C16

CHAPTER 16

A TOUR OF GANG ETHNOGRAPHIES: KEY THEMES IN CONTEMPORARY STUDIES AROUND THE WORLD

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C16.P1 For ethnographers, gangs represent one of the few "truly global social phenomena, present across time and space in almost every society on the planet" (Rodgers 2017a: 648). As such, the contemporary globalized networked society (Castells 2011) has dramatically changed the traditional field site for gang ethnographies. In an attempt to capture the impact of global processes on local gang realities, ethnographers have increasingly reconfigured classic notions of culture, media influence, and space (Ilan 2015; Fraser 2015, Brotherton 2015). In this respect, Brotherton (2008: 23) refers to globalization as the "changing contextual orbit of gangs today." This review focuses on the impact of this globalizing process on ethnographic gang research. As I will show, the international migration, displacement, and deportation of people permeating late modernity have undoubtedly shaped current gang ethnographies and led to reconfigurations of century-old debates.

C16.P2 In the first section, readers are introduced to a debate sitting at the heart of gang research from its inception: the crime-gang nexus. The extent to which gangs should be conceived as criminogenic groups resides at the center of a fundamental, often bitter, split in gang studies. A comparably deep divide between critical and administrative approaches to gangs also runs along methodological lines. In the second section, I provide an overview of ethnographies conducted across continents and how human mobility has shaped ethnographic work in (1) the United States, (2) Latin and Central America, (3) Europe, and, to a lesser degree, (d) Africa. Throughout this review, I focus mostly on monographs produced from 2005 onward. This overview is thus by no means

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exhaustive. Rather, it serves as a starting point to embark on a much wider tour in the global landscape of contemporary gang ethnographies. In the third section, the review considers how the focus on human mobility has shaped the gang-crime nexus debate. The key points of the chapter can be summarized as follows:

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- While most gang ethnographies are still firmly rooted in an urban context, the important role global migration and antimigration policies play in gang formation and organization pushes gang ethnographers to explore issues within an increasingly cross-border and international field.

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- In contemporary gang ethnographies, the prominent role of migration shifts the traditional focus on "the White working class male" to the "minority male migrant." A main endeavor of ethnographers remains to reconfigure the gang/crime debate away from populist ethnic explanations.

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- Global human mobility and a globalized ethnographic field—stretching from the Global North to the Global South—has also altered the debates about gangs and crime. The increasing transnational character of gangs has led ethnographers to adopt a more entrepreneurial understanding of gangs. However, an increased use of the gang concept across markedly different socioeconomic and cultural contexts has also affected traditional understandings of gang crime and violence.

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- Finally, the ethnographic enterprise has substantially changed as well. Gang ethnographers are increasingly female and come from various disciplinary backgrounds. Language and nationality have a deep impact on the readership of ethnographies and the resources available to ethnographers. Whereas most ethnographers of the Global North have more access to resources and greater guaranties around personal safety than those of the Global South, Anglophone ethnographers across the globe have a clear advantage over non-Anglophone scholars in writing up and presenting their work to contemporary academic audiences.

C16.S1
GANG ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE ACADEMIC LANDSCAPE

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The gang is among academia's most contested concepts (Katz and Jackson-Jacobs 2004). Much disagreement revolves around the extent to which gangs should be understood as criminal groups and held responsible for the crimes committed by (some of) their members. Here, perspectives span a continuum between approaches that emphasize the social qualities of gangs to those that focus on their criminal features. The former is represented in the work of the "critical" approach (Garot 2010; Hallsworth 2013, Brotherton 2015; Durán 2018b), while the latter is represented in the "positivistic or administrative" approach. The Eurogang Program (EG)—a group of European and

(North) American gang scholars—has long been seen as embodying this second approach. The EG defines gangs as "any durable, street-oriented youth group whose identity includes *involvement in illegal activity*" (Aldridge, Medina-Ariz, and Ralps 2012: 36 (emphasis added)). In what follows, I rely on this hotly debated definition to outline the most contested issues between both approaches.

C16.P8 Much of the debate focuses on the phrase "involvement in illegal activity." Although the EG deems it necessary to differentiate gangs from other social groups, critical scholars claim this sets up a tautological reasoning when applied to the study of gangs' contribution to crime rates (Katz and Jackson-Jacobs 2004). By definition, a group classified on the basis of members' illegal involvement will have increased crime rates. Moreover, the choice of the term "illegality"—rather than more specific forms of crime (such as intergroup violence)—has important net-widening effects (Aldridge et al. 2012).

C16.P9 This focus on crime, in combination with EG's preference for quantitative methods that leave limited room for contextualization, feeds the positivistic label and is the main target of critique from its detractors. A wealth of late modern and cultural (Fraser 2015; Ilan 2015; Durán 2018b) gang studies show that the administrative approach neglects more nuanced, alternative, and "prosocial" understandings of gangs. These include an appreciation of gangs as social institutions that can mitigate conflict (Biondi and Collins 2016; Tapia 2017) and serve as agents of social resistance in disadvantaged communities (Brotherton 2008, 2015).

C16.P10 However, the animus and even "disrespect" (Peterson 2010: 408) that exists between both approaches is closely associated with political affiliations and the "methodological politics" (Ferrell 2013: 266) of state institutions. Critical scholars argue that the state's preference for quantitative methods and the close cooperation between state agents and universities are highly problematic (Katz and Jackson-Jacobs 2004). Here, scholars point to a lack of academic impartiality, as these studies require scholars to adopt the assumptions and interests of their sponsors (i.e., the state). Next, I focus on the gang landscape in the United Kingdom to exemplify this dynamic. In contrast to the United States, the split in gang studies in the United Kingdom reflects the degree to which researchers adopt or reject state (and media) perspectives on gangs and, to a lesser degree, adopt certain methodological preferences (as most of the research discussed here is ethnographic).

C16.P11 In the United Kingdom, "the gang" is historically conceived as a highly political and mediatized concept (Fraser 2017). For many, this became especially apparent when the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, David Cameron, described the 2011 London Riots as a display of a burgeoning "gang culture"—rather than a violent escalation of civil protest—that required an "all-out war on gangs and gang culture" (Brotherton and Hallsworth 2011: 3–4).

C16.P12 Although this perspective was strongly rejected by the majority of researchers in the United Kingdom (but see Harding 2014), increasing political and media gang rhetoric paved the way for increased funding of *gang* prevention and suppression programs (and research) designed to tackle *urban violence*. Without denying the existence of urban

violence, or gangs as such, researchers in the United Kingdom strongly disagree about the extent to which gangs, *as depicted by the media and United Kingdom politicians*, actually exist—and to what extent they cause/explain the urban violence that these *gang* prevention programs were meant to tackle. Critical gang scholars see "the gang" predominantly as a conceptual tool used by the political class to justify repressive measures toward the working class (Hallsworth and Young 2008, 2011; Ilan 2015). For others, gangs are indeed the main culprits of urban violence and even constitute the "new face of youth crime" (Pitts 2008; Harding 2014). So, whereas the first group accuses the second of justifying repressive (right-wing) policies through the production of state-sponsored "gang talk" that frames youth crime in a gang rhetoric (Hallsworth and Young 2008), the second accuses the first of being "reluctant criminologists" who, in denying the existence of violent gangs, "wash their hands of the sometimes lethal gang-related crime and violence that occurs in them" (Pitts 2012: 32).

C16.P13 The situation in the United Kingdom offers an excellent example of how the gang has become a concept loaded with strong political connotations. It also contextualizes the claim of critical scholars that administrative gang research, and the EG in particular, is a state-sponsored academic player (Brotherton and Hallsworth 2011) in a "flourishing gang-control industry" (Palmas 2013: 46). Although this split does not neatly follow methodological lines in the United Kingdom, this political division is, in the eyes of critical scholars (such as Brotherton 2015), inherent to the methodology employed in research activities. Nevertheless, the review in the next section does show that gang ethnographies are largely united in their critical perspective toward gang politics and especially the use of the concept to create a public fear of entire populations. The latter is especially salient in the contemporary world with increased global human mobility. The nexus between gangs and migration, and local/international responses to both, are a central thread throughout the next section.

C16.S2

FROM AN URBAN ETHNOGRAPHY TO THE WORLD: GANGS AND GLOBAL HUMAN MOBILITY

C16.P14 In the United States, gang studies and ethnography have shared common roots for more than a century. Today, *The Gang* by Frederic M. Thrasher (1927) is still widely regarded as the first scholarly and most cited gang ethnography. According to Decker and Pyrooz (2013), however, a significant geographic shift in the gang ethnography landscape occurred at the beginning of the twenty-first century. From the 2000s onward, the number of American gang ethnographies steadily declined, while European ethnographic research on gangs proliferated. These days, however, increased attention to processes of globalization have further shifted the boundaries of traditional field sites. Single-site gang studies are proliferating beyond

American and European borders in countries such as Congo (Gondala 2016), Russia (Stephenson 2015), South Africa (Jensen 2008; Lindegaard 2017), and New Zealand (Gilbert 2013). Edited books collecting ethnographic accounts from field sites across the world are also on the rise (Hagedorn 2008; Hazen and Rodgers 2014; Hazlehurst and Cameron 2018). As such, both the gang phenomena as well as the ethnographic enterprise designed to chart that reality are undergoing processes of globalization (Hagedorn 2008; Deuchar 2018).

C16.P15 The following four sections explore the global body of gang ethnographies. Central to the analysis is the impact of human mobility on gangs, which urges ethnographers to operate beyond the traditional urban context and its local or national politics. The first section discusses how the field site of United States gang ethnographies is shifting in relation to patterns of human mobility between the United States and Central America. The second section shows that this shift also turns Central/Latin America into the upcoming field sites for US gang ethnographers. The third section addresses European researchers' struggle to reframe a gang-migration nexus into a focus on urban ecology and the working class. The fourth section discusses the rise of gang ethnography in the Global South and its connection with (post) colonialism.

C16.S3 Transnationalism and the Mara-ization of US Gang Ethnographies

C16.P16 Since the 1990s, ethnographies in the United States have been shifting from the classic focus on African American gangs (Lauger 2012; Ralph 2014; Panfil 2017) to the study of Latino gangs and youth (Brenneman 2011; Zilberg 2011; Brotherton and Barrios 2013; Duran 2013; Levenson 2013; Flores 2014; Hagedorn 2015; Martinez 2016; Tapia 2017; Durán 2018b). Within the borders of the United States, Los Angeles maintains a reputation as America's gang capital, with a long history—stretching back to the Great Depression—as a Latino gang field site. Today, research on Latino gangs is also proliferating outside Los Angeles as well (Duran 2013; Brotherton and Barrios 2013; Tapia 2017).

C16.P17 However, the current prominence of Latino gang studies in the vast collection of US gang ethnographies goes beyond an increased attention on Latino youth in American cities. A rising number of ethnographers now study the gang phenomena with attention to the Latino migration flows to (and *from*) the United States. The scope of these studies (Zilberg 2011; Ward 2013; Duran 2018b) aligns with growing political concerns about the international movement of gangs and the rise of so-called global/transnational gangs (Hazen and Rodgers 2014). Although some ethnographies are still firmly rooted in an urban context (Flores 2014; Martinez 2016; Tapia 2017), an increasing number of Latino gang ethnographies take place in a liminal space between a US metropolis and a foreign country (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Zilberg 2011; Ward 2013; Durán 2018b). Ward (2013), for instance, followed active Los Angeles-based MS-13 members across the borders of El Salvador and the United States, while Brotherton

and Barrios (2011) followed Dominican deportees in their journey(s) between Santo Domingo and New York.

C16.P18 In this set of transnational studies, the "Mara mobility" between the United States and the Central American Northern Triangle (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) figures prominently. The concept *Maras* refers to Central America's structured and highly organized gangs, while *Pandillas* refers to gangs with a much looser and more localized organization (Baird and Rodgers 2015). In particular, the *Mara Salvatrucha*'s mobility between Los Angeles and El Salvador has received substantial ethnographic attention. Allegations about MS-13's truly transnational and profoundly threatening character remain highly contested and debated (Zilberg 2011; Brenneman 2011; Ward 2013). The use of "gang talk" (Hallsworth and Young 2008) as a right-wing political tool to criminalize migration flows is also a central theme (Zilberg 2011; Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Ward 2013; Flores 2014; Fontes 2018). In discussing how Republicans in the United States strategically associate MS-13 with migrant "caravans" moving through Central America (Fontes 2018) and the political construction of a "Latino crime threat" in the United States (Flores 2014), gang ethnographies are profoundly critical of America's "crimmigration policies" (Zilberg 2011) and its link with gang rhetoric.

C16.S4 The "Deported" Gangs of Central and Latin America

C16.P19 Central and Latin America (Jones 2009; Baird and Rodgers 2015), along with the Caribbean (Harriott and Katz 2015), have been emerging research sites since the 1980s. Post-Cold War Central America, however, is the new dominant field site—a rise strongly associated with the developments in the United States outlined in the previous section. In fact, a rising number of ethnographers educated in the United States—often with roots in the country under study (Miguel Cruz 2010; Brenneman 2011)—or scholars employed at American universities have been conducting fieldwork in Guatemala (Levenson 2013; O'Neill 2015; Fontes 2018), Honduras (Wolseth 2011; Rivera 2013) and El Salvador (Zilberg 2011; Ward 2013).

C16.P20 Here, ethnographers are particularly sensitive to the (social and emotional) impact of government responses to human mobility and various antigang policies within the United States and numerous homelands. A central debate in these ethnographies concerns the extent to which the Central American gang phenomenon (and the violence associated with it) is the product of mass deportation of immigrants and refugees from the United States or the outcome of local conditions and repressive antigang legislation. As in the United States, ethnographies in this region pay much attention to politics. This political engagement is twofold. First, since the 2000s, Central American states have been endorsing zero-tolerance repressive regimes, associated with a "war on gangs" (Does 2013; Baird and Rodgers 2015). The majority of ethnographies consider the impact of regional antigang legislation—such as *Mano Dura* policies—on local gang issues (Rivera 2013; Zilberg 2011; O'Neill 2015; Wolf 2017). The mass incarceration of gang

members resulting from antigang repression has also transformed prisons into important field sites for gang ethnographers in the Northern Triangle (Saunders-Hastings 2015) and beyond (Tapia 2017). This is especially true in Brazil, where both *Comando Vermelho* in Rio de Janeiro and PCC (*Primeiro Comando da Capital*) in Sao Paolo are gangs whose origins trace back to prison. Here, the extent to which the PCC is an organization that celebrates new forms of democratic politics (Biondi and Collins 2016), or a criminal organization based in prison, remains at the heart of current debates.

C16.P21 Second, there is a growing body of work that considers the ripple effects of American deportation policies, along with past and present international political interference on gang issues in Central and/or Latin America. Again, the main focus is on the Maras whose origins date back to the 1960–1980s and lay in the United States—Los Angeles neighborhoods, in particular. In 1996, the US Congress passed legislation that, in the next decade, resulted in the deportation of 50,000 convicts and 160,000 illegal immigrants to Central America (Baird and Rodgers 2015: 482). Many of the repatriated had been part of Los Angeles' Maras. The "deportation thesis," which holds that this deportation instigated the Mara gang phenomenon in Central America, remains a much contested issue, as many ethnographers also assign a central role to local zero-tolerance gang repression policies (Miguel Cruz 2010; Zilberg 2011; Does 2013; Levenson 2013; Rivera 2013; Wolf 2017).

C16.P22 These studies offer a more nuanced perspective than the popular belief that gangs were simply deported across borders. Several studies trace the origins of Central American gangs to well before the emergence of mass deportations from the United States (Levenson 2013; Baird and Rodgers 2015). Moreover, these works go beyond the classic examinations of socioeconomic deprivation and social disorganization that accompanies migration processes. Most studies (Brenneman 2011; Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Ward 2013; Rodgers 2017a; Wolf 2017) show that the *experience* of deportation, and not a deported gang phenomenon per se, contributes to forming and joining gangs. In this way, gang formation is a way for deportees to adapt to the culture of a "homeland" from which they feel estranged. At the same time, they point at the evolution and growth of the Mara phenomenon in response to domestic factors and the hybridization of Mara culture. The latter refers to the merging of local gang cultures with US imaginations about Mara gang culture (Rodgers 2017a).

C16.P23 Whereas deportation/migration is a central topic in the gang literature coming out of the United States and Central America, studies on Nicaraguan gangs are an outlier compared to the studies conducted in the rest of the Northern Triangle. Again, there is a key role assigned to migration in gang formation and organization, as scholars (Rocha and Rodgers 2008; Rodgers 2017a) refer to the different migration patterns between the United States and Nicaragua and the *absence* of mass deportation. This is understood to have resulted in a different Nicaraguan gang scene, one that predominantly consists of local *Pandillas* whose degree of organization and involvement in violence and crime is less than that of the Maras. Despite its exceptional status, the Nicaraguan gang situation is among the most well documented in Central America (Rocha and Rodgers 2008; Rodgers 2017a, 2017b).

C16.S5

Europe and the Struggle between Migration and the Working Class

C16.P24 While the "Europeanization" of gang ethnography is often noted, European references in US reviews of the topic remain scarce. A review of gang ethnographies by Decker and Pyrooz (2013), for instance, relies exclusively on Eurogang books (e.g., Klein et al. 2000) and a handful of studies from the United Kingdom. The review by Durán (2018a) is devoid of *any* references to European research. As discussed earlier, EG work does not reflect the entire gamut of Europe's ethnographic legacy. Over the last five years, Eurogang research increasingly incorporates ethnographic work (Van Hellemont 2015; Urbanik and Haggerty 2018), but still remains largely separated from the strand of criminology/sociology that engages the most with ethnography: Europe's cultural (Ilan 2015; Roks 2016) and critical gang studies (Hallsworth 2013; Fraser 2015; Mohammed and Mucchielli 2016; Kuldova and Sánchez-Jankowski 2018).

C16.P25 Outside the work from the United Kingdom discussed earlier, there is a long tradition of critical gang ethnography conducted throughout Europe—especially in France and Spain. Spain's study of Latino gangs, for instance, even aligns with the current US and Central American focus. As in the United States, the birth of Latino gangs in Spain correlates with Central and Latin American migration patterns from the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Colombia, in particular. Much of the gang research conducted in Spain centers around the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (ALKQN) and Latin youth in Barcelona. In addition, several ethnographers in Catalonia (Feixa and Romaní 2014) have strong transatlantic links with the critical US gang studies (Hagedorn 2005; Brotherton and Barrios 2011).

C16.P26 Moreover, as in the United States, contemporary gang ethnographies in Europe—including some excellent ethnographies on drug dealing in Germany (Bucerius 2014) and Norway (Sandberg and Pedersen 2011)—are closely connected to current migration flows. In Europe, these flows frequently run along the lines of a colonial past or labor migration. Many European nations have large diasporic communities related to former colonies: Algeria, Morocco, and Senegal (France), Indonesia and Surinam (the Netherlands), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Belgium). Many also have important transnational communities (from within European borders) as the result of labor migration. Since the 1990s, these migration flows have greatly intensified and caused a shift in the traditional way gangs are understood in Europe. As in the United States, European studies traditionally examine gangs as a subculture of the working class (Cohen 1955). However, European gang studies now increasingly focus on lines of postcolonial migration flows (for instance, the study of Congolese men in Brussels and Belgium by Van Hellemont (2015), and an ethnography on Surinamese *Rollin Crips* in The Hague by Roks (2016). Here, scholars struggle to reframe their studies within a traditional focus on the working class.

C16.P27 Although separated by linguistic borders, scholarly gang perspectives in the Anglophone and Francophone world have a lot in common. They share a historically

rooted reluctance to use the "G-word," an emphasis on the working class to redirect populist ethnic explanations, an inclination toward subcultural and labeling explanations, and considerable attention to the role of media framing. Both in France (Goaziou and Muchielli 2013) and the United Kingdom (as discussed earlier), government officials have repeatedly accused gangs of being the masterminds behind large-scale violent riots. *Les Blousons Noirs* (Black Jackets) are engrained in France's collective consciousness about moral panic and gangs (Copfermann 1962), just as the Mods and Rockers (Cohen 1972) are in the United Kingdom. These days, *Les Blousons Noirs* still serve as a cultural benchmark to which contemporary street gangs are compared (Mohammed and Mucchielli 2016).

C16.P28 Much like Downes (1966), in the 1960s, Dubet (1987) dismissed the suggestion that there were well-organized and cohesive gangs in France. Dubet, along with other studies on *Les Blousons Noirs* (Monod 1968; Tétard 1988), found that the majority of young, working-class men matured out of gangs—or simply quit because of mandatory military service. In a context of economic prosperity, where working class jobs were numerous (especially from 1945 to 1975, a period known in France as "Les Trente Glorieuses" (The Golden Thirty Years)), ethnographers perceived these groups as a form of temporary rebellion of white, working-class youth against the certainty of a future of factory labor.

C16.P29 The majority of contemporary French ethnographies still perceives gangs as a phase in the lives of young men characterizing the transition from childhood to adulthood (Lepoutre 1997). Furthermore, much like in the United Kingdom, early French ethnographies (Dubet 1987; Monod 1968; Tétard 1988) perceived "gangs" as a subculture resisting the exclusion of a dominant culture. However, from the 1980s onward, the decline of the French economy, mass unemployment, and rising concerns about immigration, reconfigured debates about gangs (for an overview, see Mohammed 2014).

C16.P30 As in many European countries, race and cultural affiliation now reside at the heart of the public gang debate in France, shifting the focus from a particular "social class" to a specific urban space. France's *banlieues*—the suburbs of large cities such as Paris (Lepoutre 1997; Kokoreff 2003) and increasingly Marseille (Pujol 2015)—are strongly structured along racial lines. This, for many ethnographers, is a clear sign of ongoing racial segregation and spatial exclusion of the new working class. Today, in line with other critical scholars, French ethnographers perceive the "gang" foremost as a conceptual tool of the French political elite or repressive state to stigmatize the "laboring classes" as "dangerous classes" in these spaces (Lepoutre 1997; Kokreff 2003).

C16.P31 This might also explain why most French ethnographers focus on the *banlieues*' violence and youth of the *Cité*—inner city—and not on "gang crime or violence" (Le Goaziou and Mucchielli 2009; Mohammed and Mucchielli 2016). They offer an ethnography on life in the *banlieues*, touching upon gang issues, but strongly oppose pathological descriptions of the *banlieues* and their (young) residents (Lepoutre 1997; Mohammed and Mucchielli 2016). In doing so, ethnographers also oppose the populist discourse on crime and ethnicity by redirecting focus to socioeconomic explanations and shifting emphasis from "the immigrant" to "the working class" (Mohammed and Mucchielli 2016). A central thesis of such works is that the loss of stable jobs, coupled

with the devalorization of working-class male identities and the residential flight of working-class families, has left the banlieues as spaces reserved for the poorest (and these days, predominantly migrant) families. Together, the French body of gang ethnography offers an important counternarrative to the growing popularity of racialized pathological explanations of crime and gang formation in these neighborhoods. From the ethnographic perspective, the racialized discourse around "gang talk" and gang rhetoric hide a much more classic theme in French literature: an antagonism toward working-class youth.

C16.S6

Gang Ethnography beyond Western Frontiers: Gangs of Postcolonial Africa

C16.P32 The wealth of European and American studies show that gang ethnographies are still firmly rooted in the Global North. However, a growing body of Latin and Central American gang studies challenges the validity of "Northern" knowledge production relating to gangs. Moreover, the increasing number of African gang studies conducted in the past two decades has intensified the call for a decentralization of gang knowledge and a true appreciation of Southern perspectives. In representing gangs of the Global South—a term that denotes the less socioeconomically developed regions formerly referred to as "third world countries"—Fraser (2017: 176–178) reminds scholars about the Orientalism and Occidentalism of Western research outside its own hemisphere. Orientalism refers to the creation of Southern gangs as "the exotic other": the construction of a radically different gang identity in juxtaposition to a Western one. Occidentalism in this context refers to the assumption that all gang phenomena are roughly the same, and that Western concepts and perspectives can be used unproblematically to understand gangs across the globe.

C16.P33 The importance of both tendencies should not be underestimated. Despite the proliferation of gang studies in the Global South, the publications accessible to an international audience often remain limited to those conducted by Western Anglophone scholars. This not only holds true for the aforementioned gang studies performed in Latin/Central America but also for those conducted by Americans and Europeans in Africa (Jensen 2008; Lindegaard 2017). Like the African continent, the field of African ethnographic work is exceptionally rich and complex (for an overview, see Fraser 2017: 173–195). This review does not do justice to the complex set of ethnographic work performed in Africa. It does, however, serve to highlight an underused resource of knowledge and a too often ignored body of work on gangs.

C16.P34 As in Europe, a colonial past does much to shape African gang ethnographies. The African continent exists of sixty states—all of which, except for Ethiopia and Liberia, share a painful colonial past with European countries. Knowledge of urban youth crime in Africa is also strongly related to colonial power, and attempts to come to terms with this dynamic takes a central place in African gang ethnographies. In this respect, the

perspective of gangs understood as a coping mechanism to deal with the aftermath of colonial politics figures prominently in African ethnographic work.

C16.P35 In South Africa, for instance, ethnographies have been conducted predominantly at the Cape Flats—a region strongly marked by apartheid policy, leaving White residents in the more affluent areas and the Black population in the rather impoverished ones (Jensen 2008; Lindegaard 2017). As such, the history of apartheid runs through South African gang studies—even those conducted outside urban centers (Kynoch 2005). *We Are Fighting the World* (Kynoch 2005), for instance, sees the Marashea, a gang closely connected to South Africa's gold mining areas, and the neglect of the apartheid regime to tackle crime in Black townships, as being connected to the origins of much of the current violence in South Africa.

C16.P36 Another African country where ethnographic gang research thrives is the Democratic Republic of Congo: a nation that shares a deep colonial past with Belgium. Here, a large group of Belgian anthropologists report on gang issues (Hendriks 2012) and fighting groups (Pype 2007) in Congo's capital, Kinshasa. The recent work of Gondola (2016) discusses 1950s "Bill" or "Yankee" gangs of young men (and, to a lesser extent, women) of Kinshasa, which left a profound footprint on modern popular culture, social practices, and urban imaginations. The Bills, gangs inspired by Hollywood cinema, influenced the youth cultures that followed in their wake, such as the well-known *sapeurs* (Congolese dandies) and *Kuluna* (criminal street thugs). The *Kuluna* are at the center of a Congolese imagination about gangs—not only in the homeland but also in diasporic European communities (Van Hellemont 2015).

C16.P37 While addressing two different nations, work in both South Africa and Congo thus assigns a substantive role to colonial pasts in the formation of modern gangs, whether in the impact of colonial power on urban organization and racial segregation (Jensen 2008; Lindegaard 2017) or the destruction of traditional group formations (Pype 2007) and masculine identities (Jensen 2008; Gondola 2016).

C16.S7

GANGS, THE CRIMINAL ECONOMY, AND VIOLENCE IN A WORLD OF GANG ETHNOGRAPHIES

C16.P38 The global landscape of gang ethnographies impacts traditional notions around the gang-crime nexus in several ways. First, across continents, gangs involve a varying degree of participation in the criminal economy. American and Central/Latin American ethnographies assign a much more entrepreneurial role to gangs than the bulk of European studies (Lepoutre 1997; Ilan 2015; Fraser 2015) and African (Gondola 2016; Lindegaard 2017) ethnographies. While previously the case in only a handful of ethnographies in the United States (Skolnick 1990; Venkatesh 2000), American ethnographers now increasingly see

gangs as actors in a globalized criminal economy (Zilberg 2011; Hagedorn 2015). Here, the transnationalism (Brenneman 2011; Levenson 2013; Ward 2013; O'Neill 2015; Fontes 2018) of contemporary Latino gangs, operating between the lucrative drug market in Northern America and the main areas of drug cultivation in Latin America, plays a role in increasing the gangs' involvement in international illegal trade.

C16.P39 However, the prominence of the role gangs play in the international drug trade remains a much-debated issue. Some claim that gangs, in a business dominated by drug cartels, remain minimal and subordinate players (Wolf 2017: 68; Ward 2013: 170). Others argue that both Pandillas and Maras have become more entrepreneurial in drug trafficking and dealing, while cultivating a "complex and opaque relationship" (Baird and Rodgers 2015: 479) with organized crime (Hagedorn 2015). In fact, for Brenneman (2011: 24), the increased level of institutionalization of Latino gangs sets them apart from other street gangs in the United States.

C16.P40 While the role of gangs in the criminal economy may have increased, gang violence remains the dominant focus within contemporary gang ethnographies. Here, the levels and types of violence attributed to gangs vary greatly across different cities and continents. Whereas in Europe the role of gangs in urban violence is highly contested (see discussion about the United Kingdom and France), gangs are often seen as the driver behind *high levels* of violence in Central and Latin America (Baird and Rodgers 2015). However, the increased participation in international drug markets (described in a previous section) is seen as an important driver of the prevalence (and severity) of the violence in Latin America (Jones 2009). The levels of gang violence reported in the US and Latin/Central American ethnographies nonetheless surpasses that of the gangs of Central Europe (Fraser 2015; Densley 2013; Hallsworth 2013).

C16.P41 Here, the role of context is important. For instance, in the Global Study on Homicide (2011), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that a third (31 percent) of the 468,000 globally recorded homicides occurred in the Americas, and only 5 percent in Europe. For instance, Honduras's murder rate of 90.4 per 100,000 inhabitants is the highest in the world (UNODC 2013) and Central America's postwar context is marked by unprecedented levels of (post)war violence (Fontes 2018). Here, ethnographies show that the varying degrees of state stability and antigang legislation, as well as dire socioeconomic conditions, have a profound impact on levels of gang violence (Brenneman 2011).

C16.P42 At the same time, diverging levels of gang violence across the globe are also influenced by the increasing diversity of groups captured by the concept of the "gang." Even in the Global North, the concept of gangs has been employed to conceptualize a variety of groups (Kuldova and Sánchez-Jankowski 2018). The rise of the Global South, and Africa in particular, adds even more variety to the mix. For instance, "the gang" in Nigerian literature covers groups from street kids to political militant and even Islamic extremist groups (Matusitz and Repass 2009). As such, the varying levels of crime and violence might also be a result of the different groups the label captures in the global arena of gang studies.

C16.P43 Next to these differences, there are some remarkable similarities. Here the many ways gang violence is connected to the masculinities gangs propagate stand out. Ethnographies from the Global South (Brenneman 2011; Gondola 2016) and North (Flores 2014; Fraser 2015) seem to agree that gang membership and violence are tools to transform a male experience of inferiority into one of superiority. However, Northern literature sees that position of inferiority as the result of an endangered patriarchal imperative (Densley 2013; Hallsworth 2013; Harding 2014; Stephenson 2015) or the loss off traditional "breadwinner" models (Flores 2014; Fraser 2015), while Latin/Central American literature emphasizes the embeddedness of violent masculinities in a culture of "machismo" beyond gangs (Rodgers 2017a: 653). African work sees in gangs a response to colonial male humiliation (Gondola 2016) or resistance to White models of masculinity (Jensen 2008). And although the forms of masculinity diverge, gang violence is widely perceived as involving processes through which male honor is created or restored. Here *The Gang Is All Queer* (Panfil 2017) offers a fascinating contrast to dominant gender perspectives in gang research that challenges the image of the hypermasculine violent heterosexual gang member—and violence as a tool to protect heteronormative ideals (see Panfil, chapter 14 in this volume).

C16.S8

CONCLUSION: ETHNOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHERS IN A GLOBALIZED FIELD

C16.P44 What used to be "the criminologists' gang" (Katz and Jackson-Jacobs 2004) has become, in the past two decades a topic increasingly studied by a variety of disciplines. In gang research, the division between anthropology and criminology/sociology used to follow a geographical axis separating most of the social sciences. Where the West was mainly the terrain of criminologists and sociologists, the rest of the world was the playfield of anthropology. This traditional line of demarcation seems dated today, but most of the change has come on the anthropological side. Criminologists' fields remain primarily in Western societies, whereas anthropologists and those affiliated with the field of development studies/urban geography have been producing an increasingly large body of knowledge about gangs in the West, as well as the rest of the world. While American criminologists (Lauger 2012; Tapia 2017; Panfil 2017) and sociologists (Flores 2014; Durán 2013, 2018b) still engage in gang studies, American gang studies are increasingly conducted by anthropologists (Mendoza-Denton 2008; Zilberg 2011; Ward 2013; Ralph 2014) and historians (Martinez 2016).

C16.P45 Along with the disciplinary background, the gender of gang ethnographers has changed considerably. Today an increasing number of women engage in studies about male (Rivera 2013; Does 2013; Van Hellemont 2015; Bucerius 2014; Lindegaard 2017) and female gang members (Mendoza-Denton 2008). The latter not only brings in new perspectives to a field historically dominated by male ethnographers but also enriches

the debates about ethnographic methodology and gendered power struggles (Bucerius and Urbanik 2018).

C16.P46 While prison has become an important field site, especially in American and Central/Latin American studies, the primary site of gang ethnographies remains the urban context, typically a metropolitan context or capital city. However, because of the prominent role of human mobility, an increasing number of ethnographers follows their participants beyond the borders of urban field sites (Ward 2013; Brotherton and Barrios 2011). This draws the attention of US and Central American studies on the impact of deportation policies on gang phenomena, while cross-border ethnographies in Europe seem to capture migration flows connected to a colonial past or recent labor migration. Here, the shift from "the White working-class male" to the "minority male migrant" remains an uncomfortable move for ethnographers. Although opposed to the cultural and ethnic approaches prevalent in populist and media gang discourse, the academic ethnographic sampling of groups as gangs nonetheless remains in line with such characterizations. As such, a main endeavor of ethnographers (especially in Europe) remains to reconfigure the debate to the working-class condition and to how the gang is used to label the laboring classes as dangerous classes.

C16.P47 Although historically used as a lens to study youth crime, the gang is a lens used today to document the bias in—and often the failure of—repressive antigang legislation. All ethnographies, from the United Kingdom (Hallsworth 2013; Ilan 2015), France (Mohammed and Mucchielli 2016), the United States (Flores 2014; Martinez 2016; Tapia 2017; Durán 2018), Spain (Feixa and Romaní 2014), and Central America (Miguel Cruz 2010; Baird and Rodgers 2015), to Guatemala (Levenson 2013; O'Neill 2015; Fontes 2018), Honduras (Wolseth 2011; Rivera 2013), and El Salvador (Zilberg 2011; Ward 2013), describe how gangs are used as a political windfall for authoritarian politics. While many studies describe the harmful practices of gangs and even their increasing international entrepreneurship, most works share the view that global neoliberal policies and the exportation of zero-tolerance policies across American borders are more damaging to local communities than the (alleged) transnationalism of gangs.

C16.P48 In the Global North, gangs are still associated with urban violence and offending linked to youth rather than organized crime (Hallsworth 2013; Fraser 2015; Van Hellemont 2015; Roks 2016). Gangs in the Global South, however, seem to engage in more elevated forms of violence, and are regarded as a threat to the stability of the state (Miguel Cruz 2010; Baird and Rodgers 2015). Gang crime is increasingly perceived in the American and Latin/Central American literature as the product of international organization; where in the European Union context, it is viewed as a product of socioeconomic deprivation of migrant communities.

C16.P49 The globalization of gang culture, along with the internationalization and digitalization of gang activities (Van Hellemont 2012; Urbanik and Haggerty 2018), pose particular challenges to the field of gang ethnography—not least methodological ones. First, the concept of ethnography covers a wide variety of methods and durations of fieldwork. Second, nationality and language are still important factors that influence the visibility of ethnographies, as well as international collaboration. Here, the fact that the academic

world operates within Anglophone conventions means that nonnative-speaking ethnographers who publish work in their native language remain largely separated from an international audience (as is the case with much French literature). International cooperation is related to ethnographers' desire and skill to publish work in English. Naturally, Anglophone scholars have a significant advantage here. The same goes for the means ethnographers have at their disposal to conduct and publish their work and their personal safety during observations in the field. Again, these differ greatly between the Global North and South and might, for instance, explain the increasing American affiliation of Central American gang ethnographers.

C16.S9

POLICY IMPLICATIONS/DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

C16.P50 The overview presented above lends support to the contention by Fraser and Hagedorn (2016) that every gang issue must be examined within specific historical, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. As such, it also indicates again that the transferability of antigang policies and programs from one nation to another are highly limited. The social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of European nations, the United States, Latin or Central American societies, Asia, and those of the Global South create a hyperdiverse range of field sites that differentially impact gang formation and evolution. However, in terms of research, and in light of the increasing collaboration ethnographers employ across national borders and even continents (Hazen and Rodgers 2014; Fraser and Hagedorn 2016), researchers might keep on investing in the creation of a common understanding to prevent the "gang" from becoming an even more hollow concept.

C16.P51 Next, in less than a decade, the online life of gangs has moved to the top of the research agenda in the field of gang research. It remains, however, largely absent in contemporary gang ethnographies. Not many ethnographies fully engage with the online and offline dynamics of the street world combining on- and offline participant observation with media content analyses, delivering veritable "multi-layered ethnographies." While some research now engages with the online activities of gang members, it is clear that ethnographers would do well to explore the blurred boundaries between the on- and offline worlds of gang members with increasingly greater depth.

C16.P52 Finally, the focus on gangs and masculinities also highlights one of the major gaps that persists in contemporary work across the globe. Studies of female gang members remain grossly underrepresented (for some exceptions, see Mendoza-Denton 2008; Ward 2013). Acknowledging this situation is vital, as there are strong indications that the male gaze has led to "a masculinization of gang desistance and reformatory interventions" (Deuchar 2018: 29). Even more concerning is the alignment of a masculinization with a spiritualization of gang desistance programs. A shift from socioeconomic integration/desistance models to one that relies on religious beliefs has occurred, especially in

Latin/Central America (Wolseth 2011; O'Neill 2015), but also Los Angeles (Flores 2014; Brenneman 2011), Hong Kong, Scotland, and Denmark (Deuchar 2018).

C16.P53 More female (and, indeed, queer) perspectives could offer a much needed critical view on the rising popularity of faith-based programs to tackle gang violence (Martinez 2016) and encourage gang disengagement (Flores 2014; Brenneman 2011; Wolseth 2011; O'Neill 2015). While the main concerns in male perspectives evolve around the *sincerity* of such a religious transformation (Johnson and Densley 2018), the suitability of faith-based programs for female gang members remains largely unexplored. An exception is Pine (2009), who found that the transformation from gang member to "devoted wife" remains a struggle for gang girls. Equal concerns arise around the exchange of gang membership with that of a religious community excluding nonparticipating residents, whose views remain not particularly supportive of women's emancipation, their reproductive rights, and the LGBTQ community as a whole (Lindhardt 2016).

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