At first sight, it may appear a little strange that a publisher should produce, in the same year, two collections of papers on the same general topic - the transformation of police systems in northwestern Europe, covering a similar although not identical list of countries, and organized in roughly the same way. But the decision to publish both is comprehensible for several reasons. They have a different genesis. The van Sluis volume was sponsored by the Dutch police college and was originally published in Dutch so that this volume is effectively a second edition. The Fyfe collection emerged from a European Criminological Association conference and was then helped along by the European Police Research Institutes Collaboration (EPIC). The books have a different approach and cover different topics, though with important overlaps in the material presented. However, the decision to publish is, above all, justified in terms of the quality of both. All contributors write authoritatively and clearly on the subjects assigned to them. Unusually in collections based on conference papers, and even given a certain variation in quality, all contributors maintain a high standard and are very much in control of their often complex material. Both books are admirably informative about recent developments in the police systems of northern and Western Europe, and make essential reading for those who need to be abreast of recent reforms across a range of countries; and both provide many insights into pressures to reform.

Police reform is, of course, an old story and there have been periods in the past when police reform has been high on the political agenda. In some countries it has been a continuing preoccupation. As Bo Wennström points out (Fyfe 159), since 1922, the police in Sweden have been subject to more than a hundred enquiries and although some have been of a minor nature, others have tackled the basic issues of how the police should be organized, and resulted among other things in the creation of a national police in 1965. Nonetheless, the period from the 1990s has been a time of unusually intense reforming activity in which most countries in northern and western Europe have sought to implement “deep” reforms, in the sense of putting into effect measures which have a profound effect on police structures and modes of operation. This is not at all easy, as J. Q. Wilson pointed out as long ago as the 1970s, when he looked at the work of the FBI and DEA before and after the Church Commission, subsequent legislation and a comprehensive management review. Wilson found the working methods of front-line agents were unchanged. The editors of and contributors to these volumes, however, show that they are well aware of the possibility that reforms are often not
implemented or have little impact. They are conscious of intricate problems posed in analyzing the transformation of police systems.

The editors of the van Sluis volume in their introductory chapters provide a richer theoretical framework, and their conclusions in the last two chapters are more elaborate than those of the Fyfe volume. This does not mean that they are of greater assistance to the individual country contributions because the more elaborate the framework, the more difficult it is for the empirical research to follow and explore all the avenues indicated. In the case of van Sluis, the objective is to establish what changes in recent decades have occurred in the organization and governance of police systems in five countries, and why have they occurred. Everything depends on what one looks at, and the methods adopted to analyze change. The editors see five perspectives - a rational perspective (performance and results of the police), a societal perspective (responsiveness of the police), a political perspective (governance and accountability of the police), police professionalism (internal dynamics of the police), and an institutional perspective (the resilience of the system and the adaptability of the police). When these perspectives are further elaborated, it becomes clear that this is an enormous agenda and, although the contributors can mine the often rich seams of research in their respective countries, it is not possible to follow the agenda in every respect. The editors try to pull together all the strands in the concluding chapter, which succeeds in showing what has been achieved. This is a mapping of changes in recent history, except oddly for England and Wales. Here, a contemporary frame is adopted, concentrating on changes in progress since 2010 with the major ones implemented only in April 2013. This particular variation from the pattern of the other contributions has the virtue of emphasizing how changes in different countries show convergences and divergences. The England and Wales example show that by the introduction of elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and the abandonment of national performance indicators, this part of the United Kingdom seems to be moving in a direction different from neighboring countries. It is important to stress "seems," because it is by no means certain that the new PCCs will be effective in the ways intended, and the requirement of police “transparency” in terms of publishing their objectives and results may make purely cosmetic the abandonment of national performance indicators. Legislation and management plans are often emptied of content through imaginative implementation measures, corporatist resistance and the practical difficulties of implementation.

A virtue of the van Sluis et al. approach is that the police are presented in a political, legal and institutional context. Descriptive material is provided about this context, some of it of a basic textbook character but helpful to those readers who may be quite unfamiliar with arrangements in the smaller European countries. It also illustrates the obstacles of transferring police reform from one country to another. Similarly, although not in an identical way, the focus on centralization in the Fyfe collection allows the presentation of descriptive material because as soon as the issues of a centralizing process or of the degree of centralization in a system are posed, contextual questions concerning the reasons for reforming measures are immediately addressed. Fyfe et al. represent a serious attempt to establish a sharper focus on contemporary police systems, the changes in them, and the pressures under which they are operating. But the very title of the introduction to Fyfe et al. - “A ‘transformative moment in policing’” - shows an important overlap between the two volumes. After establishing a typology of police reform, Terpstra and Fyfe argue that there are often highly specific triggers for reform, but that reforms must be understood against a background of general social, political, cultural and economic changes. Shifting power relationships, questions about legitimacy, new concepts of management and evaluation, and how problems are defined, all affect
both whether or not reforms are introduced and the content of these reforms. Fyfe et al. therefore establish almost as broad an agenda as van Sluis et al., but the centralization focus, despite the difficulties of the concept – that the starting point adopted is often crucially important in establishing whether centralization is taking place in practice - allows some important threads to be pulled together in the conclusion.

There is much of interest in the smaller countries treated in these volumes, as well as in the relationship between police reform and the current severe restraint of public expenditure, and in the identification of certain general trends across a majority of the countries. The Belgian case in particular shows how terrible criminal outrages can trigger reform - the Heisel stadium disaster in which 39 people were killed as a result of disturbances by football supporters; the Brabant killers who raided supermarkets in very violent and still unsolved crimes; an extreme left wing terrorist campaign; and the Dutroux serial killer and child molester case, all caused widespread concerns not only about the police and criminal justice system but also about the evolution of Belgian society itself. Similarly, if to a somewhat lesser degree, the unsolved (1986) murder of Prime Minister Olaf Palme, the murder of Foreign Minister Anna Lindh, the prison escape of a major spy and the Gothenburg riots during the 2001 EU summit, raised questions about the appropriate police organization to confront these issues. But as the authors (Cachet, De Kimpe in van Sluis, and Devroe, Ponsaers in Fyfe on Belgium; and Wennström in Fyfe on Sweden) indicate, there were other more general causes and the triggers explain only very partially the content of reforms. Indeed what are sometimes suggested as reasons for introducing a reform may not be among the most important causes. A possible example is the creation of a Scottish national police. The major public justification was financial - major savings were alleged to be the result, an argument which apparently persuaded the then Labour dominated administration to adopt the scheme. Much justified skepticism was expressed about this argument although it is too early to know whether any savings will be made. The main considerations of the policy makers were probably elsewhere, for example, in management considerations - half the population was in one police region and the other half divided into seven police regions, all with “barriers created by organizational structures and the quasi-constitutional rights of chief constables” (Fyfe 124) - and the tardy but decisive conversion of the Scottish National Party may have been largely determined by political symbolism. This case illustrates a general problem of analyzing the process of police reform - the motives of the policy makers may be difficult to identify and rather different from their public arguments.

For this reviewer, the most provocative contribution is in Fyfe et al. by Christian Mouhanna, an authoritative and incisive analyst of the French police, who argues that an already centralized national police has become even more centralized in recent years. The bringing together of the national police and gendarmerie under the authority of one ministry is a landmark measure in this process. But the clear argument of Mouhanna raises a variety of questions. Has the “inversion of the hierarchy” in terms of control over what front line police officials actually do, noticed by Dominique Monjardet (1996) over two decades ago, been completely swept away by new management methods? Has the deliberate thwarting of hierarchical control documented by Gatto and Thoenig (1993) disappeared? Have the decentralizing measures from the 1980s to the turn of the century left no sediment? Also, as René Lévy (1997) has argued, the question of centralization/decentralization in a system depends not only on the relationship of the summit of the hierarchy to the base but on the numbers of independent centers of command which exist. From this point of view, the French police
look almost as fragmented as ever. Mouhanna’s extremely interesting paper can form the basis of a lively discussion.

In the plethora of information and argument presented in these two collections, three general comparative points stand out. The first is that the public standing of the police has been, for complex reasons, in decline almost everywhere. Again France is an interesting exception where, according to survey evidence, the standing of the police has improved compared with the other major public services such as education and health. Second, the pressure on public expenditure in all countries in recent years has been a factor in most reform debates and reforming measures. Third, New Public Management thinking has permeated all systems, although there is now a reaction against performance indicators. Indeed the introduction of these indicators has helped to undermine some traditional political support for the police. In England and Wales increase in expenditure on the police was not accompanied (as the police claimed it would and the Conservatives expected) by a decline in the crime rate and an improvement in the clear-up rate -- but in fact the reverse. As a consequence, relations between the police and the traditionally pro-police Conservatives deteriorated. There are many more such points of interest in these two highly recommended volumes.

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