Violence Work and the Police Order

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In Fall 2011, an American marine—who was involved in the brutal 2004 assault on Fallujah, Iraq—excoriated the NYPD for getting rough with Occupy protesters in Times Square, New York City. Standing in his fatigues and occasionally pointing at the medals pinned to his chest, Sergeant Shamar Thomas chided the police repeatedly, "This is not a war zone!" He paced back and forth in front of a cluster of police officers. "If you want to go kill and hurt people," Thomas screamed at the cops, "go to Iraq! Why are you hurting US citizens?"

Classically, the *state* is understood as a monopoly on violence, or the legitimate use of force over a given territory. In this sense, the state does not minimize force, and its agents—the police—do not eliminate violence. Instead, it legitimates violence through its monopolization of "legitimate" policing. To put it in David Correia and Tyler Wall's (2018: 6) apt and blunt phrasing, "police are violence workers." As violence work, policing exceeds the institution of the police. Indeed, the latest bout of American invasions that cluster under the label "global war on terror" have been framed as a policing operation by American officials as well as several scholars. The latter have argued that there has been a convergence between policing and the military apparatus along with a recent conceptual collapse between the "enemy" (war) and the "criminal" (policing) (Hardt and Negri 2001; Peter Andreas and Richard Price 2001; Virilio quoted in Neocleous 2014; Kahn 2013).

Thomas's castigation of the police can be understood as reestablishing that distinction, and with it, he demarcates an "inside" territory of the nation-state where violence must be regulated, and an "outside"—Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and elsewhere—where overwhelming violence can be enacted and justified. Thinking with Rancière (2010) we may say that Thomas urges a particular distribution of the sensible; by partitioning the world into "here" and "there,"

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he polices and reaffirms the current social order that calls for a redistribution of violence away from the inside and toward that which is construed as the outside. What, then, is the relationship between these two violence workers, the soldier and the police officer? Should we characterize violence work, from Ferguson to Fallujah, as policing? And if so, how? What productive analytics, politics, and solidarities can such a framing underwrite? Equally important, what significant inequalities in the global regimes of power does such an analytic obscure?

The essays in this special issue of *Public Culture* do not converge upon a singular understanding. Rather, this issue leverages the strengths of an interdisciplinary conversation—the authors of these papers met and engaged each other at a workshop hosted by Columbia University, generously sponsored by the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy—drawing upon a range of empirically grounded and analytically rigorous papers that examine the discourses and practices of policing as a concept. These papers open up our understanding, providing critical insights into the transformation of the relations policing produces, and the order it develops and sustains.

Police Order

In his influential work on the nexus between war power and police power, Mark Neocleous (2011, 2014) has argued that the police ought to be thought of less as an institution (the police), and more as a broad range of powers concerned with constructing a specific social order, an understanding that draws upon and echoes Foucault's (1972: 170) analysis of the police as the "ensemble of mechanisms serving to ensure order." Indeed, this in part explains why the present wars have been termed "policing" operations, although the phenomena may not at all be new. Colonial wars, the most prevalent form of warfare, were often conceived of as "small wars," or "imperial policing" operations, where overwhelming bouts of militarist violence worked in tandem with colonial civil administration to construct a colonial social order (Neocleous 2014; Moyn 2013; Khalili 2012).

Several papers in this issue explore the construction of the contemporary police order and its genealogical and material antecedents. Caren Kaplan and Andrea Miller situate contemporary police technologies, including drones, alongside longer histories of colonial aerial policing and use of civil air power as a technique for controlling populations. They refuse easy distinctions between military and police violence, and shift us away from the techno-fetishism that has often plagued analyses of military and police technologies. Their paper draws our attention to the everydayness of violence work by the police, which, they argue, appears obscure

and unremarkable when set against the spectacle of war. Drawing on examples from policing by the Los Angeles Police Department as well as aerial patrol at the US-Mexico border, Kaplan and Miller show how policing reorganizes spatial arrangements by constructing and maintaining boundary lines through checkpoints, raids, aerial patrols, and predictive policing technologies. Their paper enriches our understanding of policing as boundary work.

Rivke Jaffe examines the temporal dimension of the police order through her account of "speculative policing," a future-oriented policing that navigates between calculable (risky) and incalculable (uncertain) futures. Jaffe develops her analysis through ethnographic fieldwork in Jamaica, where the government initiated and used a state of emergency to establish and expand a host of securitization measures including curfews, checkpoints, detention, and data collection of residents in inner-city neighborhoods. These policing practices combined the "risk management of future-oriented policing," writes Jaffe, "with an interest in unlocking the potential of real estate." Thus, future-oriented crime management strategies that anticipate citizens as potential future criminals occurred in tandem with a crackdown on informal economic activities aimed at increasing the potential for real estate redevelopment. Jaffe carefully unpacks these parallel and linked processes to develop a probing inquiry into the techniques and logics of speculative policing as it attempts to control not only the present but also uncertain futures.

The spatial and temporal construction of the police order also arranges social relations as boundaries that partition and sort not only spaces but bodies. Andrew Carruthers ably explores questions of relationality and migrant journeys in the Indonesia-Malaysia borderlands, where ethnic Bugis migrants from Indonesia attempt to pass as Bugis-Malaysians in order to cross the border. Bugis resemble local Malay in speech, and this similitude constructs a productive space for police work, which attempts to establish thresholds of detection. Policing, Carruthers argues, is better understood as the processes of establishing thresholds of sensible intensity, thresholds that in turn underwrite an array of activities and behaviors as Bugis work to regulate their intensities in order to pass. These thresholds thus emerge as critical to establishing forms of relationships; whether one is able to be "more or less" establishes relations to the state, police, and community, and even to one's own identity.

Where Carruthers focuses on relations as the strategic and delicate art of modulating verbal and corporeal cues, Fatima Mojaddedi's finely wrought ethnographic account of the experiences of one Afghan translator, Matin, illuminates how war can "make strange the familiar." Matin, who translates for American forces as they occupy and patrol various parts of his country, speaks of feeling *dil tang*—as

though his heart is tight or closed—a sense that, as Mojaddedi shows, redoubles his alienation from the rural countryside that he is asked to translate. As Afghans bootstrap tactics to survive, endure, and, hopefully, outlive the war, Matin experiences the scene of his translation work as unruly and irrepressible, rife with disguises, masks, and double-talk, and immune to an intelligible translation. That which normative theory would hold as a medium of relationality, speech in a war zone, instead becomes volatile. It is, as Mojaddedi writes, both a "medium of persuasion and . . . an uncontrollable instrument of war that proceeds alongside the translator." Finally, the scale of violence that Matin must navigate—beheaded bodies, ambushes, improvised explosives and mine blasts—provides a critical and necessary vantage point to think through the implications of boundaries. Analytical inquiry into the links between police power and war power must also contend with the material distinctions evident in the violence waged "here" and "not here."

"Hey You There!"

What is it to be interpellated as a subject of the law? How does this relate to the construction of subjectivity? Critical Black studies scholarship has especially taken up this question and analyzed the formation of Black subjectivity and its relationship to racialized violence (Hartman 1997; Sexton 2008; Sharpe 2016; Weheliye 2014). These investigations have revealed not only the paucity of the categories of Man but, relatedly, the inextricable relation between anti-Blackness and the violence of the law. In this issue, Jesse Goldberg thinks alongside James Baldwin to further inquire into the racial politics of the law, specifically anti-Blackness as the very condition of possibility of American law itself. Goldberg follows Baldwin as the latter reflects upon his experiences with the violent force of the law through the figure of the policeman, a rumination that severs the normative relationship between the law and justice. In so doing, Baldwin, Goldberg argues, foreshadows the work of Jared Sexton (2007), who has outlined the dependence of the law on that which it polices. Thus, Goldberg writes, "to extricate Blackness from law is to tear apart the fabric of law."

There are resonances of this argument in Didier Fassin's rich ethnographic analysis of French policing of ethno-racial minorities. Fassin asserts that it is not the task of the social scientist to furnish analyses that assist the police in legitimizing their use of force. In keeping with that view, Fassin characterizes the use of overwhelming force as a form of retributive punishment, contra analysts and normative theorists who dismiss the use of violence by police officers as merely deviant or "excessive." Fassin argues, in effect, that the police are violence work-

ers that function as part of a broader punitive apparatus that metes out individual, random, and collective punishment to menace and terrorize racialized communities. "Remarkably, whether it is targeted on a suspect, random or collective," writes Fassin, "such retribution selectively concerns youth from the working class belonging to ethno-racial minorities and living in public housing." Finally, he also attends to the colonial genealogy of these policing practices, tracing patterns and resonances with the development of special police units meant to surveil Algerians in the metropole during the Algerian struggle for independence.

Ilana Feldman's historically informed work in this issue tracks colonial attempts to eliminate the native (Wolfe 2006) in occupied Palestine by legally defining away Palestinian political personhood and political community. Feldman notes that the denial of Palestinian *political* status is critical to Israel's claim that the territories are not occupied. Consequently, a range of actors, from British colonial officials during the Mandate period to the ICRC, to Israel, have attempted to adjudicate just what kind of subjects Palestinians are and ought to be before the law. Feldman focuses specifically on the criminalization of Palestinian political community and the proliferation of categories of crime and prisoners that denied the possibility of a collective Palestinian politics. Provocatively, Feldman argues that while policing is a work of sorting, it also "operates through indistinction . . . by making it difficult for people to know precisely where they stand in relation to the line of illegality, guilt, and, even, proper politics."

What is it to defy this order in the most intimate sphere of the self, the body? Michelle Velasquez-Potts's paper—a necessary and alarming read for its spare descriptions of the force-feeding of Guantánamo prison hunger strikers—tackles this question through the torturous vicissitudes of the body subjected to the biopolitics of the carceral empire. She asks us to consider seriously former Guantánamo prisoner Samir Naji al Hasan Moqbel's call to "look to Guantánamo" in light of the pain that he and his fellow hunger strikers endured. Looking, in this instance, is not merely a visual task, but an ethical witnessing that exceeds the disinterested visual gaze. Velasquez-Potts centers the relational capacities of pain and the embodied, corporeal, fleshly responses of the hunger strikers, from their refusal of the feeding tube by biting down on it to the tormented misery of repeated insertions, to vomiting and losing consciousness. It is these moans, utterances, and gastric expulsions that reveal what the politics of care are really about in this carceral scene—the elimination of political opposition through the medicalized surveillance of the captive body. While in Mojaddedi's ethnography, even the communicative encounter loses its capacity for relationality, Velasquez-Potts opens the possibility of considering the relational nature of pain when understood

less as a private event than as a social relationship that calls forth an ethical obligation to respond.

Policing the Police

Finally, several papers in this issue inquire into the internal politics of the police as an institution. Stuart Schrader looks historically at the role of police in US politics since the 1960s. He shows how police have pivoted from being the subject of state policy, as constructed by politicians, to something more powerful and independent—placing politicians under their thumb. Schrader's work initiates a history we know little about, an organizational and institutional history of the police themselves, and how such organizational emergence (and power) are fundamentally changing the capacity for policing—both what it can do, and what can constrain it. That the police now make explicit and implicit demands by, for instance, turning their back to Mayor De Blasio as a rebuke for his remarks on the failed indictment of the police officer who murdered Eric Garner, are the result of the history that Schrader traces, one is that is critical for both scholars and activists as we assess the structural and systemic issues with policing.

This is in part what makes reform so impossible. Indeed, organizer, educator, and prison abolitionist Mariame Kaba (Kaba and Duda 2017) is blunt in her assessment that the "the system—the prison industrial complex—isn't broken." Its function is to maintain and reproduce white supremacy—a project that has been in place since well before the election of Donald Trump. Kaba has argued that the response to the current juncture is a transformational politics that strategically exploits opportunities in order to wage a resistance against a capitalist, white supremacist, and colonial system. In this issue, Kim Shayo Buchanan and Phillip Atiba Goff take a targeted approach at one aspect of the policing and prison system—the relationship between police body cameras and gender equity. While the debates around body cameras have centered on questions of racial injustice, Buchanan and Goff show that the policies that govern body cams also have the effect of reproducing gender inequity against women, sex workers, trans people, and gender-nonconforming individuals. Moreover, they tackle the thorny issue of reform, arguing that body cameras can only improve the current situation if a shift toward more gender-equitable body camera policies is "accompanied by a systematic institutional commitment to just and ethical policing." Buchanan and Goff thus provide a productive juxtaposition to Goldberg's analysis—via Baldwin—of the inherently unjust nature of police power.

Samira Bueno and Graham Denyer Willis continue this theme of studying

the police themselves by looking at an "exceptional prison" in Brazil, which is to say a prison where the inmates are not "criminals" but instead police who have broken the law. We see, here, both the possibilities of what prisons could be and a reflection of the privilege of nonaccountability. Bueno and Willis's ethnographically informed paper can usefully be read in light of Fassin's demonstration that police officials and societal expectations legitimate police violence as retribution. The exceptional prison allows us to ask about the partition between forms of tolerable violence committed by the police and that violence which is deemed punishable. Bueno and Willis also find that speaking of police violence as excessive or "unjust" obscures the dynamics of violence work. The officers in the exceptional prison are not there because they have killed; they are there because they have committed a kind of border-crossing. "They were arrested," the authors write, "for crossing the fungible but observable line between what is constructed as permissible and not." From the vantage point of the exception, Bueno and Willis deliver an intriguing and unsettling analytical investigation into the workings of the police order.

Emerging Solidarities

Violence workers punish (Fassin, Goldberg), regulate our capacity to relate as communities, individuals, and political subjects (Carruthers, Mojaddedi, Feldman, Velasquez-Potts); securitize sites, temporality, and bodies (Kaplan and Miller, Jaffe, Velasquez-Potts), and manipulate the visual field (Goff, Velasquez-Potts), while demanding and receiving privileges (Schrader, Bueno and Willis). Yet, against these inordinate obstacles, solidarities persist. In August 2014, police, outfitted in riot gear, unleashed rubber bullets and tear gas on protesters in Ferguson, Missouri, who were demonstrating against the murder of Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old Black man, by a police officer, Darren Wilson. As photos of the attack circulated, Palestinian social media users expressed their solidarity by tweeting advice on how to handle tear gas; one Twitter user also posted a photo of a tear gas canister with its Pennsylvania production address evident and noted, "Made in USA teargas canister was shot at us a few days ago in #Palestine by Israel, now they are used in #Ferguson," highlighting the centrality of the United States in the global reproduction of racialized violence (Molloy 2014). Engagements and solidarity also quickly emerged offline. A Palestine contingent was present at the 2014 "Ferguson October" National Weekend of Resistance. Palestinian students from Birzeit University in occupied West Bank traveled to St. Louis and Ferguson to meet with anti-racist and anti–police brutality activists.

Subsequently, fourteen Black, Arab, and Latina activists traveled to Palestine with a delegation from Dream Defenders, a social justice organization founded after Trayvon Martin's murder that voted to endorse the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (Bailey 2015). These actions build on a longer history of Black radical solidarity with the Palestinian liberation movement since at least 1967 (Kelley 2015; Lubin 2014, 2016; Feldman 2015).

There are, of course, critical distinctions between Gaza and Ferguson. Gaza is an open-air prison subjected to a severe economic and food blockade where Israel has used a caloric intake measure to limit food to Gazans (Associated Press 2012). And, as commentator Mychal Denzel Smith expressed, "The people of Ferguson aren't being treated like a foreign army. They're being treated like Black people in America" (quoted in Bailey 2015: 1019). While Marine Sergeant Thomas's partitioning of the world obscures and renders banal the function of US policing as already a system of racialized violence (Kaplan and Miller), Smith's observation pivots toward an interrogation of the longer history of US militarized policing. It refuses to exceptionalize American police violence by comparison with Israel; rather, it reveals the persistent and systematic violence to which Black Americans have long been subject. That history is critical to understanding how US policing tactics have been globalized, even as counter-insurgency strategies from Vietnam to the "war on terror" have been circulated back to the United States (Schrader, Goldberg; see LeVine 2014).

Yet, drawing studied connections between the two sites has not only provided the grounds for solidarity, it also sustains the potential for a more capacious transnational Left politics in an era where such solidarities have suffered breakdown even in light of multiple American invasions, the continued sprawl of the military-industrial complex, the mounting visual evidence of Black death at the hands of the police within the United States, and the continuation of the American colonial-settler project evidenced by the assault on Dakota pipeline protesters at Standing Rock.

These political engagements have produced a sophisticated and rich scholarly, activist, and public conversation on the politics of race formation, settler-colonialism, and the obligations that solidarity entails (Bailey 2015; Kelley 2015, 2016). It is here that a transformative resistance to policing may be located—in an analytics and a politics that negotiate the material distinctions of disparate sites alongside our capacity to establish relational solidarities and make possible human flourishing, despite—and against—the macabre labor of violence workers.

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