

The Moral Economy of Violence in the US Inner City

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In an 8-week period, there were 16 shootings with three fatalities, three stabbings, and 14 additional “aggravated assaults” in the four square blocks surrounding our field site in the Puerto Rican corner of North Philadelphia. In the aftermath of the shoot-outs, the drug sellers operating on our block were forced to close down their operations by several mothers who repeatedly called the police. Drawing on the concept of moral economy (Thompson, Scott, Taussig), Mauss’s interpretation of gift exchange, and a political economy critique of hyper-carceralization in the United States, we understand the high levels of US inner-city violence as operating within a moral logic framed by economic scarcity and hostile state relations. Residents seek security, self-respect, and profit in social networks that compel them to participate in solidary exchanges of assistive violence dynamized by kinship and gender obligations. A hierarchical, extractive drug economy fills the void left by deindustrialization, resulting in a dynamic of embodied primitive accumulation at the expense of addicted customers and chronically incarcerated just-in-time street sellers at high risk of assault. Nevertheless, the mobilization of violence organizing the illegal drug economy also follows ethical norms and obligations that are recognized as legitimate by many local residents.

George’s field note:

A burst of loud yelling makes me glance out of the window just in time to see a frail, middle-aged heroin addict slam into the side of my parked car. He is reeling from a punch to his jaw from Roland, one of my 22-year-old neighbors. Alfredo, a gangling 15-year-old who lives two doors down from me, jumps on the fallen man, kicking him in the chest.

A few minutes later, I am sitting on the stoop with Roland, his mother Sol, and Juan, a heroin injector who regularly buys on the block, to hear the full story. Roland claps Juan on the back and explains: “Juan was the first to hit him.”

Juan shrugs, “I only went to talk to him at first; but to my eyes, it looked like he was lifting his arm to hit you so I punched him.”

Sol adds, to make sure I understand, “See, George, this morning, a man thought I was staring at him, and he cursed me. When he came by again, I pointed him out to Juan. Then when the trouble started, everybody came out to help me, and . . .”

Roland interrupts: “Yeah, now if Juan has problems I’ll ride for him, and for Alfredo too. I’ll do that because they defended my mom.”

Roland is currently on probation for seven counts of possession of narcotics, conspiracy to sell a controlled substance, attempted murder, and gun possession. If he is arrested again on assault, he could face up to 10 years in prison for violating probation. When I ask him about this risk, he shakes his head dismissively: “When I get in a fight or I’m really angry, I don’t think of anything.” Roland explains that his mother’s boyfriend, Carlos, “doesn’t have that anger inside him where he can fight. Even if he said ‘Okay let’s fight,’ and came down to fight someone, he would get his ass kicked because he doesn’t have the anger to fight hard, and the other person will have that anger. I have that anger.”

Sol nods in agreement, “I can’t depend on Carlos.”

Roland adds solemnly, “I am Sol’s only son. Carlos doesn’t fight. He won’t get into my mom’s problems. So I think God put me here for that reason. If I go to jail or if I die for my mom like this, then I don’t care, I’ll die happy. I’ll be smiling in my casket.”

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The Rider in the Moral Economy

Unlike Roland, Carlos is not a “rider,” and his gentleness conjugates with a longer list of other failures as a man incapable of fulfilling patriarchal responsibilities. Sol does not hesitate to tell others, when she is depressed, that Carlos does not contribute financially to the household, cannot repair things in their crumbling apartment, does not help her resist the temptation to binge on crack, and is sexually impotent.

The importance of being a rider propels young men and women like Roland, Juan, Alfredo, and Sol into violent conflict on inner-city streets. They find themselves trapped in reciprocal exchanges of assistive violence and public displays of fearlessness and aggression. In an environment marked by scarcity at the margins of the legal labor market, buffeted by unstable influxes of cash from illegal drug sales, violence becomes an especially abundant and valuable resource in a larger, morally regulated gift economy that facilitates sociability and day-to-day survival through exchanges of goods, services, affective bonds, small sums of money, and, perhaps most important, access to just-in-time subcontract employment in the drug economy. An act of assistive violence creates a debt that becomes the basis for an ongoing relationship generating social obligations and hierarchies of prestige. Failure to reciprocate makes an individual vulnerable to defamation, social isolation, and, ultimately, violent victimization. It also excludes that individual from the largest local source of employment and income. Participating in violence, consequently, becomes a moral, social, and practical imperative for many of the young men and women who are invested in maintaining public credibility in street-based interactions.

Historically, anthropology’s contribution to understanding violence has been to explore its structural-organizational effects and local moral valences. To avoid, however, the criminalizing, romanticizing, essentializing, or racializing trap of projecting valorizing humanistic visions of popular justice and order onto “traditional heroic peoples,” the “unworthy poor,” or spectacularized black gangsters (see critiques by Meeker [1980], Thomas [2011], and Wacquant [2002], respectively), we need to unpack the local ethics for interpersonal and criminal violence in their relationship to external fields of power and economic forces (Schneider and Schneider 2008).

Social historian E. P. Thompson developed the concept of “moral economy” in his analysis of small-town food riots in eighteenth-century England (Thompson 1971). He documented the ways an emerging capitalist market economy violated “customary norms . . . and practices,” resulting in violent outbreaks of class conflict (Thompson 1991:271). Political scientist James C. Scott brought the concept to the attention of anthropology with his analyses of rural resistance to super-exploitation by landlords and market speculators in Southeast Asia (see reviews by Edelman [2012] and Scott [1976]).¹ These

works highlight the ways in which terms of exchange—the price of bread, sharecropping arrangements, rents, access to common land, crop prices—are locally embedded in moral expectations about appropriate behavior that hold power-holders socially accountable to the poor in times of scarcity. In normal times, moral economies form part of patronage systems, with checks and balances against aberrant abuse that ultimately legitimize an exploitative and hierarchical status quo to the benefit of the powerful. When the terms of these moral economies break down under pressure from commodification, crises such as crop failures can precipitate revolutionary movements (Wolf 1969).

For the most part, anthropologists, following Durkheim (1938 [1895]), disassociate the term “moral” from its transcultural positive ethical valence and use it to describe the socially and historically contingent ethical frameworks that set collective values on specific practices and norms. Nevertheless, the word’s vague commonsensical implications have led to an analytical slippage in the use of “moral economy” often implying an association with a supracultural implication of justice. Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah (1996:319–323), in his analysis of ethnonationalist conflicts in South Asia, specifically rejects the use of a concept of a “moral economy of collective violence” because it mischaracterizes ethnic pogroms as subaltern resistance. Several critics have also warned against the term’s “banalization” (Edelman 2012; Fassin 2009). In a careful analysis of the ways Thompson’s original formulation has traveled through the social sciences, Marc Edelman criticizes the loss of Thompson’s concern with the mediation of highly unequal class relations as well as his focus on the role of the marketplace as “a nexus for class conflict and struggle.”

Thompson’s own use of the term “moral,” however, is not by any means neutral. His analysis valorizes the violence of subaltern mobilizations against the rise of eighteenth-century agrarian capitalism (e.g., see Thompson’s [1991] response to the polemics that “moral economy” elicited among antimarxist British historians). Our anthropological usage of the term by contrast makes no argument that intracommunity/intraclass street violence represents political or prepolitical mobilization (still less, that it should elicit positive valorization). Nevertheless, Thompson’s concept is useful for an anthropological exploration of, on the one hand, the contradictory pressures of extra-state customary justice and, on the other hand, the reverberations of disjunctive shifts in modes of production. In adapting Thompson’s interclass model to our own case, we draw on an Maussian (Mauss 1990 [1924]) interpretation of

dragging, feigned ignorance, sabotage . . . theft”—thus reducing the focus on violent mobilization of incipient class consciousness as the primary response to exploitation. Taussig (1986) creatively brought the concept to bear on internecine conflict, envy, and witchcraft among Colombian peasants beset by rising social inequality and a legacy of colonial and capitalist extractive violence. In the 2000s, a more classically Thompsonian moral economy framework has been usefully applied to transnational peasant mobilizations against free market globalization policies imposed by the World Trade Organization (Edelman 2005).

1. Scott (1985) later deemphasized “heroic” peasant rebellions in favor of attention to Brechtian forms of indirect everyday resistance—“foot

gift exchange in nonmarket societies.² Mauss's early twentieth-century functionalist insight on the structuring effects of reciprocity, however, does not help us see the negative articulation of local social formations within broader class hierarchies and global processes in twenty-first-century segregated urban enclaves (though, arguably, his analyses of potlatch hint at a more complex critique of reciprocity, hierarchy, and global circulation).

We suggest that to understand the disruptive effects of market and state forces, especially those shaping the drug economy, we need, in fact, to combine Thompson's emphasis on disenfranchisement in relation to commoditized market relations with Mauss's analysis of the moral regulation of everyday intraclass reciprocities by bringing Marx's theory of primitive accumulation (1972 [1867], pt. 8) to bear on the exploitative productivity of violence in the everyday state of emergency in the US inner city. Marx's emphasis on the centrality of violence to processes of new forms of capital formation helps us conceptualize the ways value can be destructively extracted from the human body by state violence as well as by interpersonal and instrumental criminal violence when other productive resources are unavailable. Riding relationships produce valuable social capital at the expense of violated bodies. The inelastic demand of the pained bodies of addicted customers elevates cash profits in the drug economy; drug bosses capitalize on the hyper-exploitation of piece-rate street-level sellers who also take on the risk and burden of chronic incarceration and/or physical maiming by competitors and thieves. Above all, the state's prosecution of a zero tolerance war on drugs elevates prices in the drug market, destabilizing supply and creating cycles of scarcity and plenty. Violence consequently becomes a practical necessity in a volatile, illegal, drug economy that obviously cannot rely on law enforcement to regulate the orderly exchange of its commodity in a safe, stable marketplace.

Our hybrid moral economy concept facilitates an ethnographic documentation of the ways the apparently individualized acts of violence that erupt intermittently in the neighborhood are embedded in the historical context of deindustrialization and the contemporary facts of inner-city hyper-segregation, infrastructural desertification, and coercive policing. It renders more comprehensible the emergence of contradictory destructive-and-solidary survival practices that are part of the fallout from both scarcity and the hierarchically accumulated volatile profits of the drug economy. Recent ethnographies of spectacular violence in West African war zones have also emphasized violence's "productivity" in relationship to extractive local and global economies and parasitical states with shrinking resource bases (Hoffman

2. Mauss's gift exchange framework has been applied to the drug economy among heroin injectors in the postindustrial US inner city to explore sharing practices that build community and guarantee access to resources and drugs but also propagate infectious diseases (Bourgois 1998).

2011; Vigh 2006; see also Abdullah and Muana 1998; Bayart 1993).

Resource Scarcity in the Deindustrialized Inner City

We have been conducting fieldwork as a team since the fall of 2007 on a block in the predominantly Puerto Rican section of North Philadelphia. According to the 2010 Census, our tract and those surrounding it are over 70% "Hispanic," primarily Puerto Rican, with significant Dominican and African American populations and a small Mexican, Central American, and South American presence. Forty-seven percent of the residents in our census tract have annual incomes below the poverty line, almost twice the citywide rate of 24% and three-and-a-half times the national rate of 13.5%. According to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2005–2009, three of the census tracts surrounding us have poverty rates over 54%, and five of the eight poorest census tracts in the city are in the Puerto Rican section of North Philadelphia.

Philadelphia has not yet recovered from deindustrialization. It is the poorest of the 10 largest cities in the United States and has lost residents every year from 1951 to 2009 (Philadelphia Research Initiative 2011), beset by the classic US pattern of white and middle-class out-migration to the suburbs (Davis 1990; Wilson 1987). Demographers identify Philadelphia as one of five hyper-segregated metropolises in the United States (Wilkes and Iceland 2004). Puerto Ricans migrated to Philadelphia in large numbers immediately after World War II seeking factory jobs in the city and agricultural work in the suburban counties (Whalen 2001). Over the next 3 decades, however, over 75% of those manufacturing jobs disappeared. Additionally, Philadelphia has some of the highest rates of vacant and abandoned property in the country, and North Philadelphia's infrastructure is especially devastated (Fairbanks 2009:5).

The block on which two members of our ethnographic team (George Karandinos and Fernando Montero Castrillo) have been living since 2009 is literally in the shade of an enormous abandoned curtain and upholstery fabric factory occupying a full square block. As late as 1962, within five square blocks of our fieldwork site, there were 14 factories producing rugs, textiles, and tools (Department of Public Works 1962). At its height in the immediate post-World War II years, our street had 66 row houses. Six are now abandoned, uninhabitable ruins. A further 13 have been demolished. Seven of these are now vacant, garbage-strewn lots, and five have been converted into parking space. From the window of Fernando's apartment, we can see another full-square-block vacant lot, where a yarn mill formerly stood, and from his roof, another 11 abandoned factories are visible.

As in many US inner cities beset by public and private sector disinvestment, the drug economy has filled the economic vacuum and become the most readily accessible "equal opportunity employer" for poor male high school dropouts

(Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003). In the context of the US War on Drugs, this effectively condemns a large portion of local residents to lives of chronic incarceration (Goffman 2009; Wacquant 2009). In 2006, Philadelphia had the highest per capita rate of county jail incarceration in the nation (Petteruti and Walsh 2008).

The poorest section of Puerto Rican North Philadelphia is also the city's most active open air drug market for heroin and powder cocaine. It attracts primarily white injectors from other impoverished Philadelphia neighborhoods and some wealthier clients from the surrounding tristate regional suburban sprawl (Pennsylvania-New Jersey-Delaware). Within 200 meters of our apartment, buyers can purchase, at virtually any time of day and night, heroin, cocaine (both crack and powder forms), PCP (referred to locally as "wet" or "embalming fluid"), marijuana, and diverted prescription pills (primarily benzodiazepines such as Xanax and opiates such as Percocet). The growth of the drug economy is most intelligible if it is understood as one of the few significant remaining sources of income generation accessible to neighborhood residents. It valorizes the cultural skills, knowledge of the streets, and ability to mobilize violence of the most impoverished members of the inner city. In contrast, the low levels of education and the limited social capital of most residents restrict their access to the lowest rung of the dwindling service, commerce, and factory jobs remaining in their community.

The prevalence of drugs is well documented in police statistics. In 2006, officers made 1,100 narcotics-related arrests in the neighborhood we are studying. This represents over 10% of total narcotics arrests in the city that year and 62% more than any other of the 68 localities identified by the University of Pennsylvania's Neighborhood Information System's crimeBase. In 2006, the drug arrest rate in the 15 census tracts with the highest number of Hispanic residents in Philadelphia was 30.4 per 1,000 inhabitants, almost four times the citywide rate of 8.5 per 1,000 inhabitants. The primitive accumulation processes that have turned the neighborhood into a sprawling open air narcotics supermarket elevate local rates of petty and major violent street crime. Addicts steal opportunistically and mug local residents for cash to ward off painful withdrawal symptoms, and dealers fight for territory, enforce (or violate) contracts, and intimidate police informers. This section of North Philadelphia, consequently, is also one of the most violent in the city. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, it had Philadelphia's highest rate of shootings and murders, and in 2011 the city of Philadelphia as a whole logged the most per capita murders of the 10 largest US cities.

Violence becomes both a risk and a resource to be managed intimately through social relations because the state mechanisms of regulation taken for granted in wealthier neighborhoods are ineffective at best and hostile at worst. Classic anthropological studies of segmentary societies have noted that fragile economic capital in the absence of effective centralized state authority elevates the practical and cultural value of violence (Meeker 1979). A reputation for mobilizing violence

and rage skillfully becomes a form of cultural capital (Bourgois 1989) that translates into useful social capital through networks of reciprocity based on kinship, friendship, romance, and utilitarian economics. Ironically, the moral economy of violence cannot exist without the personal disposition to generosity that is inculcated in those residents who seek security in the Maussian economy of face-to-face exchanges of basic resources. On most days, the neighborhood is a friendly place. Many of our neighbors respond to the routine boredom that unemployment and poverty impose by investing their energy in warm sociability. On sunny days, neighbors sit on stoops, chatting, listening to music, and playing spades and dominoes. Most blocks regularly organize block parties, and children play in the street. Spectacular incidents of violence irregularly erupt, however, in the midst of this dense sociality. Within a 2-month period during our first spring, there were 15 shootings, three of them fatal, within four blocks of our apartment. There were also three stabbings and 11 more aggravated assaults. The following spring was just as violent and just as spectacular, including a prolonged afternoon fusillade a few blocks away from us that left one man with 15 bullet wounds.

Transgressions in the Moral Economy of Drug Selling

At the same time that an ethics of reciprocity propels individuals into violent acts, these same social relations of mutual obligation and dependence also impose restraints on overly transgressive violence. During the first 2 years of our fieldwork, our block was an active open air heroin sales spot. Benito was the "bichote" (a Puerto Rican colonial Hispanization and play on words of the English phrase "big shot" and a slang term for large phallus), which means that he controlled the rights to drug selling on our block. He lived in another neighborhood and owned no property on the block, but he was recognized as "el dueño" (the owner), and he had an ex-wife, a child, and many friends residing there. He charged Rico, a local drug entrepreneur, several thousand dollars a week for the privilege of selling heroin on the block, which a rival bichote jokingly referred to as "Rico's waterfront property." Rico's workers opened the "*punto* [sales point]" at dawn and, on good days, sold over a thousand \$10 packets of heroin and cocaine to streams of primarily white addicts who arrived on foot, often dressed in rags and limping from abscesses. Occasionally, cars would swoop in from the suburbs to buy wholesale quantities.

Competition for preferential access to scarce resources in a limited territory is a classic generator of violence (Peters 1975:xxiii), but the drug economy also requires a limit on noninstrumental violence that is bad for business. For example, the beating of the heroin addict in George's opening vignette conflicted with the immediate instrumental logic of the drug economy. It risked attracting police attention and produced an undercurrent of tension over who rightfully con-

trolled public space: Rico, the manager of drug sales on the block, or Roland, the local resident. Rico ultimately reasserted his authority over the public space by beating up the lowest-status participant in the fight, Juan, the heroin addict who had thrown the first punch. He also sent out a warning to 15-year-old Alfredo, but he did not punish the teenager physically. He did not dare confront Roland and Sol, but neither did Roland step in to defend Juan or Alfredo, despite his recent public promise to ride for them. Their incipient rider relationship was too fragile, not buttressed by kinship or the kind of status and economic incentives that Rico commanded within his own larger network of retainers as a drug boss.

A few months later, a more dangerous transgression in the moral economy occurred when Benito's guarantee to Rico that no one else be allowed to compete with his sales within 100 yards broke down with a midday shoot-out that left Benito's girlfriend wounded in the foot and Benito on the run. Benito was lucky. The customized extension of his assailant's semiautomatic pistol tangled itself in his sagging "short-pants" as he was drawing it out. His opening salvo went wild, giving Benito enough time to put four bullets into his assailant's back and chest before speeding off in his SUV. Over a dozen bullets sprayed into the brick facades of six row houses 30 yards from our apartment.

The shoot-out proved to be a tipping point. Its magnitude and carelessness violated the delicate moral economy clientelist conventions that, for the past 16 months, had granted Benito an undisputed fear-based respect and begrudging, semiamiable tolerance by neighbors on the block who benefited directly or indirectly from his occasional financial generosity. Over the next few weeks, criticisms began circulating about Benito's greed. He was accused of having provoked the attack by trying to take over someone else's corner five blocks away. "He already owns this block and two others. What kind of a person thinks he needs four blocks?" We also heard complaints that "Benito and Rico ain't done nothin' for us this summer." When the block captain organized a city-sponsored cleanup of the block's back alleys, he noted angrily that Rico had failed to pay any of his hustling crew to help us pick up garbage. Several residents commented that at the Fourth of July block party, neither Rico nor Benito bought meat for the barbecue or fireworks. A mother grumbled to George, "He didn't even buy the kids one of those plastic swimming pools to cool down on hot days." These criticisms of the bichote's lack of generosity approximate a more Thompsonian hierarchical moral economy process,³ which demands proper resource sharing from patrons who hoard economic resources; Benito and Rico diplomatically shut down sales on our block in the aftermath of the shooting.

Over the next winter and spring, in the market vacuum

3. Pace Thompson's (1991:339) explicit admonishment against extending his concept to the "uses and customs [of] Pirates," we find it useful to highlight mechanisms for mobilizing restraint and demanding mutuality in the illegal economy.

created by Benito's retreat, several attempts were made by two different bichotes to "reopen the *punto* [open air sales spot]," but these operations failed following multiple police raids allegedly prompted by calls to the police by "the mothers." The "snitching" was rumored to be coordinated by Luisa, whose 20-year-old son had been accidentally killed 5 years earlier by a stray bullet from a gunfight between low-level drug sellers. She obliquely took responsibility for calling the police, noting her concern for her 11-year-old daughter and 4-year-old nephew: "We [the mothers on the block] are trying to raise kids here, we don't want to be a *punto* anymore [ya no queremos ser punto]."

Several years before we moved into the neighborhood, a row home across the street from our apartment had been firebombed after the owner reported drug-dealing activities to the police. During this 5-month-long drug market hiatus, however, even Benito's former sellers celebrated the newfound calm brought on by Luisa's alleged snitching: "Now the mothers can let the kids out to play without having to worry." They all emphasized the gendered and age-graded legitimacy of a mother's right to protect her children from violence. They all also unproblematically erased their own recent pasts as drug sellers.

Eight months later, to our surprise, Benito returned and smoothly reestablished drug sales. The previous criticisms of him were forgotten, and it was business as usual. We asked Benito how he managed to "reopen the block" when other operations had collapsed in his absence under police pressure brought on by snitching. He answered, without hesitation:

Respect . . . and then the love of the neighbors. You get that by looking out for them. If anybody else tries to open the block, the neighbors will call a cop quick. But they respect me, and they know they can talk to me, and I talk to them, so it's not a problem with me. If they need help with rent or bills, they know they can come talk to me. So when I come around and I speak to them, they be like, "that's fine." And when shit's doin' alright, you look out for the neighbors, like if they doin' a little barbecue and want to close the block, we just buy a whole bunch of stuff for the kids and do it right.

Benito had also cultivated a unique relationship to Luisa 5 years earlier following the collateral death of her son by paying for her son's funeral and commissioning both a reggaeton song and a 30-foot mural in Luisa's son's honor. According to Benito, Luisa had been sending neighbors around with a box to raise money for her son's funeral, unbeknownst to him:

Someone came over to me with that box, and I said "No, no, no. We don't do that on this block, you ain't going to be asking for money with boxes for your son's funeral." That's a loss that lasts forever. How does it look I am out here making all this money, and Luisa is sending out a box to collect money for her son's funeral? So I told her, "Get whatever you want,

and I'm gonna pay for the whole thing." Get whatever casket, and do the service the way you want it.

Early Habitus Formation: Family, Gender, and School

On an embodied level, the moral economy of violence requires the propensity to flare into rage at a moment's notice over apparently trivial insults. Bourdieu's concept of habitus (defined as an individual's socioeconomically and culturally patterned deepest likes, dislikes, propensities, and "schemas of perception") is useful for understanding how behaviors, conceptualized as embodied "practices," operate on both a conscious and preconscious level in a relationship to encompassing fields of power (Bourdieu 2000b:128–163).

Roland, for example, was proud of his habitus-level well of rage that prompted him to fight effectively ("I have that anger . . . to fight hard"). His habitus resonates with the insecurity of inner-city streets to make him an effective rider, but it simultaneously puts him at a disadvantage in his relationship to the state and the larger economic and social field ("When I'm really angry, I don't think of anything, not even getting locked up"). Riders, consequently, are especially vulnerable to being imprisoned in the current era of hyper-incarceration. At the time of the beating described earlier, Roland was living as a financial parasite of his mother with his pregnant 15-year-old girlfriend. In contrast to his failures as a man and as an only son, he excels at violence and consequently embraced the opportunity to reaffirm his love for his mother by attacking her insulter. Rather than regretting the risk of long-term incarceration on a probation violation, he felt mystically empowered afterward, referencing God and an epiphanal purpose in life.

Roland's mother and the elderly addict who was beaten are also dispositionally sensitive to imagined or real insults. The beat down itself was triggered by a hyper-alert habitus: Juan delivered the proactive first punch as a protective reflex to preempt another punch that, in fact, might never have been thrown. Finally, Alfredo, the 15-year-old, had no qualms about repeatedly kicking a fallen, emaciated, elderly addict. He did not need to know why the man deserved punishment.

Instrumental interests were also entangled with the dispositional response of each of the participants in that particular beat down. Juan was raising his fragile status as a lowly heroin addict by siding with Sol, a street dealer, and her son Roland. Juan had only known Sol for a couple of months, but he regularly brought her syringes to sell to the injectors purchasing heroin next door to her, and she often gave him food. She enjoyed conversing with him and sometimes lent him money when he was short a dollar or two on a packet of heroin. His participation in the fight extended this incipient relationship with Sol into a rider relationship with her son, publicly acknowledged as a debt by Roland: "Now I will ride for you." More mundanely, Alfredo, the 15-year-old, took

advantage of the beat down to demonstrate his budding masculinity, proving himself for the first time in his life to be a worthy rider among adults.

Adolescence and early childhood are crucial moments in habitus formation. Benito's transgressive shoot-out offered us a glimpse into the powerful habitus-level effects of spectacular violence when experienced in early childhood. We interviewed a father and mother whose row house caught the brunt of the crossfire during Benito's last gunfight on the block. Three bullets had pierced their front door, blasting through their television speakers, shattering a glass angel figurine on their coffee table, and ricocheting off their DVD player before lodging in the plaster wall. Our conversation was interrupted by the couple's precociously articulate 3-year-old daughter, Cindy. Her words illustrate how the traumas of spectacular, terrifying violent incidents become powerful conscious teaching moments for parents.

Mother: I had actually just walked in from work, and closed my door, and there were a bunch of gunshots.

Cindy: Yeah, a bunch of it. Bad people just shoot at the door. And then mommy started dragging me and pushed me down. And that's when I got scared. And I was crying. And mommy started crying too. And Papi fell down, and he just went under the table, and I just did too. And then someone knocked [shot] our glass [angel figurine] down. See! [*Pointing at the coffee table*] Look!

Father: As soon as I went down, the bullet hit the speaker, boom! Then I felt glass hit me in the back.

Mother: [*To Cindy and pointing at the hole in the front door made by the bullet*] What is that in the door?

Cindy: A bully?

Mother: No, a bullet hole.

Cindy: [*Nodding*] That's a bullet hole.

Struggling with learning the difference between a bully and a bullet hole, Cindy tries to manage her fear by opening up an imaginary space for engagement with the "bad people," offering a glimpse into the psychodynamic interface between the conscious and preconscious dimensions of early habitus formation that normalizes a self-protective moral engagement with more powerful potential aggressors:

Mother: She won't sleep in her room. No, she stays in my room now because she says she's too scared.

Cindy: [*Pointing to the three bullet holes in the door with a worried voice*] Little people could come in here? They might hit me?

Mother: No, they're not going to touch you.

Cindy: They're not?

Mother: No.

Cindy: You mean, they like my flower pants? [*cheering up*] They like 'em?

Mother: Who?

Cindy: The bad people. They like 'em?

Mother: I don't know, baby.

Cindy: They better be nice!

Cindy's father attempts to manage his daughter's insecurity through a scenario of retributive violence in the face of the state's failure to guarantee security:

She wakes up with nightmares screaming about "Daddy! Daddy, no, no, no!" That bullet in the wall could've been her. If that happened, and my daughter would have got shot, I would've went to war.

I tell them [drug sellers] "get off my steps," but they don't listen. It's turning me to the point that one day I'm going to chop somebody's head and have it down the block. The cops don't do nothing. They just pass right by them [drug sellers] like nothing happens. If it's not their people [other police who are shot], they don't do nothing.

The next person I see on my steps. . . . I got that bat right there, it's going right in their head.

The imperatives of the moral economy of violence resonate with gender and age-graded patriarchal responsibilities to defend family ("If . . . my daughter would have got shot, I would've went to war"). Our field notes coded "violence" abound with between-the-lines references to these responsibilities. In the field note opening this paper, for example, Roland was able to resolve the failure of Carlos to defend his mother by becoming a violent son in his emasculated stepfather's stead. Roland's epiphanal solidarity through sacrificial risk-taking for his mother (including exposing himself to the likelihood of long-term incarceration) contrasts with the mutual distrust that otherwise pervades his family's everyday interactions over money, caretaking, and household responsibilities. The precariousness of their economic situation, exacerbated by their addictions, provokes frequent humiliating public squabbles over unpaid loans, pilfered money, and missing possessions. Nevertheless, Roland is always ready at a moment's notice to fight for his mother's respect no matter the consequences.

The insecurity in which families are embroiled in North Philadelphia problematizes the mid-twentieth-century anthropological application of kinship's "axiom of amity" whereby family relations represent a binding force of social structure (Fortes 1970). It also complicates Bloch's (1973) insight that the security offered by the sphere of kinship enables relationships based on longer-term cycles of exchange that tolerate short-term imbalance. According to Bloch, fragile "non-kin" alliances with neighbors and friends require butressing by frequent, egalitarian exchanges of gifts or labor

with immediate benefits. In twenty-first-century North Philadelphia, in the fallout of an illegal drug economy that imposes conditions of primitive accumulation on its customers and labor force, the reliability of kin relationships, especially when strained by chronic drug consumption, cannot be taken for granted. Dramatic incidents of violent assistance for family members emerge as one of the more feasible, immediate ways of reaffirming fraught kinship solidarities.

In the insecure inner-city environment, brothers are often conspicuously called upon to protect their sisters from insult or physical aggression. For example, when we asked Robert, a young African American man living on our block, about whether he had fought much when he was a teenager, he responded, laughing: "I'm an only brother with 14 sisters!" as if the implications were commonsensical: "Of course!" He reports: "They knew they only had one brother. And I'm not just a little brother. I got so many calls. My phone would stay ringing. You know what I mean?"

In fact, we only vaguely understood what he meant, but in his fuller explanation, the everyday emergency of families fragmented by unstable unemployment, incarceration, and polarized gender relations emerges:

Robert: I never grew up with none of my other sisters.

Ain't none of us ever lived together like that. My dad wasn't in my life. Like, he came out of jail, and then I met his other kids. From him I have 14 . . . no, 13 sisters. I have one from my mom. Altogether I've got 14 sisters. I'm only a little brother to three of them, and two of them I haven't met yet, because of my dad's trifling ass. But all the rest of them, they was younger than me, so I stayed getting phone calls.

George: To fight for your sisters?

Robert: Hell yeah. I been fighting for them ever since I was little as fuck, dawg. A man is expected to provide, to protect, dawg. Not be taken lightly. Half the time if a bitch has got a problem, they call a big brother, or a dad, or an uncle. Niggas is always on time; always on the clock; always being called for something. And you ain't even gonna be the type of man that should be able to stand up with your chest out and deserve the title "big brother" or "dad" or "uncle" if you're not gonna show up for the occasion ready to ride.

Ethnographers working on inner-city gendered violence have repeatedly documented the phenomenon of older kin socializing the younger generation to become fighters as a survival skill (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Jones 2010; Ness 2010). Robert was following his mother's directives when he developed the ability to "black-out" in rage:

My mom was like, "Anybody ever touch your little sister, you gotta almost kill that motherfucker, baby." This one time I seen my sister fighting this dude in the school yard, and I blacked out. I almost killed the motherfucker. They

called the police, and my mom had to come to school. But my mom ain't even really care that I almost killed that little boy because I was defending my sister, and in her book that was right. I was the best dude in the world: best big brother in the world for that.

Robert's ability to fulfill his role as a brother was founded on earlier lessons his mother had given him in anticipation of his middle school's ritual hazing day-of-welcome for sixth graders. He remembers that first day of middle school vividly because it was the first time he "blacked-out" and knocked out an upperclassman. Robert's institutionalized experience of school violence and his internalization of the value his mother placed on aggressive self-protection positioned him well as he matured to become an adolescent rider despite his small physical stature. He and his peers fought hard to establish rigid boundaries of loyalty around violence, thereby raising the surrounding micro-neighborhood's daily level of unpredictable insecurity:

Robert: Back in the day we used to beat up random niggas every week just for fun. Point the motherfucking direction. I'm riding. [*Giggling*] We called it "catching bodies."

The terms of exchange were enforced by violent group shaming when abrogated:

Robert: If someone even looked in your direction the wrong way, and you ain't get him, and we seen that, we on your ass. If you ain't riding, then you can't walk with us, dawg, don't even act like you with us.

Shifting performatively from a narration of isolated embattlement to one of peer group solidarity to one of kin-based reciprocity, Robert claimed he ultimately sought refuge in the violent potential of solidary consanguinity. We see, once again, the closest set of kin relations, attempting to maintain unity through frequent exchanges of assistive violence, but ultimately imploding:

Robert: Later, my squad was family. Ain't none of us going to cross each other. We blood! All us has this RNR tat [*pointing to the letters tattooed on his forearm*]. Real Niggas Ride. About like 25 of us had it though. I've got a big family. It wasn't nobody outside the bloodline. After that, I didn't fight alone most of the time because you could get rolled on. But now most of them dead, locked up, or had to leave Philly.

Riders in the Drug Economy

Robert's overdetermined kin-enforced rider habitus was not produced by the drug economy, but to rise in the hierarchy of high-risk, street-level drug selling one needs to have a rider reputation. Not surprisingly, street-level drug selling became Robert's employment refuge when he was fired from his job

at a meat packing plant following an occupational injury. The profits that primitive accumulation extracts from drug markets are "subsidized" by co-opting (and reinforcing) the dispositions to rage and generous violent solidarity that are inculcated in early childhood, capitalizing on the skill that charismatic young men and women develop for fistfighting, braving gunfire, and evaluating aggressive threats.

More subtly, collective dependence on income from drug sales and appreciation for the cultural capital of violence create a dynamic of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2000b:164–205) that naturalizes and mystifies the exploitative power of the drug bosses, persuading low-level employees that they must enforce the monopoly ownership of their *bichote's* corner and absorb the risks as a matter of self-respect. Jay, the owner of a competing heroin and cocaine sales spot on an adjacent block, laughed when we asked him how much he would have to pay someone to have a customer beaten up for ripping off his workers. "I don't have to pay for that, my people are riders." Roland's first felony case, for example, was for possession of a handgun that he had brought to the drug corner where he worked as a street seller in order to chase off someone encroaching from a competing drug boss's corner. It did not occur to Roland to ask the *bichote* to enforce his own territorial control. Instead Roland interpreted the rival seller's unauthorized proximity as a personal insult. Had Roland requested assistance from his boss to chase off the competitor, he risked being ridiculed with the misogynist insult "pussy." Asserting one's masculinity by defending the economic interests of one's boss with deadly force is a classic manifestation of the symbolic violence bolstering profitable drug economy hierarchies.

There was a dramatic illustration of masculine shaming for failure to mobilize violence in defense of a drug corner's profits during our second year of residence on the block when Paul, a well-liked, 23-year-old, night-shift manager on Jay's corner, was pistol-whipped and robbed of both "the cash and the stash." This was the second successful stickup of this corner in the 2-week period since John, a new street seller, had been hired on the afternoon shift's sales crew. Because both holdups occurred strategically at the transition from the graveyard shift to the morning shift, it was assumed to be an inside job, and John, the newcomer on the afternoon shift, became the primary suspect. Paul brought a revolver to work the next day and drew it on John when he reported for his shift, and he demanded an explanation. The morning-shift manager, off-duty at the time but visiting his girlfriend on the block, proactively punched John in the face when he pleaded his innocence. Evidently guilty and fully prepared for foul play, two of John's cousins suddenly appeared with handguns drawn. The off-duty shift manager dove into his car to grab his weapon. After a brief standoff, followed by a wild exchange of gunfire, John and his two cousins fled. Hakeem, a boisterous 15-year-old, noticed that Paul was not shooting his revolver and grabbed it from him to lead the chase, firing at the fugitives until he ran out of bullets. Hakeem was eager to prove himself as a rider, because he had only recently joined

Jay's sales crew after cutting off his court-imposed home-arrest ankle bracelet for a previous drug case from another neighborhood. Paul lost so much credibility from his failure to shoot that Jay, the drug boss, demoted him from night-shift manager to street seller.

Perhaps the most insidious dimension of the symbolic violence legitimizing internecine brutality is the fact that these shoot-outs, which reassert the monopoly control of drug bosses and sometimes hurt neighbors, are experienced as fun, exciting events rife with potential (cf. Meeker 1979). Paul's peers maligned him for his lack of nerve for several weeks after the shoot-out. To them, the gunfight was an exciting reaffirmation of their masculinity and sense of solidarity.

The Punitive Interface with State Institutions

The state interfaces incongruently with the inner city's moral economy of violence, which simultaneously overlaps with, contradicts, reacts against, and thrives on the parallel but institutionally buttressed moral logics of "street-level [law enforcement] bureaucrats" (Lipsky 2010 [1980]). Riders and street-level drug sellers are periodically swept up by the carceral dragnet, and attempts to rely on police aid are exceptional and often counterproductive. When Arlena, a popular, older woman on the block, was being severely beaten by Willie, her unpopular partner, a neighbor called 911. The call, however, led to the incarceration of Arlena and three kinsmen who rode to avenge her in the face of police inaction and mixed messages. In a field note, Fernando describes the following:

There are two police cars from the local police district outside Arlena's house. I hear a woman yelling [in Spanish] "It's about time they locked Willie up! Desgraciado [that good-for-nothing]!"

Moments later, an officer is explaining to Arlena that he cannot arrest Willie "just like that, without a restraining order!"

Pookie and Efrain (Arlena's two oldest sons) and Papo (her favorite brother-in-law) demand an explanation from the officer, who, in sympathy with their outrage, and perhaps moved by Arlena's sobbing and her swelling right eye, tells them with a wink, "Wait till we leave and do what you need to do."

As soon as the police leave, Efrain, led by Papo with a baseball bat and Pookie gripping a golf-club, run into the house to punish Willie. Sol, an ex-girlfriend of Papo's, warns them not to get involved, reminding Papo of his three outstanding bench warrants for unresolved drug cases. Someone else notes that Pookie and Efrain are both on probation for drug sales.

Ten minutes later a highway patrol car screeches to a stop. Someone must have called 911 again. Highway patrol officers are nicknamed "*los embotados* [the ones with boots]" because of their reputation for kicking people with their heavy boots. They drag everyone out of the house in front

of the crowd. To everyone's astonishment, the officers ask Willie to identify his assailants, and they arrest Papo, Pookie, Efrain, and even Arlena, despite her now dark black swollen right eye. Willie is not arrested, and everyone suspects he is receiving special treatment from the police for being a "*chota* [snitch]."

The police are unpredictable but powerful arbiters of conflict. Despite the apparent rigidity of the code of law, individual officers have tremendous discretionary authority in face-to-face interactions. They too are informed by a moral code that at times overlaps with local logics ("Wait 'til we leave and do what you need to do"). But often the quasi-sovereign punitive power of the police and the courts asserts itself in direct opposition to these logics. Papo, Pookie, Efrain, and Arlena were each held in the county jail on detainers for periods ranging from 3 to 11 months. The three men had thought they had police permission as responsible kinsmen to protect a vulnerable female family member from an abusive lover. All of them eventually received a combination of time served, house arrest, and 2 additional years of probation, leaving them vulnerable to lengthy reincarceration if found guilty of another felony or a routine "technical probation violation" (such as failing to report a change of address or delivering a drug-tainted urine on a random drug test).

Trust in the police is further eroded by routine police malfeasance, especially that of narcotics officers. Many residents of our micro-neighborhood, including all the members of our ethnographic team, have been verbally harassed by the police. A significant number of local residents, including one member of our ethnographic team (Philippe), have been physically abused or falsely arrested. Local and national press have documented major scandals of police brutality and corruption in Philadelphia during every decade since the 1970s (Klein 1987; National Public Radio 2010; *Time Magazine* editors 1978). According to a 1998 Human Rights Watch report, "[Philadelphia has] the worst reputation of big city police departments in the United States. . . . Officers raided drug houses, stole money from dealers, beat anyone who got in the way and, as one judge . . . stated, 'squashed the Bill of Rights into the mud'" (Collins 1998:314–335).

Despite the common sense assumption that the police cannot be fully trusted, neighborhood residents (like the mothers on our block following Benito's midday shoot-out) desire police protection and occasionally seek it. Nevertheless, even our neighbors who are not involved in the drug economy, such as the family caught in the crossfire of the midday shoot-out, feel the necessity to enforce justice on their own. In this context of multiple levels of violence and antagonistic citizen-state relations—that range from institutionalized police malfeasance and unpredictably punitive courts to territorial conflicts in the drug economy, instrumental criminal assaults, and idiosyncratic interpersonal disputes—a common sense emerges valorizing violent self-protection. The emergent logic for a self-sufficient moral economy of violence, however, fur-

ther exposes self-respecting riders to arrest and incarceration to which this solidarity exposes them.

Conclusion: Primitive Accumulation on the Body and the Political Involution of Violence

Applying Marx's theory of primitive accumulation to the drug economy helps us combine Thompson's original formulation of the moral economy with Mauss's analysis of the reciprocal obligations imposed by gift-giving to analyze the political and economic effects of the involution of US inner-city violence. The mothers on our block imposed a moratorium on drug-dealing violence by tentatively engaging with the police. Like the rioters Thompson analyzed in eighteenth-century England, they mobilized charismatically, but only temporarily, around transgressions of "social norms and obligations of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community" (Thompson 1971:71). Following Mauss's insights, we can understand why so many of our neighbors, especially the young men and women involved in the drug economy—but also schoolchildren, brothers, and cousins, like Robert, and middle-aged kinsmen, like Pookie, Papo, and Efrain—mobilize so readily to protect themselves and others in social networks of riders despite the extraordinary risk of bodily harm and incarceration to which this sense of solidarity exposes them.

Although based on a disposition to sociality and generosity, the moral economy of violence requires a facility for rage and an anxiety over insult that exacerbates community insecurity. Consequently, despite a dramatic overall national trend of decreasing violent crime rates since the mid-1990s (Blumstein and Wallman 2006), shootings, stabbings, and assaults continue to occur at unacceptably high rates in the US inner city. Unlike the incipient class solidarity identified by Thompson in the eighteenth century's moral economy of grain riots, "riding" in the twenty-first-century inner city generates a destructive solidarity predicated on intraclass interpersonal violence. The spectacular nature of each violent incident amplifies the prevailing sense of physical insecurity and further elevates the symbolic and practical importance of commanding violent resources. In short, violence is converted into a valuable but fragile resource: unstable cultural and social capital that meshes ethically with gender and kin-based roles and is cast not as choice but as obligation to both individuals and the local community.

This moral economy of violence benefits the drug bosses and also legitimizes a coercive response by the state that ironically further augments the profitability of the drug economy. Marx defined *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* (literally, "original accumulation") as the creation of capital through physical or military coercion resulting in the total exhaustion, rather than the maintenance or reproduction, of the original resource base. We extend this primitive accumulation lens to understand how value can be extracted destructively from the human body both in the drug econ-

omy and in the moral economy of assistive violence depleting the nonrenewable resources of organic life and health. Drug bosses profit from the painful addiction of their clients and from the eagerness of riders to build valuable reputations by shooting and maiming the bodies of the bichotes' competitors. The utility of violent capital, however, extends well beyond the drug workforce. In the context of some zones of intensive imbrication in the drug economy and social isolation, it seeps into the common sense of what becomes desirable in family, friends, and lovers, generating social capital and reaffirming fraught kinship bonds through solidary violence. Obviously, some residents, especially those who are less dependent on the drug trade (or have been galvanized by experience) self-reflexively object to the normalization of intracommunity and interpersonal violence. Furthermore, there is abundant fear and anger concerning the physical insecurity imposed by the drug trade. The moral economy of violence is not a universal consensus or a habitus of poverty but the social product of a particular form of capital.

Thompson's original moral economy formulation and Scott's application of it to Southeast Asia recognized that moral economy practices often ultimately reinforce hierarchical relationships despite providing the basis for an emergent class consciousness. In the inner city, in the context of extreme spatial class segregation and disenfranchisement from integration in the legal labor force, however, the moral economy of violence profoundly depoliticizes the poor, turning violence inward—neighbor on neighbor. The violence that is irregularly but spectacularly reported on local television news stations pathologizes the poor as dangerous "others," legitimizing zero tolerance carceral repression in the name of public safety and moral retribution and fueling more rounds of institutional and structural violence (disinvestment by the private sector and decreases in public funds for welfare, health, education, and housing). Perhaps most importantly, the de facto apartheid boundaries of the US inner city are normalized by the fact that most people in the United States fear they will be ripped limb from limb if they set foot in the ghetto.

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Comments

In Search of an Interpretive Key

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If the measure of a good ethnography is the yielding of new empirical data on emerging or unknown social universes together with the production of analytical tools that, transcending the case, can become useful in understanding and explaining other cases, then this article is exemplary of what ethnography should be. The authors offer an array of vivid empirical observations and, just as important, a set of interpretative keys that allow for a superior understanding of what is going on in that violent world and that could potentially act as interrogating arrows pointing toward new avenues of inquiry in others.

Some aspects of the world the authors of this fascinating paper describe will look familiar to the students of forms of “street justice,” a world in which retaliation and reputation (keeping it, losing it) are central. But it is in its illumination of the meanings that people attach to violence that this paper offers most of its novel insights. As I am sure other readers will note, the paper expounds upon the empirical data by way of two of the proposed theoretical lenses (a modification and refinement of Thompson’s moral economy and Mauss’s reciprocity) and then trusts the readers to believe the authors’ empirical assertions regarding the other perspectives (e.g., the evidence on Marx’s primitive accumulation plus exploitation is more suggested than developed). In the language used these days by some of my fellow ethnographers, the authors sometimes *tell* rather than *show* (a limitation, I’m afraid, that is almost intrinsic in ethnographies in article format). One of those “told-more-than-shown” claims—that of the existence of a “habitus” as the outcome of a long learning process that begins in childhood—suggested to me the following expression: Thompson + Mauss + Marx + Bourdieu = Tilly (or moral economy + reciprocity + accumulation and exploitation + habitus = repertoire). So, at the risk of adding one more term to an already complicated bricolage, let me propose that the notion of “repertoire” has the potential to unify the disparate set of analytical implements proposed here.

Coined and popularized by Charles Tilly to understand and explain patterns of collective claim-making across time and space, the notion of repertoire focuses on the set of routines by which people get together to act on their shared interests. Along the lines proposed by the authors, the notion of repertoire brings together different levels of analysis, ranging from large-scale changes such as the development of capitalism (with the subsequent proletarianization of work) and the process of state-making (with the parallel growth of the state’s bulk, complexity, and penetration of its coercive and

extractive power) to patterns of citizen-state interaction. Tilly’s model exhorts us, in ways that resonate with what the authors of this paper are trying to do here, to conceptually hold together macro-structures and micro-processes by looking closely at the ways in which big changes indirectly shape collective action by affecting the interests, opportunities, organizations, and identities of ordinary people. Repertoires are both cultural and political constructs. They are “learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as a result of political propaganda; they emerge from struggle” (Tilly 1995:26). People “learn to break windows in protest, attack pilloried prisoners, tear down dishonored houses, stage public marches, petition, hold formal meetings, organize special-interest associations. At any particular point in history, however, they learn only a rather small number of alternative ways to act together” (Tilly 1995:26). This learned set of contentious routines, furthermore, is deeply political in that it (a) emerges from continuous struggles against the state, (b) has an intimate relationship with everyday life and routine politics, and (c) is constrained by patterns of state repression (Tilly 1986, 2006).

Scaled down and adapted to the study of urban violence, the theatrical metaphor of repertoire leads us not only to identify regularities in violent exchanges but also to examine their economic and political determinations and their cultural dimensions. Using the notion of repertoire to unify the diverse theoretical insights of this illuminating and provocative paper will lead us to scrutinize the different things people seek to accomplish when they use, threaten to use, or refuse to use physical force (whether it is to gain respect, to seek retaliation, or to do something else), the things they learn in their repeated attempts at dealing with violence—to inquire, for example, whether or not violence becomes “normalized”—and the ways in which interpersonal violence is shaped by the state presence at the urban margins. With the advantage of simplicity, without risking losing sight of the many factors at play, the notion of repertoire could, in principle, merge the diverse conceptual tools proposed here and serve to examine other universes, such as those of *favelas*, *villas miserias*, or *comunas* characterized by similar levels of brutality and paradoxical forms of sociability.

Comments

A Windy Winter Night in North Philly

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On a windy winter night in 2011, two members of the research team, Philippe Bourgois and Fernando Montero Castrillo,

gave me a mini-tour of their North Philadelphia field site. As a South Bronx native, I expected few surprises. I was sure I had seen it all. But I was not prepared for what came next: abandoned row homes standing in eerie silence alongside rubble-strewn lots. Drug dealers dotting the bleak, cold streets, watching, waiting, figuring out who was a potential sale or a cop. Watch your step—jagged, uneven streets and sidewalks. Crumbling structures that seemed to provide little relief from the cold. Alarming. Even the notorious South Bronx no longer looked barren or like an arsonist's playground. North Philly seemed stuck in time, as though it hadn't budged.

The researchers also introduced me to some of the neighborhood's Puerto Rican residents. Afterward, I often wondered about them, about the vigilant drug dealer I met as he scouted the street, about the street-savvy mom who welcomed me into her home, about the young men who eyed me cautiously, showing a suspicion of strangers. What was life like within this marginal Puerto Rican community, where desolation, distrust, and the drug economy seemed to rule? I wanted to know.

This research article has answered this question, showing how the residents' daily lives revolve around a dangerous resource: violence. As deindustrialization weakens men as financial contributors to families, some of them choose to work in the illegal drug economy. The drug economy, which is based on outlaw capitalism (Black 2009; Contreras 2013) then normalizes violence: violence is used to punish wrongdoers, to take over new territories, and to intimidate enemies. The rise of violence makes violence an important resource, one that members exchange as gifts or favors to ensure solidarity and reciprocity.

Within the context of previous research, this finding surprises me. Doing violence is hard, and few people can do it competently (Collins 2008; Contreras 2013). Yet, in this North Philly community, violence becomes integral to most residents. In fact, community adults instill violence in their children, teaching them that violence protects mothers, daughters, sisters, and brothers—that violence shows loyalty and reliability. That violence bonds people. Yet such normalization of violence can backfire. Residents become potential victims of brutal "beat downs" or of gun battles between rival dealers. Thus, adults and children alike live in a perpetual state of aggression, insecurity, and fear.

Equally insightful is how the "bichotes," or drug bosses, ultimately win out. Through symbolic violence, North Philly dealers believe that they must do violence to protect the bichote's drug profits. Thus, they risk physical harm and imprisonment to show that they are "riders," who willingly wield violence out of loyalty. The larger community also falls prey to the bichotes, who provide residents with block parties and help pay their bills. This legitimizes the drug market. This legitimizes the drug market's violence, too. I must say that this research finding fills a serious gap in the drug market literature, one that often misses how power and social inequalities appear and are reinforced in the underground econ-

omy (for examples of researchers missing this opportunity, see Anderson [1999] and Jacobs [1999]).

In all, these rich and theoretical fieldwork accounts show how we must rethink our understanding of inner-city violence. Such violence is more than a product of street codes that influence how one earns respect (Anderson 1999). Such violence is more than an extension of a criminal lifestyle that values chaos or unpredictable acts (Katz 1988; Shover and Honaker 1992). Such violence is just as much about riding—about using violence to integrate oneself into the community, to create solidarity, to show loyalty, care, and love.

But such violence is just as much about the larger structural and political forces—neo-liberal-backed forces—that abandon, disregard, and disenfranchise our nation's working class and poor. Because this North Philly research shows how the dramatic crime drop of the 1990s fails to reflect the reality of communities still submerged in poverty, joblessness, hopelessness, and state neglect. We must pay more attention to this point. We must find ways to show how larger social inequality appears in the immediacy of people's lives. That symbolic violence and "gift-giving" have taken a form that actively encourages violence and the risk of liberty, life, and limb shows the tragic state of the moral economy in marginal inner-city life.

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Karandinos et al.'s wide-ranging and innovative paper seeks to analyze US inner-city violence as (1) a facilitator of primitive accumulation in the drug economy (à la Marx), (2) a product of a system of reciprocal obligations (à la Mauss), and (3) a manifestation of moral economic norms (à la E. P. Thompson). Among the questions that such an ambitious theoretical synthesis inevitably poses are these: (1) Does the application of these time-honored categories to a new object provide enhanced explanatory power? And (2), what might be gained and what lost by broadening the application of these concepts or applying them in novel ways? A short comment cannot do justice to these questions, but it is worth raising them nonetheless, since the "The Moral Economy of Violence in the US Inner City" makes bold claims, explicitly and implicitly, about both.

Marx's notion of "primitive accumulation" was fundamentally concerned with violent processes (e.g., enclosures) that separated a new working class from the soil, but it was also about the immiseration of those unable to find employment in manufacturing or to adapt to capitalist work discipline. Sixteenth-century European proletarians were, he remarks, "turned *en masse* into beggars, robbers, [and] vagabonds, partly from inclination, in most cases from stress

of circumstances” (1906:806). This description has a remarkably contemporary ring, even if the language is antiquated, and perhaps particularly in the North Philadelphia neighborhood described by Karandinos et al. While Marx clearly intended his theory (which he developed in opposition to Adam Smith’s “previous accumulation”) to apply to the “starting point” of the capitalist mode of production, David Harvey (2003) and Michael Perelman (2000), among many others, have argued for its continuing relevance. The signal contribution of Karandinos et al. is to invite the reader to consider the brutal violence of US inner cities and the physical destruction of addicts’ and “riders” bodies as important motors of accumulation. One might ask, however, how weighty such mechanisms might be in relation to the extreme price differentials produced by illegality itself, an element of context that the authors appear to take largely for granted.

Marx regarded “primitive accumulation” as typical of early capitalism, and Mauss, similarly, viewed gift economies as “archaic” and prior to “the money market” (1967 [1925]:45). So how Maussian are the North Philadelphia “riders” and their families? Karandinos et al. demonstrate persuasively that survival in high-crime neighborhoods depends on nurturing and maintaining relations of mutual support and reciprocal obligation, including dependably violent allies capable of impeding attacks and delivering retribution. This formulation differs from Mauss’s, which saw “contracts” and “alliances” cemented by reciprocity not as a way of organizing violence but as a way of avoiding it: “In order to trade, man must first lay down his spear” (1967 [1925]:80). Curiously given their fascination with Mauss and their reliance on notions of “habitus,” the authors attribute the latter term entirely to Bourdieu, ignoring Mauss’s foundational role in its development (Mauss 2006 [1935]).

The term “moral economy” has “an ancient pedigree” (Lind 2010:34–35), though in the contemporary social sciences James C. Scott (1976) and Edward P. Thompson (1971) are the foundational figures. In a recent paper (Edelman 2012), I decried the tendency of many of today’s anthropologists to deploy “moral economy” as an overly capacious and polysemic category eviscerated of its political and class content. I also pointed out that moral economy theory was drifting “in the direction of Mauss’s (1967 [1925]) emphasis on the obligation to give and the obligation to receive and away from the concern with class tensions and rebellion that characterized its inception” (Edelman 2012:62). After all, the North Philadelphia residents that Karandinos et al. describe have few, if any, expectations of *elite largesse*, such as those that sparked grain riots in eighteenth-century England or rural uprisings in twentieth-century Indochina. Their “moral” universe is largely or entirely horizontal, limited to neighbors, frequently unreliable kin, and “bichotes” or “big shot” drug dealers, with the latter providing perhaps the closest yet very imperfect analog to the grain merchants and landlords that are central to Scott’s and Thompson’s analyses. Karandinos et al.’s gutsy and original research makes a significant con-

tribution in elucidating the destructive solidarities behind US inner-city violence, drug economy profits, and myriad forms of social exclusion. They rightfully point out that “moral economy” is “useful for an anthropological exploration of, on the one hand, the contradictory pressures of extra-state customary justice and, on the other hand, the reverberations of disjunctive shifts in modes of production.” They also acknowledge, however, that “the moral economy of violence profoundly depoliticizes the poor, turning violence inward—neighbor on neighbor.” This, of course, marks a profound departure from previous approaches, which saw in “moral economy” a conceptual tool for analyzing how the poor understood and responded to their exploitation as a class.

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According to a French proverb, “Abondance de biens ne nuit pas” (an English equivalent would be: “Plenty is no plague”). The paper under discussion here may prove that the aphorism is truer for ethnography than for theory.

Indeed, this remarkable collective research, grounded in Philippe Bourgois’s long experience of fieldwork on violence and addiction in several inner cities of the United States, partly with Laurie Hart, and George Karandinos’s and Fernando Montero Castrillo’s extended presence in an abandoned neighborhood of Philadelphia, proposes a “descent into the ordinary,” to use Veena Das’s expression (2007), of individuals whose lives are mostly circumscribed within the space of a few blocks where insecurity, material scarcity, and heterodox norms prevail. The ordinary of these men and women, as well as children, who are for once made visible, consists of drug selling and consuming, control of territory and elimination of rivals, police raids and mass incarceration, assaulting and shooting, but it also comprises values and sentiments, references to mutual obligation and reciprocal respect, responsibility toward one’s relatives and love of one’s neighbors, the morality of deviance and the ethics of “riding.” Via anecdotes and dialogues, the authors effectively render the unfamiliar features of this universe familiar (the dispositional propensity to fight potential enemies discussed through the beating of an elderly addict) and the insignificant details of the everyday significant (the banality of violence unveiled by a mundane conversation about a bullet hole). Without romantic fascination for their subjects, they apprehend the local hierarchy of the milieu, from the “bichote” to the night-shift manager to the street seller, and the masculine ethos of its members, implying the use of physical force, especially to protect mothers and sisters, as well as the demonstration of sexual potency. Such a rich ethnography, with its analytical

insights, could have sufficed for the comprehension of the social and moral world of these marginalized denizens.

The problem arises when they top their subtly depicted empirical infrastructure with a heavily constructed theoretical superstructure. To account for their findings, they assert that “applying Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation to the drug economy helps us combine Thompson’s original formulation of the moral economy with Mauss’s analysis of the reciprocal obligations imposed by gift-giving to analyze the political and economic effects of the involution of US inner-city violence.” The somewhat artificial character of this hybrid architecture is revealed by its location in the paper: briefly evoked in the introduction, it is substantially discussed in the conclusion, but it does not seem to nourish the core of the research; moreover, the justification of the reference to the concept of “moral economy” is not based on the material presented in the course of the text but illustrated by the final and brief anecdote of mothers calling the police for help. In fact, the “application” of E. P. Thompson’s idea of moral economy does not fit well the description provided by the authors for three main reasons: first, the original concept fundamentally involves the economic realm, of which very little is presented here concerning the narcotics market; second, it explicitly excludes values and sentiments, which are convincingly characterized in the case study; third, it supposes a subjective genitive, for instance the moral economy of the peasant, rather than an objective one, as is the case with the moral economy of violence. The “combination” with Mauss’s theory of the gift could have been productive, but it is only mentioned in passing and does not seem to add to the understanding of the situations under analysis. Finally, the bold recourse to Marx’s idea of original accumulation is interesting but provides a macro-social rather than a micro-social interpretation of life in the inner city.

A better framework to interpret the valuable ethnography presented here might be found in Durkheim’s neo-Kantian approach, explicitly cited at the beginning of the paper and allusively recalled at the end via the use of the expression “moral code.” What the authors are forcefully describing and analyzing is the set of norms, values, emotions, and sentiments that prevail among the residents of these neighborhoods: respect, honor, anger, love, solidarity, and so forth. It is the moral world of the inner city. This is what Durkheim (2010 [1924]) regards as the definition of morality: the sense of duty and obligation, complemented by the desire to follow it. But I do not want to be misunderstood. In proposing this classical approach of morality, I am not pleading for it—actually, in my own work, I distance myself from it (Fassin 2012a)—but simply suggesting that it might more accurately account for what is presented in the paper. In criticizing the concept of moral economy as it is used here, I am not defending an orthodox definition—on the contrary, I have developed an alternative one (Fassin 2012b)—but merely asserting that a more thorough discussion and reformulation of the original could enrich our comprehension of the articulation between

the moral and the political in contexts marked by the extreme inequality of lives.

Between Using a Rock and Living in a Hard Place

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Persistent patterns of high unemployment, educational achievement gaps, wage gaps, and racial wealth disparities have created a climate in many areas of urban America wherein violence, crime, and the underground or “gray” economy has thrived (e.g., Drake and Cayton 1945; DuBois 1899; Wilson 1987, 1996; Venkatesh 2006). In fact, such social issues have provided a potent recipe for a certain and nearly unrelenting brand of inequality better known as urban poverty. With limited formal educational and economic options, research has shown that urban residents, especially minorities, take refuge in alternative forms of income generation. Sometimes these routes induce violent episodes in already underserved and underdeveloped poor urban communities of color (Sampson and Bartusch 1998).

In their well-researched and descriptively rich article, Karandinos and his colleagues seek to highlight more than just everyday acts of urban violence. Rather they illustrate that such violence is best understood through a lens that combines notions of power, morality, and habitus emergent from the works of Karl Marx, Marcel Mauss, and Pierre Bourdieu, respectively. In tandem, they are able to demonstrate much like Anderson (1999) and Bourgois (1996) that underdeveloped urban minority neighborhoods are not amoral but instead are deploying a variegated moral logic in order to navigate the terrains of poverty within and outside of their homes and neighborhoods.

As a result, this article offers a new way to understand the true impact of poverty, beyond the conventional narratives that seek to identify culprits and victims, guns and drugs, dilapidated streets, and local politics. Undergirding much of what the authors observed in their time in a Puerto Rican neighborhood in North Philadelphia is that the “search for respect” endures and is perhaps made more necessary within our current socioeconomic context. Offering a taxonomy of urban violence and actors, Karandinos and his colleagues remind us that there is still much work to be done to sure up the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of poor and working-class urban minorities.

For my part, I would like to push the analysis of urban poverty and violence they offer; namely, that poverty, like racism, sexism, and homophobia (to name a few), is perhaps better understood as a series of persisting injuries that leave

many dead, psychologically troubled, socioeconomically handicapped, and emotionally on edge. Here the image of an athlete is a fruitful metaphor. If an athlete is injured, her ability to perform at the highest level is hampered dramatically. Just ask any competitive athlete who is coping with a knee injury or an ACL tear. However, in our urban policies, there is little to no provision for rehabilitating oneself (or one's neighborhood) from the effects of poverty, especially if you are an urban minority in the inner city. To be sure, many urban minorities still manage to thrive and survive despite such conditions, albeit nursing the injuries of inequality along the way.

Resource scarcity abounds, and food deserts and a volatile drug climate make for difficult living, wherein individuals are navigating, participating, avoiding, or anticipating some violent episode wherein casualties are likely (e.g., Papachristos 2009). We need only be reminded of the unfortunate death earlier this year of Hadiya Pendleton, a young black teenager in Chicago who was a casualty of the sort of urban violence Karandinos and his colleagues detail. Such tragedy notwithstanding, their article also offers a backstage insight into the necessary mobilization required to enact these violent episodes. There is a buildup of tension, rivalries, and animosities wherein kin (fictive and real) are deployed to facilitate effectively carrying out such violence.

This undercurrent of mobilization is perhaps the most important finding as it demystifies the infrastructure of urban violence. Using mobilization, the authors help to show that there is a division of labor in urban violence and that such organization operates like a structural force within such communities, often countered by efforts of local residents to create safe spaces for neighborhood children (Gotham and Brumley 2002). Mobilization is also key because it reveals a relative agency already embedded and in practice in poor and working-class urban minority communities like North Philadelphia's Puerto Rican enclaves (e.g., Hunter 2010, 2013). How then can we generate the necessary intersection between urban policies that reduce the climate of violence while also recognizing the agency of urban minorities that is always and already present?

While that question requires much more attention, it is in the article of Karandinos and his colleagues that we are given an up-close account of how urban minorities channel their agency when the state, local, and federal governments continually fail them. Although the bulk of the article is descriptively about the climate of violence in the North Philadelphia Puerto Rican enclave, it is perhaps better understood as showing us that while leaders and elected officials are deciding what to do to address urban poverty and crime, minorities in urban America are making decisions to protect themselves and those they love. The results are by no means ideal. They are, however, a real consequence of the urban policy lag that began long before and after there was a "War on Poverty" or a Moynihan Report.

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Based on their collaborative research in a deindustrialized working-class neighborhood, where the drug economy is the only one accessible "for poor male high school dropouts," as well as the only "remaining source of income generation accessible to neighborhood residents," Karandinos, Hart, Montero Castrillo, and Bourgois propose a remarkable description of the uses of violence in the US inner city. The article's main contribution is to show that violence must be understood functionally, as a constitutive element of a social situation marked by the "disruptive effects of market and state forces," rather than as a deviant, or a specific cultural, trait. From this point of view, the authors' evocation of the anthropology of violence in other contexts (specifically West Africa) is both productive and stimulating: young men must "become fighters as a survival skill."

In order to interpret the reasons behind such high levels of violence, and their broader significance for our understanding of the inner city, the authors propose a combination of heterogeneous concepts to serve as explanations. The Marxist conceptualization of primitive accumulation allows us to comprehend the "exploitative productivity of violence." The wasting of bodies and lives in drug use, incarceration, and violent death serve as a primary resource for the extortion of capital gain and the very constitution of the capital of dealer-entrepreneurs. This more general economic logic is translated to the individual scale through Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic violence. Violence then becomes, in an uncertain context, "a valuable but fragile resource," mobilizing a series of emotions (rage, anxiety, fun, excitation), which have been instilled since childhood. The Maussian analysis of the gift then allows the authors to maintain that the uses of violence do not result solely from individual calculations but constitute "reciprocal exchanges of assistive violence." Fighting on behalf of another person can be understood as an obligation in order for an individual to become enrolled in social networks, within which one must avoid any "failure to reciprocate."

Using the notion of moral economy, reintroduced in anthropology with the 2005 issue of *American Anthropologist* (notably Edelman 2005; Scott 2005; Sivaramakrishnan 2005; also see Fassin 2009), the authors aim to go beyond the Maussian definition of "the norm" by imbuing the term with a moral signification that is positive, explicit, conscious, and shared. In considering the uses of violence as part of a "morally regulated gift economy," it becomes possible to "unpack the local ethics for interpersonal and criminal violence" and to confirm the existence of ideals of justice and injustice, good and bad, mobilized by the actors.

This theoretical proposition raises several difficult issues. On an empirical level, one wonders whether all the acts of

violence mentioned in the article fit within this model. Do the high levels of violence correspond exclusively to forms of assistive violence described in the first ethnographic vignette? Is there a clear empirical split between cynical, instrumental acts of violence, within the capitalist logic of primitive accumulation, and moral acts of assistance? More abstractly, the combination of different concepts leaves the reader perplexed. Can the use of violence be thought simultaneously in terms of hierarchical “chains of allegiance” and as reciprocal acts of a “gift economy”?

Finally, one wonders whether the moral character of violence is really recognized by those who find themselves in the position of witnesses or victims of a violent scene. From what point of view may we distinguish between “assistive violence” and “transgressive violence”? Does the moral economy of violence provide a shared definition of legitimate acts? Or is it rather a *post facto* justification given by certain actors in order to justify their own actions or criticize others’?

The move toward generalization and unification promised by the concept of moral economy risks replacing one (culturalist) essentialization with another, as well as portraying the local residents in all their diversity as subscribing to the same system of moral representations. The authors tend to unify the “inner city” as a social unit equipped with homogeneous frameworks of thought (see Siméant 2010). They show us, however, a fundamental moral ambivalence on the part of residents not involved in the drug economy, *vis-à-vis* the dealers, who are at once solicited and detested. They also risk interpreting ideals of justice or ethical norms as the causes of action, somewhat neglecting the hierarchical constraints inherent to the organization of the drug economy (which they themselves describe). Can we say that the moral economy “propels,” “imposes,” “requires,” or defines “imperatives”? In the Wittgensteinian tradition, it seems to me more theoretically efficient to provide a pragmatic description of violent actions without postulating an ensemble of beliefs to explain them (Collins 2008; Mariot 2003; Naepels 2013, following Wittgenstein 1979). The justifications or reasons that the actors give for their actions are not necessarily causes (Von Wright 1971, 1991) nor elements of a homogeneous “moral economy.”

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This article discusses the meanings and beliefs that legitimize the use of violence among Puerto Rican residents living in an increasingly impoverished district in the city of Philadelphia where drug dealers impose their rules over younger men and women. By presenting an unfolding scenario of interpersonal violent interactions, this remarkable ethnographical

piece vividly describes local loyalties and imperatives that exacerbate the structural vulnerable position of young men who work for drug dealers in a context of chronic incarceration, marginality, and illegality.

A large patriarchal and hierarchical social system of obligations operates through what the authors call “assistive violence” aimed to restore what people involved in this moral economy consider to be transgressions of important local duties and behaviors. Bosses who dominate key selling points are expected to become generous and responsible providers of parties, meals, funerals, gifts, and favors. On the one hand, they are accountable for the people they love and protect. On the other, their reputation depends on their capacity to mobilize “riding,” that is, aggressive performances of adolescents and young men eager to prove their manliness by protecting their bosses’ economic interests, by avenging offenses against their buddies, and by defending their moms’ and sisters’ respectability.

The connections highlighted in this article between riding and affirmations of masculinity are particularly insightful: displays of aggression make these fellows fearless; their readiness to fight restores their self-respect and dignity. Proving budding masculinity, being the best dude, and becoming the best big brother give them the social recognition and prestige held by very important persons in the neighborhood. As in many other situations related to rebellion and political insurrections, violence gives them the power to be taken seriously. When they engage in risk-taking actions, such as gunfights and shootings that expose them to arrest and incarceration, they know very well they are doing the right thing: they are winning the local public credibility that they will never get from widespread disqualifying perceptions about the inner city and its residents.

These are not only valued violent self-protection practices of the weak to strong visibly dominant others. I think it is appropriate to bring into the discussion Pierre Bourdieu’s explanation of virility to explain how it overlaps with the moral figure of the redeemer. Virility is the source of admiration, social esteem, and satisfaction morally assessed, affirmed, and approved by other *real* men (Bourdieu 2000a:68, 70). In situations in which residents feel the necessity to enforce justice on their own and to settle accounts right away, men are trained and incited to get into social games by a mechanism that Bourdieu calls *libido dominandi*, that is, exclusive masculine social spaces in which they fight for supremacy but also to remoralize their activities widely classified as criminal and illegal.

The police, known in the streets by the nickname of *embotados*, due to their arbitrary and fake performances, symbolizes the hegemonic side of the law, one that demarcates a clear-cut boundary between the world of law-abiding citizens, considered respectable and appropriate, and inner-city residents, viewed as problematic, illegal, and criminal.

Two aspects of this article deserve to be further highlighted: first, the rich cultural codes involved in street and interper-

sonal violence and, second, its exploitative character. Instead of the commonsensical assumption that sees violence as necessarily destructive of conventions and ethics, I think it takes place amid dense, warm, but also unstable sociability. Fear, betrayal, and distrust live side by side with manipulation of affects and conviviality. One main argument of this article is that riding generates a destructive solidarity and reproduces violence. In other words, it contributes to creating the conditions through which the exploiting power of bichotes is perpetuated. This kind of violence has the perverse effect of taking out on your neighbors and beloved ones. Women and children, for instance, are extremely exposed to the gunshots and settling accounts among men to the point that mothers have defied dealers' power over opening a new drugs sales point.

This article makes a major contribution: it traces the lines between structural exclusion caused by broader social order and interpersonal violence lived and reproduced in intimate interpersonal relationships. By revealing how an exploitative and instrumental market draws on an extended hierarchical kinship system based on strong bonds, domination, and fear, it depicts the cruel link between marginality and violence: powerful drug sellers make their profit out of younger residents' quest for reputation. Hardness is interiorized from risking their bodies in performance, by intimating others and bragging about their possession of power. What keeps the reproduction of violence going is the creation of a rigid and unquestioned universe of loyalties and codes of honor that bestows participants with an illusion of dignity that is indeed exploitation.

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In the article by George Karandinos, Laurie Hart, Fernando Montero Castrillo, and Philippe Bourgois, "The Moral Economy of Violence in the US Inner City," which is based on ethnographic observation and systematic field notes, we have a daring ethnography that takes place in the Puerto Rican area of North Philadelphia—Karandinos and Montero Castrillo actually live there—replete with theoretically sustained critical reflections that allow us to think processually (Katz 1997). In this regard, it allows us to understand the interpersonal violence in which the protagonists—Roland, Juan, Alfredo, Sol, and Rico—are trapped. This violence extends beyond their immediate actions and can only be understood in its relationship with the "historical context of deindustrialization, . . . inner-city hyper-segregation, infrastructural desertification, and coercive policing." And it is precisely by contextualizing these relationships that social scientists in-

involved as political advocates in the field of violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004) can challenge the underlying views upon which public policy is based, notably policy that has done so much damage in the region, such as the "war on drugs."

Through ethnographic observations, the article highlights how, in a context of extreme social and spatial segregation combined with the impossibility of integration into the legal labor force for young men, interpersonal violence becomes a capacity and a resource utilized by these young men to join the drug economy, the largest "equal opportunity employer" in the area. The authors reveal how this violence produces deep disruptive relationships and threatening situations for residents in the neighborhood, which in turn require that these young men be willing to experiment and unleash a vengeful rage and protective violence to safeguard their own kin and friends. Violence becomes a sort of "destructive solidarity," producing obligations and reciprocity between young men and their families, which also simultaneously converts them into victims of chronic incarceration by the state. And it is precisely this moral economy of violence that creates certain limits on the exercise of violence; and, once overstepped, these limits bring together neighbors, especially mothers, who denounce violence, which results in the legitimization of police intervention.

The commitment to critical reflection is seen in the authors' theoretical proposal, issuing from an assemblage of different concepts; these concepts are then used as tools to not only "see"—theory's original function—but also to "conceptualize," "reveal," "render understandable," and finally, to "denounce"—the main axis of critical work. We are faced with a writing full of action and movement in the building of their theoretical proposal: a "hybrid moral economy concept," the result of *combining* [emphasis mine] "Thompson's emphasis on disenfranchisement in relation to commoditized market relations with Mauss's analysis of the moral regulation of everyday intraclass reciprocities *by bringing* Marx's theory of primitive accumulation . . . to bear on the exploitative productivity of violence in the everyday state of emergency in the US inner city."

This highly suggestive proposal of utilizing the notion of primitive accumulation allows us to understand "how value can be extracted destructively from the human body," to highlight the gains "drug bosses profit from the painful addiction of their clients and from the eagerness of riders [young men] to build valuable reputations by shooting and maiming the bodies of the bichotes' competitors," and to stress how the state's coercive response increases profits from the drug economy. The usage of the concept of primitive accumulation also draws our attention to the ways in which the local drug economy in North Philadelphia is linked to the global chain of drug production. Thus, we are able to make the connection between the production of drugs in the global South with the violence it produces in the global North. We could extend the authors' use of primitive accumulation to understand

what could be called *risk surplus value*, linked to illegality and the disposition to use violence, especially among young men at the margins of society. In this sense—to continue with the vocabulary of political economy—we can point out that in the chain of production, processing, trafficking, and distribution of a drug like cocaine—a chain that links peasants in the Andean region and the American consumer—there are several layers of actors who are increasing the value of the goods to their final destination: the share of market benefits accruing to farmers who grow coca is only 1.5%, while 98.5% is distributed among carriers, dealers, and distributors of the drug (UNODC 2010:77)—those who are willing to take risks and disposed to use violence to make gains. Additionally, one of the key effects of interventions that seek to control the drug supply results in higher prices—the retail price of cocaine and heroin is equivalent to the price of gold, “while its potential legal price would be rather similar to that of coffee” (UNODC 2012:68).

The reader will find an inspiring ethnography with acute discernments about the chain of events that take place beyond the interpersonal violence in urban marginalized areas, which are characterized by state dereliction and violence. Furthermore, by contributing new framings to this violence, the authors help us to question the generalized “war on drugs” that has done so much damage in the region.

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Reply

Situating Moral Economies

We thank the readers for their insightful comments and for pushing us to clarify and extend our “interpretive keys” (Auyero) for theorizing the forces driving inner-city violence in its relationship to external fields of power. We value the sense of urgency they bring to the discussion of contemporary patterns of violence, urban poverty, and disrupted local social solidarities based on their own ethnographic experiences, knowledge of the relevant literature, and appreciation for the practical/theoretical engagement that this challenging topic deserves.

Our principal ethnographic concern in this paper is to convey the narcotics economy’s imbrications with daily life and intimate subjectivity formation. The truism that “violence begets violence” is generally taken to mean that violence is imitative and retributive. The point of our ethnographic analysis, however, is to unpack this formula with an emphasis on the complex local social productivity of what we are calling a moral economy of violence in relation to its external his-

torical genesis under conditions of political economic scarcity and physical insecurity. As Contreras notes, the drug economy normalizes (uses, displays, rewards, repeats, profits from) violence, and this ambient normalization “makes violence an important [general] resource”—with a “broader currency beyond the borders of drug market logistics.” We are fleshing out the effects of new forms of lumpenization (expulsion from the legitimate economy) that are being exacerbated by a war on drugs and epochal levels of hyperincarceration (the “illegality” flagged by Edelman is key here). At the same time, we explore the complexities of the local meanings of interpersonal and criminal violence and, counterintuitively, the forms of generous sociability from which the narcotics economy profits.

Several of the comments challenge the theoretical armature of the paper. Given its flexibility, polyvalence, and intellectual charisma, the term “moral economy” has, indeed, been seized by a dizzying number of social theorists for divergent and often ill-defined aims. In their publications, both Edelman (2012) and Fassin (2009) have traced the trajectory of the phrase to make sense of—and to rein in—its usages. Anthropologists should, at the very least (they urge), be accurate about what Thompson meant by moral economy to avoid distorting his specific class struggle logic in borrowing the argument piecemeal. The debate has generated much heat: Fassin notes that by 1991 Thompson himself was ready to jettison the term “moral economy” with all its normative connotations since what interested him was, as Fassin points out, not moralities but reciprocity and obligation in a “political economy,” the lived experience of poverty, and the confrontation of customary practice and the market (2009:1237–1245). We share many of these concerns and premises, especially the emphasis on shifts in modes of production (in our case lumpenization) that disrupt the tenor of reciprocity. Food riots in times of famine are generated by the structural vulnerability imposed by the market economy on villagers and peasants, analyzed by Thompson and Scott, respectively. The nature of popular response—as well as of state repression and reprisals by local elites—is grounded in customary practice. Likewise, the moral framing of the exchanges of interpersonal violence that we documented in our field site is shaped by the structural vulnerability of mostly unemployed inner-city residents. The charged context of a drug market rendered artificially profitable by the war on drugs, a superabundant disposable labor force, and a large local and regional addicted customer base, pushes customary expectations of kinship and neighborly solidarity toward a command of violence, elevating its value as a social resource.

Nevertheless, as Edelman argues, the “concern with class tensions and rebellion” was essential to Thompson, and here there is a fundamental empirical difference with the effects of the historical formation of structural inequalities in the contemporary US inner city. To put it bluntly, we are documenting a class at war with itself: demobilization of political consciousness—not resistance. We explicitly recognize in the

report that we are analyzing not interclass but rather intraclass violence. In this sense our social and historical crisis does not match Thompson's (though it shares elements with the later Scott's (Scott 1985), and we make no claim to empirical parallelism. Whether it is the mothers threatening to call down the wrath of the state against out-of-control drug bosses or Roland victimizing a middle-aged addict to perform a defense of his crack-addicted mother's honor, the circulation of mutually recognizable, if not fully legitimized, forms of violence is a key feature of the pragmatic social reality. It might have made sense for us to un muddy the waters by taking a cue from the later Thompson (1991), and reverting to a simpler "[Political] Economy of Violence" (the original title of Karandinos's thesis that seeded this article). That term, however, carries its own mechanistically functional risks. It also obscures the local logics for the persuasive sense of obligation to fragile kin and social networks, as well as to self-respect, that propels local violent acts.

Fassin suggestively proposes that any "moral economy" supposes a subjective genitive. If we understand Fassin's syntactical critique correctly, we might have coined a "moral economy of the lumpen" consistent with Scott's "moral economy of the peasant." But framing a phenomenon as a moral economy "of the peasant" or "of the lumpen" may, in itself, be flawed because of its implied generalization about a unitary class with a unitary consciousness. Consequently, we find it more productive to place the emphasis on the moral economies, not of unitary classes or categories of populations, but of particular structural and historical circumstances: for example, the moral economy that emerges in the context of child bearing under the conditions of late twentieth-century Brazilian poverty (see, e.g., Scheper-Hughes 1992) or, in our case, the moral economy of kinship and solidarity in a drug market neighborhood. In some sense this formulation, in line with our emphasis on subjectification, stands between the two syntactical forms, without defaulting to misplaced concreteness—the "pathetic fallacy" of attributing agency to an abstract noun (a fallacy rendered provocative to varying degrees in the social sciences, however, by conceptions of the agency-effects of objects within networks [Gell 1998; Latour 2005]). Perhaps, then, Fassin's questioning of the syntax here helps us push Thompson's concept toward a more subtle interpretation of class in the twenty-first century as a complex political economy of subject formation. (For additional interesting prior uses of the phrase "moral economy of violence" in historical studies not already cited in our article, see Amussen 1994; Lee and Vaughan 2008.)

Above all, by retaining the term "moral" in our conception of political economy, we also want to highlight the centrality of kinship and gender in our analysis (implied in the root meaning of "economy" [*oikonomia*, law/custom of the household] in its contrast to politics). We fear this centrality might not have been expressed clearly enough in our paper as it was not discussed by the commentators. We purposefully focused our ethnographic selections on the ways in which violence is

an abundant "free" (but costly and valuable) resource that structures reciprocities. The currency of violence in the neighborhood circulates where residents can afford to exchange few other "goods" so generously. This lens enables us to see that, in the stress that US inner-city poverty exerts specifically on the liens of kinship relations, a demand has emerged for an iterative, hypervisible, unambiguous—often epiphenal—affirmation of solidarity. Fraught kin ties push young men in particular to a demonstrative deployment of brutality against neighbors and passerbys (see, e.g., Robert's discussion of defending sisters with whom he did not grow up; his definition of masculinity in relation to his mother's imperative to defend his sisters; and his account of "catching bodies" with his adolescent riders). Salcedo Fidalgo's comment on virility brings patriarchy and masculinity back to center stage. The centrality of masculinity formation to the processes of violence that we describe, however, does not imply that violence is the exclusive purview of men by any means. We have multiple field notes documenting fights between women, and we intend to explore the relationship of women to violence—as protagonists as well as victims—more fully in our book *Cornered* (in preparation for the University of Chicago Press). Furthermore, in tandem with its profoundly gendered content, violence is also inflected by a complex set of contrasts in racialized ethnic history emerging from colonialism, genocide, slavery, and global migration among Latino and African-American participants in the narcotics economy that are visible in the segregated context of Philadelphia. We intend to explore these dimensions, as well, in our book.

Our use of Mauss emphasizes both the violence of the gift and its social structural function. As Edelman indicates, Mauss proclaimed the gift (exchange, trade) to be the alternative to war. While drawing on Mauss's basic understanding of the social force of reciprocity, we think that this radical dualism belies his own ethnographic arguments as well as the evidence of ethnographic research (see Corbey 2006). Mauss implicitly recognized the brutal potential of gift-giving in observing the contrast between the Trobriand *kula* as, on the one hand, "an extreme case of gift exchange," and the North-West potlatch as, on the other hand, "the monster-child of the gift system" (Mauss 1967 [1925]:41). Urban violence around drug markets, as a technique of domination, partakes of the fundamentally agonistic and "wasting" effects of potlatch in its broader connection, missed by Mauss, to external forms of exploitation and primitive accumulation (Masco 1995; Wolf 1982).

As Contreras points out, violence is hard to do, and it takes training. Auyero urges us to show the formation of habitus, rather than "assert" it, and we agree that "habitus" as an explanatory concept has to be carefully unpacked to gain persuasive force (a challenge in a brief article). To this end, we presented a set of ethnographic examples of habitus formation in (1) the conversation with the 3-year-old about the shoot-out; (2) Roland's critique of the inability of his step-father to rise to a particular type of uncontrollable anger to fight effectively; (3) Robert's schoolyard disciplining by his

mother and peers and his “blacking out” into violence (the same term used by Roland). The manifestations of “habitus effects” are also further elaborated in the symbolic violence of the pride—perhaps more importantly, the pleasure with which street sellers assume the deadly risks of enforcing their bosses’ monopoly profits.

Auyero suggests Tilly’s notion of “repertoire” as a remedy. Repertoire, as we see it, may have the distinct virtue of emphasizing the social historical moment as specific context for action, the public and collective nature of the “idiom” of violence, and its dialectical nature in relation to the state (as in, e.g., the interplay between police violence and civilian violence). Most importantly, it may also bolster the social structural content of habitus, preventing it from slipping reductively into the subjective-individual and psychological. At the same time, however, we are highlighting the intimate and the embodied in our political economy/moral economy perspective. Where repertoire may also miss the mark in our case study is in its primary focus on purposefully collective rebellion. Contreras, for example, usefully notes the significance of the production of social inequality (even incipient class formation or class fracture and class migration) within the street-level drug economy as a brake on collective action.

We thank the readers for having taken up/scrutinized the concept of primitive accumulation, and we especially appreciate Edelman for his to-the-point citation of Marx’s extension of primitive/original accumulation to lumpenized urban sectors. Zubillaga’s useful comments on the global chain of production are also an interesting point of departure for more work to be done on the multiple overlapping links of a fuller primitive accumulation analysis. One of our central aims in using the concept is to bring the discussion of violence and poverty back to the ground zero of the body. The wasting of bodies (injury, death, incarceration, addiction, mental illness), as Naepels notes, is not a collateral but a central part of the illogics of twenty-first-century capital accumulation.

Naepels asks if the moral economy provides a shared definition of legitimate acts. We emphatically do not assert that there is a uniform “inner-city framework of thought” or, to make the point again, a “moral economy of the urban poor.” The obvious problem with a Durkheimian functionalism of violence is precisely this kind of overgenerality and closure: we argue that if violence is used and recognized as a form of social affirmation, it is also regarded as transgressive, frightening, and illegitimate (and this is part of its destructive/productive charisma). The problem is not to attribute a unitary “morality” to the disenfranchised but to understand the logics of violence as a resource under particular conditions. Naepels makes the important point that explanations given by actors cannot be glossed analytically as causes of action. A discussion of “ideals of justice” in the neighborhood would turn out to be astonishingly mainstream, not heterodox at all. It is the observation of social relations that is the source of insight into complex causalities. Violence—its rules, logics, outbreaks—is the source of intense anxiety and the subject

of intense debate among neighborhood residents. We are attempting to highlight a complexity, not an alternative unitary morality. As Hunter writes, the results of exerting agency in negotiating the actual challenges of urban poverty “are by no means ideal” in anyone’s estimation.

—Laurie Kain Hart, Philippe Bourgois,
Fernando Montero Castrillo, and George Karandinos

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