Colonial lives of the carceral archipelago: rethinking the neoliberal security state

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Colonial Lives of the Carceral Archipelago: Rethinking the Neoliberal Security State

Abstract
Mass incarceration, police brutality, and border controls are part and parcel of the everyday experiences of marginalised and racialized communities across the world. Recent scholarship in IR, sociology, and geography has examined the prevalence of these coercive practices through the prism of “disciplinary”, “penal”, or “authoritarian” neoliberalism. In this article, we argue that although this literature has brought to the fore neoliberalism’s reliance on state violence, it has yet to interrogate how these carceral measures are linked to previous forms of global racial ordering. To rectify this moment of “colonial unknowing,” the article draws on Black feminism, decolonial approaches, Indigenous studies, and theories of racial capitalism. It demonstrates that “new” and “neoliberal” forms of domestic control must be situated within the global longue durée of racialized and colonial accumulation by dispossession. By mapping contemporary modes of policing, incarceration, migration control, and surveillance onto earlier forms of racial-colonial subjugation, we argue that countering the violence of neoliberalism requires more than nostalgic appeals for a return to Keynesianism. What is needed is abolition - not just of the carceral archipelago, but of the very system of racial capitalism which produces and depends on these global vectors of organised violence and abandonment.

Introduction

Authors 1&2: Mass incarceration, frequent targeting by police, internal and external restrictions of movement through immigration, and border controls are part and parcel of the everyday experiences of marginalised and racialized communities across the world. From London to Los Angeles, Cape Town to Calcutta, Sao Paulo to Stockholm, a growing carceral archipelago operates to police, surveil, and pacify racialized and gendered minorities, activists, prisoners, and migrants, amongst others. Recent scholarship in IR, sociology, and geography has examined the global spread of these coercive practices through the prism of “disciplinary”, “penal”, or “authoritarian” neoliberalism (Bruff 2014; Bruff and Tansel 2019; Wacquant 2009). Highlighting the connection between capital accumulation and coercive state practices - including mass incarceration, police violence, immigration and border controls, and the erosion of democratic decision-making spaces - scholars have unraveled the ways in which the neoliberal era has also been a “carceral age.”

In this article we seek to recontextualise this evolving interplay of neoliberalism and state violence by unearthing their racial and colonial constitution. While the aforementioned scholarship has provided important empirical and conceptual contributions to identify and explain the global logics of a range of coercive practices, it has not yet interrogated how these are linked to previous forms of racialized global violence. To rectify this pattern of “colonial unknowing” (Vimalassery, Hu Pegues, and Goldstein 2016, 2017), this Collective Discussion article draws on Black feminism, post/decolonial approaches, Indigenous studies, and theories of racial capitalism. We argue that “new” and “neoliberal” forms of global control must be situated within the longue durée of racialized and colonial accumulation by dispossession. As Paula Chakravarty and Denise Ferreira da Silva (2012, 368) have shown, neoliberal globalisation does not unfold in an empty vacuum but is “mapped onto previous racial and colonial (imperial) discourses and practices.” Taking up this insight, the article demonstrates that supposedly “new” and neoliberal forms of policing, incarceration, bordering, and surveillance are rooted in a set of geographically interlinked colonial and racial capitalist histories, from the enclosures in Europe to the (settler) colonies and slave plantations. In unearthing the global-colonial origins of what is often regarded as “domestic” forms of state violence, we ultimately show that neoliberalism itself - as ideology, practice, and discourse -
must be rethought through the colonial matrix of racialized expropriation, exploitation, and extraction.

This article examines the “colonial lives” (Bhandar 2018) and common transnational origins of the neoliberal security state, and in doing so presents a methodological challenge to the approaches and forms of theorising that continue to reproduce “colonial unknowing” in the social sciences and humanities. The erasure of colonial histories is often facilitated by methodological nationalism and the separation of “domestic” politics from the realm of the “international” - the latter being the historically privileged space of IR as a discipline (Walker 1993). The analytical separation of these areas has long resulted in disciplinary foci that ignored what historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam (1997) has called “connected histories”, or the ways in which modernity was “formed in and through the colonial relationship” (Bhambra 2007, 77; see also Gilroy 1993; Lowe 2015).

To counter these forms of methodological nationalism and colonial unknowing, this article examines the transnational histories of prisons, borders, and the use of technologies in penal practices and the control of people. Where some perspectives have approached these as “domestic” systems of control, we argue that policing, incarceration, bordering, and surveillance historically have been, and continue to act as, interconnected and integral elements of global racial capitalism. In doing so, our discussion not only joins cause with an emergent body of scholarship that examines the (settler) colonial roots of contemporary security practices and the racialized and colonial origins of neoliberal ideas and policies (see Howell and Richter-Montpetit 2019; Slobodian 2019). It also brings together threads of scholarship that do not always speak to each other - particularly around questions of political economy and security. As such, we present this intervention as a contribution to the growing calls for recoupling the study of “security” and “the economy” (Best 2017; Elias 2015), as well as for taking race and racism seriously in the study of political economy (Tilley and Shilliam 2018).

The article is written as a Collective Discussion amongst a group of scholars that variously work on racial capitalism, authoritarian neoliberalism, technosurveillance, migration control, and theories of international security and violence. Our conversation began at the “Political Economy of Control” workshop at the EISA conference in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2019, and evolved over the spring and early summer of 2020. As we were writing, the police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor revitalized the Black Lives Matter protests globally, and rekindled a wide-ranging public discussion on racialized state violence. Our thinking is at once informed by these ongoing abolitionist struggles; in highlighting the colonial and transnational origins of the neoliberal security state, it is also an attempt to strengthen them by providing what Aimé Césaire (cited in Martineu 2016) has called “discursive ammunition.”

The article proceeds in four sections. We begin by examining the prevalence of “colonial unknowing” and methodological nationalism in the theoretical literature on disciplinary, penal, and authoritarian neoliberalism. Building on this, in the second section we trace the colonial and racial capitalist origins of policing and incarceration. Focusing on the colonial boomerang thesis, we argue that domestic policing functions much like overseas colonial wars, counterinsurgencies, and occupations. The third section extends this critique of methodological nationalism and colonial unknowing through a focus on the artificial separation between migration control and the criminal justice system. Tracing the colonial and transnational roots of borders and immigration restrictions, we argue that migration control and criminal justice in fact are different modalities of the same global system. In the final section we turn to the use of technology in “new” forms of e-carceration, which we argue target marginalised communities in the name of securing deservingness and immunisation against social “risk.” We conclude that countering the violence of the neoliberal security state requires more than nostalgic appeals for a return to the “golden age” before neoliberalism. As organisers across the world remind us, what is needed is abolition - not just of the carceral archipelago,
but of the very system of racial capitalism which produces and depends on these global vectors of organised violence and abandonment (Gilmore 2020).

**Unknowning Colonial Economies and Security**

**Author 3:** Despite the wide-ranging scholarly and popular interpretations of the concept, it is undeniable that “neoliberalism” has become an effective shortcut to invoke a shared understanding of the recent historical past. Both in the scholarly literature and the wider public imagination, neoliberalism has come to signify a neatly demarcated period in capitalism, in which the state “withdrew” from the management of the economy, and “market forces” became the central actors not only in the economy, but in the organization of social life in general.

Often employed within the context of globalisation debates, the early conceptual parameters of neoliberalism were primarily defined by the prevalent “states versus markets” dichotomy of the broader IPE literature, and ended up prioritizing the impact of neoliberal restructuring on the state capacity. David Harvey (2007, 2), perhaps most prominently, argued that neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” Other scholars such as Wendy Brown, meanwhile, have built on this to argue that neoliberalism also has to be understood as a mode of governance which produces forms of subjectivity, citizenship, and behaviour. In this current, the conceptual parameters of neoliberalism are drawn explicitly from the work of Michel Foucault and the term is deployed in conjunction with other concepts and frameworks - such as governmentality, resilience, and biopolitics - to explore how neoliberal governance has invaded and come to dominate every sphere of human existence, ranging from “statecraft and the workplace... [to] jurisprudence, education, culture, and a vast range of quotidian activity” (Brown 2015, 17).

Where these literatures have emphasised the withdrawal of the state vis-à-vis the provision of common goods, an emerging interdisciplinary scholarship spanning across sociology, geography, law, and IR has traced the simultaneous strengthening of the coercive and punitive state apparatuses. Neoliberalism, it is argued, has meant not so much a dismantling of the state as its restructuring, entailing a shift from the “soft bosom” of the welfare state to the “penal fist” of neoliberalism (Wacquant 2009). Under this schema, there has been a roll-back of social provisions, and a roll-out of new forms of discipline and control (Hall et al. 1978), including mass incarceration (Davis 2003, 2005; Gilmore 2007), the expansion of the detention estate and deportation regime (Peutz and De Genova 2010), and increasingly punitive forms of welfare governance (Soss et al 2011).

In IPE, the emergent literature on authoritarian neoliberalism has similarly theorised the coercive and punitive side of neoliberalism. This scholarship has been crucial for demonstrating that neoliberalism represents a deeply reactionary mode of governance that aims to shield capitalism from democracy, particularly from popular opposition and public accountability (Bruff 2014; Bruff and Tansel 2019; Tansel 2017). In this reconfiguration of capitalist governance, states *and* international institutions have played a key role in instrumentalizing laws, notions of “security” and narratives of economic necessity to enforce reforms that not only produced numerous forms of economic dispossession (e.g. wage stagnation, declining welfare provisions), but also the closure of democratic spaces in which to counter such policies (Boukalas 2015; Kristal 2010). Particularly after the 2007–8 economic crisis, the declining ability of capitalist democracies to consolidate their legitimacy has been accompanied by an increasing reliance on the state’s coercive and punitive apparatuses, which some scholars have conceptualized with reference to the emergence of a *neoliberal* “security state” (Amar 2013; Kaygusuz 2018).
In highlighting the penal, disciplinary, and authoritarian character of neoliberalism, the above literatures have offered compelling analyses of the imbrications of “security” and “economy” in the neoliberal present. Nonetheless, while many of these scholars subscribe to a conjunctural understanding of neoliberalism—regarding it as a stage in, or an era of, capitalist development—they have sometimes been prone to overlook how contemporary practices of neoliberal security build on earlier forms of racial-colonial subjugation. As Siddhant Issar (2020, 16 emphasis added) insightfully notes in relation to the work of Harvey and Brown, “in focusing on the ways neoliberalism is discontinuous from earlier phases of capitalism”, the bifurcated treatments of neoliberalism “too often hide the presence of these longstanding racialized patterns in the history and functioning of capitalism” (see also Chakravartty and da Silva 2012; Connolly 2019; Melamed 2006). Similarly, and as Raewyn Connell and Nour Dados (2014) have shown, this literature has sometimes tended to neglect the experience of the global South, where neoliberalism primarily functioned, not as an attack of the welfare state, but as a development strategy premised on opening up the economy to international capital. Building on these important interventions, in what follows we argue that the neoliberal security state similarly must be theorised in relation to the colonial and racial history of capital accumulation and dispossession, in the global North and South. We ask: What practices, ideas, and narratives has penal, disciplinary, and authoritarian neoliberalism inherited from the broader lineage of racial and colonial capitalist development? What do these histories reveal about carceral regimes and the production of (in)security in the present? Ultimately, what - if anything - is novel about neoliberal governance?

Author 4: To unearth these histories, we challenge the practice of colonial unknowing that is evident in so much of the existing research on the linkages between neoliberalism and security. Our approach to colonial unknowing is indebted to the formulation elaborated by Vimalassery, Hu Pegues, and Goldstein (2016, 2017). They stress the fundamentally reactionary epistemology underpinning these forms of ignoring, disavowal, and epistemicide. As it pertains to our focus here, these epistemologies of conquest are an essential element in marshalling consensus and enrolling complicity in the penal and supervisory norms of racialized order and commodification evident in historic and contemporary mass incarceration and supervision. This unknowing is actively produced in order to isolate and interrupt a relational mode of analysis that would hold in dynamic tension Indigenous persistence, the histories and afterlives of slavery, imperial relocation of peoples, and inculcation of gendered and sexual difference.

Author 5: One way in which colonial unknowing operates is through assumptions of methodological nationalism. Methodological nationalism refers to “the naturalization of the nation-state by the social sciences” (Wimmer and Schiller 2003, 576) that can take the form of naturalising nationalism, taking for granted the nation-state as unit for analysis, and a territorial limitation for the study of social processes. In the field of IR in particular, the domestic/international divide has often worked to prevent scholars from recognising the deep connections between colonialism, race, and various practices of policing, incarceration, surveillance, and bordering. Writing against colonial unknowing therefore also demands a critique of methodological nationalism and the separation of the inside and outside of the state.

Racialized Policing and the Colonial Boomerang

Authors 1&2: In the United States, scholars of criminal justice have been at the forefront of theorising the relationship between neoliberalism and mass incarceration. As prison abolitionists such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) and Angela Davis (2003, 2005) have shown, mass incarceration emerged as a solution to the problem of how to manage the consequences of neoliberal restructuring. In Gilmore’s (2007, 5) memorable phrase, prisons are the “catchall solutions to social problems” such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, mental illness,
and drug addiction (Harcourt 2011; Wacquant 2009). As economic liberalisation in the post-Fordist era changed the modes of production and forms of employment, increasing labour precarity, the need for “disciplinary control” disappeared and shifted towards a need for total control (de Giorgi 2006). The 2020 global Black Lives Matter protests yet again brought into sharp relief the structural racism inherent in this system of mass incarceration, which disproportionately targets Black, Latinx, Muslim, and Indigenous communities. The protests also, once again, ushered the historical underpinnings of racist policing and incarceration practices back into the spotlight. For example, in her study of prisons in the United States, Michelle Alexander (2012) famously argues that mass incarceration in the US is seemingly race-neutral when it in fact operates as “a comprehensive and well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow” (5). In tracing the roots of the prison and police to the plantation, abolition, and Jim Crow, Alexander provides the deeper historical analysis that so often is missing from existing scholarship on “penal” neoliberalism. Thus, similar to the preceding discussion put forward by Author 3, what we witness here is the neoliberal roll-back of social provisions vis-à-vis the roll-out of new forms of control, coupled with a strong recognition of the historical racial underpinnings of these practices. Yet for all its merits, this literature has so far focused fairly narrowly on the US, and the plantation in particular. In thinking beyond and against colonial unknowing and methodological nationalism, what other histories are there and what do they reveal about contemporary forms of policing and incarceration?

Author 5: One example of how methodological nationalism and the erasure of colonial histories have facilitated a sanitised view of modern policing practices is the ongoing debate about “militarisation.” In short, this debate, which is prominent in both policy and academic circles in the US (ACLU 2014; Balko 2013; Coyne and Hall 2018), suggests that American policing has become increasingly militarised through the use of wartime tactics and equipment; “war has come home” (ACLU 2014). For example, the police use of armoured utility vehicles to counter the protests in the wake of Michael Brown’s murder in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 brought the world’s attention to the ways in which Ferguson looked like a war zone. The similar spectacle of heavily armed police, National Guard, and even apparent “secret forces” using brutal violence towards peaceful protestors in the nationwide uprising following George Floyd’s murder in Minneapolis in May 2020 opened many eyes to what had been apparent to many activists and scholars for generations: that domestic policing functions much like overseas colonial wars, counterinsurgencies, and occupations.

Recent work critiquing the language of the “militarisation” of domestic politics has begun to address the ways in which the separation between wartime and peacetime operates as a form of colonial unknowing. Probing this unknowing, Alison Howell (2018, 120) argues “that those ‘civilian’ things that are claimed to be in danger of ‘militarisation’ have much deeper roots in warfare ... and colonial violence.” Derek Denman (2020) likewise draws on abolitionist work to critique “militarisation” for the ways in which it obscures long standing connections between military and police apparatuses. Mark Neocleous (2014) further explains that the idea that war is becoming more like “policing” is inadequate, and instead pushes us to recognise that “war and police are always already together” (13). It is well known that even in times of so-called peace, British, French, and American empires engaged/engage in “small wars”, colonial wars, counterinsurgencies and the like (Barkawi and Laffey 2006; Barkawi 2016). This body of work thus shows that these domestic processes cannot be separated from the broader international dynamics of racialization, colonial and imperial conquest, and ongoing foreign intervention, and that the domestic peacetimes that we assume existed were a fiction. In short, war is not coming home; rather, and as Howell (2018, 122) puts it, “war has always been at home in America.”
The separation of these two spheres and resulting assumptions around violence is facilitated by methodological nationalism, which, as I discuss above, has generated a “domestic” versus “international” distinction that most prominently structures the field of IR but is also prevalent in other fields of scholarly inquiry. One way of rectifying these shortcomings is through the so-called “boomerang” theory of imperial warfare/counterinsurgency policing. Emerging from anti-colonial literature, it centres around the idea that the colonies served as “imperial laboratories of governance” (Barder 2015, Césaire 2000 [1955]). Scholars and activists have traced the ways in which the tactics, technologies, and governance structures deployed in colonial wars and domination have rebounded “back” to the metropoles: including fingerprinting and panoptic prisons, as well as contemporary forms of community surveillance and stop-and-frisk practices (Camp and Heatherton 2016; Danewid 2020). Such technologies and tactics do not only “boomerang,” but circulate between colonies of the same colonial power, from location to location and across time, often with certain focal points as origins or nodes of transmission, such as Palestine or Ireland (see Khalili 2010).

Two recent interventions underscoring the role of the colonial boomerang in contemporary American policing practices have been made by Laleh Khalili (2013) and Stuart Schrader (2019). Focusing on the so-called “war on terror”, Khalili examines the distinctively colonial roots of counterinsurgency strategies and tactics. Contemporary forms of confinement and detention, she argues, can be traced back to the colonial occupation of Algeria, India, and Palestine, amongst others. Schrader, meanwhile, takes inspiration from the work of Black radicals such as George Jackson, who in the 1960s described policing as “internal colonization.” Building on such frameworks, Schrader (2019) details the ways in which the expansion of incarceration and policing in the US during this period grew out of the simultaneous expansion of policing capacities around the world that were part of the US’s global efforts to eradicate communism. What they show is that exhuming these transnational ties can help us better understand the historical and global underpinnings of the neoliberal “carceral age.”

To conclude, I would first like to emphasize that the American case cannot be understood in isolation from the broader workings of global processes of racialization. Foregrounding these histories of policing and “militarisation” in the US reveals the embeddedness of these practices in transnational dynamics of slavery, colonialism, and counterinsurgency in ways that exceed a solely “domestic” understanding of their origins. We must thus be attentive to both the ways in which the US “case” is both a product of broader processes such as settler colonialism (see Lytle Hernández 2017), the slave trade, and labour relations that exceed the nation-state frame, as well as the entanglements of what has previously been considered “domestic” policing and incarceration and “foreign” policies of colonial wars and counterinsurgencies.

Second, insights such as those of Khalili and Schrader — that treat “foreign” and “domestic”, not as ontologies, but as “contested outcomes of social, political, and economic processes” (Schrader 2019, 15) - not only challenge the methodological nationalism that works to shield policing and incarceration from interrogation in IR. They also point to another problem: namely, that of “methodological whiteness” (Bhambra 2017). “Methodological whiteness” is a way of taking white experience as standard, while denying its own identity practices (see also Mills 2007; Wekker 2016). It is a practice of failing to acknowledge the work that race does to structure the world, as well as the ways in which knowledge is legitimated within the world. When we understand the world as structured not in territorial sovereignties, but by, in Du Bois’s famous phrase, a global “colour line” (Du Bois (1982 [1903]), a rich agenda for shifting our focus of the study of global politics, and particularly for international political sociology, is opened up (see Anieves, Manchanda and Shilliam 2015). In such an agenda, the US is no longer an exceptional site, regardless of the specificities of its
histories and present dynamics of racial oppression evident in current and ongoing manifestations of police brutality and mass incarceration. Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2007, 247) now oft-quoted statement that “racism is the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” helps point us toward seeing the transnational and global ways in which racism functions, as well as to see how the prison, as a set of relationships rather than locally organised institutions or architectures, is a global structural process.

**Authors 1&2:** Author 5 draws attention to the circular flows of policing techniques and technologies between colony and metropole. We would add that the colonial “boomerang” that she discusses also needs to be understood through the lens of racial capitalism (Robinson 1983; Melamed 2015; Lowe 2015). While Du Bois’s work has become central to post/decolonial approaches seeking to rethink global politics beyond state sovereignty, it is important to recall that Du Bois theorised the problem of the global colour line as a question of political economy: indeed, for him the task was precisely one of revealing the “continuities between prewar colonial capitalism and postwar US global ascendency and expanding transnational capitalism” (Melamed 2006: 13; see also Horne 1986; Olsavsky 2018). Ultimately, one reason why it is so important to excavate the colonial histories of prisons and police is precisely that it enables us to analyse and understand the *function* of penalty, not just in neoliberalism, but in racial capitalism writ large.

Marxist historians have traced the roots of policing to the enclosures and the creation of a highly mobile, masterless class consisting of vagabonds, beggars, vagrants, and “tramps” (Neocleous 2000, 2014; Linebaugh 1991; Roberts 2017). Within this context, policing emerged not to prevent crime, as is commonly argued, but to protect private property, quell social unrest, and discipline the poor: in short, to fabricate and maintain bourgeois order (Neocleous 2000). While there is a Eurocentric bias in much of this scholarship, these “local” articulations of police are part of a wider system of extraction, expropriation, and exploitation.

Consider, by way of example, the history of the London Metropolitan Police. Founded in 1929 by Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel, the London Met is often invoked as the world’s first professional police force. As Philip Rawlings (2002, 1) explains, criminologists and historians of the police often depict the creation of the London Met as “one of the nineteenth-century inventions which underpinned modern civilization and democracy.” Yet this interpretation overlooks that Peel developed his ideas while managing the British colonial occupation of Ireland, where he came to the conclusion that a new, professional police force was needed to maintain “continued political and economic domination in the face of growing insurrections, riots, and political uprisings” (Vitale 2017, 31; Brogden 1987; Williams 2003). Peel’s experiments with policing eventually led to the creation of the Royal Irish Constabulary, which “for about a century was the main rural police force in Ireland.” These developments in turn both built on and extended techniques experimented with throughout the colonies. Martin Thomas (2012, 10) has documented how colonial policing was used to control labour and contain anti-colonial resistance, from “the mining industries in French Northern Africa and British West Africa, through Southeast Asia’s rubber plantations, to the sugar estates of Jamaica, the oilfields of southern Trinidad and Katanga’s copper-belt.”

The creation of the London Met in 1829 was in many ways the culmination of these developments. In 1822 Peel became Home Secretary, a position which he used to bring back “home” some of these methods and techniques. As in Ireland and other colonies, the main task of the new London Met—unofficially termed “Bobbies” after Sir Bob himself—was to “protect property, quell riots, put down strikes and other industrial actions, and produce a disciplined industrial work force” (Vitale 2007, 32). In the 1830s this “London model” was exported to Northern cities in the United States, where it fused with other methods of control developed through distinct yet interconnected histories of the slave patrols, the policing of the colonial
frontier, and later, the colonial occupation of the Philippines (Graybill 2007; McCoy 2009; Ritchie 2017). Ultimately, what unites these histories and geographies of policing - from Ireland to London to the (settler) colonies - is the role of discipline and control in fabricating and upholding racial capitalism. Indeed, the police has historically been central to enabling racialized forms of exploitation, expropriation, and extraction - “here” as well as “there.” As Correia and Wall (2018, 6) put it, “capitalism and colonialism cannot exist without a state willing and able to defend colonial domination, private property, the wage relation, and the ongoing patterns of dispossession that characterize all of these. Ain’t no colonialism and ain’t no capitalism without cops.”

Author 4: Taking Author 5’s above provocation to think policing and incarceration as practices of ongoing colonization and racialization, and Authors 1&2’s invitation to think the “local” within larger structures of extraction, I would like to point to a lacuna within current IR scholarship and offer an illustration of the international interconnections of this violence in the case of the contemporary colonial policing of Indigenous nations, specifically the Wet’suwet’en, whose territory is claimed by the Canadian state.

Indigenous nations, as with other “inconvenient” units of analysis, e.g. sub-national island jurisdictions, annexed minority regions, and transnational minority groups, have been sidelined in IR scholarship by a disproportionate focus on interstate relations at the expense of nations whose state has been occupied or otherwise unrealized (Androus and Greymorning 2016; Marshall Beier 2003; Trask 2000). Marshall Beier (2003, 109) argues that this neglect of Indigenous nations in the field of IR is a contemporary form of colonial unknowing, “to the extent that orthodox theoretical approaches to international relations exclude aboriginal knowledges and lifeways... [IR is] ... constituted by and constitutive of racial ideologies.” In the case of the Wet’suwet’en, the knowledge and lifeways being excluded here are claims to sovereignty in a place rooted in relations of care, responsibility, and hereditary forms of governance not co-opted by the settler state.

Alongside Indigenous communities all over the world, the Wet’suwet’en are on the frontlines of resistance to extractive development without local consent, and the violent repression that inevitably follows (Moore et al 2015; Unist’ot’en 2020). Their campaign against TC energy’s Coastal Gaslink pipeline across their territory to fuel the expansion of the Kitimat LNG export terminal illustrates the ongoing colonial relations that enrol transnational complicity and expose groups racialized as non-white and Indigenous to the kinds of systemic harms illustrated by Gilmore’s definition of racism that Author 5 invokes. Whilst the supreme court of Canada has twice affirmed Indigenous title to their unceded territories in Calder v. Attorney-General of British Columbia and Delgamuukw v. British Columbia (1973, 1997), the settler state has nevertheless fully committed to the realization of its plans to develop the pipeline and export terminal, going so far as to double the lease to operators of the terminal to forty years, and deploy the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in addition to Coastal GasLink’s private security, to surveil, intimidate, and arrest members of the Wet’suwet’en and their supporters. Simultaneously, the public sector pension funds of South Korea and the neighbouring province of Alberta together purchased a 65% equity stake in the pipeline, enrolling together their combined millions of members’ complicity in the project, and the violence necessary to realize it (Pasternak 2020).

The exposure to harms for Wet’suwet’en communities include increased risk of poisoning, chronic illness and toxification, elevated rates of gender-based violence due to the imposition of “man-camps” for outside labourers and private security for extractive infrastructure, and the decline of community life through terraforming and interruption of lifeways like fishing, trapping, and hunting (Dhillon and Parrish 2019; MMIWG 2019). In addition, threats of intimidation and criminalization are shared across a broad international horizon of Indigenous resistance subject to violently enforced processes of extraction under the
guise of “critical infrastructure protection...a misnomer for the real objective of protecting economic development and thwarting challenges to settler sovereignty” (Crosby and Monaghan 2018, 116). The violent enforcement of “development”, in this case carried out by the RCMP, has deep colonial and transnational resonance. Building on Authors 1&2’s insights into the colonial origins of the Peel model, the RCMP (then the North-West Mounted Police) was precisely one of the imperial franchises of this model exported within the British empire cum Commonwealth. Founded in 1873, the organization was initially 60% British born, including many veterans of the Royal Irish Constabulary, and continued to recruit in large numbers outside of Canada until WWI (Marquis 1997, 2005). The force’s always-already international practice is illustrated by Bell and Schreiner (2018), who detail the RCMP’s historic activity in enforcing “territorial acquisitions and Indigenous repression in the de facto constitution of Canada, as well as [serving as] candidates for wartime service beyond Canada in the Second Boer War and both World Wars” (117). Gouldhawke (2020) further emphasizes that this transnationalisation continues in the RCMP’s present missions Haiti, Mali, Palestine, and Iraq and in their enforcement of pipeline construction in Wet’suwet’en territory. Through the triangulation of international complicity in violence in defence of investment and the criminalisation of Indigenous resistance, the Wet’suwet’en case illustrates how policing and incarceration are imbricated with the underlying dynamics and broader context of ongoing colonisation and dispossession. These dynamics are rooted in a colonial-industrial model of the privatization of profit and socialisation of risk, where indigenous communities bear the brunt of the risks taken by violently enforced extractive speculation (Pasternak 2020). Securing this development is a massive expansion and ongoing “Indigenization” of incarceration in Canada, with Indigenous peoples accounting for 30% of those incarcerated federally, despite being only 5% of the population (LaPrairie 1997; OCI 2020). The breadth of scholarship on connections between Indigenised criminalisation, transnational (settler) complicity in extractive projects, and the acceleration of these phenomena over time indicates that an active unknowing is engaged to obscure the diverse forms of resistance to settler attempts to control Indigenous bodies and extinguish Indigenous sovereignties (Chartrand 2019; John 2020; Smith 2015).

Author 5: The colonial and transnational histories discussed above push us to rethink some of the core categories and concepts in IR and international political sociology, including the foundational status of nation-states, territories, and borders. To understand policing and incarceration as historical and ongoing practices of colonisation and racialization on a transnational - even global - scale is to challenge the artificial separation between forms of state violence otherwise studied in isolation from one another. Back in 2000, in a conversation with Angela Davis, Gina Dent reflected on how concepts inflected by methodological nationalism are undone in the face of the afterlives of race, gender, colonialism, and capitalism. As Dent explained, “We continue to find that the prison is itself a border” (Davis and Dent 2001, 1236). Taking up this insight, in the next section we examine the historical connections between (domestic) criminal justice, on the one hand, and (international) migration control, on the other. Focusing on the (settler) colonial and racial capitalist policing of mobility, we interrogate the historical co-constitution of prisons and borders.

“Prison as a Border”: Racial-Colonial Histories of Mobility Control
Authors 1&2: Just like the increase in policing and incarceration, the neoliberal era has also been accompanied by heightened forms of migration control: from the shores of the Mediterranean to the US-Mexico border wall to off-shore Australian detention centres on Nauru, states have poured billions of dollars into policing and controlling the movement of the poor and the paperless. Existing research has made important contributions to our understanding of these global processes (Andersson 2014; Hollifield et al 2014). Nonetheless,
in focusing on what is novel in the present moment, they have often failed to engage with colonial histories of conquest, dispossession, exploitation, and extraction. This is problematic, not only because the risk of border-crossing death is disproportionately inflicted on migrants and refugees racialized as non-white (Saucier and Woods 2014; Sharpe 2016), but also because contemporary forms of migration control rely on techniques and technologies that emerge through histories of enslavement, (settler) colonialism, and racial capitalism (El-Enany 2019; Sharma 2020). In what follows we argue that contemporary migration controls are a continuation and intensification of racial capitalism’s historical and ongoing search for cheap and disposable labour (Robinson 1983; Bhattacharyya 2018).

The history of mobility controls cuts across a variety of interconnected geographies, including the town and parish as well as the (settler) colony and “many middle passages” (Christopher et al. 2007) that built the modern/colonial world. For example, scholars working within historical materialist traditions have traced the roots of contemporary immigration controls to the Vagrancy Acts and Poor Laws that were introduced in Medieval Europe at the dawn of capitalism (Anderson 2013; Papadopoulos et al. 2008). The sedentarisation of the mobile poor - vagrants, vagabonds, and beggars - was, according to this literature, central to the creation of a disciplined, industrious, and low-paid working class. These measures were often racialized - designed to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor - and specifically targeted Romani and traveller communities, “Blackamoores”, “Egyptian”, Jews, and the Irish (Fryer 1984; Shilliam 2018; Weber and Bowling 2008). Beyond the British mainland, vagrancy laws were frequently applied as tools of colonial governance on a global scale. For example, racialized vagrancy legislation was used to coerce Indigenous communities into work. In the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, such measures were also deployed to tie the formerly enslaved to the plantation and ensure a continued steady supply of expendable labour (Beier and Ocobock 2008). Linking metropole and colony through a shared circuit of racialized mobility, vagrancy laws can thus be seen as a forerunner to contemporary mobility controls.

Alongside this scholarship on the transatlantic criminalisation of vagrancy, an emergent post/decolonial literature has documented the distinctively (settler) colonial roots of contemporary immigration restrictions (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2018; Mongia 2018; Sharma 2020). As Radhika Mongia (2007, 43) puts it, modern immigration controls have a “crucial colonial genealogy.” These controls emerged as a response to planters' demands for a new system of cheap, exploitable labour after the phasing out of plantation slavery in British colonies after 1834. In response, millions of indentured servitude workers (“coolies”) were recruited from India and China, and shipped to plantations, mines, and sites of investment across the world (Mongia 2007; see also Lowe 2015; Potts 1990). Entry was granted on the basis of providing relevant documentation showing a contract of indenture. These requirements set the stage for subsequent regimes of immigration control, which quickly spread throughout the (settler) colonies in the latter half of the 19th century. As Nandita Sharma (2020, 70) notes, “[b]y the end of coolieism in the early twentieth century, making people Migrants [had become] a well-established mechanism of labor and social control across the world.” In the 20th century these measures were gradually shipped back to the European metropoles, where they became central technologies for nationalising and racializing postimperial sovereignty. The string of Citizenship Acts implemented in Europe from the 1950s onwards may have been race-neutral on paper, but were designed “to close the door to dark-skinned potential migrants” (Mason 2000, 29; El-Enany 2019; Tyler 2010). In the UK, immigration restrictions were ultimately - and as the title of Paul Gilroy's seminal study from 1987 puts it - introduced to create the illusion that “there ain't no black in the Union Jack.” Similar trends could be observed in other disappearing empires, including France (Kozakowski 2014), Portugal (Gil 2014), and Italy (De Donno 2006).
This racial-colonial history disrupts narratives of contemporary border control “exceptionalism” in at least three ways: First, it shows that migration control systems that are often regarded as new are in fact continuations and intensification of processes that, in various ways, have been integral to the history of (settler) colonialism and racial capitalism.

Second, it enables us to see that mobility controls historically have operated as tools of racialized dispossession and accumulation, and through that have been central to the making of the global proletariat (Sharma 2020; Potts 1990). When analysed through the historical lens of racial capitalism, migration controls emerge as a tool to subordinate migrant labour and keep them in a place of legal vulnerability and super exploitability (Rajaram 2018). In fact, the global capitalist economy of today relies on the existence of precarious migrant labour and is unable to function without it (Sassen 1989; Walia 2013).

Third and finally, this history undoes the conceptual distinction between the control of internal and external (or citizen and non-citizen) movement (Parker 2015). The inability to think beyond the categories of the nation-state ultimately clouds out these lines of historical continuity and obfuscates how older forms of mobility controls cut across an interconnected set of geographies and were never exclusively tied to the borders of the state.

Authors 4&6: Authors 1&2 underscore the importance of recognizing that the goal of border enforcement is not to completely halt migration, but rather to maintain a vulnerable workforce that is easily exploitable. This process has led to a breakdown of any separation between labour, migration, and security policy spheres and led to what Sarah Grayce Marsden calls “multi-sited enforcement” (2018) of non-citizens as well as what Bridget Anderson (2013) has referred to as the “failed citizens” or mobile poor. Healthcare workers, social workers, and teachers as well as employers and those in banking and housing are deputized into guarding an always-already embodied and racialized border. These enforcement actors include national intelligence agencies, policing organizations and transnational technology and security firms. When viewed in situ, this ecosystem of public and private actors acts to control social movements, resistance, and organizing, revealing a total-state approach to surveillance and enforcement (Eubanks, 2018). Thus, we see a continuation today of the ways in which migration control stems historically from policies to control domestic mobility, as identified by Authors 1&2. In the contemporary period, this enforcement gaze is expressed in the imposition of workfare regimes that curtail access to social rights for both groups, thereby defining the community of value both from within and without, and surveilling and penalizing those deemed “outside” (Anderson 2013, 178; Burnett 2018; Wacquant 2009). Across these examples and those innumerable not listed is an overarching practice of coordination and orchestration of violence – as exclusion, as neglect, and as repression – through a broad array of actors to preserve a racial capitalist order.

Authors 1&2: As noted by Authors 4&6, in the neoliberal present the distinction between migration control and criminal justice is increasingly blurred and broken down. Migration control and criminal justice are often regarded as two separate systems, which respectively target insiders/citizens (criminal justice) and outsiders/non-citizens (migration control). Yet as they point out, border enforcement today is integrated with criminal justice. This link has been extensively explored in the literature on “crimmigration” (Bosworth and Franko 2018; Chase 2019). As this body of work has shown, the crime-migration nexus is visible in the similarities in policies, staffing, architecture, and the penal machinery used in criminal law and border enforcement (Bosworth 2016). Many countries are using the police to conduct immigration checks (Provine et al. 2016) and use criminal and immigration law interchangeably to target migrants (Aliverti 2013; Aas 2014).

While this literature has highlighted important links between criminal justice and migration control, the crime-migration nexus is not entirely new. In fact, the transnational, colonial, and racial capitalist history of migration control (which we discussed above) reveals
that contemporary practices of bordering, on the one hand, and policing and incarceration, on the other, historically have been part of the same overarching system. Extending this analysis, in what follows we argue that Davis’s and Dent’s formulation of the “prison as a border” should be seen as more than a pure metaphor: indeed, historically the prison has been a border, and vice versa.

To make sense of this historical co-constitution, it is imperative to again step outside of the parameters of colonial unknowing and methodological nationalism. Indeed, once we take seriously the idea of entangled or connected histories, it becomes clear that immigration control and incarceration share common transnational roots. Take, for example, the UK Vagrancy Act of 1597, which first legalised the banishment of “vagrants” to the colonies of Virginia and Maryland. Rather than two separate systems (of migration control and criminal justice), deportations, penalty, and the poor laws here acted together to punish the mobile poor (Walters 2002). This co-constitution can also be observed in the Aliens Act of 1793, which targeted French immigrants fleeing the French Revolution. Foreigners who did not comply with the Act’s registration and residence requirements could be detained, imprisoned, deported, or transported to the British colonies (Aliverti 2013). Conversely, and as Joanna Innes (1987) has shown, the history of prisons is closely linked to the policing of the mobile poor. Indeed, the first structures that embody the modern prison did not emerge in the late 18th century, as is commonly argued (Foucault 1975). Rather, prisons first arose as tools to punish and reform vagrants, the labouring poor, and those accused of petty crimes. Ultimately, and as these examples make clear, historically there has never been a clear-cut separation between criminal justice and mobility control: quite the opposite, deportations often functioned as forms of punishment, and criminal justice was used to sedentarise and discipline the mobile poor. Rather than invoking the idea of two separate (albeit increasingly entangled) systems, we would do well to speak of criminal justice and migration control as modalities of the same system. In the words of Davis and Dent, the prison has always been a border, and borders have historically been prisons.

(New) Frontiers of Incarceration

Authors 4&6: While the previous two sections discussed two widely known control mechanisms - namely, policing and migration control - and the ways in which they target marginalized and racialized populations, we would like to extend this analysis through a focus on “new” frontiers of incarceration. In this closing intervention we explore the connections between capitalism and control in the expanding use of “e-carceral” technologies and penal practices. E-carceration here refers to the deployment of technologies such as information communication technologies (ICTs), surveillance and biometric identification technologies whose primary functions are to categorize and control people, manage their movement, offer “alternatives” to incarceration, and generate risk assessments based on a variety of individualised and group-membership indicators (Schenwar and Law 2020). What we want to highlight is how these forms of e-carceration further fortify the technological frontiers of neoliberal governance transnationally and domestically, fuelling global dynamics of social closure, or “e-gentrification” within broader logics of categorization and containment (Alexander 2018; Kilgore, Sanders and Hayes 2018, 13). In other words, e-carceral technologies can be understood as ontological expressions of a racialized neoliberal security regime intended to control and curb full social participation in the walled spaces of wealth of the world.

These technologies have given rise to a more broadly applied framework of risk assessment amidst a larger shift towards risk management in society, and in penalty in particular (Phelps 2018; Taylor and Meissner 2020). They are applied in migration control, criminal justice, lending practices, welfare determinations, and other areas in society, and serve
to differentiate between the “deserving” and “undeserving,” moral assessments which, Willen clarifies, are always relational and often conditional (2011, 814). Operating through algorithmic forms, these risk assessments are ultimately premised on a form of knowing, pre-emptively, the “criminal” non-citizen or failed citizen, by their “abhorrent” “behavioral patterns, not to understand the causes of their behavior theoretically or empirically” (Mehozay and Fisher 2019, 536). For example, in 2009, the mechanism that determines eligibility for Indiana state's welfare programme was automated, outsourcing judgment and discretion away “from frontline social servants […] to engineers and private contractors [thus] supercharg[ing] discrimination” (Eubanks 2018). Needless to say, the system's outcomes were devastating; beyond barring poor families from access to welfare on the basis of flawed and biased algorithmic decision making, what Joy Buolamwini calls “the coded gaze” (2018), it was also directly responsible for the removal of children based on computational risk calculations that determined them as falsely neglected. In migration control, the development of these technologies has given rise to industries in “pre-emptive mobility governance” to keep “unwanted travellers as far away from the border as possible” (Broeders and Hampshire 2013; Taylor and Meissner 2020).

Inevitably, these developments are inextricably tied to Harsha Walia’s conception of “border imperialism,” bringing history back to the coloniality of power that roots how mobilities are governed today - and this particular historical iteration of racial capitalism - in early proto-capitalist invocations of racial ordering (Walia 2013). Border imperialism draws attention to the multiplicity of the “modes and networks of governance,” which determine the many ways in which bodies are controlled within and without the nation-state “and in conjunction with the dictates of global empire and transnational capitalism” (Walia 2013, 14). While borders are absolutely about the physical demarcation of space, Walia suggests that border imperialism also includes the “conceptual borders that keep us separated from one other” (2013, 10). Here the body comes to be understood as a border that can be transgressed and fortified in order to make sense of how invasive technology-driven interventions into undesirable bodies produce potentially immutable forms of racialised containment (Stenum 2017).

This is where e-carceral structures, tactics, and technologies meet criminalisation of both social and transnational mobility. A race-crime nexus (Hall 1978) is increasingly reimporting and adapting a crime-development nexus (Schlarek Muliniari 2018) for the extraction of profit, and expulsion of the undesired precarious (Sassen 2014). This connection is underscored by the burgeoning industry in carceral-technological services, whose business model is based on farming debts of stigmatized bodies, well at home amongst the more infamous historical forms of racial capital and colonial financial speculation of, for example, the international trade in slave-backed bonds (Baker 2019; Baptist 2016; Kilgore, Sanders, and Hayes 2018). E-carceration is fast becoming the most widespread form of carcerality, where penal barriers to access to social rights can be maintained without the cumbersome costs of facilities, staffing, or duties of care (Kilgore 2013, 124). In inverting traditional carceral logics of counting and control, such systems paradoxically rely on counting and discounting those excluded from social rights (Mbembe 2019, 10). Once informally non-labelled as such, the surveilled are contained in circular motion: temporary status, gig-contract work, and always recursive channelling into criminalisation and illegality (Tazzioli 2019). This approach of selective non-recognition illustrates the mutually co-constitutive logics of organised abandonment and organised violence within neoliberalism (Gilmore 2020).

Authors 1&2: Authors 4&6 point to the use of digital technologies in contemporary forms of surveillance and policing which turn the body into the border. While this is often looked at in the context of migration, a variety of citizens have historically been subject to surveillance and continue to be so. In short, “surveillance is nothing new to black folks”
(Browne 2015, 10). Understanding the history of surveillance allows us to see that racism, capitalism, and surveillance are deeply entangled: indeed, while the technological tools might have changed, the logics underpinning them have not. To complement Author 4&6’s argument, we draw on scholarship on slavery and plantation capitalism. For this we turn to the United States.

Simone Browne (2009) explains that the branding of enslaved persons began with the Middle Passage. They were marked with numbers and letters to be able to identify them as the property of a particular ship. Upon arrival in the US, the control of the movement of slaves was based on the intricate relationship between slave passes, slave patrols, and wanted posters for run-away slaves (Parenti 20103). Similar strategies of using wanted posters and passes were put in place to control the movement of indentured white laborers from England and Ireland. On the plantation itself, two forms of surveillance emerged. One was in the form of daily notetaking by plantation and slave owners. “The surveillance infrastructure of colonial America began here, with the simple accounts of the slave master” (Parenti 2003, 15). Secondly, Edward E. Baptist (2016) describes how a combination of surveillance, accounting and violence were used to make slave labour in the cotton fields more “efficient”. Each enslaved person had to fill an individual daily quota which was incrementally increased over time. Those who did not meet their quota were punished through whipping or other brutal means. Baptist uses these examples to make two central arguments: first, that torture and surveillance are essential elements of the history of (racial) capitalism and, second, that similar logics of quotas and surveillance still reverberate in today’s labour management systems.

**Authors 4&6:** Michelle Alexander has been at the forefront of addressing this colonial continuity. Writing in the New York Times, she argued that “digital prisons are to mass incarceration what Jim Crow was to slavery” (8 November 2018). Researching ankle monitors, Carolina Sanchez-Boe documented the common scars they leave on their wearers, and connected these embodied experiences to earlier racialized forms of marking unwanted mobility (2019). These marks of exclusion in an individualized and embodied border are always-already racialized, tracking the global “colour line” (Du Bois (1982 [1903])). At the core of this marking is the use of penal technologies to tag and extract quantifiable data from bodies to assess risk, which has created the space for a market in monitoring, measuring, assessing, tracking, and containing these “risky bodies.”

Energised by the recent refugee “crisis” and exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic, technology giants have been participating in a race to the bottom on surveillance, biometric and digital identification systems. Mastercard and the Gates’ Foundation Global Alliance for Vaccine and Immunisation’s recent COVI-pass distils these trends toward the e-carceration of everything, as biometric ID, contact-tracing, cashless payments, national ID and law enforcement is centralised under a single digital initiative deployed experimentally in the context of Western Africa. Immutable stratifications that encode marginality, such as these, recast non-citizens and ‘failed citizens’ as digital others. They weave into the fabric of mobility management, in the broadest sense of the word, racialized Silicon Valley logics.

**Author 5:** Authors 4&6 and Authors 1&2 highlight that technologies such as fingerprints, iris scans, facial recognition, and gait analysis - despite their ostensible colour-blindness - function much like older technologies of surveillance, categorization, and racialization. Following the insights of Black feminists, we should also note their gendered and sexual grammars. The point here is not one about “gendering” the racialized human subject; nor is it one of “adding” gender to the discussion of the racial-colonial architecture of the carceral state. Rather, and as Hortense Spillers (1987) and Zakkiyah Iman Jackson (2020) have argued, racial differences come into being through the very discourses of gender, sexuality, and reproduction. In her influential essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”, Spillers illustrates how the Atlantic slave trade produced bodies as commodities via the category of “captive
flesh” and in ways that subvert the gendered categories of Western political thought. Through this “total objectification,” violence against Black women was (and continues to be) rendered unrecognisable. Patrice Douglass (2018, 119) elaborates in relation to the police killing of Korryn Gaines and the wider #Sayhername movement, that “[g]ender is a category for Humans. The violence of ungendering is a domain for the captive, those who died in the hold of the ship and continue dying by the wayside of gender.”

Thinkers such as Spillers, Jackson, and Douglass challenge researchers to be attentive to the ways in which race and gender have been (re)produced in and through capitalism, colonialism, and carcerality; they also push feminists to reflect on how the concept of “gender” itself can enact racialized forms of violence. In relation to the carceral state and our immediate focus here - namely, how “bodies” can be “borders” - their analysis highlights the importance of considering, not only which bodies become borders, but also which bodies are at the root of systems of knowledge, criminalisation, and dehumanisation. Prisons are borders - as Dent and Davis suggest - and both are built upon racialized and gendered bodies and systems of knowledge.

**Authors 1&2:** The above discussion leaves us with an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between technology and racial capitalism. As Ruha Benjamin (2019, 5) explains, “antiblack racism, in this context, is not only a by-product, but a precondition for the fabrication of such technologies.” Identification technologies separate between people and operate as sorting mechanisms and actively produce differences. They “fix” certain racial identities in place based on the construction of phenotypical differences and lead to what Simone Browne (2009) calls “digital epidermization.” Racialized differences and logics of categorization form the basis of these technologies and are reproduced through them; in essence, they are both racialized and racializing. This again shows us that we cannot restrict our analysis of these coercive methods to the neoliberal present. Rather than a recent or new tool to discipline and manage surplus populations, surveillance technology has historically been central to racial capitalism.

**Conclusion**

It is often argued that the last 40 years have entailed a shift from the “soft bosom” of the welfare state to the “penal fist” of neoliberalism. In this article we have shown that, although practices of policing, incarceration, bordering, and surveillance have undoubtedly intensified and accelerated in the neoliberal era, they are not new but continuations of processes that have been historically central to racialized forms of extraction, expropriation, and exploitation. Not only has the “soft bosom” of the welfare state only ever been a reality for certain privileged groups (Emejulu and Bassel 2017; Connell and Dados 2014); but equally, the “penal fist” attributed to neoliberalism has been a constant element of racial and colonial capitalism, used to control marginalised populations throughout the world. As Nathan Connolly (2019, 86) notes, “What we are experiencing today may simply be the black side of liberalism writ large... Whatever it is, there is nothing ‘neo’ about it.”

How to explain then the disjuncture in contemporary scholarship’s periodisation and focus? As a collective, we contend that a toxic triad of disciplinary narrowness, methodological nationalism, and reactionary structures of unknowing together contribute to obscuring a relational and contextual analysis of organised violence, (in)security, and incarceration. From this perspective, overcoming the violence of neoliberalism requires more than nostalgic and reactionary dreams of returning to the “golden age” of the Keynesian welfare state. It requires, in short, abolition - not just of prisons and borders, but the undoing of racial capitalism writ large.


While our analysis mainly focuses on the racialized and racializing functions of the neoliberal security state, important work has shown that these dynamics also must be understood intersectionally and through the lens of gender and sexuality (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2006; Ritchie 2017; Stanley and Smith 2015; Sudbury 2005), disability, (Ben-Moshe 2020), and class (Herivel and Wright 2002).

Scholars of criminal justice in the US have identified the mechanisms that have facilitated the rise of mass incarceration, looking at the interplay of conservative and liberal political actors (Murakawa 2014; Weaver 2007) and the racialization of crime (Muhammad 2010).

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There are multiple other well-known cases of how racialized bodies were marked, including the yellow star the Nazis used to identify Jewish citizens. Rather than seeing these as separate histories, however, we should note their interconnectedness, as famously done by Césaire 2000 [1955] when first formulating the boomerang thesis and drawing attention to the colonial roots of the Holocaust.