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Illicit economies and the carceral social zone

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There are several interconnected issues raised by Loïc Wacquant's work which reflect not only general sociological and criminological concerns, but also pertain to specific areas of debate, including the function of imprisonment, the notion of illicit markets, the interpretation of violence, the concept of collective action and the new ways of superseding neo-liberal philosophies.

In an analysis of the continuity between the prison and the ghetto, Wacquant (2001) argues that both host a surplus population, the human waste discarded by the productive system and ignored by the welfare state. The growth of these two receptacles of marginality, he remarks, is not a response to growing crime, but to growing poverty, not a reaction to criminal insecurity, but to social insecurity: in brief, the war against poverty has turned into war against the poor. An expansion of this analysis is found in the more recent *Punishing the Poor* (Wacquant, 2009), where the author discusses how the current workfare philosophies are intertwined with the retrenchment of inclusive assistance and policies, and the expansion of custodial punishment. The control of the economically disadvantaged is thus described as a result of fear and resentment on the part of the better-off, a reassertion of institutional strength, an outmoded exhibition of the moralizing role of the state. Warehouses for the dispossessed, prisons testify to a politics of 'class cleansing' implemented against undesirable populations and neighbourhoods whose very existence may be disturbing, hence the urge to make them coercively disappear. What makes the prison system different today, according to Wacquant, is that 'it does not carry out a positive economic mission of recruitment and disciplining an active workforce. The prison serves mainly to warehouse the precarious and deproletarianized fractions of the black working class in the dualizing city' (ibid: 208). Is then the growth of custodial penalties a mere reflection of the decline of the welfare state and the criminalization of marginality?

We have two distinct issues here, the former relating to the punishment of social insecurity rather than criminal insecurity, the latter pertaining to the manifest or latent function of punishment itself. What follows may add to Wacquant's analysis while suggesting a slight change in the focus of theoretical inquiry.

The criminalisation of indolence

One would assume that with the phrase 'social insecurity', Wacquant intends to convey a notion of social disorder which is constructed in particular ways around certain groups, and widely used to serve certain particular interests. The appeal to 'social disorder' may contribute to mobilising despair as a political weapon rather than demands for justice. Appropriated by powerful groups, and turned into fear, it reflects, reshapes and reinforces the status quo (Shirlow and Pain, 2003). In common understandings 'social disorder' is associated with behaviour involving potentially threatening strangers (Sampson, 2009) like in Wacquant's elaboration 'social

insecurity' is linked with marginalisation and poverty. In other words, punishment is disjointed from the potential criminal nature of the threat experienced and is aimed at specific categories of feared individuals. In this respect, Wacquant's analysis might benefit from some supplementary observations about 'human waste' and the perception of certain groups as troublesome. The emphasis, however, can be placed on useless people who fail to act as consumers. My proposed change of focus, in other words, sets off with the hypothesis that what is feared and punished is less the criminal capacity of these groups than their indolence, and specifically their absence from markets and their relative deprivation (Ruggiero, 2010a). Let us see some precedents to this analysis.

In the words of Walter Benjamin (1999), market economies display a pure cult of the useful. It is inevitable, therefore, that uselessness is associated with disorder. Markets enact a constant, dreamless, celebration involving consumers as relentless adorers: they take on the traits of a religion. Grown as parasites of Christianity, market economies keep the essence of parasitic systems at their chore, while incorporating new types of religion. By absorbing the 'juice' of religion, they replace religious authority, managed by clerical apparatuses, with economic authority, managed by anonymous powers which are just as sacred. These systems are victorious less because they are superior than for their 'cult of possession'. According to Benjamin, the opening hours of shops remind one of liturgical calendars, in a cult which is more concrete and imperative than its religious counterpart (Gaeta, 2008).

Sure, such systems are never completely accomplished, but they will be in the coming kingdom of universal wellbeing. Here, the mixture of secular and transcendental order is decisive: the kingdom of God will only come with the total dominion of the economic sphere. As a preliminary suggestion, I would like to note that this obtuse faith in progress still affects the perceptions of order and disorder in contemporary societies. Productive activities and consumption remain today the only signs of social health and acceptable order. Even the concept of antisocial behaviour, and Wacquant's 'social insecurity', in the last analysis, might be associated with indolence and failure to play a role in the marketplace.

Social insecurity and disorder, therefore, signal unproductive lifestyles and absenteeism from markets. Wacquant's idea that punitive measures make poverty disappear echoes Lefebvre's (2003) critique of cities which prevent the constitution of a group, of a subject: it is not a coincidence, Lefebvre remarks, that whenever threatened, the first thing power restricts is the ability to linger or assemble in the street. If not devoted to consumption and the celebration of the powerful, conquerors and death, then streets have to be stripped of their political potential, and turned into 'blind fields', areas that we resist, turn away from, and struggle against. Areas of disorder. This was the character of Haussmann's urbanism, that 'gutted Paris according to plan and deported the proletariat to the periphery of the city' (ibid: 109). Social order became governed by 'straight lines, alignment and geometric perspective', more suitable for the intervention of the army called upon to confront the crowd. Social order, in sum, expresses itself through the void: 'empty space, broad avenues, plazas of gigantic proportion open to spectacular processions' (ibid). Fear steps in when spaces are populated. What is important to note, here, is that the perception of disorder leads to processes aimed at making the street apolitical, that is to the creation and perpetuation of social enclaves banned from shaping the urban. The urban community is the result of collective action by social agents, subjects acting in successive thrusts, 'discontinuously releasing and fashioning layers of

space'. Social groups, while acting with and/or against one another, forge the qualities and properties of urban space. Excluded groups are not allowed to create space.

> 'The merchant bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, and politicians modelled the city. The industrialists demolished it. The working class never had any space other than that of its expropriation, its deportation: segregation' (ibid: 128).

Excluded groups are expected to populate the other place, the place of the other, the place of anomie. This is Lefebvre's concept of heterotopy, which should be assimilated to a notion of chaos, formlessness, a menacing site that can explode, whether or not such a possibility is realistic. Wacquant may want to recognise that this process precedes and attends to the disappearance of poverty he hypothesises.

The fear of relative deprivation

We are facing a paradox: excluded from the market and its religion, materially denied the opportunities to develop a form of loyalty for 'controlled consumption', banned from collective formulations of political uses of the street, marginalised groups are expected to express a social sensibility that has been taken away from them. That such groups are automatically assimilated to ideas of chaos and disorder is not surprising, because these ideas provide an explanation of a social issue that would otherwise remain 'unknown'. There is a need to make sense of 'urban disorder' and 'diversity'. Nietzsche (1968) suggests that in turning something which is unknown into something which is known we feel a sense of lightness and power. The unknown is dangerous, disquieting, worrying, and our instinct tends to suppress it: any explanation is better than no explanation. In the past, hostile beings, 'nasty spirits' and hysterical women were mistaken for devils and witches, and yet this infamous mistake brought the pleasure of a spiritual discovery, of truth. Enemies, in other words, were 'spiritualized', so that they could confer legitimacy upon inquisitors. The translation of the unknown into the known produces righteousness; stigmatisation provides a rational escape from chaos, while disorder is strongly associated to the presumed indolence characterising groups on the margins.

It is also worth noting some aspects of the relationship between perceptions of disorder and inequality. The idea of urban disorder emerges with the very birth of the urban, and accompanies the whole history of sociological thought. However, the demand for order increases in periods in which the demand for political participation declines, as if by removing the signs of marginalisation the social problems connected to it could be eliminated. In such periods, concerns about disorder find unwitting support in criminological theories, particularly theories hinging on notions of disadvantage. I am thinking of concepts such as 'relative deprivation', according to which many disadvantaged people, when surrounded by the wealth they cannot reach, feel that they have a right to portions of it. Hence their alleged or potential engagement in illicit activity, the official means for achieving wealth being denied to them. It would be worth investigating whether such concepts have by now gained currency even among the police and the judiciary who, predicting that the condition of disadvantage inevitably leads to crime, respectively arrest and convict the marginalised, because sooner or later they will be forced to do so anyway. If this is the case, growing perceptions of disorder or insecurity are the result of parallel perceptions that social injustice is reaching dangerous levels: what is feared is not

disorder or crime, but the potential consequences of astonishingly increases in inequality.

The function of custodial punishment

Punishing poverty may be a sadistic way of inflicting pain on those already suffering from a painful social condition. This is not, of course, what Wacquant argues, although the function he attributes to the prison system in general remains unclear. He does stress that the punitive turn cannot be simply explained with the shift from a traditional industrial mode of production to a flexible post-Fordist system of work. In his view, there is a specific efficacy in the symbolic power of punishment that purely materialistic analyses may fail to account for. His view that punishment does not perfom an economic mission in terms of forging and disciplining sectors of the labour market has already been mentioned. But to sum up his analysis, the penal state is said to perform a number of complementary tasks: warehousing the surplus population, keeping the marginalised in the condition of labouring poor, and reassuring the fearful middle classes (De Giorgi, 2010). It may be useful, in this respect, to locate Wacquant's analysis within a framework of 'cultures of punishment' with which sociologists and criminologists are familiar. Les us start with some classics.

   By becoming citizens human beings acquire dignity. But there are exceptions: dignity is lost by citizens who commit crime, which makes them mere tools of state choices (Kant, 1996). Crime makes an individual a bondsman, a *servus in sensu stricto*, the property of the state. The penal state, as examined by Wacquant, seems to incorporate this Kantian notion: rulers have the right to punish wrongdoers or, to avoid any equivocation, to 'inflict pain upon them'. Kant does not hide his views behind periphrases, nor does he share the awe with which penal reformers look at the concept of rehabilitation. Punishment means inflicting pain and can never be used as a means to 'promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society'. Rehabilitation, instead, implies that a human being is treated 'merely as a means to the purposes of another' (ibid: 104). Punishment is the logical consequence of a conduct that the rulers define as crime: it is a categorical imperative.

   While for Kant we should avoid being infected by pain and leave the sovereign exercise the right to punish, in Hegel it is offenders who have a right to be punished. For Hegel, crime and punishment constitute a single category; wrong in itself carries the presuppositions and the necessity for a moral emendation disguised beyond a legal repressive measure. In sum, Hegel sees wrong and the institutional responses to it as a single whole, as interwoven components of a discrete notion. Against reformers who advocate punishment only if its beneficial effects can be proven, he retorts, first, that punishment need not be useful, and second, that it need not be deterrent, because this would imply that offenders are not free individuals. Deterrence threatens people, be they offenders or otherwise, as if they were dogs, which we menace by raising a stick. Punishment based solely on such a ground is itself a form of wrong, because it does not contain any respectful vision of the people addressed, their rationality and their personality (Hegel, 1952).

   It is difficult to determine whether the symbolic function of custody Wacquant attributes to the expanding penal state contains some of these idealistic elements, in other words, whether his analysis is suggesting that contemporary punitiveness marks the return to sacred visions of authority. If this is the case, Wacquant would find also in Durkheim a source of inspiration. Durkheim turns Hegel upside down: it is not the intrinsic nature of an act that produces the ensuing punishment, it is the fact that the

act violates a rule. Conducts which cause identical material consequences may be 'blamed or not blamed according to whether or not there is a rule forbidding them' (Durkheim, 1974: 43). Durkheim accompanies this argument, which contains an *ante litteram* element of labelling theory, with the observation that there is no strong relationship between the harm caused by an act and the intensity of the institutional response to it. For example, in the penal law of most societies, murder is regarded as the greatest of crimes. However, he argues, an economic crisis or stock-market crash can disorganise the social body more severely than an isolated homicide. 'No doubt murder is always an evil, but there is no proof that it is the greatest of evils. What is one man less to society? What does one lost cell matter to the organism?' (Durkheim, 1960: 72). In the elaboration of Wacquant individuals do not have to violate a rule to be punished, unless by rule we mean a conformist life style totally devoted to producing and consuming. Also in Durkheim, however, punishment is not meant to respond to evil, but only to vent our instinct of vengeance upon those we regard as morally outrageous: 'Punishment, thus, remains for us what it was for our fathers. It is still an act of vengeance. What we avenge is the outrage to morality' (Durkheim, 1960: 86-89). Put differently, we inflict various degrees of suffering and hardship on offenders, not because we may benefit in a material sense from it, but to mark the moral strength of a message we intend to convey (Garland, 1990). Punishment, then, is not for offenders, but is a means for boosting the common moral order, the *conscience collective*. It reassures and regenerates the righteousness of the law-abiding community, whilst also meeting out in legally sanitised fashion our need for revenge (Ruggiero, 2003; 2010b).

   All of this may help locate Wacquant's analysis of the symbolic function of punishment, particularly his view that the penal state performs the task of reassuring groups and classes that the moral fabric of society is effectively protected. As for his assertion that punishment does not perform a significant economic mission, some clarification is necessary if we are to fully understand his interpretation.

   Broadly distinguishing critical approaches to the analysis of punishment, two extreme positions can be observed: the former emphasises the institutional function of imprisonment, while the latter stresses its material function. The first is embedded in the notion of retribution and, in its extreme manifestations, addresses imprisonment as a means for the destruction of bodies. The second looks at prison as a regulatory tool and mainly focuses on the productive use of bodies. Of course, analyses adopting a mixed approach are numerous, but for the sake of clarity here the two positions will be kept theoretically and empirically separate. Founding, celebrated, theorists of the respective approaches are Rusche and Kirchheimer (1968) on the one hand, and Michel Foucault (1977) on the other. However, if we are to draw a complete theoretical map, an additional element should be added. Cotemporary prison systems, for example, can be identified as a synthesis of the institutional and the material function. Although the former seems to be prevailing, the latter is far from having become redundant. The institutional function is undergoing a technical evolution and manifests itself in the metaphorical annihilation of those prisoners who are deemed impervious to treatment. The material function, in turn, is also undergoing wide modification. We can still employ the term 'material' because it conjures up a notion of productivity, but suggest that it should not be assimilated to the notion of the workhouse nor with that of 'prison as factory' of early capitalism (Melossi and Pavarini, 1977). Prisoners' work and exploitation mainly take place beyond the prison walls, notably in those social areas where marginalised activities and precarious jobs intermingle with overtly illegal activities. We could term these areas *carceral social*

zones to which a variety of forms of control and punishment are addressed, including, when softer forms prove unsuccessful, the threat of physical and mental destruction. In such areas, the general and individual deterrent roles of punishment are not only directed to repeat or unmanageable offenders but also to the excluded populations in general (Ruggiero, 2010b).

Carceral social zones, that elsewhere I have described as *bazaars* (Ruggiero, 2000), host a mixture of official and illegal activities, and witness a constant flow of commodities and service delivery whose nature may be legal or otherwise. In such areas, 'crime as work' means that poorly-paid regular work, unregistered jobs, underemployment and criminal activity proper are not part of a definitive occupational choice. In them, people 'commute' from one activity to the other, and in doing so expose themselves to the institutional as well as the material aspect of punishment. To remark that those inhabiting these areas are met with increasingly punitive measures is to provide a partial picture of the relationship between punishment and the material condition of those punished. In other words, the concept of repression is insufficient (Wacquant, 2008a), as it leaves out the 'educational' content of state intervention. If we attempted to test Rusche's and Kirchheimer's model of interpretation to the carceral social zones, enormous problems would arise, in that such zones do not display the conventional traits of labour markets, nor do they show neat distinctions between employment and unemployment.. Even if we decided to adopt a 'long cycle' or 'long wave' of , respectively, economic development and incarceration (Melossi, 2003), problems would remain, because in the carceral social zone, unemployment, semi-employment, underemployment and illegal work co-exist, at times in the same person. On the other hand, it has to be stressed that the educational or material function of punishment, in these areas, do not cease to be exercised. The marginalised, the underemployed, the occasional workers, the petty criminals and all the others whose lifestyle and economic activity straddle legality and illegality are 'trained' to remain and survive in their areas of exclusion, like its counterpart in the past centuries was trained to the discipline of industrialism. Prison discipline aims at lowering their social expectations, an aspect that leads us back to the concept of rehabilitation so spurned by German idealist philosophers. Prisoners are deemed rehabilitated when they accept to remain in that specific sector of the labour force and inhabit the carceral zone assigned to them. This 'criminal' labour force and the adjacent marginalised labour force constitute the repository of the prison population, the human reserve upon which custody, with its diverse degrees of harshness and rehabilitative rhetoric, projects its shadow.

The economy of the outcasts

Returning to the continuity between the prison and the ghetto, another contribution by Wacquant deserves to be reviewed. His *Urban Outcasts* is a passionate study of ghettoes and *banlieus*, of their moral and material economy, and of the relationships between the growth of such enclaves and recent, general, politico-economic developments. Perceived as lawless zones, at times as no-go wild districts, such urban areas appear to be characterised, at first sight, by a uniform degree and quality of destitution, violence and despair. Wacquant's (2008b) comparative study of 'advanced marginality' remarks that these territories of deprivation, owing to the halo of danger and dread that enshrouds them, are typically depicted in monochrome tones. His is an attempt to show how urban marginality, instead, takes different forms related to space and state intervention and according to the class characteristics found

in specific contexts and epochs. He focuses on the American Black Belt and the French Red Belt (the peripheral working class areas that were the traditional stronghold of the Left). In both places social life may appear equally chaotic and brutish, but only in the former does socio-spatial relegation assume the traits of a hyperghetto, nor is it appropriate to regard such a distinct configuration of marginality as the inevitable destiny of European exclusionary areas. The US hyperghetto, we are told, is an amalgam of racial discrimination, class inequality and state inaction, where the retrenchment of the welfare state and the shrinking of occupational opportunities are compensated by intensive police activity and the constant threat of the penal apparatus.

　The declining urban peripheries of European cities and the African-American ghettoes could be therefore described as two distinct socio-spatial formations, produced by different institutional logics of segregation. Higher levels of isolation and hardship are found in the US, where exclusion is said to mainly operate on the basis of race and compounded by public neglect. Conversely, marginalisation in European cities is supposed to be arranged around the variable class, but also tempered by state intervention. In brief, while the American hyperghetto is depicted as an ethnically and socially homogeneous universe, characterised by extreme levels of physical and social insecurity, European urban peripheries are seen as heterogeneous urban settings where isolation is mitigated by the strong presence of public institutions.

　But what is a hyperghetto? We may compare it with previous forms of exclusion and marginalisation. The 'communal ghetto', for example, was a 'sharply circumscribed socio-spatial formation' inhabited by black people from all classes, while the hyperghetto is a socio-geographical entity segregated on the basis of race and class. The communal ghetto of the immediate post-war years was bounded by a unifying collective consciousness and shared values and aspirations which could be displayed in periodical moments of mobilisation. The distinction between place and space is, in this regard, very useful. While the old ghettoes were *places*, therefore fixed and stable social sites, hyperghettoes are *spaces*, namely areas of potential threat, to be feared or fled. In sum, the new ghetto is *new* because its population suffers from more severe relative deprivation, and because it lacks the organisational infrastructure and the associational networks that gave the ghetto of the 1950s its communal character and strength, making it a place of collective solidarity and potential mobilization.

　Some reference to the work of Lefebvre (1968), again, may be useful here. Collective consciousness, shared values and mobilisation are seen by Lefebvre as expressions of 'love' for the city, whereby groups elaborate a strategy aimed to re-plan the urban environment. Such 'love' coincides with the right to the city, which the authorities slowly reduce to the right to housing. The result is the habitat in its purest form, a habitat burdened with restraints. The notion of *habitat* excludes that of *inhabit*, that is 'the plasticity of space, its modelling and the appropriation by groups and individuals of the conditions of their existence' (ibid: 79). Old ghettoes, one may suggest, incorporate the concept of 'the right to urban life', namely the right to use the city as a place of encounter, where the underprivileged 'appear on all the networks and circuits of communication, information and exchange' (ibid: 80). However, while Wacquant's distinction between place and space echoes that of Lefebvre between *habitat* and *inhabit*, their explanation of the shift from the former to the latter appears to be completely opposite. In Lefebvre, such shift results from local and national institutions responding to contestation and demands by entering the ghetto, whereas in Wacquant it is caused by authorities abandoning it. In this way, the old ghetto,

characterised by shared emotions, joint meanings and institutions of mutuality, is turned into an hyperghetto, characterised by mere survival.

> 'In the final analysis, however, it is the collapse of public institutions, resulting from state policies of urban abandonment and leading to the punitive containment of the black sub-proletariat, that emerges as the most potent and most distinctive cause of entrenched marginality in the American metropolis' (Wacquant, 2008b: 4).

Here, it is worth highlighting a controversial issue revolving around two contrasting ways of analysing the role of institutional agencies. On the one hand, we have a view of agencies as organisms which distil, select, distort demands, and offer surrogate 'social goods' to those requesting genuine ones (Lefebvre). On the other hand, we have views of agencies as authorities practicing social absenteeism, thus totally ignoring demands.

A functioning disorganisation

From Wacquant's description it is not easy to evince whether between urban outcasts and the official society there is any meaningful relationship, or to put it in different terms, whether the values adopted by excluded groups and those embraced by dominant ones are totally extraneous to one another. It is my contention that there is an ambivalent and contradictory nature in excluded and ostracised communities.

   The separation of the ghetto from the official society is only apparent, and there are strong ties uniting the two in a number of ways. One such tie, for example, pertains to the structural transformation of the ghetto and the changes taking place in the economy. While the ghetto, therefore, may be 'an institutional form, that is, a distinctive, spatially based, concatenation of mechanisms of ethno-racial closure and control', it is also a territory providing 'a protective buffer against the dominant institutions of the encompassing society' (Wacquant, 2008b: 49). This formulation mainly revolves around the variables isolation, exclusion, protective withdrawal from institutional control. In other elaborations, however, other variables could be introduced that transcend the sheer relationship between controllers and controlled. Ghettoes perform specific functions within the broader metropolitan system. Some districts may be repositories of the contemporary version of nineteenth-century rabble, the hordes of 'unproductive thugs' who will not and cannot be turned into labourers. Others may be containers of despicable groups segregated less for their lack of productive capacity than for the hatred their race elicits. Finally, some districts may act as reservoirs of low-skill labour force. Note the ambivalence: ghettoes are inhabited by disposable but usable people, rabble and labour at the same time.

   In my view, at this point our analysis requires some more robust elaboration. It is true that the variable disorganisation has guided mainstream research on marginalisation since the early works of the Chicago School, but it is also true the Chicago sociologists themselves were very ambivalent about the concept of disorganisation. Their participant observation proved that 'disorganised' areas were very well organised indeed, based as they were on unwritten codes of conduct guiding their material and moral interactions. Similarly, one may remark that the contemporary ghetto does not suffer from social disorganisation, but is organised differently. In some studies conducted by the Chicago sociologists, it is not the sense of isolation and exclusion that the areas studied convey, but rather the opposite: in

such areas the licit and the illicit intermingle, both in the economic arena and in the political sphere. Think of Landesco's (1973 [1929]) study of organised crime in Chicago, where gangsters have long-standing relations with community leaders in athletic clubs, business, the church and politics. Successful inhabitants of the ghetto develop ties of mutual interest with the police, politicians and customers for the goods and services they supply. Even their violence is the result of such ties, because it is used during electoral campaigns and functions as a clandestine, supplementary tool deployed by official political parties. The ghetto, therefore, is the strong arm of the political apparatus: institutional violence accompanying political campaigning is 'contracted out' to organised criminal groups residing in the ghetto.

Returning to the question of 'ambivalence', some Chicago scholars failed to consider the mixture of legality and illegality within urban territories, treating city areas as both morally and physically isolated. Such areas appeared to possess some sort of imaginary perimeters isolating delinquents and their delinquency. Other Chicago students of marginalised areas, instead, described the activities conducted in such areas as incorporating sections of both the official and the hidden labour market. Similarly, some contemporary researchers focus on the constant movement of individuals who simultaneously inhabit licit and illicit markets and find in both opportunities and income (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001; Friman, 2004). I have already mentioned the notion of *urban bazaars*, constituted by a network of retailers, ambulatory vendors, distributors, wholesalers, seasonal workers, casual assistants, and apprentices, who are all required to possess flexibility and versatile skills. Such bazaars also act as informal employment agencies, where people hear of potential job opportunities and emerging economic sectors, be they legitimate or otherwise. In brief, the metaphor of the bazaar intends to convey an image of city areas as a market-place, a notion of urban economic activity servicing a diffuse general store, where licit consumables, regular pleasures, and illegitimate services are made available within the same context (Ruggiero, 2000).

The contemporary hyperghetto described by Wacquant seems more immobile: those who dwell in it may not be part of a separate group closed in itself, as the author explains, nevertheless they do not 'commute', as in many other marginalised urban areas, between legality and illegality, they just belong 'to unskilled and socially disqualified fractions of the black working class, by virtue of their unstable position at the margins of the wage-labour sphere' (Wacquant, 2008b: 51). Again, note the ambivalence: the hyperghetto appears to be a fixed social aggregation, a homogeneous marginal settlement, spatially isolated and morally distinctive, but at the same time, those who dwell in it do not form a separate group.

There is an important issue in recent studies of 'urban outcasts' which begs further consideration, namely the hypothesis of a double polarisation, from above and from below. Polarisation from above connotes the studies of the global, dual city, epitomised by the work of Sassen (1991) and Castells (1998), where technological development and advanced forms of production coexist with intensive, unskilled, low-paid work. We may hypothesise that the development of this dual socio-economic model is not only accompanied by 'unification at the top', that is the establishment of a transnational elite, but also by fragmentation at the bottom, what we may term polarisation from below. I would interpret this type of fragmentation and polarisation as a process creating obsessive individualism, harsh competitiveness and, crucially, social and occupational barriers within the ghetto itself. Returning to the metaphor the urban bazaar, I would suggest that polarisation from below determines unequal roles and careers, so that even in marginalised or illicit economies a principal-agent model

prevails. In the ghetto-bazaar the principal commands a number of agents to take actions on his/her behalf in exchange for monetary reward. Fragmentation, therefore, manifests itself in the form of exploitation and inequality, in a marginal economy which reproduces some of the worst aspects of the official economy. Hence the plausible remark that there is a 'scandalous' similarity between deviance and conformity: one of the problems with illegal economies is that in so many ways they are, sadly, paradoxical reflections of legal ones.

Self-victimisation

Violence is one of the most vivid expressions of this conformity, and establishes barriers and hierarchies within the ghetto itself. Wacquant (2008b: 128) describes a climate of 'perpetual latent mini-guerrilla of the dispossessed among themselves', within a context in which criminality in general is inward-turning and self-destructive. Physical danger and insecurity pervade the hyperghetto, but far from being specific pathologies of its inhabitants, they are engendered by the 'penetration and mode of regulation of this territory by the state' (ibid: 54). Internecine violence is analysed as a response to various kinds of institutional violence, composed of three elements: mass unemployment, relegation in decaying neighbourhoods and stigmatisation for residing in such neighbourhoods.

> 'Youngsters raised in this environment of pandemic violence suffer serious emotional damage and display post-traumatic stress disorders similar to those endured by veterans' (ibid: 56).

There is, however, another aspect to this violence, which is responsive to, as well as mimic of, the institutional violence suffered. It is a type of violence learned from the official agents who monopolise the use of force, but also an expression of failure, a devastating mark of impotence. In my view, the analysis of violence cannot be extrapolated from the general context in which 'violence as a resource' is distributed within a society. Violence producing benefits for perpetrators is normally less visible than violence harming perpetrators. In other words, the costs of violence in marginalised communities are much higher than elsewhere, and while replicating the brutality of law enforcers and other specialists of aggression (the army), violent inhabitants of the ghetto are constantly compelled to increase the use of force as a consequence of the meagre results this produces for them. It is indeed self-destructive, but it is also consistent with specific forms of law enforcement and criminal justice practices: if crime cannot be reduced, let us at least make sure that the perpetrator and the victim are one and the same. This type of self-victimisation is legible in the end result of the violent choice in marginalised settings, where violence or threat of violence may temporarily be used as a resource for discouraging competitors and establishing territorial and market control, but inevitably leads to 'early retirement' from crime in the form of imprisonment. We have returned to the notion of the *carceral social zone*, namely an area where the violence suffered and inflicted mimics and anticipates the quintessential institutional violence of custody. It is true that youngsters brought up in such *carceral zone* may develop post-traumatic stress disorders, but it is also true that all the inhabitants of the ghetto, due to the dire social conditions experienced, will learn to substantially lower their expectations. The ghetto, therefore, educates its dwellers to devalue themselves and reduce their demands, so that those fortunate enough to be employable will accept any job, at any

condition. Those who will find work will have assimilated the principles of insecurity and internalised their expendability and low monetary value on the labour market, while those unemployable will find even in prison a less violent environment than the one to which they are inured.

Collective action

It is not surprising that the youths inhabiting excluded communities and ghettoes regard the police as an occupying, extraneous, military force. An intimidating presence in French working-class banlieus, the police are the main targets of street collective violence. This is also the case elsewhere:

> 'In the desolate districts of the LA ghetto, the forces of order act as if they were waging a trench war with the residents, treating them as an army of occupation would its enemies' (ibid: 32).

Violent responses to such military occupation seem, therefore, triggered by what Wacquant terms 'ethno-racial injustice rooted in discriminatory treatment'. Collective violence and riots, we are told, also possess a class logic and manifest a will to rebel against widening inequality and deprivation. Direct confrontation with the agents of order, lacking other tools and resources, becomes the only available form of contestation. Likened to a distorted expression of a *lumpen* protest, collective street violence is seen as a response to the unprecedented violence inflicted on marginal communities by 'the impersonal machineries of the neo-liberal state and the deregulated market'.

   This analysis echoes similar interpretations proposed by conflict theorists in sociology, according to whom violent outbursts are nothing but reactive rebellions staged by those constantly victimised by law enforcers: in brief, pure responses to police harassment and violence. Representatives of this school of thought, during the 1960s, coined the phrase 'police riots' to designate urban violent clashes provoked and initiated by the police themselves, who forced youths to use violence in their turn as a form of self-defence (Quinney, 1970; 1971). The first problem with this interpretation is that it depicts street violence by marginalised groups as pre-political conduct, implying that missionaries, vanguards and radical sociologists should unite their efforts to try and politicise that conduct. This subtly patronising (or paternalistic) logic, in the past, has shown that the only forms of violence with which conflict theorists are analytically comfortable are those embryonic forms of social dissent, or even those unconscious elements of contention that one could read in conventional criminal acts. In this case, at least, radical sociologists can fulfil their mandate by unveiling the 'conscious' meaning behind such acts. Their role, instead, tends to wither away when consciously organised conducts prove that, at times, actors have nothing to learn from those interpreting them. In short, radical sociologists are at ease when analysing endemic violence caused by structural inequality, institutional racism or criminalisation processes, namely a type of violence that they would like to marshal in a political project. They become uneasy when actors, through their organised violence, delineate their political project (Ruggiero, 2006). The second problem with this approach is that it neglects the seductive nature of some forms of collective violence, the thrill and the fun that recent analyses recognise in a variety of transgressive and deviant acts (Presdee, 2000; Hayward, 2004; Young, 2007; Katz, 1988).

But does collective action by marginalised groups engender new meanings that open up a possible space for collective demands? One may suggest that contemporary exclusion (or 'advanced marginality') differs from previous forms of urban poverty, in that it reflects a broader context of class decomposition rather than class consolidation. In such context unification and homogenization amongst marginalised subjects is extremely problematic, also because subjects do not hold a clear memory of past mobilisation, nor are they familiar with the organisational tools necessary for the expression of demands. They are 'deprived of a language, a repertoire of shared images and signs through which to conceive a collective destiny and to project possible alternative futures' (Wacquant, 2008b: 245).

This is a crucial point that echoes classical questions posed by collective action theorists. Assuming that conflicting interests are a permanent trait of social settings, why do these turn into collective action in some contexts and not in others? Behind this question lies a fundamental sociological dilemma: do groups always act in their common self-interest? Self-interested behaviour is deemed the rule, at least when material goods are at stake, and particularly if rational calculus is thought to lead choices. According to Olson (1966), unless some types of devises are used, rational self-interested individuals and groups will not act to achieve their common interests. Action is, therefore, potential, and group-oriented behaviour is latent, until separate and selective incentives will stimulate collective action and help formulate demands. In this perspective, groups do not, spontaneously and rationally, purse their collective goals; rather, they rationally chose to 'free-ride', namely to enjoy the benefits of collective action while abstaining from participating in it. Many groups, like for instance consumers or migrant workers, are not organised, while others, like for example unionised labourers and farmers, rely on some degree of organisation. To put it in a different way, collective action is not just the result of frustration and discontent, but predominantly of strength and capacity to mobilise. Groups need 'resources', that is anything from material things such as income, savings, concrete goods and services, to non-material items such as authority, collective memory, an established repertoire of action, a symbolic patrimony, moral commitment, trust, skills or camaraderie (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008). It is true that the hyperghetto is a 'composite conglomerate, made up of heterogeneous individuals and categories negatively defined by social privation, material need and symbolic deficit'. And that 'only an immense, specifically political work of aggregation and re-presentation can hope to enable this conglomerate to accede to collective existence and thus to collective action' (ibid: 246-7). However, if we accept that mobilisation is a process by which an aggrieved group marshals and utilises resources for the pursuit of its specific set of goals, we may well define the hyperghetto as a social formation which, having been denied resources (and even when producing violent outbursts), is incapacitated in producing collective mobilisation. Hyperghettoes are such because, by definition, they cannot produce collective action. If this is a central characteristic of contemporary ghettoes, the work required to fight against them is immense. Those who do not share Wacquant's pessimism, however, have another option: re-orient their work towards the concept of social change.

Many criminologists and sociologists, by excluding possibilities for social change, end up describing society as static and social acts as facts speaking for themselves. In doing so, they omit to consider how their own emotional, cultural and political commitments create a framework in which those facts are given meaning. Scholars who re-orient their research towards social change, on the contrary, bring their subjectivity to bear on their objects of study. Examples of this re-orientation are

studies of collective action carried out by victims of violence, rather than studies of violent behaviour; of initiatives set up by illicit drugs users, rather than of institutional initiatives addressed by other to them; studies of campaigns against corporate misconduct, rather than analysis of that conduct; finally, studies of movements against the crimes of the powerful, including conventional forms of organised crime, rather than studies of those crimes (Santino, 2000). In the urban context, examples include the study of collective contentious action for the re-appropriation of space and mobility in Los Angeles (Soja, 2010), of how ordinary Americans subvert an unfair economy (Dodson, 2009), or of how citizens 'implement their values and alternatives in their experience of daily life, in local communities and in the networks and organisations of the movement'. Finally, there arestudies of the 'creation of autonomous spaces where [people] experiment with horizontal networks, alternative consumption and participatory processes' (Pleyers, 2010: 12). This process of re-focusing would fight what Pareto (1980) described as the 'instinct for the persistence of aggregates', whereby individuals, and for that matter academic disciplines are inclined

> to maintain established structures of ideas and action, to continue with familiar routines. It is how we cope with the inherent unpredictability of life. Our instinct is to make the world seem familiar and therefore more manageable. Sociologically, this instinct is the basis of cultures and tradition, of social control and social order (Noble, 2000: 110).

If we accept that by studying one phenomenon we contribute to its evolution, or even to its creation, subjective choice of the issues studied becomes paramount. Values and subjective beliefs shape reality as well as human action attempting to change it. Acknowledging the centrality of subjectivity may lead to the recognition that what is real is the mind's way of interpreting and responding to the flux of appearances. This is the conclusion reached, among others, by some historians, who claim that there is no contradiction, in their work, between the search for evidence and the use of rhetoric. Sources, in their view, are neither wide-open windows, like realists and positivists believe, neither walls blocking the gaze: rather, they are very much like deforming glasses. 'The use of desire, without which any research is impossible, is not incompatible with the refutations inflicted by the principle of reality' (Ginzburg, 2000: 49). Similarly, sociologists may start identifying dynamics and conflicts, rather than static situations, and contribute to create the conditions for solutions and change. The subjective choice of a sociological paradigm revolving around social change may be deleterious for academic careers in the field of criminology and the sociology, but may generate a perception that such change is possible and necessary.

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