Social Welfare or Social Warfare?
Montreal's Police "Mixed Squads" in the Neoliberal-Carceral Conjuncture

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the recently popularized police reform of "mixed squads" (or "co-response teams") in which officers train, collaborate, and patrol alongside non-police workers such as social workers or mental health professionals. In response to political upheaval against policing, prisons, and criminalization, mixed squads have been portrayed—by the state, the media, and much of the academic literature—as a new approach to the management of marginality in public space (notably homelessness and mental illness), based on support rather than repression. Taking the city of Montreal as a case study and operating under the framework of conjunctural analysis, this thesis argues that mixed squads are the opposite of what they claim to be: they do not reduce police violence but rather extend it, and do not provide support to marginalized people but rather preclude it. A critical examination of the impact of mixed squads—based on an analysis of interviews with community workers, archival documents, and media coverage—reveals that mixed squads serve as 1) a public relations strategy to re-legitimize policing in the absence of meaningful reform, 2) an expansion of criminalization and repression, and 3) a form of counter-insurgency that disrupts, transforms, and replaces existing ecosystems of community care, weakening their ability to provide services and to foster political resistance to repression. Moreover, a historical analysis reveals that, far from being a progressive police reform, mixed squads are the result of the state's consistent refusal to enact progressive reforms. Mixed squads appear to be a legitimation strategy of the neoliberal-carceral state, threatened by its own failures and by growing political opposition, whose survival depends on the continued retrenchment of state support, expansion of state violence, and persecution of marginalized social groups. As such, mixed squads are a tool of sociopolitical struggle, intended to entrench policing as the main response to social inequality by erasing the symbolic, material, and institutional boundaries that distinguish support from repression, attempting to dissolve the former into the latter. This thesis recommends the elimination of mixed squads and the implementation of well-known, evidence-based solutions to police violence and social distress, which have been intentionally sidestepped in favour of mixed squads.

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Martin, thank you for your kindness, for your patient guidance, and for consistently sharpening my work. Ted, thank you for your friendship, and for helping me and many others think and act towards abolition.

I have met many kind and intelligent souls in the past few years, who have taught me new ways to think and to be in the world. Alia and FG, thank you for being comrades and family. Maya, I could not have hoped for a better classmate and friend. My gratitude to everyone at the Montreal Coalition to Defund the Police, whose labour and friendship gives me hope and purpose.

This thesis belongs to my family, especially my parents, who made me curious, principled, and stubborn—and who, through shared stubbornness, always force me to sharpen my arguments. It belongs to my grandmothers, who devoted their lives to care and justice, and to my brother, lifelong friend and protector. Thank you for a lifetime of unflinching love and support.

My life partner helped me think through this research every step of the way. Nicole, thank you for your moral and intellectual clarity, one of the many gifts you bring to this world.

If this work has any value, it is only realized through its relation with an active and collective political struggle. This thesis documents decades of fighting in defence of human dignity, against vicious repression. I have come to understand, quite clearly, why James Baldwin claimed that "the world is held together by the love and the passion of a very few people." Thank you to those who hold it together, in Montreal and beyond.

Contribution of Authors

Chapter 4 is adapted from a forthcoming article of which I am the lead author:

> Nicoletti, Orlando, Karl Beaulieu, Cerine Madi, and Ted Rutland. 2025. "Public Relations, Repression, and Counter-Insurgency: The Overlapping Functions of Police Mixed Squads in Montréal." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research.* Forthcoming.

I contributed to every section of the article in research, analysis, and writing (see Chapter 3). I collected and analyzed the data for the first section (on public relations) and drafted the text. I co-researched and co-wrote the second and third section (on repression and counter-insurgency) with Dr. Ted Rutland and Cerine Madi, on an equal basis. Our analysis drew on findings from a public-facing report that we also co-authored:

> Rutland, Ted, Karl Beaulieu, Chloe Bullen, Cerine Madi, and Orlando Nicoletti. 2023. "Innovation ou extension de la répression? Perspectives des intervenant-es sur les escouades mixtes à Montréal." RAPSIM.

Data collection was conducted by Dr. Rutland, Cerine Madi, and Chloe Bullen. Analysis and writing were conducted by Dr. Rutland, Karl Beaulieu, and myself, on an equal basis (see Chapter 3).

The last section of Chapter 7, "Where do we go from here?", is adapted from an editorial that I co-wrote with Dr. Rutland:

> Rutland, Ted, and Orlando Nicoletti. 2025. "Quand le politique fait la lutte aux personnes itinérantes." Le Devoir, March 13.

The text was collectively researched, thought, and written. This thesis presents an updated and expanded version of the editorial.

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List of Acronyms

E=MC2: Équipe multidisciplinaire de concertation communautaire

ECCR: Équipe de concertation communautaire et de rapprochement

ECHINOPS: Équipe communautaire hybride d'intervention novatrice OSBL-psychiatrie-SPVM

EMIC: Équipe métro d'intervention et de concertation

EMRII: Équipe mobile de médiation et d'intervention sociale

EMMIS: Équipe mobile de médiation et d'intervention sociale

ESUP: Équipe de soutien aux urgences psychosociales

RIC: Réponse en intervention de crise

SDSVM: Société de développement social de Ville-Marie

SPVM: Service de police de la Ville de Montréal

Epigraph

« So it's that kind of a day in the city, the season doesn't matter. In fact it's not quite day. Everything is still perfect. June sits up in bed. She's heard something on the radio which wakes her.
“One hundred musicians?” she says. “Great!”
“Musicians? No, policemen. One hundred policemen.” Her lover rolls over, feet on the floor.
“It's musicians, I heard.”
Her lover laughs, “You're still asleep, dreaming; he said policemen.”
“Pianists, maybe then, that would make sense, I swear I heard pianists.”
“For Jane-Finch! Don't be silly, one hundred policemen.” [...]
“No. It must be musicians. That's going to be awesome!”
“Dream on baby.”
“Imagine! Jesus, he's a genius! Perfect.” June feels as if she's inhaled water. God, the idea of one hundred musicians in the neighbourhood. Fucking perfect. “It's diabolical!” she calls to the lover who is rising and moving toward the bathroom.
“June, wake up! Why the hell would they send one hundred musicians?” The lover's voice is exasperated now.
“Why wouldn't they?” [...]
“It's policemen,” the lover says resolutely.
“Musicians,” June says childishly.
“Policemen. Why in God's name do you think they would send musicians?” The lover is becoming intolerant. “What would musicians do?”
“Play,” June says. “Soothe the turmoil, calm the heart, they're children, they're wrecked. Music would make them happy.”
“Don't be naive. They're gunmen. They're sending police for the gunmen.”
“The gunmen are children. They need music. They could use some bicycles, some painters, some soccer balls, some trees. The place is pure post-industrial dreck. Who wouldn't want to murder somebody? A hundred trees, a hundred teachers, a hundred trips out of there, a hundred anything, not a hundred policemen. Why are you so fucking pessimistic?” »

— Dionne Brand, “100 musicians at Jane and Finch?”

Chapter 1: Introduction

« The question hurled at us is "Well what will replace the police?" They should ask instead, what are police replacing? Or as Chicago-based organizer Damon Williams put it, "When I see police, I see one hundred other jobs smashed into one thing with a gun." »

— Mariame Kaba, "Illusions of Safety"

What are the police replacing? This clarifying question, posed by abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba, acts as a compass for my thesis. I wish to explain why the labour of making a society is being systematically degraded and reduced to "one thing with a gun" and explore how it could be otherwise. My point of entry into this question is something called "mixed squads" (also known as "co-response teams"[1]): a recently popularized police practice in which officers train, collaborate, or patrol alongside non-police workers (often social workers or mental health professionals). In my experience, most people know little about mixed squads, and upon hearing this most basic definition their instinctive reactions vary greatly: some say that it sounds lovely, others think it is absurd, and yet others find it horrifying. In fact, these three reactions form a logical progression. Each tells us something significant about mixed squads: what they are intended to evoke, what their concrete reality is, and what they reveal about the society we inhabit.

Mixed squads were popularized across North America at a very particular moment in history. As the spring of 2020 turned to summer, a string of police killings (including of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor) brought huge masses to the streets to denounce the problem of police violence. More than 20 million people rose up in the United States, with millions more joining in cities across the planet, especially in the 'Western' world. It was one of the largest uprisings in the history of humanity and it was led by one statement, "Black lives matter", and one demand, "Defund, dismantle, and abolish the police" (Buchanan et al. 2020; Kaba and Ritchie 2022). The protesters were denouncing and demanding many things, which we will unpack in the following paragraphs. At the most fundamental level, they were saying that our societies have a violence problem. Only, they were not speaking of interpersonal violence or "crime", but of state violence.

State violence, as the term suggests, is simply violence exercised by the state. This concept is sometimes limited to the description of illegal or extralegal acts, but I use it to refer to every

[1] The term "co-response teams" is predominant in the academic literature, but "mixed squads" (in french: *équipes mixtes* or *escouades mixtes*) is more commonly used in the Quebec context.

form of state violence: from the most regular, like intimidation, street checks, arrests, or detainment, to the most spectacular, yet still common, like choking a man to death. In other words, I apply to the state the same standards that would be applied to anyone else. The World Health Organization (n.d.), for example, defines violence as:

> the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against ... another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.

From this perspective, almost every action of the police, prisons, and criminal courts is violence. This should not be surprising. The state, as Max Weber (2019) noted, has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. It has, therefore, an infrastructure to exercise this violence, including people to distribute it. Police officers, for example, are violence workers, and this is precisely what makes the police an influential state institution. As Micol Seigel (2018, 9) so insightfully explains, "the distinction between work that must be done by police and work that police could pass on to others [is] work that relies upon violence or the threat thereof. Violence work." This definition is clarifying in a number of ways. It implies that when the state tasks the police to address a given problem, it is choosing to address it through violence rather than through other means. Conversely, if we do not wish to use violence, it is rather bizarre to use the police, since the use of violence is their right, duty, and only expertise. (Theoretically, of course, a police officer could help an unhoused person find a shelter, but this could also be done by someone who does not have the state-sanctioned power to kill.) Seigel's definition brings a further clarification: every policy that increases interactions between police and citizens, puts more people in prisons, or makes prisons harsher, is an expansion of the use of violence by the state. As abolitionist scholar and organizer Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022a, 476) teaches us, "criminalization remains a complicated means to achieve a simple thing: to enclose people in situations where they are expected, and in many ways compelled, to sicken and so die."

State violence, then, is just like regular violence. It consists of people harming other people, and people giving out the orders. It covers the entire register of violence: bullying, humiliation, manipulation, trauma, beatings, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, torture, terror, deprivation of food, of light, of air, of healthcare, of hygiene, of love, of human touch, of mobility, of dignity, of

rights, of space, of time, of life—sometimes it is murder, more often it is a reduction of lifespan. The only difference with regular violence is that those who commit state violence do it as a job—we call them police officers, prison guards, or border agents—they are paid good money to do it, and they almost never face consequences (Burton 2023; Seigel 2018; Vitale 2017; Walia 2021). In some cases that is because the violence is done for good reasons, as violence sometimes is; in many other cases it is done for bad reasons and yet it remains protected by the law; and in yet other cases it is illegal but in practice still protected.[2] When we recognize state violence for what it is, we can face the question of its 'legitimacy' with open eyes: we see then that this legitimacy is not intrinsic, it is not unlimited, and it is largely unrelated to the law; it is a fundamental moral and political question, to be answered by the people, and yet it is largely subtracted from democratic control.[3] The protests of 2020 were a moment of popular reappropriation. For the millions of people who rose up, the problem had become simple enough: there is too much state violence, too much of it is illegitimate, and it has been going on for too long.

The people who took to the streets came from all sorts of backgrounds, but they fought for some specific social groups that are disproportionately targeted by state violence. Some groups—notably, those who are rich—are only targeted if they do something very bad, and otherwise are left alone. Other groups are targeted, heavily, every day, in every aspect of their lives, for all sorts of reasons—for doing something bad, for doing something good, or for doing nothing at all. These groups include those who are poor, those who are racialized, and especially the racialized poor (Alexander 2010; Maynard 2017; Rigouste 2021). As we will see, to speak of state violence means dealing with structures of power, difference, inequality, and dehumanization: these are the channels that determine where violence flows from, and who it flows towards. Conversely, state

[2] In exceptional cases, an agent of state violence may be sanctioned. As sociologist Fabien Jobard (2012) argues, the decision to sanction police officers depends not on the law, but on a combination of politically determined factors: the 'purity' of the victim, the 'purity' of the witnesses, the magnitude of the violence, and attendant circumstances. 'Purity' is influenced by prior contact with the penal system, along with categories like class, race, or geographical location. The evaluation of 'magnitude' and 'circumstances' depends on what forms of abuse are politically feasible in a given space and time. Notably, the very action of the state, the police, and the penal system can shape all of these factors, creating places and populations against whom state violence is normalized.

[3] These nuances are all implied in Weber's (2019, 135-136) original statement. The state's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence does not imply that state violence is always legitimate in practice, legal or not, nor does it mean that it can grow without limits. If state violence is dissimulated or naturalized, however, we are easily led astray. Moreover, though Weber's claim is often misunderstood as normative, it is actually descriptive: he observed that *if* a political organization obtains a legitimate monopoly on violence, *then* that organization is a 'state'. Vice versa, then, if the state's use of violence is no longer considered legitimate by the people, it ceases to be the state. This goes some way to explaining why movements that question the legitimacy of state violence are considered so threatening.

violence carves and maintains these channels, which is to say it enforces social hierarchies on behalf of some, and against others.

One of the great hierarchies of our social order is "the fatal coupling of power and difference signified by racism", where racism is, as Gilmore (2022e, 107) puts it "the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death". In other words racism, much like criminalization, drives the organization of "human sacrifice": very simply, it determines who deserves to suffer and die so that others might prosper and live (Gilmore 2022a, 477). Indeed, the same groups targeted by state violence are also disadvantaged at every level of our social system: they are discriminated against, they are mistreated, they are denied services, they are exploited and abused—it has been made hard for them to survive. These social groups have long been treated as if their lives do not matter, which is why the people who took to the streets needed to proclaim that "Black lives matter" (see Fanon 1963; Goldberg 2009; Kundnani 2020; Mills 2022; Wilderson et al. 2017).

The point of the democratic state, one would think, is to counteract these injustices. In the recent past, through vigorous social struggle, it has been made to do so: the welfare state is an example, but also civil rights protections, labour laws, progressive taxation, and much more. The state, however, is a contradictory thing: it is a site of struggle, and it can behave very differently depending on the preponderance of force. As many scholars have observed, since the 1970s power has re-concentrated into the hands of the dominant economic classes, and the trend of the state has been to provide less care and inflict more violence (Hall 2011; Navarro 2007). This shift was enabled by the fundamentally anti-sociological tendency to individualize and pathologize certain social issues, to evade structural explanations, and instead conceptualize them as 'crime' problems to be addressed through surveillance, control, repression, and punishment. In the introduction to *Policing the Crisis*, a prescient book that analyzed this shift as it happened, Hall et al. (1978, x) explained that,

> the problem is that the present conditions, which make the poor poor (or the criminal take to crime) are precisely the *same* conditions which make the rich rich (or allow the law-abiding to imagine that the social causes of crime will disappear if you punish individual criminals hard enough).

By "[abstracting] individual effects from the contradictory structures which produce them", however, those who profit from this arrangement can keep it chugging along. This approach has helped produce societies in which citizens have diminishing access to quality social services, housing, health, and education, while simultaneously being targeted by a growing apparatus of punishment (Fassin 2018; Wacquant 1999). This configuration of state power is what some scholars call the 'neoliberal-carceral state', and it is a key part of the context that led to the 2020 protests (Camp 2016). The neoliberal-carceral social order is defined by the dismantlement of social services and the emergence of policing and incarceration as "a catchall solution to social problems" (Gilmore 2022a, 478); this is precisely what protesters rebuked with their demand to *divest* from policing and *reinvest* in communities (see Chapter 3).

This demand emerged from a long tradition of resistance and reflection. Over the past five decades, a movement of people who call themselves 'abolitionists' (among them scholars, activists, and other citizens of good conscience) have noticed that governments spend more time and resources to hurt vulnerable social groups than to help them (Gilmore 2022b; Charbit et al. 2024; Purnell 2021; Ricordeau 2019, 2021). Abolitionists point out that this approach, which makes society worse for almost everyone, is not based on scientific research or any sort of evidence, but rather on base political interests steeped in racism, profiteering, and a yearning for domination (Christie 2016; Hall et al. 1978). As a result, public funds have been diverted towards the police and prisons, increasing their size, scope, and power at the expense of everything else, with a disastrous social impact and none of the benefits that many readers might imagine. As policing scholar David Bayley (1994, 1) tried to explain now thirty years ago:

> The police do not prevent crime. This is one of the best kept secrets of modern life. Experts know it, the police know it, but the public does not know it. Yet the police pretend that they are society's best defense against crime and continually argue that if they are given more resources, especially personnel, they will be able to protect communities against crime. This is a myth.

This is common knowledge among those who study, scientifically, the penal system. It is also common knowledge, by now, that policing is not only an inadequate solution to crime and safety, but also a major source of harm to marginalized communities and to society as a whole (Kaba and Ritchie 2022; Ricordeau 2023). In fact, a long tradition of scholarship has shown that the gravest

inequalities in our societies—between rich and poor, between white and non-white—are only possible because those with power can use violence, in the form of the police and the penal system, to maintain their domination over others (Neocleous 2014; Rodriguez 2021b; Wacquant 2009).[4] This is why the phrase "Black Lives Matter" came to be conjoined with the demand to "defund the police."

Abolitionists sought to transform the social order by building collective power and proposing common-sense solutions. They reasoned that if we stopped spending resources to hurt people, we could use these resources to help people instead; this would reduce harm in the immediate, reduce harm in the long-term, and make society more pleasant for everyone. The steps to follow were easy enough, and they were all in the slogan: divest from the police, and invest in anything else that improves the lives of vulnerable communities (Kaba and Ritchie 2022; Ricordeau 2023). As Dionne Brand's character says in the epigraph of this thesis, "A hundred trees, a hundred teachers, a hundred trips out of there, a hundred anything, not a hundred policemen." If we do it enough times, we might even end up with an egalitarian society where people are less likely to hurt and be hurt, and we can dismantle and abolish the monstrous and out-of-control institutions of the carceral state (Gilmore 2022b; see Chapter 3). In the summer of 2020, this vision reached the minds of millions and millions more, and they took to the streets to make themselves heard.

People in power, from the centre-left to the far-right, found this vision abhorrent, and they showered its proponents with both violence and ridicule. "Defund the police?" they scoffed between two rounds of tear gas, "No: fund the police!" (Democratic president Joe Biden[5], cited in: PBS News 2022). In Montreal, which experienced the largest anti-police protests in its history, liberal mayor Valerie Plante took a similar but more enlightened approach. She increased the police budget by a whopping 25% over the following five years, but she told protesters that she agreed with their demands. She ignored, as we will see, all of their demands, but she said she had a solution to many of the injustices they denounced: a little something called mixed squads (MTL Blog, November 4, 2021). As she told it, mixed squads would help solve two problems at once:

[4] A more generous (and optimistic) way to put this, perhaps applicable to some, is that because over-privileged people have the option to use violence to make their problems go away, they are not incentivized to listen to the solutions that would make society better for all, choosing instead to suffocate the protests and visions of under-privileged people.

[5] Between 2021 and 2022, Biden increased federal police funding by $800 million dollars, a 25% increase from the previous Trump budget (Semler 2023). He also encouraged local governments to use COVID-19 relief funds to fund the police (Valeeva et al. 2022).

they would reduce police violence and simultaneously address the needs of vulnerable populations, especially unhoused individuals, people experiencing mental health crises, and children going to underserved public schools. These groups, who she recognized were victims of systemic discrimination from the city and police, would all now receive support instead of repression. Mixed squads, in other words, promised to turn police work—violence work—into care work.

In the wake of 2020, mixed squads have become a trendy police reform across North America, even though no segment of the social movement included these teams in their demands (Ghelani et al. 2022). Nevertheless, in mainstream discourses, mixed squads are perceived as a cutting-edge progressive reform (see Chapter 4). Academically, they are the object of a modest scientific literature that is respectable but blinkered, and thus rarely critical (see Chapter 3: see also Ghelani et al. 2022; Marcus and Stergiopoulos 2022; Peterson and Densley 2018; Rose et al. 2013). The literature documents and evaluates mixed squads, but does not study them within other historical trends in policing; it therefore misses, as this thesis argues, a large part of the picture. Given the centrality of policing to our current conjuncture, and given the prominence of mixed squads in the contemporary landscape of police reform, they deserve a more rigorous treatment. This is what this thesis aims to provide, through a case study of Montreal—the city in which I live and work, which also happens to be unusually fond of mixed squads, having created no less than nine such teams over the past fifteen years, including five since 2020.

There is a specific history that leads to mixed squads in Montreal, both similar and different from that of other large North American cities. In the 1980s, after being criticized for their relentless abuse of Black people, the Montreal police adopted a 'community policing' model much like police forces the world over. The turn to community policing, as we will see, did not improve the institution's track record nor did it curtail the expansion of repressive activities against racialized communities. Moreover, as homelessness expanded in the 1980s and 90s due to major transformations of Western capitalism and the neoliberal restructuring of the state, new police tactics were implemented to maintain the attractiveness of urban space for tourism, consumption and investment. Like many urban police forces, the Montreal police adopted a "broken windows" approach to public order in the 1990s, which was operationalized in conjunction with its community policing approach (Heatherton and Camp 2016; Sylvestre 2010b). Under this paradigm, the central concern of police action became "social disorder", defined as the presence of marginalized populations in certain public spaces. This effectively criminalized the existence

and survival strategies of various social groups. The consequence was a surge in discriminatory police profiling, reflected through a massive increase of ticketing for "quality of life" bylaw infractions (e.g., loitering, sleeping on a bench, urinating in public). As in other cities, and as intended, it was overwhelmingly unhoused people, sex workers, Indigenous people, and racialized youths who were ticketed (Bellot et al. 2005; Bellot and Sylvestre 2017). In the 2000s, the tenuous legitimacy of this strategy was shaken by increasing public criticism and community resistance. It was in response to this sociopolitical upheaval that, in 2009, the Montreal police introduced its first mixed squad, followed by three more in subsequent years (CDPDJ 2009).

In the decade that followed, police violence did not abate on any front, leading to mass unrest in 2020 and the formulation of abolitionist demands for less police presence and power (Defund La Police 2020). This is when mixed squads became central to the city's plans for police reform, which is also when I first learned about these teams. To be transparent, I participated in the 2020 protests and in the organized campaigning that followed them. I had been learning about struggles against police violence for a few years, and I was convinced to participate. In November 2021, I joined Montreal's Defund the Police Coalition, which had brought together dozens of community organizations pushing for a new approach to public safety. It is precisely because of this theoretical and experiential knowledge that I was skeptical of mixed squads. Three knots of confusion stood out: First, even if these teams were an improvement, they fell very short of the demands of marginalized communities; why was this the best they could get? Second, if the point of these teams was to be fully supportive and non-violent, why involve the police? I knew that there were entire professions of people trained to provide care, and that these jobs suffered from chronic underfunding; would it not be better to give them all the money and then some, rather than give half of it to police officers without any relevant training? Third, I saw first-hand that the government was ignoring our long list of demands, and yet they claimed that this reform—which no one had asked for—would fix our problems. So, like a good scholar, I started a master's thesis to investigate the phenomenon.

Objectives

The first objective of this thesis, then, is to bring a critical and historical perspective to bear on mixed squads. This means evaluating their impact as it relates to their stated objectives, but also

their impact on society as a whole. It also means attempting to surmise whether there might be *unstated* objectives underpinning the turn to mixed squads. This analytical approach requires contextualizing mixed squads within the long history of police reform. As it turns out, this history is chock-full of ostensibly progressive reforms that make the police more violent, more abusive, and more powerful—what abolitionist scholars call 'reformist reforms'[6] (see Chapter 3; see also Akbar 2023; Critical Resistance 2020; Schenwar and Law 2021; Murakawa 2023).

'Community policing' is a major example, and a relevant one, seeing as mixed squads are a fairly overt extension of this influential police doctrine. The literature on community policing thus provides a useful framework through which to study mixed squads (CRCJ 1977; Rutland 2021; Williams 2014). It compels us to examine the relationship between a given police reform and all other police operations, and in turn contextualize this relationship within broader social, economic, and political developments. In other words, mixed squads are part of a whole; they are a small new police initiative among many other new and old initiatives; how does it all fit together? This line of inquiry is explored in Chapter 4, and it leads to the conclusion that mixed squads do nothing to positively change the broader operations of the police department, while having important negative effects on vulnerable people and on those who work to help them.

The first phase of my research thus revealed that mixed squads cause considerable harm to the populations they purport to help. Realizing this, I was forced to confront some complicated questions: Why is the state doing something harmful while claiming that it is helpful? If mixed squads are not helping solve the grave injustices of state violence, persecution, and discrimination that they are supposed to address, is anything else being done to solve them? If not, why is nothing being done? These questions compelled me to expand my object of analysis. Following the lead of critical scholars of policing like Stuart Hall and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, I adopted a "conjunctural" view of the problem (cf. Gilmore 2022b; Hall et al. 1978). I define this approach with some depth in the next section, but to put it very simply, a conjunctural analysis forces us to think about the kind of society (or 'social formation') that we currently live in, and examine how

[6] This concept comes from a tradition of political theory that complicates the notion of 'reform', showing that there are different kinds of reforms with diametrically opposed purposes: 'non-reformist reforms' are gradual changes that enable the radical transformation of a system, while 'reformist reforms' consist in changing a system (cosmetically or substantially) in order to entrench it (Gorz 1967). In the context of police reform, reformist reforms tend to expand the scope, power, and legitimacy of policing, while non-reformist reforms (or 'abolitionist reforms') reduce the number of people under penal control, reduce the reach of policing and prisons, create infrastructures and resources outside of the penal system, and strengthen capacities to address and prevent harm with a non-carceral approach (see Critical Resistance 2020).

mixed squads fit within this broader context (see Hall and Massey 2010). This line of inquiry is explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

Research Questions

Overall, I seek to answer four research questions:

1. What is the impact of mixed squads in relation to their stated objectives (i.e. reducing police violence and providing support to vulnerable groups)? What is the overall impact of mixed squads on the social ecosystem? Could there be some unstated objectives? (See Chapter 4.)
2. What social forces—political, ideological, economic, historical, institutional—explain the introduction of mixed squads in Montreal? (See Chapter 5.)
3. What has been the role of mixed squads in contrasting, refashioning, or extending some of the major tendencies of our conjuncture, including the retrenchment of social support and the expansion of state violence? (See Chapter 6.)

Taken together, these questions help me answer an overarching research question:

4. Do mixed squads encourage or preclude approaches to public safety—increasingly demanded by scholars, activists, and community groups—that are based on meeting the needs of all, rather than inflicting violence against the most vulnerable? (See Chapter 7 for a summary and consolidation of answers to this question provided in Chapters 4-6.)

Overall, this thesis argues that mixed squads are the opposite of what they claim to be, both in impact and in intent. As a police practice, their function is not to reduce police violence, but rather to extend it while shielding it from critique. As a ‘social service', their function is not to promote existing ecosystems of support, but rather to undermine and replace them with a carceral imitation. And as a piece of public policy, their function is to neutralize growing political opposition to the neoliberal-carceral social order, entrenching a form of the state that concentrates power and resources into the hands of a ruling elite and their allies, whose strategy for domination is based

on the endless retrenchment of social welfare and expansion of social warfare against marginalized groups. At all levels, mixed squads operate through a series of contradictions, claiming to pursue the very objectives that they exist to preclude. By focusing on these contradictions, this thesis sheds light on the common-sense propositions advanced by grassroots organizations to achieve collective safety, justice, and well-being—and on the strenuous efforts employed by the state to annihilate those visions.

Overview of the thesis

I have so far introduced the key social concerns, historical tendencies, and intellectual traditions that guide my thesis. In Chapter 2, I describe my research strategy. I start with an overview of Gramscian concepts (e.g., social formation, conjuncture, hegemony, and historic bloc) and other key notions of social theory (e.g., ruling class, racialized class war) which constitute the analytical framework of my research. I then discuss the methodological implications of this framework, before describing the methods that I employed to answer my research questions.

I follow with my literature review, Chapter 3, which explores the four major themes of my thesis. First, I review the literature on mixed squads, the object that sits at the centre of this thesis. Second, I review the literature on community policing, which provides a critical framework for Chapter 4. Third, I describe the broader sociohistorical context within which I situate my study of mixed squads: the construction of a new social formation from the 1970s to today that I call the 'neoliberal-carceral conjuncture',[7] and which is central to Chapters 5 and 6. Fourth, I review the literature on penal abolition, a social movement and intellectual tradition that frames both the history of mixed squads and all of my research.

In Chapter 4, I examine the impacts of mixed squads on the public discourse, on unhoused people, and on the community sector in Montreal. Drawing on a media review, a document analysis, and on interviews completed as part of an affiliated project, I argue that mixed squads are a public relations scheme that allows unreformed police practices to persist undisturbed, a strategy to expand police surveillance and repression, and a form of domestic counter-insurgency, which serves to neutralize political resistance to police power.

[7] I define this concept in more depth further on in the thesis. For now, it can be briefly understood as a social formation characterized by a shrinking social state and an expanding carceral state.

In Chapter 5, I examine the conditions of existence of mixed squads. Taking a historical view, I describe how neoliberalism and the expansion of policing transformed Quebec and Montreal over the past four decades. By analyzing state-orchestrated campaigns of racial and social persecution in Montreal, and the state's refusal to curtail them despite growing political opposition, I argue that our social order is politically, economically, and ideologically organized around the dehumanization of certain groups and the unrestrained use of state violence against them.

In Chapter 6, I argue that mixed squads emerged from the protracted struggle between those who benefit from this social arrangement and those who suffer from it. Through an extensive archival analysis, I trace the political history of mixed squads in Montreal, showing that this reform is a political strategy of the state, whose function is to erase alternative social visions, mystify reality, and entrench the neoliberal-carceral order.

Finally, Chapter 7, the conclusion, synthesizes the findings of this thesis, providing a concise description of the function and impact of mixed squads, along with recommendations to the state, to the autonomous community sector, and to abolitionist organizers and researchers. I close with a reflection on where mixed squads have led us, and the stark choices that now await us.

Contributions

This thesis makes contributions to the literature on mixed squads (or 'co-response teams'), a popular yet under-studied police reform. While prior research has documented and evaluated some aspects of mixed squads, this thesis provides the first analysis of how mixed squads articulate with repressive police campaigns and how they impact pre-existing ecosystems of community care. It also provides a rare evaluation of the impact of mixed squads on unhoused people (Chapter 4).

Moreover, this thesis offers the first critical analysis of the functions of mixed squads, by looking beyond their formal mission and developing a novel conceptualization of mixed squads as political strategy. This includes an examination of how they are used by police and politicians to influence media discourses, to mislead the public, to limit the possibilities of police reform, to reshape the notion of 'community', to introduce policing in new spaces, to legitimize expansions of police repression, and to disrupt resistance to state violence (Chapters 4 and 6).

This is also the first research project that traces the historical development of mixed squads, and analyses it in relation to broader transformations of the police, the state, and the social formation. For example, this thesis elucidates the strategic continuities between community policing and mixed squads (Chapter 4). Most importantly, this thesis examines mixed squads as a product of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture and as a strategy to secure its continued development (Chapters 5 and 6).

In doing so, this thesis makes additional contributions to the literature on the neoliberal-carceral turn (or 'punitive turn') of Western social formations. To begin with, it develops a novel account of the neoliberal-carceral turn in Canada (Chapter 5). More to the point, the political analysis of mixed squads adds to the existing knowledge on the reformist strategies of the carceral state, describing their evolution in the face of a strong abolitionist movement (Chapters 5 and 6).

The most important contributions of this thesis, I hope, will be to the abolitionist movement and to anti-carceral struggles more generally. In Montreal, this research has helped the autonomous community sector organize itself against the encroachment of mixed squads. Key findings from Chapter 4, in particular, were communicated in a public-facing report in September 2023 (see Rutland et al. 2023). This report was published in partnership with the RAPSIM, an advocacy group representing over a hundred organizations that support unhoused people in Montreal, who has since taken a stance for the abolition of mixed squads (see RAPSIM 2023). This report also influenced the organizers of Montreal's annual march against police brutality, who denounced mixed squads in their 2024 call to action (see Collectif 15 mars 2024). Finally, this research has influenced my work with Montreal's Defund the Police Coalition, providing insights into the political terrain and opening new lines of action. These insights will hopefully be disseminated to the rest of Canada, the United States, and beyond.

Chapter 2: Research Strategy

1. Analytical Framework

Any sociological inquiry must start from an understanding of what society is and how it functions: in other words, a social theory. This thesis is heavily indebted to the work of the Italian social theorist, revolutionary communist, and incarcerated intellectual Antonio Gramsci. It is perhaps even more indebted to Stuart Hall's exegesis of Gramsci and, as we will see, to his Gramscian analysis of policing. The Gramscian word for society is "social formation", a concept that in itself provides a theory of social relations, of historical change, and of power. As Stuart Hall (1986a, 12) explains, this term is used to "invoke the idea that societies are necessarily complexly structured totalities, with different levels of articulation (the economic, the political, the ideological instances) in different combinations; each combination giving rise to a different configuration of social forces and hence to a different type of social development." In other words, the social formation consists of different components (e.g., individuals, social groups, institutions, civil society, the state, the apparatus of production), arranged in a specific configuration, that are related to each other at various levels (e.g., through relations of production, political relations, systems of meaning and identification). This definition echoes Marx's notion of the 'structure' (i.e. the mode of production and the social relations it requires) and 'superstructure' (i.e. culture, ideology, political institutions, etc.), but it eschews this binary distinction in favour of a "structure-superstructure complex" (Hall 1980, 332; another name for "social formation") where the focus is explicitly on the *relation* between the different levels and components of the social formation.

Indeed, for Gramsci, to properly understand the social formation we have to understand how different levels of articulation influence each other: how do economic relations influence political relations, and vice versa, and how do ideological relations influence the rest? Importantly, no level is reducible to another or a simple expression of another (meaning that, for example, the mode of production does not unilaterally determine the dominant ideology or political system). Rather, the whole structure is "over-determined" (Hall 1980, 325). This means that although the levels are articulated with each other in order to create a semi-coherent system, all levels also contain their internal logics, and there are constant breaks and contradictions both between and within the levels. The structure is therefore in an "unstable balance" (Hall 1986a, 14), always

subject to change, none the least because of organic and often unexpected transformations in the economy, the environment, the culture, etc. The major driver of change, however, is the struggle between antagonistic social forces who try to preserve or change their position within the structure and, more fundamentally, to rearticulate the social formation altogether.

This is the struggle for what Gramsci calls "hegemony", which Hall (1980, 331-2) defines as:

> that state of 'total social authority' which, at certain specific conjunctures, a specific class alliance wins, by a combination of 'coercion' or 'consent', over the whole social formation, and its dominated classes: not only at the economic level, but also at the level of political and ideological leadership, in civil, intellectual and moral life as well as at the material level: and over the terrain of civil society as well as in and through the condensed relations of the State. … Hegemony is a state of play in the class struggle which has, therefore, to be continually worked on and reconstructed in order to be maintained, and which remains a contradictory conjuncture.

This definition provides multiple insights. First, it emphasizes that hegemony must be secured over all of the structures and dynamics of the social formation. Therefore, the proper terrain of struggle (and of study) encompasses economy, politics, and ideology, and it must engage with the state and civil society as much as the mode of production. Second, this definition brings our attention to the question of how coercion is used for political ends, of how consent is produced, and of how—as this thesis extensively discusses—coercion and consent combine. Third, it is crucial to understand that hegemony is not achieved by a homogeneous "ruling class" but by a "specific class alliance", or "historic bloc", that associates elements of the "dominant economic class" with fractions of the "dominated classes, who have been won over by specific concessions and compromises and who form part of the social constellation but in a subordinated role" (Hall 1986a, 15). These concessions, which can be economic, political, and ideological, are the 'cement' that "secures a whole social formation under a dominant class" (Hall 1980, 342). This perspective retains the notion that there are dominant and dominated classes, while being able to examine the fractures, contradictions, and articulations within and between these classes. The concept of a ruling class alliance founded on specific concessions is particularly illuminating for analyses of the political process. As Hall explains: "when you look at the theatre of politics, classes don't appear in their

already-united form. Unifying them with other social forces into a ‘historical bloc’ is part of what politics does" (Hall and Massey 2010, 63).

Finally, Hall's definition of hegemony implies that our analysis must always be historically situated. A given historic bloc rules over a historically-specific configuration of the social formation, which is what Hall calls a "conjuncture".[8] As he explains,

> A conjuncture is a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape. A conjuncture can be long or short: it’s not defined by time or by simple things like a change of regime—though these have their own effects. As I see it, history moves from one conjuncture to another rather than being an evolutionary flow. And what drives it forward is usually a crisis, when the contradictions that are always at play in any historical moment are condensed ... Crises are moments of potential change, but the nature of their resolution is not given. (Hall and Massey 2010, 57)

Conjuncture and crisis, then, are the two modalities of historical change. They are always intertwined: it is common for different kinds of crises to arise in different locations of the conjuncture, for related or unrelated reasons; but when multiple crises accumulate and "condense" in the same moment, and when they articulate with each other such that "the social formation can no longer be reproduced on the basis of the pre-existing system of social relations" (Hall and Schwarz 1988, 98), then we can speak of a "conjunctural crisis" (Hall and Massey 2010, 59). Such a crisis may give way to a new conjuncture, whose shape will depend on what antagonistic social forces can make of the situation.

Before moving on, I need to address some of the presuppositions and implications of this theoretical framework. Gramscian theory, and thus my research, is firmly rooted in the Marxist tradition.[9] With this comes a certain understanding of how society—or at least democratic capitalist society—functions, which is substantially different from prevailing liberal perspectives.

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[8] Gramsci uses this term for a different purpose, but I follow Hall's lead in this thesis.

[9] Gramsci's immense contribution to Marxism, as Stuart Hall (1986, 5) explains, was to sophisticate Marxist theory by developing a new series of concepts to analyze capitalist democracies at the most concrete level. This was done out of necessity: the aim of Gramsci's writing was to "[inform] political practice", providing a precise understanding of the political terrain that could guide political action.

My research starts from the fundamental recognition that our society, much like prior and other illiberal societies, is rooted in asymmetrical power relations between different social groups, or 'classes'. Some social groups have an outsize control over the economic process, which means they have an outsize control over how society is made: these are the 'dominant economic classes' or 'ruling classes'. By virtue of their economic influence, their access to resources, their class relations, their control over the media, or their high-ranking positions in state and non-state institutions, these social groups also have an outsize control over state power, which means they can directly influence what the state does and to whom, in a way that the majority of the population simply does not. In other words, state power is not democratically controlled, because the preponderance of political power resides outside of the formal democratic process (e.g., electing representatives). This is not to say that the formal democratic process is insignificant: the existence of democratic processes and institutions (e.g., elections, civil rights and liberties, formal equality under the law, labour protections, etc.) is a historical victory of the dominated classes, and it curtails ruling class power in significant ways. The power asymmetry, however, remains enormous.

It follows that, much as in other societies and historical epochs, the ruling classes use their power to advance their interests at the expense of whoever they can afford to sacrifice, while regular people strive for collective liberation or, just as often, strive to secure their own power and prosperity at the expense of others. This elucidates both the concept of 'class struggle', wherein the dominated classes try to impose their collective interests, and of 'class alliance' (or 'historic bloc'), wherein the dominant economic classes perceive the need to form an alliance with fractions of the dominated classes, who in turn perceive an opportunity to ameliorate their condition at the expense of others.

Throughout this thesis, I also use the terms 'class war' and 'racialized class war'. These terms have come to me from a radical tradition of struggle and scholarship, especially concerned with the carceral state, and hence highly attuned to the raw violence that sustains our social order. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022a, 479), for example, claims that "If, as Stuart Hall argued back in the late 1970s, race is the modality through which class is lived, then mass incarceration is class war". Similarly, in his groundbreaking study of the Attica prison revolt, Orisanmi Burton (2023, 55) argues that imprisoned revolutionaries came to understand prisons as "zones of invisibilized race war, class war, and genocide that were constitutive of the US social formation." By 'war', then, I

refer to a specific modality of political struggle, in which one's opponent is treated as an enemy to be destroyed. I do not use the term metaphorically: when I say war, I am describing ruling elites using violence, in its most brutal and eternal forms, to crush those who stand in the way of their wills and desires.[10]

This talk of war and violence may be surprising when viewed from the perspective of a hegemonic liberalism that conceives of itself as a "politics of peace", especially in the domestic space, where 'coercion' is assumed to be marginal compared to 'consent' (Neocleous 2014).[11] A critical study of penal power, however, or the simple experience of it, cannot sustain this perspective. In *War Power, Police Power*, Mark Neocleous (2014, 7) cuts through the fog of liberal political theory, arguing that "liberalism has from its inception been a political philosophy of war, has been fully conscious of this and, as a consequence, has sought to bury this fact under various banners: 'peace and security'; 'law and order'; 'police'." Indeed, the peculiarity of our historical period is that ruling class domination must evolve within the flexible confines of liberal democracy, which impose the necessity to secure some sort of popular consent. In time, these conditions have encouraged the production of a stunning array of strategies to conceal and mystify state violence, and concurrently to normalize and legitimize it. As we will see, this dual politic of legitimation and deceit is a recurrent theme of mixed squads.

Be that as it may, you do not have to take my word for it just yet. I arrived at this understanding not just from reading the literature, but by conducting my research. In my archival fieldwork, I observed some upsetting and confusing realities, and this theoretical framework provided explanations that other scholarly traditions could not reach. It then became clear, bitterly so, that our society is not engaged in a collective project towards democracy, justice, and human rights. Some are fighting for such a world; many are fighting against it. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022a) describes this as the struggle between "carceral geographies" and "abolition geographies": two antagonistic forms of place-making that bring people, land, and resources together in either

[10] In this thesis, the term 'war' is reserved to the actions of the ruling classes, because I did not quite observe a "counter-war" being waged in my fieldsite, at least not rising to the level of counter-violence (Burton 2023, 4).

[11] This assumption is widespread in the social sciences. For example, Fabien Jobard (2012, para. 34) remarks that "with a clever sleight of hand, Bourdieu's lectures on the state evaporate the police and, more broadly, coercion from the definition of the state." Similarly, Pierre Favre (2009, 1237) argues that "The social sciences are often reluctant to admit that the existence of police forces—in the broadest sense of the term—is a determining factor in the perpetuation of social order, and even more so in its production. Sociologists argue that the internalization of order is now a given in advanced societies, and that the use of force is no longer necessary."

oppressive or liberatory ways. This thesis, then, tries to understand why mixed squads came to be at the forefront of the protracted struggle between carcerality and abolition.

2. Methodology

The theoretical framework outlined above calls for a specific analytical approach, called "conjunctural analysis" (Hall and Massey 2010, 57). Put simply, this approach helps us understand social change—or lack thereof—through a rigorous and historically situated analysis of the conjuncture. We may ask: What are the fundamental components and relations of the social formation? Who composes the ruling bloc? What is the "cement" that holds it together and which, if weakened, could tear it apart? What are the relations between the economic, political, and ideological instances? Where are the tensions, ruptures, and contradictions? What social forces are working to deepen the contradictions? To what end? How does the ruling class organize itself to resolve them? Are we in a period of hegemony or of crisis? What does that entail? How are old systems, ideologies, and social arrangements being carried into the new conjuncture, and why?

This thesis develops a conjunctural analysis of mixed squads in Montreal. I follow in the tradition of Stuart Hall and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who adopt a conjunctural approach to explain how transformations in the penal system are related to broader social, political, economic, and cultural transformations. Conjunctural analysis has important methodological implications, the first one being that we must expand our object of analysis: it is no longer just the object itself, but everything that it connects to, resonates with, and embodies that must be analyzed. In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall et al. (1978, viii-ix) encourage us to think of our object "not as a fact but as a relation": "If you look at this relation in terms of the social forces and the contradictions accumulating within it … or in terms of the wider historical context in which it occurs (i.e. in terms of a historical conjuncture, not just a date on the calendar), the whole terrain of the problem changes in character." By expanding our object of analysis, then, we are also transforming it: we are not just trying to understand what mixed squads are and do, but also why they exist and why now—which eventually returns us, with a different eye, to the question of what they are and what they do.

In short, we must understand how our object of analysis fits within the broader dynamics of the conjuncture. This means that we must study not only mixed squads, but also the entire

conjuncture, and the relations between the two. Accordingly, large parts of my research are concerned not only with mixed squads, but also the broader (ideological, economic, political) structure of the social formation in which they are embedded.

This sort of analysis is methodologically challenging. It does not have any limits in terms of methods; anything can be useful to reconstruct the "terrain of the problem". It requires engaging with extremely varied types of data (e.g., statistics, documents, media coverage, ethnographic observations, scholarship from various disciplines), coming from diverse and conflicting sources (e.g., state institutions, politicians, experts, community groups, grassroots organizers, activists—none of them monolithic), and to read each source in multiple ways (e.g., at face value, reading between the lines, focusing on absences) to obtain different information (e.g., hard facts, discourses, contradictions, theoretical insights). Additionally, all of this data must be read, interpreted, and analyzed with a strong theoretical understanding of the history and dynamics of the conjuncture.

I find that Adele Clarke's work on "situational analysis" provides useful tools to address these challenges (Clarke 2005). Not unlike Gramsci and Hall, Clarke encourages us to conceptualize our object as a "situation". She then shows us how to construct "maps" of the situation in three senses:

> 1. Situational maps as strategies for articulating the elements in the situation and examining relations among them; 2. Social worlds/arenas maps as cartographies of collective commitments, relations, and sites of action; 3. Positional maps as simplification strategies for plotting positions articulated and not articulated in discourses. (Clarke 2005, 86)

These maps can integrate any sort of data, and by mapping the data, Clarke (2005, xxii) explains, "the analyst constructs the situation of inquiry empirically. The situation *per se* becomes the ultimate unit of analysis, and understanding its elements and their relations is the primary goal." Indeed, these maps help us visualize the various relations between our object and the conjuncture, at different levels of analysis. This cartographic approach helped me understand the daily operations of mixed squads, but also identify all of the actors and interests involved in their historical development, and explore the ideological assumptions that make mixed squads possible,

the flows of money and discourse that they enable, the various crises that they exist to resolve, and the political visions that they bring into being. Situational maps also facilitated the necessary back and forth between mixed squads and conjuncture. I could start from mixed squads, move outwards along their relationships, and discover new lines of inquiry into the conjuncture; conversely, I could focus on the conjuncture and discover major tendencies that enriched the cartography of mixed squads.

A conjunctural approach also compels us to take a historical view. The necessity for historical specificity is one of the most important arguments of Gramscian theory: it is what saves us from dogmatic abstractions (Hall 1986a). This means understanding mixed squads not as a fixed object but as an object that changes over time. It entails studying their entire lifespan, but also the history that precedes their existence—their "pre-history" (Hall et al. 1978, ix). To this end, constructing a timeline of events is a simple but powerful tool. A static view of the object reveals a complex and sometimes incoherent machine. By stretching the object over time, the logic of its parts becomes apparent: the context into which something emerges tells us something about its function; this is true of both the object as a whole and its constituent components. It is hard to overstate how much I learned about mixed squads in Montreal by simply tracing their development and placing it in historical context. The evolving relation between mixed squads and their 'surroundings' is one of the major themes of this thesis.

This approach is genealogical, in the sense that it is a "history of the present" (Clarke 2005, 262). As Adele Clarke summarizes,

> the major means of avoiding the present as "a necessary outcome" is problematizing how we have arrived at the present moment, seeking out those elements that each and all had to be in place for this present to "happen," and "how things could have been otherwise". (Ibid., 262-3)

Or, in Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2022c, 204) formulation, we need to understand that the history of the present is "logical, although by no means necessary": "already-existing social, political, and economic relations constitute the conditions of possibility (but not inevitability) for ways to solve major problems."

A related insight from Gramscian theory is the importance of "periodization" (Hall 1986a, 14). This is based on the view that historical change is more discrete than linear: successive periods

of relative stability connected by periods of rapid change, usually conceptualized as "crises".[12] Crises are moments where the contradictions of the social formation are "condensed" (Hall and Massey 2010), where the "pre-existing system of social relations" is inadequate (Hall and Schwarz 1988, 96), and "the weakening of old social, political, and cultural forms opens the way to a wide variety of new alliances, institutions, movements, all of which are coaxed, but not directed, by already existing practices" (Gilmore 2007, 55). In other words, crises are moments of articulation and disarticulation of ideas, practices, and arrangements in the social formation: they are moments of intensified struggle and innovation, with no predetermined outcome. These insights led me to divide my analysis into three periods: the prehistory (1979-2009), early history (2009-2020), and contemporary history (2020-2025) of mixed squads, each node representing a moment of profound turmoil in the social formation and/or in the life of mixed squads. The purpose of this thesis was to understand what it means that mixed squads, specifically, emerged from this turmoil, and not something else.

An important methodological insight of conjunctural analysis, then, is that narrowness is a sure path to misunderstanding. One could easily write two hundred pages about the minutiae of mixed squads and in so doing miss almost everything that makes this phenomenon meaningful. The reverse is also likely: an overly distant perspective will tend to mash mixed squads along with other reformist reforms, smoothing out their particularities, and thus failing to realize that mixed squads teach us something specific about the world. This tension is well summarized by Edward Said in the introduction to *Orientalism* (1979, 9): "How then to recognize individuality and to reconcile it with its intelligent, and by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context?" Personally, I was helped by the practical orientation of my thesis: I started studying mixed squads because they were an actual reform being used in real time to deny other demands; they were an active police strategy being implemented to target people I cared for; hence the need to understand what was happening in the most rigorous sense, if only to resist it adequately.

Any research project is driven by a purpose. In the simplest terms, the purpose of research is to try to understand something better. But curiosity is always directed and framed by an ethic,

[12] As Lenin put it: 'decades where nothing happens, and weeks where decades happen'.

and an ethic, as Kierkegaard teaches us, is a "leap of faith", an axiom that we choose to stand by, whether we are conscious of it or not (Schacht 1973). A common but unspoken axiom seems to be "some lives are worth less than others", which is why a small team of police officers and social workers can be studied as an acceptable—even exciting—solution to the state-sanctioned abandonment and persecution of marginalized people. A different axiom, that every person deserves a life of dignity, opens up a different question: why does the state-sanctioned persecution of certain social groups lead to no more than a minor policy tweak? In other words, the researcher's ethical framework determines what part of the situation is visible, interesting, meaningful, and worth studying.

My research was driven by an abolitionist ethic. For me, abolition denaturalizes the law, crime, and state violence, and thus rehumanizes the world (see Chapter 3). It starts from the axiom that our collective safety and liberation does not—and cannot—come from the oppression of some dehumanized others. This opens a horizon of possibility, and also poses a challenge: how do we make a world where no one is disposable? Abolitionist research finds hope, purpose, and direction in the people who think together and act together to bring this world to life. In other words, abolitionist research is *engaged* research, always rooted in—and accountable to—active communities of practice and struggle. Struggle and research are distinct activities, but they can build on each other: the former produces knowledge and questions, which the latter can help elucidate—and vice versa. The two are bound by a relationship of sheer necessity that, if driven by rigour rather than dogmatism, can greatly enhance the quality of scholarly work.

This thesis, for example, was informed by my participation in Montreal's Defund the Police Coalition. Mixed squads demanded attention because they appeared as a sudden obstacle to our movement. We soon noticed that mixed squads also posed a problem to the practice of community work, and as shared problems tend to do, this one brought us all together: activists, practitioners, and scholars, in many combinations. As I designed my research project, I followed Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2022f) advice for "scholar-activists in the mix". Good research, Gilmore argues, offers clarity about the terrain of struggle and "produces an opening on the ground, through which creative possibility can move" (101). To do so, however, the researcher must pose questions with "stretch, resonance, and resilience" (97). I have already described how my inquiry stretches "further than the immediate object without bypassing its particularity" (97). By reaching for the conjunctural roots of mixed squads, I have also tried to make my questions resilient to changing

circumstances: this research should help abolitionist organizers understand the broader reformist strategies of the carceral state, regardless of whether mixed squads disappear, as they surely and hopefully will. Finally, I hope that this thesis can denaturalize entrenched processes of dehumanization by "producing a hum that ... elicits responses that do not necessarily adhere to already-existing architectures of sense-making" (98). In my method of writing and analysis, I have tried to push these architectures to the point of resonance—an uncontrollable state of vibration that, when sustained, leads to mechanical rupture.

3. Methods

This thesis draws from both francophone and anglophone sources of data, including interviews, media articles, scholarly literature, reports, and other documents. For clarity, all francophone quotations have been translated to English. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine. Below, I introduce the research questions underpinning the work of this thesis and then describe the research methods used to answer each question.

RQ1: What is the impact of mixed squads in relation to their stated objectives (i.e. reducing police violence and providing support to vulnerable groups)? What is the overall impact of mixed squads on the social ecosystem? Could there be some unstated objectives?

The first research question this thesis aims to settle concerns the concrete impact of mixed squads. These teams exist in the real world, they are composed of police and non-police officers, they respond to calls, they walk the streets, and they interact with other human beings: unhoused people, children, community workers, journalists. Mixed squads have certain stated objectives, and they have a series of impacts in practice. What are they?

This question is largely addressed in Chapter 4, based on two sources of data. First, I had the opportunity to analyze interviews with 38 Montreal-based community workers, representing 17 different organizations. These interviews were conducted by my colleagues before I started working on my thesis, by collaborating with the *Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal* (RAPSIM, "Support Network for Excluded and Unhoused People in Montreal"). The

RAPSIM is an advocacy organization that represents the interests of over 100 community organizations that provide services to unhoused people in Montreal: this includes shelters, street outreach workers, safe consumption sites, etc. Together, they constitute (almost) the entire autonomous non-profit sector focused on homelessness in Montreal. The RAPSIM has been one of the most vocal and influential critics of the repressive management of homelessness for over 20 years. As we will see, when mixed squads were introduced in 2009, the RAPSIM initially saw this as a (small) step in the right direction. By the end of the 2010s, however, they had become highly skeptical of this police reform, and they mandated a research team (that I would soon join) to investigate their impact.

All of our interviewees worked for member organizations of the RAPSIM. They worked with unhoused people in two capacities: 24 participants (representing 10 organizations) were street outreach workers, while 14 participants (representing 8 organizations) worked in shelters. The participants worked in different areas of the city and they worked with diverse populations. The participants were also diverse with respect to the following sociodemographic factors: race, gender, age, language, and years of experience. The interviews were conducted in both French and English, depending on the preferred language of the participants. Some interviews were conducted with individual community workers, while others were conducted with groups of 2 to 8 individuals. Interviews ranged between 30 and 90 minutes in length. Almost all were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Due to concerns of confidentiality and fear of repercussions, only the most general information about the participants is provided. As such, all information that could identify a community worker, an organization, or a user have been removed from my presentation of these data.

It is important to note that the participants' perspectives were necessarily partial, for multiple reasons: most of them had only observed one or two squads; their observations were limited to the previous 3 to 5 years (while the oldest squad is 15 years old); and they were limited to the neighbourhood they worked in and the populations they worked with. It is also important to note that the community workers we interviewed do not participate in mixed squads. Indeed, for professional, ethical, and philosophical reasons that we will discuss in Chapter 4, RAPSIM's 100+ member organizations refuse to participate in these teams. Yet, their work leads them to observe and interact with mixed squads on a regular basis, seeing as they work with the same populations and in the same areas. Their experience thus helps us to understand how mixed squads operate on

the ground, while also allowing us to examine the differences between their interventions and the ostensibly supportive or therapeutic interventions of mixed squads. Additionally, insofar as mixed squads claim to provide services to unhoused people, the perspective of community workers—whose lifelong work is to provide services to unhoused people—seems to us primordial.

The interviews were collected by Dr. Ted Rutland, along with Cérine Madi and Chloe Bullen, a graduate and undergraduate student respectively. I then joined the project as a research assistant, to help analyze the interviews and write a report.[13] I conducted an exegesis of the interviews in collaboration with Ted Rutland (my co-supervisor) and Karl Beaulieu, using a tagging strategy to identify emergent themes in these testimonies. Our main themes included: "differences between mixed squads and community work" (different interests, objectives, timescales, evaluation criteria); "mixed squads disturb, transform, or replace community work"; "mixed squads increase police presence, criminalization, harm, vulnerability, and perpetuate cycles of abuse". The three of us then collectively wrote a public-facing report summarizing our findings, titled “Innovation or extension of repression? The perspective of community workers on mixed squads in Montreal” (Rutland et al. 2023). To my knowledge, this is the only publication that investigates the impact of mixed squads on the pre-existing ecosystem of community services. It is also a rare systemic analysis of the impact of mixed squads on unhoused people (albeit from the perspective of community workers), and the only one that exists in Montreal.

This report formed part of the empirical basis for Chapter 4. The research for this chapter consisted in a critical reinterpretation of the report in the light of the literature on community policing (see Chapter 3), and in particular of two of its common tendencies: extending the repressive capacities of the police, and developing strategies of counter-insurgency. In this phase of the research, we complemented the interviews with new sources of data. To obtain additional insights into the operations of mixed squads and their relation to the broader operations of the Montreal police, we analyzed publicly available documents on the squads and submitted access to information requests to the police and the city.

[13] Ethics approval for research with human subjects was obtained by Dr. Ted Rutland from the Concordia University Office of Research (certificate #300048560). All interview subjects signed a consent form, which committed to keeping their names and organizations anonymous. The ethics certificate covered my work as a research assistant.

I also conducted an extensive media review, including every article (n = 175) that mentioned mixed squads in Montreal's eight biggest (francophone and anglophone) media outlets from 2010 to 2023 (2010 is the first time, to my knowledge, that a mixed squad was mentioned in local media). This direction was suggested by a tendency identified in the literature on community policing, which is that such programs are often used as public relations projects.

I read the articles chronologically, taking notes as I went, to document discursive patterns, key insights, and important events.[14] (Doing so, I gradually constructed a timeline of the development of mixed squads; see below.) I developed an extensive tagging system to identify motifs in the media coverage (see Appendix A). I conducted a manual sentiment analysis (van Atteveldt et al. 2021) of each article, documenting the overall appraisal of mixed squads (as positive, negative, positive and negative, or simply descriptive). I also documented which mixed squads were mentioned in each article, and which voices were included (e.g., police officers, non-police members of mixed squads, other community workers, populations targeted by mixed squads, populations not targeted, political officials, etc.).

I then identified a number of narratives, arguments, and strategies that appeared throughout the articles. Overall, I identified six major discursive categories (each of which contained between 3 and 15 sub-themes): 1) "Hegemonic work", in which mixed squads were used as explicit political interventions in response to critiques of the police; 2) "Transforming the police", in which mixed squads were portrayed as ushering a different kind of police work; 3) "Appropriating community work", in which mixed squads were portrayed as equivalent to, or a replacement of, community work; 4) "Solving social problems", in which mixed squads were portrayed as solutions to a wide range of social problems (not including police problems, included in the first category); 5) "Broader politics", in which mixed squads were used for electoral strategy or for discussions of urban renewal and social "cohabitation"; and 6) "Demistifying", which includes both intentional and unintentional discourses that undermine the dominant narrative on mixed squads.

The tags themselves were the qualitative 'prize' of this analysis, illuminating the wide variety of "social forces and contradictions accumulating" within mixed squads (Hall et al. 1978, viii). They represent a sort of organic proof of the need for a conjunctural or situational approach. They opened dozens of lines of inquiry that informed the later chapters of my thesis. The

[14] Because new tags emerged from my chronological reading, I sometimes needed to do a second pass over previous articles. In most cases, however, this was unnecessary: a tag was new precisely because it had not been needed before.

quantitative analysis was also important for periodizing my study, giving empirical substance to my suspicion that the crisis of 2020 marked a fundamental shift in the use of mixed squads. Additionally, the content of the articles provided important insights into the operations of mixed squads, often revealing aspects of their work that are absent from other sources. Finally, the comparison of discourse (from the media coverage) to empirical reality (from other sources of data) revealed the extent of the work performed by various actors to misrepresent the impact and objectives of mixed squads, as well as the work performed by (and through) mixed squads to misrepresent the reality of police work.

I was also able to quantify my tags. I had collected my notes and tags in a word document, taking care to maintain a consistent formatting. I then asked a colleague to help me translate my notes into a CSV document, by writing a piece of code. Then, by running simple operations on this data, I conducted a quantitative analysis of news coverage, based on my tags. For example, I examined temporal variations in the number of articles, the relative weight of different sentiments and voices, and the evolution of different discourses over time (see Figures 1-5).

It may seem strange to evaluate the impact of mixed squads without interviewing those who actually participate in them. This decision was made for a few reasons. First, it is very difficult to obtain interviews with the police or their affiliates, especially for researchers known for having critical perspectives. Moreover, the perspectives of the participants of mixed squads are already quite well known. The news coverage of the squads consistently takes the perspective of their police and non-police members. Interviews with the former are the main source of public information about the squads—including how they operate and the benefits they ostensibly provide. For the purposes of my study, the perspectives relayed in the news coverage suffice, and I refer to them frequently in Chapters 4 and 6. Conducting my own interviews with members of mixed squads could be useful to a different kind of study, such as one that examines the contradictory feelings their involvement elicits, but were not necessary for this one. Nevertheless, to the extent that such interviews could have provided additional insights into the logics, histories, and operations of mixed squads, this remains a limitation of my study.

RQ2: What social forces—political, ideological, economic, historical, institutional—explain the introduction of mixed squads in Montreal?

The thesis then turns outwards and backwards, to understand the conditions of emergence of mixed squads. The objective here is to explore the wider historical context out of (and into) which mixed squads came to be. The aim, in other words, is not to understand the operation of mixed squads, but the conjuncture in which the introduction of a non-reformist reform like mixed squads was necessary to solidify a contested social formation. This conjunctural analysis is developed in Chapter 5. It traces the long arc of police reform in Montreal across the first two periods I have identified: the pre-history (1979-2009) and the early history (2009-2020) of mixed squads. This chapter provides the broadest analysis of the thesis, detailing the social forces, processes, and contradictions that established and propelled the development of the 'neoliberal-carceral conjuncture' in Montreal. It sets the stage for the mid-scale analysis of the final chapter, which shows that mixed squads emerged as a "solution" to a crisis of this conjuncture in the second period (2009-2020), before examining the intensification of this crisis in the third period (2020-2025) and the shifting role of mixed squads within it.

In the first part of the chapter, I focus on the "pre-history" of mixed squads (Hall et al. 1978, ix), examining some major transformations of Montreal, Quebec, and Canada from 1979 to 2009. The method for this section was largely analytical: it consisted in synthesizing diverse strands of the existing literature and drawing novel conclusions. I reviewed a mix of academic literature and public-facing reports—notably research conducted by the Quebec Human Rights Commission—focused on three main developments of the conjuncture in Quebec and Montreal: the advent of neoliberalism, the war on street gangs, and the criminalization of homelessness. Taken together, I argue, they point to a neoliberal-carceral turn with important consequences for state power, ruling hegemony, and the organization of the social formation.

In the second part of the chapter, I study the development of this conjuncture in Montreal between 2009 and 2020. In particular, I examined the struggles around policing that animated this period by using a number of primary and secondary sources, francophone and anglophone, all of them archival. For example, I read the reports submitted by experts, human rights organizations, community groups, and activists during multiple municipal (and provincial) consultations on two major forms of police violence: racial profiling and social profiling. These interventions proposed a series of recommendations to end this violence, often summarized in extensive consultation reports. I then looked at the rhetorical responses from political authorities—in official documents,

statements to the media, and government reports—and at the material responses from the state, visible in a number of policy documents, strategic plans, legislation, and other announcements at the municipal and provincial level. Finally, I looked at how the problems of police violence have evolved over time, as documented in studies from scholars and grassroots organizations.

In my choice of documents, I was informed by my own experience of political organizing in the city, which gave me some knowledge about the issues, actors, and events that have been particularly influential. The media review for Chapter 4 and the document analysis for Chapter 6 (see below) enriched my understanding of the period, and those documents referred to dozens of other events, reports, etc., which I then sought out. The process is best described as a chain reaction. I focused on publicly available documents because of their abundance and quality. Moreover, I quickly realized that there was no shortage of rigorous analyses of the problems and solutions to police violence in Montreal. What was missing was a rigorous analysis of the political struggle—and particularly of the role of the state—which is what I aimed to provide through this thesis. These documents gave me all of the material I needed: they documented police actions both qualitatively and quantitatively, they contained a variety of discourses, and they provided a basic metric to evaluate the actions of the state: whether governments implemented expert recommendations or not.

My analytical approach, then, was rather straightforward. I conducted a content and discourse analysis of the documents (Clarke 2005), using Zotero for collection and highlighting, and Obsidian for writing notes and creating links.[15] Throughout my analysis, I compared my four sources of data—1) reports from experts and civil society, 2) rhetorical responses from political authorities, 3) material responses from the state, and 4) the empirical evolution of police violence—and examined their interactions over time. The contradictions between (and within) these four poles raised a series of questions that I then explained by engaging with theory about the broader conjuncture. By making sense of these apparent contradictions, I was able to identify some of the important mechanics of neoliberal-carceral rule in Montreal, none the least understanding who composes the ruling bloc and what its hegemony is founded on.

As I discuss below, some of these same methods are used for a portion of the analysis of Chapter 6. As I noted, Chapter 6 examines how mixed squads provided a solution to period-

[15] Obsidian is a note-taking application in which notes can be linked to each other.

specific crises in the 2009-2020 and 2020-2025 periods, but it also develops an analysis of how the conjuncture has transformed in this last period. To this end, I continued analyzing archival records of the struggle between different social forces—though now also informed by my own participation in this struggle—in order to follow the evolution of political alliances, strategies, and objectives.

RQ3: What has been the role of mixed squads in contrasting, refashioning, or extending some of the major tendencies of our conjuncture, including the retrenchment of social support and the expansion of state violence?

The primary task of Chapter 6, as I noted, is to examine the role of mixed squads within the second and third periods of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture. The objective here was to understand how police violence is able to persist in Montreal despite strong political opposition, and what impact mixed squads might have had upon this broader struggle. Chapter 6, then, is primarily devoted to providing a political history of mixed squads in Montreal from 2009 to 2025. In other words, having analyzed the conjuncture, it seeks to show why mixed squads became a "fix" to the crises generated in this conjuncture.

This entails an important conceptual shift and a mid-scale analysis. Whereas Chapter 4 examined mixed squads as a set of police practices, in Chapter 6 they are studied as a concept mobilized by the state to wage a broader political struggle—a struggle for hegemony, centred around the legitimacy of state violence. The "state", here, consists of the municipal and provincial governments, including the police department insofar as it is a political actor. From this perspective, "mixed squads" become something more abstract: a policy object, used to absorb certain shocks, mobilize certain social forces, fix certain contradictions.

In Chapter 6, my approach remained archival. I had already conducted the media review for RQ1, from which I had constructed an annotated timeline of events in the history of mixed squads. That first investigation had also directed me towards additional reports and events, which I had collected. I added to this collection by examining every session of the city's Public Security Commission (*Commission de la sécurité publique*) from 2006 onwards (the earliest year available online). These included the reports, presentations, and minutes for every annual police report, as well as a number of consultations related to public safety (e.g., on the use of tasers, on new protest

regulations, on racial and social profiling, on urban security, etc.). I proceeded to read and annotate every document that seemed relevant to the history of mixed squads, either because it mentioned mixed squads, or because it touched on topics that I considered significant for my analysis. (Many of these documents ended up being useful for RQ2, described above.) This launched, as I mentioned above, a chain-reaction, and I was organically led to a number of other documents. Significantly, I was led to strategic plans on homelessness, mental health, social profiling, and racial profiling, by the SPVM, the city, and the provincial government, which were periodically renewed. I read and annotated all of these reports, adding new events in my annotated timeline.

The most important source of information were the public consultations. Dozens of experts, activists, and community groups submitted reports to these consultations, and the meeting minutes provide additional insights, including from citizens. Their voices were crucial because, as I discuss throughout the thesis, the institutional documents did not portray reality: they were a mix of omissions, lies, and a few facts. The participation of civil society was not only crucial in completing the picture, but also in revealing the absences and falsehoods in state discourses—a most valuable form of data (Clarke 2005).

As with Chapter 5, I limited myself to publicly available documents because of their abundance and quality. I did not feel like I needed more data to answer my research questions, nor would have I been able to. Moreover, to my knowledge, most of these documents have not been closely examined before.

I conducted a combined content and discourse analysis of these documents. The content analysis helped me understand what mixed squads represented as a policy: where the funding came from, how much of it there was, how the squads grew or shrank, what legal frameworks they fit in, what institutions they mobilized, what criteria were used to evaluate them, and what recommendations from civil society they formally responded to. The discourse analysis showed me how different actors portrayed and perceived mixed squads: how they were defined by the government, the promises they were endowed with, the problems they claimed to solve, and how this differed or coincided with the perspective of experts, activists, and community groups.

By following the idea of mixed squads through this trove of documents, I constructed a comprehensive timeline and cartography of the historical development of mixed squads from 2009 to 2025. I had built an initial timeline by analyzing the media coverage, which I then complemented with the other documents. Importantly, this timeline included other key events of the period

relating to policing and state violence. This included all events that mixed squads responded to explicitly or implicitly (and these relations were noted), as well as other important moments in the life of the conjuncture: police killings, protests, electoral campaigns, court rulings, new legislation, the publication of major reports, moral panics, public outrage, material crises, etc. This timeline, dense with relationships, showed me how mixed squads fit within the broader history of the period. The rhythm of their development, the patterns that their presence drew, the locations in which they concentrated—these all provided information about what the idea of mixed squads tried to fix, to hold together, or to disrupt.

The timeline naturally led to a cartography of mixed squads within the conjuncture (Clarke 2005). This was really a series of "maps" that described the "social forces and contradictions accumulating" within mixed squads, as well as their "location in institutional processes and structures" (Hall et al. 1978, viii-ix). One visual level, for example, described the different actors related to mixed squads (e.g., the police, the ministry of health, a non-profit, city officials, unhoused people, activists, community organizations, the media, etc.) and the material relationships that bind them. Another level looked at the discursive and material relationships that connected different social groups to mixed squads (e.g., business owners, homeowners, the tourism industry, developers, upper-class liberals, journalists, the unhoused, racialized communities, people who use drugs, police officers, etc.), highlighting the disparate interests they serve. Yet another level showed the contradictory discourses that were latched onto and appropriated by mixed squads (e.g., opposition to the repression of vulnerability, the notion that police are not social workers, visions of policing as a caring profession, fear of unhoused people and of mental illness, feigned and genuine concern for the unhoused) and the discourses that were suffocated by mixed squads (e.g., pre-existing frameworks of community work, expert recommendations, the difference between violence work and care work, reducing the scope and power of the police, policing as persecution). The most important level, perhaps, looked at the large-scale conjunctural movements that flowed into mixed squads (e.g., the retrenchment of the welfare state, the expansion of the carceral state, the shift in who holds power over the state) and which constituted their objective, ideological, political, and logistical "conditions of existence" (Hall et al. 1978, ix).

The timeline and cartography formed the empirical ground for my conjunctural analysis. I was compelled to periodize my analysis, splitting my chapter into two temporal segments: 2009-2020 and 2020-2025. I originally chose June 2020 as my pivot point based on the massive unrest

of the George Floyd protests. I had a hunch that this moment was a turning point for mixed squads and, as we will see, this decision was substantiated by important quantitative and qualitative changes in the political use of mixed squads. Drawing on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 5, I examined how mixed squads fit into the dynamics of the conjuncture—at the macro and micro level, and at the level of ideology, politics, and economy. It became apparent that mixed squads were a pure product of political struggle: they emerged out of the conflict between antagonistic social forces, some trying to rearticulate the social formation—via a repudiation of state violence—and others trying to preserve it. To understand the role of mixed squads within this struggle, I examined their relationship to different social forces and their impact on the conjuncture. Once it became apparent that mixed squads were a political tool in defence of police violence, I endeavoured to understand how the tool functioned and why this tool, specifically, rose to prominence. This led me to examine a few different fronts of the struggle: the game of reform, the battles between state and civil society, and the ideological struggle to mislead the public and maintain control over the shifting popular common-sense.

RQ4: Do mixed squads encourage or preclude approaches to public safety—increasingly demanded by scholars, activists, and community groups—that are based on meeting the needs of all, rather than inflicting violence against the most vulnerable?

My last research question is the overarching inquiry of this thesis. Answering this question did not require any specific methods, but rather a consolidation of the research and insights of the three core chapters of the thesis. The "practical" response to this question is provided in Chapter 4, which concludes that mixed squads are both a form of violence and a police strategy to weaken political movements with an abolitionist view of public safety. Chapter 5 then shows how period-specific crises emerged, as various groups contested the violence of the Montreal police and gave voice to political demands. We can see in this chapter that other responses to these crises were possible. Activists demanded a range of changes that were meant to reduce police violence and better meet the needs of vulnerable groups. Finally, Chapter 6 responds at the structural level, showing that mixed squads serve to protect a social order—a conjuncture—predicated on the use of state violence against dehumanized social groups. Summarizing and consolidating these insights in the final chapter shows that the very purpose of mixed squads—as a police pratice and as a piece

of public policy—is to entrench an exclusionary approach to public safety, not only precluding alternative approaches rooted in human dignity but actively undermining their already-existing forms.

Chapter 3: Literature review

Introduction

Having outlined my theoretical framework, methodology and methods in the previous chapter, I want, in this chapter, to discuss key literatures that will inform my analysis. I begin with a discussion of the rather meagre literature on mixed squads, emphasizing some key questions it fails to grasp. To push beyond this limitation, I turn to the literature on community policing, drawing especially from critical traditions that examine community policing as a public relations program, as a strategy to extend repression, and as a form of domestic counter-insurgency. I then situate these transformations of policing in the context of a historical transformation of class power and state power, reviewing the literature on the neoliberal and carceral turn of Western societies since the 1970s. Finally, I examine the movement for penal abolition, a tradition of political theory and political struggle that is defined in opposition to the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, and whose history is intertwined with the development of mixed squads.

1. Mixed squads

In the last twenty years, police "mixed squads" have emerged as a popular police reform in cities across North America. Mixed squads are police teams in which officers collaborate with non-police workers, including health and mental health professionals, social workers, street outreach workers, youth workers, special educators, or even criminologists (Ghelani et al. 2022; Peterson and Densley 2018). Rose et al. (2012) suggest these squads can be placed in three categories: (1) "crisis intervention teams," composed of police officers who have received training from other front-line workers, usually in de-escalation techniques and mental health intervention; (2) "co-responder teams," in which police officers and other front-line workers directly collaborate and often respond to calls in tandem (most often in response to mental health crises); and (3) "homeless outreach teams," in which police officers and social workers directly collaborate and seek to develop longer-term responses to unhoused people who generate repeated 911 calls.

Mixed squads vary greatly in terms of composition, strategy, and mandate, but they are usually described (by police) in terms of a common overall objective: to improve both officer and civilian safety in police interventions that are perceived to be psychosocial rather than criminal. The existing literature is mainly concerned with evaluating mixed squads in relation to this stated objective. According to both systematic and local reviews, the evidence of the effectiveness of mixed squads in improving safety ranges from non-existent (Peterson and Densley 2018) to limited (Ghelani et al. 2022; Marcus and Stergiopoulos 2022; Rose and Hurtubise 2018; Welsh and Abdel-Samad 2018). There are variations according to the type of mixed squads. A systematic review of "crisis intervention teams" concluded that they have not improved police interventions with people in crisis (Peterson and Densley 2018). In contrast, multiple international reviews found that mental health "co-responder teams" may reduce the use of arrest, detention, and involuntary commitment for people with mental illness, and improve referral to community services (Ghelani et al. 2022; Puntis et al. 2018; Shapiro et al. 2015). Finally, the sparse research on "homeless outreach teams" is inconclusive as to their impact on unhoused people (Rose and Hurtubise 2018; Welsh and Abdel-Samad 2018).

The existing research, however, is plagued by absences. There is evidence, for example, that targeted populations generally prefer mixed squads to police-only squads (Ghelani et al. 2022; Rose and Hurtubise 2018; Welsh and Abdel-Samad 2018). But there is no evidence that mixed squads have any positive impact on 'regular' police work, and it is unclear whether they reduce use of force among police officers who are directly involved in the squads (Ghelani et al. 2022). This raises the question, rarely addressed in the literature, of whether the police presence in mixed squads is appreciated, or whether mixed squads are appreciated *despite* the police presence. Indeed, while the contributions of non-police workers are consistently defined in positive terms (e.g., bringing useful expertise to interventions), the police contributions are generally defined by what they don't do (e.g., using less violence) or by what the police themselves obtain (e.g., a boost in morale) (Rose and Hurtubise 2018; Welsh and Abdel-Samad 2018; Ghelani et al. 2022). In short, the literature does not ask the question of why police officers are involved in these squads, and whether they should (Marcus and Stergiopoulos 2022).

Moreover, the existing literature relies on a comparative framework that is incomplete and misdirected. Mixed squads are almost exclusively evaluated in comparison to police-only interventions; these interventions, however, are repressive in nature, while mixed squads claim to

be supportive. As such, the proper comparison would be between mixed squads and existing support practices, as dispensed by community workers, health agencies, and other social service providers. Additionally, the literature's comparative framework obscures the fact that mixed squads do not replace traditional police interventions, but are rather added on top. The question that must be asked, then, is: how do mixed squads articulate with existing police practices, and what is their compounded effect?

A broader limitation of the existing literature is its failure to consider why mixed squads have been implemented and what socio-political function (aside from responding to calls) they serve. It takes for granted, in other words, that mixed squads are a response to objective problems (e.g., homelessness), sidestepping the vast literature that situates police institutions and practices within the broader dynamics of the social formation (cf. Hall et al. 1978; with some notable exceptions, for example: Guta et al. 2022; Michaud et al. 2023). At the simplest level, we can observe that mixed squads have emerged from the particularities of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture (see below; Camp 2016; Gilmore 2022b). The latter can be broadly characterized by a contraction of the welfare state and the simultaneous expansion of the carceral apparatus. The contraction of the welfare state has led to an increase in homelessness, untreated mental illness, and other social issues, while the expansion of the carceral apparatus makes the police the go-to response to these issues—or rather, to the problems they cause for businesses, well-housed residents, and so on. Mixed squads, then, can be seen as an adaptation to these conditions: they exist because the police have proved unable to resolve social issues, but they accept and entrench the notion that the police must be involved.

Yet, the rising popularity of mixed squads as a police reform also comes at a more specific historical moment characterized by growing and increasingly radical challenges to carceral governance, including calls to drastically reduce the role and power of policing (see below; Kaba and Ritchie 2022; Pasternak et al. 2022). Indeed, the existing literature makes clear that the current interest in mixed squads is a result of widespread protests against police violence, with these squads being openly marketed by police and governments as a solution (Ghelani et al. 2022). However, much of the literature conflates responding to protests with responding to the problems that protesters denounce, ignoring the well-documented history of police reforms that seek to pacify the former without resolving the latter (Akbar 2023; Schenwar and Law 2021; Murakawa

2023). A most notable and relevant example is community policing, a police doctrine that shares a clear lineage with mixed squads, and yet is almost entirely absent from their literature.

2. Community policing

Developing a richer analysis of mixed squads does not need to start from scratch. This thesis argues that it is preferable to view the squads as a particular form of community policing and thus draw on the significant critical literature on this subject. The scholarly consensus is that community policing emerged in the United States in the 1960s, in response to a series of social, political, and institutional crises that converged into a crisis of legitimacy for policing. Two aspects of the crisis are worth detailing. First, the decades-long process of "professionalization" had isolated the police from citizens and communities, making it harder for police to obtain intelligence for criminal investigations and undermining the institution's capacity to generate consensus for coercive law enforcement (Kappeler and Gaines 2020). Second, many of the social movements of the 1960s, including the Black liberation struggle and the student and anti-war movements, both confronted the police and developed radical critiques of policing (CRCJ 1977). These problems came to a head during thousands of urban uprisings or "riots" of the 1960s, which were virtually all triggered or inflamed by police violence. Police experts and government commissions laid the blame on the professional model of policing. They argued that the police's "isolation" made misconduct more likely, while also making it harder for police to quell uprisings when they occurred (CRCJ 1977; Hinton 2021).

The state's response to this twofold crisis was determined by its unwillingness to accept the radical demands of social movements: to address the roots of social problems and upend relations of domination between different social groups and classes. Instead, the state engaged in a transformation of its coercive apparatus. This approach was guided by new theories of social order, which viewed crime and urban violence as either a pathology of poor and racialized communities, or a structural feature of modern society that could not be changed. The call for social justice was thus displaced by a heightened concern for social control (CRCJ 1977, 126). As historian Elizabeth Hinton summarizes, "officials across the political spectrum ultimately agreed to empower police forces to mitigate the effects of centuries of structural discrimination and exclusion through

surveillance, patrol, incarceration, and other forms of social control" (Hinton 2021, 179). Yet, the lesson of the past decade was that repression without popular consent would only exacerbate social disorder and, more dangerously, political militancy.

From the 1970s onwards, these concerns were addressed through a set of reforms whose ostensible goal was to bring the police closer to communities. This approach followed from the view that the root of the problem was a "breakdown of trust" between police and those who are policed. Rekindling trust, it was said, would reduce police violence and simultaneously improve the police's ability to repress crime and disorder. Reforms included "community relations" efforts (e.g., events, outreach, consultations), the proliferation of foot patrols (so that officers would "get to know" the community), "sensitivity" or "multicultural" training, and diversity-focused hiring. An important doctrinal shift was the turn to "problem-oriented policing", which encouraged the police to adopt a proactive approach that addressed the 'roots' of crime rather than simply reacting to calls. This new doctrine could be combined with a "community-oriented approach", where the problems to be solved would be defined by "the community" (CRCJ 1977; Kappeler and Gaines 2020; RAND n.d.; Skogan 2006). These reforms eventually coalesced into the doctrine of community policing, which was given material coherence by government agencies that dispensed billions of dollars for the development of "community policing" programs (A World Without Police 2017; COPS Office n.d.). Community policing rapidly became an ubiquitous policing model across the world, from the West to the Global South (Maillard and Terpstra 2021). Today, there is scarcely a police force that does not claim to have adopted this approach. In Montreal, for example, community policing programs started being implemented in the early 1980s, and the police department formally embraced the model in 1997 (see Chapter 5).

I survey this history because I believe that the development of community policing provides valuable insights for our study of mixed squads. Community policing was an understated revolution in conceptions of the police which, as I argue throughout this thesis, created the conditions from which mixed squads could later emerge. Policing experts have stressed that community policing is not simply a list of discrete programs, but rather a global policing strategy that requires philosophical, organizational, strategic, and tactical transformations (Cordner 1997; Kappeler and Gaines 2020; Skogan 2006). Indeed, formal theories of community policing reveal that it entailed two major shifts: a massive expansion in the scope of policing and a fundamental

redefinition of what police work entails. These theories recognized that law enforcement can "at best, only manage and document most crime" because "crime is a product of socio-economic conditions and poor public policy" (Kappeler and Gaines 2020, 5), and that "if the police actually attempted to limit their mandate solely to crime, it would be almost impossible for most departments to justify the bulk of their budgets, especially since crime is declining dramatically" (Kappeler and Gaines 2020, 25). The obsolescence of the police could have been welcomed with open arms, but scholars of community policing were concerned with saving the institution. Their solution was to expand the police's mandate far beyond crime-control, making officers responsible for “health issues, zoning laws, barking dogs, or potholes” (Kappeler and Gaines 2020, 8), “neighborhood dilapidation ... public drinking, teen loitering, curfew and truancy problems, and disorder in schools” (Skogan 2006, 32), along with social welfare roles like referral, advocacy, educational programs, and recreational activities, and political roles such as mobilizing people "to bring pressure on policy makers who have ignored community problems" (Kappeler and Gaines 2020, 10). Essentially, community policing provided an ideological and material framework to extend the police's presence to every realm of social life. It encouraged expanding police forces, increasing police budgets, and bringing police to the centre of state governance.

This approach was perfectly in tune with its time. As we will discuss in depth in the next section, community policing emerged in a historical period marked by the dismantlement of traditional agencies of social intervention, and the simultaneous expansion of carceral institutions to manage the consequences. In this context, theorists of community policing conjured a new kind of police that could fulfill this historical role. "The police officer", they explain,

> must be many things, law enforcer and peace officer, armed symbol of authority and part-time social worker. It is this blend of force and compassion that makes the job so potent and unique. No other job in civilian society permits a person to choose from an array of responses that range *from flashing a friendly smile to using deadly force*. (Kappeler and Gaines 2020, 25; emphasis added)

In this intoxicating and bewildering vision, which blends violence and care in a single body, we can find the seeds of mixed squads, which join violence workers and care workers in a single mission. Compare the quote above to an excerpt from a flattering profile of mixed squads, published in a Montreal newspaper in 2012:

> [Officers] Nicolas Loignon and Sylvain Durocher know the specimens of urban wildlife better than anyone. They know that the apparent camaraderie that binds them to these outcasts can quickly turn sour. They know that the man to whom they offer a pair of boots and mittens may very well find himself, a few days later, in the crosshairs of their revolver. (La Presse, January 29, 2012)

In these two quotes, we find the contradictions that mine community policing and mixed squads alike. At the centre of it all, one question remains forever unanswered: why should the purveyors of state violence, of all people, become our omnipresent front-line workers of social change? In other words: why should our everyday problems be solved by individuals who have the state-sanctioned power to arrest, detain, and kill with virtual impunity? What other unique skills do police officers have that justify giving them such an awesome responsibility? And what are the risks of giving them this role? These questions are ignored in the mainstream policing literature, yet there is a clear consensus that the practice of community policing falls seriously short of the vision laid out by scholars (Kappeler and Gaines 2020; Skogan 2006; Mastrofski 2006). As one scholar bluntly summarizes: “billions of dollars have been spent on community policing reforms and millions on research on community policing, but there is so little rigorous evidence on its effects on crime and disorder" (Mastrofski 2006, 50). Yet, this literature fails to ask the follow-up question: *why* has community policing been given billions of dollars despite a consistent inability to achieve its stated objectives?

Returning to a critical and historical view helps us make sense of these contradictions. Like mixed squads, community policing emerged in a context of sociopolitical crisis where the legitimacy of state violence was critically undermined. As previously discussed, the response from the state was to transform the police rather than transform sociopolitical conditions, and to relegitimize repression rather than reduce it. As such, much of the history of community policing can be understood under the framework of "reformist reform," which I introduced in the opening pages of this thesis. This concept, which comes from a radical tradition of political theory, is useful because it explains that there are different kinds of reforms with diametrically opposed purposes: some are a step towards the radical transformation of a system (these are generally called "non-reformist reforms"), while others are a (substantial or cosmetic) change whose very purpose is to

fortify the status quo (Akbar 2020; Critical Resistance 2020; Gorz 1967). In this sense, it matters little whether community policing advocates were sincere in their beliefs; what matters is that their theories were only put into practice because they were in tune with broader agendas.

Notably, community policing was only one of many innovations in policing that followed the crises of the 1960s. Simultaneously, police departments were militarized, police unions expanded and became a powerful constituency, and the role of policing and the carceral apparatus in society massively expanded (Gottschalk 2008; Williams 2014; see the following section). Some scholars seek to separate community policing from these other transformations, suggesting that community policing was a positive reform within a broader turn to increased militarization and carceral power (Kappeler and Gaines 2020). My empirical research, however, resonates with a critical strand of the literature that sees community policing as an integral part of the repressive turn. As early as the 1970s, critical scholars described community policing as a "velvet glove" that hides the enduring "iron fist" of police repression (CRCJ 1977). This metaphor gives rise to multiple critical perspectives on community policing, three of which I find particularly useful.

One of the most common assessments of community policing is that it is primarily or only a public relations project (Lyons 1999a, 1999b; Manning 1997). As Klockars (1988, 41) explains, “the modern movement toward what is currently called ‘community policing’ is best understood as the latest in a fairly long tradition of circumlocutions whose purpose is to conceal, mystify, and legitimate police distribution of nonnegotiable coercive force.” Balkan et al. (1980, 104) link the turn to community policing specifically to the social movements of the 1960s. Emerging in this context, they argue, community policing programs “are just another method to persuade people that the police really do exist to serve them”. This resonates with the concerns of many advocates of community policing, who argue that though it should not serve a public relations function, it often does (Kappeler and Gaines 2020). In this view, then, community policing is a cosmetic reform that loudly announces the end of traditional police practices in order for these practices to persist undisturbed.

A second fundamental critique contends that community policing serves to enhance the repressive capacities of policing (CRCJ 1977; Rutland 2021; Sylvestre 2010b). Community policing has led to an expansion and intensification of police surveillance and repression, by providing a range of new ideological, organizational, and financial resources which can justify and enable repressive campaigns. By aggressively enforcing public order, for example, police

departments claim to be proactively addressing the causes of crime and to be responding to community demands, which are the two foundational objectives of community policing. To this end, 'community engagement' programs haved served as a tool to frame social disorder as a major public concern, and repression as the desired solution (Sylvestre 2010b; Williams 2014). Part of the rationale for the turn to "broken windows" policing in the last four decades is precisely the demand for such action among some community representatives (cf. Sylvestre 2010b). As a result, the modes of life and survival strategies of entire communities—in particular, homeless people, people who use drugs, and Black youth—have been signified as "social disorder" and either a problem in itself or a precursor to serious crime. Notably, these repressive campaigns have been materially enabled by the increases in police budgets and personnel that are fundamental to community policing (Schenwar and Law 2021; Williams 2014). Community policing can also carry the police into new spaces (King 1991), provide them access to more intelligence (Trojanowicz 1990), and position them as an appropriate response to more situations (Cohen 1979). An important insight here is that the contraction of the welfare state has both paralleled and required new roles for police. As Bayley and Shearing (1996, 595) observe, community policing has taken on the supposed task of "social amelioration," enabling cutbacks to conventional social programs while funding "an expansion of police power."

Finally, an emerging literature has theorized community policing as a form of counter-insurgency (Gilmore and Gilmore 2022a; Rodriguez 2021a; Rutland 2021; Schrader 2016; Williams 2011). The latter was originally a military doctrine or style of warfare. In contrast to conventional warfare, which occurs between two states and their militaries, counter-insurgency applies to "asymmetric warfare" against irregular or guerilla forces, such as the Mau Mau or the Viet Cong. While the battle between two armed forces is important in counterinsurgency, winning the support of the population is essential to both parties in the war. As Khalili (2015, 1) puts it, "the civilian population is the prize, to be won whether by persuasion and bribery or [the] force of intimidation and terror." Counter-insurgency became influential among US police forces in the 1960s, providing them a new strategy with which to confront social movements and urban uprisings (Schrader 2019). The purpose of the strategy is partly to win the support of the population, which makes it similar to a public relations program. However, it is more precise to say that it operates *upon* the population. As Schrader (2016) argues, counter-insurgency cleaves the population into three categories—loyal, neutral, and disloyal—and seeks to rearrange them.

He writes: “To convert the neutral into the loyal, against the disloyal, is the goal of so-called community policing.” This framework illuminates one of the most problematic aspects of community policing: its ability to define the boundaries of the "community", to designate those that are not of it, and to enforce a violent mode of relation between included and excluded.

Though the terminology of counter-insurgency seldom appears in the literature, its logic appears time and time again. Virtually every scholar of community policing, critical or not, recognizes that when the police speak of "the community" they are speaking of relatively privileged groups (e.g., businesses, homeowners, developers, specific organizations) who "[find] it easy to cooperate with the police, and [share] with the police a common view of who the troublemakers [are] in the community" (Skogan 2006, 33; see also Kappeler and Gaines 2020; Mastrofski 2006; Saunders 1999). A deeper but still common critique is that "community engagement" programs are most often platforms to harmonize police operations with the interests of privileged groups, under a veneer of public consensus (A World Without Police 2010; Sylvestre 2010b; We Charge Genocide 2015; Williams 2014). More recent studies, however, have described police efforts to redefine the meaning of "community" among the very minority groups that are targeted by police repression. By exploiting fragilities and divisions within marginalized communities, community policing programs undermine their ability to resist against campaigns of domestic warfare such as the "war on drugs" or the "war on gangs" (see Schenwar and Law 2021, chap. 5). It is often the sub-groups who rebel and precipitate crises of police legitimacy (most notably Black youth) that are constructed as threats to the manufactured community (Rutland 2021). The objective, here, is to undermine militant political opposition; in other words, to counter insurgency. This framework, then, returns community policing to the conditions of its emergence: a context of revolt and insurrection that the existing police model had failed to contain and that demanded a new strategy.

The critical literature on community policing does something that the acritical and hegemonic literature cannot do: it makes sense of apparent contradictions, and actually explains why community policing exists and persists. Community policing is a reform that is incomprehensible when taken at face value, but incredibly rich when studied in relation to how society, politics, and power evolve over time. Mixed squads share similar incongruences, contradictions, and qualities—which should not be surprising, seeing as mixed squads are an overt evolution of

community policing. This thesis, then, takes inspiration from the critical literature in two ways. First, I analyze mixed squads as a form of community policing, informed by the triple framework of public relations, repression, and counter-insurgency (see Chapter 4). Second, I develop a conjunctural analysis of the development of mixed squads, seeking to understand the social, political, and institutional crises that they exist to resolve or contain (see Chapters 5 and 6). It is to this historical context that the literature review now turns to.

3. The neoliberal-carceral conjuncture

We have previously discussed the Gramscian concept of "social formation", which understands societies as complex structures defined by the articulation of various components (e.g., the state, civil society, the apparatus of production, institutions, different social groups) at various levels (e.g., economic, political, ideological). These articulations are constantly shifting because of both organic movements of the social structure and struggles between social forces. There are periods, however, wherein the social formation is held in relative stability under the hegemony of a ruling alliance that associates elements of the dominant economic class with fractions of the dominated classes "who have been won over by specific concessions and compromises and who form part of the social constellation but in a subordinate role" (Hall 1986a, 15). These historically specific alliances, or "historic blocs", rule over historically specific configurations of the social formation, which are called "conjunctures". Conversely, there are periods in which hegemony disintegrates, opening the way for a rearticulation of the social formation and its alliances. As Stuart Hall argued, "history moves from one conjuncture to another rather than being an evolutionary flow. And what drives it forward is usually a crisis, when the contradictions that are always at play in any historical moment are condensed" (Hall and Massey 2010). Crises, in this view, are moments "when the social formation can no longer be reproduced on the basis of the pre-existing system of social relations" (Hall and Schwarz 1988, 96).

The early 1970s were a moment of crisis and subsequent conjunctural transition across the Western world. I refer to this transition as the "neoliberal-carceral turn" or the emergence of the "neoliberal-carceral state", which has led to the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture that we currently inhabit (Axster et al. 2021; Camp 2016; Dillon 2012). In the following, I provide a theoretical

framework for understanding the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, drawing out the principal intellectual traditions and concepts that will inform my analysis throughout this thesis. The literature I review here is biased towards England and the United States, which have been most richly theorized. Nevertheless, I draw from these accounts a fundamental framework that is applicable, in my view, across the Western world. I substantiate this claim in Chapter 5, by providing a grounded and empirical analysis of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture in the context of Canada and Québec.

3.1 The crisis in hegemony of the 1970s

The revolts and crises that we discussed in the previous section, which forced the police to reinvent itself through community policing, were part of what Gramsci calls a general crisis of the state, or a crisis of hegemony. "The crisis of the ruling class' hegemony", he explained,

> occurs either because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses ... or because huge masses ... have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which, taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution. A 'crisis of authority' is spoken of: this is precisely the crisis of hegemony, or general crisis of the State. (Gramsci 1971, 210; see also Hall et al. 1978, 216)

In the 1970s, crises of *both* types developed across the West. The "failure" of the ruling class was produced by an organic crisis of Western capitalism: after a few decades of unbridled growth (what the French call *Les Trentes Glorieuses*, roughly between 1945 and 1975 depending on the country), Western economies started to stagnate, and this stagnation led to increasing public debt. Indeed, the period of growth had facilitated the construction of a social state in many Western nations, with large public investments in welfare, health, education, and infrastructure, considerable government involvement in the economy (through both regulation and stimulus), and a legal regime that enshrined labour rights, civil rights, and human rights. This apparatus was not a gift from an enlightened government; rather, after decades of bitter struggle, it was a compromise between a strong labour movement and a prosperous capitalist class, which used the state as a mediating mechanism. It was the 'middle ground' between socialism and capitalism, where a

portion of the spoils of capitalist production would be collectivized through the state. In this conjuncture, cemented by a "social-democratic consensus" (Hall 2010, 58), the dominant economic classes enjoyed a measure of support from organized labour, thus securing their hegemony over the social formation (Harvey 2005, chap. 1). By the 1970s, however, Western capitalism was not productive enough to sustain the social-democratic pact. The reasons for the crisis are extremely complex, varied, and debated—from geopolitical oil embargoes, to monetary policy, over-accumulation, and the decline of empire—but for the purpose of this thesis it suffices to know that the crisis was real (Patnaik 1982). To put it simply, the mode of production could no longer reproduce the social formation—the conjuncture was in crisis.

Simultaneously, "huge masses" had become politically active during the 1960s, "and put forward demands which, taken together … add up to a revolution." Spearheaded by a reinvigorated Black liberation movement in the U.S., anti-imperialist movements in the colonial metropoles, and victorious anti-colonial movements across the Global South, those who Fanon (1963) called the "wretched of the earth" sought to dismantle the racial-colonial order that had sustained Western social formations for at least five hundred years. If social-democracy was the defining compromise of the mid-century conjuncture, racial domination was a long-standing compromise that had been transferred, and reconstructed, from one conjuncture to the next (Mills 2022; Rodriguez 2021b). As W.E.B. Du Bois (1915; 1935) observed, and as Stuart Hall (1980, 340) summarized in his famous claim that "race is the modality through which class is lived", race mediated the class struggle in every spacetime of modernity, enabling complex political alliances between the white masses and the dominant political and economic classes. Put briefly, the relations of domination that constitute racism-colonialism provided material, psychosocial, and ideological benefits to both the lower and upper classes: creating groups and territories open to limitless exploitation; giving different positions, with respect to the mode of production, to differently racialized segments of the working class; enabling unilateral transfers of wealth from colony to metropole, thus offering capital to the rich and colonial dividends to the poor; giving all white people the right to control, exploit, and violate somebody else; and constructing a white western identity convinced of its ontological unity and superiority (Mills 2022). In other words, racism and colonialism were crucial political tools to resolve or dampen sociopolitical contradictions, and ultimately to secure hegemony. This historical construction of Western social formations around the—economic, cultural, and political—principle of racial domination is what scholars have called "racial

capitalism" (Bhattacharyya 2018; Gilmore 2022b; Kundnani 2020; Melamed 2015; Robinson 2000). It follows that the concerted attempt, by worldwide masses, to destroy this organizing principle would throw the conjuncture into crisis.[16]

These crises are relevant to my thesis for a few reasons. First, as we previously discussed, these crises motivated the invention of community policing, which leads directly to mixed squads. Second, as I show below, these crises gave rise to a new configuration of the social formation—a new conjuncture—that persists to this day, and in relation to which I analyze and explain mixed squads. Third, as I will argue later, we are living through a new crisis of the conjuncture that shares important continuities with the 1970s. Part of the argument of this thesis is that mixed squads are a political strategy to placate this new crisis and prolong the current conjuncture.

3.2 Neoliberal-carceral reconstruction

The period that stretches from the 1970s to today is characterized by a retrenchment of the state on many fronts—including taxation, the protection of workers' rights, and the provision of welfare, health, and education—and yet, simultaneously, a massive expansion of the apparatus of state violence—most notably of penal law, policing, and incarceration. This dual development is best explained, in my view, by two distinct but related scholarly traditions. The first tradition argues that the crises of the 1970s were an *opportunity* for economic elites to restore class power, rearticulate the social formation, and secure a new hegemonic order (Hall 2011; Harvey 2005); the second tradition explains how this new order could only be ushered and sustained by a growing recourse to state violence (Camp 2016; Gilmore 2022b; Hall et al. 1978).

The story, roughly summarized, goes as follows. In the 1970s, Western states faced a structural economic problem that needed to be addressed: the imbalance between economic growth, tax revenue, and government spending led to ballooning public deficits. While the social-democratic left was stupefied, trying to save a model that was already dead, the revolutionary left was overpowered by conservative elites who proposed a more compelling solution: instead of a revolution for labour, a revolution for capital (Hall 2011). They drew economic, political, and

[16] Remarkably, this crisis was amplified by a series of concurrent social movements that launched critical assaults against other long-standing principles of Western society, most notably patriarchy and heteronormativity, which I do not have the space to discuss in this thesis.

social prescriptions from a somewhat coherent body of theory that has come to be known as "neoliberalism" (Slobodian 2018). This theory diagnosed that the problem *was the social-democratic compromise itself*: the welfare state and public services were simply too expensive and inefficient; union power, stringent labour rights, and generous social assistance were a drag on the economy; and high taxes and economic regulations impeded capitalist growth. As a solution, they proposed a radical program of austerity (i.e. cuts in public spending and public services), privatization (of public property and services), and deregulation (of the market, of trade, and of labour rights).

David Harvey (2005, 19) makes a useful distinction between the "*utopian* project" of neoliberalism, which aspired to reorganize and revitalize the capitalist economy, and the "*political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites." As he points out, "Neoliberalization has not been very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation ... but it has succeeded remarkably well in restoring the power of an economic elite", leading him to conclude that:

> The theoretical utopianism of neoliberal argument has ... primarily worked as a system of justification and legitimation for whatever needed to be done to achieve this goal [of restoring the power of economic elites]. The evidence suggests, moreover, that when neoliberal principles clash with the need to restore or sustain elite power, then the principles are either abandoned or become so twisted as to be unrecognizable.

The argument, then, is that the economic theory of neoliberalism, which promised to create so much wealth that it would trickle down, was de facto subordinated to a political-economic project of elite domination. In fact, the seeds of the political project were already in the economic theory. After all, the whole point of neoliberal theory was that the masses had too many rights, protections, and safety nets, and that capitalists could not extract, exploit, and accumulate freely enough; even if this argument was sincere, and even if it there was truly 'no alternative', its costs (and benefits) would be completely asymmetrical. This perspective is echoed in Paul Pierson's (1994, 1) seminal analysis of welfare retrenchment: he explains that while social-democratic governments viewed this adjustment as a "painful necessity", "conservatives viewed retrenchment not as a necessary evil but as a necessary good." Indeed, there was nothing painful about neoliberalism for the dominant economic classes: it meant lower taxes, flimsier accountability, looser regulations,

weaker worker's rights, less resistance, easier exploitation. In short, it was the destruction of the social-democratic compromise that they had been forced to swallow, the defeat of the much hated labour movement, and an open road to accelerated capital accumulation. What was there not to like?

The point I am highlighting is that the restructuring of economic relations prescribed by neoliberal theory was, by definition, a *restructuring of power relations*. To believe that neoliberal economic growth could revive social-democratic redistribution belied a fundamental misunderstanding of political economy: the previous thirty years had not generated broad prosperity merely because the economy was booming and the rich were feeling generous, but because the working masses had enough political power to *impose* a redistributive compromise. By both design and fortune (and then design once again), neoliberal policies launched a vicious cycle that weakened the influence of organized labour while concentrating resources and power into the hands of economic elites. What followed, as many scholars have noted, was a gradual (if incomplete) capture of the state by capital: after having been, for a brief period, a relatively neutral site of mediation in the class struggle, the state was transformed into an increasingly straightforward tool of elite domination (Hall 2011; Harvey 2005; Masquelier 2021; Navarro 2007; Peck and Tickell 2022). It is this concentration of ruling class power that explains, more than any economic philosophy, the evolution of Western social formations since the 1970s. For the purpose of this thesis, then, "neoliberalism" refers to this fundamental restructuring of state power (which is to say, of who has influence over the state), undergirded by a transformation in the relationship between the state and economy (defined by a reduction of the social wage, of state protection of workers and communities, and of state control over dominant economic classes).

A Gramscian perspective on the neoliberal turn raises a follow-up question: how could economic elites gather *consent* for a political program of socioeconomic annihilation? The prophetic observation of Stuart Hall et al. (1978, 217) was that this was virtually impossible, which is why the struggle for hegemony tilted “away from consent and towards the pole of coercion”. The challenge, then, became to gather *consent for an expanded use of coercion*. As early as 1978, Stuart Hall and his colleagues identified this as the construction of an “authoritarian consensus”, wherein a segment of the masses was persuaded to support authoritarian modes of rule that were used to

manage challenges to ruling class hegemony by inflicting violence against the other, insurgent, segments of the masses (Ibid., 217).

The authoritarian consensus was constructed through an "ideological onslaught"—orchestrated symbiotically, though not always conspiratorially, by politicians, judges, police chiefs, 'experts', and various "moral entrepreneurs"—that re-interpreted the (real) break down of the social order into a breakdown of the moral order (Ibid., 390). They appealed, specifically, to a dual panic within the white masses, related to the two conjunctural crises that we described above: the loss of economic stability, and the loss of an internal regime of domination—of men over women, of parents over children, and especially of whites over nonwhites. In other words, the experience of the conjunctural crisis was displaced onto a different ideological form, the "moral panic", which is "one of the principal forms of ideological consciousness by means of which a 'silent majority' is won over to the support of increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state"—"by 'consenting' to [this] view of the crisis ... popular consciousness is also won to support the measures of control and containment which this version of social reality entails" (Ibid., 221).

A parallel and equally correct history can be told by conceptualizing this authoritarian turn as a response to the second crisis that we discussed above: the crisis of the (domestic and global) socio-racial order, inflamed by liberation struggles in colonies, metropoles, and in between. The convergence between crises is described in *Policing the Crisis*, as Hall et al. (1978, 332) explain that:

> Policing *the blacks* threatened to mesh with the problem of policing *the poor* and policing *the unemployed*: all three were concentrated in precisely the same urban areas—a fact which ... facilitates the germination of militant consciousness. The on-going problem of policing the blacks had become, for all practical purposes, synonymous with the wider problem of *policing the crisis.*

Similarly, in the French context, Mathieu Rigouste (2021, chap. 3, chap. 7) describes the post-1970s expansion of policing as a mechanism to reinforce "socio-apartheid" in the postcolonial metropole and to repress the insurgency of the "wretched of neoliberalism"—largely racialized populations from the ex-colonies. Another compelling account is Dylan Rodriguez' theory of White Reconstruction, which argues that the United States of the 1970s was "characterized by a comprehensive institutional struggle to reconfigure and sustain white supremacy in the context of

an anti-Black, colonial social formation in crisis" (Rodriguez 2021b, 4). The objective was to restore a regime of domination which was historically facilitated by the (symbolic, cultural, juridical, and material) logics of white supremacy. The challenge, then, was to reassert white racial hegemony on a new political terrain where *de jure* apartheid was unsustainable and obsolete (Ibid., 9). The result was "a militarized and counterinsurgent racist state busily reforming its criminalization, policing, and carceral infrastructures in order to broaden its cultural and juridical capacities to wage domestic war" (Ibid., 4). To succeed, the new hegemonic order required the "production, refurbishing, and/or reorganization of political alliances, gendered racial statecraft, cultural common sense, and social identities": in other words, a new historic bloc (Ibid., 9). It is fundamental to understand that not only was the authoritarian turn crucial to restoring both class *and* racial domination, but the threat to the racial order was central to the construction of the moral panics discussed above.

To summarize, then, a twofold crisis in ruling class hegemony was contained through the use of force. Because the conjunctural crisis never ended, the need for extraordinary coercion never passed: rather, it formed the basis of the new social order, which paradoxically stabilized around the crisis, requiring a "cycle of moral panics" to sustain itself. This is what Stuart Hall and his colleagues surmised when they spoke of the emergence of a "law-and-order society" (Hall et al. 1978, 320-323). The victorious right-wing politics of the past five decades can easily be understood through the moral panic & state violence dialectic: to every problem a simple explanation—not enough state violence—and a simple solution—more state violence, that is, more police, more police discretion, more prisons, more prisoners, longer sentences, harsher conditions, less rights, and so on.

At the heart of this political strategy are two interrelated processes: racialization and criminalization (Camp 2016; Gilmore 2022b; Goldberg 2009). As activists and scholars have extensively documented, many of these moral panics were and are racist crime panics, wherein racialized communities are portrayed as existential threats to the social order, their suffering and their resistance pathologized as criminal behaviour, thus justifying the mass criminalization of these populations and their warehousing in both open-air and actual prisons (Gilmore 2022b; Hall et al. 1978; Hinton 2021).

The authoritarian consensus thus cemented a new historic bloc that united the upper classes—in a dominant position—to the reactionary white masses—in a subordinate position—for a joint project of neoliberal restructuring, sociopolitical repression, and reconstruction of the racial order through a revamped regime of racial criminalization (Camp 2016; Gilmore 2022b; Rodriguez 2021b). The expansion of state violence was therefore central to the conjunctural transition: it served to both repress dissent to, and gather consent for, the new political regime. With time, state violence came to serve a third structural function: it became one of the ruling classes' only strategies to manage the economic failures and social disasters of neoliberalism, and then to manage the disasters that flow from the exercise of state violence itself. This, then, is how the neoliberal restructuring of the state met the expansion of the carceral state: in a deadly spiral of necessity.

3.3 Features of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture

At the simplest level, then, the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture is a social formation characterized by an emptying out of the social capacities of the state (i.e. "neoliberal") and an expansion of the apparatus of state violence (i.e. "carceral"). This transition is apparent in virtually all Western states, both discursively and materially, albeit with different degrees of intensity and success. (We will hardly find examples of states that have become *less* violent and *more* egalitarian.) The growing inequality of Western societies has been well documented, along with its driving factors of welfare retrenchment, cuts in education and healthcare, disinvestment from social housing, deregulation of market housing, privatized public services, tax cuts for corporations and the rich, weakening labour protections, or union-busting (Harvey 2005; Korpi 2003; Navarro 2007).

The growing recourse to state violence has also been widely documented, with trends that hold true for virtually every Western country: the growth in incarceration rates (World Prison Brief n.d.); the creation of harsher, faster, sentencing regimes; the cultural and political obsession with punishment (Fassin 2018); the management of inequality through penal violence (Garland 2001; Wacquant 2009); the increasingly brazen violation of human rights in detention and policing; the intensification of the historical inequalities and injustices of the penal system, and the expansion of racialized class warfare (Gilmore 2022b; Goldberg 2009; Rigouste 2021; Rodriguez 2021b); the militarization of police forces (Roziere and Walby 2018; Schrader 2022); the spread of

domestic counter-insurgency and the suspension of civil rights through counter-terrorism (Rigouste 2021; Schrader 2019); the necropolitics of immigration enforcement (at the border, in the domestic space, and in third-countries) (Walia 2021); the criminalization of marginality in cities (Harcourt 2005); the authoritarian repression of progressive social movements (Crosby and Monaghan 2018)—and of course, the absolute lack of evidence linking these expansions of state violence to crime reduction or any sort of improvement in social well-being, the wholesale denial of this basic truth, and the bipartisan consensus for penal expansion, leading some scholars to proclaim that penal populism is "the end of reason" (Pratt and Miao 2017; see also Roberts et al. 2002).

At the interface of the 'neoliberal' and 'carceral' trends is the "carceral" turn of social services (e.g., increasing surveillance, coercion, and stigmatization; see Chapman and Withers 2019; Jacobs et al. 2020; Kim et al. 2024; Roberts 2022), and the ostensible "therapeutic" turn of carceral practices (Michaud et al. 2023; Ouellet et al. 2021; Chiarello 2024). In my study of mixed squads I only engage with the second dynamic, though some of my colleagues in Montreal are writing the other side of the story.[17]

As Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues, contrary to popular understandings of neoliberal reform, the state was not shrunk but rather restructured. The financial and administrative capacity of the state (which was vastly increased by the construction of welfare states) was simply redirected towards new social, political, and economic objectives. Through her concept of the "anti-state state", she shows that "anti-state" narratives served to undermine the state's role as provider of welfare, support, and social empowerment, while simultaneously legitimizing its role as purveyor of violence and provider of "security" (Gilmore and Gilmore 2022b). Indeed, as scholars across disciplines have observed, the spectre of security is at the heart of the current conjuncture (Balzacq et al. 2016; Walia 2021). Gilmore helpfully describes this as "the abandonment of one set of public mandates in favor of another—of social welfare for domestic warfare" (Gilmore 2022d, 338).

Gilmore describes the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture through the twin concepts of "organized abandonment" and "organized violence", which are central to my thesis (Gilmore and

[17] Karl Beaulieu, with whom I conducted some of the research that went into this thesis, is currently working on a doctoral project called "Between social work and carceral work: Social workers face the expansion of police-intervention partnerships".

Gilmore 2022a, 303). "Organized abandonment" describes the strategic withdrawal of state protection and support from vulnerable communities, and their state-supported transformation into sites of intensified exploitation, extraction, and disposal. Neoliberal policy, of course, has been a careful exercise in organized abandonment, dismantling the public services that supported the most disaffiliated social groups and orchestrating wealth transfers from the poor to the rich (e.g., what David Harvey [2004] calls “accumulation by dispossession”).

Many scholars have then drawn the link between the structural production of "surplus populations" by capitalist economies, their abandonment by the state, and the subsequent management of these populations through criminalization, policing, and incarceration (Christie 2016; Gilmore 2007; Wacquant 2009). Indeed, the same communities targeted by organized abandonment are the primary targets of "organized violence". The purveyors of organized violence are vast (they include border enforcement, private security, and some agencies traditionally considered social services, such as child removal and forced hospitalization), but they are often summarized as the courts, police, and prisons, or as the "prison-industrial complex", which englobes all those who have a political, economic, institutional, or ideological stake in the expansion of state violence.

The relationship between organized abandonment and organized violence is direct, varied, and dizzying. Most commonly, the consequences of organized abandonment (e.g., poverty, distress, disorder, petty crime, interpersonal violence) are managed through organized violence. Criminalization, policing, and prisons have become, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore neatly summarizes, “a catchall solution to social problems” (Gilmore 2022a, 478). This violence, of course, only intensifies the depths of abandonment, enabling the reproduction of the cycle. Entire neighbourhoods are occupied by the police, who make their own law; criminalized individuals, their loved ones, and their communities are broken by the life-long torture of incarceration; generations are confined to open-air prisons, trapped in a cycle of exploitation, humiliation, abuse, and punishment.

It is hard, for communities so lacerated by abandonment and violence, to mount an effective political opposition to their conditions; yet they do, time and time again, and when they do, they are most often repressed by another barrage of organized violence. The organized political opposition to abandonment is easily criminalized (e.g., the opposition to resource extraction projects), and of course, political opposition to organized violence is assailed by organized

violence (the brutal repression of anti-carceral movements, protests, and revolts, from the 1960s to today, is the platonic demonstration; see Burton 2023; Hinton 2021; Rigouste 2021). Most fundamentally, the very exercise of state violence turns its targets into dehumanized and disposable beings, that is, into legitimate targets for organized violence and abandonment. From this perspective, the function of the—juridical, discursive, and material—processes of criminalization and racialization is precisely the creation of legitimate targets.

Finally, the neoliberal-carceral restructuring of the state has had profound repercussions at the local level, contributing to a more repressive form of governance at the urban scale. The strategy of "devolution", wherein higher levels of government offload responsibilities (but not resources) to lower levels of government, has left municipalities to manage the fall-out from the retrenchment of the social state (Gilmore and Gilmore 2022a). These policy shifts have produced new or graver socioeconomic problems—including crumbling infrastructure, housing crises, homelessness, and the production of surplus populations—while incentivizing new urban strategies that seek to revitalize and sanitize urban spaces to attract tourists, investment, and relatively wealthy residents—the latter often dependent on the cleansing of the former (Mitchell 1997). The economic scarcity, moral panics, and growing use of violence that characterize the conjuncture have led to the emergence of what Neil Smith (1996, 222) called the "revanchist city", a "dual and divided city of wealth and poverty … where the victors are increasingly defensive of their privilege, such as it is, and increasingly vicious in defending it." These punitive class politics are the result of a massive power asymmetry between the urban rich and poor, but also of a structural trap: municipalities do not have the means to resolve systemic socioeconomic inequalities, but they have a well-funded tool—policing—whose very purpose has been, since its modern inception, to manage the consequences of those inequalities (see Foucault 1995). In the neoliberal-carceral context, the state's largesse with carceral interventions—and frugality with social services—has only intensified the city-level use of police repression as the first and last solution to problems of urban inequality.

We can define the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, then, as a configuration of society in which ruling class hegemony is economically, ideologically, and politically secured through the widespread use of state violence, which is legitimized and enabled by material and discursive processes of criminalization, and operationalized through the police, courts and prison system, to

which vast state resources are being diverted. This is the context in which we must try to understand mixed squads: the conjuncture has ossified around a permanent crisis of the mode of production; there is a ruling bloc whose hegemony depends on the limitless expansion of state violence, or in other words, on its ability to police and incarcerate its way through the crisis; public funds flow away from social agencies and towards carceral agencies; some social groups are governed, almost exclusively, through a dialectic of abandonment and aggression; cities have become battlefields in a zero-sum game, subjecting the most marginalized to decades of state-sanctioned aggression; and now we are told that police officers, the front-line agents of the carceral state, will work hand in hand with the front-line agents of the social state, to help the urban poor. Put in context, there is a certain dissonance. What is going on?

4. Abolition

To make sense of these contradictions, we need to look towards the movement for penal abolition, also known as prison abolition, prison-industrial complex (PIC) abolition, police abolition, or simply "abolition". These terms refer to a decades-long political struggle to dismantle the carceral state (meaning all systems of criminalization, policing, incarceration, punishment, and state violence), to upend the relations of domination that sustain it, and to rearticulate the social formation around a project of collective liberation. To paraphrase Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2018), abolition is both an absence and a presence: absence of the major forms of suffering and injustice that underlie our social order, and presence of everything that current social systems could not be bothered to address. Notably, abolition develops practices to address interpersonal and structural forms of harm and injustice, at the level of both root and symptom, driven by the principle that collective safety proceeds from collective care, solidarity, and meeting the needs of all—and not from inflicting gratuitous violence against dehumanized and impoverished groups. In other words, abolition is an intellectual and political tradition of people who work hard, day after day, to repudiate the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture.

Abolition is central to this thesis for at least two reasons. First, mixed squads were popularized (by the state) in direct response to the popularization (among the masses) of the abolitionist struggle. As we will see, mixed squads are, at once, a co-optation and rejection of

abolitionist analyses and demands. Second, the most rigorous studies and critiques of the penal system and the carceral turn of the state are found—in my view—in the abolitionist tradition. Abolitionists understand the penal system because they are willing to consider that it is neither sincere nor legitimate, because they are engaged in a practical struggle against it, because they are often directly subjected to it, and because they actively develop practices to achieve what the penal system pretends and fails to achieve, i.e. provide safety and justice. Compared with dominant studies of crime, police, and prisons, which are committed to saving and legitimizing the penal system, the abolitionist standpoint allows for a more dispassionate analysis of this machine. Perhaps most importantly, the abolitionist perspective is enriched by its ability to consider that things could be otherwise.

4.1 Abolitionist traditions

Abolition is a way of being in, understanding, and remaking the world, fundamentally opposed to the perspectives and strategies that sustain the carceral state. As such, many different forms of work and struggle (against state violence, against dehumanization, for collective liberation, for collective safety and care) can be described as "abolitionist". As a self-conscious movement, however, penal abolition emerged in the 1970s. Curiously enough, it developed simultaneously within two distinct traditions, one in Europe and one in North America, which both preceded and then responded to the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture.[18]

The European abolitionist tradition grew out of the prisoner movements of the 1960s, of that decade's push for radical penal reform, and of the emerging field of critical criminology. As Joël Charbit, Shaïn Morisse, and Gwenola Ricordeau explain in their recent history of penal abolition *Brique par brique, mur par mur* (2024), it was "a fight that some thought they would win" (19). This is hard to imagine for those of us who grew in the shadow of the neoliberal-carceral state but, as we have discussed, the penal system was much smaller and less politically powerful in the previous conjuncture. "The times were with us", remembered the abolitionist sociologist Thomas Mathiesen in 1986, "I believed I would personally experience the day when prisons were abolished" (81). The outrage, vitriol, and ignorance with which the propositions of abolitionism

[18] Throughout this thesis, my perspective is largely limited to Europe and North America. This is a limitation of both my knowledge and of the scope of my thesis.

are today received is a symptom of the entrenchment of carceral power in our minds, spirits, social structures, and political struggles—in other words, "the times are no longer with us" (Ibid., 82). Yet, in another sense, the virulent response to abolition also signals how threatening the movement has become in the current conjuncture.

While abolition is commonly derided as utopian and simplistic, early abolitionists argued that "it is the recourse to caging that is simplistic, and that the penal system relies on an essentially utopian vision of crime and society" (Charbit et al. 2024, 27). Critical criminologists like Louk Hulsman (1986) remarked that the concept of crime covers thousands of different situations that have no common denominator, and to all of them prescribes a single solution: punishment. He denounced that "the penal system can only punish, yet there are so many other possible—and generally better—ways to react to an unpleasant or painful event" (Hulsman and Bernat de Celis 1982, cited in Ricordeau 2021, 13). As Norwegian criminologist Nils Christie (1977) argued, the single-minded obsession with punishment by the state ignores the needs of both victims and perpetrators, it precludes the possibility of repairing harm, it promotes isolation, fear, and dehumanization, and it deprives citizens of an opportunity to use conflict as an opportunity to reflect on the social structure and change it. The penal system enforces its own monopoly on situations of harm and conflict, precluding the development of non-retributive solutions; it is "a blind machine whose very purpose is to produce sterile suffering" (Hulsman and Bernat de Celis 1982, 104). Sterile indeed, considering the mountain of evidence that the penal system has failed to achieve its formal objectives of deterrence and rehabilitation. As Charbit et al. (2024, 45-46) summarize, the abolitionist critique is "both ethical and pragmatic":

> the penal system is useless and counterproductive, but also illegitimate and harmful. It over-criminalizes certain populations and promotes a false analysis of problems, to which it responds with inefficient and inhumane solutions. ... The penal system is a form of institutionalized revenge ... that feeds and reinforces relations of domination, and it is therefore fundamentally harmful for individuals and society as a whole.

In the 1980s, faced with the expansion of the penal system across the Western world, Thomas Mathiesen (1986, 84) wrote that "we see much more clearly today that prisons are a part of the State's apparatus for political repression, thus being much more integrated into the political system

than some of us thought two decades ago." Yet, in the United States, another abolitionist tradition had emerged in the late 1960s from the direct experience of the penal system as a tool of political warfare. This line of analysis had bloomed within the Black liberation struggle, both as an organized political movement (i.e. Black power) and as a diffuse "radical consciousness in action" (Gilmore 2022a, 475), which found itself on the front-lines of what we have previously described as the 'carceral turn': the state's attempt to police and incarcerate the crisis, and to reconstruct the social formation on the basis of carceral control.

Starting in the second half of the 1960s, thousands of Black communities across the United States revolted against the growing police encroachment on their lives. Then as now, the expansion of policing was justified in the name of order and safety, yet as historian Elizabeth Hinton (2021) argues “the history of police violence and Black rebellion in postwar America demonstrates that patrolling low-income neighborhoods with outside forces does not promote public safety” (306). Hinton demonstrates that the communities who rebelled understood that policing worked hand-in-hand with other systems of political and economic oppression: they demanded freedom from police violence but also better access to housing, education and employment, and sometimes addressed both issues themselves by allying community self-defence with mutual aid, following the example of the Black Panther Party. The state responded with a sweeping campaign of repression and counter-insurgency, which aimed to extinguish radical consciousness and eliminate the organized Black power movement. The state's "use of incarceration to 'solve' the problem of urban rebellion", Orisanmi Burton (2023, 13) explains, "created the conditions for a new problem: carceral rebellion". A wave of prison revolts followed the urban revolts, led by imprisoned rebels and revolutionaries from the subaltern classes who developed a radical consciousness either before or after being caged. Through this continuum of struggle, they came to understand "prison walls not as boundaries between freedom and unfreedom, but as material demarcations of different intensities of captivity, vulnerability, and rebellion" (Burton 2023, 4).

This understanding of the penal system as a site of domestic war, famously elaborated by George Jackson (1996) and many other imprisoned activists and intellectuals, is fundamental to the American abolitionist tradition (see Burton 2023). It traces a lineage between the penal system and the historical antecedents of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid: not only because of the analogies, similarities, and continuities between these systems, not only because they sustain similar relations of domination, but also because they all represent unfinished projects of abolition.

Angela Davis (2005), in particular, revived W.E.B Du Bois concept of "abolition democracy", which emphasizes that "the abolition of slavery was accomplished only in the negative sense. In order to achieve the *comprehensive* abolition of slavery—after the institution was rendered illegal and black people were released from their chains—new institutions should have been created to incorporate black people into the social order" (95). In other words, the dismantlement of an oppressive machine must be followed by the material creation of a just social order, lest relations of domination reconstitute themselves around a new set of mechanisms. As Davis explains, "the prison-industrial-complex is a result of the failure to enact abolition democracy" (95). The historical outlook of abolition, then, serves to "find alternatives to the despairing sense that so much change, in retrospect, seems only to have been displacement and redistribution of human sacrifice": from slavery to apartheid, from apartheid to carceral war, from metropole to colony, from colonialism to neocolonialism, etc. (Gilmore 2022a, 475). From this perspective, "the still-to-be-achieved work of abolition" is "unfinished liberation", and what is to be abolished is not only the death-dealing institutions of the conjuncture we inhabit, "but rather the processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion that congeal in and as group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Ibid.).

The American tradition of abolition was therefore always deeply attuned to the political dimension of the penal system. That is part of the reason why it has become dominant in the neoliberal-carceral period, where the penal system has taken the historic role previously performed by plantations, vigilantes, militias, and the like. The prevalence of this tradition, however, is also the product of immense organizing efforts. The abolitionist movement was consolidated with the creation of Critical Resistance in 1997, a group formed by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis, and hundreds of other activists who challenged "the idea that imprisonment and policing are an [acceptable] solution for social, political, and economic problems" (Critical Resistance n.d.-a). Since then, organizers affiliated with or influenced by Critical Resistance have helped turn penal abolition into a mass social movement, while abolitionist perspectives have been integrated into other political struggles (e.g., to end gender violence, for free mobility and migration, for queer and trans liberation). Abolition has also been integrated in various fields of labour who increasingly reject collaborations with the institutions and logics of the carceral state (e.g., abolitional social work, abolitional public health, etc.; see Reinhart 2023; Kim et al. 2024). In

parallel, abolitionists have been elaborating strategies and practices to address harm outside of the carceral state (see Creative interventions 2012).

4.2 Features of abolition

From this brief historical overview, it should be apparent that abolition operates on various temporal scales (i.e. immediate needs and long-term horizons), at different levels of intervention (i.e. interpersonal and structural), calling for diverse modes of action (i.e. reform, invention, and revolution). Overall, it converges around a practical critique of state violence and a liberatory social program. I will now try to define some key features of this dual movement.

1. **"Criminalization is the root we choose to pull on with all our might"** (Interrupting Criminalization 2025). Abolition stems from the understanding that "Crime has no ontological reality. Crime is not the object but the product of criminal policy. Criminalization is one of the many ways to construct social reality" (Hulsman 1986, 71). Instead of "crime", abolition is driven by categories such as harm and injustice. Some crimes refer to harmful actions (e.g., abuse), while others refer to neutral actions (e.g., drug use), or virtuous actions (e.g., resistance to state violence). The (*de jure* or *de facto*) driver of criminalization is whether the person committing the action is poor and marginalized, or whether the action threatens the interests and desires of those who are rich and powerful. Moreover, the vast majority of criminalized actions (harmful or not) are symptoms of deeper social causes, often stemming from social, economic, and political injustice. Criminalization, however, is inherently individualizing: structural violence, domination, oppression, abuse, and exploitation are not addressed by the penal system (except to perpetuate them, see below). Similarly, the destruction of life by state policy, by powerful people and institutions, and by agencies of state violence, is not criminalized. To summarize, there is no correlation between crime and harm: criminalization simply designates the actions that the state and those who control it find undesirable, and the people that they are willing to violate. It is a strategy of dehumanization driven by political interests. As Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie summarize, "criminalization is central to right wing, authoritarian and fascist agendas—it is the mechanism that builds public consensus for violent repression, exclusion, and ultimately,

extermination, and that spreads fear and ensures compliance" (Interrupting Criminalization 2025, np).

2. **"The services that prisons [and police] are supposed to provide will never compensate for the harms they have caused since their creation"** (Charbit et al. 2024, 13). To the extent that the penal system is sincere about trying to provide safety and justice, it is a failure. It does little more than inflict violence and punishment against people that have already been victimized by the social system. Its only successful function, perhaps, is to immobilize (certain) people, temporarily. Other than that, it creates broken people and communities, producing the conditions for more harm. It does not deter "crime", it worsens its structural roots, and it encourages recidivism. At the same time, the penal system is an immense source of harm for the social groups it targets: its violence and destruction far surpasses the meagre services it renders.

3. **The purpose of the penal system is not to provide safety and justice; it is to preserve the asymmetries of power and resources that coalesce into relations of domination.** The penal system's ability to 'fail upwards' can only be properly understood by re-evaluating its purpose. A critical and historical perspective on police and prisons, more attuned to their concrete impact than to their theoretical promises, reveals that they succeed and persist because they effectively preserve an unjust social order. For the over-privileged, the penal system is a protection from the repercussions of their actions; for the under-privileged, it is warfare. As Kaba and Ritchie (2022, 208) explain, "our organizing and advocacy toward a world free of policing is rooted in the reality that, for many of us, the cops offer no solution to violence and in fact *are* the killers, rapists, home invaders, and looters, destroyers of lives, families, and communities." This perspective allows abolitionists to see that the penal system is not only a failure, but an obstacle: it is "what stands between us and the resources we need to ensure our collective safety and survival" (Ibid.).

4. It follows that **penal abolition is necessary (but not sufficient) for achieving collective safety, well-being and survival.** The abolition of criminalization, policing, and prisons would represent in itself a vast reduction of insecurity and suffering. It would also remove the central political obstacle to achieving a more just society and to developing effective responses to harm and injustice. The obstacle is also ideological, due to decades of "propaganda and social policy that

offer police and the carceral state as the only possible ways to meet [our basic human need for safety and survival]" (Kaba and Ritchie 2022, 208). The idea of abolition often sparks fear of losing what we imagine currently keeps us safe, leaving chaos in its wake. The concern itself is sensible and important, but its underlying assumption, that the penal system is currently keeping us safe, is sorely mistaken. This is precisely the issue: we have no systems in place to produce sustainable forms of safety and justice, because the institutions that formally monopolize these missions are pursuing entirely different ends. The question, then, is not how to replace these institutions, but how to create practices of safety and care where none exist—a question that is as urgent right now as it would be in an abolitionist future. The dismantlement of the penal system merely opens the way for things to be otherwise.

5. **The challenge of abolition is to create safety without dehumanization, human sacrifice, and state violence—which is to say a durable safety for all, not just for some at the expense of others.** The question of safety is central to abolition, but it is understood in a much more expansive way than in the carceral paradigm. Being safe means not being deprived of our basic needs, not being made vulnerable to abuse, not being isolated and excluded. It is necessarily collective and interdependent: we are safe when everyone is safe, not when we are imposing extreme unsafety against some dehumanized others. Abolitionists see safety "as a set of resources, relationships, skills, and tools that can be developed, disseminated, and deployed to prevent, interrupt, and heal from harm" (Kaba and Ritchie 2022, 213). Preventing, interrupting, and healing harm requires a diversity of resources and practices, which are entirely different depending on the kind of harm that we are trying to deal with: it can look like community health approaches to violence, transformative justice processes, Indigenous sovereignty, healing centres, community mediation, non-coercive mental healthcare and crisis intervention teams, harm reduction support for people who use drugs, school counsellors and mediators, street outreach work with exceptionally marginalized and criminalized individuals, peer-led support, regularization of migrant status, social housing, shelters, universal childcare, youth programs, free and accessible transit, and much more (see Abolition Coalition 2020; Creative Interventions 2012; One Million Experiments n.d.). These are all "creative interventions" that address both the roots and symptoms of harm, that make people less vulnerable to being victims and perpetrators of harm, and whose impact is not to compound harm but rather to transform people, situations, and social systems

towards greater safety and collective care. If there is any space for violence in creating safety (a debated argument within the abolitionist movement), it is marginal, temporary, and a last line of recourse; quite exactly the opposite of the penal paradigm, where violence is the first and only intervention.

6. **"Where life is precious, life is precious"** (Gilmore 2023). This slogan summarizes the deeper, structural dimension of abolition: that collective safety depends on the creation of social formations where no one is expendable. The most profound forms of harm in our societies are structural: they are found in the organized abandonment, deprivation, abuse, and exploitation of marginalized groups. These structural features of our social order also create people and institutions who devalue life. This is certainly true within the penal system and among the privileged classes, who have been trained to thoroughly dehumanize various social groups. This logic also applies among those who are treated as disposable. It is commonly understood that most "crimes" that land people in prison are symptoms of structural injustices such as poverty, exploitation, and exclusion. There is also abundant evidence that the distinction between victim and perpetrator is illusory: most people who commit violence have themselves been victims of violence, both interpersonal and structural, and that is before even considering the violence of the penal system (see Godsoe 2021; Reingle 2014). In other words, "no one enters violence for the first time by committing it" (Kaba 2021, 146). Processes of devaluation of human life explain why “worldwide today, wherever inequality is deepest, the use of prison as a catchall solution to social problems prevails” (Gilmore 2022a, 478).

7. **Penal abolition, then, is the abolition of the social, political, and economic conditions that make the penal system a possibility, and the founding of a new society where prisons and police are impossible and obsolete.** Abolition thus reaches for a clear revolutionary horizon. This should not be surprising, seeing as the entire project is predicated on structural change and the end of domination. As Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2004, 114) summarize:

> What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society.

8. **The abolitionist strategy is both reform and revolution.** As Thomas Mathiesen (1986,2) noticed, "We discovered that being 'both', and being unplaced, is highly threatening to the power and authority structure against which a social movement works." As we saw above, abolitionists are constantly promoting and creating anti-carceral modes of life, outside of the framework of the state. In their engagement with the state, abolitionists push for "non-reformist reforms" (or "abolitionist reforms") whose objective is to undermine the power, scope, legitimacy, and resources of penal institutions (examples includes decarceration, stopping the construction of new prisons, or the decriminalization of drugs, sex work, immigration, and homelessness). These are opposed to "reformist reforms", often favoured by ruling classes and the state, who change the penal system in order to preserve and expand it (see Critical Resistance 2020).

4.3 Defund the police

Though blistering critiques of policing are almost transhistorical, the notion of police *abolition* was only rigorously elaborated in the 2000s. This thesis is particularly focused on this strand of the abolitionist analysis, and on the specific demand to "defund the police and reinvest in communities" (see Alexander and Sered 2021; Interrupting Criminalization 2020; Kaba and Ritchie 2022; Pasternak et al. 2022). This demand embodies almost every feature of abolition: it is a non-reformist reform that seeks to address immediate harms while also undermining the structural function of policing and, at the same time, developing short and long-term non-carceral solutions to harm and safety. Mixed squads emerged as a direct response to the mainstreaming of this demand and, as I will argue, they were a deft attempt to neutralize its appeal. In order to follow this thesis, it is therefore important to understand what defunding the police entails.

"Defunding the police" can be understood at five levels:

1. Certain police tasks should simply be eliminated because they are purely harmful. As we will discuss throughout this thesis, this applies to all of the practices that contribute to racial and social profiling (e.g., street checks and the criminalization of homelessness). Other examples include the criminalization of drugs and sex work, and the political repression of progressive social

movements. These tasks, whose only impact is to destroy the lives of vulnerable and marginalized groups, represent a significant portion of police work that could be immediately eliminated, bringing only positive consequences, and freeing a vast amount of resources to be used otherwise.

2. Certain police tasks respond to genuine social issues, but the police are not competent to resolve them. These tasks, which represent another large portion of police work, should be redistributed to other professionals who have relevant training and expertise. A well-documented example is the response to mental health crises, to which the police respond by default, leading to repeated instances of brutality and death. Other examples include the management of homelessness in public space, the complaints of privileged citizens when faced with diversity and marginality, as well as conflicts between neighbours, programs to prevent violence among young people, and more. These are situations where an intervention may be needed, but it should not be from the police: the police's expertise in inflicting violence and enforcing the law is not needed, and leads to harmful consequences. Meanwhile, there already exists an alternative network of community-based organizations and even state agencies that can adequately respond to these situations, but it is under-developed and under-funded. By removing these tasks from the police's purview, more resources could be liberated to expand existing community-led interventions and develop new ones.

3. Some situations present real danger, and many people would agree that the use of coercion may be part of the solution. Though these situations fall under the proper purview of policing, many front-line workers are skilled at managing dangerous situations in less violent ways. Moreover, regardless of whether force is used, these situations still require a variety of other non-repressive interventions. The police should be reserved as a last line of response—as opposed to being the first and only response—and other forms of interventions should be well-funded and prioritized. This would ensure that violence is used as minimally as possible.

4. The most important rationale for defunding the police is the necessity to change our approach to public safety. The previous three points describe how the role of the police can be reduced in our response to the *symptoms* of social issues like poverty, violence, or mental illness. By investing in efforts that address the structural *roots* of social problems, we can further minimize the "need"

for policing, while transforming society for the better. This requires a structural vision of safety that rejects simplistic and individualizing analyses, and that is founded in a pursuit of collective well-being rather than in domination and exclusion. It also requires abandoning the neoliberal-carceral tendency to worsen social distress and then manage it through violence.

5. Finally, defunding addresses a political challenge: by minimizing the role and resources of the police, their vast political influence would be minimized. This would make it easier to hold the police accountable, to further reduce its scope and power, to avoid fear-mongering and moral panics, and to develop a humane, effective, and evidence-based approach to public safety.

Conclusion

To conclude, the existing literature on mixed squads takes their stated objectives at face value and as a consequence fails to ask important questions. For example: If the objective of mixed squads is to deal with situations that are non-criminal in nature, why is the police involved? Does the presence of police officers improve the interventions of non-police workers, or does it degrade them? How do mixed squads compare with and impact existing ecosystems of social intervention? How do the interventions of mixed squads articulate with existing police practices? Do mixed squads serve other socio-political functions? Remarkably absent from the literature is any examination of the potentially negative impacts and ill intentions of mixed squads.

Moreover, the historical and political lineage of this reform is not interrogated. Mixed squads are treated as a sincere response to social injustices and political demands related to police violence, without engaging with the complex history of police reform. In particular, despite mixed squads being a fairly overt extension of community policing, the existing literature does not draw connections between these two police innovations. Yet, a historical perspective offers important lessons about community policing programs, notably about their role in re-legitimizing policing in the absence of structural change, in expanding repressive campaigns, and in pacifying political resistance to police violence through methods of counter-insurgency.

There is an even wider context that mixed squads can be situated within: the decades-long reordering of Western social formations, defined by the retrenchment of social welfare, the

expansion of state violence, and the appropriation of state power by dominant economic classes. I suggest that mixed squads are a product of this social order, which I call the 'neoliberal-carceral conjuncture', and a response to its latest crises.

At the heart of these crises are various political movements for social justice, and in particular the movement for penal abolition. This tradition of theory and struggle describes the penal system as the central political obstacle to a just social order, revealing its failure at providing safety, and its success at preserving injustice. In response, abolition proposes strategies to undermine policing, incarceration, and other forms of state violence, along with new approaches to prevent and address harm.

I now turn to the body of my thesis. In the three chapters that follow, we will see how mixed squads, community policing, and abolition crashed into each other on the terrain of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture.

Chapter 4: Public relations, repression, and counter-insurgency: The overlapping functions of mixed squads in Montreal[19]

"What we observe is that, when someone with a uniform and a gun arrives next to you and tells you that you might want to go somewhere else, there's a good chance you'll go somewhere else."

— A community worker describes his experience of mixed squads

Introduction

In the past twenty years, mixed squads have become an increasingly common feature of urban policing. For those who care about the fair treatment of vulnerable people, this may appear like a very positive development. Two qualities make these teams unique: the close collaboration between police officers and community workers, and an ostensible commitment to providing support instead of repression. This combination seems to address, at once, many common concerns. It is by now well known that, due to a lack of investment in social services, the police have become front-line responders to many situations of social distress. The consequence is well documented: people who are homeless are often mistreated; people suffering mental health crises are sometimes killed; people call 911 because they see someone in need of help, and the result is tragedy. Everybody says that this is a problem, including the police. One prevalent explanation focuses on training: police officers are not equipped to understand and engage with people who have complex psychological or social challenges. More than that: the job of police officers is not to dispense social services but to repress crime, and their crime-fighting mentality can make them a little rough. As the proverb goes: "if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." Mixed squads, then, seem like a breath of fresh air: community workers are back on the front-lines, they are teaching officers a different way of doing things, and the police are finally open to change. Taken at face value, mixed squads signal a new, more humane approach to policing the most vulnerable. My research, however, disputes this account.

Mixed squads became a popular police reform in response to critiques of police violence. Their popularity surged after 2020, when millions of people took to the streets to denounce the

[19] This chapter is adapted from a forthcoming article, of which I am the lead author (see Nicoletti et al. 2025). I contributed to every section of the article, in research, analysis, and writing (see the Contribution of Authors section at the beginning of this thesis).

racism and brutality of police forces across the globe. Protesters articulated a profound critique of policing: they argued that racism and brutality were the very function of policing, not a deviation from its mission, and they disputed the notion that the police create safety. Informed by an abolitionist tradition of research and resistance, they asked for reforms that would vastly reduce the power, the scope, and the resources of police departments. This analysis, tied to a mass social movement, caused a crisis of legitimacy for the police. Historically, such moments of contestation have led to important police reforms. These reforms, however, have often served to expand police power and legitimacy, without changing the unjust practices that precipitated the crisis in the first place. Community policing has been one such reform, and mixed squads are a form of community policing. While mixed squads are the object of a small but growing literature, the existing analysis fails to interrogate the relationship between mixed squads and the sociopolitical conditions that gave rise to this reform. In particular, the continuities between mixed squads and community policing have not been explored. As such, the existing literature cannot determine whether mixed squads truly respond to the criticisms and demands that gained traction in 2020, or whether they serve to refashion and reinforce police power.

This chapter makes a critical evaluation of the impact of mixed squads in Montreal. Here, mixed squads have become increasingly common, especially when it comes to the policing of unhoused people. The *Service de police de la Ville de Montréal* (SPVM) presently maintains nine major mixed squads, five of which were added since the summer of 2020. Taking a conjunctural approach that looks both within and beyond mixed squads, I answer the following questions:

> RQ1: What is the impact of mixed squads in relation to their stated objectives (i.e. reducing police violence and providing support to vulnerable groups)? What is the overall impact of mixed squads on the social ecosystem? Could there be some unstated objectives?

To address these questions, this chapter connects empirical research with the literature on community policing. The first section examines the impact of mixed squads on the public discourse, through an analysis of media coverage. The second and third sections examine the impact of mixed squads on marginalized communities and the community sector, respectively, based on both archival research and interviews with community workers. Overall, this chapter argues that mixed squads aim to resolve an ongoing crisis of police legitimacy in three ways: (1)

they are a public relations scheme that allows unreformed police practices to persist undisturbed; (2) they are a strategy to expand police surveillance and repression; and (3) they are a form of domestic counter-insurgency, which serves to neutralize political resistance to police power by remaking the boundaries of the "community."

Methodology: The research for this chapter was enabled by a partnership with RAPSIM (*Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal*), a coalition of more than a hundred Montreal organizations that work with unhoused people and advocate for their needs. Many community groups, including RAPSIM, originally perceived mixed squads as a small but encouraging improvement in the police force's approach to unhoused people (see RAPSIM 2016). Yet, by 2020, RAPSIM shared our skepticism about the supposed benefits of mixed squads, and our informal discussions with them led to the development of a research project focused on the operations and effects of the five SPVM mixed squads that target unhoused people. With the help of a RAPSIM project manager, my colleagues were able to conduct semi-structured interviews with 38 community workers who work with unhoused people on the street or in shelters, representing 17 different organizations (all of them members of RAPSIM). These interviews were conducted between July 2022 and March 2023, and they were focused on three mixed squads (EMRII, EMIC, E=MC2) and one civilian squad (EMMIS).[20]

It is important to note that the participants' perspectives were necessarily partial, for multiple reasons: most of them had only observed one or two squads; their observations were limited to the previous 3 to 5 years; and they were limited to the neighbourhood they worked in and the populations they worked with. It is also important to note that these community workers have not participated in the mixed squads. As I explain below, they view such participation as a violation of their obligations to prioritize the needs of unhoused people. Yet, their work led them to observe and interact with mixed squads on a regular basis, seeing as they work with the same populations and in the same areas. Their experience thus helps us understand how mixed squads operate on the ground, while also allowing us to examine the differences between the interventions

[20] I co-authored a public-facing report consisting of an exegesis of these interviews (see Rutland et al. 2023). The report served as the empirical basis for this chapter (see Chapter 2). The research for this chapter consisted in a critical reinterpretation of the report in the light of the literature on community policing, and in particular of two of its common tendencies: extending the repressive capacities of the police, and developing strategies of counter-insurgency (see Chapter 3).

of community workers and the ostensibly supportive or therapeutic interventions of the mixed squads.

To understand other aspects of the mixed squads, including how they relate to the broader operations of the Montreal police, we also analyzed publicly available documents on the squads, submitted access to information requests to the police and the city, and conducted an extensive media review. The media review included every article (n ≈ 175) that mentioned mixed squads in Montréal's eight biggest media outlets from 2010 (the first year in which a mixed squad is mentioned in local media) to 2023. The news articles were tagged and analyzed through a qualitative and quantitative analysis (see Chapter 2). Beyond illuminating the operations of mixed squads, and the discourse that shrouds them, these articles provided key insights into the perspectives of the police and non-police participants of mixed squads, who were often interviewed. The first section, on the public relations function of mixed squads, is heavily based on this media review, while the second and third sections draw primarily from the aforementioned interviews with community workers.

1. Mixed squads as public relations

One of the main functions of mixed squads in Montreal has been to deflect public criticism of the police. This public relations function is especially visible in the moments in which new mixed squads were introduced. The city's first mixed squad, EMRII, was introduced in 2009. In the years leading up to this, the Montreal police was increasingly criticized for its harassment, repression, and ticketing of unhoused people. In 2009, the Quebec Human Right Commission (CDPDJ) published a damning report showing the ticketing of unhoused people had nearly tripled between 2000 and 2005. The report recommended the elimination of bylaws and policing practices that "target and stigmatize unhoused people" and called on the state to "replace its repressive approach to issues related to homelessness with a preventive approach rooted in the respect of socioeconomic and fundamental rights" (CDPDJ 2009, 198).

The introduction of EMRII in 2009 was a direct response to these criticisms and the CDPDJ's report. The squad, which pairs police officers with social workers, focuses on unhoused people. Its stated aim is to reduce the "judiciarization" of unhoused people by guiding those who

have accumulated a significant number of tickets to appropriate social services and "facilitating their social re-integration" (SPVM n.d.-c). In 2013, a second mixed squad, ESUP, was created. The new squad, which pairs police with mental health workers, was created in response to four police killings in the span of two years of individuals undergoing a mental health crisis.

The SPVM touted the supposed shift to a "therapeutic" orientation upon the launch of EMRII and ESUP and has benefited from glowing media coverage of both squads. Between 2010 and 2019, virtually every media article about mixed squads (45 out of 48) presented them as a solution to the management of homelessness or to the response to mental health crises. Moreover, 42 of these articles expressed positive—or very positive—views about the squads (see Figure 1). In 2011, for example, EMRII took a journalist for a ride-along. The journalist wrote of an officer that "If he did not carry a weapon and wear a police uniform, we might, hearing him speak, mistake him for a social worker", while a local police captain claimed that "We almost never give tickets to the homeless anymore" (La Presse, February 5, 2011). In 2012, during another ride-along, the same captain claimed that he saw "a marked improvement in relations between homeless people and the police" (La Presse, January 29, 2012). In 2013, an article described squad members as "angels coming to the rescue of the homeless" (Journal de Montréal, January 24, 2013). In 2019, another article claimed that "the work of EMRII has influenced police culture, resulting in fewer interventions" (Radio-Canada, September 30, 2019).

Significantly, the media coverage was not influenced by reports that these squads were failing to achieve their stated objectives. As early as 2012, a research report concluded that "EMRII is not a solution and it changes nothing" (La Presse, February 2012). In 2016, a report from the RAPSIM (2016, 8) showed that the ticketing and abuse of unhoused people continued unabated and that EMRII did not "positively contaminate the police force overall". In 2021, another research report confirmed that the ticketing of unhoused people had almost doubled since 2009. That same report revealed that the ESUP squad, created to address mental health interventions, was only present in 6% of crisis interventions (Bellot et al. 2021).[21] However, these reports and the reality they documented were only discussed in 3 out of 48 articles from 2009 to 2019. This media coverage thus exemplifies two main impacts of mixed squads on the public imagination: they

[21] Bellot et al. (2021) report that ESUP makes 1,900 interventions per year. Since 2012, the SPVM has repeatedly claimed that they receive 33,000 mental health calls per year.

project the illusion of a transformed police shifting from a repressive to a "therapeutic" role (Ouellet, Bernheim, and Morin 2021), and they conceal the persistence of police violence.

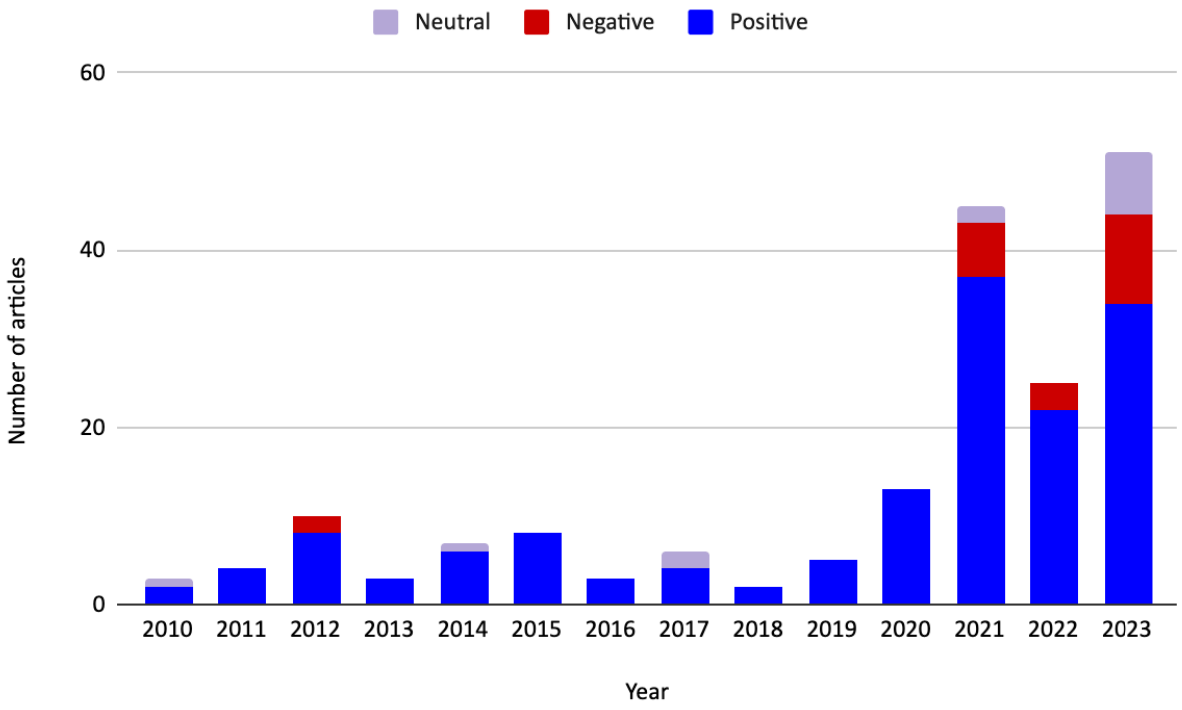

Figure 1: Positive, negative, and neutral media representations of mixed squads in Montreal (2010-2023).

The public relations function of mixed squads became especially apparent in 2020, with the historic worldwide protests against police racism and violence sparked by the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. In Montreal, the two largest protests against the police in the city's history occurred in June 2020. The same month saw the creation of the Montreal-based Defund the Police Coalition, which began to organize around 10 demands developed by coalition members, including the reallocation of 50% of the police budget to various social and community programs (Defund La Police 2024). In Montreal as elsewhere, the demand to "defund the police" expressed a profound structural critique of both policing and municipal governance. The police were described as fundamentally racist and violent, while municipalities (and other levels of government) were criticized for using state violence to respond to various social problems. The alternative, guided by an abolitionist analysis, was to reallocate police funds to programs that

would better alleviate social problems and make a police response unnecessary. The majority of the population seemed to support this alternative. A July 2020 poll found that 54% of Quebec residents supported defunding the police, while a city survey in the fall of 2020 found 73% support (Ipsos 2020; TVA Nouvelles 2021).

These developments caused a crisis of legitimacy for the police, in Montreal and many other cities. As Gilmore and Gilmore (2022b, 274) explain, the legitimacy of the police and the state more broadly rest on "a claim to provide social 'protection' [via] their monopoly on the delegation of violence." After 2020, safety and policing—or safety and state violence—were no longer synonymous. In Canada, the primary police response was to affirm the need for more spending on social programs, but not at the expense of police (HRM 2022, 61-62). In a subtle twist, many actors in Montreal touted mixed squads as both a way of funding social programs, and a justification for increased police budgets. Two key actors here were the police leadership and the Montreal Police Brotherhood, the so-called police "union." The police leadership and the Brotherhood frequently disagree, and there have been many moments in history when the Brotherhood has sought to topple the police director (Doucet 2013). On the issue of mixed squads, however, the two actors spoke with a common voice. In November 2020, as the city opened public consultations about the next year's budget, the head of the Brotherhood argued that "the number of specialized squads (ndlr: mixed squads) remains insufficient" (Le Devoir, November 3, 2020). During that same consultation, the police chief announced "a new approach" for community intervention, where "police officers and different frontline workers can work together on a daily basis in the field" (Le Devoir, November 18, 2020).

The common voice of the police leadership and Brotherhood need not have won the day. It is the city government that determines the police budget, and conflicts between the city government and the police have repeatedly erupted over the years. Moreover, the ruling party in 2020, Projet Montréal, is often (mistakenly) viewed as a progressive formation and might have been swayed by the historic protests and the demand to defund the police. Here again, however, mixed squads were a source of unity. At the same November 2020 consultation, Projet Montréal's leader and mayor, Valérie Plante, announced she did not envision reducing the police budget, while another high-ranking colleague said the party hoped to increase funding for mixed squads instead (Le Devoir, November 18, 2020). Sure enough, the party ultimately increased the police budget by 14% for 2021. The move faced no opposition from within City Hall. The opposition party, the

centre-right Ensemble Montréal party, generally favours even larger police budget increases and has frequently called for increased spending on mixed squads, specifically.

The two years following the 2020 protests saw historic police budget increases and an unparalleled increase in mixed squads. Pre-existing squads were expanded (EMRII, ESUP), and five new ones were created. The new squads focused on issues where police responses were most heavily criticized: homelessness (E=MC2, EMIC, ECCR), mental health intervention (ECHINOPS), racialized youth (EMIE), and guns and gangs (ECCR). In each case, the squad was described by police as a form of prevention that, as such, would make police repression unnecessary. The squads, in other words, were presented as the “alternative” demanded by the defund movement and the majority of the population.

The media in this period amplified the narrative of the police and Projet Montréal. From June 2020 onward, the rate of articles mentioning mixed squads surged (see Figure 2): the average rate increased tenfold, from 0.3 articles per month (2010-2019) to 3 articles per month (mid-2020 to 2023). As before, the articles presented the squads as a form of support for vulnerable people, but they also emphasized the “prevention” angle. In one article, published on the day the new ECCR squad was announced, a police sergeant told the media: "We're trying a different approach. We're trying to reach out to people. That way, we can be better at our prevention work" (La Presse, October 14, 2021). Another article summarized the change: “No more answering 911 calls or repression … The priority is to build human relations with the most vulnerable people” before an emergency call is ever made (Radio-Canada, January 14, 2022). This supposed shift away from repression became a consistent theme. One article emphasized that even "as the city's downtown faces an upsurge in violence and drug addiction", mixed squads aim "to build relationships with marginalized populations rather than repressing them" (24 Heures, July 11, 2023). Although mixed squads had been around for 14 years, they were presented as a novel solution to what protesters denounced. "Today, the majority of 911 calls are of a social nature, for which the police officer is not necessarily equipped", a sergeant told the media, "what's new, however, is that since July he is accompanied by specialized responders who can take over" (Radio-Canada, August 18, 2023). The message, as a 10-year piece on ESUP made clear, was that "Montreal's entire police culture is beginning to change" (Le Devoir, July 28, 2022).

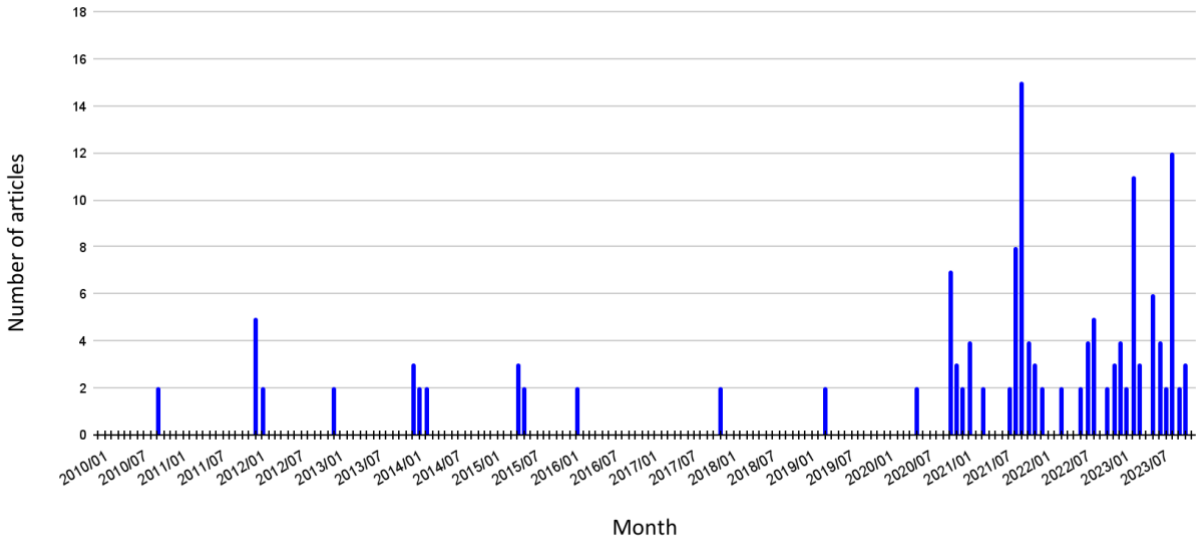

Figure 2: Number of news articles mentioning mixed squads per month (2010-2023)

The Projet Montréal government, meanwhile, began to identify mixed squads as a prominent part of a new "Montréal model of urban security" (City of Montreal 2023b), a model predicated on a "balance between repression and prevention" (Le Devoir, November 24, 2022). The public relations function of mixed squads allowed Projet Montréal to continue increasing the police budget, while claiming to address the concerns of activists and targeted communities. The budget increases for 2022 and 2023 were the highest in Montreal history and the highest anywhere in Canada (Rutland 2022). In both cases, the increases were accompanied by statements from the city and the police that emphasized mixed squads and their contribution to the new “Montreal model” of security. During the 2021 electoral campaign, for example, the incumbent mayor promised an investment of $110M in "public safety". She specified that $30M would go towards mixed squads, leaving the other $80M unaccounted for—even as her statement implied that it would fund repressive police activities. Unsurprisingly, media reports focused on the portion that was accounted for. One article, titled "Public safety: Projet Montréal invests in mixed squads", claimed that "the heart of [the city's] strategy" was "the funding of mixed squads ... a non-repressive approach” (Le Devoir, September 25, 2021). A closer look at the city's budget, however, reveals that the city and police's approach to public safety remains almost entirely repressive. We estimate that, as of 2024, mixed squads represent less than 1% of the police budget, seeing as they employ between 20 and 50 police officers out of a total of 4,600 (City of Montreal 2023a). Despite the

discursive emphasis on mixed squads, moreover, the conventional policing of unhoused people continued unabated. As previously discussed, the abuse and criminalization of unhoused people has only increased since 2009 (Bellot et al., 2021; RAPSIM 2020).

Moreover, Montreal has an extensive network of community organizations that support the city's most vulnerable populations with an approach rooted in "prevention". These organizations, however, receive a fraction of the funding that the city invests in repression. In 2023, for example, 296 organizations received a total of $30M from the city, less than 4% of the police's budget. The funding that went to mixed squads, insignificant to the police, would have increased the community sector's budget by 25%. In one article, the director of RAPSIM, who represents over a hundred homelessness organizations, remarked on this incongruence: "Instead of funding community groups that work in prevention," she denounced, "we fund these kinds of projects that do not respond to the needs of vulnerable communities, but rather to those of the SPVM and well-housed citizens" (Le Devoir, August 18, 2021). The city, however, tended to erase the presence and contributions of community groups, speaking of mixed squads as if they were pioneering a non-repressive approach to homelessness. As the director of RAPSIM pleaded in an open letter, "we encourage you to recognize the expertise of organizations that are *already* present on the ground doing prevention or street outreach work, instead of funding new initiatives ... that respond to the objectives of the City and the police instead of the real needs of those who have no option other than being in public space" (Journal Métro, November 10, 2021; emphasis mine). These critical interventions in the media discourse, however, were a rarity. The city's bias was largely echoed in the media coverage. From 2020 to 2023, community workers were only platformed in 14 out of 126 articles. The next sections of this chapter seek to redress this imbalance by focusing on the perspectives of community workers.

Since 2020, mixed squads have also helped the police and the city legitimize new repressive campaigns, as they attempted to manage a pandemic-related increase in homelessness. In the summer of 2020, a homeless encampment was established in the east of the city and it grew in size in subsequent months. In November 2020, the city announced it would dismantle the encampment. To obscure the fact that the city was pursuing a policy that many observers have qualified as a “violation of human rights” (CHRC 2024), the mayor promised she would not take a "bulldozer" approach (Journal Métro, November 24, 2020). "This operation of ‘voluntary and supportive sheltering’ is not a dismantlement", the mayor claimed, "but rather aims to guide the

homeless towards appropriate resources" (La Presse, November 24, 2020). In practice, the operation involved dozens of police in riot gear along with a mixed squad. While the riot squad pepper sprayed campers and their supporters and destroyed tents and other property, the mixed squad was there to "guide" campers to resources. Since then, mixed squads have continually been dispatched along with conventional police units to dismantle homeless encampments. In many cases, they are also accompanied by journalists, and it is the mixed squads who are tasked with explaining the operation. "We're using a humanist approach," one officer told the media. "We want to find solutions to improve their lives" (Radio-Canada, January 14, 2022).

As the above suggests, mixed squads in Montreal have been used to deflect criticism of the police, especially during moments of heightened scrutiny. The squads' creation has been tied to particular ideas about the "new" form of policing they ostensibly represent: a form of therapy, a form of prevention, or a form of accompaniment. This view has been echoed in an overwhelmingly positive media coverage, which may have improved the public perception of the police at a time of crisis. And yet, the existing form of policing has very much continued—indeed expanded—alongside the expansion of the mixed squads. The director of RAPSIM summarized the situation in her response to one of the many new squads the city created after 2020. "The idea behind this project is a noble one: to create a more positive view of the police," she said, speaking the quiet part out loud, "but on the ground, it is experienced as a threat and it translates into increased surveillance for people on the street. It does nothing to meet their needs. Police officers are not street outreach workers" (Journal de Montréal, November 5, 2023). In this sense, the function of the squads is consistent with a major critique of community policing. As Walker (1992, 252) argues about community policing, the squads have functioned to "sell the [police] department to the community rather than to change police operations." Klockars (1988, 41) provides a similar evaluation, arguing that "the modern movement toward what is currently called 'community policing' is best understood as the latest in a fairly long tradition of circumlocutions whose purpose is to conceal, mystify, and legitimate police distribution of nonnegotiable coercive force." It is notable, moreover, that the squads have been described since 2020 in ways that mirror activists' demands for non-police alternatives. As Manning (1988, 40) argues about community policing, then, the design and description of the squads "aim to produce the appearance of similarity" between the "aims of the police and society." In short, the squads are about "shaping and manipulating public opinion" (Ibid.).

2. Mixed squads as extension of repression

While mixed squads serve a public relations function, they also involve changes in policing. Mixed squads, as we saw above, have not replaced existing practices, including the ticketing and repression of unhoused people. But it remains to be seen how the squads relate to these repressive activities and whether they simply leave these activities intact or rather expand them. The community workers we interviewed described various ways in which mixed squads have increased the police presence in the lives of unhoused people. The traditional police continue to issue tickets, respond to 911 calls, and make arrests, but now mixed squads add another layer of policing—a "proactive" police presence in the lives of unhoused people. One community worker explained: "Before the mixed squads, the police tended to intervene with unhoused people when they received a call [or] when someone (a resident, a business) thought they needed to be there. With the squads, the police are more present, even if there's no problem. It's a major expansion of police action." Another worker noted that "the approach might be different" with the mixed squads, but the effect is "an overrepresentation of police [in spaces used by unhoused people] that is totally fucked up."

More than simply increasing the presence of police in certain spaces, mixed squads have also expanded policing into new sites where the police were not usually granted entry. This has been facilitated by discursive claims that these squads are "non-repressive" and qualitatively different from the rest of the police force. The EMIC squad, for example, has increased the police presence in the city's metro (subway) system. Under the guise of "[meeting] persons in need and [directing] them to the right resources" (SPVM n-d-a), there are now permanent police patrols in the metro system that interact with unhoused people in the absence of any infraction or complaint. In an article announcing the creation of EMIC, a police officer claimed that "the metro is for everyone" (La Presse, March 15, 2021); two years later, in an article titled "The guardian angels of the metro", the same officer specified: "The metro is for everyone, but certain behaviours are an obstacle to cohabitation". The function of the squad was now plain: "EMIC scours metro stations to ensure that the presence of unhoused people does not inconvenience users or disturb the peace" (Le Devoir, February 24, 2023).

Another squad, EMIE, has increased the police's access to public schools, where so-called “socio-community” police officers are already present some of the time. Again, the introduction of the EMIE squad was described as something other than repression. The stated aim is to work with schools to “prevent youth violence” (La Presse, September 15, 2022). In spite of this description, the police’s own statements and documents demonstrate that the mandate of EMIE includes surveillance and repression: the non-police members of the squad are all criminologists, cybercrime experts, and researchers (not a single youth worker is involved), and the squad collaborates with the prosecutor's office and youth protection agencies (SPVM n.d.-d). Schools are also encouraged to inform the squad about youth who "are showing affiliation with gangs" (Radio-Canada, September 15, 2022) or who appear "at-risk of committing violence" in order to "orient [other] police operations” (City of Montreal 2022). This new squad went against a continent-wide movement for "policing-free schools", which had put an end to "School Resource Officer" programs in various Canadian cities (Policing-Free Schools Canada n.d.; #PoliceFreeSchools n.d.; Police Free Schools Winnipeg 2020; Nasser 2017). It also went against the recommendations of the city's own “Forum on gun violence”, where experts, educators, and youths had asked for resources, youth services, outreach workers, community-based violence prevention, improved infrastructure, and structural solutions to precarity and discrimination—and no one had asked for another mixed squad (INM 2022). When EMIE was announced, a coalition of parents, activists, experts, and community groups denounced the new squad. Backed by abundant research (see González and Epstein 2024; Maynard 2017, chap. 8), they explained that "Bringing in police in that type of context is going to put [kids] in an even more vulnerable position in terms of racial profiling, surveillance and policing" (CBC, September 29, 2022; see École Sans Police 2022). Yet again, they denounced the sidestepping of community groups by mixed squads: "Of course, we were not consulted or informed of this project", said a long time youth worker, "which is understandable because, had we been consulted, we would have been against this" (CBC, September 29, 2022).

Mixed squads also extend the action of the police by widening the array of information it can access. In principle, the non-police members of mixed squads are obliged to keep information they obtain about people confidential. The mental health workers involved in ESUP and ECHINOPS squads, in particular, have a professional obligation to protect most information about their clients.

And yet, one of the stated benefits of the mixed squads, including ESUP and ECHINOPS, is the exchange of information they enable between police and non-police agents. Many community workers expressed concerns about this. As one worker explained about the mixed squads, "I keep hearing about how the squads 'open doors' and 'break down silos,' but [the principle of] confidentiality is not respected." Many things are possible, one worker explained, once information about a person is in the police system: "It can be potentially used by a prosecutor in a case, it can be used to arrest someone."

One of the ways mixed squads surmount the issue of confidentiality is by using social workers from a specific organization, the Société de développement social de Ville-Marie (SDSVM). Created in 2008, the SDVSM is a non-profit organization that aims to find "solutions to homelessness and social exclusion [in the downtown area] by building bridges and creating innovative projects that engage the business community" (SDSVM n.d.). The SDVSM provides the 'social worker' component of the mixed squads that focus on unhoused people, but the status of these workers is questioned by many community workers. Most social workers in Montreal are part of a Quebec-wide professional association, which has clear standards about sharing clients' information, especially with police (ATTRueQ 1997). The SDSVM, however, was refused membership in the association. One community worker explained the refusal: "The SDSVM wanted to become members of ATTRueQ, but the association said … 'No, it's not street outreach work that you do … Your approach is problematic, so we don't want to be associated with you." Social workers employed by the SDVSM are therefore in a particular position. They can present themselves as social workers to obtain information from people and then share this information with police without the usual strictures. In this way, the mixed squads gain access to information that would usually be safeguarded. The surveillance and intelligence gathering activities of the police are extended.

As we have discussed, the city and the police contend that mixed squads are a purely supportive program. In this view, the squads are therapeutic, supportive, and preventative police interventions. The community workers we interviewed, however, refused this description. They emphasized the fundamental antagonisms between their work and that of mixed squads and explained how the squads operate very much like conventional policing. For one thing, street outreach workers fundamentally prioritize the needs of the people they work with (e.g., unhoused people). "We start

with the needs of the person," one worker explained, "and not from the needs of businesses, residents, or people who might complain about that person." The mixed squads, in contrast, were created precisely to respond to complaints about unhoused and other marginalized people. In most cases, community workers suggested, this involves removing someone from public space. The squads, one worker explained, "mostly respond to the needs of businesses or 'good' citizens." The point is "to displace a problem so that it's no longer bothersome." The approach and personnel of the mixed squads might differ from conventional policing, then, but the objective is the same. One worker observed: "That's the principle: cleanse the territory so there are no more nuisances."

When the aim is to displace "nuisances," it can be difficult to use a "different approach." As we noted, the mixed squads are not described by the police as displacing unhoused people from public space, but "guiding them to appropriate services." Unhoused people, however, are usually well-aware of the services available, creating a dilemma for the mixed squads. As one community worker explained, the mixed squads "don't know the needs or desires of the [unhoused] person. But they still intervene, even if the person refuses the services they offer." In situations where a person refuses to be guided to a service, the mixed squads operate much like a conventional police unit. Some community workers described situations in which they were talking with an unhoused person and a mixed squad arrived and aggressively took over the situation. "My colleague (a community worker) was talking to a person in the metro station, and the mixed squad arrived like cowboys," one worker explained. "They interfered, not knowing what was happening and not knowing she was a community worker." Many workers also described violent interventions they had witnessed, but they also pointed to the threat of violence that defines police work, and that is itself a form of violence (see Seigel 2018). One worker half-ironically summarized this effect: "What we observe is that, when someone with a uniform and a gun arrives next to you and tells you that you might want to go somewhere else, there's a good chance you'll go somewhere else."

As this quote suggests, the mere presence of uniformed police officers in the mixed squads aligns them symbolically with conventional policing. This is significant, considering that many unhoused people have been brutalized by the police in the past and carry this memory and potential trauma with them. Perhaps more importantly, unhoused people continue to be routinely harassed, displaced, and brutalized by the conventional police. In this situation, the mere presence of mixed squads can be negative, inducing something between discomfort and retraumatization. One worker explained: "I think we often overlook the fact that a uniform, it speaks … You represent the police,

you represent all the other cops who aren't nice to you normally." As a result, mixed squads can "reanimate traumas … they spark more crises than they resolve." A news article from 2012 illustrates the permeability of mixed squads to dehumanization and violence. Officers know, writes the reporter,

> that the apparent camaraderie that binds them to these outcasts can quickly turn sour. They know that the man to whom they offer a pair of boots and mittens may very well find himself, a few days later, in the crosshairs of their revolver. It could very well be Frank, a man in his thirties who we come across on rue Saint-Denis. "He's explosive," the officers summarize. … "He's extremely unpredictable and aggressive. His thing is to get naked when he's in a crisis. He's already been neutralized with a taser," says officer Durocher. (La Presse, January 29, 2012)

This kind of treatment is, to say the least, opposite to the practices of the community workers we interviewed. Therefore, while mixed squads are described as using a more "humanist" and caring approach, our interviews reveal the impossibility of fully doing so. In practice, they inflict various forms of harm, ranging from violence and displacement to the retraumatization that their simple presence can induce.

While described as an alternative to conventional policing, then, mixed squads actually perpetuate, refashion, and expand police repression, causing significant harm to vulnerable populations. This aspect of the squads is consistent with a second strand of research on community policing. Many community policing programs, for example, have been shown to expand police repression. As Bayley and Shearing (1996, 595) explain, community policing "harnesses the coercive power of the state to [the ostensible objective of] social amelioration," allowing the police greater access to "the private life of individuals." In this way, the police gain access to more information (Trajanowicz 1990) and expand the scope of their operations (Cohen 1979). When the police take on these new roles, they tend to displace the workers and logics usually assigned to them. Without romanticizing the role of social workers, King (1991, 103) criticizes some community policing initiatives for carrying criminal justice logics "into areas of social intervention which were previously guided by the social worker's assessment of the [client's] needs." Over time, this can also transform the practice of social work, blurring the conceptual and practical "line between social work and policing" (Ibid.).

3. Mixed squads as counter-insurgency

The final function of mixed squads is to remake what counts as "community" in Montreal. This function is outlined in an emerging critical literature that views community policing as a form of counter-insurgency (Schrader 2016, 2019; Rodriguez 2021a; Rutland 2021). Like counter-insurgency in military operations, community policing has been shown to divide communities, turn some community members into partners or supporters, and use this base of support to wage a more effective war on remaining community members. As Schrader (2016) explains, "to convert the neutral into the loyal, against the disloyal, is the goal of so-called community policing." At first glance, the mixed squads may not appear to have functioned in this way. Unhoused people have certainly not become allies of the police, while the city's most important advocate for the unhoused, the RAPSIM coalition, has been critical of mixed squads. Indeed, the present research was sparked by RAPSIM's concerns about the squads, and the research findings led it to call for the abolition of the squads in a 2023 report that my colleagues and I co-authored with the organization (Rutland et al. 2023). There are other ways, however, in which mixed squads have already changed the meaning of "community" and are poised to change it further in the future.

While RAPSIM is critical of the mixed squads, it is sometimes difficult for its member organizations to take the same stance. For one thing, the squads have resources, like vehicles, that cash-strapped community organizations do not. Many community workers discussed calling a mixed squad when a client needed a ride somewhere, while making clear that "If we had a vehicle … if we had a dedicated worker for emergencies … we wouldn't use their service." Some of the mixed squads also have privileged access to state-funded social services, including mental health care. This gives community workers another incentive to work with them. "If we work with EMRII, it's a fast track," one worker explained. "We can get a client [faster] access to social services [or] medical help."

Adding to these issues, access to government funding is increasingly conditional upon an organization working with police. This arrangement, one worker explained, creates "a constant pressure on community organizations … because you know your funding will be way more stable if you choose to associate with the SPVM." The most immediate effect of this incentive structure is to create practical links between the police and the community sector, but many workers also

felt that maintaining access to social services and funding requires them to maintain a positive relationship with police. They need to think twice, then, before criticizing the police in general or filing a complaint about a particular police action. One worker hesitated to be forthcoming with us, explaining that "I am very highly critical of these programs but I mostly keep these criticisms to myself because it could very negatively impact our funding and our programming stability." In various ways, then, community organizations are incentivized to work with mixed squads and withhold any criticisms they might have. The squads serve a counter-insurgency function here not so much in recruiting new "loyal" allies, but in dampening criticism of the police and disrupting existing and potential resistance to the police, especially the policing of unhoused people.

The mixed squads have also changed how community work is understood and evaluated. We noted above that most mixed squads respond to calls from residents, businesses, and the police. Many community workers said they have received an increase in such calls. In one example, a community worker received a call from police: "They asked us to go and see some [unhoused] people and inform them the police would be coming to dismantle their encampment. It's like no, we're not subcontractors for the police." More broadly, the supposed benefits of the mixed squads are constantly reported via metrics that are foreign to the community sector. The key metrics for mixed squads in various public reports are simply the number of "contacts" they have had or "interventions" they have made with an unhoused person. As many community workers noted, these metrics provide an illusion of productivity while changing little to nothing about the lives of unhoused people. As one worker explained, "the foundation of our work is the relationship … and it develops over a long time scale." The work, in other words, involves assisting someone in multiple aspects of a person's life and moving toward goals, at a pace that the person chooses. The mixed squads, the worker continued, "ignore all of that—they're focused on a fast response to punctual needs." Many workers criticized the mixed squads for changing how community work is understood, promoting the idea there is a quick and easy way to "save" homeless people from their situation.

Perhaps the biggest change in the meaning of community has occurred through the development of a particular "community partner," the SDSVM. As we noted above, the status of the SDVSM's "social workers" is questioned by many community workers. Similarly contested is the status of the organization as "community partner." Notably, its startup funding was provided by the Ville-

Marie (downtown) borough, and it continues to derive most of its operational and project funding from the borough and the municipality. It also receives donations from businesses and philanthropic organizations. Operationally, its first major project sought to promote the social "re-insertion" of unhoused people by creating a "bridge" with downtown businesses, who could hire them (Hallée et al. 2014). In the 2010s, however, it has focused increasingly on providing "cohabitation services" to business associations, the city, and the police. In this work, it is often very clear who is being served and who is not. In one project, for example, the SDSVM sent a letter to downtown business owners instructing them to get in touch "if any inappropriate or unacceptable behaviours are observed. This allows [us] to make an intervention that goes as far as removing the person" (SDSVM 2021). Unlike other community organizations, the SDSVM does not prioritize the needs of unhoused people, but rather the needs of business owners and residents.

Many community workers highlighted the specific role played by the SDSVM in Montreal. The organization, many claimed, allows the city and the police to advance their own interests with the veneer of community support. As one worker explained, the city prefers to work with the SDSVM "because they know the organization will say yes to all their projects." The same is true, certainly, with the police. None of the community workers we interviewed would be willing to participate in a mixed squad, and some pointed out that it would violate ATTRueQ principles—a problem for them, but not the SDSVM. The SDSVM, while stretching the meaning of "community," also puts pressure on other organizations to adapt. One worker recalled a case where the city initially agreed to fund a project, "but then withdrew the funding because we refused to simply remove [unhoused] people from Place Emilie-Gamelin (a downtown park)." The funding was then transferred to the SDSVM "because they'll do whatever they're asked." The SDSVM, then, has developed at the expense of the existing community sector. By presenting as a community organization, the organization can secure funds that could go to organizations that have existed for decades and that prioritize the needs of the unhoused population over the needs of businesses and residents.

In various ways, then, mixed squads are a form of a counter-insurgency. As Schrader (2016, n.p.) argues about community policing, the squads do not work with a pre-existing community, but rather produce the meaning of "community." As he writes, "community is the stake, medium, and outcome" of community policing. The meaning of community, of course, is always political, and organizations like RAPSIM have sought to define its meaning and boundaries

in their own way. For them, the "community" includes unhoused people and the various people and organizations that work with them and advocate for their interests. The interests of businesses, well-housed residents, and the police are not necessarily ignored, but they are secondary at best. The effect of mixed squads, like community policing in general, is thus to redefine community and supplant existing definitions. The "community" produced by mixed squads is one that collaborates with the police, withholds criticism of the police, and prioritizes the interests of businesses and well-housed residents. The "loyalty" of this community provides broader legitimacy to the police in a period in which the police, and especially the policing of unhoused people, were called into question. As a form of counter-insurgency, mixed squads have secured loyalty and legitimacy not by winning over unhoused people or resistant community organizations, but by fueling the expansion of an already loyal organization: the SDSVM.

The SDSVM entered the scene in a moment of intense struggle over the policing of unhoused people in the late 2000s and has expanded over time to become the epitome of "community" for the City of Montreal—largely through its involvement with the mixed squads. Many community workers, moreover, fear a future in which the organization monopolizes government funding and, thus, the means of doing community work on the ground. Another dangerous step in this direction was taken in 2021, when the city introduced a new all-civilian emergency response squad dubbed EMMIS. A clear response to popular demands for alternatives to police, the squad is staffed and operated entirely by the SDSVM.[22] On paper, the new squad resembles innovative civilian crisis response teams like CAHOOTS in Eugene and STAR in Denver, which respond to certain categories of 911 calls and have been lauded by many scholars and activists for reducing the scope of policing (Spolum et al. 2023). The EMMIS squad, however, does not respond to 911 calls but rather direct calls from businesses, residents, and the police. More importantly, the history of close collaboration between the SDSVM and the police makes it unlikely the squad will reduce the scope of policing rather than extend the surveillance and repressive activities of the police—as the mixed squads have done. This fear was confirmed in the fall of 2024, when community groups discovered that EMMIS had been gathering information about a major homeless encampment and produced a report that was used by city officials to justify calling on the police to dismantle the encampment in question (Rutland et al. 2024).

[22] In 2025, two other community organizations joined the project. At the time of writing, it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this change.

Conclusion

Across North America, mixed squads have become a popular police reform that promises to both address the violence of policing and come to the rescue of marginalized groups. This chapter, however, contests this understanding and shows how mixed squads serve three overlapping functions that neither reduce police violence nor provide meaningful social support—functions that are outlined in the broader literature on community policing. An extensive analysis of media coverage shows that mixed squads are a powerful public relations strategy for both the City and the police, used to justify increased police budgets, to temper expansions of police repression, and to conceal the persistence of police violence. Interviews with community workers raise serious concerns about the work performed by mixed squads, indicating that they harm the populations that they are ostensibly trying to help, that they damage the ecosystems that provide essential services to vulnerable populations, and that they import repressive logics into sites of care. Most fundamentally, this chapter suggests that mixed squads are best understood as a strategy to disrupt sites of resistance to police power and to construct a "community" loyal to police objectives. In line with the history of community policing, the objective of these squads is not to reduce police violence but rather "to reduce increasing militancy and resistance in reaction to such violence" (Gilmore and Gilmore 2022b, 302).

More broadly, and as we will discuss in the next chapters, mixed squads emerge from the particular conditions of the long neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, in which the retraction of the welfare state is accompanied by an expansion of the carceral apparatus. The point is not just that, absent a strong welfare state, the police become the go-to response to a range of social problems. It's also that the retraction of the welfare state is enabled by initiatives like mixed squads and community policing in general that reposition the police as a form of care and support and, thus, help to dampen and disrupt resistance to police power. This long process of associating the police with care and support came to the foreground in the summer of 2020, when activists demanded "care not punishment" and highlighted that the majority of situations responded to by police had nothing to do with crime or danger. While very few activists actually called for mixed squads, the

police and city officials were able to contort activist demands, presenting the squads as a response to non-criminal situations and a form of care and support.

Countering the co-optation of abolitionist demands by the police requires an insistence on the inherently and irreducibly violent nature of the police. Police, as Seigel (2018) insists, are violence workers. Their work is distinguished in the domestic space by its dependence on either the use of violence or the threat for violence. A police response is thus a violent response regardless of the type of situation it seeks to address, the objectives of the intervention, or the other types of workers involved. The police cannot provide care and support, and their involvement in such interventions—whether alone or as part of a mixed squad—makes it harder to provide the care and support communities need in practical and political terms. In practical terms, as we have demonstrated, mixed squads not only fail to provide necessary support to unhoused people, but also disrupt and displace the support provided by community workers. Mixed squads also expand the need for care, as their violence leaves wounds and their presence can retraumatize people harmed in the past. Far from shrinking the role of the police, mixed squads expand the role of the police, bolster police legitimacy, and allow police violence to persist undisturbed—in both new and old forms. More scholarly and political work is needed, therefore, to underscore the "violence work" of the police in its many self-reinforcing forms and to demonstrate that "care not punishment" means less police.

Chapter 5: The neoliberal-carceral conjuncture in Montreal

"For citizens to feel safe, members of the SPVM must be seen, everywhere, throughout the whole year, in all contexts. Montrealers must perceive their presence at the heart of their life."

— Service de police de la Ville de Montréal (2007, 26)

Introduction

Mixed squads, as we have demonstrated, are not a progressive reform of policing, but rather an extension of repression disguised as a shift away from repression, with harmful impacts on the vulnerable communities it targets, on the workers that support these communities, and on the struggle for a less violent city. The previous chapter started to address the political function of mixed squads: to deflect public criticism of the city, to restore police legitimacy, to maintain the repressive management of certain social issues... These points, however, are descriptive, not explanatory. They raise a whole new set of questions: *Why* did the city and police deflect criticism, rather than address it? Why did they deceive the public? Why were they able to do so? Did they address public concerns about police violence in other ways? The very existence of mixed squads raises a parallel set of issues: Why is homelessness so prevalent? Why is it policed? Why is it easier to fund repression than support? Why are there so many more police officers than community workers? What lies at the root of these problems?

To answer these questions, we have to turn our eyes away from mixed squads and towards the historical context they emerged from and then evolved in. In other words, there is something that precedes mixed squads, and there is a lot that surrounds them. They are a small piece of a much bigger story. In this chapter, then, we put mixed squads to the side and examine their conditions of existence. I answer the following research question:

> RQ2: What social forces—political, ideological, economic, historical, institutional—explain the introduction of mixed squads in Montreal?

In the literature review, I described a fundamental shift in Western social formations that started in the 1980s. The general trend was a retrenchment of the social state and an expansion of the

carceral state. This chapter traces the development of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture in the specific contexts of Québec and Montréal, from 1979 to 2020. Of course, I cannot provide a comprehensive history of neoliberalism and carceral expansion in Québec; rather, I aim to synthesize three movements that lead directly to mixed squads: the organized abandonment of various segments of the population, the use of policing—and in particular community policing—to manage the consequences of this abandonment, and the progressive development of race-and-class-based carceral warfare in the streets of Montréal.

My analysis is split into two historical periods. Between 1979 and 2009, I describe the incursion of neoliberalism in Québec and demonstrate that its sociopolitical consequences, particularly in the urban centre of Montréal, were managed through an increasing recourse to state violence in the form of policing. I then take 2009 as a turning point in which marginalized groups mounted a critical political challenge to the carceral state in Montréal. After years of grassroots organizing, the Québec Human Rights Commission published influential reports that brought two forms of police persecution into public view: social profiling and racial profiling. By analyzing the governmental response to these critiques between 2009 and 2020, I demonstrate that the state refused to end the systematic abuse of marginalized communities, and explain the reasons for this refusal. Overall, this section develops a comprehensive theory of ruling class hegemony in Montréal during the neoliberal-carceral period. In this period, I argue, we see the emergence of a new ruling class alliance whose hegemony is predicated on unrestrained state violence against marginalized groups.

Methodology: In the first part of this chapter (1979-2009), I review a mix of academic literature and public-facing reports—notably research conducted by the Quebec Human Rights Commission—focused on three main developments of the conjuncture in Quebec and Montreal: the advent of neoliberalism, the war on street gangs, and the criminalization of homelessness. Taken together, I argue, they point to a recomposition of state power and of the social formation. In the second part of the chapter (2009-2020), I examine the struggles around policing that animated this period by using a number of primary and secondary sources, all of them archival and publicly available. My sources include reports submitted by experts, human rights organizations, community groups, and activists during public consultations; government reports, policy documents, strategic plans, legislation, and other statements from political authorities; and

empirical studies of policing, discrimination, and inequality in Montreal. These documents allow me to compare four poles in the political struggle: the demands and recommendations of civil society; the discourse of political officials; the policies enacted by the state; and the empirical evolution of police violence. Through a comparative reading of the documents, I identify some fundamental contradictions between (and within) these four poles. I then endeavour to explain these contradictions by engaging with various strands of social theory: on state power, the carceral state, racism, and revanchist city-making. My approach to choosing and reading these documents was guided by my own experience of organizing against state violence in Montreal. This political engagement gave me some historical knowledge about issues and actors that have been particularly influential in the city, as well as some practical knowledge about salient obstacles, tricks, and strategies to look out for.

1. The demise of social-democracy, neoliberalism, and the carceral turn (1979-2009)

1.1 Neoliberalism in Québec

Like much of the Western world, Quebec entered the neoliberal era in the 1980s. Despite being led by the Parti Québécois (PQ), who came to power with the support of the unions, the Left, and the working class, the province was subject to the same global economic dynamics that pressured Western capitalism in the period. The fragile social-democratic compromise between labour and capital, based on redistribution of the spoils of a thriving capitalist production, became untenable due to stagnating growth, economic crisis, the growing cost of the welfare state, and intensifying pressures from foreign and homegrown factions of capital (Balthazar 1994; Graefe 2005; Mayer 2002; Piotte 1998). As PQ premier René Levesque summarized in his 1981 inaugural address: “the times of unlimited growth are over ... Like all other societies, without exception, Quebec is now confronted by very visible limits from which it is absolutely impossible to escape” (as cited in McRoberts 1993, 362). In 1982, under the pressures of a deficit crisis, contract negotiations with the public-sector unions turned into an all-out conflict. The unions went on strike but the PQ broke their strike with draconian legislation, and in turn started demonizing the unions by positioning them against the nation (Lipsig-Mummé 1991). As McRoberts (1993, 364) explains, the PQ

gradually “destroyed the party’s primary electoral base: public-sector workers.” In the following years, it reduced taxes and reduced spending, and it cut social services but continued spending on industry. Consider Levesque in 1984:

> we must play a more active role than ever in creating a fiscal, educational, legislative, and financial environment able to liberate the private sector from certain economic and social rigidities, to promote the rapid and honourable resolution of differences between groups, and thus to heighten the competitive capacity of our enterprises, the only way in which employment can be increased on a lasting basis. (as cited in McRoberts 1993, 363)

By the end of the decade, the PQ had shifted its politics and its class base, and had become “a credible contender with the Liberal Party for spokesperson of the class it now defined as the dynamic leader of modern Quebec”: the francophone business class (Lipsig-Mummé 1991, 97). The transformation of the PQ during the 1980s is emblematic of the dramatic shifts in political representation and state power that occurred over the period. In a very real sense, the working-class—as an organized class—was expelled from any governing coalition, losing much of its influence over the state.

Much like in the rest of the Western world, the economic imperative of deficit reduction was subsumed into a political project through which a reactionary ruling class captured and transformed the state. This was both cause and effect: capitalist elites received disproportionate benefits from the liberalisation of the economy (which, on the contrary, weakened the labour movement), and this opened an opportunity for refashioning the state according to their own interests. In Quebec, this pressure in the political economy was applied from various directions: by foreign (mostly American) capital markets (McRoberts 1993, ch.10), by the offloading of social welfare costs from the federal to the provincial level (Graefe 2005), and perhaps most importantly, by the "new ascendance of a Francophone business class" now less dependent on state support, for whom "the welfare state had become an insupportable burden" (McRoberts 1993, ch.10). As Philippe Hurteau (2012, 18, 20) argues, the neoliberal objective was never to 'shrink' the state but rather to transform it, "abandoning the state's social missions in order to place it more directly at the service of the development of market economy structures." It was, after all, "a classic objective: that the form of the state should respond to the interests of the dominant classes."

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, under both PQ and Liberal administrations, the Quebec government disengaged from addressing social distress. A string of reforms targeted vulnerable populations and the structures of the social state, from healthcare to education (Hurteau 2019; Mayer 2002). In parallel, the federal government—here, too, with bipartisan support—was disengaging from its own prerogatives, notably pensions, unemployment benefits, social assistance and child credits (Bernier 2003). Of course, the two levels of government were closely linked. In the mid-1990s, for example, the federal government pursued a debt-reduction agenda and reduced its contributions to provincial healthcare (the share of federal coverage fell from 43.3% in 1980 to 31.2% in the mid-1990s to 18.8% in 2015); this was then compounded by the Quebec government's own zero-deficit objective, which cut another 20% from the healthcare budget (Hurteau 2019, 41, 44).

Altogether, this strategic withdrawal of the social state constitutes what Gilmore and Gilmore (2022b) call the "organized abandonment" of workers and vulnerable communities. Yet, as some scholars have pointed out, welfare retrenchment was not simply the mirrored reversal of welfare expansion. It was a difficult political exercise, bitterly resisted by impacted groups, with more or less success depending on the targeted welfare structures. The objective, after all, was to undermine the rights and benefits of the majority of the population. It required an entirely new political strategy (Bernier 2003; Levy 2010; Pierson 1994). The most compelling explanations of this strategy have looked beyond the welfare state, to another state infrastructure that experienced not retrenchment but rather rapid expansion since the 1980s: the carceral state.

In England and the United States, neoliberalism was introduced in tandem with a vast expansion of the carceral state. From the late 1970s onwards, the courts, prisons, and police were given wide-ranging powers to punish, and to do so ever more harshly. As Stuart Hall showed for the case of England, ‘law and order’ campaigns had the immediate benefit of crushing progressive social movements, and the longer-term benefit of redefining the role of the state (Hall et al. 1978). Speaking of the U.S. context, Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes this as "the abandonment of one set of public mandates in favor of another—of social welfare for domestic warfare" (Gilmore 2022d, 338). The expansion of the carceral state, she argues, was a way to re-legitimize the state at a time of crisis, by putting existing state capacity (i.e. human, administrative, and financial resources) at the service of a new political mandate: the fight against ‘crime’, used as a vehicle to designate

internal and external enemies, thinly veiled by a "sturdy curtain of racism behind which the prison-industrial complex [devoured] working men and women of all kinds" (Gilmore 2022c, 223). This allowed a new, reactionary, post-Keynesian ruling alliance to legitimize its use of state power in the absence of a redistributive project (Ibid.). In both the U.S. and England, then, the dismantlement of the social-democratic compromise was legitimized by the construction of an "authoritarian consensus" (Hall et al. 1978, 217), wherein considerable segments of the electorate were persuaded that state violence was the solution to their problems.

In Canada, however, it seems that the social state was dismantled without such precautions. The existing literature does not find a 'carceral turn' in Canada in the 1980s (Meyer and O'Malley 2005; Webster and Doob 2017). The prison population remained relatively stable, whereas it surged in the U.S. and England, and there was no real political obsession with crime in those early years. To explain this difference, some have argued that the Canadian social-democratic compromise was not settled, so that the government could retreat without needing to reinvent itself (Taylor 1987). In the Quebec context, some scholars have made the compelling argument that the "national consensus" was used to legitimize neoliberal policies (Graefe 2005). Essentially, the province's internal class struggle was dissimulated under the illusion of a homogeneous Quebec emancipating itself from "foreign" influence. This enabled the "dispossession" of the Quebecois masses for the benefit of a homegrown ruling class of Francophone businessmen and technocrats (Hurteau 2019).

The existing literature, however, has two major limitations. The first one is temporal: most studies are focused on the 1980s, as they try to find an 'authoritarian consensus' that would have helped re-legitimize the state during the neoliberal turn. This is a reasonable topic to investigate, and it remains important to understand why Canada was able to follow a different route from Britain and the United States. Nevertheless, while 'law and order' campaigns were important for *ushering* neoliberal dispossession, they were even more essential for *reproducing* this dispossession in the long-term and *managing* the sociopolitical problems it produced. If we shift our attention by a decade or two, we see that the Canadian state did eventually experience its own carceral turn. At the federal level, for example, 'tough-on-crime' discourses became pervasive in the 1990s, before being enshrined in policy by the infamous Conservative government of Stephen Harper (2006-2015)—with full support from the Liberal opposition and other political parties. Over ten years, the government introduced vast amounts of crime legislation to worsen prison

conditions, impose harsher penalties, expand mandatory minimums, and curtail opportunities to be freed, leading (among other things) to a surge in the incarceration rates of Black and Indigenous people (Mallea 2011; Zinger 2016).

The second and more profound limit of the literature is at its level of analysis: the Canadian scholarship on the carceral turn is largely focused on the federal government. There is some logic to it: this level of the Canadian state has exclusive jurisdiction to enact criminal law, which is to say to create new punishments. Criminal law, however, is *administered* exclusively by provincial governments, and it is *enforced* by police forces that are municipal (for urban centres), provincial (for rural and unincorporated areas), or federal (for areas not otherwise covered, for certain crimes, and for suppressing Indigenous sovereignty). This makes our task somewhat more complicated than Stuart Hall's, who dealt with a British state responsible for criminal law, prisons, and policing—all at once. In Canada, the jurisdictional stratification of the state is fundamental for understanding both the neoliberal and the carceral turn.[23] The federal and provincial levels of government are responsible for welfare, healthcare, housing, and education, etc.—which is to say, for addressing issues at the structural level. The retrenchment of the state thus created structural problems that *cities* were then forced to manage with very limited tools. One of the central tools, which cities are fully financially responsible for, is the police. In this chapter, then, I characterize the neoliberal-carceral turn at the provincial and municipal level, focusing on the expansion of criminalization and policing in Montreal. Throughout, I show how the organized abandonment of vulnerable social groups was enabled and managed by a strategy of organized violence.

1.2 "La lutte aux incivilités", or the war on the poor

The structural failures of Western capitalist economies, coupled with neoliberal policies and the progressive dismantlement of the welfare state, produced growing poverty, inequality, and socioeconomic exclusion among the less privileged segments of the population. Homelessness, in particular, started to surge across Canada in the 1980s and 1990s (Gaetz 2010; RAPSIM 2012). Though the existence of people living on the street is not new, there is a scholarly consensus that

[23] This is also true for the U.S., though the division of responsibilities is different from Canada's. Individual states, for example, have their own penal code, and the state and federal prison systems are distinct. In Canada, there is a continuum between provincial and federal prisons: the former are for those who are sentenced for less than two years, and vice versa.

the problem of chronic long-term homelessness was produced by the policies of the neoliberal turn (Smith and Kopec 2023). One of the fundamental causes of homelessness in Canada was the end of federal funding for social housing, with initial cutbacks in 1984, the termination of all federal spending for new construction in 1993, and the transfer of all responsibilities to the provinces in 1997. Hulchanski (2009, chap. 1) describes this as a shift from a post-WW2 policy of "rehousing" to a post-1980s policy of "dehousing". Concurrently, the federal government cut social transfer payments to the provinces, leading to substantial cuts in social assistance (Gaetz 2010; RAPSIM 2012; Smith and Kopec 2023). In their review of the literature on Quebec, Hurtubise and Roy (2007, 11-12) summarize the structural causes of homelessness: impoverishment produced by transformations in public policy and in the labour market; deficit-reduction policies paid with cuts to social assistance; a rapidly shrinking supply of social housing; and psychiatric deinstitutionalization paired with a vacuum of mental health services.[24] The reasons for homelessness, then, are no mystery: state policies made it harder to be poor and to find a home, so thousands were pushed into the street.

Homelessness became particularly acute in large urban centres, making poverty increasingly visible in public space. This phenomenon clashed with an important transformation in the money-making strategy of North-American cities. In the 1980s, deindustrialized and disinvested inner cities became increasingly attractive to international capital flows. As some scholars have argued, this was not unrelated to the rapid globalization of capital, which freed it from geographical constraints (Mitchell 1997; Harvey 2008).[25] Simultaneously, city governments faced a double-bind: their responsibilities had *de facto* increased due to devolution from higher levels of governments, while the funds they received from the state decreased, making them increasingly dependent on property taxes to generate revenue. As a consequence, North-American cities were incentivized to make themselves alluring to free-flowing capital. In practice, this led to major redevelopment projects that aimed to draw in tourism and upper-middle class professionals, thus creating the conditions for growing land values, high rents, real estate speculation, consumption, and good business: in other words, conditions that would attract capital by promising profit (Mitchell 1997). In Montreal, multiple redevelopment projects were concentrated in the

[24] As Smith and Kopec (2023, 45) explain, the relation between mental illness is complex, considering that "mental health also deteriorates significantly as a result of homelessness". It is a vicious cycle. The issue is not the closing of institutions, but rather the lack of mental health support.

[25] David Harvey argues that this was a "spatial fix" to the overaccumulation crisis that prompted the neoliberal turn.

downtown neighbourhood of Ville-Marie: most notably, the *Quartier International* and the *Quartier des spectacles* went through a major phase of urban renewal from the late 1990s well into the 2010s (RAPSIM 2016; RAPSIM 2020; Rose 2010). The problem, as Fiolka et al. (2022, 1) highlight in their study of the redevelopment of Montreal's Red Light District (eventually buried alive under the *Quartier des Spectacles*), was that "urban inner cities [had] been shaped into spaces of hard-fought sanctuary and freedom for a number of stigmatized groups, including Black and racialized communities, immigrant communities, communities of the unhoused … gay villages, and Red Light Districts". In other words, the areas targeted for redevelopment were not a *terra nullius*, but the presence of the local inhabitants was seen as an obstacle to the attraction of both capital and wealthier populations (Mitchell 1997; Parazelli et al. 2013; Smith 1996).

Across Canada and much of North America, one solution to these problems was to introduce thinly veiled anti-homeless laws or bylaws. Don Mitchell (1997) describes this process as "the annihilation of space by law". "Anti-homeless laws", he argues,

> serve to create the antithesis of what public space could be. But, of course, that is precisely the point. … These laws have as a goal—perhaps not explicit, but clear nonetheless—the redefinition of public rights so that only the housed may have access to them. They further have the goal of redefining the public space of the city as a *landscape*, as a privatized view suitable only for the passive gaze of the privileged as they go about the work of convincing themselves that what they are seeing is simply natural. (327)

In Montreal, ostensibly neutral bylaws were used to banish unhoused people—and other marginalized groups, notably sex workers and racialized youths—from certain areas of the city. The intention was to criminalize the forms of survival and existence of impoverished groups. Some offences, like "panhandling", directly targeted survival strategies; others, like "public drunkenness", exploited the fact that unhoused people have no access to private space; and yet others, like "loitering" or "impeding circulation", were openly reinterpreted and selectively applied to harass various marginalized groups (Sylvestre and Bellot 2014, 16). Starting in the mid-1990s, existing regulations were complemented by new closures of public space, particularly in areas slated for redevelopment. Various neighbourhoods transformed public squares, which were open to the public at all times, into "parks", which could be closed at night, enabling the police to control

curfews (Ibid., 13). In later years, the city banned dogs from parks, thus preventing many unhoused people from accessing parks during the day as well (Sylvestre 2010a, 810). As the Quebec Human Rights Commission demonstrated, these policies were all discriminatory in both design and application (CDPDJ 2009, ch.2-3).

These legal innovations were enforced, complemented, and intensified by a new form of policing called 'zero-tolerance policing', 'quality of life policing', or 'broken-windows policing', which had originated in New York before rapidly spreading to every corner of the neoliberal world (Heatherton and Camp 2016; Wacquant 1999). This form of policing legitimized the persecution of vulnerable social groups under the guise of public safety, by claiming that minor offences, bylaw infractions, and 'disorder' (as outlined in the bylaws described above) were precursors to serious crime. It was a convoluted justification to justify a crack-down on visible forms of social misery. As its theorists admitted, the targets were "disorderly people. Not violent people, nor, necessarily, criminals, but disreputable or obstreperous or unpredictable people: panhandlers, drunks, addicts, rowdy teenagers, prostitutes, loiterers, the mentally disturbed" (Wilson and Kelling 1982). Crime, which was steadily decreasing, was simply not the point, and in fact 'broken-windows policing' never contributed to reducing crime (see Harcourt 2005 and Taylor 2006; for crime statistics, see Gramlich 2024; Statistics Canada 2024). Rather, this new form of policing epitomized the state's transition from support to repression, and the transmogrification of social needs into criminal threats. As the Quebec Human Rights Commission would later explain,

> the state's objective is not to eliminate the conditions that produce poverty, but rather to ensure that its most bothersome manifestations, including homelessness, panhandling and sex work, are made as invisible as possible in the public arena. (CDPDJ 2009, 19)

The formal introduction of community policing in Montreal[26], in 1997, enabled the reorientation of police norms and practices around 'broken-windows' principles (RAPSIM 2012, 38). The Montreal police (SPVM) embraced community policing, which vastly expanded the role and

[26] As I discuss below, community policing had already been introduced in the 1980s to manage major contestations against racial profiling in Montreal. In his study of that period, Ted Rutland (2021) argues that community policing adopts different logics across time and space. What we see here is that, from 1997 onwards, the 'broken-windows' logic of community policing was put to the service of urban revitalization and social cleansing in the downtown neighbourhoods of Montreal.

presence of the police in the city. To improve the “feeling of security” of citizens, community policing called for more “police visibility” on the day-to-day, meaning more police on the street, more foot patrols, and the creation of neighbourhood police stations. Ostensibly, this was supposed to make the police more accessible to citizens and thus more responsive to their concerns (CDPDJ 2009, 53). But as in many other places, "responding to the community quickly turned into another tool in the security arsenal providing another argument to city officials and to the police to support repressive broken-window and zero-tolerance policies" (Sylvestre 2010b, 453). In particular, the introduction of community policing caused an immediate surge in the surveillance, harassment, fining (and subsequent incarceration) of unhoused people, which has since then never stopped (Bellot et al. 2021, 14; St-Jacques 2016).

In the early 2000s, the Montreal police weaponized community policing to create the illusion of popular consent for their attacks on marginalized people. They led a series of consultations, with the ostensible aim of redefining the priorities of the police department based on community concerns. Conveniently, they concluded that citizens needed a more visible police presence and that they wanted the repression of incivilities to be a priority (CDPDJ 2009, 53). In the following years, the "*lutte aux incivilités*" ("fight against incivilities") became one of the central frameworks of police action in Montreal. Their targets were named quite openly. The police explained that "Some people face complex social problems that bring them to regularly violate other people's private space or to occupy public space. Among them, unhoused people, street youth, street prostitutes, drug users, and taggers are often singled out. Their occupation of public space is "disturbing", it is deemed inappropriate." (SPVM 2009, 4, cited in CDPDJ 2009, 60) The SPVM proceeded to set dozens of new operational priorities, almost all targeted towards these groups. The police’s list of ‘incivilities’, obtained by the Quebec Human Rights Commission, included:

> *presence* of prostitutes and solicitation; *disturbing presence* of unhoused people; *disturbing presence* of beggars; *presence* of "squeegees"; group of youths on the street (loitering, harassment, intimidation, noise, etc.); alcohol consumption on the street; public drug use. (CDPDJ 2009, 55; emphasis mine)

As these quotes should make clear, the *lutte aux incivilités* was entirely based on dehumanization. It criminalized the mere existence of marginalized people, and the cornerstone of the entire project was to address the "feeling of insecurity" among overprivileged groups by inflicting violence against underprivileged groups (CDPDJ 2009, 23). On the one hand, then, there were real citizens, real human beings, whose mere feelings mattered enough to destroy other lives; and on the other, subhumans, repositories of violence and suffering, undeserving of security, undeserving of having their basic needs tended to, let alone their feelings.

Moreover, as the legal scholar Marie-Ève Sylvestre convincingly demonstrated, the police had entirely misrepresented the results of their consultations in order to justify this new doctrine. She explains that,

> a closer look to these sources leads us to different conclusions: the general population seems to be primarily concerned with marks of disorders in their environment and social conflicts among residents rather than homelessness or antisocial behaviour of street populations. Further, where the data indicate some, rather limited, concern with respect to antisocial behaviour associated to street life, there is no evidence that the population favour repressive interventions. ... On the contrary, reports and surveys referred to the need to prevent criminality, combat poverty and help youth. (Sylvestre 2010b, 435, 448)

In other words, not only did the police ignore the most popular community concerns, but they imposed a repressive solution where it was not desired. Yet, as Sylvestre (2010b, 448) argues, "Police interventions operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy". By intervening in a range of social issues, the police literally transformed them into "the kind of problem that the police should be dealing with". And by making a police response the only available response to these issues, the state created a demand for more and more repression. This was part of the long process of criminalization of social life, which pushed some groups out of equal citizenship, society, and humanity.

In this offensive against unhoused people, we can see a number of related developments of the conjuncture. First, is the straight line from organized abandonment to organized violence. The very groups that had been impoverished by the neoliberal dismantlement of the social state were now being managed by an invigorated carceral infrastructure. Second, we see the social needs of these

groups being reconceptualized as criminal threats. Criminalization enabled the expansion of police prerogatives, and vice versa: it was a vicious circle, which made policing the first-line of response to social distress. This new common-sense was then disseminated among the population, partly through the mechanisms of community policing. Third, community policing moved the police to the centre of social life. The police became more visible, more present, better resourced, and they secured a monopoly on "community" concerns. By the mid-2000s, the Montreal police could openly proclaim that "For citizens to feel safe, members of the SPVM must be seen, everywhere, throughout the whole year, in all contexts. Montrealers must perceive their presence at the heart of their life." (SPVM 2007, 26)

This vision leads to a fourth development, which is the emergence of a new "community": almost tautologically, this is the community that community policing responds to; they conjure each other into existence. In line with much of the critical literature, Sylvestre (2010b, 448) shows that the police were not responding to "what the population wants", but rather to the desires of business associations, homeowner associations, the tourism industry, and real estate developers (see also CDPDJ 2009, 107). These groups became the official "community" that the police, and thus the state, are beholden to. Through the infrastructure of community policing, privileged groups gained an intimate and immediate access to the apparatus of state violence, which they could mobilize to satisfy their interests. It is remarkable to see that, in the absence of real danger and crime, privileged groups were able to impose a whole new political basis for the exercise of state violence: their own "feeling of security", or to be more plain, their feelings and desires. This exemplifies the capture of the state by capital, which is the foundation of our historical conjuncture. It also goes a long way in explaining the carceral turn of the state: if state violence can be mobilized for every whim of the privileged, we should not be surprised to witness the emergence of a very violent state.

Finally, then, we see a convergence of political and economic interests around the expansion of police power. The police proactively pursued the "*lutte aux incivilités*" because it advanced their institutional interests. Despite the myth of the police as crime-fighters, their role was always and increasingly about maintaining a certain social order. As Sylvestre (2010b, 451-452) argues, the police's narrative on disorder and homelessness served to legitimize and "ennoble" this role, while at the same time freeing themselves from constraints and giving themselves the tools for "administering a recurring problem" that they had been made responsible for. More

importantly, out of all the problems that the police could legitimately confront, it makes institutional sense that they would focus on confronting vulnerable people who can hardly push back. It is simply much easier for the police to work against the powerless and on behalf of the powerful—and much more fruitful as well, as decades of ballooning police budgets, salaries, benefits, and political influence can attest to.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the police were given their marching orders by privileged social groups. As the SPVM freely admitted to the Quebec Human Rights Commission, "the complaints and grievances of downtown homeowner and business associations was one of the main drivers of police intervention against unhoused people" (CDPDJ 2009, 108). These actors had the means to apply pressure on city officials and the police, and their concerns were often perfectly aligned with those of city councillors. The organized assault on marginalized groups coincided with major redevelopment projects in Montreal's downtown, including the creation of the *Quartier des spectacles* and the implantation of luxury condos. The new landlords, residents, and businesses did not accept the presence of those who lived in the neighbourhood before them (CDPDJ 2009, 107). They wanted them gone, and police violence seemed the most expedient solution. The "*lutte aux incivilités*", then, was little more than a transparent form of class war.

1.3 "La lutte aux gangs de rue", or the war on Black communities

In the path-breaking *Policing The Crisis* (1978), Stuart Hall and his colleagues observed that the demise of the social-democratic compromise caused a crisis in hegemony, which the ruling classes contained through an increasing recourse to penal repression. In other words, he was giving an early description of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, or what he called the emergence of a "law-and-order" society. He argued that this new social order depends on the continuous construction of an "authoritarian consensus", wherein vast sections of the population are persuaded to accept increasingly violent forms of rule. In particular, *Policing The Crisis* argued that one of the central legitimating mechanisms is the agitation of moral panics, and especially crime panics targeted against racialized people.

Hall and his colleagues were describing England in the 1970s, but I have been arguing that Quebec underwent its own neoliberal-carceral turn in the 1980s and 1990s. Here, too, the criminalization of racialized communities was crucial to the expansion of police power. Of

course—contrary to national myths—Quebec and Canada have a long history of racial oppression against Black people, Indigenous people, and other groups, with the police always playing an important role (see Comack 2012; Crosby and Monaghan 2018; Maynard 2017). In Montreal, the contemporary iteration of this project can be traced to the 1970s, as a reaction to the arrival of immigrants from the Global South, especially Haïti and the Caribbeans. The growing non-white minority of the city was subjected to discrimination and segregation at every level, from employment to education to housing. In the streets, they were faced with harassment from regular citizens, brutal attacks from white supremacist groups, and a mix of both from the police (Aurélien and Rutland 2023). The relentless police abuse, which would come to be known as "racial profiling", was first denounced in 1979 during a public consultation on the future of policing. It was the start of a forty-year struggle against police racism that has seen almost no improvement to this day (Rutland 2020).

During the 1980s, some children of immigrants took it upon themselves to defend their right to exist in the city. Groups of friends fought back, verbally and then physically, against racist neighbours, residents, students, teachers, bosses, club-owners, bouncers, bikers, skinheads, neo-nazis, and other white nationalist groups (Aurélien and Rutland 2023, ch.3). In their oral history of the first Haïtian street gang, Maxime Aurélien and Ted Rutland explain that though many youth also committed petty crimes on the side—for reasons of socioeconomic deprivation or regular mischief—they only joined into gangs for the purpose of self-defence. Aurélien and Rutland make a compelling argument that this action was key to desegregating the city, block by block, from the parks, to the metro stations, to the bars, to the streets of downtown Montreal. As one of the then-kids involved remembers:

> We helped open up the city. We weren't a criminal gang. We were people who wanted peace from racism. We stopped the street racism, but it wasn't easy. It was a lot of combat. People died for this. (Aurélien and Rutland 2023, 82)

Of course, desegregation and Black self-defence were terrifying prospects for the white majority. In the late 1980s, the phenomenon of ‘Black street gangs’ started to be sensationalized by the media and the police. Though Montreal had a century-long history of street gangs composed of

white working-class youth which received scant attention or concern, the spectre of Black street gangs fomented a moral panic (Aurélien and Rutland 2023, ch.5). The white attackers were refigured as victims, and "In a contortion familiar to the US and Britain ... Black resistance to white/police violence was refigured as criminal violence and a worsening breakdown of law and order" (Rutland 2021, 186). The '*lutte aux gangs de rue*' ('war on street gangs') soon became a top priority for Montreal policing. In 1989, the Montreal police created its first 'anti-gang' squad, initiating a decades-long assault on Black communities in Montreal.

The nebulous concept of 'street gang' allowed the police to criminalize entire racialized communities. Any group of Black youth or Black adults, organized or not, could be labelled a gang; and a gang member, according to the SPVM, was anyone with a "passing connection" or a "weak affiliation" with a gang (Aurélien and Rutland 2023, 146; Symons 1999, 127). By the mid-2000s, the Montreal police had a secret list with the names of 10,000 alleged "gang members", even as they publicly estimated that 500 individuals belonged to gangs in the loosest terms, and only 50 were "hardened criminals" (CDPDJ 2011, 27). In the neighbourhoods of Montreal-Nord and Saint-Michel, where the francophone Black community is concentrated, 40-50% of Black residents were stopped by the police between 2006 and 2007, compared to 5-6% of white residents (Rutland 2020, 285). The creation of new anti-gang squads in 2005 and 2008 caused these numbers to surge (CDPDJ 2011).

As many scholars have argued, the vastly disproportionate attention and resources directed to street gangs was a priority "*chosen* by law enforcement officials, not based on the realities of crimes in Montreal" (Maynard 2017, 90). Although by the 1990s some gangs had joined Montreal's ecosystem of organized crime (largely dominated by the mafia and the bikers), they were responsible for an exceedingly small share of crime in the city (in 2009: 1.6% of reported crime and 4% of violent crime) (CDPDJ 2011, 27-28). Anti-gang policing, then, was not driven by a logic of crime control. Rather, the moral panic around street gangs served to legitimize racial warfare, which in turn served to relegitimize policing in a time of turmoil. As geographer Ted Rutland summarizes: "The gang squad, then, transformed the racist practices the police were criticized for in the 1980s into a modus operandi. It allowed the police to continue their customary practice of harassing and abusing Black Montrealers with a new and seemingly race-neutral rationale: the existence of dangerous street gangs." (Rutland 2021, 186)

Much like the '*lutte aux incivilités*', the '*lutte aux gangs de rue*' legitimized vast expansions of state violence by targeting marginalized, dehumanized groups. Indeed, these two campaigns shared significant overlap. Discursively, they both mobilized a revanchist and colonial imaginary of "reclaiming the land and quelling the natives" (Smith 1996, 22). They were both justified in terms of the 'feeling of insecurity' of a privileged segment of the population, whose distorted perception of reality could annihilate the rights of others (Maynard 2017, 90). In other words, they both enforced a segregationist logic, driven by intertwined racial and class interests. In fact, the dimensions of race and class were deeply intertwined. The racialized youths targeted by the police were overwhelmingly lower class: their poverty was a product of racism, and this mix of class and race was a large part of why they were so heavily policed and criminalized. Conversely, Montreal's unhoused population is disproportionately Indigenous. As the *First People's Justice Center* explained at a consultation on racial and social profiling in 2017, "Indigenous people represent 0.6% of the general population of Montreal, but 10% of the unhoused population" (FPJC 2017, 1). Across Canada, "poverty is rooted in the intergenerational effects of residential schools and the socioeconomic marginalization of Indigenous people, deeply tied to the country's colonial history" (Ibid.). We see, then, how long-standing forms of organized abandonment and violence were compounded, and repurposed, in the neoliberal-carceral turn. As the *Justice Center* (Ibid., 2) argued:

> It is a fact that Indigenous people have been forcefully displaced throughout the history of Canada and Quebec. The forms of displacement that we observe in the present context—caused by the enforcement, by police officers, of municipal regulations on loitering in parks and other public spaces—are a manifestation of this historical model.

There was, in fact, a remarkable porosity in the tools and techniques used in the two campaigns of social cleansing. The same municipal regulations were used to exclude unhoused people *and* racialized youth from public space. As the Quebec Human Rights Commission reported in 2011, groups of Black youth were systematically dispersed on the grounds that they were "impeding circulation", they were fined for sitting on concrete blocks under the offence of making an "improper use of urban furniture", and they were harassed in the metro by both police and security

guards through a discriminatory enforcement of transit regulations (CDPDJ 2011, 31-32). This new regime of infra-penality was not an end in itself; it was a weapon that could be deployed on every front of the racialized class war.

Another significant overlap lies in the use of community policing to legitimize carceral warfare. In the context of the war on gangs, the Montreal police repurposed existing community policing initiatives that had been developed with the ostensible aim of *diminishing* racial profiling. Adopting a "logic of counter-insurgency" (Rutland 2021, 186), these programs were weaponized to foment conflict between different segments of the community, to construct "gangs" as internal enemies, and to crush political opposition. The youth police, previously tasked with improving youth-police relationships, started to gather intelligence on Black high school students; Black police employees, the outcome of diversity initiatives, were used to infiltrate "street gangs" and activist groups; in an early application of broken-windows policing, foot patrols were used to surveil, harass, and criminalize Black youth; and finally, partnerships with certain sympathetic community organizations were used to disrupt and criminalize activist groups that denounced the war on gangs for what it was: a violent assault on racialized communities (Rutland 2021, 186-187). Through the war on gangs, community policing proved itself to be an elastic and effective weapon of war. As I discuss throughout this thesis, these lessons were carried into the future.

1.4 Racial profiling, social profiling, and the renewal of struggle

Between 2008 and 2009, the previous two decades of state violence against marginalized groups suddenly became a burning political problem for the Quebec government, the Montreal administration, and the Montreal police department. Thanks to tireless organizing from impacted communities, two decades of social suffering and injustice were made visible and forced to the centre of public consciousness. Since the early 2000s, community groups and experts had been denouncing the '*lutte aux incivilités*'. In 2003, the RAPSIM launched *Opération Droits Devant*, an advocacy initiative that documented and denounced the ticketing of unhoused people. In 2005, criminologist Céline Bellot published an influential report showing that these fines had multiplied seven-fold over ten years and that almost three quarters of these fines were paid through incarceration (Bellot 2005). The Quebec Human Rights Commission finally seized on the issue later that same year, launching a process of research and consultation that resulted in an unsparing

2009 report on the discriminatory criminalization of unhoused people. They gave it a name: "social profiling" (CDPDJ 2009).

This term was directly inspired from the concept of "racial profiling", which the Commission had formally recognized in 2005 in response to mounting complaints of police harassment in racialized communities. In 2008, one of these routine aggressions led to the police killing of a Latino teenager, 18-year-old Fredy Villanueva (1990-2008). Villanueva's death renewed the struggle against racial profiling in Montreal. It sparked a riot in Montreal-North, a neighbourhood that had been heavily targeted by racial profiling and the police's 'war on street gangs' (Rutland 2020). The uprising was followed by the creation of a new activist group, *Montreal-Nord Républik*, who demanded the dismantlement of anti-gang squads, along with public investments in community support for the neighbourhood rather than in repression (Montréal-Nord Républik 2010). In the following years, various influential reports documented the extent of racial persecution in Montreal. One study, based on interviews with Montreal-North youth, concluded that "It's not surprising that there was a riot in Montreal-North. The death of Villaneuva was just the pretext" (see Rutland 2020, 285). The Quebec Human Rights Commission launched a wide-ranging consultation in 2009 and published its final report in 2011, titled "Racial profiling and systemic discrimination of racialized youth" (CDPDJ 2011).

Both of the Commission's reports provided a detailed, rigorous, and structural analysis of the causes and solutions to police violence in Montreal and Quebec. I have amply referenced them in the previous sections. They made dozens of recommendations, many of which attacked the roots of the problem (see CDPDJ 2009, 198-202; CDPDJ 2011, 114-116). Both reports heavily criticized the '*lutte aux incivilités*'. They demanded a review of municipal regulations and police guidelines, and the elimination of all discriminatory provisions. The racial profiling report also articulated a thorough critique of the '*lutte aux gangs de rue*'. Perhaps most importantly, the social profiling report demanded "that the state replace its repressive approach to issues related to homelessness with a preventive approach rooted in the respect of socioeconomic and fundamental rights" (CDPDJ 2009, 198). This "preventive approach", clearly laid out, consisted in the expansion of services related to social support, healthcare, education, employment, welfare, as well as massive reinvestments in social housing. In essence, this was a complete repudiation of the neoliberal-carceral state.

The political organizing of those years, and the Commission's reports that resulted from it, were a turning point in the struggle against state violence in Montreal. To put it simply, after years of impunity, the state now faced scrutiny: from growing social movements, from the state's own system of checks and balances, and from a public opinion that had been pulled out of a comfortable ignorance. In fact, many politicians were probably discovering, for the first time, their complicity in widespread persecution. This could have been the start of a happy ending. If the government had followed the recommendations of its own human rights agency, we would all live in a much better world. Unfortunately, the following decade would demonstrate that state actors had no desire to end these injustices. Or perhaps some did want to find a solution, but they soon learned that the political cost of doing so was far more than what they were willing to pay.

2. The mechanics of neoliberal-carceral rule (2009-2020)

In the following section, I analyze the state's response to critiques of social and racial profiling from 2009 to 2020. Mixed squads were an explicit piece of this response, but for now I focus on everything else that the state did and did not do in this period. If mixed squads are, as I will later argue, the cutting edge of a reformist strategy of the state, then this section describes the underbelly of reformism. Through an empirical examination of governmental decisions, I demonstrate that this decade is marked by the state's refusal to end the abuse of marginalized groups, which leads to an increasingly visible contradiction between state action and discourse. Then, by examining the components of this contradiction, I develop an analysis of the mechanics of neoliberal-carceral rule in Montreal. In particular, I explain the importance of carceral violence to advance certain economic interests, to repress political opposition, to maintain ideological unity among disparate social groups, and ultimately to secure ruling class hegemony over an unjust social formation. Only afterwards, in Chapter 6, will I be able to explain the work performed by mixed squads within this broader conjuncture.

2.1 The contradictions of the carceral state

First, the facts of the situation must be ascertained, and they can be summarized as follows: the state claimed that it wanted to stop social and racial profiling, but in reality it did not want to, and so it did not. The government's approach to homelessness between 2009 and 2020 is a snapshot of this contradiction. Since the 1990s at least, the systemic criminalization, discrimination, and abuse of unhoused people had been an empirical reality. After 2009, it was recognized as such by the state, from the provincial to the municipal level, including the police. By then, the path to ending this injustice was clearly laid out, and it was surprisingly simple. It is equally simple, as a consequence, to measure the state's refusal to take corrective action.

The Quebec Human Rights Commission concluded its 2009 report with nineteen recommendations to end social profiling (CDPDJ 2009, 198-202). The first seven recommendations aimed to stop the criminalization of unhoused people and the discrimination and abuse that it enabled; they were mostly directed to the city and the police, who were largely responsible for this system of organized violence. The other twelve recommendations aimed to address the structural roots of homelessness through state intervention; they were thus mostly directed towards higher levels of government, who were jurisdictionally responsible for the provision of health and social services, and historically responsible for the strategy of organized abandonment. These recommendations were the result of five years of research and consultation in which the City, the police, and community groups had all been heavily involved. They are consensual recommendations that have been reiterated by experts and community groups over the years, so it is reasonable to say that following these recommendations is a necessary condition for ending social profiling—and conversely, not following them is an explicit refusal to do so.

As we have seen, the state's attack against unhoused people in Montreal was ushered through the municipal regulation of public space and a new emphasis on policing ‘disorder’ and ‘quality of life offences’. Having shown that these rules were discriminatory and that they enabled discriminatory practices, the Commission demanded that they be eliminated. They asked the SPVM to modify the institutional policies that govern the ‘*lutte aux incivilités*’, to "eliminate elements that target and stigmatize unhoused people", and to only use repression against unhoused people based on neutral criteria, "not based on the social perception of a disturbing and threatening presence" (CDPDJ 2009, 198). Similarly, they asked the city and provincial governments to review

"all of the laws and bylaws that punish behaviours that result from someone being obligated to use public space", and to modify or eliminate the regulations not in conformity with Charter rights, pointing to multiple that should be immediately repealed (e.g., the curfew on public parks; CDPDJ 2009, 199-200). Over the following decade, none of these recommendations were implemented.

In 2010, the city published its first ever "action plan" on homelessness, publicly portrayed as the start of the end of social profiling. The mayor asked his new police chief to apply a zero-tolerance policy on social profiling, and the police chief claimed that the number of fines given to unhoused people was already dropping (La Presse, October 13, 2010). The CBC declared: "The City and the SPVM come together for the homeless" (CBC, October 13, 2010). The plan announced some measures to meet the basic needs of unhoused people, along with new training for the police and the creation of the first mixed squad. Conspicuously missing, however, was any revision of municipal regulations (City of Montreal 2010). Community groups were quick to notice this absence. The RAPSIM, who represents hundreds of organizations that work with unhoused people in Montreal, claimed that the plan "deserves a good grade ... But the big disappointment is decriminalization. There is a long way to go, especially in reviewing the very existence of certain regulations. But they do not even recognize that there is social profiling" (La Presse, October 13, 2010). In fact, despite the mayor's declarations, the term was absent from the city's plan, which continued to insist that "citizens are worried by incivilities and problems linked to marginality and public disorder" (City of Montreal 2010, 12). This was the start of a steady pattern wherein the government would simply refuse to act on the roots of police violence against the unhoused, choosing instead to pursue discriminatory practices.

In 2012, the SPVM published its "strategic plan" on racial and social profiling, which did not include any revision of norms and practices, or any shift away from the "*lutte aux incivilités*". Instead, it was heavily focused on improving the police's public relations strategy, and it weakly gestured toward improving internal supervision (SPVM 2012). As the *Coalition Against Repression and Police Abuse* would later remark, the plan seemed "tailor-made to serve and protect the interests of the SPVM first and foremost" (CRAP 2017, 66). Finally, in 2014, the city renewed its action plan on homelessness, ignoring once again all of the reforms that could curtail police violence (City of Montreal 2014).

In 2017, the city organized a public consultation to evaluate its progress on racial and social profiling (see City of Montreal 2017a). The dozens of citizens and community groups that

participated were unanimous: almost nothing had been done. Over three days, they presented reports and shared their grievances. The RAPSIM (2017, 12), echoing almost every other group, denounced that “the Quebec Human Rights Commission and community organizations have been calling for an analysis of discriminatory bylaws for [eight] years, yet the city has done nothing about it.” The Commission reminded the city that it had “made precise recommendations to the City of Montreal, the SPVM and the transit authority” and yet “several of its recommendations remain unanswered to this day” (CDPDJ 2017b, 39). The *Observatory of Profiling* condemned the “inertia of police authorities”, observing that “their words and their plans do not translate by visible actions to fight against social and racial profiling” (ODP 2017, 4). *Stella* (2017, 11), a leading organization for sex worker’s rights, denounced that “despite the launch of a [federal] inquiry into the murder and disappearance of Indigenous women, the city continues to disperse communities as a matter of policy.” The *First People’s Justice Center*, writing in a “spirit of reconciliation” to “correct the harmful impacts of municipal policies that discriminate against a most vulnerable population: unhoused Indigenous people”, asked the city to “eradicate certain municipal regulations” (FPJC 2017, 1). The final consultation report, then, essentially reiterated the recommendations that had been formulated in 2009 and 2011, the most consequential being the elimination of discriminatory bylaws (see City of Montreal 2017b, 10). The consensus of the participants was best summarized by the Quebec Human Rights Commission: “there is an incoherence between the public discourse of the City of Montreal and the measures it effectively implements alongside the Montreal police” (CDPDJ 2017a, n.p.).

The 2017 consultation was pivotal because it forced formal commitments from the city. The city officially recognized that "the problem posed by social and racial profiling persists" and that they are "inacceptable forms of discrimination" (City of Montreal 2018, 1). It then committed to implementing thirty-one recommendations, including the revision of municipal regulations (Ibid., 3). In 2018, nine years after the landmark report on social profiling, the city finally created a working group to review the regulations that had been designed, twenty years earlier, to persecute unhoused people. For seven more years, however, they embroiled community groups in endless delays. In October of 2024, during another heated consultation, the groups threatened to “publicly dissociate from the process and denounce its results” (MTLVille 2024, 2:17:30). Then, in February 2025, the mayor suddenly dismissed the whole process, leaving all discriminatory regulations intact. In a terse letter she claimed that,

> We have analyzed your recommendations at length. However, we feel that the current conjuncture is not conducive to a revision of municipal by-laws. Moreover, we cannot help but notice that it has been difficult to reach a consensus. In this context, it has been decided not to modify the bylaws under study. (Plante 2025, n.p.)

The groups responded that "putting an end to this process is a failure for the City, which to date has not taken *any* significant steps to fight systemic racial and social profiling and the denial of rights it entails" (LDL 2025a, italics in the original). This was the end of a long cycle of lies and subterfuge. Despite the mayor's claim, experts and community groups had long reached a consensus. But as the documents we have surveyed make clear, the state's position had also been remarkably consistent. Under layers of dishonest discourse, we find a steady commitment to inflicting state violence against the most disadvantaged.

Indeed, the obvious consequence of the state's inaction was the persistence of discrimination, abuse, and suffering. This was amply documented by researchers, community groups, and activists. The foremost expert on social profiling in Montreal, criminologist Céline Bellot, reported that between 2012 and 2019 there was an "intensification of social profiling by SPVM officers" (Bellot et al. 2021, 6). Based on a quantitative analysis of fines given to unhoused people, the researchers documented a war-zone. Fines had multiplied by eight since 1998, they doubled between 2014 and 2017, and they quintupled for Indigenous individuals. By 2018, unhoused people received 40% of *all* fines given based on municipal regulations, up from 23% in 2009 (and these estimates, the researchers remind us, "only represent the tip of the iceberg" [Ibid., 6]). People with no home, forced to survive on the street, were physically, verbally, and financially punished for public drinking, for standing around, for sleeping on the ground, or for sheltering from the cold in the metro. From 2012 to 2019, they accrued a collective debt of seventeen million dollars (Ibid., 23, 36). Community groups, represented by the RAPSIM, documented continued and escalating police brutality. They surveyed their members in 2016 and 2020, finding that almost all respondents received frequent or occasional reports of verbal (97-100%) and physical (93-94%) police abuse (RAPSIM 2016, 12; RAPSIM 2020, 15). Through it all, a wave of aggressive urban renewal projects targeted areas where homelessness had been concentrated by previous state

policy, leading to the mass displacement and dispersal of unhoused communities (RAPSIM 2016; RAPSIM 2020).

Of course, the persistence of police violence was just the flip-side of the state's refusal to abandon its policy of organized abandonment. As previously discussed, the 2009 report included structural recommendations for the provincial government, aiming to address the roots of homelessness through positive state intervention. The Commission asked for an expansion of supportive programs dedicated to mental health, addiction, and insertion into education and employment, in particular for young people aging out of foster care who represent a large portion of the unhoused population. The Commission also called for an increase in the financial value of social assistance, and for massive investments in the construction of social housing (CDPDJ 2009, 200-202). These common-sense recommendations were in fact a frontal attack against the decades-long neoliberal-carceral conjuncture. They echoed the most basic objectives of abolitionism: to shrink the repressive apparatus of the state and to considerably expand social support, or in other words, to meet everybody's needs instead of sacrificing some groups for the benefit of others.

These demands, however, were largely ignored. Despite some concessions, such as limited federal funding for homeless services and the development of a provincial policy framework to fight homelessness (a long-standing demand of the community sector; see Bacro 2019; Government of Quebec 2014; RAPSIM 2012), the material resources deployed were minimal relative to real needs, and they were not accompanied by structural reforms (see RSIQ 2015a; 2015b). On the contrary, the social prerogatives of the state, such as social assistance and social housing, continued to deteriorate under consecutives regimes of austerity, while homelessness continued to rise (see IRIS 2018; Tremblay-Pepin 2014).[27] There was no political will, no

[27] A 2015 law on social assistance, for example, was qualified by the Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques as "the worst attack on the Law to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion" since its 2002 adoption (IRIS 2015). The evolution of housing policy is also particularly evocative. Québec's vital yet chronically under-funded social housing program, created in 1997 to palliate the federal government's withdrawal from social housing construction, was halved in 2015 before being effectively discontinued in 2022. It was replaced by an "affordable" housing program, indexed on inflated market prices and open to private developers, with no guarantees for the construction of not-for-profit social housing. The province's network of non-profit housing organizations described this as the "hijacking of funds from social and community housing … for the profit of the private sector" (RQOH 2022). As feared, the government's 2023 budget announced zero new units of social housing, while housing and homelessness organizations estimate a need for 10,000 new yearly units. Remarking on the government's abandonment of social housing, its lack of measures to protect incomes, and its under-funding of the community sector, Quebec's network of homelessness organizations warned that we should "prepare for an increase of homelessness in Quebec" (RSIQ 2022). Based on conservative estimates, homelessness had already risen by 44% in Quebec between 2018 and 2022 (Government of Quebec 2023b).

reconfiguration of the state, no shifting of resources—just the continued decay of social services, a suffocating housing crisis, a surge in homelessness, and the relentless expansion of state violence.

It is crucial to understand that the state's refusal to curtail police abuse was not limited to unhoused people, far from it. Over the same period, the Quebec and Montreal governments were pursuing their decades-long campaign of racial discrimination known as "racial profiling". As we previously discussed, this phenomenon had also been caught in a new cycle of protests, reports, and recommendations, and in 2011 the Quebec Human Rights Commission had issued forty-three recommendations, aimed at the police, to end racial profiling. Some were superficial and echoed ideas that had already been unsuccessfully implemented in the 1980s: intercultural police training, diversity in hiring, improved community relations, etc. (Rutland 2020). Many other recommendations, however, sought to constrain and reduce police power, for example through stronger external civilian oversight. In particular, the report denounced the war on gangs and the disproportionate policing of racialized neighbourhoods, calling to "revise" these practices (CDPDJ 2011, 114).

In the years that followed, the city adopted the same superficial recommendations it had feigned to adopt decades earlier, while ignoring more serious demands. The city's inaction was widely denounced, notably during the previously mentioned consultation of 2017. Much like on social profiling, participants unanimously concluded that there had been no progress on racial profiling. The *Ligue des Noirs* (2017, 3) gave a compelling account of the police's systemic impunity:

> We observe that the more people refer to their rights in front of a police officer, the more they are victimized and brutalized, with no respect for their dignity. After having mistreated a citizen, the officer gets out of it by accusing the citizen of assaulting an officer. The justice system then takes over, relentlessly. At the end of the day, it's very often a criminal case for the victim, the complainant being the officer himself. That's the brutal reality.

The most substantial demands came from the groups led by racialized youth. *#MTLSansProfilage* (2017, 7), for example, asked the city to end its wars on 'incivilities' and 'street gangs', and to transfer these resources to community-based prevention programs. *Montreal-Nord Républik* (2017, 1), the organization created in the wake of Fredy Villanueva's killing, demanded the end of

the disproportionate police presence in racialized neighbourhoods, insisting that “there is no need for more police, but rather of more investments in community services”. Both organizations also called for the abolition of police street checks, among many other recommendations, including the demilitarization of the police.

After the consultation, the city took a single step forward: for the first time, it commissioned a data-driven report to quantify the phenomenon, which had been a recurrent demand. Published in 2019, this study revealed the depths of the city's inaction. Black, Arab, and Indigenous people were being arbitrarily stopped by the Montreal police at far higher rates than white people (2 to 5 times more), and the overall number of stops had more than doubled between 2014 and 2017 (Armony 2019). These arbitrary stops, it must be noted, are best understood as a form of racial terror, a ritual of humiliation and fear that leaves deep psychological and physical wounds on individuals and entire communities, sustained by the often realized threat of brutality, arrest, detainment, criminalization, and death (MTLSansProfilage 2018; OCPM 2020).[28]

At the end of the decade, one researcher summarized the situation as follows: "four decades of history suggest that, regardless of the evidence, the city will not go further than the most limited actions against racial profiling. If the police functions as a racist institution, it clearly appears that the democratic state (under the form of the [city's] Public Security Commission) seems happy to leave this form intact. In fact, the Public Security Commission reproduces police racism in the political sphere, continually rejecting the political subjectivity and the demands of racialized populations and of the groups aiming to defend them" (Rutland 2019, 31-32). The following year, Montreal's Office of Public Consultation released another landmark report on racial profiling, taking a similar stance:

> The municipal administration knows that, on a daily basis, its police service subjects Montrealers to differential treatment based on factors such as race, colour, ethnicity, nationality, religion or social condition. People in positions of authority use force without any real motive or reasonable suspicion. In spite of this, the commission does not see any measures that reflect the urgent need for action. (OCPM 2020, 153)

[28] In 2023, the same researchers published a follow-up report, with a single recommendation: a moratorium on street checks (Armony et al. 2023, 280). They explained that this practice, which lay at the root of racial profiling, brought no benefit to public safety. Over a hundred community groups and civil rights organizations supported this demand (LDL 2024b). Yet, the city and the police rejected the recommendation. I discuss the implications of this decision in the conclusion of the thesis.

What we see here is a pattern: faced with evident injustice, being given relatively simple solutions, those with the power to implement them refused to do so. We should not make the mistake of thinking that the state was merely passive or incompetent. The problems it was refusing to fix were themselves elaborate operations that were designed, funded, and defended by various state agencies. The state was capable of developing a complex punitive infrastructure to persecute certain groups by weaponizing criminal law and municipal regulations, mobilizing vast resources in the police, courts, and prisons, and fending off repeated legal challenges and critiques from civil society. In short, state actors had capacity and ingenuity: they acted vigorously on behalf of some and resisted cunningly against others. This signals that we are faced with a political problem, which is to say a problem of who has the power to mobilize state resources in service of their desires, versus who cannot even compel the state to meet their basic needs—and who can mobilize state violence for their own interests, versus who is always and only a target. We can elucidate this problem by following our case studies to their logical conclusion. We have surveyed forms of persecution that were deployed at a single (municipal) level of government, that were documented and denounced by wide coalitions, leaving a clear paper-trail of consultations, reports, and recommendations, which the government explicitly committed to implementing. In other words, we are dealing with problems that are so consensual and have been so thoroughly examined that their persistence can only be explained by a *political choice not to solve them*, which is what I now endeavour to explain.[29]

2.2 The economic, political, and ideological functions of carceral violence

We have shown that even as communities denounced the evident injustices they were subjected to, and even as the state was forced to recognize its culpability, the violence only increased. We

[29] I have not provided an exhaustive account of all the ways that the state continues to abandon certain social groups and expose them to vicious attacks, in full contempt of its human and civil rights obligations, of scientific research, of basic morality, and of tireless grassroots political organizing from the very people who bear the brunt of this abuse. Some glaring examples with local relevance include the criminalization of drug use and of sex work, the ongoing colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the state-sanctioned exploitation of immigrants, and the arbitrary surveillance, abuse, and arrest of left-wing protesters. The examples on which I focus, however, illustrate structural patterns that operate in these wider domains.

must now answer a simple question: why? My explanatory framework is rooted in conjunctural analysis, which starts from the assumption that social processes should be understood through the "concrete historical 'work'" that they accomplish "under specific historical conditions" (from Stuart Hall's (1980, 330) analysis of racism). To put it very simply, things happen for a reason. There is a reason why the state criminalized homelessness and why it refuses to stop, and there is a reason why racialized communities are under assault—and these reasons can be explained by studying the *articulation* between the various levels (economy, ideology, politics) and components (state, capital, ruling class, masses, civil society) of the social formation, in our particular historical conjuncture.

To understand the refusal—across large swathes of the political class—to enact simple recommendations that would end immense suffering, we have to reckon with what it means to exist in the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, and what it entails in Montreal specifically. We have previously defined the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture as a configuration of society in which ruling class hegemony is economically, ideologically, and politically secured through the widespread use of state violence, which is legitimized and enabled by material and discursive processes of criminalization, and operationalized through the police, courts and prison system, to which vast state resources are being diverted (see Chapter 3). I will now explain the mechanics of neoliberal-carceral rule in Montreal, through three case studies of carceral violence in the city: against unhoused people, student protesters, and racialized communities.

The treatment of unhoused people in Montreal exemplifies the ways in which carceral violence is fundamental to the economic interests of the ruling class. The criminalization of homelessness was maintained because, as previously discussed, it was instrumental to real estate development and speculation in the city centre, which was itself a product of the neoliberal restructuring of the economy, and a solution to dwindling municipal revenue streams. This logic was observed by community groups who denounced a clear link between urban renewal projects and the repression and displacement of unhoused people (RAPSIM 2016; RAPSIM 2020). This economic interest eventually spread to local homeowners and business owners, whose comfort, real estate values, and business income was threatened by visible poverty. As we saw, they became key stakeholders in the city's offensive against "disorder", and their participation in community policing activities was used by politicians to claim that repression is "what the population wants" (Sylvestre 2010b).

City government operated under the pressure of neoliberal policy. By offloading responsibilities onto municipalities, provincial and federal governments forced cities to manage escalating crises, giving them "the authority to allocate or withhold shredded social welfare" (Gilmore and Gilmore 2022a, 304). Municipalities, however, were financially and politically dependent on attracting capital investment and keeping the local property-owning class happy and wealthy, creating strong incentives to sacrifice unhoused people. The determining factor, then, is a context in which higher levels of government have been systematically dismantling the very social state that could prevent and moderate homelessness, and are unwilling to reverse course due to their neoliberal bargain with (or capture by) capital. This configuration produces misery, and misery causes economic and political problems that paradoxically justify state intervention, which can only come in the form of carceral violence since other options have been structurally precluded. This returns us to the point of departure: criminalization.

The criminalization of homelessness also illuminates the ideological pre-requisites for, and consequences of, the economic use of state violence. The attack on the unhoused was not justified in strictly economic terms, since it needed to be legitimized among sections of the electorate who had little to gain. To manufacture public consent, it was ideologically construed as 'necessary' and for 'the greater good'. Some of this was conspiratorial—for example, the misuse of public consultations to create the illusion of widespread support for repression—but much of it was also 'organic'. Every person involved in this class war had to make their actions seem just, legitimate, and persuasive, to themselves and to others. This required them to produce a series of rationales whose purpose is, by definition, to normalize the persecution of a group. To this end, political actors exploited an ideological terrain riddled with prejudice. We can think of the neoliberal impulse to blame poverty on individual choices, moral panics about petty crime, or deep-seated hatred of the transient poor. The central tool, however, was the act of criminalization itself, which cast the unhoused as criminals, which is to say dangerous people, or people deserving of violence. As the Quebec Human Rights Commission already argued in 2009, the police's “dichotomy between ‘bad’ and ‘good’ citizens, between those who cause disorder and those who suffer from it, has the symbolic effect of pushing the former outside of the space of citizenship” (CDPDJ 2009, 76-77). A concrete consequence, as researchers and community groups observed, was to create increasing fear and hostility among the general population (RAPSIM 2017, 11). In other words, the economic use of state violence both relied on and intensified broad dehumanization.

If state violence was used to produce a favourable economic terrain, it was also used to repress political opposition to the neoliberal restructuring of the state. A transparent example came in 2012, during widespread student strikes against proposed raises in university tuition, a direct consequence of the public spending cuts that characterize our conjuncture (Giroux 2013). These protests, which involved half of Quebec's student population and garnered widespread public support, were met with brutal police repression (Jean and Valade 2022; Pineaul 2012). At the height of the strikes, the City of Montreal adopted a new set of regulations governing protests (known as the *Règlement P-6*) with stricter restrictions, increased penalties, and an expansion of discretionary police power.

Before deciding whether to approve the new regulation, Montreal's city council held a public consultation. Dozens of citizens and community groups participated in the consultation, many of whom submitted detailed reports. The vast majority (22 out of 25), including civil rights organizations and the Bar of Quebec, opposed the regulation. Their arguments covered three pages of the final report: they identified human rights violations and a laundry list of constitutional violations at the federal, provincial, and municipal level; they warned of unrestrained police abuse and arbitrariness; they predicted that this would only cause violence to escalate; and they denounced the state's repressive approach to a sociopolitical problem. They also pointed out that there were no sound arguments in favour of this regulation (City of Montreal 2012, 7-10). Indeed, the points in favour were summarized in half a page of the final report, and they were entirely concerned with the cost of protests for business owners (notably, a local business association proposed to make the new regulation even more stringent) (City of Montreal 2012, 6-7). Having heard all of the arguments, city councillors decided to adopt the regulation anyways, demonstrating that they were not operating within the bounds of democratic debate, rights, and liberties, but rather in service of an upper-class minority.

As predicted, the regulation encouraged arbitrary police violence. Years later, the Quebec Superior Court invalidated several of its articles, and the city was forced to drop all charges filed under the regulation (against more than a thousand individuals), to settle sixteen class-action lawsuits from protesters (at a cost of six million dollars), and finally to retract the entire policy in 2019 (Radio-Canada, February 25, 2015; Le Devoir, November 14, 2019; Le Devoir, March 1, 2023). This episode reveals how the state understands itself in the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture:

fanatically committed to spending cuts, for the sake of which it is willing to violate civil and human rights—even of its white, middle-class, university-educated progeny—the state's approach to sociopolitical crisis is entirely repressive, and it is therefore vitally dependent on police violence for its survival.

Finally, criminalization was also used to forge and maintain the racial alliances that sustain ruling class power. Stuart Hall provides a compelling description of the articulation between race and class, through his famous claim that race is "the modality in which class is 'lived'" (Hall 1980, 340). This has two meanings: first, that differently racialized segments of the working class have different positions with respect to the mode of production; second, that race shapes the ways in which differently racialized groups "come to 'live' their relations to other fractions, and through them to capital itself" (Ibid., 340). For centuries, one of the symbolic and material boundaries between the racial insider and outsider has been drawn by state violence: *against* who it is deployed, and *on behalf* of who. Thus, beyond the economic reasons inherent to racial subjugation, the policing of racialized groups also serves a powerful political and ideological purpose. It binds disparate swaths of the population together by continually reaffirming one of the fundamental tenets of Western society: the domination of whites over non-whites, or what philosopher Charles W. Mills (2022) calls "The Racial Contract".

In Montreal, the political importance of racist policing is evidenced in the state's brazen refusal to stop racial profiling, which we discussed above. The policing of Black and other non-white lives persists because it has many material and ideological uses. The 'benefits' it grants to white society are almost too many to list: Racial profiling is a process of criminalization that turns all racialized subjects into criminal subjects; as such, it launders racist fears and desires through a more respectable 'fear of crime' and 'desire for crime-control' (Maynard 2017, 85-87). It also enforces an informal spatial segregation wherein racialized people risk being brutalized anytime they step into the 'wrong' public or private space (Ibid., 88-92), it represses insurgent political forms, and it bolsters a sense of racial superiority among vast swaths of the Quebec population, including the police department (Maynard 2020). Indeed, the overwhelming consensus among rank-and-file officers is that racial profiling does not exist, thus implying that the disproportionate policing of Black people is a simple reflection of their disproportionate criminality (Armony 2023). Similarly, on the right-wing of the political spectrum, the idea of a multicultural Montreal

rife with immigrant crime has become a central political narrative.[30]

Among considerable sections of the liberal electorate, too, open warfare against racialized communities is easily accepted as long as it is rationalized by the language of public safety, the ongoing 'war on gangs' being a prime example. Though liberals frown upon racial profiling, failure to do anything about it does not have serious political consequences. Inaction is ignored, or explained by the difficulty of confronting the police department, or by the imperative not to alienate conservative voters, or the political necessity to be tough on crime. But these are strategic political choices made with full knowledge of what they require—who to confront? who to appease? who to prioritize? who to sacrifice? From different angles, the right-wing and liberal perspectives converge: political actors on both sides recognize that—rightly or wrongly—their hold on power requires the continued sacrifice of certain groups through processes of criminalization.

It must be emphasized that the devotion to state violence against sacrificial groups crosses formal political boundaries. It is an issue that bridges the liberal-conservative divide of Western politics, perhaps even more than the commitment to neoliberal restructuring. The anti-carceral position is only found in progressive social movements (and the odd leftist party) who, partly because of this position, are targeted for extinction by both liberals and conservatives. At the provincial level of Quebec politics, a succession of liberal and conservative governments all descended deeper into the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture between 2009 and 2020. The first premier on the list, Jean Charest, was a neoliberal ringleader who pursued what he called the 're-engineering of the state', and his policies precipitated the 2012 student strike (Giroux 2013; Pineaul 2012). The latest and current premier, François Legault, is a right-wing populist who rallies his base through xenophobic laws and the criminalization of racialized people, while offering massive tax cuts to the rich and dismantling public services, social housing programs, renters' protections, and workers' rights (Barrett 2023; CCLA n.d.; Hébert-Bernier 2025; LDL 2023; LDL 2024a; LDL 2025b; Lecavalier 2024; Red Coalition 2024; Tremblay 2022).[31]

[30] Consider a column titled "Montreal, Violent City", written by a noted far-right figure who keeps a regular column for the largest newspaper in Quebec: "One of the first signs of rising insecurity can be seen in the behavior of women, who physically feel their transformation into prey. The situation in Europe is proof of this. … It's up to us to make sure it doesn't come to that" (Journal de Montreal, November 15, 2022).

[31] Between Charest and Legault were two other premiers, Pauline Marois and Philippe Couillard, who advanced a similar austerity-driven agenda (see Castonguay 2014; Radio-Canada 2014; Lessard 2015).

At Montreal's municipal level, a centre-right mayor (Denis Coderre, 2013-2017) was followed by a liberal mayor (Valérie Plante, 2017-2025) who adopted moderately progressive policies in favour of environmentalism, housing, and public services. Yet, on policing, the latter only adopted a humanistic rhetoric (e.g., formally recognizing the existence of racial and social profiling) that was in total contradiction with her actions. By political strategy, ideological dogmatism, or conjunctural pressure—one can only speculate—Plante took an aggressive "tough on crime" approach that far outpaced her predecessor. While Coderre had frozen the police budget for reasons of austerity, Plante presided through historic expansions of police resources, power, and impunity, shielding the SPVM from accountability and intensifying criminalization on every front (see Bongiorno 2024; Nerestant 2024; LDL 2024b; LDL 2025a; Rutland 2023; Rutland and Nicoletti 2025).

It is true that the municipal government was constrained by decisions made at the provincial and federal level, which were themselves constrained by global developments in economics, power, and much more. Yet every level of government had considerable agency in deciding how to navigate those constraints. The City could have decided that the human rights of Montrealers must be respected, and that we would have to find solutions that follow from this basic condition. Instead, they decided that a welcoming investment environment, a happy police, and the 'feeling of security' of privileged residents were primordial, and that violating the human rights of certain social groups was a reasonable accommodation. Similarly, instead of securing capital accumulation through increasingly violent means, the higher levels of government could have decided that the basic right to housing, health, and care must be assured for everybody, and that we would have to engage with capital according to this basic condition. What social formation would have then come to be? What configuration of resources and power? This is the abolitionist perspective: if you cannot sacrifice anyone, if you cannot use violence to manage your failures, then what solutions emerge? Instead, politicians across the board chose to deepen their reliance on state violence. They advanced at different rates, influenced by both structural pressures and ideological ardor, but always in the same direction.

2.3 The carceral ruling bloc

What I am trying to show is that patterns of state violence draw the boundaries of a complex political coalition, which I call the "carceral ruling bloc". It is not just neoconservatives or liberal politicians, and it is not just the police; it is not just the capitalist elite, but also upper middle-class residents across the political spectrum, and local business owners; and it includes, as well, considerable sections of the white lower classes, not just in Montreal but across the province, the country, and the Western world. In other words, it is what Gramsci calls a "historic bloc" (Hall 1986a, 15) that associates elements of the dominant economic class with fractions of the dominated classes “who have been won over by specific concessions and compromises and who form part of the social constellation but in a subordinate role” (Ibid., 15). These concessions, which can be economic, political, and ideological, are the ‘cement’ that “secures a whole social formation under a dominant class” (Hall 1980, 342).

This cement is never just one thing, but in our conjuncture the bloc is largely held together by state violence, distributed in unrestrained and asymmetrical ways, along specific lines drawn by race, class, gender, political orientation, occupation, disability, and nationality. The "subordinate" members of the bloc—large sections of the white middle to lower classes—are offered material and symbolic gains through their relationship to carceral violence. These social groups, who have suffered significant losses under the neoliberal state's policy of organized abandonment, are bought off through participation in organized state violence. This corruption pact operates on two levels. First, an emerging field of scholarship argues that the expansion of a carceral economy has encouraged some white workers "to see their class mobility as necessarily tied to the criminalization and subjugation of the racialized poor. It mystified the ongoing class war between labor and capital and naturalized the white supremacist race war." In this quote, social anthropologist Orisanmi Burton (2025, n.p.) is speaking of white prison guards, arguing that "The prison has incarcerated the guard’s imagination such that the only way they can envision themselves moving up is by stepping on someone else’s neck". He echoes a rich field of study on the U.S. prison economy that shows how this perspective was entrenched in entire communities, municipalities, industries, and public services, whose survival has been tied to prison expansion (see Burton 2023; Gilmore 2007; Schept 2022). It seems reasonable to extend this argument to police officers: another overwhelmingly white, high-paying job with low barriers of entry, which

enjoys spectacular benefits because of its centrality to the "criminalization and subjugation of the racialized poor." I think, however, that Burton's analysis can be extended even further.

There is a second, more profound level of concession, that extends to the white middle/lower class as a whole: these groups have been given a substantial measure of control over the apparatus of state violence. *If they choose the right targets*, their insecurity, frustration, anxiety, hatred, and desire will have staggering consequences. This privilege cannot be underestimated: to see your enemies felled by the state is a serious form of power; it is the power to exploit, to violate, to subjugate, or what Alberto Toscano (2023, 73) calls "fascist visions of freedom (freedom to dominate, to rule)". In other words, socioeconomic losses are offset by violent gains; it is an age-old bargain, made against the lives of the sacrificial groups who are excluded from the ruling coalition. With this bargain, the victims of organized abandonment have been split in half: there are those who are targeted by organized violence, and those who benefit from it. In this sense, state violence is extractive, and the lives of marginalized groups are a resource to be plundered to generate—financial, psychological, political, etc.—rewards for the other half of the masses.

This is the neoliberal-carceral adaptation of a timeworn strategy. It is akin to the "public and psychological wage" of whiteness, theorized by W.E.B Du Bois (1935, 700) to explain why the poor white workers of the American South sided with the planter aristocracy against the formerly enslaved. It is a reworking of the classic colonial pact of Western state-formation, "composed of united capital and labor", where "the white workingman has been asked to share the spoil of exploiting 'chinks and niggers'" (Du Bois 1915). It is also strikingly similar to the pact of permanent corruption that made the Nazi regime a "participatory dictatorship", wherein popular consent for mass violence was purchased through the spoliation of Jews and the predation of conquered territories (see Bajohr 2017; Chapoutot et al. 2024, ch. 7). In our contemporary conjuncture, this strategy has served a particular function: it has allowed the ruling class to reorganize the state—materially and ideologically—around carceral institutions, which is to say around its capacity for violence.

State violence, however, is more than a means to offer concessions: it is the main mode of governance of the dominant classes. As we have seen, relatively privileged members of the bloc (e.g., upper-middle class residents, business associations) routinely mobilize police violence to secure their economic interests, their comfort, and their pettiest desires. Most fundamentally, the dominant class (to be schematic: people who wield immense power because of their wealth or their

control over institutions where wealth and influence are concentrated such as the state, the media, and corporations) use state violence, with increasing impunity, to manage the structural contradictions of their mode of development, and to repress forms of political opposition and human existence that pose obstacles to their power. In this game, carceral institutions come to wield immense political power, and indeed become ruling actors themselves. The police, in particular, are a force to be reckoned with: they are the central actors of state action, they manage the contradictions of the ruling class on a daily basis, they are incredibly well-resourced, and they have a monopoly on discourses of crime and security. They protect and enforce ruling class power, and they can easily make it fall.

Yet any ruling bloc is, by definition, full of contradictions and vulnerabilities. To misappropriate Lenin's words (who was speaking of the 1917 revolution) the coalition contains "absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous class interests, absolutely contrary political and social strivings" (Lenin 1917, quoted in Hall 1980, 325). The commonly accepted opposition between 'liberals' and 'conservatives', for example, is better understood as an internal hegemonic struggle *between ruling class factions*: the former tend towards a 'liberal authoritarian' form of rule, where authoritarianism grows and thrives within the shell of liberal democracy, while the latter aim to tip this model into a more direct form of oligarchic, fascist domination. Their aspirations have substantial differences and are in real conflict, but they both deepen the same neoliberal-carceral project. As I previously emphasized, there is a bipartisan consensus on the persecution of marginalized groups, and there is consensus on who to prioritize and who to sacrifice. In other words, there is a consensus on the boundaries of the ruling bloc, but competition persists for leadership over this bloc, with differing ideals of domination. Fundamentally, however, both political projects are rooted in the expansion of state violence against the same dehumanized groups, which is why the one inexorably leads to the other. The crucial vulnerability of the bloc is its dependence on the consent of the white lower classes, whose structural position is often close to the excluded 'others' and could be grounds for an organic alliance, if not for the corruption pact described above.

It is to these 'others' that we must finally tend to. The ruling bloc is defined by the violent exclusion of a number of social groups. Most have inherited this position from the long-history of patriarchal, capitalist, colonial white-supremacy that shaped Western modernity. Their exclusion is not a fact

of transhistorical immanence, but is rather the result of structural pressures. Over centuries, ruling class power has been built on the oppression of these groups, producing a social structure that can easily reproduce it: their subjugation is already ideologically justified, politically useful, economically necessary. This is precisely what we observed in Montreal. In every political and economic decision, the same groups are always the last to be prioritized and the first to be sacrificed. They are sacrificed because it is easy, convenient, or necessary to do so. It doesn't take much more to maintain a system of domination; it is easily reproduced by pre-existing power relations. It simply takes people with outsize power—in other words, ruling classes—using every tool at their disposal to secure their position—undermining, dehumanizing, and crushing everything that stands in their way.

This is how the ruling bloc organically comes to be: it is predicated on the powerlessness of the groups that it targets, on their inability to inflict serious political consequences. This is implied in everyday political discourse. The cost of offending white bigots, causing discomfort to the wealthy, or admonishing the police is somehow far greater than the cost of brutalizing entire communities of marginalized people. The explanation is rather simple: asymmetries in political power create a hierarchy of human life. The consequence is that the most selfish desires of ruling bloc partners can justify the most stunning violence against those it excludes; meanwhile, excluded groups cannot even convince the state to stop violating their fundamental rights, let alone actually do something on their behalf. Who could imagine a state-sanctioned armed militia harassing wealthy residents and business owners for making unhoused people feel unsafe, maybe even evicting them, turning private space over to public interest? And why not? Is that more absurd than the current state of affairs, where armed agents of the state hunt homeless people, destroy their possessions, enforce closures of public space, and for what?

The profound and persistent injustices that we have examined follow from a simple yet heavily suppressed truth: in the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, being excluded from the ruling bloc means that you are not really part of the polity, and indeed not really part of humanity. The word ‘marginalized’ is commonly used to describe this ontological exclusion. I have also been using Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2022a) heuristic of “human sacrifice”. The common logic of these two forces is perhaps clearest in Antonio Gramsci's concept of the “subaltern”, which “reveals the interconnection between political power, representation, and marginalization” (Green 2011, 393). The subaltern are those that are simply not represented, and whose every attempt at building

political power is a threat to be repressed. The state offers almost nothing to generate consent among these groups; at most (usually when governed by liberals) it will offer to soften their abuse. That is as far as the ruling class will go. More commonly, when consent is denied or unworkable, the subaltern are simply governed through open warfare. As Dylan Rodriguez (2021b, 10) argues in *White Reconstruction*, within the "the overlapping genealogies of asymmetrical violence" of racial-colonial modernity,

> the notion of 'consensus' is a fundamental fraud: domestic and hemispheric war—as an expression of anti-Blackness and racial-colonial power—is the overwhelming (if not exclusive) modality of rule over people whose access to the entitlements of citizenship, property, recognized political subjectivity, and even humanity itself is variously marginal, obstructed, disrupted, or simply nonexistent.

In the neoliberal-carceral context that we have been analyzing, the abuse of subaltern groups is the political, ideological, and economic *basis* of the partial and corrupted hegemony of the ruling class. This is precisely what the history of social and racial profiling in Montreal exemplifies: the state's political choices are driven by a (conscious and subconscious) understanding that, if you take these away, the whole edifice crumbles. Yet, power is not only bestowed from above. Everything we have discussed so far is the result of a process of struggle: those destined for sacrifice refusing their fate, organizing themselves, dealing blows, and creating political problems. Through protests, uprisings, campaigning and cultural work, they undermined the cohesion of the ruling bloc. In the next chapter, we examine the state's attempt to placate this challenge.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that Montreal is part of a neoliberal-carceral social formation that stretches across Quebec, Canada, and much of the Western world. The neoliberal restructuring of the Quebec state and economy is already well documented; what this chapter aimed to demonstrate is that, here too, the (political, social, and economic) consequences of the neoliberal turn were managed and sustained through the use of violence against marginalized communities. I focused, more specifically, on two police campaigns: the *lutte aux incivilités* and the *lutte aux gangs de rue*.

The former was instrumental to the attempted social cleansing of unhoused people (and other marginalized groups, notably sex workers) from the downtown core. The latter served to repress Black resistance to white racism, re-segregate the city, and relegitimize policing in a time of turmoil. Most importantly, both of these campaigns served to dehumanize vulnerable social groups in order to justify vast expansions of state violence.

I chose to focus on these two forms of persecution because they became a focal point of the struggle against state violence in Montréal. After decades of resistance, they came to be known during the 2000s as "social profiling" and "racial profiling". These phenomena were both amply documented and denounced by wide coalitions, leaving a clear paper-trail of protests, consultations, reports, and recommendations, which the state explicitly committed to implementing. By taking a historical view of the 2009-2020 period, I was able to demonstrate that, contrary to what it claimed, the state made a political choice to pursue these injustices; the provincial government, the city, and the police refused to enact simple reforms that would have ended immense suffering, thus ensuring that the suffering would continue. I then explained this refusal by showing that these forms of police violence are central to the stability of the neoliberal-carceral social formation: they are necessary to secure the economic interests of the dominant economic classes, to repress political opposition, and to maintain the socio-racial alliances that sustain ruling class hegemony.

From the historical analysis of the struggle against police violence in Montreal, I developed a reflection on the historic bloc that dominates the current conjuncture. This alliance, which I call the "carceral ruling bloc", unites economic elites with large segments of the white masses around a simple pact: a generalized consensus about the expansion of state violence against the subaltern social groups excluded from the bloc. All members of the bloc get some benefit from this violence: the very rich get unrestrained domination, political repression, and capital accumulation; the moderately rich get good business, high rents, rising property values, and the enforcement of their pettiest fears and desires by the local police; and the relatively poor get jobs in the carceral economy, a sense of superiority, and the right to designate enemies of the state and see them annihilated. There are internal power struggles for leadership of the bloc—centrists, for example, strive for the ideal of authoritarianism within a democratic shell, while conservatives do not care for the shell—but there is broad consensus on who to prioritize and who to sacrifice.

To summarize, Montreal is caught in a neoliberal-carceral conjuncture where the expansion of state violence *is* the ruling strategy, and the underlying challenge is to create sufficient public consensus for this violence. It follows, then, that carceral institutions have become key political actors, and that criminalizing discourses and practices are a precious political tool. In this context, movements that oppose criminalization and state violence are working on extremely unfavourable terrain, because every challenge to the penal system strikes against the foundation of the current configuration of power. For profound reasons, then, the ruling bloc is frontally opposed to any reform that would meaningfully reduce the power and scope of the police, prisons, or criminal law. The political problems posed in 2009, of social and racial profiling, were therefore caught in something much bigger than themselves. First, these injustices targeted people who simply do not matter in the eyes of the ruling alliance. Second, the common-sense solutions to these injustices attacked the three pillars of the neoliberal-carceral social formation: cuts to social services, carceral expansion, and warfare against dehumanized social groups excluded from power.

I have so far demonstrated that state actors refused to solve these injustices and provided a detailed explanation of *why* they refused to do so, laying out the economic, political, and ideological factors that structured state action. This leaves one last question: *how*, exactly, did state actors pull this off? As we have seen, aggressive police strategies generated considerable resistance and criticism. People came together to riot, to denounce, to document, to investigate, to campaign, and to stir up discontent. Activist groups and advocacy organizations were formed, committing time and resources to ending these injustices. Yet the injustices persisted. What allowed the state to side-step this political opposition and entrench a violent system of rule? This is the question I now turn to, showing that at the centre of the state's strategy was a political innovation: a new police reform called mixed squads.

Chapter 6: Mixed squads in the conjuncture: A reformist reform

> "The public system has failed ... the absence of sufficient and adapted services to meet the needs of vulnerable people has shifted the responsibility for their care to the police ... officers are increasingly called upon to carry out social interventions … [but] psychosocial interventions have now become an integral part of police work, and it would be illusory to think of walking this back."
>
> — Government of Quebec, Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Police Reality (2021b, 14, 23, 27)

> "Ni flics ni équipes mixtes, libérons l'espace public."[32]
>
> — Lead banner at Montréal's annual march against police brutality, March 15, 2024

Introduction

This thesis has followed a thread, suggesting that mixed squads are part of a deeper transformation and expansion of policing in North America, which is itself part of a decades-long shift towards unrestrained state violence and authoritarianism across the West, where ruling class hegemony is secured by generating consent for domestic warfare against certain dehumanized social groups. This thread is long and dizzying, but perhaps still too fragile. My intention now is to demonstrate that these different levels of analysis can and *must* be pulled together. In other words, that 'mixed squads' are an object that can only be properly understood by attending to its role within the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, and vice versa, that this object has much to tell us about the development of this conjuncture.

In this chapter, I trace the historical development of mixed squads in Montréal and contextualize it within local and global developments in policing, urban governance, and political struggles against state violence. At this stage, I take mixed squads in their most abstract form, as a set of words, as a concept, as an idea that makes its way through institutional processes of policy-making. By following this idea through a trove of publicly available documents over a 15-year period, a picture emerges of how the concept of mixed squads fits within the broader history of the period—of what it's trying to fix, to hold together, to disrupt. The question I am answering is:

[32] "Neither cops nor mixed squads, liberate public space."

RQ3: What has been the role of mixed squads in contrasting, refashioning, or extending some of the major tendencies of our conjuncture, including the retrenchment of social support and the expansion of state violence?

Under this angle, mixed squads become intertwined with the mechanics of political power that have prevailed, in Montréal and Québec, over the past thirty to forty years. In the previous chapter, I described and explained the willful persistence of police violence that characterizes our conjuncture. In this chapter, I endeavour to explain *how* the ruling alliance was able to stave off repeated political challenges. Mixed squads, I argue, are best understood as a political tool, used to wage a geographically and historically specific political struggle, to secure the interests of a particular set of political actors, at the expense of others. Broadly speaking, the two camps are those who benefit from our neoliberal-carceral social formation—dominant social groups and their allies, politicians who represent them, police departments who have become central to their interests—and those who suffer enormously under this system—who are targeted, criminalized, dehumanized, humiliated, surveilled, hunted, displaced, captured, beaten, and killed. These latter groups are, of course, central to the development of mixed squads. As we will see, it is their refusal of subjugation and their organized resistance that created the political problem that mixed squads were born to fix. What we need to understand is why mixed squads, specifically, emerged as a "fix": what does that tell us about the terrain of struggle? about the relative power of different factions? about the material and ideological challenges to ruling class hegemony? about tensions and contradictions within the ruling bloc? The answers are congealed within the object of mixed squads, and they become apparent when we study their historical development.

By examining the *interactions* between mixed squads and the broader conjuncture, this chapter presents a political history of mixed squads in Montreal from 2009 to the present. My analysis is divided into two historical periods. Between 2009 and 2020, I argue that mixed squads were a strategy of subterfuge in response to political challenges against racial and social profiling. From 2020 to the present, I argue that mixed squads are a radicalization of the neoliberal-carceral state, in response to the crisis in hegemony provoked by the movement for penal abolition. Overall, I show that mixed squads are a product of prevailing relations of domination, a strategy to protect them from political opposition, and a program to eliminate the very possibility of a non-violent, non-punitive, social dimension of the state.

Methodology: The empirical basis for this section is mainly archival. I examined every publicly available document I could find that mentioned Montreal's mixed squads. This includes the entirety of the media coverage of mixed squads (from eight major local news sources); major policy documents, such as various strategic plans (on homelessness, mental health, racial discrimination) from the provincial government, the city, and the police; and other documents, such as annual police reports, minutes and reports from public consultations, follow-up reports that monitor the government's progress after consultations, multi-year plans for the management of public space, short-term strategies for neighbourhoods with high concentrations of homelessness, new models for public safety, new strategic directions for the police department, and coroner reports on police killings. The counterpart to these documents were various reports written by experts, activists, and community organizations, many of which I examined in Chapter 5. These documents often addressed mixed squads on the margins, among many other concerns, but still provided important insights into the evolving perspectives of civil society and the empirical impact of mixed squads.

I conducted a combined content and discourse analysis of these documents. The content analysis helped me understand what mixed squads represented as a policy (in terms of funding, objectives, evaluation criteria, legal basis, etc.), while the discourse analysis showed me how different actors portrayed and perceived mixed squads, helping me identify discursive silences and erasures at the institutional level. By following the idea of mixed squads through this trove of documents, I constructed a comprehensive timeline and cartography of mixed squads from 2009 to 2025. The timeline, dense with relationships, showed me how mixed squads fit within the broader history of the period. The rhythm of their development, the patterns that their presence drew, the locations in which they concentrated—these all provided information about the political work performed by the idea of mixed squads. The timeline also helped me develop a series of maps to situate mixed squads within the dynamics of the conjuncture, at different levels of analysis (Clarke 2005). One visual level, for example, described the different actors connected to mixed squads and the material relationships that bind them; another level looked at the relationships that linked different social groups to mixed squads, highlighting the disparate interests they serve; yet another level showed the discourses that were latched onto, appropriated, or suffocated by mixed squads. The most important level, perhaps, looked at the large-scale conjunctural movements that flowed into mixed squads (e.g., the retrenchment of the welfare state, the expansion of the carceral

state, the shift in who holds power over the state) and which constituted their objective, ideological, political, and logistical "conditions of existence" (Hall et al. 1978, ix).

1. Struggle and subterfuge (2009-2020)

The year 2009, which marked the start of the political crisis around social and racial profiling in Montreal (see Chapter 5), also marked the introduction of mixed squads in the city. This is not a coincidence. As we will see, from 2009 to 2020 mixed squads were portrayed as overt solutions to social profiling and other forms of police abuse. The police, the city, and the provincial government all claimed that mixed squads signaled a shift from a repressive to a supportive approach to social problems, that they would reduce police violence across the department, and also provide essential services to vulnerable groups. Our problem, of course, is that we have historical hindsight. We just surveyed that same historical period and demonstrated that the state refused to implement the evidence-based reforms that could have *actually* achieved everything that mixed squads *promised* to achieve. We have shown that, because of how social relations of domination are organized in the current conjuncture, the state was unable or unwilling to abandon its twin policy of organized abandonment and organized violence. Most fundamentally, we know that all of the injustices denounced in 2009 persisted and even intensified until 2020.

Through mixed squads, then, authorities promised to achieve what they refused to achieve by other means—herein lies their fundamental contradiction. Authorities pretended that they could ignore years of research, wave away the collective work of hundreds of community members, grassroots organizations, and experts, and yet still solve the problems that had been denounced. Implicitly, they claimed that they could end social profiling without any structural reform, without any new constraint on police power, without any change in the law, without any reorganization of priorities—and most importantly, without displeasing anybody who holds power.

This opens two possibilities: that mixed squads were a sincere reform rooted in extreme naïvety and ignorance, or that they were a wholly insincere reform. Though the former explanation has some truth—it would be wrong, I think, to argue that every person involved in the development of mixed squads was acting in bad faith—I will show that the latter dimension clearly prevails. A series of questions follows: First, why would authorities implement a reform that promised to do what they so clearly refused to do? Second, if this reform could not achieve what it claimed to

achieve, then what was its purpose, what else did it do? Third, why did political authorities choose to pursue mixed squads specifically, out of all possible (sincere *and* insincere) reforms? Finally, answering these questions will help us understand how a liberal city can maintain an abusive, discriminatory, and violent system of governance in the face of strong grassroots opposition.

In this section, I argue that mixed squads were never intended as a solution to social injustice; rather, they were an attempt to solve the political problems that emerged from that injustice, without ending the injustice itself. In the first part, I show that a narrow focus on mixed squads only causes confusion and incomprehension—which, as will become clear, is part of their purpose. In the second part, I examine how mixed squads articulate not only with the state's refusal to act, but also with the structure of the social formation and the power relations that sustain it. Mixed squads, I argue, are the product of an asymmetrical power struggle: they are what emerges when the ruling class is being pressured to do something it does not want to do; they are an escape attempt, a subterfuge. At bottom, they follow a simple political logic: if the ignored recommendations discussed in Chapter 5 were "non-reformist reforms" that aimed to transform the social formation, then mixed squads were just the opposite: a "reformist reform", whose purpose was to prevent the social formation from being transformed (see Critical Resistance 2020).

1.1 Mixed squads are full of contradictions

Three mixed squads were created between 2009 and 2020: *Équipe mobile de référence et d'intervention en itinérance* (EMRII), *Équipe de soutien aux urgences psychosociales* (ESUP), and *Réponse en intervention de crise* (RIC). These were a direct reaction to the outrage over social profiling and other related forms of police violence. The first mixed squad, EMRII, was created in September of 2009, in response to the revelation that the Montreal police was handing out millions of dollars in fines to people living on the street. Its ostensible goal was to take charge of unhoused individuals who were the subject of a large number of 911 calls and received a disproportionate amount of fines. By monitoring these particularly 'problematic' individuals in the long-term and linking them to additional services, EMRII claimed it would break the cycle of police interventions and fines (City of Montreal 2010). To do so, EMRII paired a couple of police officers with a couple of health workers: the former would find targets through 911 calls, while the latter would provide socio-medical services.

The second mixed squad, ESUP, was created in June of 2012 in response to a different scandal: in less than a year, the SPVM had killed four people experiencing mental health crises, two of whom were homeless. The new mixed squad, which paired three officers with three mental health workers, promised to improve the police response to mental health crises. It followed a classic co-response model: when regular officers responded to a call, they could decide to call ESUP if they deemed the situation was not criminal, not dangerous, and required mental health expertise (La Presse, May 25, 2012). A few months later, a third mixed squad was created, also focused on mental health interventions. This program, called RIC, consisted in creating a network of specialized officers who had received training in 'crisis intervention' by mental health professionals (Journal de Montreal, January 31, 2013; see SPVM 2013).

These three initiatives had wide appeal for a variety of reasons: they recognized that police interventions had been causing harm to vulnerable populations; they acknowledged a need for change in police practices; and they welcomed the expertise of other front-line workers, who now worked hand-in-hand with the police. Most importantly, mixed squads made a double promise. The collaborative nature of mixed squads was supposed to have a purifying effect on the entire police department, who would be infused with a renewed social sensibility and expertise. At the same time, it would improve the lives of those targeted by police interventions, who would now receive support instead of repression.

In many ways, mixed squads were a seductive initiative. The only state-sanctioned evaluation of a mixed squad in Montreal was published in 2012, and it was largely laudatory. The researchers evaluated EMRII, but they only barely considered the impact of this squad on unhoused people. Instead, they focused on the experiences of police officers and health workers, seeing EMRII as a "space of innovation in the encounter between two universes of intervention" (Rose et al. 2012, 130). That same year, however, other researchers evaluated EMRII according to its original promise: reducing the ticketing of unhoused people. They showed that EMRII had not reduced fines in the slightest, and concluded that "EMRII is not a solution and it changes nothing". The researchers explained that "despite good intentions, six or seven people are not enough to change the tone. More and more people are being more and more overcriminalized." (La Presse, February 2012). A decade later, the same researchers concluded that EMRII and ESUP had a negligible impact. They argued that despite these initiatives, which they considered positive, "the repression

of homelessness is, and remains, a common practice in the SPVM, one that is even growing" and that "clearly the solution cannot only be to accompany unhoused people who are overcriminalized, but rather to avoid overcriminalizing unhoused people in the first place." (Bellot et al. 2021, 24, 35)

A similar analysis prevailed within the community sector. In 2016, the RAPSIM, the foremost advocates of Montreal's unhoused population, wrote that the multidisciplinary approach of EMRII and ESUP was "greatly appreciated" (RAPSIM 2016, 8). However, they noted that "these more human and non-punitive approaches contrast with a broader police approach that has not or almost not changed", concluding that these teams did not "positively contaminate the police force overall" (Ibid., 5, 8). During the 2017 consultation on social and racial profiling—where, as we saw in the previous chapter, community groups unanimously denounced the city's inaction—mixed squads only appeared in the margins. The few groups who commented on mixed squads expressed a two-toned opinion. The *Clinique Droits Devant* (2017, 4), which had been assisting victims of social profiling since 2003, noted that EMRII was "satisfying because less repressive", but that it was contradicted by the creation of the police's Brigade of Public Space (*Brigade des espaces publics*), another new squad that produced "increased police surveillance … disproportionately affecting unhoused people". They also remarked that EMRII's impact was "too minor considering the resources it receives, and its expertise did not really change the perspective of the police as a whole" (Ibid., 13). Similarly, the RAPSIM (2017, 7) reiterated that EMRII's "non-repressive approach is greatly appreciated by the community sector". This, however, was one of the only examples in a section titled "Some progresses to recognize…and to relativize" (Ibid., 7). The rest of the report denounced that "unhoused people are still over-criminalized" (8) and that there had been "few improvements in relations between unhoused people and the police" (9). The city was condemned for "still not having done anything" (12) about discriminatory bylaws, and for intensifying pressures on public space through an "ever-increasing police presence and numerous redevelopment projects" that "contribute to the displacement and feelings of harassment and intimidation experienced by unhoused people" (10). Finally, they decried "the death of four unhoused people … at the hands of the police over six years", asking:

> When will we reimagine front-line interventions with people in crisis? The approach of community workers is often more appropriate than that of police officers: community workers give the person

> space, are less of a threat, and know how to de-escalate tensions; police officers, by surrounding and pointing their guns at the person, often accentuate tension and the feeling of threat in the person in crisis. Finally, to restore trust, it is essential to put an end to the feeling of police impunity. (11)

By 2020, the RAPSIM reported that there had been no improvement in the police treatment of unhoused people; in fact, police abuse had significantly increased. A certain bitterness could be felt when they concluded that "the increase of police strategies oriented towards support [i.e. mixed squads] is only a relative gain, due to the persistence of repressive practices" (RAPSIM 2020, 15).

With time, it became increasingly clear that mixed squads were full of contradictions. They promised to change practices across the police department, but they employed a literal handful of officers in a police force that numbered in the thousands. Instead of replacing existing police operations, they added a new layer to them, while regular police operations became increasingly repressive. In fact, mixed squads were often tasked with managing problems created by their own colleagues, with no hope of success. It was also unclear why police officers needed to be involved at all: mixed squads were called to intervene in situations of psychosocial distress, after regular officers were already on the scene and had ascertained there was no crime or danger. Why did this second-line of intervention require another layer of officers, when even the first layer had proven to be unnecessary?

Yet, by the late-2010s, mixed squads were still understood as a positive initiative swimming against a growing current of repression. They were appreciated because they seemed like a step in the right direction, and frustration was not directed towards mixed squads but towards everything else. What community groups denounced was the *contradiction* between mixed squads and the rest. I argue, however, that the entire meaning of mixed squads lies within this contradiction. If we linger on it, a series of questions emerge: Why would the same institutions (the police, the city, the government) be responsible for one thing and its contrary? Why would they create squads intended to moderate police violence against vulnerable groups, while creating new police initiatives that intensified this very same violence? Why would they implement such an ineffectual reform while ignoring a list of effective recommendations compiled by dozens of experts? These questions can only be answered by studying the *relationship* between mixed squads and their broader context.

1.2 Mixed squads extend carceral rule

1.2.1 What were mixed squads really responding to?

Neoliberal-carceral state-making is a delicate endeavour. It depends, *for its survival*, on the ever-growing use of state violence against certain social groups. The challenge, as we discussed in Chapter 5, is to create sufficient consent for this violence. In other words, the violence needs to be seen as legitimate by the groups that are not targeted and, to a lesser extent, by the groups that are. The loss of legitimacy among the former could create the kind of crisis in hegemony that occurs, according to Gramsci (1971, 210), when "the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses". The loss of legitimacy among the latter groups could lead to the other kind of crisis, when "huge masses ... have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which, taken together … add up to a revolution" (Ibid.). The hegemony of the neoliberal-carceral state, then, is critically tied to the *legitimacy* of its repressive campaigns.

The problem of legitimacy raises the problem of ideology, and particularly of the "categories of practical consciousness" that Gramsci calls "common sense" (Hall 1986b, 30). "The problem of ideology", in Stuart Hall's formulation, "concerns the ways in which ideas of different kinds grip the minds of masses, and thereby become a 'material force'" (Ibid., 29). It compels us to study how:

> a particular set of ideas comes to dominate the social thinking of a historical bloc … and, thus, helps to unite such a bloc from the inside, and maintain its dominance and leadership over society as a whole. It has especially to do with the concepts and the languages of practical thought [i.e. common sense] which stabilize a particular form of power and domination; or which reconcile and accommodate the mass of the people to their subordinate place in the social formation. It has also to do with the processes by which new forms of consciousness, new conceptions of the world, arise, which move the masses of the people into historical action against the prevailing system. (Ibid., 29)

This thesis has argued that the 'authoritarian consensus'—wherein large sections of the masses have been persuaded that most social problems stem from a *lack* of state violence against

marginalized groups and internal enemies, and hence that the solution is *more* violence—constitutes the core 'common sense' that cements the neoliberal-carceral bloc: "before we speak, before we think, it's the framework within which we think" (Hall and Massey 2010, 62). Not only does this framework allow the ruling classes to evade responsibility for ravaging the social structure; it also gives them tools to manage the proliferating contradictions of their political project, to contain threats to their domination, and to offer rewards to subordinate members of the bloc (see Chapter 5).

This common sense, however, must be continually tended to. It is, after all, deeply contradictory, encased as it is within a liberal democratic framework that is ostensibly rooted in the respect of human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, and political freedom. For its existence, the neoliberal-carceral state needs to either undermine these values or produce a mystified picture of reality that appears to conform with them. It does both: the first through the twin processes of criminalization and dehumanization, the second through a widespread production of ignorance about the extent, purpose, and achievements of carceral violence. We have discussed the first strategy, rather extensively, in Chapter 5. One of the arguments of the present chapter is that mixed squads belong to the second strategy. Returning to the line of inquiry opened in Chapter 4, which examined the role of mixed squads in restoring police legitimacy, this chapter shows that the concept of mixed squads also operates at a higher level, as a weapon of the state in the ideological struggle over the neoliberal-carceral common sense, which is "part of the general social struggle for mastery and leadership—in short for hegemony" (Hall 1986b, 42).

But what changed in the ideological struggle in 2009, compelling the state to innovate? We know, by now, that the state came under fire for its abusive treatment of marginalized groups, particularly unhoused people and racialized communities. We know, thanks to historical hindsight, that the state did not care much about this abuse, at least on compassionate grounds. What these critiques exposed, however, was the dirty underbelly of neoliberal-carceral governance. They revealed the deepest contradiction of the conjuncture: that our ostensibly liberal democracy was materially dependent on a logic of human sacrifice, and particularly on the state-sanctioned persecution of marginalized groups.

Consider the issue of homelessness: it was a major problem for the local ruling bloc, and they had chosen to address it with violence. For ten years, they had manufactured consent for the use of policing, by constructing homelessness as a public security issue, while simultaneously sanitizing the police's actions. The goal, as Don Mitchell (1997, 327) wrote, was to redefine public space "as a landscape, as a privatized view suitable only for the passive gaze of the privileged as they go about the work of convincing themselves that what they are seeing is simply *natural"* (emphasis mine). In 2009, the landscape was denaturalized for all to see. Not only did community groups reveal the living hell that haunted the city, but they also demonstrated that this approach would never solve homelessness.

This threatened not only a loss of state legitimacy among the general public, but also the emergence of "new forms of consciousness, new conceptions of the world … which move the masses of the people into historical action against the prevailing system" (Hall 1986b, 29). In other words, there was a threat of organized resistance, upheaval, and insurgency. The previous year, after a police officer murdered 18-year-old Fredy Villanueva, Montreal-North had risen up in fury against racial profiling, the other kind of police violence that the city lived by. In its wake, new organizations had sprouted, along with a new political consciousness (Rutland 2020; see Montreal-Nord Republik 2010). Though the unhoused population and their allies did not stage a revolt, they formed an organized political bloc composed of community organizations, scholars, and the province's human rights commission, which could raise hell on the legal and media fronts. Moreover, the social and racial dimensions of the problem were converging into a single burning problem of police violence, and any spark could set it all off. We will see that these two dimensions continued to merge year after year, as the police killed three racialized men who were either homeless, in crisis, or both, and as the two social movements coalesced.

Politicians and the police stared down the barrel of discontent, disorder, moral reprobation, legal trouble, political failure, and financial ruin. Something had to be done. Though following the recommendations that would end these injustices was out of the question—because of the fundamental requirements of the conjuncture, which were much more powerful than the social movement (see Chapter 5)—they still needed to *pretend* that they were doing so. In other words, they needed to lie and make it somewhat convincing.[33] This is what mixed squads emerged in

[33] The hegemonic role of lies and propaganda in liberal democracies seems understudied. If that is true, the penal system provides a rich field of study.

response to: not from the need to solve an injustice, but from the necessity of placating the challenge to hegemony that had bloomed out of injustice. This perspective elucidates the apparent contradiction between 'progressive' mixed squads and a regressive status quo that would fluster community groups for the decade to come. It was hard to see then, but it is easy to see now, that the contradiction was never meant to be overcome. When we superpose mixed squads onto the decade of inaction and repression that we examined in the previous chapter, a coherent picture comes into view: the former enabled the latter.

1.2.2 What political work did mixed squads perform?

With mixed squads, the government embarked on a decade-long campaign of lies, confusion, and revisionism about the causes and solutions to police violence in Montreal. As we discussed in Chapter 4, mixed squads were extremely effective at capturing the media's attention and imposing their self-representation. Between 2010 and 2019, virtually every media article about mixed squads (45 out of 48) presented them as a solution to the management of homelessness or to mental health crisis intervention. Similarly, 42 of these articles expressed positive views about the squads. In contrast, the media virtually ignored reports that demonstrated that mixed squads were failing to achieve their stated objectives (3 articles out of 48). One episode illustrates the police's influence over the media discourse. In 2011, the Montreal police declared that they "almost don't give fines to unhoused people anymore" thanks to EMRII (La Presse, February 5, 2011). The following year, a report from the city's leading scholars on social profiling demonstrated that the number of fines was actually increasing and that "EMRII changes nothing" (La Presse, February 22, 2012). In response, the police justified the increase in fines by arguing that "there are more unhoused people, therefore there are more fines", insisted that "EMRII is a success, everybody recognizes it", and lamented that "we have pressures from citizens and businesses, we sometimes have no choice" (La Presse, February 23, 2012). This exchange exemplifies the police's ability to inhabit a contradiction where they are never at fault: they had allegedly moved away from repression, as exemplified by mixed squads, yet in the next moment they justified continued repression by mobilizing the illusion that this is "what the population wants" (Sylvestre 2010b). In the following years, media coverage continued to praise EMRII, while the critical report was never mentioned again.

Mixed squads operated a similarly deceptive function in the institutional discourse. The city's 2010 action plan on homelessness, which (as previously discussed) ignored every recommendation to end social profiling, claimed that EMRII "is particularly promising, as it offers people a direct alternative to immediate criminalization. It is already proving a success" (City of Montreal 2010, 13). In the city's second action plan on homelessness, published in 2014, the creation of mixed squads was hailed as one of the successes of the first action plan. Though this plan ignored, once again, all recommendations to end social profiling, it committed to an expansion of mixed squads. The city claimed that these teams were "a promising avenue for addressing health and social problems in the context of police interventions", while bemoaning that "the inadequate resources devoted to these teams limit their ability to work with the most vulnerable unhoused people" (City of Montreal 2014, 5, 17). From 2013 to 2017, mixed squads had pride of place in the SPVM's annual reports, under the banner of "Interventions with people who are mentally disturbed, in crisis, or unhoused" (SPVM 2014) or "Interventions among target populations" (SPVM 2015). In these documents, the city and the police acted as if the only problem was the inherent *difficulty* of policing "target populations". As every study on social profiling had made clear, however, the root problem was that these populations were being criminalized and policed in the first place. The single-minded focus on mixed squads concealed that nothing had been done to prevent and restrain this original repression.

Instead, mixed squads gradually became a catchall solution to the repeated tragedies of neoliberal-carceral rule. Between 2011 and 2014, SPVM officers killed twelve people; three were homeless, and four were experiencing a mental health crisis (CRAP n.d.). Police killings of people in crisis are a widely recognized byproduct of the neoliberal-carceral turn of the state. Due to a systemic lack of mental health services, people with mental disorders are overrepresented in the homeless population, in prisons, and in police interventions. In particular, police officers have become the main and often only response to mental health crises, leading to repeated brutality against people in crisis, especially those already marginalized by race or socioeconomic condition (McDaniel, Moss and Pease 2020). By and large, these interventions should not require the presence of law enforcement. As the Montreal police admits, violence is "rare" and "in the majority of cases, there is no crime or offence" (SPVM 2013, 7). Yet, the SPVM estimates that 3.2% of the calls they respond to—over 33,000 calls per year—concern people in crisis.

The string of killings could have prompted the government to rethink its reliance on police

as first-responders. In 2015, the Coalition Against Repression and Police Abuse submitted a report to the coroner, arguing that:

> it is time for the police, including the SPVM, to give way to civilians for interventions with people undergoing mental health crises. There have already been too many needless deaths. (CRAP 2015, 73)

Ultimately, the coroner reports asked the state to make psychosocial services widely accessible, to implement civilian crisis intervention teams, and to create a well-funded urban health clinic to offer front-line services to unhoused people (Radio-Canada, December 4, 2012; Radio-Canada, March 7, 2016). However, as a local news investigation reported in 2018, these recommendations were all ignored. Significantly, only two recommendations from the coroner reports were implemented: the expansion of mixed squads and the purchase of tasers (Lamontagne 2018).

After every death, authorities presented mixed squads as the solution to police killings. After the murder of Mario Hamel (1971-2011), they proposed to triple the size of EMRII; after killing Farshad Mohammadi (1978-2012), they tripled it; in response to the death of Mohammadi, Julien Gaudreau (1986-2011) and Jean-François Nadreau (1982-2012), they created the second mixed squad, ESUP; and after the killing of Alain Magloire (1973-2014), they doubled ESUP and expanded the third mixed squad, RIC. Each of these deaths was related to the state's refusal to develop adequate social services and its related commitment to keep policing social distress. Each death was a spark threatening to reignite outrage over policing, and every spark was extinguished with a mixed squad. The sub-heading of one news article summarizes how the media, if no one else, was pacified:

> In less than a year in Montreal, three people with mental health issues were shot down by the police in interventions gone wrong. SPVM police officers will soon have *a new weapon* to help them intervene with people in crisis. Starting in June, they will be able to call on the Équipe de soutien aux urgences psychosociales (ESUP), a squad composed of a police officer and a social worker … « Rather than a judicial approach, we're going to have a health approach » says the health minister. (La Presse, May 25, 2012; emphasis mine)

As the chief coroners later explained, they wished that non-repressive reforms had been prioritized: "We're saying that it's better to shoot someone with a taser than a 9mm. But the idea would be to not shoot at all. ... At least, people in crisis won't be killed by gunfire. But it's a placebo. I would prefer to take these millions and invest them in mental health." (Lamontagne 2018) Here, we can discern the policy guidelines of the neoliberal-carceral state. Any reform that expands police resources is quick to be implemented, while reforms that seek to restrain police power or direct resources to social support are consistently ignored. We can also observe the logic of dehumanization that underlies the whole system. The brother of Alain Magloire, one of the men killed by the police, decried that it always takes "more deaths to shock public opinion". In the same vein, a coroner explained that mental health is a problem "for which we do not have that many resources. Because the dead don't vote. And neither do the homeless" (Ibid.). As these quotes emphasize, some lives were made so cheap that only their brutal end could lead to some form of state response—and even then, the response was derisory.

Overall, the institutional discourse on mixed squads served to mystify reality. By 2019, the SPVM was still claiming that "officers have a better understanding of homelessness and the work of EMRII has influenced police culture, leading to less interventions" (Radio-Canada, September 30, 2019). In reality, the criminalization of homelessness was reaching a historic high and the scope of mixed squads was minimal. In 2017 and 2018, the police gave 40% of all fines to unhoused people, almost double the rate of 2009 (23.4%) when EMRII was first introduced. Data from the Montreal police shows that EMRII had only assisted 209 unhoused individuals over 10 years, while the police had fined more than 11,000 (using a very conservative estimate). Similarly, over that same period, ESUP was only present in 6% of crisis interventions (Bellot et al. 2021, 10, 23, 35).[34] At the very best, then, these initiatives had been completely marginal. By then, a decade had been lost, nothing had been done to end state-sanctioned persecution, and an unmeasurable quantity of lives had been shortened.

Mixed squads, then, had served their political purpose. They followed a long tradition of police reform, consisting of three simple steps: first, ignore the (non-reformist) reforms that aim to reduce the scope of policing and criminalization, and pretend they never existed; second, selectively implement (reformist) reforms that increase police power and resources; third, mislead

[34] 1,900 yearly interventions, while the SPVM estimates that they receive 33,000 mental health calls per year.

the public about the impact of these reforms, suggesting that the original problem is being solved. Through mixed squads, authorities pretended that they were adequately responding to criticism, and that the police's general approach towards "target populations" was shifting from repression to support. In reality, as we have extensively discussed, police repression was only intensifying and mixed squads were a minor program with a negligible impact at best. In very intentional ways, then, mixed squads were used to create an illusion of change as cover for the repressive status quo.

1.2.3 Why mixed squads, specifically?

Mixed squads were a compelling policy because they fit perfectly into the grooves of the carceral social formation, and proceeded to deepen them. The development of mixed squads was justified through a consistent narrative, according to which the police needed new tools to address "new urban realities, such as homelessness, prostitution, mental health problems, substance abuse, and street gangs, which have made police work more complex" (SPVM 2015, 8). This discourse concealed the *causes* of these "new urban realities" and it *naturalized* the police's presence on the front-lines—both of which were the result of decades of neoliberal-carceral rule.

As we have seen, cuts in social spending had produced increased social misery while simultaneously leaving a vacuum of services. This vacuum was filled by the expansion of the carceral state, funded through social cuts, which both managed and produced misery through criminalization and repression, with the police acting as front-line agents. In other words, the "new urban realities ... which have made police work more complex" were produced by the twin projects of organized abandonment and organized violence. Echoing long-standing demands from the targets of carceral rule, the 2009 report on social profiling had asked to reverse this trend. It proposed to resolve both the roots and symptoms of the problem in a humane way, by decriminalizing misery, massively expanding existing social services, and creating new services where necessary (CDPDJ 2009).

Instead, mixed squads grafted a handful of social workers onto the carceral infrastructure. In a context of scarcity, this was enough to make mixed squads appealing to some: the few 'social' institutions that collaborated were either happy to do so because they had adopted a carceral view of their own work, or because they viewed mixed squads as a way to access resources and patients that they would otherwise never reach. Some health professionals, for example, portrayed people

undergoing mental health crises as inherently dangerous, while others rejected the police's presence. In one article, the director of a network of mental health organizations argued that "it is not the role of the police to intervene with people in crisis", explaining that:

> Yes, police officers are trained in crisis intervention, but there are people who study for several years to become community workers or street workers. It's not the same training at all. The officer is associated with something at the level of order... The uniform can have a connotation of fear. (24 Heures, November 25, 2021)

In response, the police argued that "the presence of officers is necessary for the safety of the social worker and the person in crisis", and the coordinator of ESUP—a criminologist employed by the provincial health agency—defended the police's presence:

> I've been doing this for 10 years, and I've noticed that it's never 100% safe at the scene of an intervention," adds Éric Lefebvre. Even when the police are there, I've seen things happen when the officers thought it was safe, and in the end... Fortunately, the police were there.

This disagreement echoes the often antagonistic visions between the community sector and the state, even in its 'social' dimension. Mixed squads fit neatly within the 'carceral' tradition of social work, which has been encouraged by the neoliberal restructuring of the state (see Jacobs et al. 2020).

More commonly, however, mixed squads were simply seen as a vehicle to connect health professionals with people in need. As a local director of health services explained, speaking of his agency's collaboration with ESUP: "We are now able, as health actors, to be present during distress calls. ... We can potentially do more for 33,000 people with whom we would have never been able to intervene because we didn't even know they were in distress" (La Presse, November 5, 2012). In other words, the health sector did not have the resources to respond to distress calls, but the police did. Something, they concluded, is better than nothing.

This argument epitomizes the brutal recomposition of the state in the neoliberal-carceral period. Spending cuts by upper levels of government have left health agencies without the means to help people, while cities have created a tentacular police apparatus. The consequence is a police force that gatekeeps access to both resources and people in need. Instead of repudiating this

configuration, mixed squads entrenched it. The same institution that was—still—tasked with persecuting unhoused people was now tasked with 'supporting' them. Not only did the police continue to intervene in situations that had nothing to do with crime or even danger, it now took leadership in the realm of social intervention. In other words, mixed squads intensified the model of community policing, wherein "resources become … not the stuff of life but the difficult-to-refuse inducements used to secure cooperation with the occupying … police" (Gilmore and Gilmore 2022a, 301). It was a triumph of impunity. Mixed squads, which were portrayed as inviting social workers into the police, effectively formalized the encroachment of the carceral state onto the social state.

In their first decade of existence, then, mixed squads solved a complex political equation: they pacified public outrage without upsetting the power structure in the slightest. State violence was unhindered, homelessness was still criminalized, all repressive police strategies were maintained, new ones were even developed. Every system that had been denounced at the start of the decade remained firmly in place. Ruling class actors did not yield an ounce of their power, nor did they moderate their wants and desires. Simultaneously, the general public was sold a mystified version of reality, where the state was taking decisive action for social justice, and the police was being transformed into a competent and humane social service. This illusion pacified public opinion and drew attention away from necessary anti-carceral reforms.

The social movement itself was misled by mixed squads, which seemed like a symbolic first step towards more changes to come. Their hopes, however, were unfounded: mixed squads stood in for all the changes that would never come. Yet, the political challenge against social profiling had launched a process of clarification. With every passing year, with every unkept promise, with every act of state violence, the movement radicalized. Some of its members, who had been opposing police violence for decades, already understood the logics of the carceral state. For many others, this was a valuable lesson about the kind of struggle they were involved in. With time, their collective demands became sharper, harder to manipulate, harder to escape. By 2020, a decade of unresolved political problems converged into a full-blown crisis, and mixed squads were refashioned into a totalizing political response.

2. Crisis and radicalization (2020-2025)

2.1 Crisis in carceral hegemony

The summer of 2020 was a pivotal moment in the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture. It was the start of a crisis of the conjuncture, produced not from above but from below, by the sudden radicalization and expansion of a vast abolitionist social movement set on destroying the carceral state and the social relations of domination that enabled it. The crisis started in Minneapolis. On May 26, the day after George Floyd (1973-2020) was murdered by police, crowds of protestors gathered in the streets, marching to the precinct that housed and paid his killers. Two days later, the precinct was on fire. The protests rapidly spread across the nation, across the continent, and then across the world. It was the biggest protest movement in U.S. history, pulling 15 to 26 million people into the streets; it spread to thousands of cities and over sixty countries; it mined every corner of the 'Western' world.

Everywhere that people lived, lives were being cut short by the carceral state. Day by day, new names emerged, each one a channel for grief and rage: Breonna Taylor (1993-2020) in Louisville, Elijah McClain (1996-2019) in Aurora, Adama Traoré (1992-2016) in Paris, Regis Korchinski-Paquet (1991-2020) in Toronto, Eishia Hudson (2003-2020) in Winnipeg, Chantel Moore (1994-2020) in New Brunswick, Pierre Coriolan (1960-2017) in Montreal, Nicholas Gibbs (1995-2018) in Montreal... These were mostly Black and Indigenous people, all killed by the police; they embodied the most extreme form of state violence, against the most dehumanized groups. The depth of racial dehumanization was echoed in the movement's founding slogan, "Black lives matter"—a simple statement that, if taken seriously, demanded a reordering of the world. For almost a decade, these words had cemented a mass movement against racist criminalization, policing, and incarceration across North America. They revived a long tradition of organizing that understood the penal system as a central mechanism of racial domination.

Yet, what shocked and outraged those who stood on the sidelines, what most infuriated those who the protests were against, was the movement's central demand: "defund, dismantle, and abolish the police, and reinvest in communities". At the simplest level, this was a common-sense budgetary demand. While repressive programs receive immense funding to destroy people's lives, every service rooted in prevention and support is being starved of resources. It would be preferable,

the protestors explained, if we did the opposite. This was a call to massively reduce the scope and power of the police, based on the understanding that policing is both a failed approach to safety and a central mechanism of oppression, and to develop practices to address interpersonal and structural forms of harm and injustice, at the level of both root and symptom, driven by the principle that collective safety proceeds from collective care, solidarity, and meeting the needs of all—and not from inflicting gratuitous violence against dehumanized and impoverished groups. The "divest/reinvest" paradigm was understood as a non-reformist reform that advanced the long-term project of penal abolition, which aims to abolish the social, political, and economic conditions that make the penal system a possibility, and organize a social formation where prisons and police are both impossible and obsolete (see Chapter 3).

This, then, was the crisis of 2020. After three decades of organizing, the project of penal abolition suddenly made intuitive sense to a mass movement twenty million people deep. Large sections of the population understood that the historical expansion of the carceral state does not respond to human needs and demands—that it is a strategy of violent domination from a radicalized, prepotent, authoritarian ruling class, which propagates misery, dehumanization, suffering, and death. Millions understood that what they yearned for—safety, justice, equality, prosperity, freedom—could only be had if the carceral state fell. In other words, the foundation of ruling class hegemony was under fatal threat. After all, to say "divest from the police and reinvest in social services" is to call for the end of the neoliberal-carceral state. The abolitionist movement, then, is almost definitionally a social movement of the subaltern, in the sense that it seeks to abolish the very structures that produce subalternity in our current conjuncture. What was extraordinary and extraordinarily threatening about 2020 was the transfiguration of a subaltern political struggle into the largest social movement in American history.

And so it was that abolition, and the crisis it portended, came to Montreal. On May 31, on June 7, throughout the summer, and throughout the fall, tens of thousands of people marched to denounce racism, policing, and racist policing in the city. These were the largest protests against policing in the city's history, and they were felt far beyond the streets. The scourge of police racism shocked the entire political spectrum, short of the most hardened reactionaries. Police brutality, in its most spectacular form, was placed at the centre of mainstream discourse. But the abolitionist analysis, too, had wide appeal. Month after month, despite the pandemic, protestors continued to march for

police defunding and abolition. In July, a poll found that 54% of Quebec residents supported defunding the police (Ipsos 2020). A few months later, during the preparation of the city budget, thirteen reports from community groups and 18,000 citizens (representing three quarters of respondents) called for defunding the police (City of Montreal 2020a). As a consequence, the city's finance committee recommended a "reflection" on reallocating funds (City of Montreal 2020b, 9), and by the end of the year a handful of rogue city councillors supported the demand.

The movement's appeal was partly a consequence of "'mergers, 'ruptures', condensation of contradictions" in the social formation, which called into question the neoliberal-carceral paradigm (Hall 1980, 325). By 2020, the social misery produced by organized abandonment was increasingly widespread and visible. A housing crisis tore through Quebec cities and beyond, affecting everyone who was less than upper middle-class, and throwing the less fortunate into the streets; between 2018 and 2022, Quebec's homeless population grew by 44% (Government of Quebec 2023b). Some have argued that the COVID-19 pandemic shed new light on the depths of social distress (e.g., among "essential workers" or elderly people housed in public institutions), while at the same time producing exceptional social programs that prefigured a different kind of state (e.g., eviction moratoriums, universal income, decarceration). Finally, the long-standing injustices of the penal system had been exposed by a decade of vigorous interconnected organizing around anti-racism, anti-colonialism, anti-fascism, feminism, queerness, and disability rights. The penal system was observed not only at the root of many of these issues, but also on the front-lines of political repression.

The convergence of these concerns around an abolitionist project was the result of concerted efforts from local activists. At the end of June, dozens of community groups came together to form Montreal's Defund the Police Coalition (in which I have participated since 2022). The coalition made ten demands, including cutting the SPVM's budget by 50% and redirecting those funds towards harm prevention programs designed and run by criminalized communities; investing in unarmed rapid-response teams, youth programs, and social housing; developing community-led non-punitive approaches to justice; disarming the police; decriminalizing drugs, sex work and HIV status; eliminating social control bylaws on "incivilities"; withdrawing police from schools and youth-centred activities; and ending the criminalization and surveillance of migration (Defund La Police 2024). In a press release, a representative for Montreal's Native Women's Shelter explained: "The current model of public security is outdated and ineffective. Not

only is policing harmful to marginalized Montrealers, especially Indigenous and Black people, but the kinds of services that better support community well-being and security are either underfunded or non-existent. We need a new model, one that dramatically reduces the role of the police and expands the role of other, community-based services and interventions" (Defund La Police 2020).

The emergence of this coalition represented a significant shift in the local struggle around policing. The more than sixty groups that it brought together were central to the city's ecosystem of healthcare, social support, and advocacy. They included unions of community workers, Black community organizations, Indigenous networks, shelters for women and unhoused people, groups for housing justice, sex worker organizations, advocates for HIV/AIDS, harm reduction services for drug consumption, queer collectives, youth groups, student unions, organizations engaged in solidarity with migrants and prisoners, and militant environmentalist, feminist, anti-racist, and anti-police groups. Many of these organizations had been engaging with the city for decades to end the various forms of criminalization that harmed the communities they served. Some of the coalition's demands came from that process, others were new, but they were now all articulated around an abolitionist political strategy. Montreal has a long history of collective resistance against police power, including an abolitionist tradition[35], but the opposition to the police had never been so broad-based, so radical, and so clearly directed not only against police abuse, but against the police as an institution. After years of being misled by state actors, community groups had adopted a more confrontational stance. They understood that the government was acting in bad faith, so they developed demands that could not be intentionally misinterpreted. They affirmed, openly, that the SPVM's growing power was a threat to their work and to the people they served. At bottom, it was a question of how to distribute resources, labour, and the right to life; defunding the police was the first material step towards a different social order.

The prospect, of course, was nauseating to the ruling classes. The 'defund' movement was vehemently opposed by all ruling factions, but it was at the same time perceived as a serious crisis.

[35] As discussed in Chapter 6, the 2017 consultation on racial and social profiling featured abolitionists demands from organizations like #MTLSansProfilage (2017) and Montreal-Nord Republik (2017). For example, the elimination of repressive campaigns against 'incivilites' and 'street gangs', the reduction of the police presence in racialized neighbourhoods, and the transfer of these resources to community-based prevention programs and other community services. As early as 2010, Montreal-Nord Republik (2010) had asked the city to "invest in the community instead of in repression" and to "recognize the principle that as long as there will be social and economic injustice, there will be social insecurity. No justice, no peace."

There was turmoil within the ruling bloc: the police union threatened the liberal mayor with chaos if she touched their budget (FPPM 2020); conservatives seized the opportunity to wave the spectre of leftists, criminals, ethnic minorities, and complicit liberals working hand-in-hand to cause lawlessness (Journal de Montreal, August 5, 2021); and liberals, as always, tried to play all sides: disparaging the movement to their left, soothing the liberal conscience by promising that they would address all these injustices, and reaffirming their "tough on crime" stance to appease liberal voters, conservative voters and the police department.[36] We do not have the time or space to properly describe the antics of every faction in this period; at the end of the day, it was just the tragicomic political theatre of the ruling bloc. What matters is that state actors reaffirmed their commitment to carceral rule. By the end of 2022, the Montreal police had secured the two largest budget increases in their history, and a vocal commitment from the mayor that "there is no question of disarming or defunding the police" (24 Heures, October 6, 2021). Between 2020 and 2024, her administration increased the police budget from 665 to 821 million dollars, a 25% raise. The few city councillors who had wavered in their unconditional support for the police were firmly called to order, and indeed they all left the mayor's party. As U.S. Democratic president Joe Biden would infamously proclaim, the new (or not so new) mantra was "fund the police" (PBS News 2022).

Those who were sacrificed, of course, were the members of the social movement. Their demands, and the harms they sought to redress, were never taken seriously by those who held power. As we previously argued, the ruling strategy depends on the expansion of state violence, with the abuse of marginalized groups being either necessary, useful, or collateral damage. In our social formation, the grievances of the subaltern are something to be managed, neutralized, repressed, but never actually redressed. As we will see, this basic rule did not change after 2020, on the contrary. Every injustice—from racist policing to the persecution of unhoused people, from political repression to the dismantlement of public services—persisted and in fact deepened. As the social movement radicalized around a clearer vision of justice, the ruling classes radicalized towards a more brazen form of authoritarianism.

Yet, state actors realized that the ideological challenge posed by the anti-racist, anti-carceral movement had to be explicitly addressed and resolved. The movement caused a crisis of

[36] In June of 2020, mayor Valérie Plante said she was open to redistributing funds that go to the police (CBC, June 8, 2020). In August of 2021, during the municipal electoral campaign, she wrote an open letter committing to funding the police, and accusing the conservative candidate of having defunded the police when he was mayor (which he did, but for austerity reasons) (Journal de Montreal, August 31, 2021).

legitimacy for the carceral state, and it transformed the political terrain. The ecosystem devoted to social justice had radicalized, from activist groups, to service-oriented organizations, to progressive citizens; masses of people were mobilized, energized, and causing upheaval; respectable community groups were challenging the city's entire approach to public safety and questioning the police's very existence. The crisis was in the streets, among institutions, and on the battlefield of popular common-sense. The founding myths of carceral rule were taking a hit, and the carceral state became the central target. The state's response was in perfect continuity with the previous decade of governance: its only concern was to re-legitimize and reinvigorate carceral power. Partly, this was done through tried and true techniques of political repression, demonization, and moral panic. Yet, the state had long learned that an iron fist needs a velvet glove, and this called for innovation. At this juncture, mixed squads were a gift from heaven—or at least the police department, municipal authorities, and the provincial government all seemed to think so. After having been used intermittently since 2009, mixed squads suddenly became central to their political strategy.

2.2 Mixed squads are the apex of the neoliberal-carceral formation

In the previous decade, mixed squads had been one of the state's only responses to punctual scandals and critiques surrounding police responses to homelessness and mental health. After 2020, just as diverse movements converged to formulate a totalizing critique of policing, mixed squads were refashioned into a totalizing response. This was the context that pushed me to start this thesis. I had taken a personal interest in the abolitionist analysis of policing, and by the end of 2021 I was participating in Montreal's Defund the Police Coalition. I knew that city officials were vehemently opposed to the movement's demands, and yet, when I read the news and attended city council meetings, I heard a recurring refrain: "we hear you grievances, we share your pain, and that is why we are investing in mixed squads". I was frustrated, to be sure, at the misleading response and at the brazen dismissal of our demands, but I was also confused. Like many other people, I was hearing about mixed squads for the first time, and they suddenly seemed to be everywhere.

A quantitative analysis of media coverage confirms that I had not fallen prey to delusion. After June 2020, the local media coverage of mixed squads multiplied tenfold, surging from an

average of 0.3 articles per month (2010 to mid-2020) to 3 articles per month (mid-2020 to 2023) (see Figure 2 in Chapter 4). The vast majority of these articles (99 out of 126) took a squarely positive view of mixed squads, with only 19 articles including critical perspectives despite mounting criticism from activists, community organizations, and experts (see Figure 1 in Chapter 4). This reflects intentional efforts, from the political class, to reshape the discourse. While, in earlier years, the media coverage was largely driven by the police, city officials and other politicians invested massively in this discourse after 2020 (see Figure 3). In the 2021 mayoral election, for example, almost every candidate made mixed squads central to their public safety strategy.[37] The discourse of mixed squads also adapted to the prevalence of abolitionist critiques: while mixed squads continued to be presented as a solution to police violence, they were increasingly mobilized to demand or justify additional police funding, to temper expansions of police repression, and to claim that the city was adopting a new approach to public safety. It is also only after 2020 that mixed squads were portrayed as a model for the future of policing, with an emphasis on support instead of repression (see Figure 4).

Finally, and most importantly, mixed squads came to embody new promises. If they were once a solution to interventions among unhoused people and mental health crises, they were now sold as a way to prevent violence, to reduce criminalization, and to dispense welfare in the absence of state investments in social services (see Figure 5). This turn reflected the proliferation of mixed squads in policy and on the ground. Between 2020 and 2022, five new kinds of mixed squads were created, more than doubling their number in Montreal, but also greatly expanding their ostensible objectives. A new mixed squad seemed to sprout in response to every critique of policing: the repression of homelessness (E=MC2, EMIC, ECCR), mental health intervention (ECHINOPS), the surveillance of racialized youth (EMIE), the policing of guns and gangs (ECCR, EMIE). After June 2020, then, the concept of mixed squads underwent a qualitative and quantitative transformation.

[37] Only one candidate, who supported defunding the police, did not include mixed squads in his platform.

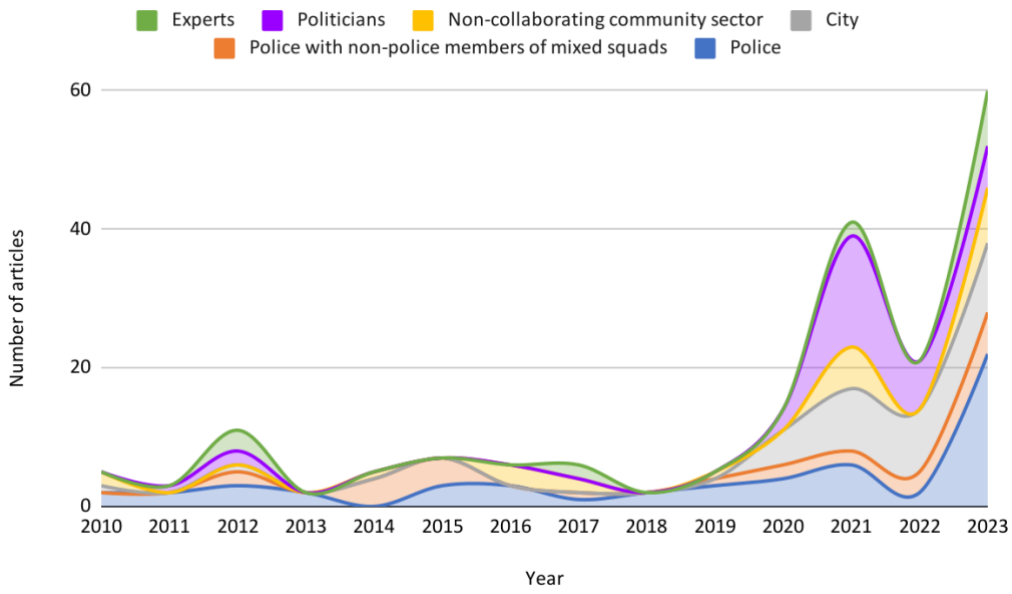

Figure 3: Political actors platformed in news articles about mixed squads in Montreal (2010-2023)

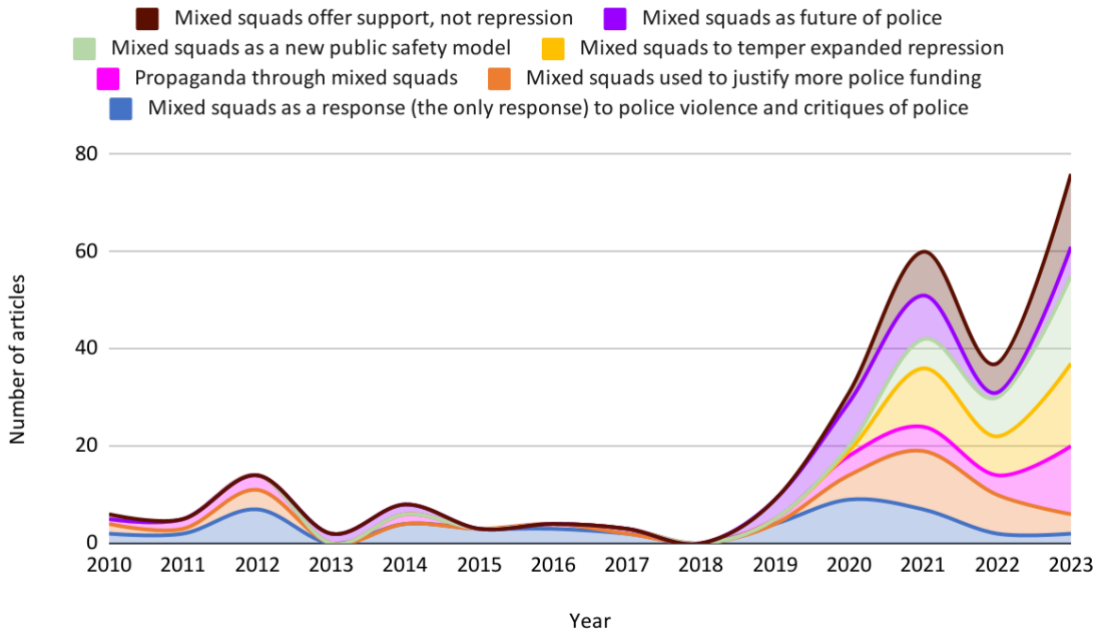

Figure 4: Prevalence of discourses that present mixed squads as solutions to police-related problems in Montreal news articles (2010-2023)

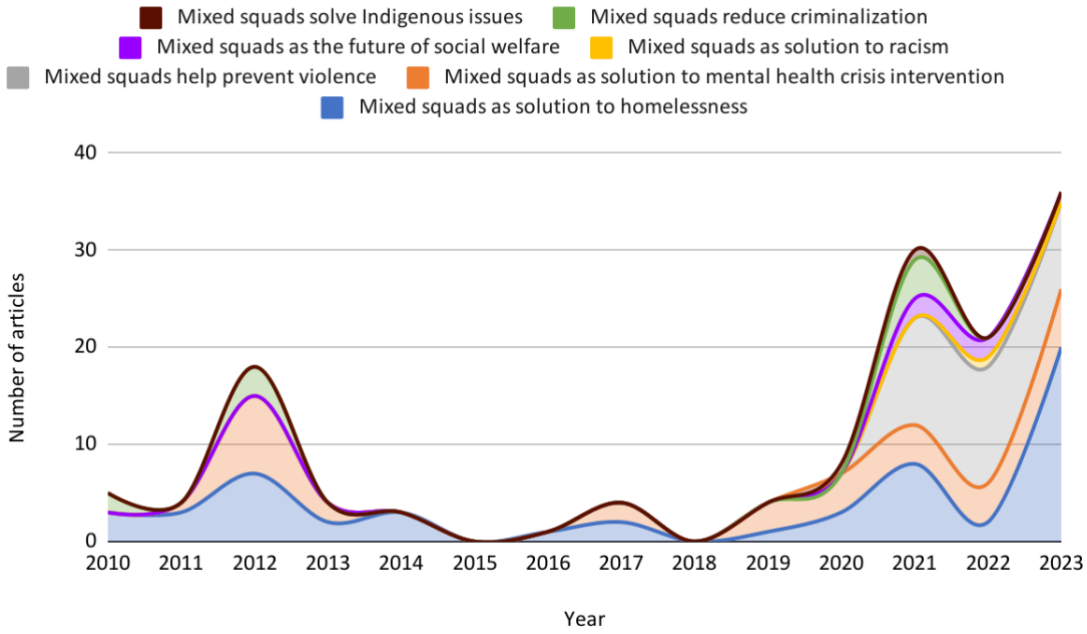

Figure 5: Prevalence of discourses that present mixed squads as solutions to various social problems in Montreal news articles (2010-2023)

In this section, I argue that the expansion of mixed squads since 2020 betrays a radicalization of the neoliberal-carceral state. As we have already argued, if mixed squads claim to solve a problem, we must always look at what the people who raised that problem actually asked for; it is in the gap and contradiction between the two that the value of mixed squads resides. The point is not so much what mixed squads do, but rather what they make it possible to avoid. Examining the major policy documents that followed the events of 2020, we see a twofold movement. From the provincial to the municipal level, mixed squads have moved to the heart of police reform; in parallel, every proposed constraint on policing has been rejected, and the existence of police violence itself has been erased. In other words, to resolve the crisis caused by the movement for abolition, mixed squads have enabled an annihilation of reality: of the city's history of police violence, of social-scientific knowledge, of grassroots demands and, more than anything, of the reality of every group subjected to carceral warfare. No one has paid a higher price than unhoused people: as I discuss below, while mixed squads were originally conceived as an ostensible solution to police violence, they were now described as a *service* to the homeless—while police violence, as a site of reform, simply evaporated. In essence, every new mixed squad has been a statement: about a violence that

will not end, a support that will not come, a life that does not matter. They represent the entrenched refusal to govern otherwise.

2.2.1 Mixed squads occupy the space of reform

After the crisis of 2020, mixed squads were suddenly enshrined as the only option for police reform. Just two weeks after the start of the protests, the Quebec government launched an investigation into racism in the province. The final report, drafted by a conservative administration who explicitly denied the prevalence of racism in Quebec, was particularly poor: it could not even bring itself to recognize the existence of 'systemic racism'. Nonetheless, it made three recommendations to "end police discrimination": minor tweaks in the police code of ethics, more diversity training, and *the expansion of mixed squads*. It is telling that a government who does not really believe in racism would include mixed squads among its meagre recommendations to stop racism. Even more surprising is that, for the very first time, the government claimed that mixed squads "would contribute to ending racial profiling" (Government of Quebec 2020, 15, 17). Though mixed squads originated as an ostensible solution to social profiling, their promise now extended to ending racist policing. This was an early example of how state actors were starting to use mixed squads as a catchall solution to critiques of state violence.

In 2021, the provincial government renewed its five-year plan on homelessness, which was soon translated into a similar plan for Montreal (CCSMTL 2022; Government of Quebec 2021a). These are major policy documents that guide state action and funding priorities. In both plans, *only one* action item pertains to policing: it is the expansion of mixed squads. Consider the city's action items:

> Objective 17. Promote *inclusive* interventions in the *sharing* of public space.
>
> - Action 17.1: Create and consolidate mixed intervention squads for psychosocial and police outreach in the community … Performance indicator: Expand the SPVM's mixed squads.
> - Action 17.2: Improve police interventions among unhoused people … Performance indicator: Implement ECCR during cold snaps; Implement E=MC2 in a second site …
> - Action 17.4: *Support* unhoused people in the underground network and in the metro *and support other users* through social mediation … Performance indicator: Implement a second EMIC mixed squad. (CSSMTL 2022, 48; emphasis mine)

In these reports, mixed squads were portrayed as important and efficient supportive measures—a complete misrepresentation of what they had proved to be over the previous decade. As we discussed in Chapter 4, for example, ECCR is the squad that enables the forced eviction of homeless encampments (including in the winter), while EMIC is the squad that harasses unhoused people in the metro. Yet, according to the provincial report, mixed squads "improve the response to the psychosocial and mental health needs of the population", but also "have an impact on social exclusion because they ... foster closer ties and dialogue between patrol officers (police and social workers) and members of the community", they "prevent problems from escalating and going to court" and even "optimize the chances of the person returning to a situation of functional equilibrium, and reduce the risk of repeated police interventions related to the same issues" (Government of Quebec 2021a, 34). The following year, in the government's five-year plan on mental health, the expansion of mixed squads was once again the *only* police-related action item, based on identical arguments (Government of Quebec 2022, 30). At this point, state actors could not have ignored that they were spreading misinformation. The web of lies that justified mixed squads had been refined, formalized, and then institutionalized. What we observe, then, is the deliberate production of ignorance about both policing and homelessness. This cultivated ignorance is fundamental to the expansion of the carceral state. After 2020, it enabled mixed squads to capture an expansive policy space that should have been filled with anti-carceral reforms.

In fact, the culmination of mixed squads was enabled by (and enabling of) the epistemological erasure of state violence. Commenting on the provincial plan on homelessness, community groups denounced “the absence of any consideration of major issues such as racial and social profiling, and the right to occupy public space, which is a disappointment in the face of major and persistent challenges” (RAPSIM 2021). In other words, the deliberate state-sanctioned persecution of unhoused people was expunged from the institutional record, and this was also true of the municipal plan. Accordingly, the reports did not include a single reform that would end the criminalization of social issues, reduce the scope of policing, or simply limit police power and impunity.[38]

[38] A few action items aimed to moderate the consequences of criminalization, but they were directed to the courts, not the police. Since 2009, some diversion programs have been implemented to reduce the incarceration of unhoused

This repudiation of more than a decade of grassroots demands was exemplified by the discursive transformation of mixed squads: though they were originally conceived as an ostensible solution *to police violence*, they were now described as a solution *to homelessness*; not only did police violence disappear from view, but the meek reforms it had produced were recast as acts of pure police benevolence. Even worse, these reforms allowed the police to secure additional funding that could have instead gone towards resource-starved community intervention. As community groups bitterly lamented:

> while [the approach of mixed squads] is preferable to traditional police intervention, it can create confusion among target populations about the role of the police, and tends to create mistrust among unhoused people towards community and street outreach workers, making their work and the creation of a bond of trust more difficult. For RAPSIM, it would have been preferable for the plan to promote and fund community intervention rather than police intervention in mixed teams. (RAPSIM 2021)

This is an example of how mixed squads facilitate the defunding of the (already underfunded) community sector for the police's benefit—a masterful reversal of grassroots demands (see also Chapter 4). At bottom, this was the state forcing its way through, using its dominance to impose a form of institutional obscurantism, which was then translated into the public sphere through the media, with the vast propaganda campaign that I explored in Chapter 4. This reflected a shift in the state's political strategy: it was now focused on producing ignorance within both institutions and the general public, instead of trying to mislead and persuade the social movement.

It soon became clear that the proliferation of mixed squads was a direct attack on the community sector. As we have seen, by 2020, community groups had strategically sharpened their demands to avoid co-optation. By 2021, they started saying that the money wasted on mixed squads should instead be used to fund real social programs (see RAPSIM 2021). In 2023, the RAPSIM, which represents hundreds of Montreal groups working with unhoused people, published a report that called for the elimination of all mixed squads in Montreal, and the

people, directing them instead towards 'social' programs. This is an interesting contrast with the intensification of police repression: while criminalization intensifies upstream, some efforts of diversion are being made downstream. However, these too have been critiqued for their coercive nature and for the brutal process that precedes them. There seems to be a complex dynamic at work, which should be explored in further research.

development of community-led civilian response teams instead (Rutland et al. 2023). The report, which I co-authored, was based on the experiences of street outreach workers who build long-term, supportive relationships with unhoused people. They explained that mixed squads do not provide any form of help to unhoused people; instead, they intensify the policing of public space, escalating harassment, displacement, trauma, and rights violations, while also causing major disruptions to the community sector, undermining its ability to support unhoused people (see Chapter 4 for a longer discussion of the impact of mixed squads). This repudiation was echoed by the more radical factions of the social movement: on March 15 of 2024, at the annual march against police brutality, the slogan was "*Ni flics ni équipes mixtes, libérons l'espace public*" ("Neither cops nor mixed squads, liberate public space"; see Figure 6; see Collectif 15 mars 2022). Community groups and activists alike realized that, far from being a gesture of goodwill, mixed squads were an existential threat.

Figure 6: On March 15, 2024, at the annual protest against police brutality, the lead banner denounced mixed squads (photo credit: Youssef Baati, @baatiyouss on Instagram)

2.2.2 Mixed squads facilitate the encroachment of the carceral state onto the social state

Examining the major policy documents that refashioned policing after 2020, it becomes clear that mixed squads were the entry point to a totalizing encroachment of the carceral state onto the social state, enabled by a police doctrine called "collaboration policing" (*police de concertation*). This doctrine was the state's official and explicit rebuttal to abolitionist demands, to the "defund the police" movement, and to any form of anti-carceral critique. The vision was laid out in an

influential report written by the provincial government's Advisory Committee on Police Reality (*Comité consultatif sur la réalité policière*). Based on two years of consultation, the 200-page document was described as "the most far-reaching reflection on Quebec policing in the last 20 years" (Government of Quebec 2021b, 6), and it was used to re-write the 2001 "Law on police" (*Loi sur la police*). In the report, the state openly recognized that cuts to social services had shifted social problems under the purview of the police—whose resources, it is implied, had not been cut. However, as the SPVM explained in their submission to the consultation, this was not seen as a problem but as an invitation to continue to "evolve". In a panicked rebuke to calls to defund the police, the SPVM claimed that,

> the police has evolved and will continue to do so; just as it did with the advent of community policing. It is no longer purely repressive … It is high time these strategies were recognized as official indicators of the real contribution of police services. (SPVM 2020, 20)

Of course, as we have seen, community policing formalized the historical expansion of policing, giving it a vast scope that went far beyond responding to crime, and enabling police interventions in every sphere of public life (see Chapter 3). It was an attempt to save the police from obsolescence in the face of declining crime rates, by focusing instead on the 'feeling of security' of privileged groups (Kappeler and Gaines 2020, 25). Three decades later, the Quebec government was now willing to admit that,

> while community policing initiatives have a beneficial effect on citizen satisfaction and the perceived legitimacy of the police, studies carried out on the subject also show that they do not have a significant impact on crime and the population's sense of security. (Government of Quebec 2021b, 20)

In other words, as critical scholars had long known, community policing had only served to restore police legitimacy. Conveniently, this allegedly misguided reform had diverted immense resources to the police, placing them on the front-lines of social intervention. The SPVM half-correctly explained that

> while [community policing] may appear costly in terms of the ratio of police officers per capita ... it has demonstrated its ability to deal with emerging social issues. (SPVM 2020, 5)

The language is typically ambiguous, but the reality is that community policing was indeed very costly because it vastly increased the scope and presence of policing. The police's "ability to deal with emerging social issues", moreover, is a euphemism for the panoply of new repressive strategies that community policing enabled, including the criminalization of homelessness that was widely denounced in 2009 (CDPDJ 2009, 33). It was out of this crisis for community policing that mixed squads had emerged: they were an innovative twist to make everything all right. In response to the 2020 protests, which demanded the reversal of this entire process, mixed squads evolved into something more: they formed the basis for a higher stage of community policing, called "collaboration policing" (*police de concertation*).

Concertation was an old vision, discussed in Montreal since at least the 1990s, which the police, the city, and the province revived and presented as new—even revolutionary—in an attempt to contain the legitimacy crisis of 2020 (see Doin and Gamache 1990). Indeed, after 2020, this concept was suddenly everywhere. It was all over the SPVM's annual reports, the city budget, provincial reports, and eventually in the province's new 'law on police' (see City of Montreal 2021; 2023a; 2023b; Government of Quebec 2021b; 2023; SPVM 2024a; 2024b). At the end of 2020, for example, in response to calls to defund the police, the police chief said that the SPVM planned to develop "an innovative approach of *concertation* with the community sector" (Journal Métro, November 24, 2020). As the city amped up the production of mixed squads, three of the city's five new squads had the word "concertation" in their name:

- E=MC2, created in July 2020: Équipe multidisciplinaire de *concertation* communautaire
- EMIC, created in November 2020: Équipe métro d'intervention et de *concertation*
- ECCR, created in April 2021: Équipe de *concertation* communautaire et de rapprochement

The city then hired a new police chief, Fady Dagher, who is the foremost theorist of *police de concertation* in Quebec (see Dagher 2020). At the height of the George Floyd protests, he had claimed in an interview that *concertation* was what the protesters really wanted, and that it was, put simply, "a revolution" (La Presse, June 13, 2020). He even promised that, where he to be given

a few extra million dollars, “I’m telling you: after a year, citizens won't be able to do without their police officers” (Ibid.).

This narrative was repeated, verbatim, at every level of the state: from the police, to the city, to the province. One of the main conclusions of the provincial report on "police reality" was that "Rather than community policing, the new approach in Quebec must be *une police de concertation et de proximité*, with partnership and dialogue as its main weapons" (Government of Quebec 2021b, 20). Community policing was out, concertation was in: the state understood, as Gilmore and Gilmore (2022a, 316) summarize, that “if we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change”.[39] The concept of ‘concertation’ was inscribed, with great fanfare, in the new law on police. In practice, this simply consisted in adding a line in the law saying that the police “act in *concertation* and partnership with the people and workers involved in their mission, to ensure that their actions are complementary and effective” (see Government of Quebec 2023a, 7). Meanwhile, this same piece of legislation was denounced by Quebec’s leading human rights organization, who explained that the new law,

> announces *unbelievable setbacks* with regard to police ethics and the Bureau des enquêtes indépendantes [the police review board]” and “fails to make the changes that have long been identified and demanded in order to act on rights violations committed by police officers.” (LDL 2023; emphasis mine)

Much like community policing, however, collaboration policing was more than just a smokescreen. This was a vision that put the police at the centre of social intervention—the exact opposite of what community groups demanded. The central actors of social support, especially in the autonomous community sector, were actively trying to detach themselves from the punitive apparatus, calling for its reduction and dismantlement. Yet, here they were conceptualized as "partners" to be mobilized as needed *by the police*, under its "positive leadership", rooted in principles such as "prevention; care and consideration of the population's needs; interculturalism; trust; physical and social proximity; impartiality; and the police's good judgement" (Government of Quebec 2021b, 20-21).

[39] Gilmore is quoting the character of Tancredi, from the novel *The Leopard* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa.

Reading this report, one might forget that these words refer to the bearers of state violence, responsible for daily violations of human rights against the very groups that they would now apparently take "leadership" in helping. But this reality, of course, was carefully erased from the report: social profiling, for example, was simply never addressed, while racial profiling was only discussed at the most superficial level. This was the same erasure that enabled mixed squads, and it was precisely the point. In all of these reports, mixed squads were taken as the archetype for this new police doctrine. Considering that, as we have shown, mixed squads were negligible programs that had already failed at their stated objectives, this is a significant admission. When the state said that it would support subaltern groups through collaboration policing or mixed squads, it was essentially saying that it would continue to manage these groups through carceral violence.

In fact, mixed squads and the doctrine of "collaboration policing" were determined by a basic condition: that the neoliberal-carceral configuration could not and should not be transformed. In an implicit rebuttal to the abolitionist movement, the provincial report opened by admitting that,

> the public system has failed ... the absence of sufficient and adapted services to meet the needs of vulnerable people has shifted the responsibility for their care to the police ... officers are increasingly called upon to carry out social interventions", before deftly concluding that "psychosocial interventions have now become an integral part of police work, and *it would be illusory to think of walking this back*. (Government of Quebec 2021b, 14, 23, 27; emphasis mine)

Similarly, the very final words of the report were an explicit rejection of the call to defund the police:

> there is still progress to be made in terms of intervention with vulnerable or marginalized people … [but] the solution lies in *concertation*, not in the migration of budgets from one sector to another ... the allocation of police resources to proactive partnership and concerted action strategies *seems to bring tangible results that it would be perilous to abandon*. (Government of Quebec 2021b, 198; emphasis mine)

In a classic co-optation of abolitionist analysis, the state accepted the premises of the movement's critique, before twisting its conclusions: yes, they admitted, the police only respond to social issues because the social state has been dismantled, and yes this harms vulnerable people, but the solution

is for the police to be even more intimately involved; and yes, we need more social services, but they need to be integrated into the punitive infrastructure, and their funds will be managed and dispensed by the police. One commentator summarized the entire argument, in an article about mixed squads titled "The therapeutic police":

> budgets for social missions continue to shrink, while federal and provincial spending on correctional services continues to grow. *It seems impossible* to return to an equilibrium. Therefore, letting psychosocial assistance *back in through the door of the police* is a route we don't have the luxury of refusing. We even have an obligation to make it grow. (La Presse, February 22, 2021; emphasis mine)

There was some truth to his statement: once you decided that providing basic services was "impossible", and that ending the sacrifice of marginalized groups was "impossible", then, after all of these political choices had been made, what options remained? Three flavours of neoliberal-carceral violence: community policing, mixed squads, *police de concertation*.

2.2.3 Mixed squads try to eliminate the possibility of a non-punitive social dimension of the state

The previous quote touches on the deep symbolic and material function of mixed squads: at the most fundamental level, they are an attempt to eliminate the *possibility* of a non-violent, non-punitive, social dimension of the state. We have seen that mixed squads are both a solution to the hegemonic crisis and a product of the prevailing hegemony, characterized by the endless shift from consent to coercion, from social support to penal repression. Economically, mixed squads could only be created because the social state has been degraded and public funds predominantly flow to the police; ideologically, they rely on the common sense that the social suffering of certain groups falls under the proper domain of policing; politically, they satisfy all the interests of the carceral ruling bloc (indeed, it is remarkable that mixed squads have been a rare point of agreement between the conservative Quebec government, the liberal mayor of Montreal, and the police department). Mixed squads, however, also represent a sort of symbolic and practical climax for this social model: they are the literal fusion of support and repression, of the social state and the carceral state, absorbing the former into the latter once and for all. They try to save the social formation by synthesizing its fundamental contradiction, superseding it, and rendering it

inoperable: there is no more distinction between help and abuse, no more difference between violence and care—the two are one, they cannot be pulled apart.

Nowhere has this strategy been more explicit than at the municipal level, where the political crisis of 2020 was most directly felt. The Montreal police is a municipal agency, and the city is solely responsible for its budget. Montreal is currently a two-party city, with a liberal and a conservative party competing for power. Since 2017, it has been governed by a liberal mayor who, like most liberal politicians, relies on the coerced votes of leftist citizens who have no better alternative, along with the votes of liberal upper-class citizens who are tended to with great care. The carceral crisis of legitimacy of 2020 translated into a complex challenge for the mayor, who needed to synthesize the 'ideal' and material interests of her liberal upper-class electorate (while staving off conservative attacks). These voters want a humane treatment of unhoused people, but they do not want to see unhoused people (and thus homeless services) in their neighbourhoods; they want an inclusive city, but they want cleansed neighbourhoods that cater entirely to their comforts, desires, and property values; they do not support police discrimination, but widespread persecution will not make them withdraw their vote. In the city's own words, they want the police to be “reassuring for the population and feared by the criminal world”, with an infantile understanding of every term in that sentence (SPVM 2024a, 2). What they need, in the end, is a good story.

Since 2023, then, the police and the city in unison have been claiming that the Montreal police are a “police de concertation” (SPVM 2024a, 7), who “focus their efforts and actions *on prevention as much as repression*” (City of Montreal 2023b, 5). This slogan is central to the SPVM's strategic plan for 2024-2026, and to what the city has started calling the “Montreal model for public safety" (City of Montreal 2023b; see also SPVM 2024a, 2, 7; SPVM 2024b, 2, 3, 6). This framework is an attempt to subvert the meaning of prevention. It is, in particular, a discursive sleight of hand from a liberal mayor who needs to justify why she raised the police budget by 160 million dollars after her constituents asked for investments in social services. But if the police can do it all, “prevention and repression”, then who can say what that money will be used for?

The slogan suggests that the police are engaged in both violence and support, yet the examples of police “prevention” in the “Montreal model for public safety” include mixed squads, foot patrols, and street checks (City of Montreal 2023b, 7). In other words, what they call “prevention” is repression targeted towards people who have not committed any crime; or, in the

police's words, “anticipating problems instead of only reacting” and “directly attacking the causes and not just the symptoms of public safety” (SPVM 2024a, 7). These quotes would make a lot of sense if they promoted an intervention by literally any other agency than the police; they would amount to the abolitionist understanding that public safety is produced by meeting social needs. As a police program, however, they embody the neoliberal-carceral strategy of managing organized abandonment through state violence.

Even the Quebec Superior Court understands this: ruling against the city in a class-action lawsuit on racial profiling, the judges wrote that the City of Montreal “contributes to the phenomenon of racial profiling by asking its police officers to do *prevention* and street checks in a context of systemic racism” (Guénette and Khelil 2024; emphasis mine). Moreover, as mixed squads demonstrate, the much-touted ‘collaboration’ of police with social agencies is largely illusory, and even worse: it puts social agencies at the service of carceral aims (Rutland et al. 2023; see Chapter 4). In this framework, then, subaltern groups are subject to two modalities of state action: repression *after* they have committed a crime, or repression *before* they have committed crime (i.e. “prevention”). This follows, of course, from the fundamental processes of legal, ideological, economic, and political criminalization, which construct subaltern groups as intrinsically criminal subjects only fit for carceral management.

The first principle of the “Montreal model for public safety” is that “Violence is not tolerated in our communities. It can be prevented and reduced” (City of Montreal 2023b, 6). State violence, it would seem, is not included, yet it is one of the most prevalent forms of violence in some of “our communities”, and it is the one that city government can—by definition—most easily curtail. As I have argued throughout this thesis, police work is “violence work” i.e. “work that relies upon violence or the threat thereof” (Seigel 2018, 9). It is difficult to measure how much of this violence is unjust, illegitimate, and illegal, but in Montreal, as elsewhere, we know where to start: hundreds of thousands of police interventions, which is to say thousands of hours of police work, have been demonstrated to be intentional violations of human and civil rights, and entire realms of criminalization nothing else than discriminatory assaults on human life. The easiest, most immediate way for the city to “prevent and reduce” violence would be to vastly curtail the scope of policing and end the persecution of marginalized social groups. The steps to take are laid out in scientific, evidence-based reports, written by respectable organizations, even commissioned by the city. It could all be done today; it could and should have been done fifteen years ago. The

humanitarian claims of mixed squads might have been believable had the city done anything to end its own violence. It did not. The violence just persisted, deepened, and became more vicious, and mixed squads were an integral part of this project.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I rejected the dominant narrative that presents mixed squads as a well-intentioned progressive solution to a complicated problem, whose aim is to reduce police violence and improve social conditions for the most marginalized. Taking a historical view, I showed that the development of mixed squads was marked at every turn by the *political decision* to *pursue* the degradation of the welfare state, the expansion of the carceral state, and domestic warfare against vulnerable groups, in the face of escalating sociopolitical crises that threatened the ability of this political project to advance. In other words, mixed squads are not an attempt to solve a social crisis; they are an attempt to solve the political challenge to ruling class authority that emerges from the social crisis, without solving the social crisis. Mixed squads, then, are a quintessential "reformist reform", whose very purpose is to fortify the status quo under the guise of changing it.

From 2009 onwards, the City of Montréal consistently presented mixed squads as a response to problems of police violence, while refusing to implement the recommendations demanded by those who raised the problems in the first place, and simultaneously expanding the discriminatory practices at the very root of the problem. By narrowly focusing on mixed squads, one concludes that they are a small and insufficient step in the right direction—this is what we see, by and large, in the academic literature. By taking a quick glance at the broader context, one concludes that the state is being contradictory in its approach—this is what many community groups, engaging in good faith with the government, originally remarked. In either case, we are left confused and hoping that there is more to come. By taking a conjunctural approach, this chapter aimed to demonstrate that mixed squads are not a door towards something better; they are a wall. This can only be understood by shifting our focus away from mixed squads, and towards the persistent contradictions that link them to grassroots demands and to other police practices. Mixed squads erase the former, while concealing and perpetuating the latter. What I have hopefully made clear is that the point of mixed squads is not just what they do, but also what they make it possible to avoid: this is the political reason for their existence, this is where their value resides.

Finally, this chapter argued that mixed squads are not just a strategy to protect neoliberal-carceral rule, but also a radicalization of this political project. I make this claim on two levels. First, the political function of mixed squads in Montréal went through an important change after 2020. In the previous decade, many community groups saw mixed squads in a positive light, as a sign that their demands were being heard by the state. Since 2020, community groups have repudiated mixed squads, and yet this is precisely when this reform became central to government policy. Notably, whereas the pre-2020 mixed squads (e.g., EMRII, ESUP) were mostly ineffective and misleading, the post-2020 mixed squads (e.g., ECCR, EMIC, EMIE) were more directly harmful to marginalized people (see Chapter 4). This reflects a fundamental shift on the part of the state: it has stopped pretending to be engaging in good faith with experts and grassroots organizations, shifting instead towards an ideological war that aims to win over the larger public and alienate it from community groups.

Second, mixed squads embody the advanced encroachment of the carceral state onto the social state. Both symbolically and practically, they represent the fusion of violence work and care work, leading many people to lose the fundamental human ability to distinguish between the two. This is not a metaphor: in the realm of public policy, mixed squads are trying to eliminate alternative visions of safety and care; in public discourse, mixed squads are producing mass ignorance and propaganda about what the police do; and on the ground, as we saw in Chapter 4, mixed squads are disrupting and replacing community work rooted in solidarity and human dignity. What is at risk of disappearing is the very possibility of a non-punitive, non-violent, social dimension of the state. Mixed squads, then, are not only a wall but a prison wall, making it even harder for us to remake the world.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Recapitulation

We can finally answer the overarching research question of this thesis:

> *RQ4: Do mixed squads encourage or preclude approaches to public safety—increasingly demanded by scholars, activists, and community groups—that are based on meeting the needs of all, rather than inflicting violence against the most vulnerable?*

This thesis has argued that mixed squads do not reduce police violence, but rather extend it, and do not provide support to marginalized people, but rather preclude it. Mixed squads, in other words, are the diametrical opposite of what they claim to be. They do not replace police work with care work, or police officers with community workers, but rather enable the reverse process, replacing support with repression, and care workers with violence workers. Through mixed squads, policing grows outwards, encroaching on new territory.

Mixed squads may be marginally friendlier than the rest of the police—the literature suggests it—but that is both irrelevant and their most dangerous quality. Irrelevant, because marginal friendliness is a poor compensation for the expansion of persecution that defines their work. Dangerous, because the façade of friendliness is precisely what allows this expansion to go unnoticed and misunderstood. This was part of the argument of Chapter 4, which described how mixed squads are used to construct and disseminate myths about police benevolence, notably through media manipulation, in order to legitimize both old and new forms of abuse.

Despite their immense discursive presence, it bears repeating that within the police department mixed squads are almost insignificant. In Montreal, they represent less than 1% of police resources, operations, and personnel, which is to say that 99% of police work is business as usual, which is to say that mixed squads are not a grand transformation, they are not a beacon of the future of policing, nor are they a "revolution" in public safety. The strategy of policing remains what it has always been: violence, coercion, repression, fear-mongering, and hoarding enough resources and political power to do whatever they want. The state's monopoly on violence grows

increasingly illegitimate, which is why mixed squads have come to be; yet, in material terms, the state's ability to inflict violence grows and grows and grows.

While mixed squads do not significantly change policing and certainly do not reduce police violence, they have an important negative impact on the people and spaces they target, which are characterized by state-produced vulnerability and a chronic lack of resources. This impact is most deeply suffered by unhoused people and the community workers that support them. As we saw in Chapter 4, mixed squads intensify the policing of public space, escalating the deadly harassment, abuse, and displacement of unhoused people, while extending the reach of criminalization into sanctuary spaces like public schools and public transit. Simultaneously, the presence of mixed squads causes major disruptions to the existing ecosystem of community-based support, undermining its ability to support vulnerable people. Not only do mixed squads disrupt the daily efforts of community workers, but they also coerce conformity and collaboration with police objectives by gatekeeping and misappropriating the increasingly scarce resources devoted to community care.

The redefinition of concepts, practices, and ecosystems of "prevention", "support", and "care" constitutes a form of counter-insurgency. As discussed in Chapter 4, mixed squads are driving a recomposition of the community sector, replacing autonomous organizations with organizations controlled by (and loyal to) the city and police, weakening networks of solidarity, and undermining sites of political resistance to state violence. It is a transparent attempt to disarticulate abolitionist arrangements of people and resources that protect the dignity of all, and incorporate them into a growing carceral geography, rooted in "processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion that congeal in and as group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore 2022a, 475).

The most important effect of mixed squads, I have argued, is political. Across the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture, two antagonistic social projects are locked in a protracted struggle: what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2022b) describes as the struggle between abolition and carceral geographies. When we recognize this struggle, the meaning of mixed squads really shines through. It is well enough to demonstrate that mixed squads serve to deceive, harm, and preserve the state's ability to harm with impunity, but a structural and historical perspective is needed to explain *why* the state and the police are driven by such ill intentions. In the absence of this perspective, those who fight

against state violence risk misconstruing mixed squads as a gesture of good faith from the state. In contrast, this thesis argues that mixed squads are both a symptom of the advancement of the neoliberal-carceral conjuncture and a strategy to secure its continued development in the face of abolitionist resistance. At stake is a particular social formation characterized by the emptying out of the state's capacities to promote collective well-being, and the simultaneous expansion of its ability to govern through violence.

Mainstream narratives recognize that the history of mixed squads is the history of the abandonment, marginalization, and persecution of certain social groups. There is a clear consensus about what this reform responds to: the disintegration of social welfare, the criminalization of homelessness, the killing of people in crisis, and the proliferation of police brutality against marginalized communities. In other words, mixed squads flow from and respond to the neoliberal-carceral turn of the state. The question is, what kind of response do they provide?

Here, a chasm opens between the state discourse on mixed squads—produced by the police, the city, and the provincial government, and largely reproduced in the media and in the academic literature—and the historical trajectory that we observed in Montreal. In the former, mixed squads are presented as a sincere attempt to correct the harms of our social system; in the latter, it is apparent that mixed squads seek to preserve and deepen these harms, while undermining the political resistance they produce. As we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, the development of mixed squads was marked at every turn by the state's refusal to enact simple recommendations that would have ended immense suffering. Mixed squads were implemented *because* the state (at all levels) refused to abide by the demands of experts, community organizations, and grassroots social movements, such as: eliminating laws that empower the police to cleanse and segregate public space based on race and social condition; not deploying state violence based on racist delusions or the whims of rich people; and providing adequate housing, healthcare, education, and social assistance.

As I argued in Chapter 5, these simple and common-sense demands posed an existential threat to people in power because the abandonment, dehumanization, and abuse of marginalized groups is the very foundation of their hegemony. Without this violence, they cannot accumulate capital, they cannot bribe their political allies, they cannot stifle resistance, and they cannot give any cultural meaning to their regime—in other words, they can sustain neither the material nor the ideological basis of their domination. The legitimation of this violence is a constant problem and an evolving challenge, managed through a politic of dehumanization (to naturalize abuse) and

deceit (to conceal its extent). The demands outlined above posed a threat of delegitimation, especially as they entered the public and institutional discourse in the 2010s and then seized the masses in the 2020s.

The problem that mixed squads respond to, then, is not social but political. As such, mixed squads are an innovation in reformism—the art of changing a system in order to entrench it—and in pacification—the art of achieving "peace without justice" (Burton 2023, 150). This became apparent in Chapter 6, when we followed the trajectory of mixed squads in the realm of public policy. Since their introduction in Montreal in 2009, a major impact of mixed squads has been to erase critiques of state violence formulated from the grassroots, along with their attendant analyses and demands. Mixed squads act as a black hole of reform, offered as a false solution to a myriad of problems, while evidence-based solutions are suppressed from institutional memory. At the policy level, the impact of this reform is to sow confusion, produce ignorance, and buy time.

Simultaneously, mixed squads are transforming the juridical, institutional, and cultural terrain, furthering the encroachment of the carceral state onto the social state. In their drive to co-opt and neutralize abolitionist critiques, mixed squads reframe abuse as ‘care’ and persecution as ‘support’, erasing the symbolic and material boundaries between violence work and care work, placing the latter under siege. They are the tip of the spear of a new police doctrine, 'collaboration policing', which formalizes the police's position as purveyors of social services, giving them leadership over other agencies and control over dedicated funds. In other words, mixed squads are driving a reformist campaign that entrenches and naturalizes the most odious consequences of the neoliberal-carceral turn.

Recommendations for research and action

In Montreal, many community workers and organizations now reject mixed squads and other reformist strategies of the neoliberal-carceral state. This shift is exemplified by the emergence of the Defund the Police Coalition. In response, the state seems to have given up on persuading these groups, focusing instead on winning the hearts and minds of the public through propaganda and deceit. Meanwhile, the province, the city, and the police are taking an increasingly aggressive

stance towards the organizations that they cannot control, pressuring and starving them, or better yet trying to replace them.

One thing this thesis was not able to provide is a comprehensive analysis of the other side of mixed squads: the non-police workers and agencies that choose to collaborate, and also those who refuse. I have situated mixed squads within the history of policing, but another story could be told through the lens of health agencies, social service providers, and community organizations. There is a long history of "social" workers choosing to resist or collaborate with the carceral state. In this thesis, I touched on the topic of collaboration: I briefly spoke of the SDSVM in Chapter 4, the main "community partners" of mixed squads, whose credentials are questioned by most community organizations; I also explored the rationales of mental health workers who participate in mixed squads in Chapter 6, and highlighted some of the tensions between state agencies and autonomous community organizations. Likewise, I brought forth the critical perspectives of community workers in Chapter 4, and highlighted the community sector's resistance to state violence in Chapters 5 and 6. However, I did not engage with the historical development of these institutions and communities of practice—their visions, their contradictions, their articulations with the social formation, the relations of power that traverse them, and the challenge of survival in a context of scarcity. The autonomous community sector can be an important site of abolitionist world-making, but only if we avoid the trap of homogenization and romanticization—hence the importance of pursuing this line of research, which I will leave to scholars and practitioners of community care.

Scholars of policing, on the other hand, may wish to develop a broader analysis of the evolution of penal reformism in the contemporary period. Organized networks of solidarity and resistance are under attack, and ruling class strategies are constantly evolving. Scholars can make themselves useful by staying alert and communicative, building tools, and helping activists and community actors avoid being tricked. Scholars and practitioners should also continue to work together to develop anti-carceral strategies to "prevent, interrupt, and heal from harm" (Kaba and Ritchie 2022, 213), something that this thesis was not able to do.

Critical research is often criticized for being, well, critical, instead of offering solutions. I hope to avoid this accusation by pointing out that the history of mixed squads is a history of ignored recommendations: it is precisely because the solutions are so well-researched and well-known that

mixed squads had to be invented. The past 15 years of recommendations can be found in Chapters 5 and 6; I will summarize them below. The state will not listen, not in its current form, but it is worth knowing what it is not listening to:

- On the topic of mixed squads, the recommendations are mine[40]:
    1. Abolish all mixed squads.
    2. Create civilian response teams for 911 calls about homelessness, mental health crises, and other non-criminal situations, and resource them with long-term state funding.
    3. Ensure that these teams are designed, trained, and managed by autonomous community organizations with relevant expertise and adequate state funding.
- To address social profiling and racial profiling[41]:
    1. End the "war on incivilities".
    2. End the "war on street gangs".
    3. Eliminate discriminatory bylaws on the occupation of public space.
    4. Abolish street checks.
    5. Stop designing urban renewal projects predicated on social cleansing.
    6. End the forced eviction of encampments.
    7. Stop using the "feeling of security" of privileged citizens as the basis for police action.
    8. Decriminalize homelessness, sex work, and the survival of marginalized people in public space.
    9. Put an end to police impunity by restructuring police oversight bodies.
    10. Reduce the size of the police force.
- To address homelessness[42]:
    1. Replace the state's repressive approach with a supportive approach rooted in human dignity and socioeconomic justice.
    2. Fund the large-scale construction of new social housing.

[40] See Rutland et al. 2023.

[41] See CDPDJ 2009; 2011; City of Montreal 2017b; Clinique Droits Devant 2017; First Peoples Justice Center 2017; Montréal-Nord Républik 2017; #MTLSansProfilage 2017; RAPSIM 2017; Rutland 2019; Stella 2017.

[42] See CDPDJ 2009; CHRC 2024.

3. Fund support services in social housing.
4. Expand existing outreach programs to provide healthcare to unhoused people dealing with problems of addiction and mental illness, including long-term support.
5. Expand support programs for youth aging out of foster care.
6. Increase the amount of social assistance.
7. Provide homeless encampments with basic necessities.
8. Ensure drop-in shelters are available 24/7.

- To address mental health crises[43]:
    1. Remove the police from the response to mental health crises.
    2. Implement civilian crisis response teams.
    3. Create mobile urban health clinics.
- To end other forms of state-sanctioned injustice[44]:
    1. Demilitarize and disarm the police.
    2. Reduce the SPVM budget by 50% by reducing the police presence, ending harmful police campaigns, and minimizing the scope of policing, and redirect these funds to the initiatives listed below.
    3. Invest in alternative justice models, notably those rooted in Indigenous traditions and in transformative justice.
    4. Invest in community-led programs for harm prevention, including harms related to violence, mental illness, and drug use.
    5. Create unarmed service teams to address mental health and drug related crises, traffic violations, gender-based violence, juvenile "summary" offenses, and missing persons cases.
    6. Invest in programs and services, including youth programs, recreation programs, and social housing, in presently criminalized communities.
    7. Decriminalize all drugs, sex work, and HIV status, eliminate the SPVM drug squad, morality squad, Eclipse squad and all other units targeting marginalized communities, as well as all proactive surveillance programs, and release and expunge criminal records for drug and sex work charges.

[43] See CRAP 2015.
[44] See Defund La Police 2024.

8. Permanently withdraw police from schools and sports programs, and cease police patrols of public parks, community events, and other spaces in which youth congregate.
9. End the criminalization and surveillance of migration by eliminating all collaboration between the police and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) agents and any other form of involvement of the SPVM in immigration matters.

These are only the recommendations that I came across during my research; they are far from exhaustive. It is remarkable that almost all of these recommendations have been developed for the specific context of Montreal. They are modest and limited reforms, yet they could be implemented tomorrow and bring immeasurable relief. Solutions exist, we just lack the power to implement them.

Where do we go from here?[45]

This thesis explored the foundational violence of our social formation and explained how mixed squads help it to endure in the face of organized resistance. Using a few decades of historical hindsight, we saw that mixed squads were always what they turned out to be: a subterfuge. I will close with three last questions: did the state's strategy work? where did it lead us? and what lies ahead?

After 2009, mixed squads helped delay a deeper crisis in hegemony, but the crisis still came to pass; after 2020, mixed squads undermined the movement for abolition, but the crisis continues to deepen. Mixed squads, then, were successful in extending the subjugation of marginalized groups, plundering and shortening their lives. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us, "What's extracted from the extracted is the resource of life—time", for the benefit of a constellation of profiteers (Gilmore 2022a, 474). But gorging on stolen time does not make anyone immortal, and our ruling classes have finally reached the end of the rope.

The fact is that the politics of lies and hypocrisy have their limits. In Montréal, the current

[45] This final section is adapted from an editorial that I co-wrote with Dr. Ted Rutland (see Rutland and Nicoletti 2025; see also the Contribution of Authors section).

administration rejects accusations of inaction by boasting that it has admitted responsibility for social and racial profiling, a supposedly momentous step. The recognition that you are abusing people, however, is only a positive act if you take steps to stop the abuse; otherwise, it is a brazen admission of impunity. And though a velvet glove may soothe the conscience of those who watch this play out from afar, it is hardly convincing to those pummelled, daily, by the iron fist of police repression. Despite the state's pacification strategies, the old slogan keeps its promise: no justice, no peace. Until one day the crisis becomes so acute that it imposes a choice: give in to justice, or abandon all pretence. Both options demand a transformation of the social order, towards either collective liberation or authoritarian rule.

It is the great tragedy of our time that the City of Montréal, in lockstep with centrist governments and liberal bourgeoisies across the Western world, has chosen the second option. In so many ways, the year of 2024 has proven to be a world-historical turning point. As many have desperately argued, Western support to the Israeli genocide in Gaza has been a siren song, inviting ruling classes the world over to embrace their bottomless cruelty, ignorance, and arrogance (Palestinian Youth Movement 2023; Petro 2023; Lordon 2024). As Colombian president Gustavo Petro warned in December of 2023: "What we are seeing in Gaza is the rehearsal of the future." It is remarkable to see how much our municipal government has heeded the call. It is not just that our leaders unleashed a barrage of police violence against protesters who denounced governmental and institutional complicity in colonial extermination (see Beaulieu-Kratchanov 2024; Beaulieu-Kratchanov and Barrett 2024; Feith 2024; Wilson 2025). It is also that at the same time, and in just a few moves, they obliterated the entire façade of liberal respectability that they had built over fifteen years.

In the summer of 2023, a group of researchers mandated by the city released their second report on racial profiling. The report concluded that police street checks—which give the police the power to arbitrarily stop anyone they want—are a major source of racist police violence, while having no positive impact on public safety. Logically, then, the researchers made a single recommendation: to impose a moratorium on street checks (Armony et al. 2023, 280). The city and the police have forcefully rejected this recommendation, thus openly committing to maintaining a practice whose only purpose is enabling racial violence.

In February 2024, the Canadian Human Rights Commission released a landmark report demanding an immediate end to the forced eviction of homeless encampments, which they

described as a "violation of human rights" that "make people more unsafe and expose them to a greater risk of harm and violence" (CHRC 2024, 3). The city continues to dismantle every single encampment it can find, thus openly committing to a policy of systematic human rights violations.

The following summer, groups of business owners and homeowners launched an assault against homeless services across the city, demanding the closure of shelters and safe injection sites, the forced medical examination of unhoused people, more police presence, and a renewed crack-down on visible poverty (FLIP 2024; RIOCM 2024). The city welcomed their demands. In the fall, the police presence in downtown Montréal was increased and then augmented through collaborations with a private surveillance company (as it happens, the same company that had been hired to repress student activism for Palestine; see Rutland et al. 2024).

Then, in February 2025, the city suddenly announced that it would not modify the discriminatory bylaws that allow the police to persecute unhoused people, bringing an abrupt end to eight years of work from community groups (LDL 2025). A month later, the transport authority followed suit by reinstating a ban on "loitering"—the only anti-homeless regulation that had been removed after 2009 (see Montréal 2017, 3)—to make it easier for transit police to displace unhoused people seeking shelter (La Presse, March 13, 2025). In a short letter, the mayor explained that "the current *conjuncture* is not favourable to a revision of municipal regulations" (Plante 2025; emphasis mine). This is precisely the argument of my thesis, but it remains an egregious admission. We might want to pause and think: what does it really mean to inhabit a conjuncture that is not favourable to ending the persecution of the most vulnerable members of our communities?

I have spent countless pages peeling the layers of disinformation, dishonesty, and hypocrisy that cover state violence. And yet, we may come to see mixed squads as the last vestiges of a liberal order that at least pretended to care, that felt enough shame and fear to invest in subterfuge. Since 2024, we have been reminded that at bottom it is just a question of power. The subterfuge "worked" not because it was particularly sophisticated, but because the power asymmetry was enormous. When the façade falls, when researchers like myself have deconstructed it brick by brick, what remains is the entire infrastructure of domination. It is a sobering reminder of the limits of scholarly research, and indeed of truth.

We are now entering a phase of pure force, of domination without pretence. In this sense, Montréal exemplifies the "flourishing of fascist potentials" that occur "in a context of domination without hegemony in which the ruling classes undergo a process of radicalisation, a context in

which their continued supremacy is dependent on a hollowing of democratic rights and capacities" (Toscano 2023, 71). Across the Western world, the transition from neoliberal authoritarianism to fascism is being consumed.

For decades, scholars and activists have argued that the discriminatory management of marginalized groups—by liberal, conservative, and pseudo-progressive governments alike—prepares a fertile terrain for fascism. What I have attempted to show is that the horrors we fear from far-right fascism have been here, all along, in our society's treatment of the subaltern. No other word can describe being subjected to an arbitrary regime of police violence, steeped in impunity, based on wholesale dehumanization. It is long past time we understand that the only defence against fascism, as journalist and intellectual Mel Figueroa (2019) explains, is to create communities where it cannot exist for anyone. As to how we get there, I will leave the last words to George Jackson, political prisoner, organic intellectual, Black revolutionary, and murdered for it by the carceral state:

> Settle your quarrels, come together, understand the reality of our situation, understand that fascism is already here, that people are already dying who could be saved, that generations more will live poor butchered half-lives if you fail to act. Do what must be done, discover your humanity and your love in revolution. (Jackson 1996 [1972], xviii)

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Appendix A: Tags used in media analysis

General	Positive
	Negative
	Positive-Negative
	Neutral

Mixed squads	General
	EMRII
	ESUP
	RIC
	EMIC
	ECCR
	ECHINOPS
	EMIE
	E=MC2
	Patrouille conjointe autochtone

Voices	Mixed squads representatives	Police without community partners
		Police with community partners
		Commnunity partners
		City
		Province
	Residents	Targets of mixed squads
		Not targets
	Others	Non collaborating community sector
		Politicians
		Experts
		Just the author

Hegemonic work	Mixed squads as a response (the only response) to police violence and critiques of police
	Mixed squads used to demand, justify, or explain more police funding
	Copaganda through mixed squads
	Mixed squads to temper expanded repression
	Mixed squads as a new public safety model

Transforming the police	Mixed squads offer support, not repression
	Mixed squads as future of police
	Mixed squads respond to non-criminal calls, allowing cops to focus on real crime
	Contradictory discourse: ask for more resources in the name of mixed squads, but also reject responsibility
	Mixed squads because the police shouldn't be involved

Solving social problems	Mixed squads as solution to homelessness	Mixed squads help homeless people
		Mixed squads help the public
	Mixed squads as solution to mental health crisis intervention	
	Mixed squads for general violence prevention	
	Mixed squads as solution to racism	
	Mixed squads as the future of social welfare	
	Mixed squads reduce criminalization	
	Solving Indigenous issues	

Demistyfing	Counter-narrative	Mixed squads don't work
		Unclear if mixed squads work
		Fund the community sector instead
	Mixed squads are small	
	Failure of mixed squads	
	Why is the police involved?	
	Revealing policeness	Mixed squads call police
		Mixed squads police
		Regular police kill
		Regular police repression persists undisturbed
		Police being

Appropriating community work	Mixed squads made equivalent to community work
	Mixed squads to make-up for failure of community work
	Creation of a new ecosystem

Broader politics	Mixed squads as electoral strategy
	Mixed squads for urban renewal
	Public space, cohabitation, mediation

		offensive
		Police presence unwanted by targets