

Racism and policing beyond North America

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In this issue's "Directions" section, we initiate a discussion on racism and policing in places beyond North America. Part of our motivation for doing so stems from a common experience we share—as antiracist educators and as anthropologists of policing and the carceral state—in our classrooms and even among our peers. This is the misplaced notion that police racism is somehow a uniquely "American" problem that does not afflict other world regions, including our own countries of origin (the United Kingdom and Turkey). Though this viewpoint gains less and less academic traction today, conceptual frameworks for comprehending policing and racism and their various entanglements beyond North America are still in their infancy. This is especially true of places where nation-states that do not routinely statistically enumerate the ethnoracial make-up of their populations (e.g., in Germany and France), regions where ideologies of admixture that code everyone as "mixed" prevail (e.g., in Latin America, this issue), and places where racism is tethered to (and conceptually subsumed by) cognate forms of discrimination such as caste or xenophobia (e.g., China and Pakistan, this issue).

Often intertwined with colonialism, the omission, amnesia, semantic recoding, or outright denial of racism go hand in hand with the erasure of both past and present forms of coloniality. While the robust and capacious scholarship on racism and policing in the United States has made enormous contributions in understanding how racism is sustained through policing, racism and policing come together in different ways historically and internationally. This historical contingency and variability call for regionally grounded framings that account for "multiple racisms" (Gilroy, 1987, 38) and, we would argue, plural policings.

Sparked by the Black Lives Matter protests, governments and commissions around the world have focused their attention on assessing—and questioning—institutional racism within the police as a social reality and an organizing principle of state-sanctioned surveillance and violence. Yet importing and imposing US mainland-centric framings on other places, without accounting for history and culture, has sometimes served to foreclose rather than engender recognition of the problem. In the context of Europe, for instance, Sara Salem and Vanessa Thompson (2016, 2) demonstrate how the US-centric lens into the discourses of racism has helped "European societies to continue to construct a self-image that displaces racism onto other geographical contexts or isolates it as a purely historical phenomenon." In a similar fashion, Dipesh Chakrabarty (1994, 145) argues that an analytical tendency to approach

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racism “as something the white people do” has undermined efforts to name and address systemic racism against various communities in India and elsewhere.

Teasing apart and making sense of the different dimensions of “multiple racisms” and “multiple policings” is critical to understanding and addressing the problem. This means thinking through the variable ways that racial injustice and violence manifest and are maintained by and through policing. As Eddie Bruce-Jones (2015) shows in his work on racism and German policing, the avoidance of using the term race in Germany is part of a layered political landscape of invisibility. Like in France, the political injunction against gathering racial statistics makes it hard to prove that police violence differentially affects nonwhite Germans (2015, 36). If we are committed to understanding and addressing how policing differently targets and afflicts violence upon communities globally, we need to engage with multiple understandings of racism and policing. This means exploring the structures and logics that allow for the criminalization and collective punishment of racialized and disadvantaged communities around the world and excavating the local and particular histories and presents that differentially value human life along racial lines, rendering some communities worthy and deserving of protecting and others unworthy and targets of police violence. Accordingly, this section and its accompanying online “Emergent Conversations Series,” is devoted to exploring the intersections of racism and policing outside North America.

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