



Drawing Boundaries or Drawing Weapons? Neighborhood Master Status as Suppressor of Gang Violence

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Abstract

Criminological scholarship on gangs has documented that attempts to take over territory and drug markets under the control of another gang is a primary motivation of inter-gang violence. However, little is known about situations where competition over territory and drug markets comes from *within* the territory, or about instances where gang competition *does not* lead to violence between criminal groups. Drawing on over 140 interviews and over nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Canada’s oldest social housing project—Regent Park—this article describes and analyzes the changing nature of the neighborhood’s gang landscape as a result of neighborhood redevelopment. In particular, it examines why the emergences of a rival gang within Regent did not incite violence as the literature would expect. The article outlines how the emergence of a new rival gang within a territory previously dominated by established criminal groups did not result in the type of violence, in part because the two groups shared a “master status” of being Regent residents, which served to buffer inter-gang violence. Further, it argues that instead of drawing weapons, the established criminal groups expressed their frustration with the loss of their territorial monopoly to emerging groups by morally distinguishing themselves from the new groups. This article concludes by casting a scholarly spotlight on the means through which boundary work develops between criminal groups, and how cultural contexts affect identities and discourses in physical space.

Keywords Gangs · Gang Violence · Disadvantaged Neighborhoods · master status · boundary work

Street gangs have been documented as a typical fixture of life in many depleted, impoverished, and often racialized inner-city neighborhoods across North America (Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Comack et al. 2013; Harding 2014). Often viewing their existence as an embodiment of the neighborhood (Garot 2007; Grannis 2009), many gangs pay tribute to their locality by naming

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themselves after their neighborhood or particular streets (Adamson 1998; Bucerius 2014; Vigil 1988), or by otherwise giving back to their communities by providing residents with material or financial resources, and even serving as agents of informal social control (Papachristos et al. 2013; Pattillo 1998; Sobel and Osoba 2009). In fact, a gang's identification with a specific turf or territory can be so strong that scholars consider it to be one of the gang's most defining elements (Aldridge et al. 2011; Brotherton and Barrios 2004; Moore 1991; Spergel 1984).

The neighborhoods in which gangs form and operate generally constitute, in whole or in part, the gang's turf or territory, and comprise the gang's primary financial means of gang sustenance (Hagedorn 1994; Papachristos et al. 2013). The greatest advantage of a gang's relationship to their neighborhoods is their access to and control of this turf, particularly in regard to drug sales. Since the major illegal enterprise of most gangs is drug trafficking, especially in impoverished, minority communities (Curtis 2003; Densley 2014, 520), gangs benefit from the territorial control of these underground markets, often imposing monopolies to ensure they are the sole benefitters from criminal enterprises within the area (Skolnick 1990, 5; Varese 2010). As such, protecting gang turf is crucial for gang members, and turf wars are often motivated by financial competition—essentially, conflicts about who *can* and who *should* make the most money from the neighborhood in question (Skolnick 1990; Toy 2011).

The intimate relationship between gang identity and its locality—the neighborhood, its turf, barrio, or block—often mandates that any perceived or actual threats need to be met with strong resistance and defense of territory (Decker 1996; Densley 2012; Horowitz 1983; Papachristos et al. 2013). The vehement “protection” of the locality is often the primary motivation for gang warfare, and gang members even rationalize this violence as a demonstration of “love” for the places they come from (Hagedorn and Macon 1988; Rodgers 2002, 5). Though the motivations behind gang wars can vary, they generally involve *attacking* or *protecting* a neighborhood (Rodgers 2002, 5), demonstrating that locality is a primary precursor of gang violence. This feature of gang membership has not been studied to the same level as drug-motivated violence, but has a noted place within scholarly debates. For instance, Decker (1996, 245) writes, “Gangs have a strong spatial structure; they claim particular turf as their own and are committed to its ‘defense’ against outsiders. The prospect of a rival gang ‘invading’ their turf and violating its sanctity is likely to evoke a violent response, leading to the spatial clustering of violence.” These “neighborhood beefs”¹ can be long-lasting and intergenerational, to the point where modern-day combatants may have no knowledge about the original cause of the conflict (Harding 2010, 33), demonstrating the deeply ingrained commitment to territorial “defense” in many of today’s inner-city neighborhoods.

Existing research on this topic is scattered with accounts of gang violence stemming from competition and battles over territory, where one gang is typically portrayed as “invading” another’s turf (Maxson 1999; Toy and Stanko 2008; Vargas 2014). Some research demonstrates that gangs can peacefully co-exist within the same neighborhoods. For example, Goddard (1992) notes that four major gangs and a number of “subgangs” occupied the same area without conflict, though they maintained distinct territorial boundaries—again, demonstrating the importance of territorial monopolization. Schelling’s (1971) work also confirms that gangs may split up territories or markets, where they still “monopolize” a territory,

¹ Neighborhood beefs need not always be associated with “gangs.” Sullivan (2005, 181) warns about this generalization/distinction, and found that beefs stemming from, or related to, area of residence may not be exclusively related to gangs, but to “blocks” or “crews.” Further, the beefs can affect *all* youth residing in an area, irrespective of their willingness or “participation” in the beef or criminal involvement (Harding 2010, 45).

although their territory becomes smaller. Additionally, Phillips (1999) documents how Chicago gang members frequently associated with African American Crips with the same neighborhood, and attributed the lack of animosity between the racialized groups to the fact that they “had grown up in the same area, gone to school together—and that there was never any reason for them not to get along” (345). Phillips also argues that a surprising number of racialized gangs get along in many gang neighborhoods, finding it mutually beneficial to engage in illegal business together and back each other up at times (346). While it is certainly not unheard of for gangs to peacefully co-exist within the same neighborhood, in accounts of peaceful coexistence, it is clear that territorial boundaries are firmly drawn and adhered to or, competition between the gangs over territory and financial gain is a non-issue. In the majority of accounts where conflicts over territory exist, the literature predicts an eruption in gang warfare.

However, little is known about what happens when new gangs emerge *within* (as opposed to coming from outside) the neighborhoods or territories previously occupied by other gangs, thereby creating intra-neighborhood competition for status and resources (Brotherton and Barrios 2004). In this article, I engage with this research question. I draw upon ethnographic data to demonstrate how the shared “master status” (Hughes 1945, 357) of neighborhood residency helps to suppress inter-gang violence. In this case, competition over turf and drug dealing between two competing gangs in Toronto’s *Regent Park* (herein referred to as Regent) neighborhood did not culminate in violence, but was characterized by Michèle Lamont’s (1992) extension of “boundary work.”

This article proceeds as follows: First, I describe gangs in Canada and Toronto, and move towards a description of Toronto’s Regent Park neighborhood, its “gang problem” and its ongoing neighborhood redevelopment. I then present my methodology and explore how the emergence of a new Somali Canadian gang on the turf of existing Caribbean Canadian gangs sparked competition—yet surprisingly, not violence—between the two groups over drug-dealing territory. I argue that the gangs’ shared “master status” of neighborhood residency suppressed inter-gang violence, with Regent’s established gangs instead dealing with the loss of territory control by drawing distinctive “us vs. them” moral symbolic boundaries between themselves and the new Somali gang. I conclude with a call for future research to further examine competition over gang turf in different settings to further unmask the complexity of inter-gang dynamics and analyze the potential of neighborhood identity in suppressing gang violence, particularly in relation to criminal groups operating within the same milieu.

Gangs in Canada

Although gangs are not a new phenomenon in Canada (see Rogers 1945), information on gangs in the Canadian context is relatively scant. The primary complication is that official statistics are almost nonexistent. Canadian police do not typically release gang or neighborhood-crime statistics, limiting our ability to make meaningful cross-national comparisons.² However, in 2002, Canadian police agencies identified 484 different youth gangs within the country (Astwood Strategy Corp. 2004), which pales in comparison to

² Another critical limitation is that only a small number of Canadian criminologists undertake empirical research exploring gang and neighborhood violence in the Canadian context.

the estimated 21,800 gangs in the U.S.³ that same year (National Gang Center 2004). Nevertheless, law enforcement agencies across the country and the Correctional Service of Canada consistently report *increases* in gang membership, gang violence, homicides and rivalries, both on the street and within correctional institutions (Chettleburgh 2007; CSC 2012; Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson 2008; Statistics Canada 2016). In fact, in 2016, almost 1 in 4 homicides in Canada were gang-related (Statistics Canada 2017), signifying that gang violence is a legitimate and pressing problem in Canadian society.

Concerns over gang violence are particularly salient in Toronto, which had the highest number of gang-related homicides across Canada in 2005, 2008, and 2016 (Statistics Canada 2006, 2009, 2017). In 2016, Toronto also had the highest number of gang-related homicides committed with a firearm in Canada, contributing to fears over growing gun violence in the city (Statistics Canada 2017). Much of Toronto's gang activity has been attributed to several of its Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) projects (i.e. Regent Park, Moss Park, Lawrence Heights, Jane-Finch, Gallo-way, Malvern), which news media often portrays as hotbeds for gang activity (Toronto Sun 2012; see also Lindgren 2009; O'Grady et al. 2010). Despite limited data to confirm such associations, TCHC residents have been found to be 4-5 times more likely to be killed than Torontonians living elsewhere. Further, although TCHC residents comprise less than 7% of city residents, over 18% of city-wide homicides occurred on TCHC property (most were shootings) between 2007 and 2009, which rose to 22% in 2011, with 35% of the city's shootings occurring on or near TCHC property (Davis and Appleby 2011; Freeze 2014).⁴ Further, ethnographic research has uncovered that some of this gun violence can be attributed to longstanding, neighborhood "beefs" between gangs from different TCHC projects, oftentimes culminating in neighborhood shootouts (Berardi unpublished; Urbanik and Haggerty 2018).

Regent Park, Toronto

Like other Toronto residents, I grew up exposed to stigmatizing news media and popular representations of Regent as a dangerous "ghetto." Erected in the 1950s, Regent is Canada's oldest and—until its restructuring—was its largest social housing project, with the neighborhood's 69 acres entirely devoted to social housing. As a result of limited investment in the neighborhood's physical infrastructure, the subsequent deterioration of its housing stock, and growing racialized poverty, it soon amassed a near-mythical reputation as a decrepit neighborhood plagued with crime, violence and other social ills. Media representations branded it as "thoroughly ghettoized" and "a poster child for poverty" (cited in Purdy 2003, 46), and many Regent Parkers described neighborhood life as mirroring the struggles of ghettos in the United States.

Demographic information supports such associations. Up until 2005, the two census tracts the neighborhood covers comprised the lowest and second lowest income census

³ Canada also has significantly lower rates of homicide, gun violence, and gang homicides than the USA.

⁴ This data was reported obtained via a Freedom of Information Request.

tracts in Ontario.⁵ By 2006, almost 68% of residents lived below the low-income cut off line, unemployment rates doubled the rest of Toronto (TCHC 2007), and almost 22% of households required major repairs (Horak and London 2010, 7). The neighborhood was also extremely racialized, with almost 80% of residents self-identifying as “visible minorities” and 78% being foreign born, predominantly arriving from the Caribbean, Africa, and Eastern and Southern Asia, respectively (Horak and London 2010, 6). This racialization was particularly prominent among young people. Of the 1700 youth, 91% of 15-19-year olds identified as visible minorities (Statistics Canada 2010). Given that “gangs emerge from the long-term struggles of a community against social suffering” (Brotherton 2015, 16), the rise of neighborhood gangs and violence in Regent was perhaps unsurprising. Between at least 1988 and 2003, Regent had the highest homicide rate in Toronto (Thompson 2009), which the news media attributed to spikes in gang violence. For years, news coverage of Regent has been dominated by depictions of poor, young Black males as violent gangbangers, perpetuating and being victimized by gun violence, painting Regent’s gang problem with a “Black” brush. This was exacerbated by the moral panic about the “Jamaicanization of crime” in Toronto sparked by the Toronto police and local media (Mosher and Akins 2015; Tator and Henry 2006).

My perceptions during my first day in the neighborhood were informed by many of these stereotypes and media depictions of Regent. The buildings were decrepit, windows were broken or boarded up, graffiti and memorials for youths lost to gun violence decorated the sides of buildings, rap music played loudly from cars in parking lots, and residents hung out on the front steps of their townhouses, often sharing a joint or beer with their neighbors. Within just a few hours of being in the neighborhood, I witnessed a young man drawing a gun and pointing it at another man’s head as I walked by, an altercation—that I later learned to be—between local gang members. The violence and victimization that characterized its reputation was associated with the struggles faced by neighborhood residents, and neighborhood youth in particular. In a Regent documentary—*Invisible City*—one schoolteacher exemplified this, explaining “you know you’re a product of the projects when you’ve been to more funerals than you’ve been to weddings” (see Davis 2009).

However, as is typical with news media accounts (Simmons 1993) the struggles facing minorities in the neighborhood and the reasons for the decay—namely, structural disadvantage, concentrated and generational poverty, unemployment, racial profiling and police brutality leading to police mistrust, and a lack of investment into the maintenance and upkeep of property—were rarely conveyed to those outside of the neighborhood. Such news coverage cast an extremely stigmatizing light on the majority of Regent youth—and Black youth in particular—who had no involvement in gang life or criminality. Further, many of the neighbourhood’s positive elements, namely a strong sense of community cohesion amongst residents, and commitment to local activism that I witnessed, a steadily increasing rate of high school completion, a plethora of well-regarded community programs, and many youth succeeding in academic, professional, and musical careers, I could only uncover through extended first-hand experience, demonstrating the large disconnect between *internal* and *external* representations of the neighborhood (Thompson et al. 2013).

⁵ Both these census tracts extend into neighborhoods that border Regent Park, which are much more affluent and therefore likely “improve” the demographical portrait of the neighborhood itself.

The Regent Park Revitalization

Regent's "gang problem" contributed to its selection as Canada's first social housing complex to undergo neighborhood restructuring, referred to as the Regent Revitalization.⁶ Championed as a means to de-concentrate poverty, and consequently, expunge its related "social ills" such as crime and violence (Wilson 1987), comparable restructuring initiatives have become popular in North America and Europe. Neighborhood redevelopment essentially involves demolishing and rebuilding severely disadvantaged areas into mixed-income spaces, where middle-class residents live alongside low-income residents in gentrified areas (Crump 2002). Efforts to artificially engineer "social mix" (Wilson 1987) in Regent and transform it into a "mixed-income, mixed-use community," means that about 63% of the new townhouses and condominiums are now sold on the private market (Toronto Community Housing Cooperation 2015). Some scholars have also examined the effects of gang-displacement stemming from gentrification on gang violence and drug trafficking, revealing that displaced gangs relocate to new turf and violently try to continue drug sales (Hagedorn and Rauch 2007, 451; Popkin et al. 2000; Venkatesh et al. 2004).

The revitalization began in 2005 and is slated for completion by 2020 (TCHC 2016). Thus, the social and physical engineering process was already underway when I entered the field in 2013, with many middle-income residents having moved into Regent and many social housing residents having been temporarily, or permanently displaced to other social housing complexes across Toronto. It is important to appreciate the neighborhood's substantive ongoing changes in order to gain a full understanding of the context in which local residents found themselves during my research. Although the mixed-income model was expected to reduce local levels of crime and violence (Katz 1993; Wilson 1987), news media maintain that "gangs, drugs, and guns still rule in Regent Park" (Warmington 2013). Many high-profile shootings of, and related to, Regent Park's young Black men support this claim. During the course of my research, several of my participants were shot at, and a few of them were killed. In fact, Regent's gun violence was so frequent in 2015, that my university almost suspended my research (Urbanik forthcoming).

Methodology

My interest in the topic of this article emerged during data collection for a separate project where I recruited and interviewed Regent residents about their experiences of the revitalization in the summer of 2013. Although most of the residents I interviewed were law-abiding citizens, I increasingly came into contact with individuals who were clearly involved in, or in charge of, Regent's criminal underworld. These men were immediately curious and suspicious of who I was and what I was doing in their community, watching me intently during my first few weeks in the area. Concerns that I was an undercover police officer actually expedited the formation of relationships with the neighborhood's major criminal players as they quickly approached and questioned me about what a young white woman

⁶ "Revitalization" is the official term used to describe the neighborhood's ongoing redevelopment, though some may suggest that the term is just a euphemism for "gentrification," now "a dirty word to developers, politicians, and financiers" (Smith 2002, 445) and forced displacement of lower-income ethnic minority residents. In the case of Regent Park, both of these terms are applicable, and my participants perceived that their neighborhood was being gentrified, and even suggested that the effects of the "revitalization" were masked through its verbiage (see Smith 2002).

was doing roaming the streets of a “ghetto” like Regent by herself. In those situations, I explained that I was conducting interviews on resident perceptions and experiences of the revitalization, and would be recruiting participants for the next few months. I eventually got the sense that both the criminal and law-abiding residents were satisfied with my intentions and enthusiastically supported my data collection efforts.

My initial contact with the neighborhood’s drug dealers and gang members was limited to short greetings as I passed their so-called “chill spots”—a basketball court, a place behind an ice rink, and the school yard—where the men would sit together smoking weed, drinking, selling drugs, playing dice/cards for money, freestyle rapping, or shooting hoops. As the weeks passed, some of the men talked with me at greater length. Initially these were attempts at flirtation, which ceased over time (Bucierus and Urbanik 2018), and it soon became clear that they were just as curious about me as I was about them. I began spending more time in-between my scheduled interviews hanging out with them as they enjoyed the warm days and worked the vibrant summer drug trade. Given this unexpected level of access into the neighborhood’s criminal underworld and my growing familiarity with these men, I became interested in understanding the revitalization’s effects on the neighborhood’s criminal milieu on a much deeper level. Thus, I decided to make Regent the site of my doctoral fieldwork, and I initiated more sustained ethnographic research which I combined with informal interviews, since a mixed method approach would be the best avenue for understanding their lived realities (Brewer 2000; Maxwell 2012).

To that end, I spent the summers of 2013, 2014, and 2015 conducting interviews and ethnographic fieldwork in Regent. For approximately three months each summer, I spent 5–8 hours a day, 5–6 days a week in Regent, partaking in “deep hanging out” (Geertz 1998) to more fully understand the neighborhood’s criminal dynamics. I adopted the perspective that “everything is data” (Dunn 2009, 280), meticulously taking field notes on informal conversations with participants, neighborhood spaces, events, community meetings, and situations that arose.

As is common in many urban ethnographies, I had key participants with whom I spent most of my time in the field. These individuals changed from year to year between the two criminal groups described below. This analysis is based on the summer of 2015, which I spent with the Caribbean Canadian group. This group consisted of about 10 men between the ages of 18–46, although most of the men were approximately 25 years old. All but one of the men were racialized minorities, either of “Caribbean” (specifically, Jamaican), Guyanese, or Trinidadian descent.⁷ Most had lived in Regent their entire lives, and they dominated much of the gang activity in the area prior to the emergence of a new “Somali” gang—*The Young Soldiers*.⁸ The Caribbean men were deeply embedded within the neighborhood’s social structure, oftentimes having most of their immediate and extended families living in the area. Some of these men were referred to as “Old(er) Heads”—a term used by both law-abiding and criminal residents to describe older gang members, oftentimes in surprisingly positive ways (Urbanik et al. 2017). Although my initial access to Regent’s major criminal actors was through the Somali group, given their increasing involvement in Regent’s rap scene (Urbanik and Haggerty 2018) my opportunities for interaction with my Somali participants dwindled in 2015. Thus, this analysis only speaks to the perspectives of my Caribbean-Canadian participants.

⁷ The umbrella term of “Caribbean” was used to refer to members of Regent’s existing criminal groups.

⁸ Gang name changed to protect identity. Members of this group comprised my second set of key participants, especially during the summer of 2014. This gang is comprised of males between 16 and 24, most of which are either first or second generation Muslim immigrants mostly from Somalia, though some are of Eritrean, Ethiopian or Djibouti descent, though they were identified by many criminal and law-abiding residents as “Somali.”

Both the Caribbean and Somali groups were similar in size, although members of the Somali group were younger (16–24 years old), had less established street reputations, were less armed, and as a result, were less capable of serious/organized violence than the Caribbean groups. While the Somali groups increasingly resorted to violence for criminal and reputational purposes, the Caribbean groups in Regent were still more proficient of violently responding to individual or group threats. This was evidenced by the violence that the groups were responsible for and/or victimized by, with violence by the Caribbean groups being much more brazen, high-profile and serious than violence attributed to the Somali group. Some of my participants had clean criminal records, while others had many convictions associated with drug trafficking, weapons possession, gun violence, gang membership, and even first-degree murder. During the course of my research, several members of the Caribbean and Somali groups were incarcerated, some were badly beaten or stabbed, and a few were murdered, though reportedly *not* by members of Regent Park's opposing gangs.

I became particularly close with a few members of the Caribbean Canadian group, who insisted that I “roll with” them so that I could get the “real story” of Regent. Extant research has documented the importance of enthusiastic and open key participants in conducting ethnographic work (e.g., Bourgois 2003; Bucerius 2014), so their insistence on showing me the “true” Regent was encouraging. Once we established a mutually trusting research relationship (Maher 2000), I devoted the entire summer of 2015 to spending time with them. My days primarily consisted of sitting around and talking to the men as they hung out at a neighborhood basketball court that served as their “home base,” where they played basketball, gambled, drank, and smoked weed. This basketball court was also where they sold crystal meth, powder cocaine, Oxytocin, Percocet, marijuana and crack to customers from within and outside the neighborhood. The men vehemently opposed the revitalization's “destruction” of the spaces where much of their collective memory was based and spent most of their time in the narrowing, still un-touched areas of Regent (see also Fraser 2013). Their decisions about where to “post up” (hang out) were also informed by their unwillingness to “mix” with middle-class homebuyers, who they (and other residents) saw as “colonizing” their neighborhood, intentionally separating themselves, and not respecting local norms (Bucerius et al. 2017; see also Elias and Scotson 1994). Some of the men were aspiring and talented rappers, heavily involved in Toronto's rap scene (Urbanik and Haggerty 2018), which meant that I also spent many hours hanging out in a makeshift rap studio while the men recorded and produced their music. On the rare occasions that they ventured outside of Regent (usually to acquire food, alcohol, rolling papers, or to visit neighboring housing projects), I would “shadow” them (Kusenbach 2003). In order to “fill in the biographical meanings of observed interactions” (Gubrium and Holstein 2002, 85), I complemented my observations with informal interviews, directly asking them about aspects of their lives that I did not fully understand from my observations alone.

The findings presented here stem from the participant observation and the 143 interviews I conducted with neighborhood residents between the summers of 2013–2015. Existing research has highlighted the importance of building rapport prior to conducting formal interviews (Venkatesh 2002). Thus, the bulk of the data in this article is derived from ethnographic observation and interviews conducted with the neighborhood's major criminal players in the summer of 2014, and overwhelmingly the summer of 2015. Initially, I relied on a semi-structured interview guide, but the interviews became more open ended with time. Interviews were anonymized, digitally recorded, subsequently transcribed, and coded using Nvivo 10.

Different Players, Same Roots, Fair Game?

My research suggests that the gang landscape of Regent has undergone drastic changes since the onset of the revitalization in 2005. Throughout data collection, neighborhood residents expressed concerns about significant changes to the nature and preponderance of neighborhood violence, which they attributed to the emergence of new gangs (of predominately Somali Canadian background) on the turf of long-established neighborhood gangs (of predominately Caribbean Canadian background). My findings reveal that despite emerging competition between these groups, and the loss of monopoly over control of the Caribbean groups' turf, the established groups did not violently defend "their" territory—despite their undeniable ability to do so. Frequently noting that the Somali groups are "from the same hood" and "you don't shoot up your own hood," my Caribbean Canadian participants highlighted the importance of neighborhood as master status and as a deterrent to inter-gang violence. Instead of turning to violence as an avenue of defense or to demonstrate their frustrations with their loss of status, the Caribbean Canadian gang members in my ethnography drew a distinctive "us vs. them" moral boundary between themselves and the newly formed Somali Canadian groups, shedding light on an important precursor to boundary work between criminal groups.

A Changing Gang Milieu

Despite the gangs in Regent historically being "Black," or more specifically—Caribbean, my research participants believed that the displacement of many neighborhood residents *changed* the ethno-cultural composition of the neighborhood's criminal actors, rather than *dissolving* the neighborhood's criminal element as was hoped by the revitalization planners. Having lived in the neighborhood his entire life, 31-year-old Jévon describes this change:⁹

They started this whole...revitalization bullshit or whatever they wanna call it¹⁰ 'cause they wanted to get rid of the all the crime and violence and drugs here. They saw it as a Black problem, right? And honestly, yo, like it was. A lot of the shootings and drugs and robberies were because of the Black guys that ran the block here. So they thought that by tearin' down the 'hood and movin' out those Black families that Regent would stop being so ghetto and violent. But...naw...I mean, look what's happening. They may have moved some of the Black gang guys out, but now we got these Muslim or Somali gangs up in this bitch!

Many of my participants were acutely aware and critical of the supposed failures of the "cleaning" up Regent, vis-à-vis the revitalization, particularly in regard to reducing local crime and violence. Jévon shared their concerns about the *consequences* of the shift in the neighborhood's criminal milieu, attributing much of the recent violence to these new groups: "Look, all the shootings and violence and heat 'round here right now is cause of the Somalians. It's all on them! You never know what could happen here now cause of how they go about their business. It's a lot more dangerous cause of these fools." Claiming that these new Somali Canadian groups are growing numerically, have many "beefs," and engage in intra-group

⁹ In order to protect the identity of my participants, all names used in this article are pseudonyms. In addition, in certain instances, other potentially identifying features (i.e. age) have been changed for my participants' protection.

¹⁰ This quote vividly demonstrates that many of my participants were not only displeased about the neighborhood's "revitalization," but also that they saw the term as a mere disguise for gentrification.

violence, many of my non-Somali participants were adamant that the preponderance and nature of violence of the Somali gangs was distinctively different from the criminal behavior of the Caribbean groups, which made them most fearful. Twenty-two-year-old Shawn exemplified concerns about the growing preponderance of neighborhood beefs, especially in regard to in-group fighting. He shares:

They're going to different neighborhoods [The Somali Canadian groups], starting a lot of shit. People are smiling in your face, eh? As soon as they hear "Yo, we can make this much money off of this person," "Yo, we'll go do it together" and then I'm gonna blast you so I can get the rest. Isn't that crazy? And we're all from the same neighborhood!

The rise of the new gangs was attributed to the weakening of the Caribbean Canadian groups that had previously dominated the neighborhood's criminal world as a result of the revitalization. Born and raised in Regent, 42-year-old Jermaine is a staple of Regent's criminal underworld, and put this into perspective for me:

Before this revitalization bullshit or whatever they wanna call it, WE ran shit! It was all us, the Black guys. This neighborhood was run by Jamaicans!...Most of the guys at the top were Black. But now, look around, girl. Where the Jamaicans at? We still here but most of us have been moved out. So now who do you see standin' around in packs all 'round here? Now, who do you see startin' all this shit and bringin' the cops in? It ain't really us no more. It's those fuckin' Somalis.

When talking about a recent spate of violence in Regent, 32-year-old Tamicka—a lifelong resident connected to Regent's criminal groups—reports: "You see, anytime you hear a shooting or anything 'gwan around here, just know it's a Somalian or one of them. It's the truth- they're the ones running Regent, they're the ones selling the drugs, they're the ones running Regent, it's no longer us, the Black people."¹¹

Jermaine and Tamicka's comments about the change in the visual ethno-cultural composition of the neighborhood's criminal actors were consistent with what I witnessed. Over the summers I spent in the neighborhood there was a marked shift in the ethnic and racial composition of the "guys on the block," with an increasing preponderance of younger Somali Canadian actors in the neighborhood's gang scene.

Changes to Gang Composition

My participants attributed the emergence of Somali Canadian gangs to the broader changes in the neighborhood as a result of the revitalization, most notably the relocation of many residents of Caribbean and Jamaican descent heavily involved in the local gang landscape to other social housing neighborhoods in Toronto.¹² When I asked 32-year-old Ricky why new gangs were forming in the neighborhood, he stated: "I would say they're coming up because the Old Heads aren't here. There's that space for them to come up because you know there's nobody here to protect, you know?" Residents believed that the displacement of the neighborhood's

¹¹ Despite the fact that my Somali participants are "Black," my non-Somali participants did not consider them as such given their Muslim background. For a discussion of how ethnic violence may expand gang membership and may affect relationships between gang and non-gang members, see Sanchez-Jankowski (2016, 171).

¹² Some Regent residents have been displaced to other social housing units in other sections of the downtown core. However, many residents have been relocated to social housing units on opposite ends of Toronto, many of which are over 1.5 hours away via public transit.

long standing criminal players prompted by the revitalization created a power vacuum where new groups could emerge onto the newly vacant criminal landscape (Urbanik et al. 2017).

Deeper probing, however, uncovered that the shift in the neighborhood's criminal milieu was more complex than the simple emergence of one group because another was displaced. *Some* of Regent's major criminal players were displaced to other sections of the city, which vacated positions in Regent's criminal underworld that opportunistic younger actors quickly rushed to occupy (Urbanik et al. 2017). In a later conversation in-between basketball games, Ricky clarified to me:

It's not like the Old Heads are ALL gone...Some of 'em are still here. They still out here hustlin', they still out here protectin' the hood, they still makin' money...The Old Heads are pissed though. These Somalian guys are taking their business. They're takin' their customers, they even movin' more product [narcotics] through the hood than the Old Heads...And on top of all that, they bringin' heat [from the police] to the hood.

By this point, I had spent considerable time hanging out with Regent's Older Heads, and knew that the Older Heads *continued* their criminal endeavors, and had not been pushed out of their positions by the relocation of their peers or by a complete takeover by Somali Canadian groups. Yet, Ricky's comment—consistent with the views of many participants—reveals that the come-up of the Somali Canadian groups was considered an encroachment on the territory previously dominated by Caribbean Canadian groups and sparked inter-group competition pertaining to finances and status. According to research, competition and conflicts over gang territory, and threats to identity and honor are the strongest predictors of gang violence (Hughes and Short 2005), and are a key way that gangs relate to, and interact with each other (Decker 1996; Rymond-Richmond 2006), with gang violence clustering at intersections of gang territories (Brantingham et al. 2012; Papachristos 2009; Tita and Radil 2011).

Given what we know about gang competition, we might expect that violence would erupt between Regent's established and the newly emerging gangs, yet it did not. I did not understand why the Older Heads who were still present in the neighborhood and were obviously upset with the emerging Somali groups, did not violently protect their turf despite being able to come out victorious. This became clear to me one afternoon. A couple of us were just sitting around near the Boardwalk as the guys enjoyed a beer and a joint, their favorite rap songs blasting from a cellphone speaker. One of the "leaders" of the Somali group sped through the Boardwalk in a Jaguar—a dangerous act given that many children played there. "Fuckin' Mali's man! No regard for nobody 'round here! Not for the kids, not for the grannies, not for the Old Heads. Nobody. They just do whatever the fuck they want" Chops said, shaking his head.¹³ Given the continued ability of the Older Heads to try and quell the existence of, or otherwise control, the behavior of the Somali gang, I continued to be perplexed at their lack of response to the groups, especially given their passionate disapproval of their activities. "So if you guys don't like what's happening, and you can do something about it, why haven't you?" I pressed. Surprised at my naivety, Luxx explained:

Look, we ain't fuckin' happy 'bout it, right? But at the end of the day, they from here... They're Regent Parkers, too. They came up with this 'hood. They don't follow the street code, and they do stupid ass shit, and some of them are pieces of shit - no doubt, but they

¹³ See Sanchez-Jankowski (2016, 25) for a discussion of how inter-ethnic friction begins through one group taking offense to another group's behavior and labelling it as crude and inferior, and how tensions build when such acts continue, thereby potentially resulting in inter-ethnic violence.

from here too. So we let them be. You shouldn't be shootin' up peoples from your own 'hood, even if they are competition!

The importance of “coming up in the same hood” was further clarified for me in a subsequent conversation with Ricky. The two of us were sitting on a bench outside one of the apartments that had been converted into a makeshift rap studio, waiting for some of the other guys to join us. I told him about my earlier conversation with Luxx, and asked what he thought about it. He shrugged, “They tryna take over Regent and peoples is super pissed about that. But like, we haven't started shootin' or robbin' each other or nothin' like that. I mean, they do that to each other, but we haven't pulled our burners [guns] on them.” I asked him to explain why that isn't the case. He shrugged, replying:

They seen what we seen, they been through what we been through. They grown up 'round us. They products of the same hood...It ain't like they from some other hood. They from Regent. But this is they hood too. They tryna hustle to make a living just like us. Every man's gotta eat. Don't matter if they Black, Somali, Asian, whatever.

Neighborhood as Master Status

Individual identities are constituted by a multitude of factors related to how others react and respond to them. Some of these characteristics are more influential and take precedence over or dilute the importance of other traits (Miethe and McCorkle 1997, 410). The significance of these traits is not static; that is, at certain points in people's lives, some traits become more important in fashioning one's self-identity than others. According to Hughes (1945), dominant characteristics that trump and neutralize other traits as they relate to a person's identity dictate the person's “master status” and may affect their treatment. For example, scholars have demonstrated how the master status of race, gender, class and even gang membership may result in differential treatment within the criminal justice system (Miethe and Moore 1986; Peterson and Hagan 1984; Wilson 1978; Zatz 1985, 15).

Sometimes less obvious characteristics—such as neighborhood affiliation—can constitute a person's master status. Apart from shaping friendship networks and affecting access to economic, social and cultural resources (Sampson et al. 2002; Shaw and McKay 1942), neighborhoods can also provide a strong sense of identity (Bucarius 2014; Fraser 2013; Schiffauer 2004). This sense of identity also often leads to residents drawing firm boundaries between their neighborhood and surrounding areas, and these socially-constructed boundaries are often well-known amongst neighborhood residents and work to separate notions of self and “other,” and may hinder inter-community solidarity (Douglas 1966; Fraser 2013, 2015). This may be particularly true for individuals (and especially young men) living in disadvantaged areas, where neighborhoods strongly influence group and identity formation and individual behavior patterns (Anderson 1999; Hannerz 1969; Liebow 1967). Most of the research exploring how neighborhood works as an important aspect of identity stems from work in the United States and South America. Despite limited explorations in Canada, it is clear that—at least for Regent's residents—neighborhood is an important aspect of identity formation.

My research demonstrates that for many residents, Regent is not just where they live, it's a *modus vivendi*, where the shared status of Regent Parker trumps other distinctions. This was true for criminal and non-criminal residents alike, who often emphasized their similarities as

“coming from the same place” as opposed to focusing on their differences in terms of the extent to which they were involved in crime. As noted above, Regent’s major criminal players believed that the shared status of neighborhood residency was integral in suppressing violence between two groups who differed in terms of ethno-cultural composition, and apparently also in “acceptability” of criminal behavior and “legitimacy” of violence. Despite the existence and *significance* of group differences that my participants continuously brought to my attention, it was their shared identity as Regent Parkers, including a shared history, shared struggles, and shared “hustle” that helped to buffer violence that one might predict would result from inter-group competition and conflict.

As a marker of identity, locale is quite important for criminally-involved and non-criminally involved young people and adults, particularly for those who are marginalized and are confined to their communities because of geographic immobility (Fraser 2013; Loader 1996). Because of my participants’ marginalization, it is therefore unsurprising that Regent became fused with their own identities, and that they also attributed this identity to the encroaching Somali-Canadian group. The “inside/outside dialectic” (Fraser 2013, 980) at play here has often been cited as the *cause* of gang violence. Yet my research demonstrates that both statuses can be at play simultaneously—insiders (shared neighborhood residency) and outsiders (competing gangs)—and this may work to *prevent* violence. For my participants, Regent was a real *and* symbolic space, and though they believed they had to vigorously defend the area from outsiders, my participants believed that it was only right to acknowledge other insiders’ claims to this space—even at their own expense. This phenomenon is certainly dependent on the particular sociospatial and demographic histories of specific neighborhoods, but is likely not unique to Regent Park. For example, Bucerius’ (2014) research on Muslim drug-dealers in Germany found that the men described themselves *as* the neighborhood, “we are Bockenheim” (69) and Fraser’s (2013) study of gang youth in Glasgow noted a similar phenomenon, with a youth claiming “A’hm Langview [I am Langview]” (977). These identifications enhanced group loyalty and discouraged intra-group violence, despite competitions for status within their respective groups, similar to the processes at play within Regent.

Insiders, Yet Outsiders—Drawing Symbolic Boundaries

While my participants did not try and violently suppress the new groups working on their territory, they repelled these new Somali groups in other ways. In particular, they turned to non-violent methods to express their frustrations; instead of drawing weapons, they drew stark distinctions between themselves and the emerging Somali groups. When talking about the Somali guys, 28-year-old Ty put it to me this way:

They have no respect. They’re crazy. They don’t care. They’re killers. Some are 13, 14, they aint scared to shoot. They don’t care who you are. They don’t care if you’re an Old Head. No respect man. The Blacks, they know what’s worth it and what aint. They THINK about it, they calculate. But these Somali kids? They don’t give a flying fuck. They shoot each other. You got boys jumping each other, guys from the same gang robbin each other, stabbing each other, setting each other up, like what happened to Fig.

Figure is a 16-year-old Somali male who was beaten into a coma by a group of men immediately after he exited a vehicle. Given that Fig was lured to the spot where he was beaten, neighborhood residents were convinced that he knew his assailants, and many believed

that his Somali best friends delivered the beating. My Caribbean participants pointed to Fig's victimization as yet another example of how the Somali groups were less legitimate and less honorable because they engaged in intra-group violence.

Jamal was one of the first to cite Fig's victimization as an exemplar of distinction between his Caribbean boys and the Somali group. I thought this was particularly interesting as Jamal was also one of the men most boastful about the violence he and his boys engaged in against "anyone who was actin' up." So I pushed him on this issue, asking how, in his opinion, the behaviors of the Somali groups are different from those of the Caribbean groups, Jamal angrily explained to me: "Yea, we did shit. Fuck, we still do shit! But we do shit differently! We ain't like these fuckin Somalis. We don't go after our own! We're loyal like that. Real shit." J-T chimed in:

Fuck yea, we couldn't have nobody runnin' up on us. That's why I said before—the Blacks, we were always packin' [carrying guns]. We still be packin'. But, we packin' for the right reasons, you know? We only go after those who need a little lesson, know what I'm sayin' (laughs). The Mali's round here though, they go after whoever. That's why we have respect 'round here and that's why they don't. Can't respect people who shootin' up the hood for no reason!

The objections to Fig's victimization at the supposed hands of his closest boys may initially appear laudable. My fieldwork however, revealed that apart from being somewhat more willing to use random violence—a factor most likely associated with their younger age (Balocchini et al. 2013; Casey et al. 2011; Feld 2008; Gardner and Steinberg 2005; Steinberg, et al. 2008)—the nature of the violence exerted by the Somali groups was not all that qualitatively different from the violence of, and between, members of the Caribbean groups. In fact, multiple residents alerted me to the fact that intra-group violence *did* occur prior to the revitalization, which is consistent with news media accounts and my Caribbean participants' proud display of scars from beatings and stabbings at the hands of some of Regent's other Caribbean men. And yet, my Caribbean participants seemed to gloss over this fact, though only when it suited their interests; bragging boastfully about their histories of violence and beefs (even intra-group or intra-neighborhood) when it made them appear "harder," yet drawing normative distinctions between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" uses of violence when it would save face for a group with diminishing power and status in the neighborhood. Indeed, it became clear that the value judgments of Somali groups on behalf of the Caribbean groups helped them rationalize and take the sting out of their dwindling positions.

Efforts by Caribbean group members to distinguish themselves from the Somali groups were not limited to the Somali's supposedly more reckless use of violence, but also included their drug trafficking patterns. On one of the cooler summers days, Chops, Andrew, and I were sitting in the laundry room of one of the old buildings trying to get warm after a long walk back from the beer store. I knew that many of the laundry rooms were used as ideal stash locations for narcotics, allowing dealers to have large quantities of drugs readily at hand for larger purchases or for days with high-sale volumes, and lessening the need to carry large quantities on their person, thereby reducing financial losses of potential robberies or more serious drug seizures and charges during police searches (see Bucierius 2014, 109). While sitting in the laundry room, Andrew started complaining about the garbage, saying that he was sick of the Somali guys leaving their trash where residents wash their clothing. I asked why he

thought the Somali groups were responsible and he explained that they had also began using the laundry rooms to stash their drugs:

I tell you, these Mali's man, they be choppin' [trafficking drugs] here, choppin' there, no regard for nobody. No regard for the people that been 'round here. See, us? We don't shit where we eat, know what I'm sayin'? We keep our business [drug trafficking] to ourselves. But, they? They ain't give a flyin' fuck about anyone who ain't from one of they own countries! And even then, they be sellin' their drugs by the Mosque with all the kids runnin' around—I seen it! Yo—tell her we seen that just the other day!

Chops nodded to confirm Andrew's account. This exchange was particularly interesting given that on multiple occasions, I witnessed my Caribbean Canadian participants selling drugs within the neighborhood, often with children of various ages within eyesight, from many of the laundry rooms, and even right outside the front doors of one of the neighborhood's churches. As such, attempts to distinguish themselves from the Somali groups on the basis of drug dealing behaviors that they themselves engaged in further exemplifies how selective memory, or, selective reporting, affected their accounts in an attempt to improve their self-image, and presentation to others in a climate of dwindling status, revealing how gangs construct their identity in relation to rivals (Papachristos et al. 2013, 5).

By providing a psychological explanation for identity formation via intergroup discrimination, social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986) illuminates why participants were so negative about the new groups in their neighborhood. Arguing that “pressures to evaluate ones' own group positively through in-group/out-group comparison lead social groups to attempt to differentiate themselves from each other” (1985, 16), Tajfel and Turner posit that the emphasis on differentiation is motivated by a desire to either achieve, or preserve “superiority” over an out-group (see also Hogg and Abrams 1988). Recent scholarship (i.e., Kefalas 2003; Lamont 2002; Newman 1999; Van Eijk 2011) has significantly expanded on the processes of identity construction through negative comparisons of the ‘out group.’

Criminological research has also documented how people draw symbolic boundaries between law abiding and criminal actors, as well as *amongst* criminal actors. This work casts a particularly interesting spotlight on how disadvantaged groups differentiate themselves from groups who are similarly deprived. For example, numerous studies of disadvantaged neighborhoods have found clear moral distinctions between law-abiding and criminally involved residents, albeit to various extents given complex neighborhood dynamics and relationships (i.e., Anderson 1998; Bourgois 2003). Studying sex workers in Brooklyn, Maher (2000) noted that the women drew distinctions between themselves on the basis of race/ethnicity, which allowed some groups to capitalize on their status and stereotypes associated with their classification. Philippe Bourgois (2003) suggests similar processes amongst Puerto Rican and Mexican drug dealers in East Harlem, who drew symbolic boundaries between each other to project their superiority, despite being similarly disadvantaged. Further, in a study of Muslim drug dealers in Germany, Bucerius (2014) found the dealers drawing distinctions amongst themselves based on notions of “purity” about the narcotics they sold, categorizing themselves as honorable dealers in contrast to “immoral” dealers.

Despite the smattering of criminological scholarship unmasking the boundary work that operates between criminal groups, little is known about *how* these symbolic boundaries emerge. My participants of Caribbean descent provided multiple reasons why the emerging groups are qualitatively different from them. Citing the use of violence, the initiation of neighborhood beefs, intra-group fighting, and drug trafficking patterns by Somali Canadian

gangs, Caribbean Canadian gang members vigorously distinguish themselves from the Somali groups in Regent. While there can be solid reasons for differentiating amongst criminal groups, the arguments put forth by the Caribbean Canadian gang members are ultimately inconsistent with their own criminal enterprises, since both groups engage in the *same types of violence and criminal activities*—drug dealing, robberies, intra-group assaults, physical rivalries with “beefing” neighborhoods, drive-by shootings, homicides, etc. It is not the case one gang is engaged in governing the territory while the other engages in ordinary crime, and yet, the Caribbean gangs have still maintained their dominance in the neighborhood. Thus, the Caribbean Canadian gangs navigate a double-standard, where they present their actions as virtuous while simultaneously denigrating the same behaviors when undertaken by Somali groups (Densley 2014, 526). Cohen writes “Boundaries enclose elements which may, for certain purposes and in certain respects, be considered to be more like each other than they are different” (2013, 14), which seems to be the case in Regent. When these similarities are brought to light, my Caribbean Canadian participants emphasize the supposed differences in the *nature* or “legitimacy” (though not necessarily type of) criminality the Somali Canadian groups supposedly engage in, as a basis for differentiating themselves from the Somali Canadian groups. Differentiating one’s gang from another on the basis of using only “legitimate” violence consequently marks one’s use of violence as more “honorable” or “legitimate,” thereby reducing the potential stigma attached to the use of violence by one’s group. Such differentiation and legitimization may be especially important in a context where status and reputation are being lost because of a period of instability given the neighborhood revitalization.

Undeniably, the revitalization’s impact on long-established gang structures within Regent (member displacement, shrinking territory, uncertainty, etc.), combined with the emergence of Somali Canadian groups who are now increasingly dominating Regent’s criminal milieu, has diminished the status and produced a compromised sense of identity amongst my Caribbean Canadian participants. In an attempt to resist and/or cope with this perceived or actual loss of status, my Caribbean Canadian participants were latching onto any point of comparison or departure for which they *could* control the narratives about them and their competition. These narratives allowed them to advance their standing in their own eyes, as well as in the eyes of others. Thus, in the context of Regent, drawing moral divisions was initiated by, and intimately related to, the loss of status experienced by Caribbean Canadian groups as a result of the instability of the revitalization, and less motivated by *actual* differences in the types and/or nature of violence and criminality in which the groups engage. Cohen (2013, 12) writes “not all boundaries, and not all the components of any boundary, are so objectively apparent. They may be thought of, rather, as existing in the minds of their beholders.” To some degree then, it is irrelevant whether there are *actual* differences in the behaviors of Caribbean and Somali criminal groups in Regent, as just being able to draw these symbolic boundaries certainly benefits those who hold these views—the Caribbean Canadian gangs—a situation that casts an exploratory light on the dynamics of boundary work amongst street gangs.

Some may suggest that my Caribbean-Canadian participants used the master status narrative to present a socially “legitimate” account of why they abstained from violently challenging the Somali-Canadian group to preserve social honor instead of admitting incapacity or fear. However, throughout my research, they frequently engaged in serious violence against neighborhood outsiders, and I even witnessed them “gearing up” to go “handle business” on several occasions. They also reasoned that they were shot at so frequently (including twice when I was in the area) because of outsider’s attempts to “get them back” for this violence.

Other residents and social workers also confirmed that they were still numerically larger and more armed than the Somali group, and could “take ‘em all out” if they truly wanted to. Accordingly, I trust the authenticity of their stories about why they did not engage in violence,¹⁴ especially since what I *heard* was consistent with what I *saw*. Nevertheless, narrative criminology argues that narratives are important *irrespective* of whether they are “true” accounts because they influence future action and *avoidance* of action (Presser 2009/2016; Sandberg 2010). Thus, irrespective of whether these are “objective” accounts of why my Caribbean participants did not initiate a gang-war with the Somali group, these accounts shaped their decisions to abstain from intra-neighborhood violence,¹⁵ and may have even had life-or-death consequences (see Presser 2016, 147). Hence, the *impact* of these stories matters more than whether they are “true” or “false” (Presser 2016, 139).

Conclusion

Most academic work exploring relationships between neighborhood gangs has examined this relationship through the lens of competition over turf and status as a catalyst for inter-gang violence. As such, little is known about how competing gangs relate to each other *outside* of violence. Given that street gangs are embedded within social networks with other gangs (Vargas 2014, 146), it is necessary for criminologists to uncover the diverse relationships amongst gangs, especially when competition over turf or status is at issue and yet does not instigate inter-gang violence. My research demonstrates the complexity of inter-gang relations, revealing the importance of neighborhood status as helping to suppress gang violence, and how drawing symbolic boundaries can help to mitigate the loss of status within a neighborhood. Additionally, findings from Regent highlight the amorphous nature of neighborhood gangs, and also the fluid and contextual nature of the distinction between insiders and outsiders; with my Caribbean participants on the one hand considering members of the new Somali gang as insiders, a situation which helps to suppress inter-group violence. On the other hand, they view the emerging Somali gang as different from them, essentially, as outsiders, allowing them to draw symbolic boundaries that help them maintain their own perceptions of status within the neighborhood. Further, these distinctions serve to further the “groupness” or collective identity of the Caribbean Canadian gangs. Hence, it remains to be seen whether this competition and loss of status will manifest itself violently in the future, since studies have found that ‘groupness’ exacerbates gang mentalities and behaviors (i.e. mutual protection), which is largely responsible for gang violence (Hughes and Short 2005; Short and Strodbeck 1965).

A cursory glance at criminological research on disadvantaged neighborhoods reveals that Regent Park is not an anomaly. Regent Park’s lived realities such as poverty, stigmatization, gang violence, and strong neighborhood loyalty largely mirror the experiences of those living in marginalized neighborhoods across Canada and the United States. Other areas in Canada have also achieved dubious notoriety for racialized poverty, territorial stigmatization and gang violence (Comack et al. 2013). Within Toronto, residents living in TCHC’s Lawrence Heights report similar experiences of immense neighborhood loyalty, neighborhood beefs and frequent gun violence as a result of neighborhood locality (Berardi unpublished).

¹⁴ See Polletta (2006, 176) for a discussion of how narratives of lower-status groups may often be considered less credible.

¹⁵ For other criminological examples of narratives explaining inaction, see Presser (2016, 139).

Given the similarity of the “hood” or gang experience—and its associated loyalty—across Canada and the United States, it is likely that the neighborhood as master status can trump other statuses such as gang affiliation, thereby reducing inter-neighborhood violence elsewhere. Hence, the findings of this research warrant further elaboration among criminologists—and gang researchers in particular—to explore factors preventing inter-gang violence associated with competition over turf and status, as well as to unmask not just the existence of symbolic boundaries between criminal groups but how, when, and why these symbolic boundaries are drawn. Perhaps ironically, gang scholars are more cognizant about what factors *cause* gang violence (namely competition over turf and territory), than the factors that *hinder* it. As a result, we often assume that the absence of gang violence demonstrates an absence of gang competition. My research however, illuminates that the relationship between gang competition and violence is not as linear as commonly believed, since inter-gang relations can be affected by other factors, which may even *override* desires to violently suppress encroaching gangs. Scholars studying violence should examine factors that *initiate* and *sustain* violence with analytic separation, since sometimes precipitatory factors remain, and yet violence ceases (Sanchez-Jankowski 2016, 143). Thus, if we are to gain a more nuanced understanding of non-violence between gangs, we should examine: a) whether the factor(s) originally suppressing inter-gang violence change over time; b) how this affects gang relations; c) whether these factors may be superseded by an *alternate* motivation(s) to restrict gang violence; and d) if a shared master status can be deployed to suppress *ongoing* gang violence.

In addition, this research raises important questions about how cultural context affects identities and discourses in physical spaces. In Regent’s cultural milieu, the collective identity of neighborhood residency was given primacy over other’s unwanted behaviors, but this was dependent on the socio-cultural fabric of the space itself. In other cultural contexts, what other less-obvious identities and discourses would trump “outsider” status and distinctions to the point of nullifying tangible and harmful consequences of said distinctions? Must “outsiders” align themselves with the collective identity to be awarded its privileges, a la Griswold’s (2004) identity construction? How are these statuses reliant on the intertwining of the minutiae of local social relations and broader political, economic and social dynamics of exclusion? How does the contestation of space via processes such as (but not limited to) revitalization and social mix affect the cultural contexts within which social identities are formed, hierarchized, and direct behavior? For disempowered residents, collective neighborhood identities serve as one of their most critical resources, enabling them to secure goods and services from other residents who respect their mutual experience. When collective identity weakens, what happens to these privileges, and what meanings will social agents construct and project onto those they interact with, and how will they come to interpret the meanings produced by others? How does gentrification affect the representation of space and belonging to insiders *and* outsiders, and do such representations serve as a resistance against spatial and social exclusion?

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