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Class war-on-terror: counterterrorism, accumulation, crisis

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Abstract

This article discusses US counterterrorism from a class perspective. It sees counterterrorism as a state policy with differential effects on different social classes. In doing so, the article starts to address a lacuna in critical studies of counterterrorism, which tend to be rather structural and formal, thus ignoring the pertinence of counterterrorism to the field of social dynamics. To partly rectify this blind spot by addressing some class implications of counterterrorism, the article examines the effects of counterterrorism policy on capital accumulation and its social conditions. It notes that counterterrorism has different implications along class-lines: for dominant capital, it signifies appropriation of public money and direct participation in political decisions; for everyone else, it means material dispossession and political exclusion. Given that counterterrorism was developed between two crises of neoliberalism, the article distinguishes between economic crises, which tend to benefit capitalism, and political

crises, which can be destructive, and suggests that counterterrorism is partly a restructuring of the neoliberal state so that it can manage recurring economic crises, while preventing their evolution into political ones.

Keywords:

homeland security economy | counterterrorism | social dynamics | capital accumulation | accumulation-as-crisis | political crisis | economic crisis | capitalist state | neoliberalism | universal adversary | political exclusion

Notes

1. For important exceptions to the formalism of constitutional-democratic accounts: Brown 2006; Gearty 2013; for security studies that combine biopolitical and class perspectives: Neocleous 2008, 2014; for a critical appreciation of Foucauldian biopolitical approaches to security: Boukalas 2012, 289–291; for a critique of Agamben's take on bio-power, 2014a.

2. In August 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, people protesting the killing of an Afro-American by the police faced a local police force in full military apparel and machinery, including armoured vehicle, snipers, etc. (Swaine 2013).

Additional information

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Christos Boukalas is a research fellow in Cardiff Law School, and author of Homeland Security, its Law and its State – A Design of Power for the 21st Century (Routledge, 2014). His current research project on the Preemptive Turn in UK Criminal Law and Policy is sponsored by the Journal of Law and Society. He has a PhD in state theory from Lancaster University (Department of Sociology) and expertise in contemporary American counterterrorism policy. He has accomplished an ESRC-sponsored research project on Counterterrorism Policy: Law, the State, and Implications for the Polity (Centre for Law and Society, Lancaster University). His research interests include political and state theory, counterterrorism, theory of law, criminal law and theory of democracy. He has published several articles and book chapters in these areas.

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