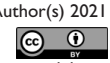
European Journal of Criminology

Article

‘I fear only the neighbourhood and the Lord!’ Youth violence in marginalized spaces

European Journal of Criminology
1–17



DOI: 10.1177/1477370821996897
journals.sagepub.com/home/euc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Abstract

Male juveniles in segregated poor neighbourhoods are at increased risk of violence. The code of the street approach is commonly used to understand the context informing street violence in such marginalized spaces, but the concept is mainly used in Western countries, especially in African American communities in the US. This study investigates whether the code of the street is also applicable to the largest Roma neighbourhood in Europe, located in Bulgaria, through guided interviews with male juveniles. The results show that some elements of the code work are applicable in this space, but clear differences also emerge. These findings affect the generalizability of the approach and the understanding of street violence.

Keywords

Bulgaria, code of the street, Roma, urban criminology, youth violence

Introduction

Youth violence is a worldwide problem. Internationally recognized studies on the phenomenon in Europe usually focus on marginalized groups in the UK or other West European countries (Wikström et al., 2012), and especially on male immigrants. Furthermore, studies typically focus on the role that discrimination and family relations play in promoting violence or other forms of criminal behaviour (Sandberg and Pedersen, 2011). This is only a part of the picture of youth violence in Europe, however, and two other aspects in particular deserve attention. First, studies on Eastern Europe are underrepresented. These societies have undergone an intense transformation in the last three decades that has, among other things, destabilized families and resulted in the disintegration of social values (Atkinson

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and Micklewright, 1992). Second, autochthonous ethnic minorities, and especially Roma, also suffer exclusion and discrimination in Europe. This study examines normative beliefs beyond those regarding male youth violence and focuses on the largest Roma neighbourhood in the European Union (EU), Stolipinovo in the city of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. By examining the discrimination of a minority subject in Bulgaria, this study allows us to gain a better understanding of youth violence in the poorest places of Europe, including Roma settlements in Southeast Europe.

The space of a disadvantaged neighbourhood affects the development of violence-related norms because, as research about neighbourhood effects has made clear, the context has an impact on the normative beliefs of its residents and vulnerable groups, particularly male juveniles (Sharkey and Faber, 2014). From US studies, it is known that the more marginalized a neighbourhood is – in the sense of blocked social mobility among its residents – the higher the disadvantaged neighbourhood effects are and the more common collective beliefs are that differ from those of mainstream society (Sampson, 2012). However, we cannot be sure that the same is true in other cultural contexts.

This study employs Anderson's (1999) street-code approach, which considers both the individual and the context, to youth violence. This approach, developed in the context of Germantown, a segregated African American neighbourhood in Philadelphia, assumes that, in circumstances of social segregation, marginalization and discrimination, young African American males develop a set of violence-related norms. The advantage of employing such a well-known approach is that it makes it possible to both build upon a pre-existing body of knowledge and contribute to an ongoing debate. In addition, because no previous study has focused on the normative beliefs regarding male juvenile violence among a discriminated minority in a highly marginalized context in Europe, this study also contributes to urban studies. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the degree of youth violence in Bulgaria and the US differs significantly: whereas the homicide rate of male juveniles between the ages of 10 and 29 in Bulgaria in 2017 was 2.0 per 100,000, in the US in 1998 it was 8.5 (World Bank, n.d.).

The research question of the study is:

> Is the code of the street in a marginalized European neighbourhood the same as in the US context?

If the answer is yes, we can conclude that the street-code approach is close to a general theory for youth violence; if not, we can establish which elements vary and which are constant.

Code of the street: A spatial perspective on youth violence

Code of the street

Anderson (1999) published his ground-breaking *Code of the Street* just over 20 years ago. The book provides a theoretical approach through which to analyse violence and deviant behaviour in segregated neighbourhoods. Its central claim is that a set of violence-related norms – a *code* – emerges as a reaction to the challenges of a segregated

and unsafe neighbourhood. At the core of the code is respect (Anderson, 1999: 33). The moral beliefs of the code justify violence, a self-centred way of life and a set of social rules that provide as much safety on the street as possible.

The book provoked an intense debate. Several studies, using different methodologies, have concluded that the street code moderates violence and aggression. However, many studies, including those using the Family and Community Health Study dataset, have focused only on African Americans (for example, Mears et al., 2013). Moreover, with a few exceptions, studies have investigated only metropolitan areas, and it is not clear whether urbanity is a necessary condition for the emergence of a street code (Keith and Griffiths, 2014). Furthermore, the assumption that the code provides safety on the street has been rejected by some studies (Baron 2003), and others have found that the code is influenced by migration (Mateu-Gelabertand and Lune, 2007).

The code of the street has been used outside of the Anglo-American world, with a higher variation in the findings. In a study about street children in Makeevka (Ukraine), Naterer (2015) used the code as an analytical framework to interpret ethnographic data and concluded that children living in a threatening social environment develop a street code as a survival strategy. Overall, studies outside the Anglo-American world have found that individuals who are excluded do develop norm-based strategies to survive, but it is not clear whether these strategies are the same across various contexts. McNeeley and Hoeben (2017) used a longitudinal school-based survey ($n = 843$) of juveniles in a poor Dutch neighbourhood for their study. Although they found some evidence of a street code, they also found some differences between that street code and the street codes identified in other studies for other locations. They interpret these differences as determined by culturally specific influences. Heitmeyer and colleagues (2019) conducted an international study that compared the code of the street in Germany, South Africa and Pakistan and found that the code has a stable core, but they also identified differences in different contexts. Heitmeyer et al.'s study is especially valuable because it demonstrates that a single code does not exist. Each context leads to the development of a specific street code and thus a specific street culture (Lepoutre, 2017: 264). Kurtenbach and Rauf (2019) have examined whether the code of the street emerges in ethnically diverse post-industrial neighbourhoods in Germany. They, too, found both similarities to street codes in other places, but also differences. In short, in a neighbourhood perceived as dangerous, young marginalized males react by cultivating a violent reputation.

It is important to note what we do not yet know about the street code. Anglo-American studies show that the street code exists, but this finding is based predominantly on studies of minorities subject to discrimination. Studies in Europe and other regions show that the street codes in these regions differ from that in the US, which indicates that street codes are influenced by culture. On the one hand, there is a street code among minorities subject to discrimination in segregated neighbourhoods; on the other, that code can vary, because moral beliefs differ according to culture. All of these studies have focused on disadvantaged groups, but without unpacking the issue of discrimination. Furthermore, exept for Naterer (2015) and Heitmeyer and colleagues (2019), these studies are focused exclusively on the US and Western Europe. To help fill a gap in the debate, it is necessary to examine whether the street code operates among a minority subject to discrimination

in the Southeast European context, a region that has undergone a deep transformation over the last three decades.

Neighbourhood effects on moral beliefs

One necessary condition for the development of a street code is a disadvantaged spatial environment, such as a socially and ethnically segregated neighbourhood. The underlying assumption is that the neighbourhood has an independent impact on the lives of its residents, referred to as *neighbourhood effects*. A poor neighbourhood makes poor people poorer (Friedrichs, 1998). The mechanisms responsible for this effect have been widely discussed (Galster, 2012), and several studies show that children who grow up in poor neighbourhoods have a lower income later in life (Chetty et al., 2015).

However, neighbourhood effects are also socio-cultural in nature: they include, for instance, shared moral beliefs. The most important approach to the study of the socio-cultural nature of neighbourhood effects is *collective efficacy* (Sampson et al., 1997), which assumes that people are willing to oppose crime and deviant behaviour if they have trust in their neighbourhood. Therefore, according to the argument, pro-social behaviour is encouraged by a collective shared belief. Collective efficacy has been tested in different countries, with mixed but positive results overall (Sampson, 2012; Messner et al., 2017). When trying to ascertain the circumstances in which a street code develops, it is important to understand the role of collective efficacy.

An important driver of neighbourhood effects is restricted opportunities in the neighbourhood. Wilson (1987) and Anderson (1999: 288) argue that individuals in poor neighbourhoods suffer from the absence of positive role models and develop justifications for deviant behaviour. Furthermore, we know that a local drug market (Flom et al., 2001) and low-quality schools (Wodtke et al., 2011) and other public services (Hastings, 2009) in a neighbourhood have a negative impact on the life paths of children and cause youth and street violence.

One constant finding in the literature is that people react differently to neighbourhood influences depending on gender, age and economic resources (Galster et al., 2010). Zuberi (2012) showed that, after moving to a less dangerous neighbourhood, boys react differently to their environment than do girls. Girls perform better in school and meet new friends, whereas boys continue to team up with deviant peers from their previous neighbourhood. In another study, Wen and colleagues (2006) showed, based on a representative survey ($n=214$) among 50 to 67 year olds, that socio-economic status has a significant impact on self-rated health: the higher the individual's status and the better their perception of the neighbourhood, the better their self-rated health. To sum up, we can propose that some groups are more vulnerable to neighbourhood influences than others, which is true for the code of the street as well.

From this perspective, the code of the street develops as a result of spatial circumstances and is a neighbourhood effect, particularly for the vulnerable group – male juveniles. These individuals have to react to a challenging and threatening social environment, and violence is rational from an individualistic point of view. This argument is consistent with that of others, including Sandberg and Pedersen (2011), who claim that juveniles who are economically dependent on the drug trade accumulate street capital through that

market, which helps them get by on the street. Similarly, Sharkey (2006) argues that juveniles in risky neighbourhoods develop a specific knowledge about their neighbourhood, which is useful in staying out of trouble.

Empirical implications and the contours of the code

Based on the discussion above, this study assumes that, in circumstances of concentrated poverty and perceived exclusion, vulnerable groups exhibit deviant behaviour. In this sense, spatial markers – the most important being social segregation and collective experiences of discrimination – are drivers of the construction of a street code. This empirical study takes both of these markers into account.

According to Anderson (1999), the code of the street is shaped by the behaviour of peers, especially in the public space. Respect, the social currency of the street, is at the core of this code, and it is earned by displaying violent behaviour, specific symbols and a certain type of masculinity. Anderson also argues that the code provides its adherents with safety. Thus, employing violence earns one a reputation as someone who should not be messed with: the individual is expected to put up a good physical fight even when he might be expected to lose. In this sense, the ability and willingness to fight are more important than the outcome of a fight.

Violence and masculinity are both elements of the street code, but they both have rules, which is why, Anderson argued, the code of the street provides its adherents with safety: the code regulates appropriate behaviour and makes forgiveness possible. For the code to promote safety, however, everyone involved in a violent situation needs to know the code.

This discussion of existing research shows that we do not sufficiently understand how social constellations within a segregated and discriminated community create the code of the street, especially outside of the Anglo-American world. Anderson focused on various family issues, the daily organization of the drug trade and the role of public services, but it is not clear whether other constellations, such as strong family relations, open racial exclusion, different collective experiences of the past, including the loss of jobs in the transition from socialism to democracy, and higher rates of poverty – all of which apply to Roma communities in Southeast Europe – were also present in the context Anderson studied.

Roma in Bulgaria: A marginalized minority

Roma are the largest ethnic minority in the EU, but their exact number is unknown because it is not captured in the censuses of most EU countries. The European Commission (2011: 2) estimates that between 10 and 12 million Roma live in the EU, predominantly in the Balkan countries, including Bulgaria. Around 10 percent of the Bulgarian population belong to this minority (National Statistical Institute, 2011: 3). The social situation of Roma in Southeast Europe is characterized by exclusion, poverty, low levels of education (O'Nions, 2010), high rates of unemployment (Pogany, 2012: 388) and higher rates of health problems such as HIV than the majority population (Kabakchieva et al., 2002), and they are avoided by most of the majority (Grekova, 2012).

In Bulgaria, Roma often live in segregated neighbourhoods in urban centres or villages close to cities, and Plovdiv-Stolipinovo is the largest Roma neighbourhood in the country. During the socialist era, this neighbourhood was socially and ethnically diverse, but in the wake of the transition to democracy it has become segregated owing to an increase in racism and social stratification. Housing conditions are poor and public infrastructure, including water and sewerage, is inadequate. This neighbourhood is also geographically isolated from the rest of the city by vacant land, rivers and other kinds of physical barriers, but it is not more violent than other parts of the city. As regards violence, this minority is subject to collective punishment (Babourkova, 2010).

Broadly speaking, the social position of Roma communities in Europe is comparable to that of many African American communities in the US. Both face race-based discrimination, poverty and isolation, and they share a history of oppression. Both groups have also suffered most from deindustrialization and inadequate public institutions. Notwithstanding cultural differences, it is thus reasonable to expect that a code of the street similar to that in these US neighbourhoods exists in a Roma neighbourhood in Southeast Europe. By comparing the findings of Anderson's original study with those in a marginalized Roma community in Bulgaria, it is possible to learn more about the general character of the code of the street and the neighbourhood effect of segregated neighbourhoods on violence-related norms.

Research design

The goal of this study is to understand whether the code of the street differs in different cultural contexts even when the social constellation of the neighbourhoods is similar.

Description of the research site

Stolipinovo is the largest Roma neighbourhood in the EU. It is situated on the edge of the inner city of Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second-largest city, which was designated the European Capital of Culture for 2019. Official and reliable statistics for the neighbourhood do not exist, but between 50,000 and 60,000 people are estimated to live in its 2.5 square kilometres (Nicoletti and Kunz, 2018: 7). The number of residents varies due to migration patterns, because it is common in the neighbourhood to go to Western Europe for work, but also to return regularly. The unemployment rate for regular employment is around 90 percent, and many depend on occasional and often low-paid jobs. The population consists of Roma and ethnic Turks, which is reflected in the daily use of the Roma and Turkish languages on the street, and children often learn Bulgarian only at school.

Stolipinovo is characterized by its apartment blocks. However, the neighbourhood was never planned for so many residents, the result of which is that the local infrastructure is overextended. Scattered around the blocks and the largest streets are smaller houses, some in a good condition, whereas others are built out of discarded materials. These houses are often built without planning permits, which results in frequent forcible evictions and demolitions by municipal authorities. Moreover, public and social services, such as youth clubs, healthcare offices and schools, are either non-existent or very poor.

The social life of the neighbourhood is organized around family demands. Household sizes vary, ranging from parents with up to two children to families that consist of three

Table 1. Interview guideline and elements of the code of the street.

Interview question	Code element
What is dis/respect?	Respect
What is a friend?	Friends and family
What is violence?	Perception of violence
What is success?	Success and aspiration
What kind of clothes/tattoos do you (want to) have?	Symbols
What is toughness?	Masculinity
How do you ensure your safety?	Street etiquette
What is an enemy?	Enemy
What makes your neighbourhood unique?	Neighbourhood perception

generations and more than five children. Families are usually organized traditionally, with women taking care of the children and men acting as breadwinners (Kurtenbach, 2018).

Data description and analytical strategy

From November 2018 to January 2019, 30 interviews were conducted with male juveniles between 16 and 21 years of age. The interviews were about 30 minutes long (min: 20; max: 71). All of the individuals had been in or witnessed violent situations in the past. Following the binary logic of the street-code approach, their socio-economic backgrounds were recorded as well educated and 'decent', on the one hand, and street oriented – never having attended school and selling waste materials to make a living, for example – on the other. The interviews took place in a local youth club, which is the only social service in the neighbourhood and is maintained by a local non-governmental organization (NGO). All participants received 20 leva (approximately €10) for their time. Subjects were informed of the survey through the NGO as well as a snowball system. To protect the individuals' identities, details such as name and age were asked but not recorded. The sample reflects the social diversity of the neighbourhood. All interviews were conducted in Bulgarian, but Turkish was also used as required. This combination was necessary because some English words do not have the same meaning in Bulgarian, the most important being 'respect'. Therefore, in the interviews, the Turkish *saygı* was used instead. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain information about the juveniles' perceptions of the core elements of the code of the street. These elements were derived from Anderson's original work via Heitmeyer and colleagues (2019), and they are Respect (Anderson, 1999: 33, 78), Friends and Family (Anderson, 1999: 49, 67, 85), Perception of violence (Anderson, 1999: 68, 70), Success and aspiration (Anderson, 1999: 38, 53–63), Symbols (Anderson, 1999: 67, 112, 113), Masculinity (Anderson, 1999: 91, 136, 146), Street etiquette (Anderson, 1999: 79, 86), Enemy (Anderson, 1999: 81, 90) and Neighbourhood perception (Anderson, 1999: 92, 112, 117). These elements were incorporated into an interview guideline, which guarantees comparability among all interviews as well as with Anderson's original work. These elements are shown in Table 1.

For the interview analysis, MAXQDA 18 was used. The code elements in Table 1 were used in the coding process. Every narrative in the interviews was coded thematically, and multiple codings per narrative were possible. In the next section, three broad issues based on the coded material are discussed to understand the code of the street in Stolipinovo. These are navigating the neighbourhood, systematic avoidance and feeling familiar in the neighbourhood.

Findings

Navigating the neighbourhood

Juveniles learn how to navigate the neighbourhood while staying safe (Sharkey, 2006) and investing in social relationships to build a 'name', which protects against victimization in the future (Anderson, 1999: 67). These preventive strategies can be violent, as Anderson argues, or more social, as the findings in this study suggest, depending on the consequences of violent behaviour. In Stolipinovo, the street code does not reward violence, not even among peers. Nonetheless, there is violence in the neighbourhood. However, this is not uncommon, as studies about working-class youth have demonstrated (Copes et al., 2013; Ravn, 2018). According to these studies, violence is a reaction to a perceived threat and an expression of helplessness, and it grants a specific kind of honour, although it is not the first resort. Following this argument, violence in Stolipinovo can be considered defensive rather than aggressive, since aggressive behaviour is perceived negatively by the community.

Furthermore, the neighbourhood is a source of identity for the juveniles, especially for those who do not have the resources to spend their time in expensive environments such as malls or sport clubs. They know which places to go to for leisure, they have friends and family there, but they also know how to stay out of trouble, which indicates that they learn how to navigate the neighbourhood by internalizing the street code. However, the challenges in Stolipinovo are different from those in Germantown and other disadvantaged communities in the US, and so is the code. In addition, most juveniles want to have a future in their neighbourhood, which was also true in Germantown. Stolipinovo is an autobiographical point of orientation for these juveniles, and that requires learning how to cope with the challenges and resources embedded in the social space; includes fearing it:

> I fear only the neighbourhood and the Lord. (Stolipinovo_28)

> Everything's fine in the neighbourhood. I have a lot of friends. When I go down the street here . . . we meet, have coffee, and people respect me. But with bad people, they say, 'What are you doing here?', that's what they shout. They don't respect me at all. They're drug addicts. Or thieves. They won't respect you. (Stolipinovo_22)

However, this is only one face of the neighbourhood; the other is that it poses a permanent threat that the juveniles have to learn to deal with. Most importantly, drug dealers enjoy a double-sided reputation. On the one hand, they are respected, particularly for their wealth; on the other, they are despised because they participate in the drug trade.

However, it remains unclear whether it is social marginalization or the drug trade that causes the street code: the two go hand in hand and create a threatening environment for male juveniles, who react to it by developing a street code:

> Only those who sell other things [drugs] have money. When you don't sell anything, you just go to work and back home again. And you're broke. (Stolipinovo_22)

Drug users have an especially low status, lower than drug dealers, but they are part of the daily canvas experienced by juveniles. The most important drug in the neighbourhood is bonzai, a herb mixture with synthetic cannabinoids that leads to uncontrollable and violent behaviour. It constitutes an epidemic in the community and a permanent threat for the juveniles, who predominantly use the street to spend their leisure time:

> Everybody tries to get some money from somewhere, no matter how – theft, selling drugs or other things. That's it. But most of them are dealers. They kill people here. Many people have died here from these weeds, bonzai and I don't know what, heroin. (Stiolipinovo_11)

Drugs and violence create the need for a finely tuned sense of when and how to navigate the neighbourhood. The points of orientation in this mental map include places where violence or drug-related situations have been observed or recounted by family members or friends. By creating their own social space within the neighbourhood, individuals can be safe in a risky place that can quickly become dangerous if one is ignorant of the rules and places:

> Here, on Landos [Street]. On the other side, further up, where the Sokoli blocks are, there it gets risky. When they don't know you, they jump you. (Stolipinovo_16)

Between the perceived threat, on the one hand, and attachment to the neighbourhood, on the other, juveniles feel the need to protect against the loss of respect, as a result of which they justify violence in the name of self-defence. Consistently with Anderson's findings, the neighbourhood poses both a physical risk and a threat to social reputation.

The drug trade in the neighbourhood also affects the interpretation of symbols and the way to earn respect, because with the drug trade comes socio-cultural and socio-economic inequality in the neighbourhood: some individuals profit from drugs, while others are consumers (Anderson, 1999). Furthermore, although some drug dealers display their wealth through their clothing and cars, these displays do not earn them respect in the way Anderson claims it, but rather admiration of their wealth.

> There are really rich people here. They drive beautiful cars, for example. We work a whole month for 500 leva, and they spend this amount in a day. We work all month for this money and he goes out one day to have a drink and he spends just as much; he drives a car that costs 800,000 leva. (Stolipinovo_22)

Male juveniles in Stolipinovo perceive their neighbourhood as a threat, and they develop strategies to cope with daily challenges. Juveniles need to know how to stay out of danger and how to behave in a violent situation to stay as safe as possible. In the

interviews, the juveniles expressed themselves on both issues. They know how to stay out of trouble, and two strategies emerge from the interviews. First, they invest in relationships with as many people in the neighbourhood as possible. This involves occasionally drinking coffee together in one of the many coffee shops that sell cheap coffee (approximately 20 US cents a cup) in the neighbourhood. Short chats on the street and congratulating marriages and other celebrations are further investments in the social network:

> Well, good people are good. For example, when they look at you, when you meet them, they'll say, 'Ah, what are you doing, neighbour, what's up, where are you coming from? How are you? I'll come later and we'll have a coffee.' That's the way people show respect. (Stolipinovo_24)

The second strategy involves clearing up misunderstandings or potential conflicts by talking them over, alone or with friends, again over coffee or a cigarette. The goal is to find mutual understanding, usually between two male juveniles. In this regard, it helps that being violent is harmful to one's personal reputation:

> We'll try to come to an understanding. We'll talk with kindness. So that nothing bad happens. We try to keep things as normal as possible. (Stolipinovo_25)

With a few exceptions, juveniles are able to stay out of violence in a risky environment. The exceptions are when someone flirts with the girlfriend of another juvenile or when a serious offence is committed against one's family. If a fight breaks out, the rules cease to operate. Even the unilateral use of weapons and kicking someone who is on the ground are permitted:

> When he falls to the ground, it will get worse for him. The other person will start to kick him. (Stolipinovo_27)

A fight has three possible outcomes: someone is unable to continue fighting, someone escapes from the situation, or a third party intervenes. In this respect, street wisdom moderates staying out of trouble better than it moderates violent interactions, similarly to Anderson's claims. If the fight ends without too much brutality, it is possible that the opponents will respect each other later, but this does not mean that others in the community will respect them.

Having a name: Avoiding and using violence

Respect is the core element of the street code (Anderson, 1999: 33). In Anderson's study, respect was accumulated mostly by a violence-related lifestyle. In Stolipinovo, this social currency is Janus faced, which is true for the other codes as well. Deeply rooted in the community is the idea of equality among peers. Elders have to be respected, but at first glance there is no social hierarchy among juveniles. This 'decent' perspective was shared by all the juveniles interviewed, even those who had been involved in highly violent situations in the past:

> On the streets, the guys my age, they're all equal. There are no 'bigger' or 'smaller' guys. We move around together. Everybody shows the necessary respect to their friends. . . . No one has more authority than me or you. It doesn't play a role. We all have to be equal. (Stolipinovo_18)

However, the ideal of equality can be undermined by the behaviour of peers, and juveniles therefore constantly evaluate their own and others' behaviour. In this process, the behaviour of an individual is assessed not only in terms of how he carries himself, but also in terms of how he treats others: when he exhibits disrespectful behaviour towards others, he loses status, which in turn means that violence is perceived poorly and is not seen as a way to gain respect:

> I respect a person who respects others. When you respect the others, right, I also respect you. People have to respect each other, not like I respect you and you don't even look at me. I respect someone when I see good things from him and no bullshit. (Stolipinovo_11)

Juveniles spend their time in an environment with clear values, values that Anderson identifies as decent, even in circumstances of poverty, organized by fuzzy boundaries. However, if someone crosses the boundary, which is constantly being negotiated through communication and an evaluation of the person and the situation, the rules of decent behaviour disappear and violence is an accepted option:

> When words don't help, he, if that's what he decides, when he's understood what things will lead to if he keeps on talking, it can lead to a fight. However, if he decides that there will be a problem and he won't get out of it unharmed, he might leave without saying anything. Then I'll understand him. But if he continues to talk, I tell him, 'My friend, stop talking, it's going to end badly.' I say it once, twice, but the third time I drag him outside, without anybody seeing it, because, you know, when there are a lot of people around, when you hit him, what will they say? 'He did it, he hit him!' But when you drag him outside, so that nobody sees it, you can do that stuff to him and he won't be able to prove it, right? There's no evidence. (Stolipinovo_8)

This is the second face of the neighbourhood, but from an analytical perspective it reveals that the distinction between street and decent values is not clear cut, because both are rooted in the juveniles' values, and their recourse to one or the other is not merely a matter of code switching (Anderson, 1999: 36). Respect, especially from peers, is important to these young men from Stolipinovo, but the way they attempt to obtain it differs from how African American youth in Germantown did in the 1990s.

Like the perception of the neighbourhood, the conceptualization of masculinity is also double-sided. As in Germantown in the 1990s, the 'tough man' in Stolipinovo is defined as the criminal and violent character who lives the street life. For juveniles, a criminal lifestyle can be seductive because it signifies wealth. But only those who control the drug market are rated highly, not the dealers or others who participate in the underground economy. An integral part of the street character is the reputation for violence and brutality towards enemies.

But this is not the version of masculinity that predominates in Stolipinovo. The more common masculine ideal is captured by the Turkish word *tarikat*, the caring father who

works hard to support his family and can provide them with a good future, which requires a regular income, food and the ability to ensure an education for his children.

> For me a *tarikat* is a person who takes good care of his family. Being a *tarikat* doesn't come from cars or fighting or money. To be a *tarikat* today is to support your family. For me, this is being a *tarikat*. To bring home food and money. (Stoliponovo_8)

Anderson (1999: 36) claims that most people in risky neighbourhoods are decent or try to be, but that the need to keep threatening people at a distance sometimes requires them to act otherwise. Thus, male juveniles in particular feel the need to acquire a street-oriented reputation, which requires the construction of enemies.

The juveniles in the study were asked to define what an enemy is. Some interviewees claimed that they did not have an enemy, or that he was absent and no longer posed a threat:

> I don't have an enemy at the moment, I'd say. I had one, but he's in jail right now. (Stolipinovo_2)

Some juveniles distinguished between temporary and long-term enemies, and they reported that a temporary enemy is someone to fight, for example in a brawl. The temporal dimension is dependent on the reason for and dynamic of a fight. If it is because of misbehaviour, which is forgiven after a fight, an opponent can become a friend, but that possibility is precluded if it is because one's family was offended or one's girlfriend or wife was harassed. The most common construction of an enemy is someone who jeopardizes one's social reputation. Enemies can be false friends, classmates or neighbours. They are despised, but violence is not considered a legitimate first response. Instead, talking to an enemy about his behaviour is the necessary first step. Juveniles learn how to avoid making enemies by learning to be gentle, supervised by the broader community. If someone does make an enemy, pathways towards violence exist but that violence needs to be justified to the broader public.

Violence is part of daily life for juveniles in Stolipinovo, although not all individuals are at risk. Only those who are too close to the drug trade, which is concentrated in a few spots in the neighbourhood, are in danger of becoming a victim of street violence, and juveniles know to avoid those places at certain times. In addition, violence is viewed poorly, and it is not seen as a way to gain respect, as a result of which juveniles try to avoid a reputation for violence. One reason for this is that families of potential brides reject violent grooms, so it is rational for male juveniles to avoid acquiring a violent reputation in the close-knit neighbourhood. Nonetheless, if a violent situation occurs and juveniles consider the use of violence justified, the response can be brutal:

> With their fists, with knives, with axes, whatever they can get a hold of, they might even kill each other. There are a lot of cases like that. It's just dangerous to live in Stolipinovo. (Stolipinovo_17)

Violence does not have a deeper social meaning in the neighbourhood in general, even not among male juveniles: it is not a way to gain respect and it is not accepted as a means

to get things done. It is also much rarer than in Germantown. Thus, although many of the conditions are common to both Germantown and Stolipinovo – spatially concentrated poverty, the disappearance of industrial jobs within a generation, drug trade and discrimination – the way violence is interpreted in the two communities differs significantly. Violence is not part of Stolipinovo's street culture because there is effective social control within the neighbourhood and because of the importance of family solidarity: being too violent is disadvantageous for the family as a whole as well as for juveniles' marriage prospects.

Feeling familiar in the neighbourhood

Although the juveniles identify the neighbourhood as a threatening place, they also describe it as their home and the place where their family and friends live, the biographical centre of their lives. They identify family as the most important concern in their lives. Strong family ties have a protective effect against the threat of the neighbourhood, as well as against poverty and discrimination. However, Anderson's (1999) binary logic of the street and decent values does not emerge from the interviews in this study. It is more common to find decent values combined with a strong work ethic, even among the poorest families in the neighbourhood, as well as the will to stand up and fight to protect the family's name.

However, the need to protect the family's reputation can also be a trap, because it can easily lead to violence. If a family member asks for help in a fight or someone insults the family's reputation, the need for violence is not questioned. In such a situation, even the most brutal behaviour is accepted by family members, as well as by the broader community:

> Well, we go out, right? One guy comes along, drunk, we look at him and say, 'Look, he's drunk.' And he says, 'What are you looking at?' And I say, 'Nothing, bro.' And we continue to walk along. And he shouts, 'I'll fuck your mother, your father! Don't look at me like that, or I'll smash your face!' And I go and hit him and he hits me, and there's a big conflict. My father's now in jail again because of this conflict. I made my father shoot this guy, who beat me. This kid went to his brother and I went to my father. And my father took out his gun and shot the kid's father. And now my father's in jail again. Ten years they gave him! (Stolipinovo_10)

As a result, juveniles try to keep the family out of their conflicts as much as possible. This is also a way to maintain control over the situation and the escalation or negotiation of the conflict. As long as someone does not ask their family for help, the family does not react, and the juveniles thus have space to solve problems on their own. If family members are asked for help, however, they cannot refuse.

The relationship between a street family and a decent family in Stolipinovo differs significantly from that in Germantown. The reasons for these differences, which range from the Roma's specific cultural background to the political economy of Southeast Europe as post-socialist neoliberal economies, cannot be tested with our dataset. But the consequence of these differences is that the street code as identified by Anderson is not as generalizable across marginalized neighbourhood contexts as has been claimed

(Heitmeyer et al., 2019; Wacquant, 2002), although it may be possible to develop a more general code of the street that also applies to youth violence in others parts of the world.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the code of the street operates in the same way in a marginalized community outside of the US as it has been found to do in the US. For this purpose, 30 male juveniles between the ages of 16 and 21 from the largest Roma neighbourhood in the EU, Plovdiv-Stolipinovo, were interviewed. The results show that the street codes in the Bulgarian and US contexts differ significantly. Only respect, street wisdom and neighbourhood perception are more or less similar in the two contexts.

The answer to the research question – *Is the code of the street the same in a marginalized European neighbourhood as in the US context?* – is therefore no. The configuration of the street code's core elements in Stolipinovo differs from that in the US. It appears that every context shapes its own street code, which is developed and adopted by those who use the street as a source of identity.

However, the results do not indicate that the code of the street does not exist in Stolipinovo. The code simply changes in different cultural contexts; otherwise, all things being equal, a juvenile from Germantown Philadelphia who has internalized the code could get by without a problem in Stolipinovo, and vice versa. In this regard, the street code is a neighbourhood effect, because it is a reaction to a threatening environment and it justifies violence as a last resort. But it is also a strategy to stay out of danger in dangerous places. Even if the code does not necessarily objectively provide juveniles with safety, they believe that it does. In contrast to Anderson's study, the data here do not reveal a distinction between street life and decent families or individuals. Even highly violent juveniles who at first glance adopt the street life exhibit decent values, such as a strong family orientation and an appreciation of the need for education in order to become successful.

The findings of the study also hint at the origin of the code. In contrast to Anderson's findings in Philadelphia, respect, as the core of the code in Stolipinovo, is not accrued through aggression or violence. However, it is necessary for these youth to defend themselves. The results thus demonstrate that a street code is shaped by the social environment, including the drug trade, collective discrimination and policing, but also by relationships among neighbours and collective norms. The street code develops in response to social marginalization, but the specific content of that code is culturally determined.

There are three important limitations to this study. First, it has examined only male juveniles, and the challenges faced by females cannot be addressed with the current data. Second, ethnographic data were absent, which limits the comparability to the original study as a whole, and only those elements of the street code that were addressed in the interviews could be discussed. Furthermore, the social circumstances of Roma in Bulgaria and of African Americans in the US differ in some important respects: Roma suffer much greater social exclusion and poverty than do African Americans as a whole, and the relative social position of Roma is similar only to that of the poorest African American neighbourhoods, such as Chicago's South Side (for example, Wacquant, 2008).

The code of the street is helpful in understanding youth violence if it is used carefully and takes the cultural context into account. It is now clear that the specific nature of the street code differs significantly between the US and this Roma neighbourhood in Southeast Europe. Thus, the understanding of the street code developed from the US context cannot be applied as is to other contexts. However, we are one step nearer to developing an adequate understanding of youth violence in risky neighbourhoods. If male juveniles perceive their environment as a threat, they both justify violence and attempt to build their personal reputations, based on respect, in an attempt to avoid becoming victims of that violence.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Jeffrey Ian Ross and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The project was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG – German Research Foundation).

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