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This is nonsense [to prohibit begging]. Because begging has always existed, you understand! Because you'll always have poor people in society. Because someone will always be excluded. One person will be forced to beg. Because the street is what you fall back into, every single time. When you're in deep shit, it's always the street (Esteban<sup>1</sup>).

## Introduction

- <sup>1</sup> Esteban has been begging for several years in the streets of Geneva, in Switzerland. He talks about the anti-begging law adopted in Geneva in 2007 and applied since 2008. This law restored the prohibition of begging and authorized police officers to immediately seize any profits. The words of Esteban, collected in the context of a study on the representations of different actors concerned, highlight the contradictions that follow such a political decision. This measure was presented by some political actors as a way of promoting access to a secure and “clean” public space for citizens, which can be understood as guaranteeing them a certain “right to the city”. Why then, are people still begging in the streets of Geneva despite the prohibition?
- <sup>2</sup> Based on a study that we carried out in Geneva between 2013 and 2015<sup>2</sup>, our paper suggests that the law adopted by the Geneva High Council in 2007 can be understood as a way of managing urban cohabitation with marginalized populations. In other words, it can be considered as a form of “poverty management”, defined by Deverteuil, May and von Mahs (2009: 652) as “spatial and temporal structures designed to regulate and manage the spillover costs associated with so-called disruptive populations”. In response to this “poverty management”, we argue that the continued occupation of the public

space by the people who practice begging can be understood as them implementing their own “right to the city” anyway, in the subversive sense meant by Lefebvre (1968).

- 3 Geneva is the first French-speaking canton in Switzerland to have re-opened the debate on begging and to have recently passed legislation in this area. From what can be considered as a “textbook case” for the French-speaking part of Switzerland, it seemed appropriate to conduct a scientific study on the issues related to the adoption of this law and on its consequences on the representations of begging on the one hand, and on the realities of people who practice begging on the other hand<sup>3</sup>. Several studies have analyzed marginalized populations management processes in different cities around the world, and particularly, the passage of anti-begging laws (see in particular Rullac, 2008 for France or Blomley, 2012 for Canada). Deverteuil *et al.* (2009) show how a number of authors mention the “carceral” (Davis, 1990), the “revanchist” (Smith, 1996), or even the “post-justice” (Mitchell, 2001) nature of such measures and, in particular, of their effects on marginalized populations’ “right to the city” and to citizenship (Mitchell, 2005; Staehli and Mitchell, 2007).
- 4 Yet the authors argue that this predominant tendency to adopt what they call a punitive frame has the effect of hiding the complexity and local specificities of the realities experienced by marginalized populations and of the responses given. They also highlight the risk of masking the heterogeneity of experiences and profiles behind a discourse focused exclusively on the adequacy of the responses given (Deverteuil *et al.*, 2009: 650-651).
- 5 Our paper seeks to avoid these pitfalls by articulating a study of the diverse political positions which led to the adoption of this law with the different meanings given to begging and its prohibition by those who practice it.
- 6 In the first part of this paper, we define the theoretical framework and the methodology used for the study. In the second part, we show how the passage of the law prohibiting begging was designed to address a problem revolving around the perceived increasing use of the public space by persons identified as belonging to the so-called Roma community<sup>4</sup>, more than around the begging practice as such (De Coulon, Reynaud and Colombo, 2015). Additionally, we mention the fact that this law results from a conjunction of different public space uses and urban cohabitation management rationales, which are more complex than the mere willingness to “punish human misery”, as condemned in particular by Mesemrom, a Roma’s rights defense association<sup>5</sup> (Budry, 2007; Lecomte, 2007; Mansour, 2007). By discussing these results in the light of the existing literature on the subject, we argue that the debates on begging prohibition refer to a representation of the public space as a functional space dedicated to security, cleanliness and tranquility more than as a space for democratic cohabitation and for the defense of citizenship. In the words of Blomley (2012: 415), we will show that politicians’ representations have favored a logic of “civil engineering” over a logic of “civil rights”.
- 7 In the third part, we focus on the views of the people who practice begging in Geneva, on the meanings they give to their practices and on their way of coping with this form of “poverty management” (Deverteuil *et al.*, 2009: 651). By analyzing their discourses, we will argue that begging cannot be understood merely as a disruption of public order or as a threat to security but that it represents, to the people practicing it, a way of taking their place in society. In that sense, their presence in the public space may be understood as a form of participation in public life and as a quest for recognition, although in a paradoxical and precarious way. To them, begging is about implementing their “right to

the city”. This concept by Lefebvre refers to an urban management approach based not only on a logic of profitability and productivity but also on the recognition of citizens’ creativity and spontaneity. In the 1960s already, this author called for the recognition of the social dimension of the urban environment as well as its functional dimension, namely the appropriation of the city by its inhabitants and the urbanity of spaces (Costes, 2010: 180).

## 1. Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

- 8 First, we carried out an analysis of parliamentary debates on this subject, which took place between 2002 and 2012 within the Geneva High Council. In a second phase, we recorded, through interviews, the representations held by those practicing begging activities in Geneva and the challenges posed to them by the prohibition.
- 9 The analysis is in line with the ethnomethodological tradition, which considers discourses as social practices which simultaneously reveal social phenomena and constitutes them (Garfinkel, 1967). The conceptual framework used to analyze data is based on the sociology of representations in particular. According to Jodelet (1989), a social representation is an interpretation system which governs our relationship with the world and with others, guiding and organizing social conducts and communications. These representations constitute a system qualified by Jodelet (1989: 52) as “spontaneous theories”, which are versions of reality perceptible through images or words. To understand the issues related to urban cohabitation with marginalized populations, differentiated representations of the public space, of its occupation and of harmonious cohabitation cannot be ignored (Parazelli and Robitaille, 2011). As pointed out by Rosemberg (2000: 2):

Intervention on space is motivated and shaped by one's representation of space, is derived from an intention for space and integrates an image of space. Representations, which constitute a filter of the knowledge of reality and thus influence action [...] must be integrated into an objective analysis of space.<sup>6</sup>

- 10 More precisely, in order to analyze these representations, we used an analytical grid developed with Parazelli (Parazelli *et al.*, 2013; Colombo *et al.*, 2016) derived from Karsz (2004). The interdisciplinary analysis method developed by this author is based on the assumption that in order to get a sense of a practice from the point of view of the person resorting to it, it is important to understand the reference points used by this person to assess situations. This analytical grid enables the identification of three types of reference points linked to representations: cognitive, ethical and political. The cognitive reference points allow us to show the subjective approach used by parliamentarians and beggars alike to explain begging. The identification of ethical reference points highlights the values behind the practice of begging and its prohibition. Finally, the political reference points indicate how these actors position themselves toward the legal prohibition of begging. Hence, the analysis seeks to reveal how the discourses of parliamentarians along with the discourses of the people who practice begging are ways of reading, interpreting and envisaging the world, and consequently, of acting.

## 2. The Begging Prohibition: a Way of Managing Urban Cohabitation

- 11 The adoption of this law occurs in a Swiss context marked by intense political arguments highlighting not only the importance of cleanliness of public spaces, often cited as a characteristic of this country but also of security as an important aspect of the management of urban areas, in response to a growing sense of insecurity in the population. Cities without any human resources and/or mechanisms specifically dedicated to the safety of urban spaces are scarce (Müller *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, the review of the press and scientific literature performed in our study indicates that Switzerland is not an exception in an international context where researchers observe an increased use of sociospatial devices and judicialization practices to evacuate, expel or disperse marginalized people living in public and semi-public spaces (furnishing of vacant spaces, begging prohibition, increased police surveillance, zealous distribution of fines, choice of street furniture preventing immobility, etc.) (Mitchell, 1997; Doherty *et al.*, 2008). Following Berne in 1998<sup>7</sup> (Gutzweiler, 2009), many cities or Swiss German cantons have passed (by popular vote) removal measures (Wegweisungsartikeln), followed in particular by Geneva in 2009. They consist of articles of law providing the police with the means to exclude individuals from some places if they threaten public order and safety. If the purpose of this legislation was originally to fight the emergence of open drug scenes<sup>8</sup> in the Bernese case, discourses now increasingly focus on issues related to the image of the city and its attractiveness to tourists and to the customers of businesses located in the concerned areas. Research on expulsion measures in the cities of Bern, Lucerne and St. Gallen (Litscher *et al.*, 2011) shows that these measures contribute to devaluing the public space by subdividing it into areas that are clean and safe and areas that are not. However, it seems that they do not contribute to reduce the sense of insecurity in the population. These examples indicate a marked tendency of Swiss cities to manage cohabitation in the public space by controlling the presence of marginalized populations on their territory<sup>9</sup> through the use of legislation in particular. According to Gasser (2003), who analyzed the management of public spaces in Bern, a growing confusion between social and criminal policies can be observed in this field.
- 12 This is the context in which the public debates on the presence of beggars in public spaces emerged, first in German-speaking Switzerland, where it was raised primarily as a phenomenon affecting the attractiveness of city centers and the efforts toward modernization that were undertaken in the area. For example, the proposal to adopt begging prohibition in Bern was linked to the refurbishment of the train station for the European Football Championships (Euro 2008) in this city (Gutzweiler, 2009). As part of our study, we made a review of Swiss legislation at the three political levels (federal, cantonal and municipal). The Federal Penal Code does not mention begging but a large number of cities and/or cantons have forbidden or limited begging<sup>10</sup> by introducing from the year 2000 onwards legislation prohibiting or limiting begging activities, on either the cantonal or municipal level (or maintaining or adapting existing laws or articles)<sup>11</sup>.

## 2.1 The Emergence of Public and Political Debates on the Begging Prohibition in Geneva

- 13 In Geneva, a regulation prohibiting begging dating back to 1941 already existed. But the introduction of the new cantonal Penal Code in January 2007 entailed some legal amendments, which caused journalists to question the validity of the prohibition. From that moment on, the legitimacy of such legislation was not clear, which triggered public and political debates. At the end of November, as two draft bills had been brought before the Geneva High Council by right-wing political parties, a new prohibition on begging was passed by a majority and came into effect as of January 2008. It was subject to an appeal to the Federal Tribunal by the Mesemrom association, which defends the interests of the so-called Roma community. In 2008, the Federal Tribunal dismissed the appeal, thereby confirming the legitimacy of the begging prohibition legislation in Geneva.
- 14 A press review of years 2002 to 2010<sup>12</sup> conducted for the purpose of our study indicates that the decision to adopt this law occurred in a socio-political context where a sense of insecurity had been growing in Geneva, expressed by citizens and business owners, in particular, those located around the train station and in sensitive areas like the Eaux-Vives and the Pâquis districts. This feeling was amplified by a media staging of the occupation of public spaces by people designated as marginalized, such as, for example, people with drug addiction, people practicing prostitution, begging or dealing drugs. Several measures (petitions, motions, etc.) called for greater intervention by police forces with the explicit aim to “cleanse” the city of unwanted populations, such as reported by *Le Temps* daily newspaper in an article titled “The citizens of Geneva ask the authorities to clean up their train station squatted by beggars and drug dealers”. The measures taken were primarily focused on security: territorial assignments at first (Petignat, 2002), followed by an extension of municipal security agents’ authority (Brandt, 2006) and, finally, the adoption of a law article prohibiting people threatening public order or safety from accessing a given area for a period of 24 hours to 3 months (expulsion)<sup>13</sup>. While mainly targeting youth and marginalized people gatherings, this latter measure also mentioned begging.
- 15 Furthermore, in a study on urban identities in Geneva and Lausanne, Galland *et al.* (1993) point out that land management has always been an important element of representations and power relationships in Geneva, whose territory is relatively small. But they mostly highlight the importance of Geneva’s upmarket international image, which sometimes conflicts with the values of openness and tolerance claimed by the city. Headquarters of several international organizations, with an airport on its territory, home to many major banks and specializing in luxury tourism, Geneva is defined by its elites as “the smallest of the big cities” (Galland *et al.* 1993: 45), whose international fame dates back many years. In a context of competition between cities, this international identity is of particular importance and allows Geneva to distinguish itself from other cities by this singularity. This was emphasized by the President of the Lake Geneva Observatory, Guillaume Pictet (2010: 3): “[in] the new global governance which is being gradually implemented [...] International Geneva is central” to attracting particularly “the institutions of this new global order, the companies, the cultural organizations or the highly skilled workforce”. This aspect even serves as the background of a slogan

launched by the city in 2010: “Geneva – a world of its own,” which is a very good example of “city branding” according to Intartaglia (2010), i.e. considering a city as a trademark.

## 2.2 The Anti-Begging Law: a Way of Regulating the Visible Presence of the Roma Community in the Public Space

- 16 As we can see, the adoption of a law prohibiting begging in Geneva is part of a context where cohabitation in the public space is marked, firstly, by image issues associated with global competition between cities and secondly, by the importance of civic and political expectations of securing public places. It could be tempting to explain this prohibition by a punitive or revanchist rationale of securing and purifying the public space (Deverteuil *et al.*, 2009) or to merely see it as a manifestation of the privatization of the public space (Perraton & Bonenfant, 2009). The “punitive” argument is widely developed by a great number of scientific studies condemning the “punitive turn” which would characterize, according to them, the responses given since the 1990s by cities faced with the occupation of the public space by marginalized populations and in particular, by the homeless (Deverteuil *et al.*, 2009). Other authors explain the growing number of legal measures that criminalize marginalized populations by a trend toward privatization of public places (Ghorra-Gobin, 2000; Perraton & Bonenfant, 2009; Parazelli, 2009). These authors explain that the economic pressure associated with globalization increasingly leads to considering public places as spaces favoring the consumption of goods, services and experiences and less as spaces fostering social ties necessary for living together.
- 17 Yet various analyses argue that it would be simplistic to perceive such measures as mere “naked instruments of domination” (Sylvestre *et al.*, 2015: 1363). They suggest that different forms of spatial regulation and legal mechanisms rest on complex rationales that deserve to be analyzed on their own terms. Furthermore, Blomley (2012: 416) points out that some measures which may look unequal turn out, after analysis, to be following their own specific egalitarian logic. For example, an anti-begging law may be part of a plan seeking to avoid any obstruction of public roads, in the same way as the prohibition of commercial objects. Finally, Deverteuil *et al.* (2009: 650) argue that.

As the punitive frame becomes what Hetherington (2001) would refer to as an ‘obligatory point of passage’ in discussions about homelessness, the rush to identify yet more examples of it obscures all other responses to homelessness, even in cities where the punitive frame cannot hope to capture the complexities of these responses.

- 18 We propose to relate the adoption of the anti-begging law to the concept of “poverty management” developed by Deverteuil *et al.* (2009: 652). These authors insist on the importance of articulating all the spatial and temporal techniques used to regulate the nuisances associated with the presence of marginalized populations in the public space. These techniques may be supportive, ambivalent or punitive in nature and vary over time but they are part of a whole and may not be examined separately. Begging prohibition seems to have been thought of as one measure among others to solve the problem associated with the presence of the so-called Roma community in the public space. Furthermore, this law coexists with other, more supportive measures like low threshold care facilities as well as proposals made in parallel to the debates on the ban to offer support and development: “concrete programs and projects targeted at Romania's Roma community” (Resolution 548). It should also be noted that the development of the

“Maudet-Moutinot<sup>14</sup>” action plan against begging, presented as a multifaceted solution (sanitary, police, and social responses) resulted in the destruction of Roma camps and in the return to Romania of persons in irregular situation of stay.

### 2.3 Parliamentary Debates. Three Positions, One Agreement: an Intolerable Presence in the Public Space

- 19 Three different type of discourse emerge from the analysis of parliamentary debates. A first discourse that we empirically called “populist” opposes an indigenous begging practice described as legitimate and tolerable to a foreign begging practice qualified as scandalous. The latter would be collective, strategic and organized (by “clans”, “hordes” or “mafia-like networks”) and associated with criminality. In the discourses based on a rhetoric of insecurity, simulation and invasion, a strong amalgam is made between begging, criminality and the so-called Roma community (designated implicitly or explicitly). The effects of insecurity and loss of attractiveness of the public space caused by the increase of this particular form of begging are denounced and deemed intolerable.
- 20 In contrast, a second discourse, which we chose to call “humanistic” denounces a process of stigmatization and of discrimination against the so-called Roma community. The arguments set forth seek above all to describe the begging practice as a symptom of the current economic context and as a practice necessary for survival. They focus more on the causes of the presence of people from the Roma community and on the risks associated with the defense of their rights than on the effects of begging on the public space. Our analysis shows that this approach may have had paradoxical effects: it notably struggled to deconstruct the arguments around insecurity developed by other discourses and helped reinforce the amalgam between begging and the Roma community.
- 21 Finally, the arguments found in the third discourse, which we called “legalistic”, demonstrate that some people did not see begging as problematic before what is considered a political error committed by the State Councilor in charge of Institutions in June 2007 (when he said that the ban on begging was no longer possible). Discourses here highlight the consequences in terms of suction effect and increase of the practice, particularly by foreigners, and consolidate the insecurity arguments set forth in the populist position. Both discourses converge to mention the risks in terms of increased use of public space, whether in connection with real insecurity for one, or feelings of insecurity present in the population for the other.
- 22 The analysis leads to the conclusion that behind a discussion on whether or not to accept the begging ban, elected representatives focused more on reference points related to the use of public space and to the management of the effects caused by the visible presence of precarious foreign populations in Geneva. By emphasizing the political and socio-economic conditions that may explain the recourse to begging (causes), the humanistic discourse develops an argument around the actors and the respect for their rights. The other two positions place greater emphasis on the effects of the practice in terms of security risks linked to the “increased use” of public space and to the importance of having a legislative framework that regulates the activity. From an analysis of municipal laws, Valverde (2005) shows that, unlike other types of laws, municipal regulations generally avoid the “person” category and resort instead to categories such as “use” or “activity”. She argues that the “use” category is very helpful at the local level because it allows authorities to simultaneously govern spaces and people, as by prohibiting certain



uses of the public space, we effectively prevent some people from accessing it. However Blomley (2012: 414) notes that this approach makes the argument of human rights difficult to oppose to municipal laws, because while people have rights, uses or spaces do not. This element may explain why the prohibition of an activity, in our case begging, is less concerned with eradicating the practice itself than with regulating the presence in the public space of certain categories of people, as shown in our findings.

- 23 In addition, few of the arguments put forward by parliamentarians are based on a conception of the public space as a place for citizenship and for the exercise of civil rights (right to personal liberty or freedom of expression), the more so for marginalized populations. Some members raised the importance of accepting the presence of begging by considering it as a claimed “lifestyle”<sup>15</sup> which should be a right and should not be judged morally, or as a “professional activity”<sup>16</sup> providing independence from State support. But the majority agrees that the presence of people begging in public spaces violates public order, especially in terms of maintaining the safety and cleanliness of public places. Only two discursive references in the analyzed debates evoke the importance of a public space allowing for some form of conviviality, promoting gatherings, exchanges and social ties. Some elected officials are going as far as to create a link between begging, soiling and public safety issues<sup>17</sup>. By emphasizing the health and safety risks, the danger of invasion, the insecurity or suction effect generated by begging, the populist and legalistic approaches agree on a representation of public space as State property. Therefore, the State is responsible for ensuring its functional regulation. Instead, considering public space as public property refers to a regulation that promotes a democratic sharing of it.
- 24 Blomley (2012: 415) considers that this type of urban cohabitation's functional regulation is based on a logic of “civil engineering”, using administrative and judicial arguments, which are apparently neutral to people. However, as notably shown by Sylvester *et al.* (2015) examining the “spatial tactics” used by criminal courts, these measures have significant effects on social justice and in particular on the civil rights of the persons affected by them. The consequences of legal measures of a spatial nature pronounced against marginalized populations may be particularly burdensome for those, especially in terms of social isolation, impossibility to use the services and support they would need, decrease in their social participation, etc. Studies, like those of Don Mitchell (2001), for example, denounce the threat of such laws for citizenship and for the “right to the city” of marginalized people, especially those whose sense of belonging to the city is strongly linked to public spaces, as in the case of homeless people. This author goes as far as arguing that such laws lead to the extermination of the homeless, “creating a world in which a whole class of people simply cannot be, entirely because they have no place to be” (Mitchell, 1997: 311).
- 25 However, while the intention of many of these studies is to advocate for greater consideration of the rights of those affected, directly or indirectly, by the measures implemented by cities to regulate access to public space and its uses, few of them are interested in these populations' actual experiences and own subjectivity. “Indeed, while we frequently hear the views of those seeking to banish homeless people from the city, homeless people themselves are rarely heard on such accounts – even in mediated form” (Deverteuil *et al.*, 2009: 659).
- 26 This low level of importance given to the views of those directly targeted leads, first of all, to a greater focus placed on aspects related to gentrification or to the transformation

of public spaces and on the political and legal processes of urban regulation, rather than on their actual impact on target audiences and their use of public spaces. These analyses also tend to forge a homogenized and barely nuanced picture of these populations by giving the impression that these measures have the same meaning for, and effects on all the persons concerned (Deverteuil *et al.*, 2009).

- 27 In contrast, our data reveal the heterogeneity of the populations begging in Geneva in terms of profiles, paths and ways of exercising this practice, as well as a diversity of meanings given to begging and its prohibition. In the next section, we argue that resorting to begging can be a way of occupying a place in the city, although precariously. While the adoption of the anti-begging law is unable to “annihilate” (Mitchell, 1997) these populations’ “right to the city”, our results show that the ban has serious consequences, partly because it legitimizes social contempt for this form of participation in the city.

### 3. Begging: a Paradoxical Way of Appropriating a Place in the City?

- 28 In his book on the right to the city, Lefebvre (1968) analyzes the “urban” phenomenon, which, according to him, follows the industrial city. He condemns the predominance of functionalist urbanism, which he considers as alienating, and proposes to think about the city not only as a product but above all as a process and as a social space. In that sense, the “right to the city” refers to putting in place the conditions enabling citizens to reclaim urban space and to participate in city life (Costes, 2010). The concept of urbanity is understood here not only as the “happy vibe” that would make cities attractive (Simonnet, 2005) but as a democratic principle of access for all to the city, without discrimination (Ghorra-Gobin, 2000). According to Abel (2005), the concept of urbanity refers to the idea of a cohabitation which reflects the diversity, without denying individual specificities or getting locked into incompatible differences.
- 29 This representation of the city involves a reversal of the perspective which prevails in the parliamentary debates that we analyzed. The visibility of people begging is mostly considered as a nuisance to the proper functioning of the city. By analyzing begging as a way of exercising a “right to the city”, we propose to consider urban space not only as functional but also as a place where power relationships come into play and where different forms of citizenship are constructed. In other words, it is about defending the “civil rights” approach (Blomley, 2012: 415). This does not mean that the people practicing begging we interviewed in our study explicitly define begging as a right and necessarily consider the urban space as a democratic space for dialogue. What we say is that the analysis of their words reveals that this practice may be a paradoxical way of appropriating a place and getting some recognition, when these cannot be acquired by other means. By begging, they choose to make themselves visible and to participate in the life of the city, even if only inserting themselves into its margins.
- 30 Our analysis is part of an approach to urban marginality, and to begging in particular, which considers populations designated as marginal and / or who identify as such, as actors who develop identity strategies in order to obtain some recognition (on beggars in particular: Pichon, 1992; Memmi & Arduin, 2002; De Gaulejac, 2008; Riffaut, 2011). In this perspective, they take ownership of public spaces in a paradoxical effort toward “socialization through the margins” (Parazelli, 2002). Although it is located on the

borders of society, marginality is not a “non-experience devoid of social aspects and meaning” (Girola, 2011: 15). It can be defined as a deviation from prevailing standards (Parazelli, 2002), which appears on both the social and spatial plans, and is part of power relationships: “marginalization refers to a power relationship and particularly, to a form of exclusion, since it renders behaviors or people transgressive on the basis of the norms of a society or a group” (Margier, 2013: 107). It is also necessary to put into perspective this inclusion into the margin when considering some of the people who practice begging by referring to the diversity of their profiles. For a number of them, begging coexists with other aspects of their identity that fit into the norm (having housing, a job although precarious, etc.).

- 31 Due mainly to the loss of the sacred nature of poverty and to the secularization of its management, begging is historically regarded as a marginal and marginalized practice, which arouses suspicion and is subject to many stereotypes and much repression since the Middle Ages (Damon, 2007; Riffaut *et al.*, 2001; Tabin and Knüsel, 2014). As we have seen, several authors argue that recent legal action taken against beggars in cities across the world contribute to strengthening the stigma of this state of destitution and to criminalizing the populations who resort to this practice (Mitchell 1997; Bertrand, 2003; Damon, 2007; Doherty and al, 2008). Social science studies also participate in the construction of representations around begging. Most of these studies approach this practice as a part of life in the street (Pichon, 1992; Memmi & Arduin, 2002; Mitchell, 2005; Deverteuil *et al.*, 2009; Roy & Grimard, 2013), while it does not apply to all the homeless people, nor is it linked exclusively to them (Mougin, 2008) and it mostly occurs to supplement another income (INSEE, 2001, quoted by Riffaut *et al.*, 2011).
- 32 Parazelli (2002) distinguishes three ideal types of margins: the endured margin (“*marge subie*”) (effects of the context of economic restructuring, socioeconomic polarization, impoverishment, violence, etc.), appropriated (for example, environmental, feminist or countercultural movements, sects, etc.) and finally, reappropriated. The latter refers to what the author calls a “forced choice”, that is to say, a rebound following an unchosen situation. Rather than considering begging as an undesirable situation only or as a form of crime, we analyze it as a form of “reappropriated” marginality.
- 33 Firstly, studying the experiences and the subjectivity of those directly affected by the law makes it possible to go beyond the strictly functionalist representation of public space and its appropriation by different populations. Secondly, it provides an opportunity to increase the complexity of the often dichotomous representations of people who practice begging as victims or criminals. Finally, such an analysis avoids the danger of homogenization of both the actors and their practices and consequently of the responses that should be given.

### 3.1 Highlighting the Subjectivity of the Actors and the Diversity of their Perspectives on Begging

- 34 Fourteen individual interviews were carried out with people practicing begging, who presented different demographic and social backgrounds. In order to meet them, we favored existing contacts established with associations and institutions delivering first aid necessities to destitute persons in Geneva. The idea was to benefit from the relationship of trust they had in order to conduct the interviews. Our increased presence at social canteens during opening hours, the delivery of food, beds or clothes and the help

of social workers allowed us to ask people directly if they were practicing begging activities and if they agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were built around a semi-structured paradigm, discussing their practice of begging, their relationship to others in the public space and the prohibition. Although the first contact was difficult to make due to the insecure way of life that the majority of participants was enduring, the interviews led to a rich understanding of their personal experience.

- 35 Among the fourteen people we met, there were four women and ten men. The interviewees were between 26 and 58 years old, with a mean age of around 37 (some did not give their exact age). They included Swiss nationals, some of whom combined the Swiss nationality with another one, French, Spanish, Slovak and Romanian nationals, among which persons who identified themselves with the community known as Roma. Some had stable housing while some were homeless in Geneva. They could nevertheless benefit from temporary accommodation such as squats, public shelters (winter time only) or a place to stay with friends, parents or acquaintances. In addition, some had housing in their country of origin. A number of them had dependence issues (drugs, alcohol) or health problems. They were all in very precarious economic situations (sometimes dependent on social welfare or various allowances) and had developed different survival strategies (recovery of unsold food or leftovers found in garbage cans, small precarious declared or undeclared jobs, etc.), among which the practice of begging<sup>18</sup>.
- 36 For all of them, begging is a practice which has become a part of very distinctive life stories, in which it has a different meaning and various degrees of importance. Begging has always developed around multiple identities and diverse practices, as for all human beings (Lahore 1998). Some of our interviewees might suffer from seeing their identity reduced to that of “beggars” as they are also, and sometimes primarily, parents, spouses, workers, musicians, recent or long-standing migrants, etc.
- 37 As we could see in the first section, the analysis of parliamentary debates revealed a consensual discourse: it is primarily the Roma people who beg (or even “all Roma are beggars”) and when other beggars are present (“our own”), they do not practice begging in the same way (less visible, less problematic). This consensus is shared beyond the Municipal Council, as we could also find it among social workers<sup>19</sup>, in the media<sup>20</sup> and even in the discourse of the people practicing begging.
- 38 However, the socio-demographic data that we presented contradicts this dichotomous interpretation. Additionally, when analyzing our discussions with the interviewees, this consensual explanation seems too limited to allow for the nuanced positions that were found in their speech. Firstly, we found common elements among all the interviewees, whether they identified with the so-called Roma community or not. We also discovered some differences in the practice of begging, for example, whether begging was a regular or an occasional activity or whether the money earned was subsequently spent on activities considered as “normal” (eating, building a home) or “marginal” (taking drugs, for example). These differences do not seem to be explained by ethnic or community origins; they require the use of other variables such as age, gender, individual life story and external processes of categorization. The analysis of their representations using the normative reference points’ grid derived from Karsz allowed us to go beyond the limits of a simplistic dichotomy, while still accounting for the patterns and nuanced positions revealed by the discourses.

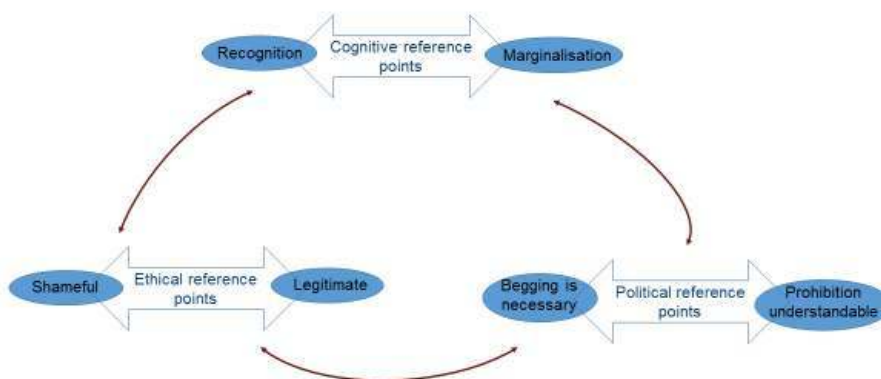
39 The results of our analysis highlight different forms of subjective reasoning and inevitably produce somewhat simplified typified outlines established for analytical purposes. However, while a type of reasoning appears to be dominant at a certain point in a discourse, the people who embody it cannot be reduced to this reasoning alone. In real life, the expression of principles is always complex and nuanced. In addition, their relationship to these forms of subjective reasoning is dynamic and can change over time.

### 3.2 Between Shame and Recognition: A Paradoxical Relationship to Begging

40 The first finding that emerges from the analysis is that all respondents maintain a paradoxical relationship to begging. Indeed, contrary to the discourse of dichotomy, which seeks to clearly associate certain types of begging with specific groups of proponents, our analysis sought to emphasize the complexity of the elements at play in people's relationship to the practice. Indeed, none of the interviewees consider begging as a long-term practice and for all, although to varying degrees, the asymmetric nature of the relationship to the other found in begging is a source of discomfort or shame. At the same time, however, their reason for practicing begging, often reluctantly, is that to varying degrees, they all associate begging with potential social recognition, even if minimal.

41 Yet, according to Wunenburger (1990: 163), any interaction is marked by an “oscillatory logic of equilibrium” which needs to be kept dynamic in order to maintain a balance. Opting for one or the other of the two poles does not allow the individuals to truly build their identity. Indeed, the discourses of the actors we met reveal a reasoning behind their position toward begging situated on a continuum between shame and a quest for recognition, which can be read as forms of an equilibrium (more or less temporary) leaning to one of these two poles, while still being pulled by the other one. The paradoxical nature of this relationship to begging is found at all levels – cognitive, ethical and political, as shown in the diagram below.

Diagram 1. Paradoxical Relation to Begging on the Cognitive, Ethical and Political Level



### 3.3 A Dead End or a Way of Taking a Place in Society? (Cognitive Reference Points)

- 42 None of the interviewees plan to beg in the long run. In that sense, begging appears to be seen as something of a dead end, because it does not seem to offer a recognized place in society in a satisfactory manner. They oscillate between the valorization of the potential recognition associated with this practice, while remaining ever-conscious of the risk of marginalization and the social contempt in which begging is held. The latter is something that they partly feel too, although to differing degrees. We can speak of a “limited choice”, as termed by Parazelli (2002), in the sense that this practice depends on choices made by these people; but still, it is a question of how they reconcile the various constraints placed upon them, who may be linked to identity, or may be economic, social, health-related or political in nature.
- 43 This paradox is expressed in different ways, depending on the interviewee. For some, social recognition is principally gained by earning a living independently and thereby fulfilling their responsibilities (for example parents who must feed their children and put a roof over their heads), whereas, for others, it is rather found in the quest for freedom and the choice of a marginal way of life. These two types of reasoning are present in all our interviewees' discourses but each tends to emphasize one or the other.

### 3.4 Begging is Both a Job and the Opposite of a Job

- 44 According to the first cognitive reasoning, begging is presented both as a form of work and as the opposite of work, in the sense of legal employment. On the one hand, begging is regarded as “*the last solution*”, to which one only resorts in the absence of a job but on the other hand, it is presented as a means of meeting one’s responsibilities, in the same way as having a job makes it possible to earn a living. Additionally, their practice of begging is sometimes similar to being employed: for example, some of them adopt regular schedules, comparable with usual business hours.
- 45 This is observed in Stephan's discourse for example. He is aged about thirty, homeless, and identifies with the Roma community. For four years, he has spent six months of the year in Geneva and six months in Romania, where his wife and three children live. Having come to Geneva initially in the hope of finding a job through a friend, it was not possible for him to gain employment. Since then, he has combined begging with undeclared work in Geneva. He explains that he does not beg willingly and that if he had a job, he would not beg. Yet at the same time, he presents begging as a way of securing the means to assume his responsibilities, given he does not have a job: “Begging is a last resort in your life. It’s sad but you have to do it. Life sometimes makes you do things. Children cry because they need to eat. We, the parents, have to take responsibility for bringing them food.” (Stephan)
- 46 According to this reasoning, the association between begging and a job is reinforced by the fact that begging is linked to a life project, which can be modified in terms of time and/or space. The money earned is not so much intended to be spent here and now as put aside for a purpose, one often associated with what is considered as a more “conventional” life, such as securing housing or sending money to family members in the home country, for those with a life project outside Switzerland; or to buy medications for

oneself or family members for example. This is why a number of them develop strategies to spend the least possible amount of money on themselves at that point in time. For example, they sleep in the street, in their car or, when possible, in emergency accommodation, and they use existing social services to eat, in order to save the money they earn begging.

- 47 Even though they do not see another solution for the moment, none of our participants plan to beg in the long-term. This can be seen by the frequent occurrence in their speech of expressions such as “*there’s no other solution*” or “*I have to*”. They are all in a very precarious situation, both economically and socially, which is often combined with other difficulties on the health or political level. This is particularly the case of Esteban, a Swiss man in his forties who reports living from begging to supplement a meager disability insurance pension. The son of immigrants arrived in Geneva in the 1970s, he has always lived in poverty and says he “*spent his life begging*”. He has been homeless for several years and declares having “*always*” resorted to begging. Nonetheless, he does not think that he will continue begging for the rest of his life. He defines himself as a composer, wishes to earn a living this way and says to be in contact with a music production studio for this purpose. Suffering from a degenerative disease, his high use of marijuana is for him a form of self-medication to alleviate the pain. For the moment, he tries to survive and fund his medicines by resorting to begging in particular. “*First, for me, life is far from rosy. Me, I struggle nearly all day long. First, because I don’t have a penny. Because me, I am at the ass of society. You now, I am even far behind the ass of society*” (Esteban).
- 48 The majority of the beggars we interviewed would like to have a job, either in Geneva, or in their country of origin, for those commuting between two countries but this ideal seems to be unattainable:

“I can’t find a job in my home country” (Stephan); “In places where there is work, people don’t practice begging. They have to because there is no work” (Mihaï); “In Romania, you can’t even earn your daily bread. If you did not study, no one gives you work. Me, I only studied for 8 years. And if I want to work, they ask me for 10 years of studies” (Iulia).

- 49 In this way, begging is presented as one of the strategies making it possible to achieve the same goals as working would, albeit in a much more precarious and partial way, but also as being the opposite of work. Begging, however, appears to them to be the object of social contempt, which disqualifies this practice when compared to working. In this sense, it is seen as a last resort solution.

“We know that it’s not normal to beg; that it might be unpleasant for Swiss people. But still, we do what we have to. They [the Swiss], they don’t know that there are things that we need. Us too. We do this [begging] and if they want to, they give, if they don’t, there’s no problem. We don’t force people to give us money when we beg.” (Stephan)

### 3.5 Between the Quest for Freedom and the Risk of Permanent Marginalization

- 50 The second cognitive reasoning describes not so much the practice of begging itself but the way of life into which it fits, described both as a means of living freely along with

being liberated from social constraints, and as the expression (and the source) of suffering.

- 51 Roger's discourse, in particular, strongly expresses this quest for freedom. French citizen in his forties, Roger has been a homeless person for many years in France and Switzerland. He has held several jobs in different countries. He considers begging, which he has practiced regularly over five years in various Swiss towns, as a way of life. At the time of the interview, he was helping a mechanic in exchange for accommodation and a small amount of money. His speech values the street as a space of freedom and socialization.

My freedom is sacred for me. It's sacred. [...] When you're used to being on the road, all that, there comes a moment when I have to get out again, I want to hit the road again, hey. In the beginning, when I was a young dad, for three days I couldn't do it, hey, because I wasn't used to it anymore. I wasn't used to it, I felt locked in, I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it, all that.  
(Roger)

- 52 The quest for freedom that marks the relationship of these respondents to the street also defines their relationships with the low-threshold services available. Indeed, several of them maintain a minimal and utilitarian use of these services. They resort to emergency shelters, showers and canteens only if they feel they do not impose too many constraints on them. Homeless drug user, Marius has been begging in Geneva for three months. He fled France, where he is under guardianship because he wanted to regain his autonomy, particularly over his finances. Homeless for several years, he had occasionally resorted to begging but this is the first time he practices begging in a more regular way.

And it's true that sometimes, I'd like to have a warm place to sleep. But the thing is the opening hours, too. Still, the Salvation Army is the fairest, because you can get there until 11 pm. You need to register earlier and then, you can go back until 11 pm. [...] In winter... but the PC (Civilian Protection's fallout shelter), you need to get there by 8 pm, which really doesn't match the habits of the people who should sleep there. (Marius)

- 53 According to this reasoning, begging is linked to a marginal trajectory and it is presented as a means of meeting various needs associated with this way of life: being able to eat, sleep or just find a way to face the toughness of life on the streets. It is thus less compared to a job than perceived as an activity directly related to their marginal lifestyle. The example of Mark is evocative in this respect. A Swiss man in his thirties and intravenous drug user, he distinguishes between the revenues related to his work as a sales clerk, enabling him to "live" and the gains obtained through begging, which are used to finance his drug use. Indeed, he refuses to spend the money earned by working on his drug consumption, which he associates with a marginal lifestyle. It is as if for him, drug use, which belong to the world of marginality, could only be financed by a practice also taking place in this environment, while his needs considered as more "legitimate" or "conventional" can be met by money earned in a way he considers as socially acceptable or at least, as socially recognized.

**And then, do you think that begging allows you to live?**

No, no, I do work.

**Ok, ok. So it is more like a supplement?**



For me, it is just to finance my drug use, because I won't spend one more frank out of my pocket into it. (Marc)

- 54 Begging is presented as an art, for which you need to have a certain amount of knowledge and skills, often acquired on the street. Although other interviewees have the same discourse, those who are part of this logic focus in particular on the concepts of “*efficiency*” of the practice, of being “*savvy*” and on the skills needed to be a “*good beggar*”. “Because there are things to know if you want to beg, there is a way to do it, you must not be too ashamed of it for a start. Because if you beg and you're ashamed, it's not very effective.” (Marius)
- 55 While several interviewees tend to highlight the more constructive aspects of their begging experience, most of those who produce this type of discourse do not see their future in begging either. While they do not necessarily seek to adopt an overly conventional way of life, they can see the risk of marginalization associated with begging. Several of our interviewees directly expressed feelings of shame and confinement related to begging and a willingness to get out of it. This is particularly the case of Cedric, a French national in his thirties, struggling with a drug addiction problematic, who has been begging in Geneva since 2013.

**“So you, you're really here every day? In winter and summer, you are here?”**

Yep, yep, yep. But you know, I gotta get out of this shit” (Cedric).

#### 4. A Practice Considered as Shameful but Legitimate (Ethical Reference Points)

- 56 All of the interviewees considered the practice of begging as difficult. It was, however, less the element of harassment which was emphasized, even though it was mentioned, than the humiliation and shame associated with it. Individuals must manage the tension that is triggered by the social gaze and try to maintain a positive identity as expressed by Luca, a French-Swiss man in his late twenties. While still resorting to begging occasionally at the time of the interview, he favors more rewarding activities in his eyes, such as the sale of recovered metals. “I just do it to meet my needs, just to buy a sandwich or drink, like that. And then I stop. I find it too humiliating, you know.” (Luca)
- 57 Facing the burden of shame, which strongly emerges from their discourse, interviewees are led to position themselves with regard to the social norms that they can accept or challenge. Confronted with the violence of the humiliation weighing upon begging, some may seek to resist it by legitimizing this practice in various ways, for example by highlighting the skills required to do it, as illustrated above. Others such as Luca seem to accept the negative social judgment of this practice. This type of discourse can be understood as a strategy to define their identity aimed at denying a marginal position and asserting a belonging to society “from the center” with reference to prevailing social norms. By confirming the shameful nature of the practice of begging, these interviewees seek to be recognized by showing that they are not so different from others since they share the same values (De Gaulejac, 2008: 103).
- 58 Hence, the interviewees develop different forms of legitimization for resorting to this practice, in spite of its humiliating nature. Depending on the way in which they explain begging, they choose different reasons to support this legitimacy.

## 4.1 Fulfilling Responsibilities or Doing no Harm

- 59 Interviewees considering begging as a means to meet their responsibilities see legitimacy in begging to earn a living without harming others, which is more “acceptable” than some other ways. They think for example that begging is morally more acceptable than stealing or acting criminally. They consider that as long as their begging is not aggressive, they do not cause harm to anyone. They feel that they respect the freedom of passers-by to give money or not, as highlighted by Livia, a woman in her twenties from Romania. She arrived in Geneva in 2012 to practice begging, followed in 2013 by her husband Mihaï. “It is not something bad that you’re doing, begging. If you’re not aggressive or you’re nice to people, you’re not hurting anyone, you’re not stealing, it’s no big deal.” (Livia)

## 4.2 Getting By

- 60 The interviewees who associate begging with an alternative lifestyle tend to emphasize begging as a way of getting by, of standing up to social inequalities and insecurity, as stated by Lisa for example. For this young French-Swiss woman in her twenties, begging has been associated in the past with freedom and an alternative form of life but also with drug addiction. Now that she has stopped using drugs, she lives with her mother because the RMI allowance<sup>21</sup> she receives does not allow her to pay a rent. If she continues to beg from time to time nowadays, it is more to supplement the family income and contribute to the rent, as her mother’s salary does not always cover all daily costs.

Since humans have been around, there have always been people who work and people who don’t. It’s always happened, there are others who go into prostitution. [...] People are here, crises are here, humanity is not easy, it’s the same everywhere. I think that as long as things are not sorted out between people, begging will happen (Lisa)

- 61 Legitimacy is thus achieved for some by highlighting the consequences (including economic inequalities, integration difficulties, etc.) of a particular social system. This practice is then defended as a reality caused by the challenges of the living together.

## 5. Facing up to the Prohibition on Begging (Political Reference Points)

- 62 After having highlighted the way in which interviewees explained and judged the practice of begging, we analyzed how they positioned themselves with regard to the ban on begging in Geneva.
- 63 All the interviewees know that begging is prohibited in Geneva and are aware of the anti-begging law and most of its associated measures. Several of them have experienced being challenged by one or more police officers, perhaps even being taken to the police station, having their earnings confiscated or receiving fines, or have friends who have had these experiences. However, paradoxically, no measure associated with the prohibition on begging seems to have deterred people who had started before the law came into effect from continuing, or even new people from starting to beg in spite of the ban. It does not

even seem to prevent them from finding a certain legitimacy in the prohibition on begging.

- 64 Their position is, therefore, moderate: at the same time, they understand that a government may want to prohibit begging but they feel that on a personal level, begging is somewhat legitimate. Two types of reasoning can be distinguished, which illustrate this paradoxical positioning associated with the cognitive and ethical principles seen above: a position which can be described as more fatalistic and another one which can be described as more confrontational.

## 5.1 The Fatalistic Position

- 65 In a number of discourses, a certain fatalism can be identified with regard to the begging prohibition, together with a feeling of powerlessness. This position is particularly common among the interviewees who declared using begging to meet their responsibilities, such as those who were responsible for other people. It is as though this was just another of the restrictions which they had to accept in order to meet their responsibilities toward those who depended on them, and on which they could not have any bearing.

**Do you know then that there was a law introduced in 2008 prohibiting begging?**

I know but what can we do? (Livia)

But they, they made the law, us, we can't do anything. (Mihai)

- 66 They do not really question the prohibition on begging in itself and say that they understand the reasons which led to the passage of this law. The principal reason used to explain the prohibition is that certain forms of begging, mainly presented as performed by others, may seem less legitimate and it would, therefore, be understandable for those to be banned: for example, begging even when not in need, using the money for alcohol or disturbing public order.
- 67 They consider that these are illegitimate forms of begging, which explain the introduction of the anti-begging law and for which they pay the price. This is the position expressed by Iulia, a young Romanian woman in her thirties, associated with the Roma community, who has practiced begging in Geneva for three years, forced by her husband to repay the debts he has accumulated and to sustain her family.

**And don't you think it would be good, then, if [begging] was authorized?**

If everyone was like me, yes, that would be good. But if not, no.

**Can you explain?**

Because there are a lot of junkies and they beg to buy drugs, to buy alcohol.

And they don't do it for their family and their children." (Iulia)

- 68 Another reason evoked to explain the introduction of this law is the need to control the growing number of beggars in the streets of Geneva, which harms the city's image. A trained mason, Andrei cannot find work in Slovakia and receives a welfare pension that does not allow him to provide for his wife and children. He alternates between his country of origin and Geneva for stays lasting between one and several months. He remains in his country when he has the opportunity to find employment there but these jobs are always precarious and temporary. Begging in Geneva is an additional source of income for periods of unemployment in his country but he understands that this practice

is prohibited in Geneva because of its visibility in the public space. “The city looks bad when there are beggars. Because there are lots of beggars here in Geneva. Around every corner, there are beggars.” (Andrei)

- 69 While they can understand what causes political decision-makers to prohibit begging, or even agree with a discourse which seems very similar to that of some politicians, it does not prevent them from flouting the ban and continuing to beg, because they do not see any other way of meeting their need for autonomy.

Me too, I can understand them [the police officers], they do their best as best they can. Everyone wants to hang on to their job, of course. Me? Of course, I’m conscious that what I am doing is not good. But I can’t do anything about it, because it’s the only way I have to build myself an apartment [for my family to live in] (Iulia).

- 70 In addition, they view this law as difficult to enforce. They develop different strategies allowing them to continue to beg, even though the begging prohibition requires greater mobility on their part. Nevertheless, several of them have witnessed an increasing sense of insecurity when they beg.

Being arrested all the time, we learned the trick, which was to never stay in one place, so we started to move, move, move. (Luca)

They dump you in jail, they try to freak you out to make you clear out. It happened to me, to my friends too. (Lisa)

They [the police] cause me stress and I feel troubled, I don't know how to behave to be able to earn a living. Me, I know how to behave but they cause me stress. I am not nasty to argue with them or ... The biggest stress, that what it is. Otherwise, without this ban, I would be calm. We don't disturb anyone, we don't do anything, we are quiet. (Luis)

## 5.2 The Confrontational Position

- 71 Other discourses challenge the law in a clearer way. This is especially the case for interviewees whose begging is, or was, part of living a marginal lifestyle. While they underline the complex nature of the issue and a number of them understand the reasons to discourage begging, they nonetheless consider that the introduction of this law is a disproportionate measure and a rather inappropriate way of addressing the issue of begging.

You know, that there is a bit of discouragement, I can understand. They don’t want to be invaded. But then, to do things that are out of proportions, it’s really stupid and all it does is push people even more into poverty, like saying “Well then, I really have nothing now, so I might as well beg three times as much”. (Marius)

- 72 In their eyes, prohibiting begging does not address the real problem. This law only makes people who beg invisible without really offering them any alternative or addressing the inequalities that pushed them into this practice in the first place. The transcription also mentions the way in which the law legitimates a form of social contempt toward begging by using the expression “*sweeping dust*”. “Well yeah, but it doesn’t solve anything, in fact, banning it, I reckon. And then it’s that... you know. Sweeping dust, it’s still just sweeping

dust, you push it into a corner and that's all. Nothing's changed. That's what's the pity.” (Cedric)

- 73 In this position, there is a very strong questioning of the predominant social functioning and its related injustices. They denounce the authoritative nature of this law, which prohibits a practice that has always existed without really seeking to understand its causes. Additionally, it is seen as unjust, because it targets people who are already very marginalized. Imposing fines on people who beg precisely because they do not have any money is regarded as nonsensical. Paradoxically, it may even contribute to keeping people begging rather than helping them to break the cycle. According to Marius, this law could even lead to people without any other solution being encouraged to get into criminal activities and put them in a more precarious situation.

Another thing I'd say is that if they want to prohibit begging even more, then it will clearly push people into stealing, add another layer to prostitution and let people with drug addiction problems sink even lower. Because when you steal, you go the criminal way and then you will more easily end up in prison. Maybe they want overcrowded prisons? (Marius)

- 74 Fear of people who beg, and in particular if they are from a foreign country, is in their eyes (but also in that of other participants), the main explanation for the introduction of this law. Another reason which is evoked is the attempt to make misery disappear so as to preserve the image of the city, in particular for tourists.

Hey there, you in the Court of Miracles, 'we don't want you around, move on!' I really see it like that. [...] The tourists, they see nice cities with all the stores, H&M, and so on, Zara. And I find that so two-faced. And in the end, I see it the same way, [this law], as two-faced. But as long as they don't hurt people begging too much, it's alright. (Lisa)

- 75 Our analysis shows that, on a practical level, rather than contributing to making begging disappear, the prohibition on begging increases the level of insecurity and precariousness for these people, which is the principal reason they resorted to this practice in the first place. It is rather paradoxical to note that a law aimed at increasing safety creates, in effect, more insecurity. On a symbolic level, it reinforces the social contempt beggars are held in, weakening their identity even further and increasing their probability of remaining in practices such as begging.

## Conclusion

- 76 It seems simplistic to understand the adoption of a law banning begging in Geneva by only denouncing a punitive approach. The analysis of parliamentary debates that preceded and followed the passage of this law shows that the political legitimacy of this measure of “poverty management” is mainly based on a functional representation of the public space. Therefore, it is less the practice of begging that is subjected to this law than the use of public space made by precarious foreign populations (often designated as belonging to the Roma community), seen as disrupting public order.
- 77 However the analysis of people who practice begging shows the limits of a response given only in terms of “civil engineering” and the interest of apprehending their practices as forms of “struggle for recognition” (Honneth 2002; Colombo, 2015) in an urban space

perceived as “the place for democratic dialogue, the production of citizenship, and the exercise of rights” (Blomley, 2012: 394). The continued and visible presence of people begging in Geneva's public space, despite the legal prohibition on this practice, accounts for the reasoning behind the occupation of the public space by populations which, failing to see their right to the city recognized, grant themselves this right. These people are in search of a status and a place, even one strongly devalued and stigmatized. For De Gaulejac (2008: 105), “those who refuse this deal, who fear to lose their dignity by admitting their shame, who prefer to keep their pride rather than begging, those who keep their hunger for themselves are condemned to isolation and rejection”.<sup>22</sup>

- 78 The analysis of these people's discourses reveals that this practice, which is always part of a multitude of strategies, is often a way of addressing the social dictate of autonomy and individual responsibility more than a try to defy it. The practice of begging is for all the interviewees we met a precarious one, which almost always supplements other activities or incomes, which are as precarious, and on which they fall back as a last resort due its shameful nature. Nevertheless, in the absence of alternatives, this practice is one of the strategies that they have found, at some point in their trajectory, to make their own a social status which meets the expectations of social recognition such as they perceive them. For some, begging allows them to meet their responsibilities autonomously, that is to say, to fulfill, at least minimally, their needs and those of their families. For others, it is a way of addressing the “post-modern” dictate of personal development and individual freedom (Bajoit, 2011) by adopting a marginal, or even oppositional lifestyle. In all cases, these are paradoxical and precarious attempts to maintain a status in the heart of the city.
- 79 But if this law has very limited effectiveness in terms of eradication of begging, it has the effect of complicating and rendering more precarious the efforts of the people practicing begging to participate in the city. In addition, the process and the debates surrounding its adoption have a broader effect on the social representations of begging in Geneva, with a consequent risk of homogenization of the relationship to begging and a reduction of the practice to a nuisance to public order, obscuring the diversity of experiences and potential citizenship aspects of this practice. Such simplification of representations carries the risk of similarly reducing the creativity of the answers that must be elaborated to face this reality and therefore, the chances of adapting such responses to the diversity of profiles and begging-related experiences.

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## NOTES

1. To protect the anonymity of respondents, they are identified by pseudonyms.
2. Colombo, A., Reynaud, C. et G. de Coulon. The adoption of the Anti-Begging Law in Geneva : an Urban Cohabitation Management Measure. Representations of the Actors Concerned. Study conducted between 2013-2015 and financed by the HES-SO and the University of Applied Sciences (RECSS).

3. No other study has been carried out on the subject. Some have been conducted on the precarious Roma population in Geneva (see in particular, Battaglini et al., 2015) and on the form of begging practiced by the people associated with the so-called Roma community in the canton of Vaud (Tabin and Knüsel, 2014).
4. We use the term 'so-called' in order to make it clear that we are alluding to a social representation; as Tabin and Knüsel (2014) point out, the use of the categorization 'Roma communities' only recently came into common use, mainly as a result of political efforts. It should be understood, for the remainder of the article, that in referring to 'Roma communities', we are referring to the social and political representation of that community.
5. Mesemrom ([www.mesemrom.org](http://www.mesemrom.org)) was created in June 2007 in reaction to the intense politicization of the conflation of begging practices and the presence of the Roma community. It aims to protect the rights of Roma.
6. Quotation translated for the purpose of this paper.
7. This is Article 29 of the Law on Police of the Canton of Bern (Canton of Berne, *Polizeigesetz des Kantons Bern*, 1997).
8. The open drug scenes were intended to get drug addicts out of hiding and facilitate their control. But this policy has proved to be a failure and the last open scene, the Letten in Zurich, was closed in 1995 (Zuercher, 2008).
9. There was an article in the daily newspaper "Le Temps" on this matter, titled "How Swiss-German cities hide their marginalized people" (Fournier, 2006).
10. In French-speaking Switzerland, actually only one canton of 6 doesn't prohibit begging neither on the cantonal, nore on the communal level.
11. This review was conducted by Noémie Pala. It should be specified that the Swiss political system allows its 26 cantons a high degree of political autonomy.
12. Conducted in the French-speaking dailies *Le Temps*, *Le Courrier*, *la Tribune de Genève*, *le Matin*, *24 Heures* and *20 Minutes*.
13. Police Act of the State of Geneva ( LPol ), Article IVA , adopted on 19.02.2009 (Canton of Geneva, LPol 10121, 2009).
14. Plan elaborated jointly by Mr. Maudet, Administrative Councillor of the City of Geneva for Urban environment and Security and Mr. Moutinot, State Councillor for Institutions.
15. PL10106-A, S, rapport minorité.
16. Débat, PL 10106-A, Velasco.
17. It may be recalled that the draft bill of 4 September 2007 (PL101106) proposed to place the begging ban under a chapter on incivilities next to degradations, soiling and noise pollution.
18. Half of them required the presence of an interpreter as their interviewee's French language skills were a barrier to discussion. Interpreters were diverse and predominantly a trust figure for interviewed persons. These interviews faced difficulties such as deepening the understanding of translated answers, differentiating interpreter's self-explanations of the beggars' situation from the one delivered by the beggars themselves. These biases were taken into consideration during analysis. Nevertheless, translated interviews paradoxically often offered us a possibility to discuss more specific intimate relation to begging and life course thanks to the interpreter specific knowledges concerning the family, migratory, social and economic situation of the person interviewed.
19. When mentioning beggars, social workers were predominantly referring us to the so-called Roma populations. Similarly, they were frequently negating the presence among their users of people begging.
20. See also the analysis by Minacci (2013) which shows how the French-speaking press contributes to construct the deviant nature of the "Roma" category by associating it with begging.
21. Minimum insertion income, in France.

22. Quotation translated for the purpose of this paper.

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## ABSTRACTS

Based on a study that we carried out in Geneva between 2013 and 2015, this paper suggests that the anti-begging law adopted by the Geneva High Council in 2007 can be understood a way of managing urban cohabitation with marginalized populations. In response to this “poverty management”, we argue that the continued occupation of the public space by the people who practice begging can be understood as them implementing their own “right to the city” anyway, in the subversive sense meant by Lefebvre.

Sur la base d'une étude menée à Genève entre 2013 et 2015, cet article soutient que la loi anti-mendicité adoptée par le Grand Conseil de Genève en 2007 peut être comprise comme un moyen de gérer la cohabitation urbaine avec les populations marginalisées. En réponse à cette forme de “management de la pauvreté”, nous argumentons que le fait qu'il y ait toujours de personnes pratiquant la mendicité à Genève peut être compris comme la mise en actes de leur « droit à la ville », au sens plus subversif entendu par Lefebvre.

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