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Epilogue

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Epilogue

Cyrille Fijnaut

In the prologue we defined the aim of the symposium at which the papers brought together here were presented: to firm up our own ideas concerning what might be the best way to study the impact of World War II on the Dutch police by comparing them with the insight gained from similar research in neighbouring countries. The ideas that the Dutch project group was considering before the symposium had been set down in its own paper on the impact of the Occupation on the police in the Netherlands. The gist of these ideas is that, first, a clear distinction must be made between what happened before World War II, what happened during the German Occupation and what happened after the liberation. This would seem to be a methodological requirement that virtually speaks for itself, but in the Dutch literature about the police during World War II this requirement is not always met. For a balanced analysis and assessment of what happened during and after the war in police circles, however, this three-pronged approach must be regarded as essential. Secondly, in view of the complexity of the organisation and operation of modern police systems it seemed to us insufficient to limit our study to the re-organisation of the administrative and operational structures of these systems before, during and after World War II, and to examine the extent of involvement of police forces and individual police officers in the implementation of the political programme that the Nazis planned to put into effect by occupying the Netherlands and neighbouring countries. Obviously these are subjects that no research project on the police during World War II can ignore, but other issues also have to be examined in order to gain a proper understanding of these two specific aspects. In our paper we have mainly concentrated on the expansion of logistical support to enable operational tasks to be performed, the development of the legal status and working conditions of police officers and the evolution of the social status of the police. But of course we might just as easily have chosen quite different, though

equally important, topics for discussion, for example internal differentiation and specialisation within the police forces.

These ideas very much reflect the views that Blom has advanced in his general paper on the focal points in historical research into the impact of the Occupation on the police. However, on a couple of points he would probably like to see them firmed up. First of all, in his view it is important to place more emphasis on research into the response – both before and during the war as well as after the Occupation – not only within the police itself, but also outside the police organisation (by administrative and judicial authorities, within political circles and among the general public), to attempts to directly mobilise the police in the Nazis' violent exercise of power against various sections of the population. Following on from this, Blom stresses the importance of research into the way in which the police played their much less ostentatious role as informal regulators of people's daily lives. How did they fulfil this role of "oil-can" in the machinery of modern society before, during and after the war? And more especially, did the Occupation have an appreciable impact on how they interpreted this role before and after the liberation?

With regard to the first point, we have already devoted due attention in our plans to the disunity that the Occupation brought about within the police forces, specifically relating to collaboration with or opposition to the implementation of the murderous policy of the Nazis towards Jews, gypsies and others. Ultimately these plans stemmed from experience with post-war conflicts in this area within the police. Blom's remark that it is also important to devote due attention to the way in which others – mayors, procurators general, and so on – viewed the attitude displayed by the police, both police forces and individual police officers, towards the occupying forces is, however, extremely pertinent. Its relevance is underlined by the contributions in this book made by Majerus and Rousseaux on Belgium, and by Berlière on France. The attitude of certain authorities and of the general public may have been an important factor in the extent to which the police turned – and were able to turn – their backs on getting involved in implementing Nazi policy, and, following on from this, in the post-war evaluation of how the police actually behaved during the war.

With regard to Blom's second point it can be said that Emsley's paper certainly emphasises how important it is not only to study abject "political" police activities in times of war, but also to give sufficient attention to the usual duties of police officers at such times, i.e. the general maintenance of public order and prevention and detection of ordinary crime. Naturally, the far-reaching consequences of the war situation for that behaviour should not be ignored, in particular what specific tasks and powers this situation entailed and what the consequences were for the organisation and operation of the police and for the working conditions of police

officers. Taking this one step further we should point out Emsley's discussion of the negative effects of the war on the health of police officers. In the case of Britain, obviously this was simply due to an increased workload of normal duties – or at any rate what might be considered normal in wartime. In the case of countries that were occupied, the negative consequences of tension stemming from involvement in illegal activities or from being threatened with or actually sent to a concentration camp should perhaps also be taken into account. This topic has been completely disregarded in research on the role of the police during World War II.

Various papers – such as those by Majerus and Rousseaux on Belgium, Berlière's on France and our own on the Netherlands – also clearly show the direct impact of the war and the Occupation on the general structure of the police systems under consideration. Three aspects stand out particularly. First, that the reorganisations that took place during the Occupation complied to some extent with plans that had been put forward before the war, but for some reason had not been implemented. The fact that this initially gave these reforms a certain legitimacy in many people's eyes is therefore not so very strange. The second thing that stands out is that these reforms were all – naturally – characterised by Nazification of the police culture through recruitment and training of new police officers, but also by extensive unification and centralisation of the police structures. The explanation for this transformation of the police systems is obvious: to gain a stronger hold at senior level on the operation of these systems right down to the roots, as was also the case in Germany itself (see Reinke's comments on this point). What is remarkable is that this situation was mirrored to some extent in Britain. The British government felt compelled to amalgamate numerous police forces in order to be able to cope better with the demands that survival of the blitz placed on them. Thirdly, the Belgian and French examples necessarily lead us to the conclusion that, within the new structures on the continent, the "dirty work" was preferentially entrusted to special departments and units. Naturally these could be better managed from the top down. And to the extent that such departments were manned by people who were favourably disposed towards the "new order", as the war progressed this obviously solved the problem of the Nazis not being able to rely on, at least not fully, the loyal cooperation of the ordinary departments and units within the police to carry out "that" kind of work. In our own research it is therefore very important, at least in principle, to distinguish sufficiently between the general departments within the police and the special departments and units that functioned as an extension of the German repression apparatus. Further research will show whether this distinction was always equally significant in every case and whether certain police officers (not an entire force – there were invariably exceptions where some police officers refused to cooperate) rendered assistance to the Nazis at particular

times, in particular circumstances and where particular issues were concerned.

Following on from this it should be mentioned that the papers on France, on Belgium and on the Netherlands reveal that our research should not be confined to the transformation of ordinary Dutch police structures before the time of the Occupation. It is just as important – firstly – to study their interaction with units of the German SS police. And of course above all the units within the SS – the Gestapo, the Sipo-SD – which were the counterparts of the special departments within the Dutch national police. But attention should not be focused on these special units at the expense of the general departments of the German SS police in occupied territory, such as the *Ordnungspolizei* (“Order Police”). These departments not only indirectly supervised the regular police forces but also occasionally took joint police action with them, especially with their militarised police companies. Secondly, it is clear from the various contributions to this book that another aspect that should not be ignored in our research is the creation and operation of the “parallel” police services that were built up by the German authorities from collaborating political organisations. This is because the formation of these services can teach us about the position and role of the regular police during the Occupation, particularly from the point of view of the occupying forces of course. To what extent were they set up because the regular police could not be relied on to enforce and protect the Occupation regime? This brings us back to the question of interaction: to what extent was there nevertheless evidence of cooperation between the regular police – or sections of it – and those kinds of “parallel” services, be they intelligence or security services?

In conjunction with what has just been said, attention can be drawn to a completely different “parallel” phenomenon that occurred in police circles during World War II: the formation and development of special police services. In his paper Emsley points out that inspectorates were set up in Britain during the war to carry out all manner of special police work, such as controlling the price of foodstuffs. This comment can be tied in with the statement by Majerus and Rousseaux that special units of the Belgian *gendarmérie* also played a part in combating economic crime during World War II. Together these two separate reports point to an enormous dilemma that persists to this day in many European countries: to what extent are regular police forces fit and able to actually enforce the special legislation currently in force in all kinds of areas, such as regulation of agriculture, collection of taxes, import and export of goods, working conditions and road traffic? In many European countries this dilemma seems to have been resolved at the expense of the regular police and the number of special police services has soared. If this development – which has far-reaching consequences, for example for the coordination of government action to combat large-scale fraud and international organised crime –

was encouraged by governments during World War II for whatever reasons, then it is important that research should not ignore this aspect of the police policy that was pursued at that time: why was a decision made then to split up the administrative police duties of the regular police to such an extent that their main task was stripped down to maintaining public order and security?

Answering this question automatically leads to a comparison with the police policy that the Allies pursued in Germany after the war. Reinke points out that an important, and possibly the most successful, element of this policy was the *Entpolizeilichung der Polizei* ("de-policing" of the police). In the German police literature it is often assumed that this drastic interference with the traditional function of the German police was a unique occurrence. The way in which *Entpolizeilichung* took place in Germany is certainly unparalleled in Europe. This phenomenon is, however, less unique than it seems because, as we have said, during and after the war the duties of the regular police in other countries were increasingly reduced to maintaining law and order and hence the police were deliberately divorced from the administrative side of things. Since the disadvantages and limitations of this isolation are now fully recognised, it would be very relevant to reconstruct and analyse its history until the moment when it became very much accentuated: the extreme circumstances that prevailed during and after World War II. In any case this is another subject that will receive more attention in our own research than was originally planned.

The policing policy that the Allies pursued in West Germany after the war comprised much more than *Entpolizeilichung*, as is evident from Reinke's paper. It also included the decentralisation, de-Nazification and demilitarisation of the German police. Reinke argues that this policy, both in theory and in practice, was less clear-cut than that phrase might suggest and he also comes to the conclusion that most of what was achieved in this area was gradually reversed by the German authorities, for the simple reason that they wanted to get back to the police system that had been built up during the Weimar Republic. This development is a telling illustration of something that Blom mentions in his general paper, namely that after 1945 the desire to re-establish the pre-war situation was often stronger than the urge to modernise. That is why he also strongly emphasises that the continuity of developments must be considered despite everything that took place during World War II. In view of what happened on the police front in other countries besides Germany after the war, this emphasis on the continuity of police history is certainly not inappropriate. The history of the Belgian police before, during and after World War II is quite simply an obvious demonstration of Blom's argument. On the other hand, we have the evidence of the history of the French, the Dutch and also the British police, which demonstrates just as clearly that much of what was radically

reformed during the Occupation or during the war was subsequently preserved in the same or in modified form. This means that two aspects must be borne closely in mind when researching this phase of European police history: continuity and change. Moreover, we must not be blind to the huge differences that arose between countries. A comparison of Dutch and Belgian police history speaks volumes in this respect. In Dutch police history, change undoubtedly predominates, while in Belgian police history it is definitely continuity that prevails. This fundamental difference raises questions about why the history of these two countries diverges to such an extent, and also about the consequences of this difference for the recent history of both systems.

In conclusion, let us talk about the people who work in police systems rather than about the systems themselves. This automatically brings us to the purge of the police in continental Europe after the war. The German and French examples in particular, but also that of Belgium, show that proper analysis of such an event is a complex matter. Of course it is primarily a question of clearly identifying which authority organised this purge and how it was organised, on which grounds the various forms of purging were used, to what extent different police forces were purged, and within what period of time the purge was completed. We already know that finding an answer to these important questions, even in the Dutch context, is no sinecure. There are also other questions, however, that cannot really be passed over. One that immediately springs to mind is of course the question of how the police purge was judged by police organisations and police officers themselves, and by the authorities concerned, by the opinion-forming media and, in relation to this, by the general public. This raises another question that is at least important: the relationship between the police purge and the purge of other public services that rendered assistance to the German occupying forces to a greater or lesser extent, though not in the same way as the police, whether it be the judiciary or the national railways. Did the police purge go further than the purge of these institutions? If so, why? And if not, why not? And finally the question that Berlière expressed so clearly: how did the purge affect the way the police operated in the years that followed? Did it lead to an enormous crisis in the relationship of authority between the political masters and the police, as it did in France? Or just the opposite: did it encourage a docile relationship of authority between the two? Existing historical research on developments in the Netherlands does not offer any answer to these questions. Partly for this reason they will definitely be addressed in further research. The events that took place in Amsterdam in the 1960s give the impression, however, that the police purge in the Netherlands certainly did not undermine the political loyalty of the police. Quite the reverse, it seems. However, as already mentioned, further research on the effects of the purge should reveal which theory stands up to scrutiny better.