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Global Street Code. A Cross-cultural Perspective on Youth Violence

Sebastian Kurtenbach ^a, Steffen Zdun^b, Simon Howell^c, Muhammad Zaman^d, and Abdul Rauf^b

^aUniversity of Applied Science Münster, Münster, Germany; ^bBielefeld University, Bielefeld, Germany; ^cUniversity of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa; ^dQuaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Some twenty years ago Anderson's seminal work, *The Code of the Street*, was published. The theoretical approach he developed there has been used in numerous studies focusing on youth violence, and is now treated as a general explanation of youth violence in risky neighborhoods in a number of disciplines. Expanding this, an international research project has used the concepts to compare violence-related norms and beliefs of male juveniles between 16 and 21 years of age in risky neighborhoods in Germany, Bulgaria, Pakistan and South Africa. In each research site, semi-structured qualitative interviews were completed with 30 participants in risky neighborhoods. The results of the cross-cultural analysis of the 120 interviews show, resultantly, that the 'code of the street' as illustrated by Anderson differs significant between the countries and that many elements of the original concept are shaped by contextual dynamics. Here we further make a distinction between those elements that were found to be in confluence with the original code from those which differ as a result of cultural influence. It is thus argued that while the street code approach is helpful in understanding the street violence of juveniles, it is not a general explanation and context-specific factors play as equally important a role.

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Introduction

Youth violence is a world-wide problem and one of the main causes for mortality among male juveniles in particular (World Health Organization 2016). However, youth violence occurs in unequal proportions between nations, cities and neighborhoods. For instance, the probability of encountering a violent situation in a segregated neighborhood in Western Europe is much lower than in Southern Africa or the Middle East. However, even if youth violence is a global phenomenon, explanations are limited to specific contexts, often urban neighborhoods of the US or European metropolitan areas. These are, however, treated as general explanations rather than culturally specific. This is problematic because violence is treated as theoretically equal between different countries, which, while true in terms of being acts, does not provide any causal explanation.

Those who engage in street violence do not do so randomly, but are guided by violence-related norms. Norms are "[...] ordinarily enforced by sanctions" (Coleman 1990:242) and "for the norm to be effective there must be an effective sanction to enforce it" (Coleman 1990:269). If accepted that these norms serve as a significant explanation for behavior, it is necessary to focus on those related to violence in order to understand violence itself. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as "[t]he intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (WHO 2002:4).

A really general explanation of youth violence in segregated neighborhoods would thus need to explain the interwoven violence-related norms, which stand beyond the violent act itself.

Here, the code of the street is one of the most prominent theoretical approaches in the scientific literature, which brings together violence, beliefs and spatial circumstances. It is formulated by Elijah Anderson (1999) and based on long-term ethnographical field work in the predominantly African American segregated neighborhood of German Town, in North-East Philadelphia. Anderson's intention was to formulate an explanation for violence under those spatial circumstances, independent of race or poverty. His groundbreaking work aimed at explaining the rationality behind youth violence in the risky neighborhood, focusing on the manner in which it may be used as a strategy to ensure physical safety and/or a higher position in a neighborhood-wide social hierarchy. The street code, or elements of it, as Anderson claims, operate independently of time and space (Anderson 1999:84) and is a general explanation of violence in risky neighborhoods.

Our purpose is to understand if the code of the street – as a theoretical framework – can indeed stand as a general approach to understanding youth violence in risky neighborhoods from an individual perspective, which has two objectives. On the one hand, the concept can be tested to discover whether it has validity in different contexts and in other parts of the world other than the US where it was formulated. On the other, such a framework provides a useful structure for the comparison of cross-cultural phenomena itself, which are otherwise substantially different. Based on this, we were able to identify more culturally-specific meanings of the code, as well as generally applicable ones. In this paper we specifically investigate the following question: *What are general parts of the code of the street and what are the more culturally-specific meanings?* As such, our focus here is on a comparison of the manner in which the codes are understood in disparate settings, rather than on comparing how the code operates in each context specifically.

To answer the research question, we review the literature on the code of the street, the original work itself, but also survey wider studies. The goal of this review is to thematically order the code of the street into its core elements, and to translate them into questions for an interview guideline, which was used in different research sites of the world. We then outline our research design and present the results of a cross-cultural comparison of 120 qualitative interviews with male juveniles, conducted in Germany, Bulgaria, Pakistan and South Africa. The results are presented using the core elements of the code of the street, the intention of which is to show similarities and/or differences between these four very different countries concerning the street code approach. Two possible outcomes can be anticipated: either the street codes are similar to what Anderson proposed, based on his study in Germantown in the 1990s, or we see variances between the cases, which would help to refine the street code approach and/or indicate its limitations as a general explanation of street violence in segregated neighborhoods.

The code of the street

Describing the code of the street: anderson's analysis of germantown

The Code of the Street was published in 1999, with many studies now citing, criticizing or using the code as an analytical framework. It has been found to be a useful approach in understanding youth violence, particularly in segregated neighborhoods. Anderson argues that the concentration of disadvantage, social isolation and discrimination in inner-city neighborhood spawns an oppositional culture, often specifically among the youth, whose norms and values are alienated from mainstream society. While oppositional to what is determined to be “mainstream”, the subculture has a defined logic and is structured by specific rules, although these may be informal and tacit, fluid, and unspoken – it is these rules which make up the code of the street. In such subcultures then, interpersonal relationships are characterized as a street code.

A set of informal rules governing inter-personal public behavior, particularly violence. The rules prescribe both proper comportment and the proper way to respond if challenged. They regulate the use of violence and so

supply a rationale allowing those inclined to aggression to precipitate violent encounters in an approved way (Anderson 1999:33).

A problem with the quote above is the nature of the informal rules or elements, which form the code of the street. These are not explained by Anderson, which is also a major critique of his work (Wacquant 2002), and an open question in criminology in general (Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth 2013). Deeper scrutiny of Anderson's arguments reveals that rules or elements are umbrella terms for norms (e.g. an interpretation of violence), beliefs (e.g. a perception of the neighborhood as a threat) and attitudes (e.g. masculinity). From this deconstruction it becomes clear that Anderson's argument is purely output-oriented and sticks to the phenomenon itself. From this perspective, the concept has an ontological touch, because it explains a phenomenon by the phenomenon itself. However, the elements do provide empirical evidence and seemingly influence each other, e.g. masculinity and the acceptance of violence. Other studies present this too, such as the study of white working-class males who are involved in bar fights by Hochstetler, Copes, and Forsyth (2014). Together, the selected elements form a way of acting in public spaces, which is labeled as the code of the street, and this occurs within a specific kind of neighborhood.

In those inner-city neighborhoods, the street code is centered on respect, and as a result the residents' young men, primarily, and to a lesser degree also the women (Jones 2010), campaign for respect, which regulates public interaction, through the use of violence. Possession of respect furthermore safeguards persons against interpersonal violence on the street. Such violence is also driven by a lack of trust in police and other state institutions and the prolonged deprivation of formal justice leads to the use of street justice and thus the emergence of the code of street. It thus emanates from a people's law where personal safety becomes an individual's responsibility (Anderson 1999:16), especially as street codes often prescribes a particular "payback" or retribution in retaliation for assault and disrespect.

Despite being founded on an ethnographic study of a specific African American neighborhood in the 1990s, Anderson argues that, while the specific forms of violence may be locally contingent, it is neither limited to his sites of study nor an exclusively African American phenomenon (Stacer 2014). In inner-city neighborhoods, the socio-economic conditions lead to the social division of residents, between those who are "street-oriented" and those who are "decent", depending on the degree of alienation they experience from mainstream values. Individuals or families that embrace the street code and reinforce it are labeled as street-oriented (Anderson 1999:35). They tend to react violently to or in instances of disrespect or threat. Many of them lack formal education and are proud of their self-made lifestyles, such as a boasting drug dealer. Conversely, decent families are future-orientated and tend to accept middle-class values and inculcate their children with these moral beliefs. Anderson (1999:182) argues that, in inner-city neighborhoods, the traditional male role model is that of the head of family and fundamentally important. Moreover, he strikes a self-assured image on the street of the inner-city neighborhood and shows that he can protect his family. Although young male members from decent families may understand the dynamics of the code, they have the ability to switch between the "street" and "decent", depending on the situation.

To be clear, it is not our intention to contribute to a discussion of whether the code exists. Furthermore, we assume that the code of the street is accepted as a general theory that to some extent explains youth violence independent of geographical or cultural location, even if it was primarily developed and tested in the US context. There are clear hints in the original work that the code is a reaction to a specific context that exists in a particular space, like spaces with a prominent and spatially concentrated drug market (Anderson 1999:111), a history of deindustrialization (Anderson 1999:108) and racial discrimination (Anderson 1999:113). At the same time, it is claimed to be an extension of an old rule found in the nature of human beings, which can be traced back to the Roman Empire (Anderson 1999:84). If it is true, we should be able to find the code, as Anderson it describes, in different places, regardless of local context, and if not, the assumption is that we would find more culturally-specific aspects of a street code that occurs only in that particular context.

Using the code of the street: empirical findings in the literature

Since the original text was published, many scholars have used the street code approach as an analytical framework to interpret and/or collect data, especially in poor African American inner-city neighborhoods in the US. Those studies have collectively produced a respectable discussion about youth violence, independent of any racial explanation, even if they addressed predominantly African American neighborhoods. In a review of the 49 empirical articles that make up this body of work, and which use the code of the street as an analytical basis for their work and which were published in journals ranked in the Social Science Citation Index between 1999 and 2018, none of the 38 US-based studies questioned if the code of the street is a general theory or applicable beyond the context within which they were used, with only a European study hinting in its conclusion that the street code could be culturally framed (McNeeley and Hoeben 2017:649).

A detailed look at the reviewed literature shows a predominantly non-reflexive use of the street code approach, which is true for the empirical strategies in particular (detailed see: *anonymized for review purposes*). If the street code approach is really a general theory, it is questionable why African Americans are nearly always the sole scope. For example, in seven of the 38 studies undertaken in the US, data from the FACHS study is used (e.g. Barr, Simons, and Stewart 2013; Intravia et al. 2014; Mears et al. 2013; Simons et al. 2012; Stewart and Simons 2006, 2010).¹ Even if the findings are informative, they do not contribute clearly to the generalizability of the street code conceptually and it is unclear if the insights are limited to the African American community in the US only. One of the major achievements of Anderson's study, further supported by Wilson's (1987) argument, is to firmly separate race and crime from each other and focus on the dynamics beyond these. It is not a "black culture" that reinforces violence, it is poverty and a lack of opportunity to participate fully in developed societies. However, to assert more rigorous generalizability it would be necessary to invest more in studies of other groups, like Latinos (Rojas-Gaona 2016) and in other settings, such as rural areas (Keith and Griffiths 2014) or in non-US-based studies, preferably with a comparative design.

Particularly in US studies, the code of the street is not only used as a basis for a variety of topics and focal areas, but as a methodological approach itself. The quantitative studies are characterized by multi-level regression models, which bring together census information and survey data. For example, Allen and Lo (2012) seek to understand the relationship between individual-level disadvantage factors, like employment, absence of fathers, the expulsion from school and drug trafficking, with the adoption of code-based beliefs with regard to gun carrying. The study employed secondary survey data that were collected from male inmates and male high school students from a segregated inner-city neighborhood. The results showed that these are significant factors in relation to co-occurring behavior among male inmates and students respectively. The findings endorsed the 'code of conduct' of Anderson's thesis – that disadvantage factors strengthen violent behavior among the youth living in disadvantaged neighborhood. One of the studies, which focused on the population more generally, is that of Taylor et al. (2010). Their empirical basis draws on multi-sites data (male = 1 659; female = 1 666, mixed race) collected in seven different cities in the Gang Resistance Education and Training program. The psychometric properties of the street code attitudinal scale were measured across various groups and context. Results show that the acceptance of the street code varies considerably across race, ethnicity and gender. Males are more committed to street code-related beliefs than females. Furthermore, in large cities youths showed more attitudinal support to street code-related violence. Nevertheless, it shows contextually different racial and ethnic framings, which cannot be explained by the theoretical approach of the code of the street.

Another mixed-race sample is analyzed by Intravia et al. (2014), who aimed to discover whether the code of the street operates among college students in Downers Grove, Illinois (N = 245). Results show that the code of the street is associated with gender (male) and race (African American). Strain factors, such as anger, are important in influencing the adoption of the code of the street. Moreover,

¹<https://cfr.uga.edu/researcher-projects/>; Last seen: 11/26/2018.

their findings extend the generalizability of the code of the street to university undergraduate students to explain important factors not necessarily criminal or violent, such as low academic performance. Even if this study provides interesting results, it is questionable. The core assumption of the street code-approach is that human beings are threatened by their spatial environment and develop a specific set of violence-related norms, which help them get on with their daily life. This is the elegance of the approach and this core idea is left when focusing on university students, which is quite a homogenous group, who are usually not forced to organize their daily routines on the street – especially not on campus – without the prospect of an improved future.

Qualitative studies using the street code approach show a wide variety of results and usually use the code as a strategy through which to understand their data rather than seeking to prove or question it. For example, in a content analysis of 403 rap songs, Kubrin (2005) points out that the code of the street was clearly portrayed in rap music. This includes the construction of a violent identity and reputation, and violence as social control. Moreover, such rap music is part of street culture and frames the action. Both street culture and rap music support the respecting of or punishment for disrespect as important factors. Another example is the study of Rosenfeld, Jacobs, and Wright (2003), who undertook interviews with 20 street-active offenders (15 male, 5 female) in St. Louis. The results show that “snitching” – reporting on others to the police – is considered negatively and yet all of them were involved in some form of it. They noted that their vulnerability increases as they engage in street activities and as they become more visible. Therefore, they always stay on the move.

The number of non-US-based studies using the street code approach, published in journals and ranked in the SSCI is quite limited. Here, the street code theory is usually used as an analytical framework, like in Naterer’s (2015) ethnographical study among street children in the Ukraine and in Beiers’ (2016) study on the acceptance of deviant behavior among pupils. In another, which focused more on the street code itself, McNeeley and Hoeben (2017) analyzed a longitudinal school-based survey (N = 843) of juveniles in a poor Dutch neighborhood. They note:

These results speak to the theory’s applicability to areas beyond the Philadelphia neighborhoods on which it was based and the samples from the United States on which it has been tested. The current study also specifically demonstrates the utility of the theory in explaining violence in international contexts without the degree of neighborhood disadvantage present in many major U.S. cities (McNeeley and Hoeben 2017:649).

However, we also see confirmation of the street code. For example, Brookman et al. (2011) interviewed 55 violent offenders in UK prisons. They found different patterns in the explanation for and justification of violence, from the perspective of the offenders. Close to the theoretical approach of the code of the street are honor-related narratives as well as informal justice on the street. From this perspective, the beliefs beyond street violence are in operation on the streets of Philadelphia, where Anderson did his study, but also in the UK. In another study, Lindegaard and Zimmermann (2017) shows how young men of the townships in Cape Town, South Africa try to survive in those violent places. Based on a sample of 47 juveniles, she shows that some juveniles from the townships, which she calls “ghetto chameleons”, when moving between these risky neighborhoods and middle-class areas, are capable of code switching perfectly. In a Norwegian-based study about the violent related discourse, Sandberg (2009) shows that, when juveniles locate themselves within this discourse to explain deviant behavior, their self-location ranged from being oppressed (by poverty or discrimination) to being a gangster (like being a tough character). In this regard, violent offenders use both arguments to justify their behavior of being a victim and a gangster at the same time (Sandberg 2009).

In other studies, the street code approach is discussed extensively. In a study from Germany, Kurtenbach and Rauf (2019) showed that the street code in socially segregated but ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Germany has similarities and differences when compared to Anderson’s approach. Only regarding the perception of violence, respect, masculinity and the perception of the neighborhood as a threat, are the findings close to what Anderson conceptualized. In all the other dimensions, like symbols or the way to campaign for respect, the differences are significant. These studies point out that the street code could be shaped by a wider contextual setting. This is also compatible

with the findings of an ethnographic study on the life of youth in an Irish suburb by Ilan (2013). He explains how mainstream exclusion endorsed the adaptation of street-related norms and works as a means of gaining social capital. Street social capital defines their relationship to space and within group and gives a sense of existential security, income and culturally-mediated notions of respect.

There have also been attempts to extend the street code approach. One is based on the ethnographic work of Sandberg and Pedersen (2011), who interviewed black drug dealers in Oslo, Norway. Their results show only a partial verification of patterns of the street code. One explanation is the specific migration-related background of the drug dealers, who are often refugees from Somalia and who are excluded from the wider society. Based on their findings, they develop the street code approach into a street capital concept, by combining it with the work of Bourdieu (1980). Jones (2010) too, who studied violence among African American girls in Philadelphia, used the street code approach to reflect their data and were able to extend it to an explanation which takes into account dynamics of femininity. Both studies picked up gaps in the original work, to explain their findings with the street code approach and formulated useful amendments.

Neither the quantitative nor the qualitative or ethnographic studies from the US or Europe, using the street code approach, demonstrate a clear generalizability – it is clear that while the code itself may have broader applicability, the practices associated with the codes are context specific. As shown, the approach of the code of the street is used more as an interpretative framework, primarily by questioning and further developing it. However, two exceptions need to be mentioned. Wacquant (2002) pointed out that the approach is ambiguous and that normative beliefs of individuals are not adequately understood. Furthermore, it is still moot how these behavioral scripts are shaped and the macro-driven markers of the neighborhoods are underestimated. Stewart, Schreck, and Brunson (2008) also argue that results show that the street code does not provide safety for those who follow it, and that they may further endanger themselves. Those who internalized the code are more at risk of violence than those who are “decent”. This presupposes that this is a choice, however.

Putting the code of the street in context: spatial framework

The code of the street, as an explanation of the development of alternative and violence-related norms by male juveniles, occurs more frequently in some neighborhoods than in others. Those who live in impoverished neighborhoods are, for instance, subject to violence more generally, and not only youth violence. In the US-based studies, African American neighborhoods often fall within this scope, which is not true for non-Anglo-American studies.

It seems that the basic assumption of the street code approach is that if a neighborhood is perceived as marginalized by its residents, the will to accept or show behavior that is labeled as deviant will emerge more easily. On the other hand, economic deprivation drives the need to garner an income through criminal behavior, such as drug dealing and may find expression in the purchasing of symbols of a middle-class lifestyle, like brand clothes or technical devices. This ambiguous relationship between the hope for a middle-class lifestyle and its rejection as a reaction toward discrimination and marginalization characterizes the development of street codes, in US-based studies in particular.

To sum up, a code of the street is developed by two interacting spatial driving forces. First, social structural markers, like poverty or segregation of marginalized groups, define the spaces. Secondly, weak collective norms that sanction so-called deviant behavior can be seen as rational in the eye of a drug dealer, for example. In such a spatial framework, the code of the street is developed by vulnerable groups, like juveniles, to cope with the challenges of their environment, gain safety in dangerous places and gain recognition by peers.

Empirical implications

The literature review above has highlighted that the street code approach is a powerful explanation of street violence among male juveniles. However, its applicability beyond the Anglo-American

world remains largely untested. The European-based studies question that, but they cannot reject the entire approach. Furthermore, it is necessary to do a systematic comparison of the core elements of the street code in different cultural frameworks, but in the same kinds of risky neighborhood which are socially segregated, and where the crime rate is higher than the average, to validate this.

However, in the original work, the elements of the street code are not clearly stated, which is why these were distilled by an intensive review of the book. Overall, there are nine elements that are most central, with the core code being “respect” (Anderson 1999:33). The elements are “Respect/Disrespect” (Anderson 1999:76) “Neighborhood perception” (Anderson 1999:76, 77, 145), “Enemy” (Anderson 1999:109, 265), “Toughness/Masculinity” (Anderson 1999:91, 97), “Interpretation of Symbols” (Anderson 1999:73), “Success” (Anderson 1999:36, 150), “Friends/Family” (Anderson 1999:26, 70) and “Violence” (Anderson 1999:70, 134). An additional aspect, but not an element in the manner as the others, is street wisdom – a knowledge of the rules of the street themselves. Anderson claims that such knowledge helps individuals avoid violence, but this has not been widely validated by other studies. In terms of the present study, the elements formed the basis of the interview guidelines, which were used in the field in the countries earlier.

Research design and data description

Context and neighborhood selection

The study compares the main elements of the code of the street in risky neighborhoods in four different countries. So as to validate the result, very dissimilar countries were chosen. Based on the available resources of the project, the following four countries were thus chosen:

- *Germany*, as an example of a Western welfare state with increasing ethnic diversity, caused by immigration. As such, it was used as a means of understanding the code in relation to higher levels of social safety. Here, Berlin-Neukölln and Wedding, Dortmund-Nordstadt, Duisburg-Marxloh were selected. All the chosen neighborhoods are socially segregated, ethnically diverse and share high rates of fluctuation of residents.
- *Bulgaria*, as an eastern European country undergoing transformation more generally, with a specific focus on Roma people, who are the most discriminated minority in Europe. This site was used to understand the code in relation to collective discrimination by wider society. Plovdiv-Stolipinovo, the largest Roma neighborhood, in the European Union (EU) was selected as the research site.
- *Pakistan*, as society which has high levels of terror and social inequality. The advantage of this country regarding the code is that the groups, living in segregated neighborhoods, are ethnically heterogeneous, but not usually discriminated against based on their ethnicity. Moreover, the country is religiously heterogeneous (Christians, Hindus and Sikh etc.), but with Islam as the primary common normative belief among the majority population. Here the neighborhoods Rawalpindi-Dhok Matkial, Islamabad-Bari Imam, Islamabad-France Colony and Karachi-Layari were selected as research locations.
- *South Africa*, as one of the countries with the highest levels of violent crime in the world. Here, the majority of people that live in urban centers live in risky neighborhoods, which are socially segregated, ethnically homogenous and subject to significant levels of murder, organized crime, and domestic violence. This context was used to explore how the code provides forms of safety in the face of widescale threats. The research sites were Hanover Park in Cape Town and KwaMashu in Durban.

All of the neighborhoods in the countries can be considered to be risky environments in their countries and all share a relationally low social position. However, variances between the neighborhoods within a country are observable, like the so-called colored township in Cape Town and the

black township in Durban, which is reflected in the data as well, as well as the use of weapons in a fight in South Africa. However, those intra-country differences are smaller than those of the inter-country. As such, the sample was comprised of dissimilar countries in which similar neighborhoods were explored, thus allowing for a comparison of the core elements of the code of the street.

Interviews in risky neighborhoods

Between February 2017 and January 2019, interviews with 30 juveniles per country were conducted in all of the neighborhoods described above. However, the recruitment strategies for interviews differed between the countries. In Germany and Bulgaria, interviews were conducted in community youth centers. Respondents in both countries received an allowance for their time (20 Euro in Germany and 20 Leva in Bulgaria). Here, social workers helped to connect with potential respondents. In Pakistan and South Africa, allowances were not paid, as this was considered to be a safety concern. Furthermore, in these two countries, also more informal ways were needed to do the interviews, like talking to shop owners or other gatekeeper, who helped to access potential respondents. In Durban-KwaMashu, a translator was needed, because the local population only speaks Zulu.

The age of the respondents was between 16 and 21, and all were male. Even though it was our intention at first, it was not possible to verify if some of the participants had a criminal record as respondents did not always disclose this. The interviews were singular and confidential, except for two group interviews in South Africa. Every interview begun with a clarification of the goal of the study and small talk about their lives at school or hobbies. The interviews were recorded with the respondents' permission.

One major challenge was to ensure the comparability of the qualitative interviews within each county and in the cross-cultural comparison, while also following the theoretical framework of the code of the street. Therefore, we chose to use guided interviews and the interview questions were drawn from the core elements of the code of the street. By doing this, we used a central research instrument that allowed us to conduct open interviews in a shared theoretically-driven framework, allowing us to compare the responses in the different countries. [Table 1](#) shows the interview questions, the element of the street code it belongs to and a short description.

Data analysis

All transcribed interviews were uploaded into MAXQDA 18. Interviews were coded by the elements, seen in [Table 1](#) in a deductive manner. Once complete a second thematic analysis was conducted, so as to further delve into participants' perceptions of violence and the street. These were coded inductively. Once complete, we thus had both a direct comparative framework with which to compare theoretically, and an interpretive set of results that provided further depth. Speaking to the first, [Table 2](#) shows the frequency per code and country.

The coded material allows us to compare the street codes between the countries in a structured and theoretically rigorous manner. Moreover, in comparison with Anderson's results, we were able to frame the applicability of the codes in contexts very disparate from the original analysis (Anderson 1999:84), or if they more closely resembled contextually dependent forms of practical rationality (Bourdieu 1980; Sandberg and Pedersen 2011). Against this background, the findings showed that the code of the street operates to different extents between the contexts, and can be a useful means of understanding street culture.

Findings

In the following section, we present the results by country. As such, a summary of the findings of each country and code is first provided, after which a partial comparison of the findings is discussed. For brevity we present only a select sample of the results, rather than an exhaustive review.

Table 1. Interview questions and description.

Interview question	Code element	Description
What is respect?	Respect	A young man is respected in terms of his engagement in violent or non-violent activities.
What is a friend?	Friends & Family	A friend assists, cooperates and provides strength when needed during the violent acts or he assists to avoid the violent activities. He is trustworthy and highlights his friends' strength and covers the weaknesses
What is violence?	Perception of violence	Physical abuses, harm or curse of a person is perceived as violence.
What is success for you?	Success and aspiration	It is necessary to show off muscles to the opponents. Gain success in education, employment and do not fail in exams, work or assignment. Shame has a high value and one must avoid being a victim of shame.
What kind of clothes/tattoos do you (want to) wear?	Symbols	Often youngster wear clothes with tattoos, wear wrist band around the arm. Some people communicate with the words or gestures, which represent the street code.
What is disrespect?	Respect	Young person bulldozes others and imposes his will forcefully and asks others to follow his orders. Dictating to people and obedience of the others demonstrates power. Dishonor of a person or family is also disrespect.
What is tough?	Acceptance of deviant behavior	A tough boy should be hard, physically strong, fighter and have capacity to resist and take stands against others.
How do you solve an ambiguous situation?	Acceptance of deviant behavior	Some may get support from the police when they are weak in fight. Others ask elders (parents/guardians). Many call their friends or group members to fight with the second party and overcome the opponent.
Who provides security?	Acceptance of deviant behavior	Friends supports friends. Similar groups (like ethnicity, migrants and gangs) support each other. They overcome and fight. They manage control over others.
What is an enemy?	Enemy	The person who hurts one's group and cannot be relied on him is an enemy. An open mind must be kept about those who are not trust worthy.
What makes your neighborhood unique?	Neighborhood perception	Drug trafficking is one sign. Often quarrels among the youngsters is another sign. Teasing, gazing at girls and an place to interact with the deviant person openly.

Table 2. Frequency of the codes.

	Germany	Pakistan	South Africa	Bulgaria	All
Respect/Disrespect	416	82	92	215	805
Neighborhood perception	287	111	88	277	763
Enemy	89	20	24	61	194
Toughness/Masculinity	135	73	23	71	302
Interpretation of Symbols	168	185	58	101	512
Success	208	14	98	83	403
Friends/Family	540	396	302	316	1,554
Violence	384	389	95	393	1,261
Sum	2,227	1,270	780	1,517	5,794

Street codes in Germany

Germany, with the most neighborhoods in the sample of research sites, had variances between the cases, like the Turkish dominated neighborhood, Duisburg-Marxloh in comparison to the very diverse Dortmund Nordstadt. But the differences within the sample also reflect the variance within the type of neighborhood the study focused on. Coming to the core elements of the street code approach, respect is the most pronounced element that was found in the German context. Gaining respect and retaliation for disrespect are salient trajectories mentioned repeatedly by German interviewees. As such, it has an important structuring effect on the worldviews and frameworks of the interviewees, so much that it is often a principle goal and fundamentally informs the life narratives of individuals. In their campaign for respect, youths portray a strong character on the street, for instance, through the manifestation of manhood and toughness. However, respect as a social currency is not only accumulated by violence, which is not a sustainable way to do so, but also by honesty and a caring character in looking after their own families. To sum up, this core

element of the code of the street is observable in Germany, but it is much more complex than is described in the original work and in line with further findings (Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth 2013). It is more than just the ability to fight for instance, although that is a part of the narrative. However, respect and violence are only interlinked in the interviews in relation to personal issues, like insulting the family. One explanation for this is the German-Middle Eastern background of some respondents, who often hail from a conservative background in which the family is central to individual life. This seems true for the juveniles from Berlin in particular.

Teach him respect. Well, I mean not hitting him directly or so. But [...] when one is disrespecting parents, I am more aggressive. Therefore, give him a slap for respect. Not boxing him, but such a slap. (Berlin-Wedding 4)

However, respect is also embedded in the individual's reputation, which is a product of the perception of peers in the neighborhood. The importance to having "a name" is frequently mentioned in the interviews, which means that people know each other and how they might interact with others:

By now nothing happens to me, because the people know me. Because they know I easily freak out if something happens. So, I have my name [reputation], I would say, I created my name [respect]. So at first, everyone said, come, let's chase him. Frequently several persons came to me or my siblings. [...] Once also, my little brother was fasting, he came to me and was crying. Then I wanted to go to the little children because they wanted to snatch his phone. And I said: Listen boys, my little brother is fasting. If I hear again that you do something, I go to your parents and show in front of your parents who I really am. So to speak: Don't touch him anymore. [...] And yes, somehow like with those 15 Bulgarians with whom I fought, since then also nobody comes to me and wants to fight with me or so." (Dortmund-Nordstadt 7)

Another element is the perception of space and the rules embedded in it. The interviewees in Germany share a strong belief that street etiquette is crucial for "survival" on the street. Adolescents who grow up in these neighborhoods are well aware of street conduct; self-confidence is instrumental for survival. Adolescents accumulate street knowledge from everyday life within their neighborhoods and street etiquette thus provides them with the confidence to present themselves on the street and in escalated situations:

If you are living long enough in Marxloh, you know where the corners are where you are not allowed to go. [...] Because I know the place quite well. The corners what is going on here, the hideaways, what exists here. (Duisburg-Marxloh 5)

Another important theme that emerges from an analysis of the element of street etiquette is how respondents behave in intense situations and how and when to challenge their enemies. There is a set of informal rules according to which one's honor and reputation within those particular neighborhoods are maintained and, when necessary, restored. In the German data, the rule for youths is to exhibit toughness through one-on-one competition, and challenging each other is prominent. If there is conflict between two persons from different groups, a fight only between those two persons is inevitable, even in the presence of friends. The parties have to stand their ground to show their ability in dealing with the situation. If this rule is broken and others enter the fray, this will result in a group fight. These rules have some important functions. They make it possible to stay relatively safe in a violent situation, lose a fight without loss of reputation, as well as clarifying conflicts without creating an enemy, all of which has been shown by Hochstetler, Copes, and Forsyth (2014) in their study of male working class men, who are involved in bar fights. A young man from Marxloh described the events:

If you see, one-on-one, nobody goes on, let them fight. Except the situation is exaggerated, we part them. But otherwise we don't interfere. Unless you see four against one, then you go on with others, then it's a mass brawl. (Duisburg-Marxloh 6)

The idea of an enemy, as one element of the street code, is not simply an opponent in a fight – who is respected in the confrontation – but rather was understood by nearly all participants to be someone who is in conflict with the prescribed street norms and rules. This is important because it limits their own position in the social order, which is itself based on their reputation and used as

social currency on the street. An essential aspect of this is toughness. In the German sample, the respondents perceived failure as being the antecedent to social or physical abuse. As a consequence, showing toughness becomes a rational two-fold strategy, meaning to prevent victimization at specific points whilst simultaneously contributing to the construction of a violent reputation which is used to prevent future victimization. However, results from other studies show that this is not always the case. In fact, a violent reputation tends to increase the probability of encountering violent situations (Stewart, Schreck, and Brunson 2008). The results show that the assumptions relating to toughness, as outlined by Anderson, are applicable in the German context as well, but with some limitations.

In contrast, the concepts of success and aspirations differ substantially from Anderson's. The interviews of the German sample showed the desire for a conventional, middle-class life, usually including a wife, an own house and a car. The youths perceived themselves as the breadwinners of the family, but also had higher aspirations, such as to graduate from college. Moreover, they perceived such paths as a strategy for avoiding violence and gaining a better future.

Ah, success, for me success is to have a calm, modest life, that's already success, I think. Well, for sure, I would like to make a lot of money, but don't have to become rich or something. If I get a good wage, house, a car, that's enough. (Dortmund-Nordstadt 4)

Symbols are interlinked with success but not in a uniquely street way and they are not linked to violence specifically. It is obvious that public spaces serve as staging areas. It is an important self-representational space where adolescents not only challenge each other's social status but also attempt to manifest their supremacy through street symbols. However, only a few adolescents believed that branded clothes, watches, and gold chains can be associated with respect within their neighborhood. Moreover, and in contrast to Anderson's findings, wealth cannot be interpreted as a direct result of involvement in the drug economy, because the current German drug market is not that openly organized. Furthermore, branded clothes are also a symbol of partial success in the legal economy, as well as a sign of possible pathways out of poverty and street culture. Although tattoos are also a manifestation of street life, some interviewees did not have tattoos as a result of their religious beliefs, believing that a tattoo makes their body impure.

No, I would never get any tattoos. First because of my religion. [...] Second my father doesn't want it, because my skin is, so to speak, it is not how God made it and you changed it. (Duisburg-Marxloh 1)

Friends are a symbol of strength and reputation. Due to their threatened environment, adolescents count on their friends, particularly in violent situations. They engage in brawls and fights for their friends. In risky neighborhoods, young men believe that trust and loyalty are most important for friendships and they expect that friends help in difficult situations. While talking about friendship, a young participant expressed this opinion:

Pff ... loyalty is important, I think, that you can also trust him [friend], not that he, that I confide something to him and he betrays me the next moment because that one can rely on him. Yes, if I need help sometimes or he needs help, of course you also have to be there. Of course, also that you get along well, yes, that's logical, that you can have fun, and simply there must be true chemistry between you. I think such things are important. (Duisburg-Marxloh 9)

This juvenile highlighted the mutual nature of trust and friendship. This kind of loyalty is essential for a close-knit friendship, which is important for their reputation on the street. In similar accounts by other participants a sense of safety with friends in the neighborhood is acknowledged. Generally, adolescents clearly distinguished between friends and peers. They described friends as people with whom they have a strong bond of trust and who stand by them. Street peers are just people with whom they spend time and socialize in the neighborhood.

The last core element of the code of the street of the analysis is the perception of violence. The adolescents are well aware of high levels of street activities, including brawls, the drug trade and drug consumption, and police discrimination in their neighborhoods. The neighborhood's image and the place-based perceived discrimination is evident, such as when seeking employment. The neighborhood's disorder and street violence are moreover viewed as routine.

Then, at the fair, at the fair somehow I had a fight or something. Like it is common among adolescents. Unfortunately. ... Yes and I saw my brother, he also saw that I was fighting. But he did nothing. (Dortmund-Nordstadt 6)

Similar to those storylines, other adolescents reported different modes of violence in their neighborhoods. Furthermore, they perceived these as a permanent threat to which they have to react, by building up a violent reputation. As such, they frequently carried small weapons, like knives, tasers, and knuckle-dusters, as symbols to protect themselves on the street. Despite not really knowing how to use them, their value was seen as purely symbolic in order to show dominance in street disputes. None of the adolescents reported ever using a weapon in a fight or had seen someone that had, even if they carried one. As such, they are symbolic of being a potential rather than real threat.

Street codes in Bulgaria

The core element of the code, respect, was also the central to the participants in Bulgaria, although the extent is more difficult to determine as accurate translation was not possible. Although the word does exist in a similar sense in Bulgarian, it is not understood in a similar manner by all people in the research site of Plovdiv-Stolipinovo, where the population is bilingual and speak Bulgarian and Turkish (with Turkish being the predominant language in everyday life). Very frequently they used the Turkish word “*saygı*” instead of the Bulgarian. This duality extends to life in the neighborhood more generally, and this is reflected in the code. On the one hand, clear societal rules regarding decency exist, and everybody knows them. On the other hand, an indeterminate social line exists which once crossed over negates these rules. This is the case in talking about respect. Those who are respected are those who are engaged in their community, trying to organize positive growth in the neighborhood and who take care of their families. On the other hand, and this is a different kind of respect or reputation, are those people who control criminal activities or who are known for their violent behavior. By organizing everyday life in such a risky environment, people develop a differentiated image of respect, the realization of which depends on the person and type of engagement occurring. This is in line with the findings from Anderson, who showed, on the one hand, that “old heads” are respected for their public engagement while, on the other hand, those who have become notorious are also respected. Such a polarization is also observable in framing perceptions of the neighborhood itself. Here, the same respondent speaks of how the community is a close-knit neighborhood and the feelings of belonging that exist there. On the other hand, the neighborhood is understood to be a dangerous place where there is little hope of employment or economic growth. Most importantly, the increasing impact of drugs in the community is clearly visible, such as the use of bonzai, which is a mix of marijuana and amphetamine. This drug is well known in the neighborhood and has been cited by those involved in serious crime. Involvement in the drug market also operates as a division within the community, between those who are close to it (the minority) and those who are not. The polarization within the community is translated into spatial patterns as well, as the following statements shows.

Question: *They [bonzai consumer] have a certain place here?* Answer: *Yes, they have. I don't like to go there because they are not my type of persons. These people are, they catch a fly and fuck it on top of it, you understand? I don't like such people at all. (Stolipinovo 11)*

However, the drug market is not only seen as a normative border, but as an economic one, as those who are involved in it profit. The consequence is again translated into a duality in the code, between masculinity and toughness. On the one hand, symbols of affluence, like expensive cars or brand clothes are appreciated, which is close to Anderson's description of the street families involved in the drug trade there. However, even the same respondents would define masculinity and toughness as including a decent way of life, supporting their own family, hoping for a regular

income and a legal job and are appreciative of education. In this sense, neighborhoods become quite risky for juveniles, because the seductive forces of the fast but criminal life of involvement in the drug market are a part of their everyday life experiences. Only some, however, opted to live this lifestyle, which begs the question of why others do not.

Close-knit family relations and the migration to Western Europe, and Germany in particular, are seen by many as one way “out” of the issues. In the interviews, all participants reported that they maintained close emotional relationships with family members, even if conflicts and violence between them happen at times. Those kinds of social and intergenerational relations do influence the interpretation of criminal careers or drug consumption in a significant manner and here it is necessary to understand the social change of the neighborhood and the position of Roma in Bulgaria as a whole. Nearly all families in the neighborhood recount positive memories of their lives under socialism, because the state guaranteed work and income, including for the discriminated Roma population. This serves as moral reference point and lead to an enormous working ethos, even under the circumstances of living as the working poor. With socialism ending, migration has increased, which is possible due to the EU-membership of Bulgaria. A common story told in the interviews was that if no legal work in the neighborhood or city is offered, then the young men go abroad to find work. This is in contrast to Anderson’s case where immigration elsewhere was not possible.

However, these close-knit family relations also drive violence with a unique dynamic, as claimed in the interviews. Violent situations, as described by the participants, often start with an argument between children with other family members then joining the conflict, which can then grow into a family brawl.

Brawls, fights, it can happen very quickly, for example, two children have a fight, the parents come instantly and also start to beat each other up. They don’t tell their children not to fight, they don’t give them an idea, how to act in life. (Stolipinovo 5)

Such family-driven solidarity, even in violent situations, is part of the local street dynamics (Esping-Andersen 1990:230) which determine the form of violence seen. Those rules and social practices are helpful in drawing a line between violence and safety. Most important here is the strategy of constant communication between people in the neighborhood, often over coffee on the street. This simple strategy is mentioned in nearly all the interviews as a way to stay safe on the street, solving problems and coping with the threatening environment by accumulating respect in a non-violent way. It is characterized by communication, respect and the seeking of understanding, but suspended when it comes to family conflicts. Furthermore, behavior like not committing adultery or respecting the property of another, are known by all yet sometimes broken.

Beside those clear rules and strategies to stay out of violent situations, no such rules exist to stay safe when it comes down to a fight. While in the other research contexts rules are developed to create safety in violent situations, those do not exist in the Bulgarian research site. This includes the use of weapons, like knives, guns or axes, which are all mentioned in the interviews. Furthermore, it is also acceptable to fight if only one party is armed, and this does not undermine the reputation of the armed person.

With fists, they drag out knives, they hit each other with chairs. Many things! I forgot my phone at home, I could show you a video, how they beat each other with long knives and axes. (Stolipinovo 2)

Furthermore, rules that moderate the end of a fight do not exist. For example, a fight does not stop if someone lays on the ground or gives up. The only manner in which a fight is stopped is as a result of someone separating each party, one leaves the confrontation or the police stop the fight. Remarkably, irrespective of the dynamics of each conflict or how it ends, this does not impact on the level of respect of an individual.

The reputation of a young man in his neighborhood is something of importance and in Stolipinovo, reputations play a significant role regarding marriage. Only if the family of a woman agrees to the marriage, will it occur. Here, a violent reputation can be a reason not to agree to

marriage. As such, the line between violent and non-violent behavior has a long-term impact on people, with violence often being generalized. Against this background, it becomes clear why juveniles further define an enemy for themselves as not only an opponent in a fight, but as someone who undermines their own reputation, such as by gossiping. Such damage has a larger impact than a physical fight in the eye of the juveniles.

Street codes in Pakistan

Respect is the core code of the street among the interviewed juveniles in Pakistan. An individual seeks respect and will try to maintain this respect in the cultural context. For them, it is necessary to avoid disrespectful behavior and if this happens, violence is used as a response. One respondent reported that in his eyes:

I am a respectable [Shareef] person and it usually happens to people like us. (Bari Imam 3)

Respectability is equal to gentleness in the eyes of the juveniles. It is often claimed that if people show respect, they receive respect in return. This reciprocal idea works inversely as well: disrespect may provoke the other person to be disrespectful and this leads to violence. Furthermore, such a fight may generate a chain reaction of conflicts that continue long after the original has ceased. Indeed, respondents in Pakistan often try to keep a distance from conflicts. However, if they have violation of respect, they will fight with each other to gain and maintain respect. An adolescent mentioned:

If a guy does not want to play with us or make a bet on the game or he avoids violence so then we have nothing to do with him. He has his own life and own choices, we don't force him. But I think noble people have no such place in this neighborhood because here respect is given to those who are more violent and aggressive. (Bari Imam-1.6)

Respect is also linked to family honor and the protection of one's own family's women, which is very important in the Pakistani context. It is also central to show that one is able to protect and uphold respect for oneself, his family, and particularly female relatives. In this regard, the individual's reputation is rated as less important in relation to the reputation of the family, which points to a more collectivistic understanding of respect. Embedded in this is the willingness to fight as a prompt response or payback for harm caused to the family, its honor or the individual's reputation:

Once we had one in our school, which was fought on behalf of our friend. One of our friends was going to school, on the way few guys surrounded him, they were blaming our friend for teasing one of boys' sister. We know our friend very well he is a very gentle (respectable) and nice guy and we were sure he would never do any act of disrespectful like this. the guys took advantage of it and they beat up our friend very badly. We captured three of them and given them beating of their life which they will never forget. [...] I have to react (due to respect and honor) and fight, because in our neighborhood if I always keep tolerating the aggression of other fellows so they will start considering me a (beghairat) shameless or coward person and an easy target, as they did with my friend as well. (Bari Imam 8)

For the juveniles, it is essential to show aggression to others in order to not be seen as a coward. It is equally important to show other opponents that toughness is an expression of masculinity. The purpose of violence beyond this, as understood by the respondents, was a means by which to "survive" on the street: to stay safe, to maintain their respect and honor, and able to protect their family. Toughness also indicates that a person has capacity to survive, to dominate others and may also be used as a means of demonstrating physical power.

I told you earlier that the boys who have formed the groups give respect and recognition to the person who is more tough and violent. Those guys also get more respect that provides them with the drugs like chars and Samad bond. (Dhok Matkyl 8).

The Pakistani juveniles also highlighted their knowledge of the street and how this knowledge shapes their lives. However, the family as a collective plays a significant role, primarily because if the family becomes

involved in a conflict generated on the street, juveniles lose control thereof. Therefore, it is necessary and in their mutual interest to solve problems quickly, which often means physical confrontations.

When we have a fight with someone then we try to settle the things as soon as possible. Because if the enmity remains for long then it could result in the involvement of our family members in the issue (Bari Imam 15)

These rules also regulate the use of weapons, with most of the juveniles carrying a weapon with them, often a knife, so as to be ready to defend themselves. Firearms, including hand guns and Kalashnikovs, are known to be kept in the neighborhood, the availability of weaponry being a result of the securitization of society post 9/11. These weapons are always described as symbols of the ability to fight and used for self-defense. None of the juveniles noted that they would use a weapon for criminal purposes but some had experienced fighting with such weapons or were injured by them. The weapons are reserved for fights against outsiders of the community, which usually draws the attention of the family.

Friends do not use weapons while fighting with each other. If there is a conflict with groups of some other area, then weapons are used. The most frequently used weapon is a knife. Sometimes pistols are used but it is only used to scare other people, they don't shoot at people (France Colony 13)

Nevertheless, we are unable to find the concept of the “street family” or the “decent family” as per Anderson’s conception. Everyone is decent as well as street, because they participate in and on the street almost every day in completing household chores. Middle-class values are prevalent, where success is linked with educational achievements (high grades), owning a property and having a family. If a person has material capital, he is perceived as successful. Another difference from Anderson’s findings relating to material symbols is that we were unable to find any dominant trend, such as tattoos or special symbols in the Pakistani data. Respondents appeared the same as everyone else in the community and do not use any particular gang symbols. Material symbols may exist but they do not have a significant value. For example, we found the use wrist handkerchiefs and wrist rings, but they were not a symbol of violence or violent activities nor symbolic of group representation. However, non-material symbols were reported:

I do not know about such material symbols. However, we use gestures. If a girl starts gazing at you it means she is interested in you. At that time you can use the winking of an eye that you are also interested in her. (France Colony 17)

Violence is a part of the daily life of the juveniles and its use has many causes. Mostly, it occurs between friends who disagree, in contestations over lovers, or the solving of marital concerns. However, if someone is often violent or cannot control themselves they are not respected in their peer group nor in the wider community. Thus, violence is not valued as a good strategy to gain respect, but it is necessary to be able to fight to defend oneself. Violence is not a tool to get things done, then, but a means of not being excluded.

Street codes in South Africa

Similar in some sense to the Bulgarian example, the interviews in South Africa showed a dualistic life in the neighborhood. On the one hand, social rules determine how to behave decently and are known by all the participants, but by crossing a constructed line, unregulated conflicts may occur. These two aspects were mentioned by the participants with regards to respect as well as in relation to violence itself – the one might be understood as the ‘public’ and the other as the ‘private’ narrative. However, the South African juveniles linked respect directly to success, which means that the successful ones are respected and the others are not. It is from the outset important to note that simply because young people live in risky neighborhoods that have high instances of gang activity, it is not possible to posit that all or even the majority of young people are necessarily gang members. In the same way, goals are individual and not collectively shared, as one juvenile points out:

I can define success as a time when you have achieved all your goals. All your dreams have come true. You have everything that you have wished for in life. Although I know that as people we always wish for more. But there are times when you can see that some people have achieved what they were wishing for. Some people wanted to become doctors and they have achieved that. They have also wished that they could get married and now they are married. It is having everything that you have wished for. I see that as success. (KwaMashu 5)

In this sense, success and respect are visible manifestations of economic, social, or cultural power. They are, however, complicated when compared to the 'private' narrative articulated by participants in the individual interviews. Furthermore, the quest for respect is reciprocal by itself, because it moderates further behavior, which helps to accumulate more respect. In this sense, the campaign for respect is not only a part of building up a street reputation, it also structures interpersonal relations, which moderates violence. One participant noted:

Respect is to respect someone who is older than you respect is doing something that you know that okay it is to do something which you don't want another person to do it its always looking for whether being the better person, respect its knowing your lane and being conscious of everybody surrounding you in such a way that you guys don't you won't clash because if you people respect each other. (KwaMashu 8)

However, this is only one dimension, narrated in terms of a 'public' life. The other one, the 'private' narrative of respect, is far more closely linked to physical ability and the capability to commit violence. Interestingly though, the use of violence as a means of enforcing respect was itself understood as a normalized leadership strategy and behavioral outcome. Even this is again linked to the idea of toughness and masculinity in South African.

It's based on how they act. Their attitude towards it. If they go around, bragging about it, I'm going to think there is something you can't do, so now you go around bragging, because you have a weakness, and someone can exploit that. If you throw stuff like that in my face, it gets irritating. (Hanover Park 14)

The narrative above reveals that showing weakness is viewed negatively in risky neighborhoods and causes violence, or more specifically, leads to victimization. However, toughness is also defined in relation to the social context, or more accurately, the survivability of specifically challenging social situations that require an individual to go beyond their normal abilities or those expected by others in the social cohort.

A person that is always violent. They're always hard, they can't relax and they are always fighting. If I was a tough guy I would swear at people but not fighting. (Hanover Park 2)

Interestingly, toughness is then similar in logic to that of an enemy, because it is perceived as an immediate form of violence in terms of capability. However, the abilities to solve problems without violence are mentioned in other interviews. Regarding the perception of enemies, two types were defined by the juveniles, the first of which is a physical enemy, such as an opponent in a fight, while the second was those who are seen as malicious and who damage the social reputation of an individual, by lying or gossiping:

Well these things of enemy it is someone who has betrayed you, it is someone who has a problem your blood and his don't clash. Enemy can also be your friend they betray you and if they betray me it is over. (KwaMashu 2)

Thus, even friends might become enemies, which causes permanent uncertainty about the individual's own social position in a threatening social environment. This contributes to the perceived necessity of violence as an integral part of one's behavior. At the same time, friends are an important source of power, social and emotional support as well as a protective bubble, because a group provides more protection than being alone on the street. This is very important, because the neighborhoods were described as a permanent threat that the juveniles have to cope with. This is not overstated, because the townships of South Africa do have high rates of violent crimes. The most important danger in those areas are gangs, which are very different in the South African context compared to the other research sites of the study. Furthermore, the interview partners perceived

a shift in the role of gangsters in their neighborhoods from protective to threatening, which moderates their integration on or use of the street as a public venue.

I would say that it is not how it used to be. The previous gangsters had died out and now it's this new generation, who thinks that shooting and drugs is what it's about. I would say back in the day it was safer, because the gangsters were actually protecting the area, for instance if someone in the area got robbed, the gangsters in the area, would go teach that person a lesson. Now people are scared, because everyone is trigger-happy. (Hanover Park 9)

By sharing these kinds of everyday stories, juveniles understand that they have two paths to choose from: the fast life of a gangster or the way of a hard-working individual who slowly rises from circumstances of poverty and discrimination. This binary logic is close to Anderson's concept of decent- and street-orientated people. However, the interviews show that juveniles negotiate with themselves in determining whether they want to become involved with the gangs and the life attached to that lifestyle or not. Most of the respondents did not outright reject the criminal street life categorially, because it is a way to rapidly gain symbols of respect, such as cars and money.

Success, I think it is something like going to school, pass, finish school, and further your education. Or sometimes it's having money even when you did not go to school. There is this life that we call 'quick life'. These are the people who do things their own way, they strike deals and end up having houses and cars. (KwaMashu 2)

All these elements cluster around the issue of violence, which is a kind of social currency on the street. It helps to get things done, which would not be done otherwise or in another way, because individual resources are limited on the one hand and because violence has itself been normalized on the other. Moreover, such reactions have been normalized, as the experience of violence is an everyday occurrence. Violence is bound to reputation, as respect is linked to standing one's ground to avoid becoming a victim, which is close to Anderson's description. Some social rules on the street do exist to moderate the levels of violence, and to provide safety in instances of more widespread violence (Esping-Andersen 1990:230; Sharkey 2006). Those violence-related rules primarily moderate the behavior of an individual on the street, but also guide the use of weapons in a fight, which does not take gang fights into account. For example, one juvenile claims:

Just fists. My fist is my weapon. (Hanover Park 12)

By maintaining a violent reputation but rejecting anything other than fist fighting and expecting the same from opponents, people stay relatively safe and are able to accumulate respect as being tough men. These rules also moderate violence and its perception even in the most violent townships in South Africa. The rules are logical, because they provide for the possibility to campaign for respect by using violence; they uphold the line between the violent and the criminal, between those who use weapons and those who do not, and allow for the accumulation of respect by peers and a broader audience. Avoiding extreme violence also prevents being noticed by gangsters or the police. As such, participants usually show respect to one another.

Cross-cultural reflections about the findings

The comparative analysis among male juveniles living in risky neighborhoods in Germany, Bulgaria, Pakistan and South Africa revealed that three assumptions on which the code of the street is based are limited to the US context. Most important is the binary logic between street- and decent-oriented families or individuals. None of the juveniles were clearly street oriented or only decent in other contexts, and as such could undertake both without needing to switch between them, as was suggested by Anderson. They know their social roles, the rules of the street and the expectations of the environment and through this develop, in their eyes, a coherent strategy and identity to handle the restrictions of this social environment. This occurs even in very different contexts, such as the contrast between Berlin and Cape Town.

The second assumption that was found to be different is the role of the underground economy. In none of the 120 interviews did any of the juveniles express a desire to be a part of this kind of economy or did it sound seductive to them. Rather, they feel threatened by the knowledge of an ongoing drug market, because they view both addicts and dealers as dangerous. However, some participants (especially those who were suffering discrimination like the Roma in Bulgaria) understand that the underground economy can provide a path out of poverty, but it is often perceived as too risky and in conflict with their own beliefs about success and the expectations of the family.

Thirdly, we do not see the erosion of the civil law in the same manner described in the US context. However, all the juveniles perceived their neighborhood as a threat and which acts were a justification for violence or violent behavior, and thus as a means by which to maintain a reputation that protects them or their loved ones from harm. Nevertheless, this is socially defined and open to change, and juveniles know that. As a result, civil law has not disappeared in any one of the neighborhoods, but it has been changed. Clearly expressed beliefs and rules for the street and within families – which are modeled on middle-class ideas of life and which prevent lawlessness – were expressed and followed, with the exception of South Africa where gangs often rule the townships. Even here, however, they remain in the minority.

In reflecting on the elements of the code of the street, we note both differences and similarities between the German code of the street and the one Anderson described, but a holistic interpretation based on the four cases is reserved for elsewhere. But it is important to note that even the extremes of violence demonstrated in Anderson's study are not akin to those described in Bulgaria, Pakistan or South Africa. From the perspective of the respondents, all the neighborhoods are a threatening environment to which they have to react. From this perspective, we see that the relational position of a neighborhood within a given context shapes the violence-related norms.

Across all of the contexts, the elements of respect, neighborhood perception and interpretation of violence are clearly visible and closely aligned to Anderson's conception. These three elements of the street code do have some variance, but the most important – that of respect or reputation in the eyes of the juveniles – is stable over all contexts. However, the manner in which they may campaign for respect differs significantly, but not the goal itself. An important force in the construction of a street code was the perception of the neighborhood as a source of threat that requires a response. Furthermore, violence is seen as a seductive danger and tool to enable oneself.

However, the other elements, most important of which were toughness/masculinity, interpretation of symbols, success, friends/family, or the construction of an enemy differ significantly between the contexts. These elements are more influenced by contextual dynamics that shape the code itself rather than being logically unchanging. We assume that these valances are culturally based, like the interpretation of symbols. Based on our findings, [Figure 1](#) shows the general concept of the code of the street with its core and the culturally-framed influences. There may be more determinants, but it was not possible to determine such within the constraints of the comparative methodology employed in this study.

All in all, the cross-cultural comparison of the elements of the code of the street brought us one step further in the understanding of youth violence on the street in general and the generalizability of the street code approach in particular. The core elements, neighborhood perception, respect and interpretation of violence are also general explanations of the occurrence of street violence from the perception of male juveniles, the leading group of street violence all over the world. They form the pattern of reaction toward a risky social environment in the eyes of the juveniles. All the other elements differ significantly according to cultural context.

Conclusion

The starting point of our study was the observation that youth violence as a global phenomenon is unequally distributed between countries, cities and neighborhoods. Most frequently violence occurs in neighborhoods already marginalized in some way, and become a focal point of street violence

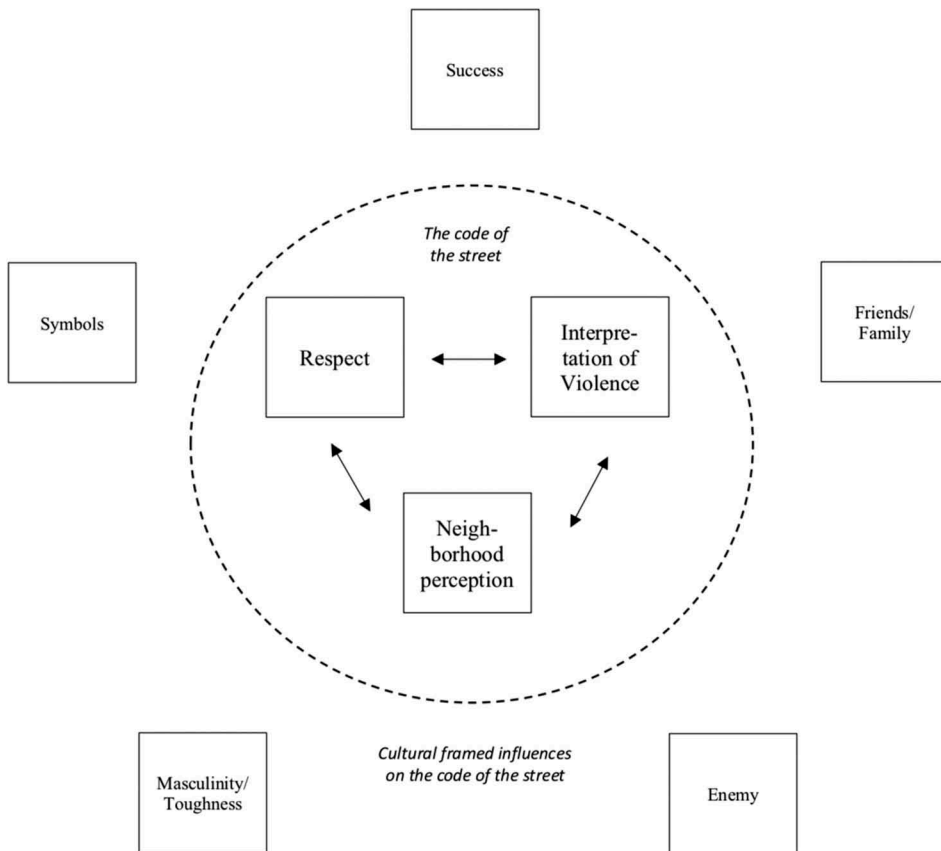


Figure 1. The code of the street.

especially by male juveniles. Furthermore, explanations of youth violence have often been developed in the West, mostly in the US, and treated as general approaches, without reflecting on the limitations and cultural determinants. This is true for the prominent concept of the code of the street as well, which we used as the basis to compare youth violence from the perspective of male juveniles in risky neighborhoods in four different countries around the globe. This had two advantages: first, we were able to control if the code of the street is a general theory. Secondly, it provided a structural framework within which to undertake a comparative analysis.

The research question of our study was: *What are general parts of the code of the street and what are more culturally-specific meanings?* Based on our findings, we do see a core of the street code concept, which is stable over different countries and we do expect it to remain so over time, but the code as drawn by Elijah Anderson has limited applicability. However, we were able to distinguish the general from the culturally-influenced elements. The core of the code is: respect, neighborhood perception, and the interpretation of violence. All other aspects that we controlled in the qualitative interviews differ significantly and are culturally shaped.

One question remains open: How is a street code itself shaped? Here, we see two explanations. One is a *bottom-up explanation*, which places emphasis on the individual. Generally, people, irrespective of whether they live in a risky, mixed or wealthy neighborhood like to be in balance with their environment. As such, they develop strategies to fit in with the environment as best as they can. However, in some neighborhoods, people are threatened by violence, drugs and or in general, deviant behavior. Here, specific strategies need to be developed to be able to cope with the challenges of the environment. The other theorem is a *top-down explanation*, which refers to the

other elements of the code. Here, macro-level influences, like the general level of violence and crime in a society (Kesteren, Dijk, and Mayhew 2014), a history of discrimination (Maylam 2017), or the type of welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1990) form the elements of the code in a significant way. The role of friends or the perception of violence are examples of this.

We were able to identify the general part of the street code approach and distinguish it from the culturally specific ones, which is a significant step forward for the understanding of youth violence. However, the study is not without limitations. First, we only interviewed male juveniles and we cannot be sure if gender-related differences influence the core elements of the global street code. Secondly, due to the qualitative nature of our study, we cannot claim that our sample was representative. Therefore, it would need further studies, which control the findings with the survey data. Thirdly, we have not taken into account countries from all parts of the world, with South America completely absent because of lack of resources of the research project.

All in all, we were able to show that street codes are culturally shaped and that important elements of the original work differ. Someone who grew up in a risky neighborhood in Pakistan cannot utilize the Pakistani street code to get by in a risky neighborhood in South Africa. However, to analyze and compare street codes, the concepts developed by Anderson, and the elements themselves is very useful. The core of the code, respect, as well as the perception of the neighborhood and violence help to understand the basic dynamics in a given neighborhood. The other elements of the code cluster around this core and is questionable if the list of elements – enemy, symbols, friends/family or masculinity/toughness – is exhaustive. Of all the findings, the range of explanations require reflection. Such an approach is analytically helpful to understand, for example, youth violence in Indonesia, but the findings are not generalizable on their own.

Notes on contributors

Sebastian Kurtenbach, born 1987, interim professor for social policy at the University of Applied Sciences Münster, and he was a senior researcher at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University in Germany from 2016 till 2018. His research interests are urban sociology, conflict studies and migration. Contact: kurtenbach@fh-muenster.de

Steffen Zdun, born 1975, is a research associate at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University in Germany since 2006. He is also a lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences for Public Administration and Management of North Rhine-Westphalia. His main research interests are: juvenile delinquency, street culture, desistance, and inter-ethnic relations. Contact: steffen.zdun@uni-bielefeld.de

Simon Howell, born 1984, is a research fellow in the Global Risk Governance program and Center of Criminology, University of Cape Town. He has published a number of academic articles, book chapters and reports, teaches a number of postgraduate courses, and comments regularly on select topics in the national press. His core research interest focused on the relationship between justice and violence, and how this relationship is made manifest both in the structures of modern governance and in the architecture of marginalized peoples' identities. Contact: simonphowell@gmail.com

Dr. Muhammad Zaman, born 1981, established the Department of Sociology, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad in 2014 and he was the Chair from 2014 till 2017. He is also Researcher at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University from 2016 to 2019 on the project "Violence related norms, attitudes and beliefs of young men in high-risk urban neighborhoods". His main interests are youth violence and politics, childhood, marriage and family. Contact: zaman@qau.edu.pk

Abdul Rauf, M.A., born 1988, is working as a research associate at Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence (IKG) at Bielefeld University. Before, he was part of an interdisciplinary research team at the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies at University of the Punjab in Pakistan. His research interests are urban sociology, youth studies, migration, boundary-making and group relation. Contact: abdul.rauf@uni-bielefeld.de

ORCID

Sebastian Kurtenbach  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6030-3906>

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