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ABSTRACT
The murder rate in Port of Spain, Trinidad, rose dramatically around the turn of the millennium, driven overwhelmingly by young men in gangs in the city's poor neighborhoods. The literature frequently suggests a causal relationship between gang violence and rising transnational drug flows through Trinidad during this period. However, this is only part of a complex picture and misses the crucial mediating effect of evolving male identities in contexts of pronounced exclusion. Using original data, this article argues that historically marginalized "social terrains" are particularly vulnerable to violence epidemics when exposed to the influence of transnational drug and gun trafficking. When combined with easily available weapons, contextually constructed male hegemonic orders that resonate with the past act as catalysts for contemporary gang violence within those milieus. The study contributes a new empirical body of work on urban violence in Trinidad and the first masculinities-specific analysis of this phenomenon. We argue that contemporary gang culture is a historically rooted, contextually legitimated, male hegemonic street project in the urban margins of Port of Spain.

Introduction

"Breaking bad" – a phrase meaning to turn to a life of crime – was the title of the interdisciplinary research project upon which this article is based. It references the famous television series and may appear superficial, yet it raised an important question that was carried into the field: why did so many people in Port of Spain (PoS), the capital of Trinidad and Tobago (hereafter Trinidad), seemingly "break bad" and turn to gangs and violent crime some two decades ago, driving up the murder rate dramatically? Consistent with

other similarly violent cities in the region, it is striking how this phenomenon coalesces around a specific demographic: poor, young, urban males are the overwhelming perpetrators and victims of lethal violence. Therefore, it is logical to inquire about the role that masculinities have played in this transition.

We know that transnational drug trafficking and increased weapons flows began to pass through the country in the late 1990s as it became a key trans-shipment point. This period was followed by a meteoric rise in male-led gang violence in marginalized neighborhoods in PoS. The murder rate in Trinidad has fluctuated in recent years but remains consistently among the highest in the world. Between 1999 and 2007, it rose precipitously, from fewer than 100 murders per year – in a country of around 1.4 million people – to 395. Since then, it has stubbornly remained above 400, even exceeding 500 in some years. This equates to a murder rate of more than 30 per 100,000 people, making Trinidad one of the most violent countries in the world per capita.

The increased prevalence of gangs (Pawelz 2018; Seepersad 2016; Townsend 2009) and transnational organized crime (Griffith 1997) have been cited as reasons for the rise in the murder rate in Trinidad. There is a broad consensus in the region that drugs and firearms have played a signifi-cant role in the rising gang violence, as fiercely defended turf requires the increased weaponization of gang life. It is unsurprising that many gang-afflicted communities in the Caribbean are located along international trafficking routes, such as Kingston and Montego Bay in Jamaica (Arias 2017; Harriott and Katz 2015; Jaffe 2015; Munroe and Blake 2017) and Central America (Baird 2019; Cruz 2014; Fontes 2018; Rodgers 2018).

However, transnational drug and gun trafficking alone cannot directly account for the violence. If it could, we would expect all communities along the drug supply chain to be affected in similar fashion, when, in fact, local patterns of violence – not only their extent and intensity but also their nature, meaning, and significance – vary dramatically. In short, surges in gang violence should be understood as part of a complex process gener-ated by the interlocution between transnational crime and the specific "social terrains" of nearby urban communities, rather than as a mechanistic product of global processes. The term social terrains refers to the local conditions where chronic levels of violence emerge, placing emphasis on underlying community fragility or vulnerability. In the case of eastern PoS, this fragility stems from historic patterns of exclusion and poverty, the legacy of coloniality and slavery, and the failures of contemporary development. While the lit-erature is right to emphasize the importance of international trafficking, subsequent patterns of violence in local communities need to be perceived through a prism of sociological factors that play a critical intervening role.

Although Trinidad is primarily a trans-shipment point rather than an end point for drugs, firearms and ammunitions associated with the trade often

remain across nodes in the supply chain once narcotics transactions are complete. These weapons have filtered into the urban margins of eastern PoS and central and southern Trinidad, stimulating street-level criminal enterprise, along with brutal forms of illegal market governance and conflict resolution. Consequently, local levels of lethal violence have increased dramatically, but this cannot be attributed to the weapons alone; to make such an argument is to elide the agency of those pulling the trigger and ignore the shifting contexts in which they do so (Kerrigan 2019). The protagonists – and victims – of murder are generally poor young men, usually operating in gangs. However, Trinidad's contemporary violence has yet to be analyzed from a masculinities perspective.

This article argues that historically excluded social terrains are acutely susceptible to violence epidemics when exposed to the influence of transnational drug and gun trafficking, and, given that the vast majority of people involved in these transitions to violence are men, such transitions must be distinctly gendered processes. Following Connell (1987, 2005), we claim that hegemonic masculinity coalesces around gang practices linked to male status and power that order the local gender hierarchy, subordinating women and non-gang ways of being a man. These practices intensify violence and compound wider development challenges in already marginalized communities as inhabitants are forced to navigate an increasingly perilous social order. Hegemonic masculinities are not presented here as a static model of reproduction; rather, they are dynamic, under constant and context-specific (re-)construction and legitimation. Yet the lineage between new and evolving gang-related identities and the violent neighborhood men of the past is undeniable.

This article makes an empirically grounded contribution to our understanding of violence by shining a light on an area that is marginalized within Trinidad (Forde 2018) and rarely features in the literature. By doing so, it adds a rare Caribbean study to an emerging literature on gangs and masculinities, while testing the parameters of hegemonic masculinities conceptually. The first three sections appraise the literature on gangs and masculinities, provide an overview of the research project's distinctive methodology, and describe the context of gang violence in Trinidad. The substantive analytical section is divided into two sections, on "old violence" (before the murder boom) and "new violence." The article concludes by responding to the project's original research question: did young men in PoS really "break bad"?

Gangs and masculinities

Although academic literature connecting street gangs to masculinity has existed since the early twentieth century, it is actually rather rare, particularly when compared with the extensive attention given to research on gangs

generally and on urban violence. This is somewhat surprising, because street gangs share a strikingly consistent demographic characteristic no matter where they are found across the globe: they have an overwhelmingly male membership, composed primarily of the young urban poor. This does not discount female gang membership or girl gangs. In the 1980s, Quicker (1983) conducted an in-depth study of Chicana "Homegirls," and Campbell (1984) found that some 10 percent of gang members in New York City were female. More recently, Mendoza-Denton's (2008) ethnography uncovered "macha" women "ready to fight" among Latina gangs in California, and Brotherton (2015) has shown further evidence of women gang members. Although female leadership of gangs containing men is very rare, girls and women frequently relate in myriad ways to gangs, which is often overlooked in the literature. Baird (2015) has found that women's agency can be complicit in, or sanctioning of, violent gang practices, yet they rarely become "one of the guys" (Panfil 2021), and engaging with gangs makes women highly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence (Aguilar Umaña and Rikkers 2012; Miller and Brunson 2000). The male composition of gangs has consistently been observed in several comprehensive reviews spanning the globe (see, for example, Brotherton and Gude 2021; Decker and Pyrooz 2015; Fraser 2017; Hazen and Rodgers 2015; Peterson 2018), yet maleness is often an assumed rather than a problematized and analyzed characteristic across much of the research.

Nonetheless, men under socio-economic stress has been presented as a driver of gang activity since Adler's (1928) conceptualization of "protest masculinity" and the gang in 1920s Chicago; later in the 1950s and 1960s, as a pushback against structural constraints (Bloch and Niederhoffer 1958; Cloward and Ohlin 1960); and in the 1990s, when Messerschmidt (1993, 1997) considered the relationship between masculinities and crime as structured action. These approaches are indicative of critical theory (broadly understood), in which gangs are symptomatic of structural asymmetry – a male class rebellion (Baird and Rodgers 2015) – although, as Connell (2005) noted, such rebellions are often ultimately self-destructive. Over the years, with the literature emanating mainly from the United States (US) (see Decker and Pyrooz (2015) for an expansive collection), gangs have been perceived as structure-like institutions (Hagedorn 2008) and socialization spaces that confer symbolic, social, and material capital upon young men struggling for esteem (Fraser 2017; Mullins 2006; Mullins and Lee 2019; Shammas and Sandberg 2016). Consequently, we have moved on from presenting gangs simplistically as surrogate families to developing nuanced analyses of their function as sites of social cohesion amid chronic urban violence (Cruz 2014). These struggles were famously depicted by Bourgois (1995) in his East Harlem gang study *In Search of Respect*. Gangs have come to be understood as bonding spaces of homosocial enactment, normatively governed by

a robust collection of practices and even written rules (Anderson 2000; Bourgois 1996; Brotherton 2015), which often require ambition, intelligence, and dexterous management, as Venkatesh (2008) discovered when he became gang leader for a day in Chicago.

While no single condition determines gang emergence, it is clear that structural constraints in marginalized urban contexts are a consistent feature. This is evident in recent studies of gangs in Latin America and the Caribbean, where 14 of the 20 most homicidal countries in the world are found: just 8 percent of the global population accounts for 33 percent of global murders (Muggah and Aguirre Tobón 2018). Barker's seminal book *Dying to Be Men* (2005) explained that exclusion made the gang an attractive pathway to manhood in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*. Similarly, Zubillaga (2009) wrote about *malandro* gang members in Caracas who were also aiming to gain respect. Since Adler's notion of protest masculinity, the gang has been conceptualized variously as a resistant, rebellious, or compensatory reaction to contextual threats of emasculation across the Global South – for example, by Heinonen (2011) in Ethiopia and Dziewanski (2020) and Jensen (2008) in South Africa. Fundamentally, gang practices have come to be seen as indivisible from processes of socialization (Rodgers 2017), and they are often presented as a structure–agency dialectic in which disenfranchised young men seek opportunities through the symbolic and material "masculine capital" provided by gang life in contexts of stymied socio-economic possibility (Baird 2018).

This is not to deny individual agency and responsibility for violence, nor to reduce gang membership to victimhood or masculinities "in peril," as discussed by de la Tierra (2016). Studies of gangs and masculinities have benefited from a rich vein of research that has teased out the complexities of gender in Latin America in recent years – for example, Gutmann (1996) in Mexico City, Viveros Vigoya (2001, 2002, 2018) and Theidon (2007) in Colombia, and Hume and Wilding (Hume 2004; Hume and Wilding 2015) in Central America. Contemporary research has moved away from masculin*ist* readings that essentialize male gang violence, instead incorporating multiple masculinities, and, as we flagged earlier, women's relational roles. Women can advocate and participate in gang life, but this remains an under-researched topic even in most gender-sensitive analyses (including our own here), reflecting wider problems of denying women agency in the production – whether direct or indirect – of violence (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). Nonetheless, *conventionally*, women are subordinated within the explicit and visible gang gender hierarchy, excluded from leadership positions and activities requiring the use of direct violence, which are the reserved domain of men. Not only does this have real material consequences, but also women are often sexualized and victimized in ways that male gang members are not. In a rare and telling case, a legendary female gang member in Medellín,

Colombia, was required to become "more *macho*" than her male counterparts to secure leadership status (Baird 2018).

One-dimensional notions of exaggerated, violent, or toxic masculinities have therefore been discarded in favor of more nuanced appraisals in which gang practices are setting or audience specific. Moncrieff Zabaleta and García Ponce de León (2018) highlight multiple male "masks" in a recent Mexican study; some are associated with individual gang performances in certain moments and places, reflecting other studies of hyper-visible gang "displays" (Baird 2015). Away from the gang space, behaviors can change dramatically. Violent men have been shown to be loving sons, husbands, or fathers (see, for example, Fontes 2018; Gutmann 1996), a phenomenon that has also been observed among combatants in conflict settings (Mäki-Rahkola and Myrttinen 2014). Gang violence is not, then, a fixed male trait; it is functional and deployed to control illegal street markets or in timely demonstrations of "badness" and the "warrior-like persona" (Baird 2018; Levenson-Estrada 2013, 97). This has been uncovered by predominantly ethnographic gang studies in the region reviewed by Rodgers and Baird (2015), where violence is understood as a situationally dependent element of a larger repertoire of gang performance. The gang project serves as a conduit for masculine power, status, and capital that orders both the competitive internal gender hierarchy of the gang and that of the broader community.

The ordering process highlights the importance of the concept of hegemonic masculinities. This notion was originally developed by Connell (1987, 2005) as an aspirational and actual form of masculinity and concomitant practices that legitimize men's dominant position in a gender hierarchy, locating "real men" at the top by subordinating women, femininities, and non-hegemonic versions of masculinity. Although the idea of hegemonic masculinities has traditionally been understood as ideologically driven through public spaces and social institutions, Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) "rethinking" of the concept absorbs the critique of trait models and rigid typologies in which the concept does not equate with a model of social reproduction, allowing for multiple hegemonic masculinities across global, regional, and local scales, while maintaining the underlying principle: the legitimation of unequal gender relations (Messerschmidt 2018, 48). This is exemplified by Connell's (2016) discussion, which cites numerous studies – many from the Global South – to demonstrate the range of hegemonic projects and capacity for transhistorical change from the colonial period, to post-colonialism, to neo-liberalization, highlighting that the key concept is now "hegemony under construction, renovation and contestation."

In recent years, hegemonic masculinities have been understood as including elastic, hybrid, and fleeting variants, underscoring their fluid and contingent nature (Bridges and Pascoe 2018; Messerschmidt 2018). These have

been used, for example, in gender interventions in South Africa (Jewkes et al. 2015; Morrell et al. 2013), to compare civil war masculinities in Sierra Leone and Sudan (Duriesmith 2016), and to examine the continuation of pre-existing patriarchal logics in conflict settings (Myrttinen, Khattab, and Naujoks 2017). However, the specific relationship between hegemonic masculinities and gangs has rarely been explored. Hagedorn (1998) identified four "enactments" of hegemonic masculinity in gangs in the US: the Frat Boy, the Bossman, the Stud, and the Gentleman. In a study of young African American men, Cobbina, Like-Haislip, and Miller (2010) found violence, respect, autonomy, and reputation to be indicative of the centrality of "hegemonic masculinities on the streets." Similarly, an insightful study by Cooper (2009) in Cape Town described "hybridized" gangland masculinities that combine what it means to be a "real man" with local language, practices, and rituals based on "outlaw masculinities," when corporate or executive hegemonic masculinities are out of reach for the urban poor. More recently, Baird (2019) reflected upon transnational Blood and Crip gang practices in Belize City since the 1980s that were subject to culturally syncretic "creolization" across generations, while maintaining a definitive "hegemonic shape" that ordered the local gender hierarchy, compounding a "patriarchy of the streets."

In fact, the latter is one of the few studies – until this current article – to apply a masculinities framework to the production of gang-related violence in the Caribbean, as opposed to Latin America, into which the region tends to be homogeneously subsumed. Much good critical work – often juxtaposed with the dominant mainstream criminological tendency – exists on drug trafficking, gang-related murders, and community violence throughout the Caribbean (see, for example, Arias 2017; Deosaran 2018; Evans and Jaffe 2020; Jaffe 2019; Knight 2019). There is also a substantial amount of research on multiple masculinities (and femininities), usually addressing either the historical legacies of slavery (Beckles 2003) or modern issues such as sexuality, familial relations, race and ethnicity, access to public services, and sexual and gender-based violence (Anderson 2012; Hosein and Parpart 2016; Reddock 2003; Sukhu 2012; Thompson 2019). However, much less work has been done that brings these two concerns together by deploying an explicit masculinities framework to explain the nuances in, and distinctive patterns of, gang-related violence in the Caribbean in general and Trinidad in particular (for partial exceptions, see Gayle 2009; Gayle and Mortis 2010; Gayle, Hampton, and Mortis 2016; James and Davis 2014).

In sum, while hegemonic masculinities may share aspirational ideals between the global and the local, these are contextually interactive, meaning that they are also locally legitimated and constituted in what we refer to here as the social terrain. In the case of eastern PoS, an area deeply affected by historical poverty, recent inflows of guns and drugs prompted

the emergence of a distinct gang culture indicative of a new male hegemonic street project.

Mixed methodology

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken between 2017 and 2019,[1] conducted by a multi-disciplinary research team comprising three academic members from the disciplines of international political economy (IPE), sociology, and cultural anthropology. Two members of the team were based at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad; they were supported by a non-academic partner at a local community organization, himself a former gang member. The interdisciplinarity of the project allowed the team to approach the problem of local violence and transnational crime from multiple angles, generating an interrogatory process in which disciplinary assumptions could be questioned more rigorously. Our analytical and methodological frameworks mirrored each other by functioning at three levels: at the macro level, Trinidad's situation within hemispheric trafficking networks was analyzed from an IPE perspective, drawing primarily on expert interviews; at the meso level, a sociological interpretation was used to understand the connectedness between the macro and the micro, from the transnational to the streets, drawing substantially on community focus groups; and at the micro level, cultural anthropology and a number of ethnographic methods – bolstered substantially by spoken-word workshops (explained later), including participant observation, "liming" (Nakhid-Chatoor et al. 2018), and informal interviews – were used to chart the shifting meanings of masculinities in relation to violence in the marginalized neighborhoods studied. While the macro-level analysis drew upon both quantitative and qualitative data to study the flows of drugs and firearms, the meso- and micro-level analyses were predominantly qualitative in method, placing gender and masculinities front and center, particularly in our interpretation of the social terrain.[2]

Our study involved 30 formal expert interviews with professionals either currently or formerly working in the security services, and innumerable informal ones, the majority of which were conducted by the two members of the research team living and working in Trinidad. In addition, six focus groups were held with the police and armed forces, as well as with young people aged 16–25 and middle-aged community members from the most troubled neighborhoods in eastern PoS, including Laventille, St Barbs, Beetham, and Sea Lots. The older community members were key informants precisely because they had lived through the transition to violence in the 1990s and 2000s. This, alongside historical research studies (see, for example, Brereton 2010; Craig 1988; Lovelace 1978; Oxaal 1968; Reddock 1994a; Stuempfle 1995), was central to constructing a transhistorical narrative of local

masculinities and their connectedness to violence and communities' vulnerabilities to the nefarious influence of transnational organized crime, particularly the way in which hardship bends individual agency to pursue crime as an opportunity structure. Fundamentally, this approach was about charting social change over time. The overall methodology allowed us to contextualize how transnational crime interacted in a gendered way with the local social terrain to generate violent outcomes.

The methodology was strengthened by data collected and analyzed from a series of innovative spoken-word workshops – similar to slam poetry – drawing on cultural traditions in collaboration with our local partner, the Roots Foundation. An original spoken-word curriculum was co-designed with local partner Mtima Solwazi around the key research questions focusing on gender, gangs, and violence. The masculinities-focused non-governmental organization Promundo was also brought in to strengthen the training and curriculum. The workshops ran over 15 weeks with 30 young people from the disadvantaged neighborhoods of Beetham Gardens, Morvant, Diego Martin, and El Socorro, led by Dylan Kerrigan. This was a pilot curriculum designed for real-world impact. It was later evaluated, improved upon, and rolled out by our local partner the following year to more than 700 disadvantaged young women and men across Trinidad. It also served as a unique data-gathering tool. It permitted us to build trust with participants (seen in the focus group quotations), allowing the often-silenced voices of young people living in gang-afflicted communities to be heard and enabling them to express their feelings about violence, gender, and masculinity in ways that were cognizant of, and sensitive to, their social and cultural reality.

Gang violence in Trinidad

Located in the south-eastern Caribbean just seven nautical miles off the coast of Venezuela, Trinidad was not known for high rates of lethal violence prior to the 1990s. This is consistent with other Caribbean nations, except perhaps Jamaica and Guyana, which have long histories of political and social violence (Arias 2017; Edmonds 2016; Munroe and Blake 2017). What is striking about the Trinidadian case is the arresting rise in the murder rate since the late 1990s, and its continued increase in the 2000s (Seepersad 2016).

This increase coincided with transnational drug trafficking flows being re-routed though the country as previous paths through the central Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, were squeezed by US enforcement agencies. PoS has come to be recognized as an important trans-shipment point (Townsend 2009) given its proximity to the South American mainland and busy maritime trade links with Europe and the US (Reichel and Randa 2018). International agencies and academics using deductive methodologies have been quick

to point out the relationship between the wider arc of drug trafficking and the rise of national-level violence in Trinidad (UNDP 2012, 10). In the mid-2000s, the murder rate spiked dramatically, surpassing 30 per 100,000 people and making Trinidad one of the most violent countries in the region and the world (UNODC 2018). The murder rate shows no sign of abating: 2018 was the second-bloodiest year in Trinidadian history with 517 murder victims out of a national population of 1.4 million; more than 90 percent of the victims were men (OSAC 2019).

A number of factors in recent history besides drug trafficking have contributed to the rising violence. First, in 1990, there was an attempted Islamic coup to overthrow the incumbent democratic government, following which a number of the perpetrators and their weapons found their way back into the urban margins. Second, the 1990s saw the deportation of jailed Trinidadian criminals who had experience with armed crime from the US to PoS (expert interview A, 2018). Third, by the early 2000s, two significant gang factions had either emerged in the capital or had begun to do so: the Muslims and, later, Rasta City. The former is an informal federation of disaffected groups of mostly Afro-Trinidadian Muslim men loosely affiliated with the ideology of the 1990 coup. Subsequently, non-Muslim gangs in the city identified themselves in oppositional terms using the moniker Rasta City, before, more recently, the Muslim grouping redefined itself explicitly as Muslim City. Inter-gang rivalry between these factions pushed the murder rate in PoS yet higher. Finally, there has been a confluence of gun flows into the country over time: initially from the US and Grenada in the 1980s following the US invasion and political upheaval, which also helped to catalyze the 1990 coup, and later across the "very, very, very porous" maritime border from weapons-rich and increasingly unstable Venezuela (focus group B, participant 1, 2018).

The ongoing violence emerges from the fabric of history. In the following sections, we analyze "old violence" and "new violence" as a way in which to order our analysis of PoS before and after the murder boom and to demonstrate the violent male identities across distinct periods, arguing that modern gangs are an evolved and locally constituted masculine hegemonic project.

Old violence

Patriarchy and male violence have been presented as foundational facets of Caribbean capitalism (Lewis 2004), and scholars of colonialism note that patterns of violence in poor neighborhoods in PoS have always existed (Brereton 2010; Singh 1984). As Oxaal (1968, 82) suggested decades ago, the "old rivalries of the *jamettes* and stickfighters" developed into territorial "steelband wars" that flared up at Carnival. A deep historical connectedness to the dehumanization of the enslaved and the "coloniality of power" (Quijano

2000) meant that the Black population emerged from slavery and indenture-ship into the barrack yards and what would become the poorest neighbor-hoods of the nation's capital. A current inhabitant of one such neighborhood said:

> Well, dat whole ting coming from slavery, ya know. Slave-master used to beat de slaves. Dat's what de slaves know, dey were treated violently, so dey treating others violently. So, it come from slavery handed down from generation to gen-eration. (focus group B, participant 5, 2018)[3]

It is not coincidental that Laventille became one of the most deprived areas of the city. It was a squatter community where the emancipated relocated to escape the harassment that they faced on plantations as well as anti-Black racism and inequality over 180 years (Kerrigan 2016). From its genesis, Laventille has been criminalized, suffering from oppressive law enforcement and the systematic denigration of the local population (Trotman 1986, 85). Unsurprisingly, locals have come to mistrust the state, and violence is framed by histories of rebelliousness toward hostile outsiders (Forde 2018).

In Trinidad, masculine ideals traced through recent history are connected to strength and breadwinning, but particularly to the capacity for violence and the subordination of women, with an emphasis on the number of sexual partners that a man could maintain (Kerrigan 2019; van Koningsbruggen 1997). One respondent said: "Machismo? I mean, all the Car-ibbean islands function off of machismo!" (focus group B, participant 5, 2018). While the research project focused on the rise in male-on-male murder, it should be noted that high levels of men's violence against women in Trinidad date back to colonialism (Pemberton and Joseph 2018). Furthermore, con-temporary sexual and gender-based violence rates in the Caribbean are par-ticularly alarming. They are statistically higher than those in South and Central American countries and among the highest in the world (UNDP 2012). One women's organization confirmed that gender-based violence has "always been part of the culture," only in the past, it was under-reported or ignored by authorities (field diary, May 26, 2016). A 2018 United Nations (UN) Women report shows that the situation is worsening (Hosein et al. 2018).

Women's roles have traditionally been associated with domestic affairs tied to respectability, marriage, and motherhood – ideas largely inherited from the British colonial value system (De Freitas 1999, 14; Kerrigan 2020). Within the overarching Trinidadian patriarchy, gender stereotypes are locally rooted (Haynes-Robinson 2008; Reddock 1994b), informing the social-ization process for young people, in which girls are expected to stay indoors while boys are socialized to the streets:

> Young women have always been sheltered in what we would call the "family curfew." They would not be allowed to go out after a certain time [or] to certain events, while [young] men would be. That socialization is based on

culture. Women tend to be guarded, but young men are influenced [lured] into gang activity or violent crime. That is why the majority of gang members are men in Trinidad and Tobago. (expert interview B, 2018)

For Beckles (2003), the seeds of Afro-Caribbean masculinity in the present were planted in the violent and exploitative relationship of colonial primitive accumulation, where the realities and social organization of slavery led Afro-Caribbean masculinity to adopt a patriarchal, sexist, and violent value system similar to that of the white male planters. Lovelace (1978) provided a detailed genealogy of violent men citing the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when rural stickfighters became urbanized. They were revered as warrior heroes representing their villages with a trail of supporters. In the city, they became less romantically known as Bad Johns, after a notorious criminal in early twentieth-century Trinidad called John Archer (Kerrigan 2019).

Rohlehr (1985, 1) traced through history how celebrated men who often featured in calypsos reflected machismo, aggression, and violent self-assertion directed inward toward the same members of the under-privileged class, illustrating Connell's (2005) earlier observation that male class rebellions are often self-destructive. Neil (1987) went further, stating that the "battles" fought between men of rival neighborhood calypso steelpan bands acted as a genesis point for gang structures, and Lovelace (1978) affirmed that the toughest members, like the urbanized stickfighters, also became known as Bad Johns. In one of our own focus groups in eastern PoS, a participant said: "Gangs is nothin' new to Trinidad, right? Calypsonians sing 'bout gangs. They call them vagabonds long-time! If you look back to the steelpan era, the gangs came out of the steelpans when the steelpans became organized" (focus group B, participant 2, 2018). Lovelace argued that the Bad John was a historically evolved figure, and, crucially, one who was widely revered within the community. This reverence indicates a process of legitimation within the local gender hierarchy, and, arguably, the post-colonial position of women tied to domestic affairs and girls expected to stay indoors represented historical variants of "emphasised femininities" (Messerschmidt 2018, 60) subordinated to men in this period.

Although men's violence was a historical part of PoS's colonial and post-colonial reality, more recent flows of guns into these communities have galvanized (some) men's identities into a more virulent version by dramatically increasing their technological capacity for lethal violence. The Bad Man is a later derivative of the Bad John: "De Bad Man in San Juan [was] jus' one Bad Man. Everybody had to listen to him, and usually dat Bad Man jus' had a razor [and he] would cut you. Now is plenty Bad Man in one community!" (focus group B, participant 3, 2018). Considering this transhistorical arc of

Bad Johns, these figures are evolved, part of a *lineage* of what one Trinidadian academic described in prosaic terms as "that violent masculinity that is ever present" (expert interview B, 2018).

Poverty and underdevelopment experienced at the urban margins of PoS, and the associated stigma, created a rebelliousness against authority among young men and susceptibility to the lure of the gang's relative riches. This explains why there is a consistently higher prevalence of poor young men in gangs than in wealthier sections of society, framed as "masculine vulnerability," deliberately placing the emphasis on the way in which excluded social terrains intersect with gender, where gangs are seen as sites of opportunity and possibility (Baird 2019). In PoS's transition to high levels of lethal violence, young men were a receptive interface for newfound flows of guns and drugs. Within a decade, the fist and razor fights of earlier generations of Bad Johns felt quaint in comparison with the formidable gang leaders who superseded them, as one police officer explained:

> It was not so violent in da 1990s, 20 years ago. Well, dere was gun violence, but [now] the usage of firearms became prevalent because of de availabilities ah deze guns. De young men of da 1990s was not dat aggressive and violent as it is today. De ting is, it goes back to how easy deze guys carry [guns]. A firearm is a very powerful, powerful weapon. Once deze guys have firearm on dem, dey feel dat dey above everybody. (police officer A, 2018)

The entrance of drugs into communities led to the territorial organization of gangs in competition for illicit markets, initially based on cocaine and marijuana. In turn, the flow of guns into the country meant that they were quickly adopted to protect territories from the competition: "Where dere is drugs, you have to have guns to protect your territories" (focus group B, participant 5, 2018). Gangs unwilling to use them quickly became obsolete as activities began to diversify to incorporate an extortive "community protection industry," money laundering, loan sharking, and co-opting government contracts, as gangs became both beneficiaries of clientelist practices and facilitators of local political corruption (expert interview B, 2018; Seepersad 2016; Townsend 2009). This institutionalization of gangs produced community-wide social change.

Proximity, not just exclusion, was a contributing factor to the murder boom. Drugs and weapons flowed through porous maritime borders into PoS, percolating through to the urban poor, as one youth from these communities said:

> Everybody is involved [in drugs and weapons trafficking]! Gangs have friends in de coast guard and police. When dey trafficking out on de sea, dey might pull ah lil coast guard brethren [friend] and say "Well, ah bringing ting na [do a deal and bring the drugs or weapons in]." (youth interview, February 1, 2017)

The narratives of young people demonstrated how pervasive guns and drugs are in poor communities, coming up time and again in focus groups and interviews (focus group A, participants D–H, 2017):

G: Meh cousin and meh godfather [have guns], ah bag ah weed and cocaine.
E: Cocaine and ting! I see meh stepfather [with drugs]. I ask hem 'bout it but he never really answer me, naa. Yeah, he had one [a gun].
H: Well, up by we [at our place], it av no guns in the house, he have ah a big warehouse in de side [keeping guns outside of the house to avoid police raids and prosecution, but close enough to access in a hurry].
G: Well, they always have them [guns] who want to fight for money and all kinda ting. Yeah, it plenty deals that does go bad …
F: … It's all about the money with them.
D: And they come up dead too. I had a close friend, he end up in gang life. De police come an lick hem down [killed him]. He dead now.

Key here is the connectedness between the transnational drug trade and the social terrain as a bi-directional, fluid process, not a simple imposition of transnational criminal networks upon passive communities. The way in which the social terrain engages the transnational is fundamentally about *agency in context*. This brings us back to the idea of (masculine) vulnerability and opportunity: within the social terrain in eastern PoS, young men are more likely to perceive connectedness to transnational crime and the local gang as vehicles to accumulate masculine capital, "looking for a hustle that can bring in fast money that they would not get otherwise [by becoming] foot soldiers to move drugs" (expert interview B, 2018). These changes dramatically increased levels of gang-related murder. It was a momentous shift in the necro-politics of the street, distinguished here as "new violence."

New violence

As drugs, weapons, and ammunition proliferated in the early 2000s, new generations of gang members in PoS were obliged to adopt firearms or lose control of illegal markets to competitors, leading to an acceleration of lethal violence that one expert described as an "intensified ghettoization process" (expert interview C, 2018). Those not prepared to use guns, retaliate, or kill were subordinated within the power structure of the gang. Boys and men were affected by an increasingly violent trope of masculine expectation to demonstrate strength and aggression far beyond previous Bad Johns in order to keep pace, similarly described elsewhere in the region as a type of brutalist meritocracy (Baird 2018):

Ninety-nine per cent of gangs are male. The men that rise to the top of gangs tend to be the most violent. They identify themselves as the leader based on their ability to enforce and control using violence, and they are feared by their peers because of that. (expert interview F, 2018)

While steelband gangs, followed by Bad Johns and then Bad Men, were notorious, they have been supplanted by more violent contemporary gangs with colloquially known Alpha or Zesser leaders, whose violence has been made lethal by the interdiction of firearms, competitive gang territorialization, and institutionalization:

> Before it was cutlasses, knives, bottles, but no less brutal. Now it's guns. Since 2000, guns have really come on the scene, so that changes the whole thing. A lot of the guys too, they're just young – 16, 17, 18, you know. I did foolish things when I was that age too – it's just that now we have guns in the mix … So, in that regard I just see it as an extension of an inter-generational acceptance of violence. (expert interview C, 2018)

Members of the community may be subject to violent domination by these men; however, there is a more complex process occurring than simple masculine domination or suppression, and we are keen to avoid conceptual slippage between domination and hegemony, as averted by both Connell (2005) and Messerschmidt (2018). Violence and threats are indicative of coercion, not consent, and therefore unlikely to be hegemonic. Curiously, although gang violence has increased dramatically, Alphas or Zessers, and gangs more broadly, have become exemplars of masculinity in the local gender hierarchy, subjugating not only women, but also non-gang – or what might be fittingly termed here "beta" – versions of masculinity. In short, while gang life can be confoundingly complex, from this perspective, the gang project can be understood as a manifestation of local hegemonic masculinity. It is counter-intuitive that Alphas are legitimated despite their violence as "the most honoured way of being a man [requiring] all other men to be subordinate to it" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). This requires some explanation.

A local hegemonic project draws upon wider legitimation across the community. As Messerschmidt (2018, 48) said, "the hierarchy of gender relations is a pattern of hegemony, and not a pattern of simple domination," which requires cultural consent and the de-legitimation of alternatives. Within these communities, there is a subtle yet powerful process of "hegemony under construction" (Connell 2016). Alphas and Zessers in particular have the power to both punish and reward local inhabitants. One local from Sea Lots, a gang-affected community by the port, discussed the "Alpha [as] a community leader," to which another added: "Like a government, dey have all de power" (focus group C, participants 1 and 2, 2018). In this vein, Alphas and Zessers in communities such as Sea Lots and Beetham do not only threaten, they also garner local approval and support. One young man said: "[At Christmas, an Alpha] provided a box of roti for me mother so I feel dat I committed to doing whatever he ask me. So, you also find dat kind of relationship between da young people and da leaders" (focus group C, participant 2, 2018).

Acting as "community leaders" and local dispute settlers and providing cash hand-outs for food or medicine are practices that legitimate the gang project – particularly the leader – within the community through subtle yet powerful processes that encourage complicity or consent *despite* community predation and violence. Similar legitimation experiences have recently been seen across Caribbean ganglands (see, for example, Blake 2013; Jaffe 2013). This version of "provider and protector" cannot be disassociated from regional, or even global, hegemonic ideals but has a very specific local manifestation in gang settings. In other words, there has been some debate over the extent to which marginalized Black and Brown men in the Global South can actually embody hegemonic masculinities, but this suggests that as gang leaders, they represent a localized variant. Therefore, gang practices in communities are diverse, and some reflect the construction and "cultivation" (see Messerschmidt 2018) of hegemonic masculinity. Certainly, it seems unlikely that gang leaders would be called community leaders or Alphas by locals without the ongoing legitimation of their position within a local gender hierarchy.

The Alpha or Zesser is a hegemonic exemplar, a venerated way of being a man in eastern PoS, an ideal that the majority of young men will not be able to live up to but that requires other men to position themselves in relation to it (see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832, 846). This position is largely derived from the accumulation and display of masculine capital provided through gang membership, which appeals to both young men and women in poor eastern PoS neighborhoods excluded from middle-class society:

> As society evolves, you'll find that younger persons are getting involved with [gang] activity. They see the lifestyle, expensive cars, they have an expensive gun, nice girls. They are now exposed at a young age, not just at secondary age but at the primary school age. It is a life where you livin' in the criminal, hostile area, and as you grow up, you hearing the gunshots. It is daily, so it becomes part of your life. So younger and younger you are being socialized into a life of gang activity. (expert interview F, 2018)

For younger generations, the gang version of masculinity is often perceived in aspirational terms precisely because it "outperforms" other local male identities. Interestingly, despite being worlds apart, we can actually tease out a connectedness to "managerial masculinities" (Connell 2016, 311–312), in which both the gang leader and the elite manager are competitive and power oriented, underpinned (we would argue) by the accumulation of masculine capital relative to their setting, which is used to continually construct hierarchical relationships with women and non-hegemonic beta masculinities. There is a telling difference, though: hegemony in construction is a competitive enterprise, but in settings of male-led chronic violence, that competition is lethal.

The young men to whom we spoke often referred to various forms of gang competition. Selling drugs was seen as a way in which to "mek it to the top," a reputational exercise of "betterment" casting light on their perception of the gang project as a pathway to manhood in settings of structural constraint. However, lethal competition means that this can be "over in a moment. The last time a shot buss [gunfire] in St Barbs, [a gang member was killed fighting over] who claim better, betterment and ting naa boi!" (youth interview, June 20, 2017). In this hyper-competitive arena, gang members are "brought back down, [rivals will] kill the man [who encroaches upon their turf]. Ya cyan [cannot] sell on somebody else block. Last time, they beat [a man to death] and roll he in the canal" (focus group A, participant G, 2017). What is interesting is how the young people interviewed ordered the gang hierarchy using "big man" or "small man" discourse – the hegemonic "gang" versus the subordinate "non-gang" male: "Dem small yout, dey feel dey big, dey could do anything and dey does go and rob the small man for dey money and wateva anyting" (focus group A, participant H, 2017).

For young people, daily horrors have become a banal "sort of a culture" in which murder is to just "geh rid ah hem": "Say like, dis man from dis area, don' like dis man from dat oda [other] area, and dey like 'Geh rid ah hem [murder him]'" (youth interview, March 16, 2017). "Eventually, it become sort of a culture where you are now being gunned down, you fear being murdered. 'You kill one of mine, I kill one of yours'" (expert interview F, 2018). When a gun is re-sold on the streets of PoS, it is commonplace to ask "How many ghosts?" (how many people have been murdered with it?), as "ghost-heavy" weapons are lower in price (Sanatan 2018).

Numerous respondents during the research flagged how much attention gang members received from women in the community, saying variously "gangs get ah [lot of] attention from women" (focus group B, participant 3, 2018) or that they stand out because they "have women and are high [smoking marijuana] all de time" (expert interview C, 2018). It has been observed across the region that gangs regularly "get the girls"; clearly, young women living under structural constraints are also drawn to gangs. They are often sexually objectified, "emphasised femininities" in relation to male gang power (Messerschmidt 2018, 47), and, as such, they arguably contribute to the cultivation of the gang's hegemonic project (Baird 2019). However, women's relationships with gangs are complex, and while not covered in depth here, stories were widespread in the field that gang girl-friends were frequently victims of physical and sexual abuse, reflecting women's experiences with gangs in Central America and the Caribbean (Aguilar Umaña and Rikkers 2012). Despite the centrality of violence, the gang project finds legitimation, consent, and complicity among the local population, much of which is derived from the accumulation of local masculine capital relative to the exclusion of the social terrain.

Conclusion

So, did young men really "break bad"? There is no straightforward yes or no answer. Clearly, there is a lineage of violent male figures in poor neighborhoods who were already bad, from Bad Johns and Bad Men to Alphas and Zessers. What we have learned is that the latter lead the local gang project, which has mediated the pattern of "new violence" – the homicide boom – in Trinidad. Using a masculinities approach to understand gangs is rare in Latin America, and rarer in the Caribbean, and to our knowledge, this is the first dedicated study of this kind of Trinidad.

We have argued that the gang project serves as a conduit for masculine power, status, and capital, juxtaposed with the social terrain of exclusion in which it is constructed. This orders the gender hierarchy between Alpha male gang members and women and non-hegemonic beta masculinities. Lethal violence is indivisible from gang competition for said capital, but, counterintuitively, despite the violence, gangs are continually legitimated and thus indicative of a new male hegemonic street project.

While we agree with Connell and Messerschmitt that hegemonic masculinities are not a rigid model of social reproduction, reflected by evolving local gang practices, neither can we deny the historical continuity of legitimated exemplar men who exist in these neighborhoods – from the stickfighter warrior heroes of yesteryear to the Alphas of today. This raises some conceptual tension: hegemonic masculinities are fluid and subject to change across time and place, but to what extent is there scope to understand them as socially reproductive? Certainly, there is need for further research into intergenerational gang violence and gangs and masculinities in comparative perspective. Furthermore, far more needs to be done to understand the agency of women in gang projects and how younger generations adapt and navigate their gendered selves in increasingly violent social terrains.

In terms of the wider relevance of our research, these findings imply significant risk to excluded urban populations located in proximity to global drug trafficking networks elsewhere in the world. Although we do not claim the arguments in this article to be a "violence predictor" or model, this analysis provides conceptual understanding of how and why "new violence" can arise as a gendered process in vulnerable communities. Simply tackling trafficking networks will not work to reduce violence (Baird, Bishop, and Kerrigan 2018). Where networks are disrupted in one location, they arise in another. When Jamaica came under US Drug Enforcement Agency scrutiny, Central America and Trinidad became new thoroughfares. When the Colombian cartels collapsed, much violence was displaced to Mexico. Recent re-routing of drugs from South America to West Africa points to comparable problems. Today, Fiji faces challenges that worryingly parallel Trinidad's recent history (Lyons 2019). Shifting international

trafficking flows therefore create an arc of potential transitions to violence among disadvantaged communities along the supply chain.

Moreover, there is good reason to suspect that the results from any substantial reduction in trafficking at the hemispheric level – if it could even be achieved – would be disappointing in terms of ameliorating the situation locally. Although drug trafficking via the Caribbean certainly had a decisive effect in crystallizing the contemporary transition to violence, violence now operates locally, in accordance with its own gendered, social, and cultural logics that are products of the interplay between deeply rooted post-colonial norms and realities of exclusion on the one hand, and shifting cultures of violence in a highly weaponized context on the other.

Notes

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2. A further article produced from this research project covers the methodological approach (Kerrigan 2019).
3. Interview quotations have been written phonetically in an attempt to present a more accurate representation of the field. Locals and young people tended to have a thicker accent than the experts interviewed.

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