

Call for papers: Media and the Police State

Editors: Soumik Pal and Namrata Rele Sathe

Special Section of [*Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*](#)

- ★ In May 2020, the murder of an African American man, George Floyd, by a white police officer in Minneapolis, United States became a lightning rod for a wave of protests against police brutality and the policing of black bodies. The Black Lives Matter movement coalesced around Floyd's death, highlighting the dire need for radical policing reforms across the United States, and spearheaded various movements that questioned the absolute power of the police state around the globe.
- ★ In September 2020, a 19-year old Dalit woman was gangraped by four upper-caste men in Hathras district in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. The local police forcibly cremated the body of the young woman, without the consent of the family, in what was seen by many as a hurried attempt to destroy evidence. The incident was an example of caste-based atrocities that occur with regularity in India, in which the police often collude with upper-caste perpetrators of the crime, making sure that they are not punished.

We understand policing to be an essential feature of capitalism and the resultant colonial and imperial expansion across the globe. Furthermore, modern day policing practices in the neoliberal era, though transformed, seem like a return to the age of unbridled capitalism of the 19th century with its characteristic use of brute force for ensuring compliance of the working-classes. Significantly, the control of the populations by the police has always followed identitarian lines of race, caste, gender, and ethnicity. For instance, after Indian soldiers revolted against the East India Company in 1857 for violating their religious beliefs, the British colonial state crushed the rebellion and the Police Act of 1861 was instated as a response. The legacy of the Police Act i.e. of policing caste (e.g. Dalits in India), ethnic (e.g. Pashtuns in Pakistan), religious (e.g. Muslims in India), racialized (indigenous tribes), and gender and sexual minorities, remains intact, and its colonial-era techniques of governance are used to subjugate the population of postcolonial South Asia to this day. Similarly, the present-day policing of black and brown people's bodies in North America, institutionalized in the prison-industrial complex, is a direct legacy of the measures of control and coercion that were applied during slavery, as Michelle Alexander argues in her book, *The New Jim Crow* (2010).

In the proposed journal section, we attempt to understand if, and how, media and popular culture legitimize the role of the police as a state apparatus in the governance of subjects. The police specifically targets those groups that the state deems "deviant", including racial, religious, sexual, and caste minorities. Mass media representations support the security state by creating paranoia and fear, which makes it seem that stringent and pervasive policing, with its role of "fighting crime", is necessary and natural.

The neoliberal project of regulation involves a top-down approach to policing in which the ruling elite is responsible for who, how, and what to police. The role of the police is essentially tied to the protection of private property. In addition to this, neoliberalism has propelled the expansion

of the police state, wherein models of security and incarceration followed in the United States are being replicated in other countries. Thus, policing functions to impose a perpetual “state of exception”, in which the state has the right to kill, arrest, imprison, maim, and violate. The state acquires impunity for its extra-judicial actions, justifying them in the name of identity, order, and/or national security. Such acts are often glorified via media representations as examples of the bravado, honour, and patriotism of the police. For instance, in India, extra-judicial killings are called “encounters”, a term made popular by Bollywood films.

As the neoliberal crisis deepens across the globe, with the climate crisis being its horizon, the vast majority of the working population of the world are being minoritized (while remaining the numerical majority). The ruling classes are tightening their iron grip over society by criminalizing minorities through means of coercion and direct violence, the police being a primary one. This is why a radical understanding of the police, as agents of the ruling classes, is imperative now. As media scholars, we want to point out that the transgressions of the police are not a bug in the system but a feature. In these desperate times, an examination of the police’s role in society should not aim for a “return to normal” from a recent past but ruthlessly question why the police exist in society in the first place. We believe that only by radically questioning the punitive imagination can we begin to think of creative, life-affirming alternatives to society in a time when humanity is rapidly moving towards an endgame situation.

We invite articles, essays, and reflective pieces examining how various types of media, including news, cinema (popular, documentary, avant-garde, experimental etc.), television, digital, and social media shape the perception of the police through representation. We are hoping to receive contributions analyzing phenomena as diverse as the policing of black bodies (United States and Brazil), controlling populations in the name of drugs (Philippines), religion and ethnicity (South Asia, Israel and Palestine, Iran, Sudan, Turkey, Nigeria), gender, sexuality and family values (Russia, Mexico, Argentina, Pakistan) etc.

Contributions can address but not be limited to:

- How do representations of police in popular and news media influence their functioning and their relationship with the citizenry they police?
- What are the linkages between the representations of police and their use by the state machinery for the purpose of propaganda? What kinds of media are used for this purpose?
- What are the historical and material origins of the cop film, cop hero trope, police procedurals, forensic TV shows etc.?
- What is the role of extra-legal/ quasi-state agents such as armed gangs, violent mobs, mercenaries who commit atrocities in tandem with the police at the behest of the state, and how are they featured in the media?
- What are the structural and historical connections between the police and media industries?
- Is the United States the exception in being a police state or are similar processes at work in other parts of the world? How do these connections play out in relation to the culture industries of these states?

- What is the role of the police and its representations in maintaining hegemonic societal structures within publics? How does the police play a role in the fashioning of publics on the basis of caste, ethnicity, race, religion, language etc.?
- How are movements and practices of resistance to police brutality and violence represented in popular culture? How do these representations function as extensions of on-ground resistance against the police?
- How are glorified representations of the police related to the right-wing, neoliberal turn of states?
- How do representations of the police construct masculinity or allow for diverse expressions? Also, how are these representations challenged, resisted, and mitigated?
- What is the relationship of the police in maintaining the hegemony of global finance?
- How does the media construct the idea of “crime”? How does the media create paranoia about crime and security that only the police can “solve”? How does that uphold the surveillance state?

Submission information

We welcome a range of submissions including article length essays, short reflection papers, opinion pieces, book reviews, film reviews and review articles.

All submissions will undergo a peer-review and revision process prior to publication.

Submissions should be original work, neither previously published nor under consideration for publication elsewhere. The text of the submission should not contain any references or indications of the contributors’ identity to facilitate a blind peer review. Please use APA citation style. Please submit your document in a MS Word-compatible format.

Timeline

Abstracts (with a short bio-note) should be emailed to both Soumik Pal (spal@siu.edu) and Namrata Rele Sathe (sathe.namrata@gmail.com) by **December 15, 2023**. Please put “JC – Media and the Police State” in the subject line.

Decisions will be communicated by **January 2, 2023**.

Completed first drafts of submissions are due by **March 15, 2023**.

The special section will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Jump Cut* in the winter of 2023.

Bio-note of editors:

Soumik Pal holds a PhD in Film and Media Studies from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. His work has been published in journals such as *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*, *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies*, and edited volumes on Bollywood cinema and language politics in India. He teaches courses on Sound Studies, History of Film and Television, Visual Art and Perception and Screenplay Writing as guest faculty at

West Bengal State University, Kolkata. He has worked on the phenomenon of stardom and celebrity as commodity, notions of masculinity as seen in Hindi cinema from the 1970s to the contemporary era, and how that has informed Indian politics leading up to the current Hindutva era. His research interests include neoliberal cultures concerning bureaucracy, finance, construction of gender representations, and the rise of fascism.

Namrata Rele Sathe holds a PhD in Media Studies from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Her writing has been published in academic journals such as *Jump Cut*, *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*, and the *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. She has also published book chapters in edited collections focusing on representation of women in popular visual cultures. She teaches courses in English Literature and Cultural Studies at Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce, Pune and Savitribai Phule Pune University. She is the Assistant Editor of *Studies in South Asian Film and Media*. Her research interests include feminist media studies, neoliberal subjectivity, literary studies, gender and sexuality studies, and popular culture.