

Diachronic Capabilities and Social Integration Policies in Affluent Societies The impact of life course events on the construction of capabilities

(very first draft of Aug 2004)

Lionel Thelen*

Abstract

The paper will focus on the diachronic aspect of capabilities. Comim, in a stimulating article, has shown that a capability to handle time can be characterized by the individual's autonomy in becoming what the individual has reasons to become. The temporal capability, as defined by Comim, involves, mainly, a temporal awareness. The latest does construct itself on the ability to project oneself into the future.

An empirical research devoted to homeless people in affluent societies allows us to put into evidence the fact that if temporal capability evolves over time, it is yet based on an *original capability*, the “resilience”: the capability one has to adapt oneself to change over time.

This paper is divided into four parts. In the first part, we will explore the peculiarities of the life conditions inherent to the homeless career, from its core origins to its latent closing stages, the *exile from the self*. In the second part, the focus will be put on the homeless' temporal awareness and its consequences on her future expectations. Subsequently this will permit to explore further the consequences of homelessness on the individual's capability for life.

Both first parts will permit to grasp at best the third one, devoted to the description of a gradually more problematical relationships: the one existing between extremely excluded populations – such as the homeless one – and a social security system utterly focused on the activation of the totality of its beneficiaries, whatever their reasons to get stuck there.

It is argued here that:

1. If “becomings” are crucial to a capability assessment, they nevertheless rest on the foundation of the individual' self, her resilience. It ensues from this statement that – when the resilience of any given individual does not overstep a certain threshold (still to be defined) – “becomings” should follow in importance the “beings”.
2. The diachronic dimension of individuals' capabilities must be taken into account into social integration policies. It is useless to “activate” an individual who is not able to sketch her own future expectations

Preliminary draft of August 2004. Please do not quote without permission from the author.

* Department of Social Sciences - University of Fribourg
lionel.thelen@unifr.ch

1. Introduction

The steep social hierarchies, which still prevailed at the turn of the century may have been dismantled in favour of a middle class which has grown in numbers, but social inequalities have not disappeared. They can be translated into temporal inequalities.

Helga Nowotny

In this article the focus will be put on the capability approach (CA) as developed by Sen (1982 1993; 1999, 2000). This notion of *capability* – or better of capabilities set – has to be understood as the formal opportunities any human being is able and enabled to transform into real ones, this in matter of “beings” and “doings”. Another economist, Flavio Comim, has put into evidence the intrinsic dynamical aspect of capabilities, i.e. to vary across time. Hence to the concretisation of the capability into doings and beings, Comim has added the realization of capabilities into “becomings” (Comim, 2003). By doing so, Comim does imply that capabilities are never allowed once for all but can be rather seen as the fruit of processes that are continuously mutating. Neither are these capabilities fully belonging to the individuals nor are these ones completely out of reach. They are literally “in the air”.

This view allows conceiving the capability as a deep-rooted contextualised – *in situ* – notion. This goes, for instance, against the idea of static, universal capabilities as developed by Nussbaum. Indeed by means of her list of capabilities, which, for a better understanding, could be merely compare somewhat to a sort of Declaration of the Human Rights, Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000) does not fully include the idea that any opportunities given to any human being genuinely depends on the social, cultural, juridical and geographical characteristics inherent to her society.

We can even go one step beyond and try to inquire not only inter-societal variations in the individual capability set – which is the main subject of interest of researchers in development studies – but also intra-societal variations. In order to do so, we have to add, to the aforementioned factors of change, the socio-psychological ones.

The question then is to ask what could be the added value of such dynamic vision of capabilities that takes into account inter- as well as intra-societal factors of capability dynamism? In order to answer that query we could have investigated two very different fieldworks:

- To explore how people who enjoy a full capabilities set in a given society manage to maintain and perpetuate that set throughout their lifetime or even through generations;
- To study how people who suffer – for various reasons – from an absolute capability set deprivation and are led to adapt themselves to such a disadvantaged life.

In the framework of this article, we have chosen to investigate further the second option, having the opportunity to use extensively, to do so, the results of a research led on homeless people in three European countries, Belgium, France and Portugal, from 1996 to 2001¹ (Thelen, 2002).

Why should we focus on extremely deprived people instead of focusing on mere “average” people, the so-called middle-class?

First of all, it must be evident that most social sciences researchers have themselves whether a middle or an upper class background. Thus social sciences, in order to have an “exotic” understanding of their society are always tempted to explore social categories that are utterly different of their owns. As it is easier to the anthropologist to perceive uses, habits, costumes and life patterns of cultures considered as “other”, it is easier to the social scientist to study – above all within her own society – social categories that are distant from her own (Freilich, 1970; Monod, 1972)

Another reason, definitely more attention-grabbing, is that while it is rather difficult to define what is – even in a given society at a given moment – a full individual's capability set, it is noticeably easier to describe what is a “complete lack of capability set” and this in any given environment at any time. *Why is it so?*

To study the socio-psychological dimension of the individual capability set, to show at best the emergence of its evolutionary character, it is of the utmost importance to link it with the process of individual' socialisation.

However, nothing could be more complex than to determine how an individual is socialised and, above all, to understand that this socialisation is an unceasing ongoing process. A possible bias to lessen this difficulty consists to proceed in a reverse way, *a contrario*. It means to explore how an individual can be obliged to carry out a process of desocialisation so thoroughly that she can become gradually deprived of any social support.

We will show henceforward that once one found such a dissocialised person – which, fortunately, only occurs in very rare circumstances, as we will show hereafter – it is then feasible to study further:

¹ For this research, the data were collected with homeless person themselves thanks to various actors such as social workers and/or the persons in charge of association of social aid (day and night shelters, soup kitchens, etc.). In order to do so, it has been necessary to combine various qualitative methods such as semi-directed interviews, life histories, participating observation as well as the embodied experience (where the researcher becomes himself a homeless person). The total fieldwork time was 14 month at a rate of approximately two months per carried out fieldwork. As well, 32 interviews were realised with homeless persons, certain in several times due to their length or the need to proceed by little steps. It has also been possible to carry out 6 life histories since a good contact was progressively installed between the interviewer and the interviewees. In addition to these interviews of homeless people, 17 interviews of social workers were carried out. For more details about the used methodologies, do not hesitate to contact the author. This PhD Thesis will be published (in French) at the Presses Universitaires Saint-Louis (Brussels) and will be intituled: *L'exil de soi. Sans-abri d'ici et d'ailleurs (The Exile From the Self. Homeless People From Here and Elsewhere)*; December 2004.

- a. The conditions of existence of such a desocialisation process, i.e. its *sources*, its *starting point*, its *facilitators*, the factors that allow its perpetuation over time, as well as what we could call its *precipitates* (by analogy with the world of chemistry), i.e. the elements that serve to transform such a process of desocialisation in a self-nurturing one, which one I have defined as the *exile of the self* (Thelen, 2002);
- b. The self-limitations over the capability set of a dissocialised person: the desocialisation “vicious circle”, led to its extremities, disables not only the entire ability of a person to convert the commodities at her disposal into achieved functionings but also impede any kind of external assistance (be it public or private: social aid, family etc.) to enable such a conversion. In such a situation, it is tremendously problematical and time-consuming to reintegrate – even partially – the dissocialised person into society. This happens, first of all, because her whole attention is caught by *survival*.

“Such a category of person does not exist, at least in our societies” would be a very sensible response to the prior affirmation. However it exists... and is personified by the figure of the long-term homeless².

2. The social nakedness of the homeless person

The social deprivation of the homeless³, what we could call her *social nakedness* is mainly due to the peculiarities of his life milieu – the street. Briefly said, the street – a designation that accounts for all the spaces frequented by the homeless, be they streets, squares, dormitory, soup kitchens, day shelters and so on – is, for the homeless, a very hostile milieu in which her physical integrity is

² A homeless person can be considered as a long-term one once she is completely adapted to the life conditions that are specific to her milieu, the *street*. In brief, the street is a generic designation that accounts for all the spaces frequented by the homeless, be they streets, squares, dormitory, soup kitchens, day shelters and so on. A social psychologist, Alexandre Vexliard has, no later than in 1957, already delineated what are the four main steps of what he called the *homeless career*. These four steps are the aggressiveness towards his new peers as well as to come back to a “normal life”, the withdrawal into oneself when the homeless realises that his attempts to come back to his previous life are repeated failures, the installation which marks the acceptance of the new life and the use of strategies peculiar to homelessness (begging, etc.) and the rationalisation, which is the full acceptance of the new life that goes with a justification and even a pride of the homeless lifestyle (Vexliard, 1957). At this stage, the homeless can be considered as a long-term one. He has become a tramp and shares the common characteristics to the majority of tramps, i.e. lack of care (hygiene, health), a different temporal perception, a neglect of social relationships linked to an indifference to otherness. What is of the utmost importance is to notice that “long-term” in itself does not mean anything: a homeless can become a tramp after 5 months while another will rationalise his lifestyle only after 5 years in the street.

³ When we will address the question of the homeless in the following lines, please keep in mind that we always speak (unless we precise it) of the long-term homeless. It is also crucial to add that the greatest majority of homeless will providentially never become “long-term” ones since they will be taken into care in a short span of time by social security net, family, relatives or friends.

constantly threatened. In such life conditions⁴, the whole and unique aim of the human being is to manage to see the next morning, in a day-to-day logic of survival. To cope with permanent danger, the vagrant has to develop various strategies of preservation. For instance, one among the greatest dangers is constituted by the interactions with peers. Relationships with other homeless can reveal themselves very dangerous: stealing, fights, injuries are quite common and the result is that anyone can be trusted. The best behaviour to cope with such a reality is to be distrustful towards any vagrant, even the one who seems to be very friendly or even especially towards this one: friendship has to be disregarded since it does not enhance the ability to survive (at the exception of some cases of collaboration that remain, however, very occasional).

Homeless flees also away of any contacts with the passer-by since such a relationship is more than often mixed with feelings such as pity, disdain or indifference on one side and shame and humiliation from the other side.

The consequence is that homeless people do not have close social relationships but superficial ones. The long-term homeless person is undoubtedly the ideal-type of whom Turner would call a “depersonalised” individual (Turner, 1992). This depersonalisation, this disappearance of the individual’ sociality goes hand in hand with a desubjectivation of the latest. Actually Turner defines the *person* as the part of the individual self that is dealing with the interactions with others, while the *individual* has to be seen as the moral facet of the human being, which one reflects on her own actions or, in other words, on the interactions she does exchange with herself. However, the Turnerian self is made of an endless process of comings and goings between the person and the individual. It maintains itself united only because pre-exists a balance between both components. Once occurs a disequilibrium, due to the weakening of one of its part, it is the whole unity of the self which is endangered. It follows from this assertion that the depersonalisation process cannot be persistent over time without damaging its counterpart, individuality. Consequently depersonalisation goes hand in hand with desubjectivation. This auto-destructive process is even enhanced by the fact that the homeless evolves in a very poor context, made of repetitive and monotonous days that always look the same, in which the survival logic catches the entire attention of the vagrant. So, living constantly on her toes, the homeless person has to adapt herself to the street, univocal universe that excludes any other one. In this milieu the development of survival strategies is realised at the expense of all past behaviours that have become useless. Among these abandoned behaviours, we have already put the stress on the deliquescence of social relationships. Indeed, what does firstly suffer from the habituation to the requirement of the new milieu is the

⁴ Such life conditions are not specific to homeless since the patterns of these ones may also be met by various human groups in a multiplicity of circumstances such as, for instance, the refugee camps (Beiser, 1987) or the prisons (Cunha, 1997)

individual' social capital. In a desperate attempt to preserve her from violence and humiliation, the homeless is led to cut all her social bonds. This radical process, enhanced by all the adaptations required by the homeless environment, if led to its asymptotes, can progressively lead to an emotional as well as temporal insensitivity, which I have called “the exile from the self”.

3. Resilience, temporal awareness and capability for life

3.1. The core origin of homelessness: the deficiency of resilience

What is actually quite underestimated in a capability approach – currently in search of operationalisation as well as of recognition, busy to define its own domain and, thus, temporarily over centred on itself – is the primary importance given by this concept to the individual.⁵

However, if the capability may be defined as what entails the individual to achieve something as well as what the individual is able to achieve by herself, it does mean that the evolution of the capabilities set is narrowly linked to the evolution of the individual herself. It does also imply that the relationship between the individual and her capability is not at all given for granted: one has to fit to the other.

This brings to a twofold conception of the interconnection man-capability:

1. Definitely a certain amount of “plasticity” is needed to adapt any capability set to any individual. Such plasticity must take into account socio-cultural items that impede the constitution of a universal list of capabilities, even the most basic one. It is not the scope of this article to plunge foolhardily once again in such debate but this argument will be useful to understand what will follow.
2. All humans are not equal to take the very substance out of their capability set. To the plasticity of the latest must correspond the plasticity of the individual. The empirical study about homelessness – as we will show hereafter – has allowed us to put into evidence the fact that if the capabilities set of any human being evolves over time, it is however based on an *original capability*, what Cyrulnik calls the “resilience”: the capacity to adapt oneself to change over time (Cyrulnik, 2001).

The concept of resilience is of the utmost interest in order to grasp at best the idiosyncratic borders that constrain individual capabilities.

Comim has clearly marked his interest for the socio-psychological aspect of the assessment of capabilities. First of all, he did mention, in the aforementioned article that “*We should not confine capabilities to an ex-ante view that assumes that individuals always “know what they are doing”.*”

⁵ And this even if the capability may be seen too – we will explore it further in a forthcoming article – as an interface between man and society. As such, it is obvious that it could neither belong to the first nor to the second.

This would imply an over-emphasis on the role of free actions and responsibilities.” (Comim, 2003: 7). In the line of the present article, he stated as well – unfortunately without elaborating upon it – that *“Time seems to be an important element to be taken into account for the evaluation of the individuals’ erosion of agency. For instance, short-term unemployment might affect people’s well-being but not their initiative and confidence. On the other hand, long-term unemployment might be “also a source of far-reaching debilitating effects on individual freedom, initiative, and skills” (Sen,1999: 21) leading to other cumulative psychological losses. Whereas this distinction between short-term and long-term unemployment was not present in the original Senian argument, it could be useful here to illustrate the temporal impact of unemployment on the erosion of capabilities.”* (Comim, 2003: 7-8)

Actually various studies have aplenty shown the impact of long-term unemployment on the socio-psychological patterns of individuals (or of households). One of these studies, among the most famous ones, is the work of Lazarsfeld, Jahoda and Zeisel concerning the unemployed people of Marienthal, an Austrian village studied during the Great Depression. The researchers stated that, among the most frequent witnessed behaviours, it was possible to establish that *“The wishes (of the long-term unemployed) are progressively more limited; the range of the objects and of the institutions to which one may appeal restricts itself each day more. The energy that remains is concentrated on the preservation of a more and more limited vital space. We have also seen that another characteristic of this narrowing is the significant degradation of the time perception, which loses its role of structuring the daily activities.”*⁶ (Lazarsfeld and al., 1981: 129)

For an updating of this somewhat dated study, it can be interesting to pay attention to the works of Samuel Shortt or Christian Belzil (Belzil, 1995; Shortt, 1997)

Another fascinating point that is common to studies on long-term unemployment consequences on individuals is the emphasis put on the various ways to react to such a social disqualification, to use the words of Paugam (Paugam, 1991). For instance, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues have put into evidence four different reactions to long-term unemployment, which range from despair to optimism. (Lazarsfeld and al., 1981). However the researchers were in trouble when they had to explain the ins and outs of such a variety of reactions. In trouble they left this puzzling question aside since they had, by no means, the possibility to explore it further, in lack of appropriate sociological tools or theories. It is only recently, with the help of developmental psychology and of ethology that sociology – in a more encompassing vision of human sciences – is able to treat such research object.

⁶ My own translation from the French version of this book (the only one in my possession).

The solution of Lazarsfeld's problem is called "resilience": the fact for any human being to resist a process of desocialisation and, more largely, the capacity that have all human beings to live or survive in spite of various obstacles was defined by the ethologist Boris Cyrulnik. This resilience – although evolving throughout the life path – is primarily built during childhood (Cyrulnik, 2000). Knowing the level of resilience of the homeless person, it could be possible to delineate the moment when the individual will pass from the third Vexliardian step of the homeless career to the last one: when the vagrant could be regarded as a "long-term homeless person" having embodied the environmental pressure of the street. Anyway we have still no technique of measurement that would permit to design a "resilience graduated scale". It is only *a posteriori* that it is feasible to discern the factors that have impeded such individual to remain more than three days in a night shelter from the factors that have ease the installation of another one in homelessness for more than 10 years.

During the various fieldworks of the research, it has been feasible to put into evidence what one could call the "originating habitus", fundamental to the possibility of a durable adaptation to the street life patterns. In other words, the new homeless person can fall down in the street but she will not remain there "by coincidence": she must have acquired, from the very beginning of her lifetime, a predisposition. Bourdieu defines the latest, this originating habitus, as: "*a practically compatible habitus, or sufficiently close and, above all, malleable and likely to be converted into a conform habitus, in other words congruent and flexible, i.e. always open to the possibility of a reorganization.*" (Bourdieu, 1997: 120). Among its major components, one can quote the lack of affection during childhood, intra-family violence and the absence of solidarity between members of the same family as well as, but at a lesser extent, a weak school investment and/or a chronic lack of financial means. It is only when these conditions, necessary but no sufficient, are combined with the extraordinary pressure that the street milieu tirelessly exerts on the individuals that all the favourable elements for a permanence in the homeless career are met. This alliance of an originating habitus and of objective conditions in a milieu as pathogenic as the street, are the indispensable ingredients, together with the passing of time, for the appearance of the exile from the self.

As a matter of consequence, the resilience of the individual or its scarcity will weight in a predominant manner on her entire life pattern, shaping all the daily acts of the individual and allowing – or not – neither the production nor the erosion of her capabilities set but its very existence.

The survival ethos from childhood onwards

It is as of childhood, throughout educational process, which a many people homeless person test of the enormous lacks, especially at the emotional level.

It is important to note that the lack of affectivity, like the other listed factors does not lead, *manu militari*, to the condition of homeless person. The largest majority of the people having endured such problems during their childhood did not become vagrants for such a reason.

On the other hand, it is right to affirm that all homeless people interviewed and/or met during the research have been the victims of major emotional lacks in their youth. During the interviews which I carried out with homeless person, I have been, each time, confronted to people having suffered from serious family problems, troubles that could easily be apprehended in their speech.

Aloyse de Saint Marcq, Director of a day shelter, explained me the lived case of a woman who is a frequent user of the shelter: “(..) *this lady, yesterday, I looked after her in the people’s dispensary and she told me "Ah, you know Aloyse here I am pampered and it is so good, you know, to be pampered because me, you know, I have never been pampered", it is the problem of all these persons. This problem (...) is that these ones lack the emotional bases that they did not have, for the majority and, therefore, we will be always only palliative to this great absence. The world cannot be changed so easily. There are many people who, when they were children were placed in homes and they have children! The majority of these people that are here have children, who are also in homes. Thus "belote and rebelote"*^{7,8}”

On a level statistically more relevant, a vast study undertaken by the INED (The French National Institute of Demographic Study) ⁹ on the young homeless people underlined the vulnerability of these young people because of their family milieu. For example 60% of these young people do not have anymore contacts with their father: “*The situation where the father is unknown or deceased is approximately three times more frequent in the young people in precarious situation than in the others categories*” (Marpsat and al., 2000: 2). In the same way, 43% of the men and 47% of the women taking part in this investigation declared that their parents had serious disputes while respectively 38% and 47% stated to have undergone ill treatments during their childhood. Lastly, respectively 27% and 39% of the questioned young people were entrusted, during one specific period or even during the entirety of their childhood and adolescence, to the Public Assistance or within host families.

The “home sweet home” as protection against homelessness

Vexliard wrote on this subject that the family protects the individual against homelessness as much as a work for example: “*The comparison with some normal subjects showed that men who have to carry out a normal existence may experience paths that can seem to be comparable with that of the*

⁷ Idea of a reproduction of precariousness and homelessness due to lacks of affection related (among other factors) to the placement of the children in social assistance orphanages.

⁸ Interview of Mrs Aloyse de Saint Marcq, Director of the "Fountain", Brussels, June 1999.

⁹ Relating to a sample of 641 people from 16 to 24 years using various services and shelters for the people in great difficulty.

tramps. It is the external supports of their social environment, i.e. the family, the profession, the employers, who prevent them in extreme cases to fall in the path of desocialisation. (...) a social and familial supervision is the best prevention, if not the absolute one against desocialisation” (Vexliard, 1957: 146).

This sentence of Vexliard finds a contemporary echo in “the supports theory” as developed by Martuccelli (Martuccelli, 2002): in this theoretical background, the modern individual must, to comply with the expectations that her society places in her, demonstrate that she is ready and able to show a solid sense of responsibility, of autonomy, as well as to have the ability to control herself, or, in other words “to be held from inside”. However to do so, this individual must rest on supports of all kinds, such as the family, friends, various social networks as well as cultural or economic assets. To be recognized as a full-accomplished individual, it is essential that the action of these supports remains implicit to the eyes of others as well as to the eyes of the individual herself. This self deception would be indispensable to the preservation of the self esteem of the modern individual: it is one of the major components of the grammars of the individual, i.e. all the essential prerequisites to evolve and to be considered in our society, from which everyone uses the rules but without being anymore able to clarify them. These prerequisites, which Wacquant calls also the “sense of the play” (Wacquant, 1995), must indeed be embodied to become pre-conscious: these are so often used in the everyday life that one does not think of it any longer when she uses it¹⁰.

A contrario, the person who, such the homeless person, does not enjoy anymore such supports, really alone, finds herself in the obligation to cope with this lack. However, her deprivation is so important that to subsist, she is to call upon institutions of social aid. However, what are such institutions if not institutionalized supports, whose main objective consists in helping the disadvantaged people? That is where the shoe pinches: Martuccelli, continuing on its impetus, shows that those who found themselves obliged to appeal to explicit supports, prove in that way that they are not able to cope with the situation “by their own (means, resources and, in fact, supports)”. They cannot thus claim to enjoy the statute of full-accomplished individual. It is rather paradoxical since “because of their situation, they appear to be closer than any others from the figure of the individual being held from inside.” (Martuccelli, 2002: 102). It follows from such a statement that the simple fact to appeal to the institutions of social aid is already, in itself, such a stigmatizing act

¹⁰ To illustrate the last point, we can take the example of the basketball player, who does not have anymore to think about her adversaries’ position while she zigzags with the ball among them: she has a vision of the game that encompasses, at the preconscious level, past, present and even future moves of hers opponents as well as the ones of her team mates. The same is true for the boxer, who has materially not the time to think what will be the next hit of his counterpart and how to block it: her sense of the game allows her to predetermine that it will certainly be a right uppercut and to prepare a parry as well as a counterattack. What happens in the play does also occur in real life. It is quite often forgotten but, as explained in detail by Bateson, play interactions serve, first and foremost, to frame how real social interactions have to start, to take place, to unfold and, finally, to end (Bateson, 1971).

that it appears to be extremely difficult to realise. The entrance cost into the social aid system can be seen as so high in terms of loss of self-esteem that a great number of people that could easily fit the requirements to receive social aid benefits refuse to claim for such an opportunity.

In addition to such a cost, the running of many social services – quite often described as impersonal and anonymous – still reinforces the feeling of stigmatisation and, so, of the user' social exclusion.

3.2. *The adaptation of temporal awareness to the street milieu*

Homeless people have to adopt a lifestyle that fit to their milieu. The latest forces them to operate a change in their way to perceive the passing of time, in their temporal horizon (Nowotny, 2004). The survival in the street involves the need of the immediate fulfilling of basic needs. This way to perceive the time flow, in an unceasing continuous present, does impede the homeless to grasp anything else than the passage from an undefined future to a fuzzy past, both dimensions being useless in the new milieu, are progressively put away in the oubliettes of memory, antechambers of oblivion.

One can advance that the homelessness temporality bathes in a *cancelled time* because, to have an impression of a demarcation between the past and the future, it is still necessary to have a function, a mission that requires investments in the future. However the homeless person has no proper role – except those she attributes to herself – and is dispossessed of those that she could have had.

Since the vagrant does not have any means to domesticate time to her exigencies, it is possible to postulate, into the steps of Bourdieu, that “*the extreme dispossession (...)*” of the homeless person “*(...) permit to the evidence of the relation between time and power to emerge, by showing that the practical relationships to the near future, in which the time experience come to birth, depends on the (individual) power, and to the objective chances it allows*” (Bourdieu, 1997: 264).

Since the homeless person has no power at all, she is at the mercy of all people that have even only a parcel of power on their own time schedule as well as on her. Civil servants of social aid administration enjoy such a power and, rather often, use and sometimes abuse of it to the point that some homeless have reported that they have the impression to pay their social allowance by means of the time they spend in waiting rooms. If the time of a practitioner is seen as precious – everybody knows it – it appears that the time of the homeless, in any case, is perceived as wasted: anywhere else the relationships between time and power is as visible as in the interactions between a homeless and a civil servant. The only power that remains to the homeless person to avoid the seizure on her time and her private life is the exit option, the rejection of any institution: heavy price to pay to preserve the two only goods that fully belong to her.

Immediateness, the fact to get stuck into continuous present does not only signify to live the present moment, but also to lose itself in it vacuity. I, for example, intensely felt this impression of

temporal loss especially in the queues – be they in front of the entrance door of the night shelter of the Salvation Army in Lisbon or at lunch hour in front of one of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia refectory –, during the hours spent on the benches of the Praça da Alegria Park or within the walls of the CHAPSA of Nanterre, the biggest night shelter of Paris area –the hours follow one after the other and nothing seems to change, as if we were fallen into a temporal interstice, a *no man's land* where only the homeless people would still vegetate, without even sometimes really knowing what they were supposed to do there.

The homeless people are not only "men without history" as Vexliard called them (Vexliard, 1951) but also men without *future*, without projects, who stagnate in an *atemporalized space*: "*Excluded from the (societal) play, these men dispossessed of the vital illusion to have a function or a mission, to have to be or to do something, can – to escape the no-time of a life in which does not occur anything and where there is nothing to wait – to feel to exist, have recourse to activities which, like the tiercé, the totocalcio, the jogo do bicho and all the games of chances of all the shantytowns and all the favelas of the world, make it possible to be torn away of the cancelled time of a life without justification and especially without possible investment*" (Bourdieu, 1997: 263-264).

Obviously, to be perpetually embedded in such an environment does not occur without consequences, in particular on the feeling of personal identity. It is necessary here to refer to Frederic Melges and to his psychology of time to grasp at best what can be the consequences of such a life on the individual self-perception.

Melges reports that a person such as the homeless, perpetually dived into an unceasing present, would have gradually more difficulties to capture her own uniqueness, her very essence: "*If a person were totally bound to the present, he or she would have great difficulty in observing himself or herself. He or she would have only present moments with no perspectives on their linkages. His or her experience would be like beads strewn about without a thread to tie them together. Such a present-bound person would have little sense of self, or "I-ness", because he or she would lack the capacity to reflect on oneself over time. The capacity to self-reflect over time appears to be a fundamental aspect of self-consciousness.*" (Melges, 1990 : 264)

The street milieu is a-temporal and composed of infinity of small trivia that do not have any significance other than their own end: the time of the refectory to eat, waiting as... waiting, etc. No coherence, and thus nothing that permit the homeless to stop falling.

3.3 *From the homeless' temporal capability to her capability for life: the self-dispossession process*

Knowing that the temporal capability of any given individual is mainly composed of her temporal awareness, it is possible to sketch hereby by means of the homeless individual, what can be seen as the zero degree of temporal capability. Deprived of any means to imagine what could be a hopeless

future as well as tempted to ignore a past that does not fit any longer to an incredibly pregnant reality, the long-term homeless is utterly driven by the survival logic that leads all relationships in the street milieu. From this we can infer that the homeless had sacrificed her temporal capability on the altar of street rationality. Nevertheless, such a choice – which is not a choice but merely an resignation – , that seems coherent in a short-term view, the only one at the reach of the vagrant, is evidently a catastrophe in a long-standing vision since without temporal capability, it is not longer possible to inscribe the beings and doings on a diachronic line, i.e. to study their evolution to define what are the individual becomings. Consequently, the person is deprived of any capability for life, condemned to wander in an asocial universe, in which she is progressively led to an individual disintegration. The average span of time passed in the street is 10 years: the majority of long-term homeless enter in the street at the age of 35-40 years old. The average age of deceased homeless person is around 50 years old (Hassin, 1996)

4. The activation of homeless people or the institutionalization of social exclusion

From Antiquity to present days, the problem that have arisen for the authorities has been to decide how to manage the question of the homeless people. The taken into account of this one always oscillated between repression and assistance, two attitudes often motivated by the health of the person: the valid vagabond, supposed to be able to work was punished while the invalid, inapt to survive alone, was assisted (Sassier, 1990). Nowadays, this population undergoes a double constraint: while the most common ideal of reintegration in our society proves to be work, towards which converge, implicitly, all social rehabilitation policies. However having little education, often illiterate and without any identity documents, homeless people – even the most valid ones – do not catch any longer the attention of employers.

The new move from passive to active social policies, that aims to reintegrate unemployed people by means of an emphasis put on the creation of new jobs positions as well as on the strengthening of the existing ones is now enthusiastically promoted in the entirety of the European Union. Nonetheless if the activation of the job seekers is comprehensible in order to minimize as much as possible the unemployment of long duration and thus to escape to the destroying effects of this one on the unemployed person's behaviour (Shortt, 1996; Wuhl, 1992), the activation of the recipients of the minimal social aid – among whose are included, in various EU countries, the homeless people – is, on the other hand, much more problematic. This population is indeed indelibly marked by the fact that its members are inscribed in a trajectory of failure and this often since long years.

These persons have ended up – because of problems inherent to their trajectory in poverty but also due to a labour market led by extremely discriminating procedures of recruitment (Eymard-Duvernay & Marchal, 1996) – between precarious and unqualified jobs, into a discouraging situation made of a set of repeated layoffs and humiliating steps towards administrations too often considered to be cold, haughty or even suspicious. It should be thus necessary to operate a clear distinction between the population of job seekers, that have to be activated as soon as possible – keeping however in mind that activation does not mean “to find whatever job at whatever cost” – and the population of the social aid recipients. The two populations are, in fact, extremely different despite the fact that, for social security system, both can be basically considered as unemployed people who need to be activated.

The main question raised by activation measures is that, beforehand, the beneficiaries of social aid were entitled to receive their social aid allowance since this one was considered as the minimal income necessary to ensure the buying of their food and lodging, this in the spirit of the articles 22, 23 §1 and §3 as well as of the article 25 §1 of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights. In other words, it was an unconditional right, given whatever the circumstances and the willingness or not of the recipient to find a job. Nowadays, the activation of the minimal social aid, as it is for instance the case in Belgium and soon in France, conditions the delivery of the allowance to the signature of a contract of activation. By such contract, the recipient of social aid engage herself to do whatever she can to find a job as well to act in accordance with any instructions delivered by the institution of social aid to help her to accept a(ny kind of) job. In exchange, the recipient is entitled to continue to receive its minimal allowance. It means that, in the case of homeless people or other social categories of very stigmatised social aid recipients, they see themselves confronted with the obligation to perform a research that they are unable to carry off successfully due to their incapacity to planify any kind of project, to enhance their temporal horizon beyond the immediate present or, in other words, to make use of a necessary but inexistent capabilities set. Moreover, conscious of their own powerlessness, these persons are reinforced into the extremely negative vision they have of themselves, are more and more stigmatized in confront with the complexity of the tasks they have to do while they have the lasting (and right) impression that they account for nothing since the contract of activation is not at all a contract between two equals that share a known amount of right and duties but the only existing possibility for them to receive money, at the exception of begging. In any contract both parts must have the choice to negotiate its terms, to change the ones they do not consider convenient and, eventually, to refuse to firm it. None of the previous choices is left to the recipient of social help. It merely means that, in the case of a homeless person, the latest is not only devoid of a real freedom of choice – since she is not able to conceive the implications of such

choices along time – but she is even reinforced in her powerlessness by the complete absence of freedom of choice that explicitly involves such a “contract”.

The socially active state could be thus, if nothing is done to take into account the life conditions of homeless people, the first attempt to induce a institutionalised form of extreme social exclusion.

5. Conclusion

For everybody, including the poorest, there is a strong link between future expectations and the objective chances to realise these ones. Homeless, having no project, being in a path of repeated failures and suffering from a lack of resilience, are bounded to the present and have no temporal awareness beyond 24 hours. Such a lack of temporal awareness finds its roots in a life that does not allow the opportunity to make any kind of projects. It means that the temporal capability of homeless people suffers from a sort of unconscious “auto-censorship”: the time horizon is so shortened that no possibilities are left to the homeless individual to fill it with dreams and/or future expectations. Consequently these persons are unable to define what are their concerns or even their desires. They are stuck in a life that is framed by the immediacy of basic needs such as to find food and a place to sleep, a life enlivened with alcohol tobacco and other little expedients.

In such a life, there is no place for concepts such as temporal capabilities or capabilities for life: the homeless are driven by a life at the margins of the so-called affluent societies and are evicted from the possibility to escape from their milieu, due to the univocity of the latest. Trapped in a self-nurturing process of self-dispossession, this population constitutes a real challenge for social policies. It is obviously inefficient to try to activate such vulnerable and stigmatized people, which is the way currently chosen by various EU countries. An activation that conditions the allowance of a social benefit by means of the imposition of a contract that cannot be neither negotiated nor refused reinforces the homeless – since she has no other choice than to sign it – into the idea that she is an incapable individual that can be dispossessed of her free will. The only way to reintegrate these persons in their human dignity is, first and foremost to restore their primary capability, i.e. the freedom of choosing between to stay in the street or to try a very long and arduous process of resocialisation, which certainly will have a very high cost but will perhaps permit to such individual to have the ability to dream and have future expectations. However, even to create the possibility to offer such a primary capability will reveal itself a long and exacting job.

What are the consequences of such results for non-affluent societies? Perhaps that it could be necessary – before working on the enhancement of individuals’ capabilities – to study, in an anthropological way, the specificities of the resilience that is peculiar to the socio-cultural patterns of

the given society. It is only by precisely knowing how people are ready to face and overcome difficulties and obstacles that it will be feasible to delimit at best the range of what is, in that very society an acceptable freedom of choices in nurturing the individual future expectations, the voicing of her concerns as well as to have the life they have reason to value.

References

- Bateson, Gregory. 1977 (1971). *Vers une écologie de l'esprit 1*. Paris : Editions du Seuil.
- Beiser, Morton. 1987. "Changing Time Perspective and Mental Health Among Southeast Asian Refugees." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 11(4):437-64.
- Belzil Christian. 1995. *Unemployment Duration Stigma and Reemployment Earnings*. Aarhus: University of Aarhus.
- Bonvin, Jean-Michel, Thelen, L. (2003), "Deliberative Democracy and Capabilities. The Impact and Significance of Capability for Voice", paper prepared for presentation at the Conference "*From Sustainable Development to Sustainable Freedom*", 7-9 september. Pavia, Italy.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1997. *Méditations pascaliennes*. Paris : Seuil.
- Comim, Flavio. 2003. "Capability Dynamics: the Importance of Time to Capability Assessments." *Pavia Capabilities Conference* (Pavia, Italy, Sep).
- Cunha, Manuela I. 1997. « Le temps suspendu. Rythmes et durées dans une prison portugaise . » *Terrains* (29) :59-68.
- Cyrulnik, Boris. 2000. *Un merveilleux malheur*, Paris : Odile Jacob.
- Fraisse, Paul. 1992. "From Time Lost to Time Regained." Pp. 385-92 in *Time, Action and Cognition; Towards Bridging the Gap*, eds. Françoise Macar, Viviane Pouthas, and William J. Friedman. Dordrecht : Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- . 1967. *Psychologie du temps*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France.
- Freilich, Morris. 1970. *Marginal Natives. Anthropologists at Work*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Gaulejac, Vincent d. 1996. *Les sources de la honte*. Paris : Desclée de Brouwer.
- Hassin, Jacques. 1996. *L'émergence de l'abord médico-social des populations sans toit stable. Aspect médical, socio-anthropologique, politique et éthique*. Paris : Université Paris V : thèse de doctorat.
- Horenbeek, Bernard, éd. 1996. *Diogènes. Rapport d'activités 1995 : un an de travail de rue au service des sans-abri* . Bruxelles : A.S.B.L. Diogènes (non publié).
- Lazarsfeld, Paul, Marie Jahoda, and Hans Zeisel. 1981. *Les chômeurs de Marienthal*. Paris : Les Editions de Minuit.
- Lyon-Callo, Vincent. 2000. "Medicalizing Homelessness: The Production of Self-Blame and Self-

- Governing Within Homeless Shelters.” *Medical Anthropological Quarterly* 14(3):328-45.
- Marpsat, Maryse, Jean-Marie Firdion, and Monique Meron. 2000. « Le passé difficile des jeunes sans domicile. » *Population Et Sociétés* (363) :1-4.
- Mathieu, Arline. 1993. “The Medicalization of Homelessness and the Theater of Repression.” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*(7):170-184.
- Melges, Frederic T. 1990. “Identity and Temporal Perspective.” Pp. 255-66 in *Cognitive Models of Psychological Time*, ed. Richard Block. Hillsdale: Lawrence Elbaum.
- Monod, Jean. 1972. *Un riche cannibale*. Paris : Seuil (Coll. 10-18).
- Nowotny, Helga. 1994. *Time. The Modern and Postmodern Experience*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 2000. *Women and Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paugam, Serge. 1991. *La disqualification sociale. Essai sur la nouvelle pauvreté*. Paris : PUF.
- Sassier, Philippe. 1990. *Du bon usage des pauvres. Histoire d'un thème politique XVIe-Xxe siècle*. Paris: Fayard.
- Sen, Amartya. 1982. Equality of what, in *Choice, welfare and measurement*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Sen, Amartya. 1993. Capability and well-being in Sen, A. and M. Nussbaum. *The quality of life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shortt, Samuel E. D. 1996. “Is Unemployment Pathogenic? A Review of Current Concepts With Lessons for Policy Planners.” *International Journal of Health Services* 26(3):569-89.
- Snow, David A. and Leon Anderson. 1993. *Down on Their Luck. A Study of Homeless Street People*. Berkeley: California University Press.
- Thelen, Lionel. 2004. “L’exclusion sociale en Belgique : les limites de l’état social actif”, in *Politiques sociales*, special n° on social exclusion, october.
- Thelen, Lionel. 2002. *Du déni des autres à l’exil de soi. Le sans-abrisme en Belgique, en France et au Portugal*. Florence : European University Institute. PhD Thesis Collection.
- Turner, Victor. 1992. “Morality and Liminality.” Pp. 132-62 in *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* Victor Turner. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.
- Vexliard, Alexandre. 1957. *Le clochard. Etude de psychologie sociale*. Paris : Desclée de Brouwer.
- . 1951. « Le clochard : un homme sans histoire. » *Evolution Psychiatrique* 4 :507-27.
- Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 1995. “The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel About Their Trade.” *Theory and Society* (24):489-535.
- Wuhl, Simon. 1992. « Chômage : de la longue durée à l’exclusion. » *Esprit* (182) :12-22.