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The Policies and Policing of Gangs in Contemporary Spain. An Ethnography of a Bureaucratic Field of the State

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The Policies and Policing of Gangs in Contemporary Spain

An Ethnography of a Bureaucratic Field of the State

by Luca Queirolo Palmas

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1. Unthinking the *Gangs*¹

Over the last few years a developing interest in gangs has arisen as a consequence of the French *banlieue* explosion, the UK and Swedish riots and other phenomena concerning young migrants and second generations in Europe. According to Brotherton and Hallsworth, in the case of Great Britain,

by constructing the gang as a suitable enemy, complex social problems that have their origins in the way our society is organized are being translated instead into problems of law and order to which illiberal law and order solutions are then to appear logical and necessary [2011, 1].

Similar media panic processes and the depiction of gangs as scapegoats, have been documented in the case of the young *latinos* in Spain and Italy [Feixa *et al.* 2006; Queirolo Palmas 2009]. Moreover, research networks such as EuroGang [Klein *et al.* 2001] have been set up with the aim of observing the development of such phenomena in Europe, underlining analogies and differences with the American case

¹ This article comes from the research developed in the frame of *Yougang Project* (Gangs Policies: youth and migration in local contexts). The research was supported by a Marie Curie Intra European Fellowship within the 7th European Community Framework Programme. The text has been translated from Spanish by Teresa López (University of Lleida) and revised by Nicole Bosisio (Genoa University). For general findings see: Queirolo Palmas [2015].

study both in terms of groups' criminal characteristics as well as proposed solutions, which tend almost always to be of a repressive nature.

Despite the concept of gangs developed in the early years of sociology [Hagedorn 2009], its definition is not so widely shared; pioneer studies led by Trasher and the Chicago school provide an open representation of the phenomenon where conflict is only one aspect among other main elements incorporating "corpus spirit, solidarity, mood, group consciousness and attachment to territory" [Thrasher 1927, 46]. Klein [1971] instead has developed a definition, probably the most predominant among those currently in use, whereby criminal potentiality is considered to be the main feature of a gang; following Brotherton and Barrios, from an alternative perspective to the sociological and criminological mainstream, gangs can be observed as street organizations or

groups composed mainly by youths and adults from marginalized social classes whose aim is to provide members with a solid identity, a chance to be recognized at individual and collective level, a voice to challenge the dominant culture, a refuge from tensions and pressures of the neighbourhood and ghetto life and a spiritual *enclave* where new rituals can be generated and considered as sacred [Brotherton and Barrios 2004, 23].

In line with this perspective, resistance to subordination, mutual help and cultural recognition all become a means of interpreting and observing the daily behaviour of the gangs members.

However, the main focus of this article is not about the social working of youth gangs but rather the fabrication of gangs² as a social problem in Spain during the last decade. Therefore we attempt to interpret the genesis and transformation of the object-problem *gangs* from a theoretical perspective that revolves around, in an heterodox way, some classical categories of the Bourdieu's sociological thought: *field*, *capital* and *habitus*. Constructing a scientific object means breaking away from the academic *doxa* and common sense; generating this change in approach means to *un-think gangs*, to view them from behind and assume as object the work of construc-

² In the present text we use the word *gang* aware that it is an *etic* category, blurred by the social control agencies, which does not correspond to an *emic* language of the young members that prefer to talk about *chorus*, *group*, *nation*, *association*, *clica*, *family*, *organisation*. We will also use the *etic* term gang scene to highlight the fluid, turbulent and heterogeneous character of the memberships of street sociability. For an insight on gangs from a rhizomatic, versus an arboreal approach, see Hallsworth [2011]; for a theoretic overview about the topic, see Feixa [1998] and Scandroglia [2010]. If this article confronts mainly with agents in a bureaucratic field of the State, in the same research process I've developed an ethnography of street gangs – the clients of those agents – through the tools of visual sociology; the result is a documentary film (*Buscando Respeto*), freely accessible at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSMHicXO7F0>

tion of the gang-object, as problem and as target of intervention. The advantage of mobilizing this focus and these categories lies in the possibility to opt out from a pathological gaze on gangs, highlighting the social and political fabrication of the object: gangs are actors in a field among other powerful actors with more and different capitals, specific interests and fighting in order to impose a mode of action and forms of classification.

The mobilisation of the different agencies in Spain during the last ten years to highlight, eradicate, heal this object-problem has created expert officials from different state bureaucracies and their local frameworks (Autonomous Communities, Provincial Administrations, Municipalities, etc.), as well as models of relationship, cooperation and conflict between them. According to Bourdieu [1992] a bureaucratic field is a space where government and non-government agents struggle to control a field of practice (the *policies* and the *policing* about gangs, that is, the management, supervision, control and repression measures) through laws, regulations, funding, classifications and the production of suitable languages and codes. Each field, in turn, is defined by the specific capitals, by the betting and habitus of its players, by the faith that the game is worth playing by their rules, by the entry rights required from new players, by the fights between the dominant and those aspiring to be (*orthodoxy and heterodoxy*), by the construction of vision principles and division principles, by a topography of positions and stances, by the reference public (*the clients of the field*).

The specialised field that we study here emerges from the intersection of many bureaucratic fields (police, penal, social, educational, etc.) and experiences articulations, struggles and variable relations of force between their different agents (broadly speaking, between the State's *right and left hands*). The gangs – the whole gang scene in all its heterogeneity – are the public of this field, the clients, partly captive and partly resistant, towards which practices and discourses are addressed. The State is the ruling meta-field, constituting the policy guidelines and defining priorities and resources towards this specialised bureaucratic sub-field.³ How can this specialised field be located and studied? As Bourdieu shows us, on the one hand the boundaries of a field are the boundaries of its effects; on the other hand, agents and institutions are part of a field so far as they act and produce effects in it. We can imagine that this boundary is placed in the transformation of the gang scenario, in its autonomy and

³ Public officials mainly populate a bureaucratic field; nonetheless the habitus of *professionalism* that these agents often mobilise as rhetoric is always sensitive to the political relations at State level. State, through his political capital (decision about the importance of the specific bureaucratic field) and economic capital (resources and allocations assigned), acts on the birth, the reproduction, the transformation and, eventually, the death of his bureaucratic field. Agents fight in order to legitimate the importance of their practices and sustain some autonomy for the field; other scholars call this field devoted to the fabrication of a phenomenon as a problem-target the gang industry [Hallsworth 2013].

permanent turbulence, in a public-client of *policy* or *policing* of some sort (be they prison protocols, specific social programmes for this category of young people or police mechanisms of investigation and detention). What agents share to be able to play on the same field, is having, as capital of their own, experiences of intervention on the young migrant condition (and their leisure practices within the urban space) seen as inopportune and problematic, as they are seen to generate and import violence, and therefore are susceptible to being denounced, corrected, transformed, watched, suppressed or punished, according to the circumstances.

Thus, we have identified the following effect-producing positions: *a*) the police; *b*) the justice; *c*) the prison; *d*) the school; *e*) the territory (local institutions) with their clients (religious or laic associations) in charge of certain categories of marginal people; *f*) the academia; *g*) the media; *h*) the group leadership in the gang scenario. The first three (police, justice, prison) articulate the State's right hand, the second two (school, territory) are the left hand, and the last (academia and communication media) work – both for the State's right and left hands – in the production of a public narration and interpretation of the phenomenon. Finally, the gang leaderships express the point of view of the clients of the policies boosted by the State's right and left hand. In this text we will develop a field analysis focusing on the State's right and left hand actors; in other works we have explored in more detail the role of the media in term of symbolic capital of visualization [Queirolo Palmas 2013], and the academia [Queirolo Palmas 2014]. State's right and left hand refer to agents collocated in the previous mentioned positions in the administrative and political apparatus and are linked to broad and legitimated forms of interventions on society, performing in our specific setting social policies and policing on the gang scene. This article explores, in an ethnographic way, the concrete and veiled logics of action in the field promoted by changing coalition of agents situated in the State's right and left hand.

2. About Contexts and Methods

We have chosen to focus on two great metropolitan areas – Barcelona and Madrid, scenarios of massive reception and subaltern insertion processes of immigrant labour – because of the polarity that they express and publicly narrate, in terms of institutional interventions facing the gang scene.⁴

The murder of Ronny Tapias, a young Colombian boy in Barcelona, in October 2003 outside a school marked the media and social emergence of the *gangs*: groups of

⁴ For further details see Feixa, Scandroglio, López Martínez, Ferrandiz [2011], Scandroglio and López Martínez [2010], Canelles [2008], Lahosa [2008], *Aparicio and Tornos* [2009].

migrant young people with dangerous and exotic names (Latin Kings, Ñetas, Vatos Locos, Dominican Don't Play, Trinitarios, Mara Salvatrucha), fighting for their territories and taking part in violent actions perceived as gratuitous and novel. Three years later, as an effect of the explicit policy of Barcelona City Council, these groups had been turned into youth cultural associations, registered by the Government of Catalonia. The change in the approach – *institutionalising and normalising*⁵ gangs – emerged from a public intervention in which academia, local institutions and the autonomic police collaborated with the aim of directing this phenomenon within a framework of control, vigilance and social empowerment, and damage and violence reduction.

The same groups that in Barcelona institutions consecrated as cultural associations since 2006, in Madrid fell within the area of illicit organisations and into the consequent legitimacy of a repressive type of action;⁶ different judicial sentences – some of them later annulled by the Supreme Court of Justice – declared these youth groups illegal, so that just belonging was a criminal offence, detaining and deporting members and the top leaders.

The gang-policy field emerges within the two contexts of study under different force correlations: in one case the focus is placed on the State's right hand, and in the other case it is placed on the left hand. The physical and symbolic sign of this polarity is the opposition between *cultural association* and *illicit association* in the treatment of the young people. At the same time, the polarity between *zero tolerance* on the one hand and *normalisation* on the other hand, clouds the incoherencies that in many cases are hidden between practical needs and discourse needs.

At the end of 2011, when this research began, little remained in Catalonia of the social interventions on street groups: the legalised associations were ephemeral and void of any public relevance, while a new hegemonic, political and media discourse attempted to overcome “the kindness that had lead to funding gangs.” In Madrid, at the same time, institutions attempted not to mobilise the discourse of *gangs* too much in public terms and held onto the same policy of zero tolerance.

The crisis is the crucial element that marks a before and an after in the history of this bureaucratic field in both contexts: the first stage corresponds to a period of economic prosperity that lead to the increase of social expense and of the youth and *integration* policies, but since the end of 2008 the economic cycle has been radically reversed in all its indicators. My entry into this field thus corresponds to the peak of the crisis: all sorts of social cutbacks in basic sectors of society (education, health,

⁵ “*Normalisation*” is the word used by many of my informants to describe the sense of their actions and policies toward the gangs.

⁶ It is important to point out that, until that time, the figure illicit association had been used almost exclusively in the fight against ETA, the “gang” par excellence in Spain.

pensions, public salaries, etc.) and massive unemployment (approximately 50% of young people and 25% of the total labour force in 2012), even more pronounced among the immigrant population (35%) due to the collapse of the building sector; the reduction of the net stock of immigrants and the increase of migration of Spanish citizens to other countries must be added to these. The crisis is thus a key element to be taken into account within the research panorama, as it changes the resources the players have on the field, transforms the game and its rules, the order of priority in public policies, and structurally modifies the logics of action in the gang scene.⁷

We have opted for a methodological triangulation, crossing different accounts and empirical tools: *a*) grey literature produced by the actors in the field (protocols, press statements, reports, congress and conference minutes, statistics, judicial sentences, etc.); *b*) 79 interviews carried out in Madrid and Barcelona with the different actors that are involved in the gang scene; *c*) 9 focus groups conducted with the relevant actors; *d*) the participation as an expert in consulting committee fostered by the right and left hands of the State in Catalonia.⁸

What was at first envisaged as a classical research mechanism focused on interviews, has little by little turned into an ethnography of a bureaucratic field of the state; we have shared many informal conversations with the informants, participation in events and lectures, meals and coffee meetings at restaurants, salsa and reggaeton concerts, e-mail discussions, visits to significant places and work-related journeys; all of which have enabled the accumulation of time together and a crucial capital of trust to go beyond the effects of representation consubstantial to the interview technique.

3. The State's Right Hand and the Warrior Capital

Throughout this ethnography, police officers and other justice and security agents were the subjects with whom I had most interactions. This wasn't intentional, but a natural thing that emerged from the field work. They were the ones who

⁷ For example, the growth of the importance of the ties between groups, young people and street economy, within the framework of a radical increase of unemployment.

⁸ The *Gabinet de Seguretat del Departament d'Interior* de la Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan Government's Security Cabinet) invited me to participate in a discussion workshop about "violence and the public space," focused on the so-called NGJOV (*Nuevos Grupos Juveniles Organizados y Violentos*) (New Organised, Violent Youth Groups), the politically correct acronym to refer to gangs at the time. The workshop was held monthly from January to July 2012 and officials from Barcelona City Council, the Catalan Government, the Catalan Police (Mossos d'Esquadra), the Juvenile Justice Agency, the Catalan Ministry of Education participated. In November 2012 I was contracted by Barcelona City Council as an expert in order to put forward: "A theoretical framework for a public intervention about the phenomenon of gangs."

had up-to-date information about and dealt with the young people in the gang scenario.⁹ As we have seen in other works [Queirolo Palmas 2013] the policy gang field is populated by multiple actors, but only some of them are constantly incorporated in the production of the media account. This means that the sources mobilised in this narrative are probably the best indicator to identify the hegemonic subject in the field.¹⁰ In this sense, throughout ten years of public discourse, we can conclude that the police actor has almost always been hegemonic.

This natural finding is the sign of a structural process: young people in the gangs are mainly *treated*, and therefore known, by what we can call, following Bourdieu, the *State's right hand*; a position from which warrior capital is articulated, accumulated and sought: the power to discipline, judge, punish and, in the case of migrants, also deport. But this power is only legitimated by its attempt to redress and exert pedagogy on social *deviance*, which demands complicity with the agencies of the state's left hand; that is, the agencies that carry out *care* and *sanitation* of the social body, accompanied by mechanisms for the redistribution and attenuation of the class stratification. These two hands have competed with each other for power and position throughout the history of the contemporary State. The second post-war period corresponds to the establishment and expansion of the Welfare State; however, in the last twenty years we are witnessing the consolidation of a *Penal State*, oriented to punish the poor [Wacquant 2002]. In contemporary Spain, the massive cutbacks in health, education and social policies show clearly this course in the construction of the State. At the end of the economic *bonanza*, which somehow transformed the school failure of these young people into a more or less assured and more or less subaltern incorporation into the labour market, the gang scene had to face this new articulation of forces in which the penal state is hegemonic.

What types of capital are sought from the state's right hand? Sauvadet [2006], building on Bourdieu's theory, has introduced the category *warrior capital* to qualify what is wanted within the gang scenario: the body, the physical strength, the capacity to create or threaten with violence, of giving and procuring protection, of demon-

⁹ In the middle of a crisis, the police – a category of subjects from a lower social background – experience more acutely the contradiction between being the armed force of the dominant classes in their endeavour to keep public order and their own class condition; X. for instance, tells me that he would like to put a hood up and burn a bank down; Y. feels part of the working class, he goes to the demonstrations against cutbacks and he would rather arrest corrupt politicians and bankers than chase poor people; Z. gives me a t-shirt from the movement in defence of public schools and tells me, outraged, about the brutality of the police repression during a demonstration in Madrid.

¹⁰ “A parasite is someone who is somewhere but needs someone else to survive [...] and vice-versa, isn't it? The relation that we have with the police is a parasite one. I'm all day on the phone with my police sources,” says a journalist that built the imaginary of gangs in Catalonia.

strating superiority and, in certain cases, eliminating those defined as the enemy. These are the elements that compose the warrior capital. If the warrior capital within the gang scenario is an extension of the physical capital, in which power makes the law¹¹, then in the State's right hand, it is the law that makes the power: a belligerent logic is promoted by the State's right hand in relation to certain categories of subjects defined as enemies of the public order, in this case, gangs members. The power that is built up lies within the collective body – institutions as a political body – it is applied and produced through the law, the legitimate pretention of having the political monopoly of violence, which ultimately, according to Weber's theory, defines the State and is questioned in the group use of violence by the gangs; it is not by chance that many young people in the ethnography perceive the police simply as “the gang with the most power,” whose violence has immunity and impunity and is superior. The warrior capital is supported by an imaginary which needs to justify the activity of repression: this is why the presence of gangs is pictured and focused upon from a criminal viewpoint and exhibited within this code.¹²

The police – judicial – and prison agents are the ones who define the interventions in the gang scenario, in Madrid, in Barcelona and at State level; but we will attempt to qualify more precisely which are the practices and styles that are generated within the different contexts and political cycles, that is, the different uses, productions and accumulations of the warrior capital. This capital, as all other forms of capitals, is an accumulated resource and a search of different agents which allows

¹¹ This is how the author defines the warrior capital that young people develop in the French suburbs: “*In my field, physical confrontation was the main way to determine social hierarchy. The physical capital was thus a strong principle of classification [...]. Just a few street confrontations were sufficient to lay the foundations of hierarchical order that later developed its own story in the field. [...] What capital is that? Of course it includes physical capital, but also takes us to a form of moral discipline (not to relinquish, to defend the honour, to know the rules of the street school, etc.), to the use and modulation of violence and the art of socialising that the actors call ‘vicio.’ This represents the manipulation of the other and allows us to distinguish between those who know the streets and the ‘charlatanes.’ [...] Finally, the warrior capital takes us mostly to the alliances built by the groups: The strength of number is the first way of capitalization of the warrior capital.*” [Sauvadet 2005, 118]. There are many analogies between police officers and gang members; the cult of the body and the physical capital is one of them. Many gang members attend gyms, practice martial arts, work occasionally in the field of private security, are children of police officers or soldiers, and sometimes even enrol in the Spanish armed forces. In November 2012, I interviewed a high ranking official of Barcelona City Council and talking about the social background of police officers in Catalonia he told me that many officers were recruited at gyms and boxing clubs.

¹² We could add that an epic of this struggle is needed and also the exhibition, as a trophy, of the enemy and their belongings. Just like for the young people in a gang taking an object from another gang can be a sign of humiliation and status it is common, although above the law, for police to seize objects (crucifixes, necklaces, literature, etc.) from the different groups. In the training I took part in, police speakers circulated among the participants certain objects inside numbered plastic bags. In this way objects are crystallized and transformed into the body of evidence of a crime, that of belonging.

to set hegemonies, hierarchies and power relations among dominant and dominated positions in the field.

3.1. *At the State Level: Emergence of a Police Plan against Violent Youth Groups*

During the socialist government term in office, the Ministry of Home Affairs became active and started a specific line of interventions towards the end of 2005.¹³ While the death of Ronny Tapias in 2003 opened the discourse of institutional interventions into the gang scenario in Barcelona, in Madrid a series of murders in 2005 nationalized the issue. Here it was the death of a local boy and the successive man-hunt by the natives against immigrants that gave birth to a phenomenon and crystallized it through a glass prism of a *color line* [Du Bois 2010], opening thus specific programmes in the Autonomous Community and the City Council, and especially generating a State framework of interventions.

The “*Plan de Actuación y Coordinación Policial contra Grupos Organizados y Violentos de Carácter Juvenil*” (Police Coordination Plan Against Organised and Violent Youth Groups) is created within this context and encourages cooperation between police forces and prosecutors, building data bases and follow-up protocols, surveillance of websites, mapping of group locations, quarterly assessment reports including operational definitions and intervention philosophies. The Plan aims to prevent and deter the emergence and consolidation of youth groups (aged between 12-30 years) that cause alarm due to their organisation and discipline and to the violent behaviours that they may have; starting from these object individuation criteria, *gangs* are divided by their political affiliation (extreme right – extreme left) and their ethnical affiliation (*latin*); according to this police definition, the category *gang* is applied to collective subjects that manifest a social and/or political conflict, and that may resort to violence. Moreover, the Plan suggests the training of prosecutors and other justice professionals, information activities in schools and with families by the police, and structured activities according to the age of recipients: a) detachment of minors and coordination with social services for eventual protection measures; b) building of criteria and police files to encourage “an energetic response within the judicial process towards major offenders.”

In July 2009 the Ministry of Home Affairs revalidated the Plan, resorted to deportation as a tool to *eradicate* the problem and promoted the accumulation of

¹³ Besides, during the same socialist political stage, crucial changes were made to the Minors Act that increased the possibilities of punishing offenders.

circumstantial evidence and documentation that enable the proving of the criminal offence of unlawful association. It is not by chance that, from 2005 onwards, the State Prosecutor's reports classify *Latin gangs* within the framework of organised crime, which includes belonging as a crime.¹⁴

3.2. *Local Articulations of the State's Right Hand*

Although the repeated attempts to outlaw groups mark out the national arena, actions at Autonomous Community level are quite varied: until March 2011 the official position of Catalan Police (Mossos d'Esquadra) was to maintain the idea that gangs did not have the explicit objective of carrying out crimes; therefore, any parallelism with organised crime was inappropriate. According to this police view, groups didn't emerge around illegal activities that needed to be protected using violence, although the members could be involved in criminal activities; data gathered by the Home Affairs Ministry of Catalonia [2011] yielded that the members of such groups had a very little incidence on the total volume of registered crimes (0.18%).¹⁵ Until the end of 2011, this police approach in Catalonia was supported by the members of the judicial system and the public policies that supported transforming these groups into acknowledged cultural associations.

What in one case – Catalonia – is represented as a possible factor of associated risk, in the other case – Madrid – becomes an objective criminal offence that needs to be prosecuted. The crime of unlawful association generates mechanisms to clearly define what belongs to the social realm and what to that of policing. Many educators throughout this field work explain that “gang is a police issue,” and this makes any intervention unfeasible on such groups, who are consequently defined as *inaccessible* for social work. The efficacy of the unlawful association has to do on the one hand with the symbolic, and on the other hand, beyond its penal-prison effects, with the material.

Making the groups illegal, removing them under the force of the State's right hand, becomes the imperative model of intervention in Madrid, agreed and mutually confirmed by the different actors – Justice, Prisons, the Police. The dominating actors try to gain and accumulate *warrior capital*, enabling the fight against the gangs' reproduction through a law that punishes identity rather than conduct (unlawful as-

¹⁴ Circular 2/2011 of the State Prosecutor's Office on the reform of the Criminal Code by Organic Law 5/2010.

¹⁵ Records on organised crime in the Prosecutor's Office in Catalonia, unlike that of Madrid, rarely mention Latin gangs.

sociation). In the following account a high ranking national police officer evaluates actions previously carried out in terms of effectiveness.

“You know, with our repression we expected to destroy the gangs and to be left only with those devoted to organised crime... but this is not what happened. [...] What has happened 5 years later? We have gangs, with younger members who are still a strange mixture. We failed. We are now still detaining more minors...” C. has certain criteria to determine how dangerous a group is, their capacity to get economic resources: “These ones, Luca, do not sell a thing, they don’t have money to buy a single gun, 500 Euro, and if they do not have money this means that in the drug market, which is where the money comes from, they’re nobody.” Why so much energy and harshness with them? “You know, in terms of quantity the amount of crime they commit is hardly any, 0,000001 of all crime... but in qualitative terms it has great repercussion...” Repercussion? “The press talk generates alarm, politicians make declarations and we have to intervene. This is the repercussion I’m talking about. Ours is an obliged response...” [Field diary, May 2012].

This self-critical account seems very far from the persistent association made of these groups with organised crime by the highest judicial bodies in official acts. All discourses have suitable places to be archived; in this sense, my informer asks me to quote his account as an anonymous police source without further mention. In the field of the official discourse, the State Prosecutor’s Office report for 2011 details, in the case of the Autonomous Community of Madrid, a stabilisation of the groups’ activities (Tab. 1)¹⁶, it values as positive the increase in the number of detentions and the confirmation of sentences for unlawful association, and values as negative the decrease in the requested prison sentences.

TAB. 1. *Autonomous Community of Madrid: murders and detentions in the gang scenario*

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Murders	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	2*
Detentions/Prison	121	56	-	114/32	54/24	44/20	144/12	-

Source: Records of the State General Prosecutor’s Office, Autonomous Community of Madrid*: newspapers information.

In their fragmented character, data on detentions reveal that in contexts where unlawful association operates, police pressure can be facilitated, but it seems difficult

¹⁶ However, data on detentions and crime and membership are very variable according to the sources and local contexts. In Catalonia the Police estimates there are 3500 members (2011), while in Madrid in 2012 police sources talk of about 1000 members. In 2007, Home Affairs Ministry sources estimated that *Latin gang* members throughout the State were 2000/2500 [Soriano Gatica 2008].

to link this control with effective imprisonment, and vigilance with punishment. The account of the high ranking police officer mentioned above – who points out the ineffectiveness of their own practice – confirms that the mechanisms of deportation, imprisonment and control did not stop the reproduction of groups or the violence.

The model of police intervention in Catalonia has not stopped the reproduction of groups either. In this context the definition used by the specialised unit of the Catalan Police (NGJOV - New Young Organised Violent Groups) attempts to avoid the stigmatisation of the Latin collective, avoiding any ethnic reference. In spite of the different rhetoric and the non-prosecution of members for unlawful association, more murders took place in Catalonia (Tab. 2) and the pressure on these groups was a lot tougher than in Madrid.¹⁷ From a police estimation of 3,500 members, police interventions generated 903 detentions in 2010: nearly one out of three members. The increase in global figures – of course in the volume of detentions and offences there is a quota of recurrence – is explained by our police informants as a result of a greater intensity of the control action and a better understanding of the phenomenon.

TAB. 2. *Catalonia: Offences, Detentions and Murders in the Gang Scenario*

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Criminal Offences and Administrative Breaches	-	-	-	-	-	1185	1293	1550	-	-
Detentions	-	-	-	151	361	754	861	903	-	-
Murders	1	1	0	0	0	2	5	1	1 (*)	6 (*)

Source: Mossos de Esquadra, press release, 22/11/2011; the data on deaths in 2003-2007 and 2010-2011 is a reconstruction through the press and my informants in the police. However, regarding 2012, the new Mossos team specialised in gangs officially mention 3 people killed.

We could question the legitimacy of the construction of the data that self-confirm the criminal character of these subjects, and includes in the number of known crimes murders and driving offences; we could equally question why similar statistics or pictures that build an object, rather than reflect it are not made for other groups (traders, politicians, businesspeople or schoolteachers) and also whether these figures ultimately reveal criminal activity or institutionalised processes of criminalisation of

¹⁷ As other researchers add, there is an evident problem with lack of transparency from official sources in all the statistics on the subject. For example, evaluation reports of the Home Affairs Ministry Plan against violent groups are not available for researchers.

certain subaltern groups. It has been made clear that there is always a great selectivity in the surveillance work and punishment from the State's right hand and that this factor allows the capturing of only certain categories of subjects within the justice system; what is interesting to observe is that, in spite of the public discourse and representations that oppose a *zero tolerance* strategy in Madrid to a *neighbourhood police* in Catalonia, the global figure of detentions, a simple indicator of the police pressure, is more intense where it should not have been, just where unlawful association has not been used, and where there was a social policy of normalisation of the gang scene.

3.3. *Surgery, Proximity, Intervention and Arbitrariness in the Police Work*

In Catalonia, police work has been characterised by an attempt to articulate *knowledge, prevention, intervention and suppression* in a comprehensive manner. The accounts of events by the leaders of the specialised unit NGJOV until mid 2012 highlight on the one hand normal police work (crime prevention and repression) and on the other hand the need to establish a constant relationship with the group members and leaders thanks to a proximity approach. The Mossos d'Esquadra were the hegemonic subject in the field, they gave undoubting support to the process of institutionalisation of the Latin King and Ñetas promoted by Barcelona City Council, they started their activities before any other actors and remained in the field when the actors of the left hand withdrew. We introduced here an extract of an interview with two of the senior officers of that police unit.

Police officer 1: "Communication is a fundamental element, you need to talk to them, identify their leaders and talk."

Police officer 2: "One of the things that didn't work was direct confrontation, understood as wanting to finish the groups by force; it only causes group members to become more entrenched in their positions with time, they become more impermeable, less accessible and even more extremist."

What did that police practice consist of? The accounts mentioned: *supporting those deserting* (helping harassed members who want to leave the groups); *control of recruiting and chapter management* (favouring the entry of new members into chapters with whom there is a relationship of trust and information); *leader training* and distinguishing the "good" from the "bad" members (through police control and practices of deportation towards the latter); *imposed mediation* (preparing a suitable environment for the groups to organise a *gang diplomacy*); *aggression prevention* (use of the information to anticipate acts of violence). This practice, in the framework of a harm reduction approach, reflects how police actors in Catalonia shaped the gang ge-

ography through a work of moral surgery and pedagogy of the members, structurally alternating the *carrot* and the *stick*; the bet was to accumulate warrior capital (the capacity of fighting against the reproduction of violent and criminal behaviours within the gangs, and if possible, cut the groups' own reproduction) through an investment of social capital (cultivating relationships, constituting alliances, supporting certain leaders and having preventive and intimate knowledge of the groups).

Towards the end of 2011, when our ethnography started, the description of the context by the police actors in Catalonia made it clear that the objective of breaking up reproduction was an ephemeral one and, nearly ten years after their first appearances, the groups were still recruiting new people. Police information services stated the following elements from the gang scene: *a*) the great rotation of members among groups (some young people get in and out and go from one group to another); *b*) the numeric and territorial expansion throughout the whole of Catalonia;¹⁸ *c*) the fragmentation of the historical groups (Latin Kings and Ñetas) into different branches and the generation of violent episodes among them; *d*) the incorporation of Spanish/Catalan and other non-Latin young people into the groups.

However, the intervention into the gang scenario in terms of an articulation of social capital and warrior capital does not mean that police work does not take place in parallel – like in Madrid, thanks to the adoption of the unlawful association measure – with some degree of arbitrariness. Sometimes, as our informants tell us, in order to detect those suspected of breaking the law one needs to do something illegal; which ultimately makes us wonder what is the crime and who the criminal. For example, we hear the accounts of young gang members and a judge.

I am with a retired leader of an important street gang: “When we had meetings the police always arrived. They came in and searched us for weapons, drugs and papers. They seized personal objects. I told them there was nothing secret and they could stay and listen...” Other brothers tell me how the police seize personal belongings without any permission and get into parties organised in private premises hitting people with their batons in order to make identifications. [...] I tell a judge the same things and add about phones and e-mail hacking done without authorisation. He says: “I think there was a problem of coordination between the police and social parties in this story. Of course, police officers do illegal things, it is illegal to hack phones if a judge doesn't tell you, if there isn't a crime suspect... it is illegal to seize objects and people for no reason.” [Field diary, December 2012].

¹⁸ Supposing that all members are Latin – which is not true –, this volume would represent around 3% of the residents aged between 15-29 years [Catalonia Home Affairs Ministry, 2011]. In a press conference in January 2013, the new team of Mossos reduced the number of members from 3,500 to 2,480, as well as the participation rate (2% aged between 13/25 years). Figures are always an area of political dispute, communication and social construction.

These accounts reveal how an amount of discretion is common in all types of police work and, once more, many differences exhibited in both contexts have to do with rhetorics; besides, it is worth highlighting that, in spite of having a significantly different approach from that of Mossos in Catalonia, there were police actors in Madrid – juvenile liaison officers from the Municipal Police – that operated in the gang scene following a proximity, damage reduction, communication and mediation approach. The police officer from the next extract of our field diary had meetings with all the chapters of the Latin Kings in the city in order to give support to a non-violent conflict resolution culture; we are in the neighbourhood of Tetuán at a discussion between police and educators.

Police: “Police work cannot be done like in a hunt... and take the streets. This only generates fear. We need to establish communication channels...”

Street educator: “They grew up here... we must have done something wrong... we continue to insist on ‘we need to detach the young people...’ this is the problem... we don’t do structural prevention... there are a lot fewer resources than there used to be...”

Police: “Why can’t they wear their colours? This would help a lot. Adolescents wear uniforms today... why are certain aesthetics not legitimate? If the kids don’t tell you there’s no way of knowing if they belong to one group or another. Gang kids wear their colours less to protect themselves. We need to talk to them.”

Street educator: “We need to get the groups to sit down and let them talk. There was no fight before between Trinitarios and Ddp.¹⁹ We need to work with the Dominican community; we need to work with positive leaders.” [Field diary, May 2012].

The narration itself from the glaring discrepancy in the police approach between Barcelona and Madrid loses its legitimacy in 2012, when the leaders of the specialised group in Catalonia are replaced and other discourses and priorities take over. Until then, the articulation between warrior capital and social capital, and a yawning gap within the social policies on the phenomenon had concentrated both functions of the State’s right hand and left hand in the Mossos: gang members were being arrested and at the same time they were being helped to organise sports events; members’ personal possessions were being seized without judicial permission and at the same time police helped gang leaders to anticipate conflicts and fights in discos; they made protocols to detect members in schools and they favoured the less confrontational leaders. Punishment was being carried out, as well as vigilance and selective healing: an articulated mode of action between proximity and criminal-moral surgery. Such overlapping rapport between the right and the left hand is clearly perceived by a high

¹⁹ Groups of Dominican origin (DDP, Dominicans don’t play). “Trinitarios” evokes the three homeland heroes in the fight for independence.

ranking civil servant in the City Council when he tells us – once the euphoria of the policy of *normalisation* of the groups was exhausted – “the only community worker left was the policeman;” the penal State, by the way, can incorporate certain types of action that were typical of the social State.

The new discourse in 2012, in the aftermath of the political change in Catalonia and using a case of murder to denounce publicly the failures of the previous police *do-goodism*, is sustained on the idea that it is necessary to end the communication/intervention activities with gang leaders in order to repress, illegalise and imprison. For many of my informants, this change – which ends nearly ten years of construction of intervention and communication practices with the street groups leaders – is perceived as a *blow* to which the subaltern ranks within the police will have to accommodate, or exile to other tasks within the police force, being in a military hierarchical non-democratic organisation.

I'm discussing with a cop: “It doesn't matter, it's all theatre. The new cops want to do something spectacular where they arrest the leaders and say they have finished the gangs. But as you know, this doesn't end with this sort of operation.” [Field diary, April 2011].

Z. tells us that they finally got to hear the new policy guidelines from their bosses: “Go after them, that is, stop the do-goodism. Detentions, detentions. Nothing preventive, repression. There's a new protocol...” [Field diary, May 2012].

A police woman says: “When they go to detain them, they say... let's get the fucking blacks. And you hear only what they tell you in public, you don't see the inside. They encourage one another... They have won, you hear unrepeatable comments. In two months we became Franco's police again.” [Field diary, June 2012].

Another policeman asserts: “It was all smoke and mirrors... and specially us, the Mossos with this idea of mediation we ended as subaltern to the gang leaders, and this had to end, it ended. Now we will take action.” [Field diary, May 2012].

Massive detention, which was always practised, becomes common; great raids to fill archives with members in parks and in front of the church where the groups meet.²⁰ These police operations are, in a certain way, contrary to proximity policing; when there is no social capital available, that is, cultivating trust between police and young people from the gangs, more serial control operations are applied. The change of team members in the specialised gang Unit of Catalan Police resulted in a drastic loss of social capital and hence the need to reconstruct lists and archives through a greater investment in massive operations, phone tapping and the use of *informants*. In the words of a police officer:

²⁰ In February 2012 and January 2013 the Catalan Police carried out two great operations in front of the churches where the young Latin Kings and Ñetas meet; communication media talk about preventive operations in meeting places without specifying.

“Unless you’re in the street you don’t understand anything, you lose all your contacts; you don’t know what alliances are built up. In one month you lose everything. Now the police do not have any contacts and my contacts from before do not want to talk to them.”

This account confirms that the warrior capital resides not only in the physical capital, but also in the social capital that police officers accumulate within the gang world; and that this articulation of social and warrior capital can have very different signs.²¹

3.4. *The Jail Solution*

This change in the police action evidences the isomorphism of the repressive work in Catalonia, Madrid and at a State level, and the centrality of the warrior capital in its purest form: accumulate force and law to counter, end with or pretend to end with the youth groups defined as violent.

In this sense, a crucial part of the State’s right hand apparatus is the prison; police work, judicial work and certainly the life of many young people in gangs precipitate in prison. Of course the rate of conversion from arrest to imprisonment is always variable; in the case of Madrid – according to the reports of the Office of the State Prosecutor – it ranges from 10% to 50%. In the case of Catalonia we do not have quantitative data available on the success of the police pressure, but the following accounts about incarceration in juvenile justice and detention centres confirm how many of the arrests ended up in deprivation of liberty, and how prisons little by little filled with gang members.

We’re in a prison module. The gang scene is concentrated here. The person accompanying me adds that she could never say the same things in an official recording, because the administration policy is to deny the existence of gangs in prisons; in spite of that, almost every young Latin in prison belongs to a group. When I visit the prison’s entrance yard, what we could call the *lion’s den*, the entrance to prison,

²¹ We have other signs of these changes in Catalonia in the option for the prosecutors to ask for the crime of unlawful association for these groups. In November 2012 Trinitarios are the target of a large police operation that ends up with 19 detentions based on different accusations (unlawful association, drug trafficking, assaults, threats, coercion and robbery with violence and intimidation). In January 2013 most of the detained were released on bail. In December 2012, the High Court of Barcelona sentenced 6 Latin Kings to 26 years for attempted murder and 4 years for membership of a criminal gang. In February it was the turn of the Black Panthers: a spectacular operation by the Mossos produced around 30 detentions. Once more the charge is, along with other crimes, unlawful association. One informant in the judicial-penal system tells us: “*How sad, they started with the Trinitarios and the Panthers, and now they’ll go after all the rest for unlawful association, they are scapegoats, a smoke screen to divert attention, while the country lives through one political scandal after another.*”

I can see inscriptions and graffiti on the walls that reveal the multiplicity of groups living together behind bars (Latin King, Ñetas, Maras Salvatrucha). [Field diary, February 2012].

“Between 25 and 50% of the inmates are from gangs” the educators of the juvenile justice centres told me during the training I was giving them. [Field diary, May 2012].

On a more general note, during the last twenty years the quota of foreigners in prison increased more than in proportion with the increase in immigration in Spain. Today (2012) approximately one in three inmates is a foreigner²², making it one of the highest levels in Europe; what’s more, Catalonia stands out as having a massive level of foreign inmates, well above the national average: one in two (45.87%), which makes the criminal justice and prison policy of this Autonomous Community an emblem of the criminalisation of immigrants.

Prison for gangs is close to their social reality and is often part of some of their member’s daily lives; their condition as young, migrant and proletarian makes them easy targets of the penal system. The street and the prison are still two communicating spaces in the members’ lives. But what relationships are there between them? To a certain extent the aim of institutions is that *prison* can punish, and also rehabilitate the *street*. But many of the State’s right hand operators I have met throughout the ethnographic work doubted the pedagogical character of prison and are sceptical about the possibility that the deprivation of liberty interrupts the reproduction of groups. Besides, with the crisis, all the *treatment* and production of rehabilitation is subject to intensive budget cutbacks; in this context, prison experience is easily reduced to a simple place of contention.

“It is not a police problem, the causes are elsewhere and it is not by detaining members that we’re going to bring these groups to an end. We can detain 2,000 people tomorrow, but we’re not solving anything. Every young prisoner is a failure. They only make groups in the street grow.” [Field diary, March 2012].

I am with a former Trinitario leader in Madrid: “Young people need attention, many are lazy kids that are talented but they just don’t realise. Putting them in prison is not the solution, they come out worse, we have more policemen but it serves for nothing, but this is what we do here. Others have the big businesses: Colombians have coca, Moroccans have hashish. The gang is something else, but this is the city where it is unlawful association to be part of these groups.” [Field diary, May 2012].

The judicial-criminal treatment can also contribute to the production of conflicts and the fragmentation of groups. A leader of the Ñeta association explains:

²² With a slight decrease in relation to the previous year, due to a regulation that allows foreigners to opt for repatriation in case of minor offences. In 2011 out of 70,472 inmates, 24,524 were not born in Spain, an incidence of 34.8% (according to data from the General Directory of the Directorate General of Penal Institutions).

“The police want us to resort to the Justice system as a way of conflict resolution, but they do not understand that by doing this we would have a permanent war on the streets”.

Another young man from a Dominican group in Madrid, referring to a conflict that was taken to court, adds:

“But you’re in the gang, how can you report them? You either report the gang or you belong to it”.

The process of institutionalisation of the Latin King and Ñetas during 2006/2007 was viewed with great disappointment and scepticism by the young people in prison:

“They sold us out to the police”, inmates from the two groups told me.

Visiting prisons in Catalonia has unveiled a domain of occult practices by civil servants: in these places where the conflicts in the street are always heard about, in a discreet and anonymous way certain civil servants work to maintain positive relationships between the youngsters of all the groups, a neutral space that attempts to prevent the transfer of the problems in the street into the detention units.

In the interview, Z. tells me that foreigners go to prison because judges always mention the risk of escape. Z. works daily with young people in the groups; if there is a space of non conflict in this prison it is thanks to her. The administration knows part of it and prefers not to know the rest. It is comfortable not to have gang trouble inside and they don’t want it known that most of the young Latin inmates belong to these groups. Z. knows kids from all the groups, helps them have meetings, sends information from one unit to another, helps them negotiate and she even tried to organise a ritual of a group inside the prison. [Field diary, July 2012].

The young inmates, a great number of them Latin American children of the reunification, enjoy a superior status thanks to the family solidarity they receive, compared to other inmates who experience complete isolation behind bars. Many gang members rediscover during detention the importance of the family and the inconsistency of the street groups when emotional and material support is needed. Prison administrations deny publicly this presence and refuse to acknowledge it officially, but sometimes foster detection and labelling processes, or they give civil servants some room for action so that they can work beyond their normal remit to break up the prison/street connection and end the continuation inside of problems from outside.

Throughout the research we encountered very complex situations. Paco is a Latin King recently released from prison in Madrid and he explains other aspects of

the experiences behind bars; as a gang member he was treated as a dangerous inmate in the FIES regimen²³ and wants to document the conditions of institutional violence and human rights violations against inmates.

“All the gang members go to certain prisons. In one of them there were 8 people killed in recent months. It’s the civil servants with their beatings. The prison belongs to them, and now with PP everything is worse; it’s the war against the immigrants. I was a dangerous inmate, I was alone all the time in a cell. I read and did sport, one joint every night to sleep well. Jails run with drugs, methadone. When I got in, I quickly settled in with the chapter of Latin Kings; there were 150 of us, with our necklaces and all. Then they transferred us all and put us in different jails. It was the end of 2004, when unlawful association became law and the gang chapters were ended in the prisons. I was a dangerous inmate, and prison officers always beat you. One day I put on a show, and I cut my arms to attract attention. Sometimes they tied us up. Many of my friends were tied up in their cells and injected with Gardenal to tranquilise them. Then I saw them in the yard like mummies... This is how they treated us. What prison civil officials tell you is all false. The truth about inside is not known outside.” [Field diary, May 2012].

Beside the discourse of rehabilitation and the practice of contention, there is a practice of institutional revenge and torture. We see another example; the witness has committed a small crime linked to drugs in the national territory and at the same time was an important leader of a street group in Barcelona. If he committed a crime as an individual, his account shows that he was punished for being in a gang.

“I had to pay a bill and I didn’t know how to do it. So I accepted to carry some stuff. They caught me and discovered that I had been a gang leader. They put me into solitary confinement. They held me like that for 9 months, in total isolation, they only let me out one hour a day, handcuffed, to eat and have a shower. What was it like? I wouldn’t want it for my worst enemy; 23 hours alone in one cell – *he bursts into tears* – they want to destroy you psychologically. I nearly went nuts, I had to organise my time, I didn’t sleep, I only saw a priest and together we talked about the bible. Then for one hour I read the Bible on my own, and I had one hour of physical training. I didn’t know when it was night or day. I still have disorders as a result of that. Then in the other prison they assigned a psychologist to help me get over it.” It’s amazing the role the State has in perpetrating institutional torture. They never deny you a priest, and afterwards a psychologist. “Once I was sleeping in my cell, they got in and started to beat me up after covering me with a blanket. They were hooded, but of course they were prison officers, and they told me that this was for being a gang member. I lost consciousness and the following day I woke up in

²³ *Internal Files for Especial Follow-up*. Many human rights organisations have criticised this unit for being illegal and brutal, which was really invented for political prisoners and protesters in prison. In recent changes, organised crime can be object of this unit. Control is very hard and isolation can be up to 23 hours a day. Members of *Latin gangs* may deserve this treatment which has many affinities with torture.

the infirmary with two drips in my arms. Why didn't I report them then? Because I didn't want them to make life impossible for me. Why don't I report it now? It's done, and I don't want to remember it... sometimes at night it all comes back to me and it's terrible." [Field diary, October 2012].

We cannot forget that today the crisis is having an effect on institutions, like on the gang habitus in Barcelona and in Madrid: fewer social resources, fewer mechanisms of contention, more orientation towards street economy, and therefore, more police-prison involvement in the lives of these immigrant and proletarian young people. From this context we will try to reconstruct the action of the State's left hand in the two fields of study.

4. The State's Left Hand

We will now look at the work done by different agencies at a local level in Madrid and Barcelona in *dealing* (producing practices, discourses and visions) with the gang scene: a field of positions populated by local institutions, associations contracted by City Councils to implement activities designed for young people considered as problematic, schools that digest pupils coming from migration, churches that get involved in welcome projects of street groups. Public officials, social assistants, teaching staff, educators and priests are the people we find in these positions; their habitus, their discourses and their practices, their mutual relationships and interests, their conflicts and power relations articulate interventions.

We would like to add that the action area of the left hand is somehow a secondary and discontinuous segment in our field of study: secondary, because the gang presence is primarily approached and treated from a delinquency standpoint; discontinuous, because its development is cyclical, while the police knowledge and treatment is continuous. The penal-police system reacts permanently on these types of subjects, while the left hand is activated through projects that depend on the situation. The separation in the field between what concerns the right hand and the left hand is always mobile; it is a territory of variable conflicts and alliances, not all of them verbalised. It is never a linear relation between the actors of the right and left hands: discourses and practices often converge formally only, and an invitation to network can be accompanied by hidden resistance or diverging practices from the actors; like a street educator from Madrid told us, referring to the discretionary controls in public parks, "three minutes of police intervention destroy six months of educational work." In the account below, social services technicians and a high

ranking official of the Madrid Council express the conflict between the left and the right hand.

High ranking official: “Since at least 4 or 5 years ago, all the people who have immigrant phenotypic traits, who on top of that are young, are systematically detained, even at the door of our premises; they look out for undocumented aliens, to take them to the police station and open a file for expulsion, etc. This phenomenon takes place a lot in parks and leisure areas. It is harassment, this is called harassment.”

Technician 1: “Such a continuous police presence, with all the paraphernalia, sirens and their uniforms, it only makes the kids move about a lot, they disperse.”

Technician 2: “It also generates a social alarm, an association between immigration and criminality, a social stigma: ‘if they detain them, it is for something, there must be a reason’...” (Madrid Council officials, Department of Immigration, Madrid)

If the right hand is built upon warrior capital, the media produce a capital of visualisation²⁴ and academics produce a cultural capital, the three capitals being always connected with certain forms of social capital that empowers the others, what type of capital is sought and accumulated between the actors of the state’s left hand in the measure in which they intervene and get involved in the gang scene? We imagine the left hands of the State as agencies working to produce social capital within the gang scenario and transform it into symbolic capital, that is, giving value and recognition to certain types of interventions.

4.1. *Conversion and Ostracism: Official Channels and Occult Practices*

In Catalonia the police position until spring of 2012 – “gangs are not a police problem,” summarised the senior officer of the group specialised in the phenomenon – opened the path for social interventions for a long time. Since 2005 the aim of the Barcelona Council was to transform the street groups called gangs into associations, their *institutionalisation* and *normalisation*. Around this process of conversion into associations, different actors were mobilised, and alliances and complicities were built with the hegemonic positions of the State’s right hand.

The medium is the message: to articulate pedagogy about values through relationship and through group involvement in a project of institutionalisation. Normalisation evokes, on the one hand, the possibility of access to public resources and

²⁴ In the fabrication of gangs as a social problem, mass media played a huge role and perform the capacity of extracting profits from the capital of visualization they detain: an accumulated symbolic power which allows to reflect in the *published opinion* the adequate principles of vision and division of the gang phenomenon, highlighting and emphasizing some aspects while occulting others [Queirolo Palmas 2014a].

facilities; on the other hand, it seeks to weaken the uneasy and *improper* aspects of street groups: the practice of violence (outwards and inwards), male chauvinism, the lack of democratic processes, the use and occupation of the urban territory. The objective of the City Council in that time was an acknowledgement that allowed groups to disappear and to reduce the symbolic association between the Latin American collective and youth violence; it also entailed generating a classification and segmentation between groups that could fall better within a more institutional logic and those that opted to reproduce in a space of strictly street bound rules and relationships.

In this sense, the intention was to promote a conversion which was not just material – to give the gangs an association status – but mainly symbolic; the conversion implied the production of a self-critical distance in relation to what groups were, or were thought to be, and a materialisation of what groups could become thanks to public intervention. It was about building an example, a referent of a disappearance which came from an incorporation, a policy that we can call *gangs in*.

“My prospective imaginary was that if the group was transformed into a normal juridical entity and had a normal relationship with the city’s association world, in 5 years they would disappear as specific group; in fact, through intervention we could see that the interest and needs were the same as of any other youth group.” (Barcelona Council Official, Prevention Directorate).

Bauman [1999] mentions two solutions in the management of the foreigner, the *anthropophagic* and *anthropoemic*; the policy of *gangs in* implies the first strategy, incorporating foreigners so that they cease to be, that is, incorporating a certain group of street gangs so that they cease to be what they were. *Gangs in* is a departure point, but it also implies its reverse, that is *gangs out*, as not all groups will be able or willing to follow a process of conversion and consecration: the second strategy, that Bauman calls *anthropoemic*, consists in rejecting the foreigner, erasing them straight away from the social space. Recalling the experience of ancient Greece, we call this situation with the term ostracism: the visibility of a stigma and a collective shared deliberation by many agencies that allows one to define these groups as dangerous for society.

In the case of Madrid, the policies fostered have the second strategy as a departure point, *gangs out*: the phenomenon is a police matter by its criminal definition and what is left to the agencies of the State’s left hand is residual on the one hand, and subaltern to the pathologically dominant vision on the other. Social policies are thus based on the *pre-gang*, as our informants express, that is, in the prevention of the phenomenon, in order to avoid “young people falling” into these groups;

while the only imaginable social treatment for members is based on the formula of *detachment*.

“They are gangs so organised, they won’t tell you: ‘I belong to this gang’ and the one thing about them is they are really violent, and this is punishable. We don’t have access, but police do. They know the young people, they follow-up, they are the ones who have most information. We are in the pre-gang, in the prevention.” (Madrid Council Official, Department of Immigration).

Dividing the tasks between the right and the left hands makes the groups invisible and inaccessible for social interventions that work on youth cultures from the languages of youth; the issue belongs to different perspectives and a different kind of work, thanks also to the establishment of the juridical discourse and a police practice around unlawful association. As a consequence, social work will be placed in a space of complicity with the police-criminal work, accompanying the roles of detection and imagining the possible cure to a pathological phenomenon.

Mentioning the importance of prevention in the pre-gang, through the thrust of transversal activities to youth and the coexistence in neighbourhoods, social work is then conceived as a way to generate detachment with the active members of groups, that is, to favour processes of detaching with the help of social, psychological and family treatment. These types of interventions have been implemented since 2005 by companies offering social services, tightly tied to political guidelines coming from institutions.

“Agency X wanted to detach the minors that were in violent groups. Street educators in our program drew maps of hot spots. Those maps were sent to the police. If I had two districts, I drew a map and I had to draw the points with the gang letters. That is, in that park if there were *Ñetas*, then I was supposed to draw a blue dot with a *Ñ*. The agency had three day centres for the whole of Madrid, but they had no street educators, they didn’t do the real work, the grassroots work with these kids. [...] in order to work with gangs you need to be in the street.” (Street educator, Madrid).

Looking at these groups with the approach, often rhetorical, of detachment, is a sort of double mistake: on the one hand membership is seen as something fixed, when in reality we find it has the transitory character typical of young-adolescents. This means that many members get uninvolved by themselves through the elements that mark their own biographic cycle (setting up a family and getting a job). The discourse of detachment means that: *a*) members are obliged to participate (which may happen in individual cases but is not the normal thing); *b*) that their own will is not capable of being manifested (here is the figure dramatically evoked by school teachers of *recruiters*, responsible for the reproduction of groups); *c*) that adherents do not obtain significant advantage by getting the status of members, when what really happens

is the opposite, and explains participation. In other words, for many young people participating in these groups allows them to enjoy social and symbolic resources from which they were previously excluded: being in the *gang*, in the *choir*, in the *nation*, in the *association* provides them with status, esteem, respect and acknowledgement in the street social scene. It means to shift from a condition of invisibility to a condition of visibility, from being *nobody* to being *somebody* [Queirolo Palmas 2009].

In Barcelona the challenge was to incorporate certain groups to defuse their dangerousness; the incorporation of some implies, of course, the exclusion of others. In this sense, if Madrid played the strategy of *gangs out* in an integral way, Barcelona complemented the two strategies; it was a federation of Latin American associations who was in charge of activating the processes of normalisation and pedagogy (*gangs in*) that were particularly intense until 2008, although they were concentrated on the Latin Kings group, which had become an association. The tools used were workshops on gender and sexuality, artistic and musical groups, learning tied to the management of an association, fostering of sports events, work training. The process of normalization, which was supported by the connections between educators and the young Latin Kings, had the aim of reducing the culture of violence, generating and accessing alternatives, broadening symbolic and social references for members: acknowledging and binding, institutionalising, if possible, the group, and making it disappear little by little.

The projects of intervention by social service agencies in Madrid, financed by the City Council, worked at an individual level, making an investment in un-addiction: the gang is a *sect*, a *drug* and hence dependence needs to be reduced to produce detachment. Educators were supposed to detect, attach themselves to and accompany members in protected spaces of socialisation, psychologists needed to cure, social assistants had to do the case reviews and follow-ups. The frame of interventions was fixed and investment was only made on *derived* minors, that is, cases detected and inserted into the channels of social services.

“You had to do what they told you in the City Council, you were never free to decide on a job. You worked with minors derived from social services. But when you work in the street you’re aware that not all minors pass through social services.”
(Street educator, Madrid).

Moreover, agencies specialised in the subject wanted the monopoly on the referred young people who had entered the official channels; they needed to produce figures, because behind the treated cases there was financing. This mechanism generated competence over the cases to treat, between the small associations with fewer resources who worked in the street, outside the boundaries of these channels, and the

large associations that executed activities with clients from their offices. As a street educator in Madrid told us in November 2012:

“They make us refer them to the official project if they belong to the gangs and they have a file in social services. Social services never talk about gangs; they talk about ‘young people in a social conflict.’ It is difficult for us to work with these groups; we work outside the law.”

The hegemonic culture, which as a matter of fact is driven by institutions, is that gangs and members are approached as pathologic and criminal.

In Madrid the intervention is organised around an official path that provides subjects referred from other agencies, while in Barcelona a range of interventions were officially organised around the proximity of street educators to vulnerable groups. Any alternative intervention outside the detection/un-addiction/detachment, has to be done as an occult practice in Madrid, it is done, but not said in public; in order to attempt to do something similar to what Barcelona City Council did between 2005 and 2008 and to experience a social intervention that acknowledges the existence of the street groups, one has to get into the register of the non-reportable.²⁵

When I carry out the ethnographic work in Madrid in May 2012, I find a field articulated around the occult: there is a gang scene and youth violence that is not portrayed by the media; general policies to officially treat and prevent youth violence are in reality *anti-gang* programmes in disguise. Moreover, there are actors and experiences that, beyond the formality of detachment, generate activities of harm reduction similar to the ones implemented in Barcelona with institutional support: street work with chapters of DDP and Trinitarios, conflict mediation, leader involvement.

Educator 2: “[...] A big part is prevention, we think we need to prevent, because very young kids are getting involved and we need to do something so that such little kids do not become involved in the groups, so the work now is containment.”

Educator 1: “Or if they become involved, we have to work so that they do not commit crimes. Then there’s group work to be done on certain positive values that they have, brotherhood, for instance. Now my objective is not to detach them, like it was 5 years ago.”

Educator 2: “We need to find the alternative, that is, give them their strength back, they have an enormous potential. They also need to be the regenerators of their own change.” (Street Educators, Madrid).

All these work experiences with the groups take place in the street, in an informal manner, they are born from day-to-day contact with young people who place their sociability in public spaces and avoid the referral and follow-up protocols dic-

²⁵ But occult practice can also be functional and fostered by the institutions themselves; see Giliberti [2013a, 1].

tated by social services. There are also frictions within the projects, the discourses and the practices that social work wants to control. We observe for example the development of the discussion between the professionals of the ASPA project, who, after a period in a vacuum, have recovered the *business* of young people from gangs. Option 3, the social service company that manages the ASPA program runs four labour and socio-educational centres in four districts of the city of Madrid; they deal with 250 young people in a special program of violence prevention. The latter – who are mostly gang members – are referred from schools and social services; the heart of the activity is focused on the search for job opportunities, a difficult task in times of crisis.

Educator 1: “There are often cars from the gangs that come to recruit with the music very loud. Thank goodness the police intervene...”

Educator 2: “They become criminalised very quickly, there are many legends about gangs in this city and they are very harmful. I think these are processes of youth identity. They do their gang theatre and I do my educator theatre... I never ask them to get detached.”

Educator 3: “It would be fascinating if they let us work with the groups like they do in Barcelona, but here it is not allowed...”

Educator 4: “The kids feel harassed by the police. And they react, they defend themselves.”

Coordinator: “We don’t call them gangs in Madrid, they are violent groups. It has to be made clear that we do not search for gangs in order to help them. Our experience is not with gangs, but with risk practices. Our approach is always about the individual, we do not work with groups. We’re interested in the practices; we want to defuse the risks of belonging to violent groups.” [Field diary, May 2012].

Any space of discourse is stratified, positioned, contingent. There is a façade and a backstage; each discourse is instituted by power relations. Thus, an educator from an association from another district talks about the relation they have with the City Council:

“Some associations made a lot of money with the gang thing, projects of detachment, money went there... Many of us preferred not to talk about the subject”. I show him an official report: “this, for example, I wouldn’t believe it much, it is produced by the City Council. We don’t say anything because they’re going to send us more police ... why talk?” [Field diary, May 2012].

If the texts are constructed, our work as researchers is to show the breaches. Associations live on public contracts, they follow the guidelines given by politicians, and this factor, outside any discourse about professionalism, determines a crucial point on autonomy; social workers are often precarious workers within a precarious

contract of service between agencies and the City Council.²⁶ The official version is that work is individual and has to do with detachment; practical work sometimes goes in different directions.

If in Madrid an official path of intervention is accompanied by occult practices of a different nature, in Barcelona two official pathways coexisted, measuring their forces in the field and in time, with their occult practices: on the one hand, the pathway of normalisation/conversion that worked in the modality *gangs in*, on the other hand, the classical pathway of approximation to the phenomenon by social services, by schools, by the public facilities who organised barriers and devices of exclusion. We now try to analyse in depth the evolution of the approach *gangs in* in Barcelona, with full detail of its characteristics.

4.2. *Evolution and Truncations of Interventions on Gangs in Barcelona*

If in Madrid we observe signs of group-based interventions as an axis of parallel and occult experiments, in Barcelona those who bet on the group somehow re-discovered the individual as a target of intervention. Encompassing the group allowed the opening of a way for individual interventions; however, to broaden this type of intervention, the group structures had to be broken. In order to go on with the normalisation, groups had to disappear; although not declared, the objective, the practised (but not achieved) desire, was to detach the young people from a group dimension which was seen as problematic, as *a burden that had to be taken off their shoulders*. We see how a person responsible for direct intervention on gang members in Barcelona explains to us and constructs a narration on the need for a change in approach:

“The group had to open up. In 2009 we went through all this definition revision. [...] I kept telling them that, if they went around saying that they were those fantastic Latin Kings: the girlfriend’s father chased them away, the boss at work sacked them, the principal at school didn’t accept them either and then the police came and took them to jail... Where was the deal? I liked to say ‘take this burden off your shoulders.’ I interpreted all that as a shield that in the beginning has a use, but then it becomes a very heavy rucksack.” (Educator, Barcelona).

The intervention directed itself to the reduction in the autonomy of the groups, to their institutionalisation making their members clients of a specific administrative activity and setting aside the development of their members’ lives in the street. How-

²⁶ Of course these processes of externalisation of social interventions to companies and associations also exist in the Catalan experience.

ever, the conversion into an association being the sign and proof of this process, institutions and their operational arms also remarked critically how the group and its members expressed a lack of autonomy, that is, a not very enthusiastic or active party in the appropriation of this official code. The narration about the groups' autonomy issue in the accounts of the different informants is, by its ambivalence, a very interesting indicator of the political-administrative desires: to insert the members within another container (the *association*), to empty the previous container (the *gang*), to value the first one and to devalue the second one as channels of normalised access to the host society. The members were asked to be active in the first one and to defuse themselves in the second one; a lack of investment in the first field is classified in consequence as a lack of autonomy.

“We have tried to support the groups' autonomy. But in the past 8 years there hasn't been one single autonomous project by any of the two associations. [...] What's the main failure? It is dependence. We have consolidated a group with no capacity of generating projects of their own.” (Barcelona Council official, Directorate of Prevention).

At the same time we think that this lack of activism in following the channels marked by institutions is a clear indicator of gang *autonomy*; a tactic that articulates opportunism and non permeability, a resistance to the individualisation ideas promoted by the institutions.

The desire of achieving the disappearance of the groups was assumed as the condition for individual incorporation and success into the host society; the role of social work was to implement guidelines for institutional intervention with those who were available for this type of intervention, *those available for integration*: a classification criterion of the gang scene and of course of migrations. Our informants in the organisation that carried out the street-based activities use the following language: “to be a bridge;” “to achieve normality;” “young Latin management;” “entrance door to normality for these youngsters that now have Catalan children;” “offer them a more interesting role than being in a square;” “provide with tools for integration;” “guarantee the safety of public places where these young people are;” “our objective as organisation is to disappear, it will mean that we normalised these young people;” “we want to be part of the administration;” “the day of normality will be when we have a coloured policeman, a coloured journalist in Catalan TV, a coloured public official;” and of course we could not avoid the local-national discourse, as “in year 2000 we only gave foreigners services, now we are a real Catalan entity.”

These tropes articulate an interesting and interested mixture of assimilationism and multiculturalism, hymns to coexistence and a reivindication of a role in the

sub-contracting within the mechanisms of public policies, and it should never be forgotten that the work done by these associations, and their autonomy, depend on resources passed on by institutions and, ultimately, on a political relationship and filiation. What did the directorate in the City Council fostering the process aim at? Something different from acknowledgement of gangs, if by this word we refer to the classical approach of multiculturalism:

“Our strategy? Community mobilisation, control, change in the organisation (I doubt they can change now), access to alternatives. Make them appear and disappear... both things go together in the strategy we had with the groups. The process was instrumental. We wanted them to disappear, to blend with the environment.”
(Barcelona Council official, Directorate of Prevention).

Intervention from the left hand sought to open an option for the groups: inviting them to be placed alongside the institutions and elevating the converted as an example. The fragmentation – that is, a classification between good and bad – was partly an objective of the process, which also helped distribute tasks between the State’s right and left hands; the gang scene indeed fragmented and was divided between those for and against the conversion process started by the institutions. However, associations formed during the time of our ethnography also disappeared as subjects of activities; the groups reproduced and transformed outside the institutional logic. The fact that most groups did not settle in the process of normalisation can be seen as a flaw in the construction of a policy, but also as another evident sign of what we call *gang autonomy*.

There were some important truncations in the processes of conversion – normalisation; the first has to do with the unfulfilled administrative transfer of the interventions from prevention/security to social and youth policies. The areas of policy production are organised around philosophies, practices and intervention routines. Above all, social services manage *cases*; problems are assessed on an individual basis and on the needs, articulating follow-ups through the activation of different administrative and professional subjects; a routine that appears in Barcelona and in Madrid is, for instance, to address the subject of gangs as an addiction and lead the subject classified as such into certain programmes of psychological therapy.

Assuming the group, not the individual, as the target for intervention by social services entails a rupture in a deeply rooted professional culture, as the other pole of social work – street education – has less power within the administrative structure: on the one hand it is externalised towards companies and associations (and precarious workers, not officials), on the other hand, in the framework of the crisis we witness a process of withdrawal to the social work offices; as a consequence of the cutbacks,

users go to the services rather than the services going to the clients' life spaces. Social services focus on problematic cases, while youth policies foster creativity and opportunities for the subjects who attend school and have some amount of cultural capital, which makes it inappropriate to consider gang members as clients. Here's an account about these frictions:

“The culture of social services had embraced the mythology about gangs, partly because they had the practice of protecting minors, and partly because gangs appeared as a violation of the rights of the minor. Besides, the Youth Directorate wanted to chase them from the youth centres; there was the idea that intervention had to be earned... and this blocked the relationship with the groups. Our work has been easier with the police than with the social services, and that's because our intervention put their professional paradigm into crisis.” (Barcelona Council official, Directorate of Prevention).

These frictions are manifested in the relationship between groups and public facilities; the process of conversion gave broader access, but at the time they also maintained resistance and mistrust towards the *gang-associations* about the access to the *normalised* spaces, that is to say, spaces that according to some areas of the administration would allow the reduction in the importance of street socialization.

“Some professionals believe that these groups are harmful and are afraid that if one group comes, then another will come and there will be a conflict and their centre will be stigmatised.” (Barcelona Council official, Directorate of Prevention).

Access to public facilities was a field of conflict and of social-police surveillance, also during the golden time of *normalisation*, according to the account of a Latin Queens leader.

“In the *Centre*, we had the police one day. They installed recorders, in order to listen to our meetings... It's a feeling of, 'ok, I'm going to trust you but not quite, I'm going to be watching you.' Of course, we learned how to use the public space, what forms we had to fill in. In that sense, everything was all right, even though there was always that fear, that mistrust which is still present today.” (Latin Queen leader, Barcelona).

From 2008/2009 onwards direct interventions of the City Council with the groups are interrupted. The *conversion* model is not replicated on the new street subjects that are emerging. The reason for such interruption is officially explained in different ways: the existence of a pathway is evoked, and of some possibilities already in place; therefore, available to whoever expresses a desire for institutionalisation; a different quality – more delinquent – is added as specific of the new groups who are

now dominating street life;²⁷ the impact of the crisis is added, which causes political priorities to change for local institutions. These appreciations can be contrasted if we observe the account of other professionals that question the persistence of a memory effect among the new gang scene about the conversion policy, the real accessibility to resources, the structural difference between the street groups then and the street groups now.

During the period of our ethnography, social services officials in different neighbourhoods of Barcelona tell us that nowadays there is a certain amount of tension when one of these groups tries to use municipal infrastructure to carry out their activities; the reason is the stigmatised label that these groups have associated to their collective identity. Some professionals explain to us that if these young people are accepted, then that space suffers from a social stigma; others tell us that they would be willing to accept them with an increase of resources. The fear arisen has to do with the possibility that the young people use these spaces for violent activities and rituals. This attitude of distrust and exclusion is contradictory with the work of other branches of the administration – for example the Service of Conflict Management and, previously, the Directorate of Prevention – who have as one of the objectives of their interventions to bring the street groups into public centres; the administration tried to persuade the leaders of Latin Kings and Ñetas that being an association was the necessary status to access public infrastructure on equal terms, but after six years, many of those barriers are still standing. Nonetheless, the process of normalisation allows to visualise the space of conflict between different branches of the institutions, between two official pathways dealing with the same issue, and to open a dialogic dimension that is part or condition of a solution.

If we look at the timings of the interventions, after a specific policy of *gangs in* there was a void where the only subjects that took action were the police. The group reproduction (beyond the institutions) and the persistence of the boundaries of normalisation open again a reflection about the need of an intervention. From 2010 onwards, the Municipality launches a pilot diagnosis in the districts with the objective of building relationships and defining courses of response and action protocols between the different actors involved, that is between the two intervention practices (*gangs in* and *gangs out*); this process sought to generate trust and harmonise the different positions and professional cultures (prevention, school, police, social services).

²⁷ “When a confrontational movement takes a step forward and becomes a political movement it does not belong to the street any more, then others occupy the street,” an educator tells us.

One objective was also the detecting and gathering of case files for intervention; but detection encountered resistance in schools and in many cases there was no intervention carried out, or any harmonisation practice completed. As an official in a social service centre of the Municipality said in an interview:

“We filled file after file, and then it wasn’t clear what we were supposed to do with the cases. Those above can’t even agree on the language to use: gangs, NGJOV, groups... They should tell us what to do: detach, detect, empower, prevent, acknowledge... here everyone does their own thing. They should agree among themselves what it is we should do and then we’ll do it.” [Field diary, November 2012].

After 2009 as interventions with groups came to an end, a background practice shared by different left hand agencies regains space and legitimacy: the detection of individuals oriented to improve the circulation of information, visualising certain memberships and labelling certain lives. The emphasis on the need of detection, the opening of case files and protocol production indicate on the one hand, that the pathological imaginary about the young people’s experiences returns, and on the other hand that the contacts with the groups are lost; that social capital has weakened and to produce knowledge we need to resort to a more bureaucratic form of involvement; files from social services and other agencies are not very different from the detection mechanisms the police are starting to use massively as the strategy of proximity is being abandoned. Even more, as we have already seen in the case of Madrid, as in Barcelona, the detection efforts are shared between the administration’s right and left hands; at the district level commissions are organised with the assistance of social workers, police officers, educators and schools with the aim of generating a general archive of members and cooperating in the production of information.

In January 2013, within the framework of the *Servei de Gestió de Conflictes* (Conflict Management Service), a new team specialised in street work is constituted with the task of intervening in an experimental way in certain districts; the gangs young people are now defined as “subjects with an intensive, territorial and exclusive use of the public space” and the team will work as an invisible subject, with little advertising, as the officials in charge tell us.

Official 2: “When you have someone to rely on it is easier to tell your team: we have a service that will come to us, who will accompany us, that we can trust, who will guide us and give us support.”

Official 1: “A team that sets boundaries in the street, that mediates between the *chapters*. Not only a service that works for the administration, but who works with the group. In the same way that we have specialised services for the *homeless*, for

parentless minors, we need to set up a specialised group for these types of groups.”
(Barcelona Council officials, Conflict Management Service, Barcelona).

This is how the interventions were transferred from the field of prevention and safety to social and youth policies. The intervention attempts to recover the concept of the link with the gangs through a harm reduction approach; to a certain extent the aim is for social capital to be again a resource in this field, beyond the logic of detection, although it is early to make a diagnosis of this policy.

4.3. *Ostracism and School Minorisation*

The school experiences of the children of migrants in Spain can be summarised through the idea of school minorisation: a multiplicity of inter-school and intra-school segregation mechanisms put this category of students in the spaces of lower qualifications, lower expectations, a more rapid ejection towards the labour market [Carasco *et al.* 2011; Pámies 2013; Ballestín 2010; Giliberti 2012 and 2013]. Subaltern integration in the labour market is founded in school minorisation; but in the context of the crisis, this expulsion does not place these youths inside the official job market, but on the street, with its double dimension: void of opportunities and insertion into illegal economy.²⁸ How schools deal with gangs is part of this process of minorisation.

Schools represent crucial places where a permanent struggle and ambivalence on the visibility and invisibility of the gang phenomenon take place. Most of the young people in the gangs have gone through the school system, where they found a place to access and build this kind of experience. Dropping out of school, the decrease in public investment in education and transfer into a context which is devoid of work opportunities is a structuring axis for understanding the reproduction of street groups during the crisis. School labelling of gangs is at the same time an interesting and interested rhetoric as it allows educational institutions to self-absolve from their own failure with the most fragile groups of students, those from a migrant origin; an educator in a program for violent young people in Madrid tells us the following:

“From the services they send reports, they label the young people that come to our prevention programme as gang members, for their suspicious attire, for example. Reports are short and very simple. At schools they are labelled as gang members because they are Ecuadorian, problematic, absent, a failure. My impression is that

²⁸ According to the research of the collective IOE [2013, 48-49], in 2010 “37,000 young Latin American people have abandoned their studies without obtaining a degree in Secondary Compulsory Education (over 20,000), or without *finishing* baccalaureate or the Secondary Education Vocational Training (17,800 students).” The global dropout rate among young Latin Americans is 22.3% in the range 16-19 years and 38.9% in the range 20-24 years.

they have found the perfect explanation: any child who is problematic is in some way turned into a gang member. Any behaviour which is not understood is associated with the gangs.” [Field diary, May 2012].

In this account, being defined as *gang member* by the school institutions is a metonymic mechanism to define and explain school dropout; unlike the simplistic explanation provided by Aparicio, Haller, Portes [2009a; 2009b] – gangs are an independent variable to explain educational failure – rather, the thing to do would be to assume the school discourse and classifications of these groups as an argumentative rhetoric to legitimate intra-school segregation, which articulates the students’ social inequalities. As another educator adds, teachers produce a pathological discourse about those youth cultures that fascinate some of the students, giving respect and a group identity.

“Gangs are part of the environment, the microclimate of the district of Vallecas; it’s like with football, you follow who wins and who loses and you talk about it in the street... In schools belonging to gangs is demonised, the police train the teachers in this matter, when they raid the parks they take TV crews along with them, and the kids hide even more as they know they can be charged with unlawful association.” [Field diary, may 2012].

In a study about the San Cristóbal district in Madrid, carried out between 2005 and 2008, Eserverri [2012] states how the *special workshop* in schools is the place for the *bad ones*, where the most problematic students are sent to and treated through manual activities. At the same time the recent cutbacks²⁹ in the field of education also limited the use of these educational mechanisms, inside and outside the classroom, devised to create contention structures of youth sociability; a similar process takes place in Catalonia with the decrease in training opportunities in the PQPI³⁰, the compensatory training offered to young people of migrant and working class origin who do not complete their compulsory education. Some analysts [Ferrer *et al.* 2008] have also highlighted that Catalonia is the community with the highest intra-school segmentation practice: about one in three schools separate students according to their level. In the city outskirts, as stated by Luca Giliberti [2012a; 2012b] in his school ethnography, the result of these mechanisms is that school stratification is a mirror of the relations of class and *race*, which, despite the rhetoric of inter culture, reduces the meeting and contact spaces between students [Ponferrada 2009].

²⁹ In Catalonia expenditure in education was reduced by 7.5% in 2011, and by 6.3% in 2012; similar measures are applied in the rest of Spain [Albaigés and Martínez 2012].

³⁰ Programas de Calificación Profesional Inicial (*Programmes of Initial Professional Qualification*).

In Madrid, the works by Cecilia Eserverri [2012] give an account of how for many young people of migrant origin a culture of school dropout is established in the suburbs, where “school dropout is, in some situations, a solution as it takes the young people away from an adverse social environment” [*ibidem*, 300] and allows them to recover some self-esteem in the face of a process of material minorisation – the inclusion in the segregated niches of education – which always has a symbolic side and a consequence. School puts to the fore its reproductive function [Bourdieu and Passeron 1970] and transfers some sectors of youth to other determinisms and other agencies (the labour market or prison institutions), as the following account of my ethnographic work clearly shows:

I am in a park in the outskirts of Madrid, with some street educators, with a group labelled as Dominican. The educators try to explain to me the multiple mechanisms of minorisation of the young migrants at the school. It is not by chance that the kids I find these days speak so much about their experience in the juvenile detention centres. “Hey, did you get out of Teresa de Calcuta? And how about you at Mecos?”³¹ They are DDP, they pass on information about the last prison *hotels* visited. I talk to a youngster a little while in private, who is from the *choir*. “It is the crisis brother, I used to work as a maintenance operator at the airport, then in the building trade... the crisis caught me in 2008 and now my unemployment benefit is over... we’re here. They treat us as offenders, the police are always doing raids, companies only hire Spaniards.” [Field diary, May 2012].

The process of normalisation-conversion which attempted to open a path to legitimisation within Barcelona’s municipal facilities never reached the schools, where failure and expulsion are often connected to the institutional practices toward young gang members; this ostracism culture is acknowledged in 2010 when a district school won the educational prize City of Barcelona with the project *Gangs out*. Listening to the protagonists accounting this experience is a prism that sheds light on fears and passions, conflicts and practices in educational environments.

The conversation with these teachers starts with the subject of the groups legalisation: “Here in Catalonia they are legal, cultural associations, I can’t understand the policy from the City Council, nobody does. Here we have mainly Latin kids and the risk that they belong to a gang is high. If you want to be in a gang, do it far from our school, you don’t play out your private life in here. You shouldn’t wear a cap. Muslim girls can, but that’s a religious issue.” Such discourse is strange because it is accompanied by a rhetoric about the benefits of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism for everyone, except for gangs, who cannot be considered part of a youth culture because of their intimate criminal qualities. [Field diary, March 2012].

³¹ Juvenile detention centres in the Community of Madrid.

Many schools defend protocols of uniforms and styles that forbid the signs of gangs. What was generated at the school's micro level little by little became the Catalan Government's Ministry of Education recommendation for the whole educational system.

“At the school level we forbid any displays by the gangs. We had a great war with the caps. We also banned scarves, wrist bands, belts with buckles, weapons... We realised that by concealing the group insignias the violence inside the school went down.” (Ministry of Education official).

Detection is a practice which spreads to all schools in Catalonia thanks to an official protocol between the police and the Ministry of Education which, on the one hand, enables a referral to the police and the Judicial system of individuals suspected of belonging to groups, and on the other hand promotes education-police cooperation in the field of teacher training with the aim of improving teachers' capacity to identify the signs of the gang phenomenon in the classroom.

“The aim of the protocol is to detect students who are susceptible of belonging to a gang. It is a matter of learning how to recognise all the clues that a student may enter a gang. Part of the intervention and action is made by the whole social network: the police, street educators, social workers. It is also very important that the schools prevent these kids from entering the gang.” (Ministry of Education official).

The image of these youth groups is completely slanted towards a criminal view; this brings the need to detect and produce joint records within the State's right hand through an action protocol that mentions, in its first page, the need to maintain the *maximum confidentiality* of the document. If we made protocols to detect squatters, anti-system, *indignants*, independentist militants at schools with the complicity of the educational authorities and the police, this would entail some sort of democratic scandal within public opinion; but here we would be talking about groups of native Spanish young people, while the gangs constitute the main space of the young migrants' self-organisation that ultimately enables what Sayad [1996] has called the double punishment: violence and crime of the non-native always has to face their role of host and the accusation of ingratitude in the receiving society's imaginary. The same crime, or the same behaviour by a migrant child and by a native child will hardly have the same symbolic value.

While prohibiting the gang aesthetics invisibility is pursued, on the contrary, detection aims to make this presence visible;³² there are also shortcomings in the

³² At the same time prohibition, since it has a public status, makes the issue of gangs visible within schools, while their detection remains *confidential* and a practice that is not displayed to the whole of the educational environment.

willingness of schools to cooperate. We see some examples: a police officer responsible for school training explains that in his visits to Hospitalet, a town known for its flourishing gang scene, teachers denied the presence of gangs among the students; the principal of an important secondary school, in an informal meeting, tells me that he is not going to apply any protocol of reporting his students; social services professionals often mention the lack of willingness of schools to participate in the case detection, that is, to contribute to the production of files on gang kids. Behind all this resistance there is the fear of associating the school with falling standards, and of losing native students. The following account has been collected in a district school in Barcelona:

Teacher 1: "Gang legalisation was a false model. We don't want to reinforce these groups."

Social assistant 2: "Schools are afraid of being labelled as gang places."

Social assistant 1: "The people at the City Council? They can't even agree on what to call the gangs. How could they ever do anything?"

Teacher 2: "When we heard about the process of legalisation we wanted to do things, but nobody from institutions helped."

We left the school; the most interested social worker in an alternative approach about the subject tells me that many schools expel the kids just for suspecting that they belong to these groups. "There are no resources, teachers are angry: they don't want more problems with fewer resources." It is the same discourse pronounced by the principal of a youth centre: "With no resources these kids don't get in here as gangs." [Field diary, November 2012].

In conclusion, there is no doubt that in educational contexts in Madrid and Barcelona school expulsion was pursued, as well as detachment and derivation to other agencies which were preferred for this type of young people: immigrant, defined as gang members, problematic and trouble makers.

4.4. *Space Ostracism*

Gangs have played an important role in the use of the public space and at the same time have stirred debate, created outcry and controversy about the use of territory. According to Canelles [2006] the presence of Latin American young groups in public spaces has been described in terms of fear, nuisance, disorder and occupation. In the following account between a Justice official and a police officer from Barcelona, the public space becomes the crucial place for conflict, where a nuisance is expressed but also the possibility of control:

Justice official: “They were a visual nuisance, neighbours complained about them. The City Council said that if the kids were just hanging about, there was nothing they could do about it. The park is big; they didn’t even bother the neighbours, only park users.”

A local police officer: “In terms of policing, it’s good for us that they are in the street. It’s easier to control them.” [Field diary, February 2012].

The public space – spaces that are not subject to commoditisation of their use – has seen a change in its users with the arrival of the immigrants’ children. As Canelles [2007] states, rather than “take the square off us,” these young people start to use a space that they find virtually empty. In Barcelona, officials from the Conflict Resolution Services tell us how many interventions are prompted by calls from local neighbours and elderly people who denounce inappropriate use by young immigrants, so there is also a generational issue to be taken into account.

In the urban spaces of the ethnography, like in any other capitalist cities, the use of space is regulated and *civiness* tries to regulate the use and punish the behaviour understood as inappropriate;³³ thus, law becomes an excluding mechanism, something that contributes to the ebbing away of the city’s public character. As Cerbino and Rodríguez add, reflecting upon the relationship between gangs in Madrid parks [2012, 177], one of the most surprising things for the newly arrived young immigrants “is that territories do not belong to a community, that is, they are not negotiated with the people living in there, but are accessible through an established regulation, which takes away the real possibility of insertion through negotiation;” Manuel Delgado [2007], in a masterpiece about Barcelona as a paradigmatic city, had already evidenced how urbanism becomes an enemy of the urban.

The fear of territorial occupation has often been created by the media and the shared public opinion. The young people from street groups are thus accused of improper use of the public space; improper because it is intensive and excluding other possible users; the crime thus would be monopolisation and privatisation of the public space; a supposed privatisation. We can see below a definition of this *crime* by the Service in charge of this issue in Barcelona:

³³ Since 2005, with the “Ordinance of measures to promote and guarantee citizen coexistence in the public space,” using the rhetoric of civility, beggars are disciplined in Barcelona (not for begging, but for using public space without authorisation), like sex workers and other categories of poor people, for improper behaviour. The aim is to build an intimidating environment and the establishing of preventive repression; Manuel Delgado [2007] talks about the new social hygiene in the urban environment that has to be transformed into a theme park, immersed in good behaviour and without any trace of conflict and the foul character of social inequality. The policy of turning gangs into associations is contemporary to the ordinance on civiness, maybe we could add that it is a reflection and a rehearsal of that ideology: civilise the behaviours of certain individuals considered as barbarians and primitive, putting them within the framework of a long list of statutes, regulations and protocols.

Author: “What does it mean to say intensive use?”

“Being in the square. When you go at 10 a.m. there’s someone from the group, and they’re still there at 2 a.m. The corner where the kids are, the site used by Ecuadorians to play volleyball, or the bench used by the *homeless* to sleep and spend the day, this is what we call *massive* or *intensive use*. It is *massive* when it is used by a large number of people and *intensive* when it’s for a long time. Of course, if you spend half an hour or two hours in a public space, you have a different impact than if you stay all day in the same space.” (Barcelona Council official, Conflict Management Service).

But the fact that the meeting place is fixed doesn’t mean the space isn’t – or can’t be – shared. Indeed, in different diagnoses carried out about the use of public space by young people in Barcelona Metropolitan Area [Porzio *et al.* 2008 and 2010] it is stated that, in spite of the presence of gangs in squares and parks, their use always ends up being shared. This doesn’t mean that there are no conflicts between the groups because of the use of space, which of course happens in certain circumstances.

Why do gangs use public space so much? On the one hand, as we have seen, the groups do not have free access to the spaces managed by the public administration. In this sense, the presence of these young people in parks and squares reveals the lack of social and educational youth policies. On the other hand, the street is always an important space for socialisation for young people from different countries, who keep this habit throughout their migration process. The use of public space is also connected to a social class issue; it represents a territory for leisure activities that does not involve the need for money.

The use of public space by gangs is based on socialisation and sport and leisure activities – spend some time with their mates – in a fixed place that becomes their second home; we should consider the frequent limitations and precariousness of the first home. We have a story about an everyday situation in the words of a Latin Queen leader in Barcelona.

“Once we organised an activity at the beach, here in Badalona, the police on bikes arrived and told us that there were too many of us and we should have warned the City Council and asked for permission. Another time we were playing football and, well, someone called the police and then they came, and then we were all lined up against the wall for a search. We spent hours there – there were lots of us – and we felt uncomfortable and ashamed, because everyone was looking from their windows at what was going on. A show, like in films.” (Leader Latin Queens, Barcelona).

Thus, the public space is the stage for identity construction and representation – individual and group identities – and at the same time it is a context where young people live, develop cultural practices and experiment forms of discrimination; in a certain way they make up their own space, they recreate with old and new habits

the usage of public space that has been abandoned and commoditised, they perform what Mike Davis [2012] calls, in a classic work about Latin immigrants in the USA, the *magical urbanism*.

The professionals who most often approach young people in the street and parks are the police. The groups and young people I met in Madrid and Barcelona talk about continuous checks and searches by the police in the public space. The pressure is so excessive that a young Latin King tells me during a workshop for the production of the research documentary: “they talk about democracy here, but I don’t understand why in this country, for us young immigrants, the right to meet is forbidden.”

These young people – expelled from schools and not accepted in public facilities – end up relating to the police as the most visible face of the *host* society. The police actors that intervene in the street invite them to vacate the public spaces, social interveners evoke the need to access normalised resources (public facilities, youth centres, sports centres, etc.) without the guarantee it is within the boundaries of possibility, neighbours evoke alarm at their presence and the media narrate the privatisation of the public space by immigrant youths. New categories of criminalisation of their practices emerge: *the intensive and privative use of space*. Often, as a consequence of these actions and gazes, the young people in the gangs get dispersed and become less visible, in order to escape from these forms of permanent surveillance.

Expelled from schools and public facilities, controlled in parks and the street, many gangs find a welcoming space in the churches. It is called to our attention that the Church hosts what for secular public spaces, schools and youth centres is so problematic; of course, with the increasing distancing of autochthonous new generations from the church, these young people represent *clients* that churches otherwise would not have.

A priest told us, reflecting on the experience of the encounter of his parish with the young Latin Kings and Ñetas who have frequented the church since 2005:

“It is hard to understand what they are doing”.

In spite of all attempts to turning them into clients with certain benefits, in this case religious benefits, the young gang members keep their autonomy and seem to make an instrumental use of the spaces, which nonetheless are not totally immune to police pressure. The multiple processes of ostracism in the public spaces have driven these categories of youth into the only place that by definition has the mission of hosting *sinners*: the churches. When the police identify churches as meeting points and organise operations to check and detect around them, they tend not to name

them, maybe to protect the religious authorities, or maybe to avoid awkward questions that may reveal institutional racism: why are these terrible youth gangs meeting and praying in our churches? The religious space thus configures itself as the final space of social discharge for those interventions that the other left hand actors carry out.

5. Summarising the Field

Throughout this analysis of State's left hand we have seen a plurality of logics and temporalities. In the following table (tab.3) we mention and summarize these polarities that help us place social interventions into the two contexts, relating them at the same time with the work of the State's right hand. The modalities presented here were experienced in Barcelona and in Madrid; the difference has to do with the power relations within the State's left hand and the complicities/resistances towards the right hand.

It's important to stress that the two policies or instituted logic of action in the field observed during this research – *gangs in* (conversion) and *gangs out* (ostracism) – derive from a crystallization of an instable and conflictive relation between agents positioned at different levels in the left and right hand of the State. The hegemony, always contested, of a specific logic of action in the field also perform habitus of agents at lower levels, because articulates, through professional training, socialization and everyday informal interactions, a set of dispositions and cultures of acting towards gangs as a social phenomena.

In Madrid there was on the one hand a privileged official channel and on the other a set of occult practices to manage the phenomenon and experimentation at the micro level; the aim was, and still is, to detect, to insert *those detected* into the channels of personalised intervention (*refer them*, in the words of actors), to detach them from gangs and prevent entries. This official policy – *gangs out* – runs in parallel to the work of the State's right hand, who imprison, deport and illegalise street groups.

The dominant actors in the field look for social capital (detection of the gang scene) to turn it into warrior capital (gang disappearance) and symbolic capital, that is, to give their practices and discourses, and the policies *gangs out* value and legitimacy. The dominated actors experience practices of investigation and action (academics), conflict mediation and empowerment of the members (neighbourhood associations), neighbourhood police (the mentors), trying to turn social capital, fruit of a more empathic relationship with the street groups, into symbolic capital, that is to affirm the value of approximation in terms of incorporation and harm reduction (*gangs*

in). But the dominated actors develop part of their practices in an occult way and without any political support, which ultimately is the one to give efficacy to symbolic capital. In the context of Madrid, cultural (views), political (decisions) and economic hegemony (resources) is clearly located under the sign of ostracism.

TAB. 3. *A Map of Policies on Gangs from the State's Left Hand*

Policies	Gangs out	Gangs in
Subjects of Intervention	Referred	Free
Focus of Intervention	Individual	Groups
Space of Intervention	Office - Service	Street - Informal Education
Definition and Principal Assignment of the Phenomenon/Problem	Police - Security	Social - Cultural
Objective 1	Membership Prevention and Detection	Membership Prevention and Detection
Objective 2	Detach	Re-attach (Associations as a Pedagogical and Transformation Tool) to Detach
Objective 3	Make the Street Gangs Disappear through Social Exclusion and Police Pressure	Make the Street Gangs Disappear through the Normalisation of their Behaviour. Fragmentation of the Gang Scene and Segmentation of Police Pressure

Source: Author's elaboration.

In Catalonia, among the actors of the State's left hand there was a much more balanced struggle between anthropophagical (*gangs in*) and anthropoemic strategies (*gangs out*); different branches of the administration – schools and municipalities, prevention policies, youth policies, social services and facilities at a neighbourhood level - backed one strategy or the other in a conflictive way. Moreover, within each branch of the administration occult practices of resistance also took place; the insistence in creating protocols and response pathways from the different institutions can also be explained as a political-administrative attempt of unifying a deeply striated space.

Power in the field was maintained for a long time by a coalition partnership that tied police work in all of Catalonia with certain social interventions in the region's main urban conglomerate. The conversion into an association of the Latin Kings and Ñetas between 2006 and 2007, as well as their appearance before the Catalan Parliament, were the symbolic acts of consecration of this anthropophagic strategy. The hegemony of this coalition in the field was assured by the continuity of a culture

and a police team that worked to segment the gang scene into those who are *good* and *bad*; the first are granted mediation, help and acknowledgement; the latter arrest and deportation.

The difference in field operation between Madrid and Barcelona is first a political one, as the groups have the same dynamics for generation of violence, based on status affirming mechanisms. The political difference of the Catalan experiment turned around the idea of normalisation, a magical word, a field language that many actors shared; however, it was diluted and fragmented between the different institutions. Normalisation also evokes another dimension, the transformation of the social capital into symbolic capital, as a gamble by the State's left hand: to establish a cultural relationship with the host society giving value to the gestures, in the groups and the institutions, that allow collective identities performed by gangs to transit from a space defined by the origin to a space defined by the destination. This was an attempt of pedagogical work, unfinished and unaccomplished, in certain aspects *colonial* because it endeavoured to solve and to cure the condition and the symbolic inventions of a subaltern group from the standpoint of a sentiment of superiority of the receiving society towards those it considered as culturally disabled [Delgado 2010]. Maybe the gamble for normalisation failed due to its excessive, assimilative character, as Barbara Scandroglio and Jorge López emphasize in this conversation with the author:

“You cannot keep the essence of a youth organisation like the *Latin King* or the *Ñetas*, if you dissolve completely the dimension of identity spaces that are contrary or marginal. If you don't preserve part of the other dimension, you miss many of the group essences on the way, needed to integrate and work with people who are outside the normal procedures of insertion into society.”

One of the protagonists of the intervention with the Latin Kings says:

“The aim was to normalise, tackling the problems rather than the identity [...] We wanted to do a pedagogy of the autochthonous [...] Groups don't do anything by themselves.”

In these expressions we find certain features of the field, of the mainstream coalition and transformation: the contact, the pedagogy and the maieutic, the passivity of the young people, the adults as educators, and the desire of recovering the members as individuals to be able to counter their deficits in their access to citizenship. Our informant goes on:

“*Latin gangs* represented the secular detritus of the old fashioned baroque Hispanity. These ties of fraternity between Spain and Latin America (more so now with the economic crisis), the exaltation of the blend of the Latino cultures, all sounds to me like the other side of the same old fascistoid coin. These ‘organisations’ share

all the repertoire of anti-modernity: verticality, spirit of body, royalty, casts, kings, queens, rites of initiation, liturgies, etc. This always seemed to me more dangerous than a knife.” (Educator, Barcelona).

The *Latin gangs* like the *secular detritus of the old fashioned baroque hispanity*. The expression is fascinating; but mistaken, I think. Because after all it still assumes these groups as an importation product, even evoked as a colonial type of history, while their reproduction, here and now, invites us to re-think them as a genuine product of the contemporary receiving society, one of the many possible forms of creative resistance that the youth of immigrant origin and from a lower class background invent to confront the multiple mechanisms of ostracism that cause bias in jobs, education, leisure, and ultimately hinder the construction of a future for these generations. Gangs are a genuine commodity produced by the brand Spain.

Maybe what marks the field in a most radical way, both in Madrid and Barcelona, is precisely the crisis: when the structures of contention or empowerment weaken, an empty space grows – an area of non work and non study – where the street gangs reproduce between economy and politics of the street. We could add that, under the weight of the crisis, the final result of this multiplicity of interventions around the object-gang is something similar to what Young [1999] has called bulimic society: a space where pretensions of inclusion or moral and cultural correction are accompanied, falsified, through radical processes of structural exclusion.

The crisis is a process of expulsion and a deepening in the construction of an even more segmented social space by class and race; this empty space also generates a parallel time, as Perea Restrepo [2007] suggests, a temporality disentangled from school routines and work obligations. What will be left in the day-to-day territories of the proletarian and immigrant youth looks like the State’s right hand. In this sense social interventions become more discontinuous, distant and secondary in contemporary Spain.³⁴

In this space, emptied of those resources and relations that would have normally be provided by the State’s left hand, and at the same time populated with subjects abandoned to their vulnerabilities, the discourse of institutionalisation – the idea of conversion of the *gangs* into associations – was wiped off the map; to a certain extent that attempt and wish was framed within a trajectory, a gamble on an ascending mobility that is no longer possible nowadays. The opinions that we collected among the leaders of the groups that accepted that gamble are now critical and disappointed; it is something they would not do again.

³⁴ When I got back to Madrid in February 2013, I found many of my informants who were street educators unemployed, fired by their companies, victims of the cutbacks.

Z. still expresses all his disappointment at that process: “Now the problem is that the new generations don’t know anything about the peace we had in 2006.” Z. was the public face of the process in Barcelona. What G. was to the Latin Kings, Z. was for Ñetas. “Have you any idea how I stood up for the process of legalisation, and I had to give a lot inside and outside. Inside, because the idea was to walk on the right path and there was a lot of cleaning that we needed to do. I’m being honest, we had a heavy conscience for what we were doing ourselves... but many did not agree and they left. And outside, to become public, all of us. You know, Luca, we were disappointed, we don’t want anything to do with institutions now.”

I’m thinking about the situation of the public actors of this story among the street gangs: some are in prison for transporting drugs because they didn’t have the money to pay back a debt and now they don’t have papers; others always worked in hotels and bars and lost their jobs because of the crisis and don’t have papers either, and the brother who we just heard of does not have a job or papers either. These were the leading actors of that policy launched by public institutions, and didn’t get anything... What type of State’s left hand was that? They were talking about promoting the groups in order to transform them from the inside. Eight years after the groups are fragmented because of that policy, and the subjects of that desired normalisation by the State are in prison, with penal problems and paper problems, jobless. Like many from the edges of society, they live alternating precarious work, crime and welfare. [Field diary, July 2012].

The policies of *gangs in* and *gangs out*, in a period of almost ten years from the first appearance of the phenomenon, could not end the gang scenario that started with the first family regrouping of Latin American immigrants, and became a structuring element within the young, urban and mestizo proletariat. Their resistance to be transformed into clients, treated by contemptuous state devices, whatever the sign of such contempt, is the innovative element of interest in this story, beyond an approach in terms of heritage, of a baroque and stale Hispanic legacy. This is what we call *gang autonomy* confronting the State, its right hand, its left hand.

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The Policies and Policing of Gangs in Contemporary Spain

An Ethnography of a Bureaucratic Field of the State

Abstract: The focus of this article is the fabrication of gangs as a social problem in contemporary Spain. The mobilisation of several agencies during the last ten years to highlight, eradicate, heal this object-problem has created expert officials from different State bureaucracies, as well as models of relationship, career, cooperation and conflict. Using, in an heterodox way, some categories of critical thought and Bourdieu theory, the article explores ethnographically the functioning of this bureaucratic field, observing the policies and the policing of gangs, as well the everyday practices of agents of the right and left hand of the State in defining, constituting, managing, stigmatising these forms of subaltern youth sociability.

Keywords: Gangs; Police; Youth; Migration; Policies.

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