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On a visit to New Delhi, I found myself caught up in the (very imperial) celebrations of India's national day. The processions, ceremonies and bands were sufficiently intriguing to lead me to stand on the lower part of the plinth of a monument to get a better view. Along came an Indian policeman carrying that emblem of colonial policing, the 'lathi' (a long baton) which he wielded against me and others who had taken up the same vantage point. Officious as I thought his attentions were, I was nonetheless fascinated by the postcolonial implications of the action: an Indian policeman 'persuading' a European to act with more decorum. The heritage of 'invented traditions' represented by the ceremonies of the day, together with this tiny incident, gave some food for thought.

Of the many continuities from the imperial to the post-colonial periods, the police constitute a central phenomenon. As Georgina Sinclair points out throughout this book, the police were a key instrument of colonial control, but they also posed a major dilemma. The British Empire was generally in the business of exporting 'Englishness' and British politicians and administrators often deluded themselves into imagining that they successfully did this even through such a fraught institution as the police. The English and the Irish models seemed to offer some contrasts for external emulation, but the reality was that even the points on the spectrum represented by these differing cases were insufficient. The concept of 'policing by consent', allegedly the English ideal, simply did not work, and various state-controlled 'paramilitary' forms were found, at different times, to be more appropriate. Yet models are never fixed. Thatcher's manipulation of the police during the miners' strike of the 1980s (not to mention the changed role of the police during more recent terrorist attacks) indicates the manner in which British policing remains fluid in its character.

To a much greater extent, colonial policing represented different models both simultaneously and in sequence. The police had a variety of different functions, ranging from the suppression of what most would regard as 'crime' through support for traditional authorities and supposedly 'holding the ring' in the face of communal strife, to aspects of civil control in times of labour strikes, political agitation, or major insurrection. This range of duties became more pronounced during the turbulence of the decolonisation period. Yet we should not forget that there were many inhibitions to this complex exercise of imperial state

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power. One was fiscal parsimony, which led to the police being often undermanned and ill-equipped. The other was confusion as to whose interests were being served. Clearly policy-makers operated within an imperial mindset, but when they began to recognise that 'modernisation' was essential, they were never clear about the perspective from which that modernisation should be approached – from the points of view of the departing power or inheritor governments, from the standpoint of the people of varied ethnicities being policed, or from the interests of certain sectors of society (traditional authorities, specific ethnic groups, the bourgeoisie, the new political elite). Policies of localisation or indigenisation were obfuscated by these confusions.

Georgina Sinclair sets out to unravel these many complexities in the era of decolonisation. Her range across the many different territories of the British Empire is striking, as is her detailed examination of many specific cases of personnel recruitment and training, as well as the multiple moments of tension and violence in the decolonisation process. Not only has she used a striking range of sources and archives, but she has also collected some 400 interviews of surviving police officers which place future historians in her debt. She has also rightly pointed out that influences in policing were not all one-way. The experience of policing the empire also had an effect upon domestic policies, not least in the decolonisation and post-decolonisation years. This is yet another of the many ways in which the British were affected by their experience of Empire. Sinclair offers us much opportunity for further reflection on the complex roles and purposes of the police.

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