

GHETTO, BANLIEUE, FAVELA, ET CAETERA TOOLS FOR RETHINKING URBAN MARGINALITY *

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Ghetto in the United States, *banlieue* in France, *quartieri periferici* (or *degradati*) in Italy, *problemområde* in Sweden, *favela* in Brazil, *villa miseria* in Argentina, *rancho* in Venezuela: the societies of North America, Western Europe, and South America all have at their disposal in their topographic lexicon a special term for designating those stigmatized neighborhoods situated at the very bottom of the hierarchical system of places that compose the metropolis. It is in these districts draped in a sulfurous aura, where social problems gather and fester, that the urban outcasts of the turn of the century reside, which earns them the disproportionate and disproportionately negative attention of the media, politicians, and state managers. They are known, to outsider and insiders alike, as the ‘lawless zones’, the ‘problem estates’, the ‘no-go areas’ or the ‘wild districts’ of the city, territories of deprivation and dereliction to be feared, fled from, and shunned because they are – or such is their reputation but, in these matters, perception contributes powerfully to fabricating reality – hotbeds of violence, vice, and social dissolution. Owing to the halo of danger and dread that enshrouds them and to the scorn that afflicts their inhabitants, a variegated mix of dispossessed households, dishonoured minorities, and disenfranchised immigrants, they are typically depicted from above and from afar in somber and monochrome tones. And social life in them thus appears to be everywhere the same: barren, chaotic, and brutish.

Breaking with the exoticizing cast of media discourse as well as with the semi-scholarly approximations of conventional research, this book takes the reader inside these territories of relegation in two advanced countries, namely, the black ghetto of the United States and the working-class *banlieue* of France, to show that such is not the case: urban marginality is not everywhere woven of the same cloth and, all things considered, there is nothing surprising in that. The *generic mechanisms* that produce it, like the *specific forms* it assumes, become fully intelligible once one takes caution to embed them in the historical matrix of class, state and space characteristic of each society at a given epoch. It follows that we must work to develop more complex and more differentiated pictures of the ‘wretched of the city’ if we wish to accurately capture their social predicament and elucidate their collective fate in different national contexts.¹

GHETTO, BANLIEUES, STATE

The chapters that compose this book dissect and compare the postwar upheavals and contemporary makeup in the American ‘Black Belt’ with the structure, dynamics and

¹ We would likewise gain from ‘broadening the horizon of our gaze’ on the neighborhoods of relegation in the First-World metropolis by replacing them in the broader spectrum of variegated forms taken by the urban constellations of the dispossessed caught ‘between war and city’ in the countries of the global South (Agier 2001: 6-8).

experience of urban dispossession in France's deindustrializing 'Red Belt' (the peripheral working-class areas that were the traditional stronghold of the Communist Party). The immediate empirical thrust and ulterior analytical purpose that animate them are closely linked. The first is to describe and explain *the institutional transformation undergone by the African-American ghetto* caught in the undertow from the wave of riots that swept the metropolis in the 1960s, in the wake of the reorganization of the regime of racial domination, the capitalist economy, and public policy in the United States in a way that integrates, rather than separates as is customary, the roles of the labour market, ethnic division, and the state. The second is to extract from the similarities and differences displayed by the American 'hyperghetto' and the declining French 'outer city' the elements of a sociological sketch of *advanced marginality*, i.e., the novel regime of sociospatial relegation and exclusionary closure (in Max Weber's sense)² that has crystallized in the postfordist city as a result of the unequal development of the capitalist economies and the disarticulation of welfare states, according to modalities that vary with the ways in which these two forces bear upon the segments of the working class and the ethnoracial categories dwelling in the nether regions of social and physical space.

After diagnosing the unexpected resurgence of the repressed realities of collective violence, material destitution and ethnoracial division in the First-World city over the past three decades, the first part of the book focuses on the nexus of racial domination, class inequality, and state (in)action in the racialized core of the US metropolis. Breaking with the trope of 'disorganization' that has dominated mainstream research on poverty in America since the early works of the Chicago School, I develop an institutionalist conception of the ghetto as concatenation of mechanisms of ethnoracial control founded on the history and materialized in the geography of the city.³ I retrace the historic shift from the *communal ghetto* of the mid-twentieth century, a compact and sharply circumscribed sociospatial formation to which blacks of all classes were consigned and bound together by a broad complement of institutions specific to the group and its reserved space, to the fin-de-siècle *hyperghetto*, a novel, decentered, territorial and organizational configuration characterized by conjugated segregation on the basis of race *and* class in the context of the double retrenchment of the labour market *and* the welfare state from the racialized urban core, necessitating and eliciting the corresponding deployment of an intrusive and omnipresent police and penal apparatus.

I draw on a range of empirical data from quantitative surveys, in-depth interviews with residents, and ethnographic observations conducted on the South Side of Chicago in 1987-1991 to delineate the fabric of everyday life in the contemporary ghetto and pinpoint the economic and political factors that have propelled its recent evolution, first among them economic informalization and deproletarianization, the persistence of a rigid and all-enveloping racial segregation, the erosion of America's rump welfare state and

² By closure (*Schliessung*), Weber (1971/1995, vol. 2: 56, 55) designates the set of processes whereby a collective restricts 'access to the opportunities (social or economic) that exist in a given domain': its members 'draw on certain characteristics of their real or virtual adversaries to try and exclude them from competition. These characteristics may be race, language, confession, place of origin or social background, descent, place of domicile, etc.'. A succinct and effective presentation of this approach to social and spatial stratification can be found in Mackert (2004).

³ For a compressed discussion of the perennial biases and limitations of mainstream research on racial division and urban poverty in the United States, the reader is referred to Wacquant (1997 and 2002 for its ethnographic strand).

local measures of ‘planned shrinkage’ of government services. In the final analysis, however, it is *the collapse of public institutions* resulting from state policies of urban abandonment and punitive containment of the black (sub-)proletariat that emerges as the most potent and most distinctive cause of entrenched marginality in the American metropolis.⁴

The second part of the book develops a comparison of the structure, lived experience, and political-economic foundations of marginality in the United States and France based on an empirical study centred on the notorious public housing estate of the Quatre mille in La Courneuve, a depressed industrial exurb of Paris emblematic of the ‘crisis of the *banlieue*’. It draws out the contrasted social morphology, organizational makeup, and functions that these ‘neighborhoods of exile’ on Chicago’s South Side and in the Parisian periphery fulfill for their respective metropolises. It highlights the desolidarizing effects of territorial stigmatization on local social structures and strategies, and uncovers the principles of social vision and division that pattern the consciousness and practices of their residents, anchored by the pervasive opposition between blacks and whites on the American side and the vivid dualism of ‘housing estate youths against the rest of the world’ on the French side. This analysis reveals that the declining urban periphery of France and the African-American ghetto constitute *two disparate sociospatial formations*, produced by different institutional logics of segregation and aggregation, which result in sharply higher levels of blight, isolation, and hardship in America’s dark ghetto.

Social closure and spatial relegation in the Black Belt operate on the basis of race first and foremost, modulated by class position after the break of the 1960s, and both are anchored and *aggravated* by public policies of urban triage and neglect. It is just about the reverse in the Red Belt, where marginalization is primarily the product of a class logic, in part redoubled by national origin and in part *attenuated* by state action. It follows that the American hyperghetto is an ethnically and socially *homogeneous* universe characterized by low organizational density and weak penetration by the state in its social components and, by way of consequence, extreme levels of physical and social insecurity, whereas the French urban periphery is typified on the contrary by a fundamentally *heterogeneous* population according to ethnonational provenance (and, secondarily, class position), whose isolation is mitigated by the strong presence of public institutions catering to social needs. This internal heterogeneity is moreover redoubled by the external heterogeneity across different French working-class *banlieues*, which contrasts sharply with the social and spatial monotony exhibited by the ghettos of the major US cities. That is why we shall, whenever possible, speak of the ghetto in the *singular* and the *banlieues* in the *plural*.

The balance sheet of similarities and differences between the ‘new poverty’ rooted in the French working-class periphery and its structural counterpart in the United States highlights the *specifically racial dimension* of urban exclusion in the American metropolis. It directly refutes the furiously fashionable thesis of a transatlantic

⁴ The invention of the policy of penalization of social insecurity in the United States, translating into the hyperincarceration of black subproletarians (one African-American man in three is presently under criminal justice supervision, and two of every blacks without school credentials will serve a prison sentence during their lifetime), is analysed in *Punishing the Poor: The New Government of Social Insecurity* (Wacquant 2006, orig. 2004), and its internationalization in *Prisons of Poverty* (Wacquant 2007, orig. 1999).

convergence leading to the emergence of ‘ghettos’ along the outer ring of European cities.⁵ And it confirms that *state structures and policies play a decisive role* in the differential stitching together of inequalities of class, place, and origin (whether ethnoracial or ethnonational), and this *on both sides of the Atlantic*. At crosscurrent with the political ideologies and scholarly discourses that concur to stress the weakening of the state so as to better bring it about, it emerges that Leviathan remains the main vector commanding the genesis and trajectory of advanced marginality in each country. Even where the state might on first glance seem to be absent, passive or puny, it is still the national state that, through its multisided action, shapes the markets for housing, employment, and educational credentials, but also the distribution of basic goods and services, and through this mediation governs the conversion of social space into appropriated physical space. In the United States no less than in France, ‘effects of place’ (Bourdieu 1993) turn out to be essentially *effects of the state projected onto the city*.

Finally, the methodical comparison of the black American ghetto with the French working-class *banlieues* enables us to discern the main properties that distinguish fin-de-siècle marginality from the ‘Fordist’ regime of poverty that had dominated the period of industrial consolidation during the decades after World War II. The analysis of polarization from below presented in the third part of this book underlines, *inter alia*, the fact that postfordist poverty is fueled by the growing instability and heterogeneity of the wage labor relation; increasingly disconnected from the short-term cyclical fluctuations of the national economy; and tends to concentrate in defamed and isolated territories where the erosion of a sense of ‘place’ (referring both to a shared objective position and the subjective sentiment of having a ‘place of our own’) and the absence of a collective idiom of claims-making exacerbate the experience and effects of deproletarianization and destitution.

As a new century dawns, the incapacity of the governments of the advanced countries, that is, the refusal or reticence of their ruling classes converted to neoliberalism to check the social and spatial accumulation of economic hardship, social disaffiliation, and cultural dishonor in the deteriorating working-class and/or ethnoracial enclaves of the dualizing metropolis promises to engender chronic unrest and poses a daunting challenge to the institution of citizenship. It is one of the major springs behind the spectacular expansion and generalized hardening of police and penal policies trained on the urban subproletariat in the United States and the European Union since the denunciation of the Fordist-Keynesian social compact (Wacquant 1999). So much to say that, to make a real difference, social policies aimed at combatting advanced marginality will eventually have to reach beyond the narrow perimeter of wage employment and move towards the creation of a right to subsistence outside of the tutelage of the market via some variant of ‘basic income’ (Van Parijs 1995).

⁵ This thesis rests on a complete sociological misconstrual of what constitutes a ghetto, produced and perpetuated by (1) ignorance of the historical realities of the American city (whose empirical investigation is conveniently replaced by the endless rehashing of clichés which, being shared by tabloid-style journalism, political rumour and the more worldly sectors of scholarship, appear in the end to be founded on fact) and (2) a persistent conceptual confusion between ghettoization and spatial differentiation, residential segregation, economic pauperization, concentration of foreigners or immigrants, physical enclosure, degradation of the housing stock, criminal violence, and so on (either taken *in seriatim* or in clusters).

TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY OF URBAN MARGINALITY

By specifying the distinctive causal dynamics, social modalities, and experiential forms that fashion relegation in the metropolis in the United State and in France, this book endeavors to forge tools for rethinking urban marginality in the advanced societies. It intends thereby to help invigorate the *comparative sociology of social polarization from below* in the cities of the First World but also of Second-World countries, such as Argentina, South Africa and Turkey, and of the nation-states issued out of the rubble of the Soviet empire, where the diffusion and intensification of urban poverty in recent years are even more pronounced.⁶ From this comparison – provisional and subject to revision – between the American ghetto and the French working-class peripheries at the close of the twentieth century, arise five principles that may usefully orient future research.

First and foremost, it is imperative to establish a clearcut separation between, on the one hand, the *folk concepts* used by state decision-makers, city authorities and the residents themselves to designate neighborhoods of exile and, on the other, the *analytical concepts* that social scientists must *construct*, against the prenotions of urban common sense, to account for their evolving makeup and position in the sociospatial structure of the metropolis. This implies that particular attention be given to the critical examination of the categories and discourses (including those produced by social science) that, under cover of describing marginality, contribute to moulding it by organizing its collective perception and its political treatment. As a corollary, one must beware of the international circulation of phony concepts --such as that of the “underclass”-- which are not only unsuited to their contexts of *importation*, but do not even have purchase at home on the urban realities in their *exporting countries* (Wacquant 1996). One must likewise guard against the confused and confusing invocation of notions, like that of ‘ghetto’, that operate as mere metaphors calling forth an emotive imagery that hides fundamental structural and functional differences, thereby stopping inquiry just where it should get going.⁷

Secondly, it is vital to replace the state and fate of a neighborhood (be it upscale or deprived, noble or ignoble) into the *diachronic sequence of historical transformations* of which they are the material expression and which never find their source and principle in the neighborhood under examination. Any ‘cross-sectional’ slice of the metropolis is comprehensible only as a synchronous precipitate, artificially frozen by analysis, of ‘longitudinal’ tendencies of the long run that traverse social space and appropriated physical space. Thus the *brutal implosion* of the black American ghetto in the wake of the urban uprisings of the 1960s was propelled from the outside, by the confluence of the decentering of the national political system, the crumbling of the caste regime, the restructuring of urban capitalism, and the policy of social regression of the federal government set against the backdrop of the continued ostracization of African Americans.

⁶ Cf. the extension of the problematic of the nexus of poverty and ethnicity to post-Soviet societies in eastern Europe (Emigh and Széleányi 2001, Ladányi and Széleányi 2002), the resurgence of the debate on marginality in Latin American cities (Auyero 2000, González de la Rocha et al. 2004, Lago 2005), and the blooming of work on urban exclusion in post-apartheid South Africa (Robinson 1996, Gervais-Lambony et al. 1999) and Turkey during the phase of integration with Europe (Erder 1997, Keyder 2005). This debate is also of burning currency in China (Wu 2004).

⁷ This is what I will attempt to demonstrate in *The Two Faces of the Ghetto*, the book that is the sequel and counterpart to this tome, by directly confronting the controversial question of the ghetto.

The same is true of the *slow decomposition* of the working-class territories of the French (and more generally European) urban periphery in the postfordist era which, like their consolidation during the period between 1920 and 1980, is overdetermined from above by the triangular relationships between the state, social classes, and the city. To forget that urban space is a *historical and political construction* in the strong sense of the term is to risk (mis)taking for ‘neighbourhood effects’ what is nothing more than the spatial retranslation of economic and social differences.⁸

A third recommendation pertains to methodology: *ethnographic observation emerges as an indispensable tool*, first to pierce the screen of discourses whirling around these territories of urban perdition which lock inquiry within the biased perimeter of the preconstructed object, and secondly to capture the lived relations and meanings that are constitutive of the everyday reality of the marginal city-dweller. But, lest one condemn oneself to monographic myopia, fieldwork cannot for a single moment do without institutional analysis and vice versa --even if one or the other is sidelined or muted at certain moments of the research and its end-product. It must be guided at every step by the methodical knowledge, itself constantly revised and enriched by the first-person study of concrete situations, of the macrostructural determinants that, although ostensibly absent from the neighborhood, still govern the practices and representations of its residents because they are inscribed in the material distribution of resources and social possibles as well as lodged inside bodies in the form of categories of perception, appreciation, and action (Bourdieu 1980/1990). This is not here a matter of collecting ‘fresh’ data to compose ‘lively’ illustrations of theories elaborated outside of sustained contact with the prosaic reality but indeed of enrolling ethnographic observation as a necessary instrument and moment of theoretical construction.

Although this book does not belong to the established genre of the ethnographic monograph, ethnography played an essential role in it. For field observation, structural analysis, and theoretical construction advance in unison and mutually reinforce each other in it,⁹ rather than opposing one another in a sterile conflict of priority. Without the direct information obtained through personal participation in ordinary scenes of life on Chicago’s South Side ghetto, I would not have been able to validate my initial intuition of the incongruous and unconvincing import of the academic legend of the “underclass,” and I could not have rearticulated the question of race, class and state in the despised space of the *inner city* (the geographical euphemism used by normal US social science to designate the black ghetto, precisely to avoid *naming* it). Similarly, the data produced first hand during the investigation carried out in La Courneuve and among the municipal and ministerial services charged with French urban policy in 1989-1991 were vital in helping me set aside the false problems imposed by the current political debate and its administrative focus, and then to triangulate the view from below and the view from above of the pauperized estates in the Parisian *banlieue* with the relevant economic and

⁸ As Pierre Bourdieu forcefully reminds us (1993: 250, 256, my translation): ‘One can break with falsely self-evident notions, and with the errors inscribed in substantialist thinking in terms of *places*, only on condition of effecting a rigorous analysis of the relations between the structures of social space and the structures of physical space’, relations that are the historical product of ‘struggles over the appropriation of space’ in which the state plays a doubly decisive role as the ground of confrontation and as interested protagonist.

⁹ A model of synergistic integration of these three elements is found in Pereira’s book (2005), *Classes e culturas de classe das famílias portuguesas* (especially in part 3, ‘Cidade e Território’, pp. 479-767).

demographic data. The more abstract theorizations –such as the analytical sketch of ‘advanced marginality’ with which this research culminates– always gain from being solidly harnessed to a carnal grasp of the historical experience for which they purport to account.¹⁰

Fourthly, it is useful to distinguish, at minimum, between the social *condition* characteristic of a zone of relegation and the conditionings it entails (which can, over time, crystallize into a local culture and panoply of typical strategies, cf. Bourgois 1995); its *position* in a hierarchized structure of places, measured by the double yardstick of material and symbolic value; and the *function* it performs for the broader metropolitan system. Some such districts serve as active and resilient reservoirs of low-skill labour force; others are mere warehouses for supernumerary populations that no longer have any identifiable political or economic utility in the new polarized capitalism; and others yet are spatial containers for the ostracization of undesirable social categories and activities. This is true of the lowly neighbourhoods of different countries but also of different cities in a single society or even in the same metropolis. In Brazil, for example, the label of *favela* fuses and confuses stable working-class districts that continue to provide solid harbors of proletarian integration into the city, zones in which the victims of ‘regressive deindustrialization’ are forsaken to their fate in an informal street economy increasingly dominated by criminal activities and the entropic violence they generate, and enclaves for *marginais* defined by the experience of group stigma and collective taint.¹¹ The same neighbourhood can fulfil one or the other of these functions in succession or, depending upon the sector, simultaneously for different categories, according to proportions set by the history of its composition and position in the objective and subjective hierarchy of the districts that make up the city.

Lastly, one needs to specify the *degree and form of state penetration* in neighborhoods of relegation as well as the changing – and often contradictory– relation that their inhabitants maintain with different public officials and agencies, schools and hospitals, housing and social welfare, firefighting and transportation, the courts and the police. This relationship cannot be assumed to be static, uniform, univocal or adequately summed up by the catch-all phrase of ‘clientism’ or by the familiar figures of conflict and complaint. On the one hand, indeed, even when poor city-dwellers fail to overturn the ‘rituals of marginality’ that bind them to the governing elite, their collective action continually engenders new meanings and multistranded exchanges that open up a possible space for collective demands and social critique (Vélez-Ibañez 1983). On the other hand, there exists a wide gulf between public policies ‘on paper’, decided and articulated by the centres of state power, and the ordinary practices of the street-level bureaucracies (Lipski 1980) that provide (or fail to provide) public services in a manner

¹⁰ This grasp can itself be thematized by means of *comparative* ethnography, based on parallel fieldwork conducted in two sites chosen to throw light upon theoretically relevant invariants and variations, as opposed to the currently fashionable ‘multi-sited fieldwork’ which is too often a handy excuse for escaping the practical drudgery of ethnography by not doing fieldwork anywhere.

¹¹ It suffices, to realize this, to contrast Ribeiro (1996) with Pamuk et Cavallieri (1998), Pino (1997) with Goldstein (2003), and, from a historical and biographical viewpoint, the works assembled by Zaluar and Alvito (1996). The same demonstration could be made for the *Problemquartier* in Germany, the *bairro degradado* in Portugal, the *ciudad perdida* in Mexico or the *pueblo joven* in Peru, and so on.

that is always differentiated and differentiating according to client category and location, a gulf that we can bridge only by empirical analysis on specific and prosaic cases.¹²

Among the institutions that stamp their imprint on the daily life of the populations and on the climate of ‘problem’ neighborhoods, special attention must be accorded to the police. As the ‘frontline’ agency and frowning face of the state directly turned down towards precarious and marginal categories, the police are everywhere confronted with a deep crisis of legitimacy, mission, and recruitment that the recent managerial turn can neither contain nor mask, since it finds its spring in the overall reconfiguration of the state, the erosion of the public monopoly over systems of surveillance and sanction of deviancy, and the broad diffusion of a feeling of *social* insecurity to which political leaders have chosen to respond with the all-out politicization of *criminal* insecurity, which sets off an upward spiraling of expectations that the forces of order cannot but betray in the end.

Yet, while the social foundations of ‘police fetishism’ – the ideological illusion that would make it the ‘solution’ to the ‘crime problem’ (Reiner 1997: 1003) – are crumbling, the police have again been entrusted, not only with maintaining public order, but also, in a very concrete sense that returns it to the historic mission of its origin, to buttress the new social order woven out of vertiginous inequalities and to check the turbulences born of the explosive conjunction of rampant poverty and stupendous affluence engendered by neoliberal capitalism in the cities of the advanced and advancing countries throughout the globe.¹³ And if putting working-class districts left economically and socially fallow under police restraint has recently become so popular among rulers, it is because it enables the high state nobility to give itself the comforting feeling that it is responding to the demands of the ‘people’ while at the same time exculpating its own historic responsibility in the making of the urban outcasts of the new century.

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¹² For a fine-grained study of ‘the regulation of tensions and of the production of consent’ by state administrations responsible for the everyday management of urban poverty (in the case at hand, two family benefits offices in two French towns), read Dubois (1999).

¹³ On this issue, see Chevigny (1995), Palidda (2000), Jobard (2002) and Binder (2004), respectively, on the Americas, Italy, France and Argentina.

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