Deadly symbiosis:
How school exclusions and youth crime interweave

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Practical background. Taking the cohort of Bristol's young people involved in the criminal justice system (approximately 300), I aim to cross-reference these individuals with those registered as 'looked after' to assess the degree of correlation between the two. Also, by gathering information on the levels of secondary school exclusion within this cohort, we can establish whether this phenomenon is sufficiently statistically significant to form part of the 'explanation' for committing crime. Many young people excluded from school end up receiving education 'other than at school' creating desocialisation due to their separation from mainstream provision.

The graphs produced should be symptomatic of the scale of the issues around young peoples' exclusion and offending behaviour in UK cities generally, as Bristol is in may ways a 'typical' UK provincial city: so the patterns should be nationally applicable, with policy implications about how educational entitlement is regulated, and authorities *in loco parentis* should do more for the children in their care. This phenomenon is generally understood at a 'common sense' level by many professionals working with disadvantaged young people – but not counteracted by regulatory strategies within the relevant social care, criminal justice and educational institutions.

Research background. This project compiles evidence of the mentalities and behaviour generated by 'anti-social' or 'marginalising' (Wacquant 2008) effects, gathered from youth involved in the juvenile justice system, through interviews to capture life histories and significant episodes that illustrate the phenomena, and quantitative data collected to measure the key factors determining inclusion in this 'decivilising process' (Elias 2000) that forms the 'life-world' or habitus – a product of long-term interdependency generating modes of behaviour and self-control amongst social figurations over time – has been applied to the anomie of the US 'hyperghetto' and European 'neighbourhoods of relegation' by Loic Wacquant (2004).

Aims. By demonstrating the 'triangulation' effect of the three social factors – youth offending, young people 'looked after' by the state and exclusion/absence from secondary schooling; we hope to outline both the scale of the problem for this alienated minority, and how the lack of positive socialisation through education has disempowered them from overcoming advancing marginalisation. The rising level of recidivism is testament to the way in which neoliberal economic models and policies have institutionalised inequality in the outcomes of young people. This can allow new cultural forms to emerge outside the rigidities of the previous system of industrial structuration, which challenge assimilation and pose new problems of integration for society as a whole.

By re-introducing a degree of educational regulation, it is possible that some of more unpredictable and anti-social outcomes of this decivilising process could be overcome.

Main contribution. The thirteen years of social democratic government which has recently ended in the UK included a theoretically sophisticated programme of social policy designed to address the problem of widening social exclusion in Britain's most deprived areas. One aspect of this was the formation of 'multi-agency partnerships', which would allow public sector workers to collaborate in resolving issues of deprivation which are so often interlinked. The author works part-time for the Youth Offending Team in Bristol, an institution formed in the early 2000s to address juvenile delinquency, which combines social workers, police officers, teachers and other support workers in a 'joined-up' team.

This 'jobs gap in Britain's cities' (Turok 1999) has been complimented by an extensive educational re-organisation, which has left a 'schools gap' in the poorer localities of cities. At the same time the area education authorities have lost the legal power to regulate and ensure a comprehensive education for all, which has resulted in this minority being either 'excluded' from, or 'choosing' not to attend, secondary school. The fact that this is now effecting a second generation of young people, many of whom whose parents were the victims of the 'first generation' of mass UK unemployment in the 1980s, exacerbates the negative role models and habitus of today's marginalised youth. Britain's level of youth incarceration continue to rise alongside growth in the prison population as a whole, the highest in Europe outside Turkey.

Implications. The implication is that this long-term institutionalisation of inferiority is breeding what Elias called a 'decivilising spurt', where codes of violence play a greater role in everyday living. This leads to the principal research question: What are the implications of this growth of anti-social conditions for today's 'urban outcasts'. Will this minority who are becoming 'reluctant gangsters' (Pitts 2008), grow in proportion as 'advanced marginality' leads to 'a world of gangs' (Hagedorn 2008). Can their subculture be positively integrated through their guaranteed inclusion in the school system?

By concentrating professional's time and resources at the young people whose offending behaviour puts them at risk of custody it was hoped to marginalise the social problems that often give rise to social exclusion or what Loic Wacquant (2008) has termed 'advanced marginality'. This would allow those at risk of offending behaviour to rejoin the mainstream of society through employment and further education, thus undermining their attachment to delinquency as a form of socialization and informal employment opportunity.

Introduction: From 'Learning to Labour' to social exclusion

In order to understand how the transition from school to work can be interrupted in this fashion, derailing young people from more functional career paths, it is necessary to analyse the historical context whereby the relatively 'secure' transitions of the post-war era have been transformed through the last three decades of neoliberal economics. At the end of the 'trente glorieuse' – the thirty glorious years of the welfare state expansion which had been characterized by rising working class living standards and expectations, Paul Willis had chronicled how this process worked in secondary schools in his influential text 'Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs' (1977) which demonstrated how the least academically able cohort of the school system acted out their rebellion within the school system in preparation for their absorption into the low-skilled employment sector upon leaving school. After the decade of mass unemployment in the 1980s and the substantial reorganization of the economy in the subsequent 20 years, these secure opportunities were no longer available and the rigid demarcations and classifications of the industrial era no longer seemed to apply. Whilst the overall level of educational achievement was rising, the bottom section of the cohort seemed more detached, or 'excluded' from the bulk of society. Often this process of exclusion began with its namesake – i.e. exclusion from school, which increasingly appeared to deal a severe blow to young people's ability to re-attach themselves to the education system.

Having previously worked as a secondary teacher in a Bristol school, the author wished to research the degree to which school exclusion necessarily led to broader societal or social exclusion, typically expressed through juvenile delinquency. This field of research is a well-trodden one in sociology; ever since McKay and Shaw tracked youth crime rates in different areas of Chicago to reinforce Burgess' concentric zone theory, which explained how social inequalities are represented in city space (Park et al 1925, Smith 1988). I also wanted to focus on describing some of the social-psychological consequences of this process, using Elias' notion of the civilizing process to measure how these excluded young people may be mentally affected by the lack of socialization and integration caused by their educational exclusion. By combining Wacquant and Elias I wanted to ask is this process decivilising? And, despite their intentions, are some government policies toward the excluded actually reinforcing these mentalities by pathologising them i.e. placing an anti-social stigma upon them through curfews and anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs)? (Rodger 2008)

Aims

This project aims to compile quantitative data gleaned from the databases of Bristol's performance and analysis team at the local authority, in order to trace the correlation between school exclusion and youth offending in a typical UK city. Looking at 2 cohorts (i.e. year groups) of young people aged 16-18 to see what percentage of offenders had their education disrupted by significant amounts of exclusion from school.

Anecdotal evidence from my experience of working with dozens of young people within the criminal justice system would seem to suggest that the coincidence of these two factors is statistically significant. By compiling a rigorous profile of this degree of symbiosis, it is hoped that the city authorities could be presented with incontrovertible evidence of the social cost of school exclusion. The policy implication is that more money and resources targeted at keeping these young people in schools would be well spent if it resulted in a subsequent reduction in their rates of incarceration. The latter is a powerful experience for any young person to go through, costing the state a considerable amount in accommodation fees, and inflicting a corrosive institutionalisation upon these vulnerable youth that seems to play out in high levels of recidivism and difficulty in positively reintegrating.

I maintain that re-regulation of the school system to ensure pupils do not remain excluded can only occur if local education authorities regain control over school admissions, as the competitive nature of current educational legislation ensures no school has an interest in retaining excluded pupils, rather the reverse, so this minority find themselves 'lost' from the educational mainstream. In order to live up to the promise of recent legislation the 'Every Child Matters' we need to give local authorities the powers to ensure re-inclusion takes place.

Bristol: Riots, racism and marginalisation

As is typical of many UK cities, Bristol has seen a number of key events that have contributed to the break-up of the old regime of secure transitions. For example, the St Paul's riot of April 1980 was the first major post-war civil disturbance in Britain; the swallow before the 'long hot summer' of riots in British inner cities in 1981 (Kettle and Hodges 1982). Black and white residents of the inner city protested at the lack of equal opportunities in employment that drove many into the informal economy of criminality and thus heavy-handed policing and racial discrimination from an institutionally racist police force. Recent research has shown that white estates in poorer areas of

Bristol were also affected by this sense of the need to express this marginalization: One, Southmead, rioted immediately after St Paul's (Ball 2010) and another, Hartcliffe, 12 years later when this outer city area suddenly faced mass unemployment through factory closures, followed by social stigmatization and insensitive policing that led to the death of a local teenager in a similar manner to the French banlieues in 2005.

Deindustrialisation in Bristol has been accompanied by social decline in what Wacquant calls the remaining 'neighbourhoods of relegation'. One notable aspect of this phenomenon has been school closures: Declining numbers in schools in poorer areas have been largely caused by the effects of the 1988 education act which allowed 'successful' schools to grow at the expense of their neighbours. Inevitably those in areas of social housing have lost out in this 'beauty contest' and Bristol has closed 5 secondary schools in areas of social deprivation in the last decade. Not only has this 'decivilised' the environment and encouraged families traditionally less engaged with the school system to conclude that they need not participate in schooling, it has degraded the quality of those remaining schools in poorer areas, as more conscientious parents feel increasingly obliged to move their children out of 'failing' schools. The whole process is a vicious circle – a self-fulfilling prophecy. This has created a type of educational apartheid with the gap widening between the rising prospects of the bulk of pupils, contrasting with worsening circumstances of those living on council estates. Indeed, the whole project of social mixing across the working class which council estates represented has been undermined by the widespread selling off of council houses since the early 1980s, which has tended to remove aspirational residents from these areas and tip the social balance towards the sort of 'culture of poverty' or 'underclass' existence described in many accounts of social problems.

The poverty of education

The poverty of Bristol's secondary school system can be explained by this type of discourse. Despite being the UK's fourth richest city, its secondary school results in terms of exam scores at 16 in 2009 was the second-worst in the country. One reason for this is the high level of attendance at private (public) schools – 18% - which removes some high scorers from the end results: Also, many parents bus their children to outlying schools which boosts the scores of neighbouring areas at Bristol's expense. This, plus the closure programme, has hollowed out the old model of city provision with predictable poor results (Clement 2006).

Before the 1988 education act, local education authorities controlled school provision and managed the budgets, employed the teachers and regulated its outcomes. This meant a person who school A felt compelled to remove was re-accomodated at school B – usually the nearest alternative institution – with comparatively little difficulty. As all schools were liable to take these excluded pupils they recognized there was no point excluding except as a last resort, and tended to be imaginative in their efforts to retain pupils. However, the imposition of a national curriculum pressurized schools to standardise their provision and undermined retention.

Above all the act gave headteachers control of their budgets and responsibility for 'selling' their product – all of which added to pressures to exclude those deemed to be undermining the education of others through disruptive behaviour, or likely to reduce the school's academic standing by their lower than average exam results. Inevitably, school exclusions began to rise: Not only were headteachers keen to exclude the 'undersirables', they also fought not to admit other excluded pupils from neighbouring institutions. Even though this problem has been recognized by subsequent educational policy-makers, their reluctance to dismantle these regimes of competition have prevented measures to reduce exclusions from working. Instead, in order to meet targets that government has set to reduce exclusions, education authorities have encouraged the establishment of 'alternative education provision' in the form of private projects not based in school premises that end up having a far more minimal impact upon the young people concerned: They do however have the advantage of allowing the authority to no longer count these people as 'excluded', although in terms of the school system they undoubtedly are.

The anti-social sources of crime

The reason why these matters of educational administration have such significance is the subsequent fate of those Wacquant calls 'urban outcasts'. If their lack of education and social integration puts them outside the city's job markets and their social peer groups then the life-world of the marginalized youth discussed here is likely to be significantly removed from the expectations and values of the 'mainstream society. When visiting some of these boys who are currently incarcerated in the local Young Offenders' Institution, I am struck by their casual attitude towards the use of violence, and weapons, as part of their daily lives. Many talk about having difficulty managing their anger and appear hypersensitive to apparent affronts; which in turn can lead to the sort of violent retaliation that constitutes their crime. This hypersensitivity may come from the lack of opportunity to be socialized

through schooling, leading to an emotional immaturity that makes them vulnerable to such dangerous reactions. I am reminded of Marx's assertion that:

> *Crime must not be punished in the individual but the anti-social sources of crime must be destroyed to give everyone social scope for the essential assertion of this vitality. If man is formed by circumstances, then his circumstances must be made human. (Marx 1971 [1844], pp.32-33)*

Renowned expert on the UK gangland phenomenon, John Pitts has dubbed this group 'reluctant gangsters' in his recent book (2008): Small-scale drug dealers earn very little from their trade - but lack of other sustainable employment throws them back upon this meagre option – as Mike Davis epitomized: 'Gangs mint power for the otherwise powerless from their control of small urban spaces'. The question of the degree to which the uneven urban development that condemns poorer zones to a subordinate status necessarily makes these neighbourhoods 'zones in transition' subject to social disorganization is a complex one, which defies easy stereotyping.

Ghettos of the mind

John Heale, in his study of London's gangland 'One Blood' describes the 'ghettoisation of the mind' that can result from long-term marginality and gang involvement (2010 75): despite the fact that that their neighbourhood may have undergone regeneration, and lack the extremes of anomie associated with, for example, the true ghettos of contemporary US cities (Wilson 2007). For these reasons Wacquant terms these areas 'anti-ghettoes', suggesting that the communal institutions once forged by residents to compensate for their isolation are also lacking. Whereas in the US this leaves them bereft of state intervention, in Europe and the UK the state commissions a cluster of public services to fill the gap. This makes a difference:

For example, In St Paul's the old 'front line' has been converted into a regular residential street by demolishing the old 'Black and White Café' – the scene of the police raid that sparked the original riot – and building two replacement mock Georgian terraced houses to fill the gap. New arrivals would never know that this spot was for two decades Bristol's principal area for street dealing of illegal drugs: A learning centre and local library have been built opposite and the area finally has its own publicly-funded community and sports centres. However, this record of capital investment was driven by rising inner city property values which were dramatically called into question in 2008's bank quake, and the slow motion process of

advancing austerity, is already undermining the sustainability of communities closest to the economic margins of many western cities.

A decivilising process

The numbers compelled to enter the informal economy are already provoking a rising tide of gang-involved criminality in Bristol over the last year. The central M32 motorway runs through the inner city en route to the downtown shopping malls and riverside, bisecting the cities two largest multicultural neighbourhoods, Easton and St Paul's. Bridges across the highway are scenes of increasing animosity and small-scale turf wars between gangs from the two areas. One Bristol youth aged 16 was stabbed to death in a case of mistaken identity and territorial rivalry at the 'World's End' pub in summer 2009: This is in the suburban working class suburb of St George in East Bristol, equivalent to zone 3 in Burgess' map of urban evolution. In the modern city the conditions breeding these symptoms of advancing marginality can be found in an urban sprawl extending beyond merely the inner city or out-of-town 'sink' estates, as Heale's London evidence suggests: The inhabitants of many working class areas are at risk.

One other unknown factor confronting us when predicting the extent of this deadly symbiosis is the long-term effects of consecutive generations of mass unemployment concentrated in the most marginalized families. Long-term exclusion from school can be reinforced as an unavoidable reality by parents lacking the regular rhythms of working life; no one to encourage you to get up, or set an example by not vegetating in front of day time television for example. Habits such as parental collusion in school non-attendance in order to gain joint leisure time can be built up into expectations of the daily life experience that militate against achieving a 'normal' (socialised) schooling process. We do create our own life-world, but not in circumstances of our choosing, so the realities of the exercise of 'choice' are perennially reflected through class prisms that describe our 'options' with more or less limitations. This is why it is fruitless to condemn these examples of anti-social behaviour, which are the inevitable product of attitudes bred in decidedly anti-social circumstances.

Without this civilising 'transitioning' process accompanying their pattern of everyday life, some ghettoised young people react against the anomie of their existence by an overly defensive stance of self-protection. This contemporary decivilising process creates a mindscape similar to those of previous 'pre-civilised' societies that pre-dated

welfare state capitalism in the world's advanced economies: Figurations such as the

knightly/warrior caste, the nineteenth century 'gangs of New York' (Asbury2002), or prohibition-era gangsters – a 'gang culture' dominated by violence conferred an aggressive mentality upon individuals as an instrumental survival goal.

Norbert Elias liked to counsel his readers not to normalize their own (implicit) educated and 'civilised' standards as applicable to all situations, reminding us that:

> *The armour of civilized conduct would crumble very rapidly if…the danger of insecurity…were to break in upon us again, and if danger became as incalculable as once it was. Corresponding fears would soon burst the limits set to them today. (Elias 2000 253)*

Conclusion

Over time, this research will be compiled through collaboration with the Performance and Analysis Team at Bristol City Council, cross-referenced with information from the Youth Offending Team database: This could allow the team to track the costs of care interventions and institutional fees associated with the various agencies that have intervened during these 'poor transitions' for the most marginalised young people; in order to demonstrate the unsustainability of the sticking-plaster social policy whereby young people excluded from school are placed on 'alternative education' programmes that like the socialising capacity of mainstream academic institutions.

For these 'teenagers under the knife' this process of marginalisation is already having a decivilising impact: Advancing austerity could widen the ranks of those exposed to this level of insecurity, heightening fears of loss of status and damaging the fabric of everyday life.

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Biography

Matt Clement is a mentor at Bristol's Youth Offending Team as well as lecturing for various local universities. He has worked as a careers adviser, community worker and teacher in Bristol over the last 15 years and has campaigned against education cuts, for trade union rights and opposed racist and fascist initiatives.

He is conducting further research into youth marginality as part of his PhD study at the University of the West of England. He is currently writing a case study of the effect of neoliberalism upon the public realm of the city.

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