

CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGINS OF SECTOR POLICING

A National Instruction on sector policing will shortly be issued by SAPS National Commissioner Jackie Selebi. This monograph will examine the new sector policing policy for South Africa and reflect on the experience of sector policing in London (UK). In doing so, consideration will be given to some issues related to ‘policy transfer’¹—the process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc, in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place²—as there is explicit acknowledgement that the concept of sector policing being used in South Africa was drawn from those used in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the developed world.

The Final Draft of the South African Police Service (SAPS) National Instruction on Sector Policing (2003) makes the connection between sector policing and the philosophy of community policing very clear—sector policing is described as a “practical manifestation” of community policing.³ By contrast, the authors of the London Metropolitan Police guidance note on sector policing avoided linking it with community policing quite as explicitly as the SAPS have, although the then-Commissioner, Sir Peter Imbert, did go so far as to describe it as a community-based style of policing.⁴ The aim of this section is to trace the origins of sector policing back from its adoption in London in the early 1990s, by looking at where its key elements—geographical responsibility, community consultation, problem-solving and the more efficient use of resources—came from. But first, we need to explore—albeit briefly—this connection between sector and community policing.

As the books, articles, and manuals about it pile up, and the number of police organisations who claim to do it grows, precisely what ‘community policing’ is becomes both less clear and more controversial. One British critic memorably described it as a “brand name” that, like *SPAR*, “gives a common identity to a diverse range of independent concerns”.⁵ Writing at about the same time, the American editors of a volume of essays on the subject make the same point, observing that it “means many things to many

people”.⁶ To some, the lack of any “suffocating orthodoxy” is a welcome stimulus to innovation and creativity.⁷ To others, the lack of theorising about community policing is both a puzzle and a challenge.⁸ Opinions have also diverged about whether it represents a new philosophy and/or an organisational strategy for contemporary police.⁹ Even more confusing—and politically convenient—is its ability to be used by ‘spin doctors’ to appeal to both liberals and conservatives alike, allowing everything from aggressive order maintenance tactics, to their polar opposite to be presented as forms of community policing.¹⁰

Arriving at a meaningful and relatively uncontentious definition of community policing, or specification of the policing practices it entails, is no simple matter. One popular device is to contrast community policing with whatever it is intended to replace.¹¹ Another is to state the philosophy of community policing in the form of a series of declarations or principles.¹² But for our purposes, perhaps the most useful approach is to look at the programmes, projects and tactics advocated or undertaken in its name. The most ambitious of the many researchers to have attempted to do this is David Bayley, who uses data collected in five countries to identify four essential elements.¹³ Tagged with the acronym CAMPS, these distinctive features of community policing around the world are:

- *consultation* with communities about their security needs and the police assistance required to meet them;
- *adaptation* of organisational structures to allow local operational commanders greater decision-making powers;
- *mobilisation* of public and private non-police agencies and individuals;
- *problem-solving* to ameliorate conditions generating crime and insecurity.

Critics—including Bayley himself—have questioned whether the Anglo-American model of community policing captured in the CAMPS formula either has been, can, or should be, exported to countries with very different histories, legal cultures and policing traditions.¹⁴ Yet these four elements are as central to the models of sector policing adopted by London’s Metropolitan Police in the early 1990s, and the SAPS ten years later, as they were to the community policing programmes studied by Bayley in the 1980s. Whatever the framers of the respective policies may choose to say, or leave unsaid,

sector policing stands squarely within the broad tradition of community policing and it is to this tradition that we must turn in search of its origins.

Community policing in Britain

In Britain at least, the words ‘community policing’ are widely associated with the career and writings of a now long-retired chief police officer named John Alderson. Alderson’s conception of what he called “democratic communal policing” was extremely ambitious.¹⁵ He argued that police officials should assume the moral leadership of their communities, influencing behaviour from illegality towards legality. He called for greater co-operation between the police and other public sector agencies, for less reliance on the use of criminal justice as a solution to problems of crime and insecurity, and for the creation of “villages in the city” policed by trusted and familiar local officials.

When many British cities were affected by rioting in the early 1980s, an inquiry into the disorders in the Brixton area of south London in April 1981 led by Lord Scarman took up many of Alderson’s ideas as the way forward for policing “with the active consent and support of the community”.¹⁶ Stressing the need to avoid an oppressive presence of large numbers of police unknown to the community, in socially deprived areas such as Brixton, Scarman advocated a style of policing “based on small beats regularly patrolled by officers normally operating on foot”.¹⁷

Influential though John Alderson’s evidence to the Scarman inquiry undoubtedly was, his ideas did not go unchallenged and ‘community policing’ (usually complete with inverted commas) was condemned as everything from a ‘romantic delusion’ to a thinly veiled attempt to legitimise the coercive power of a racist and increasingly authoritarian state.¹⁸ Early reviews of community policing programmes in operation were not favourable either. After studying patrol initiatives in five police forces, one researcher concluded that the more rigorously schemes were evaluated, the less evidence of successful implementation there appeared to be.¹⁹ However, none of this prevented a broad community-oriented approach to policing, derived from the ideas of John Alderson, from becoming the dominant philosophy of the highest ranks of the police service in England and Wales within less than a decade of the publication of Lord Scarman’s report.²⁰ For London’s Metropolitan Police to introduce a community-based style of policing such as sector policing in the early 1990s was therefore entirely consistent with the spirit of the times.

Community policing, crime prevention and sector policing in South Africa

It is worth remembering that the first concept document on sector policing for the SAPS was developed in early 1998, and that the current National Instruction has been five years in the making. The current document is remarkably similar to its original incarnation, which may be one of the reasons for the unusual emphasis on 'crime prevention' in the South African sector policing policy document. In 1996, the government adopted a National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) as one part of its response to increasing public concern over crime. The NCPS motivated a shift in emphasis from crime control to crime prevention; that is, a shift towards understanding crime as a social issue requiring a wide array of preventive measures instead of the traditional criminal justice responses. Importantly for the SAPS, it emphasised that crime prevention could not be the sole responsibility of the police, and laid out a framework for interdepartmental collaboration within government, as well as crime prevention partnerships with non-government actors and local communities.

Although subsequently hampered by inadequate resources, a reputation for being 'soft', and by only partial implementation, the NCPS has had a significant effect on policy thinking within the SAPS over the past five years.²¹ However, in late 1997 and early 1998, during the period in which the sector policing concept document was being developed, there was still some early optimism about longer term, multi-agency problem-solving approaches to crime prevention.

Following the NCPS, the 1998 White Paper on Safety and Security advocated targeted, multi-agency crime prevention strategies which would focus on offenders, victims and the environments in which they live, as well as a focus on the root causes of specific types of crimes. This approach was characterized as 'social' crime prevention. Long term, socio-economic and preventive approaches took something of a beating around the time of the second democratic election in 1999, and the police's 'Crackdown' approach dominated government thinking about crime after the new Cabinet was appointed. As will be seen in Chapter 3, sector policing has been associated with both the 'tough' and 'soft' approaches to crime reduction in South Africa. This is perhaps one of the reasons why it has survived five years of debate and is finally being adopted as official policy in the SAPS.

The continuity of the discourses of 'democratic policing', 'community policing' and 'crime prevention' evident in the sector policing policy document may be a

result of the continuity of SAPS personnel involved in all these policy efforts in the decade since community policing was first introduced in South Africa. The senior personnel involved in promoting sector policing at national level (SAPS head office) were all previously involved in community policing initiatives—some as far back as the early 1990s in the former South African Police. While their commitment is admirable, this monograph will later question whether their well-meant policy initiative will survive and succeed.