

1 Colonial policing: A discursive framework

This chapter has several aims. One is to show how historians and social scientists have tackled colonial policing and its attendant violence as discrete phenomena. From there, I move on to discuss the rationale for making political economy an explanatory tool for the actions of colonial police. This, in turn, brings economic distress and patterns of labour usage within the inter-war colonies investigated in later chapters to the fore. The result is to highlight the connection between policing and the development of colonial economies, a link that strengthened as a result of the depression of the early 1930s. As we shall see, these socio-economic factors help make sense of what policemen – forces were still exclusively male (and, predominantly, single male) at this point – were instructed to do. The suggestion is that, for all the local variations involved, colonial police forces between the wars may be usefully seen as part of a complex economic enterprise, one that will be explored, case-by-case, in later chapters.

Approaches to colonial policing: protest, law and regulation

Disintegration of the European colonial empires in the twentieth century has led historians to analyse the internal protest that convulsed them in terms of its impact, firstly on processes of socio-political reform, and, secondly, on the development of organized nationalist groups, many of which assumed power when imperial governments collapsed or withdrew. Neither approach places significant emphasis on political economy as a determinant of colonial police work, a third perspective and the one pursued here. Within the existing broad narratives, colonial policing, which, in this context, includes the internal security operations of colonial militaries has become a story with two overriding themes.

The first theme examines the discrete institutional cultures born of the dominance of certain ethnic groups within individual forces: Irishmen in

Palestine and elsewhere; Corsicans, often of Italian descent, in French North Africa; and, at the rank-and-file level, Punjabis, Moroccans, Malians and Senegalese, Ambonese and other so-called 'martial races' that were prevalent in British, French and Dutch colonial police ranks.¹ In this depiction of colonial policing questions of identity construction and cultural transmission provide the key to understanding operational activity.²

Underlying these arguments is the idea of exceptionality. British colonial police forces were different from their French, Belgian or other equivalents because ethnic composition, cultural background and discrete patterns of training were necessarily unique to each force. Local iterations of the 'classic' colonial police force model of rigidly vertical organization were to be found within and between empires: white officer leadership, life in barracks apart from the local community and paramilitary style activity. Every force was also shaped by a combination of imported practices, local requirements and the resources available to them. For all that, the argument runs, each colony's police remained distinctive. Other analysts suggest that we should look to the institutional setting – the expectations, modes of behaviour and disciplinary codes of security forces – for explanations of the forms and scale of repression.³ To Isabel Hull, whose study of police actions against the rebellious peoples of German South West Africa makes the argument persuasively, organizational culture was the root cause of extreme military violence.⁴ Here, too, a security force's characteristics reflect distinct national traits, this time measured in organizational norms rather than simply in terms of ethnic composition and cultural borrowing.

The second theme relates to the first. It concerns what is presumed to have been the growing preoccupation of colonial police forces almost everywhere: their struggle to contain organized political opposition to imperial control. In this interpretation, policing and political violence are symbiotically linked. Both fed off each other with increasing appetite as resistance to colonial incursion persisted or, to telescope forward to the post-1945 years, as the momentum for decolonization increased. Colonial policing was necessarily political and frequently violent because its principal targets were oppositional groups that threatened colonial supremacy.⁵ Insights from political scientists come in here, providing more schematic approaches to authoritarian state violence in which police and other security agencies played a part. Some have used micro-histories of past colonial repression to discern patterns of collective violence in conditions of acute asymmetry between the rights and powers of rulers and ruled.⁶ Several work to a model of action and reaction to explain escalations in political violence.⁷ In some cases the

inability of imperial nations to justify protracted colonial repression before increasingly sceptical home populations emerges clearly.⁸ So, too, does the political paralysis and pressure for negotiated withdrawals produced by metropolitan revulsion at mounting death tolls and the runaway costs of police actions spiralling out of control.⁹ In other cases anti-colonial violence may be usefully conceptualized as civil war. Such diagnosis, in turn, demands analysis of differing 'markets' of violence: the local communities and colonial bureaucracies for whom – or against whom – the use of force appealed.¹⁰

Decolonization conflicts, in other words, have been studied as locally specific and internecine, but also as much more: as supra-local phenomena that may usefully be compared.¹¹ This approach – combining the local with comparisons between territories and empires – renders colonial rebellion more complex and yet, paradoxically, more comprehensible. At the local level, it helps clarify how internal security operations, broadly defined, could be appropriated by local communities to advance their own interests. At the broader imperial level, it indicates that such appropriation was sometimes facilitated, even manipulated, by colonial authorities – in Malaya or Algeria for example.¹² This was a dangerous game to play. Colonial policing frequently became bound up with inter-ethnic conflict or faction-fighting, leading to a loss of state control over the resultant violence. Mandate Palestine during the Arab Revolt of 1936–9 and Kenya during Mau Mau provide striking examples of such downward spirals.¹³ In circumstances such as these, the lines separating the use of police forces and their local auxiliaries from sectarian support for particular loyalist groups become harder to trace.¹⁴ Still, commonalities may be found. The practice of co-opting client groups and recruiting local police from these favoured communities, was not only extremely widespread, but was usually in place long before wars of decolonization erupted. Indeed, some have argued that it was a cornerstone of colonial governance from its inception.¹⁵ It was certainly integral to policing in the inter-war years as we shall see.

Other findings from social science have been largely overlooked in otherwise innovative work on the socio-ethnic backgrounds and attitudinal formation of policemen and the political cultures of colonial police forces that resulted. Yet there are three perhaps discernible sociological or sociologically influenced approaches to the repressive strategies of modern imperialist powers from which we have something to learn.¹⁶ One sees the development of distinctly colonial types of repression as written in the very formation of colonial states. Central to this interpretation are three linked factors. First is the effort of colonial states to transcend their origins as occupation regimes. Second is the influx

of European administrators, settlers and corporate interests and the attendant requirements imposed on the state both to protect them and to advance their interests. And third is the physical displacement of indigenous populations as state consolidation and settler land grabs gathered momentum.

The second, more sociological approach is exemplified by the work of James Scott. His analysis of peasant protest movements in Southeast Asia indicates that the fear or actuality of colonial state violence drove indigenous populations to more innovative, surreptitious and subtle forms of political mobilization and protest.¹⁷ Policing did – or, more often, did not – respond effectively to what Scott dubs this ‘infrapolitics’ or ‘politics below the line’: invisible to the naked eye but pervasive nonetheless.¹⁸

The third approach rejects the idea that imperialism gave rise to unique forms of state coercion. Instead, it proposes that methods of state violence, policing, judicial regulation, incarceration and repression, were all, to varying extents, imported, whether from the imperial mother country or from other colonial dependencies. In this model, there is no new form of repression under the colonial sun, only the reconfiguration of past precedents practised in other places at other times. Not surprisingly, this final approach has appealed more strongly to historians of colonial policing for whom, to return to the point made above, cultural transmission between imperial police forces has been considered paramount. This treatment of the violence of imperial rulers as either the transposition of European practices to non-European settings or, more broadly, just another variant of violent conflict between a state and its internal opponents, intersects with the micro-dynamic studies of recent civil conflicts by political scientists seeking to explain the scale and form of collective violence practised by authoritarian states and their domestic enemies.¹⁹

Colonial policing and labour rights

The work of colonial repression has also interested social scientists inspired by ‘democratic peace theory’. They have tried to account for a particular paradox: namely, the escalation of colonial dissent immediately after conflicts within western Europe came to an end, first in 1918, then in 1945.²⁰ Why was it that Europe’s democracies, many of them also imperial powers, agonized about avoiding future wars in Europe while prosecuting conflicts within their colonies? The question is a variant of a staple theme in international history, which approaches the modern states system by distinguishing between the ‘vital interests’ of

core actors in the industrialized ‘North’ and their ‘adjustable interests’ in the colonized regions of the ‘South’.²¹ The costs of conflict in the former were much higher and rarely risked, whereas aggressive action between or within colonies usually came at a lower price, at least for the ruling power. A problem here is that international historians have sought answers solely within the European context and, principally, from a state-centric vantage point. Colonial peoples were rarely considered significant actors – agents of change in their own right – in international relations, theoretical or otherwise.²² Returning to the local level, as Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn and Richard Roberts suggest in relation to colonial Africa, ‘investigations into colonial hegemony must actually turn on the Africans who were employed in a variety of roles and on the nature of their “bargains” with colonial states’.²³

As wage labour became more widespread in the European empires so colonial workers began to push for bargains of their own. During the inter-war years, hopes that the new framework of international treaties, League of Nations oversight and more robust international laws might safeguard the rights of these colonial workers – as individuals or groups – were largely invested in the International Labour Organization (ILO).²⁴ Attached to the League, the ILO devised workplace regulations and monitored their implementation. Little scholarly work has focused on the ILO’s early impact in the non-western world, including the colonial dependencies so widespread in the organization’s first two decades after 1919.²⁵ To be sure, ILO members set themselves against the persistence of colonial forced labour by promoting four conventions on Native Labour Codes between 1930 and 1939.²⁶ And some colonial governments bent to this new reformism.

Former police official, Joseph Byrne, Governor of Kenya from 1931 to 1938, introduced measures to comply with ILO conventions. Trade unions were legalized, the right to strike acknowledged, and minimum wage levels set for various categories of worker. Prior to Byrne’s arrival, the Labour Party’s Colonial Office reformers, led by Under-Secretary of State Drummond Shiels, also pressed for land reforms and a reduction in the tax burden borne by Kenya’s native population.²⁷ In this instance, the locomotive of reform built a considerable head of steam. For one thing, the Colonial Office initiatives outlived the second Labour government, which gave way to the National Government coalition in August 1931. For another, prosecutions of settler farmers who breached the colony’s ‘Master and Servant’ laws by flogging, beating and even killing their African workers increased markedly during Byrne’s term in office.²⁸

The ILO also campaigned tenaciously for free labour markets, an end to coercive recruitment of workers and contractual obligations that bound employers to uphold basic safety and hygiene standards. But the organization's limited horizons were revealed by its 1930 decision to institute a Native Labour Code alongside the International Labour Code devised for the industrialized nations of the West. Its members accepted the premise that colonial workers should not expect the same rights and entitlements as their European or North American counterparts.²⁹ Only with the ILO's now famous 1944 Philadelphia declaration, which wedded the organization to development in the world's poorer countries, did the organization focus its priorities on the colonial world.³⁰ Prior to this, the ILO's gaze was more first world than third, more Eurocentric than empire-centric. Its readiness to treat colonial labour discrimination alongside that of white Europeans marked a significant breakthrough even so: recognition that colonial economic and labour conditions were pivotal to the long-term political stability of empire.

The case of French West Africa, scene of an early twentieth-century turn towards associationism, France's variant of indirect rule, is especially instructive.³¹ There, confusion persisted among French administrators regarding the implications of official doctrines of 'association' and 'assimilation' for the ways in which internal order was to be upheld. It had been pointed out before the First World War that the advocates of associationist methods were conspicuously silent about the regulation of native working conditions and the importance attached to the development of an internal colonial market through heightened commercial activity. One former official, Paul Bourdarie, argued in the pages of *La Revue Indigène*, a specialist periodical for the administrator types concerned by such matters, that methods of labour regulation were integral to any 'doctrine' of colonial governance.³² The end of the war had seemed to promise material improvements in the administration of justice and working conditions for salaried employees. Summary punishments and arbitrary fines meted out by French officials to African subjects under the infamous *indigénat* legal code were curtailed – but not abolished – by decree legislation passed on 31 March 1917. And a further law promulgated on 23 April 1919 instituted an eight-hour working day for contract labourers (the application of which was patchy at best).³³ In France meanwhile, university courses in the legal and economic principles of colonial commerce proliferated, sponsored by regional Chambers of Commerce. The efficient management of colonial enterprise achieved respectability in the academic corridors of leading French business schools as a result.³⁴

Alongside such reforms, forced labour persisted in the form of the *prestation* system. *Prestation* afforded colonial governments legal powers to requisition local manpower (all able-bodied Africans aged over fifteen) to work for up to twelve days each year on public works projects of wider benefit to the region. Bridge building, road clearance and the maintenance of irrigation channels all relied on the practice, whose enforcement usually fell to the police. Furthermore, the Labour Code instituted by Governor-general Jules Carde in West Africa in October 1925 blurred the distinction between voluntary and forced labour. Carde's scheme effectively guaranteed that officials would provide African workers to major private employers in return for the fulfilment of certain obligations, including the provision of basic accommodation and food, a minimum wage and a maximum working week.³⁵ Old habits, it seemed, died hard.

The state was thus integral to coercive labour recruitment, whether on public projects or in the private sector.³⁶ ILO criticism of such practices, most notably at the organization's 1930 conference on forced labour, coincided with the first effects of the depression and a labour surplus as export production ran down.³⁷ The continuation of forced labour in francophone black Africa was, in consequence, rendered less visible by the heightened availability of migrant workers and unemployed day labourers who could be employed without the safeguards of any workplace contract.³⁸ Still, the wider inter-war trend was clear. Policing colonial workplaces was becoming a matter of political concern. Nor was it just the ILO that took an interest. Colonial ministries, sensitive to domestic and international criticism, established colonial labour inspectorates whose job it was to prevent it.³⁹

In this changing workplace environment, colonial law, while assuredly an instrument of social control, did not serve the interests of privileged Europeans exclusively. After the First World War recourse to law offered a means for colonial subjects to test the limits of imperial claims to benevolence, challenging those in authority to live up to their high ideals.⁴⁰ Officials and police also turned to the courts to curb the most egregious instances of exploitation of land and labour by settlers or corporations.⁴¹

In the French case, government ministers could still find indigenous allies prepared to defend the exigencies of economic extraction even as the worst of the depression hit home. Some were representatives of the few colonized communities with French citizenship rights; hardly representative of the wider subject population.⁴² Blaise Diagne was one such. The long-serving Senegalese deputy achieved prominence through his successful 1914–15 campaign to extend citizenship

entitlements to the original African residents of Senegal's four urban communes. Yet this led him to endorse the extension of coercive conscription to West Africa during the First World War.⁴³ French-educated and thoroughly 'assimilated', Diagne even defended forced labour in a 1931 speech to ILO delegates in Geneva. His comments indicated that, in the eyes of some elite Africans, colonial subjects could not expect better treatment or more basic rights unless they fulfilled their designated duties to the state.⁴⁴

Diagne's views could also be viewed as merely orthodox: the articulation of attitudinal norms about the treatment of colonial labour. Perennially short of capital funding, politicians and colonial administrators resorted to labour-intensive plans when considering how to make the agricultural economies of French West and Equatorial Africa more productive.⁴⁵ Although they preferred the term 'labour mobilization' to the less palatable moniker 'forced labour', Albert Sarraut and his successors at the Ministry of Colonies were quite prepared to defend coercion as the only means to ensure that farming communities placed the needs of the state above those of the household.⁴⁶ Labour coercion, variously disguised as compulsory resettlement, military duty or fiscal obligation, remained essential to major economic projects such as the completion of the Thiès-Kayes railway and the *Office du Niger* cotton production scheme in French Soudan (now Mali).⁴⁷

The latter, in particular, suggested that older practices of the conquest period persisted. Chronically short of local manpower to undertake the vast tasks of irrigation and cultivation central to their scheme, *Office du Niger* officials, with the connivance of *commandants de cercles* (colonial district officers) were unscrupulous in their quest for workers. Their tactics included mass round-ups of recalcitrant villagers and their relocation to curfewed compounds, the misleadingly named '*villages de liberté*'. Long working hours and corporal punishment were commonplace. Wages and food were withheld for 'slack' performance. Women workers were manipulated under threat that their husbands would be beaten if their work was unsatisfactory. In short, these were working conditions analogous to debt bondage, if not to slavery.⁴⁸ The architect of the *Office du Niger*, the notoriously ruthless engineer Émile Bélimé, always insisted that ends justified means, despite mounting evidence to the contrary by the mid-1930s.⁴⁹ Bélimé and his staff were not wholly – or solely – culpable. Politicians and reformist colonial officials also allowed such practices to continue, even though evidence of widespread labour abuses surfaced repeatedly as a result of inquiries initiated in the Popular Front years of 1936–8. Why? The answer lay in an echo of Bélimé's instrumental thinking. Most administrators favoured

a transition from a coercive labour system to more widespread use of contracted workers, but few thought this achievable because of the huge regional variations in labour supply.⁵⁰

The example of Émile Béline is instructive. Work by imperial and international historians suggests that the inter-war years marked a transition period in which repressive colonial labour relations were beginning to be transformed; at the same time, for contemporaries the scope and direction of political reforms and workplace regulation was far from clear.⁵¹ Colonial police were caught in the confusion, often uncertain about what they were being tasked to do.

The political economy approach

By political economy I refer to the connections between the changing political priorities and institutional forms of colonial government and those local economic activities that most concerned it. These activities typically related to revenue generation and, in particular, to some degree of export production. The point I wish to develop here is that police operations reflected not just the colonial political order but its economic structures as well. The actions of colonial police were driven by this combination of the political and the economic, of what the colonial state needed to combat internal threats on the one hand and what export producers and other key economic actors required to enhance their output on the other. Using political economy to explain the ordering of colonial priorities and the differing roles of colonial administrative services is far from new. It was central to arguments advanced by dependency theorists about the colonial roots of African under-development.⁵² Some thirty years ago, Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, subtle analysts of colonial implantation, noted that ‘most analysts of the colonial state agree on its most salient feature: its centrality in the political economy of a colony through the unusual scope and intensity of its intervention into colonial social and economic life’.⁵³ Richard Price, reflecting on recent trends in imperial history, has taken up the charge, writing: ‘Is it possible to write a history of empire without considering political economy or without some notion of the “state” as a historical actor in the imperial process?’ The question begs an affirmative answer. But Price added an important rider to it by stressing the ‘untidiness’ of cultural transmission and patterns of colonial rule.⁵⁴ His point is well taken. Treading warily and recognizing local variation, it seems reasonable to suggest that colonial police forces promoted revenue collection and labour practices conducive to heightened commercial exploitation. This was neither their sole

purpose, nor their avowed aim. It appears to have consumed a large part of their time nonetheless. The case studies investigated in later chapters will test this claim.

We also have the benefit of a number of outstanding studies that have integrated political economy into their analysis of other, related aspects of colonial life. These range from investigations of industry, banking and economic output in French Algeria and French Vietnam to studies of public health and the organization of plantation agriculture in British Malaya and Dutch-ruled Sumatra.⁵⁵ Others have unpicked the threads that bound together colonial authorities, trading companies or public sector conglomerates in imposing harsher labour regimes from French West Africa's interior territories to the Congo basin and Portuguese Mozambique.⁵⁶

For all that, there is a fustiness to political economy, the air of something left hanging too long at the back of the analytical wardrobe. Like other more wholly economic approaches, it has scarcely featured within the many innovative works of new imperial history.⁵⁷ Nor has it figured large in the imperial and international histories of European empires and European colonial rivalries in the twentieth century.⁵⁸ David Edgerton is particularly forthright in this regard: 'Most accounts of international relations in interwar Britain ignore its crucial political-economic aspects, both in relation to actual political-economic relations, but also to the political-economic mode of thinking about international relations ... Although some historians have noticed the continuing significance of political economy, its full importance in the interwar years has clearly not been appreciated; it has been seen as at best a curiosity.'⁵⁹ Historians of colonial policing have also been remarkably silent about the imperatives of political economy. There are several reasons for this, but they are essentially reducible to a primordial concern with the origins of local colonial policing styles and a consequent preoccupation with the transmission of institutional practices from one police force to another. Put simply, the most incisive work on colonial police methods and actions has been dominated by two linked questions: 'Where did the colonial police come from, and how far may this explain the why and wherefores of what they did?'

Merely asking how the characteristics of particular colonial economies influenced patterns of internal dissent has its own pitfalls. It invites crudely instrumental answers loosely derived from the economic disparities and resultant social iniquities visible in most colonial societies. Observing that uneven distribution of wealth promoted instability and unrest is a platitude. Yet if political economy presents the problem here, it also offers solutions. Of the many aspects of colonial economic

structure that shaped institutional forms of state repression, three stand out:

- First, the dominance or otherwise of a narrow range of primary goods produced for export within the colonial economy, which, in turn, is closely linked to the matter of goods prices and local wage levels.
- Second, the principal forms of employment within the local economy; a factor that obviously bore on types and degrees of worker organization.
- Third, the relationship between sources of private capital, the state, and the indigenous workforce.

Clinical separation of these factors is, in some respects, artificial. Falling market prices for colonial exports as, for instance, in the early 1930s, generated pressure from business managers, plantation owners or external investors for cutbacks in workforces and wage levels. These, in turn, catalysed new forms of worker organization and protest.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the extent of state involvement in colonial economic activity, although variable, was generally apparent at all stages of the process whether the government acted as market regulator, major employer, labour recruiter or police enforcer. Colonial administrations were, at the same time, pulled in opposite directions. From the control of goods prices and financial or fiscal support for corporate interests to the policing of worker dissent, government identified its interests with expanding or, at the very least, safeguarding the export sector of dependent territory. As Peter Cain and Tony Hopkins have demonstrated so thoroughly, government, business and City finance were imperially co-dependent.⁶¹ Yet relations between them could be fraught. As mentioned earlier, colonial governments increasingly regarded themselves as guarantors of basic workplace standards and minimum wage levels, typically working through labour inspectorates to do so.⁶² There is also no reason to assume that colonial public servants took the idea of public service any less seriously than their metropolitan counterparts. Police officers experienced these conflicting pressures more directly than most – not least in the depression years.⁶³

The depression and colonial labour

To explain the book's preoccupation with the depression years, we need to consider prevailing conditions in the years preceding 1929 to 1935, the hiatus period in which Europe's imperial powers and their overseas dependencies were, at varying speeds and different intensities, mired in economic crisis.⁶⁴ As Michael Havinden and David Meredith,

analysts of British colonial development, point out, the twin foundations of British colonial economic policy remained firmly embedded during the 1920s. European and North American businesses dominated international imperial commerce, figuring largest in the industrial export of primary goods and controlling their onward movement through shipping to distribution and final point of sale. In counterpoint to colonial administrative support for these commercial networks, the rise of native capitalism was resisted. The supposedly complementary relationship between metropolitan powers and their dependencies, which required colonial economies to supply foodstuffs and raw materials while absorbing increasing quantities of European manufactured goods, did not confer reciprocal benefits.⁶⁵ Colonial officials lamented the iniquity involved, but, as we saw earlier, their overriding fear of social changes unleashed by rapid industrial growth kept their complaints in check.

Official alarm over the consequences of industrialization points to a deeper truth. European colonialism was, in many respects, the antithesis of modernity insofar as modernity may be linked to the rise of the nation state, technological innovation and the growth of complex, industrialized economies.⁶⁶ Where imperial rule brought technological innovation, it was primarily harnessed to the development of particular export industries whose growth was, in turn, tied to the overarching demands of the imperial power, whether for raw materials and semi-processed goods to service metropolitan manufacturers, or, more simply, for revenue from the sale of colonial commodities. Meanwhile, the growth of colonial industries, based on import substitution, was antithetical to the interests of metropolitan manufacturers and was anyway hampered by central imperial control over colonial monetary policy, exchange rates especially.⁶⁷ Movements of people mirrored the economic disparities within and between territories. White Europeans generally moved freely within colonial worlds, whether as colonists, traders, officials or policemen.⁶⁸ By contrast, between the 1840s and the 1940s, the largest long-term migrations of non-whites within the European empires involved the shipment of indentured labourers to work colonial plantations after the formal abolition of slavery.⁶⁹ Their transport costs were often met by employers who recouped the money as part of the indenture contract that bound these workers to them for a specified period.⁷⁰ Indentured Indians and Chinese predominated, encountering intense workplace discrimination both from employers and, sometimes, their local counterparts as members of this transnational labour force.⁷¹

Colonial industrialization also generated peculiarly modern threat perceptions within colonial governments in black Africa and Southeast

Asia especially. It remained axiomatic that political stability rested on preserving the socio-economic fabric of the colonial countryside in which the peasant family was, typically, the primary unit of agricultural production. Waged work and the drift into industrial employment therefore provoked hand-wrenching anxiety among senior bureaucrats.⁷² Yet, here we confront a paradox. Throughout western Europe, ardent defenders of empire in the early twentieth century insisted that its principal justification was to inculcate political accountability and modern forms of economic organization in dependent societies. In place of missionary zeal, the equation of imperial expansion with national vitality, or a simple assertion of racial mastery, by the 1920s colonial governance achieved validation through practical outcome. 'Modern' habits of politics, 'modern' ways of transacting business and 'modern' conceptions of personal and social responsibility were conceptualized as the legacy of colonial control and incontrovertible proof that European imperialism was a force for good.⁷³ The 'night watchman' colonial state of the late nineteenth century, which interfered in local economies to meet the demands of administration and goods extraction, was supposedly giving way to benevolent regimes committed to improving infrastructure, nurturing commerce and providing basic welfare.⁷⁴

The paradox lay in the temporal side of these equations. Numerous colonial governments conducted surveys of land, population and trade as precursors to modern revenue systems based on various forms of taxation and excise. Promised development lagged far behind. Colonial revenues may have grown, but a high proportion still drained away to the mother country or was swallowed up by personnel costs.⁷⁵ There was thus an inevitable gap between the clearer enunciation of political and economic targets and the remodelling of colonial societies envisaged. The problem was also an opportunity. A commitment to gradual societal renovation offered the cast-iron justification of continuing imperial rule: there was now an obligation to maintain empire until such transformations occurred. Rhetoric of this kind bore the seeds of philosophies of development that germinated in the altered international circumstances of the Second World War and its aftermath. More pertinent was that the depression rendered such projects moot in the short term, meaning that colonial police would be required to serve established economic interests more than helping the consolidation of new ones.

Not surprisingly, the depression also elicited firmer expressions of opinion about empire on both sides of the divide between ardent imperialists and anti-colonialists. What Norman Ingram terms the 'new-style' integral pacifists of Victor Méric's *Ligue internationale des combattants de*

la paix (LICP), France's fast-growing pacifist movement of the 1930s were militantly, almost violently, opposed to colonial oppression, damning imperialism as the cause of wars and the clearest articulation of man's inhumanity to man. The LICP's anti-empire critique hardened in response to several factors.⁷⁶ The crass commoditization of colonial peoples at the 1931 Vincennes Colonial Exhibition was one. The colonial rapaciousness of French businesses laid bare by the depression was another. And European governments' readiness to tolerate colonial injustice, affirmed by Italy's October 1935 invasion of Ethiopia and the dilatory Franco-British response to it, only added to LICP disgust. Worth noting in this context is that the LICP drew stronger support in coastal Algeria during the early 1930s than either the colony's communists or the other left-leaning groups that would later coalesce into the Popular Front. Little wonder that the Algiers police clamped down on LICP activities in 1933.⁷⁷

British political argument about the depression's impact on the empire was less polarized. But the underlying economic factors that propelled – and constrained – imperial policy were much the same. The Treasury's disinclination to pump funds into colonial industrial projects and British manufacturers' alarm about unwelcome new sources of competition intersected with Colonial Office anxieties about the unsettling social consequences of industrialization for predominantly agricultural societies. For all that, it seems doubtful that the poorer, non-settler colonies' economic misfortunes ranked high among British politicians' priorities in the worst of the depression years between 1930 and 1935.⁷⁸ There is even some evidence that leading imperialist advocates such as former Tory Colonial Secretary Leo Amery and his Labour predecessor, J. H. Thomas, who briefly returned to the Colonial Office in August 1931, misunderstood the financial basis of the 1929 Colonial Development Act. This legislation, less munificent than its title implied, was the centrepiece of government efforts to ameliorate the depression's adverse effects on colonial territories. Both Amery and Thomas over-estimated the funds likely to be made available. The Act provided a mechanism for Treasury grants to empire infrastructure and public health projects during the 1930s. But, contrary to the ministers' claims, the funds involved were small.⁷⁹ Robert Boyce acidly describes J. H. Thomas as 'a hard-drinking trade unionist with no ideas of his own'. Amery is less easily dismissed. An All Souls fellow maniacal in his empire devotion, the fact that Amery shared Thomas' misconceptions about colonial finance points to its marginality within government thinking.⁸⁰

Nor were the two ministers alone. Ramsay MacDonald's second Labour government, elected in June 1929, regarded development

spending as a stimulus to the British economy, not as a means to improve colonial living standards.⁸¹ The irony here was that colonial governments, too, remained extremely conservative in the sums they requested, with applications and take-up of development loans declining significantly in the trough of the depression between 1931 and 1934. Next to the funds being contemplated for defence spending as earlier hopes of disarmament evaporated, public spending in the colonies was nugatory to the point of insignificance.⁸² And this, despite the fact that the same economic crisis which propelled the arms race also drove Britain, like France, to turn to empire in their search for the last-ditch salvation of protected markets.⁸³ Colonial producers suffered as a result. Take Senegal's groundnut farmers, producers of French West Africa's most remunerative export crop. Denied the power to set more competitive tariffs, they were constrained to sell at market rates determined by the mother country.⁸⁴ In April 1933 a delegation of peanut growers made their way from Louga in Senegal's north-west to implore Jules Brévié, the reform-minded Governor-general, to rectify matters. Senegal's colonial government had offered a higher fixed price for groundnuts to help cultivators through the depression. But the federal administration also increased personal taxes and freight charges at much the same time, leaving Louga's farmers teetering close to destitution.⁸⁵ Ironies, contradictions, errors: all were of a piece with what Boyce terms 'a rudimentary grasp of economics' among most western political leaders in the depression's early stages.⁸⁶

Uncertain of their economic footing, Britain's political leaders trod warily. Their French counterparts, impelled by premier Aristide Briand's schemes for European federation and a tariffs 'truce' to liberalize international trade, ventured more boldly. Briand's far-sighted ambitions came to nothing in the short term.⁸⁷ Most French parliamentarians, industrialists and farmers remained staunch protectionists. Few were ready, as yet, for European economic integration (fewer still in Britain). Both Entente partners chose more familiar routes to financial recovery – a balanced budget, swingeing expenditure cuts and other measures designed to restore market confidence and curb inflation. This was not just financial orthodoxy; it was as far as most politicians', bankers' and business leaders' economic horizons stretched.⁸⁸ Whitehall institutions, Westminster voices and the City of London were thus ranged against any abrupt departure from the long-established colonial compact through which colonies furnished cheap raw materials and received British manufactures. Their French counterparts, resolved to keep the franc pegged to a gold standard and so avoid devaluation, had similar deflationary priorities.⁸⁹ Facing a chronic debt burden and still reliant

on customs revenue, colonial governments responded, in turn, to the calamitous fall in the prices paid for their exports by raising the volumes of produce exported. Unfortunately, so did their competitors.⁹⁰

Depression and the colonies

For European colonial empires no less than for Europe itself, the depression years formed a 'hinge', connecting a decade of rapid growth to a more troubled decade of contraction, economic nationalism and resurgent internal conflict.⁹¹ In the British Empire, as we shall see, Nigeria and the Caribbean sugar-producing colonies were severely affected by the increasing gap between declining export values and their mounting public debt, which required servicing through interest payments.⁹² Other colonial authorities as far afield as the Belgian Congo and French Indochina faced a comparable squeeze.

Aware that customs duties still accounted for over half of all Nigerian government income, Nigeria's Governor Sir Donald Cameron pored over weekly statements of the sums collected at Lagos as the depression deepened in 1933.⁹³ The statistics told a grim story. Continuing oversupply of foodstuffs and raw materials for export at a time of declining industrial production in the recipient markets only lowered prices still further. Havinden and Meredith capture the dilemma of such economic imbalance:

The colonies were not only poor but caught in a relationship of dependence with the industrialised countries who bought their exports ... As demand for their exports grew [in the 1920s], and as the colonial government and expatriate private enterprise developed export production, so dependence on one or several products increased. Almost without exception, British colonies became more dependent on a narrower range of export commodities between the wars and in most cases secondary industry based on processing did not develop. The colonies were therefore in no stronger a position to withstand the contraction of the international economy in the 1930s than they had been at the beginning of the 1920s.⁹⁴

No corner of empire escaped the depression's grasp. Indeed, so rapid was the spread of the industrial world's economic crisis to the colonial world that historians have argued that it revealed a process of globalization – of economic, political and institutional interdependence between rich imperialist north and poor colonial south.⁹⁵ The analysis requires qualification insofar as colonial economies rarely achieved the growth expected of them by governments, businesses and capital investors.⁹⁶

Southeast Asia, another of the colonial zones studied in this book, was especially hard hit.⁹⁷ Here, again, caution is required. Anne Booth's

analysis of public spending in Southeast Asia's colonies indicates that the pursuit of laudable policy objectives, such as infrastructure-building, education and public health provision, varied markedly between territories. Government investment in transportation and welfare in British Malaya during the 1920s outstripped that in more densely populated Dutch Indonesia or in French Indochina where fiscal policy was relatively arcane. In each of these cases, funds for development remained conditional on export growth.⁹⁸ Expenditure was rigorously pruned when boom turned to bust. Throughout Southeast Asia the costs of colonial administration became a major deficit burden. Previously profitable business ventures faced ruin meanwhile.⁹⁹ It was in these circumstances of economic adversity that colonial policing was tested to its utmost, often in new and unexpected ways.

That Southeast Asia's rural population experienced 'severe economic distress' during the global depression is indisputable; the questions at issue are just how severe those hardships were and what socio-political consequences ensued.¹⁰⁰ At one end of the spectrum, James Scott has argued that colonial rebellion was provoked by combinations of collapsing commodity prices, peasant producers' crippling debts and heightened taxation.¹⁰¹ At the other, Michael Adas suggests that cheap foodstuffs were more generally available in the early 1930s and that colonial authorities assuaged the effects of the economic slowdown by reducing their fiscal impositions.¹⁰² Certain connections seem clear, these disagreements notwithstanding. Falling commodity prices and the contraction or collapse of internal agricultural markets contributed in some measure to early 1930s peasant revolts in central and northern Annam, to the Saya San rebellion in Lower Burma, and to an uprising on the Philippine island of Luzon. Persistent low-level unrest, from food riots and raiding of grain stores to attacks on government offices, also suggests that violence provoked by extreme hardship was endemic to Southeast Asia's colonial states during the depression years.¹⁰³ Pressure on police resources increased.

But was such distress peculiar to the depression? Ian Brown's forensic analysis of governmental and academic surveys of rural incomes, taxation revenues and living standards across Southeast Asia in the early 1930s indicates that the acute deflationary pressure of 1930 to 1935 was less calamitous than often presumed. The colonial territories he examines – from French Indochina through British Malaya to the Dutch East Indies – certainly depended on primary product exports for their economic buoyancy. But their rural populations were not passive bystanders to what was taking place. Farmers and smallholders adopted various strategies to minimize the impact of falling prices for

their produce. Extra household consumption or the hoarding of food-stuffs that would otherwise have gone to market helped avert starvation. Those families that were not directly involved in the crop's production might even benefit from collapsing rice prices. The resulting glut in local markets as producers struggled to sell surpluses made this basic staple more widely available and affordable than in the pre- and post-depression periods. Moreover, according to Brown, available statistics regarding monetary expenditure on other essentials such as fuel, matches and textiles do not reveal declines consistent with famine or near-famine conditions.¹⁰⁴ Finally, Brown deploys indirect evidence to reinforce his overall conclusion that the depression, while unquestionably the cause of chronic suffering was less of a calamity than natural disasters or the coming war in Asia. Taken together, figures for the numbers of Indian economic migrants traversing Southeast Asia in the depression years, for the condition of textiles markets in Burma and the Dutch East Indies and for peasant mortality rates in the early 1930s, all point to a less precipitous decline in economic welfare than widely presumed.¹⁰⁵

Where do issues of colonial policing enter these debates? The answer is threefold. First, central to Scott's argument is that the coercive resources of the colonial state were deployed both to collect the taxes that helped trigger rebellion and to suppress the resultant disorder.¹⁰⁶ Second, colonial police became targets of peasant and worker anger as economic distress intensified.¹⁰⁷ Finally, colonial police provided much of the intelligence regarding workplace conditions, rural opinion and sources of opposition.¹⁰⁸ Colonial authorities depended on this information to estimate the likelihood of violent dissent. Again, Ian Brown's work is essential. His re-examination of tax returns and remission rates in the provinces of Lower Burma provides convincing evidence of three linked phenomena. For one thing, colonial taxes were less uniformly burdensome than might be imagined. For another, British administrators repeatedly lessened the tax burden, either reducing the sums imposed or deferring collection in an effort to minimize popular hardship. Finally, rural taxpayers sought to avoid or postpone payment when confronted with insupportable tax demands. In Burma at least, tenants faced more insistent financial demands from their landowner or moneylender than from the colonial state.¹⁰⁹

One other point implicit in these detailed analyses is that venturing definitive conclusions may be unwise. Circumstantial evidence suggests that colonial authorities in regions that were hard-hit by the depression did not enforce their tax demands rigidly. Meanwhile, local populations in places such as Lower Burma and Cochin-China developed strategies

to evade not only state exactions but those of landlords and moneylenders as well. The fact that such actions could not be openly admitted makes it near impossible to quantify them.¹¹⁰ It seems clear even so that depicting the colonial state as unremittingly oppressive and, therefore, unresponsive to the hardship consequent upon the 1930s economic crisis is inadequate.¹¹¹ Where does that leave us? Scott is surely right to point out that the progressive extension of colonial authorities' administrative reach – what Joanna Lewis, in the different regional context of British Kenya, terms 'the tentacular state' – resulted in greater monetary impositions on dependent populations, not least because it was imperative to finance this growth of state-sponsored activity.¹¹² On the other hand, Brown's findings reveal that Burma's district administrators were neither blind nor deaf to the sufferings of the colony's rural cultivators in what remained predominantly a rice crisis from 1930 to 1935.¹¹³ Depression-era reductions in land revenue and in the hated capitation tax culminated in complete abolition of the latter in 1940–1. As for the land revenue, annual reassessment of the rates to be charged took into account crop production levels, market prices and consequent living standards. Colonial tax collection, in other words, was not everywhere insensitive to the welfare of Burma's peasant producers.¹¹⁴

If this suggests that Ian Brown's reconsideration of Lower Burma's depression-era tax records backs the 'minimalist impact' arguments of Michael Adas over the 'maximalist impact' views of James Scott, Brown himself is careful to qualify his own conclusions. For one thing, when Burma's *Saya San* rebellion began in late December 1930, the British authorities had yet to readjust their tax demands to reflect the deepening economic crisis in the colony. Heavy taxes could thus have 'detonated' the uprising much as Scott contends. For another, despite the progressive reduction of land revenue and capitation taxes over subsequent years, fiscal impositions on peasant landowners actually increased in real terms during the depression.¹¹⁵ Measuring the direct effects of colonial taxes is a delicate business. The preceding examples remind us that we need multiple case studies before any general conclusions about the depression, economic marginalization and policing may be advanced.

For many among the rural populations of Southeast Asia securing enough food to eat dominated their daily lives as the economic crisis crystallized into a rice crisis. The northern Vietnamese protectorates of Tonkin and Annam in French Indochina suffered badly. A combination of increased production for export and unaffordable local market prices threatened widespread famine.¹¹⁶ To meet the challenge, the French authorities established an 'Indochina rice office' in April 1930,

pumping funds into agro-economics. Laboratories began work across the Indochina federation, experimenting with higher yield grains.¹¹⁷ Any long-term benefits from such investment were obscured by the short-term damage done by a major revaluation of the piastre in June that same year. Meanwhile, personal taxes on peasant cultivators continued to rise.¹¹⁸ The colonial government in Tonkin, the hub of Vietnam's rice economy, even recorded a net budget surplus in 1934 thanks to more stringent collection of head taxes. As significant for us, the personnel costs for Tonkin's *garde indigène*, its internal policing force, were the biggest single item of budgetary expenditure for the Hanoi authorities in that year.¹¹⁹

Far to the Southwest, for Malaya's indentured Tamil labourers, in Sunil Amrith's words, the depression 'began to tear at the interconnected regional economy that had developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, involving flows of people, goods, and capital throughout the arc of coasts around the Bay of Bengal'.¹²⁰ Malaya's 1930 Aliens Ordinance solidified immigration controls designed to extract unwanted Chinese and South Indian labourers from the plantation economy. And the economic crisis sharpened ethnic, cultural and socio-economic differences between Malays and non-Malays, as well as between urban Tamils better integrated into colonial society than their plantation-confined brethren of South India's Diaspora community.¹²¹

The fate of Indians in Britain's Asian empire also informs the work of Sugata Bose, which begins from the observation that colonial economic extraction before and after the First World War tied regional agrarian economies into a capitalist world market. Colonial authorities developed larger, more intrusive bureaucracies to facilitate revenue collection, promote export output and guarantee the social order needed to fulfil their economic objectives. In the countryside of East Bengal, the focus of Bose's research, the depression challenged all of this. As Bose puts it, 'The depth and length of the economic crisis of the 1930s meant that unlike earlier ruptures the tears in social relations were not repaired. During the 1930s and 1940s landlords who were reduced to their rentier role and traders who remained as grain-dealers rather than lenders were marked out as the targets of peasant resistance ... the usual modality of protest was for large crowds of peasant debtors to surround the house of a moneylender and demand back the documents that recorded their debts. If the moneylender did not oblige, his house was looted and burnt.'¹²² The depression-era credit crisis had 'snapped the bonds' between a Hindu rural elite, which clung on to its rentier rights more tenaciously, and a class of smallholders, predominantly Muslim farmers, confronted with insupportable debts. Despite these

communal divisions, the impetus behind the collective protests that followed remained essentially economic, not religious.¹²³ Once again, local police were heavily implicated both in the process of revenue collection and the clashes it provoked.

Another question arises in bringing these arguments together. Just how significant was the depression for the future of empire? Did it signify the start of economic and political decoupling between metropolitan governments and their colonial territories? Did the colonies cease being the moons that revolved around metropolitan financial centres, or were the poles of economic attraction neither loosened nor reversed? The limited impact of Britain's introduction of imperial preference tariffs following the Ottawa economic conference in July 1932 is suggestive. Although the colonial moons remained in their British orbit, the magnetism holding them in place was diminishing. Certainly, the depression exposed the structural vulnerabilities of Britain's economy. Its old, staple industries – coal, steel, shipbuilding, textiles – were in terminal decline. Its currency was already overvalued, making it difficult for home and colonial exporters to stay competitive in international markets. And British investment capital did not flow as freely overseas as it had done in the heady days of late Victorian and Edwardian imperial expansion. But these were all long-term shifts. The Crash accelerated, but did not cause them.¹²⁴ In 1929 Britain also ran the world's largest visible trade deficit, importing 67 per cent more than it exported. Yet this was a curate's egg. A huge deficit spoke of weakening export industries, but it could be a source of political strength because so many other nations (and colonies) relied on access to the British market to sustain their own balance of payments. Through it all, the City of London remained the pre-eminent international money market.¹²⁵

The two foremost components of Britain's continuing economic magnetism were not particularly beneficial from a colonial perspective. First, colonial membership of the British-led trading bloc, the sterling area, established after Ramsay MacDonald's National Government abandoned the gold standard in September 1931, tied colonial exports to the fate of a free-floating pound.¹²⁶ The financial future of dependencies that conducted most of their trade in sterling, which held reserves in sterling and which pegged their local currencies against the pound was tied to British recovery.¹²⁷ Like their French counterparts, Britain's colonial governments, let alone its colonial subjects, had little say in the terms on which their foreign trade was conducted during the 1930s.¹²⁸ Second was Britain's abandonment of free trade in July 1932. Hugely symbolic and the source of bitter resentment in the United States, Japan and elsewhere, tariff protection did little to help colonies reeling from

the downward slide in raw materials' prices. Benefits accrued from preferential customs tariffs were wiped out by the declining real value of exports.¹²⁹ It could even be argued that the official focus on tariff policy diverted government attention from the dreadful social consequences of falling real wages in most colonial territories.¹³⁰ Only when these difficulties became impossible to ignore with widespread strikes, rioting and other civil disturbances across the British Empire between 1934 and 1939 did political attention turn, belatedly, to the devastating long-term damage wrought by the depression on colonial peoples' lives.¹³¹ Police forces were at the heart of these developments, whether overseeing the introduction of increased taxes and monitoring workplace activity in the early depression years or confronting the outbreaks of disorder catalysed by the economic crisis.

Thinking about colonial order and repression

Depression-era events make the case for considering political economy as an explanatory tool for colonial police action. It bears emphasis, however, that levels of colonial collective violence in the early 1930s remained low. Even revolts with lasting political fallout, such as Tonkin's 1930 Yen Bay mutiny and the accompanying rebellion in northern Annam, counted overall deaths in the hundreds and not the thousands. The same could be said of the other episodes of unrest investigated in later chapters. Next to the political killings of Civil War Spain, Stalinist purges, the rape of Nanking, or the horrors of Nazi mass murder to come, the colonial empires of the 1930s rank lower as sites of lethal state repression, at least until Italy's murderous conquest of Ethiopia between 1935 and 1940.¹³² What should we read into this relative absence of violence and the appearance of order only fitfully disturbed within colonies? Does this imply that popular grievances were more limited or that effective state control stifled opposition?¹³³ How, in other words, can we gauge the relationship between the policing of colonial rule and the expression of violent dissent? The editors of a recent work on order, conflict and violence explain the dialectic involved:

Clearly, order is necessary for managing violence as much as the threat of violence is crucial in cementing order ... On the one hand, order requires the taming of conflict. However, this is often impossible without an actual or threatened recourse to violence ... On the other hand, violent conflict entails the successful contestation of existing order, and its collapse. Put otherwise, violence is employed both by those who wish to upend an existing order and by those who want to sustain it.¹³⁴

Violent disorder or order sustained by threat of violence; do these apparent opposites reveal a single constant: that violence – either actual or potential – was a constant feature of colonial politics? Ann Stoler is an excellent guide here. Her study of the fear of violence, and the repression that such anxieties generated among the planters, officials and policemen of the Deli region of Dutch Sumatra offers empirical evidence to explain how non-violent worker protest could be construed as something very threatening. By the 1920s, it seems that colonial officials and Dutch estate managers of Deli's rubber plantations were obsessively nervous that the tables between rulers and ruled might be turned. Fear of violence thereby underpinned employers' behaviour and Dutch colonial policy.

According to Stoler, in 1924 it was calculated that a European assistant with fifteen years of service had a 3 per cent chance of being killed by a worker and at least a 50 per cent probability of being physically assaulted. Yet these official figures are contradictory, and only included those for (more widespread) assaults on Asian overseers on rubber estates from 1925 onwards. One colonial government source states that thirteen Europeans were assaulted on Deli's plantations in 1919; another doubles that amount. In a sense, the precise numbers do not matter. Stoler's figures, necessarily approximate, indicate that actual violence against those in charge bore little correlation to worsening dread of it. Between 1914 and 1923 the numbers range from twenty-five and thirty-five attacks annually at a time when the total labour force stood at about 200,000.¹³⁵ How might this be explained? The key, according to Stoler, is that official attention was gripped less by attacks on the estates than by political activity and violent dissent outside them; in other words, by higher levels of nationalist, communist and anti-colonial protest in the 1920s. Her findings are worth quoting at length:

The [Dutch East Indies] government's refusal to distinguish political agitation from criminal offense, or labor actions from political incitement, meant that anyone actively participating in a work stoppage by verbally supporting it (for example, by simply addressing the workers) was subject to criminal prosecution ... This blurred administrative vision of what comprised political agitation, economic grievance, and ergo criminal offense provided a base for government repression of anticolonial resistance in Java. In regard to the issues that arose in Deli [on Sumatra] during the mid- and late-1920s, it is important to keep this legal and ideological justification in mind. It colored the tenor of labor relations and the interpretations of imagined insurgence and real confrontation.¹³⁶

Even by colonial standards, the rubber-producing region of Dutch Sumatra was an exceptionally 'tense society'. Officials, planters, overseers and police were liable to treat any protest or worker unrest harshly.

Hence the mass arrests and other signs of disproportionate repression that followed an abortive communist rebellion in West Sumatra in November 1926 and another in Java two months later.¹³⁷ There was nothing unique to the Dutch colonies about this.¹³⁸ Indeed, as we shall see in later chapters, these Indonesian uprisings triggered similar alarm and heightened security measures in neighbouring British Malaya and French Indochina.

Telescoping forward, David Anderson and Sloane Mahone in their work on Britain's official responses to Mau Mau have highlighted that the flow of 'administrivia' between government offices could be interrupted by extraordinary flurries of government activity provoked by concern over indigenous transgression of racial or sexual boundaries. Then, as during the inter-war period, panic, moral or otherwise, lurked beneath the calm exterior of colonial rule.¹³⁹ And, as Patricia Lorcin notes, 'Of the many issues that preoccupied colonial minds, labor and forms of violence were among the most enduring as each concerned both economic prerogatives and racial relations. Labor issues, in particular, defined colonial societies.'¹⁴⁰ Imagine, for a moment, an episode common to several colonies between the wars: a strikers' march that descended into a violent confrontation in which protesters lost their lives in clashes with the police. Thus did industrial protest become identifiable with something profoundly menacing – an inter-ethnic riot in which the forces of order were targeted because they personified colonial authority and employer interest.

Several events of this kind figure in later chapters. So we should take into account Donald Horowitz's influential study of such inter-ethnic riots, which starts from this proposition:

The outbreak of violence may inhibit the management of conflict in some cases, facilitate it in others. One thing it will not do is to leave the conflict where it was. After the killing, it is no longer possible to bury the ethnic problem by denying its existence. The riot constitutes a statement of group intentions by conduct – even the conduct of a relative few – and it exposes the malevolence of those intentions, belying the former tranquillity inferred from the routine interethnic contact of the marketplace or the government office.¹⁴¹

Horowitz's reflections on the consequences of inter-ethnic riots amplify a perhaps obvious point. The more people engaged in protest, the harder the job of policing became and the greater weight attached to police powers by governments feeling under pressure. Also important in this context are the tactics employed by dissidents or oppositional groups. In autocratic or otherwise repressive states there is greater likelihood of a swifter recourse to violent opposition when compared with more open societies that provide outlets for free expression of dissent

without legal sanction. Another factor comes into play here. This is the extent to which the perceived danger to authority replicates, evokes or exceeds previous experience of threatening oppositional activity. Measuring present dangers against past precedents may be a critical determinant of the official response. Conversely, the manifestation of a threat that went undetected or that was completely unexpected may also elicit an especially powerful repressive act.¹⁴² The following chapters contain numerous examples of protest policing and workplace violence that reveal these abstract processes in action.

Conclusion

‘The colonial world is a world cut in two’, wrote Frantz Fanon, the Martiniquan psychiatrist, in 1961. ‘The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations.’¹⁴³ These dividing lines became easier to discern after 1918 amidst rising official fears that popular hostility to imperial rule might escalate into open defiance. Police were expected to prevent or to contain any such outbreaks. In the event, few uprisings occurred. Mass killing remained mercifully rare in the inter-war empires, although lower-level abuses were both commonplace and systemic. The social divisions in colonial societies reflected an institutional racism that connected rigid class distinctions with racial differentiation. Colonial rulers classified and valued various groups according to precepts of ethnicity that were themselves defined in terms of white conceptions of racial hierarchy and economic value. Casual violence was widespread. It could be physical: the corporal punishment of workers or sexual assaults on house servants or plantation employees. It could also be psychological: repeated insult and humiliation, or the cultural violence inherent to the denigration of indigenous societal practices. Sometimes police could be found attempting to stop such violence; at other times, they were its perpetrators. Whichever the case, non-lethal violence was prevalent in colonial life and imperial policy-making.¹⁴⁴ To understand why, the next two chapters dwell on the working lives of colonial police forces and, in particular, their experience of protest policing.