

Colleen Bell and Kendra Schreiner. "The International Relations of Police Power in Settler Colonialism: The "civilizing" mission of Canada's Mounties." *International Journal* 73:1 (March 2018): 111-128. DOI:

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0020702018768480>

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Published by ISSF on 21 November 2018

<http://tiny.cc/ISSF-AR105>

<https://issforum.org/articlereviews/105-mounties>

<https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-AR105.pdf>

The role of police institutions in transnational governance and economic development has become a site of intensive scholarly and policy debates, especially since the revitalization of counterinsurgency doctrine in the early twenty-first century as the crux of U.S.-led coalition actions in the so-called War on Terror. Some argue that public police ought to remain occupied solely with matters of 'domestic' law and order, sounding alarms about 'mission creep' and the inappropriate involvement of 'civil' institutions in 'military' interventions across 'international' boundaries, or the vice versa.¹ But research that exhibits a critical historiography of policing as an already global practice, and that explicitly recognizes and foregrounds the rise of police institutions in the context of imperial expansionism, colonial administration, and the rise of (neo)liberal political economic ideologies, belies any assumed bright lines between domestic-international and civil-military spheres of police influence and praxis.²

¹ Cornelius Friesendorf, *International Intervention and the Use of Force: Military and Police Roles*. (London: Ubiquity Press, 2018). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/bbo>; Torin Monahan and Neal Palmer. "The Emerging Politics of DHS Fusion Centers." *Security Dialogues* 40:6 (December 2009): 617-636; Dominique Wisler. "The International Civilian Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina: From Democratization to Nation-Building." *Police Practice and Research* 8:3 (July 2007): 253-268.

² Beatrice Jauregui. "Categories of Conflict and Coercion: The Blue in Green and the Other," in John D. Kelly, Beatrice Jauregui, Sean T. Mitchell, and Jeremy Walton, eds., *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency* (Chicago: The

Colleen Bell and Kendra Schreiner's article works in this critical vein to rethink the complex position of 'Canada's Mounties' in their various historical iterations, most recently as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or RCMP. The authors examine the Mounties' foundations in practiced concepts of 'civilization' and settler colonial governance to argue that, contrary to common wisdom, this national police force has "always been international." They further suggest that such an understanding of the Mounties allows—indeed, demands—reconsideration of how Canada and other settler colonies, not least the U.S., participate in "Western-led peacebuilding and counterinsurgency operations in the global periphery" (115).

The analysis traces three dimensions of police power that link the *longue durée* history of British and European imperialism to the forces and relations of Canadian colonialism, framing the Mounties as a primary conduit. It begins with a grounding conception of police as not merely a state organ modeled on British Home Secretary Robert Peel's nineteenth-century London Metropolitan Police force ("Met"), but *inter alia* a "political discourse of social regulation" dating back to the fifteenth century. Relying heavily on conceptual frameworks put forth by Mark Neocleous and Tia Dafnos³, the first sub-section of the article reiterates the general centrality of police power to securing economic interests and territorial control in empire through discourses and techniques of 'civilization.' The inquiry then turns to how police power has manifested among past and current versions of the Mounties and contributed directly to founding and developing Canada as a nation-state. This second sub-section demonstrates how the institution has always been "more military than police" in form and function (118), and also how it has been fundamental to the socio-legal construction of the Canadian federation as a settler-colony-turned-settler-state at the expense of Indigenous political orders and sovereignties. The third section argues that the general outlawing of Indigenous sovereignties, the pacification and regulation of Indigenous peoples' everyday lives, and other activities comprising the Mounties' unusually wide policing mandate have been vital to constituting not only Canadian nationalism but also a Greater British internationalism "composed of (mainly) self-governing, white-dominated settler states" (122). The analysis concludes with a discussion of some of the implications of conceptualizing the Mounties as an inherently international institution projecting police power into the world, particularly how "Canada's role in recent international missions in the global periphery... cannot be considered independent of its own internal periphery and the conflict between claims to nationhood and sovereignty" (126).

Connecting practiced concepts of 'police' and 'civilization' through analysis of institutionalized praxis of security and order is of course hardly ground-breaking. The history and theory of this convergence has been drawn in various forms and contexts by scholars in fields like police studies,⁴ socio-legal studies,⁵ and

University of Chicago Press, 2010); Olly Owen, "Policing after Colonialism," in Ben Bradford, Beatrice Jauregui, Ian Loader, and Jonny Steinberg, *The SAGE Handbook of Global Policing* (London: Sage, 2016).

³ Tia Dafnos. "Negotiating Colonial Encounters: (Un)mapping the Policing of Indigenous Peoples' Protests in Canada" (Ph.D. dissertation, York University, 2014); Mark Neocleous. *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power*. (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

⁴ Allan Silver. "The Demand for Order in Civil Society," in D. J. Bordua, ed., *The Police: Six Sociological Essays* (New York: Wiley, 1967), 1-24; Ian Loader and Neil Walker, *Civilizing Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵ Markus D. Dubber and Mariana Valverde. *The New Police Science: The Police Power in Domestic and International Governance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

political-legal anthropology.⁶ So, too, with claims of blurred boundaries between civil (police) and military spheres of influence.⁷ Bell and Schreiner's contribution here is nonetheless intriguing and exciting for its linkage of the complexities of globally projected police power (as always already militarized might and right) with an organization generally considered as a domestic law enforcement body that has only 'recently' made forays into international security interventions and discourses. As this article ably demonstrates, the central involvement of the Canadian Mounties in what may be considered internationalist discourses and practices of governance—particularly through settler colonial domination and legalistic violence against Indigenous people—dates back to their founding in the late nineteenth century, and continues into the present.

Even in the face of public introspection inspired by institutions like the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) regarding the history of official disenfranchisement and direct harm of Indigenous peoples, the national myth of the red-coated Mounties as valiant keepers of law and order and protectors of all people inside Canada's borders remains strong today. Moreover, the symbolic power of the Mounties in the Canadian foundational mythos, to say nothing of their tentacular multi-level jurisdictional power across the country, is unparalleled among police institutions in the Anglo-sphere and arguably unique in the world. As I discuss with students in my course on global policing, it is difficult to imagine not only a Canada without the Mounties but also a national police force anywhere else in the world that is so ubiquitously celebrated that its lionized avatars appear as central figures in international fields like the Olympic Games closing ceremony in Vancouver in 2010.⁸ It is thus somewhat surprising that, with the exception of a few historians cited by Bell and Schreiner (see notes 13 and 14, 114), there has been relatively little critical assessment of the Mounties as a simultaneously revered and feared set of institutional actors whose 'protection' of 'Canadians' has been uneven, discriminatory, and generally serving the interests of colonial capitalism at the expense of Indigenous and other minority rights. Such critical assessment is vital for any student of Canadian political and legal history and also for government officials and practitioners who engage more or less directly with the Mounties today, especially in light of ongoing and apparently increasing allegations of misconduct and corruption in the RCMP.⁹

Critical analysis of institutional developments and current practices of the Mounties is also important for persons and governance institutions outside of Canada. Bell and Schreiner's highlighting of the Mounties' representing a key node of a broader Anglo-Saxon internationalism is perhaps the most important and incisive contribution of the article in the present moment, not least because it compels scholars in a variety of interdisciplinary fields—from international studies and security theory to critical race theory and what some

⁶ William Garriott, ed., *Policing and Contemporary Governance: The Anthropology of Police in Practice* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013).

⁷ Beatrice Jauregui, "Civilised Coercion, Militarised Law and Order: Security in Colonial South Asia and the Blue in Green Global Order," in Marleen Easton, Monica den Boer, Jelle Janssens, Rene Moelker, Tom Vander Beken, eds., *Blurring Military and Police Roles* (The Hague: Eleven International Publishing, 2011), 57-78.

⁸ Jack McLaughlin, "Vancouver Olympics Closing," YouTube video, 2:34, posted 12 March 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p717yP7-6s>.

⁹ Alison Crawford, "RCMP misconduct cases jump 158% in single year," *CBC News*, 19 April 2016, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/rcmp-misconduct-cases-report-1.3541315>.

have called the “prospective field” of global policing studies¹⁰—to engage more directly and explicitly with the role of racialized forces and relations of (trans)national and (neo)liberal governance through police power. Drawing on recent work by Duncan Bell, Uday Singh Mehta, and other political theorists and critical historiographers of British empire,¹¹ their analysis underscores how Canadian confederation as a moment of transition to self-governance was not merely a process of independence from monarchical ‘tyranny’ à la the U.S. narrative of national sovereignty, but rather part of a larger sociopolitical movement aimed at producing a ‘Greater Britain.’ As key players in this movement, the Mounties not only became a metonym of the new nation-state of Canada but also served as harbingers of an idealized global Anglo-Saxon society. In Bell and Schreiner’s words:

“The Mounties were *the* agents of collective representation for Canada and its identity formation as a sovereign state... [an identity] constituted so as to exclude Indigenous self-determination and traditions of governance, and to define Canada as a distinctly European polity in contrast to emerging American political traditions that were making a mark in the northern regions. [Through an] authoritarian paternalism derived almost exclusively from British models... [t]he Mounties effectively functioned as a transnational institution importing British traditions and laws to northern and prairie communities, and even though they were working on behalf of Ottawa, they saw themselves as agents of British Empire... [and may thus be understood as] part of a larger, global imaginary for a British-led white world order.” (123-124)

The centrality of the Mounties to Canada’s founding myth as a distinct self-governing nation-state under the British Commonwealth has certainly been recognized by the aforementioned historians of the RCMP and its predecessors. The vital thing that Bell and Schreiner add to the mix is an historical account—albeit one based on secondary sources—that foregrounds a racialized project of white supremacy in transnational governance that continues in various forms today. This opens a much-needed space for difficult questions about discriminatory policing in a multicultural society, both within and outside of Canada’s borders.

This article’s important and multi-faceted argument could have been further strengthened had the analysis engaged more directly with other critical scholarship on Canadian settler colonialism and statehood, and its ongoing fallout via racialized policing institutions.¹² One of the statements with which I fully agree, and

¹⁰ Bradford, Jauregui, Loader, Jonny Steinberg, *The SAGE Handbook of Global Policing* (London: Sage, 2016).

¹¹ Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw, David Phillips, and Shurlee Swain, *Equal Subjects, Unequal Rights: Indigenous Peoples in British Settler Colonies, 1830-1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); William Morrison. “Imposing the British way: the Canadian Mounted Police and the Klondike gold rush,” in David M. Anderson and David Killingray, eds., *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

¹² Elizabeth Comack. *Racialized Policing: Aboriginal People’s Encounters with the Police* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishers, 2012); Sherene Razack. *Dying from Improvement: Inquests and Inquiries into Indigenous Deaths in Custody* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); Stephanie Latty, Megan Scribe, Alena Peters and Anthony Morgan, “Not Enough Human: At the Scenes of Indigenous and Black Dispossession,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2:2 (Fall 2016): 129-158;

which I wish could have been developed and deepened, is the suggestion that “The movement for a Greater Britain, of which Canada’s Mounties were a part, suggests that culture and race are central dynamics of international relations” (125). While this point has long been obvious to political-legal anthropologists¹³ as well as to scholars of post-colonial studies and critical race theory,¹⁴ it seems to be mostly neglected in other disciplines like international relations and comparative politics. Hopefully Bell and Schreiner’s keen analysis can encourage sustained and fruitful dialogue among all of our disciplines, which still tend to remain stuck in silos and echo chambers.

The article’s conclusion hints at how racialized police power dynamics may configure things like “Canada’s role in recent international missions in the global periphery... [and how] imperial policing continues to guide the counterinsurgency strategies deployed in the Global South by a number of Western states including Canada, the U.S., and the United Kingdom...” (126). I could not agree more, and was thus a bit surprised not to read more in-depth discussion, or even mention, of how such racialization configures particular policy orientations for which Canada is well-known and has been at the helm of pushing on an international scale. The most obvious example would seem to be the global Responsibility to Protect (R2P) commitment, which has been receiving increasing scrutiny and critique over the past decade as an apparently kinder, gentler form of neocolonial domination or ‘right to punish’ that validates certain forms of state violence—especially Wester-led counterinsurgency—while arbitrarily criminalizing other forms conducted by less powerful states.¹⁵ Such asymmetrical positioning and labeling of ‘better’ and ‘worse’ forms of state violence are integrated with a highly problematic valorization of Canadian international interventions vis-à-vis demonization of the apparently more blunt and brutish forms demonstrated by the United States. The question is less who is better or worse, and more what do the similarities and differences in domestic and transnational policing by these and other global actors tell us about possibilities for social justice and equity?

While some points of the article seem a bit underdeveloped, its strengths include a streamlined vision and clarity of critical writing, both of which make it eminently teachable in a wide variety of courses related to policing, socio-legal studies, (post)colonial studies, international studies, critical military studies, critical race studies, Indigenous studies, and Canadian studies. It also spurs further comparative case-study research contextualizing ‘domestic’ and ‘global’ police praxis within broader and long-standing forces and relations of power projection, economic development, and transitional justice. Such intersectionality has been, if not completely ignored, then certainly not adequately attended to in various scholarly fields, even the most open interdisciplinary ones. Overall, this interrogation of the conceptual assumptions and practiced technologies of

Lisa Monchalin, *The Colonial Problem: An Indigenous Perspective on Crime and Injustice in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

¹³ Network of Concerned Anthropologists, *The Counter-Counterinsurgency Manual* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009); John D. Kelly, Beatrice Jauregui, Sean T. Mitchell, and Jeremy Walton, *Anthropology and Global Counterinsurgency* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Sherene Razack. *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Mahmood Mamdani, “Responsibility to Protect or Right to Punish?” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 4:1 (March 2010): 53-67.

the Canadian Mounties has much to contribute to broader debates around racialized power asymmetries and conflicts marking key challenges to transnational governance.

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