

# Managing the mendicant: regeneration and repression in Liverpool

Roy Coleman and Joe Sim explore constructs of inclusion – and exclusion

*In 2010, Liverpool was the most deprived local authority area in England. Its position was unchanged from earlier surveys conducted in 2004 and 2007. Almost a quarter of England's 100 most deprived smaller areas were located in the city (Liverpool City Council, 2011). The city was also the 'easiest place to die – 35 per cent above the national average – ...' (Armstrong, 2012) while one third of its children lived in poverty.. What has been the local state's response to this dire state of affairs? It has developed a strategy built on governing poverty through regenerating the city, particularly its central shopping hub.*

## Governing poverty through regeneration

Governing poverty through regeneration proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s and legitimated the shift to the entrepreneurial city/state and the contemporary notion of the 'can-do/austere city guided by neoliberal mentalities. These developments are crystallised in Loïc Wacquant's notion of 'advanced marginality' operating as a 'regime of socio-spatial regulation and exclusionary closure' (2008). Within cities, alongside mass unemployment and their 'relegation to decaying neighbourhoods', the 'heightened stigmatization' of the poor has instigated a 'violence from above' (ibid) involving both the entrepreneurial and criminal justice arms of the state. The former operates via synoptic arrangements in utilising public realm media platforms that both silence and promote aspects of urban rule and

living. The latter, operating as a disciplinary mechanism of control, banishment, trauma and terror is directly targeted at the mendicant. There are a number of elements involved in this process.

First, the development of locally embedded neo-liberal projects in the last 30 years has heralded novel ways in which the city is being 'envisaged' by governing authorities. This development is built on a synoptic strategy of rule whereby benign representations of 'place', the locally powerful and imagined collective solidarities are constructed in an attempt to persuade local populations about the magnanimity of local state rule at a time of growing social inequality and the corporatisation of urban spaces.

Second, synoptic strategies construct discourses that encourage the wider population to view the targets of state power and the state's actions in imaginary terms. In this sense, states are 'powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production that are themselves always culturally represented and understood in particular ways' (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). Creating affective urban spaces – through emotional narratives of place, notions of urban patriotism and images of self-responsibilising consumer-citizens – encourages a regressive, sentimentalised understanding of the urban landscape and the reinforcement of the moral boundaries between 'regenerated' citizens and those who cannot, or will not, be psychologically or socially regenerated – the mendicant.

Third, these discourses have been popularised by a combination of 'moral entrepreneurs' and new and old 'primary definers', locked together ideologically to sell the Liverpool brand to government ministers and capitalist investors whose neoliberal mentalities look to the free market, individual responsibility and performance indicators as leading inexorably to a prosperous, benevolent future. Importantly, however, this strategy is underpinned by a local criminal justice system whose repressive, gimlet gaze remains targeted on the politically and economically marginalised. In the current economic, political and moral climate, the formal and informal mobilisation of local state power is legitimated by the characterisation of the mendicant poor, in general, and subaltern groups within this category – the pejoratively labelled 'bodies without brains' (Wilson and Anderson, 2011) – as not only morally deficient but also as dangerous to the ideology of a rejuvenated Liverpool.

The entrepreneurial and criminal justice strategies pursued by the state can be seen in the targeting of the homeless through the forcible removal of rough sleepers and barring them from shopping malls – in effect, from using toilets and accessing food. They have also experienced violence from members of the public and public and private police officers. More specifically, Big Issue vendors too have been subject to state 'visibilisation' and 'responsibilization' strategies – the wearing of bibs, the display of identity cards, the siting of selling pitches, the stipulation to stand at all times and to engage with 'charm' training techniques aimed at 'improving' demeanour and decorum on the streets, thereby controlling their capacity to move around the city while generating feelings of insecurity among the vendors themselves (Coleman, 2005).

Importantly, the valorisation and policing of regenerated public spaces as places of consumer benevolence has done little to deal with the ongoing dangers generated in

private, domestic spaces. Between April 2010 and April 2012, Merseyside police had the highest proportion of emergency calls relating to domestic incidents in the country: from over 207,000 calls, just under 44,000, or 21.2 per cent were made in the area (Townsend, 2012).

### State coercion: wider issues

Maintaining order through the mobilisation of coercive techniques also remains central to the local state's more general interventions. For example, Merseyside police stopped and searched 60,290 individuals and vehicles during 2009/2010, which amounted to 45 per thousand of the population. This was the highest in England and Wales outside of the London region. The national average was 25 per thousand of the population. Nearly 6,000 individuals – 10 per cent of the total number of those stopped and searched – were arrested. The national average was 8 per cent (Home Office, 2011). Additionally, for the young, the informal policing of the streets, and the dispensation of non-accountable justice, remains a central, disfiguring and alienating aspect of their Liverpool lives (Jamieson, 2012).

Furthermore, the three prisons on Merseyside have a combined operational capacity for over 3,000 prisoners. In 2012, with an overcrowding rate of 193 per cent, Kennett was the most overcrowded prison in the country. A report from the Chief Inspector of Prisons on HMP Liverpool also revealed a grim, mainly invisible, picture far removed from the cosy, visible world of the regenerated city centre. There was an informal network of punishment operating that subverted the formal disciplinary procedures and was largely beyond the bureaucratic gaze of the prison's managers. The use of force had also risen significantly since 2009 to the point where 'some...prisoners described carrying out extreme acts such as jumping on

netting and barricading in cells as a way of extricating themselves from what they saw as dangerous circumstances and as a last resort following a lack of support from wing staff' (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2012).

### Conclusion

Regeneration implies re-generating minds, bodies and mentalities – or re-educating them under an entrepreneurial ethos – alongside material infrastructures. As noted above, in this process, the synoptic cleansing of urban space is itself a form of 'violence from above'. Through creating boundaries of affect, regenerated spaces and their idealised citizens stand in binary opposition to the degenerate other – the poor. In this context, regeneration

## *Regeneration is likely to intensify already existing injustices and social inequalities*

is likely to intensify already existing injustices and social inequalities. Furthermore, in the febrile context of grotesque austerity strategies and budget cuts, state power will continue to be mobilised, pathologising those who remain one step away from accepting the dominant discourse of benevolent consumerism and repressing those who take one step beyond the law. The financial cuts were impacting disproportionately on already desperately deprived areas. By the end of 2012, council budgets in cities like Liverpool were being cut at almost ten times the rate of cuts imposed on southern-based, mainly Tory controlled areas (Ramesh, 2012). The city's mayor noted:

*Over the last two years, Liverpool has had to make savings of £141m. Over the next four years we estimate we have got to cut the budget by another £143m, from a total spend of £480m. In total, it means we will have lost more than 52% of our controllable government grant income since 2010. Liverpool has one of the UK's highest rates of welfare dependency... (Anderson, 2012).*

Ultimately, the discourse of regeneration simply legitimates desperate levels of inequality and extreme social and political marginalisation. Behind the seemingly benevolent mask of consumerism for all, massive capital accumulation, wealth and privilege for the few remains the corrosive norm in the second decade of the new millennium. ■

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