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Rehabilitating Leviathan:

Reflections on the state, economic regulation and violence reduction.

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Liberty is the perfection of civil society, but still authority must be acknowledged essential to its very existence

David Hume

Abstract

This article argues that some currently influential liberal-culturalist discourses tend to underplay the direct link between violent street crime, economic marginalisation and the more ruthless adaptive aspects of advanced capitalist culture. In doing so they consistently reify the state, misconstrue its social role and represent its decline as a *fait accompli*. There is also a tendency to misrepresent the relative and moderate success in reducing street violence that it once achieved by using its political mandate to help maintain underlying economic stability above the required threshold. Underneath these

discourses is a tacit political endorsement of the global neo-liberal project that is revealed by their collusion in the political neutralisation of populations and the delegitimisation of the potentially democratic state and its vital role in socio-economic stabilisation and violence reduction.

Keywords: state – market – culture – economic management – violence reduction

Precarious Places: Violence and Rapid Capital Retraction

In 2001 and 2002, both Lee Jasper and Burhan Wazir, who number amongst a growing group of concerned black commentators, made strikingly critical statements in the British press about the current condition of black working-class culture. According to them, in some economically impoverished communities, which, although saturated by the values of consumerism, have been deserted by investors, this culture has become increasingly hostile and self-destructive. Despite protests from other members of the black community that these self-admonishing remarks fuel the labelling strategies of racist politics, Jasper proceeded to press the claim that some young black men are being caught up in:

'….a multimillion pound economy of drugs and guns which subverts mainstream morality and social responsibility, appealing to those who have been excluded from society …. [where] …. black neighbourhoods have become free trade zones for every kind of drug and illegal contraband, including guns …. [w]e are paying for short-sighted political leadership [and]…. we must work with the police' (Observer, 17th Feb 2002).

For these commentators it appears that violent crime has become socially corrosive to a point where it is necessary to break free from the liberal-culturalist discourses that currently dominate the intellectual world and return to explanations grounded in political economy (see Wacquant, 2002). Although racism, with its own unique historical development (Gilroy, 1987; Bowling and Phillips, 2000), can never be omitted from an economically grounded theory of social divisions, social scientific research tends to confirm that similar levels of violent crime can be found amongst and between groups of white and Asian young people in similarly marginalised circumstances (Webster, 2001). It is entirely unnecessary to postulate the combination of economic marginalisation and hyper-competitive values as a 'direct cause' or a 'single theory' of such diverse categories as interpersonal or inter-cultural violence to accept that hostilities old and new flourish in these conditions. If we look beyond misleading statistics that indicate rises in minor violence during times of economic boom, this more penetrative research suggests that extreme forms of exclusion from the circuits of the mainstream economy can set the conditions for increases in much more serious forms of violent crime during times of recession (ibid; Winlow, 2001).

Despite the lingering political fallout from the Lawrence affair, Jasper has made the provocative move of publicly advocating closer co-operation between black communities and the police in the fight against intolerable levels of drug-related violence in some economically deprived areas of London. It is, however, quite clear from his statement that he recognizes the temporary pragmatic nature of policing solutions to social and cultural 'problems' that are more deeply rooted in political economy. His term 'paying for short-sighted political leadership' indicates a further recognition that, in the absence of a genuine politics that can oppose or at least regulate neocapitalism's economic processes, this form of exclusion and its accompanying tribulations could become a permanent feature of Western life (Horne and Hall, 1995; Lash, 1994; Morrison, 1995).

Wazir (2001), observing that socio-economic decay in many 'downtown' North American areas is considerably more advanced, speaks in impassioned tones about a drawn-out 'black holocaust' in some former manufacturing and agricultural communities. Echoing the structural positions of writers such as Wilson (1987), Currie (1990,1993), Zimring and Hawkins (1995) and Wacquant (2002), Wazir observes that rates of violent crime in these areas, aggravated by a resilient North American pro-gun and anti-state (yet pro-punishment) culture, have risen sharply since the mid 1980s to their highest post-war levels. As in Britain, the evidence suggests that this rise is not merely an effect of variations in reporting and recording (Reiner, 2000). The victimised and fearful inhabitants of both British and American zones of capital retraction seem to be asking for some sort of effective long-term intervention in the very real problem of violent crime.

The upshot seems to be that, in the short term, these zones require more effective regulation and, in the long term, quite profound transformations of their economic and cultural foundations. Short-term regulation is becoming increasingly difficult because state-community control traditions are collapsing as disaffected post-industrial generations lose whatever respect for traditional public policing and informal controls they might once have had. The prospect of genuine long-term social renewal looks dim because the political relationship between this economically surplus population and a weak market-bound government that can offer little more than empty promises of helping individuals become 'fit to compete' and cosmetic regeneration schemes is, understandably, in the process of breaking down.

However, as Ian Taylor (1999) warned, 'fear of crime' is one of the worst possible motivations for a renewed state-community partnership. To be fruitful in the long-term, such a partnership would have to be founded on a political discourse that can explain and address violent crime from deeper perspectives. The cry for help from the excluded zones is for the ears of neither a punitive state, which alienates and oppresses, nor a welfare state, which de-skills and disempowers. Rather, it seems to be aimed at some mythical political authority that can offer concrete help to revive prosperity, security and comprehensible moral codes alongside some sense of mutual interests and collective identity in environments where the traditional control mechanisms of both state and civil society have become significantly less effective in maintaining public order and managing underlying economic conditions.

Moving on to examine the broader criminological context in which these zones are located does little to raise the spirits. The fall in crime in 1990s Britain was '.... largely a recording phenomenon' (Reiner, 2000:82) and nothing is stemming the rise of the 'grey figure' of unreported violence in specific Western locales (Winlow, 2001) despite some overall statistical declines in what had become since the mid-1980s notably high historical levels of recorded violent crime (see Levi and Maguire, 2002; Hagan, 2002). However, these geographically and socially undifferentiated statistics of recorded violence are rather misleading when compared to more penetrative differentiated and ethnographic research. This suggests that levels of drug-related crime, intimidation and serious violence in specific locales in Western nations since the 1980s have risen and remained unacceptably high at the same time as foundational economic changes in a move towards the 'pure' competitive market have taken place (Currie, 1993; Hall, 1997,2002; Winlow, 2001; Wacquant, 2002). It might also be worth considering the possibility that the overall statistical decline in North America has less to do with advances in prosperity and sociability and more to do with the rise in the prison population from about 200,000 in 1970 to almost I,200,000 in the late 1990s (Taylor, 1999).

Erring towards rather more circumspect readings of these ambiguous research findings, a number of the longer-serving criminologists have become increasingly less inclined to celebrate advanced capitalism's liberating potentials or 'resistances' and ever more vocal in their condemnation of its culture as a Darwinian process of ruthless competition, where exclusion and disaffection await the losers (Currie, 1997; James, 1995; Taylor, 1999;

Reiner, 2000). In many of the West's former industrial areas, pockets of permanent recession contrast starkly with the extravagant prosperity of nearby centres of global commerce, administration and service industry (Lash and Urry, 1994; Winlow, 2001). In the shift from manufacturing to consumption and service industries, secure employment, especially for young working-class males, is now a relative rarity (Amin, 1994; Byrne, 1995). Much production has been moved abroad permanently, and this, alongside the increasing mobility of finance capital, the decline of state-centred labour politics and the absence of effective government at the international level, makes the return of tenured jobs and stable local economies unlikely (Byrne, 1995). This permanent departure from a physically, practically and collectively grounded agricultural-industrial past is engendering novel and intractable forms of social exclusion, political disenchantment and cultural fragmentation (Horne and Hall, 1995). The consistently low levels of educational and electoral engagement that accompany high crime rates in these excluded fragments of the former proletariat indicate growing disaffection with an increasingly distant neo-liberal political culture and a severely weakened labour movement that once represented them (Lasch, 1996).

This is reinforced by a hegemonic liberal 'cult of the self', which ensures that only lip service is paid to any traditional value apart from individualism, entrepreneurship and personal lifestyle opportunity, and that discourses of regulation or opposition are framed predominantly in terms of existential and ethico-rational choice (see Wouters, 1999; Beck, 1992). Absorbed in a mass-mediated ornamental culture that has '.... served to legitimate capitalism in the eyes of millions of ordinary people' (Bocock, 1993:2), and

the captivating daily routine of trying to acquire the fashionable objects that signify in this month's structure of symbolic value (see Lefebvre, 1991; Lash, 1994), most of these populations have been intellectually and politically neutralised (Baudrillard, 1983; Horne and Hall, 1995). Disconnected from its history, and from what Marx and Engels ([1888]1972) and Sorel ([1908]1961) once identified as the struggle for political and mythological unity, the atomised working class's sole exciting attraction is the leisure industry: holidays, sport, T.V., film, popular music, computer games, intoxicating drugs and the regular soiree into the 'nocturnal economy' for a dose of manufactured Saturnalia. This largely enrolled and domesticated Western culture can no longer be seen as a seedbed for the politics of opposition or reform (Baudrillard, 1983), or even for the sort of active participation that the new regulatory strategy of 'state-community partnership' requires. Rising violent crime seems to be coexisting with the silent majority's loss of faith – or even interest – in the ability of the state to govern the anarchic global market and its socio-cultural consequences. Perhaps the gravity of this situation should impel critical intellectuals to question the neo-liberal doctrine of *fait accompli* and reopen the investigation into precisely why democratic state government is in such difficulty.

Hamstrung Leviathan: The entrepreneurial state as a continuum

In today's globalising economy, traditional nation-states have been caught in a downward spiral of political disempowerment (Loney et al, 1996; Bauman, 1998). Consistently

under-funded and forced to borrow from city investment institutions, they must also convince corporate executives that their public policies are capable of supporting profitable business activities before their territories are earmarked for investment. We are approaching a stage where the survival of putative democratic government itself – and not simply incumbent political parties – is largely dependent on preparing the infrastructure, setting the cultural mood and providing administrative services for the business interests that run the global economy (Ellwood, 2001; Monbiot, 2000). The state appears to be politically hamstrung by the constant threat that, in the event of 'loss of confidence' by global financial institutions, loans will be refused or investments discontinued and placed overseas where labour and other unit production costs are cheaper and state regulatory policies more obliging.

Global capital's 'casino culture' encourages financial institutions to invest their clients' money solely where it is likely to produce high short-term returns (Bourdieu, 1998; Ellwood, 2001), and at the moment currency speculation tends to generate significantly higher profits than most forms of commodity production, distribution or public service. Of the $1.5 trillion traded every day on the global money markets, 95% is simply bet on whether currency values and interest rates will rise or fall (Round, 2001). Investment is not arranged (and never has been in any absolute sense) by voluntary agreements between financial institutions, communities and politicians on the basis of social need, no matter how serious the consequences of capital retraction might be. By assuming the role of creditor and monopolising the management of the large-scale movement of finance capital, global financial institutions now wield unassailable power over states.

The virtually unlimited flexibility and opportunity made possible by the emergent global market system has radically altered traditional investment culture. In 19th century Britain, for instance, Victorian industrialists invested large proportions of their profits in the communal infrastructure. Railways, roads, factories, offices, schools, houses, bridges and parks were built and maintained to last as long as the technology of the time would allow. During the industrial phase of its expansion capitalism needed secure, orderly communities for the circulation of commodities and the reproduction of workers for manufacturing, military service and unwaged domestic work (Willis, 1977; Hall, 1997). When domestic markets were of prime importance and stability outweighed 'flexible accumulation' as the guarantor of long-term capital returns, investments in infrastructure, strong state institutions and state-centred public services were relatively high, and order was maintained by repressive forms of social control and cultural restrictions.

In the neocapitalist world the situation has changed radically. As traditional Western manufacturing becomes less profitable, neocapitalism is looking increasingly to the 'orbital' currency exchanges for higher short-term returns (Round, 2001). The relocation of manufacturing and the expansion of consumer demand are outcomes of the requirement of traditional industry to compete not only with itself but also with the highly profitable practice of currency speculation. This has increased the pressure on traditional trade and industry to adopt practices of 'flexible accumulation', and any nation-state that displays genuine democratic and regulatory potential can appear to be a threat and a burden to this process.

In this climate the corruption and decline of state governance and the emergence of some sort of 'market in social control' (see Taylor, 1999; Ruggerio, 2000) are inevitable. Because the market dominates so extensively, money has transcended its economic role as a medium of exchange to become a means of political and social control (Zysman, 1983; Ruggerio, 2000). Rolling back the state and its capacity to manage economic and social conditions is creating increased 'business opportunities' in everything from violence and criminality to crime prevention and imprisonment (Johnston, 1992; Taylor, 1999; South, 1988,1994). Thus the privatised social control market can combine with the general global market to create its own autopoeitic (self-reproducing) system of supply and demand, which not only generates profit but also an important ideological revenue. If the market monopolises the more visible and popular 'rowing' role, confining the state to a residue of impossible front-line tasks alongside the rather unsavoury back-stage 'steering' roles of monitoring, surveillance and intelligence-gathering, the popular image of the active and capable frontline protector of life, limb and property will be transferred to the former. Thus the politico-cultural forces that promote the market can further de-legitimise the institutions of collective provision and public policy.

The current decline of the state and the rise in violent street crime are products of a long historical process. There is little doubt that the modern nation-state, despite its frequent role as an instrument of imperial war-making and an oppressor of dissidence, was also the key administrator of a relatively successful process of internal pacification (Elias, 1994; Fletcher, 1997). As Norbert Elias reminds us, the significant reduction of violence

in the states and cities of modernity '…. becomes evident only when one realises how much more violent and how much higher in risk were physical attacks in earlier epochs of human development' (in Keane, 1988:178). But why did the frequently warlike liberal-capitalist state put so much effort into reducing interpersonal violence in its internal territories? Although we want to offer something beyond standard Marxist instrumental or dialectical explanations, we are, nevertheless, convinced of the need to retain one core Marxist principle. During the bourgeois revolutions in Europe the expansion of the commodity market was the overwhelming primary interest of the business classes and the key motivation behind the development of both private and state-centred social control apparatuses (Hall, 2002). Affording other interests – such as those of religion, bureaucracy, patriarchy, medicine or the human sciences – the same explanatory weight as the business classes' politico-economic project, and thus associating power with the 'knowledges' and representational cultures of these elite discursive regimes, has been a profound intellectual and political mistake (Anderson, 1983; Eagleton, 1997,2000; Taylor, 1999).

History reveals a number of reasons why democratic ethical government free from the logic of the commodity market and the political control of the business classes failed to establish itself. However, the core reason appears to be the regrettably vulgar fact that the modern capitalist state, unlike previous imperio-religious states and feudal principalities, has never possessed its own means of income. It is a cluster of abstract institutions, not a major landowner, manufacturer or merchant. It has indulged in the conquest and occupation of land only when allocated funding by the private interests that controlled its

policy and military resources. Despite the power generated by its ability to legislate and control national resources (Van Creveld, 1999), Leviathan's core relationship to the wealth-creating and property-owning aristocratic or business classes has always been one of *financial dependency*.

This relationship of ultimate dependency allowed the business classes to establish and maintain an enduring monopoly on political representation and fiscal policy. Although the embryonic administrative state existed as a consultant to sovereign monarchical power in Britain in the period following Edward II's Model Parliament in 1295, it experienced its first wave of rapid bourgeois development in the period from the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 to the establishment of the Metropolitan Police in 1829. The ease of the removal of James II in 1688 to make way for property-based parliamentary rule demonstrated that the business classes had truly overpowered the aristocracy and commandeered the nascent state apparatus. The peasantry and embryonic proletariat simply did not figure in the political equation, and the main purpose of the political project was not curtailing aristocratic privileges but extending them to the 'gentrifying' business classes (Van Creveld, 1999; Held, 1995).

According to the modern capitalist philosophy of statehood, forged in the early Italian states of the Renaissance, the state should be an instrument for private individuals to fulfil their own property-orientated ambitions (Held, 1995). Thus the immediate legal task of the early state was to pacify a volatile population in order to protect this private property so it could be accumulated, stored and circulated with increased safety, and its

early success can largely be attributed to its passable ability to do so (Elias 1994; Van Creveld, 1999; Hall, 2002). However, underlying this was the longer-term strategy of promoting the accumulation of private property by legally endorsing the commodification of land, agricultural produce and mineral resources, and, ultimately, ensuring the installation of market exchange-value, rather than practical use-value, as the lynchpin of the economy (Hechter and Brustein, 1980).

To lubricate this economic transition the bourgeois project required an emphatic shift in criminalisation from offences against traditional symbols of authority to offences against property. After the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 the initial task of Europe's nascent states was to disarm and legally subjugate the aristocracy, thus eliminating their customary entitlement to exercise 'righteous violence', the most serious obstacle in the path of the bourgeoisie's system of acquiring, legally protecting and exchanging private property. If the state was to offer genuine protection it needed to overthrow the principal property owners and political rulers, namely the Roman Catholic Church in a fragile alliance with the hostile familial and clan powers that had emerged as the ruling 'aristocracy' after the demise of the Roman Empire (van Creveld, 1999). Feudalism was the result of warrior governors and chiefs struggling free from imperial power and reintroducing into their methods of government the practice of expanding and protecting hereditary assets by means of private violence and transmitting them to successive generations. Their relationship to the lower orders, amongst which the merchant class ranked the very lowest, was little more than a violent and exploitative protection racket. However, the early business classes' primary interest in the subjugation of these old

barbarians was not part of an ethical struggle on behalf of the downtrodden but a revolutionary *politico-economic* struggle to establish a bourgeois market-dependent state (Hall, 2002).

The second pacifying task was to prevent rebellious or criminal forms of violence welling up from the lower orders, who during the Peasant's Revolt had demonstrated a disturbing potential for political mobilisation under the influence of demagogues such as Wat Tyler and John Ball. However, before the 19th century, lower class insurrection above the level of traditional symbolic protest was rare (Thompson, 1963). As the aristocracy became more domesticated by absorption into courtly culture in early modern Europe (Elias, 1994) and the peasantry remained politically docile, the most persistent and immediate internal threat to the early mercantile bourgeoisie's power and property – in an age when property tended to exist in the tangible form of material goods – was theft or robbery committed largely by populations that had been dispossessed by early capitalism's commodification of land (Jutte, 1994; Beire, 1983; Sharpe, 1996). These criminal practices could quite often be executed more successfully with the aid of intimidation or violence, tactics that were encouraged by redundant soldiers who swelled the ranks of criminal bands in peacetime (Rawlings, 1999). Although most bourgeois states gradually outlawed side-arms amongst all classes, preventing the private use of technological advances in weaponry and legally safeguarding its monopolisation of violence, during hard times violence remained a core technique for determined criminals. Despite the alleged deterrent effect of harsh punishment, throughout the capitalist project both violent

crime and punitive state reactions developed into a pattern of increasing in times of economic recession and social disruption (Box, 1983; Taylor, 1999).

Despite being of central importance to the expansion of the market, the expensive business of maintaining law, order and security was always difficult to evaluate in terms of tangible returns on investments. In Britain, early private initiatives such as Houses of Correction, Town Watches and thief-catching agencies often ran at a loss (Rusche and Kirchheimer, 1969; Melossi and Pavarini, 1981; Johnston, 1992), making them more difficult to justify. The declining aristocracy allowed social control to be transferred to the state because the responsibility of payment could also be shifted to the tax-paying business class and their professional service workers in a nation where wealth was spreading outwards. They accepted the costly burden of funding law and order through taxation in return for an even firmer grip on the state, more ideological justifications for their political power and a deepening of the condition of dependency in which the state and the rest of the population existed. Despite loud protests from the less politically insightful bourgeois factions who could not see 'direct profit' in social control, those who were more aware and fearful of crime, disorder and rebellion in the 'age of revolutions' considered its pacifying capacity to be a costly yet worthwhile investment that would produce long-term political, ideological and economic returns (Reiner, 1985).

At various points between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, European states attempted to strike a deal with their potentially unruly populations, promising to establish the conditions for widening prosperity and political representation in return for

acceptance of the state's increasing disciplinary intervention in everyday life (Donzelot, 1980). It is possible to portray this intervention as either insidious, like Foucault (1977), or potentially progressive and beneficial, like Habermas (1992), but this argument tends to miss the point. The primary business of the state concerned the relationship between society and economic growth, which the French Physiocrats enshrined in the principle of 'laissez-faire'. All aspects of life, as Hegel later contended, should be subject to the state's sovereign power, because the state was a product of the evolutionary dialectic that drives history forward and, as such, the highest form of human authority. The rest of Europe reluctantly agreed, with one decisive caveat: the laissez-faire principle decreed that economic activity should be subject to the most minimal interventions and restrictions possible, which would allow the business classes maximal freedom to perform their primary task of creating the wealth that Keynes later claimed would 'trickle down' through the allegedly permeable layers of society to benefit the poor.

The age and endurance of this principle shows that the 'entrepreneurial state' is not new but the essentially unmodified prototype of modern Western government. The restriction of politics and law in the economic sphere to the minimal restraint and maximal promotion of the commodity market became an integral part of the state's development. The economy was declared to be qualitatively and ineluctably 'different', sanctified as the exclusive preserve of the private individual seeking personal wealth, and as such it was, ideally, to be regulated differently, not by the state but by the moral and behavioural codes that, according to the parables told by classical liberals from Adam Smith ([1776]1986) to Francis Fukuyama (1999), reproduce themselves organically and

independently as 'social capital' in civil society. The durability of these core ideals –
restored to their former glory in the current neo-liberal ideology of the 'property-owning
democracy' in 1980s Britain and America – suggests that *in essence* the relationship
between the state, the business classes and the population has remained relatively
unchanged from the mercantile beginnings of Western capitalism.

There is little doubt that the Western business classes preferred state intervention *solely*
where and when it was necessary to maintain the momentum of the capitalist economic
project. But what strategies did these rulers employ? For too long libertarian critics have
portrayed the rule of the capitalist state as an only lightly and occasionally interrupted
genealogy of oppression, punitiveness and insidious disciplinary manipulation of the
rightfully 'free' individual (Habermas, 1992; Cohen, 1985). There is obvious truth in this
critique when it is levelled at specific manifestations of the secular state, especially those
monopolised by religious fanatics, totalitarian bureaucrats or racial supremacists.
However, the important caveats are that pre-capitalist life was infinitely more violent on
the interpersonal level, and that early mercantile capitalism's *primary* requirement was
not to oppress but to disarm and pacify all social groups, especially the aristocracy and
the marginalised banditry (Elias, 1994; Fletcher, 1997).

After a bout of quite gratuitous punitiveness in Tudor England, the bourgeois state's
intention to eschew naked physical oppression as a first resort in controlling the
population began to unfold. However, this was not the product of some blooming of the
humanitarian spirit, but rather a requirement set by market-capitalism's central logic. The

alchemy of market-capitalist societies required reactions between destabilising dynamics in the economy and a complex mixture of stabilising restrictions and stimulating incentives in the legal, social and cultural dimensions, but techniques of managing such a volatile and unpredictable process have never been more than partially successful. In an attempt to develop such techniques, the business classes monopolised violence not only as an instrument of imperial expansion or internal control, but also to evacuate as much of it as possible from civil society to ensure the protection of property and the free-flow of commodities. This 'pseudo-pacification' (see Hall, 2000, 2002) of the internal state territory was an indirect unit cost of the production and distribution of commodities when the domestic markets of state-governed territories were of primary importance. The disturbing thought here, of course, is that what appear to be the 'civilised' aspects of Western culture might be primarily accidental by-products of this underlying historical process.

However, consumerism, imperialism and globalisation were immanent in the capitalist process from the beginning, hampered only by inadequate manufacturing, transport and communication technology. As Braudel noted, '[t]here have been world economies, if not always, at least for a very long time' (1985a:24; see also Wallerstein, 1993). If we look at the dynamism and profitability of early global trade, the burning ambitions of the Hanseatic League and the intensity of the 'trade wars' that appeared from the 17th century onwards, it is obvious that the early mercantile elites harboured global ambitions. We could suspect that, for the elite of a culture based on gambling, commodity exchange and global market expansion, the need to set up and maintain at great cost the imperial

nation-state, internal production facilities, living spaces and social security arrangements for workers in the domestic, nation-bound phase of wealth creation was a temporary inconvenience. However, the vital economic importance of the producing and consuming populations that constituted the European domestic markets, the measured development of commodification and the logical need for reduced violence allowed most states to oversee a *relatively* civilised approach to economic growth and most social control techniques (Hall, 2002).

This is not quite the case if we look briefly at other modes of development. North America, for instance, experienced a significantly more rapid and chaotic commodification process from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries. Here, there was no legacy of state administration stretching back to the thirteenth century, and, after independence, no ruling aristocracy and no customary peasant's rights to land and resources; only naked competition in a land populated by 'savages' and thus, to the Judeao-Christian entrepreneurial mentality, ripe for the taking. Thomas Paine presented us with an early example of the libertarian flight from reality when he declared North America to be the only exception to the state's tendency to 'crush and barbarise' its populations (see Keane, 1988). His miraculous failure to notice the increasingly violent population's ability to crush and barbarise itself on a daily basis has been replicated in the current neo-liberal ascription of the title 'champion of freedom' to a society whose violence and mass imprisonment rates are significantly higher than, for instance, those of 'state-bound' Europe or Canada.

The distinct and enduring shape of violence in North America is related directly to a unique process of commodification and the way it was interpreted by the embryonic nation's principle political actors, the Republican bourgeoisie. Following the ejection of the British and French monarchical state authorities in the 18th century, various private interests engaged in a chaotic and violent struggle to claim ownership of the continent's vast land and natural resources. In the absence of an effective system of law and order, the rush to claim as much as possible created a violent 'frontier economy' that approached ungovernability in the 19th century (Zinn, 1980; Trachtenberg, 1982). Levels of interpersonal violence and murder became so high, methods of summary justice and punishment so brutal, and settler populations so fearful and volatile that desperate appeals for a revised form of 'statehood' began to overshadow the anti-state rhetoric that had become an ingrained aspect of political culture since the heady days of the 18th century independence movement. In stark contrast, 'state-bound' Canada, whilst still embracing the market and commodifying many of its material resources – and despite the long-running conflict between two state authorities – created a much more stable civil society in the 19th and 20th centuries. The result is a significantly less murderous and imperialistic nation today.

If there is a rough principle here, it seems to be that in capitalist societies unmanageable, psychologically traumatic and socially corrosive levels of violence tend to occur on the one hand where democratic state control and economic management are unacceptably weak, or on the other where there is no genuine separation between state and private interests and an excessively powerful version of the former is merely an autocratic

facilitator for the latter. Put simply, in capitalist history violent crime and disorder display a tendency to increase where the requirement for major shifts in investment patterns in intense phases of socio-economic reorganization – which can be facilitated easily under either of the above political conditions – outweighs the human need for collective government, stability and civilized relations. In the postmodern age of Rorty's (1989) 'anti-foundationalism' and Lyotard's (1984) 'incredulity to the metanarrative', it is with some sheepishness that we feel unable to conceal the distinctly modern scientific proposition that this eminently observable pattern seems to have repeated itself across time and space in the capitalist epoch.

The Rise and Stumble of the Post-War Democratic State

The current version of the dismal Machiavellian view could be that in no previous historical form, from the agricultural economy of Sumer to the command economy of the Soviet Union, has any known form of government succeeded in severing the link between governing institutions and private ambitions. However, the fundamental Marxian notion of the inextricable political connections between the business classes and the state might not precisely describe the immediate post-war era in Europe, from 1945 to 1979, when the leaderships of the labour movements put into political practice the fact that the industrial project had not yet technologically transcended the need for labour. In 1950s Britain, for instance, full employment and continuing interdependence between capital and labour met briefly with increasing prosperity, improving work conditions, stable

communities and a dominant bourgeois class begrudgingly grateful for the huge working-class sacrifice in World War II. This formed the basis for the ascent – albeit brief and partial – of state-led social democratic politics. Even when the political representatives of labour were out of government, the collective identity and negotiating power of the labour movement itself still remained relatively strong, allowing a temporary balance of political forces.

Between 1950 and 1973, in the afterglow of Beveridge's 'cradle to grave' promise, state spending in Britain rose from 27.6% to 45% of GDP. Increased state provision of services in all dimensions of life indicated the practical fruition of the Beveridge ethos as some of the core political ambitions of the post-war labour movement were realized. Even in the USA, supposed home of rugged individualism and private enterprise, public spending rose to 35.8% in the same period. More important than the level of spending, however, is the fact that a substantial proportion of the state's intervention was focused on maintaining economic stability and social security. It is more than a coincidence that, in the same period, rates of murder reached a 600 year low in Britain, less than 1 per 100,000, a decline from between 20 and 40 per 100,000 in the 14th century, and rates of the more serious forms of street violence were also at their lowest (Gurr, 1981). Even though hidden white-collar crime, institutional violence and domestic violence were inadequately researched – and small but disturbing rises in overall rates appeared from the mid 1960s – it still seems likely that violent street crime, imprisonment and execution in the West were significantly lower than either previous rates or today's rates after the extremely steep rises in the 1980s (Hagan, 1994; Zimring and Hawkins, 1997).

The primary reason for this unusual convergence of prosperity and stability was not state management but post-war economic reconstruction, which stabilised social conditions and relations, curbing crime and interpersonal or sub-cultural hostilities well below what we might call a threshold of manageability in a restitutive social project. Initially, these conditions presented democratic socialism with an opportunity to establish itself as a long-term political player, but before labour's feet could be planted too firmly under the political table the profound economic effects of the oil price rises and increasing competition from transnational manufacturing industries in the early 1970s precipitated the 'long recession' in the West. The monetarist response in Britain and America was to systematically wipe out whole sectors of unprofitable or marginally profitable manufacturing industry, especially core heavy industries that sustained the workforces of Northern Europe and the North Eastern states of the USA. Unemployment tripled by the early 1980s, and this compounded with rising taxes and 'stagflation' (the unmanageable combination of rising inflation and unemployment) to precipitate a monetarist economic revolution and the emergence of neo-classical liberal politics and culture (Ormerod, 1994). Thatcher's 'British cure' involved the rapid transfer of 40% of state-controlled industry into private hands, the closure of 'lame-duck' manufacturing plants and a massive and rapid loss of jobs. Expenditure ceilings were imposed all over the public sector, justified by an orchestrated and quite relentless ideological shift from the public to the private facilitated by the burgeoning mass media.

At the same time the culturo-economic revolution of the 1950s and 1960s promoted the expansion and infiltration of the powerful symbolism of the consumer marketplace into all aspects of life, the establishment of Guy Debord's (1995) mass-mediated 'spectacle'. This was a dialectical phenomenon that both reflected and impacted upon the epochal shift from an industrial productivist economy – where the value of skill, role and practical function had converged briefly with the logic of commodity production – to ornamental consumerism, where value swung towards the acquisition and conspicuous display of the symbols of social status (Faludi, 1999). In a social structure defined by a widening and hardening gap between the included and the excluded (Westergaard, 1995), this new culturally driven and socially restructuring economy produced a heightened sense of relative deprivation, anxiety, disaffection and social strain (Lea and Young, 1993) beyond the degree that Robert Merton (1938) had observed before consumerism's post-war quantum leap forward.

Violent crime and social disorder rose sharply as the children of ornamental consumerism, recession and social disruption moved into young adulthood in the mid 1980s (James, 1995; Taylor, 1999). In Britain and the USA especially, the expectancies of material wealth, social status and security that had become ingrained in post-war working class culture were frustrated for those unable to gain a fingerhold on the ornamental consumer economy. At the same time the international drug market began to expand its distribution activities to address the amplified demand created by a combination of disaffection and consumerism's hedonistic, pseudo-libertarian culture. The crime, riot and violence rates rose sharply to a high plateau in the late 1980s and

early 1990s, and, despite recent declines in statistical 'national averages', they have remained unacceptably high in specific locales ever since (Reiner, 2000).

In an historical phase now known as 'postmodernity', or in Eagleton's (1997) possibly more sober and accurate term 'advanced capitalism', Western populations, which throughout modernity had begun to identify themselves in terms of nations, regions, classes, communities and occupational groups, fragmented into competitive interest groups and privatised consuming selves. The potential for collective class-consciousness melted away as the practical economic point for working-class communities and identities disappeared in many locales, and consumer culture promoted the narcissistic, competitive lifestyle with all the vigour that its advanced mass-media technology allowed (Baudrillard, 1983; Bocock, 1993; Winlow, 2001).

In this climate of disorder both the classical right and left-libertarian wings of liberalism seized the opportunity to depict the state and private individuals as opposed players. They concurred on the fundamental issue of the state's oppression of the individual, even though they tended to focus on different dimensions of individuality, namely the positive rights of the ambitious entrepreneur and the negative rights of the oppressed subject. The former tended to lobby for an increased punitive role for the minimal state, whilst the latter tended to indict the punitive state as a major cause or amplifier of crime and violence (Cohen, 1985). However, the abstract economically disembedded conception of 'rights' and 'choice' at the heart of these complementary dogmas glossed over the power of deregulated market logic to absorb Western populations in a renewed process of social

Darwinism (Dickens, 2000), where 'adapting to the environment' means reconstructing and marketing the self as a competitive functionary in the circulation of symbol-dependent commodities (Hall, 2000). Thus neo-liberalism ignored the disruptive, limiting and brutally competitive *market context* in which the struggle for these putative 'rights' and 'choices' has been forced to take place. In this free-for-all scramble, traditions of stable productive work, socio-economic interdependency, practical role, collective identity and the usually judicious (but too often unwisely excessive) repressive codes and inhibitions internalised by individual subjects during modernity's unique historical construction of the super-ego began to disintegrate. Hyper-competitive and individualised forms such as 'flexible accumulation', ornamental self-construction, lifestyle choice, hedonism and individual risk calculation (Lash, 1994; Wouters, 1999; Faludi, 1999; Beck, 1992) began to displace them at a quickening pace.

In this process of foundational change a complex system of interdependent civilising conditions and strategies that had evolved in the industrial phase of market-capitalism began to show signs of rupture and, in the specific locations highlighted earlier, partial disintegration. In these locations informal community control and self-control mechanisms began to break down alongside the complementary strategies developed by the state. In other words, the vital elements of the underlying socio-economic and cultural infrastructure, which the state needed as cultivatable organic bedrock on which to perform its moderately successful violence-reducing government of the population, were subjected to a process of relentless erosion. This was no temporarily disruptive evolutionary advance towards a libertarian future, but a politically implemented

calculated sacrifice of vital civilising conditions made on behalf of global market expansion.

This problematic situation is not confined to the West. It is a global phenomenon occurring at its most acute wherever community and state have been disrupted with traumatising rapidity and replaced by competitive individualism. For instance, the rapid establishment of merchant capitalism in the new Russian Federation has set the conditions for the emergence of the distinctly free-market problems of unemployment, insecure low-waged work, low educational returns, collapsing public services, emergent private oligarchies and huge rises in crime and violence (Rawlinson; 2002; Volkov, 1999; Gerber and Hout, 1998). Russia is an extreme illustration of the state losing its monopoly on violence because a new business oligarchy shot through with corrupt and criminal elements regards it as a threat to the expansion of profitable commercial activity.

The decline in state power and the emergence of pockets of social decay is directly related to the huge increase in power of the global cosmopolitan elite. It takes a disarmingly honest neo-liberal such as Ian Angell (2000), or a maverick such as Christopher Lasch (1996), to penetrate the smokescreen that the neo-liberal and affirmative postmodern schools have swathed around this new phenomenon. The cosmopolitan corporate business elite is concerned solely with its own futuristic economic and cultural projects and has no allegiance whatsoever to nation-states or the communities and individuals on which it once depended. It displays no concept of responsibility, sacrifice or common fate, and it tends to be the most reluctant contributor

to public services as it seeks the 'pure and perfect' competitive market on a global scale (see Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2000; Taylor, 1999). Unfortunately, the cosmopolitan elite's lack of concern for the former working class is being vindicated by the tendency of some liberal intellectuals to question the existence of this enduring socio-economic category by positing it as a group in the midst of fragmentation and potentially 'free' reconstruction (see for instance Lyotard, 1984; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1994).

As Eagleton (1990, 2000) warns, to 'wish class away' in this manner plays straight into the hands of the business elite, who have traditionally shown themselves to be most adept at absorbing and converting any struggle for equality or power into fuel for their economic engine. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (2000), neo-liberal intellectuals of the right and the left are immersed in the process of constructing a new language, a 'new planetary *vulgate*'. This imperialist discourse has assembled a lexicon of hip new terms such as 'individualisation', 'lifestyle', 'risk' and 'responsibilisation' that threaten to displace vital categories such as class, exploitation and democratic government, categories that are now even more relevant in the global neocapitalist world (see also Westergaard, 1995; Eagleton, 1990, 1997; Anderson, 1983). The constant elevation of cultural idealism, personal identity politics and administrative pragmatism over primary economic relations is accelerating the decline of the politics that underpin the potentially democratic state and its more enlightened methods of governing its territory. This leaves localized resource-poor classes of its population politically abandoned and defenceless (that is, defended solely by a politically loaded and cumbersome legal system and a dispiriting welfare state) against the disruption caused by globalisation. In place of

traditional politics and government, this new language is promoting unworkable and often quite outlandish 'alternative' or 'informal' law and order strategies (Matthews, 1988; Hall, 1997), for which the more thoughtful liberal intellectuals (see for instance Garland, 1996), quite rightly, do not hold out much hope in the current economic context. The 'cultural turn' and the new identity politics – joint constructions of Anglo-American libertarianism and Parisian postmodernism – together tend to either ignore, underestimate, obscure or apologise for the vulgar economic power of the business classes at a time when it is at its most potent (Anderson, 1983; Habermas, 1992; Hall, 1997; Eagleton, 1990, 2000; Taylor, 1999). Political and economic interests are the key reasons for the demise of the state, not the progressive liberation of the various cultural 'means of identity' via the relaxation of 'discipline', the essential interest being the long-term politico-economic benefit of the cosmopolitan business classes, furthered by the expansion of the global market game in which they are guaranteed winners.

Conclusions

There is little doubt that individual acts of violence have complex micro-cultural and psychological aetiologies. There is also little doubt that some post-structuralist and postmodernist theories can provide some insights into the construction and deconstruction of identities at the micro and macro levels. However, in the process of furthering our understanding in their preferred cultural-linguistic direction they have a tendency to ignore or conveniently reformulate more durable and intractable vehicles of

meaning and practice, and Jefferson's (2002) reminder that the unconscious has been marginalised in this way could be extended to economic relations, the *habitus* and class or occupational cultures (Hall, 1997; Winlow, 2001) or even, in an enlightened way, human biology (Dickens, 2000). Substantiation of the rather speculative claim that some forms of postmodern cultural politics can encourage the self to 'transform' and subsequently refrain from responding to life's complex pressures, arousals and altercations in violent ways by manipulating cultural representations or calling upon the power of will and desire remains to be seen. Sifting through history's representations of gendered cultural forms with the unquestioned assumption that representational culture, will and desire are considerably more constitutive than they are reflective and adaptive has so far furnished us with much interesting reading but few feasible political solutions to unremitting problems. Social patterns of serious violent crime expressed in the traditional categories of class and locale are undeniable (Zimring and Hawkins, 1997), and for at least three decades they have shown more indications of major expansion and consolidation than transformation. Identifiable historical shifts in these patterns seem to suggest that the attempt to reduce serious violent crime by improving underlying material circumstances and challenging the core values of capitalist culture is more likely to be fruitful in the short and long-terms. Because the unpredictable economic forces of capital retraction and investment create the social conditions for increased rates of violent crime in specific locales that are best defined by their economic class position, the claim that the minimally regulated free market is inherently criminogenic (Currie,1997; Taylor, 1999; Hall, 1997) can be made with much less speculation and a good deal of confidence.

The state and its mandate to govern is being rolled back not because of the patchy record of previous undemocratic forms, but because of what a network of potentially more democratic states might be capable of doing in the future. Extreme liberals choose capital's adaptive and uniquely anomic form of 'freedom' even when they are quite aware that many individuals use it to abuse, intimidate, swindle and exploit, and that the real cost is always paid by the exploited and, in the long-term, the social in terms of loss of stability and civility. What might really be worrying the liberal elite is not the history of brutal oligarchs and irrational romantics using the state to oppress populations, but the potential of carrying forward and building upon its brief and moderately successful post-war role as an economic regulating authority. Thus it becomes vital for liberal discourse to conceal the probability that in their brief democratic phases, some modern states, combining economic management with legal power and social intervention, achieved the lowest internal violence rates in the history of complex, heavily populated societies (Elias, 1988). However, it must be acknowledged that they were allowed to play this part solely when the business classes saw pacification as a vital condition for the promotion of commodity exchange. When the economic importance of this condition declined, the promotion of public order and civilised culture where it no longer really mattered ceased to be a prudent investment.

This historical perspective, if taken in the long duree as Braudel (1985b) and Elias (1994) advised, suggests that one of the main targets of postmodern liberal critique – expressed by Garland thus: '…. one of the fundamental myths of modern societies …. [is] …. that the sovereign state is capable of providing security, law and order, and crime control

within its territorial boundaries' (1996:448) – is itself a liberal myth, a product of short-term historical analysis which reifies the state by ignoring its controlling interest-group and their stringent economic logic, and assumes that the 'cultural' promotion of allegedly innate human sensibilities against violence is the supreme civilising force (see for instance Bauman, 1988; Arendt, 1976) rather than an historical product of psychosocial processes in which the state's monopolisation of violence plays a crucial part (Elias, 1994,1988; Fletcher, 1997). In direct contradiction of this myth, this analysis suggests that the modern state, in partnership with the required socio-economic interdependencies and super-ego building cultural codes, has been the sole institution capable of delivering law and order, managing violence and maintaining the underlying economic conditions necessary for a general civilising process.

Western governments, spearheaded by America and Britain, have made a significant move away from their traditional economic management, welfare and rehabilitation programmes towards the actuarial targeting of 'risky' populations, private security, mass imprisonment and the retention of the death penalty (Morrison, 1995). If the populist far right achieves sufficient purchase on the remaining political apparatus – which is more likely as the left's flight into administrative and cultural gesture politics allows them to move into the vacuum created in economic class politics (see Zizek, 2000) – some degree of immigrant repatriation looms on the horizon. In the long duree historical view, some progressive form of social democratic state authority – itself monitored by democratically constituted legal institutions – at the regional, national and global levels seems to be the only serious contender with the capacity to halt these tendencies and return to an agenda

of economic regulation, social justice, public security, the defusing of culturo-religious conflict and the reduction of violence – in other words the only feasible civilizing force.

At the centre of current state theory is a debate about future forms of institutional democratic authority, which range across a wide spectrum from world government (Held, 1995; Elias, 1988) to state-monitored devolutionary communal governance (Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Hirst, 2000). Such arguments are beyond the scope of this article (see Holden, 2000 for a digest). However, we suggest strongly that social science in general, and criminology in particular, need to pay more attention to this realm of ideas than to the grim neo-liberal pragmatism of privatised social control discourses or the stratospheric heights of postmodern libertarian fantasies. Neither of these, in the short-term or the long-term, is of any practical use whatsoever to the harassed and insecure inhabitants of sink estates. Security is irreducibly social, and only a public body can offer it (Loader and Walker, 2001), and this means putting cultural analysis back in its rightful place and returning to the old mundane intellectual questions of collective morality, politics, economic management, taxation and law, bearing in mind that '.... democracy can result from, and only from, a nucleus, or cluster, of democratic states and societies' (Held, 1995: 22). The inexorable rise in crime and violence that has accompanied the expansion of the global market is one of the starkest indicators that a network of enlightened social democratic nation-states funded by a global tax-raising authority and monitored by international law is a vital civilizing need.

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