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A tale of two capitalisms

Preliminary spatial and historical comparisons of homicide rates in Western Europe and the USA

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Abstract

This article examines comparative homicide rates in the United States and Western Europe in an era of increasingly globalized neoliberal economics. The main finding of this preliminary analysis is that historical and spatial correlations between distinct forms of political economy and homicide rates are consistent enough to suggest that social democratic regimes are more successful at fostering the socio-cultural conditions necessary for reduced homicide rates. Thus Western Europe and all continents and nations should approach the importation of American neo-liberal economic policies with extreme caution. The article concludes by suggesting that the indirect but crucial causal connection between political economy and homicide rates, prematurely pushed into the background of criminological thought during the ‘cultural turn’, should be returned to the foreground.

Introduction

This article aims to draw attention to correlations between homicide rates and divergent forms of capitalist political economy. However, we must commence by making three points to clarify our basic definitions. Firstly, we are concerned primarily with variations in the *form* of capitalist political economy, that is, formal differences in the regulatory relationships between the State, civil society and the economy and not simply the boom–recession ‘business cycle’ of economic performance or the political colours of parties in office. As we shall see, in the industrialized West the most striking distinction in homicide rates can be found between, on one hand, the American neo-liberal form, and on the other the social democratic and corporatist forms that, although currently under pressure from the global hegemony of neo-liberalism, still characterize Western European nations.

Secondly, we will not concern ourselves with political, state-sponsored or institutionalized killing, which are complex issues with their own specific literature and potential solutions (see Green and Ward, 2004; Ruggiero, 2006). Their inclusion would significantly increase overall homicide rates. For instance, were we to factor in capital punishment and war-deaths, the USA would display a rate of killing far higher than that indicated by official homicide statistics. Something similar would occur if we were to view the rates of killing in 20th-century Europe through the prisms of both World Wars, the Holocaust and capital punishment in the period before its abolition. Adding the further lens of deaths caused by

governmental/ corporate crime and negligence would complicate the matter even further (see Tombs and Slapper , 1999). However, our purpose here is to compare variations in the spatial and temporal patterns of legally defined interpersonal homicide that characterize two specific forms of capitalist economy. Thus we will focus on statistical trends of recorded incidents *within* territories governed by sovereign states.

Thirdly, we are aware of the standard problems one encounters when using official statistics (see Reiner, 2007: 44–75). Speaking of 'homicide' as a uniform concept does indeed represent as a generalized abstraction of what in reality is a concatenation of diverse concrete acts, meanings and motivations (see Ferrell et al., 2004). We are also aware of the tendency of cultural differences to vary the way definitions and recorded incidents of crime are socially constructed in different nations and regions, which makes comparative studies rather difficult. However 'homicide', which combines murder with manslaughter and infanticide, is the concept most useful for making valid cross-cultural comparisons in the impossibly complex noumenal reality of human killing. According to Barclay and Tavares (2000: 3), 'since the definition of homicide is similar in most countries, absolute comparisons of rates are possible'. Murder, of course, is a complex and slippery legal concept. Definitions can range from an act motivated by 'malice aforethought' and intent to kill, an act displaying 'reckless indifference to life' or a killing committed in the course of committing another inherently dangerous crime. Definitions of murder vary according to nations' different cultural norms and penal codes, but because the broader term 'homicide' includes all murders alongside other *malum in se* crimes such as manslaughter and criminal homicide caused by negligence and recklessness, the way it is defined and statistically recorded is similar across all the nations discussed in this study.

This broader concept 'sweeps up' most incidents of criminalized interpersonal killing, including those which in some nations or regions might not have been included in the murder statistics. Whereas complex culturo-legal differences prevent us from making convincing statistical comparisons of murder rates in Western Europe and the USA, comparisons of homicide rates are not perfect but certainly far more useful. Indeed, in the qualitative dimension, many previous studies have suggested that wherever neoliberalism dominates a nation to destabilize the economy and atomize the society, we find a far more aggressive, 'harder' competitive-individualist culture that increases anomie, narcissism, interpersonal hostility and punitiveness (see Hallsworth, 2005; Reiner, 2007; Hall et al., 2008). Therefore, rather than restrict our focus to premeditated murders, it is important to use a broader concept which includes killings that might well be related to the explosion in general crime and the unsupportive and chaotic conditions of existence engendered by neo-liberalism (see Currie, 1997; Dorling, 2004; Reiner, 2007). However, we need to avoid very broad concepts such as 'assault', 'wounding' or 'serious violence', which are so culturally nuanced, diverse and contested as to be unmanageable in a short study such as this. For that purpose, and for the purpose of cross-cultural comparison, 'homicide' is currently the best that is available to us.

Our intention is to comment upon temporal and spatial patterns of homicide rates

in relation to shifting politico-economic forms. Previous statistical analyses demonstrate quite clearly that, in terms of geographical concentration, personal circumstances and individual motivations, a significant majority of homicides are at least in a correlative sense strongly connected to the socio-economic structure. For instance, over the past two decades annual homicide rates in economically impoverished British and US locales have been up to six times the national averages; up to 10 times if age and ethnicity were also to be taken into account (Zimring and Hawkins, 1997; Dorling, 2004). On closer inspection, if we look at a simple breakdown (US Department of Justice, 2005a), without denying the uniqueness of each event it is still quite clear that circumstances and motivations do not seem to be unfathomably diverse. In the USA in 2005, in the category of homicides committed in the course of committing other crimes in known circumstances, economically driven crimes, such as robbery, burglary and so on, outnumbered others, such as sexual crimes and arson, by 1693 to 90, or about 19 to 1. In the other main category of homicides unrelated to other crimes, circumstances usually associated with life in downtown areas, such as escalated arguments, gang killings and drug-related violence, outnumbered other circumstances, such as child and intimate partner homicides, by 4970 to 157, or about 32 to 1. It thus seems quite likely that over 90 per cent of US homicides in known circumstances can be associated in one way or another with economic motivations and/or situations and locales defined principally by their disadvantaged positions in the socio-economic structure.

This relationship between the capitalist economy, crime and punishment has been discussed for quite some time. Most introductory textbooks discuss the familiar statistical surveys carried out in Western Europe in the 19th century. However, it is a little-known criminological fact that the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg (1951 [1913]) conducted a statistical survey of violent crime in Germany. This rather contrived yet enlightening effort to highlight the tendency of capitalism and religion to foster and reproduce aggressive human relationships showed higher rates of violence in 'traditional' regions dominated by right-wing politics and in the throes of disruption by industrial capitalism. The far less revolutionary British historian R.H. Tawney, in his celebrated work *The Acquisitive Society*, warned of the socially deleterious and potentially criminogenic psychocultural effects of the competitive individualism that characterizes the capitalist free market economy, which:

suspends a golden prize, which not all can attain, but for which each may strive, the enchanting vision of infinite expression. It assures men that there are no ends other than their ends, no law other than their desires, no limit other than that which they think advisable. Thus it makes the individual the centre of his own universe, and dissolves moral principles into a choice of expediencies.
(Tawney, 1961 [1921]: 33)

Subsequent well-known works might include those of the Dutch criminologist Willem Bonger (1969 [1916]) in the early 20th century, in the midst of *la belle époque*, the opulent yet unstable 'free-trade' era. He claimed that the fragile capitalist economy and its unequal structure of social relations engendered conditions of egoism and demoralization that were inherently criminogenic. Because he was quite clear about the importance of cultural mediation, his

formulations were certainly less ‘mechanically deterministic’ than the ‘new criminologists’ of the early 1970s suggested (see Reiner, 2007; Hall et al., 2008). Rusche and Kirchheimer (1939) made a similar claim a little later, also emphasizing capitalism’s tendency to develop economically functional punishment systems that discriminated heavily against the working class. During the post-war era Robert Merton (1957) and numerous Mertonian-influenced criminologists (see Downes, 1966; Karstedt and Farrall, 2006; Messner and Rosenfeld, 2007) emphasized the inherent dissonance between capitalism’s heady and seductive cultural aspirations and its structured socio-economic reality of unequal opportunities, which engendered an anomic and therefore criminogenic cultural climate.

The Mertonians stopped short of the sweeping claim that capitalism was inherently criminogenic, arguing instead that unequal opportunities can be remedied by governmental policy. The claim that capitalism per se was simultaneously criminogenic and punitive was often used by more radically inclined criminologists to bolster the argument for accelerating the anticipated revolutionary change to a socialist society (see Greenberg, 1981; Taylor, 1981). However, as ‘actually existing’ socialism in the East collapsed in the 1980s, the socialist Left also suffered heavy political and ideological defeats across the industrialized West (Taylor, 1999). Thus the clamour surrounding this criminogenic relationship died down somewhat, but it was revived in the early 1990s as the homicide and violent crime rates yet again rose alarmingly in the USA (see Figure 1; also Hagan, 1994; Zimring and Hawkins, 1997). In a rigorous attempt to revive social democratic principles, Elliot Currie (1997) suggested that the investigation of violence and the political approach to its reduction would be better served if criminologists shifted attention away from the revolutionary transformation of the Marxian economic base as well as the alternative micro-interventions in interpersonal relations and individual psychology. It would be more useful, he argued, to focus on the problematic yet more politically tractable sociocultural conditions of the ‘mid-range’; increasingly polarized social inequality, the erosion of community and informal networks of control, the fragmentation of family, the withdrawal of welfare support and the competitive individualist culture of Darwinian brutality. All these conditions, he argued, were inevitable features of the lightly regulated neo-liberal variant of the capitalist market economy.

This argument was in many ways similar to that of the British Left Realists. With notable exceptions (see for instance Lea, 2002), they had resigned themselves to the failure of political macro-intervention and suggested their own ‘mid-range’ targets of intervention: the complex relationships between the State, the public, the victim and the offender represented by the well-known ‘square of crime’ (see Young and Matthews, 1992). For both Currie and the Left Realists, capitalism’s competitive individualist culture and exploitative economic relations still constituted the broad aetiological bedrock of violent crime. However, realistically, the targets of intervention should be shifted to the more tractable ‘mid-range’, where political systems of democracy, citizenship and economic regulation combine with cultural systems of morality to mediate and control the capitalist economy’s often anarchic and brutal dynamism. This heavily diluted reformist

approach expects standard liberal-democratic systems of mid-range political intervention to underpin complex configurations of formal and informal micro-management in an effort to reduce violent crime in increasingly unstable economic and social macro-contexts. However, for us this ignores the copious empirical evidence of the success of European economic macro-intervention, which operates at a deeper and more fundamental level to stabilize economy and society and maintain low rates of violence, especially homicide, alongside low rates of imprisonment (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006; Reiner, 2007). To support this argument, we will emphasize what many radical criminologists gave scant attention to; the stark differences in homicide rates to be found in the two distinct 'capitalisms' that continue to dominate the industrialized West: the US free-market model and the Western European social democratic models.

In post-war Western Europe, programmes of mid-range intervention were implemented on the firm bedrock of genuine socio-economic macro-intervention managed by various forms of social democratic state. Although some Anglo-American criminological theorists have now suggested that this approach might be obsolete (see, for instance, Young, 1999,2007), the Western European homicide rate, as we shall see presently, remains significantly lower than that of the USA, a situation maintained alongside far lower imprisonment rates (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006). Thus we will contend that continuing to examine the problem of violence through the lenses of micro and meso approaches ignores the elephant that continues to stand obdurately in the room. In some intellectual quarters it has become increasingly unfashionable to question the legitimacy and the inevitability of the deregulated free-market economic system currently engulfing our planet, and even more unfashionable to support either organized political resistance or deep state regulation. Indeed, as Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) remarked recently, the term 'capitalism', along with its critique, have virtually disappeared from the mainstream social scientific lexicon.

Nevertheless, we will argue that there is a good deal of evidence to support the view still put forward by some criminologists (see Dorling, 2004; Reiner, 2006, 2007) that the essential nature of this American model of capitalism is irredeemably criminogenic and prone to a relatively high homicide rate. This situation contrasts starkly with a *potentially* sustainable decrease in societies that have embraced the assortment of Western European social democratic or 'social market' models that, at least up to now, have been unified by their ability to stabilize their economies and social relations.

Plural capitalism

Neither North America nor Europe has ever exhibited a homogenous form of capitalism; rather it would be more appropriate to talk in the plural of 'capitalisms' (Gray, 2002; Hutton, 2002; Todd, 2004; Cavadino and Dignan, 2006). The political macro-context of our analysis—which relies on the claim that nation-states and their various politico-cultural traditions have the ability to 'customize' market capitalism's basic economic form—will undoubtedly be contested in many quarters. For example, early hyper-globalists such as Ohmae (1990, 1993)

argued that the nation-state will surely die in the relentless process of globalization. However, later sceptics such as Hirst and Thompson (1996) and Gray (2002) argued that the intensity of today's economic transformation pales into insignificance compared to the *belle époque* of pre-1914. During this time, as Karl Polanyi (1944) noted, global trade and labour flows were much greater than those we witness today, yet the nation- state prevailed in spectacular forms. More recently, a number of commentators have converged around the idea that globalization does not necessarily imply a move towards economic, political and cultural homogeneity (see Held and McGrew, 2007). Nations, their anthropological cultures and their state apparatuses differ greatly across the globe in their respective forms of economic organization and methods of political governance, and so far these differences are being quite successfully maintained (Gray 2002:55–6; Cavadino and Dignan, 2006).

The culturo-political traditions contained within the world's nation- states seem to be more diverse and durable than was once thought during the heyday of modernity. It seems possible that unless the current round of regulation mooted at recent conferences in the wake of the global credit- crunch fails and the inherently unstable global capitalist system is driven to meltdown by resource depletion, rising prices and financial failure—in which case we will find ourselves in an unprecedented scenario with potentially grave cultural, political and criminogenic consequences—some of the various historical strands of capitalist politico-economic development might, with the aid of resolute political will, survive and develop throughout the 21st century. These strands include, among others, the 'Washington consensus', 'residual welfare regimes', 'social democracy', 'Catholic corporatism' and, most recently, China's fascinating and rather daunting model of rapid market-driven industrialization governed by a quasi-Leninist state (see Naughton, 2007). Equally, we cannot contend that there is a single 'European' social market model. As Hutton (2002: 326–40) reminds us, there are also many variations of the European capitalist welfare state, ranging from the Rhineland model of Germany, Austria and the Netherlands and the Catholic paternalism found in southern Europe to Nordic social democracy. Added to this mix are the French and British models, with the former placing a heavy onus on state support, while the latter is 'the economy and society regarded as nearest in Europe to the American model' (Hutton, 2002: 337; see also McLean and Patterson, 2006; Patterson and McLean, 2008). On balance, the suspiciously ideological notion that the globalizing free market and its accompanying hegemony will inevitably dissipate the authority and potential for political choice held by the world's nation-states appears to be rather disingenuous.

The politico-cultural organization of capitalist markets across the globe is widely variegated and seems likely to remain so. However, when it comes down to the primary interface between the political, the economic and the social, there seem to be two basic forms of capitalist development in the industrialized West: the neo-liberal 'Washington consensus' variant of the Anglo- Saxon model, and the social democratic model of north-western continental Europe, of which all other European models, even the more conservative Catholic corporatist models of the South, are cultural variants. These contrasting forms of neo-liberal and social democratic capitalist organization have also been referred to as *hyperliberalism*

and *state capitalism* (Cox, 1996: 30–1), and the differences between them are quite fundamental. The latter is characterized by state administered socio-economic management in partnership with capitalist industry, whereas the former is characterized by laissez-faire economics, minimal state intervention, multilateral financial institutions and the resurgence of an oligarchic elite (Harvey, 2005). For thinkers such as Cox (1996: 31), neo-liberalism or hyperliberalism:
in the ideology if not always in the practice of Reaganism and Thatcherism, rejects state intervention to influence the results of market behaviour and views the state only as the enforcer of market rules ... The key words in the currently dominant global ideology are competitiveness, deregulation, privatisation, and restructuring. Restructuring refers to the reorganisation of global production from Fordist economies of scale to post-Fordist economies of flexibility. It means fewer reasonably secure and high-income core workers and a larger proportion of precariously employed lower-income peripheral workers [and] ... that a large part of the world's population exists in deepening poverty, outside the global economy. Privatisation and deregulation refer to the removal of the state from a substantive role in the national or global economy, except as guarantor of free movement for capital and profits. Competitiveness is the justification for dismantling the welfare states built up in the post-World War II period—negating the effort in the more industrialised countries to legitimate capitalism by avoiding a recurrence of the immiseration that occurred during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Cox's claim that the social democratic project was instigated simply to 'legitimize capitalism' is perhaps a little too instrumentalist and lacking in dialectical sophistication, but his description of neo-liberalism and its glaring contrast with social democracy is very clear. Cultural differences aside, in the midst of the competitive pressure exerted by a corporate-driven and increasingly aggressive globalizing economy and the elusiveness of feasible alternatives, European political leaders are now faced with a stark choice between these two models (Amin, 2004). The short-term dynamism of the neo-liberal model was until very recently more attractive to shareholders, financiers and corporate business leaders, and more adept at establishing technologically advanced consumer/service economies that can attract inward investment and temporarily fend off the challenge of the East's burgeoning low-wage manufacturing centres. On the other hand, the traditional social-democratic or 'Rhineland' model of political economy 'is distinguished from the Anglo- Saxon model by its emphasis on corporate structures that encourage consensus among the principal economic actors' (Roberts and Hogwood, 2003: 61). Social democracy's ability to maintain socio-economic stability stands in stark contrast to the destabilizing slash-and-burn capitalism of the Washington consensus, a contrast that, in the wake of the recent financial collapse, is now reviving the ideological challenge to neo-liberalism.

This fundamental dichotomy is reflected in starkly and consistently differentiated homicide rates. These rates actually underwent a sustained decrease across Western Europe from various points in the Early Modern period to the mid-1960s (Eisner, 2001), but as social democracy faltered and neo-liberal political economy, consumer culture and permanent localized recessions took root

(Taylor, 1999; Lea, 2002; Reiner, 2006, 2007), a sustained and uninterrupted rise occurred for the first time in modern history. As we shall see shortly, a similar contemporary pattern can be observed on a far larger scale in the USA as it moved out of the more socially aware and interventionist 'New Deal' and 'Great Society' periods into the anarchic economic dynamism of the globalizing, consumer-driven free-market. There is little doubt that the neo-liberal economy can generate short-term dynamism in terms of profitability. However, in Western Europe, up to now, despite some recent political shifts and incidents of public unrest as relentless pressure is exerted by global markets, neo-liberal ideology and economic instability (see Young, 2007; Žižek, 2008), social cohesion still remains significantly stronger.

Consistent social cohesion is undoubtedly not the case in all regions and locales of the USA. Gray (2002: 217) reminds us that 'the chronic insecurities of late modern capitalism, especially in its most virulent free-market variant, corrode some of the central institutions and values of bourgeois life'. These are precisely the same institutions and values that Currie (1997) recognized as crucial to the maintenance of low rates of violence. Perhaps more importantly, the crucial communal and political institutions of working- class life continue to be corroded, even more abruptly and completely in areas of permanent localized recession (Lasch, 1996; Harvey, 2005). This process is also discernable in parts of neo-liberal Britain (Taylor, 1999; Winlow and Hall, 2006; Hall et al., 2008). At the turn of the millennium, the neo-liberal Washington consensus and its attendant cultural forms, which had already infiltrated Britain, had also gained some popularity across continental Europe, percolating relentlessly through the mainstream political economy and the commercial mass-media into its cultural and institutional nooks and crannies. Diverse cultures and politico-economic models still exist, but economic and ideological pressure is still building up on social democratic nations, threatening to disrupt their fragile infrastructures. This means that crucial political choices of a deeper nature than the recapitalization and light-touch regulation suggested at the recent G20 summit will have to be made at some point in the near future. However, we contend that the varying rates and patterns of homicide that seem to be associated with the two fundamental capitalist models of political economy should be important guiding factors in the decision-making process.

A historical overview of US and Western European homicide rates

If we wish to establish the possibility of a significant connection between political economy and homicide, the main question becomes this: do trends in homicide rates correlate in clearly identifiable relationships with the two principal forms of political economy described above? In historical terms, statistical representations of homicide rates in the USA in the 18th and 19th centuries are unreliable because of poor recording practices in the southern and frontier states and lack of knowledge about cultural variations in reporting trends (Eckberg, 1995; Lane, 1997). However, historiographical and anecdotal evidence suggests that throughout this period some of the minimally governed parts of the USA experienced periods of extreme interpersonal violence (Trachtenberg, 1982;

Slotkin, 1998; van Creveld, 1999). Some commentaries on US homicide trends emphasize the low national rate of about 1.0 per 100,000 at the turn of the 20th century, but in an interesting demographic step analysis, Eckberg (1995) exposed this as a myth.

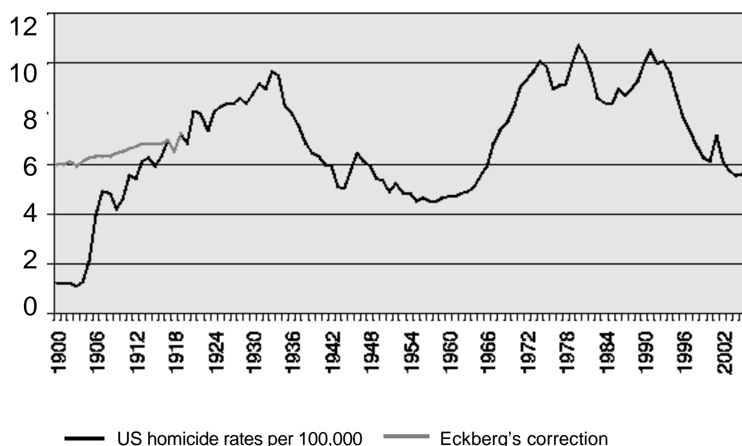

Figure 1 US homicide rates, 1900–2006
Sources: Eckberg (1995); US Department of Justice (2005b).

This supposed low rate was the result of only a few states with relatively low individual homicide rates returning death registration data. Had the remaining states returned their relatively higher rates, he estimates that the national mean average rate in that period would have been nearer 6.0 per 100,000 in 1901. Furthermore, if we superimpose a political picture across this analysis, it becomes quite clear that the states with lower homicide rates in this period were those in the throes of state-sponsored economic development. States such as Massachusetts, Michigan, Connecticut, Maine and New Jersey were characterized by urbanization and manufacturing industries, stable economies and communities, strong labour movements and advanced state administrations. The higher-rate latecomers to the analysis, such as Arkansas, Tennessee, Nevada and Texas, were characterized by precisely the opposite: minimally regulated and socially divisive antebellum capitalism.

If we include Eckberg's correction (see Figure 1) it is still quite clear that rates ascended through the increasingly unstable and socially divisive free- market 1920s to a peak of 9.7 per 100,000 in 1933 during the Great Depression. This contrasts with significant decreases in 1937 and 1938 as the social democratic 'Second New Deal' project stabilized the economy and its working communities. However, Eckberg's correction also demonstrates quite clearly that the social democratic era was not a poor statist substitute for a lost cultural 'golden age' at the turn of the century. Rather, it seems to be a significant improvement during which the USA experienced what might well be its historically lowest annual homicide rates. Rates in the revived social democratic project in the early 1960s

were also lower than those of the more traditional society at the turn of the 20th century. In fact, by 1958, when consensus government and Keynesian economics existed alongside a stable Fordist economy in the post-war reconstruction era, the rate had been reduced to 4.6. It remained low and roughly

Figure 2 US homicide and imprisonment rates, 1900–2006 *Sources:* US Department of Justice (2005b, 2005c).

constant throughout the 1950s, and did not climb above 5.0 until 1960, before falling back to under 5.0 the following year.

It hovered around this mark until 1965, when it reached 5.1 per 100,000, and then rose steadily thereafter, with alarming spikes in 1980 and 1991, before beginning a decline in the late 199 0s. However, this decline correlated with an intense period of mass incarceration and increased surveillance of ‘problem populations’ (Cavadino and Dignan, 2006). During the 1990s the Clinton administration was determined to lower the homicide rate, and ‘[b]etween 1995 and 2001, the increasing number of violent offenders accounted for 63% of the total growth of the State prison population’ (US Department of Justice, 2005c). There does seem to be some truth in the notion that the increased incapacitation of violent offenders, heavy-handed ‘zero tolerance policing’ and the expansion of surveillance, supervision and risk-management strategies by criminal justice agencies correlate with a significant reduction of the US homicide rate (see Figure 2). This can be asserted without denying the accompanying truth that a huge number of minor offenders are imprisoned unnecessarily in an overly punitive ‘culture of control’ (Garland, 2001; Cavadino and Dignan, 2006). However, the undeniable role played by the incarceration of violent offenders does nothing to convince onlookers that the reduction in the homicide rate had anything to do with bogus, credit-based Clintonite ‘prosperity’ or improvements in social justice, social cohesion and interpersonal relationships in the USA’s troubled locales (Hall, 2002). Figure 2 also demonstrates quite clearly that the politics of the social democratic era, which stretched from the mid-1930s to the

late 1960s, were capable of maintaining a reduced homicide rate alongside a low imprisonment rate.

Until the late 1960s, when the homicide rate entered a steep climb, American social life was still administered by a residual welfare system initiated by the New Deal, which, although officially created by Roosevelt in 1933 to drag the USA out of the Great Depression, was also in part a response to pressure exerted by vocal working-class political movements from a strong bargaining position (Zinn, 1980). The New Deal programmes ended officially in 1943, but, although the resulting welfare system was limited in comparison to those of Western Europe, in the post-war years it still continued to provide a minimal social safety net for disadvantaged Americans. Post-war reconstruction also generated a boom in manufacturing; working- class communities that had suffered during the Depression era were rejuvenated, and new ones were created. From 1963 to 1969, Kennedy's 'New Frontier' and Johnson's 'Great Society' programmes focused on education, health, community development and transportation rather than deep economic regulation and the further expansion of welfare and job creation, but, nevertheless, they retained at least to some extent basic social democratic principles at the heart of American politics. For the first time in the USA's history, most communities across its industrial conurbations and rural heartlands experienced a heightened degree of stability. A population that had for four-and-a-half centuries been constantly on the move, seeking opportunities to acquire property and increase personal wealth in a difficult and often hostile environment, settled down to a set of socio-economic interdependencies that—despite huge tensions and gaps in equality across the axes of class, race and gender—were relatively stable. This stability provided a helpful platform for hope, political organization and the subsequent emancipatory leaps forward in the civil rights of Afro-Americans, women and gays in the 1960s and 1970s. Long chains of socio-economic interdependencies were stabilized. This is probably the most crucial factor in the 'civilizing process' that Norbert Elias (1994 [1939]) placed at the centre of violence reduction in western history. Yet, it is the one that is systematically ignored by some of the less theoretically sophisticated commentators on historical patterns of murder rates, who prefer to focus on the other two factors, the State's monopolization of violence and shifting cultural/behavioural codes (see for instance Spierenburg, 2008), which allows for a rather unthinking celebration of modernity and liberal individualism while avoiding the requirement for more sophisticated analyses that seek to integrate culture and statecraft with political economy and social relations. However, the tight correlation between stable *economic* functions and the ability of political and cultural institutions to help to maintain social interdependencies, as we can see quite clearly here, adds weight to the criticism that Elias's rather over-simplified and apolitical thesis tended to neglect political economy as the crucial platform for stabilizing society and reducing interpersonal hostility (Fletcher, 1997; Hall and Winlow, 2003; Hall, 2007).

The late 1960s was an era of heightened racial tensions and cultural change. Yet it would be folly to blame the beginning of a long-term increase in the homicide rate on purely racial factors, or indeed the moral 'permissiveness' that flourished during this period, or even the legitimation crisis of a state that had thrust the

USA into an un-winnable war in Vietnam. Political upheaval, racial tensions, institutional racism, hedonism and sexual liberation also characterized Western Europe at the same time, yet homicide rates remained low (see Figure 2). The most profound difference is, however, quite banal and obvious. In the period that began in the late 1960s, alongside the rising expectations of prosperity and personal freedom promoted by consumer culture and the so-called 'cultural revolution'—which some now regard as a bogus product of the marketing industry (see Hall et al., 2008, for a discussion)—the dark clouds of a gathering economic crisis based on overproduction, global competition and rising oil prices loomed on the horizon of the industrialized West. In the ensuing storm European nations tried very hard to stabilize their manufacturing bases, retain their social democratic models and support their working communities. However, in a process that began tentatively under Nixon and slipped into top gear during the 'Reaganomics' regime, the USA followed more immediately and more closely the economic dictates of neo-liberalism. Deregulated markets, industrial rationalization and closure, a systematic assault on working-class political organization and tax-breaks for the wealthy were all overseen by a minimal- punitive state that decreased welfare as it increased punishment and surveillance. In the 198 0s the nation underwent a transformation that tore asunder the regime of quasi-welfare and economic management that had been instigated during its brief social democratic era.

We must understand here that US economic regulation differed to that of Western Europe. The former was essentially a moderately enhanced welfare programme loosely bolted on to a free-market economy with a minimal degree of Keynesian demand management. The latter, however, was an integrated system based upon cradle-to-grave welfare provision in conjunction with deep economic regulation and nationalization of many major industries and services. Commitment to the social democratic model was always weaker in the USA, where entrenched sentiments of anti-statism reside on both ends of its political spectrum. This made it much easier for the Reagan government to usher in a purist revival of traditional American economic liberalism. The traditional 'bourgeois state' could indulge in punishment, surveillance and militarism on behalf of the business elite while the positive role that it is capable of playing in the everyday socio-economic lives of its citizens was severely restricted (Hall and Winlow, 2003). Legitimized by public fear of the *actuality* of rising crime and violence—exaggerated, of course, by the mass media—US incarceration underwent a sharp rise during the increasingly unstable years of the Reagan Presidency, a rise that has been sustained throughout the neo-liberal project to the present day (see Figure 2).

If one believes the core neo-liberal tenet that unfettered free-market capitalism invariably increases the prosperity, liberty and happiness of all individuals, then one could be forgiven for thinking that a rising level of wealth and opportunities to earn money automatically equates with a reduction in violent crime. If anything, however, the reverse was true. From 1971 to 1995, the homicide rate in the USA consistently topped 8.0 per 100,000 (US Department of Justice, 2005b). It spiked up alarmingly in specific geographical locales of permanent recession in the 1980s and early 1990s, where it regularly topped 40 per 100,000, occasionally reaching the astonishing heights of over 100 per 100,000 for young black males

(Zimring and Hawkins, 1997), many of whom throughout US history have been consistently discriminated against, consigned to the bottom end of the labour market and restricted to marginal economic activity (Wilson, 1996). Prosperity and the market's narrow form of 'efficiency' (see Messner and Rosenfeld, 2007), therefore, did not correlate with a general reduction in the homicide rate or the crime rate in general (Hagan, 1994). Rather, in a nation where the distribution of wealth was the most polarized in the industrialized West, it correlated tightly with significant increases across the nation and notably greater increases in specific geographical locales. A remarkable, virtually unprecedented criminological phenomenon occurred during the unstable era of Reaganomics; a rash of workplace and school revenge shootings, which, virtually unknown before 1980, burgeoned from that date onwards to reach a peak in the early 2000s. The immense pressure placed on workers and school students in the downsizing, hyper-rationalized and insecure economy was creating unprecedented levels of interpersonal hatred and hostility, manifested in numerous acts of violent revenge among those humiliated by ultra-competitive and oppressive associates in work and educational institutions (see Ames, 2007).

This contrasts quite sharply with the European experience. Until very recently, Europe had experienced a long-term relationship of inverse proportionality between its homicide rates and the development of various inclusionist socio-economic models. As Eisner (2001: 618) reminds us, 'homicide rates have declined in Europe over several centuries'. In the five Western European regions of the British Isles, the Netherlands/Belgium, Scandinavia, Germany/Switzerland and Italy, where recording practices in earlier centuries were advanced compared to the USA, rates began to decline in the early 17th century, continuing on a downward trajectory to the mid- 1960s (see Figure 3). In some nations, such as England and Wales, the beginning of this decline can be traced back to the late 14th century (Gurr, 1981). The inclusionist ethos that developed during this long era—even though its underlying economic purposes were instrumental (Hall, 2007)—consolidated itself during the industrial revolution, developing through customary philanthropy, charity and 'poor law' practices to undergo a sweeping centralization process at the beginning of the 20th century (Garland, 1985). After the Second World War, it flourished across the whole continent in an unprecedented redistributive and interventionist form. Even though the British welfare state in its earlier 19th-century institutionalized guise of the Workhouse and the Asylum was brutal to say the least (Melossi and Pavarini, 1981), after the Gladstone Report in 1895 it did tentatively begin to reform and humanize its practices to offer citizens at least some degree of social protection against the insecurity of the labour market.

However, the British welfare state was never entirely dependent on this sort of institutionalization. With the introduction of the decarceration movement and provisions such as national insurance and pension schemes— initiated by early 20th-century liberals and bolstered further by democratic socialist politics after the Second World War—it moved towards a form of increasingly de-institutionalized universal welfare. Admittedly this was haphazard at first, and by no means did it measure up to the egalitarian ideals of British socialists. Nevertheless, by 1948 it had been formalized as a relatively successful stabilizing mechanism by a Labour

government that had gained the respect of the working population by enhancing social justice as it led the nation out of the ravages of the Depression and the Second World War. Tax-funded education, health services and a universal state pension, operating on the crucial *stable bedrock* of a politically managed mixed economy wherein most major industries and utilities had been nationalized, formed the basis of the social consensus from that date until 1979. With national variations, this pattern was mirrored in continental Europe with the rise of systems such as Rhineland capitalism in post-1945 Germany and the continuation of the Scandinavian welfare state. In the 1950s and early 1960s Western European homicide rates were the lowest ever recorded (Eisner, 2001; Reiner, 2007).

But then something went wrong. Taking into account national and regional variations of the time-scale, homicide rates had fallen consistently in Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium, Scandinavia, Germany and Switzerland, and Italy between the 14th century and various points in the late 1960s. From that point onwards they actually increased (Eisner, 2001: 629; see Figure 3). Why? Immigration and 'cultural permissiveness' had been common features of many of these nations since the mid-1950s, and capital punishment had been abolished at various points on a time-scale that stretched from 1857 (Portugal) to 2004 (Greece), so as direct causes these standard reactionary explanations hold little water. However, common themes that affected all five regions from the late 1960s were impending economic crises, entry into a competitive, globalizing market, attenuation and destabilization of manufacturing bases, the increasing popularity of neo-liberal ideology and politics among the political and business elites, rising unemployment, social polarization and the intensification of hyper-individualized consumer culture at the expense of traditional working-class identities (Lea, 2002; Hall and Winlow, 2005; Hallsworth, 2005; Reiner, 2007; Hall et al., 2008). OPEC's quadrupling of oil prices in 1973 and the rise of competitive manufacturing in other parts of the world created profitability problems and economic instability in the West. This signalled the decline of the post-war Keynesian consensus, which was founded on the basic principle of the gradually democratizing state rejecting its traditional punitive 'nightwatchman' role to become the interventionist macro-manager of both economic dynamism and social stability. As these problems intensified in the 1970s recessions occurred across the western world and unemployment rose alongside inflation. In the late 1970s, in what was regarded as a major crisis of the capitalist economy—a potential 'epic recession'—the ascendancy of neo-liberal ideas finally consigned Keynesian economics to the grave. For the majority, who equated progress and human happiness with profitability, prosperity and economic growth, the legitimacy of social democratic governance was severely damaged.

Echoing the rise of 'free-market' ideology in the USA, the Thatcher Government embarked upon a grand project of introducing slash and burn neo-liberal economics into Britain. Rendered uncompetitive in a global market economy where low-wage nations were increasing their manufacturing outputs, many of the industrial plants upon which traditional working class communities relied were closed down, creating localized vortices of permanent recession and high

unemployment in which the presence of criminal markets grew quite alarmingly (Taylor, 1999; Lea, 2002; Dorling, 2004). This was a period of ideological crisis in which many individuals lost faith in the post-war social-democratic political class, their own class-based communal identities and the State's ability to represent their interests. Many among the political elite, succumbing to the doctrines that collectivism has unavoidable totalitarian tendencies and the market economy is better when left to self-regulate, withdrew their support for the political intervention and rights-based welfare that had become traditions in the post-war era. There was a subsequent shift to a mixture of residual welfare, punishment and micro-management of 'risk'. Long chains of socio-economic interdependencies—so vital to the maintenance of convivial relations because they constitute the structure and dynamic interactions of everyday life in which individuals learn to value and respect one another and the underlying platform for real democratic politics *outside of the State*, whose wishes it is the State's duty to represent and implement (see Badiou, 2006; Rancière, 2007)—began to disintegrate (Hall and Winlow, 2003). The era of social consensus politics was well and truly over as the atomized individual was forced to take responsibility for his or her own fate as an economic actor in competition with all others. Profound shifts in cultural life followed and the intensification of Currie's (1997) Darwinian competitiveness (which could probably be more precisely termed Spencerian) correlated tightly with increasing violence and criminality (Reiner, 2007) and a general climate of augmented anxiety, aggression and punitiveness (Garland, 2001; Cavadino and Dignan, 2006). Barring the remarkable coincidence of a number of disparate aetiological factors, all this seemed to be a *direct result* of the shift from one capitalist model to another (Reiner, 2007).

In the 1980s, Britain also experienced numerous riots, strikes and political protests alongside rises in crime and violence. In the late 1970s US and British neo-liberals harboured the tacit expectation that increases in crime, violence and social unrest—expressed openly and rather guilelessly in J.Q. Wilson's (1975) dour classical liberal revivalist tome *Thinking about Crime*—would inevitably follow an economic transformation of such profundity, and that they could be regulated by modified practices of classical criminal justice; increased deterrence, prevention and risk-management administered by re-empowered agencies of law, policing and punishment. This 'tough' approach combined uneasily with a residual, rationalized welfare state. It challenged the sensibilities that some proudly liberal individuals had cultivated over two centuries of life in what they perceived to be a progressively more pacified and humane cultural environment (although this was of course neither a uniform reality nor a dominant bourgeois ideal—see Kearon, 2005). Neo-liberal thinking encountered resistance from the liberal-left as it filtered into Anglo-American criminology and criminal justice policy to demand increases in the certainty and, if need be, the severity of punishment (see Wilson, 1975). Indeed, some neo-liberal supporters, perhaps tacitly mindful of the residual conservative element of their intellectual tradition, which stressed the positive relationship between social cohesion and civility (see Lasch, 1996), sensed the potential dangers of allowing stable interdependencies to fall apart. For instance, even the quintessential neo-liberal apologist Francis Fukuyama (2000), in an effort to recover the credibility he lost when he prematurely announced the 'end of history', eventually admitted that reducing the

interventionist power of the welfare state to throw the individual into the crucible of atomized competitive individualism—which, of course, fans the flames of anxiety, narcissism, acquisitive desire and anomie (Hallsworth, 2005; Messner and Rosenfeld, 2007; Reiner, 2007; Hall et al., 2008)—might cause some temporarily disruptive problems. Even so, he argued that forms of 'social capital' that were independent from political economy could be revived to replace social democratic politics and revive social cohesion and civilized relations in the midst of this disruption. Thus he effectively denied any sense of inevitability or direct causality in the relationship between rising aggression and the move to deregulated capitalism; admitting that, of course, for a highly fêted and remunerated establishment mouthpiece, would have been going too far. This perennial hope that things can be improved without any deep politico- economic intervention had been echoed in suitably different terms by thinkers on the US liberal-left, the 'alternative establishment', where Rawls (1971) continued to argue that markets were inherently compatible with freedom and justice and Rorty (1980) suggested in rather vague terms that 'ethical' and 'sentimental' checks and balances might promote improved social relations in the heat of the economic inferno.

Neo-liberal doctrine was less popular in Western Europe, but this is not to say that European states remained unsullied by developments in the Anglo- Saxon world. As the sale of former state-run enterprises by the *Treuhandstalt* in the former GDR demonstrates, privatization did gain some degree of acceptance, although this was far from universal. Hence, the common denominator in Western European politics since the mid-1970s has been the variegated and cautious importation of neo-liberal economic practices to counteract the possibility of deep recession. At the same time, however, there was a concomitant increase in homicide rates (Eisner, 2001), as well as increases in property crime and the advance of criminal markets in commodities such as drugs, prostitution, stolen goods and contraband, which tends to increase internal violence and homicide rates among the increasing numbers of individuals involved in economic crimes (see Woodiwiss, 2005). Therefore, the recent infiltration of what appear to be socially toxic neo-liberal practices, although limited, still seems to have played a part in precipitating slight rises in homicide rates, which we will now examine in more detail.

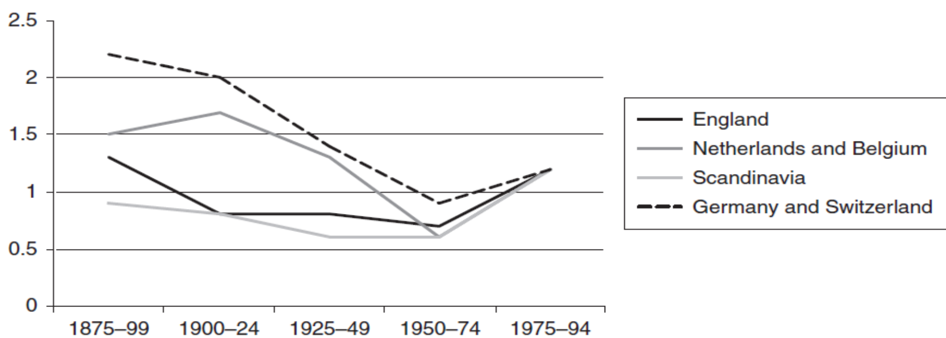

Figure 3 European homicide rates per 100,000 of the population: 1875–1994 (by interval)
Source: Eisner (2001: 629).

Comparisons of recent Western European homicide rates

Today, the British, Swedish and Finnish homicide rates are higher now than they have been since the first half of the 18th century; Denmark's and Switzerland's are higher than at any time since 1850–74; and Belgium's is higher than in any period dating back to 1900–24. What should not be forgotten here, however, is that even though homicide rates in Western Europe have tended to rise, *they are still on average less than half of those found in the United States* and the rises are on a correspondingly smaller scale. This suggests that the stabilizing effects of the residual social democratic model are still in evidence, minimizing increases and in many cases maintaining national rates below 1.5 per 100,000 (see Figure 3).

In the early years of the 21st century Western European rates of criminal violence (i.e. violence against the person, robbery and sexual offences) also remained low, an average of just over 40 per 100,000 recorded by the police in 2001. Across the Atlantic, the rate stood at 8.6 in Canada, but in the USA it was a notable 310 per 100,000 of the population (United Nations, 2005: 36–7). However, as we noted earlier, non-lethal violence is a contested category susceptible to variations in culturo-legal definitions, sensibilities, reporting, recording and litigation. Therefore it is rather unreliable in a cross-cultural context. However, having said that, it would be stretching the imagination to suggest that such a vast statistical difference does not represent anything less than a significant difference in reality. If we return to the far more statistically reliable homicide rate (see Figure 3), it has since the late 1960s followed a similar trend to that of the USA, but on a smaller scale. This was especially true before the EU was widened to incorporate 12 new Member States. For example, between the years 1999 to 2001, the EU average homicide rate was 1.59 per 100,000 compared to 5.56 in the USA (Barclay et al., 2003: 10). Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden all stood below the average EU level,

whereas England and Wales,

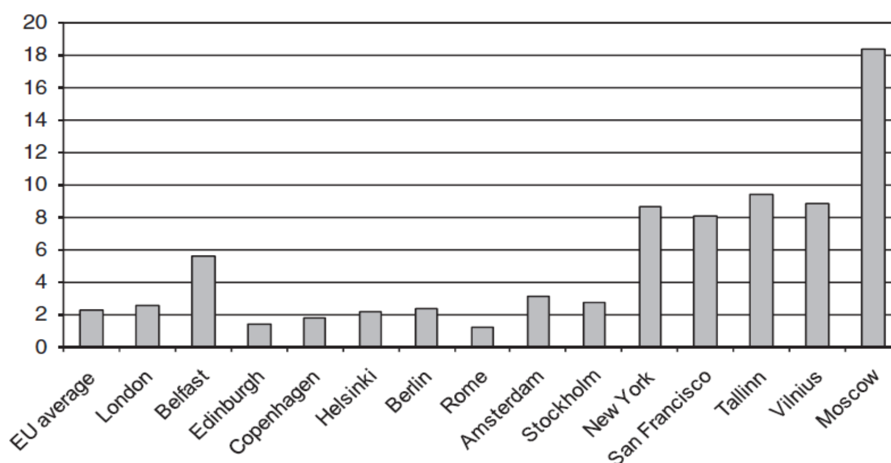

Figure 4 Average homicide rate in cities per 100,000 of the population between 1999–200 1
Source: Barclay et al. (2003: 11).

Northern Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, Finland and France were above average (Barclay et al., 2003: 10), yet still nowhere near US levels.
The only countries in Europe that displayed homicide rates similar to or higher than the USA were Estonia (10.61), Latvia (6.47), Lithuania (10.62) and Russia (22.05) (Barclay et al., 2003: 10). However, at that time these four countries were administered by fledgling post-communist states struggling to overcome the Soviet legacy and adapt to an extremely abrupt transition to a free-market economy. This transition, although portrayed by western neo-liberal ideologues as necessary and unavoidable ‘shock therapy’, turned out to be, as Gerber and Hout (1998) pithily observed, ‘more shock than therapy’. During this time the State failed in all of these nations, and welfare rights and tenured employment that had been instigated during the Soviet era were either drastically curtailed or removed altogether. This created a climate of economic instability, social disruption, intense competitive individualism and increased anxiety, which correlated with the emergence of ‘gangsterized’ criminal markets in many economic sectors and rising rates of violent crime and homicide (see Volkov, 1999).

National homicide rates are of course rather crude indicators, and rates vary widely from city to city and locale to locale (Hagedorn and Rauch, 2004). However, if we narrow our analysis for a moment and focus on homicides recorded in cities by the police, the contrast between the EU and the USA does not diminish but becomes even more apparent. In major EU cities between 1999 and 2001, there was an average of 2.28 completed homicides per 100,000 of the

population. Compared to these Western European cities, rates are much higher in equivalent cities in the USA; for example, New York 8.65, San Francisco 8.10 (see Figure 4)[1] and in Washington, DC an extraordinary off-the-scale 42.87. Figures were slightly higher in Tallinn and Vilnius (9.40 and 8.90 respectively), but a significantly higher 18.38 in Moscow. Thus rates in Western European cities are much closer to their national averages, and the region does not seem to suffer from the serious urban homicide problem that characterizes the USA and is now beginning to appear in some British urban locales (Dorling, 2004).
Again, this reinforces the point that where the social democratic state is minimal—either by conscious design and force of belief as in the USA, or as a result of the ensuing chaos and neo-liberal ideological interference found in post-communist states—homicide rates will tend to be higher than those in social democratic nations with relatively stable economies and social relations, active welfare regimes and the types of cultural values and norms that have constituted and reproduced themselves in climates characterized by social cohesion and economic stability. However, compared to this very tight correlation between politico-economic forms and homicide rates, culture, as an autonomous or even relatively autonomous force, seems to be a relatively weaker explanation for homicide. If factors based on broader cultural differences are paramount, how is it that Japan, for instance—noted for a uniquely cohesive cultural life that contrasts starkly with the West—is now experiencing rises in hitherto very low crime and homicide rates *precisely* at the same time as it is being pressured by global economic forces into adopting neo-liberal economic policies and consumerist cultural practices? On the other hand, why did the USA—with a cultural history of violence, racial tension, competitive individualism and far less social cohesion—experience significant decreases in its hitherto relatively high homicide rate during the era of social democratic regulation? Furthermore, research on the currently hot cultural issue of firearm use suggests that there is no consistent connection between levels of gun ownership and homicide. The upshot of the statistical picture seems to be that firearm homicide rates are high in countries with high levels of gun ownership, high levels of general violence, unstable free-market economies and minimal-punitive states, such as Russia, Colombia and the USA, but low in countries with stable economies and regulatory social democratic states whether they have high levels of gun ownership, such as Canada, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland, or low levels, such as Britain and the Netherlands (see Squires, 2000; United Nations, 2005). The same can be said about the culture of 'masculine honour'; how is it that homicide rates are high in some southern states of the USA, where this cultural form is prevalent, yet low in Italy and Germany, where it is also prevalent? Cultural factors are of course vitally important (see Ferrell et al., 2004; Young, 2007), but it is perhaps unwise to use configurations of these factors as a means of obscuring political economy and pushing it into the background.

Conclusion

One brief article cannot definitively prove a broad hypothesis about a complex phenomenon such as this. Further research is needed to examine whether our contention that *minimally regulated forms of neo-liberal capitalism invariably*

generate the basic socio-cultural conditions that tend to increase homicide rates holds water. However, this preliminary examination does demonstrate that homicide rates fell continuously in Western Europe from various points in the Early Modern period until the late 1960s, reaching their lowest points during the relatively stable post-war social democratic era. It is quite possible that this was accompanied by similar decreases in rates of serious non-lethal violence, although the latter proposition needs a great deal of further research on issues such as cultural sensibilities, definitions, penal codes and recording practices to demonstrate whether correlations across time and space are sufficiently consistent to suggest an aetiological relationship. As the post-war social democratic consensus began to unravel, to be replaced by a neo-liberal macroeconomic policy and a hyper-individualist consumer culture, homicide rates began to rise slowly. Yet, nowhere in Western Europe are the homicide rates as high as those of the USA. Here, despite the highest incarceration rate in the industrialized West and a general expansion of the overall web of surveillance, risk management and social control (see Cavadino and Dignan, 2006), it returned to the obdurately higher national rate—with spectacularly higher rates in locales characterized by permanent recession, deep social divisions and criminal markets—that was the norm before its brief flirtation with a diluted form of social democracy (see Figure 2).

A criminological re-investigation of the direct and durable generative effects of the prevailing *politico-economic form*—rather than an exclusive focus on the cultural, moral and regulatory processes that mediate, manage or 'resist' these effects—is long overdue. A research agenda aimed at establishing this aetiological relationship, while avoiding crude mechanistic claims of causality, would first have to explore further the complexities of its empirical base by focusing on regional and local breakdowns of homicide rates and variations in governance across territories within nation- states. Differences in penal codes and police and court recording practices are also important, and if the analysis is to be extended to serious nonlethal violence, variations in conviction and sentencing practices, cultural sensibilities, language and litigious tendencies would also require close examination. Historical patterns would need to be compared carefully with spatial variations, and of course the analysis would have to be extended to all regions of the developing world where neo-liberalism is currently interfacing with various cultural and political traditions. The rise of transnational crime and gangsterism in a global neo-liberal economy is also a crucial factor. This is a huge amount of work that would require international collaboration, but despite the enormity of the task ahead, and the probability that work would be hampered by politically inspired cut'n'paste criticisms of 'economic reductionism', 'essentialism' and so on, the currently available data still suggest that there are indeed complex causal relationships between the economic and socio-cultural conditions laid down by neo-liberalism and relatively high rates of homicide.

We emphasize yet again the term politico-economic *form*, an everyday economic way of life with distinct political governance, social relations and cultural practices, not simply economic *performance*. Variations in performance also correlate with variations in rates of crime, violence and homicide; in late 2008 a

leaked draft letter from the British Home Office admitted the inevitability of rising rates in the midst of the current 'market correction', a revelation that was a little later described by Home Office minister Tony McNulty as 'a statement of the blindingly obvious' (BBC, 2008a). However, we contend that, despite the recession, rising rates of crime and violence would be neither 'inevitable' nor 'obvious' if a regulatory, stabilizing form of political economy that acted as an incubatory platform for new forms of social solidarity and cultural enrichment that could cope with the disembedding, disengaging and divisive effects of 'liquid modernity' (see Bauman, 2000) were to replace neo-liberalism, the quintessential politico-economic generator of social division, anomie, narcissism and brutalizing competitive individualism (Currie, 1997; Reiner, 2007; Hall et al., 2008). If this preliminary hypothesis could be corroborated by further research, it might contribute usefully to the broader intellectual challenge that must be made to the current European acolytes of neo-liberal politico-economic policy. If Europe moves closer to the Washington consensus model, will it—despite its contrasting cultural and political traditions— see its homicide rates continue to climb, accompanied by a US-style rise in incarceration that in some nations is already underway (see Walmsley, 2005; Cavadino and Dignan, 2006)? Conversely, if the Washington consensus model is firmly rejected worldwide and the European model consolidates itself as part of a pluricentric and culturally sensitive global network of social democratic states—not as an end in itself, but as a platform for economic stability and more substantial progressive social change in the future—will it lay the foundations for more egalitarian and culturally enriched societies in which homicide and all other forms of serious interpersonal violence are less prevalent?

In an era where the Washington consensus still dominates global economic practice despite the current crisis, and the economic pressure exerted by developing industrial-capitalist economies such as China and India continues to increase, the EU appears to be in eclipse. On the other hand, recent events have shown that the foundations of the current economic system might be more fragile than had hitherto been imagined. Caused by an enormous asset price boom in the American housing market, and unbridled speculation in the world's financial markets, the credit crunch has led to falling stock markets, failing banks and increasing unemployment. Coupled with historically low interest rates, a frozen interbank market and rising commodity prices, the spectre of 'stagflation' across the globe suggests that in reality neo-liberalism is the system in deep trouble, sustained only by institutionalized power and hegemony. Indeed, very recently, Michele Barnier, agricultural minister in the allegedly 'right-wing' Sarkozy government in France, remarked that vital needs such as food should not be left to the 'rule of the market and international speculation' (BBC, 2008b). Even Gordon Brown, arch-apologist for 'light-touch' regulation, conceded at the G20 Summit on 2 April 2009 that the global economy faced difficulties, when he euphemistically stated that 'the old Washington consensus is over' (Sky, 2009). Nevertheless, Brown's attempts to re-inflate the economy by the process of 'quantitative easing' have agitated many policymakers in Europe. The cut in VAT and the increase in national debt have been described by Peer Steinbruck, Germany's finance minister, as 'crass and breathtaking' (BBC, 2008c). For the French and Germans in particular, the Anglo-Saxon model of minimally regulated

capitalism needs to be redesigned with some urgency. Perhaps a growing realization that the neo-liberal system is heading for the rocks might build upon the recent rejections of the EU's transparently neo-liberal draft constitution, which indicate that the popular will to retain the ideal of 'social Europe' and forge a more stable, egalitarian future based on updated variants of its core post-war values has not been entirely vanquished. Variations in both crime and homicide rates could play a vital part in the presentation of that argument.

Note

1. The US figures *do not include* those killed by the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

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