

Police history, police reform and police education

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In this short speech I will discuss two big issues. On the one hand I want to focus on police history and police reform and on the other hand I will pay some attention to police history and police education.

Police history and police reform

My first big topic is concerned with police history and police reform: in 1978 I defended at the K.U. Leuven in Belgium a PhD thesis on the political history of the police in Europe. It was published in 1979 in two volumes, mainly covering the history of the police in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and to some extent Austria, Italy and Spain, since the second half of the 18th century, up to the 1960s of the 20th century ⁽¹⁾. This book was the final result of a project that started in 1974 at the Leuven University and was meant to study the contemporary policing problems in Belgium and to come up with proposals for its reform.

Immediately, I was confronted in this project with the fact that political parties, police chiefs etc. used the history of the Belgian policing system and its main components as an important argument, a justification, or a counterargument in their discussions about the future of this system. But nobody could explain to me what the history of the system really was. And there were almost no books about the police history of Belgium. Police history at the time in Belgium was not at all

⁽¹⁾ C. Fijnaut, *Opdat de macht een toevlucht zij. Een geschiedenis van de politie als een politieke instelling*, Antwerpen, Kluwer Rechtswetenschappen, 1979, 2 vol.

a topic for academic historians. So that is why I started to collect a huge amount of material about policing in this country since the end of the 18th century until the 1960s: legislation, police journals, parliamentary documents, references in books on the general history of Belgium etc.

But after two or three years I didn't know how to analyse all these materials. In any case in Belgium there was no model, no theory, on how to do so. In order to understand the way in which I solved this problem I have to add to this that at the same time I was studying at the K.U. Leuven, philosophy and particularly the writings of Thomas Kuhn, the famous philosopher and sociologist of science. I was heavily impressed by his ideas about paradigms and paradigm shifts in scientific developments ⁽²⁾. Hence I came to the idea that I should develop a model by studying what happened in other relevant European states and that in the end I should apply this model to the history of the Belgian police. And indeed I developed in my PhD thesis a model to understand the general dynamics of police history in Western Europe by comparing the histories of policing in the named countries. I defended this thesis at the end of 1978. I can only summarise it here a bit.

One of my general conclusions was that the driving forces behind radical reforms of policing systems were wars, revolutions and coups d'états, and — to a lesser extent — large-scale public disorders and serious crime problems, or disasters in the field of criminal

⁽²⁾ Th. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1970 (2d enlarged edition).

investigation. Take, for example, the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 in France and other European countries, the French-German War in 1870, the First World War and the Second World War, and not to forget the establishment of the Soviet Union. If you asked what successively happened to the policing systems in the related countries at those crucial stages in the history of Europe, you could easily conclude that it meant, most of the time, three important things.

First of all, it meant the centralisation of policing and police forces; in any case the governance on the police forces became more and more centralised. Secondly, it meant specialisation of the police forces and police systems, particularly in the field of public-order policing and in the field of criminal investigation. And thirdly and also quite self-evident and easy to understand; the militarisation of specific components of the policing systems; their militarisation was more or less a substitute for the involvement of the army in public-order policing. And parallel to centralisation, specialisation and militarisation one can easily see the rise of the intelligence services, or special units or special services within the existing police systems meant to deal with intelligence gathering on political opposition or political protest in general.

The irony of all this is, after I presented my PhD thesis in 1978 I didn't get the opportunity to apply this model on my huge material research on the Belgian police system. But now I am retired I hope I can do this within the coming years and that I can write a coherent, long-term history of the Belgian police system, applying the model I developed in the 1970s. The Belgian case nevertheless can currently teach a number of lessons, but two lessons are most important when it comes to the demonstration of the importance of historical studies on police and policing.

First of all, the history of police systems is very helpful in understanding contemporary policing structures, policing powers, policing ideas and policing practices. It also gives you an idea or a better idea, a better clue, on political, public and professional discussions about the issues I just mentioned: structures, powers, ideas, and practices. But history is not only helpful in this way. Secondly it is also helpful when it comes to understanding what really matters in policing over centuries, decades and years. Which factors and which

circumstances can, or will have, a major impact on policing as an institution and as a practice?

These lessons make up one of the reasons why I initiated a number of historical projects in the field of policing, not only in the Netherlands and Belgium, but also at the European level ⁽³⁾. That is also why I joined national and international networks of historians, who gradually, step-by-step, have become more interested in the history of policing ⁽⁴⁾. And thirdly that I myself not only participated in international networks of historians and international book projects on the history of policing, but also organised such projects over the years ⁽⁵⁾. I am happy to say that step-by-step, I wasn't that lonely fighter any more.

Over the years in a number of European Union Member States other academics took similar initiatives. I refer here in France to Jean-Marc Berliere and to Jean-Luc Noel — the first one spent (together with a.o. Rene Levy) a lot of energy on the history of the civil police forces in France and Jean-Luc Noel on the history of the French Gendarmerie ⁽⁶⁾. I may also refer to Herbert Reinke and others in Germany and self-evidently also to Clive Emsley in the United Kingdom ⁽⁷⁾. All this has led to a situation where we know much, much more about the police history in a number of European states than 20-30 years ago. There is now an increasing body of knowledge

⁽³⁾ Hereby I may refer to a comprehensive project on the history of the police in The Netherlands and its (former) colonies and as far as Belgium is concerned to C. Fijnaut, *Een kleine geschiedenis van de huidige organisatie van het Belgische politiewezen*, Antwerpen, Kluwer Rechtswetenschappen, 1994, and to C. Fijnaut, B. de Ruyver and F. Goossens (eds), *De reorganisatie van het politiewezen*, Leuven, Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1999.

⁽⁴⁾ E.g. the European network of historians who are heavily interested in the policing of the colonial empires in the 19th and 20th centuries.

⁽⁵⁾ See a.o. C. Fijnaut (ed.), *The Impact of World War II on Policing in North-West-Europe*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2004.

⁽⁶⁾ E.g. J-M. Berliere and R. Levy, *Histoire des polices en France de l'Ancien Regime a nos jours*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2011, and J-N. Luc (ed.), *Gendarmerie, etat et societe au XIXe siècle*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002.

⁽⁷⁾ C. Emsley, *Policing and its context, 1750-1870*, London, The Macmillan Press, 1983, and *Gendarmes and the State in Nineteenth-century Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999. As far as Reinke is concerned, see e.g. G. Furmetz, H. Reinke and K. Weinbauer (eds.), *Nachkriegspolizei; Sicherheit und Ordnung in Ost- und Westdeutschland, 1945-1969*, Hamburg, Ergebnisse Verlag, 2001.

that can be used in police education and is also useful with a view to police reform.

But of course there is still a lot to do with regard to the police history in a number of Member States, for example Italy or Spain or Portugal, or also Central and Eastern European countries. And also in relation to the history of policing at the European level.

First of all: what really was the impact of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire on policing in Europe, as well as the impact of the totalitarian police states of the 20th century? The impact of the Nazi regime goes for many of us without saying, but what about the impact of the Soviet Union on policing in Central and Western Europe⁽⁸⁾. And in the wake of this one should also pay attention to the impact that American policing policy has exerted on policing in Europe and in cross-Atlantic police cooperation since 1945, particularly in the field of criminal investigation, but I believe that also in the field of political policing, this is a major issue⁽⁹⁾.

Secondly, one should not only look, however, at the impact of these empires on policing in Europe, one should also pay attention to the force of policing models in Europe and in the United States on the ways in which policing has developed over the centuries in the West. For example, take the impact of the models of the police of Paris and the French Gendarmerie in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the impact of the Metropolitan police model after this force was established in 1830. One should also refer to the impact of the German big-city police forces at the end of the 19th century and their impact on the structure, the division of tasks, the training, the housing and the equipment of police forces in big cities, not only in Europe, but also in the United States. I may in particular refer here to Raymond Fosdick's

⁽⁸⁾ As far as the impact of the Soviet Union on policing in Central and Eastern Europe is concerned see a.o. D. Fogel, *Policing in Central and Eastern Europe*, Helsinki, Academic Bookstore, 1994; M. Pagon (ed.), *Policing in Central and Eastern Europe. Comparing First-hand Knowledge with Experience from the West*, Ljubljana, college of Police and Security Studies, 1996, and N. Uildriks and P. van Reenen (eds.), *Policing Post-communists Societies. Police-public Violence, Democratic Policing and Human Rights*, Antwerpen, Intersentia, 2003.

⁽⁹⁾ One of the most important books still is: E. Nadelmann, *Cops across Borders. The Internationalization of U.S. Criminal Law Enforcement*, Philadelphia, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.

book on the organisation and performance of European police systems, published in 1916⁽¹⁰⁾. And one must not lose sight of the impact of the Weimar Republic police, in particular the police of Berlin, on policing in Europe. Out of necessity to survive in such a highly divided society this police was steadily under pressure to modernise its operational systems in order to be able to deal with the manifold challenges it continuously faced.

Thirdly, apart from the impact of empires, and apart from the impact of policing models, I should also mention here in the third order the spreading of police techniques and police technology all over Europe since the second half of the 19th century, like for example the *Bertillonage*. Which forces have driven the spread of this technology into the 20th century? And not only its spreading in that period, is most interesting. We should — sticking to this example — also look at what is going on currently in the security business and explore the historical connections between the rise of biometrics and the development of the Bertillonage⁽¹¹⁾.

Police history and police education: the Dutch case

After these few words on police history and police reform I introduce my second topic — police history and police education. In particular I will focus on this issue in relation to the Dutch case.

After the defence of my PhD thesis in Leuven, I wrote several pieces on the history of the Dutch police and started to collect books, reports, leaflets and articles etc. on its history since 1813. Around 2000, the Chief Constable of Utrecht and later on The Hague, Jan Wiarda, together with chiefs of police of some larger regional and national police forces and with the support of the Ministries of Justice and Home Affairs, they all collected money for a major project on the history of the Dutch police. And they asked me to compose a research group of experienced historians to perform this project. Guus Meershoek became a member of

⁽¹⁰⁾ R. Fosdick, *European Police Systems*, New York, The Century Co, 1916.

⁽¹¹⁾ P. Piazza (ed.), *Aux origines de la police scientifique. Alphonse Bertillon, précurseur de la science du crime*, Clamecy, Karthala, 2011, and S. Cole, *Suspect Identities. A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001.

this research group. The other two members were Jos Smeets and Ronald van der Wal.

In 2007 we published a four-volume history of the Dutch police. Three volumes specifically focus on the development of the municipal police forces, the history of the state police forces and on the evolution of the police unions and police education ⁽¹²⁾. I myself wrote an overarching volume on the general history of the Dutch police since the end of the 18th century up to these days ⁽¹³⁾. Later on I summarised these four books in a paperback for the general public and for Dutch police officers. Some 30 000 copies of this booklet were published in a year. Later on it was translated into English for a more foreign audience ⁽¹⁴⁾.

In the wake of this more or less national project, I took the initiative together with historians from Utrecht University and Leiden University — in particular Elsbeth Locher at the Utrecht University and Gert Oostindie, director of the KITLV, the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden — to build up a research project on the history of police and policing in the former Dutch colonies. This comprehensive project was finalised rather smoothly. Indeed, in recent years three books were published on the history of policing in the Dutch Indies since the 19th century up to the Second World War, on the history of policing in Surinam until its independence in 1975, and on the history of policing on the Dutch Caribbean islands: Curaçao, Aruba etc., from the end of the 18th century, up to 2000 ⁽¹⁵⁾.

During this whole historical project we asked ourselves two key questions. The first one was: what will be the

legacy of this big project and what are the possibilities to continue historical police research in the Netherlands and also at the European level in the long run? Should we get the universities involved? Are they now really consistently and coherently and for the longer term interested in this topic? Or should we to some extent see whether we can integrate or should integrate this subject into the research programme of the Dutch Police Academy? Then we would have more guarantees that it would survive in the longer run. A precondition of course is that the research should be able to maintain its academic quality. These considerations led to the conclusion that the last option would be the best one.

The second question was: isn't it important to integrate the results of historical research into the training and education, at least to some extent, of police officers? And we came to the conclusion that the answer is 'yes' for a number of reasons.

The first reason is that, if policing is moving from a craft to a profession then all police officers should have a clear idea about the ways in which their profession has come into existence. They should have an idea of the historical relationship between police forces, the army and private policing, of the images and realities of policing in the past, of the increasing complexities of police operations in modern society, of the evolution of the standards of police education and of the working conditions of police officers etc.

Secondly, police officers at all levels, but also judicial and administrative authorities, should be aware of the fact that their working environment — institutions, structures, powers, cultures, ideas, strategies — is not at all self-evident, but is the result of a sometimes very painful history that they should know about. What happened and in which conditions it happened. For example: why the Dutch political leaders maintained to a large extent the policing apparatus that the French and German occupiers installed? What are the dilemmas the professional forerunners faced in the field of criminal investigation and public-order policing, and what are the ways in which they tried to solve the dilemmas with which they were confronted. And of course they should also know about the history of cross-border policing and the challenges and possibilities in this field, not only in the 19th century but also since the Second World War in the framework

⁽¹²⁾ G. Meershoek, *De gemeentepolitie in een veranderende samenleving*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2007; J. Smeets, *Verdeeldheid en eenheid in het rijkspolitieapparaat*, Amstrdam, Boom, 2007, and R. van der Wal, *De vakorganisatie en het beroepsonderwijs*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2007.

⁽¹³⁾ C. Fijnaut, *De geschiedenis van de Nederlandse politie. Een staatsinstelling in de maalstroom van de geschiedenis*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2007.

⁽¹⁴⁾ C. Fijnaut, *The History of the Dutch Police*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2008.

⁽¹⁵⁾ M. Bloembergen, *De geschiedenis van de politie in Nederlands-Indie. Uit zorg en angst*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2009; E. Klinkers, *De geschiedenis van de politie in Suriname, 1863-1975. Van koloniale tot nationale ordehandhaving*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2011, and A. Broek, *De geschiedenis van de politie op de Nederlands-Caribische eilanden, 1839-2010. Geboeid door macht en onmacht*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2011.

of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

And the third reason why we thought police history should be integrated into police education is that police officers generally should have sufficient knowledge of the history of policing in order to deal with historical arguments in the ongoing debate on policing in their home countries or home forces: to understand these arguments, to evaluate or to assess these arguments, and to criticise them, if necessary or desirable.

And so, on the basis of these three arguments, we convinced the board of the Police Academy and the Ministries of Justice and Home Affairs to establish a lecturer's position in the field of historical police studies at the Dutch Police Academy. And a mixed committee of police officers and academics selected Guus Meershoek for this position. He is not only a qualified researcher in the field of police history — for example he wrote his PhD thesis on the Amsterdam Police in the course of the Second World War and wrote the history of the municipal police in the Netherlands — but he has also organised teaching programmes at the Twente University for many years now.