

# Territorial Stigmatization: Symbolic Defamation and the Contemporary Metropolis

by

Tom Slater, University of Edinburgh, [tom.slater@ed.ac.uk](mailto:tom.slater@ed.ac.uk)

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“Physical squalor is an affront to the order of society, which readily becomes associated with other signs of disorder in the public image. Crime, drunkenness, prostitution, feckless poverty, mental pathology do indeed cluster where housing is poorest – though not there only. Once this association has been taken for granted, any anomalous pattern of life embodied in shabby surroundings is easily assumed to be pathological, without much regard for the evidence. Bad housing thus becomes a symbol of complex discordances in the structure of society and so to be treated as if it were a cause of them. In this way, society hands its most intractable problems to professional administrators, who accept the ideals which underlie their assignment, but are neither trained nor required to search out the social implications.”

Peter Marris (1986, p.53-54)

## **‘Create Streets’ (by stigmatising and demolishing high rise social housing estates)**

*Create Streets* describes itself as “a non-partisan social enterprise and independent research institute focusing on the built environment”, with a mission to “encourage the creation of more urban homes with terraced streets of houses and apartments rather than complex multi-storey buildings”<sup>1</sup>. The brainchild of Nicholas Boys Smith, a director at Lloyds Banking Group, it campaigns for “a London-wide programme of community-led building and estate regeneration which could deliver the homes London needs while building homes that are popular and stand the test of time.” *Create Streets* first hit the UK headlines in January 2013, when it published its first report in conjunction with *Policy Exchange*, a highly influential right wing think tank<sup>2</sup>. Boys Smith co-authored the report with Alex Morton (who has since left *Policy Exchange* to become David Cameron’s special adviser on housing and planning policy) and together they argued that high rise social housing blocks in London should be demolished to make way for low rise flats and terraced housing:

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<sup>1</sup> From [www.createstreets.com](http://www.createstreets.com)

<sup>2</sup> Just six months earlier, *Policy Exchange* published a report on the ‘future of social housing’ calling for social housing in ‘expensive areas’ to be sold off in order to fund housebuilding in areas that are ‘cheaper’.

“London has a large amount of social housing built as large multi-storey blocks from the 1950s to the 1970s. This housing is unpopular with the public. Nor, ironically, is it particularly high density. Replacing it with proper terraced housing would transform London, making London more attractive, benefitting residents, and potentially allowing a large increase in housing in the capital. *Create Streets* has therefore been created to encourage and facilitate the replacement of London’s multi-storey housing and the development of brownfield sites with real houses in real streets.” (Boys Smith and Morton, 2013, p.5)

Leaving aside the high probability that those living in ‘large multi-storey blocks’ feel that their houses and streets are already ‘real’, a call for demolition and displacement on this scale cannot be made without some sort of moralising justification, and it is to be found in the language and symbols deployed in Chapter 3 of the report, entitled “Multi-Storey Housing is Bad for its Residents” (including the subtitle “Multi-storey housing is more risky and makes people sadder, badder and lonelier”). Some illustrations:

“Other studies have found children in high-rises suffering from more bedwetting and temper tantrums and that the best predictor of juvenile delinquency was not population density but living in blocks of flats as opposed to houses.” (p.30)

“[T]he evidence also suggests that tower blocks might even encourage suicide. Without wishing to be glib, tower blocks don’t just make you more depressed. They make it easier to kill yourself – you can jump.” (p.30)

“The atomising and dehumanizing size of multi storey buildings makes it harder to form relationships or behave well toward your neighbours.” (p.32)

“Multi-storey buildings can create a myriad of opportunities for crime due to their hard to police semi-private corridors, walkways and multiple escape routes.” (p.32)

The ‘evidence’ for such claims, contrary to being “unambiguous” and “overwhelming” (a word used multiple times), appears to be drawn from a few highly questionable studies in the fields of architecture/urban design and psychology, from some journalistic memoirs, and hammered home via obligatory and hagiographic appeals to the writings of modernist-bashers Jane Jacobs, Oscar Newman and Alice Coleman. No ethnographic accounts of life in high-rise public housing are referenced, and the very few social scientific studies that are mentioned have been mined for quotations entirely wrenched out of their historical, social and geographical contexts. Furthermore, the authors falsely claim that high rise housing is “bad for you” regardless of income or social status (avoiding the question of how to account for the explosive growth and appeal of luxury condominium towers in many large cities), and the obvious and pressing question of how to account for any “social problems” in low rise or terraced housing is studiously - perhaps judiciously - ignored. Later on, and in the wake of a stunning deployment of numerous semantic battering rams (‘sink estate’, ‘ghetto’, ‘slum’, ‘spiral of decline’, ‘anti-social behaviour’), Boys Smith and Morton make their case for demolition under subheadings such as “Building attractive streets provides the best returns for the long term landowner” and “Plugging into the rest of the city improves economic returns”<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps anticipating some challenges to their drastic manifesto for a “London that is more pleasant for everyone”, they conclude, “This agenda is pro-housing and pro-growth, and would create a more beautiful and better London. We cannot allow a minority with vested interests to defeat it.” (p.69)

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<sup>3</sup> This is a common tactic in urban regeneration strategies across Europe: implying that the area to be ‘regenerated’ is so degraded, outlandish and abnormal that it is not even part of the city.

The astounding hypocrisy of a banker and an organisation describing itself as “David Cameron’s favourite think tank” attempting to guard against “vested interests” is, in this instance, something of a red herring. At the time of writing, *Create Streets* has had two major policy impacts; first, the March 2014 UK Budget followed its recommendations, cited its work, and created a £150m Estate Regeneration Fund; second, in April 2014 the UK Government commissioned *Savills* (a global real estate corporation with expertise in elite residential markets) to investigate the potential of its proposals<sup>4</sup>. In considering these policy impacts, it is crucial to register that the mission, the website and the publications of *Create Streets* all rely upon the production, reproduction and activation of stigmatising images of particular urban places. Such disturbing yet lush materials invite a consideration of the concept and impact of *territorial stigmatization* vis-à-vis the transformations roiling lower-class districts of unequal cities, which in turn are always tightly tethered to strategies and skirmishes traversing circles of power.

## **Analysing a ‘Blemish of Place’: Theoretical Guidance**

Urban studies, notwithstanding theoretical fads and countless claims of novel approaches and theoretical frameworks, remains dominated by two generic modes of analysis: the Chicago School human ecological tradition, and the political-economic tradition (either its Marxist or Weberian variant). Both these modes of analysis arguably short-change the *symbolic dimension* of urban processes, and therefore preclude the possibility that urban poverty and marginality can be understood via intense scrutiny of the *symbolic defamation* of particular urban places. For centuries - and certainly since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the confluence of urbanization, industrialization and upper class fears - particular quarters, districts and locales have suffered from negative reputations, so it is rather surprising that the social scientific literature has paid rather limited attention to the symbolic defamation of places in comparison to the array of stigmatized circumstances addressed by scholars at both the individual and collective levels. Sociologists, geographers, psychologists and anthropologists have developed a substantial body of scholarship on the stigma attached to those experiencing, inter alia, unemployment, poverty, social assistance, homelessness, mental illness, ethnic discrimination, HIV/AIDS, and single parenthood. This has not been matched by a sustained focus on the burdens carried by residents of places widely perceived as urban purgatories to be shunned and feared. The disgrace of residing in a notorious place can become affixed to personal identity and may prove to become - true to the Greek meaning and history of ‘stigma’ - an indelible mark during encounters with outsiders. It is only in recent years that a small (and growing) body of scholarship has emerged revealing that urban dwellers at the bottom of the class structure are discredited and devalued not simply because of their poverty, class position, ethnoracial origin, or

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<sup>4</sup> In announcing this investigation, Eric Pickles, Communities Secretary, revealed the economic motive: “[T]his radical approach could also create value in land in a way that is not possible with the incremental, building-by-building regeneration, rather than optimal whole-scale, regeneration that has been favoured in the past. A greater potential for private investment, could, over 10 years, lead to several hundred thousand additional new homes in London.” See: <http://www.savills.co.uk/news/article/72418/175241-0/4/2014/savills-research-london-regeneration-research-proposal> Building new homes in London seems promising, until one considers their obvious unaffordability to those displaced by regeneration.

religious affiliation, but because of the *places* with which they are associated. Furthermore, as we saw in the opening example of *Create Streets*, and as Keith (2005) notes, “the manner in which tower blocks, estates, quarters and neighbourhoods are described...[is] central to a debate about their future” (p.65). It is therefore of both conceptual *and* political importance to dissect what Keith helpfully identifies as an “iterative relationship between the folk-naming of city spaces and their official or analytical cartographies” (p.63).

The concept of territorial stigmatization was forged by the urban sociologist Loïc Wacquant in several publications that have generated significant attention among urban analysts across a range of social science disciplines (e.g. Wacquant 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010). Based on his comparison of the structure, function and trajectory of the remnants of the black ghetto of Chicago’s south side with a working class peripheral housing estate in La Courneuve, Paris, he documented and then analysed the crystallisation of what he termed a “blemish of place” (2007, p.67): the profound sense of *neighbourhood taint* emerging on both sides of the Atlantic. It is instructive to read Wacquant’s (2009) recounting of his research experiences:

“The high-level civil servants whom I interviewed [in Paris] all spoke of the deteriorating working-class districts of the urban periphery with anguish and disgust in their voices. Everything in their tone, their vocabulary, their postures and gestures expressed regret at being in charge of a mission and a population degraded and therefore degrading. Then I found the same feeling of disgust and indignity at the very bottom of the urban ladder, among the residents of the *Quatre Mille* housing project in the Parisian industrial periphery and among black Americans trapped in Chicago’s hyperghetto.” (p.116-7)

In the French case, stigmatization had reached such heights that those high-level civil servants “considered receiving an assignment in one of the officially designated ‘sensitive neighbourhoods’<sup>5</sup> a personal black mark and an impediment to their career advancement.” (Wacquant, Slater and Pereira, 2014, p.1272).

These qualitative encounters required an analytic register, and Wacquant thus sought theoretical guidance from the work of Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu. In his foundational sociological study of stigma, Goffman (1963, p.14-15), argued that individuals become “discredited” and then “disqualified” from society in three respects: “abominations of the body” (e.g. disability), “blemishes of individual character” (imprisonment, addiction, unemployment etc.), and “tribal stigma of race, nation and religion”. In all three, he posited a relational view, whereby an individual possesses “an undesired differentness from what we had anticipated. We and those who do not depart negatively from the particular expectations at issue I shall call the *normals*.” For Goffman, each and any form of bodily, moral and tribal stigma constituted “a social impediment, a major axis along which all other characteristics are measured and evaluated” (Cohen, 2013, p.114). To Goffman’s dissection of stigma, Wacquant married Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic power. Bourdieu was always interested in symbolic struggles between different classes, and particularly the ways in which agents, authorities and institutions attempt to impose a definition of the social world best suited to their own interests, where symbols become instruments of knowledge and communication in the production of consensus on the *meaning* of the social world. Symbolic power is, in Bourdieu’s (1991) words,

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<sup>5</sup> For an intricate dissection of the history and politics of ‘sensitive neighbourhoods’ policies in France, see Dikec (2007)

“a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilization” (p.170).

Notably, Bourdieu’s theory was also relational, for symbolic power “is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it.” (ibid.)

Wacquant (2007) added *place* both to Goffman’s three categories of social discredit, and to Bourdieu’s insistence that symbolic power is the “power of constructing reality” (or the power of making representations stick and come true). The result is that these two theorists lead us closer to understanding urban marginality *from above and below*:

“Bourdieu works from above, following the flow of efficient representations from symbolic authorities such as state, science, church, the law, and journalism, down to their repercussions upon institutional operations, social practices, and the self; Goffman works from below, tracing the effects of procedures of sense-making and techniques of ‘management of spoiled identity’ across encounters and their aggregations into organizations. They can thus be wedded to advance our grasp of the ways in which noxious representations of space are produced, diffused, and harnessed in the field of power, by bureaucratic and commercial agencies, as well as in everyday life in ways that alter social identity, strategy, and structure.” (Wacquant, Slater and Pereira, 2014, p.1272-3).

Wacquant (2008) claimed that territorial stigmatization is “arguably the single most protrusive feature of the lived experience of those trapped in these sulphurous zones” (p.169), and two key aspects of his conceptualization of territorial stigmatization bear stressing at this juncture. First, there are some areas of disrepute in many societies that have become *nationally renowned and denigrated*; we are dealing with a new and vamped up circuit of symbolic production, quite different from earlier portrayals of destitution and delinquency that smeared the working class quarters of the industrial city. Now, it is not only policy elites and upper class voyeurs who recoil at, mock, or slam a small set of notorious urban districts; it is also the citizenry at large (many of whom have never visited them), and sometimes even the residents of those districts. Second, territorial stigmatization is not reducible to the ‘spoiled identities’ of e.g. poverty, ethnoracial origin, working class position, unemployment, and so on, even if it may be closely tied to them in certain contexts. We are seeing a phenomenon of spatial disgrace that has become so powerful that it is partially *autonomized* from other forms of stigmatization, exerting its own very real and deleterious effects. It is a considerable analytical challenge to disentangle the effects of territorial stigmatization from myriad other ways in which those residing in lower class districts of cities are disqualified and stained. Much of this challenge stems from the intense racialization of residents of tainted neighbourhoods of relegation, which are so often portrayed in homogenising sociospatial terms (e.g. black or immigrant or Muslim ‘ghetto’) when their demographic composition and cultural characteristics are in fact extremely diverse. Nonetheless, the challenge is vital for knowledge and understanding, not to mention for remedial action in the form of appropriate social policies and effective community activism.

In recent years, there has been increasing research momentum around the concept of territorial stigmatization, partly spurred by Wacquant’s writings but particularly in response to various urban and social policy developments that appear to rely on the activation and (re)production of stigmatising images and discourses attached to

neighbourhoods of relegation. Studies are emerging from societies as diverse as Scotland, Canada, Portugal, Sweden, Australia, Poland, Israel, Brazil, Japan and South Africa, to name just a few. The emerging literature can be sorted into several sub-themes, which are useful to discuss in turn in order to reveal the state of the art vis-à-vis research on spatial taint, to identify some emerging trends, and to identify avenues for future inquiries.

## The Production of Territorial Stigma

Link and Phelan's (2001) highly cited review and critique of social scientific treatments of numerous forms of stigma is propelled by their dissatisfaction with what they saw as the "decidedly individualistic focus" (p.366) of published research – a focus that funnels analytic attention towards the stigma itself, rather than towards the *producers* of the stigma and the discursive and social strategies used to produce it. To gain a more complete understanding of stigmatization, they call for scholarship to scrutinise the numerous techniques of stereotyping, labelling and 'othering' that occur alongside the separation, loss of status, and discrimination felt by stigmatized individuals. Very few studies have taken up the challenge of tracing the production of territorial stigmatization. Hastings (2004) correctly noted "the lack of in-depth analysis of the causes of the phenomenon" and how "causal frameworks tend to be implicit rather than explicit" (p.137). Similarly, Pearce (2012) observed that "there is relatively little work examining broader concerns relating how local residents become 'contaminated' by their area of residence" (p.1922). In the diverse contexts in which place stigma is present, much work remains to be done to identify stigmatising agents, institutions and policies - what Musterd (2008) refers to as "the roles played by journalists, politicians, planners and intellectuals in the [social] construction process" (p.108). In one recent study, Glasze et al (2012, p.1208) deployed lexicometric analysis to scrutinize how housing estates in Germany, France and Poland were portrayed in major national newspapers, and in all these contexts they found "discursive demarcations which constitute and reproduce spatial and social structures." Their research is a major step forward in identifying the production of place stigma, but they are rather lonely voices in a field of inquiry that tends to focus on *consequence* rather than *causation* (for fascinating exceptions, see Power et al, 2013 and Schultz Larsen, 2014).

It is perhaps unsurprising that some parts of cities suffer from negative reputations: they are typically working-class districts that have been subject to long-term systematic disinvestment, where unemployment tends to be higher and where the presence of the welfare state is clearer than in other parts of the city (for example, with inordinate densities of social housing), where levels of recent immigration are high or rising, and where street crime, vice, physical abandonment and dereliction are prevalent. But precisely how such areas become so widely shunned, feared and condemned over time, how negative images circulate in everyday discourse as well as in the media and political discussion, and how extreme events in these areas are taken to stand for the whole of those areas and impugn the civic standing of their residents *in toto*, are all research questions demanding further attention. Much remains to be learned about how the blemish of place is produced in different contexts, not least because of critically important distinctions in respect of, *inter alia*, welfare state regimes, modes of housing tenure, municipal governance and planning

priorities, the political orientation of local and national media, and the organisational structure and influences of neighbourhood associations.

In the UK, the activities, publications and influence of right wing think tanks in shaping the urban perceptions of politicians and their supporters make them key specialists in symbolic production vis-à-vis territorial stigmatization. Witness, for instance, the work of the misleadingly named *Centre for Social Justice* (CSJ), a think tank set up in 2004 by the current Conservative Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan-Smith, following his visit to the defamed neighbourhood of Easterhouse in Glasgow (see Slater 2014). Following his lead, senior personnel from the CSJ now visit and paint scornful images of this neighbourhood *repeatedly* (not to mention of numerous other infamous districts and, in particular, declining seaside towns<sup>6</sup>) in their efforts to corroborate the need and elicit support for the regressive welfare reforms currently sweeping across Britain. Even a brief glance at a few of its reports and press releases reveals writers keen to portray themselves as “lonely voices of reason, as principled outsiders in a corrupt, distracted, and wrongheaded world” (Peck, 2006, p.682), when actually they speak for and serve the interests of the powerful and the dominant:

“2013 is the year to tackle the tyranny of sink estates, no-go neighbourhoods and child poverty.... Look a little closer at such neighbourhoods, and we see something deeper than physical dilapidation. Behind the front doors are far too many broken and chaotic families.... Many adults could work but don’t because when they do the maths, there’s nothing to be gained by coming off benefits. There’s usually a local school where a culture of low expectations and high truancy rates is a catalyst for underachievement and future welfare dependency. Alcohol abuse and drug addiction tend to flow through these estates like a river...” (Guy, 2013, p.10).

In a thorough analysis of the history and sociology of think tanks, Medvetz (2012) argues that their rise and influence must be set analytically “against the backdrop of a series of processes that have contributed to the growing subordination of knowledge to political and economic demand” (p.226). Under such conditions, and vis-à-vis territorial stigmatization, it is imperative to scrutinise and expose the practices of think tanks when trying to understand how symbolic systems do not simply mirror social relations but help constitute them.

## **The Political Activation of Territorial Stigma**

The Glasgow case above is doubly instructive, for it shows how territorial stigmatization is sometimes so powerful that it can shape the direction of *national* work and welfare policies. The CSJ is a think tank determined to portray poverty and worklessness as behavioural conditions, as genetic traits passed down the generations in thousands of ‘troubled

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<sup>6</sup> Disregarding pressing issues of systematic disinvestment, the CSJ (2013) attributes poverty in Rhyl, Margate, Clacton-on-Sea, Blackpool, Great Yarmouth to “the ingrained disadvantage which has resulted from the decline in British bucket-and-spade holidays” and make the conclusion that the overarching problem is “poverty attracting poverty” (p.33). Their solution to their own ridiculous contagion theory is just as farcical: “If we are to help communities achieve long-term resilience and upward mobility, it is essential that we help more people get together and more couples stay together. This means tackling teenage pregnancy, improving relationship education, removing the couple penalties that exist in the welfare system and recognising marriage in the tax system.” (p.35)

families'<sup>7</sup>, and therefore divorced from structural causes. The negative portrayals of Easterhouse speak to the urgency of *the political activation of territorial stigma* as a research theme, especially when considering the rise of penal policies in several advanced societies. As Tyler (2013) has argued in an analysis of social abjection in neoliberal Britain, territorial stigmatization (amplified via the resuscitated discourse of the 'underclass') has become a device to *procure consent for punitive policies* directed at those living at the bottom of the class structure. Hancock and Mooney's (2013) discussion of the harsh political and judicial response to the 2011 riots in urban England is also alert to the relationship between the symbolic and the spatial:

"[P]articular representations of urban places as problematic on a number of different levels are mobilized. While the 2011 disorders were largely confined to inner urban areas with a significant degree of tenure mix, social housing estates (or areas where these dominate) and the populations therein are frequently highlighted and represented as being not only vulnerable, but as particular locales where social pathologies and problems flourish." (p.48)

Thus, the stigmatized districts of dispossession in the postindustrial city elicit overwhelmingly negative emotions and stern corrective political reactions driven by fright, revulsion, and condemnation, which in turn foster the growth and glorification of the penal wing of the state in order to penalize urban marginality. When persons of power and eminence visit such districts, typically it is not in reformist but rather in *martial mode*, to announce measures designed to root out rot, restore order, and punish miscreants.

The sense of social indignity that has come to enshroud certain urban districts in increasingly unequal cities has implications for residents in terms of employment prospects, educational attainment, and receipt of social assistance. The difficulties of searching for employment, succeeding educationally and dealing with public agencies (the police, the courts and street-level bureaucracies such as state unemployment and welfare offices) can be exacerbated as soon as residents of stigmatized areas mention where they live (Sernhede, 2011; McKenzie, 2012). There are examples in the literature of employers, educators and public officials modifying their conduct and procedures once addresses are revealed. In St. Ann's, a stigmatized housing estate in Nottingham, England, McKenzie<sup>8</sup> (2012) discussed the treatment of a young single mother by local state officials:

"She felt an acute stigma, particularly whenever she went to any of the benefit agencies.... [and] told me that when she gave her address to any of the 'officials' there was often a silence as they mentally processed her single-parent status, the ethnicity of her children, and then her address in St. Ann's: 'I know what they're thinking you can see it ticking over in their brain as you wait for them to think "oh it's one of them from there".'" (p.468)

A striking trend is how certain places become associated with class position, and how the names of stigmatized locales offer an alternative to the taboo of the word 'class'. As Skeggs (2004) pointed out in research on class inequality in English cities, "the term 'class' was rarely directly articulated...rather, local areas were continually used as shorthand to name

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<sup>7</sup> For a very detailed catalogue of the eugenic mentality of civil servants who think they can fix Britain's "troubled families", and of the abuse of statistics and general skulduggery that underpins the entire troubled families agenda, see the excellent work of Stephen Crossley at <https://akindoftrouble.wordpress.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Lisa McKenzie has recently published *Getting By* (2015), a rich and stirring ethnographic study of St. Ann's, which offers a fine-grained portrait of the lived experience of territorial stigmatization and of class prejudice.

those whose presence was seen to be potentially threatening” (p.112). This *politics of naming* has been shown in several societies to have profound implications for labour market participation, interactions in daily encounters, and for personal dignity (e.g. Brattback and Hansen, 2004; Greenberg and Hollander, 2006; Mood, 2010; Morris, 2013).

In Sweden, researchers who examined the implications of territorial stigmatization for the children of recent immigrants attending suburban schools found that it affected their life plans and educational prospects (Johansson and Olofsson, 2011; Sernhede, 2011). Because of the notoriety of their place of residence, youths were constantly having “to adjust to what they believe is the appropriate behaviour of a ‘good Swedish student’” (Johansson and Olofsson, 2011, p.197). A policy of ‘equality’ in the school curriculum (speaking, writing and thinking in Swedish) had the effect of reinforcing the ‘otherness’ of a ‘defective’ and ‘problematic’ immigrant category, one amplified by the stigma attached to certain suburban districts in Malmö and Stockholm. For the youths interviewed in these studies, school environments were far from a respite from living in stigmatized places – they unintentionally served as another context where place stigma was experienced and served to aggravate the daily challenges of learning and assessment (a situation also analysed by Eksner, 2013, in Berlin).

## **Neighbourhood Investment and Disinvestment: Stigmatising Influences**

The citywide, regional and/or national perceptions of particular places all play a vital role in patterns of investment and disinvestment in them, and correspondingly shape the opportunities available to their residents. The effects of disinvestment range from day-to-day frustrations (such as finding it impossible to get taxicabs to drop off/collect residents, or arranging for deliveries of take-out food), to the more serious issue of finding it impossible to obtain mortgage credit due to the impact of the taint of place on lenders and financial institutions (Aalbers, 2011). The teachings of classical industrial location theory have long demonstrated that businesses of varying sizes – all of which hold potential employment opportunities for urban dwellers at the economic margins of society – partly make decisions on where to locate based on the images associated with places. If a place is widely shunned and condemned, private sector operators are likely to locate elsewhere in their mandate for profit. The cumulative effect of such decisions based on negative neighbourhood reputations is sustained economic disinvestment (Rhodes, 2012). When this is considered in the context of many cities currently enduring a period of severe fiscal austerity, neighbourhoods already facing a multitude of social challenges are especially vulnerable.

In respect of the opposite – increasing investment – it should not be assumed that any investment is uniformly positive. The appropriate question to ask, rather, is, “To what extent is any investment in stigmatized territories in the interests of their residents?” This is because research evidence has revealed an intense and direct relationship between the defamation of place and the process of *gentrification* (Gray and Mooney, 2011; Slater and Anderson, 2012; Kallin and Slater, 2014; August 2014; Thorn and Helgersson, 2014). The taint of place can become a target and rationale for ‘fixing’ an area via its reincorporation into the real estate circuit of the city, which can have major consequences for those least able to compete for housing. Symbolic defamation can provide the groundwork and ideological justification for a thorough class transformation of urban space, usually involving

housing demolition, dispersal of residents, land clearance, and then the construction of housing and services aimed at a more affluent class of resident. There are many examples of stigmatization occurring prior to gentrification (e.g. Sommers, 1998; Blomley, 2004; Slater, 2004; Liu and Blomley, 2013). In addition, a substantial body of scholarship on public housing demolitions in several societies illustrates how the frequent depiction of public housing complexes as obsolete failures justified the expulsion of people from their homes and the subsequent gentrification of valuable central city land tracts (e.g. Arthurson, 2004; Crump, 2002; Imbroscio, 2008; Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009; Darcy, 2010; Steinberg, 2010; Goetz, 2013).

The role of the state is crucial in these and other examples of territorial stigmatization justifying gentrification. Wacquant (2007) has it:

“Once a place is publicly labelled as a ‘lawless zone’ or ‘outlaw estate’, outside the common norm, it is easy for the authorities to justify special measures, deviating from both law and custom, which can have the effect – if not the intention – of destabilizing and further marginalizing their occupants, subjecting them to the dictates of the deregulated labour market, and rendering them invisible or driving them out of a coveted space.” (p.69)

Over forty years of research into gentrification reveal a process triggered by an alliance between financial institutions (supplying capital in the form of mortgages and loans) and the state (at various levels acting as an investor of that capital), whereby the state provides the conditions that stimulate private market reinvestment (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). The instances where gentrification has happened without state intervention are rare, and the state often plays an active role in constructing the blemish of place it then purports to remedy via gentrification strategies (Kallin and Slater, 2014). Yet there is an unresolved analytic puzzle requiring attention: why does it appear to be the case that gentrification rarely seems to occur first in the most severely disinvested and parts of a city or a region – where the disparity between potential and capitalised ground rent known as the *rent gap* (Smith, 1979) is at its greatest - but proceeds instead in devalored, working class tracts that are disinvested but by no means the poorest or offering the maximum profit to developers? Hammel (1999) helpfully offered a clue:

“Inner city areas have many sites with a potential for development that could return high levels of rent. That development never occurs, however, because the perception of an impoverished neighbourhood prevents large amounts of capital being applied to the land.” (p.1290)

So, the wider ‘perception’ of a neighbourhood that Hammel outlines can be so negative and entrenched that it acts as a symbolic barrier or diversion to the circulation of capital. In sum, as territorial stigmatization intensifies, there are major implications for the rent gap theory of gentrification, and further investigations are needed to understand how the theory might be recalibrated to account for the pressing issue of the symbolic defamation of space. Such defamation serves economic ends, but also vice versa: examples abound under authoritarian urban regimes whereby the economics of inter-urban competition – with gentrification strategies at the core - are serving the brutal and punitive policies directed at working class minorities, and particularly, at the places where they live (Ahmed and Sudermann, 2012; Kuymulu, 2013; Sakizlioglu, 2014).

## Residents' Strategies for Managing Territorial Stigmatization

Reflecting on his fieldwork in Chicago and Paris, Wacquant (2009) remarked that residents “demarcated themselves from their neighbours and reassigned onto them the degraded image that public discourse gives them”, and strategies for managing territorial stigma included “mutual distancing and lateral denigration, retreat into the private sphere, and flight into the outer world as soon as one acquires the means to move.” (p.117) He has consistently argued that various forms of *submission* tend to be the dominant (it not exclusive) strategies employed by residents of degraded urban zones. These strategies to deflect spatial disgrace include: concealing the truth about place of residence from various public officials and private operators; rejecting being in any way like their neighbours and investing energy in spelling out micro-differences (see Shildrick and MacDonald, 2014); a rejection of the public sphere as an arena for neighbourhood sociability; and exiting the neighbourhood as soon as possible (see also Keene and Padilla, 2010, 2014).

Yet submissive strategies of *internalizing* stigma as the dominant response of residents have been called into question by scholars who have undertaken fieldwork approaches in other contexts. Jensen and Christensen's (2012) scrutiny of data gathered in Aalborg East, a deprived area in the northern part of Denmark, revealed that the residents were not resigned to the defamation of their place of residence. They became sad or angry when confronted with the stigma, but they had either a positive or an ambivalent view of the area, and most were content to live there. In Bristol, England, Slater and Anderson's (2012) research in the deeply stigmatized district of St. Paul's uncovered a strong sense of neighbourhood pride among residents, often in defensive response to external defamation. This was achieved via the claiming of the derogatory 'ghetto' label frequently affixed to the district by outsiders, in an attempt to invert that label and make it something positive. McKenzie's (2012) work in St. Ann's revealed a profound sense of “being and belonging to” the neighbourhood, something common to different age groups and a resistant response to stigma. Similar conclusions were drawn by Watt (2006) from work on housing estates in London, where “knowing people and being known were important in facilitating a sense of safety and belonging, even in estates which to outsiders could well be regarded as 'rough' or dangerous places” (p.786).

In a study conducted on the very site where Wacquant formed the concept of territorial stigmatization, Garbin and Millington's (2012) article on La Courneuve in Paris explored how residents “negotiate the grammars of marginalisation associated with their banlieue, how they live with the effects of territorial stigma” (p.2068). They found a variety of coping strategies, some submissive, others resistant. Chief among them was recalcitrance, or “an assertion of the right to be other” (p.2075) via pride in La Courneuve's ethnic diversity. Their nuanced conclusion was that future research should not fall into the traps of “glibly celebrating 'resistance' or drawing overly pessimistic conclusions about the impact of place stigma”, but should focus instead on the “ambiguities of domination/resistance” (p.2079). This argument mirrors the work of Purdy (2003) in the now demolished public housing project of Regent Park, Toronto, who documented a place of “affirmative association” for many tenants, where a common response to defamation was “self-affirmation and pride of place....reflected eloquently in the themes of solidarity, friendship, and community in the face of economic devastation” (p.97-8; see also August, 2014). Whereas Wacquant (2010) reports that the internalisation of territorial

stigmatization has a dramatic effect on the collective psychology of place (to the extent that it undermines class solidarity and collective action), the above studies present a more positive picture of collective defiance and defence of residents in response to the denigration of their communities (dissected thoroughly in Nimes, France, by Kirkness, 2014).

In sum, there is evidence that residents employ a variety of strategies of symbolic self-preservation in the face of territorial stigmatization, depending on class position, age/generation, lifecourse stage, type of employment, housing tenure, poverty status, ethnic origin (to name but a few factors). Each and all demand further intellectual scrutiny. Rhodes (2012) has shown that “while forms of contemporary stigma share commonalities....they differ both within and between national contexts, influenced by patterns of governance, racial formation, demography, and urban geography.” (p.685) However, we still need to know much more about the contextual conditions under which certain types of residents adopt certain strategies to manage the impact of spatial disgrace in their lives.

## **Conclusion: Not a ‘Neighbourhood Effect’, But a Gaze Trained on the Neighbourhood**

The monstrous literature on ‘neighbourhood effects’ is sustained by a near-obsessive belief in the view that ‘where you live affects your life chances’. That literature usually (and surprisingly) ignores how the stigmatization of neighbourhoods matters, and in some instances ends up contributing to that stigmatization (for an elaboration, see Slater 2013). When the focus is on place stigma, analytic errors and misconstruals are commonplace. For example, Maloutas (2009) has argued that when Wacquant writes of territorial stigmatization he is “definitely arguing about a growing neighbourhood effect” (p.830). Yet what becomes clear from a close reading of studies of territorial stigmatization is that it is *not a property of the neighbourhood, but rather a gaze trained on it* - and therefore definitely *not* a neighbourhood effect. It is beyond dispute that the blemish of place affects life chances (Permentier et al, 2007; Sampson, 2012; Arthurson, 2012), but studying territorial stigmatization teaches us about the effects of symbolic structures applied *to* neighbourhoods (or to other local geographies<sup>9</sup>), which are not produced in neighbourhoods, and therefore not ‘neighbourhood effects’.

Failing to question the operation of a political-economic system that sorts people across metropolitan space based on their purchasing power in land and housing markets, and failing to question the role of symbolic structures in the production of inequality and marginality in the city, means that neighbourhoods *become the problem* rather than the expression of the problems to be addressed. Health inequality researchers are especially prone to these failures: generally they tend to shy away from such structural and symbolic questions, preferring instead to focus on how neighbourhoods are conducive to certain kinds of ‘health behaviours’ like smoking and unhealthy eating. Much of this stems from

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<sup>9</sup> Geographers reading this essay may be ask, “What is *territorial* about territorial stigmatization?” It’s an important question that remains unaddressed by Wacquant, and indeed by all the other sociologists who dominate the literature. To answer it would require an analytic focus on the production of scale, rather than immersion in pedantic definitional battles about what constitutes a territory, place, region, neighbourhood, and so on.

their lack of methodological self-consciousness in research on health and its social determinants, characterised by the refinement of measuring tools, boasting about the size of data sets, and soporific use of terms such as ‘controlling’ and ‘pathways’ – all at the expense of theoretical vision and conceptual clarification. Thus, they often fail to uncover the mechanisms by which place and people are linked (ironically, the ‘black box’ of neighbourhood effects scholarship!). A wonderful recent exception is to be found in the blend of ethnographic and survey work in Wutich et al (2014), who examined how neighbourhood stigma<sup>10</sup> and ‘social bonding’ affected the physical and mental health of Latino immigrants in Phoenix, Arizona.

If, as Wacquant (2010) has argued, “the social psychology of place operates in the manner of a symbolic cog latching the macrodeterminants of urban political to the life options and strategies of the poor at ground level” (p.4), then the study of territorial stigmatization provides propitious terrain for reformulating from ‘below’, in empirical terms, the labels, discourses and categories from ‘above’ that have been shown in scholarship to have corrosive consequences. Such work is necessary to inform not only public policies designed to reduce the burden of material deprivation and the press of symbolic domination, but also grassroots campaigns and political struggles geared towards fighting the impact of social abjection in the metropolis.

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<sup>10</sup> The authors develop a fascinating ‘neighbourhood stigma scale’ designed to capture both “enacted stigma” (actual experience of discrimination) and “perceived stigma” (internalized or felt stigma) that includes shame, secrecy or withdrawal, and fear of discrimination (p.561-2).

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