

## Policing Uganda, Policing the World

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**SARAH BIECKER AND KLAUS SCHLICHTE**

**POLICING UGANDA, POLICING THE WORLD**

**InIIS-Arbeitspapier Nr. 40  
2014**

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**POLICING UGANDA, POLICING THE WORLD**

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**Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

This essay examines the Ugandan police by combining approaches from political science, sociology and anthropology. Based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Uganda the essay draws a detailed picture from inside the police force and examines the everyday practices of the police, their bureaucratic dimensions and their relations with the Ugandan public.

Following John Dewey's understanding of adaptation, the essay argues that the Ugandan police cannot be seen as a product to external standards. The main thesis here is that the police in Uganda are a highly self-referential institution, embedded in a local context and a global policing code of self-representation.

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Laura Koch and Densua Mumford who contributed a lot to the research for this paper when they acted as student assistants in this project. Comments of colleagues from other projects of the Priority Program SPP1448 ([www.spp1448.de](http://www.spp1448.de)), especially Thomas Bierschenk, were also very helpful in hinting us to relevant aspects.

## 1. Ugandan Police – Adaptation to Global Norms or Idiosyncrasy?

African states have been for a long time subject of generalizations. While some authors have labelled them as “neo-patrimonial” (Médard 1982, 1991; Bratton/van de Walle 1994), others have strongly contradicted this view (Therkildsen 2010) or at least doubted whether this concept sheds much light on structures of authority (Erdmann/Engel 2007). Other authors estimate the institutional weight of African states extremely low and almost close to nothing (Bates 2008), thus forming hotbeds of international terrorism and global crime networks (Krasner 2003). Again other authors plea for studying African states in their historicity and stress at the same time the encroachment of African societies by their states in the form of rhizomes and more open institutionalization (Bayart 1989; Bierschenk 2010).

While African states have thus attracted new attention in the discipline of International Relations, they are far from being thoroughly studied. Sweeping judgement if not outright stereotypes prevail. In comparison to earlier periods, core parts of African states, like their armies, do not attract any scholarly attention any more. Worse still is the situation when it comes to African police forces. Apart from a few general overviews (Alemika 1993, 2009; Hills 2000; Baker 2004, 2006, 2007b, 2009, 2011) and a first row of more recent case studies<sup>2</sup> there is no academic knowledge on police forces in African states.

On such weak grounds, we argue, nothing serious can be said about the reality of African states. We do not know whether they just adapt to external conditionalities, whether they are really subordinated to the arbitrariness of “autocrats” or decaying institutions. For a true picture of the structure and “strength” of African states, we need to look much closer, and this means getting closer to what African states do. By combining questions of International Relations<sup>3</sup> with methods from political anthropology, this paper makes an attempt to answer the question. It looks at whether we can interpret the contemporary Ugandan police force as an instance of institutional adaptation to global standards of policing or as an idiosyncratic phenomenon. In answering this question, we address on the one hand overarching questions of the Priority Programme SPP1448 of which our research is a part, and, on the other hand, we attempt to link our case study to on-going debates on statehood in Africa and elsewhere.

*The main thesis we argue for in this text is that the Ugandan police is an astonishingly self-referential institution, embedded simultaneously in a local context and part of a global code of self-representation of policing. While clearly of colonial origin, it was appropriated by Ugandan social realities, and it underwent a long crisis that affected the entire Ugandan state and society in the 1970s and 1980s, but it re-emerged as a highly self-referring institution that is part of a global culture of policing.*

<sup>2</sup> On Niger see Göpfert (2009), on Ghana the work of Beek (2008, 2011, 2012). Baker has studied police forces in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Rwanda (2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). On the case of Uganda see Schlichte (2005a) and Baker (2004, 2006, 2007a). An exception from the rule is the extensive literature on policing in South Africa (cf. e.g. Brogden/Shearing 1993; Brewer 1994; Shaw 2002; Hornberger 2004, 2007; Altbeker 2005; Marks 2005).

<sup>3</sup> We follow here an approach that falls into “International Political Sociology” (cf. the respective journal published by the International Studies Association) but with a stronger historical orientation, cf. e.g. Schlichte 2005b; Migdal/Schlichte 2005 and Jung 2001.

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Referring to the framework and the keywords of the larger research context out of which this text resulted, a few words on our understanding and findings seem to be necessary. By arguing that the history and the contemporary reality of Uganda's police cannot be seen as an adaptation to external standards, we refer to a differentiated understanding of that term as John Dewey (1986), the American pragmatist suggested it. He divided the summarizing German term "Anpassung" into three understandings:

The first one, *accommodation*, means to adapt to unchangeable circumstances. It is a very passive form that may result in resignation and submission to what is perceived as an external force but insurmountably strong. Here, we have the strongest power asymmetry.

*Adaptation*, the second form, is a more active form. Here the subject is adapted to the environment, in an active way, however, without affecting internal structures of the acting person or institution. One could think of mere "tactical behavior", much along the distinction between strategy and tactics as in Clausewitz (1832/1991: 148) or de Certeau (1984): those who adapt are not able to change the situation, but they might benefit from the situation if they behave in a smart manner.

*Adjustment*, finally, is the most demanding form of "Anpassung". It is not just about behavior. It is a change in the internal structure of the thing in question itself. So an institution might change its rules, a person might change her attitude or her preferences. There is still a power asymmetry in the relation, but at least the adjusting party has the resources and the time to restructure itself.

Reading both international governmental literature and its critics, one gets the impression that such processes are assumed to happen in Africa all over: Africa is a social space that is, due to global power structures, forced to adapt itself. People and institutions in Africa might have the leverage not only to accommodate but to adapt and to adjust, but they are in any case not in the position to define the situation. This, according to that imagination, is what strong states like the USA, Germany or Great Britain and powerful international organizations like the World Bank or the IMF might demand from African states. They seem to define what the situation is. African states and people in Africa can at best "bend" policies (Clapham 1996: 174), but basically, they need to adapt to requests and imaginations and structures that are defined and designed by other, more powerful actors. But is this really true? Is it that we see that African institutions adapt to standards set elsewhere?

Our main thesis, deduced from preliminary research findings, hints at a different direction. While the Ugandan police are of a clear international origin, they are now much more self-referential and, if at all, externally shaped only by the interaction with the local social space in which they operate.

In order to elucidate this counter-intuitive assertion, we will proceed as follows: we will first explain the key terms self-referentiality and global police culture (section 2). The question of whether we see here a process of adaptation will then be answered by a brief sketch of the genealogy of the Ugandan police (section 3) and by presenting a few findings of its everyday practices (section 4). In the final section we will put our findings in a broader comparative perspective. By contextualizing the Ugandan police we will relate what we discover here to

questions about the dynamics of statehood in Africa and elsewhere (section 5).

The research presented in this paper is based on the currently evolving field of “political ethnography”, which crosses the boundaries between political science, micro sociology and anthropology (Burns 1961; Nullmeier et al. 2003; Schatzberg 2008; Schatz 2009; Bierschenk *forthcoming*). Immersion and meticulous analysis of state agencies’ procedures, or simply looking at the “banalities of daily life” (Schatzberg 2008: 5) are at the core of political ethnography. The practices and discourses that constitute the everyday life of state agencies are in political science often glossed over by macro-analyses. Political ethnography in contrast contributes to a more detailed, concrete analysis that combines the perspective of “politics from below” (Bayart et al. 2007) with phenomenological methods used in the micro-sociology of power (c.f. Goody 1990; Herzfeld 1993; Sofsky/Paris 1994; Paris 2001, 2005) and in the ethnography of legal sectors (c.f. Galanter 1997; Vismann 2000; Eckert 2005; Bierschenk 2008; Jauregui 2010; de Lauri 2010). Political ethnography is particularly apt to shed light on subjects that are not or only marginally documented. It is based explicitly on a combination of research methods that are mainly borrowed from social anthropology such as field research, participant observation, focus groups, narrative interviews, archival work, and discursive formations (Schatz 2009: 3). A strong emphasis is put on participant observation (Schatz 2009: 3). According to Edward Schatz, the contributions of political ethnography are the following: first, it produces evidence that can flesh out or question generalizations produced or meanings assigned by other research traditions; secondly, it leads to “theoretical vibrancy” and explodes how we understand the boundaries of the “political”; and thirdly, it promises epistemological innovation (Schatz 2009: 10-11). Ethnographic approaches make

“visible the invisible, convert silence to sound, and ... begin the arduous process of thinking the unthinkable that may provide us with some keys to uncovering the politically subjacent and often hidden domains of politics that all societies possess” (Schatzberg 2008: 24).

In short, we can understand (political) ethnography as “sensitivity” (Schatz 2009: 6). This openness renders political ethnography the right approach for the study of the police in Uganda and elsewhere. The method of participant observation, for example, provides insights into an institution that is normally not accessible to outsiders and about which therefore little is known. Even complainants or suspects who are in close contact with police only see one specific side of them. Participant observation in contrast makes practices visible, both on the side of the police and the side of citizens. Ethnographic approaches allow building on what “people bring up” (Schatz 2009: 12). How police officers speak about their work is one side of policing, their attitude against suspects and complainants, informal behavior, the way officers document their work, or the daily routine at the station, is another side. The latter happens mostly at the ‘backstage’, but is nevertheless important reality of policing. These realities also encompass the role of civilian actors since policing never occurs in a vacuum, but always in interactions. How people behave towards police officers is highly ambivalent and depends not only on the criminal case, but also their social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1982), their previous experiences with police, their educational background and even their age and gender. The only way for a researcher to gather this complexity is to ‘be there’, too.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Although participant observation is of great value, it is nevertheless difficult in sensitive areas such as the police. These difficulties range from research permissions, the police’s willingness to share



Field research has been carried out by one of the authors in 1998, 1999 and 2004, and by the other in 2011, 2012 and 2013.<sup>5</sup> Our field research in Uganda in 2011, 2012 and 2013 benefited from an unrestricted support by the Ugandan police headquarters. We had access to several facilities and the chance of participant observation during everyday practices of the force. It was mainly conducted at one police station in an average district of Kampala City.<sup>6</sup> However, to avoid one-sided interpretations, a two-weeks field research was undertaken in a police station and a regional police headquarter in Western Uganda. To learn about the daily police practices we conducted participant observations during day and night shifts with different units of the stations, e.g. records office, criminal investigation, traffic and mobile force, not only in the station, but also on field operations. Field research further included the analysis of files and related forms of police's documentation and inscription, and finally narrative and semi-structured interviews with police personnel of different ranks at police stations and the police headquarters in Kampala, at a regional police headquarter in Western Uganda, and at police trainings schools. Further narrative and semi-structured interviews were conducted with suspects under arrest, their relatives, as well as lawyers, human rights activists, and journalists. In addition to that, a representative sample of two daily Ugandan newspapers, *Daily Monitor* and *New Vision*, has been used to create another pool of sources.<sup>7</sup> And, as it is an old practice of anthropology, other kinds of possible observations have become part of the process and been noted in field diaries to which this article will refer occasionally.

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information with an outsider to the presence of a researcher in daily police work (cf. e.g. Beek/Göpfert 2011, 2012; Lynn/Lea 2012 explicitly on police and Schatz 2009 explicitly on political ethnography).

<sup>5</sup> The field research in 1998, 1999 and 2004 was carried out by Klaus Schlichte and was part of a project on state dynamics funded by "Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft" (DFG) at the University of Hamburg. The field research in 2011, 2012 and 2013 was carried out by Sarah Biecker and was part of the project "Policing Africa", based at the Institute for Intercultural and International Studies of the University of Bremen. This project is part of the Priority Program "Adaptation and Creativity in Africa. Technologies and Significations in the Production of Order and Disorder" (SPP1448), funded by the DFG.

<sup>6</sup> Due to the topic's sensitiveness, all places and persons are withheld.

<sup>7</sup> Here, we read all articles in which the police appeared in titles of the months of February and September from both newspapers between 2007 and 2011. This led to a sample of more than 500 articles. The analysis of newspapers in 1998, 1999 and 2004 was unsystematic.

## 2. Ugandan Police – Self-Referentiality and Global Culture

Niklas Luhmann, the founder of a German variety of the theory of social systems wrote extensively on self-referentiality, probably because of his biographical experiences. Before he became a theorist, he was for a long time a chief administrator in Germany's public administration. The science of administration, the working of a bureaucracy, of organizations generally, became his obsession because he was so fascinated by the strange things that take place within such highly differentiated organizations.

Self-referentiality means that the internal communication of a system revolves around values set by that system and in a code developed in that system (Luhmann 1993). It is in a way, the exact opposite of adaptation. Instead of listening to others and reflecting upon possible reactions, self-referential systems do not care. They just carry on, ignoring the environment, not listening, and not reflecting upon what is going on outside the system.

Our thesis now is that the Ugandan police have an international origin, and they are still embedded in a global self-representation of policing, but, in fact, they are self-referential. The Ugandan police are a system in a pretty hard shell. Communication within that shell is much more important than communication across the organization's boundary.

Global police culture is less easy to explain. Instead of referring to established theories, we will make use of empirical material to illustrate what we mean:

### *German Police*



1



2



3



4



5



6



New York Police



8

⇐7



9





10



11

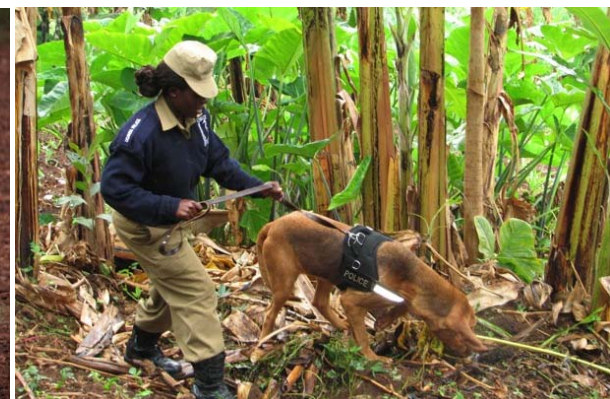


12

*Ugandan Police*



13



15





14



16



17



18



19



20



Ab. 21



22



23

Police forces in Uganda and in Bavaria seem to be very much alike: they search with dogs, they take care of statesmen, they take care of children, and they even protect lakes and rivers.

How can we interpret these pictures? They are of course no proof that police forces around the globe are all the same. They only show that police forces at least in three countries like to present themselves in a similar manner. They are part of a global police culture, a globally generalized imagination of what police and policing wants to be. And in their respective public relations departments, people apparently believe in the same ideas of what might be attractive to show the general public or how to express best what the police think of themselves.

One can understand the global police culture as a repertoire of such police imaginations, of police symbols and police practices. And this police culture shows a high degree of continuity across otherwise decoupled contexts, since there is no direct relation between Ugandan and Bavarian police forces or between the two and those of New York City. One could hint to other things than just websites. Uniforms, ideas about the profession, institutional structures differ of course, but they share a number of essential elements. The Ugandan police are quite clearly part of that culture of self-representation.

It is tempting to see a contradiction to our argument above: is this not adaptation what we see here? The fact that police forces in New York, Bavaria and Uganda show the same

features in their outward oriented self-representation, one might argue, is a proof of a power difference and a process of adaptation. Don't we see here that Western models formed the Ugandan police?

We would reply to that: this is hard to tell. The three institutions, while showing similar pictures, are hardly a representative sample. Furthermore, the pictures as such and what we know do not really tell us who is influencing whom. One could as well argue that not only Uganda's police, but Germany's or New York's are influenced by this global police image – and in fact, historically, they are. When we study the history of the police, of the institution, as we know it now – for many things have been called police in history – we find that the original model was the police of London (Emsley 1991; Berlière 2011). Being the fastest growing city of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, London had a problem of curbing crime and it developed a model of policing that other big cities simply imported. Paris wanted to have it, Berlin wanted to have it and so did New York. Policing was observed, copied, adopted and adapted like other institutions of urban 19th century European culture, like gas lanterns, trams or concert halls.

So while we know that it is not easy to determine who adapted to whom or what, we want to dwell on this historical perspective a bit more. This paper will borrow the Nietzschean and Foucauldian ideas of genealogy, seeing what forces at what moment shaped the object under scrutiny. This will allow us to better trace the genealogy of the Ugandan police.

### **3. Genealogy and Features of the Ugandan Police**

The police in Uganda clearly have a colonial origin. Forms of social control were of course also existent in pre-colonial times. Whereas the king of Buganda had his own (secret) police force (Rusch 1975: 253; Ugandan Police Force a.n.d.: 2), policing was generally based on customary rules and obligations. Kings, chiefs, and elders policed villages and communities (Uganda Police Force a.n.d.: 2), and they overlapped with the police for a long period.

In 1899, the Uganda police force was formed as a paramilitary force under the name "Uganda Armed Constabulary". The first Inspector General of the Police, W.F.S. Edwards, was appointed in 1906, in connection with the establishment of a civilian police service with about 970 men (Raleigh et al. 1998: 55; Uganda Police Force a.n.d.: 6, 28). Policing as an institution in the colonial society was thus modeled along military lines, and cases of greater unrest, as occurred in 1945 and 1949 (cf. Thompson 1992), were indeed dealt with by military means. Nonetheless, the colonial state did attempt at a very early stage to transfer the moral code of the metropolitan coercive apparatus to Uganda.

Interestingly, this first police force was already of an internationalized origin. These origins demonstrate the multiple entanglements and trajectories in local and global histories of colonial empires. Of course, its main design, its institutional core was modeled after a British blueprint. But British officers working in it often had already made career steps elsewhere. Christopher Harwich, a high-ranking police officer to whom we owe one of the few longer accounts of policing during colonial times, had worked in Palestine before (Harwich 1961).



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Many others served in Jamaica, the Bermudas, the Gambia, Mauritius, Nigeria, Kenya or Zanzibar (Uganda Police Force a n. d.: 86-88).

The international character, however, goes further: the Penal Code that was the main legal basis for police work in colonial Uganda, was British in origin, but the version that was implemented in Uganda was a new, revised version, in which the colonial state had already taken into account its experiences in India (Wallis 1920: 244-245). This codification can in fact be interpreted as an innovation of British law theory by the colonial encounter (Skuy 1998).<sup>8</sup> So here again, we see multiple adaptations, and it is not so clear who adapted what to whom. In fact, our research on the contemporary Ugandan police suggests that the police as an institution is molded not only by political design that reflects earlier experiences, but is also the result of interactions and global communication (cf. section 4).

In the regulations for the police force in Uganda of the 1920s, for example, sufficient reasons for arrest were disturbances of the public order, sodomy, drunkenness and loitering (Handley 1924: 6). Formally at least, the Ugandan police had a resemblance to the Metropolitan Police of London, with white Europeans as officer corps and a racial rank order that continued to exist until the mid-1960s. The first Ugandan Inspector General of Police was appointed in 1964.

The universal image of a modern state police force survived decolonization. Uganda's first constitution of 1962 stated that the general duties of the police were "the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations; and as a military force to discharge military duties" (quoted after Munanura 2007: 72).

In the 1960s some police officers continued to be trained in the UK, Australia, Israel and the United States (Uganda Police Force a n.d.: 12). In 1962, when Uganda gained independence, the Ugandan police were, at least according to a DFID report, efficient, adequately equipped, had strong leadership and were well-trained (Raleigh et al. 1998: 55; Uganda Police Force a n.d.: 13). The standard of their houses and premises was good, wages were sufficient, and to be a police officer was regarded as a prestigious position within the community (Raleigh et al. 1998: 55; Uganda Police Force a n.d.: 13). Records of the Ugandan police raise doubts, however, whether this was not an idealization of the colonial past. In the early 1960s, when the police had enrolled about 5,000 men, discipline was seemingly already a problem. In 1960, 2,548 disciplinary measures were taken, and 98 policemen had to quit service (Uganda Police 1961: 4).

Like any other state agency, the Ugandan police was soon drawn into the maelstrom of Ugandan politics. Between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s, during the Amin and Obote years, the police degenerated into a lawless institution with illiterate recruits from the north and the east of the country, often including soldiers both in police barracks and stations (Munanura 2007: 72). Higher ranking officers changed often and irregularly, according to the vicissitudes of Ugandan politics in that period. In those years of political decay and rising violence levels, inertia and corruption became the rule rather than the exception among

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<sup>8</sup> Policing in Uganda is still based on the Penal Code Act 1950. It is available on the website of the Ugandan police: <http://upf.go.ug/>.

Uganda's police. The police station in Wandegeya, an average district of Kampala, registered in 1984 exactly 592 complaints, of which more than a half concerned theft. During that year, police officers from that station undertook 113 arrests, and in 90 cases suspects were brought to court. But in the end, only 20 sentences were passed (Mugisha 1986: 70). National statistics for the same period show similar ratios: more than 13.000 complaints of theft led to 3.800 sentences, and only in 110 out of 3.000 registered cases of murder could a sentence be reached (Mugisha 1986: 69).

In more recent years the discrepancy between rates of reported cases and rates of prosecution remain remarkable. In 2003 for example, the police in Kampala counted 19.996 reported cases, while only 6.720 of them were prosecuted (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2004: 145). In other regions of Uganda we find similar situations, as table 1 demonstrates.

| District               | Cases reported | Cases prosecuted |
|------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>Central Region</i>  |                |                  |
| Kampala                | 19.996         | 6.720            |
| Luwero                 | 1.331          | 69               |
| Masaka                 | 2.539          | 1.356            |
| Wakiso                 | 2.504          | 1.208            |
| <i>Eastern Region</i>  |                |                  |
| Jinja                  | 5.626          | 1.402            |
| Mbale                  | 2.170          | 919              |
| Soroti                 | 1.983          | 591              |
| Tororo                 | 1.252          | 592              |
| <i>Northern Region</i> |                |                  |
| Arua                   | 1.543          | 972              |
| Gulu                   | 1.314          | 1.109            |
| Kitgum                 | 1.371          | 463              |
| Lira                   | 2.013          | 1.229            |
| <i>Western Region</i>  |                |                  |
| Hoima                  | 1.695          | 529              |
| Kabale                 | 2.945          | 557              |
| Kabarole               | 1.920          | 529              |
| Mbarara                | 3.479          | 1.248            |

Table 1: Cases reported and prosecuted in selected districts for the year 2003 (data is based on Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2004: 145-146).

The national figures of the year 2003 are the following: altogether 97.103 cases were reported and 43.202 cases were prosecuted (Uganda National Bureau of Statistics 2004: 146).<sup>9</sup> The majority of the cases that were reported to the Ugandan police in 2003 included

<sup>9</sup> A national breakdown for reported crimes in 2003 positions the central region as having the highest rate of reported crime (altogether 218.450 cases), followed by the Western region (23.681), the East (22.210) and lastly the North (12.771) (counting based on data of Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2003: 145-146). However, this data is only about reported crime. Reasons for different rates of

cases of theft, altogether 17.308, and common assaults, altogether 13.885 cases (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2004: 147). Countrywide only 8.130 cases of theft were prosecuted and only 3.969 cases of common assaults (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2004: 147).

Four years later, in 2007, the number of cases that were reported to the police increased noticeably countrywide: 236.124 cases were brought to the police (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2009: 157). Again, the offenses primarily included thefts of cash and common assaults (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2009: 157-158). Since only 46.422 cases were prosecuted, the ratio between report and prosecution remains relatively low (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2009: 158). Table 2 gives an overview of annual reported and prosecuted cases.

| Year | Cases reported | Cases prosecuted |
|------|----------------|------------------|
| 2003 | 97.103         | 43.202           |
| 2007 | 236.124        | 46.422           |
| 2008 | 119.072        | 46.943           |
| 2009 | 103.592        | 37.783           |
| 2010 | 99.676         | 29.282           |
| 2011 | 99.321         | 43.813           |

*Table 2: Cases reported and prosecuted countrywide for selected years (data is based on National Bureau of Statistics 2004: 146; 2008: 158; 2009: 157-158; 2012: 150).<sup>10</sup>*

We can interpret these figures in very different ways. Again, we do not have conclusive explanations, but rather some hypotheses and interpretations based on our fieldwork. First of all, the increased number of reports does not necessarily mean an increased level of criminality. Rather, the figures could show, surprisingly or not, that more Ugandans report cases to the police. One explanation could be that the people's trust in the police increased within the last ten years or so. Even if the police continue to possess a negative image among many Ugandans, and they are in particular blamed for being the most corrupt institution in the country, *Transparency International* ranked the police 2012 first again, and newspapers regularly bring headlines like "brutal police should be held personally liable" (*The Observer*, 23.06.2013) or "police rape, rob suspects in night operations, activists say"

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crime reports vary. On the one hand, the people's willingness to report cases to the police might be higher in central Uganda, maybe even their trust in the police. On the other hand, it might be also possible that the low rate of reported cases in the North is based e.g. on a lower people's accessibility to the police, lack of police stations or police posts, better functionality of alternative dispute solutions, or simply a higher mistrust in the police. As a comparative glance at the situation in Germany shows, Uganda is not an exception. Heinz (2010: 9) shows that in Germany in 2008 only 40 persons were actually sentenced, out of more than 6.000 cases known to the police .

<sup>10</sup> These figures are not so easy to interpret as they assume. We cannot automatically suggest that the relative low rates of prosecution mean that cases are not investigated, followed up or brought to court. We have to consider that many cases, in particular the majority of cases of assault, become civilian cases after reporting to the police since both parties normally prefer to avoid involvements of the court and instead solve the case based on private agreements. After their agreements, the complainants usually withdraw the case. Negotiations between two parties do not necessarily occur with involvement of the police, the local councils, the courts or any other institution. Interview with police officers, 12th November 2012, Kampala; 20th November 2012, Kampala.

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(*Daily Monitor*, 07.04.2013), the police however are no longer dreaded as they were in Amin's and Obote's eras, where people associated the police with special branches that spread terror among the population.

Today, police stations are no longer avoided in any case, but people go there. As we will show in detail below, people enter police stations with different expectations. While some clients just need a proof of loss, especially in the cases of theft and loss of IDs and bank cards to get replacement from the respective institution, others report the loss or theft of a mobile phone or SIM card in order to get the phone and card blocked by the company for which they also need a police document. Against this background we can, secondly, explain the increased figures of reports simply as a consequence of modern times. Mobile phones and bankcards belong to the everyday life of Ugandan citizens and so their theft fills police stations' diaries today. Citizens most likely do not expect the police to recover their items, but will report the crime to the police for bureaucratic reasons or simply to feel better.

However, and here we assume a third explanation that is linked to the first one, others go to police stations really in the hope of being helped. In particular, cases like child neglect, disappearances of friends and family members, assaults or land conflicts are brought to the police for advice and help. Even if police officers are not always involved in problem solving, since many cases of assault or family disputes are resolved after negotiations between the counterparties, the police function as a place to go, as authority that people refer to or simply as contact when family members live far away in upcountry.

There could be a fourth way to interpret the figures above: lack of alternatives. Whenever we asked our interviewees why they or Ugandans in general go to the police despite negative experiences and the force's image, they answered that there is no alternative. A fifth interpretation for increased figures of crime reports could be the fact that more police are available. Cases can only be reported when police stations are accessible and police officers are around. As the next section demonstrates the force's strength encompass now more than 40.000 people and the number of police stations in the country has grown to 255 police stations.<sup>11</sup>

During most parts of Uganda's post-colonial history, the police's fate was very unsteady. By 1971 the strength of the force had swollen to a figure of 18.300 men, but this figure was reduced to about 8.000 in 1985 and then, after the current regime took power, to 5.000. However, plans were announced to increase the number of the police force to about 30.000. The force are enlarged to about 15.000 officers in 1999, but cut back to less than 13.000 four years later, mirroring a decline in the state budget for justice, law and order (Enyimu 2006: 15, 26).<sup>12</sup>From 2000 to 2002 the force's strength remained at around 17.000 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2001 to 2003). In 2003 it was reduced to about 12.000 (1.653 officers were female officers) and in 2004 the numbers increased to 14.000 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2001 to 2005; Uganda Police Force b n.d.). After 2004 the strength of the force

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<sup>11</sup> Data is based on an internal document from the Ugandan police.

<sup>12</sup> So in 2003 with a population of about 20 mio, this meant 1.300 persons per police officer. Reunified Germany at the same time had a ratio of 333 persons per police officer.

grew. In 2008 the figure was about 38.600 and in 2011 about 43.500 officers, including 5.331 female officers (Uganda Police Force b n.d.).<sup>13</sup>

How do the police themselves explain these high growing figures of police personnel in Uganda? Until 2006 the police in Uganda worked together with special police constables. These special police constables were citizens “with good records”<sup>14</sup> who assisted the police in their daily duties e.g. patrolling streets. They wore khaki police uniforms and were equipped with AK47s. Due to several complaints from the public about the misconduct of special police constables, the police had to change this system of policing assistance. They asked the government to raise their recruitment of ‘real’ police officers and got the authorization to recruit 5.000 police constables and 500 police cadets every year.<sup>15</sup> Before, the police recruited only 1.000 new police personnel annually. The recruitment of special police constables stopped.<sup>16</sup> However, due to lack of budget the police have recruited new constables and new cadets only twice since. Nevertheless, 11.000 new officers joined the force. That Uganda needs more police is explained not necessarily with higher crime rates, but with reference to the increase in population and also with post-conflict situations in northern Uganda, which needs, according to the force itself, a higher police presence. Uganda wants to achieve a police-population-rate of 1:500, while their current rate is 1:1.700.<sup>17</sup> By that they follow a ratio mentioned by the UN (UN 2010: 19).<sup>18</sup> However,

<sup>13</sup> Collecting figures about the Ugandan police is an exhausting endeavor. The first difficulty is to find data at all. This is not only based on the fact that the Ugandan police do not want to give data to civilians or foreigners due to “security reasons” (Interview Police Headquarters, 14th March 2011, Kampala). The force’s hesitation to answer questions about figures and statistical data could also be due to a lack of data. It is almost impossible to find anyone who is responsible for data of the whole force. While the records officers in the stations count the cases and the amount of reports for every month, data that goes beyond crime counting is hard to find. In 2007 the Ugandan police published a paper that faces the statistical capacities of the force (Uganda Police Force 2007). It describes the data production and management as “characterized by a decentralized system with isolated and uncoordinated pockets of statistical units at different levels of governance [...]. The Data is collected using police outdated forms and books which were designed during the colonial times” (Uganda Police Force 2007: 8). Based on observations during field research in 2011, 2012 and 2013 we assume that the process of documentation and technologies of inscription has not changed much since 2007. The second difficulty is the question how to interpret figures, statistics and tables. One example is the search of personnel strengths. While an internal document handed over from headquarters in 2012, presents a figure about 43.500 officers (Uganda Police Force b n.d.), the force publishes on their websites the number of 37.400 officers and 396 civilian staff at the same time (Uganda Police Force 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Interview Police Headquarters, 26th November 2012, Kampala.

<sup>15</sup> Interview Police Headquarters, 26th November 2012, Kampala.

<sup>16</sup> However, some of them are still on duty. In January 2012, I (SB) could observe in Western Uganda how approximately 40 special police constables had to report at a police station for two days. In the morning a long queue extend over the court in front of the station. They were trained in military parades and marching. Every special constable had to come for a personal talk with the DPC. Their records were checked and it was decided whether they continued their duty or the contract ended. During these days, police officers observed the queue with interest and sometimes amusement when they observed how the special police constables practiced. When I asked officers about the special police constables they clearly distinguished between special constables and police officers and also told me about the public’s complaints and their misbehavior, e.g. when they are drunken on duty or even shoot people. Interview with police officers, 31st January 2012, Western Uganda. Moreover, according to an interviewee from a human rights organization the recruitments of special police constables in fact never stopped, but continued. Interview, 19th December 2012, Kampala.

<sup>17</sup> Interview Police Headquarters, 26th November 2012, Kampala.

<sup>18</sup> Interview Police Headquarters, 26th November 2012, Kampala.

explanations from outside the force draw a different picture. While they also refer to the growing population and growing crime rates, they also clearly explain that recruitments are done by political decisions and officers are appointed in higher positions even without any training.<sup>19</sup>

The changes within the force over the last decades do not only affect questions about personnel, but also their structure. The Ugandan police is currently organized into eleven directorates: administration; operations; crime intelligence and investigation; counter terrorism; research, planning and development; political commissariat; information and communication technology; human resources development and management; logistics and engineering; Interpol and peace support operations; Kampala metropolitan police. The highest institution within the force is the police headquarters in Kampala while every region is structured by a regional headquarter that heads the local police stations, which in turn head local police posts.

The salaries over the last ten years also underwent various changes. The following figures present the monthly salary scale of the last ten years.<sup>20</sup> We present the figures for two ranks of the Ugandan police: sergeant and police corporal. Both are lower ranks, but they are the officers who do the normal daily and nightly police work at stations. What the figures tell is that the salaries have increased visibly since the last ten years (see table 3).

| Year      | Corporal                           | Sergeant               |
|-----------|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1999/2000 | UGX 85.276 (US\$ 51) <sup>21</sup> | UGX 88.216 (US\$ 52)   |
| 2000/2001 | UGX 93.804 (US\$ 56)               | UGX 97.041 (US\$ 58)   |
| 2003/2004 | UGX 104.020 (US\$ 70)              | UGX 210.030 (US\$ 105) |
| 2008/2009 | UGX 196.107 (US\$ 98)              | UGX 244.481 (US\$ 122) |
| 2010/2011 | UGX 310.462 (US\$ 118)             | UGX 339.849 (US\$ 139) |

*Table 3: Salaries of police corporal and sergeant by year.*

Since around 2000 the salary has been transferred to personal bank accounts on a monthly basis. At least according to our interviewees in Kampala, the money comes in regularly and punctually.<sup>22</sup>

So the UPF underwent changes over time, it changed its size a number of times quite quickly, and it changed in its scope and activity too, but here rather incrementally. But such numbers do not yet reveal what policing Uganda means in practical terms. So what do the Ugandan police do? What are their practices and their routines? Seemingly, as our participant observation showed, they do what they always have been doing: they register

<sup>19</sup> Interviews with anonyms, 19th December 2012, Kampala; 4th January 2013, Kampala.

<sup>20</sup> All figures of the salary are based on tables from the Ministry of Public Service, but were handed over from Police Headquarters in Kampala. The Ministry of Public Service refused to release any information concerned the police. Interview with personnel of Ministry of Public Service, 16th November, Kampala.

<sup>21</sup> The exchange rates in US\$ are based on the exchanges rates of the particular years.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews with police officers, 5th November 2012, Kampala.

criminal cases, they sort out conflicts from time to time, they administer files, and they interact with citizens in various manners. One could summarize the activity of Ugandan police like this: office work and fieldwork. Simply said, it is just police work. Police work that we can find also in other parts of the world, is it in the Global South or in the Global North. The Ugandan police listen to complaints from victims, interrogate suspects, they take down statements, they arrest people, they patrol streets, they maintain public order, they control traffic, and they produce a huge amount of bureaucratic documents. In the following section we will present more detail based on our ethnography of the Ugandan police.

#### 4. The Everyday Life of the Police in Uganda

One of our main results is the complexity of police-society-relations. Even if the Ugandan police are known for being corrupt, brutal, and politically influenced, we cannot assume that there is only one single relationship between the force and the citizens, but various. Consequently, we cannot reduce policing in Uganda to just a local instance of a universal global pattern of police-society relations. Rather, the relations between both sides are highly intricate as the following abstract of the field observation demonstrates.<sup>23</sup>

*During the daytime the place in front of the station is lively. Street hawkers, businesspeople, students, pupils, and families cross the streets in front of the station. Altogether, the district has a very mixed population. People come and go, most of them complainants or people whose friends and relatives are arrested and who now ask for bail or bring food to the cells. Moreover, officers chat in front of the station, waiting for their next patrol round or a chance of a lift, or just passing the time because their offices are dark due to the electricity blackout.*

*Climbing the four steps of the station, visitors find themselves directly at the counter. The counter divides the room into two parts. To right of the entrance, a wooden bench provides a makeshift waiting area. Here, people sit patiently waiting for the counter officer's beckoning to report their case. Other people wait to meet officers who decide about bail for their relatives,<sup>24</sup> and others wait to talk and bring food to their arrested relatives.<sup>25</sup>*

*The bench at the counter is also used at night. Regularly, street children and homeless people sleep on the bench counter. For them, the police station is a safe haven at night before they normally leave in the morning. Some police stations even have special dormitories for street children. While not all officers feel comfortable with that and*

<sup>23</sup> In this section, we quote in those paragraphs set in italics field notes taken during field stays in Uganda in 2011 and 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Journalists and lawyers explained that most of the people waiting at police stations are relatives and friends of arrested persons. They wait for an opportunity to meet the officer in charge of the case to pay him or her. Interview 11th November 2011, Kampala; Interviews 12th January 2012, Kampala.

<sup>25</sup> Visiting hours of suspects are posted up at the cupboard at the counter. Three hours a day, in the morning from 07.00 to 08.00h, in the afternoon from 13.00 to 14.00h and in the evening from 17.00 to 18.00h suspects can be visited. Field note, 2nd December 2011, Kampala.

*complain about the nightly visitors,<sup>26</sup> I (SB) never saw anybody banished from the station. If street children stay till morning, the child and family protection unit handles their cases or transfers them to children's homes.*

The state-society-relation which we observed comprises a broad range of attitudes, reaching from severity and strict rule application to lenience, corruptibility, and even pity and mercy on the police's side, and from obedience to bribing, ignorance, and resistance on the side of the citizens. The logic of social life affects what the police actually are and do. It also affects their efforts to maintain order, as in our example of the order of the station. Surprisingly, this order is more flexible and permeable than one might assume. Although some officers are not satisfied with the presence of nightly visitors, they accept them. What is more remarkable, the civilians select the station themselves. Due to lack of alternatives and knowing about danger at nights, they choose the station as being a safe place. This is even more surprising since, as we will see in the example of patrolling streets, it is also this societal group of street children and homeless people that police suspect to be responsible for disorder and crimes. Thus, they are target groups for arrests and sometimes even violence and brutality. Instead of avoiding any contact with the force, however, they themselves decide to go to the police for very personal reasons and make use of the police properties in their own way.



*24: The desk in an Ugandan police station, seen from the officers' side.*

<sup>26</sup> During one night shift at the CID desk the officers discussed the nightly visitors. One policewoman explained that she would prefer to lock the visitors up in the cells. They should sign a paper where they would agree to stay in "self custody" and no longer spend their nights on the benches of the police station. Another officer was strictly against this, because "what if someone dies in custody?". Field note, 6th December 2011, Kampala.



How complex the relation between the police force as state agency and citizens and their causes also becomes obvious in the real bureaucratic dimension of police work, which we call 'the life of files'.

*To the left of the entrance is the counter, a long table that only provides a small gangway to the CID (Criminal Investigation Directorate) desk. To the right of the CID desk is a small door that leads to the station corridors. The CID desk is a table with two chairs. Here, two police officers sit day and night to take down evidence. Except for traffic cases that are forwarded directly to the Traffic Office on the first floor, the counter officer refers all clients to the CID desk or the Child and Family Protection Unit outside. Beforehand, they make an entry in the station diary (SD).*

*What happens after the officers at the counter finish the entry in the SD? People are referred to the CID desk. Here, officers listen to their case. As the counter does not brief the officers at the CID desk, clients have to repeat their statement over again. If the desk officers decide that the case is serious enough, they open up a file by taking down the statement.<sup>27</sup> The file's cover page is a page with preliminary information. This page is filled out after finishing the statement. After that, clients receive a docket with the file number and are asked to come to the station the next day to meet the officer handling the case. The file is now forwarded to the Records Office on the ground floor. Here, officers record the case before they forward it to the OCCID. The task of the OCCID is to sign the file for allocation. He also decides which unit handles the file. If the OCCID is too busy, another officer, someone who is in charge of a squad, signs the file.*

*The entire documentation process is handwritten. In front of the stairs is the secretariat, however. Within the secretariat is a typewriter, and a more important piece of technical apparatus, the photocopying machine. Its main function, though, is to produce forms. The UPF work with more than 200 forms, e.g. form for reports, statements or bail release.<sup>28</sup> These forms have to be copied by clients. When the power is on and the copying machine is working, the secretariat actually functions as a copy shop. In fact, whenever I visited her, I saw the secretary sitting in her office and chatting with colleagues, only briefly interrupted by people requesting copies. Beyond this modern technical device, it seems as if a blue and a red ball-pen, a sheet of paper and a piece of twine, to fix the file, are the most important equipment of police officers.*

*Once written, cases often rest, as officers are absent for various reasons.*

*During four weeks of participant observation in the station almost half of the personnel was absent for workshops. During this time, the remaining officers took over files from their colleagues. Some of them had to handle 30 to 40 cases at a time. Due to lack of personnel, patrols, and possibly other police work, were reduced or cancelled. This also happens when the President's appearance in public is announced in Kampala. In such*

<sup>27</sup> However, it can happen that police officers do not open up a file. In these cases, they work as mediators between parties. During one night shift, for example, a moped taxi driver and his client came to the station. They argued about the fare. The client refused to pay 500UGX (0.19 US\$) although they had fixed the price before the trip. After listening to their problem, the policewoman on duty demanded payment from the man. He finally accepted, but under great protest. The officer was irritated by this minor case and asked both to leave the station and to stop wasting her time. Field note 23rd November 2011, Kampala.

<sup>28</sup> Examples are annual crime report = police form 1; medical examination report = police form 3; "how the vehicle was before the accident" = police form 24.

*cases, manpower is relocated from the stations. However, sometimes information is obscure and it can happen that the President is announced, officers go on stand-by and the President never appears.*

*After signing, the document goes back to the Records Office. The personnel of the Records Office forward the file to the officer in charge of the corresponding unit. This officer passes the case on to one of his or her employees. However, some squads have more work than others so that files are sometimes passed on to any office. Officers of the homicide unit, for example, very often handle different cases because homicides are rare in the police district.*

*When the file reaches the desk of an officer, investigations begin. Officers explained to me that they now listen to complainants, suspects and witnesses, visit the crime scene and collect any relevant information. However, whether all these steps of investigation really happen is not clear. In fact, I rarely observed officers visiting the field. I only can speculate about reasons. Maybe it is due to lack of transport, maybe officers have too much work on their desks, maybe investigations play a marginal role within policing, maybe it is not the police, but the complainant who has to provide evidence.*

*It seems as if the next step is to decide whether to release a suspect on bail or not. Moreover, cases are referred to court. Every morning the suspects are paraded. All the suspects sit on the ground in front of the whole team of the station. When his or her name is called up, the suspect either has to go back to the cell or to a section in the court. All suspects who wait in this section are later released on bail. The others go back to their cells or are transported to court.<sup>29</sup>*

Policing Uganda is essentially a bureaucratic process. Maybe it is more or less the same in every part of the world, just with varying technical standards. Maybe the produced files are the 'blood' that flows through the veins of the station; maybe they are just the embodiment of the illusion of being busy due to lack of alternatives. The essence of the bureaucratic aspect of police officers, though, is a transformation. It is the transformation of an experience orally recounted into a file that then enters a different universe – the universe of officialdom (cf. Bourdieu 2012). Police files have a legal status, and it is exactly for that reason that citizens enter the police office. It is the power of files, of the official status of a written paper that is perhaps the most important production of the police. While the production of files appears to be induced by the demands of the society, police forces have their own standard bureaucratic procedures. It is, at the same time, a process of ordering.

These processes of ordering, or at least processes that are guided by the idea that the world can be ordered and controlled, do not only take place within the station, but also outside during patrols. Patrolling streets is the task of the mobile force unit of the Ugandan police. Although police officers rarely leave the station for field investigations, they patrol regularly. These nightly and daily performances are especially relevant for the police's self-declared mission to protect and maintain order.

*The DPC introduced me (SB) to the night patrol team: three men in uniform all armed with the usual AK 47 and black truncheons. Before we left the station, the officers were briefed. The DPC asked which of the three officers knew the area. When one raised his*

<sup>29</sup> In Uganda, every suspect has to go to court within 48 hours. However, I (SB) talked to suspects who had been held in custody for more than ten days. Field note, 12th January 2012, Kampala.

hand, the DPC explained the route we had to take. One officer asked the DPC for handcuffs and a brief discussion about the use of handcuffs followed as his colleague argued against them because “we can discuss, we do not have to use handcuffs”.<sup>30</sup> The DPC handed over one pair. Handcuffs, as well as the AK 47 and truncheons do not belong to the personal equipment of every police officer. Rather, they are stored in a locked room inside the station and handed out to the officers on duty.

Asking the DPC about the need for night patrol, he explained to me that the police have to patrol for “three reasons. First, visibility, when we go on patrol, people see us, thieves see us. The second reason is safety. People feel safe when they see the police on the street. And the last reason is education. We want to talk to people, explain that they are doing wrong”.<sup>31</sup>

The first destination of our patrol was a police post at the entrance to a slum, a march of about 20 minutes from the main police station. We entered a small room of about six square meters, lit by a candle and run by two officers. After a short chat the chief officer of our patrols registered us in the SD and we continued our patrol, now joined by one of the officers of the police post who walked ahead. While we criss-crossed the slum’s narrow alleys, people hardly noticed the police. Obviously, they are used to their appearance. Though the police patrol a different route every night, they move within a certain area and focus on so called “black spots”<sup>32</sup>, places that are seen as places with a high crime rate.

After a while and with no incidents in the meantime, we arrived at the office of LC.<sup>33</sup> The chairman was sitting at his desk, with the defense officer and some other members of the LC are seated in a semi circle. The police call on the LC every night and the defense officer of the LC often attends the arrests of suspects.<sup>34</sup> He joined us when we left the LC office after chatting for 15 minutes about the quiet situation tonight. Now he is the one who knows the area best and so he took the lead of our group until the end of the night patrol.

We continued our way through alleys and small paths in silence and at good pace. When we entered a dark backyard<sup>35</sup> the defense officer pointed to a balcony. The officers were looking for people who gamble. While two policemen scale a wooden stair

<sup>30</sup> Field note, 25th November 2011, Kampala.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with the DPC, 25th November 2011, Kampala.

<sup>32</sup> A hand painted map on the wall in the DPC’s office documents all black spots within the catchment area of the police station.

<sup>33</sup> LCs are elected bodies with quotas for young people and women. While the lowest level LCs are elected by all adults, all upper echelons are elected from the LCs, as in the tradition of democratic socialism, up to the district level of LC 5. This system was the institutional innovation of the NRM/A during the war and then established in most parts of the country, and comprises elected local bodies tasked with regulating social life as closely as possible. Originally called “Resistance Councils”, the system was introduced to replace chieftaincies as colonial vestiges (cf. Mamdani 1996), to enhance participation among local populations, and, on the other hand, to give the NRM a strong tool for controlling the countryside as well as urban areas. The scale of its influence is extremely ambiguous (cf. Banégas 1998).

<sup>34</sup> His attendance is not obligatory. However, in many cases the police appreciate that members of the LC accompany them. They know the area and residents very well and even better than the police. The company of the LCs is a protection for the Uganda police, at least in the perception of the police.

<sup>35</sup> Power is a problem in Kampala. Daily between 2011 and 2012, electricity was switched off in different parts of the city for several hours or even days. Thus, also our patrol occurred in almost total darkness. Though we had two torches, the alleys were hardly visible and we could not always find the best ways through mud and garbage.

and checked the rooms, the others waited attentively downstairs. But tonight they did not find anybody. During our patrol, the police frequently checked groups of people. Sitting in a circle and playing cards arouses immediate suspicion.

We continued the patrol now in a crew of seven: the three police officers from the main station, the officer from the police post, the LC defense officer, another LC member who joined us shortly after we left the LC, and myself. While gamblers are one of the main target groups, people who smoke marijuana or opium are the other. Whenever we encountered young men, the officers stop, illuminate their faces and eyes with the torches to check if they had been smoking. Gambling and smoking are one of the main offences the patrol officers target. The officers explained to me that smoking causes madness so that people who smoke also burgle houses and assault people. Following this logic, young men are suspects. We checked all the bars we passed, on the lookout for them. In most cases, not the officers, but the people from the LC entered the bar while the policemen waited outside. When the LC decided that the situation was calm, we continued on our way. During one of these checks, the LC stayed more than ten minutes inside. Outside the police started to wonder and finally three policemen entered the bar. After some minutes, they came out with a young man of 18 years at the most. The common procedure started: torch light in his face and check the eyes to find any indications of drug use. This time the officers seemed confident and handcuffed the young man.

With him in our tow we continued the patrol, passing a wooden shack near a dump. After a short discussion between LC and police, we entered the shack and found five men sitting around a table. A big plastic bag full of herbs lay on the table and demonstrated what the men were doing: they were chewing khat. Asking, "Don't you know that is it forbidden?"<sup>36</sup> One officer started to explain to the men the negative consequences of their drug use. Although chewing khat is an offence in Uganda, the police arrested no one. As they explain to me later, chewing khat is less dangerous than smoking marijuana or opium. While the latter can provoke aggression and further crime such as housebreaking, assault and theft, the former does not. So we left the shack and the police did not even confiscate the bag.

Before we finished the first part of the nightly patrol, the police officers arrested another suspected marijuana smoker in a bar. This time, the attempt to arrest was complicated and gave rise to a row between officers, the suspect and other visitors in front of the bar. Finally, with much effort and very close to the use of the truncheon, the suspect was handcuffed. He dropped the joint. Immediately the head of the patrol instructed an officer to pick it from the ground "for evidence".<sup>37</sup> After this arrest, the members of the LC wanted to continue patrolling, but the officer in charge decided that we should go back to the station. After 30 minutes and almost at midnight, we arrived at the main station. Due to a power cut the building was totally dark and hardly visible. The four officers at the counter and the CID desk had lit their room with an oil lamp. The two suspects were checked into the cells, the officer in charge documents the patrol in the SD, and after a short break the second round of the night patrol began.

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<sup>36</sup> Field note, 25th November 2011, Kampala.

<sup>37</sup> Field note, 25th November 2011, Kampala.

When the Ugandan police patrol streets they have an objective. It seems as if the police construct a kind of danger to the society emanating from certain groups.<sup>38</sup> Seemingly, as it would not be possible to register and evaluate all information visible on a patrol, the police target groups according to profiles in which perhaps self-fulfilling expectations and popular stereotypes mix and stabilize as patterns of perception. People who smoke marijuana are dangerous; people who chew khat are not, but have to be educated about the effects of their drug use. Young men in groups are suspicious, as are solitary women at night. This appears to be a specific feature not only of the Ugandan police, but a characteristic of police in general. Maybe police have to be geared to such a pattern because the officers know that they cannot control the whole society. It then serves to rescue the illusion that they are able to ensure social order. Clearly, this activity during patrolling is a self-imposed practice by the police, and it is repressive.<sup>39</sup> Its functionality in terms of delivering the public good 'security' is highly questionable; at least there is no evidence that this activity has crime reducing effects.

## **5. It is 'Just Police Work' – Contextualizing and Historicizing the Ugandan Police**

This preliminary presentation of results suggests that the practices of the Ugandan police are highly ambivalent. While they do not hesitate to behave repressively as the above-mentioned articles (see Part 3) and our field observations attest (see footnote 39), it would appear foreshortened not to consider other characteristics of policing in Uganda. In Uganda and every part of the world, police officers interact with citizens on various matters, produce bureaucratic documents, patrol streets, and attempt to maintain public order. With every daily routine and every deviance from routine they produce specific forms of order and disorder, power, justice, and even stateness. Our empirical observations substantiate the highly intricate character of the Ugandan police and their practices. We gave examples of the relation between the police and citizens, state and society respectively, the bureaucratic dimensions of policing, and the production of order, or at least the illusion of order through police practices. We would like to conclude therefore with a few questions and hypotheses instead of firm statements:

### **5.1 Policing as control? The ambiguous relationship to society**

Police in Uganda, as everywhere in the world, are always embedded in contexts (Knöbl 1998). They are simultaneously part of and apart from society (Hills 2000: 7). They have always to balance concrete societal context with abstract legal order (Schlichte 2005b: 137) while the population's influence on and handlings with the police force are much more present than common imaginations of the police in Uganda suggest. The police are assumed

<sup>38</sup> Cf. for example, the recent work of Fassin (2011) on similar conceptions among the French police in suburbs or Becker's description of German police forces in the 19th century (1991).

<sup>39</sup> The patrol described above was a peaceful one. However, I (SB) have also attended night patrols that went out of control and were dominated by brutality and violence against suspects, arbitrary arrests and drunkenness of officers. These patrols were clear examples of the repressive and violent face of the Ugandan police.

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to be the main state actor in the production, maintenance, and protection of order and simultaneously to be producers of disorder, at least in countries like Uganda. At the same time the citizens' actions also influence policing, and thus the implementation of (dis)order in several ways. People's attitudes, opinions about, and handlings with the Ugandan police are ambivalent and range from rejection, avoidance, and compliance to being controlled. Civilians transform policing and respectively the order that is conveyed by the police.<sup>40</sup> According to de Certeau orders are "ensemble of possibilities" (de Certeau 1984: 98). Citizens do not necessarily follow the given order, but take them as "possibility". While they usually avoid contact with the police at daytimes, they see them as protectors of their security at night. By using the station as safe haven during nights, they transform the force's order and, following again de Certeau, cross, drift away, create shortcuts or detours, and improvisations to transform significations (de Certeau 1984: 98).

## 5.2 Bureaucratic nature – demand driven or self-referential?

The second empirical example highlights the bureaucratic dimensions of the Ugandan police. Again, it is not a 'Ugandan specialty' to be observed, but just the simple characteristics of every modern administrative authority. We call this bureaucratic characteristic the 'life of files', a metaphor for the process of documentation and practices of inscriptions that are observable at all levels of the force's institutional life. Why do the Ugandan police administer? One explanation would be that the procedures of documentation are based on citizen's expectations. People who report their cases want the police to document them. Documentation is an act of paying attention to someone and something. People expect and fear that only something that is written down is taken seriously.<sup>41</sup> Only when people leave the police station with a docket with the file number, do they trust that their cases are handled. The fact that people go personally to police stations already demonstrates a kind of expectations towards the police. Also we can understand these observations the other way around. The whole process is based on expectations from 'inside' the institution. Then, the idea behind would be the assumption that when something is written down, it is somehow dealt with. The police open a file and 'the work is done'. In this interpretation the police would not serve the public, but they would serve themselves. Documentations then are not necessarily based on the intention to investigate crimes, to solve cases, to protect citizens, or to contribute to justice, but are performed as self-legitimizations. In this regard, practices of the Ugandan police could be understood as "self-referential" as Luhmann suggested (Luhmann 1990). Self-reference would mean that internal communication of the police revolves around values set by the organization itself and in a code developed within this organization. Listening to the environment or the reflection of possible reactions does not play any role since communication within the system is much more important than communication across the system's boundaries (Luhmann 1990). Michael Herzfeld argues in a similar manner (Herzfeld 1993). He emphasizes that the objective of a bureaucracy, and this is how we define the police here, is not efficiency, but the survival of the institution and

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<sup>40</sup> Corruption might be the clearest example of changing these orders or of influencing policing to own interests as bribes are not always stacked against clients.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Reynolds Whyte examines healthcare in Uganda and argues in a similar manner (2011). She describes how patients care about the health worker's performance of writing. They attribute this process of writing to the superior knowledge and authority of the health worker and see it as right way how formal healthcare has to be done (Whyte 2011: 34-35).

its bureaucrats (Herzfeld 1993). The empirical example demonstrates that bureaucracies are essentially “social phenomena” (Herzfeld 1993: 4). “Social indifference” (Herzfeld 1993) and other bureaucratic features described by Herzfeld are also central features of the police in Uganda. When, for example, civilians are asked to come back to the station the next day to check on their file, the temporality in the interaction between police and society becomes visible since the client’s time is absorbed into the officer’s space (Herzfeld 1993: 162-165, 170). The procedures to produce documents in a particular form and the files’ journeys within the station for official signatures show not only the state’s insignia, but also the high degree of ‘routinization’ of the Ugandan police (cf. Herzfeld 1993: 164).

### 5.3 The police – a state fortress?

The third empirical example illustrates another remarkable dimension of the Ugandan police. The mentality we can observe resembles what we know about, for example, Prussian police forces in the 19th century. Alf Lüdtke, a historian of the police and social order in Germany, coined this mentality in the word “Festungspraxis” – literally “fortress-practice”, by which he suggested the self-legitimizing understanding in the internal discourse of policing within the state (Lüdtke 1982). Policing, according to that understanding, is about safeguarding the “bourgeois order” and it is the state, in practice the police, who defines what is and is not an aberration from that order (Lüdtke 1982: 53). Against this background, policing is about protecting the state and the society against its own perverse effects. It is about keeping the social body clean, the public order calm and keeping a proto-capitalist economy functioning. The police, still not really emancipated from military dominance, are about protecting the state, which is a fortress.

Two interesting further theses can be deduced from this diachronic comparison: first, practices as well as mentalities of state employees are not independent of what the state claims to be. Uganda’s police officers clearly demonstrate a “state mentality”. The Ugandan police indicated a much stronger autonomy of the Ugandan state than what is usually assumed. As in Nicolas Poulantzas’ state theory, what we see here is a semi-autonomy of the state. This does not mean that the Ugandan state is totally decoupled from societal interest or from donors’ expectations. It does mean, however, that it is not subdued to such interests and expectations but that it is able to develop its own logic, its own “raison d’Etat” (Bourdieu 1998). This *raison d’Etat* is the result of an adaptation, one could say. Following again Dewey’s terminology of adaptation, we can observe both: the Ugandan police adapt and adjust. The direction of the adaptation, however, is not quite so clear. The state of Uganda is of colonial origin. But it is not an imported state, as Bertrand Badie (1992) and others have argued. It is, as Jean-François Bayart (1989; 1996) has argued for African states, an appropriated state. What is true for the state in its entirety is true for the police as a part of the state as such.

The second deduced thesis is that the Ugandan police are not a single instance. In a way, policing Uganda is policing the world. The globalization of the police, the fact that every state has a police force indicates another feature of the global police culture that we have referred to. Perhaps, practices and routines resemble each other as well as mentalities and symbols. We cannot yet answer questions about the intricate ways of the spread and dynamic of

police institutions and police cultures as there is no global history of the police written. Only parts and parcels exist (cf. Knöbl 1998; Deflem 2004). Writing such a history would require an acknowledgement of the intricacies of global connections. While we see here how local interaction has an effect on policing, we could not find any evidence for strong pressure exerted by international actors. Surprisingly, the Ugandan police are not really targeted by a lot of external pressure. While there are foreign teachers in the police academy, and while a lot of police officers participate in further education measures, there is no huge presence of foreign experts running the police or shaping the institution. Also, foreign aid seems to be of no big importance. A tool-kit here and a building erected with donated money there, little items of technology, and seminars for very limited numbers of officers – this seems to be the direct international contribution to the Ugandan police. Perhaps, one might argue, the focus on actors, the by far dominant approach in political science, is not so apt for discovering how a connected global history (cf. Bhambra 2011) has shaped our present and continues to do so.



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