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LEARNING WITH HISTORY? HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION WORK WITH POLICE OFFICERS IN GERMANY

A functioning memorial site since 1999, Villa ten Hompel, the home of a former industrialist from the 1920s, can be found at the edge of Münster city centre in northwest Germany. In 1940 the National Socialist police, headed by the SS-chief Heinrich Himmler, bought the Villa ten Hompel to use as one of their control centres. Until 1944 it was the headquarters of the uniformed police in the military district VI. Up to 60 policemen (and a few policewomen) and civilian staff members co-ordinated the operation of uniformed police within a single geographical district known as a "Wehrkreis", which comprised of large parts of western and northern Germany, including the cities of Cologne, Düsseldorf, Essen, Dortmund and Münster. No fewer than 200,000 police officers and auxiliary police officers served in this Wehrkreis in the 1940s. The Villa ten Hompel turned into a location for desk-bound perpetrators. Their bureaucratic actions had consequences for the whole of Europe, in part with murderous results. In examining this site of commemoration, this article analyses how human rights education for German police officers has come to embrace the topic of police actions during the Nazi epoch.

Keywords: police history, Nazi perpetrators, human rights education, personal value orientation, learning at memorial sites

Introduction

"I thought it's "only" about police history, which I would have found boring. But it is also about me. I liked that!" This statement is from a policewoman who took part in the seminar "Police – History – Responsibility" in 2012 at the Villa ten

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Hompel, a memorial site to National Socialism in Münster, a university city with about 300,000 inhabitants in northwest Germany. This assessment shows that the seminar did not only convey knowledge about police history with a focus on National Socialism but it also provided the participants with thought-provoking impulses on how deal with their own personality and their roles as policemen and policewomen today. In these seminars, participants had the chance to assess their personal value orientation and adjust their "inner compass." This raises the question as to whether it is possible to include aspects of job-related self-assurance and orientation in basic and further education programs, thereby working on the history of the police and its most problematic era, the period of National Socialism. Can historical-political education on the topic of National Socialism, including job-related issues, have an influence on the ability of policemen and policewomen to become critical and self-critical citizens in uniform?

This paper will first provide a survey of the historical development of the Villa ten Hompel and present the main fields of research and work currently being conducted on it. The second part will consider the use of history by the German police force. It will analyse the developments in dealing with the past of the police, especially with the crimes of the National Socialist era, to reveal a basis on which current education programs for policemen and policewomen can be built. The example of historical-political education at the memorial site Villa ten Hompel will be used to discuss mediation strategies and the problems connected to it in practical seminar work. Finally I will discuss the experiences, limits and perspectives emerging from the implementation of this project at Villa ten Hompel for contemporary guiding strategies in developing a police culture that retains a commitment to civil rights, especially in unquestioned police job routines in face-to-face situations.

The Villa ten Hompel: from an industrialist's villa to a place of bureaucratic work in the 20th century

A functioning memorial site since 1999, Villa ten Hompel, the home of a former industrialist from the 1920s, can be found at the edge of Münster city centre in northwest Germany. It is operated by the municipality in close co-operation with universities as well as national and international institutions for commemoration, research and education, such as Yad Vashem in Israel and the concentration camp memorial site Majdanek in Poland. The Villa ten Hompel is a "think tank" for historical debates, innovative memory culture and human rights education. Visitors can explore a multimedia permanent exhibition, partly funded by the German Federal Government, and use a broadly based education program. About 25,000 people visit the Villa ten Hompel each year (Villa ten Hompel 2015).

The house was built in the mid-1920s by the industrialist Rudolf ten Hompel. He was the owner of the "Wiking" plant, the largest cement factory of the German Reich at that time. In the course of the global economic crisis in 1929 the company got into financial difficulties and ten Hompel was forced to declare

bankruptcy in the beginning of the 1930s. Finally the family had to move out of their villa in Münster. However, the ten Hompels were not left penniless by the insolvency. At their new place of residence in Munich, they moved into a stately home in a posh suburb. The Villa ten Hompel in Münster now had new owners, the Reich Treasury. Due to the size and value of the estate, including the vast garden, it was not easy to find a private buyer at the end of the 1930s. This explains why the building came to be used for government administration (Fritsch 2002). Münster is nicknamed the "desk of Westphalia": long before 1933 many important governmental institutions were based in Münster, such as the regional parliaments and the administrations of the Reich Treasury, the railway and the post office for this region. Furthermore, Münster was and is an important military location. The police force is part of this administrative location.

The German police force was one of the major pillars of National Socialist tyranny. Next to the SS, police troops were primarily responsible for implementing the criminal policies of the Third Reich. In 1936 Adolf Hitler appointed Heinrich Himmler head of the German police force. In his dual function as head of the SS and head of the police he created an enormous apparatus of power, which looked to achieve the racist aims of the SS. Their range of tasks mainly consisted of carrying out the control and prosecution of politically and ideologically defined enemies. The genocide of the Jews, for which the expression "Holocaust" has established itself, was an endeavour in which many different institutions were actively involved. The German police, however, played a key role in it as an executing body (Kaiser, Köhler 2012).

In 1940 the National Socialist police, headed by Heinrich Himmler, bought the Villa ten Hompel to use as one of its control centres. Until 1944 it was the headquarters of the Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*, i.e. uniformed police as opposed to the criminal investigation police and the Security Police *Gestapo*) in the military district VI. Up to 60 policemen (and a few policewomen) and civilian staff members co-ordinated the operation of the uniformed police in a geographical district, known as a "Wehrkreis", which comprised larger parts of western and northern Germany, including the cities of Cologne, Düsseldorf, Essen, Dortmund and Münster. Altogether around 200,000 policemen and auxiliary policemen served in this Wehrkreis in the 1940s. A total of 2 million men were subordinated to the National Socialist police. Thus every tenth uniformed policeman was commanded from Münster. The Villa ten Hompel became a location for desk-bound perpetrators. Their bureaucratic actions had consequences for the whole of Europe, in part with murderous results. The police organized and controlled the surveillance of forced and foreign labourers during World War II. In 1943 alone more than 750,000 forced labourers and prisoners of war had to work in industry, agriculture and cleaning up bomb damage in the district, which was organized by the police in the Villa ten Hompel. Many of them were murdered by SS and police troops, especially in the last year of the war (Rommé 2013).

Uniformed police played a major role in the deportation of the Jews, Sinti and Roma to ghettos such as Riga or Theresienstadt and to the large-scale National Socialist extermination camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka or Sobibor. At least two dozen police battalions (closed formations organized in a military way), which were controlled from the Villa ten Hompel, were assigned for "external action" during World War II. It was these policemen, named "ordinary men" by the US historian Christopher Browning (Browning 1992), actively and systematically took part in the final solution of the Jewish question, especially in Eastern and Central Europe. For example, more than 33,000 Jews were shot by SS and police troops in the canyon of Babi Yar near Kiev at the end of September 1941. In Lublin more than 42,000 Jews were killed during Operation Harvest in and around the concentration and extermination camp Majdanek at the beginning of November 1943 (Kaiser, Köhler 2012; Klemp 2011). More than 60 percent of all murdered Jewish men, women and children were either shot or directly deported to the extermination camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau or Treblinka, where they were gassed by the uniformed police (Curilla 2011).

After the end of the National Socialist regime in 1945 the Villa ten Hompel was used, amongst other things, to carry out functions related to denazification. Police officers who had not yet been politically cleared and were therefore not allowed to carry on their service within the police force could make an official appeal in the Villa ten Hompel. Many former National Socialist policemen managed to continue their careers in the Federal Republic of Germany in such a way. A relatively small number of police officers were sentenced to imprisonment for their involvement in mass murders. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the bureaucratic procedure of denazification ended in 1951 (Villa ten Hompel 2015).

From 1954 until 1968 the Villa ten Hompel housed a department, which investigated whether victims of National Socialist persecution were entitled to compensation. 12,000 people made such a request in the Villa ten Hompel. But only very closely defined groups of people had a right to compensation. First of all, the law only applied to German citizens. Therefore all requests made, for example, by forced labourers from Eastern Europe, were flatly rejected. The right to compensation was granted to German citizens who were persecuted in the Third Reich for political, racist or religious reasons, such as Jews, communists or members of the Christian resistance. One third of the 12,000 requests for compensation were rejected as unfounded. Amongst other groups, homosexuals or people who had undergone forced sterilization did not receive any compensation; today they are indisputably recognized as victims of the National Socialist regime (Volmer-Naumann 2012).

Villa ten Hompel was reconfigured and opened as a memorial site and historical place in 1999 on a proposal of the city council of Münster. This came in response to the initiatives of civil society groups, which had campaigned against the sale of the building and had instead demanded that a memorial site be installed at this historically significant place. This would allow the Villa ten Hompel to

serve as a site for research on the history of the house, holding exhibitions and an extensive education program. The Villa ten Hompel holds a unique position in Germany because the building was both a location of police crimes in the National Socialist regime and an administrative head office where the Federal Republic of Germany attempted to come to terms with the aftermath of National Socialism (Kenkmann 2003).

The new permanent exhibition entitled "History – Violence – Conscience", which opened in March 2015, depicts the unique history of the building in the 20th century (Villa ten Hompel 2015). Now, the basic issue is how to use history in order to find a position for both the present and the future. On the basis of historical learning, questions of human rights education are discussed. With this approach, the strengthening of the human autonomy, a guiding principle of the Villa ten Hompel, is attempted. The main target groups for the seminars and the education program are school classes and members of the police (Hefter 2009).

Lines of development in dealing with the history of the police

In the 20th century, the German police force used history, especially the history of the institution itself, as an internal and public means of self-stylization, legitimization and tradition-building. Police-historical initiatives started in the Weimar Republic, when the "Day of the Police" used to be an annual highlight (Dams 2007). The National Socialist regime used the "Day of the Police" to intensify Nazi propaganda. Police officers were not only exposed to the day-to-day propaganda of the National Socialists, they also received intensive ideological training. "Ideological education" was a central examination subject. The aim was the internalization of National Socialist ideology, which was supposed to become part of one's personality. Policemen turned into ideological warriors (Köhler 2001; Matthäus et al. 2003).

After the end of the National Socialist regime, one might have assumed that recourse to history and the images of history for legitimization and self-orientation of the new police force of the Federal Republic of Germany would have been problematic. However, there were four stages of handling and using the history of the police (Busch et al. 1988). Until the 1960s, spiritual and moral orientation was dominated by the so-called "Patriarchs". The term Patriarchs refers to those police officers who had already been in high positions during the National Socialist regime and, as such, had a crucial impact on the *Leitkultur* (official police culture). In National Socialism, the notion of the nation was determined by racial totalization; after the war this was followed by an exaggeration of the concept of the state, which was used as a cross-epochal reference point for the police (Weinhauer 2003). In this stage, the discussion of National Socialist crimes was passively avoided and replaced with the promotion of the legend of a "clean police" was actively initiated. Policemen who were leading officers during the National Socialist regime thus turned into builders of tradition for the police and for their own cause (Hölzl 2002). The involvement of the police in the Holocaust was negated; instead the uniformed

police were stylized as victims of the National Socialist dictatorship. Within the police force and also in large parts of the public this historical construct remained valid at least until the 1980s. A key aspect of the self-image of the police was their own perception of their role as an elitist organization with active influence on social, political and moral developments of the German society. Numerous protest movements from the end of the 1950s strongly rejected this self-conception, marking the transition to the second stage. Within the police force the necessity of adapting to changing social conditions was acknowledged. At the same time there was increasing social pressure to include civil rights more strongly in the culture of the police. With some delay the police finally followed the general atmosphere of changes in the civil society. The "scientification" of police education and training started with the establishment of universities of applied sciences for public administration and the creation of a police management academy, today's German Police University phase (Kleinknecht, Sturm 2004; Weinhauer 2003).

Furthermore, German police divisions were confronted with their National Socialist past through the first large-scale investigations into the trials of police perpetrators. The foundation of the Central Office of the State Department of Justice for the investigation of National Socialist crimes in Ludwigsburg and the task force trial (*Einsatzgruppenprozess*) in Ulm in the year 1958 are two representative examples. Police officers were arrested at their workplace. For younger policemen this came as a shock. The picture of a previously "clean" police tradition began to show cracks (Weinke 2008). The reforming zeal of the "post-Patriarch" generation would have stood a good chance of continuing this process right up to the foundation of a modern civil rights police. However, the government's (over)-reaction to the incipient terrorist movement of the 1970s and 1980s led to a standstill in the pace of reform. This stagnation characterizes the third phase until the end of the 1980s. As was the case 20 years before, there was again a strong call for an upgraded police that could function as a civil war army (Kleinknecht, Sturm 2004; Weinhauer 2006).

Meanwhile educational aspects and engagement with National Socialist crimes in the basic and further education of the police were not carried any further, not least because the younger generation, who had more willingness for reform and modernization, was biased against their tutors. In order not to be considered "traitors" and not to question "comradeship" within the police, this topic was excluded; no incriminating facts about "old comrades" was to become official (Noethen 2003).

The fourth phase, a paradigm shift in dealing with the institutional past in National Socialism, started in the mid-1980s. The official concept of the police and its operational strategies were modernized and became a central subject in police education. Continuing up to this day, such efforts seek sustainable reform of the police into a critical civilian police (Schulte 2003).

However, with regard to the investigation of the institutional history of the police during National Socialism, such efforts were mainly the initiative of a few

individual police officers that initiated moves towards a critical reassessment of police history. It took about 15 years before these "history cops" were no longer perceived critically within the police and their official projects for the investigation of the National Socialist past of the police were given the green light and the results of such investigations published within the police institution. However, it should be noted that one substantial impetus for the acknowledgement and assumption of police responsibility for the National Socialist crimes came from US researchers Christopher Browning (Browning 1992) and Daniel Goldhagen (Goldhagen 1996) with their studies on the police battalion 101.

From around the turn of the millennium historical research of the police has experienced a real boom, supported by broad public debate on Browning and Goldhagen. In many cities and regions successful research and exhibition projects on the more recent local and regional police history were conducted, like in Cologne, Münster, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Bremen and Munich. In 2011 the supra-regional exhibition "Order and annihilation" was finally presented in the German Historical Museum in Berlin. The project was funded by the Conference of the Ministers of the Interior and carried out by the German Police University. With more than 50,000 visitors it not only fulfilled its aim to attract a large audience but also had a sustainable impact on the state police forces (Dierl et al. 2011). In co-operation with the Federal Central Office for Political Education, a didactic work- and textbook was published, developed by staff of the House of the Wannsee Conference Berlin and the historical site, Villa ten Hompel Münster (Kaiser, Köhler 2012).

Education work with police groups at historical learning places by the example of the Villa ten Hompel

Over the last decade there has been an increasing willingness by the police not only to carry out research and exhibition projects with external partners but also to participate in independent education programs. Police institutions now carry out visits to locations with a historical connection to the National Socialist past, such as concentration camp memorial sites and other historical learning locations. At several of these locations seminars are being offered with an explicit historical reference to the role of the police, such as at the House of the Wannsee Conference Berlin, at the Concentration Camp Memorial Neuengamme in Hamburg and at the historical site, Villa ten Hompel (Lange 2013).

This is an attempt to start a dialogue about history with policemen and policewomen and with representatives of other professions. The development of the historical-political education work with members of the police in the course of about a century will be presented in the following narration.

Each year around 50 seminars for police groups are held, with more than 1,000 members of the police visiting the Villa ten Hompel every year. In addition to police groups, the Villa ten Hompel also trains soldiers of the German army and prison employees. The composition of the police groups is heterogeneous,

which has an effect on the course of the seminars and for the evaluation results (openness, impact, content). The most frequent participants are young police-women and policemen going through their studies or training, police officers from individual headquarters, leading officials from the ministries as well as members of the police union. In recent times, transnational seminars in "summer schools" have been carried out with police officers from Great Britain, the Netherlands and Germany.

Today, "classical" tours and lectures are offered only occasionally and have been replaced by so-called "theme days". Most groups book the theme days "Police history and contemporary manifestations of right-wing extremism" and "Police, history, responsibility". At the heart of all the seminars stands the permanent exhibition, which has a very object-related and associative orientation. After an opening sequence, in which different sources are classified according to situation and group, the policewomen and policemen go through the exhibition by themselves on a historical trace search. Topics include police role models in the 20th century, the relationship between police and the National Socialist state, the crimes of the police during the National Socialist regime, the legal and social ways of dealing with the National Socialist crimes (of the police) and continuities and reforms of the police after 1945.

The police officers can leave their personal traces in the exhibition temporarily, by sticking coloured points on installations, objects, pictures, facsimile or quotations. In the future, such participatory elements will also be available electronically. Feedback and votes can be given via an app. The points or electronically submitted statements can have different aims, such as: I would like to get more information on this; I have an association to this which I would like to discuss with the group; I have a personal problem with this part or statement in the exhibition. In a second phase of the seminar, the traces of the participants are taken up as impulses for further discussion and reflection. It is always discussed why a participant has left a trace.

This way, the relevant topics of the seminar are not set up by the Villa ten Hompel; instead the policewomen and policemen themselves initiate the dialogues and discussions. The exhibition refrains from any updates and references to current issues. In spite of this or perhaps because of this, one of the important functions of the police history exhibition for the seminars is to serve as an opener for discussions on current questions and problems. Especially "popular" are the biographical and regional references of the exhibition because they create the feeling of being comprehensible most strongly, particularly when depicting everyday situations. On the other hand, the small number of installations focusing on topics of structural history such as the development of police authority in Germany or processes of bureaucratic government are only very rarely selected.

So what kind of questions and discussions do police officers initiate in the exhibition? Personal motives dominate: What would I have done? Would I have refused to carry out criminal orders? Can something like this happen again in

the police? More concrete problems relating to their own professional routine are discussed less often and more carefully: Is police surveillance subject to stigmatization in the sense of racial profiling, meaning the consciously or unconsciously discriminating surveillance of people with different skin colour? What will I do in a critical situation as a member of the police? Up to which point do instructions and orders have to be followed and carried out? Will I become an outsider if I ask critical and "uncomfortable" questions and act accordingly?

The intensity of the discussions varies according to the group composition (Pastoor, Wrochem 2013). In general the following observation can be made: the more homogenous a group is, the more cumbersome the seminar is and the more silent the police officers are, especially in sensitive discussions. If the group has come voluntarily to the Villa ten Hompel to take part in a theme day, they will show a more active participation. But if the seminar is part of obligatory training, it can often be observed that individual participants are not only deliberately passive but also actively provoke counterpoints; Is the seminar leader really qualified? Is he or she able to place him- or herself in police thought and action patterns? The presence or absence of superiors plays a role, too. On the one hand, they can be intimidating: Can I talk openly in front of my boss or might I say something "wrong"? On the other hand, superiors might open the door for unusually open discussions. If they tell their employees about their own problems, for example in dealing with violence, stress or personal errors of judgement, this can be a liberating experience and open up a relaxed communication.

In the evaluations of the seminar program at the Villa ten Hompel most of the feedback is positive. Most frequently, increased knowledge about National Socialism and the participation of the police in the crimes committed at that time as well as current manifestations of right-wing extremism are emphasized. More ambivalent is the assessment of the police officers as to whether the theme days with a police historical focus are relevant to their current professional ethos and resulting actions. With regard to this, the impact of "cop culture", as analysed by Rafael Behr, can be observed (Behr 2008). The assessments are shaped by standards which in turn have an impact on habitus and action strategies. Such internal role models cannot or can only very arduously be broken down through police training or prescribed paradigm shifts in police culture. There is a sense of resistance, one of the maxims states that "my world view, based on extensive experience, cannot be changed by those "up there" in the interior ministries or the police universities of applied sciences." (Behr et al. 2013). External learning places can open up the opportunity for an unbiased communication which can have consequences on one's own "internal compass".

Perspectives and requirements of future historical-political education in the police

Currently it is still largely open if education programs at external learning places, like the Villa ten Hompel, are sustainable. The aftereffects of a seminar can-

not be measured here. Feedback from the police is infrequent and depends heavily on each concrete situation. Personal feedback is only given occasionally and with a certain time lag. This can come from the participants of the seminars themselves or from training or department managers. The feedback is almost exclusively very positive, but this should not be considered as representative. The enquiry of expectations at the beginning of a theme day gives a selective indication in how far the experiences of a seminar have an influence on the professional routine of police officers and therefore also on the "cop culture". If, for example, groups from the same police headquarters visit the Villa ten Hompel on a frequent basis, there has been a prior exchange with colleagues who have been to the Villa before and have recommended the visit as worthwhile, especially emphasizing the open atmosphere for dialogue. All in all, there is lack of co-operation on an equal basis between police authorities and external scientific institutions with regards to educational programs at external learning places. Police authorities still have problems in accepting the independent status of external scientific learning places, especially when evaluations within the police trainings reveal that educational techniques at external learning places are more sceptical and self-critical. To achieve such cooperation, there would need to be further changes in general conditions and the police would have to open itself up more systematically to the outside world.

The examination of the institutional past and the current problems should be part of the curriculum at the police universities and colleges and a permanent feature of further education programs not only in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia. There should furthermore be a sustainable exchange on these questions at external learning places. Elements of historical learning should be taken into account not only in subjects like political science or sociology but also in ethics courses, criminology, law and operational tactics. This would open the opportunity to show that many tasks in the professional life of police officers have historical roots and are partly linked to decades of historical tradition. The bridge between past and present as well as the relevance of a critical investigation of historical complexes could become even more transparent this way.

Learning at historical places could set even stronger impulses in this direction because it offers broader possibilities in the sense of a didactic experimental field. To use this freedom in a multi-perspective, discursive and controversial way would imply doing research together with the policewomen and policemen on the "Why" of their professional routines. Such an approach, which would then have to be continued and intensified in courses of studies and further education of the police and could support new thought and action patterns which do not follow an hierarchical order but are developed by the police officers, as part of a new organizational culture. Historical learning using the example of the police history in National Socialism could then indeed strengthen "human autonomy", which can be understood as competence in aligning one's own actions on human rights, looking critically at one's professional routine to make it transparent and comprehensible for others, especially colleagues and citizens. Understood in these terms, the self-image of the

police can also be more open towards a constructive culture of error and criticism that could strengthen the police both internally and externally. Self-critical assessments and an unprejudiced engagement with any criticism of the police from politicians and especially from society would only strengthen the individual police officers, their principles and personal options for action towards the currently dominating unquestioned group-oriented maxims for action in the police.

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