

INTRODUCTION

When the Covid pandemic began to take hold in early 2020, it snapped the dominant institutions of the world into rapid mobilization. ‘We’re all in this together’, was the common refrain, repeated to coordinate the actions of governments, corporations, civil society organizations, and individual households. Expectations that such compassion for human suffering would translate into a universal response turned out to be a fairy tale. Turns out we were never all in it together. Citizens of wealthy countries got vaccines and antivirals in a matter of months, but others – indeed most of the world’s population – would need to wait much longer. Many are still waiting. They will no doubt wait forever. Rich governments moved quickly to stockpile as much of the vaccine supply as they could, in some cases importing it from countries such as India where the vaccines were being manufactured. Crucially, this scarcity was not simply imposed by the material constraints of manufacturing and distributing vaccines at scale, real as such constraints are. Instead, the making of this scarcity was primarily by design. Critics called it vaccine apartheid. But the problem at the heart of this violence is something more fundamental and deeply rooted in the capitalist world-system.

The problem is security.

Covid has given the world a lesson in the normalization of mass death. It reveals the ways that capitalism continues to be premised on the mass exploitation and disposability of life; and not just human life. Capitalism has been dripping with blood since it came into the world. Millions of people worked to death on plantations, fields and factories; the genocidal campaigns of the early corporations; Indigenous peoples killed for their land and resources; the slave trade; ecocides and politically managed famines and disasters resulting in countless

corpses; the mass execution of women in witch hunts; the imperialist wars, exterminatory wars and world wars; the wars on drugs, crime, terror and many others; the deaths from mass incarceration and police killings; the imprisonment, torture, disappearance and execution of countless numbers resisting any of these destructive tendencies; not to speak of the mass deaths resulting from capitalism's most counter-revolutionary form of state power, fascism. Start counting the deaths caused by capital, its social forms, and its political institutions, and you'll never stop. It begins with the obvious crimes that created capitalism – the violence of enclosure, slavery, colonialism – and spirals out to the everyday violence we inflict on ourselves and each other.

We understand this violence and its causes in terms of security.

'Security' should not be reduced to common sense notions of safety. Security is the monstrous idea that we are alone and locked into competition over scarce resources, that private property is a natural right, that we need to protect our little island of private life against the threat of others, and that we must submit to authority to do so. Security promises that the state exists to protect us from an ever-growing list of internal and external threats, the folk devils that form the grounds of policing one crisis after another: muggers, terrorists, insurgents, drug cartels, migrants, refugees, and on and on. Security demands we look up and submit to the Leviathan, rather than search for solidarity with our fellow human and non-human beings on this planet. Security tells us that we are obstacles to each other's freedom.

Security is a racket premised on a threat of death. Security transmutes the universal human fears of threat, danger, and death into particular fears of the supposed enemies of social order. It mobilizes these energies and imaginaries into participation in the maintenance of capitalism, a grotesque social order of extreme polarization with poles of elite decadence and mass privation. In the bourgeois imagination, which is to say in the ideology that dominates and shapes our world,

security is a private right tied to individual property, which, in turn, supposedly enables individual liberty. Security is private property's cop; liberty is security's lawyer.

Yet, security is the emergent property of social order. Private property is only real and secure when we all buy into the illusion and act accordingly. As a 'social contract', individual security is continually threatened not only by the state's official enemies. It is also at risk from the state withdrawing its protection or redefining its adversary. Security, then, is a political relation, where the individual accedes to the state's threat of death in exchange for the freedom to securely pursue their self-interest, to build and guard their own prison of private property.

As a political relation, security proposes a particular way of being. Yet this way of being is neither natural nor apolitical. When the state and its security intellectuals represent any given issue as a matter of security, they aim to depoliticize it. Such representations obscure their own history of 'threats', presenting them as technical problems of management rather than political problems inherent to our way of life under capitalist domination. Witness, for example, recommendations by leading medical authorities for 'global vaccine *security*' as a solution to vaccine apartheid. According to the WHO and UNICEF, 'vaccine security' is defined as 'the timely, sustained, uninterrupted supply of affordable vaccines of assured quality'. On the face of it, this logic seems to make good sense. If governments of the world simply took a more global focus in securing vaccine supply, then the prevailing focus on profit-generation and national security concerns could be ameliorated. Yet, such an approach is not only inadequate, but also wildly misleading. To be sure, the critically minded public health scholars get much right: big pharma *is* primarily concerned with their bottom lines; captured government officials *are* all too happy to line their shareholders' pockets with public funds by stockpiling vaccines for *their* citizens; leaving the majority of the ordinary people in the

world to their fate *does* defy any basic epidemiological rationality, let alone ethical or moral considerations of justice. But let us be clear: the problem is not a matter of short-sightedness or callousness. The problem is capitalism, and the solution cannot be security. No doubt when corporate and state leaders told the world that their primary concern is to *secure* (some of) us from the scourge of Covid, they told the truth. The part they left out is that within capitalism this protection would not and could never be universal. The reason for this is the manufacture of scarcity. Vaccine profitability would not exist in a world where free and open access to the vaccine is the norm.

Vaccine *security* is not the answer to this problem. Despite its prevailing connotations as a good thing, something we all need and should desire, security is neither of the two. This is the apocalyptic truth behind the principal reasons given for our present vaccine apartheid: profit-generation and security. With Covid, first we were told by the PR ghouls of global pharmaceutical corporations that it would be impossible for them to simply give the proprietary formulas to production labs around the world. They could not *afford* to do so because it would prevent them from recuperating the vast sums of money that these same firms had invested in and taken risks to produce in the first place. To varying degrees, such officials essentially admit that facilitating the largest possible scaling up of vaccine production and widest possible distribution of it – though perhaps a laudable public health goal in principle – was out of step with their core function of generating profit. And this was even though most major labs that produced the vaccines were principally funded *not* by such corporations but by public funds - *our* money. We were then told by the politicians managing the administration of mass death that they had a legal and moral obligation to protect their own populations, framing such obligations as matters of *national security*. The message was that the *only way* to protect certain populations from the

deadly harms of the virus was to exclude the access of others to these same life-saving vaccines. While Trump's rhetoric of 'America First' was explicitly articulated in Operation Warp Speed, most wealthy nations shared the same inward-looking approach. This supposed hard 'reality', we were told, was unfortunate as well as unintended, just as it was equally intractable. The life-saving protection offered by the vaccine, in principle potentially universal, could not ultimately be given to *everyone*, at least not right now. The best we could hope for would be that rich countries with oversupply would generously 'gift' their unneeded vaccines to poorer countries through philanthropic schemes such as COVAX.

Members of the medical establishment and governments of the global South rightly criticized such claims. COVAX and similar schemes were farcically inadequate. Indeed, vaccines themselves are inadequate. We were quick to learn that the vaccine does not prevent transmission, yet most governments were quite content to make vaccines mandatory and the centerpiece of their Covid response. The reason for this? 'Health security'. But 'health security' has nothing to do with what most of us understand by health. It is concerned with the viability of our fragile, underfunded healthcare systems and their ability to keep workers working. 'Health security' is aimed at the health and security of capitalism.

Claims of 'vaccine apartheid' are therefore not hyperbolic. It is an apt reference to the way security mechanisms reproduce and exacerbate existing inequalities to ensure the continued accumulation of capital and protect the polarized relations of wealth and power they create. Beyond being a racialized system of control, the system of apartheid in South Africa was a comprehensive mechanism that produced and managed different strata of a multi-racial working class in the name of accumulation. It was, in other words, a police mechanism for the fabrication of capitalist social order. So it is with the 'apartheid'

of present-day vaccines: global intellectual property laws and the varied restrictions put in place by national governments ensure that pharmaceutical companies make record profits and states manage labor mobility, all the while rendering the vast majority of humanity disposable and vulnerable to premature death.

Push away the pabulum and sop of bourgeois humanism and it becomes clear that decent treatment and respect for life is a scarce commodity. Humane treatment was and remains very much contingent on social position: the braiding of class, race, gender, caste, and nation that constrain and enable our apparent choices. On 23 April 2020, for example, 37 people died in the Mexican state, Baja California, at a time when there were just 10 ventilators available in Tijuana, despite the fact that Tijuana was a huge producer of ventilators and other medical equipment for the world market. Global trade laws prohibited Mexico from buying many of the products it produced before they were shipped abroad. Security, in this context as in so many others, meant that ventilators produced in Mexico could not be used to treat patients in Mexico. Rather, the ‘security’ of concern was of the supply chain: securing the production of ventilators in Mexico for purchase by other nations. The same issues played out in the Global North where, with a few notable exceptions, working class and non-white people were the main ritual sacrifice. In every advanced capitalist state, the governing parties pitted the health of the economy against the health of its citizens, sacrificing the latter for the former, privileging the health and security of capital. The gradual ‘opening up’ of economies to boost spending and encourage business and commercial activity helped spread the coronavirus and contributed to successive waves of infections. Vaccines reduced the risk of imminent death but did not prevent transmission. The return to normal continues to expose millions of people.

The idea of ‘health security’ normalizes this sacrifice of working class

and racialized groups. Indeed, these differentiated death rates may be normalized but they are not natural. They are the contemporary manifestations of the structural violence of capital. Capital has not created a uniform global proletariat. Instead, it divides the working class, using the wage, gender, and race to further compound the subordination of some groups through patriarchy, white supremacy, nationalism, religion, age, and ability. These realities are apparent to many public health experts who have made bold critiques of vaccine apartheid. However, they have generally dodged the basic root structure, namely global capitalism. An article in *The Lancet* (16 April 2022) notes that although it is capitalism that sustains millions in a condition of hunger, ‘anti-capitalism might not be wholly desirable given the impressive investment that produced COVID-19 vaccines’. Capitalism, in this view, is the solution to the problem that is capitalism. To these measured critiques of public health scholars, we insist that when crises such as the recent pandemic are governed as security matters (and we say more below about other crises), the goal has never been and can never be protecting ordinary people from anything. Rather, the logic of security *necessarily* means the protection of some through the denial of protection to others. The ostensible attempts to ‘secure’ us from the pandemic are simply the latest iteration of this general tendency of capitalism as a historical system. It is nothing exceptional and certainly nothing new. The same logic is at play when state officials explain that the only way to protect ‘us’ is by closing borders to ‘them’ and why stemming crime requires millions to spend their lives caged in prisons.

In all of these cases, security separates populations into groups demarcated by a determination of risk: criminals and respectable people, citizens and aliens, those deserving protection and the undeserving who require careful and often coercive management. Undergirding these social polarizations is the most basic one that respectable research and opinion does so much to avoid: bourgeoisie and proletariat. What

we are dealing with here is how capital accumulation trumps basic human needs and how workers, especially those further subordinated by racialization, gender, caste, age, and disability, are sacrificed at the altar of profitability and in the name of security.

The goal of security is not protection or safety but the maintenance of a system of capital accumulation that continually undermines itself through the scarcity that constitutes private property.

A system of mass polarization and privation always creates excluded, devalued, debased, and ‘dangerous’ populations that need to be policed in order to secure the lives and property of others. The lines separating these two groups – those incorporated into capitalism on relatively equitable terms and those viewed as dangerous and disposable – usually neatly track other structural inequalities. The Black criminal, Muslim terrorist, Indian Thug, the loose or fallen woman, are all powerful avatars of disorder that not only justify the intervention of state security but mobilize many – including those from oppressed groups – to participate in pacification.

Security is a lie. Security is a lie in the strong sense that foundational relations of our way of life are just that: particular human relations, not transcendental, instinctual universals of humanity. Private property is not natural. It is the appropriation by one class of the collective social product and the gifts of nature. It is the dispossession of the people through violence enforced by law: the institutionalized violence of state administration (police, prisons, social policy), the internalized violence of social wars (on ‘crime’, ‘drugs’, ‘poverty’ and all the many other declared enemies), and the structural violence of market dependence (the separation of needs and capacities and the commodification of life). Security is a fabrication, which means that the lie of security is patched together out of real relations and circumstances. Security is deeply ideological to be sure, but it cannot be reduced to a simple distortion of ‘real’ social relations. Rather, it is a constitutive, organizing

principle of everyday life. It is, as Marx wrote in 1843, the ‘supreme concept of bourgeois society’. The supreme concept of bourgeois society: a lie that operates at the expense of ordinary people, justice, and liberation. When the owners of a mine or factory call in ‘security’ to suppress a strike or uprising, they know what they are after; security serves their needs well. The same can be said for innumerable other situations, although here the direct benefit is sometimes more psychological than material: the annoyed homeowner calling the police on young people enjoying themselves in public; the panicked white woman reporting the menacing public presence of non-white men; the paranoid ‘patriot’ who ‘sees something’ such as a Muslim person renting a car and ‘says something’ by putting in a call to the local police, which then files a report with Homeland Security. But for the rest of us, security offers nothing; or at least, nothing desirable.

Our world still runs on brutal forms of labor exploitation: slavery and debt peonage (especially of migrants), child labor, and sweatshops. This violence is not an aberrant exception found in the weakly regulated economies of the Global South and informal sectors, but is part of the continuum of capitalist exploitation that connects the most overly administered instances of wage labor with the most brutal and ‘backward’ forms of exploitation and appropriation. Global capitalism organizes all known forms of labor exploitation and appropriation under the law of value. Security is the integument of this system, the organizing principle for our global social order of grotesque inequality and institutionalized suffering, the flexible, adaptable, resilient, complex covering that holds it all together.

Anti-security cuts to the core of the problem. We call out the lie and offer a challenging yet liberatory truth: there is no security. There is only solidarity, mutual aid, and the struggle for a good life in common.

This book is a provocation to escape the ideological dictatorship of security over our imaginations, and to do so by abolishing it. Security

abolition means breaking free from the prison of self and stuff: an impoverished vision of humanity that assumes that we are born alone and that our social relations are naturally mediated through money and things.

Security abolition means the abolition of private property and the commodity form. It means the unification of needs and capacities through the commons and the production of use-values. In working for capital, security works for colonization, empire, and race-making. Police power is also patriarchal power, the discretionary power of the head of the household applied to the problems of civil society and the state. There is a continuum of discretionary violence flowing through and connecting the patriarchal family to varied police apparatuses of empires, corporations, and states. Security abolition is the conceptual and practical link that connects abolition of institutions sustaining class power, racism and sexism. Security abolition complements and connects the task of dismantling police, prisons, and patriarchy with the challenge of reconstructing social order around the commons and commoning.

Security abolition is not simply a matter of refraining from the terminology of security. The project has in sight a different world. A manifesto for security abolition is a manifesto for the transformation of basic social relations and for a move away from a world organized around individual competition and scarcity to one of collective power and communal abundance. Such a world is necessarily antithetical to security. The two cannot co-exist harmoniously.