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KATEDRA ANGLISTIKY A AMERIKANISTIKY

The American Street Gangs

Introduction to gang situation in the U.S.

(bakalářská práce)

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I declare that I worked on this bachelor thesis independently and that I included the complete list of used and cited literature.

In Olomouc _____

Signature _____

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1 Introduction

My bachelor thesis addresses the topic of the American street gang. I conceived the issue in more general way, mentioning different areas in research of street gangs, such as defining gangs and their typologies, historical background and emergence of gangs, the contribution of gangs to local political environment and finally, community factors which affect gang intervention.

First of all, I would like to point out that the main concern of my work was primarily focused on a street type of gang. I did not include any observations regarding motorcycle, prison or any other type of gangs. However, I may mention them, should they relate to discussed issue. In general, in most of this work I refer to *street gang*, when using the term *gang*.

The idea of focusing my work on the street gang subject crossed my mind during a search aimed at today's American social and cultural issues. I remember the content of the movie "Juice" had an enormous impact on my decision. This movie drew my attention to the American youth (African American in this case), living, fighting and surviving on the streets of their neighborhood, flooded with gang activity. It occurred to me that examining the gang situation in America might give me the idea of what it is like to live in one of gang-controlled neighborhoods.

Besides, the question of gangs represents a contemporary issue that influences many young people not only in the United States, but also, through so-called "gangsta" rap, all over the world.

To describe the whole picture gang question represents is an uneasy task. The topic is in its principle very complex, extensive and still evolving. Many truths known only a decade ago are already out of date and therefore inapplicable. Among scholars, who are involved in the research exists a number of different ways to approach the issue. I have decided to create an overview guide of various concerns.

The corresponding sources of this topic were difficult to obtain. In Europe, there is a true scarcity of printed publications related to this problem, yet I managed to acquire some of the most influential writings. Moreover, I made a use of online sources adequately.

In the first chapter, I briefly introduced the definitional struggle, which gang scholars undergo in attempt to define and diverse gangs, and some of the gang types determined by extensive research.

The second chapter reveals the emergence and gradual development of gang activity on U.S. territory. The origins are allocated geographically, for better orientation. Further, the development is divided by time periods within each location.

The third chapter introduces an alternative perspective on street gang activity through their involvement in political activity. It is particularly interesting to follow the process of transformation from gang members to street activists. No less appealing is the finding that some gangs are or were formed on terms of political situations.

Finally, the fourth chapter presents the community characteristics, which attract gang development and on which basis an environment for gang activity prevention or intervention can be established.

2 Theoretical gang distinction

The word *gang* is associated with many meanings and evokes a variety of images for people. Some of them picture a gang as a small group of youngsters who hang out in the streets of the neighborhood. Others understand the term in association with graffiti artists or as a group of organized adolescents who practice drug dealing to make money out of it.

Gangs may have many different characteristics and, therefore, it is vital to distinguish them in attempt to deal with the gang problems infiltrated into community neighborhoods. It is said by many that the success or failure of community efforts to cope with the gang problems very likely depends on how the problems are understood and diagnosed.

2.1 The research on gangs

All that we know now about gangs is thanks to several observations carried out in three fairly distinct times.

The earliest studies were held by university in Chicago in 1920s. The researchers were interested in the effects of social disorganization in quickly growing urban areas. The most influential study on gangs of this period of time was Thrasher's *The Gang*,¹ first published in 1927. This wave of studies aimed its focus at the lack of stable social structures in particular parts of the city.

The mid-1950s and 1960s witnessed the second wave of the research. The main focus of studies was represented by community subcultures. Albert Cohen saw delinquent gangs as primarily a lower class, male phenomenon. In his opinion lower class boys have the same aspirations as middle class ones only with restricted legitimate opportunities to succeed. Therefore, they create a subculture – a gang – in reaction to their environment.²

On the other hand, other scholar, Walter Miller suggested that there is no need to create delinquent subculture because lower class culture itself includes a set of characteristics, such as toughness, trouble and excitement that is responsible for gang

¹ Frederic M. Thrasher, *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927/2000).

² Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang* (New York: The Free Press, 1955) 73.

life and higher rates of delinquency. Consequently, delinquency could be seen as a natural reaction to living in a lower class culture.³

Researchers, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin connected both thoughts mentioned above and on their basis created typology of subculture. Their typology has been very useful for identifying the types of activities in which and individual may become involved.

The third wave of studies has begun in the 1980s and continues to the present. The research is in many ways parallel to the 1920s inquiry. Except that the social and economic opportunities of some groups have not improved or have become worse. The society struggles in sense of the absence of stable family and community structures. Gang life appears to have much more dramatic consequences. Current situation suggests that gang membership is led by the pursuit of profit rather than by the cultural or territorial reasons as in previous decades.⁴

The study of gangs helps to understand the reasons why the youth become involved in gangs in the first place and shows, in case that there are some, the possible benefits of gang membership to the community.

2.2 Defining the street gang

The term *gang* is more loosely used by the media, community agencies and the general public than by the law enforcement community.

The public's definition of a gang relates to a group of individuals – mostly inner-city youth – who are organized, involved in drug dealing and violent.

On the contrary, the law enforcement body builds the definition upon legal parameters. Nevertheless, these formal definitions often point out only high-profile gangs of the ones that cause the most problems to police. Thus, criminal behavior seems to be a key constituent of the definition from the law enforcement point of view.⁵ The inaccurate definition may often be connected with misuse of the term *gang related*.

³ Walter B. Miller, "Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency," *Journal of Social Issues* 14.3 (1958): 5–19.

<<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=5e30dff1-0d04-4995-bd99-7058e7329dbf%40sessionmgr13&vid=5&hid=19>>.

⁴ Jeffrey Fagan, "Social Processes of Delinquency and Drug Use Among Urban Gangs," *Gangs in America*, ed. C. Ronald Huff (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990) 183-213.

⁵ Police Executive Research Forum, *Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Practical Guide*, (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, 1998) 9. <<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/164273.pdf>>.

Much of what is labeled as gang related behavior is not gang related at all. Police may identify a crime as gang related only because the individual involved is a gang member.⁶

It is even difficult for many experts on gangs to settle on precise definition, partly because they view the question from two angles, when either juveniles or young adults are studied. However, both groups have characteristic differences. Those are obvious when we compare gang behavior with delinquent-groups behavior. In contrast to gang members, most youth do not get involved in further criminal behavior as they grow older.⁷

Still, the difficult definitional issue persists. Then, what *is* a street gang? Nominal definition of the street gang with an explanation of how it came into existence may help: “A street gang is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity.”⁸

- 1.) *Durable* – this refers to the group continuity despite turnover of members. An existence of several months can be used as a guideline.
- 2.) *Street-oriented* – it focuses on time the group spends outside home, work, and school – often on the streets, in parks, and so on.
- 3.) *Youth* – street gangs tend to comprise of more adolescents than adults, but most members have average ages in adolescence or early 20s.
- 4.) *Illegal* – meaning delinquent or criminal.
- 5.) *Identity* – it puts emphasis on the group, not the individual self-image.

This consensus nominal definition has been agreed to by more than 100 American and European researchers and policy makers in a series of workshops between 1997 and 2005 (the Eurogang program). The necessary and sufficient defining characteristics help to distinguish street gangs from other troublesome youth groups.

These definers of street gangs – durable, street-oriented, youth, illegal activity and identity – are the basic elements to recognize a street gang. However, they only help

⁶ Cheryl L. Maxson and Malcolm W. Klein, “Street gang violence: Twice as great, or half as great?” *Gangs in America*, ed. C. Ronald Huff (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990) 71-91.

⁷ Irving A. Spiegel, “Youth Gangs: Continuity and Change,” *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research* 12 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 171-275. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1147440>>.

⁸ Malcolm W. Klein, Cheryl L. Maxson, *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 3-4.

us to capture variations across gangs, but they are not necessary definers of a street gang.

The definitional problem

The definitional issue has been the most persistent that gang scholars have had to confront. So far no consensus has been made among gang scholars, who feel the need to find a useful and acceptable approach. However, the most influential attempts to define gangs do exist.

The earliest pioneering efforts to establish such definition were determined as early as 1927 by Frederic Thrasher in Chicago. His characterization of a gang as “an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict”⁹ is still recurrent in more recent gang descriptions.

Another definition was offered by Malcolm W. Klein (1971). It is of juvenile gangs and stresses a social-psychological framework: “[A juvenile gang is] any denotable adolescent group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood, (b) recognize themselves as a denotable group (almost invariably with a group name), and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies.”¹⁰

After twenty-five years Klein admitted to so much controversy over this and decided to approach the problem in two ways. Emphasizing the term *street gang*, this excludes certain groups, such as terrorists, football hooligans, motorcycle gangs, and prison gangs, and then characterized gangs in terms of common descriptors: age, gender, ethnicity, territoriality, and criminal patterns and orientation.¹¹

In contrast to both definitions above, which include involvement in illegal activities as one of their definitional components, James F. Short, Jr. (1996) emphasizes self-determination of the group by its members, but avoids any connection to illegal activities: “Gangs are groups whose members meet together with some regularity, over time, on the basis of group-defined criteria of membership and group-defined

⁹ Thrasher 57.

¹⁰ Malcolm W. Klein, *The American Street Gang: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Control*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995) 21-23, 101-135.

¹¹ Klein (2006) 7.

organizational characteristics; that is, gangs are non-adult-sponsored, self-determining groups that demonstrate continuity over time.”¹²

All above definitions were derived from observations and experience with gangs. They focused on specifying critical points of *informal* groups.

This principle collides with the establishment of a *legal* category of gangs by law enforcement in the late 1980s, in order to suppress gangs and incarcerate gang members. Law enforcement definition was originally embodied in the California Penal Code (section 186.22) and legislation known as the Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention (S.T.E.P.) Act (enacted January 1, 1993). It was concerned specifically with “the criminal street gang” as “any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts enumerated in paragraphs (1) to (8), inclusive, of subdivision (E), which has a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity.”¹³

Based on the acceptance of this definition by the general public, street gangs lost their informal, street-corner characterization and have become demonized as purposefully criminal conspiracies, and as violent organizations. The goals of law enforcement – to label youth as gang members and to incarcerate them for as long as possible – replaced reality.¹⁴

2.3 Gang diversity – types of gangs

In attempt to understand the issue of gang diversity, which affects how a gang is defined, it may be helpful to describe some of the different types of gangs. Gangs can be divided in several ways, for example, according to structure, behavior (motivation) or scope of activity.

Behavioral typology

Cloward and Ohlin differential opportunity theory says that people in all levels of society share the same success goals. But those in the lower class are limited by means available for achieving their goals. In other words, they may join gang life and

¹² James F. Short, Jr., *Gangs and adolescent violence*, (Boulder: University of Colorado, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 1996) 5.

¹³ Klein (2006) 8.

¹⁴ Klein (2006) 9.

crime because legitimate means are out of their reach: "...the disparity between what lower-class youth are led to want and what is actually available to them is the source of a major problem of adjustment. Adolescents who form delinquent subcultures . . . have internalized an emphasis upon conventional goals. Faced with limitations on legitimate avenues of access to these goals, and unable to revise their aspirations down-ward, they experience intense frustrations; the exploration of non-conformist alternatives may be the result."¹⁵

Cloward and Ohlin's so-called subcultural theory suggests that young people are likely to mingle with one of three types of gangs¹⁶:

- a) *Criminal gangs* are usually operating in low-income areas; there are close relationships between adolescents and adult criminals. Afterwards, the recruitment of adolescents into organizations results from such relationship and the organization conveys training grounds for criminal careers.

As an example of criminal gangs may serve Chinese gangs which are often connected with and managed by community organizations and they are knotted together with economic and social structures of their community. Based on the historical experience of the Triad societies, they have certain legitimacy within the community.¹⁷

- b) *Conflict gangs* often fight to protect their integrity and honor. This is why they managed to develop apposite self-image and evoke admiration from their equals. They exist in communities with disintegrated conditions and variable populations. African American and Hispanic gangs fall into this group.
- c) *Retreatist gangs* can not be considered as criminal gangs, although they may achieve their goals by using both legitimate and illegitimate means. On the contrary, they are seen as double failures. They retreat on the fringe of society to give in to heavy drug use and removal from social interaction.¹⁸

This component occurs in case of Vietnamese youth gangs, especially in Southern California. Vietnamese youth have developed a retreatist attitude

¹⁵ Albert Cloward, and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1960) 86.

¹⁶ Police Executive Research Forum 11-13.

¹⁷ Ko-Lin Chin, "Chinese gangs and extortion," *Gangs in America*, ed. C. Ronald Huff (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990) 137.

¹⁸ Cloward 183.

toward gang life as a result of problems they have experienced in becoming assimilated into American culture. Thus, for example, drug dealing is considered too risky; however, drug use is heavy. Vietnamese gang members have adopted a low-profile approach to avoid the attention of police.¹⁹

Another behavioral typology has been suggested by Taylor, who formed an evolution of gangs related to drug sales in Detroit:²⁰

- a) *Scavenger gangs* have members who often act impulsively, with no particular goals and no purpose. Their crimes are spontaneous and senseless. Except for their impulsive behavior and need to belong, they do not have much in common.

Scavenger gang members could be characterized as low achievers having fun while committing the crime.

- b) *Territorial gangs* need to identify with something or someplace as belonging exclusively to the gang. Territory is called turf when it is defined as gang's own. Territorial gangs are often formed on account of the transformation of scavenger gangs, when those decide to serve a specific purpose.

The main goal of territorial gangs is to defend their turf from outsiders. It is not unlikely that in such areas territorial law is more respected and feared than traditional law. Territorial gangs use any means necessary to enforce their law, especially physical violence.

- c) *Organized/Corporate gangs* have very strong leaders. Their main interest lies in illegal money-making ventures. The worth of the individual to the organization is highly praised. Each member has a certain role and works as a team member. All actions are profit-motivated.

In contrast to scavenger gangs, crimes are committed for purpose, not for fun. This type of gang addresses not only the lower class and underclass, but also middle-class and upper-middle-class youths.²¹

Structural typology

¹⁹ James D. Vigil, and Steve Chong Yun, "Vietnamese Youth Gangs in Southern California," *Gangs in America*, ed. C. Ronald Huff (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990) 147, 158-159.

²⁰ Carl S. Taylor, "Gang Imperialism," *Gangs in America*, ed. C. Ronald Huff (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990) 105-108.

²¹ Taylor 108.

Klein and Maxson compiled a great amount of data on structural dimensions, such as gang size, age ranges, ethnicity, location, subgroupings, duration over time and organizational norms, using various sources, for example, coordinated ethnographies of street gangs, an archival analysis of already reported field studies, interviews and questionnaire surveys, the observations of street gang workers and police observations. The obtained data served to create a typology of five “gang scenarios²²”:

1. The *traditional gang* is a large, constant, territorial gang with a wide age range and several internal subgroups based on age or area.
2. The *neotraditional gang* is a newer territorial gang with a prospect to become traditional in time. It is subgrouping, but may or may not have achieved territoriality. Its size suggests that it is evolving into the traditional form.
3. The *compressed gang* has short history. It is unclear whether it will grow into the more-traditional form or remain as less-complex group.
4. The *collective gang* is similar to a shapeless mass of adolescent and young adult members and has not developed the distinguishing characteristics of other gangs.
5. The *specialty gang* is crime-focused in a narrow way. Its main purpose is more criminal than social. It has smaller size and its form of territoriality suggests the focus on crime pattern.

This structural gang typology is applicable in the vast majority of a random sample of cities with reported gang problems. Besides, it shows, that traditional gangs are not the most common or typical gang form, and that drug gangs comprise a relatively small proportion of street gangs.

Klein and Maxson claim that the five street gang structures provide an acceptable *operational* definition: “a street gang is any durable, street-oriented youth group whose own identity includes involvement in illegal activity and is substantially described by ... the gang scenarios presented in this section.”²³

²² Klein (2006) 172-178.

²³ Klein (2006) 194.

3 Historical overview

The activity of gangs in Western civilization was first documented during the 17th century by Pike, who was a British crime chronicler. He admits that similar gangs might have appeared in England perhaps as early as the 14th century or even the 12th century, although these gangs had a very little in common with today's street gangs.²⁴

The first record of the emergence of gangs on the United States territory dates back to 1783, respectively on the East Coast as the American Revolution ended. But it was not until the early part of the 19th century when the more serious street gangs emerged.²⁵

For better understanding of the origins of gang activity might be more transparent to define the emergence of gangs by regions of their prevalence: the Northeast, Midwest, West and South.

The Northeast and Midwest have seen the rise of gangs driven especially by immigration and poverty. The immigrants came in two waves. The first wave, which lasted up to about 1860, brought the immigrants from Northern and Western Europe (Great Britain, Germany and Scandinavia). The second one included the Poles, Italians, Irish and Jews and meant enormous increase of population in the urban areas causing housing and welfare crisis, the "ideal" background for formatting a slum. Shortly afterwards, the new-arrivals created communities to strengthen each other in the economic struggle and also against the discrimination received from Anglo native-born Americans.²⁶

In contrary to the Northeast and Midwest, gangs in the Western region arose from preexisting Mexican culture. El Paso and Los Angeles were settled first by railroad laborers working on the trail from Mexico to Los Angeles.²⁷

The crucial moment in the gang emergence came with a second major wave of migration, when African American population left the Deep South in persuasion of better level of living.

²⁴ Luke Owen Pike, *A History of Crime in England: Illustrating the Changes of the Laws in the Progress of Civilisation: Written From the Public Records and Other Contemporary Evidence* (London: Smith, Elder & co, 1873) 274-77.

²⁵ Luc Sante, *Low Life: Lures and Snares of Old New York* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991) 197.

²⁶ Jacob A. Riis, *The Battle with the Slum* (Montclair, NJ: Paterson Smith, 1902/1969) 1.

²⁷ James Diego Vigil, *A Rainbow of gangs: street cultures in the mega-city* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002) 31-45.

3.1 The Northeast – New York City

The New York City street gangs developed over the years from innocuous youth fighting over local turf to more structured and dangerous gangs. Many of early gangs were created from neighborhoods that suffered due to economic and social disorganization. The ethnic question was not essential in comparison with day-to-day struggle; therefore these gangs were often multi-ethnic.²⁸

First period

New York gangs were not of criminal substance at the very beginning, however, the violence represented a normal part of then life. Thus, gangs have soon become the “basic unit of social life among the young males in New York in the 19th century”.²⁹

The main area of gang activity prevalence involved the Lower East Side – particularly around the Five Points. The place gave rise to the Five Points Gang, which is said to be “the most significant street gang to form in the United States, ever”.³⁰

Second period

Further development of gang activity in the city was stigmatized by increased immigration and creation of slums. Primarily the Poles, Italians and Jews were the main occupiers of tenement houses that were built as a temporary solution to the burning question of slums. However great the solution might have seen at first, its transformation into a permanent solution meant favorable condition for gang growth.³¹

Probably the most powerful downtown gang of that time was the Whyos.

After some time, the city’s gangs began to gradually transform by branching out and merging with other smaller and less well-organized units. Soon they were controlling much of territory.

²⁸ Christopher Adamson., “Defensive localism in white and black: A comparative history of European-American and African-American youth gangs,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23.2 (2000) 272–298. <<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=30&hid=11&sid=5e30dff1-0d04-4995-bd99-7058e7329dbf%40sessionmgr13>>.

²⁹ Sante 198

³⁰ James C. Howell and John P. Moore, “History of street gangs in the United States,” *National gang center bulletin*. Institute for Intergovernmental Research, (May 2010) 3. <<http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Content/Documents/History-of-Street-Gangs.pdf>>

³¹ Riis 2.

Longest-lived gangs that survived jailing and deaths on the Lower East side of Manhattan were four gang alliances – the Five Pointers, the Monk Eastman, the Gophers and the Hudson Dusters.³²

The Five Points' co-leader and later member of the Sicilian Mafia (La Cosa Nostra), Johnny Torrio, was the one who recruited from streets of New York City a teenaged Brooklyn boy of Italian descendant, named Alphonse Capone, known as Al Capone or “Scarface”. The times when La Cosa Nostra ruled the streets of New York City are often recognized as a blood-soaked American history.³³

Third period

It has been presumed by many that, by the 1950s, street gangs had dissolved from New York City; quite the contrary is the case. Once again migration played an essential role in increased gang activity in the city.

Firstly, mass migration of Southern Blacks, fetched up in urban locales near all-White neighborhoods, sparked interracial conflict. Thus, Black neighborhoods started evolve into social protection groups. Subsequently, street gangs became instituted in the social fabric of the lower class.³⁴

Secondly, gang situation was also intensified by Latino immigrant groups (from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico) that moved particularly in South Bronx and Brooklyn.

From the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, high-rise public housing developments were built across the country. In comparison with the development in Chicago, low-income public housing projects in New York were scattered around the city to disband, to some extent, the between-gang violence.

In the 1960s, more than two thirds of the New York gangs were of Puerto Rican or African American origin.³⁵

By the late 1990s, Puerto Ricans were succeeded by Hispanics that, over African American community, became the largest minority group in the city.³⁶

³² Sante 214-217.

³³ Howell (2010) 3.

³⁴ Steven R. Cureton, “Something Wicked This Way Comes: A Historical Account of Black Gangsterism Offers Wisdom and Warning for African American Leadership,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 40.2 (2009) 347–361.

³⁵ Thomas M. Gannon, “Dimensions of current gang delinquency,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 4.1 (1967) 119–131.

3.2 The Midwest – Chicago

As an industrial hub between the Civil War and the end of the 19th century, Chicago was flooded with a labor force from the peasantry of Southern and Eastern Europe.³⁷ Gangs that emerged in the area at the beginning of the 1900s were mainly formed from the same immigrant groups as in case of New York City. First of all, Polish and Italian gangs took the lead of Chicago's streets.

Therefore, there is no surprise that soon after gangs began to mingle, reaching almost 40 percent of all gangs in Chicago being of mixed nationalities by 1925.³⁸

First period

One of the first street gangs emerged among white immigrants before the American Civil War. They may have proliferated from fire departments that used to sponsor social events in the streets.

In case of black gangs, they did not appear until 1920s, and their impact on Black community remained minimal at that time.³⁹ It was during this period, when gangs began to be involved in political corruption. During the 1920s, violence among gangs increased no doubt due to organized crime mobs, headed by the infamous Al Capone gang.⁴⁰

However, as the socioeconomic situation of white immigrant families improved, Chicago's white ethnic gangs soon came to an end. Immigrants were able to move out of downtown ghettos into a social and economic mainstream, leaving their gangs behind. This period in gang history is being often referred to as one-generation immigrant ghetto phenomenon. Consequently, the move of white settlers to the suburbs made room for African Americans who replaced them in the more impoverished central city.⁴¹

³⁶ Arun P. Lobo, Ronald J. O. Flores and Joseph J. Salvo, "The impact of Hispanic growth on the racial/ethnic composition of New York City neighborhoods," *Urban Affairs Review*, 37.5 (2002) 703–727.

³⁷ Herold Finnestone, *Victims of Change* (Westport, CT: Greenwood. 1976) 6.

³⁸ Thrasher 68.

³⁹ Useni E. Perkins, *Explosion of Chicago's Black Street Gangs: 1900 to the Present* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1987) 19, 25.

⁴⁰ Virgil W. Peterson, "Chicago: Shades of Capone," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 347.1 (1963) 30–39. <<http://www.jstor.org/pss/1036550>>.

⁴¹ Joan W. Moore, "Understanding youth street gangs: Economic restructuring and the urban underclass." *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Youth and Violence*. Ed. Meredith W. Watts. Stamford, CT: Jai Press, 1998) 68.

Second period

The period started with a steady migration of Mexican and African Americans to northern cities. More than a million blacks moved during the “Great Migration” between 1910 and 1930 in search for jobs and to escape the misery of Jim Crow laws. In this period Chicago gained almost 200,000 black residents. Most of them settled in the area known as the Black Belt on the South Side.⁴²

American society made assimilation of black migrants difficult. They had to face not only race, but also class segregation.⁴³

The formation of street gangs started unobtrusively, while black youth were hanging out together, for example, to apply themselves to athletics. After series of conflicts with white gang members the situation quieted down by the early 1940s, but interracial conflict continued.

Between 1940s and early 1960s many gang organizations were formed, among others Devil’s Disciples, P-Stones, Vice Lords, and Latin Kings. Later on the Devil’s Disciples splitted in other fractions: the Black Disciples, the Black Gangster Disciples, and the Gangster Disciples.⁴⁴

In the 20 years that followed World War II, 51 high-rise public housing projects were constructed, only worsening the situation in black ghetto sites. The public housing projects, such as the Robert Taylor Homes, granted exquisite ground for gangs to grow out of, creating high-rise forts with gangs in total control of them.⁴⁵

In the 1960s, Chicago’s mainly black gang problem exploded. Gang growth reached its peak by formatting so-called “super gangs” with 1,000 members or more.⁴⁶

It was not only due to high-rise gang forts but also racial unrest that stood behind this rapid period of gang growth. Together with rise of the Black Panthers and proceeding of the Civil Rights Movement, grew black pride and sense of unity. After partial muting of the Black Panther Party, Chicago’s street youths started having their own violent demonstrations. Although, organized gangs could not be seen in lead of

⁴² William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) 186-192.

⁴³ Carole Marks, “Black labor migration: 1910–1920,” *Critical Sociology* 12.4 (1985) 22.

⁴⁴ Perkins 353-354.

⁴⁵ Sudhir A. Venkatesh, “The gang in the community,” *Gangs in America* (2nd ed.), ed. C. Ronald Huff (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 1996) 241-256.

⁴⁶ Perkins 74.

these demonstrations, they certainly did provide an infrastructure within which sensibilities of racial anger formed and circulated.⁴⁷

In comparison with black gangs' activity in Chicago, Latino gangs' emergence is less well-documented. First major Mexican migration appeared during 1919 and 1939. Mexico underwent the revolutionary period and the immigrants were seeking new employment opportunities in the city.⁴⁸

The increased immigration resulted in racial violence and coherent gang growth in Mexican barrios. The first notable gang was the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation.⁴⁹

Modern days

The most recent period of Chicago gang history goes about in terms of proliferation of gangs outside the city. Their main field of coverage relocated from the inner city to the suburbs. Nowadays, Chicago is no longer the only city in region that reports extensive gang activity. Beside others, St. Louis, Detroit, Cleveland, Kansas City and Omaha include those cities where serious gang activity emerged.⁵⁰

Even though, Chicago still remains the city with the largest street gangs, such as the Gangster Disciple Nation, Black Gangsters/New Breeds, Latin Kings, Black P. Stone Nation, and Vice Lords.

3.3 The West – Los Angeles

Gang emergence in the Western region has been always closely affected by local politics, mainly by long lasting conflict between the United States and Mexico. The Mexican population, which lived in the area, felt the US government stole this part of country from their ancestors, when Mexico ceded a large southwestern region to the United States. This notion was preserved in many Mexican street gang members who

⁴⁷ Andrew Diamond, "Rethinking culture on the streets: Agency, masculinity, and style in the American city," *Journal of Urban History* 27.5 (2001) 677.

⁴⁸ Gabriela F. Arredondo, Navigating Ethno-Racial Currents, Mexicans in Chicago, 1919-1939, *Journal of Urban History*, 30.3 (2004) 399-420. <<http://lals.ucsc.edu/directory/downloads/arredondo/arredondoJUH.pdf>>.

⁴⁹ Howell (2010) 8.

⁵⁰ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *National Gang Threat Assessment: 2009*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2008) 11-18. <<http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/national-gang-threat-assessment-2009-pdf>>.

still feel that way. It is said that, in the Western region, a gang-like activity has first been spotted as early as 1890s.⁵¹

First period

The appearance of so-called “boy gangs” can be traced to as early as 1920s in Los Angeles. However, the typical Latino gangs began to form in the barrios (neighborhoods) of East Los Angeles in adolescent friendship groups in the 1930s and 1940s.

The main reason for most conflicts at that time was territorial-based; “mi barrio” (my neighborhood) became synonymous with “my gang”. These terms can be easily interchanged in the gang subculture; a boy is a member of a gang, of a neighborhood, and of a barrio.⁵²

This bonding to barrios and gang is unique to Western region; the long-term activity of gangs within barrios across Southern California has helped the formation of other gangs in nearby areas.⁵³

In contrast to the situation in New York and Chicago, Latino gangs drew more of their strength from their own ethnic history rather than conflicts with other racial/ethnic groups.⁵⁴

Second period

In following years Los Angeles County grew enormously, becoming the Latino “capital” of the US with more people of Mexican descent than most cities in Mexico.

Certain historic events in the 1940s had an impact on and forever changed the body of Mexican street gangs. Gang members were convicted and sentenced to jail in connection with the Sleepy Lagoon murder and the Zoot Suit Riots. These incidents united the Mexican community in a common cause, a fight against class distinction based on prejudice and racism, a fight against the establishment.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Al Valdez, *Gangs: A Guide to Understanding Street Gangs* (5th ed.), (San Clemente, CA: LawTech Publishing, 2007) 94.

⁵² Joan W. Moore, James Diego Vigil, and Robert Garcia, “Residence and territoriality in Chicano gangs,” *Social Problems* 31.2 (1983) 184. <<http://www.jstor.org/pss/800210>>.

⁵³ James D. Vigil, “The established gang,” *Gangs: The Origins and Impact of Contemporary Youth Gangs in the United States*, eds. Scott Cummings, and Daniel J. Monti (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993) 97.

⁵⁴ Howell (2010) 10.

⁵⁵ Valdez 98.

Third period

In this period, Los Angeles was facing the emergence of black gangs on its territory. Similarly to Chicago, the black migration from the South endorsed the growth of black gangs in Los Angeles. The first black gang appeared in the late 1940s in response to white youth violence in the schools.⁵⁶

Although, in LA the development of black gangs had two phases: post-World War II to 1965, and between 1970 and 1972. Those gangs that formed in the 1950s and 1960s were far more serious. They first served as protectors of the community, later began conflicts with other black clubs. The end of the 1960s represented the last chapter of the political social and civil rights movement by black groups in Los Angeles. But the context gave rise to new emerging street groups between 1970 and 1972. In search for new identity, black youths of Los Angeles began to mobilize as street groups, consequently creating two camps, Crips and Bloods.⁵⁷

Behind the foundation of the Crips was a 15-year-old student, Raymond Washington, who, inspired by the Black Panther Party, desired to continue the revolutionary ideology of the 1960s and act as community leaders and protectors of their neighborhoods. This praiseworthy idea started off as quasi-political, unfortunately, it slowly turned into a spree of misguided teens.

Between 1973 and 1975 increased inter-racial fighting of Crips and non-Crips gangs. In response of that non-Crips gangs decided to form a united federation. After, killing incidents started the rivalry between the Crips and the Piru Street Boys (non-Crip gang). The unbearable situation led to a meeting where the Blood alliance was created.⁵⁸

Both gangs adopted the territory-marking practices that developed the early Los Angeles Latino gangs. Crips wore blue colors; the Bloods chose red. They use graffiti to mark their territories, to which they often refer as “hoods”. Crips even created a mantra, “Crips don’t die, they multiply.” Indeed, their numbers grew enormously, particularly in settings of the public housing projects built in Watts in the 1950s.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Vigil (2002) 68.

⁵⁷ Alejandro A. Alonso, “Racialized identities and the formation of black gangs in Los Angeles,” *Urban Geography* 25.7 (2004) 663-69. <http://www.streetgangs.com/academic/2004ug_gangsla.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Alejandro A. Alonso, “Black Street Gangs in Los Angeles: A History,” excerpts from Masters Thesis *Territoriality Among African American Street Gangs in Los Angeles*, (University of Southern California, 1999. <<http://www.streetgangs.com/history/hist01.html>>.

⁵⁹ Virgil (2002) 76-77.

Modern days

The Bloods and Crips gangs are still regarded as mortal enemies and continue to shed blood. Additionally, over the years, hundreds of gangs in the Southwest – and in other parts of the US – adopted their names. Nowadays, all west-coast black street gangs associated themselves with either the Bloods or Crips.⁶⁰

Among the most significant Latino gangs functioning in the Western and Pacific regions are La Eme, 18th Street, Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13), and Nuestra Familia.⁶¹

3.4 The South

The emergence of the Southern region as an important gang territory happened much later. One of the indicators was the fact that the South lacked a central large city within which early gang activity could concentrate. More so, gang activity did not appear in the region prior to the 1970s.

In the late 1970s only few southern cities reported gang activity: Dallas, Fort Worth, New Orleans, Miami, and San Antonio. But actually only Miami and San Antonio had a moderately serious gang problem at that time.

The major growth of gang activity across the South took place from 1970s through the 1990s, the emergence scattered across the region, however, did not have significant impact like in other regions.⁶²

By 1995, the South witnessed an increase in the number of not only new gang counties, but also new gang cities. In comparison with the Northeast, where gang activity is steadily declining, the South appears to catch up with other regions in the prevalence of gangs in recent years.⁶³

⁶⁰ Valdez 189.

⁶¹ FBI 19.

⁶² Howell (2010) 12-13.

⁶³ Walter B. Miller, *Crime by Youth Gangs and Groups in the United States*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1982/1992) 26-68. <<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/156221NCJRS.pdf>>.

4 Gangs and politics

In last ten years effort has been evident to document the organizational transformation of street organizations; the transition from gangsterism to activism. There are contacts being made between members of the Bloods in Los Angeles and the New York City Bloods in order to contain or stop the violence between these two groups. It is very interesting to watch the determination of people who are labeled as “gang leaders” to rise up as community leaders.⁶⁴

4.1 Theoretical discussion

The literature

Most of a social science literature, which deals with street gangs, focuses on the criminological aspects of these groups. Researchers challenged the gang question and came to a conclusion of three major issues that affect gangs and their respective communities: violence, drugs, and sex.

In contrast, a more traditional approach to the study of gangs has oriented on their organizational aspects⁶⁵, the politics of culture⁶⁶, and the institutional transformation of gangs⁶⁷. These studies has helped in creating sociology of gangs, however, they have failed to identify the political agency of gangs and the political agents within gangs.

Nevertheless, studies of street organizations on the East Coast have developed an alternative approach to the study of gangs. Their attention has aimed at the structural transformation of gangs into politically and community-oriented street organizations, and the spiritual and political practices of street organizations.

This can be documented by tracing the careers of individual members of street organizations and their gradual transformation into political agents.

⁶⁴ Juan Francisco Esteva Martínez, “Urban street activists: Gang and community efforts to bring peace and justice to Los Angeles neighborhoods,” *Gangs and society: alternative perspectives*, ed. Louis Kontos, David Brotherton and Luis Barrios (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 95-96.

⁶⁵ Martín Sánchez Jankowski, *Islands in the Street: Gangs and American Urban Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991) 28-29.

⁶⁶ Dwight Conquergood, “Street Literacy,” *Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy through the Communicative and Visual Arts*, ed. James Flood, Shirley Bryce Heath and Diane Lapp (New York: Prentice Hall, 1997) 354-375.

⁶⁷ Joan W. Moore, *Going down to the barrio: homeboys and homegirls in change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) 135-136.

In contrast with the literature that was orientated on the negative aspects of gangs, this approach presents an alternative perspective on gangs. It differs from previous studies in three ways:

1. The gang and gang members are seen as political actors/agents engaged in the transformation of their social background;
2. it recognizes different types of street activists and follows their career paths;
3. it presents the interaction of political actors with the range of organizations that surround them.

The main goal of this study is to contribute to the development of an alternative theoretical approach to the study of gangs.⁶⁸

Historical background

In case of the origins of the Crips and the Bloods the account seems to be ambiguous. However, there are two reemerging explanations.

The first one is represented by James Carr, who places the origins in a *political context*:

“In fact the origins of the Crips and especially their expansion ("cripping") is linked to the rise and defeat in the early 70s of the Black Panthers - Crip originally meant “Community Resource Independent Project”. The Panthers sought to homogenise black gangs throughout America's ghettos, turning their internecine warring tendencies into a united revolutionary assault force against the real enemy. The successive Crip absorption of smaller gangs reflected this but with a direction the Panthers would not have approved of...”⁶⁹

OGs (original gangsters) and street activist who witnessed the early formation of these gangs gave similar descriptions. They narrate times in which the Black Panthers, the Black Stone Rangers, and other street organizations were trying to politically organize their neighborhoods and empower their communities. Some of those OGs became active members of the Black Panthers and since then they continue to work on civil/human rights issues.

⁶⁸ Esteva Martínez 97-99.

⁶⁹ James Carr, *BAD: The autobiography of James Carr*, (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2002) 233.

The second explanation, provided in form of interview by unnamed OG in 1999, places the origins of the Crips and the Bloods in *racial conflict context*:

“When the Crips first started, it was a group of kids that got together to go to the beach. They had to walk through all of these white neighborhoods and they would get mugged or beaten up. So these dudes would get together in a group and go through the white neighborhoods in a group. That way they wouldn’t mess with them.

The Bloods were started by a group of people who were engaged in the Karate club. They stucked together to protect the neighborhood, when the program ended. In the process, they fought with other sets, especially with the Crips.”⁷⁰

As the above OG declares, the Bloods were formed to protect their communities from external violence (i.e., police and racial violence) but the violence became internal when the Bloods and the Crips used violence on one another.

Whatever stood behind the origin of the rivalry between these two groups, one is true, the introduction of drugs into these communities intensified the rivalry.

During the late 1980s and the first part of the 1990s, street violence transformed, no doubt due to the combination of drugs and the increase of high-powered weapons.

The situation led to the impersonal gang warfare with the use of automatic weapons in drive-by shootings.⁷¹

4.2 Urban street activists, gangs, and community activists

In contrast to the attention given to the state efforts to control the spread of gang-related violence, urban street activists and community efforts to stop violence awoke only a little interest.

This has changed in 1992 during Los Angeles uprising, when was, thanks to urban street activists’ effort, achieved the truce between the Bloods and the Crips.

⁷⁰ Esteva Martínez 100.

⁷¹ Esteva Martínez 101.

Unfortunately, and despite the support from outside organizations and the community, the possible strong and lasting general truce soon disintegrated.⁷²

4.3 The making of street activists

Urban street activists are individuals who are devoted to change the social, political and economic situation of their respective communities.⁷³

Street activists are reputable members of well-organized and sophisticated gangs. They are respected because they occupy leadership position within the gang. What is characteristic for the urban activist is his charismatic authority.

Specialized knowledge

The essential key for street activists is knowledge of the gang structure and cultural codes. Understanding to the structure can make it easier for political message to reach its final recipient. Familiarity with cultural codes helps to comprehend the gangs' cultural value system and avoids disrespecting gangs' leaders or members.

The acquired knowledge develops the social understanding of gangs. However, it is difficult to gain the knowledge because of its restriction to insiders only. Even with all this street wisdom and understanding⁷⁴, street activists are still facing high-risk and life-threatening situations.

Developing political consciousness

The level of political consciousness differs among street activists. Most of them receive education from informal sources that usually takes place during their imprisonment. Ironically, the time they spent in prison allows them to have their first experienced as organizers and political activists. It is in prison where they develop their ideological basis for political action.

Subsequently, street activists are integrated into different prison political groups, which include political/religious organizations such as the Nation of Islam, Marxist/Maoist groups, and other political rights groups.⁷⁵

⁷² Esteva Martínez 102.

⁷³ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, (New York: International, 1971) 122-123.

⁷⁴ Elijah Anderson, *Streetwise: Race, Class, and Change in Urban Community*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 207-230.

⁷⁵ Esteva Martínez 103-105.

Types of political consciousness

Essentially, there are three levels of political consciousness: parochial, national, and international.

1. *Parochial political consciousness* is concerned with local issues facing communities and neighborhoods. The parochial street activists deal with sociopolitical and economic isolation, such as lack of good schooling, lack of opportunities for jobs, violence, crime, drugs and police brutality within black communities.

It resembles of Black Nationalism drawn from Afrocentric thought.

2. *National political consciousness* makes efforts to create solidarity links with other communities facing similar issues. Therefore, the national street activists tend to work with racial/ethnic groups, such as Latino and Asian groups.

They result from various ideological sources, including Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and leftist ideologies, such as Marxism, Maoism, and feminism.

3. *International political consciousness* is more critical of the U.S. government. The international street activists see a connection between global capitalism and the criminalization of youth all over the world.

They usually have connections with local community organizations such as neighborhood associations, police brutality watch groups, as well as nationalistic organizations such as the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, or the Congress of Racial Equality.⁷⁶

4.4 Street activist typologies

Martínez differentiates three general categories that describe the different types of street activists: recovered gang members, OGs, and gang members.⁷⁷

Recovered gang member street activists

They tend to detach or separate themselves from the gang by describing themselves as ex-gang members.

⁷⁶ Esteva Martínez 105-106.

⁷⁷ Esteva Martínez 106.

Their main focus is to get gang members off the streets by finding them jobs, raising funds to pay for school tuition, and involving them in community empowerment projects. They try to achieve re-socialization of gang members into mainstream society through acquisition of middle-class values.

OG street activists

In contrast to the recovered gang members, OG street activists still admit to have some attachment to the gang. They use the link to recruit more gang members to work on different political activities. They see the violence among the gangs as a manifestation of a misdirected and legitimate rebellion of the youths against the social conditions in which they are forced to live.

OG street activists dislike cooperating with government agencies. They connect with economically and politically government-free institutions. With respect to gangs, they are critical and condemn some of the gangs' practices but they justify them as a social reality. "We say that crime was here before gangs. Crime will continue as long as we have a repressive system."⁷⁸

Gang member street activists

They use the strategy of reconstruction or transformation, and thus, they believe that the gang itself can be turned around and politicized.

In contrast to the other two types of street activists, gang member street activists are still attached to the gangster value system and cultural practices.

Some gang members predict the potential of the gang, particularly, in becoming a social movement organization. They believe that cohesion, culture, organizational structure, and spiritual practices of the gang can be changed into positive attributes for a social movement.⁷⁹

4.5 The intervention of the Gangster Disciples

Gangster Disciples has released many documents on its ideology and plans. According to them, the current gang structure is the core form of social organization for youth in the slums. They point out that Chicago gangs are in long power struggle with

⁷⁸ Nancy Stein, "The Gang Truce: A Movement for Social Justice, an Interview with Michael Zinzun," *Social Justice*, 24.4 (1997): 259.

⁷⁹ Esteva Martínez 106-108.

the white leaders of Chicago. Namely, the reason for conflict is the disenfranchised African Americans struggle to create their community on their terms and not on the terms of mainstream African American leaders. According to Nehemiah Russell, a spokesman for the Gangster Disciples, “the gangs have created a paradigm shift across the nation. Traditionally, African Americans functioned as house negroes or field negroes. Gang members do not consider themselves as house or field negroes. They consider themselves as runaway Africans.” Based on police oppression and recognized “sell-out” by their leaders, gangs formed to fill social vacuums and create an alternative social order. Russell says: “The movement toward [Black] freedom came to a halt in the 1970s, but the desire for full rights can never be satisfied outside victory to achieve that goal. Those years of hope when we were unafraid to recognize that all people group and define themselves and have a right to do so, were the years that the gang structures anchored in inner cities. *The residue of the freedom struggles of the 20th century in the African American community is, indeed, the gang structure*” and the gang structure is the only “liberating structure” available to poor, urban African Americans. These statements show that the Gangster Disciples are fighting for the power of self-identity and community control.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Albert Dichiara and Russell Chabot, “Gangs and the Contemporary Urban Struggle: An Unappreciated Aspect of Gangs,” *Gangs and Society: alternative perspectives*, ed. Louis Kontos, David Brotherton and Luis Barrios (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 79-80.

5 Community context

The life of individuals and groups takes place in the broader context of the communities in which they exist, go to school, hang out with their friends and interact with other people in the neighborhood. But what are the features of community that creates suitable environment for gang activity? It would certainly be bold, if not foolhardy, to attempt gang prevention or intervention without attending to community characteristics. Therefore, it seems appropriate to review the current state of knowledge about the community characteristics that spawn gang development. However, the researchers first face the challenge of defining communities

But first, it is important to note that, in research writing, terms like *community* and *neighborhood*, and *community* and *city* are often used interchangeably. In terms of the definition of neighborhood among U.S. cities: there is a contrast between Chicago, St. Louis and some eastern cities, and, for example, Los Angeles, which does not have well-defined neighborhood boundaries recognized by all.⁸¹

However, the existing boundaries, such as census tracts or block groups, police reporting districts or divisions, city and county boundaries or standard metropolitan statistical areas, are artificial devices created to represent the ambiguous and abstract construct of community, the context of common interests and attributes that defines the parameters of individual agency and behavior. Many scholars of neighborhood effects declare that this strategy presents a major limitation to understanding the social processes related to problem behavior among young people.⁸² Thus, the main aim is to search for general patterns of the communities, which can be used in gang programs and policy.⁸³

The respective research on community factors generally contains of two broad categories: *structural conditions* and *community processes*. But it is also necessary to consider three other community features. An important aspect of gang research includes: the racial or ethnic composition of communities; then, variation in gang patterns between rural and urban communities; and finally, a construct that uses the

⁸¹ Klein (2006) 209-211.

⁸² Robert J. Sampson, Jeffrey D. Morenoff, Thomas Gannon-Rowley, "Assessing "neighborhood effects": Social processes and new directions in research," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28 (2002) 445. <<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=43&hid=9&sid=5e30dff1-0d04-4995-bd99-7058e7329dbf%40sessionmgr13>>.

⁸³ Klein (2006) 211-212.

period of onset of gang problems as a means of categorizing communities: the emergent versus chronic distinction.⁸⁴

5.1 Structural conditions

The recent research literature on neighborhood effects related to problem behaviors and health-related outcomes confirms the associations among neighborhood economic and social disadvantage – concentration of poverty, racial isolation, single-parent families, and rates of home ownership and residential stability – with crime, adolescent delinquency, and other indicators of social unrest.⁸⁵

Probably the most common structural variable in studies of gang prevalence is city size. However, population size says very little about the community context that fosters gang emergence. Therefore, it is important to also consider community features in addition to population size. The effects of transformation from a manufacturing-based to a service-based economy show a key application of underclass theory on the emergence of gangs.⁸⁶ Although, this approach did not address neighborhood variations, it suggests that the types of economical transitions important to underclass theory may be more important to understanding gang emergence than poverty, ethnic distribution, or overall crime.⁸⁷

Other researchers constructed composite measures of neighborhood disadvantage (poverty, public assistance income, and female-headed households with children) and neighborhood instability (owner-occupied housing and residential stability of five years or more).⁸⁸

5.2 Community processes

Social relationships among community residents can help to employ informal social control with neighborhood youths. For example, the willingness of elder respected figure, often female, to call neighborhood youth on the carpet for misdeed,

⁸⁴ Irving A. Spergel, David G. Curry, “The National Youth Gang Survey: A research and development process,” *The gang intervention handbook*, ed. Arnold P. Goldstein, Ronald C. Huff, (Champaign: Research Press, 1993) 359-392.

⁸⁵ Sampson (2002) 445-465.

⁸⁶ Wilson 261-269

⁸⁷ Klein (2006) 213-217.

⁸⁸ Richard Rosenfeld, Timothy M. Bray, Arlen Egley, “Facilitating violence: A comparison of gang-motivated, gang affiliated and nongang youth homicides,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 15.4 (1999) 501-502. <<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=40&hid=9&sid=5e30dff1-0d04-4995-bd99-7058e7329dbf%40sessionmgr13>>.

and her expectations that her neighbors will do the same, illustrates the concept of neighborhood collective efficacy. It is a matter of especially African American neighborhoods, which represent typical concept of neighborhood collective efficacy. It is a process whereby the social cohesion, or mutual trust, among neighbors creates the foundation for mutual expectation, which neighbors will intervene to confront incipient crime problems.⁸⁹

Moreover, the structural aspects of community conditions provide a backdrop for the community processes that may affect more directly the nature of gang activity in a neighborhood.

Community processes are the social relationships among neighborhood residents, the informal and formal bindings that link them to one another and to neighborhood social institutions like schools, churches, community groups, local political agencies, and public services. It is possible to differentiate these social relationships as private (friends), parochial (casual relationships among neighbors), and public (ties to secure goods and services – police services).

Community processes are central to efforts to produce effective policies and programs for gang control. Creating hostile environment for them would have required law enforcement to employ neighborhood residents in a process that enforced social bonds, provided a forum for the development of mutual trust or social cohesion among neighbors, and revived the mechanisms for informal social control.⁹⁰

5.3 Other community characteristics

Ethnicity

This aspect of gangs is one of the most widely discussed, but little studied. Conventional wisdom, and some research, considers black gangs to be more entrepreneurial and instrumental.⁹¹ Hispanic gangs are often described by law enforcement as more expressive and more turf oriented. Asian gangs have tight ties to

⁸⁹ Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, Felton Earls, “Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy,” *Science*, 277 (1997) 918-919. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2892902>>.

⁹⁰ Klein (2006) 217-221.

⁹¹ Jerome H. Skolnick, “Gangs and crime old as time; But drugs change gang culture,” *The Modern Gang Reader*, ed. Malcolm W. Klein, Cheryl L. Maxson and Jody Miller (Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Co., 1995) 223-224.

adult organized crime groups; they are also traditionally pictured as the most organized and mobile.⁹²

Ethnographic gang research is usually sited in just one ethnic community, and surveys rarely address the community context that might clarify different ethnic patterns. Unfortunately, there are very few gang studies that provide systematic comparative ethnic data on communities.⁹³

Rural gang communities

In benefit of rural communities, researchers have begun to observe local gangs more closely as a consequence of the patterns of gang proliferation. The differences between rural and urban communities could lead to contrasting elements of gang emergence, organizational structures, and activities – and such differences would suggest different approaches to gang prevention and intervention. It is known very little about gang-joining patterns and gang structures in rural areas, but the National Youth Gang Center survey has gathered useful data, which proved to be a promising starting point for exploring the prevalence and characteristics of rural gang neighborhoods.

The NYGS study reveals declining tendency in gang prevalence and discloses that gang problems emerged in rural counties much later: the majority of rural gang counties in 1996 said that gangs had surfaced no earlier than 1993.⁹⁴

The declining trend in gang prevalence in rural areas is closely related to the passing nature of gangs, which increases with the level of rurality. Weisheit and Wells find that just 14% of rural agencies, which reported gangs in 1997, still had them in 2000. These researchers notice that gangs are hardly omnipresent and relentless in rural areas, “raising questions about the commonly held belief that once gangs have a foothold in the community it is rare for them to leave or disappear. Indeed, most rural gangs are so small and unstable that the loss of one or two members – through arrest, movement out of the area, or maturation – can easily mean the end of the gang.”⁹⁵

Ultimately, the available research suggests that to export programs, which are developed in urban settings, into rural neighborhoods is false. More-recent gang onset,

⁹²Chin 129-145.

⁹³Klein (2006) 221-223.

⁹⁴ James C. Howell, Arlen Egley Jr., Debra K. Gleason, *Modern-day youth gangs*, (Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2002) 1-12.
<<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/191524.pdf>>.

⁹⁵ Ralph A. Weisheit, Edward L. Wells, “Youth gangs in rural America,” *NIJ Journal* 251 (2004) 4.

lower prevalence, the fluid nature of gang membership, and different community risk factors show many gang interventions as inappropriate to employ in these communities.

Onset of gangs

A final community context, focused on in national surveys of gang cities, considers the time period when gangs first emerged. Spergel and Curry observed that roughly 45 gang cities fell evenly into two categories. Those with a long history of serious gang problems can be distinguished as chronic gang cities. Whereas emerging gang cities had confronted gang problems only since 1980, they were often smaller and reported less-serious gang problems. Based on Spergel and Curry's studies, intervention strategies vary by these two types of communities. Thus, we can identify strategies with some promise of efficacy in the two community types: community organization in emerging gang cities and opportunities provision in chronic gang cities.⁹⁶

Nowadays, the definition of emerging gang city might seem outdated, since it has been 30 years and, therefore, it is slowly turning into chronic. However, Spergel and Curry defined the importance of the chronic-emergent distinction for understanding both the nature of gang problems and the appropriate attempts to control gangs.

Evidently, based on studies, which address the onset of gangs in a community, different approaches to intervention in chronic and emergent gang cities may be required. Gang types, characteristics of gang members, and gang activity in more-recent onset cities call for innovative strategies. Still, the perceived gang problems in smaller cities and rural areas can also disappear as quickly as they emerge. Thus, gang intervention can be double-edged and perhaps disturb the natural processes of extinction already occurring in many places.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Spergel (1993) 359-392.

⁹⁷ Klein (2006) 225-227.

6 Conclusion

The main aim of my bachelor thesis was to view and summarize the contemporary social phenomenon, addressing street gangs in the U.S.

The complexity of American street gang situation accounts a certain level of difficulty for the attempt to map condition of gang activity, because the scope of street gang involvements and interests is wide. It varies from criminal to political, economic and social.

Firstly, I found disturbing that, in reality, even after long lasting struggle for an accurate definition, which took place over more than ninety years, are the issues concerning gang activity still primarily handled within law enforcement basis. As if, there is no more to street gang activity than their participation in illegal behavior.

Certainly, gang activity no longer includes just criminal behavior. This statement represents one of the additional goals of this work; to bring this another “face” of street gangs to wide public’s attention. The concern and support gangs show to their neighborhoods and communities is historically well-known fact, for example, via their involvement in local or national politics. Unfortunately, this factor seems untrustworthy and surprising, due to the weight of media-created perception of today’s street gangs in the U.S.

Of course, the criminality is still a burning issue of gang-related society, but an idea occurs to me, that the excessive attention given to the matter of criminal activity overrides the more important feature, that is, in first place, the actual reason for gang emergence and persistence.

Street gangs are primarily low-income and underclass phenomena, and so, the impoverishment plays a major role in gang existence. Therefore, the rare idea of viewing street gang as a form of resistance and struggle for economic freedom appears to be justifiable, however, without using violence. Thus, the politicization of street gangs can be considered as a better way to confront the issue. After all, even though the successful fight for civil rights ensured minorities, who nowadays create the vast majority of gang members, their social stance, the economic situation of minorities is still seen as hopeless.

The general street gang concept leaves aside the fact that gangs may have a positive impact on their members, as suggested by the gang-as-positive-mechanism

philosophy. However, this approach is said to be controversial, because of its rather ideological then realistic nature. Nevertheless, this trend has been explored by a few scholars and has legitimate place in gang research.

In principle, the question of street gang control follows two paths of either intervention, or suppression. First one refers to community efforts, which led to introduction of several gang prevention programs. However, the impact of prevention programs was considered as counterproductive. Therefore more prospects were expected from community gang reform programs, these require knowledge of gang structure, of types of gangs, of the relevant environment, of gang behavior and of members' responses to reform efforts. Without this knowledge reform programs tend to only increase gang cohesiveness.

On the other hand, the suppression, which partially implies a negative meaning, accounts for law enforcement form of gang control programs, which were created in reaction to increased gang-related crime.

Nevertheless, gangs are not a law enforcement problem. Putting more gang members in jail is not the answer to the gang problem. There needs to be a strategy involving local communities, not just law enforcement. In other words, every attempt to solve the problem of gang activity should be neighborhood-oriented, neighborhood-staffed and neighborhood-directed. However, it is important to mention, that it is not in community's power to much influence the main reasons for street gang appearance and prevalence

Besides community and law enforcement gang control programs, there are other ways of addressing the street gang problem. For instance, one of the alternative intervention approaches can be represented by music, art or film industry involvement. When gang members are asked to join a creative process, it allows them to enter and participate in different surroundings and activities. The contribution of these industries may also serve the other way round. As it happen in case of the intervention of a rapper, actor and activist Tupac Shakur, who wrote up so-called "Code of THUG LIFE" together with help from other OGs. It is a set of do's and don'ts that every gang member should obey. It was sign by rival gang members of Crips and Bloods within the Gang Truce in 1992.

Last of all, it is crucial to point out that street gangs are primarily by-product of partially incapacitated communities. Therefore, they will continue to emerge despite all

the efforts, until the state representatives dedicate state resources to improve social situation in affected areas. Unless the economic and social certainties are met, there is no rightful reason to believe that the gang problems will disappear.

Resumé

Předmětem této bakalářské práce je ve stručnosti přiblížit a shrnout problematiku pouličních gangů ve USA. Cílem pak je vytvořit ucelený přehled několika zásadních oblastí studia vývoje a působení (činnosti) tohoto kulturního fenoménu.

Představa o tom, jak se gang vyznačuje, se liší názor od názoru. Někteří si pod tímto pojmem představí hloučky mladých lidí, kteří se potulují v sousedství, jiní v gangech vidí zločinná uskupení, který kolem sebe šíří kriminalitu a násilí. Z důvodu zjevné nejednotnosti, co si vlastně pod slovem gang představit, je vhodné si tuto problematiku více rozebrat. Na základě rozlišení jednotlivých charakteristik pak bude snazší situaci pouličních gangů porozumět.

Studiem gangů se v minulosti zabývalo nemálo vážených odborníků, a to především z oboru sociologie. Samotné zkoumání gangů se v podstatě odehrávalo ve třech hlavních fázích. První období začalo už ve 20. letech 20. století a později vedlo k vytvoření tzv. Chicagské školy, hlavním představitelem této éry byl profesor Thrasher. Druhá fáze výzkumu proběhla v 50. až 60. letech a nesla se v duchu tzv. podkultur, tedy gangů, které vznikaly v reakci na prostředí ghetta a na život nižší třídy. Třetí období začalo v 80. letech a trvá až dodnes. Odborná veřejnost se v jeho průběhu potýká především se zhoršujícími se socioekonomickými příležitostmi nízkopříjmových skupin, pro které gang často představuje jediný způsob obživy.

Jak již bylo naznačeno, správné definování problému může výrazně přispět k jeho zvládnutí a postupně i k vyřešení. Proto bylo stanovení základní definice pouličního gangu pro odborníky hlavní prioritou. Avšak je tomu teprve nedávno, co došlo ke shodě na jejím přesném znění. Nicméně, rozhodnutí amerických a evropských špiček v příslušných oborech vedlo ke stanovení konsensu, na jehož základě je pouliční gang definován jako *jakákoli trvalá, na ulici orientovaná skupina mladých lidí, jejíž účast v nelegální činnosti se stala součástí identity skupiny*.

Nadále však existovali pochybnosti, že toto tvrzení je vhodné pouze pro vyjádření variant napříč gangy. V amerických odborných kruzích se uvažovalo nad možností vycházet ze základní definice, avšak s pozměněnými atributy, která by lépe odpovídala realitě amerických ulic.

Správné vymezení definice bylo obtížné už od samotného počátku výskytu pouličních gangů. Závěry, ke kterým vědci docházeli během posledních devadesáti let,

se velmi často zásadně rozcházel. Zatímco část definicí poukazovala na zapojení gangů v nelegální činnosti, další se o tomto aspektu nezmiňovaly a naopak upozorňovaly na skupiny, jejichž členové se rozhodují sami. Stále se však o pouličních gangech mluví jen jako o *neformálních* skupinách. Avšak tento přístup se změnil na konci 80. let, kdy se do diskuze o správné definici pouličních gangů vložily bezpečnostní složky. Záhy následovalo zavedení *právní* kategorie gangů, která měla za úkol lepší vymahatelnost trestné činnosti související s aktivitou gangů. Uplatňování tohoto právního předpisu policií a mediální pozornost, která se tomuto tématu v 90. letech věnovala, zapříčinily, že gangy začaly být širokou veřejností vnímány jen jako čistě zločinné a násilné organizace.

V odborné sféře se ukázalo být velmi přínosné vycházet z různorodosti gangů. Gangy tak bylo možné dělit do různých typů, a to v rámci typologie složení, chování (motivace) či rozsahu činnosti. Třeba právě Cloward/Ohlinova teorie příležitosti se odkazuje na typologii motivace jedinců, podle které se mladí lidé mohou dostat do kontaktu s jedním ze tří typů gangu: zločinného, konfliktního nebo ústupnického. Další rozdělení, rovněž na základě chování jedinců, odkazovalo na rozvoj drog-distribuuujících gangů, které postupně dosahují tří stádií, od tzv. odpadních, přes teritoriální až k organizovaným.

Avšak jako nejprogresivnější se jeví využití typologie složení gangů. Na jejím základě došla dvojice Klein/Maxson k definování výskytu pěti typů pouličního gangu: tradiční, neotradiční, stlačený, společný a specializovaný. Spojením s již existující základní definicí a se scénáři těchto pěti typů gangu došlo ke stanovení přijatelné *pracovní* definice, která označuje pouliční gang jako jakoukoliv trvalou, na ulici orientovanou skupinu mladých lidí, jejíž účast v nelegální činnosti se stala součástí identity skupiny a je v podstatě popsána scénáři gangů obsažených v této části.

Neodmyslitelnou součástí každého problému tvoří jeho minulost, neboli, jak se tento problém vyvíjel. Historie ve vývoji pouličních gangů představuje neméně důležitý faktor. Napomáhá nejen porozumět důvodům, které ke vzniku pouličních gangů vedly, ale rovněž k jejich řešení.

Dějiny pouličních gangů se v západních zemích začaly psát již v 17. století, avšak zmínky o nich existují už mnohem dříve. Co se týče jejich činnosti v USA, první záznam se datuje roku 1783. Avšak pouliční gangy, jak je známe dnes, se objevily až v 19. století. Jejich šíření se dá v podstatě shrnout do dvou hlavních fází. V první fázi

byly gangy utvářeny buď evropskými přistěhovalci (Severovýchod a Středozápad), anebo již existujícími mexickými obyvateli (Jihozápad). Zásadní okamžik ale přinesla až druhá fáze, která opět sestávala z další výrazné migrace obyvatel, Afroameričanů z Jihu.

Výskyt gangů na Severovýchodě a Středozápadě provázely obdobné rysy. Spojení přistěhovalectví a chudoby, obojí soustředěné do slamů ve středu města, mělo za následek ekonomický a sociální zmatek. Ve druhé fázi se s příchodem Afroameričanů začala k prohlubování socioekonomických problémů ve slamech navíc přidávat i rasová nesnášenlivost.

Na Jihozápadě stála za vytvářením gangů politická situace regionu. Původně mexické území, které bylo po ukončení války mezi USA a Mexikem připojeno ke Spojeným státům americkým, bylo místními (mexickými) obyvateli stále chápáno jako vlastní, které bylo jejich předkům ukradeno. Proto hispánské gangy, které v oblasti vznikaly, byly velmi silně teritoriálně zaměřeny. Za úkol si vytyčily chránit své sousedství a jejich členové prokazovali svému okolí (a gangu) naprostou oddanost.

Afroameričané, kteří do oblasti přibyli v poválečné době, se začali organizovat následkem rasové diskriminace a v komunitě sloužili coby bezpečnostní složky. V 60. letech, během povstání za občanská práva, se gangy začaly spolupodílet na politice Černých panterů. Další mezník v historii kalifornských pouličních gangů představovalo uskupení Crips, které se pokusilo navázat na revoluční hnutí 60. let. Avšak z důvodu nedostatku zdrojů, podpory, nedospělosti a pochopení nerealizovatelnosti jejich představ zůstalo jen u snah. Policejní brutalita při pronásledování a zatýkání členů Černých panterů vedla ke vzrůstu kriminality, která se záhy začala projevovat v mezirasových útocích. Nakonec boje vyústily v seskupení konkurenčního gangu Bloods. Crips a Bloods se stali nepřáteli doslova na život a na smrt.

Jak je už z historického přehledu patrné, pouliční gangy se nevěnovaly jen nelegální, ale i politické a sociální činnosti. Proto jejich organizační přeměna, kterou u některých gangů můžeme v posledních letech sledovat, není překvapivým trendem. Dochází tak k přerodu od tzv. gangsterismu k aktivismu, který lídrům gangů umožňuje stanout v čele komunity a stát se jejím vůdcem.

Studie zaměřené na organizační aspekty, politiku kultury a institucionální přeměnu gangů dopomohly k vytvoření sociologie gangů. Tento alternativní přístup ke studiu obrátil pozornost ke strukturální proměně gangů, na politicky a komunitu

orientované pouliční organizace a na jejich duchovní a politické postupy. Orientaci na politiku a komunitu dokládají rovněž okolnosti vzniku některých gangů. V případě Crips to byla snaha navázat na myšlenku hnutí za svobodu. Bloods sloužili jako ochránci komunity proti vnějšímu násilí (policii, rasové nesnášenlivosti). Nicméně zavlčení drog a zbraní do těchto komunit zhatilo veškeré snahy.

Málo známým faktem je, že s násilím, které souvisí s činností gangů, bojují nejen bezpečnostní složky, ale i pouliční aktivisté a samotné komunity. Aktivisté jsou často uznávaní členové sofistikovaných gangů, kteří se snaží pozměnit sociální, politickou a ekonomickou situaci jejich komunity. Velmi důležitá je pro ně znalost skladby a kulturních kodexů gangů. Ideový základ pro politickou činnost zpravidla, a je to paradoxem, získali během svého uvěznění a jejich politické záměry se můžou zabývat otázkami na třech úrovních: na provinční, národní a mezinárodní. Pouliční aktivisté, kteří se rekrutují z řad gangů, působí v rámci svých komunit ve třech typech: (a) napravený člen gangu – představuje bývalého člena gangu, který se snaží pomoci ostatním členům gangu dostat se z ulice, (b) původní gangster (OG) – je stále napojen na gang a snaží se přivést k politické činnosti i další členy gangu, (c) člen gangu – věří, že samotný gang lze změnit a zpolitizovat.

Vývoj pouličních gangů je zasazen do kontextu komunity, v jejímž okolí se vyskytuje. Sociologové si záhy správně uvědomili, že to jsou právě určité charakteristické znaky jednotlivých komunit, jež mají na rozvoj gangů ve svých sousedstvích největší podíl. Avšak ještě než se začal samotný výzkum komunit, bylo třeba si přesně vytyčit, co se komunitou vlastně míní. Současná vymezení, která byla založená na uměle vytvořených označeních, jako například čtvrť, obvod či okres, měla podle odborníků za následek omezené chápání sociálních procesů spojených s problémovým chováním mladých lidí. Hlavním cílem se tak stalo hledání znaků, které komunity sdílejí, a které by mohly být využity v plánech a strategiích na řešení problematiky gangů.

Studium charakteristik komunit se skládá ze dvou hlavních skupin: strukturální předpoklady (v úvahu přichází velikost lidské populace a teorie zabývající se nejnižší sociální vrstvou) a procesy v rámci komunit (jedná se především o formální a neformální sociální vztahy mezi místními obyvateli. Za zmínku rovněž stojí rasové či etnické složení společenství; rozdíly v systémech gangů v rámci venkovských

a městských komunit; a nakonec, pojetí, které bere v úvahu dobu začátku problémů s gangy jako způsoby třídění komunit na: rodící se versus chronické.

Pouliční gangy představují v oblastech jejich výskytu závažný problém, který se často projevuje paralizací celé oblasti. Co by se mohlo jevit jako neúčinnější v intervenci do problematiky pouličních gangů, je patrně vyřešení sociálních a ekonomických nejistot, které vedou k výskytu a šíření gangů. To však záleží na ochotě politických představitelů.

Je zřejmé, že problematika pouličních gangů v Americe je velmi obsáhlé téma, které je možné studovat na základě nejrůznějších oblastí zájmu. Ať už se jedná o teoretický, historický, politický, či společenský rozměr, toto téma toho má hodně co nabídnout.

Annotation

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The nature of this bachelor thesis lies in an effort to sketch the issue of American street gangs. It is divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents not only wide variety among individual definitions and types of gangs, but also the divided approach in their studies. The second one follows the historical overview of gangs on the US territory, approximately from 1860s to 1990s. The third chapter looks into the gang's ability to create and participate in local politics. And finally, the fourth chapter explores the context of community characteristics to attract gang activity. This thesis represents a brief guide of the activity and current gang situation in North America.

Anotace

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Podstatou této bakalářské práce je přiblížit problematiku pouličních gangů v Americe. Práce je rozdělena do čtyř kapitol. První kapitola představuje nejen širokou rozmanitost, jež existuje jak mezi jednotlivými definicemi a typy gangů, ale rovněž tak i v přístupech k jejich studiu. V druhé kapitole je zkráceně obsažen historický vývoj gangů na území Spojených států, a to v rozmezí od přibližně 60. let 19. století až do 90. let 20. století. Třetí kapitola se zabývá schopností gangů vytvářet a spolupodílet se na politice svého nejbližšího okolí. Čtvrtá kapitola pak zkoumá spojitost typických rysů komunity a její schopnost přivábit činnost gangů. Snahou této práce je představit stručného průvodce činností a současnou situací gangů v Severní Americe.

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