

Reviews

Norman SJ Baxter (2001) Policing the Line: The development of a theoretical model for the policing of conflict, Ashgate Dartmouth, Aldershot, ISBN 0 7546 2173 1

The author addresses a timely and important theme. We live in an era in which internal conflicts produce more suffering and injury than conventional warfare does. The author writes from the perspective of being a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (recently re-titled and reformed as the Police Service of Northern Ireland) as well as from that of a PhD graduate upon whose thesis this work appears to be based. Dr Baxter is therefore well-placed to undertake a substantial piece of research of this kind. As the cover notes rightly acknowledge, policing internal conflicts 'has become one of the most controversial and critical issues facing modern policing'.

The book resembles a doctoral thesis in its attempts to acknowledge a range of literatures pertaining to the challenges of modern policing (including strategic planning), its generation of a number of questions to be explored, and its testing of the questions through the vehicle of three case studies. It concludes by proposing a theoretical model useful for police management of conflict. There is also an engagement along the way with postmodernism, perhaps inspired by Robert Reiner's 1992 article on this topic (which is listed in the book's bibliography). The author has therefore diligently turned his attention to a range of considerations in producing this book. However, ultimately, the approach taken is limited and unsatisfying.

In addition to drawing upon his compendious knowledge of policing events in Northern Ireland, Baxter enlists the rather disparate disciplines of law, philosophy, history and modern management in writing this book. The author's aim is to develop what he terms a Matrix Model of Conflict Management to assist police handling of internal conflict in a society such as Northern Ireland. In developing his model, his approach to these discipline areas is frequently simplistic, rendering any attempt to draw these threads together rather flawed and begging of more questions than it can possibly answer. Some of Baxter's historical digressions are rather lengthy and, at times, arcane. This points to his obvious partiality to historical materials, yet in many instances they fail to offer any real analytical advantage. His approach to history is remarkably untheoretical, causing him to ignore largely the works on postcolonialism and indeed even other works dealing with colonial policing.

His style is also highly schematic in nature, leading him to offer a wide range of diagrams as analytical constructs to aid understanding. However all too commonly they are either trite or difficult to decipher. While thoughtful on many issues, the author also lapses into banal and even misleading comments at times, such as that 'the role of the police is simply one of maintaining the peace and upholding the law' (p40). His liberal consensus view of policing causes him to focus on conflict around policing as a matter for more dialogue and understanding, rather than as grounded in structural patterns of class and religion. One issue

which his analysis expressly sidesteps is the role of the police in societies in which the 'foundation principles' he proposes — the legitimacy of the state, the law, and the police — are deeply contested on some level, rather than being generally accepted by the citizenry. While it is possible to recognise the many drawbacks of police operating in societies that are undemocratic or otherwise deeply divided, it is hardly realistic for the author to think that his starting point can be considered the general rule among states. A global view of these matters readily reveals that chaos and conflict are the norm, rather than the exception, in many countries. In other words, policing internal conflict as an order maintenance or public safety issue cannot be considered only *once the democratic fundamentals are in place*. How police should intervene in internal conflicts and respond to everyday crime in less-than-democratic societies are important questions for scholars and the police, as well as for citizens in these places.

A surprising feature of the book is its omission of references to such recent developments as the *Human Rights Act 1998* (UK) and the Patten Commission Report of around the same time that examined policing in Northern Ireland. The failure to look at the former inevitably should caution the reader to the fact that the legal analysis offered is not as complete or up to date as it should be for a 2001 published book. It must also count as a serious omission for a book dealing with internal conflict and policing in Northern Ireland that the Patten Report (1999) is not mentioned or discussed, despite its treatment of public order policing. Here it is also strange that there is not greater use made of relevant literatures from other 'divided' societies; even stranger is the omission from the bibliography of the work of Ronald Weitzer (1995), who has looked at policing internal conflict in Northern Ireland as well as in southern Africa. The anti-globalisation movements have also generated many problems for the police in recent years, yet again these developments find no mention in the book. The very heavy focus on events in Northern Ireland at the expense of other materials on policing internal conflict reinforces the impression that the approach taken to theory generation is all too limited in scope.

Finally, I cannot let pass this opportunity to comment on the disappointing quality control evident in the production of this book. There are numerous editing errors and oversights that detract from the reading experience — 'principle aim' (p23), 'collaborate' instead of 'corroborate' (p23), and 'environmental resistance' (p132) are just a few glaring examples. The book also lacks an index. Not bothering with indexes seems to be another increasingly popular way in which academic publishers cut corners to save money. However, to state the obvious, omitting indexes reduces the reference value of the book, which ought to concern publishers interested in promoting sales of their books.

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REFERENCES

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