Book Review

Cops, Crime and Capitalism: The Law and Order Agenda in Canada by Todd Gordon. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2006. $21.95 CAN, paper. ISBN 1-55266-185-7. Pages 1-171.

Reviewer: Gulden Ozcan[1]

Debates around the notions of security, police, the state and the dissent have accelerated in the aftermath of the G8/20 summit in Toronto. On the face of these debates, revisiting one of the ambitious contributions to the critical literature on police in Canada is important. Todd Gordon's *Cops, Crime and Capitalism: The Law and Order Agenda in Canada* provides two primary insights that can be utilized in current discussions. First, Gordon situates his analysis of the broader police project in the context of massive restructuring of social relations after each crisis of capitalism. Thus, the increasing adoption of the 'law-and-order policies' by the Canadian state since the 1990s is depicted in relation to the neoliberal restructuring of social relations after the downfall of Keynesian policies. Second, Gordon's focus on racialised and gendered aspects of policing in Canada opens up the possibility for new approaches to locate this long-delayed discussion at the very centre of the materialist analysis of state power, capital and labour relations. Gordon, by conducting a careful empirical study of legal regulations, demonstrates how police practices have served the systematic subordination of racialised and gendered populations in Canada.

The theoretical stance Gordon employs in the book is informed by Open Marxism and the concepts developed by Mark Neocleous, one of the leading figures in critical police/security studies. The Open Marxism approach provides him with theoretical tools in defining the state as the political form of the class antagonism between labour and capital. Even though the organization of social relations are

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operated by the state and its apparatuses, Gordon argues these operations originate from the struggles between labour and capital. Gordon draws on Neocleous's historical analysis of the broader police project in relation to the rise of capitalism as well as his conceptualizations of the "political administration" and the "fabrication of social order". Paralleling Neocleous, Gordon defines policing as a form of "political administration" that has historically played an important role in the "fabrication of social order" (pp. 38-50).

I shall also acknowledge a third theoretical stance Gordon uses, that is, his critical attitude towards "Marxist-oriented functionalism" and Foucauldian "panoptical theories". Although he mentions the former very briefly only in the introduction, he spends a great deal of the first chapter on the latter. It is, therefore, important to mention Gordon's critique of what he calls "panoptical theories", i.e., theories that take "governing at a distance" approach as their starting point. Gordon pinpoints a "gap between the reality of contemporary policing and its portrayal" in this literature (p. 7). He identifies three main assumptions of panoptic theories: (1) policing is done electronically at-a-distance; (2) electronic policing is exercised equally on everybody regardless of class, race and gender differences; (3) electronic policing reinforces the emergence of more local and autonomous forms of policing (pp. 7-8). Gordon's position toward these assumptions unfolds in the question of "at a distance or in your face?" (p. 13). He basically argues that the new tactics of policing does not change the historical objective of police forces, i.e., targeting working-class, racialised and gendered populations through ever-ascending centralized and intense state power (pp. 8-27).

Drawing attention to the problematic aspects of panoptic theories strengthens Gordon's approach to police as a state-centred strategy. Although his criticisms of the panoptical and at-a-distance approaches are persuasive, his equation of Foucault with Foucauldians is not. It is obvious that Foucault's work has generated a basis for both panoptical theories and governing at a distance approach. However, some aspects of these approaches contradict Foucault's own writings. Gordon does not distinguish Foucault from the Foucauldians and thus presents a reductionist attitude towards Foucault's contribution to the literature on police. His miscomprehension of Foucault's *oeuvre* results in a few literally wrong assumptions such as the naming of 'at a distance approach' after Foucault—which was originally suggested by P. Miller and N. Rose in 1992[2]—, the rejection of Foucault's meticulous attention to material social relations, the denial of Foucault's understanding of police as a state-centric initiative at its birth, and his attack of Foucault's notion of "docile bodies" on the basis of the absence of agency. Nevertheless, this confusion neither

[2] Rose, N. and Miller, P. 1992 "Political Power Beyond the State: problematics of government", British Journal of Sociology 43(2): 173-205.

diminishes the strong basis of the arguments in the book, nor contributes anything to it.

Following the theoretical debate in the second chapter, Gordon draws on the history of police in the making of the capitalist social order from the nineteenth century onwards. Gordon defines this historical role of police as such:

> Police power has been mobilized [by the ruling classes] to criminalize a series of street-based activities that either provide people with an opportunity to survive outside market relations or serve as distractions from waged work. In the process, policing has worked to constitute a class of labourers dependent on the wage for subsistence and thereby a bourgeois order rooted in the authority of private property and the subordination of working people to the imperatives of capital accumulation (p. 50).

In what follows, he compares and contrasts nineteenth-century police practices with more current police practices and thus illustrates the continuous dynamic that lies at the very *raison d'etre* of the police project, i.e., targeting labour power to build a more orderly, disciplined, regulated and supervised society in accord with the changing needs of capitalism.

The third chapter provides a brief history of the neoliberal transition from Keynesianism in advanced capitalist countries, with specific attention to Canada. In order to respond to the growing structural imbalances in the economy, Gordon explains that labour costs have been reduced significantly since the 1960s through increasing the number of non-standard, non-unionized, and unqualified types of labour as a state policy. This of course was not a pain-free process. Although the initial attempt of consecutive governments was to have policies of "austerity by consent", Gordon argues this did not work due to the disruptive power of labour at the time. As a result, the coercive power of the state has been increased and law-and-order policies increasingly adopted (pp. 54-57).

The fourth chapter portrays that new regulations introduced with the law-and-order policies that target not so much the poor, but the contemporary indigent that seek to live outside the labour market. In this sense, Gordon examines the Vagrancy Act of 1869 and shows that following the economic crisis of the 1970s, vagrancy status did not come back to the criminal code; however, substitutes have taken their place in an attempt to serve the same objective. This is evidenced, for example, in provincial legislation and municipal by-laws such as the Safe Streets Acts, panhandling by-laws, and the adoption of targeting and intelligence policing strategies (pp. 82-85). Accompanying this new work ethic has been a re-regulation of social assistance programs. Gordon reveals that people in need of social assistance

due to unemployment are encouraged to gain and/or improve their "transferable skills" (p. 105). These skills are defined as self-discipline, getting to work on time, meeting the expectations of the employer and being motivated to work.

In the last chapter of the book Gordon problematizes how policing as "an administrative feature of state power" takes on a certain position when it comes to immigrant communities (p. 128). Unlike some Marxist approaches to immigration, Gordon does not limit his account to portraying immigrants only as a source of cheap foreign labour. Although the initial emphasis is put on the role of immigrant labour in filling the worst jobs Canada has to offer, Gordon does not ignore other circumstances surrounding immigrants. He especially takes issue with the conditions of women and non-white immigrants. For instance, he demonstrates how the points system used in immigration applications neglects the unpaid domestic labour of women and makes them rely on their husband in the application process (p. 115). Moreover, he establishes the link between the exploitative immigration policies of the federal government and the cheap labour requirements of capital by drawing attention to the Non-Immigrant Employment Authorization Program (NIEAP), Live-in Caregiver Program, as well as the government's blindness to non-status immigrants' participation in the labour process. Gordon also speaks to the fact that the criminalization of certain drugs are strongly related to Canada's immigration policies. He claims, for example, that the prohibition of opium in 1908 was a direct response to Chinese immigration. The ruling class was concerned that opium shows "signs of non-conformity with "Canadian" order, and that this vice of bodily pleasure might infiltrate the ranks of the white working class" (p. 130). The same applies to the prohibition of cocaine in 1911, cannabis in 1923 and khat in 1997, however this time as a response to Black, Mexican and Somalian immigrants, with the explicit aim being to produce public order on the streets (p. 135).

All in all, Gordon's book provides a significant overview of policing in Canada. It has much to contribute to the current debates on the role of police in the current reformation of the neoliberal order. Although Gordon's approach to police as a state-centred strategy leaves some questions unanswered such as the ever-increasing numbers of private police, he provides an accessible account to remind us that policing is a strategy driven by a moral discourse on the importance of employment and self-discipline, rather than a strategy to fight crime.