

**Debby Bonnin and Shaun Ruggunan**

## Editorial: A Southern African Dialogue

This special issue showcases some of the papers presented at the 2017 Colloquium titled “A Southern African Dialogue on the Professions and Professional Work” held at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. While the special issue contributes to the conversation on professions and professionalism within southern Africa (see also Bonnin & Ruggunan, 2013; Bonnin & Ruggunan, 2016; Erasmus & Breier, 2009; Young & Muller, 2014), it also opens up a conversation between southern Africa and the economic/political North. Writing in 1972 Johnson (p. 281) noted that “the sociology of professions, as a specialist field, today stands almost alone in ignoring the third world”. Forty-seven years later, it feels as if not much has changed. Annisette (2007, p.245) points to the repeated calls for “greater spatial and temporal diversity in historical research in accounting”, while her focus here was on accounting, this call resonates with most research fields in the professions. However, we would argue that not only is there a need for “spatial and temporal diversity” but also a need to recognise that the professions in both the global south and the economic north are shaped firstly by colonialism and imperialism, and later, through globalisation and neo-imperialism. Just as Johnson (1982, cited in Annisette, 2000) argued that professionalisation in Britain and its former colonies are linked through the project of imperialism, so the globalisation of professions through the global reach of professional service firms (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007), transnational companies and multilateral organisations continues this mutual shaping albeit in a different form (Hopper et al., 2017; Lassou, Hopper, Tsamenyi, & Murinde, 2019).

Recognising that the professional project “is grounded in history and unfolds through continuous negotiations set in a broader political and economic order ... which over time mobilises different claims, methods, and systems ...” (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2007, p. 10), the articles in this special issue are situated within the specific historical, political and economic context of southern Africa. As they demonstrate colonialism, apartheid, and post-apartheid as well as globalisation and neo-imperialism are all political and economic contexts that are deeply significant when analysing the professions and professionalisation in southern Africa.

Southern Africa was first colonised in 1652 when the Dutch occupied land at the Cape of Good Hope. In the decades and centuries that followed, the colonising powers in this region included the Dutch, the French (very briefly) and the British (with Portugal colonising areas slightly north of southern Africa on the west and east coast of the continent). However, by the nineteenth century, Britain was the major colonial power in much of southern Africa. The professions that developed in the region bore the hallmarks of similar professions back in the colonial motherland. The recognition of qualifications; the way in which particular professions developed and organised; and very centrally who, in terms of race and gender, were admitted were all closely bound to the colonial relationship between southern Africa and the imperial power. In 1910 the four British colonies unified to become the Union of South Africa—at first a self-governing dominion under of the British Empire and

*Debby Bonnin,*  
University of  
Pretoria,  
South Africa

*Shaun Ruggunan,*  
University of  
KwaZulu-Natal,  
South Africa

**Contact:**

*Debby Bonnin,*  
University of  
Pretoria,  
South Africa  
[debby.bonnin@up.ac.za](mailto:debby.bonnin@up.ac.za)

then from 1931, through the Statute of Westminster, legislatively independent. Long before Apartheid became the official policy, the policy and practice of segregation between black and white as well as gender norms that did not recognise women's right to occupations ensured that those seen to be white and male were privileged.

During the early twentieth century, many of the professions struggled to establish themselves as "befits the image bestowed from the metropolis" (Chanock, 2004, p.212). They needed to instate themselves as recognised professions, protect their domains through organisation and lobby for legislation that would recognise their right to "manage" the profession and craft the status associated with the profession. The early years were also about creating exclusivity. Professions and their services were for whites as both Bonnin and Abrahams et al demonstrate in this issue. Chanock (2004) in his discussion of law in South Africa and other parts of the Empire; Odenyo (1979) in his examination of the development of the legal profession in Kenya; and, Annisette (2003) in her study of accountancy in Trinidad and Tobago, illustrate that this was not much different to other parts of the Empire. But what made South Africa different and was to have a lasting impact on the entire social structure including the Professions was Apartheid. In 1948 white South Africans voted the Nationalist Party into power. As Bonnin & Ruggunan (2016, p. 252-256) discuss the Apartheid state enforced a form of social closure based on race and black South Africans confronted a number of challenges and obstacles in joining any profession. Conversely, white and middle-class South Africans were enabled and advantaged when it came to education and training and thus had privileged access to the professions. While South Africa during this period provides an example of legislated social closure, it needs to be noted that this situation was then used by professional associations to further secure the labour market advantage of white professionals. The articles by Bonnin and Abrahams et al., in this special issue demonstrate this with regard to the legal profession and speech-language pathology respectively.

In April 1994, South Africans went to the polls to elect the first-ever government based on a universal franchise. Amongst the primary tasks of the post-Apartheid state was the abolition of all laws which discriminated on the basis of race and gender. A number of policy measures were taken by the post-Apartheid state to bring about the racial transformation of the economy in the post-Apartheid period (Bonnin and Ruggunan, 2016, p. 254-255). These measures ranged from employment equity legislation to ensuring educational opportunities were available to all South Africans. Nevertheless, despite these actions, transformation in almost all professional fields remained limited. Almost twenty years after democracy the traditional professions continued to be white and male-dominated; only twenty percent of attorneys were black African (in 2011); seven percent of chartered accountants were black African (in 2012); and, fourteen percent of engineers were black (in 2013) (Southall, 2016, p.138). Furthermore, only thirty-three percent of attorneys; thirty-one percent of chartered accountants; and, three percent of engineers were women (Southall, 2016, p.138). Given this situation the state intervened further in an attempt to secure the transformation agenda. Occupational sectors and professional organisations were urged to develop transformation charters and meet black economic empowerment targets. Some of the more notable examples to fast-track transformation are those developed by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) (Bonnin & Ruggunan, 2016; Southall, 2016). The state passed new regulatory legislation in a number of professions (see Bonnin in this issue for a discussion of the regulatory framework in the legal profession) that sought to address access to the profession as well as access of the public to the services of the profession. For many professional associations these actions threatened their right to self-regulation.

This special issue speaks to many of the important debates regarding professionals and professionalisation within South Africa. Firstly, as the discussion above demonstrates the most important issue is the legacy of apartheid i.e. legislated social closure on the professions in South Africa as well as gender discrimination.

The papers by both Abrahams et al. and Bonnin demonstrate the way in which this legacy shapes professions today.

Secondly, any discussion of the professions in Southern Africa cannot escape analysing the way in which they are raced and gendered as well as the intersectionality of continued race and gender discrimination. How do multiple identities such as race, class, nationality amongst others shape the milieu and labour markets for professionals? Social closure around race and racism is one of the themes discussed in Bonnin's article. However, this legacy and debate are relevant to professions in the southern African region as a whole as the entire region contended with similar legacies deriving from colonialism. Furthermore, with Britain the major colonising power in southern Africa the way in which the professions in the region organised and are regulated bears the hallmark of the British professions.

Thus, race and racism are at the core of understanding the shaping of professions in the southern African context. As Anisette (2003, p.639) notes, in contrast to discussions of race in much of the economic north where "persons of African and East Indian descent are described as ethnic "minorities"", the southern African case (as does her research in Trinidad and Tobago) demonstrates situations where black people are in the majority. Yet, despite constituting the majority of the population and having political power black people remain underrepresented in the professions. Thus, research in southern Africa demonstrates the ways in which "inclusion" and "exclusion" operates in contexts where the racial majority is excluded through various forms of social closure.

Thirdly, a key debate is the role of the professions in relation to public interest and the common good. It has been argued that while professions are given the right to control access to the labour market and self-regulate, they in return should not act in their own self-interest but rather use their knowledge and skills to the benefit of wider society (see Saks, 2014). There are many examples and scandals internationally which demonstrate that this has not been the case and South Africa is no different. Furthermore, public interest does not exist outside of its social context and as Adams (2016, p. 1) argues "it is a social construction and therefore subject to contest and change". Articles in this special issue demonstrate the raced and gendered constructions of the public interest in the South African professions over time, with Chikarara's article on Zimbabwean engineers in South Africa showing the way in which the construction of public interest can also bear the hallmarks of nationalism. In post-Apartheid South Africa, the construction of the public interest adopts a new significance as the state and the professions address the issues of access both to the professions and to the services of professionals for those so long excluded.

The four papers published in this special issue clearly demonstrate the grounding of the professional project in history and the broader political and economic order.

Abrahams, Kathard, Harty & Pillay in their article "Inequity and the professionalisation of speech-language pathology: A profession embedded in coloniality" uses the concept of social embeddedness of professions as a guiding frame to explore the history of the profession and the influence that both the medical model and coloniality had in shaping speech-language pathology profession's knowledge and practices. They demonstrate how deeply the profession is embedded in the colonial and apartheid past and as a result access to both the profession and its services is often limited to middle-class, white populations. Ultimately, they argue for the profession to reimagine its activities and to transform the way it is practised and offer suggestions in this regard.

In her paper "The Legal Profession, Associations and the State in South Africa" Bonnin provides a historiography of the legal profession from colonial times, through apartheid and into the post-apartheid period. She argues that professional self-regulation is as a result of "an arrangement" between professions and the state. The paper explores the regulatory bargain struck between associations and the state

during these different periods. She shows how during Apartheid the profession allowed to self-regulate provided it complied with the state's definition of citizen and limited access to both the profession and justice in the interests of the white minority. But with liberation in 1994, the profession needed to renegotiate the regulatory bargain—agreeing to transform its practices and ensure that barriers to entry as well as discrimination based on race and gender were removed and that the public would have access to both the profession and to justice—in order to remain self-regulating.

Chikarara's "The Precariatization of Zimbabwean Engineers in South Africa" focuses on the question of occupational closure. Facing difficult economic circumstances in their home country many Zimbabwean engineers looked south of the border to employment in South Africa. However, once there they faced bureaucratic processes relating to the processing of their work visas, their qualifications were not recognised by local universities and the employment offered was often less favourable than what they had been led to believe. The combination of these factors, Chikarara argues pushed them into insecure labour market positions and illustrates that Standing's conceptualisation of the precariat describes their position.

Barac, Gammie, Howieson & van Staden's "How do auditors navigate conflicting logics in everyday practice?" explores the way in which auditors, located in Big Four accounting firms in South African, Australia and the United Kingdom, traverse conflicting logics (professional, commercial and accountability). It demonstrates the way in which they balance and make sense of these logics and argues that in addition to the well-known balancing mechanisms of segmenting, bridging and demarcating they also utilise assimilation. While this study is not directly located in South Africa, drawing on in-depth interviews with regulators, professional bodies, audit partners, talent partners, audit committee chairpersons, chief financial officers and chief audit executives in the three countries, it demonstrates that auditors face similar pressures in all three places and respond in similar ways. Furthermore, the paper adds to the discussion on professionals and the public interest in highlighting the tensions between commercial and professional logics. For South Africa given recent scandals, involving some of the "Big Four" firms this is particularly relevant at present.

## References

- Adams, T. (2016). Professional self-regulation and the public interest in Canada. *Professions & Professionalism*, 6(3), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.7577/pp.1587>
- Annisette, M. (2000). Imperialism and the professions: the education and certification of accountants in Trinidad and Tobago. *Accounting Organization and Society*, 25, 631-699. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0361-3682\(99\)00061-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0361-3682(99)00061-6)
- Annisette, M. (2003). The colour of accountancy: examining the salience of race in a professionalisation project. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 28, 639-674. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0361-3682\(02\)00030-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0361-3682(02)00030-2)
- Annisette, M. (2007). Editorial: International perspectives on race and gender in accounting's past: an introduction. *Accounting History*, 12(3), 245-251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1032373207079025>
- Bonnin, D., & Ruggunan, S. (2013). Towards a South African sociology of professions. *South African Review of Sociology*, 44(2), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2013.802533>
- Bonnin, D., & Ruggunan, S. (2016). Professions and professionalism in emerging economies: the case of South Africa. In M. Dent, I. L. Bourgeault, J. L. Denis, & E. Kuhlmann (Eds) *The Routledge Companion to the Professions and Professionalism*, (pp. 251-264). London & New York: Routledge, Taylor &

Francis Group.

- Chanock, M. (2004). Chanock, M. (2004). *The Making of South African Legal Culture 1902-1936. Fear, Favour and Prejudice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Erasmus, J. & Breier, M. (Eds) (2009). *Skills Shortages in South Africa: Case Studies of Key Professions*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Faulconbridge, J., & Muzio, D. (2007). Reinserting the professional into the study of globalizing professional service firms: the case of law. *Global Networks*, 7(3), 249-270. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2007.00168.x>
- Hopper, T., Lassoud, P., & Soobaroyene, T. (2017). Globalisation, accounting and developing countries. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 43, 125–148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2016.06.003>
- Johnson, T. (1972). Imperialism and the professions: Notes on the development of professional occupations in Britians’s colonies and the new states. *The Sociological Review*, 20(1), 281-309. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1972.tb03222.x>
- Lassou, P. J. C., Hopper, T., Tsamenyi, M., & Murinde, V. (2019). Varieties of neo-colonialism: Government accounting reforms in Anglophone and Francophone Africa – Benin and Ghana compared. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2019.01.003>
- Odenyo, A. (1979). Professionalization Amidst Change: The Case of the Emerging Legal Profession in Kenya. *African Studies Review*, 22(3), 33-44. <https://doi.org/10.2307/523894>
- Saks, M. (2014). Regulating the English healthcare professions: Zoos, circuses or safari parks? *Journal of Professions and Organizations*, 1, 84-89. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpo/jot001>
- Southall, R (2016). *The New Black Middle Class in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media & Konrad Adenauer Foundation.
- Young, M., & Muller, J. (Eds) (2014). *Knowledge, Expertise and the Professions*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315883083>

### ***List of papers presented at the Colloquium***

- ABRAHAMS, Kristen. A case study of emerging practice in speech-language therapy in a community practice context.
- AGBEDAHIN, Komlan. Phases, faces and perceptions of the military profession in Togo.
- BAISON, Precious. ‘Interviewing the interviewer’: power dynamics in researching women journalists.
- BARAC, Karin The impact of institutional logic multiplicity on audit quality.
- BONNIN, Debby. Professions – Associations, State and the Labour Market in South Africa.
- BRADY, Jonathan. Advent of mechanisation and machine learning in professional workspaces: Implications and social outcomes.
- BURNS, Catherine. Gender, Race and Power in the Thwarting of Forensic Nursing in South Africa.
- CARRIM, Nasima. ‘Indian males’ upward mobility in corporate South Africa: an identity work and intersectionality’ perspective.
- CHIKARARA, Splagchna. Migrant professionals relegated to the precariat ranks: experiences of Zimbabwean Engineers in South Africa
- DAWOOD, Quraisha. An Emerging Profession: Mechatronics and the Struggle for Legitimacy.

- FORTAILLIER, Léo. The professionalization of the NGO sector: the case of the Cape Town migrant cause and its “professional activists”.
- KRUUSE, Helen. The professional and ethical role of the legal practitioner in contemporary South Africa.
- MAUNGANIDZE, Farai. The changing nature of professional work in Zimbabwe: A case of the chartered accounting profession.
- MEYER, Tamlynne. Professional closure for women lawyers in South Africa.
- MUSYOKA, Jason. Spaces of scarcity within state employed black middle classes in South Africa.
- NAIDOO, Charuna. HR Ethics and Professionalism aimed at HR Professionalisation. An Exploratory study done in South Africa.
- RUGUNANAN, Pragna. Re-defining the boundaries of professional work: A case study of Hair and Beauty Salons and Tailors in Fordsburg, Johannesburg.
- SAKS, Mike. Researching and Reforming the Professions: An International Academic Journey.
- VAN DER WIEL, Renée. Professional ambiguity about doctors’ knowledge-making in South Africa – Pull towards progressive science, pushback against the elite university.
- WILDSCHUT, Angelique. MCWANGO, Bongwiwe & MEYER, Tamlynne. A society in flux and the purpose of professional work: A perspective from the South.
- WILLIAMSON, Charmaine. Scaling Up Professionalisation of Research Management in a Majority World Context.