Abstract
In August 2012 an attempt to hold a commemoration for members of the Royal Irish Constabulary provoked criticism and abuse. The strength of feeling expressed, that members of the RIC were traitors not worthy of commemoration, was particularly striking. The sentiment which 90 years ago lead to attacks on members of that force and drove many men and their families to leave the country apparently lingers. As the country approaches the centenary of so many defining events, it is perhaps fitting to consider the lasting impacts of these transitions for policing.

This paper presents findings from a forthcoming monograph entitled Policing Twentieth Century Ireland: A History of An Garda Síochána. Drawing on post-colonial theory, through the work of authors such as Said, Ghandi and Cole, the paper will explore the ways in which post-colonialism has shaped policing in Ireland and what other post-colonial, and even post-conflict, states can learn from this experience. It will be argued that in terms of structure, governance and organisation the force created in 1922 differed little from its predecessor and that many of those features, introduced for a colonial force, remain today. Despite these similarities, a discourse of difference quickly became central to narratives of Irish policing and An Garda Síochána. Politically, An Garda Síochána is presented as different from the RIC: Irish in thought and action (rather than a British force), unarmed (rather than paramilitary) and regularly makes sacrifices to protect our country (rather than being an instrument of oppression). Not only will I trace the emergence of that narrative and document its existence but I will argue that it has determined the nature of political support for the police. Given, however, that this discourse does not accurately reflect the reality of policing, some points of conflict will be identified, as are reflected in current disputes between police and politicians in Ireland.

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