

Empires of the Beat: Policing the Empire, Governing the Colony, Negotiating the Postcolony

My research aims to provide a new perspective on histories of, and debates around, citizenship, race, gender, and labor in Pakistan Studies through a multidisciplinary and multi-locational study of the creation of colonial policing forces, the debates around policing practices, the daily crime reports and memoirs of policemen, court cases, the rise of convict labor, and the popular image of the policeman as seen in newspapers and novels roughly between 1840 and 1970.

As we approach the 71st anniversary of South Asian independence, it is important to examine the residues of empire and colonial state-making that continue to shape everyday politics and life in Pakistan. My dissertation reimagines policing as a process that is central to the project of governance in both the colonial and the postcolonial state. Studying the police provides a new approach to study of human experience and the conditions of its possibility as delimited by state formation, both colonial and post-colonial, in the areas delimited as Pakistan in 1947 and across the former colonies of the British Empire. Indeed, my concerns with citizenship, race, gender, and labor across empire connect several areas of African, East Asian, and Pakistan studies with the field of South Asian history through the analytic of policing.

A movement of policing practices, attitudes, technologies, and personnel intimately connected Britain's other possessions, Kenya and Hong Kong - the former a settler colony and the latter a crown colony – to colonial India, and, more specifically, its north-western provinces. By studying policing as colonial state-making across various sites of the British Empire, this project provides a comparative basis to assess the North West Indian experience and an opportunity to tease out the continuities and discontinuities of the British exercise in colonial governance across different territories of the Empire. Policing was crucial to the colonial production of difference across the British Empire along the lines of race, class, and gender as well as the construction of a fractured colonial subject-citizenship, that fused the modern liberal citizen with the backward traditional subject.

Moreover, this dissertation pays close attention to the continuities and discontinuities in the relations between the police and military in the colonial and post-colonial period. I hope to show that the synthetic division between the military and police generated a set of frictions between these two agencies of security within the colonial state that has persisted after independence from colonial rule. Indeed, the impact of this entangled relationship of these two 'security' arms along with the role of paramilitary forces in everyday policing in Pakistan, or lack thereof, are important contributions to conversations regarding contemporary states and defense in Pakistan Studies.

This project aims to sharpen and inform current conceptualizations of policing and its centrality to governance as well as 'the experience of being human' in the contemporary state. Keeping in mind the efforts to reform Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's provincial police in August 2016, my dissertation project can make a relevant and timely contribution to contemporary debates on governance and policing in Pakistan Studies.

On a separate but related note, this grant has allowed me to conduct crucial research for my dissertation. I have a much better sense of my project and I have obtained copies of some very uncommon and understudied materials. I am very grateful to AIPS for funding my research through the Junior Fellowship.