

The Making of the Citizen-Worker

Labour and the Borders of Politics
in Post-revolutionary France

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2 Epidemics and subaltern classes

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2 Epidemics and subaltern classes

“It must ultimately be understood that, beyond the parliamentary conditions of an authority’s existence, there is a social question that needs to be addressed,” the daily newspaper *La Quotidienne* stated on 18 November 1831, commenting on the Lyonnais weavers’ insurrection (cf. § 1.1). This editorial is usually credited with having introduced the expression *question sociale* into the French debate (Castel, 2003, p. 25). From that moment onwards, such a neologism was destined to designate one of the major challenges faced by 19th-century European societies: the condition of deprivation and exclusion of the emerging industrial poverty and the plebeian subjectivities which the events considered in the previous chapter had catapulted to the centre of the political stage. In the first instance, the representations of such a condition appeared to be chiefly marked by fear and outrage with respect to the new subaltern classes brought into being by the Industrial Revolution.

This first part of the book focuses on the interpretations and representations of the social question which emerged in the liberal field to retrace their transformation, whereby those initial feelings of fear gradually gave way to a mighty project of social integration centred on wage labour conditions. The cholera epidemic of 1832 will be identified as a crucial moment in such a process, a moment which fostered unprecedented and dramatic perceptions of urban pauperism epitomised by the two images of “dangerous classes” and “new barbarians.” We will explore the way in which such images gradually turned into that of the poor yet decent and virtuous working class. To this end, the present chapter analyses how the pandemic crisis stimulated the rise of social research on the subaltern classes with the aim of developing new security policies and risk reduction strategies. The next chapter then considers the first major enquiries into urban pauperism, to retrace how they brought the question of wage labour into focus as an object of scientific study and public governance. Chapter 4 will eventually explore the impact of those social investigations on French policy and legislation, so as to interpret the genesis of modern labour law. As such, these three chapters aim to retrace a single development that may be described as the process of “objectification” of the realm of wage labour as a field of knowledge and administration. This aim implies establishing a dynamic intersection between social history (the critical junctures giving rise to the social issues which theory was intended to address), intellectual history (the

interpretations and representations of such issues), and legal history (the measures adopted to translate those interpretations into practice).

2.1 The new barbarians: genealogy of a metaphor

On 8 December 1831, the academic and journalist Saint Marc-Girardin commented on the Lyonnais workers' insurrection (cf. § 1.1) in a *Journal Des Débats* editorial that sparked a heated controversy:

The sedition in Lyon has revealed a serious secret, that of the strife that is taking place within society. . . . Our commercial and industrial society has its bane like all other societies. This bane is its workers. . . . Commercial competition today has the same effect as folk migrations had in the past. Ancient society is dead, because peoples set in motion the wastelands of the north, and clashed with one another, until they gradually fell upon the Roman Empire. Today, the *barbarians* threatening society are to be found not in the Caucasus or in the Tatar steppes; they are in the suburbs of our own manufacturing cities. . . . It is there that the threat to modern society lies, it is from there that the barbarians may come who will destroy it. . . . It is not a matter of choosing between republic and monarchy, but of the very *health of society*.

(*Journal Des Débats*, 8 December 1831, p. 1, emphasis added)¹

It is precisely from this figure of the subaltern classes as *nouveaux barbares*, or a “bane” threatening the “health of society,” that we must set out to understand the elites' initial perceptions and representations of the nascent social question. And it is through this kind of image that a working-class subjectivity emerged in the European imaginary at the outset of industrialisation. Herein lies the controversial origin of the process which was to lead to the image of the honest, working-class father figure whose laboriousness stands as the foundation of constitutions, political parties, and citizenship rights. From this perspective, the shocking comparison with the barbarian invasions seems prophetic today in the way it describes the momentous impact of what the Lyon insurrection was bringing to light for the first time: the political meaning of labour. Girardin himself was to stress this point, thirty years later, when recalling the controversies sparked by his editorial:

I compared the workers seeking to make their way into our society to the barbarians who in another age invaded the Roman Empire and became the origin of modern peoples. But there was no disgrace or insult in this. . . . The barbarians of the 4th and 5th centuries are no longer considered monsters. . . . The barbarian invasions amounted to a renewal of the world and, along with the establishment of Christianity, contributed to founding a new civilisation, of which we are the heirs and custodians. The Goths, Heruli, and Franks have long been historically rehabilitated.

(Girardin, 1859, pp. 143 and 156)

The strength of the editorial lay in the fact that it described contemporary reality by appropriating a central figure in the historiographical debate on the French nation's origins (cf. § 2.2), assigning it a new meaning. To grasp this aspect we must first note that Girardin had just recently been appointed Chair of History at the Sorbonne as the successor of François Guizot, who had made historiography a weapon of the liberal opposition to the Bourbon Restoration and supporters of the Old Regime (cf. § 1.3). He had done so by focusing precisely on the interpretation of the barbarians and their invasions of France in the Middle Ages.

Guizot, like the Thierry brothers and other early-19th-century bourgeois historians, described the barbarian age as a disorderly one in which there was “no society,” but only a general freedom that was exercised through violence, and yet constituted the matrix for those *modern liberties* that had been unknown to ancient civilisations, to the Roman world, and to medieval Christendom. “Despite this combination of brutality, materialism, and foolish selfishness,” Guizot wrote, “the taste for individual independence is a noble, moral sentiment” which “was introduced into European civilisation precisely through the barbarians of Germany.”²² In the barbarians' modes of life, this post-revolutionary liberal historiography saw the matrix of a kind of freedom which the course of civilisation had reshaped by making property rather than brute force the primary means of exercising it. The evolution of European civilisation made property the new means to satisfy the ancient, independent barbarian spirit, which was thus translated into the codified liberty of the bourgeois citizen and property-owner. Foucault (2005, p. 197) has described this interpretation as a model for “the filtering of the barbarian” which, in post-revolutionary France, liberal authors set in contrast to other historiographical models to turn it into a weapon in the fight against the supporters of the Old Regime through the distinction between the “bad” barbarism of the invading Franks from Germany and the “good” barbarism of the native Gauls – which had inhabited France since the 5th century BC.³ Thirteen centuries of national history were thus portrayed by bourgeois historians as a long struggle between two barbarian “races,” to present the 1789 Great Revolution as the outcome of this centuries-old clash, as an ultimate rebalancing of history that did justice to centuries of oppression.

The evocative power of the *Journal des débats'* editorial thus lay in how it interpreted contemporary reality through a reference that was extremely relevant to the debate on the significance of national history and the French Revolution. By this gesture, however, Girardin also gave the notion of barbarism a semantic twist, by replacing its historical meaning with a metaphorical one. He juxtaposed the image of the historical barbarians, who had come from afar to invade and conquer, to that of the “new barbarians” – metaphorical yet no less dangerous ones – who from the backward agricultural heartland of the nation had migrated into the urban spaces transfigured by the Industrial Revolution, bringing their savage attitudes and primitive behaviours with them. Through this metaphorical image of barbarism, his editorial crystallises the first and most compelling representation of the industrial subaltern classes, whose relevance social and intellectual historians have not failed to emphasise. The first to do so was Louis Chevalier (1973), who stressed the spread of this representation and its impact on public opinion in the

19th century, turning it into an emblem of those “dangerous classes” which lie at the centre of his evocative portrayal of Paris in the first half of the 19th century. Such was the relevance of Girardin’s image that Pierre Michel (1981) spoke of the emergence of a genuine “romantic myth” of the barbarian. Thus, the latter figure became a “metaphor translating . . . the marginality of the proletariat with respect to bourgeois civilisation” (Chignola, 2004, p. 448). The historical fascination with the barbarians who, by destroying the old world, had sown the seeds of modern liberties thus became fear of their return: a metaphorical yet equally destructive return, as it was connected to the unleashing of primal urges and instincts that civilisation had reshaped, yet not removed.

The metaphor of barbarians is one of the great representations of the 19th-century lower classes; and it too, in a way, “filters” the historical image of the barbarian so as to highlight certain specific elements. The first is an ambivalent attitude towards a society which is at the same time destructive (posing the constant threat of disorder, violence, and turmoil) and marked by the desire for appropriation – appropriation of the goods that civilisation produces. Then there is the tendency towards nomadism and the incurable aversion to work, “the restless obsession with movement and idleness,” as Eugène Buret put it:

The poverty-stricken are reminiscent of these Saxon bands who, in order to flee the yoke of the Norman conquest, hid under forest trees, in their nomadic independence. . . . An uncertain existence is the first resemblance between the poor and the savage. . . . Beggary [and] vagrancy [are] a premeditated return to barbarism.

(Buret, 1840, Vol. II, pp. 1–8)⁴

The historical barbarians were nomads who moved through bloody conquests, and whose independent spirit was embodied by a rejection of work and the exercising of violence: the new barbarians are those who migrate from the countryside, establishing their primitive and idle attitudes in manufacturing cities, thereby exposing them to the threat of social collapse. In their anti-social traits, these people are “hyper-natural” and evoke a kind of freedom that has never been socialised. Only the discipline of work might bring these subjects into modern bourgeois civilisation by removing them from that condition of foreignness/outwardness with respect to society that brings it close to the historical barbarians.

“It is not an insult to any part of the human species to compare it to the barbarians, but simply a way of saying that this part is *outside* current society,” Girardin (1859, p. 157, emphasis added) writes again, presenting the issue of “how to let them in” as the crucial challenge.⁵ “*The barbarian is always* trampling at the frontiers of states, crashing against the walls of the city,” writes Foucault, highlighting this very condition of outsidership.⁶ Yet in the case of the 19th-century barbarians, this outwardness becomes merely figurative and paradoxical: for whereas the historical barbarians came from faraway lands, the metaphorical ones are *internal* barbarians who are a genuine product of industrial society, which never ceases to create them. And it is precisely this ambivalent outwardness – a radical yet only

metaphorical one – that underpins the transition from the great historiographical figure of the barbarian to that of the new internal barbarians, the bringers of an invasion that is paradoxical because it is somehow “endogenous.” The exodus of these *classes dangereuses* out of the agricultural heartland of the country thus marks the beginning of the metaphorical use of the barbarians’ image, which extends down to the present day as one of the most evocative metaphors for social and urban disorder (Tomasello, 2015, pp. 208–215).

2.2 A different race: the dangerous classes

The figure of the barbarian became entrenched in the French imaginary through the debates between competing historiographical theories about “race war.” Starting from the publication of Hotman’s *Francogallia* (1573), authors such as Boulainvillier, Mably, Montlosier, and Thierry had – in different centuries – invoked an original racial difference – between the breed of the Germanic conquerors and that of the native Gauls – to explain conflicts within the French nation (Barzun, 1932; Dubois, 1972; Jouanna, 1976). They resorted to this idea of different “races” to address the question of the enemy and the “other,” and to assert the legitimacy of a social order based on the primacy of the Crown, the aristocracy, or the Third Estate. Yet these notions of *race* had an exclusively historico-political nature: they were based on a historical event – an invasion and conquest – which had founded a relationship of political domination in the light of which this historiography sought to make sense of the French nation’s entire history (cf. Rosanvallon, 1985, pp. 183–184). Therefore, using the figure of the barbarian to designate the new industrial pauperism also meant somehow bringing the concept of race into play – although at the time this did not yet possess the biological connotations it was later to be charged with.

In this respect, the shift from historical barbarians to metaphorical ones as a means to describe the rural masses’ migration to manufacturing cities also reflects a tension within the concept of race, which has to do with a kind of otherness and idea of invasion of a completely different sort. The new barbarians are *internal* ones; they are the product of the very industrial civilisation that creates and ceaselessly reproduces them. Their behaviour falls outside the rules of civilisation which inform the social body and keep it alive, but their existence is the endogenous and inevitable outcome of the very dynamics which the social body engenders through the industrialisation processes. Their invasion, therefore, has a metaphorical and paradoxical character, and in the face of it is no longer a matter of guarding the frontiers, but rather of “defending society” – according to the expression which best encapsulates the attitudes of the liberal elites faced with the social question’s emergence.

Michel Foucault drew upon this expression to describe how the historiographical discourse on the conflict between races was transformed in the first half of the 19th century. His thesis is that the liberal historiography of those years replaced the idea of war as the “web of history” with a philosophical dialectic describing the progressive universalisation of the bourgeois way of life and affirming “two transcriptions” of the traditional discourse on the “race war” (Foucault, 2005,

pp. 59–60). On the one hand, we have that transcription which translates the historiographical discourse about the race war into the idea of class conflict according to a conception of history as the outcome of the struggle between different classes.⁷ On the other, we have a “biological transcription” which draws its “vocabulary from a materialist anatomo-physiology” and “European policies of colonisation.” Within this framework, “defending society” means acting against the biological threat of “the other race,” which is “basically not the race that came from elsewhere or that was, for a time, triumphant and dominant, but that it is a race that is permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating the social body, or which is, rather, constantly being re-created in and by the social fabric” (Foucault, 2005, pp. 60–61). The metaphor of proletarians as the new barbarians reflect this kind of conception because it implies the notion of race and, at the same time, lends it a semantic nuance steeped in new references. We can indeed observe that a range of mentions of the native people of colonised lands come to integrate the comparison between industrial subalterns and barbarian invasions.

A significant contribution in this direction was provided by ethnology, which in these years acquired a specific epistemological status as the science of the classification of races, centred on the investigation of “primitive societies.” As we shall see, its approach was also used to carry out some of the first enquiries on urban poverty (cf. § 3.1.1).⁸ “The modernising of history and this comparative ethnology . . . imposed the racial stereotype of the barbarian,” writes Pierre Michel, stressing the way in which the *détournement* of the figure of the barbarian became intertwined with the history of colonialism (1981, pp. 95, 196). Thus, René Chateaubriand compares the poverty of American Indian tribes to that of the French lower classes (cit. *ibid.*, p. 259). Eugène Buret likens the tendency for alcoholism among the urban proletariat to that of the “native races of North America” and the “Negro of the African coast,” who “sells his children and himself for a bottle of brandy” (1840, vol. II, p. 13). Jean-Baptiste Monfalcon describes the insurgent Lyonnais weavers as a “frenzied and barbarian throng” akin to the Native Americans, drunk “from the smell of blood” (1834, pp. 124–128). Louis-René Villermé notes the use of the “strange epithet white-Negroes” to describe the cotton workers of Lille (1989, p. 348). Such are the kinds of references informing the notion of race that underlie the metaphor of the new barbarians. Even the previously quoted editorial by Girardin, alongside its parallel with the ancient invasions, draws a comparison with the inhabitants of modern colonies:

The sedition in Lyon is akin to the Santo Domingo insurrection: each factory-owner lives in his *fabrique* like a colonial planter among his slaves, one to a hundred.

(*Journal des Débats*, 8 December 1831, p. 1)

In the early 1830s, Orléanist circles, liberal pundits, and the bourgeois elites represented the subaltern classes immigrating into manufacturing cities by comparing them simultaneously with the barbarians of Antiquity and the natives of the contemporary colonies. The use of the idea of barbarism as a metaphor to describe

19th-century subalterns thus also involved the concept of race resulting from public debates on colonised populations. The new “dangerous classes” were perceived as somehow foreign, as “external” to the social body of the nation, and were therefore compared to the “savages” of the colonies to indicate a sort of anthropological or even racial difference (Virdee, 2019).⁹ This “racialisation” of the emerging European proletariat (Robinson, 1983) served to describe a condition of radical otherness and foreignness with respect to the bourgeois society established by modern political revolutions. In this sense, we can recognise the role that the very concept of race played in the genealogy of what was destined to become the notions of the proletariat and working class. The comparison between the insurgent workers in Lyon and barbarians is so significant precisely because it crystallises the perceptions of a social *difference* that is so profound as to appear somehow racialised. The new human breed which, with the impetus of an invasion, migrated into industrialised cities was perceived, first of all, in terms of a radical anthropological otherness: as a different race. The cholera outbreak of 1832 offers a striking illustration of this aspect and of the social representations described so far since the public authorities interpreted and faced the epidemic as a sort of new invasion by drawing upon the barbarism/civilisation dialectic and the image of a biological foundation for social differences.

2.3 The disease of civilisation

To grasp how the French authorities approached the cholera outbreak in 1832, we must, first of all, consider the way in which the political, scientific, and intellectual elites interpreted a threat that had clearly been looming on the horizon for a few years. The pandemic first broke out in India in 1817, but was stopped by the rigours of the Russian winter in 1824 (Pollitzer, 1960; Longmate, 1966; Hamlin, 2009). It resurfaced in 1826 when a new wave spread from the Ganges Valley to Persia. The existence of cholera had been known to Western medicine for centuries, but with this epidemic, the disease actually entered Europe for the first time. Hence, the authorities commissioned several studies about the “Asiatic journey” of cholera, and in 1831 inspectors were despatched to Russia, Hungary, and Poland, where the outcome of the anti-Russian battle for independence contributed to carrying the disease to Austria and Germany.¹⁰ The westward march of cholera was indisputable, but in France – which had not experienced any epidemics since the plague of 1720 – the public debate on the disease drew upon the barbarism/civilisation dialectic to exorcise its threat. Charles de Rémusat recalled:

We thought that these great plagues which historians spoke of only belonged to the Middle Ages; that they could no longer penetrate into such an advanced society: our climate, the wholesomeness of our country, our administrative measures, and scientific progress would protect us against it. How were we to imagine that a magnificent city such as Paris, just like the wretched cities of the Orient, would fall victim to an infection from Indochina?

(Rémusat, 1959, Vol. II, p. 556)

This kind of attitude towards cholera was widely echoed by medical science, which regarded the maturity and quality of the *civilisation française* as a powerful antibody, stemming from the virtuous interplay of factors such as the country's geography, climatic conditions, scientific culture, and advanced customs. "The topographical situation in France is so advantageous that there is not much to fear from cholera in this country," we read in the *Mémoire* by military doctor Larrey (1831, pp. 27 and 33): "today, as in no other country of the world, have civilisation, industry, and commerce reached a higher level of perfection."

In the reports from the Royal Academy of Medicine, the geographical, climatic, and social features of the country from which cholera had spread, India, and the ways of life of the savage people of the Ganges Valley are set in contrast to the "superior" characteristics of French civilisation (Dubois, 1831). Considering the "progress" that France could boast of before the whole world, this Asiatic disease coming from sweltering, rainy regions governed by despotic, backward regimes and inhabited by barbarians seemed somewhat of an anachronism. The historical-political notion of civilisation was thus grafted upon the medical discourse, and through the concept of *milieu*, direct causal links were established between "health" and "civilisation." "Among which peoples" – asked the *Gazette médicale de Paris* – "has cholera wreaked havoc? Among *barbarian* or semi-barbarian peoples; but rest assured that in our advanced civilisation it will find a formidable obstacle."¹¹ This interpretation of the dynamics of the epidemic, based on the dialectic between civilisation and barbarism, adopted the latter notion in an ethno-anthropological sense, which was now added to and intertwined with the socio-historical meaning we have considered above.

In such a way, the appearance of the disease in Paris in the last days of March 1832 (cf. § 1.1) had the immediate effect of intensifying discourses that had already been associating proletarian ways of life with those of colonised people, thereby bringing the racial theme into play as well. "All men struck by this epidemic . . . belong to the popular class. . . . They inhabit the filthy alleyways of the Cité and of the Notre-Dame district," Eugène Roch (1832, p. 40) wrote, stressing the unequivocal fact that cholera had primarily spread in the working-class streets of the city centre. The living conditions of the rural populations who had recently settled there immediately suggested a comparison with the savage ways of life of the Indian tribes from which the scourge had spread. "The working classes stood before the privileged classes as India did to France. Within French society, the proletariat constituted a different race – a uniquely vulnerable one," François Delaporte writes in a fine study of the topic (1986, p. 2).

The parallel between new urban pauperism and barbarian or savage populations thus acquires new references, and the interpretation of the epidemic reveals several connections with that of the Lyon revolt. The two events are perceived and described as two expressions of the same social danger, of the same risk of "contamination" by barbarism – that of the internal migrants and that of the "savages" from the Ganges Valley.¹² Cholera and insurrection, poverty and illness, the epidemic and the uprising appear to be different symptoms of the same disease

affecting society; a disease which is interpreted and described by intertwining medical and anthropological, scientific and social, moral and political language.

When, in the first half of the 19th century, the effects of the revolutionary abolition of intermediate bodies and craft guilds in France (cf. § 3.1) started becoming intertwined with the effects of the first industrialisation processes, the vagrant humanity that emerged from this conjuncture was at first literally perceived as another species. Portrayals of it do not stress any specific – social, economic, or cultural – difference, but rather its overall anthropological difference, which only the concept of race seemed capable of encompassing. The image of barbarians ultimately points to this high degree of human otherness, and the cholera outbreak realised the most dramatic historical crystallisation of this condition of separation and radical difference, exacerbating the perception of what was seen as an anthropological and racial, more than merely socio-economic, cleavage. When it comes to 19th-century France, any investigation of the genesis of what came to be known as the “working class” is bound to start from these images and perceptions of the social question as expressing a radical otherness and overall difference resting on an anthropological foundation.

More than anyone else, the social demographer Louis Chevalier (1973) has stressed these elements, that is, “the truly racial character of social antagonism in the Paris of this period” (*ibid.*, p. 408).

This was unquestionably a class struggle, but it was carried out by means of a struggle which its contemporaries themselves described as a struggle of race; a conflict between two population groups differing wholly from each other, but above all in body; a difference not merely social but biological.

(*ibid.*, p. 433)

Indeed, the very “term proletariat” was to emerge in the public debate still in close connection with “characteristics which were not yet economic. It had not yet been purged of the ethnic and physical antagonisms” (*ibid.*, p. 364). In this context, the proletariat “is a race rather than a class and the word connotes a savage and barbarous way of living and dying rather than an occupational distribution or economic characteristic” (*ibid.*). Only in the light of this initial portrayal is it possible to grasp “the great reversal of the working-class position” which gradually took place through deeds and ideas, leading to the “new and triumphant concept of the worker . . . , the ‘sublime’ worker in which even bourgeois opinion was to acquiesce” (*ibid.* 394; cf. Gossez, 1956). It is precisely this gradual “reversal” of the figure of the new barbarians into that of the honest and industrious worker that I wish to retrace in the following pages by exploring a different set of references and problems – first of all, the interplay between the liberal interpretation of pauperism and the genesis of the modern social sciences.

To sum up the elements considered so far, we may say that the use of the metaphor of barbarism was rooted in a centuries-old debate through which French historiography had sought to make sense of the conflicts that the nation was experiencing

by drawing upon the idea of an original division between different people, or races. In the first half of the 19th century, this interpretative grid was then applied again to the emergence of the new social cleavages and rifts that industrialisation processes and the resulting “social question” of urban pauperism were creating within the post-revolutionary bourgeois society based on civil equality. However, this racial approach was now charged with different meanings and with a new degree of otherness which we may describe as “biological” to stress its overall and fundamental character. Out of this image of the subaltern classes’ general otherness, the wage labour condition gradually began to emerge as a *specific* difference capable of functioning as a means of governance and, at the same time, of social and political subjectivation. A difference among other differences, work conditions acquired their centrality through complex and multifaceted processes. The *contingent* nature of the latter must be stressed to carefully avoid any kind of historical determinism that understands labour as a kind of anthropological condition that is irreducible, essential, and basically coextensive with the modern subject.

We can thus assume the radical and general otherness embodied by the figure of the barbarian as the starting point of this intellectual-historical journey along the production of a labouring subject as one of the pillars of the post-revolutionary social order. It is now a matter of bringing into focus the trajectory which, from this figure of otherness, leads to other representations of the 19th-century subaltern classes, down to the “limpid” and unitary image that came to be known as the working class. My hypothesis is that, within this transition, a key role can be assigned to the genesis of the modern social sciences. I will look at such a genesis as a process shaped by the development of methods and practices for the empirical study of the social realm that made urban pauperism their first specific object of investigation, thereby gradually bringing into focus the figure of the wage labourer as a field of knowledge, governance, and emergent social policies.

2.4 Cholera and the genesis of the social sciences

The experience of the 1832 epidemic lent the image of the “dangerous classes” a meaning that extended far beyond that of a criminal threat, adding the perception of a sociobiological risk to the representations of urban pauperism that had emerged in the previous months. The cholera outbreak reinforced those discourses that the elite had developed in the wake of the Lyonnais weavers’ insurrection of 1831 (cf. § 1.1 and 5.1), because the two events came to be regarded as symptoms of the same social malady: a disease which was breaking out in the insalubrious urban areas overcrowded with immigrant workers and then spreading as a result of their savage way of life. “The poverty in which the people are left to wallow draws, engenders, and nourishes the deadly disease,” writes Antoine Métral (1833) in his *Natural, Moral, and Political Description of Cholera*.¹³ The expression *miasmes populaires*, to which many attributed the disease’s spread, bears witness to this understanding of the epidemic’s dynamics, which seamlessly combined hygienic, political, and social considerations: “it is the morbidity of the popular city [districts] that makes the miasmas of cholera and those of insurrection spread at the

same speed” (Rancière, 1981, p. 83). Indeed, as soon as the disease broke into Paris, rag-sellers rose against the public health measures, while the Republican inmates at Sainte-Pélagie reacted to the first death in their prison with an uprising. This foreshadowed the big insurrection that was to break out in June, sparked by the funeral for General Lamarque’s death from cholera (cf. § 1.1). “People in their political zeal had never been more ready to fight,” recounts Louis Blanc (1844, p. 406); “under the cholera, revolution was incubating,” writes Lucas-Dubreton (1932, p. 55). Thus, when Dr Frayssinet states that “there is nothing more favourable to the spread and development of the epidemic than the state of exaltation dominant among populations subject to political excesses” (Delpech de Frayssinet, 1833, p. 167),¹⁴ he echoes a well-established discourse that incorporated social, political, and moral categories into the medical-scientific description of cholera.

Such attitudes also reflect the difficulties faced by medical science in the attempt to establish a shared definition of cholera, capable of isolating it to grasp its causes and suggest a cure. Algid, blue, asphyxial, passive, Asiatic, spasmodic, typhoid-like, contagious, inflammatory, epidemic, asthenic: the wide range of adjectives used to define it bear witness to the many perspectives from which physicians sought to grasp the nature of cholera, which – not unlike the social question – emerged as a protean and hazy object that was difficult to understand and frame in a rigorous way.¹⁵ The effort to develop a theory about cholera thus sparked a medical dispute that touched directly upon political discourse, as it juxtaposed two different medical-scientific perspectives that supported the implementation of different security measures and urban governance policies (cf. § 3.3.1). On the one hand, we find the perspective that understood cholera as a *contagious* disease and identified its cause as specific germs whose spread needed to be prevented. Hence, it promoted “sanitary measures,” such as quarantine, designed to contain the spread of the disease by isolating the sick and dividing the urban population, as had been the case during major epidemics in the past. On the other, we find the “anti-contagionists,” who in the wake of hygienist theories identified physiological causes connected to the contexts in which “miasmas” proliferated. Consequently, they advocated “salubrity measures” of public hygiene designed to improve unsanitary environments and the “living conditions” in urban spaces where the choleric infection was at risk of developing.¹⁶ By juxtaposing a strategy based on the improvement of working-class living conditions with one designed to prevent contagion through the marginalisation of subjects at risk, this medical opposition between contagious disease and bacterial infection directly translated into the medical-scientific field different conceptions of the subaltern classes within the new social order forged by the political and industrial revolutions.

This debate opposing “contagion” and “infection,” aimed at advancing different theories of cholera, thus implicitly reflecting different theories of society. At the same time, as we shall see, the effort to develop a theory – or rather a science – of society appears deeply influenced in these years by the event of the epidemic, which nourished organicist conceptions of society that incorporated a hygienist perspective into the budding one of the social sciences (cf. § 3.3.1). The pandemic enabled the penetration of medical metaphors into social and political debate based

on a simple yet persuasive analogy: just as an inflammation limited to the intestine becomes a threat to the whole human body via cholera, so specific social pathologies such as riots or the unhealthy and immoral attitudes of the urban subaltern classes can put the health of the social body as a whole at risk.

“My mother has finally decided to leave Paris after five people have died on the corner of the street in which we live,” Alexis de Tocqueville writes (1984, p. 115), bearing witness to the flight of the affluent classes at a moment when fear of contagion went hand-in-hand with fear of social and political conflicts. In the French capital, cholera caused 18,402 deaths in four months: this “scourge” – to use the journalists’ favourite term – first broke out in the unsanitary poor neighbourhoods, but then from these “hotspots” the threat soon spread throughout the urban space, making it a risky and unpredictably hazardous environment. On 16 May 1832, even the head of government, Casimir Périer, succumbed to the illness. His death contributed to the feeling that the subaltern classes’ living conditions might be a problem affecting French society as a whole, a problem that far exceeded the scope of philanthropy and charity and threatened the very social order. By this time, the social question clearly emerged in the terms in which Girardin’s editorial envisaged it: as a “scourge” threatening “the health of society” as a whole (cf. § 2.1).

The effort to define cholera constantly shifted between medical and socio-political language and frameworks, as different explanations about the dynamic of the epidemic corresponded to different ways of understanding the social order. Cholera revealed the socio-biological roots of the problem of urban pauperism, fostering different perceptions and interpretations of the social question through an unprecedented intertwining of political and medical-scientific discourses that paved the way for new ways of governing poverty. Even among the liberal elites steeped in *laissez-faire* dogmas, the idea emerged that political power somehow had to deal with such problems to “defend society.” That is to say that the government needed to act in a sort of “medical” way by developing a “scientific” knowledge of the subaltern classes’ living conditions capable of suggesting policies for the prevention and immunisation of the social body – understood, in organicist terms, as a whole that can be threatened by the sickness of any one of its parts (cf. § 3.3.1). Thus, as a response to the social challenges raised by the events of this pandemic crisis, the need emerged to develop cognitive maps capable of grasping and describing the new depths of a complex social body to immunise it against ills potentially threatening the whole system.

This interaction between political discourse and medical language revolving around the concept of “social environment” (*milieu*) and an organicist conception of society played a relevant role in the genesis of the modern social sciences’ epistemology. Exploring such a role offers a glimpse of a minor and less-known history of the birth of sociology, viewed not in terms of the development of great concepts, models, and theories but of social research *practices* that appear to be partially derived from the empirical method of medicine and driven by the political need to respond to the social challenges posed by the emerging industrial society. In the very years when Comte’s *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830–42) established the foundational theoretical assumptions of sociology, certain institutional

and government circles started to promote initiatives for the empirical analysis of society to identify new security policies for the reduction of social, biological, and political risks. This drive to study and *classify* the new human species which was transforming manufacturing cities fostered the rise of unprecedented practices for empirical analysis of the subaltern classes' conditions.

2.5 The epidemic as a social question

As early as July 1831 a central health committee was established as a means of prevention in Paris, along with twelve district commissions and forty-eight neighbourhood ones, entrusted with "visiting" thousands of sites regarded as "insalubrious" (Boulay de la Meurthe, 1832). These commissions proceed to identify the unhealthiest buildings and areas, and to promote their sanitisation, the demolition of certain slums, the closing of alleys infested with "miasmas," and the disinfecting of streets with chlorinated water. These were exceptional measures inspired by an unprecedented effort to understand the urban and social roots of the pandemic threat, which nonetheless proved ineffective in preventing cholera, thus fostering the search for a more general level of understanding of those conditions that expose the urban fabric to threats such as an epidemic. This failure stimulated further research into measures aimed at managing the urban space as an environment posing constant hazards, to prevent new sociobiological risks. The trauma of cholera thus led to the first official social enquiry in French history: the *Rapport sur la marche et les effets du choléra morbus dans Paris et les communes rurales du Département de la Seine*, commissioned by the prefecture to a committee headed by the demographer Louis-François Benoiston de Châteauneuf and including a group of ten doctors, scientists, public servants, and emergent social research experts such as Trébuchet, Villot, Chevallier, Devaux, Millot, Petit, Pontonnier, Parent-Duchâtelet, and, most notably, Louis-René Villermé (on whom, see § 3.3). This document offers an in-depth portrayal of Paris in the early 1830s, resulting from the attempt to systematically establish the "relationship of cholera mortality" with various demographic, climatic, geographical, urban, and social factors (Benoiston de Châteauneuf, 1832).

The *Rapport* examines the spatiality of the Department of the Seine in all its detail to single out conditions that might pose some kind of health risk or threat. The urban space is here envisaged as a "social environment" that can be described and investigated in a scientific way for the purpose of developing pioneering welfare measures inspired by systematic methods and practices for the empirical study of the social fabric (cf. § 3.3.1). The committee's diagnosis is clear: the central factor in the spread of the epidemic is *social conditions*, which is to say unhealthy ways of living in the poor neighbourhoods of the old city centre (Coleman, 1982; Delaporte, 1986). The report stresses that such neighbourhoods occupy one-fifth of the capital's territory yet house half of its population: "these streets, all of them without exception," and "these houses" have had "mortality rates that are double the average" (Benoiston de Châteauneuf, 1832, p. 30). Through the analysis of medical statistics on the epidemic, the committee affirms that the overcrowded

areas inhabited by immigrant workers constitute the key centre onto which new security policies must be grafted to prevent new epidemic threats:

These classes were pushed into the districts of Arçais, Grève, Cité, Saint-Denis, Saint-Martin, and Popincourt; into the *faubourgs* of Saint-Marceau and Saint-Victor, whose dirty, narrow, damp houses, without courtyards, without air, received in their dark recesses these new guests who came to pile up alongside the already too numerous inhabitants of these unhealthy neighbourhoods. . . . In these gloomy districts, the population vegetates sadly, the filth is disgusting, the air infected, the streets narrow, and death so active that it strikes more than anywhere else; the inhabitants are weak and puny, to the point that one in three called up for military service are exonerated.

(Benoiston de Châteauneuf, 1832, pp. 30 and 202)

The *Rapport* on cholera first of all highlights the extremely high mortality rates in these poorer neighbourhoods, and hence a basic social inequality in the face of death. Clearly, this acknowledgement of inequalities is far from new and surprising, but what is striking is the fact that it is now “photographed” in an official document which derives further authoritativeness from the extensive use of statistics. The latter linked the epistemological and methodological framework of budding social research to that of the natural sciences, giving the former a scientific outlook that strengthened its normative character. This was further supported by the publication in 1832 of the first *Statistique général de la France*, which marked a turning point in the project – begun at the end of the previous century – of introducing the concept of measurement into the description of human and social phenomena.¹⁷ This publication reflected a broader trend towards the professionalisation and regularisation of population statistics, which was defined as the “science of facts” and progressively replaced the term “political arithmetic” (Rabinow, 1995, pp. 59–61).

“In saturating the social space, the epidemic revealed its non-neutrality: the social selectiveness of the epidemic, which chiefly struck the poor, made people aware that conditions for order in the social space might, or might not, be produced,” write Procacci and Szokolczai (2003, p. 68), stressing the importance of this event for the social sciences’ genesis. “The cholera epidemic of 1832 was a watershed event,” writes Paul Rabinow (1995, p. 30), because it “set the stage for a new understanding of social conditions” and “opened the way for new scientific discourses, new administrative practices, and new conceptions of social order.” By revealing basic deep inequality in the face of death, this experience intensified and exacerbated the way in which French society perceived its internal rifts. But at the same time through this very trauma, a vivid need arose, even in the liberal field, for a political strategy to socially integrate the subaltern classes and include them into an actual condition of citizenship, a strategy that required the development of specific knowledge about their living situation. Let us now observe how such a need found practical development in the aftermath of the pandemic trauma and how the latter stimulated the rise of social research on poverty and pioneering measures of social security.

2.6 The moral and political sciences

The cholera outbreak fostered a change in the way in which French liberalism looked at urban pauperism and the management of problems associated with it. The dynamics of the epidemic nourished the idea – an idea no doubt conflicting with classical liberal principles – that to safeguard the social body as a whole, the political authorities somehow needed to take charge of the conditions of the subaltern classes, so as to “defend society” by immunising it against a risk that far exceeded the political sphere. The cholera crisis brought about representations and interpretations of the lifestyles, customs, and habits of the subaltern classes in terms of a “social pathology.” The will to adopt safety measures to prevent the risk that the latter implied for the health of society as a whole thus stimulated the development of strategies and practices aimed at providing a scientific understanding of the social fabric, of subaltern urban subjects, and the major hazards associated with them (cf. § 1.3). “The fear of dangerous classes, the fear of a new irruption of barbarians into the depths of society, contribute to making social research one of the linchpins of the new kind of governance that is being developed,” writes Rosanvalon (1985, p. 261), who uses the metaphor of the *État sociologue* to describe the original intertwining between political power and social enquiry which emerged in the early 1830s. Doctrinaire liberalism – committed to establishing an ideological infrastructure for the Orléanist regime and translating liberal theory into government policies for the first time in continental Europe (cf. § 1.4) – consistently interpreted this political-intellectual tension through several institutional measures. Particularly relevant is the decree of 27 October 1832 by which François Guizot, then Minister of Education, reopened the *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques* (ASMP).

This Academy was first established in 1795 by the Revolution and then suppressed by Napoleon owing to its Republican tendencies. Its new regulations of 1832 asserted the principle of election among peers, starting with the surviving original members (including Sieyès, Tayllerand, Destutt de Tracy, and Gérando) and defined its mission as the promotion of studies, social investigations, and research grants.¹⁸ Among the thirty full members initially elected we find two leading figures in the cholera debate, Lous-René Villermé and François-Joseph-Victor Broussais – which shows how the ASMP project was driven by the same kind of issues that had emerged during the epidemic. Out of the Academy’s five sections, it was especially the political economy and statistics that engaged with the issues considered so far: through the joint work of economists, mathematicians, doctors, civil servants, and jurists, it focused on the complex and hazy set of problems related to the social question, seeking to clarify it through the observation, “classification,” and organisation of the social actors it involved. The Academy further encouraged the use of statistics to tackle the problems brought into play. The “physical and moral conditions” of the urban lower classes thus became the object of increasingly regular and systematic observations ranging from their biological constitution to their expression of political wills and passions – to prevent the unrest that might stem from them. In such a way, the ASMP became a crucial

workshop for the genesis of the modern social sciences, which made pauperism the first specific object on which to develop a scientific method for the analysis of society.¹⁹ Up until the 1848 revolution, the Academy played a leading role in the intertwining of political institutions with the emerging practices of social research that contributed to bringing workers' conditions into focus as the strategic area for the governance of urban pauperism.

The ASMP perfectly embodies "the connection between science and power which characterises the early July monarchy" (Leterrier, 1992, p. 656; cf. § 1.3). This Academy expresses the government's ambition to become both sociologist and the arbiter of sociological knowledge through the establishment of an instrument enabling it to act in the field of social research while delegating it, according to the liberal paradigm, to private initiative. In such a way, the Academy presented itself as a public yet independent body that was nonetheless closely connected to the political authorities, in relation to which it aspired to act not just as an adviser, but as an inspirer and in some cases – as we shall see in Chapter 4 – as the direct promoter of administrative and legislative measures. This hybrid, public-private configuration is precisely what enabled the ASMP to become an avenue for collaboration between different kinds of intellectuals and scientific approaches sharing an original interest in the subaltern classes and in new research practices aimed at scrutinising these classes' living conditions to orient government and administrative policies.

The social question immediately emerged as the central focus of the Academy's activities, giving rise – over the course of the 1830s – to major enquiries into poverty that marked a turning point in the processes we have been exploring so far. The image of otherness so radical as to acquire anthropological-racial connotations, and crystallised in the metaphor of barbarism, was now replaced by the tendency to take this very field as the object of a budding form of knowledge. The next chapter follows this development by considering the major social enquiries promoted by the ASMP over the course of the 1830s, to illustrate how they brought about new representations of the subaltern classes and a progressive redefinition of the "social question" as a "labour question." By retracing the evolution of the social investigation on poverty, we will see how the latter progressively began to distinguish specific problems and classify different figures within the dark and hazy universe of the subaltern classes – what had been initially represented as a single dangerous subject through the figure of the "new barbarians." Specifically, we will observe how the social enquiries promoted by the ASMP gradually brought into focus the condition of wage labour as a field of knowledge and a set of administrative practices that were designed to limit potential risks and brought about the first occupational medicine and labour law measures. Although these studies – consistently with the spirit of the Orléanist regime – were primarily driven by a conservative concern to stem the growing political pressure from the subaltern classes and by a moralising approach, they were to have powerful reformist outcomes in terms of policies and legislation, which will be the focus of Chapter 4.

Notes

- 1 Founded in 1789, the *Journal des débats* was the most authoritative mouthpiece and supporter of the Orleanist government.
- 2 Guizot (1828, pp. 150–151): “there is one element that must be clearly understood to get a true picture of what a barbarian was, and that is precisely the taste for individual independence, the pleasure of using one’s strength and freedom amid the world’s possibilities.”
- 3 The same aspect is stressed by Rosanvallon (1985, p. 86 n. 2): “the history of civilisation is naturally that of a gradual cleansing of barbarism, through the separation of its positive principle (individual independence, equality) from its negative principle (confusion and anarchy).”
- 4 Cf. § 4.3 concerning this important treatise, which interprets poverty as a specifically modern phenomenon which, at the same time, is also a kind of return to the *état de barbarie* and “savage life” (Buret, 1840, Vol. 1, pp. 67–68).
- 5 “The workers’ poverty is a social bane which must be cured through the broadest possible division of property,” writes Girardin (1859, p. 154), bearing witness to the fact that the main strategy envisaged by the liberal elites in this period was “to make the proletarians property-owners.” The aim of the present book is also to reconstruct the gradual transformation of this position into an integration strategy based instead on the broad extension of wage labour.
- 6 Foucault (2005, p. 195): unlike the “savage,” the man of nature, who lacks history and leaves his condition behind by establishing the contract that founds society, the barbarian “does not emerge from some natural backdrop to which he belongs. He appears only when civilization already exists, and only when he is in conflict with it. He does not make his entrance into history by founding a society, but by penetrating a civilization, setting it ablaze and destroying it” (*ibid.*).
- 7 This perspective clearly finds its most authoritative development with Marx, who in any case attributes its conception to great historians of the French bourgeoisie such as Guizot and Thierry: “I do not claim – Marx writes to Joseph Weydemeyer in 1852 – to have discovered either the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them. Long before me, bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this struggle between the classes” (Marx, 1983, p. 62).
- 8 Particularly revealing in this respect is the case of the *Société des observateurs de l’homme* (1799–1804), among whose founders was Baron de Gérardo, who in the 1820s sought to apply the ethnographic principles developed for the study of “savage people” to the analysis of the urban poor (cf. § 3.1.1).
- 9 Even Louis Blanc describes the *canuts* of Lyon as “a long-subjected race” that is regarded as “inferior and degraded” (1844, pp. 354 and 345), whereas Alphonse de Lamartine writes: “these are what are, strictly speaking, called the proletarians, a race destined to populate the soil . . . a people sprung from the people, a nation within the nation, a displaced race” (1864, Vol. IV, p. 109). Note that François Guizot himself draws upon comparative ethnography to develop his interpretation of the historical barbarians: “I know but one means to represent . . . the social and moral condition of the Germanic *peuplades*: to compare them to the *peuplades* that, in modern times, in various areas of the globe, in North America, in the interior of Africa, and in northern Asia, are still at a roughly similar level of civilisation. . . . For us they become like a mirror that reveals . . . the image of the ancient Germanic peoples” (Guizot, 1853, Vol. I, p. 194).
- 10 This second pandemic of “Asiatic cholera” spread from the Ganges delta in 1826, reaching China in 1828, Persia in 1829, and then Poland, Hungary, Prussia, Germany, Austria, and Britain in 1831 (cf. Bachrel, 1952). Hegel died from it in Berlin on 14 November 1831.
- 11 Cit. in Leca (1982, p. 77, emphasis added): “civilisation, you see, is the best means to fight all epidemics.” This kind of discourse was also adopted by the republican

- opposition: “the admirable people of Paris . . . are not made to be served up to Asiatic Cholera and to die from the disease of slaves” (Société des Amis du Peuple, 1832, p. 4). On this topic, see also the Saintsimonian movement’s pamphlets by Chevalier (1832) and Flachet (1832).
- 12 On 15 April 1832, in the republican newspaper *Le National*, Armand Carrel denounces “this way of understanding society . . . transposed from the events of Lyon to the circumstances of the terrible disease that is ravaging Paris,” and represented by the reference to the “new barbarians.”
 - 13 Métral (1833, p. 160): the lower classes are here described as “a kind of hermaphrodite race: they belong neither to nature, since they are not like the savages, nor to society, since they are not civilised” (ibid., p. 24).
 - 14 Among the possible causes of cholera, this surgeon lists “violent emotions,” “passions of the soul,” and hence too revolutionary drives and political unrest. Some journalists stress the role played by Polish political refugees in the westward spread of a disease that the clergy was portraying as a divine punishment for the impiety of a population that the previous year had gone so far as to plunder the archbishop’s palace. “Labour movements are contagious,” we read in the 26 November 1831 issue of *Le Temps*. On these matters, see Morris (1976), Bourdelais and Dodin (1987), and Bourdelais and Raulot (1987).
 - 15 In March 1832, the public authorities circulated an *Instruction populaire sur les principaux moyens à employer pour se garantir du choléra-morbus, et sur la conduite à tenir lorsque cette maladie se déclare*. It reflects all the confusion surrounding this disease (“the less one is afraid, the smaller the risk one runs”), providing generic suggestions in terms of “cleanness,” “sobriety,” and moderation, and advising people to avoid the kind of situations which the popular classes were forced to deal with owing to their poverty (to avoid sleeping in crowded rooms, to wear woollen garments and not go barefoot, to wash one’s clothes and take hot baths, to avoid wine of poor quality, etc.). Even the medical debates on possible “cures” for the disease reflect the same kind of confusion, suggesting treatments that range from leeches to coal, and from cold water to punch and even opium.
 - 16 See esp. the addresses made by Louis Villermé, on whom see § 3.3, and by François Broussais, who supported the identity of the physiological and the pathological, and identified the origin of cholera as an inflammation of the intestine to be treated exclusively by external means, such as the use of ice and leeches (cf. *Gazette médicale de Paris*, April-June 1832 and Le Mée, 1998).
 - 17 See also the *Rapport au roi sur les hôpitaux, les hospices et les services de bienfaisance*, which was published by the Prefecture of Paris in 1837 and reflects the emerging “public health” approach (cf. § 3.3.1). “In the first half of the 19th century, statistical research in Paris responded to the population’s concern, and actually witnessed a remarkable spread”, exercising a considerable influence on public opinion (Chevalier, 1956, p. 624). As far as public statistics are concerned, demographic ones were first published in 1821 and those on murders and suicides in 1827, while the first meagre statistics on industry appeared in 1839. See Marietti (1949), Lazarsfeld (1961), Hacking (1982, 1990), and Porter (1986).
 - 18 The first phase of the Academy lasted until 1803 and centred on the *Idéologues’* work. This group included intellectuals such as Condillac, Cabanis, and Destutt de Tracy, who already displayed a tendency to combine science and governance, social research and administration, in analysing the population’s physical and moral conditions (see Simon, 1885). Victor Cousin was the orchestrator of the ASMP’s reopening in 1832, whose members increased from twelve to thirty, subdivided into five classes (political economy and statistics, philosophy, ethics, law, and history); in addition there were five foreign members (including Sismondi and Malthus) and up to forty overseas correspondents (see Sellière, 1926).

- 19 Among the various steps taken by ASMP with regard to the social question, it is worth recalling the establishment of the “Beaujour” Award in 1834 and the “Bigot de Morogues” one in 1843, both of which were devoted to research on poverty (cf. Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, 1960).

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