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Article

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Austerity-driven policification: Neoliberalisation, schools and the police in Britain

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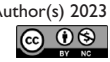

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Abstract

This article argues that as a consequence of austerity, police in England and Wales have taken over important roles in welfare and social policy institutions. This renders those institutions more coercive, punitive and exclusionary, and normalises a police worldview in those institutions. This process of what I call austerity-driven policification can be observed specifically well in the increasing numbers of police officers integrated into schools most affected by austerity. Such 'transinstitutional policing' in Britain is triggered by contradictory post-global financial crisis austerity measures, but reliant upon a long, racialised history of authoritarian neoliberalisation. Cuts to public spending in the 2010s reduced state institutions' capacities to provide for vulnerable people, who were further criminalised and whose rights to support and solidarity were further delegitimised by a radicalisation of the framing of welfare recipients as undeserving, social housing estates as drug-infested gang territories, and schools in deprived areas, and Black pupils in particular, as dangerous. Police, while subjected to austerity measures also, functioned as an institution of last resort, supplementing and replacing incapacitated state institutions, while also being presented as an appropriate institution to address problems increasingly understood to be of a criminal rather than educational nature. This article suggests that austerity-driven policification is an intensification of longer-term trends toward a larger role for police in the neoliberal era. It shows the racial and authoritarian nature of neoliberalisation, and its messy realisation.

Keywords

austerity, neoliberalism, police, racialisation, school policing

Introduction

The police are in high demand in Britain. In an 'increasingly punitive and authoritarian political climate' (Joseph-Salisbury, 2021, p. 578) and following the 'Pandemic of Police

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Powers' (Liberty, 2020) used to (over-)enforce COVID-19 rules and lockdowns (Pidd & Dodd, 2020), political leaders have been outbidding each other with promises and policies to hire more officers, invest more money into policing, loosen stop-and-search regulations, equip the forces with wider powers such as Knife Crime Prevention Orders, and follow the forces' demands for harsher sentences for those assaulting officers via the Sentencing Act 2020. Turbocharging the latest iteration of British law-and-order politics (Nijjar, 2021), the Conservative government under Boris Johnson with Home Secretary Priti Patel passed authoritarian landmark legislations such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which are criminalising democratic rights to protest and asylum, with their successors, Rishi Sunak and Suella Braverman, aiming to expand police powers further.

This more-is-more approach to policing appears to stand in sharp contrast to the tenure of Johnson's predecessor, Theresa May. First home secretary under Prime Minister David Cameron, then prime minister herself, for many officers, May stands for a time in which successive governments led by the Conservative Party – 'formerly the avid paramour of the police' (Reiner, 2016, p. 90) – turned on the force. From 2010, the Conservative-Liberal Democrats coalition and from 2015, the Conservative majority government subjected the police to stricter oversight, as well as severe austerity cuts to personnel, pay and budgets.

'I hold Theresa May personally responsible for the fact that policing is on its knees – it's been personal for her, and it has been incredibly damaging', wrote John Apter (2019), the national chair of the Police Federation when celebrating 'The End of May' as the Member of Parliament for Maidenhead stood down as leader of the Conservative Party and subsequently as prime minister in 2019. Apter accused May of having had 'utter contempt for policing and those who deliver it' and saw as her legacy a 'broken police service' and the need to put 'policing, and the safety and security of the public, at the heart of Government policy' again.

Considering key developments in policing in England and Wales helps to make sense of the rank-and-file fury channelled by Apter: May bore political responsibility for an 'unprecedented diminution of police powers, autonomy, status, pay and resources' (Reiner, 2016, p. 81). Police forces shrank by more than 20,000 officers, successive governments reduced spending on the police by on average 18% and pay settlements were 18% below inflation. Moreover, following a European Court of Human Rights ruling, Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 was suspended, significantly reducing the number of stop-and-searches, one of the most intrusive, and racially disproportionate policing tactics – yet also one of the most visible and crucial for the public articulation of police power (Correia & Wall, 2018; Fassin, 2013).

These reforms represented a break in the 'traditional special relationship' (Reiner, 2016, p. 80) between the Conservative Party and the police and, after decades of expansion, put the police on the back foot. Yet, despite the fact that in some regards policing has indeed been weakened (Millie, 2013; Millie & Bullock, 2012; Reiner, 2016), and despite what Apter called the 'attack' on policing, i.e. austerity cuts, I suggest that the role of the police in British society and for the state has grown – to some extent *because of the cuts*. Contrary to an understanding of austerity cuts as akin to abolitionist efforts of 'defunding the police' (Fleetwood & Lea, 2022), I show how as a consequence of

austerity, police have taken over important roles in welfare, social policy and education institutions, rendering those more coercive, punitive and exclusionary, as well as normalising and instilling in them a police view of the world.

Revisiting earlier assessments of the post-2010 transformations of policing, I argue that we have witnessed a contradictory process of austerity-driven policification (cf. Millie, 2013). My argument is this: austerity reduced British welfare, social policy and education institutions' capacities to provide and care for its most vulnerable people and led to their further criminalisation. Austerity framed welfare and social policy institutions and services as unaffordable and poorly designed handouts to the undeserving (Stanley, 2016). Thus, democratically won rights to state support and institutions rooted in practices of solidarity and class compromise, like the National Health Service (NHS), were hollowed out and delegitimised. This resulted in the police supplementing, replacing and integrating into incapacitated institutions, while being presented as the appropriate institution to address social problems increasingly understood to be of a criminal nature.

This happened despite the subjugation of the police to severe austerity measures. While officer numbers and budgets were reduced, the police retained its fundamental function as state institution of last resort that can be tasked with addressing any problem imaginable (Bittner, 1974). Schools, or youth services, but also the NHS, however, do not have such a function and often had to retreat. They were partially replaced and supplemented in the delivery of their services by a stretched, increasingly agitated, and politically alienated police force, with a nevertheless 'extraordinarily broad' (Newburn, 2022, p. 440) mandate, effectively without any limit.

As a consequence, people in Britain increasingly encounter an outwardly robust and coercive, yet de facto substantively weakened, state. Despite its idiosyncrasies, the COVID-19 pandemic with its intrusive policing of lockdowns and a health service close to collapse can serve as an illustration of this dynamic. Through the policification of state institutions, coercion, punitiveness and carcerality within the British state are normalised and amplified beyond the context of the pandemic. Racialised and working-class communities experience this most directly, yet the transformations reach deeply into British society.

The case of policification supports the observation that while austerity has reduced state capacities and resources of care and support, 'cutbacks have involved an extension of the state's capacity to apply force in citizen's lives' (Davey & Koch, 2021, p. 46; Laub, 2021). This may be explained by drawing on the concept of 'pacification' (Neocleous, 2011, 2014): policification may be seen as an effort to securitise the (social) insecurity intrinsic to capitalism and brought to the fore through transformations such as austerity. Yet, policification also shows the frailty of such securitising efforts for it supports the observation that where governments move toward expressions of a strengthening of state power, they tend to create a more fragile state in the long term (Bhandar & Toscano, 2022; Bruff, 2014; Poulantzas, 2000). This is because austerity-driven policification, just like wider authoritarian neoliberal reconfigurations, challenges the democratic legitimacy and accountability of the transforming institutions and wider state: it raises the question of what can be expected of the state other than coercion and carcerality, and it might ultimately trigger popular dissent against these offerings (as campaigns by organisations such

as SistersUncut or the wider movement for Black lives show). Moreover, this process also explicitly politicises the police and wider state institutions. Officers do not necessarily welcome their new responsibilities, increased workload and the changing – as it were 'welfarised' – institutional profile of the police (cf. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service [HMICFRS], 2018; Koch, 2020). Officers push back publicly against consequences of austerity, and the government as illustrated above. Such 'disputes among various clans, factions and fiefs' may cause 'political divisions' and 'shock-waves in the State', ultimately leading to a form of what Poulantzas called 'administrative debility' (Poulantzas, 2000, p. 246).

From a conceptual perspective, I suggest that austerity-driven policification helps to illustrate the long reach of decades of neoliberalisation, its fundamentally racist and authoritarian nature, as well as its contradictory and messy realisation.

The article first offers a history of the relationship between neoliberalisation and policing in Britain with a specific focus on how policing and welfare institutions have become increasingly intertwined, illustrated by the case of the policing of council housing. It then revisits earlier assessments of the post-2010 transformations in policing as a reduction of police power, before suggesting a different reading of austerity-driven policification based on an analysis of the increasingly large role of police in schools. The conclusion reflects on the authoritarian nature of neoliberalisation and relates these considerations and developments to recent overtly expansionary and authoritarian efforts to ramp up policing in Britain.

Neoliberalisation and policing in Britain

The police in Britain have always been instrumental to neoliberalisation. In the 1970s, Margaret Thatcher campaigned on a law-and-order platform, accusing the governing Labour Party of being soft on crime and responsible for high crime rates and disorder. Her 1979 Conservative manifesto spelled out what later became apparent, namely that the police were fundamental for Thatcher as a candidate, and Thatcherism as a political project:

> The most disturbing threat to our freedom and security is the growing disrespect for the rule of law. . . . We will restore [respect], re-establishing the supremacy of Parliament and giving the right priority to the fight against crime. . . . The next Conservative government will spend more on fighting crime even while we economise elsewhere. Britain needs strong, efficient police forces with high morale. Improved pay and conditions will help Chief Constables to recruit up to necessary establishment levels. (Conservative and Unionist Party, 1979)

As Robert Reiner (2010, 2016) has shown, Thatcher's election victory was helped by the police entering the political stage in support of her party. The early years of Thatcher's tenure then showed that the police had not merely been an asset on the campaign trail, but were a key factor in her remaking of Britain. The breaking of the trade union movement, symbolised by the police bludgeoning of the 1984 miners' strike, is the most prominent example of this (Buckley, 2015; Conn, 2012; Fine & Millar, 1985; Hendy, 2009). Earlier examples are the violent containing of the 1981 riots in Brixton, Toxteth,

Handsworth, Chapeltown and Moss Side in response to racism and police violence as well as deteriorating living conditions and increasing unemployment rates that were, not least, a result of Thatcher's monetarist turn (Beckett, 2015; Gilroy, 2013). Thatcher increased spending on law and order by 53.3% (Reiner, 2010, p. 249; Stewart, 2013, Appendix), expanded police budgets and pay, grew the force, and gave it wider powers. She also put police power closer to government: the creation of the National Reporting Centre was crucial for the coordination of the policing of the miners' strike, with information directly fed into the government (Foot & Livingstone, 2022).

Even if some of her toughest ideas like the reintroduction of the death penalty (Bell, 2011) did not become policies, Thatcher's reliance on the police was extensive and overt. This was possible not least due to the deep roots policing has in British history. As a former colonial power Britain had always employed its police in the interest of the ruling classes and against working classes, racialised minorities and colonised subjects (Camp & Heatherton, 2016; Elliott-Cooper, 2021; Fekete, 2022; Hadden, 2018; Marenin, 1982; Nijjar, 2022; Schrader, 2019; Sivanandan, 1981; Vitale, 2017). This was true for policing in the colonies and on the British mainland. Despite the popular view that at the time the 'British state was a weak and limited one', Joyce (2013, p. 318) has shown 'that the working-class, poor, Irish, [and] the "criminal classes" . . . were the . . . most exposed to what by 1914 was the long-developed and sophisticated security apparatus of the state'. Thus, as Davey and Koch (2021, p. 45) have argued, instead of analysing the shift from the period after the Second World War to Thatcher as one from institutionalised solidarity and class compromise to authoritarianism – 'a "radical break" from a "golden age" of postwar social democracy' – it is more useful to think of the transition as one of an intensification, expansion and deepening of existing modes of governance. They remind us that already, pre-Thatcher, 'working-class people were subject to intimate monitoring with governance through "the social"', in a welfare state centred around 'the white, male breadwinner as the idealized worker-citizen' (Davey & Koch, 2021, p. 45; see also Marenin, 1982). Many women – not to speak of people outside the assumed gender binary – were systematically excluded 'from vital social services that were supposedly universal in their reach' (Davey & Koch, 2021, p. 45). Immigrants, former colonial subjects and People of Colour were, if they had access at all, subjected to 'demeaning forms of social assistance' (Davey & Koch, 2021, p. 45), but often excluded from housing associations, had little access to mortgages, were forced into segregated school classes, side-lined by their trade unions, and had their health jeopardised by the NHS's 'neglect of "black disease"' and 'obsession with black fertility' (Sivanandan, 1981, p. 148). Their citizenship, if they could get it, was constantly in question (Bhambra, 2017; Sivanandan, 1981). On top of that came permanent and extensive racist and violent policing, such as via the sus law, and openly racist violence by white mobs that police at best ignored and played down, such as in Notting Hill in August 1958 (Elliott-Cooper, 2021). Thus, the post-war years, with their immigration, welfare and public health acts 'fashioned in the matrix of colonial-capitalist practices and beliefs', were a time in which modern Britain institutionalised racial discrimination 'in the structures of the state, locally and nationally' (Sivanandan, 1981, p. 124). This means, the ramping up of the state's more overt coercive powers under Thatcher, and later Tony Blair, was contingent upon a history of policing and social control embedded in imperialism, colonialism, patriarchy and class

struggle (McQuade & Neocleous, 2020; Neocleous, 1996, 2000); and, in the short run, the crisis of Fordist capitalism in the 1970s. Already before Thatcher had taken office, Nicos Poulantzas had observed a move toward 'intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life' and the 'radical decline of the institutions of political democracy' (Poulantzas, 2000, p. 203). Stuart Hall had interpreted Thatcherism as a 'Great Moving Right Show', relying on an increasingly coercive and authoritarian (liberal) state (Hall, 1979, 1985; Hall et al., 2013) that aimed to create consent in times of crises. From this perspective, neoliberalisation sharpened the liberal state's 'coercive edge' (Davey & Koch, 2021, p. 45), but the blade had long been forged and used ever since (Koch, 2018).

Subsequent British governments polished the blade. Outcampaigning the Conservatives under the slogan 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' (Blair, 1993/2015), Tony Blair's New Labour paved its third way with more than one newly created criminal offence per day that the prime minister was in office (Koch, 2018). Emphasising the importance of policing during his first answer to Prime Minister's Questions, Blair confirmed that he saw 'the need for effective measures to prevent crime as well as a criminal justice system in which the public can have confidence' (Hansard, 1997) and announced that Labour would alter the law on criminal responsibility so that children over 10 but under 14 would no longer be considered incapable of crime as the law had stipulated previously. Moreover, the policing family was extended with Police Community Support Officers and the landmark Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were introduced (for discussions of ASBOs, see Bell, 2011; Pickard, 2014). The prison population grew significantly and in a racially disproportionate way, so that nowadays, 12% of prisoners in England and Wales are Black, while Black British people make up 3.3% of the overall population. As I show below, it was on the Blair governments' watches that questions of welfare, under attack for decades, were comprehensively reframed as, and conflated with, issues of criminal, rather than social insecurity. For Blair, crime was a problem of the poor, the disadvantaged (Bell, 2011) and those 'having passed through care' (Blair, 2001). And as such, it had a clear locality: the council estate (Campkin, 2013) where a 'dysfunctional underclass' lived (Lees, 2014, p. 924) that needed to be policed strictly.

Neoliberalisation and policification in Britain

Neoliberalisation, welfare and police

British council housing estates were once aspirational buildings, symbolic of the promises of the post-war welfare state, yet, over the decades, in the political and public imagination they were turned into 'urban jungles', 'ghettos' or even 'hell's waiting room' (Alexander et al., 2018; Koch, 2018; Lees, 2014, pp. 927–928). This demotion started in the late 1970s when councils were ordered only to house the most vulnerable in social housing, and was amplified by Thatcher's Right to Buy policies that allowed residents to buy their council flats at discounted prices, creating a split between estates: here the privatised desirable estates, there the less desirable estates in which poverty and deprivation were concentrated (Murie, 1997). This provided the groundwork for Thatcher's declared 'greatest achievement', Blair and New Labour (Burns, 2008), conflated notions

of poverty with urban disorder and crime, a new type of 'underclass' and talk of 'sink estates' inhabited by 'welfare scroungers' (Slater, 2018, p. 882; Laub, 2021; Lees, 2014; cf. Wacquant, 2007). This discourse was radicalised, not least due to the work of right-wing pressure groups such as Policy Exchange and sensationalist reporting, so that estates were increasingly presented not only as *socially* insecure, but as *criminally* insecure and in need of strict policing (Slater, 2018). This radicalisation was also reliant on the racialisation of crime and poverty: council estates became seen as the 'turf' (Elliott-Cooper, 2021, p. 114) of the Black gang. While the moral panic about gangs escalated a few years later, this context justified ASBOs, increasingly punitive welfare policies and divestment from allegedly failed council houses. Police presence became a permanent fact of life for residents and those living in their vicinity (cf. Davey & Koch [2021] and Laub [2021] for just two examples).

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government taking office in 2010 continued to criminalise estates and their occupants. Following the 2011 riots after police officers killed young Black man Mark Duggan in Tottenham, North London, the government quickly blamed gangs for an unrest it saw rooted on estates. Policing intensified with the introduction of a database by the Metropolitan Police, the gangs matrix, and a doubling down on ASBOs, and the government enabling councils to terminate social tenants for offences or even investigations unrelated to their tenancy. Thus, estate residents see an ever more authoritarian and coercive side of the state. From Thatcher to Cameron, police officers had become an increasingly common sight on council estates. Fuelled by divestment and welfare state rollback (Peck et al., 2018) as well as a moral panic about criminality, drug addiction and gang violence, the formerly progressive, aspirational and modern buildings became 'territorialized stigma' (Wacquant, 2007). They also became the spatial nucleus in which different coercive capacities of the state overlap most prominently. Detailing the 'omnipresence of state and state-like officials' and the wide range of powers these social workers, welfare agencies, local officials, housing associations, bailiffs and police officers wield, Davey and Koch (2021, p. 48) show how residents of a Southern English estate experience a highly integrated 'everyday authoritarianism'. Leaning on the concept of 'everyday austerity' (Hall, 2019, p. 29), their work illustrates how residents navigate a built environment marked by divestment of resources from local councils and police patrols, while threats of evictions and benefit cuts loom over their heads. Their study demonstrates that in this everyday authoritarianism, 'the state's capacity for legal coercion cuts across both welfarist and criminal justice-related parts of the state' (Davey & Koch, 2021, p. 44).

Such interactions between different parts of the state and also the private sector have been analysed before: seminal studies like Beck's (1992) *Risk Society* offered comprehensive accounts of how risk and security had become all-pervasive logics in the closing decades of the 20th century, with Ericson and Haggerty's (1997) showing how police acted as information brokers in this new age, supplying welfare, health and education organisations with knowledge influencing their risk assessments. Others saw increased policing, imprisonment and surveillance as a product of 'late modernity' (Garland, 2001) or situated them on governance level (Simon, 2007), thus equally pointing to the integrated nature of coercion, albeit locating its sources in large-scale, abstract transformations or narrowly perceived law-and-order politics. Focusing on the tendency of state

actors 'to resort to legal instruments, to the violence inherent in the law', Comaroff and Comaroff (2006, p. 30) used the term 'lawfare' and shifted attention to the growing role of 'duly enacted penal codes, . . . administrative law, . . . states of emergency, . . . charters and mandates and warrants' and the enforcement mechanisms behind them. These, they argue, have rendered societies more authoritarian and provide an insight into the shift away from welfare and care capacities of the state. Focusing more on the political-economic dimensions of the moves away from welfare and expansion toward austerity and contraction, Streeck (2015) suggests the term 'consolidation state' to make sense of the reduced, cold statecraft of the 21st century. Earlier, Wacquant (2010, 2012) had theorised the shift as one from welfare to workfare to prisonfare, highlighting interrelations within the American state and the growth of its penal system, especially prisons. This observation is also key to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's work on the growth of a penal and coercive 'anti-state state' (2022a, p. 35) which she defines as 'a state that grows on the promise of shrinking' (Gilmore, 2022b, p 276). It is a quintessentially neoliberal state that shrinks its welfare and care capacities, insists on self-reliance and responsibility, criminalises and excludes poor and racialised people, and sees 'the expanded use of cages as catch-all solutions to social and political problems' (Gilmore, 2022b, p. 260). Therefore, it spends heavily on prisons, courts, police, the military and guard duty, 'while schools, hospitals, arts and leisure go begging' (Gilmore, 2022a, p. 35). As Sivanandan (1981, p. 152) put it in the early 1980s reflecting on the violence and racism of the British state: 'a free economy needs a law and order state'.

Policification

As the discussion has shown, welfare and policing have always been intertwined to varying degrees. But by 2010, scholars such as Andrew Millie argued there had been a qualitative shift: social and welfare policy in Britain had not only been *criminalised* – i.e. thought of and addressed from perspectives of crime and punishment – but in fact *policified* (Millie, 2013, pp. 149–152; Millie & Bullock, 2012; see also Kemshall & Maguire, 2001). Seeing the transformations as policification means employing an institutional perspective (see also Patel, forthcoming). It helps illustrate that the British welfare state had not simply contracted in the sense that it could not offer certain services anymore, or that policies had been radicalised in the spirit of notions of lawfare, workfare or prisonfare. Instead, it focuses our attention on the police as an institution and its relations with, and powers within, others. It helps us look beyond officer numbers, budgets and powers as proxies for coerciveness or authoritarian shifts. Rather, it shows that the state police had become increasingly integrated with other institutions and turned into a key agent in the delivery of welfare and education services.

For Millie, this happened due to 'mission creep, leading to growth in the policing task', with the British police coming to act 'as probation/social workers, school workers, disaster managers and as providers of stewarding/event security' (Millie, 2013, p. 145). He considered this expansion of policing with 'police officers taking on more roles that are traditionally covered by other social or welfare agencies' as widening the policing task too much and the new roles as not central to it (Millie, 2013, p. 146). Granting that police traditionally bridge 'crime control, social service and order maintenance' (Millie,

2013, p. 155), he argued that often where police officers delivered services 'other agencies, community groups or volunteers may do as well as the police . . . and could do better (and may also be a lot cheaper)' (Millie, 2013, p. 155). This is predominantly an argument about inefficiency. Yet, Millie also highlights that reversing policification 'could be an opportunity to decriminalize social policy, to govern through crime *a little less*' (Millie, 2013, p. 155, original emphasis). Therefore, while he disagreed with her on the specifics, Millie saw in May's 2010 announcement of austerity cuts to policing a chance to 'reassess' the policing task, create a 'slimmer (and fitter) police' (Millie, 2013, p. 155) and de-policify and de-criminalise social policy in Britain.

Policification revisited

Millie's hope that the '[austerity-]enforced contraction could be a positive opportunity' (2013, p. 143) for de-criminalisation and de-policification was not fulfilled. Below, I use the case study of the policing of schools to illustrate how austerity drove further policification and why austerity cuts to personnel, budgets and powers cannot be equated, as they occasionally are (Fleetwood & Lea, 2022), to abolitionist 'defunding' of the police. As I will show, as long as defunding is understood substantively as a 'strategy to reduce police power' (McElhone et al., 2023, p. 280), austerity has led to its opposite. The reasons for this are threefold: firstly, the police is the modern state's institution of last resort (Bittner, 1974). It is essential to its functioning and cannot retreat from its roles in any comprehensive sense, despite austerity cuts. Secondly, comprehensive cuts to welfare and social policy agencies curtailed their capacities to fulfil their roles with some de facto being abandoned. In institutions such as the NHS, it may be argued that the police took over some roles directly, such as responding to mental health emergencies (Dodd, 2017; Greenwood, 2017; HMICFRS, 2018; Hymas, 2018; Independent Commission on Mental Health and Policing, 2013; Langton et al., 2021; Laub, 2021). In others, it means police involvement further down the line, with police becoming deeply integrated into institutions such as schools. Thirdly, as shown above, British neoliberal statecraft of recent decades rests on the criminalisation of poverty and race, legitimising, intensifying, and even demanding police involvement in welfare and social policy institutions considered engaging with dangerous populations. Recent work on the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and so-called 'county lines' drug trafficking shows (Koch, 2020) that policing and the police as an institution are seen as capable of responding to problems that used be seen as criminal, but are now framed as issues of safeguarding, care and vulnerability. This illustrates the wider relevance of conflations of welfare and police institutions for British statecraft, and means that while austerity has driven recent policification, it is not the only force propelling it. This can be observed in the case of increased school policing.

Policifying the school yard

There is a long history of police officer deployment in British schools, and this involvement has intensified in the era dominated by austerity that followed the global financial crisis of 2007/8 (GFC). Over time, the approach to the policing of schools shifted from one

focused on punishment to one that emphasises welfare aspects, with most recent developments indicating a renewed importance of punitiveness with a welfarist appearance.

Historical forms of school policing

Liverpool set up the first British juvenile liaison scheme in 1949. As the chief constable put it later, by focusing on young people, police were 'ideally situated to learn of potential delinquents at an early stage and take immediate action to prevent them developing criminal tendencies' (Schaffer, 1980, p. 29). Thus, the scheme centred on crime prevention, detection and punishment. When the first School Liaison Officers were introduced in 1966 in Sussex, these reasons still underpinned police involvement, but the means of gaining 'direct police access to schools' had been refined: police were asked to tie close relationships with youth workers, social services, as well as education departments and thus were incorporated into a network of welfare institutions (Gordon, 1984, p. 42). This drive toward cooperation between police and welfare institutions came with frictions, not least due to mutual dislike between officers and, for example, social workers and teachers. Some teachers saw the police as trespassing on their territory and would 'prefer to handle episodes of anti-social behaviour by invoking school discipline rather than calling the police' (Schaffer, 1980, pp. 86–87). This conflict still exists today, as Remi Joseph-Salisbury has shown when investigating teacher attitudes toward school police: while some teachers in his study supported police involvement in schools under certain conditions, the 'vast majority were opposed to police being in school', with some arguing that police in schools render pupils as criminals (Joseph-Salisbury, 2021, pp. 584, 587).

Despite such persistent critique, police have come to see access to pupils as crucial for community policing (Gordon, 1984, p. 42): a model of policing adopted in the 1960s and 1970s on both sides of the Atlantic in response to social movements of the time that directly targeted police as defenders and enablers of a racist and exploitative status quo. Community policing was – and is – a bid for police legitimacy, and ultimately police violence, under threat by such perceptions. In its attempt to sustain legitimacy, it 'offers a nostalgic image of an imagined past populated by your friendly neighborhood cop on the beat' (Correia & Wall, 2018, p. 130). Thus, it wants to present officers as caring for, and embedded in, 'their' community – while keeping tabs on it. Liaison and school policing are key components of community policing and, in Britain, emerged precisely out of the struggle over police legitimacy. As Stuart Hall argued, the 'whole process of post-war social change – a process, incidentally, for which the term "Youth" had by then become a vivid social metaphor' (Hall, 1978, p. 28) – was seen as dangerous and demanding of (police) control (see also Gilroy, 2013). Police tried to use liaison officers to establish relations with Black communities and to 'mediate [their] opposition and distrust' of the police that many Black Britons had experienced as the 'enforcement arm of the white establishment' (Roach, 1978, p. 18). With the uprisings of the early 1980s and the associated panics about (Black) youth crime and violence, governments were interested in formalising the different forces' approaches to school policing (Henshall, 2018, p. 594). Over time reports and strategies such as the 1983 *Police Liaison with the Education Service* report (Department of Education and Science, 1983) achieved this and defined

the objectives of police liaison with schools. Next to crime prevention and guidance on how young people could protect themselves from danger, these objectives included for young people to understand the role of police and the criminal justice system and, as its first-listed objective, to help 'young people to understand and accept principles of good citizenship and social responsibility' (Henshall, 2018, p. 594). Police had the task to instil fundamental societal values into pupils.

Pre-austerity

The 1997 report *School Security, Dealing with Trouble Makers* (Department for Education and Skills & Home Office, 1997) followed several high-profile incidents in schools throughout the 1990s and demanded that schools develop security strategies, which often resulted in increased surveillance in schools and more police presence. Blair then introduced Police Community Support Officers that may either be assigned to work in schools or act as School Liaison Officers directly. And with the prime minister being vocal about his plans to 'be tough on crime', the end of the 1990s and early 2000s saw several initiatives aimed at schools and young people which were perceived as violent and criminal, such as the Street Crime Reduction Strategy 2002 (Home Office, 2002). Part of Blair's Street Crime Initiative were Safer School Partnerships (SSPs) that formally put officers in schools. Initially, the partnerships were set up in areas identified as hot spots of street crime. Henshall noted that the aims of this partnership, of which police officers were a key part, had expanded and shifted. The focus on safety and prevention work remained, but the focus on good citizenship and social responsibility disappeared. Instead, an objective of punishment was added ensuring 'focused enforcement to demonstrate that those who do offend cannot do so without facing consequences' (Department for Children, Schools and Families & Home Office, 2009, p. 6). SSPs aligned with Blair's trademark ASBOs in their moralism and paternalism as the strategy also encouraged officers to micro-manage students to ensure 'improved standards of pupil behaviour and attendance' and work toward more positive relations with the police (Department for Children, Schools and Families & Home Office, 2009, p. 6). In England, this guidance document remains relevant (in Wales, the 1984 model is still in place) and throughout the 2000s, schools in the UK have refined their relationships with the police in its light. This often included more use of electronic surveillance, to the point that by 2012 it was estimated that 85% of UK secondary schools had a form of CCTV system, possibly making British school pupils and their peers in the United States the most surveilled subgroup of the population, bar prisoners (Taylor, 2012, p. 225).

Austerity, gangs, knives

Much of the recent drive for police in schools came on the back of a racialised moral panic over gang and youth violence in the aftermath of the 2011 riots – riots that were triggered by the police killing of Duggan but took place in, and related to, the 'deteriorating socio-cultural context of life in post-industrial, austerity Britain, particularly as it affects young people marginalised by "race" and class' (Cooper, 2012, p. 6; see also Body-Gendrot, 2013; Gilroy, 2013; Newburn et al., 2016).

The government as well as the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, presented the riots as driven by gangs of Black youths based in ghetto-like council estates on whom Prime Minister David Cameron declared 'a concerted, all-out war' (Cameron, 2011; Channel 4, 2011). This was despite the fact that the rioters were by no means exclusively Black, notorious problems to properly define what constitutes a gang, and official findings that even where a definition of gangs was employed, gangs were not particularly strongly involved in the rioting (Home Office, 2011, pp. 18–19).

Regardless, in 2012/13 the government invested £10 million in the Ending Gangs and Youth Violence programme 'to improve the way mainstream services identify, assess and work with the young people most at risk of serious violence' (HM Government, 2011, p. 8). The government aimed to identify those areas most affected by 'gang problem[s]' (HM Government, 2011) and, as part of the programme, placed officers in schools to identify young people 'at risk' of gang engagement and to refer them for further intervention (HM Government, 2011, p. 30; Nijjar, 2021, p. 492). This focus on gangs and its deeply racialised conceptualisation put Black pupils at the centre of this new drive for school policing. The findings of Amnesty International's investigation into the Metropolitan Police's gangs matrix illustrate just how racialised the notion of gangs is: 87% of listed 'gang nominals' were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (78% were Black), 80% were aged 12–24, and 15% were minors with the youngest listed alleged gang member 12 years old; 90% of those listed in the matrix were male (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 2). The database was established after the riots and heavily criticised for its racial imbalance, nebulous inclusion criteria, the lack of a clear gang definition, and the fact that more than a third of people listed on the matrix had never committed any serious offence (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 3). Yet, as a gangs unit police officer put it to Amnesty International, police collaboration with schools became a priority, not least due to the exchange of information (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 24).

In the wake of incidents in April 2018 in which young people in London were killed or injured in altercations involving knives and guns, the government's Serious Violence Strategy reinforced the focus on gangs in school policing. It suggested an increased police presence in schools and to expand on 'existing models of police-school partnerships' (HM Government, 2018, p. 58), only this time not to police potential rioters, but to quell 'knife crime', understood as a specifically violent, hyper-racialised form of gang violence seen as rooted in Black youth subcultures like drill music (Fatsis, 2019). It also advocated for police and non-police agencies to further integrate and share information, data and analyses. Crucially, these strategies of school policing came in the context of austerity cuts to a wide range of social services, many of which affected those areas most that police were told to focus on: deprived inner-city neighbourhoods, often with a high share of racialised residents. Marginalised communities were hit hardest when budgets for social work, youth clubs or local sports facilities were slashed after 2010 (Runnymede Trust, 2017). They were also most affected by cuts to the NHS or housing services as poor and marginalised communities lacked the resources to mitigate the effects of such cuts. In London, 'cuts have removed 46 percent of funding from London council youth services' (London Assembly, 2019) and 104 youth centres and projects shut down since 2011/12, leaving the city with 130 centres in 2019. The capital also lost 562 youth worker

jobs in this period (Berry, 2019, pp. 14–15). Yet, school officers it gained: in 2019, Metropolitan Police Deputy Assistant Commissioner Mark Simmons had announced that his force was 'investing heavily in more officers working full time in schools' and said that numbers had increased between 2017 and 2019 from 280 to 420 full-time school officers, with the force aiming at just under 600 (Weale, 2019) – which, incidentally, would roughly add up to the number of lost youth workers. However, according to a 2021 Freedom of Information request, the figures for London are not as high, yet still have increased from 294 in 2016–17 to 357 in 2019–20 (Metropolitan Police Service, 2021). Written evidence to a Serious Violence Commission session in 2019 supports those latter figures, which amount to more than a doubling of Safer School Officer numbers in London since the beginning of the austerity regime, with 183 employed in 2010–11 (Metropolitan Police Service, 2019). Numbers for England and Wales are rapidly increasing, too: while in 2021 more than 680 police officers were working in schools (Parveen et al., 2021), most recent figures are as high as 979 (Runnymede Trust, 2023).

School policing in austerity Britain

Using pupil eligibility for free school meals (FSM) as an indicator for pupil disadvantage, Henshall showed that officers were more likely to be based in schools with a higher share of disadvantaged pupils, with almost all schools where 50% or more pupils were eligible for FSM having an onsite police officer. None of the schools that had no FSM-eligible students had an onsite officer (Henshall, 2018, p. 597). This is not coincidental. As *The Guardian* has reported, the London Metropolitan Police 'sometimes used data on the numbers of deprived children to choose "priority schools" to receive more intensive interventions. In London, every school is offered a police point of contact, but priority schools will usually have a dedicated officer assigned' (Parveen et al., 2021). To determine priority schools, forces across the country used indicators such as free school dinners, GCSE attainment rates, crime data linked to schools and persistent absence levels. The Norfolk Constabulary also considered the number of children on Pupil Premium grants and those with allocated social workers (Parveen et al., 2021).

This indicates that contemporary school policing deliberately and systematically targets poorer and disadvantaged pupils. It also implies a strong link between intensified school policing and austerity, as the use of free school dinners as an indicator for priority schools shows. Austerity has exacerbated food insecurity with increased use of food banks (Jenkins et al., 2021) and more children arriving to school hungry (O'Connell & Hamilton, 2017). Between 2015/16 and 2020/21, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals in England increased from 14.3% to 22.5%, meaning that more than one in five pupils are eligible. Partially, the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic may explain this, but figures had been rising prior to the outbreak. More than 40% of Black Caribbean pupils and 32.5% of Black African pupils were eligible for free school meals, compared to 21.6% of White British pupils (Department for Education, 2022). This suggests that austerity measures have not only exacerbated food poverty and reliance on free school meals among Black pupils, but also justify increased school policing. At the same time that school officer numbers have been increasing, schools in Britain have started to warn of teaching assistants leaving, often due to low pay (Fazackerley, 2022a). The average

number of pupils per full-time equivalent teaching assistant position had seen a minor upward trend since 2015, but following the austerity decade since 2010, schools in the early 2020s say they fear they will have to lose teaching and support staff in response to rising inflation and energy costs since no financial cushion is left (Fazackerley, 2022b). This would lead to a loss of support structures, especially for special needs students who benefit most from teaching assistants. These fears come after more than a decade in which per-pupil spending in state schools dropped by a conservative estimate of 9% (real terms), while net private school fees – and thus the equivalent to per-pupil spending – increased by 23%. Since the coalition government took over, the per-pupil spending gap between state and private schools has doubled (Sibieta, 2021). Policing in the former schools, however, has increased.

Consequences of austerity-driven policification in schools

Research on school policing in Britain is still limited, though work published since 2018 has contributed to our understanding, while simultaneously affirming the increasing relevance of the subject (Connelly et al., 2020; Henshall, 2018; Joseph-Salisbury, 2021; Nijjar, 2021). These studies give a sense of the consequences of school policification, showing that when officers are placed in schools this leads to stigmatisation of schools and pupils, as well as their criminalisation, creates climates of hostility and low expectations, and comes with problems of inappropriate conduct, physical violence and harassment (Connelly et al., 2020, pp. 1–2).

Research in the United States, where school policing is much more prominent, supports these findings and raises concerns about drives to increase police numbers in schools and codify their roles within a larger welfare setting. As Alex Vitale has argued, it 'fundamentally undermines the educational mission of schools, turning them into an extension of the larger carceral state and feeding what has come to be called the school-to-prison pipeline' (Vitale, 2017, p. 56). Involving police officers in the mediation of conflicts between pupils, in counselling, mentoring and pastoral roles, means linking pupils into the criminal justice system with its potentials of punishment, violence and arrests, while withdrawing, reducing or mitigating their access to social and welfare services. This way, 'schools-based police officers risk turning minor behavioural issues into criminal issues' (Joseph-Salisbury, 2021, p. 587; Joseph–Salisbury et al., 2020).

Thus, austerity has not only affected pupils through reduced per-pupil spending in state schools, or by increasing food poverty and housing insecurity. But police forces have consistently identified deprived areas – and therefore those particularly vulnerable to austerity cuts – as priority areas for school policing. Moreover, they have used indicators negatively affected by austerity to justify and assign police officers into schools where they are supplementing or even fulfilling roles of counsellors or mediators, and establishing a direct link from schools into the criminal justice system. This indicates that in the instances where there are officers in schools, welfare and social care is policified. Austerity drives and intensifies this process with its long history and potentially grave consequences for pupils. Moreover, by further institutionalising the role of the police in schools, it deepens the inclusion of the educational sector in larger policing and social order projects, such as the 'war on terror' via the Islamophobic and stigmatising

(Cohen & Tufail, 2017; Qurashi, 2018) anti-extremism PREVENT programme that rests on data sharing between a wide range of institutions, including schools, to tackle extremism, or the 'war on gangs' for which school exclusions and Pupil Referral Units are seen as crucial parts of the British school-to-prison pipeline (Perera, 2020). Simultaneously, pupils have lost social workers, youth clubs, and are in danger of losing teaching assistants and teachers in the future, thereby tipping the scales further toward more coercive and punitive interactions with the state.

Conclusions

By discussing the case of school policing, this article has argued that post-GFC austerity has driven the policification of state institutions in Britain. It has suggested that this is a worrying development since the routine inclusion of the police into institutions like schools renders them more coercive, punitive and exclusionary, with working-class, racialised and vulnerable people bearing the brunt of these transformations. The article has suggested that austerity-driven policification should be understood as a UK-specific intensification of neoliberalisation processes and a key aspect of a wider British statecraft increasingly reliant on policing and an ever more carceral state (cf. Gilmore et al., 2022).

Considering the wider authoritarian turn in British politics under the 2020s Conservative Party, policification is all the more alarming. It is very much in the spirit of authoritarian legislation such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and in fact serves to tie institutions such as schools closer into the overarching policing project realised by such policies. To deepen our understanding of these transformations, further research is needed. Specifically useful would be investigations of policification in other branches of the welfare and social care sector, for example in the wide field of mental health care, and empirical studies that centre the experiences of those interacting with policified institutions, such as pupils or persons with mental ill-health.

What seems clear is that policification is not a seamless process: austerity-driven policification strengthens the state and renders it more coercive and violent. However, it also opens up the state to critique and contestation. The police in Britain have received substantial and effective opposition, especially since the intrusive policing of COVID-19 lockdowns, the murder of Sarah Everard by serving Metropolitan Police Officer Wayne Couzens, the second wave of the movement for Black lives, all in 2020, the conviction of the rapist Metropolitan police officer David Carrick in 2023, and a range of other scandals over misogyny, racism and corruption. Protest aimed directly at school policing emerged after four Metropolitan Police Officers had stripped-searched 15-year-old Black school girl, Child Q, in Hackney, East London, without another adult present and in the knowledge that she was menstruating. This indicates that there is not only a dimension of strengthening of state power and violence to policification, but a simultaneous weakening (Bruff, 2014). It challenges the democratic legitimacy and accountability of the transforming institutions and wider state and raises the question of what can be expected of the state other than coercion and carcerality. As is the case with the movement for Black lives, demands to defund the police, or the protest against the strip-search of Child Q, it might

trigger popular dissent against this offering. Organisations such as SistersUncut, a revolutionary feminist group of abolitionists with roots in the anti-austerity movement, make these connections between neoliberalisation, austerity, policification and racism explicit and contest them powerfully.

On the other hand, the strengthening/weakening dynamic also has a dimension internal to the state: officers, police organisations and even government institutions have problematised and opposed the process of policification. While this likely did not occur with any progressive agenda in mind, but was rooted in opposition to higher workloads, lower pay and job cuts, it politicised the police and, as Reiner (2016) has shown, led to a break in traditional political allegiances between the police and the Conservative Party. This may partially explain the Party's renewed focus on higher police spending and recruitment targets. This could well be read as a bid to calm the waters and avoid further 'political divisions' and 'shock-waves in the State' in a political climate rich in divisions and shockwaves, and, as the Truss government experienced, at times closer to 'administrative debility' than it would like to admit (Poulantzas, 2000, p. 246). It may also indicate how important policing has become after decades of neoliberalisation have stripped away key functions and institutions of the (welfare) state, leaving Britain with a stretched and scandal-ridden police as one of the few remaining ones – with all the consequences this entails.

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