
OUTLINES - CRITICAL PRACTICE STUDIES

• Vol. 14, No. 2 • 2013 • (79-105) •
<http://www.outlines.dk>

Praxis development in relation to gang conflicts in Copenhagen, Denmark

Line Lerche Mørck, Khaled Hussain, Camilla Møller-Andersen, Tülay Özüpek, Anne-Mette Palm & Ida Hedegaard Vorbeck

Department of Education, Aarhus University
Campus Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract

The primary question addressed in this article is how to understand and produce praxis development in the complex and contentious field of street communities of young marginalized men, an area highlighted almost on a daily basis in the Danish media under headlines with terms such as 'foreigner problems', 'ghetto problems', 'gang conflicts' and 'gang war'. Since 2009, activists and professionals related to this field have gathered at Grundtvigs Højskole where they initiated and inspired community building activities in relation to the recent gang conflicts in the Copenhagen area of Denmark. The article explores these practices and changes, including some of the communal initiatives arising in response to the escalating gang conflicts. The conflict and community building activities are contextualized in terms of broader tendencies and changes in Danish society, from enduring struggles with ethnic othering of young minority men since the late 1990s, to other societal changes escalating 'gang-conflicts' to 'gang-war'. The article examines how these changes produce new dynamics, tensions and dimensions of binary thinking, which in turn creates new dilemmas in the everyday lives of the people involved in social work practice, community building activities and praxis research

Introduction

Our ambition in this article is to concretize how a social praxis understanding of praxis development is based on *participating criticism* (Mørck & Nissen, 2005, p. 123) in and across action contexts; on one side is the praxis researchers and the co-researchers common research of a particular praxis (here the gang problematic in Copenhagen, Denmark), and on the other side the praxis researchers participation in critical reflection and theoretical dialogue with other researchers and theoretical references. Empirically and

theoretically we participate in relentless criticism in our exchanges and cooperation with engaged co-researchers (e.g., Søren, Ali, Fatma, Elena, and Sayied¹), who are producing “the new”, or praxis development, with us and through interaction with other powerful parties, such as the police, media, politicians, and groups affected by and involved in current gang conflicts in Denmark.

In this article, we do not have room for relating our discussion of praxis development and gang conflicts to the huge amount of international gang research. But we briefly comment on some of the similarities to the epistemology of PAR for Social Justice research community from the Graduate Centre New York (Torre, 2008), including the gang research approach of David Brotherton and research group, who terms their work an “unabashedly critical approach”(Brotherton & Barrios, 2004, p.3). Like ours, this is a holistic approach, collecting and analysing multiple data sources, conducting a collaborate mode of inquiry, an active, dialogical, reciprocal and quasi-democratic research relationship. One difference, though, is that Brotherton & Barrios (2004, p. 4) manage to collaborate closely with a very marginalized group such as the Latin Kings gangs of New York, following their dialogues and social transformation (Brotherton & Barrios, 2004, p. 4). Our study mainly follows dialogues, subjects and communities on the borderland of gang cultures, and includes only few young men who are still in a gang.

Theoretically and empirically, we unfold what we regard as the following three main and closely interconnected theoretical points of praxis development within this field:

- Relentless criticism is the core aspect of understanding recent gang conflicts as “praxis problematic” (see Lave, 2011, explained below), and it is also fundamental to producing the new/praxis development.
- Praxis development is a dialectical process involving society, subjects/participants, and their communities as vehicles, with the telos (Lave, 1997, p. 146) of producing the new, moving (partly) beyond dualisms, binary thinking, and other societal contradictions and double binds in the analysed praxis. Jean Lave’s notion of telos underscores that the direction of movement or change is not the same as goal directed activity (Lave, 1997, p. 146). In other words, neither we nor our co-researchers planned this praxis development in relation to gang conflicts beforehand; rather, it took form in the processes of collaborations.
- Praxis development related to gang conflicts is built on an in-depth understanding of the way in which complex societal conditions simultaneously contribute to both suppressive and empowering processes of interpellation. Nissen (2012) develops Althusser’s concept of interpellation, understanding the constitutions of subjects through “relations and movements of recognition between singular collectives and their participants. Interpellation is when the subject recognizes herself as recognized in a unique but universal identity, and with a responsibility given as meaningful in a collective’s ideology. The subject must be recognized as *Other*, then *submit* to the collective’s common sense, and finally realize and transform it, to demand another level of recognition” (Nissen, 2012, p. 193). The telos of this collaboration between praxis researchers and co-researchers became a process of

¹ To preserve co-researchers anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all co-researchers, with the exception of Søren Lerche.

interpellation of the parties involved, including marginalized participants and (former) gang members, such as Ali, thereby jointly producing community building activities that contribute to in-depth understanding, also called “relentless criticism”, and developing praxis for gang intervention and movements beyond gangs.

In this article we philosophically, theoretically, and empirically explore and discuss praxis development related to the collaboration between Grundtvigs Højskole’s² Bandedseminarer (Gang Seminars), and other related community-building activities, such as volunteer projects (e.g. Vores Unge, Perlemor, and Kirke Care), which developed from the Gang Seminars. Back in 2008, Ali, a student at Grundtvigs Højskole, came to project manager Søren Lerche with the idea of organizing a ‘gang seminar’ in response to the rise in gang conflicts. As we discuss below in section 3, during the past decade Ali went from being a marginalized and angry young man involved in organized crime, to being a højskole student, and now he is about to finish his studies as a social worker. Since 2009 he has been the head of Vores Unge,³ a volunteer social project in Copenhagen that organizes volunteer preventive work with youth involved in, or at risk of becoming involved in, crime. Recently, Vores Unge has also developed exit strategies with volunteers helping (formerly) incarcerated young people leaving criminal life behind. Ali has received funding for a paid, full-time position as manager of Vores Unge. As we will see, this movement involves complex interpellation processes across time and different contexts; Søren Lerche and the Gang Seminars have been vital to Ali’s development, and Ali has had an important role in establishing the Gang Seminars and other community-building activities, such as Network for Dialogue and Community building, which address gang conflicts. In this article, the philosophical, theoretical, and empirical depths of this type of dialectic in praxis development are explored.

The Gang Seminars are annual, two-to-five-day dialogical seminars held every September since 2009, and one-day follow-up conferences held in the spring of 2011 and 2012, directed by Søren Lerche, project manager at Grundtvigs Højskole. At the follow-up conferences, “Outcomes”, which summarized reflections on the most recent Gang Seminars, was published on Grundtvigs Højskole’s webpage (see Møller-Andersen & Palm, 2010; Okkels, 2011a, 2011b; Møller-Andersen & Fuglsang, 2012), and followed up by new, often international reflections on the spring seminars. These dialogical meetings have involved more than 400 participants, including about 60 national and international

² The Danish “Højskole” can be translated to “People’s College”. There are 73 Højskoler in Denmark. Grundtvigs Højskole is working in quite a unique way in relation to the extent to which it involves students and other parties outside the school in community building activities – discussing different societal problems. Danish højskole is an independent, alternative school for adults. It is a voluntary supplement to obligatory and traditional schooling, and the different schools often have a specific focus and cater to different age groups. Grundtvigs Højskole is one of the oldest of its kind, and its main subjects include philosophy, art, politics, journalism, and, the past few years, also courses about gang criminality. Participants pay a small fee and attend shorter or longer courses (up to 8 months), usually boarding at the school to immerse themselves in the topics. There are no exams.

³ Translates as “Our Youth”, a volunteer project offering counseling, mentoring, and activities for youth. Their home page can be viewed: <http://vores-unge.dk/>

keynote speakers and workshop organizers, in discussions about gang intervention, gang conflicts, and related issues. Søren Lerche also teaches student courses about social work, gang criminality, and radicalization, involving (former) students and collaborators from Grundtvigs Højskole, such as Ali, in presentations, and organizes conferences in collaboration with local communities in and around Copenhagen. Like Søren Lerche and Ali, many of the activists and presenters involved have personal experience in this field. Since 2012, Søren Lerche has organized prominent speakers, experienced, professional gang specialists, activists, and former criminals in the Network for Dialogue and Community building. Many of those involved have also participated in activities such as field visits to gang (and community) interventions in Copenhagen, Manchester, Stockholm and Chicago. The Network for Dialogue and Community building is most recently working closely with Fryshuset⁴ (Sweden), to obtain political and economic support to build a Fryshus-inspired youth centre in Copenhagen, combining local cultural activities, youth education, social work, social economic enterprise, and exit strategies related to gangs and other marginalized groups.

Since 2009, we (Line Lerche Mørck and Søren Lerche) have invited five master thesis students (Hussain, 2012; Palm & Møller-Andersen, 2010; Vorbeck, 2012; Özüpek, 2013) as collaborative researchers and co-authors in this article, to contribute to the collaborative praxis research in this field, researching on the ground conflicts and struggles for change.

Background: Danish gang conflict in an international perspective

Denmark is a relative newcomer, both to the area of prolonged gang war and in regard to organizing collaborations between NGO's/volunteers and professionals related to gang intervention. In contrast to the lengthy and well established international gang research traditions in so-called "gang cities", such as Los Angeles, USA (Vigil, 2002), New York (Brotherton & Barrios, 2004), Glasgow, Scotland (Deuchar, 2009), and England (Aldridge, Medina & Ralphs, 2008), we have a very sparse gang research record in Denmark.

In Denmark, as in the gang cities, we see an ongoing trend of demonization of adolescents by politicians and the media (Brotherton & Barrios, 2004, Deuchar, 2009), but in contrast to these cities, the dilemmas of territoriality (Deuchar, 2009) are rather new phenomena in socially deprived areas of Denmark, and interventions have so far mainly been left to the Danish police force, who intervene through "visitation zones" and extended "stop and search" zones. Apart from the possible future collaboration between researchers and the Network for Dialogue and Community building, we do not yet have independent Danish research on interventions or formal education that qualify professionals to help youth caught in the double binds related to territoriality and gang conflicts.

What we do have in Denmark is a broad and well-established welfare state, and since 1997 the SSP collaborations between schools, social services and police. In 1997 a new law allowed knowledge sharing in collaborations between police, schools, and social services (SSP collaboration). In 1998, as a result of this collaboration, 15 to 20 street gangs were identified in Copenhagen, each with 5 to 20 members between the ages 15 and 20. The police department reported the "majority of these youngsters as having ethnic minority backgrounds", and as being from "families that are poorly integrated"(Stevens,

⁴ Fryshuset.se/

2001), thereby equating street gangs with integration problems. This gang intervention research was done by evaluators, and by the police department (Stevns, 2001). The police gang-report was criticised by psychologist Ida Koch (1999) for being “misleading and sloppy”. In 2003 a newer police report concluded that it is misleading to term these groups of youngsters as gangs (PLS-Rambøl og Socialforskningsinstituttet, 2003). At that time there was a critical discussion of the so called gang-discourse of the police and media, arguing not to use the term “gang” for these street communities (Mørck, 2006, pp. 189-190). After 2008⁵ it has become broadly acknowledged that we also have gang conflicts, involving street gangs in Denmark. In 2009 the municipality of Copenhagen introduced the first “18 + center” at the Blågaards Square area for youth older than 18 years (see Mørck 2011, p. 121) and since then several 18+ centres have been introduced in local areas affected by gang conflicts. In 2011 a national exit plan was implemented by the Danish government, but there is still no research in these new gang interventions.

Copenhagen has a strong, longstanding tradition of employing street-level social workers with “wild”⁶ backgrounds, who collaborate closely with formally educated social workers (Mørck, 2006). This includes the street projects of the 1990s, such as Sjakket, Tjekpunkt (Nissen, 2000, 2012), and Amager Total Teater (Bechman, Mørck & Nissen, 1993). In the 2000s there was the Copenhagen “wild” social work boundary community (Mørck 2000, 2010, 2011). For a decade, Sayied, and many others, were employed here and collaborated closely with teachers, formally educated social workers, and youth club workers, as well as the police, to some extent. Lately, since the recent escalation of gang conflict in the Copenhagen area, municipalities seem to be tightening their boundaries and employing mainly professionals with formal college education, and/or academic degrees. This tendency could create new dilemmas, such as those related to the lack of “street smarts” in the social work boundary communities (Mørck, 2006). But lately we also see new trends of gang preventive volunteer work, as part of “Vores Unge”, Livsbanen (Elkjær & Holm 2013.), Perlemor (see section 5 of this article), and the new volunteer work at Blågåards Plads citizen network (see section 5 of this article).

⁵ Mazdak’s drive by killing in 2008 of 19 year old Osman Nuri Dogan (from Tingbjerg) is pointed out in the media and by many of the involved parties, to be the start of the gang conflict. The conflict between Nuri and Mazdak arose because one of them was hitting on the other’s (former) girlfriend. After the murder, Mazdak was offered a position (as hang around or prospect) as part of Hells Angels (HA), a solution based on mutual interests: Mazdak needed protection, which he could get by joining HA. For HA, a prospect who had committed such as brutal drive by killing was attractive, because it symbolized power and dangerous reputation in relation to other street communities (such as the Blågaards group), that HA was in conflict with.

⁶ Wild is a term attributed to a particular segment of urban youth in Danish society - both Danish and ethnic minority youth who are involved in different “alternative” activities (e.g., involving marginal young people in solving problems of marginalized youth, but wild youth are also involved in illegal activity). At a particular historical juncture in Denmark, described in Mørck (2010), the position of a wild street social worker was created as a form of alternative street social worker, addressing the needs of these youth; this wild social street worker was to come from within the wild community and serve that community (see Mørck, 2010, 2011, 2000).

But when it comes to collaborations with NGOs, Denmark still has a lot to learn from other countries⁷. Despite their much lower levels of gang conflict, our Nordic neighbours Sweden and Norway have important experience, both through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the police. For example, the youth centre, Fryshuset, has, for 27 years, combined youth activities (e.g. basketball, music, skating) with youth education, gang exit and prevention strategies, as well as employing and educating social workers and mentors who have backgrounds in radicalized or criminal communities. In contrast to Denmark, Norway and Sweden employ police officers with doctorates⁸ in gang research and/or criminology to develop police intervention practices related to gangs.

The goal of international exchanges, collaborations, and field visits arranged by Søren Lerche as part of the International Network for Dialogue and Community building is such a mutual inspiration. As we will see later in this article, Danish and international experiences illustrate how important it is to continue challenging the binary ideas of professionals versus volunteers, supporting further activity-based collaborations among the wild youth, broad interest-based youth communities, teachers, and social workers (as part of the established system), and others, such as NGOs, local residents, and experts with wild backgrounds.

Gang conflicts understood as a praxis problematic

Our ambition is to understand the gang conflicts as a praxis problematic (Lave, 2011), which we believe makes it possible to both understand the praxis field and at the same time contribute to praxis development. “A problematic includes assumptions (an ontology, an epistemology an ethics) about relations between persons and world, the nature of human beings and how it is produced, in what terms we can know it and the nature of knowledge” (Lave, 2011, p. 150). Praxis problematics are imbued with the politics of the historically, political-economically structured social-cultural world, which includes understanding “on the ground conflict and struggle for change” (Lave, 2011, p. 153).

We have chosen the term “praxis” over “practice” to underscore the Marxist philosophical roots, and the understanding of praxis development and change as historical, materialistic, and dialectical in relation to praxis ideologies and binary ways of thinking, expressed in contradictions, dilemmas, double binds and conflicts in praxis. Our concept of praxis development is also rooted in the critical psychological tradition of praxis research, where one of the primary goals is to research and expand action possibilities through new understandings of dilemmas in the praxis field. Another goal of our collaboration is to organize and support community building activities (Newman & Holzman, 1997, p. 77). The main parties involved in the present Copenhagen area gang conflict are motorcycle clubs (such as Hells Angels and Bandidos, and their supporters) and different geographically based groups of “street socialized wild youth” (from areas such as Tingbjerg, Blågårds Plads (BGP), Kokkedal, Værebros, Mjølnerparken, etc). Some of these geographically based groups recently (spring 2013) formed an official affiliation, now displaying a stronger gang identity by wearing black hoodies marked with “LTF” (Loyal

⁷ The Gang Seminars are looking for international inspiration from strong NGO’s such as Mothers against Violence from Manchester and Ceasefire and the South West Organizing Project (SWOP) from Chicago, all NGO’s working on gang intervention.

⁸ Such as Amir Rostami.

To Familia) and local geographic names, such as Kokkedal, BGP, Skovlunde, and Tingbjerg.

But the gang conflict, understood as a praxis problematic in Lave's sense, involves other parties as well, such as street social workers, police, media, politicians, activists, relatives and us researchers, i.e., parties who try to intervene in and/or represent the conflict to the broader public. From within and across different empirical subcases we discuss how collaborations between researchers and co-researchers create political agency and may contribute partially to transcending dominating tendencies of dualistic thinking and demonization of youth (Deuchar, 2009), thereby avoiding the risk of contributing to the reproduction of marginalization of the involved young men, their relatives, volunteers and local street social workers, etc.

Praxis research as dialogical exchange with co-researchers

As we will see, this praxis research position is in line with Brothertons & Barrios (2004) goals of 1) humanizing subjects, 2) contributing to social reform and social justice, 3) creating conditions for a dialogical relationship between researchers and research participants (Ibid, p. 4).

Critical psychological praxis research "identifies itself as an approach from 'within and below', it takes the side of the subject of practice and refuses traditional notions of scientific objectification" (Nissen, 2009, p. 67). "Within and below" indicates the co-researchers' positions in the field in and across different communities and action contexts. Discussions of "top down" versus "bottom up" approaches (Mørck, 1995) involve analysis of different positions, agency (potentials and limitations in ability to influence the field together with others) and structures of power that define the field.

One of the goals of our praxis research is to research subject standpoints from within the conflict and below, which means coming to an understanding of subject perspectives that we/the public know very little about. Within this praxis field, the problems and conflicts have mainly been described and defined by the police, media, and politicians, but also to some extent by one party in the conflict: Hells Angels (HA). For a period of time (2008-2010) Hells Angels succeeded in transforming a very negative reputation into a near celebrity position by effectively controlling their public appearance through their home page, bestselling books, and broad media representations as "the protectors of Denmark" against young men from ethnic minorities. HA spokesperson, "Jønke", calls them "Jackals" in his so-called "Jackal Manifesto".⁹ According to the media and the police, this manifesto was published on HA's web page on June 30, 2009, on the same day that they planned to kill a young man called "Little A", who was meeting his brother, "Big A", in court. Both brothers were known by the media as leading members of the Blågårds Plads group. A video of Little A was published with the manifesto, stating that this was a picture of a Jackal. The video presents Little A participating in one of Grundtvigs Højskole's dialogic conferences on ethnic minorities and the media, which took place in 2008 at the community centre at Blågårds Plads:

⁹ <http://dk.hells-angels.dk/default.php?id=16393>

“The media has a tremendous role when they allow us [ethnic minorities] to be constantly scorned, we are being criminalized, and you [the media] generalise and generalise and generalise. You do not even know what it does to people. 10 years ago I loved Denmark. Today, Bloody Hell. You do not even know what hatred I have come to have for this country. Now when Danish soldiers die in Afghanistan, I almost enjoy it. Look at the rut I ended up in. It’s almost impossible to live in Denmark, so I almost consider moving away from here”. (Little A).

This sequence reveals how strategically HA used the media, and how they partly succeeded in their media-based strategy of demonizing their ethnic minority “enemies”, even getting politicians involved in the process of demonization: In 2009, the Manifesto was followed up by a major politician,¹⁰ Søren Pind, who wrote, “This is damn well written”, and “What if Jønke is right?” (Pind, 2009).

HA’s very strategic use of the media is contrasted to other parties in this praxis field, such as Little A, who was shown criticising the media in the video-quote, and other local street socialised wild youth, who often refer to their experiences of being misunderstood and stigmatised by the media, and therefore have developed a praxis ideology of not talking to “the established Danish system”, including the police and the media, although there are also exceptions to this tendency (Mørck, 2011). As shown in an Al Jazeera video about the Danish gang conflict, the ethnic minority street socialised communities also felt very discriminated by the police,¹¹ even accusing the Danish police to be in alliance with “their enemies” helping the other part of the conflict¹².

An example of doing research from within and below includes the subject perspective of another young man, Ahmed, living in one of the geographic areas of Copenhagen that suffers from many shootings. He is one of the 1,863 police registered gang members¹³ as observed by the Danish police, but in the interviews he positions himself as part of different groups of “us”. Mostly as “us from [a specific geographic area]”, but also as “us Muslim ethnic minorities and citizens of Denmark”, and “us getting involved because we have to defend our brothers from the groups who come in and shoot the young men in the local area”, and finally a family “us” that includes his wife and children to be. In our first interview in December 2010, Ahmed said that if the young boys from AK81¹⁴, whom HA

¹⁰ Søren Pind was Danish Minister of Integration in 2011, and Danish Minister of Development from 2010-2011, Copenhagen Deputy Mayor of Building and Technical Services from 1994-2005.

¹¹ According to police gang intervention research by Arne Stevns (2001), the so called “street gangs” of Copenhagen, mainly consisted of young ethnic minority youth age 15 to 20, also felt very discriminated against in the late 1990s.

¹² Al Jazeera (2010). Denmark’s gang war. 12/04/2010, www.M.aljazeera.com/

¹³ In 2011 the Danish Police registered 1,863 people in their gang register. About 1,250 of these people are related to motorcycle gangs and 613 to what the police calls gangs (Rigspolitiet, 2012).

¹⁴ AK81 is a Hells Angels support group formed in 2007. The letters A and K stand for Always Ready (“Altid Klar”), and the numbers 8 and 1 refer to the letters H and A’s placement in the alphabet. Another co-researcher with personal experience of being in a biker gang described the difference between being a prospect in Hells Angels and being a member of AK81. He stated that it is easier to get into AK81. There is still an initiation, which might be beating or killing someone, or taking some drugs, but you don’t have to be humiliated, as in “go wash the dishes bitch”, running around cleaning and running errands for almost two years whenever a member

have engaged to do their dirty jobs, actually met and talked to us [the young men from our area], they would get to know us and not see us as enemies.

In the follow-up interview in 2011, Ahmed termed such a meeting between the young men from AK81 and his side of the conflict as “naive”. In this interview he was asked if he still saw a solution to the gang conflicts:

“Everything does have a solution somehow. But there are several fronts now, so it is much more complicated than people think. You have to see it from within to understand it. Honestly, I had never thought that people would start to kill each other. To begin with it was all about sending signals, showing that you wouldn’t just take anything, but now it is executions on open streets. We are making fools of ourselves as ethnic minorities, humans, and citizens of Denmark. Even Allah is angry with us. Because this is not what our religion dictates. If you look at it in the Islamic way, this is solved, well, between Muslims, for example with blood money and such. I hope it all ends someday, because we are only making it worse for our children in the future.” (Ahmed, 2011).

Like Nissen (2009) our praxis research stresses the intersubjectivity between researchers and co-researchers:

Practice research is a view of research basically as a practice among others - and engaged in an exchange with those other practices, establishing forms of dialogue directed toward their development. The idea of a ‘dialogue’ between practices recognises that practices are subjective and that humans are reflexive, so that the relationship between researchers and practitioners is an intersubjective relationship in which both are participants. (p. 68).

In this case the research collaboration and intersubjectivity between Ahmed, the research interviewer and the broader “us” (the team of researchers and co-researchers) produces new understandings from within, from first person experiences of the change from conflict to war situation, the change from having one front/enemy (Hells Angels/AK81), to having many fronts, including other groups of Muslims and ethnic minorities. But our research also produces a new understanding of Ahmed as much more than a police registered gang member, as this quote illustrates; he is a young man who shares the common interest, motivation and hope for solving this conflict. A young man, who before this conflict began, had never thought he would be carrying a gun. A young man who’s biggest wish is that this war is only a phase that soon will end, so that families and his future children will be able to live without anxiety, fear and shootings. This understanding is (re)produced in and across our different praxis research collaborations, as we will see in the other empirical cases involving former gang members, local women/relatives and social workers, who struggle to move (local communities) beyond criminality Getting to understand this complexity from different positions “below and within” (Mørck, 1995) is an example of the “production of qualities beyond this consensus” (Nissen, 2009, p. 68).

shouts “prospect”. As a prospect in a motorcycle gang you get hit if you don’t behave like a humble servant, following some very strict and arbitrary rules. AK81 is found across Denmark and is affiliated with Hells Angels Motorcycle Club’s seven divisions in Denmark. (Mørck, Møller-Andersen, & Palm, 2010).

As a research team we collaborate with very different parties and co-researchers. For example, we also interviewed a man from a motorcycle gang and another young man from a geographic area outside Copenhagen, an area which later on in spring 2013 became more active participant in the conflict. We have interviewed social workers with backgrounds and connections to the different fronts, and women who are closely related to some of the young men at risk of getting shot (from one of the other local areas in Copenhagen). One of us (the first author of this article) has, together with Nissen (2000), followed Copenhagen area preventive work around the so called Wild Learning community since the mid 1990'es (Mørck 2000; Mørck & Nissen 2001; Mørck 2006; Nissen, 2012), and now manages the research project by collaborating closely with all the sub-projects over time, being in dialogue with most of the co-researchers in and across all of these praxis research projects. Together we are “producing the new” (see explanation below) in close interaction with praxis development produced and mediated together at Grundtvigs Højskole's Gang Seminars, and theoretical developments published in research papers and journals. Summing up, a way beyond dichotomies of subjectivity versus objectivity of praxis is to view praxis research as one praxis among others. This means that we as praxis researchers actively engage in exchanges with those other praxes (such as co-researchers from Grundtvigs Højskole's Gang Seminars). Together we establish forms of dialogue directed towards the mutual development of our praxes (Nissen, 2009, p. 68) and the praxes that our co-researchers collaborate with and/or are in conflict with.

Relentless criticism as understanding praxis and producing “the new”

The described praxis research exchange procedure can also be termed participating criticism. It is inspired by Marxist theory, which argues that we find “the new world” through (participating) criticism of existing conditions. Marx calls for “relentless criticism of all existing conditions, relentless in the sense that the criticism is not afraid of its findings and just as little afraid of the conflict with the powers that be” (Marx, as cited in Bernstein, 1971: 51). Our participating criticism “is not a matter of arbitrarily **condemning** an institution or a belief, but of **understanding** it” (p. 52). According to the praxis philosopher Richard Bernstein (1971) this kind of understanding demands: “a correct theoretical analysis of existing institutions and the contradictions inherent in them” (Bernstein, 1971: 53).

Bernstein discusses different aspects of Marx's understanding of praxis, which includes a very relevant question in relation to praxis development: what are the reasons to believe that critical understanding of existing conditions and institutions would lead to actual transformation of these?

A praxis theoretical Marxist answer is that theory is capable of gripping the masses when it appeals to their emotions or common interest. Osterkamp concretizes this idea by formulating a Marxist psychology, stating that an analysis must “proceed from people themselves, that is, to help them to voice their problems and to grasp their societal preconditions and hence the possibilities of overcoming them” (Osterkamp, 1999, p. 468). As such, we try to develop research collaborations around *common interests* (versus *special interests*) (Mørck, 2011, p. 118). Examples of common interests could be transcending marginalization of the young men in question, trying to stop the escalations

to gang war, and minimizing growing number of young men getting killed, involved and affected. This article shows examples of how such common interests can be explored and developed through praxis research collaboration.

Understanding the media's role in processes of interpellation

We have already touched upon the media's crucial role in marginalizing and/or celebrating the different parties in the gang conflicts and in this analytic process it is an enduring risk of all kind of gang research (ours included) to point out "heroes" and "bad guys". Osterkamp (1999) writes how critical psychology should be revolutionary from the subject standpoint:

It is a revolutionary one insofar as it does not view people themselves as a problem, but regards the prevailing tendency to define them as a problem to be the real problem to be analysed in both its societal and personal presuppositions and consequences. Such a theoretical approach includes the analysis of one's own active entanglement in suppression of others as well as the manifold tendencies to deny and/or justify it (p. 467).

As researchers, we are part of an enduring struggle to move beyond the personalizing tendency. We suggest analysis of both suppressive and empowering processes as interpellation (Nissen, 2012) as an important step in humanizing the subjects, and contributing to social justice (Brotherton & Barrios, 2004, Torre, 2008). In continuation of Nissen (2012), we reinterpret Althusser's (1972) notion of interpellation by relating it to recognition and participation within communities. We develop the social praxis theory further by theorizing how marginalizing and expansive interpellation through diverse practice ideologies is (re)produced in and across different communities (Mørck, 2011, p. 119). This will be demonstrated empirically at a later point in the article.

The processes of interpellation include how powerful parties, including both us as researchers and the media, may interpellate and thereby partly move different parties in different directions. Our goal is to move the involved parties towards positions of more engagement and more common responsibility and beyond the problematic stereotypes of immigrants, foreigners and gangs described in mainstream media discourse (Deuchar, 2009, chapter 1). The knowledge we need is related to studying changes in participants in and across communities and fields of conflictual and contentious societal praxis (Holland & Lave, 2001), involving many different parties and layers of society. According to social praxis theory, to research social change in social praxis is to understand the societal "institutions, capital and forces of production" that "give people power over legitimacy, peripherality and participation without dividing one from another" (Lave, 2008, p. 285).

One of the most powerful institutions affecting the conflicts among young men and their marginalization is the media. One of our co-researchers, Ali, called the media "the third party, and very responsible for creating the gang war". He said:

"It is important to talk to the media, because they have a huge co-responsibility [...] They are the first to be on the spot, stigmatizing these people, they inflame the young to counter attack [...]. All this gang-war [...] the third party was the media, and I think they should be held responsible for this... you can't do this, this is wrong, think of our society... the media created these gangs... I was following the media closely, I could read in every newspaper, that they had

divided the whole country in gangs... in this and this street there is a gang [...] and the young people who did not feel that they were part of any gang... they could damn well read in the newspaper ‘hey, I am in a gang now’” (Ali, 2010).

The media focus and discourse has changed over the last decade. In the late 1990’s to the mid-2000s the Danish media’s top news was frequently themed ‘The Foreigner Problem’, ‘The Muslim Problem’, ‘The Immigrant Problem’. Ali and Little A (quoted above) are not alone in their relentless criticism of the media. Prominent media figures, politicians, and researchers also describe this period in terms of “Bullying of ethnic minorities and irresponsible politics of asylum” (Fenger-Grøn, Qureshi & Seidenfaden, 2003). More recently, the headlines have changed to “Ghetto Problems” and “Gang war”. In the 1980-90’s the term “gang war” was mainly linked to biker groups such as Hells Angels and Bandidos in the Danish media, but from 2008 it is also linked to groups from deprived areas, the so called “ghettos”. Ali described how a smear campaign against “foreigners” published by Ekstra Bladet¹⁵ in 1997 became an obstacle for his own educational trajectory:

“... I started at HF¹⁶, but in that period, there was this about Ekstra Bladet [...] this smear campaign against immigrants... and then I went from never thinking about it to suddenly becoming a ‘perker’ [a derogatory term for people from the Middle East]... I became a foreigner, an outcast and not welcome; suddenly you were something else than you had always thought you were” (Ali, 2010).

Ali described in the interview how he in this particular period started to hang out with a group of boys who were beating up people, which was where the violence began. Ali’s personal experience was that the smear campaign in the media changed his life:

“I went from one day to the next... I had Danish friends, but in that period... wham, then something happened.... Then you were just a second generation immigrant; I think it was in this period the concept was invented, you had to be positioned... you became stigmatized and categorized, and then there had been some incidences of knife attacks, and then everybody started doing that... yes, because then you had to live up to the stereotype that had been created...”

I: “So you actually tried to live up to it?”

A: “Yes... you thought... yes, ok, that is what I have been stigmatized to be, that is what society expects from me... if I go to prison, then I have really made it...” (Ali, 2010).

In this interpellation process there is a certain similarity to Althusser’s (1972) famous example of the policeman who hails: “Hey you!” The simple physical turning of the body, 180 degrees, shows that the subject has recognized that he, and not someone else, was the person hailed, (Althusser, 1972, p. 60). The French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser

¹⁵ “Ekstra Bladet” is a Danish tabloid newspaper.

¹⁶ “HF” is a two-year program leading to the higher preparatory examination, which qualifies for admission to college and university.

(1972) originally conceptualized interpellation in close relation to the ideological state apparatus, such as school, church, government, political parties, family and law abiding union. Today the media is just as powerful a force of society, fuelled by economic interests and the production of attention grabbing stories that will sell the most papers. With social praxis theory we argue that interpellation is not only about ideology, discourse and the ideological state (Nissen, 2012), which it may seem like when considering Ali's interview quote above. It is equally important to analyse how actual people, such as Ali, participate in and change as part of communities with certain practice ideologies. Communities that (re)produce both discourse and local praxis in different action contexts and in relation to other communities (Mørck, 2011). Below, we further illustrate how subjects, like Ali, Søren, Elena, Fatma and Sayied, may also produce changes and develop praxis as part of communities, in and across Grundtvigs Højskole's Gang Seminars, and in their different local communities. So from our interest in researching praxis development in relation to gang conflicts, the question arises: how can and do the different parties and communities challenge, break away from, or influence these dominating ideologies and discourses? And, importantly, in what direction do they/we change them?

Back in the late 1990s, Ali suddenly did not feel welcome in any communities except the street community with the other young men of ethnic minority origin. In his own words, he felt that he might as well live up to the image the media had created about his kind. He was not just interpellated to this marginalized position by the media; he also let himself be interpellated as "a marginalized second generation immigrant", someone who attacks others, which he did, participating in a community of other young marginalized ethnic minority men.

Ali ended up in prison. Later, while he again was doing time in prison he created a blog called "Perker.dk/" ("perker" being the aforementioned derogatory term for people from the Middle East). Project leader Søren Lerche from Grundtvigs Højskole read the blog and contacted Ali with the message, "You are very good at writing in your blog. You should become a journalist; come and study at the media course at our school". This was the beginning of a new expansive and empowering interpellation process.

Although Ali felt very different from most of the other students (the majority were Danish, light-skinned, and primarily from middleclass backgrounds), he nevertheless became a very active student at Grundtvigs Højskole. As mentioned in the introduction, Ali was later the one who went to Søren Lerche with the idea of setting up the Gang Seminars there.

At these Gang Seminars, one of the topics discussed was the role of the media as partially responsible for the conflict and for gang labelling. Kim Kliver, head of Denmark's national police investigation agency (Rigspolitiets Nationale Efterforskningscenter, NEC), held a presentation at the second Gang Seminar in 2010. He stated that the police had become much more aware of how they presented a shooting to the media in order to avoid fuelling counter attacks. He had also appealed to the media to be more critically aware and take an active role in combating the celebrity position of biker groups¹⁷, and this celebrity position seemed to disappear from the Danish media from year 2010.

¹⁷ <http://politiken.dk/indland/ECE1068340/se-og-hoer-politiet-har-ret-i-kritik/>

Contesting stigmatization and dualistic thinking

“Binary division between subject and the world precludes questions about how they mutually constitute each other” (Lave, 2011, p. 116). According to Osterkamp (1999) this

dualism embodies a range of further dualisms, above all the dichotomy of rationality and irrationality with its implicit message that it is sensible to do what is demanded and irrational to risk one’s own acceptance by deviating from prevailing expectations (Osterkamp, 1999, p. 469).

In our praxis field of gang conflicts, the processes of stigmatisation are often linked to social categories of foreigners, criminals and gang members. In our field of study, gangs are not just gangs, but rather change historically with respect to which communities are categorized as gangs by the police, the media and by other communities, and as the gang conflict have escalated into gang war, more and more groups also have begun to use the gang term about themselves. The people related to these communities are different and change over time. We need to analyse and understand these processes of differentiation and, according to Osterkamp (1999), “perceive beyond all possible individual differences, the unifying bond of our mutual responsibility for creating societal conditions where suppression is not a matter of course, but something to be openly discussed as a problem to be overcome” (p. 470) This is an important goal of this research and the Gang Seminars.

Later in this article we relate processes of dualistic thinking and stigmatisation to Bernstein (1971), discussing what it means in praxis to evolve beyond boundaries of stigmatization, categorization and different and changeable understandings of “us versus them”. But first we will take a look at an example of the style of dualistic thinking that (re)produces problems, conflicts, barriers and double binds in our praxis field.

Two women, Fatma and Elena, relatives to young men in the area, experienced this dilemma as co-organizers of a demonstration against shootings and killings in 2011. The women participated in a television debate about the demonstration. In such media debates there is a general risk of re-producing stigmatization of certain geographical areas, using “gang” and “ghetto” labelling. In this particular television debate about the demonstration, the interviewing journalist reproduced the negative stereotype of the young men as gang members by comparing them to Hells Angels. Prior to the televised interview, the journalist articulated the conflicts and shootings among young ethnic minority men using concepts such as “gangs”, “criminality” and “gang conflicts”. During the interview, the journalist asked one of the young women who organized the demonstration whether the young men were so “dangerous” that not even the local women wanted them to participate in the demonstration. By describing the young men as dangerous, the journalist contributed to the marginalization and negative discourse labelling all of these young men, including the youth who had been shot and killed. Fatma responded that the women’s purpose was to protect their young men by not letting them participate in the demonstration. The women did not use the term “dangerous” about their relatives and local young men. But the negative stereotypes produced in the media impact the way the public thinks about the young men and their relatives anyway. As we saw in Ali’s example, it may influence the mutual expectations between groups of young men and their

local communities; particularly if not contested in the media and other contexts, including this praxis research. Concurrently, the praxis ideology of the female relatives and the communities that were engaged in the demonstration require the young men to not commit crimes, to change beyond criminality. However, as we will illustrate below, the young men's opportunities for action are restricted through societal contradictions and media requirements. Hence the youths are caught in a dilemma where they must change, but at the same time they are retained in stigmatized positions.

The female relatives contested the media's portrayal of the young men as "other": foreigners/not-Danish, criminals and gang members. In research interviews, the women contrasted their lived experience with the othering media discourse, using the young man who was killed in 2011 as an example. In an interview, Elena, who is also a teacher, illuminated and exceeded the ethnic othering and dichotomy between criminal and non-criminal. Elena described her experience with the young man who was shot:

"In the media he was described as a foreigner I think... And known by the police. Not of Danish ethnicity or something like that. It made me very sad. You see, the boy was born and raised here. He always went to school here. He was on his way to culinary school, and at the same time... He and his brother tried to open (...) a clothing store, a sandwich bar, and also an ordinary dairy... And then they [the society and the media] treat it as a gang related issue. They are some really nice guys. Big, warm, smiling, and everybody liked them... And we [the teachers at school] used them as security guards sometimes, because they were big and we tried to give them some responsibilities. They were really popular, and warm and nice and so on." (Elena, 2011)

Elena emphasized another praxis ideology about the young man who was killed, and thereby contested the dominating discourse analysed above: She does not view him as a gang-member, but rather interpellates him along with other young men at risk as youths undergoing change, moving beyond criminal activities. Elena also said, "To be a criminal doesn't mean that you constantly do criminal activities. It means that you can commit a crime Saturday night and then 2-3 months pass where you don't commit any crimes." (Elena, 2011)

Dreier (2008) emphasizes the importance of looking at people's participation in and across contexts, because people have different standpoints in different communities. Therefore the young boys cannot be seen as independent from their participation in other contexts, and from other participants, and must be seen as more complex subjects in and across their varying contexts. The first person perspectives (Dreier, 2008) of these women are closely linked to their family communities and their praxis ideologies, including what is seen as legitimate versus illegitimate praxis within the involved communities (Mørck, 2011). There are also similarities across communities and parties: The critique of gang labelling, for example, overlaps with standpoints and discussions at Grundtvigs Højskole's Gang Seminars (Palm & Møller-Andersen, 2010).

Praxis development as a dialectical and collective process of "going beyond"

We observed the same struggle to move beyond dichotomized thinking about "criminal versus not criminal" as relevant in our dialogues with Majid, a street level social worker in Copenhagen. Majid has been doing social work for more than a decade; he is part of the

boundary communities of Wild Learning (Mørck, 2006, 2011), as well as participating actively in organizing Gang Seminars from their beginning in 2009. But Majid also experienced living with double bind situations without any really viable choices or good action possibilities. In dialogue with us, Majid, presented a hypothetical situation to illustrate a common dilemma:

“I have seen a lot of shootings in this area, and when I am driving in my social work car, if I saw somebody taking aim to shoot from their car into the internet café, and I am driving in that direction, what would I do? Would I drive away or would I crash into them? Surely I would drive into the car” (Majid, 2009).

This hypothetical double bind situation has negative consequences no matter the choice. Driving into the car breaks with the defined limits of legitimate social work and may well cause Majid to lose his job, possibly even go to prison. On the other hand, if he chooses not to drive into the car in a potentially fatal situation where he has power to intervene, he would get the cold shoulder from the local youth, and he would not be able to continue his work in this particular area (Mørck, Møller-Andersen & Palm, 2010). Initially Majid could not see any good choices or courses of action in the situation, however, by presenting it as a hypothetical situation he reflected on the situation, moving beyond it to a meta level in collaboration with others “Going beyond” is to “negate, affirm and transcend” (Bernstein, 1971, p. 18) and movement beyond is realized through its own *negation*: Majid tries to expand society’s understanding of this present war-like situation by *affirming* how even he as street social worker in one moment could be turned into “a criminal” and “gang related”, illustrating the contradictory positions many of the local youth live in, as well as the marginal boundary positions from which he and others do their social work. But the movement beyond implies *transcending* or overcoming this negation through the realization of his own self-existence and freedom (Bernstein, 1971, p. 28) as self-consciousness in itself and for itself, and by the fact that it is only by being acknowledged or “recognized” as such (Hegel, as cited in Bernstein, 1971, p. 25). In 2012, we talked to Majid about the hypothetical dilemma, and his affirmation back then, as part of engaging him as a co-researcher reading a draft for this article. Majid’s response was: “Things have changed a lot since then. Now I would call the police and maybe follow the car. But I certainly wouldn’t risk my own life by driving into the car” (Majid, 2012).

How do we in praxis, theoretically and empirically, understand this movement beyond? We understand it as part of expansive learning (Mørck, 2010) where double bind situations play a major role. Engeström (1987) conceptualizes how learning by expanding is motivated by the resolution of contradictions. It is an alternative to reactive forms of learning and an expansion that transcends the given context. In our case learning by expanding is a response to a societal change and crisis, when the conflicts among the communities of the young men change into war-like situations. The collective production of new forms of thinking about causes and consequences, including who is “innocent” and who is “criminal”, is a way of producing historically new forms of societal activity that can be collectively generated. This may be a first but important step towards a solution to the double binds potentially embedded in everyday actions for those involved (Engeström, 1987). The young men and the street social workers are all (because of the changed societal crisis situation from conflict to war) participating from marginal positions, and Majid is, in his example, inviting to a broader “us”. From time to time, they are at risk of

being caught up in double bind situations. Here our praxis research contribution to expansive learning is the collective struggle with such situations, and the steps taken to move beyond these marginal positions by collaboratively analysing and mediating the existence of these double binds to the public, the media, to politicians and police (Mørck, 2011). During this process, participants such as Majid receive *recognition* as experts in this difficult field, and they may be seen as role models daring to share and discuss problems, thereby making an important difference alongside researchers, local police, local citizens and others. Nissen (2012) defines recognition as “the objectification of the other as subject, within a cultural form of participation, and thus, within a collective” (p. 135). We can understand Majid’s change in relation to participation in and across different communities and contexts (Dreier, 2008) as part of broader changes, broader social movements in historical time and space: Majid has for about a decade been participating as a street social worker in the wild social work boundary community, which, since the late 1990s, has contributed to processes of moving young men beyond criminality by offering them new and meaningful positions from which to participate (Khawaja & Mørck, 2009; Mørck, 2006; 2010; 2011; Nissen, 2012). But despite his years of experience, he still struggles with dilemmas and double or multiple bind situations, quite similar to people in suppressed positions, and the professionals working with them (Osterkamp, 1999). Osterkamp (1999, p. 472) stresses the dilemma that people can only act responsibly towards others if they have the necessary power and influence to tackle the societal and institutional preconditions of the expressed problems. Instead of justifying suppression by assuming an asocial human nature in people (similarly to those involved in the present Danish gang conflicts), Osterkamp recommends that we analyse how people’s allegedly natural asociality is more or less imposed on them, while they simultaneously are being blamed for and controlled because of it (Osterkamp 1999, p. 469). She calls this a “multiple bind situation” and places it as unintended spin-off of general suppression, but also as a very effective means of individuals’ subjugation. She argues that we need to reverse the common reversal of causes and consequences of suppression (Osterkamp 1999, p. 469).

Now we turn to how we can reverse causes and consequences of suppression through interpellation in collectives producing a certain kind of community building that we call common third processes.

Common third activities: interpellation and development

Processes of recognition imply and institute a singular inter-subjective relationship to “the other”, moving beyond marginalization (Nissen, 2012). One specific way of moving beyond (risk of) marginalization is to contribute to these processes of recognition by undertaking “common third activities” together with co-researchers. “The principle of the common third” (Henriksen & Magnussen, 2001) proposes that activities and communities should not primarily be about treatment or prevention of the participants’ “problems” or “deficits”. Rather, activities should start with common engagement in an idea that can mobilize participants from different positions and across different communities. Mørck (2011; 2006) conceptualizes this type of common engagement across very different positions and communities as producing boundary communities, boundary positions and

new connections, across communities that otherwise tend to be separate or disconnected, partly moving beyond mutual mistrust.

Since 2009 both Majid and Ali have participated, along with Søren Lerche and one of us researchers (Line), as presenters and co-organizers in Grundtvigs Højskole's Gang Seminars, along with other more established parties, including the police. Majid and the local police have developed a new citizen network, inspired by Manchester¹⁸, where local residents are invited to dialogues on a regular basis to discuss and prevent conflict situations, both in relation to gang conflicts and broader issues, addressing local residents' conflicts with police. This change was very important for understanding how Majid in 2012 had "moved beyond" to see the new action possibility of calling the police.

The case of Fatma illustrates how the women relatives were interpellated into new boundary positions, recognized as presenters and active parts of the community at Grundtvigs Højskole's Gang Seminars. After Fatma's presentation about the young man who was shot, she experienced recognition and interest from the other participants at the seminar. She expressed great surprise that both the Danish majority seminar participants and researchers from other countries were interested and shared standpoints and engagement in what she had to say about her field. In a research interview Fatma expressed that she (like many others in her local area) previously had distrusted and even hated professionals from "the established system", such as the police and the local authorities. But this had changed. On her way to the Gang Seminar she was told over the phone that a female police officer, who worked in the area she lived, would pick her up at the train station. She sat in the police car and thought:

"How can I look at her and say something without.... I really couldn't stand the police; I still had that attitude at that time. And I was sitting there in the car thinking, 'Oh, what should I say to her? Should I swear at her? Should I spit at her or...' [...] Then she was really nice. Then I said to her: 'You have to know one thing [after a meeting in our area I had written down all the negative things the women had to say about the police] they are not very good things [the local citizens have to say about you, the police]. You are being demeaned and sneered at.' Then she said to me: 'I know it'." (Fatma, February 2012).

Fatma described how she changed as a person; she became better at communicating her critique, and various parties started to listen to her. Fatma and the other local residents would no longer put up with the injustices. They used rights as a basis for a critique of the police and gang members, which was illustrated with an example that she now dared to point out: that the person who shot the boy was still walking around the area and making obscene gestures to the family. She criticized the police for not doing enough to protect the family, even though they knew that the boys were in danger about six months before

¹⁸ Trevor Richards, Leader of Education, Greater Manchester Police, and Tony Winter, a former gang member turned Street Pastor in Manchester, have visited the Gang Seminars three to four times. They have also organized visits to Manchester for local Danish police, street social workers, Karina Lorenzens political advisor and others. In 2013 Tony Winter is helping the development of a new Danish NGO-organisation called "Kirke Care" in Hillerød, an organization inspired by Street pastors from Manchester.

the killing. This injustice motivated her in a new direction; in 2011 she began dreaming of becoming a lawyer. Fatma had already changed; she had become better at formulating critique and making people listen, in contrast to previously, when she used to keep her knowledge to herself or show her anger by hating the police and the established Danish system. Through the community of local participants and activists, Fatma was interpellated into a new, expanded ideology of professionals who work with gang issues: “I’ve really got a lot of contacts now. I began to cooperate with both the local authorities and the police... it has opened my eyes in relation to the established system” (Fatma, February, 2012).

This expansive learning extended into other contexts; for example Fatma changed her participation in school contexts. Fatma went to school almost exclusively with ethnic minority students during her first 10 years of school, and her ideological understanding of “Danes” was derived from the media and her acquaintances. When Fatma started in HF (a two-year program to qualify for university), she joined a class with multiple ethnicities, including Danish. Here, her new experience regarding the possibility of expanded communities across ethnic majority and minorities was reinforced:

“I’ve always thought that I am a foreigner, and I hate the Danes and I hate the society. And it is because I have always felt they have pissed on us. They were totally unconcerned about us. And then after all the things I’ve done, and I have met all those people who actually want to help, I was quite surprised that there was even one who ever bothered to help. And then I go to school at HF and actually meet many Danes; before that, I have never mingled with them. It took me six months - but still. But in the end, I mingled with them, and then I realized they don’t hate us, I was filled with so much crap before - but they don’t hate us... I am a Dane here God damn it; I’ve embodied a lot of culture, and you don’t really feel it until you contribute to society. When you really do something, you can feel that Denmark has had such an influence on you. It has affected you in many ways, and you don’t understand it until you go out and work on things. So I feel that it has changed me... the funniest thing was a year ago, when my teacher asked me if I am Danish or a foreigner. I told her I’m 100% Palestinian. And I was asked the same question this month. It is exactly a year ago. And now I said I’m a Dane of different ethnic origin. It’s exactly a year ago. But it’s crazy, the kind of person I have developed into. I’ve become stronger this way.” (Fatma, February 2012).

Here, Fatma reveals the good things about being Danish, including the right to criticize the established system, which is not a common right in many Arabic countries. In this way she contributes to producing expansive personal trajectories that combine being Danish with something meaningful, a first step to transcend structures of suppression and alienation, which is also in the common interest of citizens in her local area. In Fatma’s view, the volunteer community group, Perlemor, opens up new possibilities for herself and other local women to come out of isolation at home with their children, and to participate in change by daring to voice problems and challenge injustices.

The process of interpellation at the Gang Seminar was not only expansive; even though Fatma did experience empowering and expansive interpellation processes that transcended the binary “Danes” versus “foreigners”, and went partly beyond the binary “local residents” versus “the established system”. But at the next Gang Seminar in 2012 other problematic dichotomies of municipal professional versus volunteers emerged, and Fatma felt “talked down to” as volunteer.

Ethical dilemmas and dangers

When working with praxis development through combinations of relentless criticism, common third activities revealing double binds, and movements beyond in regard to gang conflicts, we also (re)produce difficult ethical dilemmas in research and as part of the dialogic (Gang) Seminars.

One example was a video of Little A's monologue from a 2008 seminar about Danish media representations of ethnic minorities was misused, in opposition to their intention, which was of empowering these communities. The video was published by Hells Angels as part of the Jackal Manifesto, and supported by politicians and the media to further suppress ethnic minorities, who were already angry and marginalized in Danish society. Furthermore, it was used by Hells Angels during a gang war, to train their members to recognize and kill Little A¹⁹ on June 30, 2009 (Ritzau, 2011).

This example shows the severity of the ethical dilemmas we are dealing with, and that it cannot be determined beforehand how relentless criticism, dialogues about extremely difficult issues, and voices from "below and within", as part of seminars or research, might be misused by people in powerful positions. This particular example of misuse occurred even before we started this specific gang research collaboration.

Marx defined "relentless" in the sense that the criticism is not afraid of its findings and just as unafraid of the conflict with the powers that be. Practicing relentless criticism of existing conditions means that we as praxis researcher and co-researchers put ourselves in the midst of conflicts and at risk, because we have to "walk the margins" when trying to produce change that moves scientific and social work praxis beyond binaries (Khawaja & Mørck, 2009). Walking the margins beyond the neutral researcher is, for example, to challenge and move beyond academic binaries of "going native" versus "going academic" – becoming a researcher, who is also an activist *and* a person *and* an academic (Fuller, 1999). This means applying academic reflections from multiple positions, going beyond being positioned as either an insider or an outsider (Khawaja & Mørck, 2009, pp. 38-40). Our group of praxis researchers participates from multiple positions, with two of us working as professionals conducting gang exit praxis, one of us in the position of being both a street social worker and a researcher, and two of us also being volunteers participating in the struggle to establish Perlemor as a societal recognized and locally viable movement.

Expanding the margins of scientific legitimacy to include groups of female relatives and street social workers involves conflicts and taking risks. Time and again, we go into situations without knowing beforehand where our collective work will take us. Neither the Gang Seminars, network activities, nor research is strictly planned far ahead. Both

¹⁹ Ritzau writes that a young man, who used to be closely associated with HA and AK81, has witnessed in trial against 16 members of Hells Angels and AK81. He was one of six persons from Hells Angels who were positioned to recognize Little A, and call for a biker with a gun. Before the planned execution, the 6 persons watched the video several times, to be sure to recognize Little A. (<http://www.jv.dk/artikel/1126417:Indland--Saadan-skulle--Lille-A--likvideres>)

research and network activities are organized and run by people (with almost no funding²⁰), often done beside full time employment and studies.

For the most part, we researchers and our co-researchers have chosen a very open way of collaborating, which includes a combination of relentless criticism and reaching understanding between very diverse first person perspectives and communities from within. To date, these collaborations have primarily produced acknowledgment, legitimizing and expanding the conditions for the production of boundary communities and new boundary positions, even though, as in all praxis development, this also includes conflicts and difficult discussions, where participants experience being misinterpreted, and feeling angry, tired and/or sad. This mixture of empowerment and conflict also applies to the boundary communities of Copenhagen wild social work (Mørck 2010; 2011) and for the expanded networks that have come about as a result of Grundtvigs Højskole's Gang Seminars. This collaborative and open approach has so far helped the social workers and women to continue to live with the contradictions inherent in being part of the boundary communities, even though struggles and conflict do hurt.

Doing open and relentless praxis research closely combined with community building also makes it impossible to secure complete anonymity for the involved participants and our co-researchers. We are all active participants in dialogues, presenters at Gang Seminars, and sometimes also official spokespersons in the Danish media. In dealing with the ethical dilemma of anonymity, we continually involve our co-researchers in discussing how they are presented as part of articles and presentations, and sometimes we need to rewrite research texts before publication.

Conclusion

Praxis development with(in) the boundary communities discussed here is fundamentally about the individual and collective struggle to transcend marginalization, expanding opportunities for sharing legitimate criticism regarding very conflicted issues that involve institutions with power and people in powerful positions, taking risks, and being unable to control events, or foresee where we are going.

Regarding praxis development, what has actually changed between 2009 and 2013?

As described in this article, we are working to develop praxis against many odds. These include societal escalation on many fronts, such as the increasing demonization of the groups involved, which goes hand in hand with the growth of more serious gang identities within these groups, and more "zero tolerance" policies, all of which present serious obstacles to our telos of humanizing involved participants, partly transcending marginalization of the young men in question. The common interests in the collaboration are to stop the escalations to gang war, and minimizing growing number of young men getting killed, involved and affected.

There is still a significant lack of Danish gang (intervention) research: the school, social service and police (SSP) collaboration was evaluated by the police department (Stevns, 2001, Pedersen & Leleur, 1999), which, together with the Ministry of Justice, eventually

²⁰ Søren Lerche managed to get economical funding from "Det kriminal Præventive Råd" to an international eurogang seminar in 2011.

received the state funding earmarked for studying gang-related risk factors, bikers and gangs (Rigspolitiet, 2011, Klement, Kyvsgaard & Pedersen, 2010), and “children and adolescents in criminal groups” (Pedersen & Lindstad, 2011). We are also applying for funds from the Danish research council and others to ongoing praxis research, in close collaboration with practitioners and marginalized youth engaged in gang interventions.

Since 2010, the Gang Seminars have collectively increased police and media awareness of the necessity of not contributing to the celebrity of bikers and gangs.

As a collective, the Gang Seminars and Network for Dialogue and Community building have contributed courses and conferences on gang intervention as well as field visits organized by Søren Lerche, in close collaboration with international practical experts from Sweden, Manchester, and Chicago, which have been attended by at least 400 Danish professionals. These international exchanges have inspired the Danish local police and local residents to organize new networks and volunteer projects, such as the citizens’ network in Inner Nørrebro, Perlemor, Kirke Care, and Vores Unge, some of which are run by young men and women who once were marginalized, but, as part of new communities, have turned their lives around and are realizing new directions in life, such as studying to become social workers.

As a collective, we continually contribute to community-building in an international network for mutual exchange and inspiration on gang interventions, with experts from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Scotland, England, and USA, including people with personal experience, who have changed their own lives and others’, leaving gang life behind.

These many projects, including praxis research, Gang Seminars and international cooperation, are all part of the process of participating (relentless) criticism that contributes to a growing understanding of gang problematics.

The second point, producing “the new” and countering established dualistic thinking is also an important part of these movements, especially clear in the examples in which the lines between gang member and researcher, professional and volunteer, become blurred and the projects are able to produce new praxis as a collective.

The simultaneously suppressive and empowering processes of interpellation, which are described in the third point, are established in this article as being important to all involved parties, from researchers to at-risk youth. The article presents examples of the complex interplay of different groups and ideologies that produce a field in continuous change, with possibilities and risks for different persons and groups involved in gang conflicts as well as responses to them.

What still needs to be changed? The established systems of power, including the media, politicians, police, and other parties in our municipalities, must acknowledge their role as co-producers of the gang problematic in order to expand further possibilities for praxis development. Danish politicians are partially responsible for the lack of independent research into gang interventions as well as the lack of independent NGOs working extensively with youth. Work must be done to give more young people, both those at risk and those attempting to exit gangs, a chance to find new networks and broader friendships to escape these gang conflicts. To turn around the recent trend of gang escalation, we also need to collectively develop new, societally-acknowledged strategies for gang conflict mediation. We hope to continue our collaborative praxis-development work and praxis research, and to share our telos of all parties acknowledging and acting on their shared

responsibility regarding the gang problematic. We especially hope that more professionals will join this kind of open-minded collaboration with relatives of gang members and at-risk youth and with other local residents, including the marginalized groups involved, with their knowledge and experience from “below and within”.

References

- Aldridge, J. Medina, J. & Ralphs, R., (2008). *Youth Gangs in an English City*. University of Manchester. Research Report.
- Althusser, L. (1972). *Om ideologiske statsapparater*: Forlaget København.
- Bechmann Jensen, T., Mørch, S., Nissen, M. m.fl. (1993). *På eget ansvar. En evaluering af Ama''r TotalTeater*. København: Rubikon.
- Bernstein, R. J. (1971). *Praxis and Action. Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Brotherton, D. C. & Barrios, L. (2004). *The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation: Street Politics and the transformation of a New York city gang*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dreier, O. (2008). *Psychotherapy in everyday life. Learning in doing: Social, cognitive, & computational perspectives*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Deuchar, R. (2009). *Gangs, Marginalised Youth and Social Capital*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Elkjær, L. & Holm, G. (2013). I Livsbanen lever unge deres drømme ud. *Social Kritik*.
- Engeström, Y. (1987). *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Helsinki:
<http://www.edu.helsinki.fi/activity/people/engestro/>.
- Fenger-Grøn, C., Qureshi, K. Seidenfaden, T. (2003). *Når du strammer garnet. Et opgør med mobning af mindretal og ansvarsløs asylpolitik*. xx
- Fuller, D. (1999). Part of the action, or "going native"? Learning to cope with the "politics of integration". *Area*, vol. 31(3), pp. 221-227.
- Haug, F. (1987). *Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory*. London: Verso
- Henriksen, K. G., & Magnussen, S. (2001). Pædagogiske bolcher - en diskussion på baggrund af Pendlerrapporten. *Social Kritik* (72), pp. 69-86.
- Holland, D., & Lave, J. (Eds.). (2001). *History in Person. Enduring struggles, Contentious Practice, Intimate Identities*. Oxford: SAR-press. James Currey.
- Holzkamp, K. (1983). *Grundlegung der Psychologie*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag GmbH.
- Hussain, K. (2012). *Ingen over, og ingen ved side af - bandekonflikten set indefra*. Aarhus Universitet.
- Khawaja, I., & Mørck, L. L. (2009). Researcher positioning. Muslim "otherness" and beyond. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 6 (Special Issue: Critical Psychological Research Methodologies in and on Practice), pp. 28-45.

- Klement, Christian, Britta Kyvsgaard og Anne-Julie Boesen Pedersen (2010). *Rockere, bander og risikofaktorer*. Justitsministeriets Forskningskontor, Rigspolitiet, oktober 2010. Link:
http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/fileadmin/downloads/Forskning_og_dokumentation/Rapporter/Rockere%20og%20bander%202011.pdf
- Koch, I. (1999). ”Vildledende og sjusket rapport om gadebander”, *Social Kritik*, nr. 65-66.
- Lave, J. (1997). Learning, apprenticeship, social practice. *Journal of Nordic Educational Research*, 17,140–151.
- Lave, J. (2008). Situated learning and changing practice. In A. Amin & J. Roberts (Eds.), *Community, economic creativity, and organization* (pp. 283-296). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lave, J. (2011). *Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice*. Chicago: The university of Chicago Press.
- Møller-Andersen, C. S. & Palm, A. M. (2010). Outcome. Bandeseminar d. 20-22. september 2010 på Grundtvigs Højskole. Retrieved April 2013 from:
<http://grundtvigs.dk/files/2010/05/Outcome-seminar-Grundtvigs-H%C3%B8jskole-20101.pdf>
- Møller-Andersen, C. S. & Fuglsang, L. (2012). Bandeseminar 2012, Grundtvigs højskole. Retrieved April 2013 from: <http://grundtvigs.dk/files/2011/03/Outcome-Bandeseminar-2012.pdf>
- Mørck, L. L. (1995). Praksisforskning som metode, teori og praksis. Refleksion over praksisforskerens positionering i og mellem handlesammenhænge. *Udkast*, 23(1), pp. 34-78.
- Mørck, L. L. (2000). Practice Research and Learning Resources. A joint Venture with the initiative “Wild Learning”. *Outlines* 2, pp. 61-84.
- Mørck, L. L. (2006). *Grænsefællesskaber - Læring og overskridelse af marginalisering* (1 ed.). Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetsforlag.
- Mørck, L. L. (2010). Expansive learning as production of community. [The 109th Yearbook]. *Learning Research as a Human Science - National Society for the Study of Education Yearbook*, 109, 1, pp. 176 - 191.
- Mørck, L. L. (2011). Studying Empowerment in a Socially and Ethnically Diverse Social Work Community in Copenhagen, Denmark. *Ethos*, 39(1), pp. 115-137.
- Mørck, L. L., Møller-Andersen, C. S., & Palm, A. (2010). *Exit-strategies - trajectories and conditions, that help wild youth and gang-members to move beyond the criminal activities*. Paper presented at the Eurogang network seminar Frankfurt.
- Mørck, L. L. & Nissen, M. (2001). Vilde forskningsprocesser: kritik, metoder og læring i socialt arbejde. *Nordiske Udkast*, Årg. 29, nr. 1, pp. 33-60.
- Mørck, L. L., & Nissen, M. (2005). Praksisforskning. Deltagende kritik mellem mikrofonholderi og akademisk bedreviden. In T. B. Jensen & G. Christensen (Eds.),

- Psykologiske & pædagogiske metoder. Kvalitative og kvantitative forskningsmetoder i praksis* (Vol. 1, pp. 123-153). Frederiksberg: Roskilde Universitetsforlag.
- Newman, F. & Holzman, L. (1997). *The end of knowing: A new developmental way of learning*. London: Routledge.
- Nissen, M. (2000). *Projekt Gadebørn: Et forsøg med dialogisk, bevægelig og lokalkulturel socialpædagogik med de mest udsatte unge*. Frederikshavn: Dafolo.
- Nissen, M. (2009). Objectification and Prototype. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 67-87.
- Nissen, M. (2012). *The Subjectivity of Participation - Articulating Social Work Practice with Youth in Copenhagen* (pp. 292). Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Okkels, A. (2011a). Bandekriminalitet - praktikerseminar 2011. Retrieved April 2013 from: <http://grundtvigs.dk/files/2011/05/Outcome-bandeseminar-2011.pdf>
- Okkels, A. (2011b). Gang crime – Eurogang research seminar XI, 2011. Retrieved April 2013 from: <http://grundtvigs.dk/files/2011/04/Outcome-research-seminar-March-12-final.pdf>
- Osterkamp. (1999). Subjectivity and the other. In Mayer, Bayer, Esgalhado, Jorna, & Schraube (Eds.), *Challenges to theoretical psychology* (pp. 467-477). North York, Canada: Captus Press.
- Palm, A., & Møller-Andersen, C. S. (2010). *Exit og veje ind i samfundet*. Aarhus Universitet.
- Stevns, A. (2001): Street gangs and crime prevention in Copenhagen. In Klein, Kerner, Maxson & Weitekamp (2001). *The Eurogang Paradox*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 175 – 180.
- Pedersen, M. L. & Lindstad, J.M. (2011). *Første led i fødekæden? En undersøgelse af børn og unge i kriminelle grupper*. Justitsministeriets Forskningskontor. Juni 2011. Link: http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/fileadmin/downloads/Forskning_og_dokumentation/Rapporter/Rapport_-_Foerste_led_i_foedekaeden.pdf
- Pedersen, F.R. & Leleur, A. (1999). *SSP-projekt Erhvervs-motivering - unge der kommer videre: projektrapport og slutevaluering, august 1997-august 1999*. Københavns Politi, Den Kriminalpræventive Afdeling.
- Pind, Søren. (2009, July 5). "Hvad nu hvis Jønke har ret?". *Berlingske*. Retrieved from www.SorenPind.blogs.berlingske.
- PLS-Rambøll og Socialforskningsinstituttet (2003). *Grupperelateret kriminalitet i Danmark*. København: PLS-Rambøl og Socialforskningsinstituttet.
- Rigspolitiet (2011): *Rockere og bander. 2. marts 2011. Rigspolitiets Statusrapport*. Politiets Nationale Efterforskningscenter, Juridisk sekretariat.
- Ritzau (2011, May 24). *Sådan skulle "Lille A" likvideres.. Jydske Vestkysten*. Retrieved from <http://www.jv.dk/artikel/1126417:Indland--Saadan-skulle--Lille-A--likvideres>.

- Torre, M. E. (2008). Participatory Action Research and Critical Race Theory: Fueling Spaces for Nos-otras to Research. *Urban Rev*, DOI 10.1007/s11256-008-0097-7
- Vigil, J. D. (2002). *A Rainbow of gangs: Street Cultures in the Mega-City*. Austin: University and Texas Press
- Vorbeck, I. H. (2012). *Studie af pårørende kvinders muligheder for overskridelse af marginalisering gennem fællesskabende aktiviteter. Relateret til kriminalitet, vold og skyderier blandt unge*. Aarhus Universitet.
- Özüpek, T. (2013). *PERLEMOR – Et studie af pårørende kvinders mulighedsrum for, at overskride de samfundsmæssigt marginaliserende diskurser og positioner, gennem fællesskabende aktiviteter*. Aarhus Universitet.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the reviewers, the editors and Jean Lave for inspiration and constructive comments during the process of writing this article. Thanks also to Kari Gustafson and Yvonne McAneny for English proofreading and other improvements, and big thanks to all our co-researchers for good collaboration and feedback on each of their parts of the article.

About the author

Line Lerche Mørck is associate professor currently based at Department of Education, Aarhus University. Her research centres on marginalized young adults and their everyday lives, learning and transcending marginalization. In her book *Boundary Communities* she develops a social practice theory of how to support learning and transcending marginalization through overlapping communities which are constituted across ethnic and social differences. At present she is further developing the theory of expansive learning in the areas of gang conflicts and inclusive education for diagnosed children and youth.

Contact: Department of Education, Aarhus University, email: llm@dpu.dk