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Police Peacekeeping: The UN, Haiti, and the Production of Global Social Order

by Lou Pingeot, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023, xi + 292pp., £83.00 (hardback, also available as ebook), ISBN 9780198886617

In introducing her book, Lou Pingeot asks the reader a provocative question, ‘Could intervention in one country be sowing the seeds of future crisis in another?’ (p. 16). Pingeot’s brilliant monograph articulates how hegemonic international relations and political science scholarship on UN peace operations has – until now – failed to meaningfully interrogate the global scale of relationships and exchanges fostered on the ground. *Police Peacekeeping* demonstrates how the field-based activities of peacekeeping missions – as opposed to simply their mandated limitations – could be productively understood in conversation with the recent wave of abolitionist scholarship. In doing so, Pingeot’s book thus joins a strong group of existing historical, IR, and socio-legal literature that has begun to examine long lineages of policing in the West. *Police Peacekeeping* provides a crucial new dimension to these largely domestic studies by tracking the globalisation of policing methods through the humanitarian guise of UN peacekeeping. By empirically interrogating the racist and authoritarian practices of ‘public order’ mandates in UN peacekeeping missions, her book is a welcome addition to other recent studies that have demythologised narratives of instability used to justify violent (inter)national interventions and policies.¹

Over six empirical chapters, Pingeot explores the – often paradoxical – political logic for the continuation of the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) from 2004-2017, and outlines deviation of its field-based practices from UN Security Council resolution 1542. By focusing on MINUSTAH, a robust mission with a mandate to prevent civil war, she argues that the mission had tangible effects on both the host *and* contributing countries. Throughout the book, she evaluates the trade-off of this global co-constitutive process, writing, ‘Even if peace operations are considered ‘successful’ (and, as we have seen, that is an object of debate), these systemic effects may mean that the cost of ‘success’ are prohibitively high in terms of global reverberations... Is stabilization in one country ‘worth’ the growth of paramilitary police units in another...?’ (p. 16). Thus, moving beyond the inflexible binary of wartime/peacetime and the trappings of methodological nationalism, this book adopts a truly global assessment of peacekeeping, refusing to limit analysis to the temporal or territorial borders of its case study.

It would be ahistorical to suggest that the question posed by this book – ‘are we doing more harm than good?’ – has not been asked before – especially by those participating in peacekeeping missions of the past. This fear has pervaded humanitarian action for over a century, especially in organisations concerned with retaining their more left-leaning donorship and thus framing operations in terms of liberal ideals, such as human rights. For instance, *Medécins Sans Frontières* withdrew from Ethiopia in 1985 during the government’s violent resettlement policy and the resulting famine, concerned that their continued operations would upset donors and ruin the organisation’s political standing. Indeed, such organisational withdrawal can offer greater reputational currency than ‘sticking it out’ today. Both decisions – to stay or withdraw – are political. However, in a neoliberal world, donors expect moral supremacy to guide the actions of their choice of NGO. The complexities involved in the delivery of aid is rarely understood by a culture trained to expect wars divided between good and bad buys. Today, delivery of aid in the face of accusations of

¹ See, S. Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (University of California Press, 2019); O. Zavala, *Drug Cartels Do Not Exist: Narco-Trafficking and Culture in the US and Mexico* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2022).

naivety or complicity – especially for a sector seeking to *depoliticise* the context of their activities – can involve reputational risk and require delicate PR management.

In *Police Peacekeeping*, Pingeot uncovers how this ethical and reputational dilemma is negotiated by UN personnel in the field through a liberal conviction in the ‘good’ of law and order; that, ultimately, any harm incurred by peacekeeping is mitigated by the global benefits of policing (within a domestic or international force). She examines how marginalised communities (within the host country and within contributing home nations) are disproportionately harmed by militarised policing in UN-managed conflict contexts. Focusing on the mission’s preoccupation with armed gangs, urban poor, and protesting activists, as part of their mandate, the book neatly shows how harmful peacekeeping practices develop from hegemonic policing strategies, adopted to control and incarcerate marginalised populations or those deemed societally transgressive – or ‘uncivilised’. Militarised policing is frequently concealed beneath technocratic promises and the emotive ‘fire-fighting’ or emergency rhetoric of conflict response: ‘they’ve been experts at war for decades!’ or ‘they had to do something!’. Pingeot makes visible the violence of this ethical calculation; not just the assumption that *something* must involve militarily intervention, but also that there is only one – approved – type of response, and it always looks the same. She suggests that replicable methods for state governance and conflict response make claims to scientific credibility, yet that this logic has its origins in colonial ideas of universality and a one-and-done European ‘model’. Through Pingeot’s careful study, the reader learns precisely how Western imperial practices are remade for a globalised society through the actions and mandates of its peacekeeping staff; arming the *mission civilisatrice* with not only a gun but with a permanent mission – to police.

Challenging a wealth of scholarship on peacekeeping and international interventions that continues to argue that the absence of violence is peace, the book provides vital insights into peacekeeping contexts as sites of violent innovation and catalysts for greater militarisation of policing forces around the globe. The mainstream conversation on policing is evolving and this is a timely opportunity for UN leadership to reassess the organisation’s position on militarised policing in peacekeeping. As Pingeot cites, ‘According to the 2014 UN policy on police in peacekeeping, “perhaps the greatest comparative advantage of United Nations peacekeeping is that it provides international legitimacy to police development efforts.” But does the world really need more police?’ (p. 4).

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