



## Introduction to the Special Issue on Capitalist World-Economy in Crisis Policing, Pacification, and Legitimacy

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While managing the working class has been a central concern of capitalist ruling classes throughout history, contemporary restructuring in the face of slowed growth, declining profit rates, climate change and environmental degradation makes the question of maintaining social order, and hence of policing, more important than ever before. We decided to focus this special issue on the various modalities of policing to secure, maintain, and reproduce existing racialized class structures at this moment of world-systemic crisis. In this introduction, we try to situate the urgency of understanding the relationship between policing, pacification, and legitimacy in the larger context of the capitalist world-economy in crisis. We then turn to a summary of the contributions to highlight the main themes that emerge in this Special Issue.

Just two months into a global health pandemic, the world watched as a white police officer slowly choked to death a working class Black man over an alleged \$20 counterfeit bill outside of a Minneapolis corner store. George Floyd's death sparked militant protests throughout the United States not seen since the urban rebellions of the 1960s. Taking direction action, the Black-led and



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multiracial movement in streets did in a few months what the scholarship on the carceral state and police power has pushed for nearly a decade: raise the mantle of abolition. Rallying around slogans of “defund” and “abolish the police,” protestors targeted their righteous indignation at carceral infrastructures—from the burning of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis to the setting ablaze of the corrections complex in Kenosha, Washington. Despite all the foundation money thrown at Black Lives Matter organizations in an attempts to wrangle the protest movement into dead end liberal police reforms, in the span of just five years, the dial moved from a defensive position of “hands up don’t shoot” to an offensive demand: “Our futures have already been looted; loot back.” In Chicago, for instance, protestors defied the boundaries that enclose and shield the predominantly rich and white downtown area from the structural violence unleashed daily on poor Black Chicagoans and descended upon the Magnificent Mile, significantly damaging property and liberating luxury commodities. The global pandemic served as an important backdrop—it threw into sharp relief the race and class inequalities that underpin life in America and globally. Americans watched the crisis of American capitalism laid bare: bodies piled up outside of hospitals too overcrowded and underfunded to treat patients dying of covid-19 as police officers showed off and tested out their expensive riot gear on unarmed protestors demanding an end to racist police violence in cities and small towns across the country.

Moreover, the George Floyd Rebellion sparked solidarity protests around the world, especially throughout the Global South as protestors drew parallels between racist police violence in the United States and their own countries. In Nigeria, the protests congealed around the demand to #ENDSARS, Nigeria’s Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police Force that has become notorious for its violence and brutality. Between 2000 and 2007, Human Rights Watch (2007) estimates that police have killed 10,000 people in Nigeria. The heavy militarized response to Black Lives Matter in the United States has resonated with those in the Global South who have most starkly experienced war and police power jointly to maintain capital accumulation, squash opposition and dissidents and secure borders. For example, in South Africa, police killed 2.6 times as many people as the United States in 2019 (Clarke 2021). In Turkey, expansion of police forces and police powers, alongside other mechanisms of pacification has been central to the making of the new authoritarian state formation.<sup>1</sup> The discourses on “war on drugs,” “war on crime,” and the “war on terror” provide the legitimacy for an ever expanding police state in Turkey, and globally. In 2016, Brazilian police forces relied on Israeli security and high tech firms to secure the Olympic games to protect spectators from Rio de Janeiro’s poorest residents. The insecurity created by the covid-19 pandemic has also generated a repressive response—in many countries police violence has increased in the wake of imposed lockdowns, curfews, and new restrictions in everyday life. The shuttering of businesses has also swelled the ranks of surplus humanity which will yield more repressive measures by states to contain and manage these populations. Others continue to cling on to what little job security they have, willing more than ever perhaps to

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the edited volume, *Turkey’s New State in the Making*, by Bedirhanoğlu, Dölek, Hülagü, and Kaygusuz (2020).

accommodate the exploitation of cruel bosses. Police power has flexed its muscles, enforcing curfews and lockdowns, killing unarmed poor and working class people in Angola, Colombia, Kenya, Honduras, South Africa, Dominican Republic and other parts of the world. Covid-19 and police violence have exposed the deepening capitalist crisis. But first a word about the magnitude of the crisis we face and the role of policing, pacification and legitimacy will play in this historical gridlock.

From Marx onwards, there has been general acceptance that global capitalism is crisis prone. Periodically, capitalism is thrown into crisis by contradictory dynamics inherent to its functioning. We want to specify that crises range from those related to boom/slump or inflation/recession, which are most generally identified as “business cycles” and which occur periodically all the way up to more severe, deep, and long-lasting structural and political crises that completely interrupt the accumulation process and which throw the legitimacy of capitalist social order into question. Periods of world-systemic crisis are always important opportunistic moments for the ruling class to strengthen its resolve. A recent example is neoliberalism which was a ruling class solution to the crisis of overaccumulation. It resulted in a four-decade long assault on the working class through cutting wages and social services and investing in policing and other mechanisms of social control to manage exploited and precarious wage workers at the point of production and the growing ranks of surplus populations in the spatial ghettos, slums, and *favelas* of large cities. For example, in China, the world’s “global factory,” capitalists envision new ways of squeezing out more labor from their newly proletarianized workforce while in Europe, policy makers innovate border security methods to exclude immigrants and refugees. These past four decades have seen a tremendous rise in police power, prisons, and carceral infrastructures ranging from private policing, border security, new surveillance mechanisms, lateral expansion of policing via engaging the “respectable citizens” against the “undesirables”, increasing reliance to anti-terror legislations to securitization of everyday life; all aspects of what William Robinson (2020) calls the “global police state.”

Globally the neoliberal capitalist social order is being challenged on the one hand by the stirrings of global revolt starting with Arab Spring and Occupy protests through Hong Kong’s umbrella movement, the *gilet jaunes* movement in France to Black Lives Matter; and the growing power of the far-right on the other. The visions of utopia/liberation on the left and dystopia/barbarism on the right are continuously rising and cresting, and also running up against the neoliberal order which is fighting tooth and nail to restore bourgeois order and profits. It would seem that our period shares a lot in common with the crisis of the interwar years—especially the way *creeping fascism* is being used by liberal democratic governments to justify deepening the security apparatus and carceral state. Writing from a prison cell in 1930 where he was imprisoned by the Italian fascist regime, Antonio Gramsci wrote presciently about the world-systemic crisis that confronted his generation: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old world is dying and the new cannot yet be born; in the interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” Nearly a century later, Gramsci’s words have never been more relevant to describe the morbid symptoms of our contemporary era.

Yet as Robinson (2020) reminds us, there are also particular material dynamics about our contemporary crisis that are important to highlight: namely the real limits of capitalist accumulation and the increasing role that war, repression, brutality, social control, and policing can play to manage global working class and surplus populations and to resuscitate the falling rates of profit. For these reasons, we agree with David Ranney (2014) who argues that the capitalist world-economy has entered a period of what he calls “churning and flailing,” where the ruling elite strategy to reorganize capitalist production to meet the ends of the drive to accumulate and generate profit has not worked itself out. We predict that policing and pacification will be expanded to manage recalcitrant populations but also to shore up legitimacy for the ruling class order—all in the name of securing the decaying bourgeois social order.

Since the 1970s, repression has been ramped up. In the United States, scholars have called attention to the role that policing, prisons, and a growing private security industry have played in managing growing inequality structured along class, race, and gender lines. Over the past decade, terms like “prison industrial complex,” “penal state,” “carceral state,” has attempted to capture how policing and prisons have managed surplus populations across the color line and most directly affecting working class Black communities, who have been hit the hardest by processes of deindustrialization and capitalist restructuring. Scholars like Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) and Loïc Wacquant (2009) for instance understand the consolidation of the carceral state in the United States as a ruling class response to the crisis of Fordism-Keynesianism and the subsequent era of economic and social insecurity also termed neoliberalism, which deeply transformed the relationship between capital and labor. The underdevelopment of the American welfare state is exceptional among core capitalist countries and has relied on criminalization, surveillance and social control to punish, shame and stigmatize the poor as a way to kick them off relief programs. Recent writings on the carceral state have attempted to situate its reach globally—bringing in how wars, military, and counterinsurgency operations abroad have been integral to the formation of the security state at home. Moreover, scholarship on police power, pacification, and security has attempted to provide a Marxist analysis that we have benefited greatly from.

While by no means an exhaustive examination of these issues, we wanted to contribute to these ongoing debates and scholarship on policing, pacification, and legitimacy. Historically, policing has been integral to capital accumulation. As Marx reminds us, these methods were anything but idyllic. War, colonization, imperialism, expropriation were all aspects of the direct and brutal violence unleashed by capital in its quest to open up new markets and proletarianize the globe—all permanent features of the capitalist world-economy. As our colleagues of the Anti-Security Collective remind us, insecurity is inherent to the bourgeois social order and capital has also relied on the processes of pacification, which brought together war and police power to secure bourgeois social order and make it amenable for capital accumulation.<sup>2</sup> As capitalism continues to generate greater insecurity, we can imagine all kinds of pacification and security projects being

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<sup>2</sup> See edited volume by Mark Neocleous and George Rigakos (2011) and the *Socialist Studies*’ special issue: “On Pacification” (2013).

propped up by ruling elites that movements will need to resist politically but also ideologically. Any emancipatory global project against the bourgeois status quo will also need to re-envision security and safety.

### **Summarizing the Contributions**

In this Special Issue, we wanted to offer a world historical perspective on how policing manages the global working class structured along race and gender. Governments are borrowing from, and working together with each other and with private entities to produce methods of penal regulation and pacification of the working classes, and thus creating a large repertoire of policing and accompanying discourses of security. A case in point is the U.S.-led war on drugs, which criminalized and contained the racialized poor at home, while exporting this war to the rest of the world. It was well fitting for many governments' that looked for "legitimate" expansion of policing in controlling their own surplus populations. Steven Osuna's article shows how the war on drugs in Mexico is also a way to legitimize the militarized control of surplus populations and poverty especially in the face of the crisis of capitalism in the neoliberal era. Together with the United States, Mexican elites invest in the policing and militarizing the drug trade, not only worsening structural violence against Mexican populations but also supporting military industrial capital as a fix to economic crises. Thus the global nature of capitalist relations and the crises shape the securitization of Mexican society in the name of a drug war. Despite the United States' new rhetoric of decriminalization and legalization of drugs in many of its states, globally, neoliberalism continues to rely on security, enacted through the war on drugs as Osuna demonstrates.

Moreover, expanding neoliberal security formations are not gender-blind. Simten Coşar and Gülden Özcan's study of Turkish state's recent "security packages" that combined new policies of patriarchal social security measures with laws that expanded police powers is one striking example of the gendered regulation and pacification in the neoliberal era. In order to maintain its neoliberal order, the AKP government's authoritarianism not only fortifies its police powers, but empowers heterosexist familial relations through the field of social policy, while criminalizing those outside of those relations. Coşar and Özcan's paper also demonstrates how security and policing go beyond the institutions of force, and how the family under neoliberal patriarchy can serve as a unit through which the state can reconfigure and control working class women.

The expanded concept of policing also comes alive also through Mark Neocleous' essay "Debt as Pacification," which explores how "subtle weapons," such as debt, help to fabricate the social order and are integral to police power. Neocleous' essay prompts us to think more broadly about police power and to look beyond just its armed men and reliance on violence work to understand how the social order is secured. His focus on debt as a way to control and pacify populations is an important contribution to the elasticity of police power. Neocleous draws on countless historical and contemporary examples from the Global South and North to explore how the pacification of populations in capitalist relations relies on the ever expanding indebtedness and debt to hold them global laboring populations until their death. From the United States to the UK,

the indebted poor are subject to growing surveillance, policing and imprisonment. In this moment when abolitionism is gaining more ground politically, he pushes us to connect debt, police power, and abolition of capitalism.

Forms and intensity of policing is racialized; they change depending on the population in question. For the white middle classes, debt might be the main mechanism of pacification, but for racialized poor there are multiple ways in addition to debt. Tom Montel's article that focuses on the policing of immigrants in the EU through the Dublin regime can provide an urgent example. The core capitalist countries faced with increased migrant flow as economic and political instability, wars, and environmental and climate crises push large numbers of people from their homelands, seek to develop and revamp new forms of policing and exclusion directed towards the "invaders." While the U.S. border wall, detention and deportation regime, increasingly punitive migration system police the migrants, the EU scrambles to find its own methods. Montel's article shows that the Dublin regime not only regulates the refugees but also creates multiple labor regimes of exploitation for migrant populations in the EU. Thus policing is not only reactive and exclusionary but productive as well. The division between migrant/refugee/citizen creates one of the axes of division of labor and multiplies exploitation in capitalist markets, while ideologically pacifying the "native populations."

The security surge—whether it is in response to the immigration and refugee crisis or to the threat of "terrorism" has led to growing concerns with managing risk and securing the bourgeois social order. Brendan McQuade's article offers a nuanced and world historical approach to our contemporary phase of police power. Since 9/11, one of the most important developments in policing has been the embrace of "big data" policing, heralded as a technological revolution in policing. However, as McQuade argues scholarship on "big data" policing tends to hone in on issues of privacy, criminalization and racial bias as a way to justify a project of liberal police reform. Instead, McQuade seeks to historicize "big data" within a larger global and world historical context. He re-considers the rise of big data policing in relation to pacification and its corollary projects of police-wars that have accompanied the rise and crisis of U.S. hegemony. McQuade brings together Marxist anti-security perspective and anti-racist critiques of surveillance and big data policing from within the Black radical tradition to historicize "big data" policing as "the latest development in on-going processes of pacification that have expanded, organized, and reproduced the colonial/modern world-system over the *longue durée*."

Our Special Issue ends with an interview with Tony Platt, long time Marxist scholar of the carceral state and part of the 1960s cohort of radical criminologists, who demystified liberal notions of "crime control," and prioritized instead the understanding of capitalist social relations and the coercive social order it continuously produces. Platt shares with our readers his own political development, how anti-systemic movements of the 1960s helped shape the roots of radical criminology and offered keen historical insight and global perspectives on policing and the carceral state. In this interview, we revisit the lessons of radical criminology and what they have to offer abolitionists today.

When we set out to put together this issue we would have never imagined to be living through a global pandemic rife with challenges but also great possibilities. Therefore, we are pleased to offer this special issue as a means to contribute to ongoing conversations and debates on the interrelationship between capitalist crises, policing, pacification, and legitimacy.

We conclude this introduction by extending our gratitude to the authors, the editorial team at JWSR, with a special shout out to Rallie Murray who has worked diligently and tirelessly on this special issue. We would also like to thank our anonymous reviewers for their critical attention and feedback to all the drafts.

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