POLICING A VIOLENT SOCIETY WITHOUT RESORTING TO VIOLENCE: - A CASE OF PROTESTS

Malose Langa
STRUCTURE OF MY PRESENTATION

- Protests and their causes in South Africa
- The Law and the Constitution
- Who are the protestors
- Peaceful to violent protests
- Police responses to the protests
- Back to the basics of policing protests
PROTESTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Over the last few years, protests in South Africa have been on the increase ranging from community, labour and student protests.

No reliable source of information

The Municipal IQ has recorded more than 150 protests in the year 2015 and 2016 respectively.

Protests are over access to basic services such as water, electricity, housing, health and educational services (Alexander, 2010; Booysen, 2007, 2009; De Visser & Powell, 2012; McLennan & Munslow, 2009; von Holdt, et al, 2011)

Theoretically, I draw on the work of James Holdston that protests represent an insurgent citizenship (inequalities, class differences, demand of certain rights etc).
Protests form a part of democratic expression

Form of public participation that is more democratic

Mapping the right to protest

The right to protest is enshrined:

1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
2. The South African Constitution
3. The Regulation of Gatherings Act (rights and responsibilities of the protestors and the state)
WHO ARE THE PROTESTORS?- SMOKE THAT CALLS

Concerned community groups lead a march against corruption, service delivery
CG combines ANC figures, ordinary residents
SACP (ANC), PAC, youth organisations
Civic organisations
Independent councillors & residents organisation with long history of protests
Students
PEACEFUL TO VIOLENT PROTESTS

Protest movements fighting both for material improvements…

- ‘I have not been working for the past three years. I want to work.’
- ‘We have not had water for the whole week.’

and the right to be heard:

- ‘The premier undermines us, he’ll see by the smoke we’re calling him.’
- Years of peaceful protests before violence
POLICE RESPONSES TO THE PROTESTS

- The Regulations Gatherings Act - it is clear about the responsibilities and duties of the police and the organizers. However, things do not unfold in this manner in reality.

Some protests are peaceful, disruptive while others violent (Duncan, 2016). However, police always come with the aim to disperse the protestors.

- ‘You see casspirs remind us of apartheid, that we are not free in this democracy. We don’t need casspirs. We need police that respect human rights.’

- Allegations of torture and harassment of the protestors
APPLYING BASIC PRINCIPLES IN POLICING PROTESTS

- Access to professional police services
- Consultations with protest leaders
- Containment (agitation, provocation, insults etc)
- Holding the line
- Facilitation of peaceful and disruptive protests
- Negotiations for peaceful resolution of grievances
CONCLUDING REMARKS

- These basics may help to de-escalate and manage protests in order to maintain public order.
- It is important that police see protests as an essential right of democratic expression.