ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *THIN BLUE RAGE*

"*Thin Blue Rage* offers a compelling analysis of Canadian policing as a reactionary countermovement that aligns with conservative forces to thwart progressive social movements mobilizing for social justice. In the process, Crosby and Monaghan skillfully document the role of police as violence workers in defense of a capitalist and settler colonial order. By employing this countermovement lens, the book encourages us to think more deeply about police complicity in ongoing injustices and the challenges involved in overcoming them."

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THIN BLUE RAGE

THE POLICE COUNTERMOVEMENT

ANDREW CROSBY &
JEFFREY MONAGHAN

Fernwood Publishing
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Development editor: Fazeela Jiwa
Copyediting: Jenn Harris
Text design: Lauren Jeanneau
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WHY DO POLICE DISPLAY SUCH ZEAL AT CRACKING DOWN on progressive protests? How can we explain the contrasts between the footage of police high-fiving and hugging right-wing participants at Freedom Convoy blockades with images of gratuitous violence used against Indigenous land defenders, Black Lives Matter, or Palestinian solidarity movements? What helps explain the wanton disregard for unhoused people and their few possessions when encampments are broken up with riot squads? How can we explain the steadfast commitment by police officers to thin blue line symbolism even when confronted with widespread public concerns that such imagery is just plain racist? Through a broad empirical examination of police activities in Canada, this book delves into these questions — and more — by exploring how police increasingly seem to be unmoored, belligerent, and unabashedly self-interested. Police in Canada have a long history of insulating themselves from community or democratic controls, yet there is a growing sense that police are campaigning for greater impunities and additional authorities. And while police regularly claim to be public institutions or politically neutral, our effort is to explore how police are ambiguous private-and-public actors who are increasingly engaged in political struggles as a movement that advances deeply conservative and far right ideological values.

Captured by the metaphor of police as a line of brave warriors protecting the innocent from forces of lawlessness, the conservatism undergirding the thin blue line as an ideology reinterprets the messiness contained in social relations as a world of good versus evil, with police as the ultimate defender of an almost-lost golden age under threat from not-so-subtle racialized outsiders. Scholars have long pointed to

how policing embraces conservative values, yet the current campaigns launched by police represent an escalation of a police program to secure and entrench political values — and one that happens to share significant overlaps with far right movements. Within these contexts, we not only aim to demonstrate how policing is a function for the preservation of law and order in the settler colony, we also seek to highlight a contemporary dynamic where police see themselves as pitted against other social groups and movements as well as *rage* against these various opponents. In a context where progressives are singled out as primarily responsible for increasingly visible criticisms of policing — or, as police argue a "war against police" — these critics are met with particularly acute retaliatory violence.

At the core of the reactionary police rage is a political context transformed by the Black Lives Matter movement. Building off decades of struggles by communities impacted most directly by police violence, Black Lives Matter first emerged in response to the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the killing of Trayvon Martin in Florida followed by mass mobilizations in response to the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 (Ransby 2018; Taylor 2016). Black Lives Matter renewed contestations around policing, reanimating public debates linking the roots of policing to ongoing systematic violence against Black and Indigenous peoples in North America through structures of slavery and settler colonialism (Maynard 2025). Black Lives Matter mobilizations commanded tremendous momentum and have been at the forefront of criticisms of police violence and calls to defund police in Canada and beyond (Diverlus et al. 2020; Hudson 2025; Maynard 2025). Black Lives Matter Canada has spearheaded a national campaign to defund police and has embraced an abolitionist stance insisting that police and prisons must be defunded, dismantled, and replaced with institutions that value Black lives (Black Lives Matter Canada 2025). With unprecedented mobilizations in 2020 and after, police and police organizations faced widespread public critiques about the historical and current relationship between policing and colonialism, slavery, racism, misogyny, and violence. Yet when faced with this public scrutiny and calls for accountability, the police responded defensively with countermobilizations of their own under the rallying points of Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter, and the Thin Blue Line that displayed the latent and often explicit racisms fuelling police rage.

The focal point of police reactionary rage has been the Toronto chapter of Black Lives Matter. Naila Keleta-Mae (2020) details the emergence of Black Lives Matter Toronto, which has engaged in a series of actions that have challenged the violence and impunity of the Toronto Police Service (TPS). In July 2015 BLM-TO shut down a major thoroughfare to protest the killings of Jermaine Carby and Andrew Loku by police. When the officer who killed Loku was not charged, activists built a tent city in front of police headquarters in March 2016, where they stayed for fifteen days. Responding to calls for accountability with violence and intimidation, Toronto police swarmed the site at night and inflicted injuries on those who had gathered (Brake 2016). A freedom-of-information (FOI) disclosure later revealed police surveillance of the encampment and BLM activists, including prominent author and police critic Desmond Cole (Davis 2018). In response to a TPS intelligence assessment that "a request for attendees to bring pots, pans, and wooden spoons to use In [*sic*] a 'mini arts festival in honour of Afrofest' … could pose security and safety concerns," Cole noted that "the police engage in acts of violence, and when we show that they're doing that, they turn their focus on us" (Davis 2018). Black Lives Matter also drew the ire of police in July 2016 for challenging Toronto Police presence in the annual Pride parade.

Sandy Hudson (2025) details how Black Lives Matter Toronto halted the parade in protest with other Black queer groups demanding that the thirteen police department floats and contingent of hundreds of armed, uniformed officers not participate; these actions in turn prompted changes at Pride parades in Canada and around the world. The barring of uniformed officers from the Toronto Pride parade the following year exposed the victimization complex of police, with one veteran cop accusing Black Lives Matter of "creating hate" (Druzin 2017). The police countermovement further mobilized resources, with the Toronto Police Association (TPA) lobbying Toronto's city council to withdraw funding to Pride Toronto, a letter from TPA president Mike McCormack bemoaning that the association would "feel completely devalued and unsupported" if funding continued (Druzin 2017). According to McCormack, police have put in "a lot of serious work and dedication aimed at breaking down barriers and establishing a relationship with the LGBT and other communities…. But it seems that any acknowledgment of our efforts has been thrown out the window. We feel like we have been thrown under

the bus" (Druzin 2017). Along with police in Ottawa, Halifax, Vancouver, and other communities where Pride organizations and activists have moved to exclude police pinkwashing (Levinson-King 2017), responses like McCormack's present the police as victims of violence, hate, and exclusion. Police express strong feelings of ostracism and entitlement, with blame and rage aimed directly at Black activists. McCormack accused Black Lives Matter of "creating a negative environment around something that should be positive and something that should be inclusive" (Sienkiewicz 2017). Not only with Pride but in any context where police are subjected to scrutiny, reactionary police responses embody a competitive victimization complex that lashes out against even subtle criticisms, seeing the gullible public as largely manipulated by their enemies and by what police describe as "professional activists" (see Chapter Seven) and "special interest groups" (see Chapter Two). The racial undertones are far from subtle, as grievance-driven police narratives have increasingly conflated efforts to limit police power with a "war on police" led by Black communities.

Despite resounding calls to curb police violence, Black and Indigenous people continue to die in unprecedented numbers during encounters with police, as documented by the projects Mapping Police Violence (US), Tracking (In)Justice (Canada), among others (Nicholson and Marcoux 2018; Séguin 2025; Wortley et al. 2021). The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 led to widescale urban rebellions that included mass protests in Canada. Black Lives Matter protests were organized in at least 230 cities and towns in the US and Canada, joined by uprisings in the Caribbean, South America, Asia, Europe, Australia, and Africa (Hudson 2025). BLM protests challenged police violence, impunity, and resources — they pushed to divert public funding from police to other community services, lobbied for increased police accountability and the curbing of police violence, as well as calling for the outright abolition of police. Because police continued to kill Black people with impunity, police departments became a natural site of anti-racist and anti-police protest, particularly after activist arrests in Toronto and Ottawa. In Toronto, police arrested and charged BLM activists who threw paint on colonial statues (Perkel 2020), and in Ottawa police swarmed a blockade camp at a downtown intersection that was led by Black and Indigenous activists; twelve people were arrested and charged (CBC News 2020). Under the leadership of Black Lives Matter, these mobilizations served to

fundamentally change the conversation on anti-Black racism in Canada (Thompson 2023), propelling a reckoning that centred on longstanding realities of police violence and racism (Wortley and Owusu-Bempah 2022). In response, police rage and victimization claims only amplified.

From Rage to Collective Action

One prominent expression of amplified rage in response to demands led by Black Lives Matter to defund police was the Blue Lives Matter countermobilization. At the centre of this countermovement was campaigning to push thin blue line and related symbolism into the public spotlight, to oppose Black Lives Matter messages to instead assert that all lives matter, but most prominently the lives of police officers. The predominant symbol of Blue Lives Matter in Canada is a black and white Canadian flag with a superimposed horizontal blue stripe across the centre. For both police and those challenging police violence and impunity, the thin blue line is more than a symbol. El Jones asserts that it represents "an ideology that imagines the world as this violent, chaotic place, were it not for the police, and that sets a mindset around crime and a certain mindset of particularly who is on the other side of that blue line, which traditionally have been Black people and Indigenous people and people who are outside the middle class, white ideal of public safety" (Campbell 2020). Blue Lives Matter is an ideological campaign waged by police to counter challenges to their hegemony, a desperate attempt to reassert their control over the narrative of policing as dangerous and under-appreciated. As we see further throughout this book, police in Toronto, Calgary, Montreal, and Vancouver and elsewhere were told to remove thin blue line symbols after complaints from the public.

Public pressure and insistence that thin blue line symbols represent "bigotry, racism, and hate" (Code 2022) has resulted in numerous police boards banning the patches on police uniforms, including a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) memo request to this effect. But despite the public-facing capitulation to progressive voices, there has not been one publicly available instance of disciplinary action toward officers who continue to regularly wear thin blue line symbols. In part, the gap between public-facing distancing from the thin blue line and the lack of action against its regular visibility is explained by its ideological importance for both management and the rank and file. For police, the thin blue line embodies their group identity regardless of rank,

specialization, or jurisdiction. And while some police spokespeople attempt meek pleas to ignore the obvious metaphor of the thin blue line and instead insist it represents fallen officers, membership of the police movement unifies around a vehement ideological belief that police stand between order and chaos. Shaping the core identity and collective action framework of the police movement — from management to rank and file to the broader police family — is a set of core, shared beliefs that police are distinct from the rest of us: police run to danger, they protect the mostly ignorant public, they put their lives on the line every day, they endure unspeakable hostilities and aggressions, they protect the weak and needy. Heavily steeped in beliefs of nobility, white benevolence, and colonial hierarchies, the collective magnanimity of the police has a potent trip wire: when compliance and reverence are not performed by the public, police get angry.

Thin Blue Rage details elements of the current milieu: the goal of our study is to engage with core debates from policing studies in order to highlight various themes that help explain the reactionary and retaliatory violence that defines contemporary policing. We explore a number of themes — policing as a social movement, police officers as violence workers, the historical development of policing and police ideology in Canada, police culture studies, and police communicative powers — in an effort to explain the Manichaean and authoritarian practices within policing. While detailing current elements of the police milieu, we also survey policing's ideological dimensions, provide examples of powerful communications practices and instances of movement ritual and renewal, as well as review policing's political campaigning and many examples of violence work. These thick, emotional outbursts of blue rage give ample evidence of what we characterize as the authoritarian thrust of policing, often directed against activists or groups who police believe are primary sources of the current "bad image" associated with policing. Blue identity and blue rage, we contend, cannot be undone from each other and form a self-referential accord that defines police functions. Moralistic rage is the necessary outcome from a social entity that views itself as the violent protectorate of a set of social values that are under attack, and its culture of supremacy and violence is repeatedly confirmed when its moralistic violence is subjected to critical scrutiny, media attention, activist campaigns or other forms of public criticism. Interpreted by police as an attack against their sacred duty, police feelings of victimization

transform into belligerent rage toward a public that does not understand their sacrifice.

In describing the affective and reactionary elements of police rage, we conceptualize these actions within a broader arc of police as a social movement. Building on social movement studies, the police can be seen as a grassroots movement with membership, ideological cohesiveness, resources, distinct organizations, and a clear sense of collective action frames that define how they engage in politics and contentious debates. And while police are also state functionaries with various public-facing orientations, they mobilize in ways that advance their collective organizational interests but also in ways that advance the politics of the far right, carceralism, and authoritarianism more broadly. Commenting on the predisposition within social movement studies to research almost exclusively left-wing movements, Manuela Caiani and Donatella Della Porta (2018) suggest that the aspects and organizing of the radical right have been virtually unanalyzed by the discipline. Most studies of radical right movements are structured using "breakdown theories," whereas Caiani and Della Porta (2018) demonstrate how more conventional tools from social movement studies could focus on organizations, networks, and political opportunity structures. Even in social movement studies' robust frameworks, a standard assumption in the field is that movements are outside institutions of power, not an integral aspect of governance institutions (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; McAdam et al. 2009; Meyer 2021). Movements are often approached to understand their abilities to make claims and mobilize as protests against powerful institutions (Tarrow 1998: 4) — yet policing presents a highly unique case. Where police are associated with protests, it's almost exclusively with their repression. And while police have engaged in protests and forms of collective action, they have not been analyzed sufficiently as collective actors.

Countermovement literatures, with which we engage here, provide exceptions in these regards, since they understand far right mobilizations as both imagining themselves as victims and outsiders yet often — given the general expansion of conservatism — occupying privileged and often institutionally powerful positions (Keyes and Keyes 2022; Irons 2016; Staggenborg and Meyer 2022; Shanahan and Wall 2021). An essential aspect of countermovement identity — including that of the police movement — is the manufactured existential threat of all-seeing,

all-powerful social justice warriors. In the case of the police, they are threatened not only by social justice warriors but also the murderers, terrorists, raging grannies, and Antifa with whom the social justice warriors conspire to attack police both materially and figuratively. Moreover, the distinct and explanatory crossover between police and far right movements constitutes what Jenny Irons (2016) calls the state-countermovement relationship, where lines between state and far right movements are increasingly unclear. An ever more relevant dynamic to the crossover between identities and strategies of the police movement and the state is the centrality of policing — especially the Mounties — to constructions of nationhood and settler colonial identities of and within Canadian institutions.

Police are, as Keith Smith (2009) details, intimately tied to the very fabrication of settler colonial order and the shaping of the colonial relations within liberal states. In his vast survey of the cultural impacts and influence of the RCMP, Keith Walden (1982: 13) suggests that the enormous appeal of the Mounties' image was due to meticulous curation and its focus on one essential symbol: order. As Walden notes, "the policeman was almost always described as a hero figure, a universal type well known in the pages of myth and romance." He argues that characterizations of the force were essentially similar in both fictional and non-fictional accounts, attaching a mythic quality to the RCMP. The overwhelming symbolic power of the Mounties, according to Walden, was due not only to the extensive cultural production that boomed in the early decades of the force but also to the fading relevance of Christianity in the cultural order. As a Durkheimian interpretation of sources of social cohesion in an increasingly fractured, anxious society, the police — specifically the RCMP — fulfilled a stabilizing role. "As comprehensive authority disappeared," writes Walden (1982: 19), "western society longed that some universal standards of truth and morality could be found. It was this yearning, more than anything else, that produced the symbol of the Mounted Policeman." As visions of order, these heroic narratives hold tremendous appeal for the public — but they also shape self-conceptualizations of police themselves, particularly about their centrality in the functioning, proper ordering, moral guidance, and benevolent command of Canada's settler colonial society. These histories that have institutionalized policing in Canada have now combined with a raucous contemporary ideological current that holds that police are

under constant attack; these are the driving forces that guide and shape their social movement.

Police and Conservative Order

Conceptualizing police as a social movement with deeply conservative histories offers a competing narrative to the dominant refrain that policing is a democratic, public, responsive, or neutral institution. Certainly, these romantic depictions of police are a legacy of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP)-RCMP folklore and the production, like Walden (1982) notes, of strong affinities between policing and white notions of benevolent colonialism. Heliographic depictions of the RCMP — and police more generally — have dominated our collective understanding of policing in Canada. While the relationship between policing and settler colonialism has received increased attention, few histories address how policing systems were initially established through slave patrols in North America (Brucato 2023), and rarely are there any accounts of such patrols and other forms of largely private efforts to capture and control Black lives in Canada (Maynard 2025). Instead, dominant narratives around benevolent policing have been profoundly shaped by a small number of scholars and researchers — due, in part, to the limited accessibility of the RCMP archives.

For many decades, the RCMP only provided access to their archives to official RCMP historians, and these individuals' accounts had tremendous influence on public understandings of the RCMP (Beahen and Horrall 1998; Turner 1950). Other authors worked in close collaboration with RCMP brass to carefully convey RCMP versions of history (Fetherstonhaugh 1940; Kelly 1949; Phillips 1954), serving to "romanticize and glorify the Force to the point of absurdity" … including "descriptions of controversial events involving the RCMP [that] bear little relation to the facts" (Brown and Brown 1973: 130). It was not until the Access to Information Act in 1983 that scholars began to slowly sift through the troves of RCMP records (Kealey 1992). Despite the difficulties in accessing records — what Sethna and Hewitt (2018) dryly describe as the paradox of the "Mountie bounty" — critical takes on NWMP-RCMP history demonstrate a political institution deeply entwined with the material and immaterial interests of settler colonialism. Even the official motto of the force, *Maintiens le Droit* — translated in official circles as "Uphold the Right" (see Sallot 1979)

— holds a powerful double meaning: one that straddles a liberal façade of protecting the rule of law but also signals a deeper political affinity for entrenching conservative values.

A history of police antagonism against the political left has been rigorously documented (see Chapter Three), and our work comes about at a time where far right movements in Canada have mobilized. These mobilizations have heavily influenced the political climate, pulling centrist political discourses further and further right while normalizing the widespread withering and collapse of social infrastructures associated with liberal institutionalism. Further, the far right has advanced an extensive campaign of direct actions and political disruptions. From harassing politicians and public health or judicial officials to extensive anti-migrant organizing both online and offline, to targeting gender-nonconforming groups, children, and families, to campaigns against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, as well as establishing militia-type networks, man clubs and fight clubs, and obsessive levels of social media trolling, far right mobilizations are often twinned with, or operate under a thinly veiled threat, of violence.

No example of far right mobilizing illustrates this more than the Convoy occupation of 2022, a protest movement that was thoroughly facilitated and supported by individual officers and police collectively. Yet refracted through the "mirror world" of online news environments (Klein 2023), far right activists consider themselves the victims of police repression and totalitarian control. And while the federal government's invocation of the Emergency Act stands as a clear example of state overreach aiming to target and demobilize a social movement (and as far as we're concerned, counterproductive in terms of feeding the illusory victimization narratives within the Convoy and Convoy-adjacent far right groups), the intervention of federal politicians was directly in response to the non-intervention — and facilitation — of the Freedom Convoy by police. Even with the extensive harms visited by the Convoy against local residents and economic interests (Ottawa People's Commission 2023), policing agencies have taken extensively lax approaches to Convoy groups and offshoots. In fact, the laissez-faire approach to the far right has transpired alongside a period of intensified repression against progressive movements, some of which we detail in this book. This includes the three raids in Wet'suwet'en territories, extensive criminalization and brutality in the Ada'itsx/Fairy Creek watershed, repression of urban encampments,

and coordinated attacks on Palestinian solidarity and protests against genocide in Gaza. The contradictory yet consistent pattern of double standards between police responses to far right and progressive protests brings us back to the core research questions that animate this book: why do police display such zeal at cracking down on progressive protests? What accounts for the contrast between crackdowns on land defenders and facilitation of the Convoy? Why do police act with much malice and dehumanization toward the unhoused? What explains the unshakable police affinity to thin blue line symbolism? To answer these questions and more, we visit key themes across social movements and police studies literature by underlining that efforts to explain contemporary police affairs must start with an understanding of *what the police actually are*, and *what the police actually do*.

What Is Policing, Who Are the Police?

So, what do police do? Especially with the inception of community policing discourses and parallel efforts at professionalization (Klockars 1988; Marquis 1993; Martin 1995), a dominant conceptualization of police has been its public authorization to serve and protect an imagined community. Extensive and elaborate public image campaigns have foregrounded liberal conceptions of police as community-centred actors who are responsive to democratic and collective values. In contrast to these popular conceptions of democratic policing, scholars have suggested that one key feature stands out as the most definitive character of police work: violence. Understanding the police and the police function more generally needs to start with the particular and most fundamental element of their power, what policing scholar Egon Bittner (1970) defined as the ability to impose non-negotiated solutions backed by the threat — or use — of force.

Twinning violence with police work is not a new observation; it has long been established within the subdiscipline of policing studies and perhaps most associated with Bittner's (1970, 1990) work. As a sociologist of policing and among a group of intrepid ethnographers to explore its evocative worlds (Bacon et al. 2020), Bittner offered a highly influential account of violence as the core of police work and, flowing from this occupational context, as the key element of police identity. In centring the unifying force of violence within the occupation, Bittner defined police work as "a mechanism for the distribution of nonnegotiably coercive

force employed in accordance with the dictates of an intuitive grasp of situational exigencies" (Bittner 1970: 131). While certainly providing a critical account, in the sense that Bittner explicitly lampooned cleansed accounts of police work — what he called the "Sunday school vocabulary" (1970: 6) of talking about police — his "realist" perspective was appreciated by police just as much as critical sociological scholars. Police appreciated Bittner's representation of the difficulties and messiness of the police milieu, particularly his fundamental articulation of police knowledge as shared, brotherly, experiential knowledge that contrasts — if not entirely contradicts — more prescriptive representations of law and policing. The "intuitive grasp of situational exigencies" spoke to, from the police perspective, an occupation that the public doesn't understand and/or appreciate. While policing was a fundamentally "tainted occupation" (1970: 94), as Bittner put it, those marshalling violence did so on behalf of a public who themselves do not want to use violence in situations that otherwise required some form of coercion to maintain control.

In understanding what the police do, a number of critiques point to how urban policing has come to rely on — and indeed contribute to — an understanding that certain subjects are legitimate targets for police violence. Adding significant critical flavour to Bittner's police realism, scholars have moved to define policing as violence work (Wall and Linnemann 2020). Micol Seigel (2018: 10) demonstrates the appeal of violence work as a definition of policing in that it captures an extensive continuum of what can be understood as violence but particularizes, or de-abstracts, this understanding through its attachment to practices, or work, in "making real" the "core power of the state." While the term *violence worker* extends far beyond police officers, it remains the central element of the occupation because the activities of police depend upon, and simply would not be possible without, the "threat or potential for violence, because their authority relies on that threat" (2018: 12). Seigel, like others who underline the importance of violence work as the definition of policing, do so precisely because it represents a more jarring and disruptive term than common conceptions of policing that background its violent ontological status.

Conceptualizing police work in Canada as violence work is important for two reasons. First, it contests reformist claims around forms of police violence as being the product of "bad apples" by situating violence at the core of police functionality. Second, defining policing as violence

work connects scholarship on police violence to the affective dynamics of protest policing. Through the consistency and aggressiveness of police crackdowns on protests, the visibility of police operations — despite their bureaucratic constructions — can be understood as emotional outbursts that arise from collective adherence to particular conceptions of moral order and traditional values. In other words: what *police do* is constructed through who *police are*. These core notions are likewise shaped by policing as a tightly established political community that influences the identities and violence practices of officers, demonstrating that the zealous crackdowns on progressives, the unhoused, Black and Indigenous movements, or Palestine solidarity groups are done from a collectively produced and individually enacted righteous and moralistic rage. With violence as the definitional characteristic of policing, we can undo any pretense that the brutality isn't a normative, moralistic undertaking. In all aspects of violence work, police are upholding and protecting (their iteration of) social values against those who are deemed (mostly by police) to be failing, threatening, or undermining those values. Violence work is a moralistic defence of what the police consider collective values. If such work is enacted to uphold a set of collective values, then, one must question which identities and groups are represented as belonging within these value systems. To answer this question it is best to start with the cultural group at the forefront of this moralistic violence: So, who *are* the police?

Policing scholars have responded to this question by moving away from personal or individualistic approaches and instead have described policing as a powerful cultural or subcultural group with extensive socialization powers.[1] Scholarship on police culture underlines that individuals within the field are fundamentally shaped by the powerful and unique occupational culture, a culture that persists despite decades of conversations around cultural reform, police deviance, and efforts at professionalization (Loftus 2009). We offer an extensive synthesis and engagement with this literature in Chapter Four, highlighting that a key lesson from this research points to the centrality of a shared worldview that emerges, as police culture theorist Robert Reiner (2010: 137-138) suggests from "the nature of police work [that] does seem to generate a recognizably similar basic culture in all forces that have been studied." What Reiner and others have suggested is that police work is a highly unique occupational phenomenon — these violence workers of society

have tremendous impacts on everyday governance while also deploying wide-ranging communicative powers. Not only do police shape everyday order in communities, but they also shape ideational orders through powerful and convincing discourses of crime, criminals, crime fighting, disorder, and security. All of which, police culture theorists argue, are powerful forms of world making that arise from, are shaped by, and aim to reproduce the identity of who police are and, often in contrast, those who are considered outsiders, deviants, undesirables.

Policing scholar Peter Manning (2010) describes the occupational identity of policing as being shaped by a distinct "assumptive world" that is, unlike other occupations, twinned with the violent enterprise that creates everyday police practices. In bringing an interactionist understanding of policing, Manning's (1977) work underscores how the intersubjective everyday practices of violence shape a "sacredized" version of their identity in society. As shared core commonalities among police, not only do these intersubjective experiences rationalize the assumptive world of policing, it is precisely in integrating its occupational socialization process that hegemonic ideals shaping core beliefs and practices are reproduced. Our reading of police culture research borrows heavily from insights into the fundamental elements of police identity and the occupation. In Chapter Four, we detail six core elements of police culture that we believe reflect the reactionary and vindictive character of contemporary policing. However, we also position our understanding of policing outside of the police culture framework for two important reasons.

First is that their object of study — culture — is almost exclusively coupled with the explanation that police attitudes and behaviours normatively interpreted as "bad" policing exist below what is assumed to be textbook, regular, or good police behaviour. In this analytical frame, culture is something that describes how group dynamics might produce or explain "bad" or irregular behaviour. This assumption is based on notions of professional, neutral policing that are not shared as our starting point for interpreting the cultural dimensions of police. Instead of seeing forms of identity and occupational harmony as culture, we see these as elements for a shared political ideology that animates collective action. Second, police culture studies begin by twinning "culture" with problematic attitude-behaviours and then extend this analysis toward efforts that "reform" the cultures responsible for policing's various abnormalities.

Correct the culture(s), then align practices with the idealized goals of the police function, or so the argument goes. We take a fundamentally different approach to these questions of bad behaviour: instead of seeing these happenings as abnormalities, we view these practices as completely foreseeable behaviour-attitude outcomes from a social movement defined by thin blue rage. While we share many of the same descriptive accounts of the cultural and the basic elements of policing's referential repertoires, we do not suggest that these values are deviations from its core functions. Unlike official postures, police are not neutral actors: these violence workers are shaped by powerful self-conceptualizations of justice and morality, as well as assumptions that hold police as the guardians of a thinly bounded social order. Therefore, police work cannot be uncoupled from its moral fibers; violence, in other words, cannot be understood simply as an occupational happening and must be situated as a repertoire of morally justified affective responses grounded in a well-articulated police understanding of themselves in the world. We contend that the most explanatory framework for understanding how police enact power and rage in the world is not through a cultural lens but through seeing police as a social movement.

Situating the Police as a Countermovement-In-Power

Throughout our study, we engage critically with police culture research — specifically to break from this scholarship. While we borrow heavily from numerous insights within the police culture field, we also work to reformulate an understanding of police not as cultural actors but as a social movement — the police movement. Our approach underlines why and how police need to be understood not merely as an institutional force with cultural traits but as a social movement with core goals, a flexible but nonetheless coherent ideological framework, a highly attuned and unified membership, and an institutional formation that transcends public-private boundaries to operate as both a movement structure and state-sanctioned structure. Our suggestion that policing is in fact a movement presents a fundamentally different approach for posing questions around reform and transformation than those taken by the police culture scholarship.

To conceptualize the police movement, then, we introduce some social movement concepts of movements-in-power and countermovements as ways to rethink the relationships that police and policing have within our

society. Our central contention here is that the dominant understanding of policing as a public, liberal institution and police as neutral arbiters of social conflicts is fundamentally misplaced. Police are partisans — they exist within a powerful ideological structure, they have multiple levels of membership and loyalties, they campaign relentlessly to shape the world around their ideological worldview, and they demand loyalty and deference internally (and externally) in their efforts to control and advance their political opportunities. Most social movement scholarship conceptualizes movements as coalitions outside of government or as forms of resistance that influence change on multiple levels: policy, ideas, organizational institutionalization, and even the creation of responsive government departments or agencies (Meyer 2021; also McAdam and Scott 2005; McAdam et al. 2009; Tarrow 1998). But movements also capture institutions and levers of power, most often the state itself (Amin et al. 1990), leading to situations where movements must mediate between a grassroots membership and the optics-responsibilities of governance. As an institution of the state, it might seem odd to classify the police as a social movement. Yet we draw on a range of cases and histories to reinforce how the police movement aims to enhance its own interests and control as both a (largely) self-governing state entity and a network of social movement groups and organizations that function as extensions of the blue family.

Classical social movement scholarship has often focused narrowly on "the political process model" (McAdam and Tarrow 2010) as a way to classify movements, political demands, and successfulness in terms of levering positions of power. The political process model puts forward a state-centric approach, assuming that most movements are oppositional movement or party-based enterprises that aim to take control of the state and establish governance regimes (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Davidson 2018). Such models remain popular for understanding party politics, electoral-grassroots dynamics, and macro-level political changes. More recently, a healthy scholarship within social movement studies has called for a move from state-centrism to multiple scales and sites of contention, with a more flexible appreciation of divergent goals and objectives that are outside of full-scale governmental control (Andrews 2006; Lima 2021; McAdam and Tarrow 2018). Writing about the growth of civil society political campaigns in democratizing states, Jack Goldstone (2004) observed that scholars need to account for more dynamic politics, political organizing outside of capital-P politics. Goldstone (2004: 358)

writes that theorizing on localized and sub-state level organizing needs to "not simply treat a movement as an "outside" actor seeking opportunities for "non-institutional" actions; rather, movements would be seen as elements in a complex field of players in politics and society that are seeking advantages by using a variety of tactics." Employing Tilly's (1995: 41) insights around "repertoires of contention" being a collection of "ways that people act together in pursuit of shared interests," Goldstone's approach understands a fuzzy distinction between outside/inside groups as well as the complex fields where repertoires of contention can be practised to pursue and accumulate collective advantages. Rather than simply looking at state-level policies, scholars can trace the efforts of movements to seize power at multiple scales or specific institutions, where movements can seek power over institutional affairs governed in sometimes more autonomous, less visible, or arms-length manners. From this perspective, movements do not always set as their objectives seizing national power or formal political offices — some movements seek to control localized infrastructure or specific institutional controls in multiple levels of jurisdiction. In this sense, policing is an ideal site to understand a multitude of governance manoeuvres given that, particularly in Canada, police are essentially self-governing agencies.

An additional contribution helping to inform our take on policing as a movement is literature surrounding movements-in-power. Almost exclusively centred around leftist movements that translate grassroots mobilizing into electoral success (Anria 2018; Lima 2021), this literature attends to how movements defined by particular collective action frames and collective identities — in other words, movements shaped by and dependent on grassroots support and identities — navigate more complex terrains of governing. Given the tendency to focus on leftist movements in neoliberal governance contexts, this literature often narrates as disappointments and undoings of grassroot movement aspirations (Heaney and Rojas 2011; Jaffee 2012; Lapegna 2013), yet the movement-in-power literature likewise reflects how those with political power (e.g., control arms of the state) are finely tuned to the emotions and desires of their core constituencies (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Auyero 2000; De Jong and Kimm 2017). Unlike seeing movements as always oppositional and outside the state, this perspective offers insights into how certain movements (in our case, the police) influence and, in some cases, take controls at multiple levels of governance (Levitsky and Roberts

2011; Schifeling and Hoffman 2019). Such an analysis helps explain how police take the reins of governing while maintaining fierce solidarity among a base alongside the development of legitimacy manoeuvres that aim to consolidate their power in the eyes of the public.

From our perspective, police have long been embedded in state power, but they often act like *a movement within the state* — mobilizing political campaigns to defend autonomy, secure resources, shape law-and-order discourse, extend their mandates, and vilify their opponents. As a movement-in-power, the insides and outsides of the movement are blurred, particularly with the huge range of non-state associations, groups, and networks. In fact, while all professions have networks and professional groups, we were hard-pressed to find a comparable profession with such a sprawling range of non-state entities and connections as policing. In many regards, its blurring of state and non-state agencies is remarkable and is advanced by many of the non-state entities (the most visible being the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police — CACP) — which are largely constituted by state actors, on state resources, with state-level affairs and influence. Yet their private status provides ample shielding from public engagement mechanisms while simultaneously ensuring that direct campaigning is seen as something less contentious than what it is: police activism. While the array of private entities attached to policing are often unproblematized, we suggest that these are easily categorized as social movement organizations (SMOs) that play an integral role in advancing movement goals, accumulating resources, and expanding ideological affinities.

Not much research or study has focused on the field of police SMOs, yet there is an array of organizations who hold significant public influence while functioning as civil society organizations that loudspeaker the goals of the police movement — often while wearing uniforms. Randy Lippert and Kevin Walby (2022: 22) refer to this amalgam of police foundations, associations, and private groups as a networked component of policing as a "greedy institution." Demonstrating how the coordinated proliferation of adjacent SMOs advances the interests of the police movement through "demand[ing] conformity and loyalty of its members" while simultaneously reproducing the myth that police are "a socially necessary institution," the authors note the potential acceleration of these SMO strategies post-2020 "as a potential hidden police response to the recent global police defunding movement" (Lippert and Walby 2022: 7, 22). In

addition to the recent swell of grassroots police organizations like Police On Guard for Thee, Thin Blue Line Canada, Beyond the Blue, or Blue Lives Matter Canada, the movement has long used formal institutions to advance a politics of thin blue lines.

Police unions have regularly been characterized in such ways, recognizing their activism to advance both their institutional interests and an ideological repertoire mirroring conservative and authoritarian politics (Thomas and Tufts 2020; also Duncan and Walby 2022). Likewise, police agencies have set up police foundations as mechanisms to produce institutional separation in terms of collecting significant donations and financial resources (Fridman and Luscombe 2017; Lippert and Walby 2017), where foundations can then operate as arms-length SMOs to advance police interests. Describing lucrative "police-sponsorship networks," Luscombe et al. (2017) illustrate the role of police "galas" and how these functions work to absorb significant amounts of sponsorship funding into police-adjacent foundations and associations; but they also utilize these networks to advance the police movement's political goals and increase its political and economic influence. Greg Marquis (1993) has provided extensive insights into the historical activities of the CACP, which emerged in the early iterations of police professionalization specifically as a reaction to perceived liberalism and criticisms of the police order. Doing away with notions of impartiality or deference to legislative authorities, the CACP functioned to advance police interests and intervene against political reforms appearing to challenge conservative, settler colonial notions of the nation. As part of the movement ecology, police SMOs pull from public resources and often appear as state institutions, yet they possess unfailing loyalties to the movement and its sociopolitical aspirations.

A final insight we glean from social movement studies in conceptualizing policing comes from the insightful and largely recent literature on countermovements (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Meyer and Reyes 2010; Staggenborg and Meyer 2022). Countermovements have been defined as reactionary assemblages that mobilize against other movements — most often progressive — that have campaigned and achieved relative gains over contentious issues. The current reactionary character of policing that we detail throughout this book epitomizes countermovement mobilizations, and we borrow from works that see the police countermovement as one that arises in direct opposition

to progressive social change (Cooper 2020; Keyes and Keyes 2020; Shanahan and Wall 2021; Thomas and Tufts 2020). Several scholars have detailed this shift, most notably as a response to the criticisms that have intensified with policing's new visibilities (Goldsmith 2010). The most illustrative countermovement formations have been those reacting to Black Lives Matter, taking shape under various labels of Blue Lives Matter and related symbols associated with thin blue line groups (Cooper 2020; Olson 2017; Keyes and Keyes 2022). Detailing the element of white fragility that is encoded within the movement, Frank Rudy Cooper (2020: 633) describes how "resistance to Black Lives Matter movements has coalesced around the Blue Lives Matter movement." In his account of "thin blue line" as a discourse mobilized in defence of racial capitalism, Tyler Wall (2020: 320) asserts that such imagery reflects the "police fantasy as national nightmare with dark, bestial forces threatening to devour the body of the nation, were it not for police 'holding the line.'" Wall (2020: 320) notes that in October 2017, the US Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) adopted the thin blue line as a "'symbol of solidarity' amid the reactionary Blue Lives Matter movement." At the core of the Blue Lives Matter movement are ideological underpinnings often ascribed to police culture, yet the contemporary version of police culture has adapted alongside developments in urban policing and the increasingly reactionary character of conservative politics.

In fact, one of the foremost developers of the thin blue line as an ideological assemblage was former LAPD chief William Parker in the 1950s (Kramer 2007). While the particular coining of the term in regards to policing is perhaps disputed, Parker (1956) popularized the term specifically to delegitimize public criticisms of police violence toward Black residents. As one of the first prominent police officers to articulate the "war on cops" — a narrative we discuss in the next chapter — Chief Parker accused media and public critics of turning the public against noble police officers. "The accumulated result," wrote Parker (1956: 375) about the public criticisms of police violence, "was the fomenting of a hysterical 'cop-hating' attitude which rendered suspect every police action involving non-Caucasian persons." Parker's legacy in policing circles around professionalization efforts specifically relates to "community policing" practices and public relations (Kramer 2007). Not only do these "image work" practices have consequences in shaping a police version of reality on issues of crime, disorder, and the urban, but

such forms of communicative power also have a fundamental, ideological stake in shaping collective responses to a range of social problems. And like Parker's early iterations of campaigns against critical journalists and activists for "cop-hating," the many subsequent police-generated thin blue line narratives are all weighted with conceptions of them-versus-us, the dystopic nature of the city (and people), and the righteousness of police violence. In this way, the "thin blue line" serves not merely as a collection of cultural claims, but instead as an exemplary representation of policing's reactionary, ideological understanding of the world and a corresponding set of political beliefs and demands for power. Police are a movement — but a countermovement-in-power that balances expectations and optics associated with maintaining public legitimacy while also mobilizing to advance political programs that appeal to its membership and enact a more entrenched conservative social order.

What stands out in terms of conceptualizing police as a countermovement is the striking overlaps with other scholarly work that explores the far right as a countermovement. We are particularly interested with intersections between the ideological characteristics of far right countermovements and the core ideological features of policing described in the police subcultures literature. In detailing aspects of far right convergences between neoliberalism, white nationalism, and libertarian networks, Quinn Slobodian (2025) has argued that long-term conservative countermovements have oriented themselves against the social democratic, progressive and/or egalitarian reforms of the past decades. As demonstrated by the new authoritarianism literature of the 1970s–1980s (Hall 1979; Poulantzas 1978) — as well as the newer authoritarianism literature from Slobodian or Alberto Toscano (2023) — far right countermovements tend to position themselves as grassroots or working class but are fundamentally driven by elite interests, funding, and institutional access. Using countermovements as a theoretical approach is particularly applicable to police as a countermovement-in-power, one presenting itself as a victim of the public mood yet retaining a considerable degree of institutional influence and power. From such privileged vantage points, countermovements often work from within to obstruct, roll back, or attack the progressive movements they rail against.

What makes the reactionary character of the police movement somewhat unique is that the movement's membership has successfully occupied major governance institutions for decades. As a

movement-within-the-state, police hold almost unilateral controls over major public systems and resources yet also retain social movement status. Police are successfully in control yet continue to mobilize their base, engage in ideological renewal, extend domains of power, and exercise their desires for more authority. As a countermovement-in-power, policing retains a strong insider-versus-outsider identity, shaped by its reactionary ethos. Ideological currents that bond collective identity of policing also carry potent, affective qualities: strong enmities toward any critics, a righteous defence of moral order, loud and violent worldviews directed against people, neighbours, and — of course — "bad guys" who threaten all that is sacred. As we will argue in this book, the blue rage that is propelled forward by the embedded ideological forces within policing are mirrored by the value systems of far right movements. Didier Fassin (2024) has described police as simultaneously a "state within a state" and as an "armed wing of the state." And while Fassin notes that these two descriptions sound "incompatible" because one suggests autonomy and isolation while another suggests political subservience, he notes rather dryly how such contradictions are resolved in practice: "Authoritarianism" suggests Fassin (2024: 1101), "accomplishes their combination."

The Authoritarian Thrust

In setting out to discover why police violently repress progressive demonstrations with such zeal yet seem so eager to high-five and hug activists on the far right, one key explanatory feature arises from how scholars detail the ideological characteristics of police cultures and how other scholars describe the current ideological character of the far right. An overwhelming symmetry emerges — both countermovements share virtually identical infrastructures of resonance. Countermovement literature has its genesis in examinations of far right politics in the US and has largely been applied to contemporary far right literature in Western countries dealing with the decline of liberal institutionalism and the rise of fascist movements (Cunningham 2018; Staggenborg and Meyer 2022). Several core characteristics of far right politics hinge on prejudicial feelings toward racialized Others as well as the endorsement of a well-defined social hierarchy established by the values of settler colonialism. Yet, scholarly attention to the far right — especially fascist identities — has developed more layered understandings of the authoritarian thrust that animates the ideational and collective repertoires of these movements.

Alberto Toscano's (2023) revisiting of the foundational critiques of fascism, from the Frankfurt School to Black Marxism, provides particular insights into the characteristics of fascist and far right movements. Describing the rise of fascist politics in the US, Toscano (2023) borrows from the recently uncovered *Prophets of Deceit*, authored by Frankfurt scholars Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman (2021), who point to conditions of social malaise and "eternal adolescent uneasiness," which fascist agitators identify and exploit "like a fly to dung" (quoted in Toscano 2023: 11). While *Prophets of Deceit* was published in 1949 and examines American flirtations with fascism that occurred alongside European fascist ascendancies, Toscano highlights the salience of Lowenthal and Guterman's analysis of how social audiences — particularly those drawn to fascist values — are captivated by a "call to the hunt." In an analysis that shares many figurative and literal sources of inspiration as those of the thin blue line described by Wall (2020), Toscano (2023: 13) underlines how an attraction to revanchist violence is the attraction itself, where "this protofascist and apparently anti-systemic, but ultimately conservative, intensification of malaise … joins the feeling of agential impotence to the disorientation of the humiliated individual in the face of an enigmatic totality imagined as a limitless conspiracy." As a concoction of malaise and aggrieved white subjects, what Toscano describes is a reactionary culture hedged against a perceived political moment where privileged identities are conspired against. Facing a loosely defined but unproblematically evil antagonist, the fascist thrust is not merely a political community but an affectively bound collective striking back against its perceived enemies.

Conceptualizing the far right around a nostalgic project of regeneration and faded greatness, Roger Griffin (2018) uses leitmotifs of decline, decadence, degradation, defeat, and destitution to describe contemporary conservative far right politics. Seeing liberal institutionalism as an aspect of the conspiracy against a lost, white romantic past, the far right mobilizes this bygone-era idealism with a zero-sum politics that foregrounds the need for violence against those taking scarce resources. Addressing how white working-class Americans increasingly felt "passed over" by progressive policies, Arlie Hochschild (2018) in *Strangers in Their Own Land* details the affective place of "honour" in the imagination of past and current conservative identities. Hochschild also attends to the reactionary anger that grassroots conservatives express toward "being told how to feel by liberals." This affective structure imagines a nanny state bearing down

and indoctrinating working and middle classes; the decline of wages and living standards are not associated with the excesses of capitalism, wealth hoarding, or globalization but that of deeply felt injustices stemming from over-regulation, affirmative action, immigration, and welfare provisions to the *unworthy*. These movements are propelled by feelings of anger and abandonment: white, settler colonial, "deserving" citizens are being betrayed by cunning and deceitful social justice warriors. In what Bataille (1994) describes as the "affective sources" of fascism, current far-fight populism attempts to claim a specific romanticized past and locate its current undoing in the politics of social justice, anti-racism, decolonization, and gender liberation.

Paradoxically, however, the forces that shape this authoritarian thrust are, in fact, rooted in broader social conditions of neoliberalism and the decline of liberal institutional infrastructures. The dominant political orthodoxies of our time have not only hollowed out any state obligations toward providing humane levels of social, medical, and other forms of social assistance, but also normalized an individualistic and punitive politics (Bonnet 2019). Writing of the wave of sensationalist and increasingly verbose right-wing politics of the late 1970s, Stuart Hall (1979) used the term authoritarian populism to describe a creeping wave of far right politics that embedded itself — he used the analogy of a "slow moving show" — into contemporary politics. Authoritarian populism, Hall (1979: 15) wrote, represented "an exceptional form of the capitalist state — which, unlike classical fascism, has retained most (though not all) of the formal representative institution in place, and which at the same time has been able to construct around itself an active popular consent." Decades of hollowed public infrastructures combined with a more honed rage from penal populists have translated into a far right politics that demonstrate no reluctance in calling for both state and vigilante violence. "Today's far right," Toscano (2023: 72) suggests, melds a "cynically selective anti-statism with a revanchist ethno-nationalism passionately attached to the symbolism and reality of the repressive state."

Organized under an explicit nostalgia for empire (Griffin 2015), the reactionary (white) mood embraces an ethnonationalism twinned with explicit, emotive meanness toward outsiders and the perceived undeserving. In the US, "great replacement" narratives from racist provocateurs, YouTubers, and far right influencers have proliferated,

alongside calls to enhance policing systems. In moves aimed to roll back civil rights, far right agitators and their police allies never miss a political opportunity to rally the wellspring of white anger and attack progressive institutional gains. Like-minded agitators in Canada are quick to recirculate the same far right tropes of great replacement and DEI grievances, while sometimes adding Canadian content with topics like residential school denialism (Sinclair and Carleton 2023; also Heath Justice and Carleton 2021). Such explicit postures to embrace hate generate an affective dynamic within movements, illustrating what David Cunningham (2018: 509) describes as "'reactive' mobilizations" that engender popular support for fascist attacks, often animated by a sense of "preserving" an imagined "status quo." The contemporary moment, especially illustrated by Donald Trump's fusion of spectacular hate-violence with cult-like devotion under a promise of restoring honour, threads a clear connection between far right countermovements and other recent fascisms. Griffin (2018) understands contemporary fascism as a conservative counterrevolutionary force — a reactionary avant-garde not all that dissimilar to the fascist avant-garde of the 1930s yet better attuned to the current temporalities of liquid modernity. What Griffin describes is a movement of crisis, propelled by raging anger about lost privileges, one that has long roots in discourses about the silent majority, racialized crime, and often white working-class entitlement, all of which have clear tie-ins to Canadian nationalist movements that centre on settler colonial identities like those detailed by Eva Mackey (2016) in her book *Unsettled Expectations*. What Mackey (2016) describes as "resurgent colonialism" in relation to countermovements mobilizing against Indigenous land claims is even more visible in current residential school and mass graves denialism (Gerbrandt and Carleton 2023).

In similar ways, organizing against police violence by Black communities in Canadian cities has a long history and has frequently been met by reactionary conservative forces that often divert it through "reforms" into bolstering police power (see Maynard 2025; also Ajadi 2025; Rutland 2020a). While some communities have successfully defended themselves against particularly violent police units, like TAVIS in Toronto (Maynard 2025) or the Collective Opposed to Police Brutality in Montreal, these efforts are often portrayed by media and police as attacks on policing. In such circumstances, police and police SMOs deploy broad communication strategies (as we detail in Chapter

Six) to provoke classist white fear about crime and racial threats; often directly in line with authoritarian claims on who belongs, what residents can be protected, and who requires subjection to police violence. These insights conjure Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2007) description of the carceral state as a populist substitute for the liberal state and illustrate popular majority participation in these carceral rituals of violence. At the core of these majoritarian movements, shaped by the popular will and robust enculturation of settler colonialism, is the defence of a hierarchical society, a revanchist anger toward progressive politics that attempt to humanize, an embrace of violence toward those who are presented as not deserving of rights or dignity, and a deeply held view of an insecure society plagued by scarcity.

With worldviews defined by violence, social enmity, and — most of all — an affective opposition to progressive politics, the far right and police culture draw from almost identical cultural and political repertoires — each narrating their collective identities around nostalgic projects defined by racial and colonial hierarchies. Policing is particularly aligned with what Toscano (2023: 72) calls the "fascist potentials" and a "hardening of authoritarian tendencies" that arise with the hollowing out of all social infrastructures under neoliberalism due to the fixation within conservative politics around criminal subjectivity.

Tough-on-crime political currents have been aided by the political effectiveness of discourses around "Leviathan's subjects" (Melossi 2008), which mark categorical distinctions between deserving, hard-working, good citizens (with ample racial overtones) in contrast to failed subjects who engage in crime and produce social disorder. While the Job-like subjects who conform to settler colonial hierarchies are rewarded as protected members of the Leviathan, those failed subjects are recast as undeserving, authors of their own misfortune, and justifiable targets of state repression. Tough-on-crime responses have themselves become institutionalized and mark a convergence where the far right and police movements sing in unified, ideological harmony. While in other instances far right movements and the policing movement do not directly overlap, their general gravitas is linked through a shared sense of victimhood, their fervent defence of a hierarchical settler society, their identification of deserving and undeserving subjects, and their embrace of violence against society — all of which point to shared authoritarian futures. More than anything, both domains share an understanding of their social order

in permanent crisis. Toscano (2023: 43) writes that "our late fascism is an ideology of crisis and decline." Fascism is a "crisis ideology" and so too is the ideology of policing.

Policing and the Authoritarian Thrust

Policing as a countermovement-in-power is illustrated best by the ways in which police function as crisis communicators. In *Policing the Crisis,* Stuart Hall et al. (1978) emphasized how police manipulate strong (and racialized) emotions around crime both as the primary responders to social problems and as operatives who mobilize their collective resources to engage in campaigns that shape political and social structures. Using their insider status as police — and the "primary definers" of crime — police opportunistically shaped discourses around criminality into a broader "ideological conductor" in which an entire "referential context" — US race politics, the decline of the British Empire, racialized youth, and symbols of urban disorder — became harnessed by populist authoritarian movements centred on a tough-on-crime politics. Occupying a position of unparalleled influence, police create and embed discourses of social crisis to enhance their power and scope, continually reinscribing further waves of crisis. Like the far right overlaps of white ethnonationalism and its revanchist victimhood, both British and American police have mirrored and popularized narratives of widespread victimization (Hall et al. 1978). An overarching metaframe in both far right and police campaigns was/is that they are the last defenders of a social order being overtaken by an assemblage of progressives, naive do-gooders, annoying "know nothings" (Van Maanen 1975), the incorrigible, the petty criminals, the failed citizens, the welfare cheats, the subhuman, and whoever else could be blamed for the social crisis.

Such animosities toward the public have resulted in increasingly visible police campaigning. Police marshalling of their role as primary definers of public disorder has been matched by a willingness to use these definitional powers to further a dystopic narrative of cities being destroyed by progressive policies, bike lanes, crime sprees, the unhoused, and racialized outsiders. A prominent example of these dynamics occurred during the contentious 2024 budget vote in Toronto, where mayor Olivia Chow proposed a lesser increase to the $1.2 billion police budget than was requested by police. While the defund movement has shaped certain elements of debates around police budgets, Chow was nothing close to

articulating a defund or detask position. Yet when Chow offered only $7.4 million of a requested $20 million increase (to bring the police annual budget to $1.174 billion), Toronto police chief Myron Demkiw mobilized vast resources and official police communications accounts in a campaign against the "cuts" proposed by the mayor (Demkiw 2024; Toronto Police Service 2024a, 2024b). Warning of "unacceptable risks" to public safety, Demkiw told the Toronto Police Services Board that in the face of such "cuts" to a police service "strained more than ever," the force will have "no prospect of delivering adequate and effective policing services" (Toronto Police Service 2024c). Demkiw also conducted a slew of interviews and published an op-ed that lamented funding shortfalls, warning of a service "stretched so thin" and hinting unsubtly at the threat of cutting "critical services." As this occurred amid heavy policing of Palestinian solidarity marches, activists were quick to point out the extensive police deployment to these events. Demkiw's efforts, however, were matched by the TPA, which launched a broad-scale PR campaign along with a website, keeptorontosafe.ca. Using sensational images that alluded to child abductions and violent home invasions, the website flashed the text "…an officer will be arriving in 22 mins," which echoed Demkiw's talking points about 911 wait times.

When Chow eventually caved to the police campaign and granted the full $20 million annual increase, the TPA sent a jubilant email to all members that claimed: "Our goal was to inform the public about the realities of frontline policing and encourage the silent majority to speak up, and they did" (Pagliaro and Gillis 2024). Not only did TPA communications stake out a language about the "realities" of frontline policing, it also invoked a reference to the Nixonian "silent majority" slogan, which carries deep racial allusions and solicited a direct connection to war-on-cop discourses that associated social movements with a cultural shift that critiqued police violence, racial capitalism, empire, and white supremacy. Such campaigns illuminate the ideological repertoires of police as a countermovement-in-power and their identitarian fragilities. In particular they likewise showcase a powerful victimization narrative that alludes to a more honourable past while heaping responsibility for its contemporary decline on progressives, police reformers, abolitionists, and "complainers." These narratives provide important insights into the milieu of police and their response to reform debates — a feeling of victimization that mirrors the cultural repertoires of the far right:

a shared belief in collective identity and status that has been declined, degraded, and defeated, and this has occurred squarely at the hands of social justice warriors. What these narrative framings reveal is how the far right and police movements share antipathy toward progressive political opponents but also toward the general public, liberal institutionalism, and democratic institutions.

A critical examination of policing as a countermovement-in-power starts with an understanding of police as an illiberal force that exists simultaneously within and against public institutions. Not only do a litany of examples demonstrate the institutional limits that continue to fail to provide even a modicum of democratic control over police agencies, but Canadian police forces have existed largely outside of democratic controls since their inception. When the NWMP was initially formed with a host of exceptional enforcement powers, Bob Beal and Rod Macleod (1984: 28) described the force as "virtually a separate government." Notwithstanding the many critiques of these institutional limits to harness police deviance, and the police efforts to curtail the limited controls that have existed, a key element of policing rests on defending a hierarchical social order where police power is necessarily wielded against large swathes of the population. In constructing such a social hierarchy, it is precisely the policing of these relations that occupies a vast amount of police work. The violent defence of the hierarchical society is a hallmark of authoritarian politics, and police have long integrated the management of social hierarchies into their management of settler colonial order. Yet police affinity toward authoritarianism does not reside only in its structural predisposition to reproduce the hierarchical violence of settler colonialism; policing scholars have also traced an authoritarian personality within policing itself.

Police ethnographers have documented the often violent and vengeful attitudes of police toward outsider groups, almost always defined by racial status or conceptualized as threats to the idealized nation. John Van Maanen (1978) infamously recounted police hatred toward "assholes" and detailed how police described their extralegal violence as necessary for "asshole control." For Van Maanen (1978: 221), "assholes are conceptually part of the ordered world of police — the statuses, the rules, the norms, and the contrasts that constitute their social system." In the Canadian context, Ericson (1982) accounts for the violence directed toward "pukes," and Fassin (2013) has noted the routinized violence directed toward the

category of "les bâtards," which depicts racialized communities in France. In various accounts of violence directed toward racialized groups, there is a clear parallel to Bittner's (1970: 7) warning that, though police were created with the ideal of advancing non-violent social norms, there "is something of the dragon in the dragon-slayer." It is precisely the justificatory reliance on vigilante violence that defines efforts to identity the authoritarian personality within the policing apparatus.

The concept of the "authoritarian personality" originated from research conducted in the 1940s by Theodor Adorno and his colleagues, who sought to understand factors that contributed to the rise of authoritarianism and fascism in Europe, in particular the dynamics of Nazism (Adorno et al. 1950). Developing an instrument known as the F-scale (Fascism scale), Adorno et al. (1950) identified and measured several key features of this personality type. In applying the F-scale to police in her 1975 study, Nancy Cochran (1975: 641) asserted that prejudice is considered an essential part of the "authoritarian personality" because "beliefs in absolute authority justify feelings of intolerance or qualified tolerance toward others." She added that "authoritarianism may also be described as an endorsement of a well-defined social hierarchy without invoking prejudice as a definitive concept." While Cochran's study of forty officers from New York City concluded that the authoritarian personality did not apply to the police as a group, her study formed the basis of a significant psychological literature that affirms the link between authoritarianism and the police occupation (Colman and Gorman 1982: 9; Haley and Sidanius 2005; Gatto and Dambrun 2012; Jones 1984; Laguna et al. 2010). The ideological fixture, however, is not merely an individualistic pathology where those with predispositions are attracted to the profession due to the magnetism of dehumanizing violence work. While that attraction explains individual interest in the occupation, the binding form for the authoritarianism within the police movement is its crisis ideology, which interprets the world through the lens of the thin blue line, the delicate balance between order and chaos.

Such authoritarian tendencies are evident by assessing how police movements attach heavy significance to fascist symbolism and aesthetics. Detailing recent preoccupations with the Punisher logo, Travis Linnemann (2022) describes its broad-based appeal within policing circles and its appearance on a raft of badges, insignia, stickers, and other paraphernalia. Bilagáana/Diné scholar Melanie Yazzie (2021) explores the

rising fixation with the Punisher logo by police, charting the rise of this obsession in tandem with the Blue Lives Matter movement after 2014. First appearing with a fictional comic book character in 1974 and then in a Netflix streaming series in 2017, the Punisher — whose character name is Frank Castle — is a vigilante embraced within police and military culture in the United States and Canada. Castle is a war veteran, and his Netflix character, Yazzie explains, is not traumatized by battle but instead strengthened by it; his lethality and moral code driven by his war experience help explain his overwhelming popularity with cops, soldiers, and militias. As a vigilante narrative with roots in settler colonial frontier justice but transplanted to a dystopic urban contemporary-future, the Punisher is romantically depicted as above the law, the only thing standing between good and evil, engaged in a sacred duty that is dangerous and heroic. Punisher logic is infused with the rationale underpinning the thin blue line and the Blue Lives Matter movement, exacting what Yazzie (2021: 137) refers to as a Punisher version of policing, "which dictates that police are exceptional, that their lives matter more than others and must be protected and celebrated by any means necessary, that they are under siege by an endless stream of suspects and enemies, and that they deserve our undying loyalty, obedience, and compliance." Where the comic plays on archetypal anti-hero themes that are standard fare in dystopic fiction, police seem to have absorbed the white vigilante killer motif quite literally as an unironic and meaningful portrayal of their occupational environment.

What the Punisher symbolizes, according to Linnemann (2022: 96), is an "embodiment of retaliatory rage, a no-nonsense anti-hero waging a literal war on crime without the encumbrances of due process afforded to undeserving street criminals." Linnemann traces how police and other violence workers are attracted to the fantasy-like violence but also the transgressive and authoritarian component — it is not only a wanton violence that flows outside of the law but one that is decidedly against liberal conceptions of legal order. With these cultural attachments to vigilantism, police curate their particular experiential knowledge of who the "bad guys" are and demonstrate a moralistic embrace of the requisite violence needed to tame them. Police power, as Linnemann (2022: 25) describes, operates across these narratives in ways that "for some [it is] the only means to achieve order in a disordered world, a necessary and righteous violence to balance the scales of not just legal but cosmic

justice." In Canada, Punisher logos have been worn as patches and used in various iterations of police decals (Lavery 2020), some instances of which have garnered attention among the press and public. One especially peculiar but highly evocative patch was captured on video in February 2024 showing a Punisher logo overlayed with the flag of Israel while policing a Palestinian solidarity demonstration in Vancouver.

Another publicized incident occurred in 2020 in Toronto at a press conference outside a public school addressing road safety issues. There a Toronto police officer was photographed by a journalist wearing a Punisher patch integrated with a thin blue line symbol alongside an ominous phrase: "MAKE NO MISTAKE, I AM THE SHEEPDOG." The sheepdog reference was popularized by retired US army ranger-turned-self-described "killologist" David Grossman (Atkinson 2016; Pedler 2022; Wall 2020), who, according to Sandy Hudson (2025), has provided "killology" training to police at each jurisdictional level in every US state. Grossman is popular within far right and military-police-militia circles, and explains sheepdog mentality as one that places all people in one of three categories: "wolf (predator), sheep (prey), or a Sheepdog" (Doyle 2025). Grossman's sheepdog metaphor plays on the same tropes as the thin blue line, placing police violence as a righteous calling within a fragile and dystopic social order. Thin blue line patches with references to sheep, sheepdogs, and wolves have proliferated in the United States and Canada. Describing the ideological appeal that gets recirculated around thin blue line symbolism, Wall (2020: 322) depicts the belief as positing that "there is no civilization without police, because police is civilization and civilization is police." In the police worldview, the thin blue line is more than a symbolic rallying point. For police, it represents an actual line inhabited and experienced collectively as officers; one where police function as the separation between civilization and savagery, actively decipher predator from prey, and patrol the moral barricades between good and evil.

Such examples are, of course, among a growing trend of expressions associated with the thin blue line, Back the Blue, Blue Lives Matter, and Punisher symbolism. In particular, the thin blue line has become the defining symbol among police to articulate both their pride and their public dissatisfaction with questions about policing's role in society. While some police managements have sought to limit or ban thin blue line and other far right insignia, researchers have detailed the widely shared

"moral injuries" felt by police when these racist symbols are prohibited (Towns and Ricciardelli 2025). In their research with officers in Canada, Towns and Ricciardelli (2025) show the strong emotional bonds between police and the thin blue line metaphor. Police regularly downplay the vigilante violence of the Punisher or the clearly racialized symbolism of the savage-civilization binary in the thin blue line metaphor, instead suggesting that the symbols are merely recognitions of fallen officers. Bans are regularly portrayed by police as attacks against officers and, as Towns and Ricciardelli (2025: 2) lament, the efforts to ban Punisher and the thin blue line symbols reinforce the popular conception among police that "officers' worldviews are not heard, valued, or acknowledged." In response to such censure, police officers continue to regularly defy — with no documented disciplinary action — management efforts to curtail these expressions of racial animus.

In many respects, thin blue line paraphernalia — alongside Blue Lives Matter and others — have become sacred symbols for police organizations and are frequently seen on badges, T-shirts, hockey jerseys (in Ottawa's case), and flags (particularly outside police unions). Increasing symbolic police flirtations with fascism are particularly relevant because such aesthetic and affective dimensions demonstrate collective loyalties and shape how movements engage in ideological assembly and renewal. As ritualistic practices, the outward displays of thin blue line symbols function to narrate ideological common ground, preserve and consolidate movement identity, engage in affective elements of fraternalizing membership (especially through humour and amusement toward violence against outsiders — see Ahmad and Monaghan 2022), and construct tensions against other groups within the social.

While many individual police have voiced support for thin blue line (and related) symbolisms, the most prominent defence has originated from the RCMP police association, the National Police Federation (NPF). In October 2020, RCMP management directed its members to stop displaying the "subdued" thin blue line patch across the middle of their uniforms and equipment (Beattie 2020). To support this decision, the RCMP cited public scrutiny about a number of recent violent killings by police in Canada as well as the US and the killing of George Floyd. Yet following the RCMP memo, the NPF posted a Facebook message vigorously defending the use of thin blue line symbols (National Police Federation 2020). The statement expressed that the NPF "strongly"

disagreed with the RCMP position and promised to "advocate for our Members' right to display and honour this important and selfless symbol." Highlighting how the thin blue line symbolized the "barrier between social order and chaos," the NPF informed its members that it had "new custom NPF/Thin Blue Line patches for all front-line RCMP Members to wear proudly." The union promised to defend any members against disciplinary actions; however, to our knowledge no disciplinary actions have been enforced. Attempting to further pressure RCMP brass, NPF president Brian Sauvé did several media appearances related to the statement. In one interview, Sauvé responded that "we are the first line of defence from crime, chaos, violent communities, riots, outbringings [*sic*]" (Global News 2020). Sauvé said the thin blue line symbol "brings us together."

In a long-form essay that appears in the NPF online publication *The Locker*, an article (with no byline) further elaborates on the affective meanings of the thin blue line symbol for police. The essay details that, for Canadian law enforcement, "it's a badge of honour that signifies unity, sacrifice, and a steadfast commitment to justice." After detailing some of the symbol's history and its emergence from US politics, the author dismisses criticisms of the symbol as "divisive," concluding: "Whether you see it as a mark of division or unity might just depend on *which side of the line you stand on*" (National Police Federation 2023, emphasis added). Like many police communications, contradictions abound. The symbol purportedly represents fallen officers, but is narrated exclusively through a good-evil binary. But readers are asked to ignore the binary metaphor (which, of course, is the most direct and explicit element of the symbol) and believe the image is actually about "a steadfast commitment to justice." And while the essay warns against "divisive" politics, there's a clear threat that the division is not to be undone but defined: you're either on *our side* of the line or you're against us. Contradicting the supposed notion that police are the line between the sides, it's clear from the statement that neutrality is, in fact, a Trojan horse. For its intended audience, the point of the NPF statement (and the police countermovement in general) is not to eliminate division but to delegitimize, attack, and undermine criticisms of police power.

In their persistent defence of the thin blue line, police articulate the depths to which their worldview is defined by a dividing line. Without making the threats specific, the "side" of the line upon which individuals

happen to fall then denotes a very clear designation: either on the side of civilization and protected by righteous violence, or you're on the other side. Like those subjected to ridicule, abandonment, and pervasive violence at the hands of far right movements, the police see the "line" as representing a natural hierarchy punctuated through social crisis. And as TPS chief Demkiw alluded in his Toronto budget campaign, the unstated but obvious repercussion of seeing the world divided by a line is that, should you be on the other side, whatever violence you encounter is deserved and justified. Expressing seemingly paradoxical claims of protection (for some) and abandonment (for others) is deparadoxified through an understanding of the police as a movement outside of the state alongside its institutionalization as an armed entity of the state. In other words, police as a countermovement-in-power. *Thin Blue Rage* provides multiple vantage points into the conditions of policing as an occupation that foments crisis while claiming to be an exclusive source for policing the crisis, giving currency to Foucault's warning that the police are "the permanent *coup d'état*."

About the Book

Thin Blue Rage is organized thematically in an effort to explore key issues and contestations around policing in Canada. Chapters examine core literature and then engage with a range of empirical investigations under each theme: the "war on cops" and police countermovement (Chapter Two), history (Chapter Three), police culture (Chapter Four), police violence work (Chapter Five), and police communications (Chapter Six). The themes represent established debates within policing studies and, while they're certainly not an exclusive list, they provide a theoretical and empirical picture of the police countermovement-in-power. Our project proceeds from the following key research questions: What explains the differences between policing approaches to different movements or groups? How can these differential policing practices be explained by conceptualizing who the police are and what the police do? What are some key themes in policing studies that can help explain the contemporary elements of police violence in Canada?

We have divided our chapters according to these prominent themes, with each chapter offering an overview of key research under that thematic field, then engaging with our core questions around policing as a reactionary social movement. Organizing our text in such a manner

blends our overlapping narrative of police as a countermovement-in-power as a contribution to existing theoretical engagements, supported by rich empirical work from the Canadian context.

We aim here to present readers with core police studies literature and to provide a bridge between the insights from that more scholarly world with contemporary discussions and critical questions around policing. We have also tried to narrate classic texts from policing studies alongside more contemporary literature on social movements, the far right, and critical carceral studies. Engaging with many works from police studies and many of the rich police ethnographies from the 1960s onwards is a key starting point for our research because these works on police cultures continue to present some of the most potent *police-narrated* conceptions of how policing systems work. Many scholars have explored these texts and, while aspects of police technology, organization, and policy have changed, we revisit these classics for their continued relevance at explaining identity, power, adversarialism, and the ideological commitments of the police fraternity. While these works are sometimes regarded as dated among current police scholars, the insights produced around the core characteristics of policing remain illuminating in the context of the police countermovements sparked post-Ferguson and the ever more clearly articulated overlaps between police and the far right.

Within each chapter, we have organized empirical materials as detailed case studies and supportive vignettes to illustrate key thematic aspects of understanding police as a countermovement-in-power. To paint a richer picture, we have relied almost exclusively on Canadian-based materials to support our investigations but also incorporated secondary research, media, and social media data collection, statistical data with new insights from the Tracking (In)Justice project, and access-to-information (ATI) and freedom-of-information (FOI) data collection methods. Much like our previous works, including *Policing Indigenous Movements* (Crosby and Monaghan 2018; see also Crosby and Monaghan 2012, 2016), we adopt a research design that approaches the study of state power by accounting for the vantage points and rationalities that are expressed by policing and state actors. We are greatly indebted to research that accounts for those movements and individuals directly impacted and experiencing state violence — and we use resources produced from the perspectives of those directly impacted as much as possible to inform our narrative, analysis, and the contextual premises of our case studies. However, our method

primarily focuses on accounts of policing expressed by police. Like *Policing Indigenous Movements*, which explores surveillance activities through the accounts of police and government records, the method adopted in this study borrows from police descriptions of their realities, their movement, their ideological and cultural repertoires, their political demands and perceptions of opportunities and enmities. We also borrow from police studies accounts, internal documents, media accounts, and legal cases, all of which have been systematically collected, organized, and presented throughout our text.

Bringing these insights into a specifically Canadian-focused discussion, our efforts seek to highlight the important distinctions and similarities between US and Canadian policing. Police regularly complain that their critics in Canada import politics from America. As we detail, Canadian policing does have significant unique elements in terms of history, identity, and practices. Yet we also want to underline how the core thematics of police studies can embody specifically Canadian dynamics while simultaneously absorbing many of the ideological, identitarian, and contextual dynamics present in the US. Such an approach grounds much of our discussion within scholarship that is often associated with the United States but places these debates in relation to contemporary issues in Canada in an effort to explore commonalities in what are clearly overlapping and cross-boundaried milieus of policing and authoritarianism.

In Chapter Two, we explore the countermovement character of the police movement through a discussion of the police-seeded discourse of a "war on cops." We trace historical iterations of these reactionary, emotive feelings that inform a thin blue line outlook that is universally shared by the police fraternity. While some police studies scholarship tries to emphasize heterogeneity in cultures and values within policing, the chapter demonstrates an unshakable solidarity among movement membership around the highly moralistic self-identity of police as noble, duty-bound warriors in a struggle of good versus evil. The chapter starts by exploring the police funeral as the centrepiece of these identitarian values, where the core identity of police as a thin blue line is celebrated and renewed internally among the movement membership but also paraded as a dramatic display of power. The chapter demonstrates how the ideological harmony of the thin blue line has been longstanding in police cultures, always twinned with an isolationist (nobody understands

cops except cops) and a reactionary character that lashes out against any criticisms or lack of deference as "anti-police" attacks. With these histories of antagonisms deeply embedded within police cultures, we trace the current victimization narratives arising with claims of the "war on cops" as countermovement mobilizations against urban disorders and the unhoused, current debates around defunding police or merely calls for police accountability, and the centrality of police anger against Black Lives Matter and related activism.

After illustrating how the current character of police mobilizations has coalesced as a reactionary, angered, and aggrieved countermovement, we turn our attention to the historical development of policing in Canada. Policing histories are layered, scattered, complex; therefore we focus on the creation and practices of police institutions in Canada to demonstrate how policing cements itself as a movement-in-power. While we suggest in Chapter Two that the police movement has a distinct character (countermovement), Chapter Three is devoted to explaining the in-power component of how policing functions as a movement within the state. We intervene in the rich scholarship on police history in Canada by suggesting that police mobilizations through three avenues have shaped policing's institutional character. First, settler colonial expansion was the animating reason for creating the NWMP in 1873, which vastly eclipsed all other policing efforts up to that point in Canada. Not only was the NWMP an extensive and exceptionally violent enterprise, the successor RCMP remains a central node of the police network in terms of material factors such as memberships and resources but also the immaterial domains of police identity and current iterations of the police movement. A second driver of police institutionalization was the cementing of the police role in repressing labour and other progressive social movements. In the convergence of state requirements to support capitalism and settler colonialism with an inherent disposition toward conservatism and ideological frames aligned with capitalist hegemony, the policing of progressive movements embedded both the police as antagonists of politics that contest state priorities as well as distinct police belief systems for collective action. A third historical driver of policing in Canada was the extensive pressures and influences from US urban policing. We discuss militarization, SWAT (special weapons and tactics), and the various warrior cultures in US policing that infuse and extend from distinct elements of the police movement in Canada. Our history

of police begins with a discussion of the RCMP-NWMP Depot and ends with a short vignette on the reintroduction of mounted police in Ottawa — a circuitous illustration of the materiality and immateriality of history's present configurations.

Chapter Four reinterprets research on police cultures through the lens of the police as a social movement. While police culture research often depicts informal, discretionary, and varied forms of systemic police practices, we reposition literature within this field to suggest that any police movement interventions are informed by six characteristics at the core of police identity, membership solidarities, and prescriptions on the social. While many other "cultural" traits might be attached to policing, our contention is that policing studies has articulated six basic attributes that we assert are fundamental elements of the police movement: mission orientation and "the police calling"; police truths and a monopoly over crime knowledge; isolation/solidarity; hegemonic subjectivities and systemic oppression; police fragility and the impacts of policing's collective victimization complex; and the dominant conservatism within policing. This chapter opens and closes with the case study of the police killing of Abdirahman Abdi, which sparked intense mobilizations for justice as well as intense police countermobilizations. In this re-narration, we suggest that what appears in much police research — and many case studies, like of the killing of Abdi — shows the broader terrains of membership, identity, ideology, and political opportunity structures at the centre of the police movement.

To analyze how the police movement engages in movement renewal and cohesion, the thematic of Chapter Five is police violence. We canvas classic texts, from Egon Bittner's definition of policing as the imposition of non-negotiated solutions backed by violence to contemporary work on police as violence workers. Our contention is straightforward: Violence is inherent to the full spectrum of police encounters and remains the defining aspect of the police. Violence designates the internal bonds of the police fraternity and police movement relations with the external world. In this assertion, we offer an empirical examination of use-of-force (UOF) training in Canada to underline the unambiguity with which violence narrates all police action. We then examine the empirical realities of how violence work and violence workers act in the world through examining the police killings tracked by the Tracking (In)Justice project. The chapter concludes by demonstrating how critical interventions like

Tracking (In)Justice have provoked reactionary rage and hostility from police. Like other efforts to make visible and challenge the impunities of police violence, the collective reaction by the countermovement is to disparage data justice efforts as recirculating "anti-cop" sentiments in a milieu where the police face constant attack.

In Chapter Six, we explore the power of police communications. Various scholars have connected the communication practices of police with deliberate attempts to make or remake the world in a conservative and authoritarian fashion. We present various contributions to the literature on their communicative power and follow an analysis by Hall et al. (1978) underlining how police campaign in ways that advance movement and authoritarian goals. We apply these insights to a case study of the actions of the RCMP's Community-Industry Response Group (C-IRG), rebranded in 2024 in British Columbia as the Critical Response Unit or CRU-BC. Using ATI data, media, and court sources, we describe how the C-IRG works to advance extractivism as a paradigmatic example of police as a countermovement-in-power. We pay particular attention to their leveraging of communicative techniques to delegitimize and de-Indigenize the conflicts at Ada'itsx/Fairy Creek and on Wet'suwet'en land and, as one commander put it in relation to critics of police, "Counter everything negative they say." We then link the particularities of these conflicts to how the C-IRG–RCMP campaigns were, in fact, about advancing the police countermovement-in-power much more broadly. Tying settler colonial histories with countermovement contestations against the "fucking hippies" and other police detractors, this chapter unambiguously demonstrates how the police movement and conservative politics align.

Through *Thin Blue Rage*, we aim to reconfigure the rich scholarship on policing, social movements, and politics. Police and policing (and what to do about it) remains a critical issue — particularly around the need to cultivate more humane, more egalitarian, and far less violent social relations. *Thin Blue Rage* attempts to illustrate the stakes at play; when police transgressions take place and spur renewed interest or debates around the futures of policing, we contend that the trajectory of these discussions is shaped by our understandings of *who the police are* and *what the police do*. Herein we share a wide range of scholarly, journalistic, and media interventions that attempt to define these fundamentals. Through our journey with these texts and resources, we also present a particular

take on these definitional questions: police comprise a network of public and private power, animated by and overlapped with the most violent imaginaries of conservative order, and they are currently unanimously self-configured as victimized outsiders under attack from activists, the public, bureaucrats, media, and anyone not fulfilling their requirements for compliance and fidelity. As guardians of a thin blue line, the police are not the metaphoric line between order and chaos, but the armed and righteous defenders of a very particular version of "order." Police righteousness in feeling that they and their vision of society are under attack is what propels their mobilizations. Given this, debates around what we do with policing and police as a countermovement-in-power are less a question about the levers of policy or reforms than a question about who controls those levers.

Note

1 Scholars within the field use both "culture(s)" and "subculture(s)" to describe the informal, normative forces within the police occupation. We use "culture" to highlight and emphasize the persistent and elemental dimensions of policing that are key to our arguments.