid turnover of commissioners of police in the period 1945 to 1971 – there were six, compared to two for the period 1913 to 1945 when civilian outsiders led the force – as those at the top soon reached the mandatory retirement age.

The SAP's relevance to the issue of continuity and change in the apartheid state is evident in the stability of significant elements of its personnel from the 1930s through the 1960s; the numerical superiority of Afrikaners among whites in both its lower and officer ranks before 1948; its experience of wartime internal political division, which was mainly a division among Afrikaners and hence seldom openly mentioned if far from forgotten after 1948; and its prominence within the state both before and during apartheid. In 1949-50, the SAP's 18,002 regular staff represented a quarter of all permanent central government employees (73,178) excluding the railways. This figure was almost double the number working for Native Affairs (3,220) and Defence (6,644) combined; only the post office had more permanent staff (19,141). The SAP's growth from 10,454 men in 1945 to 21,367 in 1955 – at least half of which happened before the NP took office – was proportional to public service enlargement as a whole, meaning the police's relative size within the state remained constant. Two other key developments within the SAP during this postwar decade – again both well under way before 1948 – were the rising percentage of black police in its overall strength from 37.3 to 50.5, and the formal establishment of a discrete Special Branch to deal with political matters.²¹

¹⁹ The National Archives, London (TNA), Records of the Cabinet Office (CAB) 67/9/124, Harlech to Cranborne, 12 Aug. 1941.

²⁰ Evans, *Bureaucracy*, 6 and 70-3, referring to the NAD.

²¹ Union of South Africa, Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Union and of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate, and Swaziland*, No. 26-1950 (Pretoria, 1953), 86-7; Union of South Africa, Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Union and of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate, and Swaziland*,

While the Cold War and decolonisation internationally—and the transition to apartheid, economic expansion, and growing black nationalist resistance domestically—help explain post-1945 developments within the SAP, they are not the whole story. They are what the police told themselves and others officially—a Parsonian narrative of organic institutional enlargement and specialisation in response to changing circumstances.²² I argue that the internal dynamics, institutional arrangements, and capacity of the force that confronted the state's opponents in the early apartheid era grew out of the intra-police conflicts of the Second World War and how they were managed subsequently. To illustrate this argument, I consider the careers of specific policemen, showing how they experienced the divisions from the inside, responded to the war, and later fared in its aftermath. These profiles cast new light on one of the most controversial state bureaucracies of mid-twentieth-century South Africa; reveal the complexities of 'Afrikanerisation' in the public service; and link the state's responses to its most determined opponents before and after 1948.

THE POLICE AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In September 1939, Smuts narrowly won a parliamentary vote in favour of declaring war on Germany. For nationalistic Afrikaners, who wanted neutrality, Smuts's government lacked legitimacy, and while most supported the NP's constitutionalist opposition to the war, many others, having lost faith in electoral institutions, flocked to the extra-parliamentary OB, possibly the largest organisation of its kind in pre-1980s South African political history. The OB had been founded as a cultural body during the 1938 centenary of the Great Trek, but assumed an openly militant anti-government posture once the Nazi-sympathising and charismatic J. F. J. van Rensburg resigned as administrator of the Orange Free State at the end of 1940 to become its commandant-general and leader of the Stormjaers.²³

Participation in the war was unpopular with many white policemen, a substantial majority of whom by this time were Afrikaners.²⁴ A former Johannesburg detective told me that his immediate colleagues were split right down the middle: '50 per cent... were sympathetic to the war effort, the other 50 per cent were dead against it'.²⁵ Many of the latter became OB members before this was prohibited in the SAP in November 1940. The SAP implemented internment orders, which many policemen disliked, particularly once the initial focus on 'enemy subjects' and leftwingers gave way to

No. 28-1954-55 (Pretoria, 1956), 61-2. See also J. D. Brewer, *Black and Blue: Policing in South Africa* (Oxford, 1994), 189 and 208.

²² M. de W. Dippenaar, *The History of the South African Police, 1913-1988* (Silverton, South Africa, 1988), 191-259; Posel, 'Whiteness', 102-3.

²³ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Cape Town, 2003), 439-45, surveys the literature on Afrikaners' responses to the war.

²⁴ Dippenaar, *The History*, 144-5.

²⁵ Interview with C. W. Pattle, Magaliesburg, 4 Nov. 1994.

concerns about the reliability of public servants and the infiltration of the state by anti-war republicans.²⁶ The harsh discipline instilled during the 12 year commissionership of I. P. de Villiers might have sufficed to keep policemen at their unpopular tasks.²⁷ Given its size, composition, and visibility it was always possible that the police would be politically riven, but the likelihood increased when the army approached the SAP for a fighting brigade. Because legislation made policemen liable for call-up only in South Africa itself, De Villiers asked for volunteers for service anywhere in Africa. Volunteers signed a document known as the 'Africa' or 'Red' oath because they were issued orange shoulder tabs—or 'rooi lussies' in Afrikaans—and were derided by opponents of the war as 'rooi luisies' ('little red lice'). The tabs distinguished the small majority of volunteers from those who did not sign and whose loyalty to the government and its war policy were thus questioned. In law-enforcement operations—notably some very public conflicts between soldiers and the OB in Johannesburg in early 1941—the actions of the police, and of those wearing or not wearing orange tabs, were scrutinised for evidence of partisanship.²⁸ In October 1940, De Villiers was seconded to the Union Defence Force to command the Second South African Infantry Division, of which the Police Brigade formed part.²⁹ At SAP headquarters this left his considerably less effectual English-speaking chief deputy, G. R. C. Baston, in charge.

Until the invasion of France, officials were complacent about 'the dangers of Fifth Column activities' and 'the possibility of internal sabotage and communication with the enemy from South Africa'.³⁰ In May 1940, however, Smuts created a cabinet-level 'Internal Security Committee' under Interior Minister Harry Lawrence 'to co-ordinate all information' concerning 'subversive and other activities against the interest of the State'.³¹ Confusion in reporting and jurisdiction resulted, and that October Smuts directed that any information 'regarding subversive, disloyal or suspicious activities of any person within or outside the Union, including public servants', was 'to be sent immediately to one point only', Colonel (subsequently Brigadier) H. J. Lenton, the postmaster-general and controller of censorship, whose Intelligence Clearance (later Records) Bureau was 'made responsible . . . for the allocation of any such information to the proper quarter

²⁶ CAD, Secretary for Native Affairs Archives (NTS) 511/400, Chief Control Officer (CCO) to All Control Officers in the Union, General Minute No. 7 of 1939, 'Subversive Propaganda', 29 Nov. 1939.

²⁷ Dippenaar, *The History*, 145.

²⁸ Visser, *OB*, 30-45; Dippenaar, *The History*, 144-52; Seegers, *The Military*, 60; D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective* (Berkeley, 1981), 125-6; O. Geyser et al., *Die Nasionale Party, Deel 5: Van Oorlog tot Oorwinning, 1940-1948* (Bloemfontein, 1994), 199.

²⁹ F. W. Cooper, *The Police Brigade: 6th S. A. Infantry Brigade, 1939-45* (Cape Town, 1972), 23.

³⁰ Union of South Africa, *Report of the Select Committee on German Foreign Office Documents (Conduct of Member)* (Cape Town, 1946), 131 and 148, paras. 1, 190 and 1,318.

³¹ *Ibid.* 128, para. 1,162; M. C. van Deventer, 'Die ontwikkeling van 'n militêre inligtingsvermoë vir die Unieverdedigingsmag, 1937-1943', *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies*, 25:2 (1995), 91.

for appropriate action'.³² The implicit lack of confidence in the SAP's dependability signalled by this controversial decision appeared to be corroborated as reports came in from around the country throughout the early 1940s of unreliable police, and infiltration of other state organs by OB, pro-Nazi and anti-war agents.³³ At the peak of the politicisation of wartime policing, Acting Commissioner Baston told a press conference that 'it was vitally essential to clean up the Police Force';³⁴ and Secretary for Native Affairs Douglas Smit cautioned a subordinate he had asked to investigate alleged subversive propaganda among Africans: 'in view of the fact that there are so many disloyal men in the Police you should act independently of them'.³⁵

The SAP alone, however, had the trained personnel and legal authority systematically to investigate such reports of 'subversion' or candidates for internment, and efforts to bypass individual officers considered definitely untrustworthy often led only to dependence on other policemen who were possibly untrustworthy. As the chief control officer (who oversaw internments) noted, '[a]ll [his] investigations were done through the police. [He] had only an office staff... no outside agents whatsoever'.³⁶ Even Lenton's Bureau was allowed only the tiniest field staff, for Smuts thought Lenton's ambitions 'smacked of the Gestapo'.³⁷

Clearly white policemen's loyalties were deeply divided during the war, but their individual dispositions were expressed in or informed by a limited number of variables: whether they took the 'Africa' oath, and, if they did, whether they went up north; whether, if they stayed behind, they were interned on suspicion of being OB members, or, if not interned, they participated in the arrests and interrogation of their colleagues; whether they were in the uniform or the detective branch; and whether they were officers or in the lower ranks. Which side individuals took during the war is clearest in two groups of policemen: those, like H. J. van den Bergh, dismissed for active disloyalty or forced to resign because of membership in organisations deemed incompatible with police service, and reinstated by the Nationalists after 1948; and those who zealously pursued the first group. Many cases, however, were more ambiguous and the loyalties of policemen, even in the highest ranks, were tested on both sides of 1948.

WAR SERVICE AND INTERNMENT: SCHISM IN THE LOWER RANKS

Although the call for volunteers to serve abroad visibly divided the SAP, the principal rift came later among pro- and anti-war policemen who stayed behind. Rocco de Villiers, who joined the SAP in 1933 and became a physical education instructor at the police training depot in Pretoria, took the oath when war came, worked briefly on the Johannesburg 'political staff' interning

³² CAD JUS 1/49/39, H. G. Lawrence, Minister of the Interior, to SJ, 29 Oct. 1940; K. Fedorowich, 'German espionage and British counter-intelligence in South Africa and Mozambique, 1939-1944', *Historical Journal*, 48:1 (2005), 214-15.

³³ See reports in CAD NTS 511/400.

³⁴ Dippenaar, *The History*, 176.

³⁵ CAD NTS 511/400, D. L. Smit to C. P. Alport, 19 Feb. 1942.

³⁶ Union of South Africa, *Report of the Select Committee*, 93, para. 740.

³⁷ TNA Records of the Security Service (KV) 3/10, 'Appendix', 5.

'enemy subjects', underwent military training, and then served in the Western Desert from 1941. He did not feel his war record disadvantaged him. The Nationalists, he said, distinguished between overseas service, which was not held against one, and 'home' service. 'My service', he said,

was disliked, but was tolerable, but those who worked for the government ... were really hated. The 'Smuts dogs', as they were referred to by the Afrikaans media. That form of hatred spilled over afterwards, when the Nationalist government took over.³⁸

Policemen who were on 'home' internment duty for long enough to experience directly the open division with colleagues arrested for involvement in OB subversion, but who were very junior when war came, and kept their heads down after 1948, also fared reasonably well. Even so, the schism profoundly and permanently affected them, and left them, unlike those who served overseas, feeling undervalued. This was the experience of Cecil Pattle, who joined the police in 1932, transferred to the CID in 1938, and was working in Johannesburg at the beginning of the war. Pattle 'took the oath to fight' in 1940 but, being a detective, was not permitted to join the army. He described to me what happened at Marshall Square, Johannesburg's CID headquarters, on 20 January 1942 when his OB colleagues were detained:

[W]e were instructed, at such and such a time, we've got to be at Marshall Square ... supposedly a kit inspection. We used to have these once a year ... On this particular day ... we all formed up and we had our kit laid out in front of us. And then the officer in command came along and he said, 'These men take two steps forward', and I was amongst them. We had to take two steps forward. And then he said, 'Now the men in the front rank, the men who've stepped forward, about turn'. And we did an about turn. And then he said, 'Arrest the guy immediately opposite you'. Honest, this is what happened. We arrested, ah, there must have been about 50 chaps we arrested. They were all chaps who were anti-war, and they were taken off and sorted out, and interned. ... We came out. Now we had to go and take them to their houses and search ... And as we went out, to our motorbikes, this Scottish regiment was ranged right around Marshall Square with fixed bayonets.

Although Pattle eventually reached high rank, retiring as a brigadier in 1973, he felt uncomfortable once the Nationalists reinstated the policemen interned in 1942. Pattle believed he was disadvantaged in relation both to those who had fought overseas, and to the reinstated men, who sought accelerated promotion to make up for lost years of service and in 'a political decision' were 'granted commissioned rank without passing the examinations. And that held us out, the chaps who were doing the work, ... which caused a lot of ill feeling.' These wartime divisions within the SAP, and the resentments they bred, lasted many decades:

There was a tension up until the time I left the force. You know, there's 'Oh, they're OB', and we knew them. ... Those in positions were not pushed out [after 1948], but those filling vacancies were pushed up. They were brought from these blokes who had been discharged and interned and given commissions, made

³⁸ Interview with R. de Villiers, Cape Town, 18 Nov. 1994; R. de Villiers, responses to follow-up written questions, 28 Oct. 1995.

lieutenants. . . [T]hat impression was left that these chaps were naturally favoured because they reckoned they'd been badly treated, . . . these OB guys who came back. I cannot say because quite a few of these chaps who had taken the oath and fought up north did quite well afterwards too. . . but there's the strong feeling that the blokes who hadn't taken the oath were favoured.³⁹

H. J. van den Bergh, who joined the SAP in 1934, was one of these 'favoured' men; certainly his post-1948 trajectory seems to bear out Pattle's complaint. When the NP came in, Van den Bergh led 'some of his old Koffiefontein police colleagues' in successfully petitioning for reinstatement, and was promoted from second-class detective sergeant to detective head constable within two days of re-enlisting in August 1949.⁴⁰ The former internees' break in service was 'condoned' as a 'special leave of absence' and '[t]en of the most senior' were allowed to take the examination for commissioned rank. Van den Bergh thus received his commission in March 1950, whereas Pattle had to wait until 1950 to become a detective head constable and until 1954 to be commissioned. Unsurprisingly, Van den Bergh recalled that the ex-internees experienced 'tremendous enmity' after rejoining the police.⁴¹

Van den Bergh's account of the arrests at Marshall Square on 20 January 1942 corroborates Pattle's except he believed 'that the one row of detectives knew what this was all about while we knew nothing'.⁴² From Koffiefontein in September 1942, Van den Bergh addressed a letter, signed by 42 other low-ranking policemen, to the minister of justice explaining 'from [their] point of view' the circumstances leading to their arrest, and requesting their release and reinstatement. The 43 conceded that most had belonged to the OB 'during its existence as a Cultural Organisation', but said they had resigned their membership once it was forbidden in the SAP. Yet Lieutenant G. E. Diedericks, the CID investigating officer (who was later particularly reviled by Nationalists), had refused to accept their denials that they were part of a Stormjaer unit planning a coup, while believing the statements of other policemen since released and reinstated.⁴³

Responding, Acting Commissioner Baston detailed in turn the evidence against each of the 43 that he believed proved the 'genuineness' of the seized Stormjaer lists. Even while 'protesting his innocence', Baston argued, Van den Bergh was 'actually engaged in Stormjaer activities in [Koffiefontein] camp'. Baston observed that police membership in the OB had been prohibited in November 1940. Only later, in early 1941, had 'the Stormjaer Organization [come] into being' and secretly recruited policemen. Some of those initially detained had indeed been released for lack of evidence, but the 43 were among those 'in whose cases the entries in [the brigade leader's] records were corroborated' and whose internment was thus merited. They

³⁹ Interview with Pattle.

⁴⁰ D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 140; *The Nongqai*, 40:10 (1949), 1,371; *The Nongqai*, 40:11 (1949), 1,491.

⁴¹ Pensions (Supplementary) Act, No. 32 of 1950, Schedule, Section 1; D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 140; *The Nongqai*, 41:5 (1950), 633; interview with Pattle.

⁴² D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 84-7 and 140.

⁴³ CAD JUS 1/49/39, CCO to SJ, 9 Oct. 1942, encl. H. J. van den Bergh et al. to Minister of Justice (MJ), 21 Sept. 1942.

had 'reorganised their Stormjaer ranks in camp' and 'any leniency shown towards them would be misplaced and to the detriment of the safety and security of the State'.⁴⁴

Van den Bergh's petition and Baston's response suggest that many policemen who occupied senior ranks within the OB held relatively junior ranks in the SAP. This inversion accounts for some of the tensions within both the OB and the SAP and explains why many who were refused release from internment were among the lowest-ranking members of the SAP. Possibly the lower ranks in the SAP had less to lose by identifying themselves wholeheartedly with the OB; certainly a much higher percentage, Afrikaners included, of the commissioned than of the non-commissioned ranks signed the 'Africa' oath.⁴⁵ By such outward shows of loyalty, or sitting on the fence, officers with republican, anti-war, or anti-British sympathies prevented a more fundamental schism that might have left the SAP less able institutionally to accommodate the charged post-1948 'hatred', 'tension', and 'enmity' recalled respectively by Rocco de Villiers, Pattle, and Van den Bergh.

AVERTING SCHISM AT THE TOP: COLONEL COETZEE AND HIS PROTÉGÉS

A few Nationalist-leaning officers resigned because of the war policy, but many more remained in the SAP and negotiated the competing claims of their professional, political, and personal commitments. No instance of such tested loyalties was as ambiguous, layered, or, given the importance of his office, as significant as that of Jacobus Johannes ('Bill') Coetzee, the CID chief ultimately responsible for arresting and investigating 'disloyal' police in early 1942. Coetzee is especially difficult to characterise because he died in 1944 and therefore played no potentially revealing role after 1948. However, his decisions in delegating wartime responsibilities to protégés he had cultivated during postings in Pretoria and Cape Town in the 1930s significantly shaped the SAP's post-1948 leadership and therefore enhance Coetzee's status as a pivotal figure in this account.

Born in 1892, Coetzee joined the Transvaal Police in 1912 as a 'plain clothes constable'. He moved slowly through the non-commissioned ranks, finally being appointed a sub-inspector (lieutenant) in 1928. Then, in a period when promotion rates in the CID were 'abnormally rapid', he became an inspector (captain) in 1930 and Transvaal divisional criminal investigation officer (DCIO) based in Pretoria; chief inspector (major) in 1933, transferring to the Cape Western division as DCIO in 1934; and lieutenant-colonel and CID chief at headquarters in 1937 following the Police Inquiry Commission's recommendation that the post, vacant since 1933, should be filled to ensure a Union-wide 'co-ordinating and controlling authority for criminal investigation matters in direct touch with the Commissioner'.⁴⁶ His rise, which his

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Baston to SJ, 21 Oct. 1942.

⁴⁵ Dippenaar, *The History*, 160 and 258.

⁴⁶ CAD Police Inquiry Commission Archives (K80), 18 Jan. 1937, J. J. Coetzee, 1,648; *Ibid.* 15 Apr. 1937, J. T. Clarke, 6,838-9; *Ibid.* 19 May 1937, I. P. de Villiers, 8,797 (for 'abnormally rapid' promotion in the CID); Union of South Africa, *Interim and Final Reports of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed by His Excellency the Governor-General to*

close subordinates clearly thought was merited,⁴⁷ drew adverse comment from older English-speaking officers whom he overtook in rank. One attributed Coetzee's success to his 'having a nice [that is, Afrikaner] name' – a disparaging remark of a sort that Coetzee and other Afrikaners working their way up the police hierarchy by the 1930s undoubtedly encountered often and resented.⁴⁸

Before the war, the SAP was the government's chief intelligence agency, and Coetzee, as CID deputy commissioner at headquarters, was the commissioner's staff officer for counter-espionage, '[s]ubversive movements and communist activities'.⁴⁹ During the war, however, domestic and foreign intelligence rivals, beginning with the aforementioned controller of censorship, Lenton, not only questioned the broader police's reliability but sowed suspicion about Coetzee particularly. Coetzee's responses to these challenges led his rivals to label him a 'staunchly anti-British Afrikaner' and the "cause of most frustrations of allied intelligence operations" in Southern Africa.⁵⁰ They claimed he was a member of the secretive Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) – an organisation promoting the interests and leadership of republican-minded Afrikaners in all spheres of society – and closely associated with Van Rensburg and the OB. Their evidence for Coetzee's links to the AB and OB was circumstantial or hearsay.⁵¹ Although their charge of 'strong anti-British bias' was better founded, it did not necessarily indicate more than a jealous protectiveness of the prerogatives of South African institutions.⁵²

The rivals' suspicions surfaced in early 1942, after the internment of the police on the Witwatersrand, and in the midst of the OB's retaliatory sabotage campaign, both of which reflected badly on the CID and on Coetzee's leadership. Coetzee's obstruction of his rivals' operations, rather than signalling ideological commitment to the OB or to the German cause, likely originated in these personally and professionally mortifying circumstances. Disentangling the two is difficult, however, for there is indirect evidence that Coetzee did aid the OB after January 1942. Vorster, interned in September 1942, hinted that Coetzee had warned him that he was being watched.⁵³ Yet if the OB had contacts in the SAP through Coetzee, then equally Coetzee had information from OB sources, and necessarily so for the Leibbrandt case had seen lower-ranking policemen prevent 'senior officers [from being] informed of [Leibbrandt's] presence'.⁵⁴ Certainly Coetzee enjoyed the confidence of Acting Commissioner Baston, whom Smuts described as, 'if not of the highest intelligence, ... thoroughly loyal and true as steel'.⁵⁵ And

Inquire into Certain Matters Concerning the South African Police and the South African Railways and Harbours Police (Pretoria, 1937), 22, paras. 80–2.

⁴⁷ CAD K80, 28 Apr. 1937, U. R. Boberg, 7,663.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 15 Apr. 1937, J. T. Clarke, 6,839.

⁴⁹ CAD Archives of the South African Police (SAP) 9/6/46, Palmer to Secretary, Public Service Commission (PSC), 21 Jan. 1947.

⁵⁰ Fedorowich, 'German', 219.

⁵¹ TNA KV 3/10, 'Southern Africa', 24 (footnote), 66 and 'Appendix', 5; J. S. Chavkin, 'British intelligence and the Zionist, South African, and Australian intelligence communities during and after the Second World War' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2009), 203–4.

⁵² Chavkin, 'British', 203, note 84.

⁵³ D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 64.

⁵⁴ Dippenaar, *The History*, 163.

⁵⁵ TNA KV 2/907, 32A, Copy of Minute from Director-General, 4 Nov. 1943.

I. P. de Villiers, the indisputably pro-war commissioner seconded to the military, insisted he was ‘completely satisfied as to COETZEE’s loyalty’.⁵⁶

Coetzee’s loyalty was also accepted by reliable lower-ranking officers. Johannes Taillard recalled reporting directly to Coetzee in early 1939 when working undercover in South West Africa ‘to gather information about Nazi activities’, but did not question Coetzee’s wartime record.⁵⁷ In 1941, Taillard again acted covertly, to capture Leibbrandt. Taillard’s plan required Baston and Coetzee’s support, which again shows that, whoever did the preparatory work, the execution of operations usually depended on the SAP. Taillard did not say the chiefs themselves were unreliable, but warned that their offices were ‘full of informers’.⁵⁸ George Cloete Visser, Lieutenant Diedericks’s assistant in interviewing Van den Bergh and his comrades at Koffiefontein, distinguished between Coetzee’s demeanour and that of future Commissioner Cornelius Ignatius Rademeyer. Called to headquarters in February 1942 during the OB sabotage campaign, Visser heard Rademeyer, who ‘had been brought up from Kimberley to supervise the investigation and interrogation of those in custody’, declare it “‘against [his] conscience to have to prosecute [his] fellow-Afrikaners’”. Rademeyer apparently ‘had a stormy session with Colonel Bill Coetzee, but it did not affect his career in the police’.⁵⁹ Was Coetzee’s tolerance of Rademeyer’s dissent an instance of subversion, of partiality towards a pre-1939 protégé, or of that wiser forbearance by senior officials which, as Lord Harlech had implied, kept the state ‘harnessed . . . to the war effort’? And had Coetzee hoped that Rademeyer would accept the assignment for one or more of the same reasons?

Coetzee died in July 1944 and was buried along with the possible motives for his actions – an ambition to rise to the top of his profession and become commissioner of police, resentment of anti-Afrikaner prejudice, sympathy with the militant republican cause, a determination to frustrate the rivals who suspected him, and his police organisational tribalism. Coetzee’s wartime loyalties were tested in a very intimate sense too. His son-in-law, D. A. Bester, who himself eventually retired as head of the CID in the early 1970s, took the oath in 1940, was an investigator in the 1942 Stormjaer coup plot, and testified in the treason case that followed; there was ‘loyalty’ in one part of Coetzee’s immediate family.⁶⁰ His older son John, however, also a policeman, who enlisted to fight overseas and later joined the Special Branch, was rumoured to have ‘been practically disinherited by his father’ for ‘work[ing] with the Germans and . . . broadcast[ing] anti-British propaganda’ while held prisoner of war.⁶¹ The sources say only that Coetzee died ‘suddenly . . . “from natural causes”’, suggesting a heart attack or fatal stroke.⁶² Subjecting him to tremendous professional, political, and personal strains, his wartime trials and

⁵⁶ TNA KV 3/10, ‘Southern Africa’, 71 (capitals in original).

⁵⁷ South African Police Service (SAPS) Museum, Pretoria, 1/4/2/49, Statement of Johannes Taillard Made to Captain J. Hurter, Olifantsfontein, 1 Mar. 1965.

⁵⁸ Strydom, *For Volk*, 231.

⁵⁹ Visser, *OB*, 107–8.

⁶⁰ CAD SAP 2/85/40, encl. in Deputy Commissioner (Decompol), Johannesburg, to Commissioner of Police (Compol), 27 July 1940; Visser, *OB*, 95 and 116.

⁶¹ P. C. Swanepoel, ‘The South African Police during and after the Second World War’ (unpublished document emailed by Swanepoel to author, 23 Apr. 2011).

⁶² TNA KV 3/10, ‘Southern Africa’, 77; *The Nongqai*, 35:8 (1944), 943.

choices defeated him physically, but lastingly influenced the careers of the protégés to whom he delegated, or that he prudently exempted from, controversial tasks. A few – conspicuous ‘Smuts dogs’, in Rocco de Villiers’s phrase, including Diedericks, Visser, and Taillard, whose zeal in pursuing the OB perceptibly exceeded the requirements of neutral professionalism – experienced retarded promotion after Smuts’s government fell in 1948, and resigned from the SAP during the 1950s.⁶³ Others, however, including Bester and Rademeyer, eventually reached the highest ranks of the force.

THE LINEAMENTS OF CONTINUITY FROM THE 1940S THROUGH
THE 1950S: ‘PROFESSIONALISM’, THE SPECIAL BRANCH,
AND THE SUPERSESSION OF WARTIME DIVISION

Rademeyer’s is perhaps the least complicated case of continuity in the SAP’s highest ranks in the transition to NP rule. His refusals to take the ‘Africa’ oath, investigate ‘fifth column’ activity, or interrogate policemen interned in January 1942 were celebrated in the apartheid era. In addition to enjoying Coetzee’s protection, Rademeyer, who joined the SAP in 1925 and was commissioned a decade later, was a skilled detective, and his protests did not slow his promotion under Smuts even after his mentor’s death. An inspector in 1942, Rademeyer was appointed a chief inspector in 1945, deputy commissioner in 1950, head of the CID in 1952, and finally commissioner of police in 1954.⁶⁴

Robert John (‘Bobby’) Palmer’s continuation in his post as commissioner for three years under the Nationalists was less straightforward. A member of the SAP from its formation in 1913, Palmer was commissioned in 1924 and posted around the country before becoming commandant first of the canine facility outside Pretoria and then of the recruits’ training depot. A ‘people’s person’ according to his daughters, Palmer’s ‘authority rested on the respect and affection which he naturally evoked. There were very few officers or men who did not take to him.’ Raised to deputy commissioner in 1937, he was in command of the Cape Western division by September 1939. Palmer led the 1st Police Battalion during training and internment camp duty during 1940 and into war in North Africa in 1941. He was made a brigade commander in 1942, and remained abroad until July 1945, returning from Italy shortly before becoming commissioner in succession to I. P. de Villiers, who apparently recommended him for the office.⁶⁵

Palmer’s politics, which could be inferred from his British settler Eastern Cape background and his service record, meant that his loyalties were more tested after 1948 than before, but he managed to work with the Nationalists by adopting an attitude of neutral professionalism. It helped too that most of his war service had been overseas and that his congenial personality enabled

⁶³ De Villiers, responses; Strydom, *For Volk*, 264.

⁶⁴ Visser, *OB*, 107–8; Dippenaar, *The History*, 258.

⁶⁵ Profile based on interview with Marais and McLennan; G. Butler, *Bursting World: An Autobiography, 1936–45* (Cape Town, 1983), 163; ‘Personality parade’, *Indaba* (August 1954), 2–4, 13 and 15; R. Norval, ‘General Palmer’s life story – I’, *Cape Times Magazine*, undated [28 July 1951?]; copies of other undated press cuttings kindly shown to me by Mrs McLennan.

him to establish a rapport with Justice Minister C. R. Swart. Palmer's daughters told me:

He was always a Smuts supporter, but as you know the Nationalists came in when he was Commissioner, and there was never any thought of him not remaining on. . . . And when he left the police force, both the United Party and the Nationalist Party asked him to stand for them. So that's how neutral he kept his [politics]. He maintained that if you were a public servant, you served the government in power and you kept your political leanings to yourself. . . . And he really got on very well with Blackie Swart.⁶⁶

The NP might have preferred the commitment of officers like Rademeyer, but it was prepared to settle for, and indeed publicly made much of, the professional respectability and continuity that Palmer and other remaining English-speakers at the apex of the state bureaucracy gave it early on in its rule.⁶⁷ For the SAP, at least linguistically, was already substantially 'Afrikanerised'; its archives suggest that Palmer's office by 1950 was a rapidly shrinking islet of English in a sea of Afrikaans. This makes the loyalties of many of the senior officers who stayed behind in South Africa during the war years – but who were both less forthright than Rademeyer in expressing dissent from the war policy, and less visibly zealous than the 'Smuts dogs' in supporting it – more difficult to categorise than Palmer's.

Hendrik Jacobus du Plooy, another of Coetzee's protégés and executor of the CID chief's estate when he died, exemplifies the significance of key personnel from the war years in the creation of policing capabilities commonly associated with the apartheid era. Du Plooy, whose career closely shadowed Rademeyer's, joined the SAP in 1926, became a detective in 1928, was commissioned in 1935, and received all his subsequent promotions in tandem with Rademeyer, becoming head of the CID in 1954, and eventually also succeeding Rademeyer as commissioner in 1960. Du Plooy was hand-picked by Coetzee to supervise the investigations of the OB when Rademeyer refused the role. Thus, in 1942 Du Plooy came from Grahamstown, where he was Eastern Cape DCIO, to Pretoria 'for special service', in recognition of which he was asked in 1947 to head a new Special Branch (SB). 'All files on Communism were handed over to me with the instruction from then on to combat Communism more actively – on account of [my] previous experience.'⁶⁸

The SB therefore evolved from Coetzee's wartime 'special staff... established at Pretoria for the purpose of investigating subversive [mainly Afrikaner extremist] matters'.⁶⁹ In May 1946, Du Plooy assembled former members of this staff into a team of 11 officers and NCOs who were thereafter, as Commissioner Palmer put it at the beginning of 1947, 'continuously engaged... in the United Kingdom, Europe and South Africa in the

⁶⁶ Interview with Marais and McLennan.

⁶⁷ G. R. Berridge, 'The ethnic "agent in place": English-speaking civil servants and Nationalist South Africa, 1948–57', *Intelligence and National Security*, 4:2 (1989), 264–5.

⁶⁸ Quotations and career details from SAPS Museum, 1/4/1/49, Verklaring van Luitenant-Generaal H. J. du Plooy, 5 Feb. 1968.

⁶⁹ Visser, *OB*, 103; Brewer, *Black*, 174.

investigation of War Crimes, communist activities, [and] European and Native agitators engaged in stirring up industrial strife'.⁷⁰ Fear of white republican conspiracies – former wartime internees 'remain[ed] a source of danger to the State', Palmer wrote – segued into seeing 'communism' behind every local strike and protest. Alluding to an 'enormous field' of subversive activity, Palmer justified the perpetuation and enlargement of Du Plooy's team and formalised its status as a discrete SAP branch.⁷¹ In 1950, soon after the far-reaching Suppression of Communism Act became law, Palmer projected that 80 white and black SB policemen of various ranks, based in the country's major urban centres and 'focus[ing] their attention exclusively on security work, mostly of an extremely confidential nature', were the minimum required to effectively counter 'Communism ... as well as all other movements and evils that might threaten the safety of the State'.⁷² 'Fly' Du Plooy, as the SB head was known in the SAP, travelled abroad twice in 1948 and again in 1949, 1950, 1951, and 1952, sometimes leading a larger study team, to confer with MI5, Scotland Yard, and Commonwealth police chiefs.⁷³

Du Plooy may have been a Nationalist before or prepared to identify himself as one after 1948. If so, he was far more discreet than his successor as commissioner, J. M. Keevy, who had also served through the war and whose pursuit of Broederbond membership became an open secret in the 1960s.⁷⁴ Piet Swanepoel, who joined the Broederbond around 1970, learned of Keevy's membership, but 'never heard [Du Plooy] being spoken of as a member. We assumed that he was a member of the Freemasons or one of Harry Lawrence's men.' Lawrence was Smuts's justice minister when Du Plooy was establishing the SB. Also telling against Du Plooy's Nationalist credentials, in Swanepoel's view, was his authorship 'of the lectures we all bought to prepare for the [promotions] exams ... [which] were only available in English, which was the reason why we all believed that Du Plooy was pro-English'.⁷⁵ Moreover, Du Plooy, alongside Diedericks and others with 'leading parts in the investigation of the Leibbrandt, the Stormjaer and other cases relating to subversive activity', received the King's Police Medal in December 1945, attracting the criticism 'that they had been decorated by the British for putting their fellow-Afrikaners behind bars and barbed wire'.⁷⁶ For organising security during the royal family's visit to South Africa in 1947, Du Plooy also accepted membership of the Royal Victorian Order and was

⁷⁰ CAD SAP 9/6/46, Palmer to Secretary, PSC, 21 Jan. 1947; Visser, *OB*, 176.

⁷¹ CAD SAP 9/6/46, Palmer to Secretary, PSC, 21 Jan. 1947.

⁷² CAD SAP 9/15/50, Palmer to MJ, 26 Oct. 1950.

⁷³ *Ibid.*; Swanepoel, 'The South African Police'; Chavkin, 'British', 227–44; Dippenaar, *The History*, 209–11.

⁷⁴ J. H. P. Serfontein, *Brotherhood of Power: An Exposé of the Secret Afrikaner Broederbond* (London, 1979), 183.

⁷⁵ Swanepoel, 'The South African Police'. Du Plooy later prepared an Afrikaans edition of his lectures: *The Nongqai*, 44:6 (1953), 584. But Rademeyer's commissionership was better remembered for his Standing Order conferring on policemen 'the inalienable right to draw up any document ... in [their] mother tongue'. Dippenaar, *The History*, 258.

⁷⁶ Visser, *OB*, 133.

unembarrassed about mentioning it later.⁷⁷ Most telling was an early personal tragedy:

I had never even thought about a career in the police until after the shocking events of 10·3·1922 when my only brother, to whom I was very close, was shot dead during the 1922 strike on the Rand while performing his duties as a young policeman. The suddenness and shock of this loss are even now indescribable. Gradually, however, I became obsessed, possessed, with the idea of carrying on his good work which so suddenly, overnight, was cut short. But my parents wouldn't allow it and only when I was 21 did I succeed in enlisting in the Force, with the help of the local station commander ... still without my parents' approval.⁷⁸

For Nationalists, Smuts's suppression of the 1922 revolt signified, like September 1939, a betrayal of South African to imperial interests, and Du Plooy's self-identification with it is revealing. Like Palmer and his own brother, however, Du Plooy maintained that he 'perform[ed] his duties as a ... policeman', whoever governed. British High Commissioner Evelyn Baring attributed Minister of Justice Swart's suggestion that the SB head might report directly to him to Du Plooy's being "a relative of Mr Swart and a convinced Nationalist". Yet, given the SB chief's record, distrust of Du Plooy possibly better explains Swart's thinking here.⁷⁹

Du Plooy's case illustrates what is problematic about the 'Afrikanerisation' theme in the historiography of apartheid, which, partly originating in prejudiced essentialising like Baring's, hid the continuities in the policing of anti-state resistance before and after 1948. Pro-war or predominantly career-oriented Afrikaners who remained in service after 1948 responded defensively, claiming a professional commitment to the ideal of non-political policing—rarely to evade responsibility for the SAP's highly politicised control of blacks, but more often to reclothe their equally partisan wartime bearing towards the Nationalists they now served. In contrast to Coetzee, who trod an even finer line, Du Plooy was apparently too 'English' for his fellow Afrikaners, but like his predecessor he nonetheless remained too 'Afrikaner' for the English.

A final pair, who illustrate particularly well the apartheid-era supersession of the schism that had rent the wartime SAP, are Willem Carl Ernst ('Sampie') Prinsloo and Abraham Theodorus ('Att') Spengler. Successive heads of the SB on the Witwatersrand, they figure ubiquitously in writings about the 1950s. Singly or together, they presided over landmark episodes of the time: the Sophiatown removals; the hounding of *Drum* magazine's reporters; the disruption of the Congress of the People at Kliptown in June 1955, at which the Freedom Charter was adopted; the Treason Trial that followed; the secession of the Africanists from the ANC; and the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960. Spengler and Prinsloo are variously portrayed in this literature. Both of course typify the increasing menace of apartheid political policing, but also feature as representatives of a first-generation SB that gave way to an altogether different organisation when Van den Bergh

⁷⁷ SAPS Museum 1/4/1/49, Verklaring van Luitenant-Generaal H. J. du Plooy, 5 Feb. 1968.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Chavkin, 'British', 238, citing Minute by Baring, 6 Dec. 1949.

took over on Prinsloo's retirement in January 1963.⁸⁰ 'However firm the old type of policemen like Spengler were', MK and SACP leader Joe Slovo later wrote, 'they were not torturers'; the 'old-style security police... were gentlemen'.⁸¹ *Rand Daily Mail* reporter Benjamin Pogrund explicitly contrasted Spengler with Prinsloo, who at a prohibited gathering threatened Pogrund with arrest while Spengler looked on 'embarrassed'. Spengler, Pogrund thought, 'belonged to a dying breed, one of those Afrikaners who had entered the police force during the Depression years of the 1930s and who viewed himself as a professional policeman. He told me that he had served General Smuts, he was serving Dr Verwoerd, and he would serve Chief Luthuli just as faithfully if the ANC ever came to power.'⁸² Less blinkered than Evelyn Baring in that they distinguished among Afrikaners, Slovo and Pogrund nonetheless overstated the extent of generational change.

Drum writer Bloke Modisane also characterised Spengler and Prinsloo as 'good cop, bad cop', but with a clearer perception of the two officers' common purpose. Wishing to study abroad, and having applied for a passport that the SB was delaying, Modisane secured an interview in Pretoria with Prinsloo, 'a little man with a tight skin which seemed to stretch like elastic around the cheek bones and the forehead'.⁸³ Prinsloo 'was extremely polite', but questioned Modisane about prominently reported incidents in which *Drum* staff had been ejected from whites-only churches. He promised to help Modisane get a passport in return for information about 'why the story was done, whose idea it was'. Spengler, when Modisane saw him in Johannesburg, 'was equally courteous', but although no more yielding than Prinsloo his 'approach was far more reasoned and realistic'.⁸⁴ Spengler, Mike Nicol notes, 'stalks through *Drum*. There is a photograph of him, a large, thick-set man in an open-necked shirt... and on this occasion without the cigarette that's usually held lightly between his lips'. Nicol's interviewees describe Spengler variously as having 'a small bust of Hitler on his desk'; as 'a very wicked man... [who] did his job and did it thoroughly and concentrated all his energies on it'; 'as a figure of fun' who met the *Drum* staff and ANC politicians 'for a drink after work'; and 'a nasty guy, no question about it, but underneath he was a joke'.⁸⁵ Prinsloo too betrayed the occasional 'fit of generosity', as when he allowed Nelson Mandela out of jail at weekends

⁸⁰ M. Nicol, *A Good-Looking Corpse* (London, 1991), 331; D'Oliveira, *Vorster*, 141–2; P. H. Frankel, *An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and Its Massacre* (New Haven, CT, 2001), 60 and 91. They were also members of the Pretoria Police Rugby Club first fifteen in the 1930s (overlapping with Du Plooy, who had earlier played in the team with Rademeyer)—a detail that adds point to their shared history of division and cooperation before and after 1948.

⁸¹ J. Slovo, 'The sabotage campaign', *Dawn*, Souvenir Issue (1986), 25; J. Slovo, *Slovo: The Unfinished Autobiography* (Melbourne, 1997), 105.

⁸² B. Pogrund, *War of Words: Memoir of a South African Journalist* (New York, 2000), 86.

⁸³ B. Modisane, *Blame Me on History* (London, 1963), 268. Swanepoel (email to author, 8 June 2011) met Prinsloo 'once or twice, but he was a quiet reserved man. He was slim, of medium height and quite unassuming'.

⁸⁴ Modisane, *Blame*, 202–3 and 269–72.

⁸⁵ Nicol, *Good-Looking*, 330–2.

during the Treason Trial to wind up the legal practice he had shared with Oliver Tambo, who had gone into exile.⁸⁶

What does knowledge of these two policemen's earlier careers, and particularly of their wartime experience, contribute to our understanding of their juxtaposition and their behaviour in these accounts? Born in about 1908, Prinsloo was one of four brothers adopted from the Abraham-Kriel Children's Home in Langlaagte, Johannesburg, the oldest of whom became a Nationalist MP and senator in the Vorster era.⁸⁷ Prinsloo was not interned as a suspected Stormjaer in January 1942, but there was a break in his police service from 19 December 1944 until 31 July 1949, when along with Van den Bergh and company he was reinstated.⁸⁸ The beginning date suggests he was dismissed or forced to resign because of Broederbond membership, which Smuts prohibited in the civil service in December 1944; Serfontein listed a 'Brigadier Prinsloo' (the SB chief's rank at retirement) as a Broeder living in Johannesburg in the late 1970s.⁸⁹ Already commissioned by 1944, Prinsloo was promoted to inspector immediately upon reinstatement.⁹⁰ He was the SB's Johannesburg head from 1950 and, following Du Plooy's elevation to CID chief when Rademeyer became commissioner, was brought to Pretoria to replace Du Plooy in 1954. In Prinsloo, Rademeyer and Justice Minister Swart now had someone more ideologically reliable, but not necessarily more effective, as national SB head than Du Plooy, with his team composed initially of 'Smuts dogs', had been.⁹¹

Spengler, by contrast, served continuously through the 1940s. Born in 1912, he joined the SAP in 1933 and took the oath in 1940.⁹² His own brother, A. C. Spengler, a uniform constable on the Witwatersrand, was among those arrested on 20 January 1942; he was also one of the 42 Koffiefontein internees who signed Van den Bergh's petition for release in September 1942.⁹³ Reported as holding 'pronounced anti-Government views', openly antagonistic towards soldiers, and boasting of his OB membership, A. C. Spengler apparently 'threatened to have his brother D/Sgt. A. T. Spengler, whom he accuse[d] of having been the cause of his internment, shot'.⁹⁴ The brother benefited from Van den Bergh's efforts to have 'his old Koffiefontein police colleagues' reinstated in 1949.⁹⁵ Yet it was to 'Att' Spengler, by then a colonel, that Van den Bergh turned in 1963 for

⁸⁶ N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston, 1994), 245.

⁸⁷ L. du Plessis, 'Oud-senator Prinsloo (86) in Pretoria oorlede', *Beeld* (Johannesburg) 6 Nov. 1991, 10.

⁸⁸ Act No. 32 of 1950, Schedule, Section 1.

⁸⁹ Serfontein, *Brotherhood*, 73-4 and 268. ⁹⁰ *The Nongqai*, 40:9 (1949), 1,241.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 41:6 (1950), 715, notes Prinsloo's appointment as 'Officer-in-Charge' (Diedericks's former position) at 'The Grays' (a building later synonymous with the SB in Johannesburg). See also *Ibid.* 45:9 (1954), 955; 'Two days in London for Mr Swart', *The Times* (London), 23 Dec. 1954, 5.

⁹² CAD SAP 2/85/40, F. J. Verster to Compol, 15 Aug. 1940, encl. "'On Service" Badges: Members of the Criminal Investigation Branch: List of Members Who Took New Oath'.

⁹³ CAD JUS 1/49/39: Coetzee to SJ, 24 Jan. 1942, encl. lists of detainees' names; CCO to SJ, 9 Oct. 1942, encl. H. J. van den Bergh et al. to MJ, 21 Sept. 1942.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Baston to SJ, 21 Oct. 1942.

⁹⁵ Act No. 32 of 1950, Schedule, Section 1, showing A. C. Spengler's service resumed on 31 July 1949.

help in building ‘the new Security Police’ that Vorster asked him to head, and particularly BOSS’s forerunner, the secretive Republican Intelligence Service, created because SB members attending political meetings were recognised, which made it ‘exceedingly difficult to debrief sources afterwards without risking their lives’.⁹⁶ It was the ‘old-style gentleman’ Spengler who, under cover of opening a private detective agency, would pioneer the training of ‘askaris’ – ‘Black agents whose main target [was] to infiltrate the ranks of Black liberation movements’.⁹⁷ In a finale to the antics of his *Drum* years, Spengler formally announced his departure from the SB for this much less ubiquitous but surely more lethal role in a newspaper interview which ‘paid tribute to the sincerity of the political activists whom he had kept under surveillance’.⁹⁸

CONCLUSION

The 15 years from 1948 to 1963 gave the NP government little cause to question the fundamental architecture of the police force it inherited from its predecessor, including the SB, whose harassment of apartheid’s opponents soon came to epitomise the regime. Nor did the NP have reason to doubt the loyalty of long-serving policemen, among them SB officers who had pursued anti-war republicans during the 1940s. Even under the more openly Nationalist direction of Rademeyer and Prinsloo from 1954, the SB underwent little quantitative or qualitative institutional change. From the baseline field staff of 80 that Palmer had said in 1950 would be needed countrywide to administer the Suppression of Communism Act, the SB had grown by the early 1960s only to about 200 overall, half of whom were black with one-third of the whites based at headquarters.⁹⁹ A December 1962 estimate of South Africa’s preparations against ‘insurgency’ called the SB ‘a very small organization’ that could not prevent ‘a disciplined clandestine organization’ from ‘planning and implement[ing]’ ‘sabotage or violence’, bringing arms or explosives into the country ‘for subversive purposes’, disseminating ‘subversive literature’, or moving its members in and out of the country.¹⁰⁰ The reference clearly was to MK’s then year-long sabotage campaign. The SB did expand in the first year of Van den Bergh’s leadership as some of its veterans transferred to Republican Intelligence while ostensibly resigning and being

⁹⁶ D’Oliveira, *Vorster*, 141–2; J. Sanders, *Apartheid’s Friends: The Rise and Fall of South Africa’s Secret Service* (London, 2006), 20–1; P. C. Swanepoel, *Really Inside BOSS: A Tale of South Africa’s Late Intelligence Service (and Something About the CIA)* (Derdepoortpark, South Africa, 2007), 27; Swanepoel (email to author, 22 June 2011, for closing quotation).

⁹⁷ G. Winter, *Inside BOSS: South Africa’s Secret Police* (Harmondsworth, UK, 1981), 568; T. Bell, with D. B. Ntsebeza, *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid, and Truth* (London, 2003), 42–4.

⁹⁸ Slovo, *Slovo*, 105. In his docudrama *Drum* (Johannesburg, 2003), Zola Maseko suggests that Spengler suborned the murder of crusading journalist Henry Nxumalo by a township gangster.

⁹⁹ See tables for authorised establishments in CAD SAP 9/19/60, kindly copied for me by Fred Kooijmans.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Country Internal Defense Plan’, encl. in A-278, J. C. Satterthwaite, American Embassy, Pretoria, to Department of State, Washington, 18 Dec. 1962, reproduced in *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Farmington Hills, 2011).

replaced 'from the ranks of the CID and uniform branches', but its growth was nothing like on the scale suggested in some accounts.¹⁰¹

At least until 1963 little had changed in the state's ability to counter 'a disciplined clandestine organization' since the OB's Stormjaer division had conducted its own campaign of subversion and sabotage two decades before. In legislative terms – given the emergency measures Smuts had at his disposal during the war, with their draconian penalties for sabotage and their provisions for control orders and indefinite detention – the Nationalists by the mid-1960s had only recently armed the state with powers equal to those of the earlier era, as Vorster and his critics from different perspectives observed. The main difference from the late 1940s through the early 1960s lay in increasing white solidarity and, hence, the political and administrative will needed to repress the state's most dangerous opponents. The saboteurs of the early 1960s also had little purchase on the loyalties of the SAP's black members, who although now a majority in the force were unrepresented in the higher police ranks, unlike their Afrikaner counterparts two decades previously, with all the ambiguous potential that had entailed both for subversion and its containment.

Among white policemen of all ranks, the new targets of political suppression caused far less internal dissension than those that had tested their reliability in wartime. With anti-communism and efforts to curb black nationalism the common ground between them, two particularly controversial police factions populated the Special Branch that was created in the final years of Smuts's UP government and elaborated by its NP successor: first those who had pursued anti-war 'subversives' in the 1940s, and then those who themselves had been interned and were readmitted to the police after 1948. For these and many other white policemen whose careers spanned the period from the 1930s to the 1970s, their concerted post-1948 focus on common enemies was facilitated by a variety of beliefs or rationalisations. Policemen who had served continuously and willingly through the 1940s maintained that they were politically neutral professionals whose duty was to the state, or that inwardly they had always been nationalists who were now able to express their Afrikaner identities openly. Meanwhile those with broken service, or who had retained their positions despite being suspected of obstructionism in the 1940s, could feel that the consolidation of NP rule vindicated their earlier stance. Yet, wartime cleavages, for all that they went unspoken and were superseded by the common purpose of the early apartheid decades, were not forgotten. The members of each group knew their former antagonists, monitored the progress of their careers, and kept each other close.

¹⁰¹ Swanepoel e-mail to author, 28 Aug. 2011.