Chapter 1
Introduction

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Violence, both conceptually and pragmatically, has been a central research topic in the Social Sciences for several years. Perhaps because the topic is especially prominent in the US and the UK, the extant literature on urban violence remains predominantly confined to studies in these and other industrialized countries, with far less empirical research having been undertaken in developing and least developed nations. Although a concern in itself, such a deficit is further compounded by the lack of transferability—it can hardly be said that the respective findings in developed countries are applicable to other contexts, such as those that are less developed. Indeed, Klein (1999) has gone so far as to argue that the lack of comparative work in the existing research on violence amongst young people in high-risk urban neighborhoods is itself one of the key issues that is lacking in the literature on violence. Moreover, although a considerable body of research now exists on youth-specific concerns—such as gangs and their involvement in criminality—more nuanced approaches to the myriad of contextual factors and concerns that a rapidly grown and heterogeneous population of young people now face, and the resultantly complex relationships they may have with violence, has been largely neglected. As a result, the norms that set the parameters, which themselves frame this population's understandings of violence, remain little understood, despite their importance in shaping both young people's tolerance to and use of violence in high-risk urban neighborhoods.

Anderson's (1999) seminal work, *Code of the Street* sought to address this deficit by bringing to light and defining the characteristic norms structuring participants' understandings of violence in high-risk, inner-city neighborhoods in the US. He argues that these norms prescribe that in order to obtain respect or status young men need to demonstrate a willingness to resort to violence in response to perceived or real threats of violence, or indeed if their dignity is challenged. As Stewart et al. (2006: 431) conclude: "At the heart of the street code is an emphasis on respect, toughness, and retribution. The code regulates the use of violence and supplies a rationale allowing those who are aggressive to precipitate violent encounters in approved ways." Anderson's insightful argument does not simply seek to understand the hierarchies and power networks used by young people to define themselves, but under-

takes to explore their *relationship* with these structures and violence itself. Thus, for instance, it is not simply that violence provides a mechanism to establish hierarchies and enforce subordination, but in its enactment, violence may also become a symbolic instrument through which identity itself can be expressed—no individual that wishes to be treated respectfully should admit weakness or openly avoid conflict as all behavior to the contrary stands to be severely punished. In short, Anderson's work mandates that studies on violence seek to not only understand the weapons of violence, but violence *as* a weapon.

Violence-related norms of this kind can serve as guides to behavior that themselves shape how an individual may react to specific circumstances, or can at least seek to understand the form and character of responses an individual may be likely to understand as plausible in encountering violence. They may also serve as rationalizations for acts of violence that young men engage in for other reasons, such as gaining monetary wealth or accruing luxury goods, and may further serve as a justification that perpetrators use to explain their use of violence to themselves or others. As such, young peoples' complex relationships with violence need to be understood through a dynamic framework that not only seeks to understand the impact of violence and violent acts in isolation, but critically engages with how those acts are embedded in intersubjective relationships within a challenging environment to understand what stands beyond violence.

While violence and violence-related norms have been studied quite extensively by Anderson and others in the US, beyond this country only a limited number of studies of this kind have been conducted. Importantly, there are no comparisons of the code of the street and young people's relationships to violence among or between societies beyond Anglo-American countries. Not only is this indicative of an empirical deficit in the literature, but it suggests a broader conceptual shortcoming, because although Anderson's analysis may shed light on youth violence in the US, its applicability and utility in understanding youth violence beyond those borders remains untested. Beginning to address this need empirically is one of the principal goals of the proposed book—an international, cross-cultural comparison of the norms which define and make meaningful violence in three countries, namely Germany, South Africa, and Pakistan. This is much in line with a criticism leveled by Klein (2011) that even the more developed literature on gangs has been undermined by an absence of studies comparing data temporally and spatially, between young people from different sociocultural contexts, and in contrasting the results of studies, employing divergent methodological frameworks (see as an exception Decker and Weerman 2005). The unfortunate result is that assertions regarding youth violence—which may themselves have a wider impact when used to inform policy and government programs—are often made on the basis of generalized stereotypes, themselves formulated implicitly through the hegemonic discourses which narrate the literature. For example, depictions of gangs are typically framed using models derived from US street gangs in the 1980s despite gangs from elsewhere depicting very different structures, purposes, and concerns (Decker et al. 2009; Klein and Maxson 2006). The result is that the "traditional" understanding of gangs—young men concerned solely with drug trafficking and overt violence—is neither representative nor accurate even

in the US itself, the depictions of which are doubly dangerous in fueling intellectual stasis and political division.

Comparative research on violence-related norms of young people can therefore not continue to remain informed, by and large, by the current state of the art. New research is needed that seeks to go beyond convenient depictions of young people, in attempting to adequately understanding the different types and roles of violence, and the norms that make them meaningful, which serve to characterize highly violent communities in very different geographic regions and socioeconomic contexts. Such studies need to include those structures which, while implicit, serve to define the contexts in which young people live, such as the spatial makeup and divisions of urban areas and which contextualize neighborhoods. Indeed, as can be seen in Anderson's (1999) work, the neighborhood takes a prominent place in the creation of individual risk factors. The wider conceptual utility of the work on youth violence requires, however, a cross-cultural perspective, from which we can conceptualize and prove the assumptions outlined in his framing of risky neighborhoods. In doing so, moreover, violence-related norms can be explored in the context in which they are understood by young people, as they inform actions and perspectives. However, such comparisons would have, first, to address the large range of interpretations and forms of practice of street culture within relevant communities and between countries. Second, Klein's (2011) argument asks for applying the same methods preferably in regions that lack violence research. This, however, motivates that political, environmental, structural, or other factors that shape the environment in which these norms emerge should also be acknowledged. Against this background, our study is guided by the research question: *Does the Code of the Street operate equally in different contexts than that of the US?*

To answer the research question, a comparative research designs was chosen, which includes the perspectives held by young people in relation to and because of violence. We focus on three countries: Germany, which is largely representative of an industrial country and liberal society; South Africa may be seen as an example of a highly violent and historically polarized country; and Pakistan as emblematic of an emerging democracy faced by terrorism, authoritarian forms of control built on a colonial legacy and weak economic growth. A comparison of these three very different examples promises a better understanding of the code of the street, and through extensive comparison aims to both compare and contrast the extant literature and Anderson's assertions against a far more diverse backdrop, drawing on fresh empirical data that takes seriously the dynamism of young people and their intricate relationships with the violence of their immediate surroundings. Despite being very different, the study draws on a rigorous comparative methodology, in which 30 interviews per country with young men between 16 and 21 years of age are compared, along with contextual input from individuals with whom they have frequent contact, such as social workers, local politicians and/or police officers. Using an open-coded, direct comparative framework, the study seeks to directly and significantly contribute to an ongoing academic discussion, while showing the value of cross-cultural qualitative comparative research.

The monograph is devided into 11 chapters. After the introduction, which is the first chapter, the spatial framework for our study, so-called risky neighborhoods as a specific kind of social segregated neighborhood, is developed in chapter three. Afterward, in chapter three, the "Violence related norms and the 'Code of the Street'" is discussed as the analytical framework of the study on the one hand, and the theoretical approach we want to prove with our analysis. In chapter four, we discuss the methodological challenges of a cross-cultural comparison and in chapter five, the used research design is described. Following, in chapter six to eight, the national sub-samples are described. In chapter nine, findings of the cross-cultural comparison regarding the code of the street are presented in detail. Chapter ten includes further findings. In chapter eleven, the theoretical implication for the development of the street code theory are discussed and the research question is answered.

References

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