

In the neoliberal, 'Leviathan' state the most socially and economically marginalised classes are controlled through a mixture of prisonfare and workfare

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*This collection of critical responses to the work of sociologist **Loïc Wacquant** provides an exciting invocation to greater inter-disciplinary research and collaboration. **Tara O'Leary** finds the range of disciplinary viewpoints on offer in this volume, ranging from critical race theory to welfare studies, stand as testament to the immensely varied implications of Wacquant's work.*

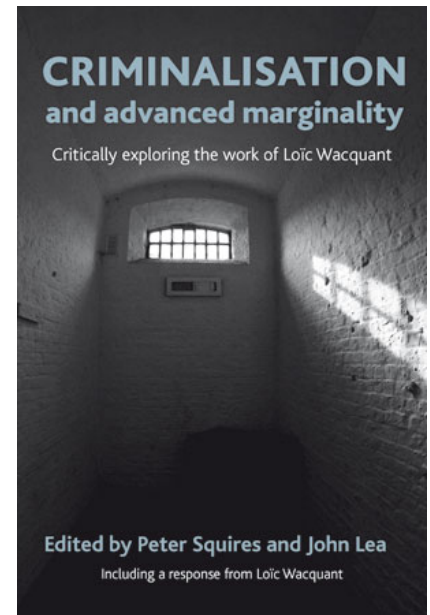


Criminalisation and Advanced Marginality: Critically Exploring the Work of Loïc Wacquant, edited by Peter Squires and John Lea. Policy Press. May 2012.

Loïc Wacquant, Professor of Sociology and Research Associate at the Institute for Legal Research, Boalt Law School, University of California at Berkeley, links together diverse areas of research on urban sociology, inequality and poverty, social theory, ethnography and ghettoisation, amongst others, by focusing on the development of punishment as an institution aimed at poor and stigmatised populations, the "precariat".

Presenting a series of contributions which were initially gathered at a Symposium on Advanced Marginality in 2009, this book explores a variety of commentaries, critiques, applications and

developments of Wacquant's work. Perhaps best known for two seminal works, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (2008) and *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (2009), Wacquant has conceived of the typical neoliberal state as inherently penal, developing "punitive containment as a governmental technique for managing deepening urban marginality". In this "Leviathan" state, the most socially and economically marginalised classes are controlled through a mixture of prisonfare and workfare. Prisonfare is seen as a system of "warehousing" permanently unemployed sections of society, effectively penalising poverty; workfare has seen welfare rights become conditional on job-seeking at low wages.



Neoliberalism in this context is the reconstruction of all social relations on the model of the entrepreneur responsible for her own fate. Wacquant views this reconstruction as a process by which the capitalist market establishes a monopoly of democratic coercion or violence within the social sphere, where it translates economic injustices - poverty, inequality, exploitation, unemployment and social exclusion – into social problems which are addressed by police action and penal treatment.

One of the most compelling criticisms of Wacquant's own research has been his over-reliance upon the neoliberal state as exemplified in the US, and the prison system as the core coercive agency. John Pitts, for instance, asserts that by ignoring "crucial historical, political and cultural differences between countries", Wacquant has failed to develop a general model of the development of the Western Penal system.

In response, contributions to this book seek to extend the Wacquantic framework outwards to various geographical and social contexts. Markus-Michael Müller, for instance, describes how a Latin American penal state has unfolded alongside neoliberal reforms, from the Pinochet coup of 1973 through to Chavez' free market. As major South American metropolises are pressured to become "entrepreneurial cities", urban regeneration projects have consistently incorporated penal mechanisms – foremost amongst them the police, but also armed gangs, militias and, eventually, the prison system – in physically and socially dislocating the "undesirables" responsible for urban disorder and criminality.

Going in another direction, Denise Martin and Paula Wilcox distinguish the British welfare state in terms of Wacquantic thinking, identifying income maintenance, housing, education, immigration, health and social services (rather than mass incarceration) as the pre-eminent means to "control, regulate and remake welfare-dependent 'problem populations'".

Lynn Hancock and Gerry Mooney expand on these ideas by considering how British political and popular discourse about the "precariat" plays a role in the state's production of social disadvantage. Their Wacquantic analysis of media portrayals of the working classes – particularly reality television shows – is a disturbing vision of how the values and habits of working class families are portrayed "shameful" and "dysfunctional" for entertainment and titillation and used to invoke anger and indignation, yet fail to provide insight into the underlying causes and contexts of the social problems portrayed. Reconfiguring what Wacquant calls "penal pornography" to a British concept of "poverty porn", Hancock and Mooney illustrate how both phenomena contribute to policy making which is hostile towards the socially marginalised and demands accountability for errant behaviour.

Martin and Wilcox also identify a second major limitation in Wacquant's explanation of the penal state and of marginality: gender. Although Wacquant has written about the vulnerability of women in the "precariat" and in regimes of workfare, the authors posit that his theory fails to understand

how social policies escalate penal outcomes for women. Prioritisation of resources for crime and security-related state control, and the resulting reduction of welfare, have impacted disproportionately upon women, and necessitate greater efforts to examine these trends on a gendered and local basis.

A third major critique of Wacquant's work relates to the theme of resistance. His perspective of the "precariat" is largely passive, a collective body of victims unconcerned with autonomous struggle and political disorder. Peter Squires, instead, considers the violence and breakdown which often accompany both advanced marginality and the state attempts to re-impose forms of order and authority, an analysis which may be of particular resonance in post-riots Britain. Lynda Measor, in discussing young British welfare mothers, demonstrates however that "struggle" can be defined in creative, compelling and non-political contexts.

Many of the contributors in this book expressly noted their agreement with Wacquant's work, seeking only to extend the concept of the penal state to new categories and geographical reaches, and to flesh out the meaning of that reach for its victims. Wacquant's response to these critiques – included in the volume – is to reiterate the primacy of the penal wing as a state response to social insecurity rather than to trends. While conceding that patterns of incarceration in Europe differ to those of the US, his response is somewhat disappointingly narrow in its failure to engage with the expansionist themes of other contributions. Nonetheless, his encouragement of greater collaboration between researchers of criminal justice and welfare policy is an exciting incitement to inter-disciplinary enterprise.

In that sense, this volume holds great potential for future research and collaboration. Overall, the overwhelming impression is that the range of disciplinary viewpoints on offer – criminal justice, critical race theory, feminism and welfare studies, amongst others – stands as testament to the immensely varied implications of Wacquant's work and to the burgeoning development of cross-cutting perspectives in the study of social and penal policy.

Tara O'Leary graduated from the LSE with an LLM in Public International Law, and works in the fields of international and human rights law. Past positions have included legal adviser and researcher with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Kosovo and in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She is currently an assistant legal adviser with Amnesty International. Tara also has an LLB in Law and European Studies from the University of Limerick." [Read more reviews by Tara.](#)

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