

SAPA, science and society: A debacle revisited

Abstract

Little is known about the first national association to be established for psychologists in South Africa: the South African Psychological Association (SAPA). While it is commonly assumed that Anglophone psychologists were politically enlightened in comparison with their Afrikaner counterparts, this paper attempts to illuminate the complexities of SAPA's intellectual project. Offering a critical discourse analysis of eight presidential and opening addresses delivered at national congresses between 1950 and 1962, the paper identifies among SAPA's Afrikaner presidents a preoccupation with a socially relevant psychology, enunciated in the form of a professionalist discourse that encouraged public service yet bore no trace of Christian-National influence. Among English-speaking psychologists, by contrast, social responsiveness was less of a priority in a discourse of disciplinarity concerned with fundamental debates in the field. It is suggested that these divergent conceptions regarding the role of psychology in society presaged the SAPA split of 1962 and provide, also, an important historical perspective from which to view a contemporary struggle within the discipline.

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The 1962 splitting of the South African Psychological Association (SAPA) ranks among the most distasteful episodes in the history of psychology in South Africa. While a fair amount has been written on the subsequent founding of the whites-only Psychological Institute of the Republic of South Africa (PIRSA) – see, for example, Long (2014a, b) – comparatively little is known about SAPA, which was established in 1948 as the first national association for psychologists in the country. If anything, SAPA has come to be defined by the events of 1962, discussions of which tend to suggest that, whereas the association's Afrikaner psychologists ended up being mouthpieces for the apartheid state, its Anglophone members remained faithful, more or less, to a non-racial psychology. This paper contends, however, that such an assessment of SAPA's politics simplifies matters to a fault. While it is true that many of the association's Afrikaner members went on to devote

themselves to a brazenly racist formulation of the discipline, the ostensibly progressive politics of their English-speaking counterparts is not beyond interrogation.

To be sure, this is not a novel contention. Nicholas (1990: 59), for example, advances the position that SAPA's apparent openness to multiracial membership "centered around avoiding censure from the international community, maintaining standards for all psychologists, and promoting unity and the study of psychology by blacks rather than defeating unjust apartheid laws." More recently, Richter and Dawes (2008: 296) have claimed that, since its membership was "99%" white, SAPA was only "notionally" integrated. But despite the reasonableness of assertions such as these, none has been validated in any empirical sense.

The primary objective of the present study, then, is to trace the ideological contours of SAPA's pre-1962 intellectual project on the basis of available evidence. Indeed, a psychological society – far from constituting an innocent assemblage of scientifically disinterested psychologists – serves as a barometer of its social milieu. For, just as the American Psychological Association (APA) "emerged at a particular time, in a unique social and institutional environment, and as the result of actions of specific individuals" (Sokal, 1992: 111), the SAPA of the 1950s and early 1960s was more than just a learned society; it functioned as a microcosm of the social and political matrices in which psychologists of those years lived and worked.

In order to identify the parameters of SAPA's early disciplinary vision, it was decided to compile a data set composed of official addresses delivered at the association's annual national congresses between 1948 and 1962. The operating assumption was that such addresses would shed light on SAPA's central preoccupations, which, in turn, would reflect to some extent the social and political currents of the day. Accordingly, eight presidential and opening addresses were collected. These were sourced from two of the association's official publications, namely, **SAPA Proceedings** and **Psygram**. Varying in length from one to twelve pages, four addresses were delivered in English, three in Afrikaans, and one in both languages.¹

In the analysis that follows, the contents of addresses are recounted and then contextualised by way of recourse to the Raubenheimer interviews and the broader history of psychology in South Africa. Thereafter, standout discursive practices are identified, following which the social practices within which discursive events are located, are described. The attention to discourse, social practice and their mutual embeddedness is of central importance to the overarching aim of the study: language use is "a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or a reflex of situational variables ... there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure On the one hand, discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels On the other hand, discourse is socially constitutive..." (Fairclough, 1992: 63-64). The study's analytic frame is indebted, consequently, to Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework for critical discourse analysis – an acknowledged method for the analysis of official speeches (Antaki, 2009) – with its emphases on rhetoric, discourse and history.

It should be stated from the outset that the data set and its analysis were limited in several respects. First, despite the perusal of several archival collections across the country, it was not possible to source all addresses for the analytic period in question. As a result, analytic offerings must be approached with some circumspection. Second, any attempt at excavating meanings buried in

¹ All translational work was undertaken by the researcher.

texts more than half-a-century old is vulnerable to the charge of “reading history backwards.” It is submitted, nonetheless, that sufficient evidence has been provided to substantiate analytic claims. And third – as a possible solution to the first two limitations – it may be pointed out that this study should have included a set of interviews with older generations of South African psychologists, which could have supplemented the collected addresses as an additional data source. The reading of addresses is, after all, an interpretive activity and interviews with early SAPA members could have mitigated the challenge of deciphering the meanings of addresses delivered more than fifty years ago. The problem, of course, is that most psychologists from the 1950s have passed on, while the process of interviewing the surviving few about events from the remote past may either invite distorted memories or draw blank responses.² Fortunately, a collection of transcribed interviews with prominent psychologists in the early 1980s did provide assistance with the interpretation of the empirical material.³ While these interviews would not have been free from distortions either, it can be reasoned that these would have been of a lesser magnitude than had those interviews been conducted in 2014.

Analysis

Presidential address, 1950 (A J la Grange)

In 1950, Adriaan la Grange was SAPA president, a position he had held since the founding of the association in July 1948. SAPA had been established for professional reasons – chief among them the registration of trained psychologists (Foster, 2008; Seedat & MacKenzie, 2008). In the published summary of his address, la Grange identifies “[t]he greatest problem facing modern psychology [as] the fact that [the unprecedented demand for psychological services] is being shamelessly exploited by quacks and pseudo-psychologists of all kinds” (1950: 7). He adds that “[c]ondemnation and disapproval of these practices must be voiced in the strongest of terms” and recommends “[p]romulgation of an energetic short-term policy intended mainly for the protection of the title ‘psychologist’” (ibid.). He advises further that SAPA membership be conditional “not only on the basis of academic and professional qualifications, but also upon proof of a deserving reputation and high standing in public esteem” (ibid.). Regarding long-term policy, la Grange sets out in some detail the contents of a suitable undergraduate curriculum, proposing the introduction of a dedicated Bachelor’s degree for aspiring teachers and the provision of training facilities for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. He anticipates such outcomes as the improvement of clinical services in schools, public appreciation of psychological services, increased inter-disciplinary cooperation and “facilitation of the achievement of the ultimate goal” (ibid: 8): statutory recognition of the discipline.

For an Afrikaner – given the ascendancy of Afrikaner nationalism at the time – la Grange’s non-partisanship is surprising. Granted, a public service motif does feature prominently in the address – but it is not couched in the nationalist idiom of serving the *volk* (that is, Afrikanerdom). On the political front, the newly installed National Party (NP) regime did not regard the further elaboration and dissemination of Christian-National ideology as a pressing concern: because it had won the 1948 elections on a minority of votes, the party’s immediate challenge was to broaden its constituency (Moodie, 1975). In a similar vein, la Grange would have understood the significance of his audience comprising “psychologists of various stripes, English and Afrikaans-speaking, liberal

² In fact, several preliminary interviews were conducted by the researcher, and psychologists were frequently unable to recall in sufficient detail the kind of information that was being sought.

³ Professor Naas Raubenheimer, a former PIRSA president himself, donated a collection of audiocassettes and transcripts of interviews with important figures in South African psychology to Stellenbosch University. I am indebted to Desmond Painter (Department of Psychology) and Mimi Seyffert (Special Collections) for facilitating my access to this material.

and conservative, [who] came together to form... SAPA" (Foster, 2008: 105). To espouse an Afrikaner nationalist agenda would have risked alienating his English listeners. Moreover, SAPA's forerunner, the Psychological Society, Johannesburg (PSJ), had been dominated by English-speaking psychologists (Wulfsohn, 1948) and with registration ostensibly the new association's "ultimate goal", having all hands on deck was a basic prerequisite.

Opening address, 1951 (I D MacCrone)

In July of the following year, the liberal psychologist (Dubow, 1995) and former president of PSJ, Ian MacCrone, delivered the opening address at the SAPA congress in Pietermaritzburg. Titled *Perspective in psychology*, MacCrone attempts to define the discipline's proper subject matter. He dismisses the potential role of neurophysiology in understanding human behaviour for the reasons that "fundamentally it is a cock-eyed view which offends against psychology, against its own logic, and against a sound philosophy of science" (1951: 9). He criticizes on similar grounds stimulus-response theory, as it "seems to me to reduce behaviour to an unreal abstraction, a kind of artifact, since it consistently ignores the organism itself" (ibid.). MacCrone's address ends abruptly with him arguing instead for the importance of consciousness in behaviour and self-consciousness in particular.

Simon Biesheuvel remembers MacCrone as "essentially an academic" who was not easily interested in psychological applications (1981: 2). Indeed, the disparity between la Grange (1950) and MacCrone – the latter was at the time of his address head of psychology at the English-language University of the Witwatersrand – cannot be starker. La Grange is already plotting the extension of the discipline into the public domain while MacCrone has yet to move on from "the fundamental debate in psychology" – known otherwise as the "battle of the schools" (MacCrone, 1951: 8). Whereas la Grange restricts himself to professional issues, MacCrone immerses himself in "these fundamental issues ... that go back to the beginnings of psychology as science" (ibid.). MacCrone reminds his audience that, while the "battle" may have receded in recent years, it remains unresolved. By implication, hopes for the professionalization of a "pre-paradigmatic" discipline (see Kuhn, 1962) with an undecided subject matter are misplaced – which explains in part why, despite psychologists' desire for professional registration since at least the mid-1940s, they had to wait until 1974 before the establishment of the first Professional Board for Psychology (Seedat & MacKenzie, 2008). All hands were not on deck: MacCrone spoke a scientific vernacular that would have been familiar to English-speaking psychologists, while la Grange represented Afrikaner pragmatists eager to serve the public. To be sure, psychology departments at English-medium universities were noted for their "heavy emphasis on basic, theoretical psychology and research publication" (Strümpfer, 1993: 8) whereas Afrikaner institutions – Stellenbosch University in particular – took up the gauntlet in the drive for professionalization (Strümpfer, 1993).

Opening address, 1953 (E Pratt-Yule)

At the 1953 SAPA congress, Eleanor Pratt-Yule, long-time head of psychology at the University of Natal, delivers the opening address. Unlike MacCrone and la Grange, who confine their deliberations to the basic and applied science respectively, Pratt-Yule focuses her attention on the "dichotomy" itself, lamenting the harm it has done "in Britain where clinically oriented and experimentally minded research workers are separated by an abyss of prejudice" (1953: 4). Trained as a psychoanalyst but interested in animal experiments (Böhmke & Tlali, 2008), she concedes "at the outset that both the clinical and the experimental approaches have their aberrations" (Pratt-Yule, 1953: 4). Expressing concern about "the type of article too frequently found in the psycho-analytic reviews", she rebukes simultaneously the scientific approach for

its “worship of measurement for its own sake, a tendency to juggle with statistics, a free use of pseudo-mathematical symbols” (ibid.). She implies, also, that the clinical approach is of greater real-world significance, as “[v]ery often the results of precise and carefully designed experiments appear to have little relevance to significant and urgent problems of behaviour” (ibid.). Pratt-Yule then sets herself the task of “bridg[ing] the gap between the two approaches and consider[ing] what contribution each may properly make to the scientific study of behaviour” (ibid.). But since the “achievements ... of experimental psychology are obvious... it is the clinical approach which requires clarification, evaluation and defence” (ibid.).

Pratt-Yule’s position is somewhat contradictory: she finds fault with both traditions but states that only one is in need of “defence”. According to her protégé, Ronald Albino, Pratt-Yule had played an instrumental role in the founding of SAPA: “Now also in that time the South African Psychological Association was founded. I was present on the very morning that it began when Prof Pratt-Yule said to me: ‘I think there are enough psychologists in South Africa to have a psychological association,’ which she then proceeded to form. She wrote a letter to Prof MacCrone at Wits making this proposal, [I] can’t remember the year ... He wrote back and said, ‘Fine,’ and immediately... the first [congress] was [held] in Bloemfontein. I don’t know how many were there, [it] must have been about twenty people at the most – that was our first conference That meeting was very interesting in that it exhibited this conflict ... between behaviourism and the non-behaviouristic psychologies. There was a man at Wits – American – he got up and told us in very vigorous terms that ... behaviourism was what psychology was all about. That immediately produced an uproar and for the rest of the three days it was a battle.”⁴

From its humble beginnings, SAPA was split not only along the pure/applied divide, but also – and more or less correspondingly – between behaviourists and non-behaviourists. Pratt-Yule was a compromise figure in both controversies, having interests in psychoanalysis and animal experimentation while excelling as teacher⁵ and practitioner.⁶ Albino recalls how, because of the limited number of psychology staff at the University of Natal, “we did everything: we taught fundamental psychology, applied psychology, we did service work – everything that came to hand – which I think made us all quite good general psychologists.”⁷ Pratt-Yule was uniquely positioned to appeal to all constituencies: by placing the burden of proof squarely on the clinical approach, she endears herself to experimentalists; on the other hand, by taking it upon herself – a psychoanalyst – to present the clinical case, she is assured the approval of non-experimentalists.

While Pratt-Yule suggests that her point of departure is experimentalist, this amounts to little more than a rhetorical attempt to set experimentalists at ease. Midway through her address, she returns once again to the shortcomings of the scientific method: “Every day research workers in the field of personality get new reminders that restricted test situations are restricted in their effects; they do not ‘excite’ the subjects adequately. If people are placed in non-significant situations and set

⁴ Ronald Albino interview, 7 April 1982, p3. Accessed December 22, 2010 from the Raubenheimer archive, Special Collections, J S Gericke Library, Stellenbosch University. All interviews cited in this study were drawn from this archive.

⁵ Jack Mann interview, 14 May 1982, p15. When asked to think of “great names in South African psychology” (p14), Mann answered: “I think on the purely academic scene Pratt-Yule had an enormous influence on the teaching. It was interesting that after the Second World War there was a time that nearly all the top posts at the English universities in psychology were held by people that had been trained by her and they seemed to naturally go into academic psychology” (p15).

⁶ Albino interview, ibid., p2.

⁷ ibid.

trivial tasks, trivial and non-significant responses are elicited, and conclusions based on these have little predictive value for real behaviour. The more complex, the more involved in total character structure, the more significant the variables we wish to estimate, the more useless the laboratory and test situation. Examples are legion” (1953: 6).

Pratt-Yule proves unable to further the claims of clinicians without circumscribing those of experimentalists – one would expect nothing less in a “dichotomy.” Yet she admires the work of Lorenz and Tinbergen because, “[i]f they have shown us the value of the clinical eye, they have never questioned the value of the experimental eye” (ibid: 7). It is this approach that allows her to resolve the impasse: “We like the outlook of a certain professor who has portraits of Freud and Pavlov on opposite walls of his study and declares that his aim as a psychologist is to move those portraits round till they hang side by side on the middle wall!” (ibid.).

Pratt-Yule asserts that much psychological research entails in any case “the proper blending of both approaches ... despite the theoretical controversy between the die-hards of both camps” (ibid.). Confronted with urgent real-world problems, psychologists have been forced into a methodological pragmatism, “developing new techniques *ad hoc*, ignoring methodology, and drawing heavily on ‘hunches’. For such as these, theoretical dichotomies have not existed” (ibid: 8). Pratt-Yule concludes her address with the observation that “[h]ere in South Africa we are fond of stressing the immense complexity of the problems which face us as a multi-racial society. If we, as psychologists, are to play our proper constructive role in their solution, we cannot afford to spend much time on theoretical controversy, however much intellectual fun and stimulus we may undoubtedly derive from it. The problems which face us are indeed urgent, and it behoves us to be both liberal-minded and pragmatic in our approach to them” (ibid: 9).

By the end of her address, Pratt-Yule comes down decisively on the side of the clinical approach. She talks up the potential of “intuition ... as a potent source of testable hypotheses” in the course of a lengthy discussion on “how the clinical approach may enrich the experimental” (ibid.). By contrast, her account of the benefits of the experimental approach is considerably less substantial as she reproaches “militant experimentalist[s]” for their “basic insecurity” (ibid.). The ongoing theoretical controversy is, for the most part, the fault of experimentalists, the continuation of which will curtail the discipline’s efforts to solve the country’s problems. Still, Pratt-Yule maintains the importance of being “both liberal-minded and pragmatic” (ibid.) – a significant choice of adjectives given the opposing constituencies they call forth. What is implied is that, whereas English science provides objectivity and Afrikaner practice affords social relevance, neither can do without the other. Pratt-Yule is identifying and attempting to heal a fracture in South African psychology that, less than a decade later, will break entirely.

Presidential address, 1954 (S Biesheuvel)

Since he is the first personnel psychologist to lead the association, Simon Biesheuvel believes that his choice of topic – *The relationship between psychology and occupational science* – is justified.⁸ He admits the possible tedium the field may induce in clinicians and theoreticians – shades of Pratt-Yule’s “dichotomy” – but claims to “make no apology for discussing it on this occasion” (1954: 129). Biesheuvel links productivity to economic prosperity and reasons that psychologists should involve themselves in the question of labour efficiency – “[i]f for no other reason than that their own way of life is directly and vitally involved” (ibid.).

⁸ At the time of his address, Biesheuvel was also the director of the National Institute for Personnel Research (NIPR).

Despite his claim to the contrary, Biesheuvel's tone is preponderantly apologetic. He appeals to his *ethos* (the presidential prerogative) as well as the *pathos* (sympathy) and *logos* (reasonableness) of the audience, creating an impression of one uncertain of his place in the discipline. While he acknowledges the field's "disreputable origins" (ibid: 130) – he describes how Hugo Münsterberg's "economic psychology" was focused primarily on providing "the means whereby industry and commerce could best achieve their ends, the social and moral value or wisdom of these ends being none of its concern" (ibid.) – he hails its improved sensitivity to workers' needs. He accepts, further, that occupational psychology's subject matter can appear, at times, to be unpsychological and, on other occasions, to transcend psychology. Biesheuvel ends up suspecting that "[o]ur analysis [is] leading us to the absurd conclusion that in order to carry out his job properly the occupational psychologist must become a kind of scientific 'superman' required to conquer a universe of sciences within the time of an ordinary professional training course. In this predicament, he could either choose to become a scientific dilettante, knowing the headlines but none of the content, or accept the advice given by Hamlet to his mother concerning her heart, to 'throw away the worse part of it, and live the purer with the other half'" (ibid: 134).

Whereas Pratt-Yule resolves her "dichotomy" by asserting the mutual dependence of basic and applied psychology, Biesheuvel sees an impossible "dilemma" (ibid.). He escapes it by explaining the process by which a pure science is able to generate a "technology" – or "practical art" – such as occupational science (ibid.). Just as medical doctors and engineers are not required to master each of their respective ancillary sciences – "[o]f necessity the treatment must often be synoptic, but never to the point of inculcating headlines only" (ibid: 135) – the same holds true for occupational scientists. A host of sciences have contributed unevenly to the emergence of occupational science and so deserve differing degrees of devotion: "mothered" by occupational psychology with mathematical statistics in "the role of father", physiology and sociology are its "godparents" while education, physics, economics and the rest of the multidisciplinary family function "as aunts and uncles" (ibid: 136).

Biesheuvel's standing in South African psychology is a matter of controversy (Painter & van Ommen, 2008; van Ommen, 2008). Described conflictingly as a "liberal-inclined psychologist and critic of race bias in intelligence testing" (Dubow, 2006: 253) but elsewhere as a "public apologist" for the exploitation of black labour (Cooper, Nicholas, Seedat, & Statman, 1990: 10), Biesheuvel's detractors will argue that his address says nothing of the fact that the NIPR's special interest in African educability was born not of intellectual curiosity but of funder-driven obligations "to generate knowledge [that would] promote efficiency of the workforce and curtail industrial action by workers" (Seedat & MacKenzie, 2008: 80). Others take the benign view that the NIPR's studies on personnel management corresponded to a massive expansion in South Africa's industrial capability, which resulted in skills shortages and an associated need for vocational and aptitude testing (Dubow, 1995). For the former group, NIPR research exemplifies the kind of liberalism typical of White English-speaking South African (WESSA) "bastards": "rapacious, exploitative imperialists cunningly masking their racist, reactionary attitudes and conduct beneath a veneer of apolitical neutrality" (Foley, 1991: 15; see also Terre Blanche & Seedat, 2001), while, for the latter, such research "involved an element of social meliorism" (Dubow, 1995: 237).

Biesheuvel's location on the basic-applied continuum is also unclear. According to one commentator, his bearing towards theoretical considerations in psychology was habitually dismissive (Dubow, 1995) – yet his address does not come across as anti-scientific in the least. Biesheuvel makes the case, for example, that regardless of whether trainees are interested in human relations, personnel

techniques or ergonomics, mathematics and statistics are “essential for all” (1954: 139). In his later years, moreover, he seemed especially taken by the notion of scientific disinterestedness (Biesheuvel, 1987, 1991). Gordon Nelson, a former NIPR director himself, remarks that Biesheuvel’s career had “a profound effect on the [post-war] development of applied psychology and basic psychological research in South Africa” (1991: 571, emphasis added).

Adopting a different strategy to Pratt-Yule, Biesheuvel seems almost to position himself *beyond* the “dilemma”. Indeed, when reminiscing a quarter-of-a-century later about the early SAPA congresses, he would recall how “[u]nfortunately a perennial debate between behaviourists and psychoanalysts developed, which I found rather sterile and partisan” (1979: 6). Although he was “irritated by irrelevancies and anything that he construed as a waste of time” (Nelson, 1991: 572), as an applied scientist he also cautioned against the pursuit of the “perfect product [because] one would have to spend one’s whole life on it, and in the end it would probably be irrelevant” (ibid.: 571). Unlike Pratt-Yule, Biesheuvel considered applied psychology to be as susceptible to irrelevance as the pure science itself. This explains not only the circumspection of his own conceptual analysis of “relevance” (Biesheuvel, 1991) but also clarifies why, despite wanting to put occupational science “on the map”, he makes virtually no effort to extol its real-world virtues. Rather, in the introduction to his address, Biesheuvel chooses to distinguish himself from “those who require their subject matter spiced with the more colourful and imaginative aspects of personality study” as well as those desirous of “opportunities for the formulation of theoretical ingenuities, so amply provided by behaviour studies” (1954: 129). But this reluctance to position himself within either the basic/behaviourist or applied / non-behaviourist traditions meant not only that he would not offend anyone in the audience – after all, his non-committalism was a rhetorical strategy designed to win occupational science a seat at psychology’s table – it also meant that more than three decades later it would prove impossible to fix his location on the political spectrum.

Presidential address, 1955 (A B van der Merwe)

After obtaining a Master’s degree in psychology in 1938 from Stellenbosch University, A B van der Merwe went on to qualify as a medical doctor at the University of Cape Town. In 1945, he returned to his *alma mater* to teach clinical psychology, earning a doctorate in 1949 for his exploration of *Peripheral vasomotor reactions as an index of emotional tension and emotional stability*. By 1955, van der Merwe was SAPA president, and his address, titled *Tension and psychosomatic reactions*,⁹ was an abbreviated form of his doctoral thesis and consisted of a two-page foray into physiological psychology.

In comparison to those of his predecessors, van der Merwe’s address is arguably the least controversial. It resembles in content most APA addresses in which “presidents ... summarize their own substantive contributions or ... describe recent developments in a particular subarea of psychology” (Fowler, 1990: 1). Just as la Grange had done in 1950, van der Merwe steers clear both of Afrikaner ideology – unusual for a Broederbond member (Wilkins & Strydom, 1978) – and of wading into the “battle of the schools” that troubled in varying measures such Anglophone psychologists as MacCrone, Pratt-Yule and Biesheuvel. Then again, as regards the interpretation of psychosomatic disturbance, he does mention in passing how “[o]n the one side there is the school that wants to see a deep-seated symbolic meaning in every functional symptom” (“*Aan die een kant is daar die skool wat ’n dieperliggende simboliese betekenis wil sien in elke funksionele simptom.*”) (van der Merwe, 1955: 4). He ends his address enigmatically too, concluding that “[t]he concepts of basic

⁹ The address was delivered in Afrikaans.

tension and lability help us to view certain reactions of the normal person, the neurotic as well as the psychotic from a new vantage-point, and necessarily direct our attention to psychotherapy of a different nature” (*“Die begrippe van basiese spanning en labiliteit help ons om sekere reaksies van die normale persoon, die neurotikus, sowel as die psigotikus uit ’n nuwe gesigspunt te sien, en moet noodwendig ook ons aandag op psigoterapie van ’n ander aard vestig.”*) (ibid.).

Until as recently as the new millennium, psychology at Stellenbosch University cared little for psychoanalysis. Yet van der Merwe’s comments about the field do not constitute evidence of an underlying behaviourist antipathy for all things unconscious.¹⁰ He noted for himself how young Stellenbosch psychologists of the late forties and early fifties “were obsessed with the idea ... of giving the theoretical subject a practical orientation” (van der Merwe, 1984, quoted in Scholtz, 2002: 10). But this was not to be accomplished through inter-school one-upmanship or, for that matter, Christian-National rhetoric about serving the *volk*. Similar to NP strategy, the first half of the 1950s was to be years of consolidation rather than antagonism in the discipline. Psychologists throughout the country were beginning to open private practices (J O’Meara, nd); SAPA, for its part, was in the process of developing an ethical code of conduct – it was passed at the 1955 AGM – and had been negotiating since 1951 with the Minister of Health and the South African Medical and Dental Council regarding the registration of psychologists (Louw, 1997). Professional interests encouraged SAPA in-group solidarity “against a pretty tough and exclusive [medical] trade union” (J O’Meara, nd: 15).

Presidential address, 1958 (A B van der Merwe)

At the 1958 congress, A B van der Merwe was into his second term as SAPA president. He starts his address by thanking the audience for the confidence it has placed in him by electing him president.¹¹ He then pays tribute to la Grange and Biesheuvel for their leadership at a time “when the air was but rather thin” (*“... toe die lug maar bra dun was”*) and “feelings of insecurity, and inferiority, were busy overcoming many of us” (*“... gevoelens van insekureiteit, en inferioriteit, besig was om baie van ons te bemeester”*) (van der Merwe, 1958: 2). He compares both of his predecessors to the prophet Elijah, who, lifted into the heavens on a chariot drawn by steeds of fire, drops his mantle, which is then gathered up by his successor, Elisha. Humbled by the occasion, van der Merwe “in this case cannot help but wonder if Elijah’s mantle has descended on the true Elisha” (*“... dan kan ek nie help om te wonder of Elia se mantel wel in hierdie geval op die regte Eliza neergedaal het nie”*) (ibid.). Under the successive stewardships of la Grange – “the father of our association” (*“die vader van ons vereniging”*) – and Biesheuvel – who “with his thorough, scientific aggression inspired us to independent conduct” (*“Hy het met sy weldeurdragte, wetenskaplike agressiwiteit ons geïnspireer tot selfstandige optrede...”*) (ibid.) – SAPA has emerged from “its infant years” (*“sy suiglingsjare”*) and “youthful uncertainty” (*“jeugdige onsekerheid”*) to “where we stand today” (*“waar ons vandag staan”*) (ibid.).

Van der Merwe proceeds to remind his listeners of the association’s founding sentiment: “a need for professional psychological services in this country, a gap the community feels increasingly with each passing day” (*“... ’n behoefte aan professionele sielkundige dienste in hierdie land, ’n leemte wat daagliks al meer gevoel word deur die gemeenskap”*) (ibid.). Accordingly, his address pays homage to the role of the clinical psychologist in the community, firstly, in respect of “the positive promotion of mental health” (*“die positiewe bevordering van geestesgesondheid”*) (ibid: 3) and, secondly, in encouraging the rehabilitation of patients that otherwise would spend their lives in institutions.

¹⁰ In those years, the psychology department at Stellenbosch was “eclectic in nature” (Scholtz, 2002: 10).

¹¹ This address, like the 1955 one, was delivered in Afrikaans.

He details the shortage of psychiatric facilities and trained personnel in the face of massive public demand, criticizing the fact that, while only two hundred beds exist in the country for the treatment of patients with serious neurotic illnesses, there are ten state institutions for a much smaller population of psychotic patients. In addition, national mental health organizations and education departments are hamstrung by a crippling shortage of trained clinical psychologists. For van der Merwe, the remedy is two-fold: a focus on preventative work and the creation of “a more effective psychotherapy” (“... ’n meer doeltreffende psigoterapie”) (ibid: 4). By the latter he means an “active psychotherapy” (“aktiewe psigoterapie”) (ibid: 5) that is offered in outpatient settings, is multidisciplinary in scope and involves a “thoroughly elaborated readjustment program for each patient” (“... ’n sorgvuldig uitgewerkte heraanpassingsprogram vir elke pasiënt”) (ibid.). Citing British, Dutch and American examples of community-based mental health services, van der Merwe predicts the end of custodial care, an eventuality owing much to the maturation of modern psychopathology over the previous fifty years and the development of tranquilizer drugs. Moreover, because no single science can assume responsibility for the mental health of a community, the clinical psychologist plays a vital role in the multidisciplinary team, failing which “he will commit an unforgiveable sin against humankind” (“... hy [sal] ’n onvergeeflike sonde teenoor die mensdom begaan”) (ibid: 6).

In comparison with his 1955 address, van der Merwe’s change of tone is conspicuous: whereas his earlier address is chiefly of a *forensic* kind, the 1958 address is in turns *epideictic* and *deliberative* (Corbett & Connors, 1999). The difference is that, in the course of the intervening years, the effects of two important developments have begun to permeate the discipline. First, in December 1955 the profession attained statutory recognition as an auxiliary medical service (Louw, 1997). The achievement of this milestone along with, second, the formal adoption of an ethical code at that year’s AGM, afforded psychologists the much-desired legitimacy of *bona fide* professionals. This is why van der Merwe can “biblicize” the occasion, declaring triumphantly that the discipline has moved beyond its “periods of youthful uncertainty” (“periode van jeugdige onsekerheid”) (1958: 2), with psychologists now operating alongside psychiatrists, general practitioners and social workers. With the requisite ethical and legal credentials, he is in a stronger position than any of the earlier presidents to affirm the necessity of psychological services while warning off “the ignoramus [who] is busy gambling with the mental health of his patient” (“Die onkundige... is besig om met die geestesgesondheid van sy pasiënt te dobbel.”) (ibid: 4). Unlike MacCrone, Pratt-Yule and Biesheuvel who apply themselves to intra-disciplinary controversies, van der Merwe can extend the discipline’s horizon of ambition by exhorting his fellow professionals to dedicate themselves to the mental health of all. But, like la Grange (1950), he manages to draw on the unifying ideal of public service without ever having recourse to Afrikaner nationalist discourse.

Presidential / opening address, 1961 (A B van der Merwe)

By 1961, events had deteriorated. Ever since the debacle of 1956 – when an Indian psychologist was told by then SAPA president Biesheuvel to withdraw her membership application because he “thought it better to let sleeping dogs lie” (Louw, 1987: 342) – the “race” question had been simmering in the background. Delegates arrived at the Stellenbosch congress in the knowledge that, this time around, there would be no postponement of a matter on which there were fierce differences of opinion. In the absence of the university’s rector, A J la Grange calls on van der Merwe – once again president – to deliver the opening address.¹² To general laughter, van der Merwe complains that the venue is lacking in homeliness, before adding that “[y]ou will however not get

¹² On this occasion, van der Merwe takes turns to speak in Afrikaans and English.

too cold or warm as we regulate the temperature automatically according to the heatedness of the discussions taking place” (*“U sal egter nie te koud of te warm kry nie, want ons reël die temperatuur outomaties volgens die hitte van die diskussies wat plaasvind.”*) (1961: 229). His mood darkening, he then gives the lie to his 1958 celebration of SAPA’s coming-of-age: “Ladies and gentlemen, the Psychological Association is now in its thirteenth year – from a genetic point of view it can thus be considered in the stage of puberty – and we must perhaps expect ... growth pains and passing fancies. I just hope that, as true professional psychotherapists, we shall be very sober-minded when considering and dealing with these whims” (*“Dames en here, die Sielkundige Vereniging is nou in sy dertiende jaar – uit genetiese standpunt gesien dus in die puberteitstadium – en ons moet ... groeipyne en grille miskien verwag. Ek hoop net dat ons baie besadigd soos ware professionele psigoterapeute hierdie grille sal beskou en behandel.”*) (ibid.).

Van der Merwe stops short of outing the ‘race’ question directly. Instead, he attempts to normalize the controversy as a foreseeable growth pain, cautioning the audience against overreaction. Three years earlier, he had waxed lyrical about the “independent conduct” of the association and its successful negotiation of “youthful uncertainty” – now, he returns SAPA to the adolescent gawkinsness it was supposed to have resolved. In contrast to his earlier addresses, he also takes the trouble to address the delegates partly in English, quoting for good measure, as we shall see, the national poet of Scotland. With this ethical appeal (*ethos*), van der Merwe attempts to ingratiate himself as a benevolent and even-handed leader (Corbett & Connors, 1999). He recognizes the importance of finding common ground with English-speaking psychologists, since it was more or less understood that the English-medium universities entertained liberal views on the ‘race’ issue. And then, having already made reference in Afrikaans to the temperature in the venue, he informs his Anglophone colleagues of the expected weather outside: “Our branch secretary, Mr. Botha, guarantees fine weather. If we do get a few occasional showers, please remember the immortal words of Robert Burns: ‘The best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft agley [often go astray]’” (van der Merwe, 1961: 229).

In quoting Burns, was van der Merwe making a veiled threat against the English contingent that had come to Stellenbosch in droves to outvote any proposal for racial segregation (Nell, 1993)? It is impossible to tell. But as surely as la Grange did not anticipate the incipient drama,¹³ van der Merwe could not have foreseen what was to happen either – that the coming days would alter irrevocably the future of South African psychology. Notwithstanding the tense debates between Freudians and behaviourists, English-Afrikaner relations during the early SAPA conferences had at least been collegial. But in the years following the 1961 congress that witnessed the establishment of the whites-only PIRSA, “a lot of damage was done”¹⁴ between the two associations – and South African psychology’s international profile suffered accordingly.¹⁵

Presidential address, 1962 (B J Schlebusch)

A year on from the Stellenbosch debacle, SAPA’s mood was one of “exhaustion” and “sadness” for, despite the terminally insoluble “race” question, the association’s affairs had been proceeding smoothly prior to the split, particularly with regard to the urgent matter of professional registration (D Strümpfer, personal communication, 10 March 2012). Since 1948, SAPA had been run more or less

¹³ According to Dreyer Kruger, la Grange had not prepared himself for the possibility that the Afrikaner psychologists might lose the vote on the ‘race’ question (Kruger interview, 15 April 1982, p2).

¹⁴ Ronald Albino interview, 7 April 1982, p10.

¹⁵ Biesheuvel interview, 14 May 1982, pp 20-21.

by Afrikaners: the English universities of Natal, the Witwatersrand and especially Cape Town had never taken much interest in the association's activities (Kurt Danziger, personal communication, 8 March 2012). As a result, the mass exodus of Afrikaner psychologists in 1962 was a significant setback not only for the SAPA leadership but for its administration too. SAPA's first post-split president, Bob Schlebusch, was one of a handful of Afrikaners who withstood considerable pressure to remain with SAPA – but unlike his fellow members who were keen to put the recent debacle to bed, Schlebusch, despite inheriting a fractured and demoralized society, was not quite done.

In the course of his address,¹⁶ it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Schlebusch has unleashed an allegorical attack on *volksgebondenheid* – that is, the Afrikaner group solidarity that hastened the split. Seeing as there are still a number of Afrikaners in the audience – least of all himself – he does not name the object of his assault directly. He is, after all, the president of Anglophone SAPA: any criticism of Afrikanerdom will likely offend even dissident Afrikaners if it is perceived as originating in the outgroup (Louw-Potgieter, 1986, cited in Billig, 1996). Instead, he executes the face-threatening act by using an *off record* strategy, retaining his politeness by saying things in a roundabout way (Brown & Levinson, 1987, quoted in Fairclough, 1992: 164). He accomplishes this by expressing an undirected dissatisfaction with the latter-day “domination of the group” (“*heerskappy van die groep*”) in which “slavery and autocracy” (“*slawerny en outokrasie*”) have reappeared parading themselves as “freedom” (“*vryheid*”), but because of the dissimulation, embody an even stronger form of “utter bondage” (“*uitermate gebondenheid*”) (Schlebusch, 1963: 6): “Whereas the individual formed the group to protect himself, the group became the monster that uses the individual to protect itself” (“*Waar die individu die groep gestig het om homself te beskerm, het die groep die monster geword wat die individu gebruik om hom te beskerm.*”) (ibid.). Drawing on Riesman's **The lonely crowd**, Schlebusch describes the outcome as a “dependence on the group ... [that] led to standardization and inflexibility not only of behaviour but also of thought and creative activities” (“*Dit het gelei tot standardisasie en onbuigbaarheid, nie alleen in gedrag nie, maar ook in denke en skeppende aktiwiteite.*”) (ibid.). It is Colin Wilson's “cult of the ordinary chap” (ibid: 7) that has snatched the accolades while Ayn Rand – being “rebellious purely for the sake of rebellion” (“*die skryfster [is] opstandig... bloot vir die onthalwe van opstand*”) (ibid: 8) – does not portray heroes at all. Although he criticizes Rand's depiction of heroism, Schlebusch appears sympathetic to the objectivist philosophy that “the great inventor and creator is not motivated by the needs of his fellow people but by his search for the truth, by vision, strength and courage that springs from his own spirit” (“*... die groot uitvinder en skepper [word] nie gemotiveer... deur die behoefte van sy medemens nie, maar deur sy soek na die waarheid, deur visie, sterkte en moed wat uit sy eie gees voortspruit*”) (ibid: 8). He asks the audience to consider whether in fact “this tyranny of the group” (“*tirannie van die groep*”) (ibid: 8) has gained such a foothold that the age of heroes – individuals in the truest sense – has passed.

The extensive use of *nominalizations* – “domination of the group”, “standardization and inflexibility”, “this tyranny of the group” – allows Schlebusch to register his point from afar without having to wade into the messiness of SAPA-PIRSA politics. It is the *individual* – the hero – that he wishes to rescue from this state of affairs, which is why “psychologists must make greater use of novels with the specific goal of using the shrewd observations of the writer for training [themselves] in observation and especially for further interpretation ... [C]hanges in the social structure, as mentioned, and the *individual's* reaction thereto, are frequently reflected first in the works of great writers” (“*... sielkundiges [moet] meer gebruik ... maak van novella, met die spesifieke doel*”

¹⁶ Schlebusch's address was delivered in Afrikaans.

om die fyn waarneming van die skrywer vir eie onderrig in waarneming en veral vir verdere interpretasie te benut ... [V]eranderinge in die sosiale struktuur, en die individu se reaksie daarop, [word] ... dikwels eerste in die werke van die groot skrywers weerspieël.”) (ibid: 9, emphasis added). And yet, for Schlebusch, Rand’s account of her heroes’ internal conflicts is inadequate. Accordingly, “[t]he psychodynamic elaboration of the heroes’ reactions will be extremely interesting ... Intensive knowledge of these social processes and individual reactions thereto is in different areas so important that it must be investigated in all possible sources” (*Die dinamiese sielkundige verwerking van die reaksies van die helde sal uiters interessant wees ... Intensiewe kennis van hierdie sosiale prosesse en individuele reaksies daarop is op verskillende gebeide so belangrik dat dit uit alle moontlike bronne nagespoor moet word.*) (ibid: 9, emphasis added). The minutiae of human sociality essential to individual psychotherapy are lost in the psychological report’s “dead succession of cold facts” (*“dooie aaneenskakeling van koue feite”*) (ibid: 9). Moreover, in the field of organizational psychology, “the work context ... that can bring to the fore or even strengthen the anxieties created by the social order is overlooked besides ... [T]he immovable standardization [the worker encounters] in social life [he must] now negotiate even more acutely in his work situation” (*“... die werk situasie ... wat die angste geskep deur die maatskaplike orde na vore kan bring of selfs kan versterk, word merendeels oor die hoof gesien ... [D]ie onbuigbare standardisasie [wat die werker teëkom] in sy sosiale lewe [moet hy] nou nog in ’n verskerpte mate in sy werksituasie hanteer.”*) (ibid: 9).

Schlebusch bemoans the standardization of thinking itself. A situation has arisen where success in the world of politics depends on one’s affiliation with a strong party, while, in research circles, it hinges on being “a team member in a big organization like the [Council for Scientific and Industrial Research], such that most books nowadays appear under the writer, ‘edited by ...’” (*“... lid van ’n span in ’n groot organisasie soos die W.N.N.R., sodat meeste boeke vandag verskyn onder die skrywer, ‘edited by ...’*”) (ibid: 10). The dearth of knowledge that human beings have about themselves is the result of being “caught up in [this] narrow passage in which [our] culture allows us to think” (*“[O]ns [is] so vasgevang in die nou gangetjie waarin die kultuur ons toelaat om te dink ...”*) (10). Psychological studies must become correspondingly “more alive” (*“meer lewend”*) and “more interesting” (*“interessanter”*) by breaking out of “the conventional mentality” (*“die konvensionele denkwys”*) (ibid: 10).

By the end of his address, Schlebusch seems to have abandoned his community of practice, presenting himself as a modified Randist maverick released from jingoistic groupthink. In casting mainstream politics, big industry and society in general (*“die maatskappy”*) in the role of villain with their unending “requirements and objectives” (*“eise en doelstellings”*) (1963: 9), Schlebusch takes a dig at his Afrikaner colleagues for capitulating to the machinations of big-time politics. In effect, he drives a wedge between psychology and broader society, presenting his case for scientific independence by eulogizing the disinterested freedom of the intellectual pioneer. Of course, it is not solely about science for science’s sake, but an associated liberal tradition that resonates with the English speakers in the audience. Indeed, despite delivering his address in Afrikaans, Schlebusch makes no mention of the Afrikaans literary canon, eschewing it in favour of English-language classics. He presents himself as an Anglicized Afrikaner, demonstrating *ipso facto* his solidarity with WESSAs.

Discussion

It is evident that Anglophone and Afrikaner psychologists of the 1950s and early 1960s entertained divergent conceptions regarding the place of psychology in society. Both Afrikaner presidents of that period – la Grange (1950) and van der Merwe (1958) – articulated a *professionalist* discourse of

public service. They spoke variously of the imperative to protect a “shamelessly exploited” public, a service “gap the community feels with each passing day” and “an unforgiveable sin against humankind” should psychologists fail to assume their places on multidisciplinary teams. In turn, English-speaking psychologists advanced a discourse of *disciplinarity* that left them preoccupied with a “battle of the schools” (MacCrone, 1951), a “dichotomy” between the clinical and the experimental (Pratt-Yule, 1953), a “dilemma” between pure and applied psychology (Biesheuvel, 1954) and a “search for the truth” (Schlebusch, 1963). Troubled by these “fundamental issues”, they sought “perspective” and “liberal-minded pragmatism”.

It is not by accident that the Afrikaner professionalist discourse of the 1950s lacked the explicitly political accoutrements of the *volksdiens* (ethnic-national service) discourse that would dominate PIRSA addresses of the 1960s (Long, 2014b). In order to set in motion the apartheid project, the NP needed to expand its political base: there was little likelihood of an Afrikaner republic with a five-seat parliamentary majority when the United Party had won the popular vote by some margin. Moreover, because D F Malan and J G Strijdom “were determined to keep the nationalist policy agenda firmly in the party’s hands” (Dan O’Meara, 1996: 47), the Broederbond – the custodians of Christian-Nationalism – ended up being sidelined for much of the 1950s. So, too, within the discipline, the apparent absence of ideology among Afrikaner psychologists mirrored the general downplaying of Christian-Nationalism in political circles of the 1950s, while there was also the practical matter of professional registration that required cooperating with their Anglophone colleagues.

As for English-speaking psychologists, the discourse of disciplinarity involved a significant degree of political retreatism. Concerned with the scope, structure and independence of the discipline, its ensuing advocacy of circumspection, “perspective”, “liberal-minded pragmatism” and “truth-seeking” was characteristic of “liberals in the post-1948 era [whose] insistence on reason and moderation was, perhaps, a comfortable and comforting position to adopt – because it allowed those in the beleaguered middle ground to cast their opponents as extremists” (Dubow, 2001: 116). A case in point is Schlebusch’s invocation of science in the struggle against apartheid – a common discursive practice among an influential minority of English-speaking liberals (Dubow, 2001) committed to a “tradition of dissent” (Garson, 1976, quoted in Foley, 1991: 22). To be sure, some will read Schlebusch’s inspired valorization of liberal individualism as an antidote to such caricatures of WESSAs as imperialist “bastards”, “pseudo-liberal weaklings” and “ghosts with ears” (Banning, 1989, quoted in Foley, 1991: 15). But for others, SAPA’s thoroughgoing politics of indifference was typical of a near majority of WESSAs described as “political introverts ... less concerned with encouraging a practical solution to South Africa’s problems, more concerned with preserving a ‘White’ heritage, more concerned simply with leading a quiet, respectable life and more concerned with protecting the standards of the social class to which they belong” (Schlemmer, 1976: 124).

It would seem as if SAPA addresses of the 1950s provide almost no discursive indication that a split was on the cards. Occasional references were made in respect of tensions that existed between the basic/behaviourist and applied / non-behaviourist camps – which corresponded roughly to an English-Afrikaner divide – but at no point over the course of that decade did addresses ever turn overtly political. If there were hostilities of an ideological kind, then it would appear that Anglophone and Afrikaner psychologists colluded in “displacing” their resentments upon an unsuspecting pure-applied antinomy instead. Nonetheless, these addresses do hint at the eventual unravellings of 1962, since their outstanding theme involves an implied dispute about the independence of the discipline. The foregoing analysis would suggest that, in one corner were Afrikaner psychologists

arguing passionately for a socially relevant discipline that would minister to the mental health needs of the wider public, but in the opposing corner stood Anglophone psychologists intent on restricting themselves to intradisciplinary considerations. In the wake of the NP's shock electoral victory of 1948, the growing mobilization of Afrikanerdom and the imminent split from the Commonwealth, it was only a question of time before the Afrikaner service motif of the 1950s would assume an ethnic-national flavour. The SAPA-PIRSA split, then, may have involved more than just the question of admitting black psychologists to the national psychological association: the schism looks to have resulted from a longstanding fault-line regarding the goals of psychological science.

Interestingly, that ideological discordance repeats itself in the present. For, just as SAPA and PIRSA adopted the contrasting ethical positions of scientific independence and social responsiveness respectively, in a recent critical discourse analysis of addresses delivered at national congresses of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA), Long (2013) identifies a discursive struggle between, on the one hand, a neo-liberal market discourse and, on the other, a discourse of civic responsibility. To be sure, the link between PIRSA's *volksdiens* discourse and the contemporary discourse of civic responsibility is self-evident: both are concerned with serving the public, notwithstanding PIRSA's early conflation of that public with an exclusive Afrikaner minority. As for the connection between science and the market, it has long been known that science and the "technological rationality" it enables, can become the very lifeblood of market capitalism (see Marcuse, 1964) – which may explain why the rise of neuroscience within psychology and the marketization of the broader academy seem to have occurred simultaneously. Accordingly, if in the case of SAPA and PIRSA the science-society antinomy exploded in acrimony, is it possible that another 'split' is on the cards?

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