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# From Breakers to Bikers: The Evolution of the Dutch Crips ‘Gang’

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## ABSTRACT

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and a content analysis of secondary sources, the current study presents an in-depth case study of gang evolution. We chart the history and development of the Dutch Crips, from playgroup origins in the 1980s to criminal endeavors in the 1990s, to its rebirth as an Outlaw Motorcycle Gang in the 2000s. At each evolutionary stage, we examine the identity of the group, its organization, the nature of its criminal activities, and branding. We highlight how, over 30 years, the Crips constantly reinvented themselves to meet their members’ age-defined needs and to attract future generations to the group.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

The consensus Eurogang definition states that “a street gang is any *durable*, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity” (Klein and Maxson 2006: 4, *emphasis added*). Unlike the names, colors or symbols often used to *describe* a gang, therefore, durability helps to *define* a gang. In the case of the popular Eurogang definition, a threshold of three months is used, meaning groups that come together and dissipate for a specific event or for less than a quarter year are not gangs (Weerman et al. 2009). Moreover, gangs continue despite the fact that in many places gang membership is criminalized and, for a variety of reasons at all levels of explanation, member turnover is constant – the average gang member career lasts two years or less (see Pyrooz 2014). The mechanisms underlying this paradox of gang durability are relatively underexplored in gang scholarship.

To fill this gap, the present study presents a case study of a prominent Crips gang from The Netherlands and examines how the group has endured for over 30 years. Through ethnographic fieldwork, qualitative interviews with current and former gang members, and a content analysis of secondary sources, the research argues that the gang owes its longevity to its ability to evolve. Like the best commercial artists or brands, the Crips have constantly reinvented themselves, often by reimagining themselves completely, and in so doing the group has attracted future generations to its cause and kept older generations engaged. We demonstrate how the gang evolved over time from a break-dancing crew to a criminal gang to an outlaw motorcycle club to meet its members’ age-defined needs. We explore how the Dutch Crips constantly innovated, such as by changing names or merging with other gangs, to guarantee their legacy. We conclude with implications for gang research.

## Studying European gangs

*Made in America*. The title of Stacy Peralta’s 2009 documentary about the Bloods and Crips of Los Angeles well summarizes conventional wisdom about gangs. The Twentieth Century was an “American Century” (Luce 1941) in political, economic, and cultural terms, but also in terms of

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gangs and gang violence (Klein 1995). Research over the past two decades, however, has evidenced the presence of gangs outside of the United States, especially in Europe (Van Gemert and Weerman 2015). As Pyrooz and Mitchell (2015:43) observe, an “international turn” in gang research occurred at the Millennium, “when the study of gangs was no longer the study of gangs in the United States.”

The rise of European gang research is intimately tied with the establishment of “Eurogang,” a network of about 200 researchers and practitioners that has come to resemble its own “invisible college,” unburdened by traditional borders (Pyrooz and Mitchell 2015:45). Eurogang’s founder, Mac Klein (2001), famously coined the “Eurogang Paradox” or denial that there are *American-style* gangs in Europe based on a vision of the *typical* American gang that is not at all typical of gangs in America (Klein 2001:10). For Klein, Europe’s inability to (fore)see gangs was a collective failure of imagination brought about by a constrained view of what Europe was supposed to be imagining. Part of the problem was the term “gang” was perceived to be both ambiguous and highly stigmatizing (Hallsworth and Young 2008). It was also lost in translation. As Ralphs and Smithson (2015:521) observe, the Dutch “jeugdbendes,” French “bandes,” Norwegian and Swedish “gjengs,” and Danish “bandes” were not, and still are not, functionally equivalent.

To facilitate European gang studies, however, the Eurogang network developed a “consensus definition” of a street gang as a “durable and street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity” (Klein and Maxson 2006:4). There is not the scope here to discuss the nuances of gang definition (see instead, Curry 2015). Some argue the Eurogang effort is too inclusive (e.g., Aldridge, Medina-Ariz, and Ralphs 2012; Medina et al. 2013; Smithson, Monchuk, and Armitage 2012). Nevertheless, it has been highly influential (Klein 2012) and accurately captures the essence of the group under investigation – at least, at some stages of evolution.

Consistent with American gang research, gang membership in Europe is correlated with violent offending, but it is less lethal in part due to lower levels of firearm use (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry 2006). One international comparison has showed that offending and drug use were equally elevated among Dutch and American gang members (Esbensen and Weerman 2005; Weerman and Esbensen 2005). Another comparative study suggested that the levels and severity of gang-related youth violence were generally lower in European countries than in the United States (Klein, Weerman, and Thornberry 2006).

Nevertheless, themes of migration, marginalization, and neighborhood, also feature predominantly in the etiology of European gangs, as they do American gangs (e.g., Decker, van Gemert, and Pyrooz 2009; Van Gemert, Peterson, and Lien 2008). Research in France (Mohammed 2011), for example, finds gangs fulfill five functions that are deficient in certain young men: a material function (consumption), a symbolic function (power and recognition), a political function (social conflict), a psychological function (self-esteem), and an identity function (being part of a history); all themes documented in the annals of US gang research (for a review, see Wood and Alleyne 2010).

Notwithstanding these contributions, some European scholars take issue with a flourishing gang control industry, represented by databases that customize police action and civil gang injunctions that limit the freedoms of gang members (see Densley 2011; Fraser et al. 2018), and a related “quantification of gang research” (Pyrooz and Mitchell 2015:42) exported from America to Europe. Young (2004), for example, argues that an “administrative criminology” characterized by “voodoo statistics,” dehumanizes and denaturalizes the human experience, reducing gang members to “walking clusters of de-contextualized variables” (Hallsworth and Young 2008:187). To offset such criticisms, the current study relies on ethnographic methods that hark back to the original gang research (e.g., Thrasher 1927), and it prioritizes the voices of the people embedded in gangs, who self-nominate as gang members, not control agents.

## **American gangs in Europe: branding and mythmaking**

The myth of the American gang looms large in European gang studies. From The Hague to Brussels to London, there have been reports of gangs influenced both by fictional American

gangster movies, such as *New Jack City* (1991), and factual (albeit mythologized) American “supergangs,” such as the Bloods and Crips (Roks 2017b; Van Gemert 2001; Van Hellemont and Densley 2018). Through processes of migration (Maxson 1998), mimicry (Howell 2007), and globalization (Van Hellemont and Densley 2018), the 21st Century has witnessed the global dissemination of gangs such as the Crips (e.g., Densley *Forthcoming*; Hagedorn 2008; Roks 2017b; Van Gemert 2001; Van Gemert, Roks, and Drogdt 2016). Some of these “franchises” are more imagined than real. Gangs themselves create myths as part of what Felson (2006) calls their “Big Gang Theory”. By displaying a famous gang name (e.g., Crips) and standardized signals or symbols, such as hand signs, colors, graffiti, clothes, and language, gang members can create a fiction of their gang that, over time, becomes accepted as fact (see also, Densley 2012a; Gambetta 2009). In many cases, crime control agents and the media can unintentionally help local gangs promote their Big Gang Theory (Hallsworth and Young 2008).

## Gang evolution

Continuity and change are central concepts in life-course criminology (Farrington 2003), and they feature widely in studies of gang membership and gang disengagement at the individual level (e.g., Pyrooz, Sweeten, and Piquero 2013). Not only is gang membership a “turning point” in the life-course (Melde and Esbensen 2011), but there are different age-gang membership curves, analogous to the age-crime curve (Pyrooz 2014). However, because the unit of analysis in this area of study typically is “gang members” not “gangs,” less is understood about continuity and change at the group level (see Short 1998). What we do know is gangs exist on a wide spectrum from the simple to complex (Klein and Maxson 2006) and gangs can and do change over time (Ayling 2011; Densley 2014; Thrasher 1927; Weisel 2002). Truly observing this change, however, is difficult owing to cross-sectional data. Research demonstrates that factors internal and external to the gang contribute to its “maturation” (Gottschalk 2007) and that gangs can shift from an emphasis on youthful, recreational, non-delinquent pursuits (i.e., Thrasher 1927) to financial gains, whereby crime becomes more central to group identity (McLean 2018). Densley (2012a, 2014), for example, identified a linear progression of gangs from early expressive to late instrumental stages of “actualization”. This evolution permitted movement from recreational goals and activities through crime toward financial goal orientation, wherein gangs “resemble not just crime that is organized, but organized crime” (Densley 2013:66). For Densley, recreation, crime, enterprise, and governance were not static gang activities or distinct gang types, but instead sequential stages in the life-course of gangs.

## The current study

The process of gang evolution is difficult to capture in research because gang studies often are cross sectional and time-bound. Existing studies also rely on individual *perceptions* of gang evolution, drawn from the representatives of multiple different gangs, thus indicative of broader trends (e.g., Densley 2014; McLean 2018). By contrast, the current study focuses on one gang exclusively. We draw on over a decade of ethnographic research with the gang in question, plus a content analysis of three decades worth of secondary sources, to provide an in-depth case study of evolution in action.

## Method

Data were collected since 2007 by the first author. Through an email address in the back of *Crips.nl* (Van Stapele 2003), a book on 15 years of gang culture in the Netherlands, the first author contacted Raymond, the leader and founder of the Dutch Crips. Once Raymond provided his informed consent, the first author developed a specific digital work routine to reconstruct Raymond’s life in the Dutch Crips (see Roks 2007). In-depth interviews, informal conversations, observations, and

secondary sources about the gang served as the input for questions via email directed at Raymond several times a week. During seven months in 2007, Raymond wrote about 100 pages about his life, criminal career, and the formation and development of the Dutch Crips. Not only did this benefit the internal validity of the findings (Klockars 1974:223; Steffensmeier 1986:4–6), it resulted in rich, unique material that acted like a window into Raymond’s world of experience.

The current study also draws on three years of ethnographic fieldwork in a small neighborhood in The Hague where the gang is most active. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the first author’s home institution. Between January 2011 and December 2013, the first author built a network of 150 informants consisting of (former) members of the Crips, community residents, young people hanging in and around the neighborhood and a Youth Centre, social workers, and local police officials. Interviews, informal conversations and observations resulted in in-depth information about the lives and/or criminal careers of 60 of these informants. Additionally, the first author monitored and analyzed the activities on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) of 40 gang-involved young people (Roks 2016).

Beyond primary data collection, we conducted a content analysis of media sources about the gang. The Dutch Crips are well-documented in local and national media. They feature in articles in popular magazines (Van Stapele 1998, 2003, 2009; Viering 1994), their members have appeared on various Dutch national television programs, and the gang was the focus of the aforementioned book *Crips.nl* (Van Stapele 2003) and a 90-minute documentary film, *Strapped ’N Strong* (Van der Valk 2009).

In total, the data cover a period of 30 years, beginning in 1988 with the first photograph of Raymond in the Dutch magazine *Vrij Nederland*. Data were analyzed thematically in terms of the gang’s identity, organization, activities, and brand. The combination of ethnographic fieldwork and content analysis of secondary sources offers a unique, long term perspective on the development of the gang, covering different phases in its evolution. These different empirical sources provide an opportunity to describe this development by “being there,” but also to retrospectively reflect on media representation of the earlier phases of the gang and, therefore, to triangulate its evolution. To that end, we make the time dimension of the empirical material as clear as possible, in particular by giving each interview, email conversation, observation, or informal conversation a time stamp.

## **The evolution of the Dutch Crips gang**

The sections that follow outline the chronological development of the Dutch Crips gang. In their evolution there are several discernable phases, usually corresponding with a significant change in the group’s name. We use these changes to structure the evolution of the Dutch Crips. Four central themes run throughout each of the respective phases: the identity of the group, the organization of the group, the nature of their criminal activities, and branding.

In the empirical data on the history and evolution of the Dutch Crips, the group’s leader and founder plays a prominent role. In most of the media coverage – in the magazine articles, the *Crips.nl* book, and the *Strapped ’N Strong* documentary – Raymond acted as the gang’s spokesperson. Moreover, during the ethnographic fieldwork, Raymond was a key informant and gatekeeper. We acknowledge this is a potential source of bias, but in the sections that follow, Raymond is one of the primary voices on the evolution of the Dutch Crips.

### ***CUC: from ‘Call Us Cool’ to ‘Crazy Underground Criminals’ (1983–1988)***

Raymond was born in the early 1970s in the Republic of Suriname, a former colony of the Netherlands. He migrated with his parents to the Netherlands at the age of three, just before Suriname became an independent country on November 25, 1975.<sup>1</sup> For the first year in the

Netherlands, the family resided in the Bijlmer neighborhood in Amsterdam, but soon moved to the city of The Hague. The family settled in Forgotten Village, a small neighborhood of 600 houses and 1,400 residents where many other Surinamese families lived (Roks 2017b).

Raymond is the second eldest son from a family with four sons and two daughters. Talking about his childhood, Raymond mentioned:

My childhood was tight. Look, with four brothers, we always were kind of in a ‘gang’. We never needed other people to chill-out, but with a number of cousins and homies we knew from the neighborhood, we grew into a large group of youngsters. Many youngster wanted to join us back then, because they could feel our unity. We did everything together: laughing, fighting, crying. (Email conversation with Raymond, April 4, 2007)

Van Stapele (2003:17) notes that Raymond and his brothers were already part of a gang before they learned of the existence of the word. The brothers were inseparable during childhood, referring to themselves as “the Eagles” because of the eagle coats they wore. Presenting themselves as a unified front towards the outside world would remain a central theme throughout their youth. The jackets with eagle prints were replaced by black leather jackets and later they all started wearing green jackets with fur (Van Stapele 2003:21).

The four brothers played a crucial role in laying the foundation for the current gang with the formation of Call Us Cool (CUC) in the early 1980s. This breakdance collective featured Raymond, his younger brother Rick, and older nephew Nigel as the main dancers, supported by other relatives and friends from the local neighborhoods and school. Breakdancing, “the acrobatic, combative form of competitive dance” (Ilan 2015:112), was the first element of the hip hop subculture to spread across the globe (Chang 2005). For the youngsters of CUC, breakdancing was a fresh, new, and exciting thing, something they could enjoy, but also excel in. In addition, as Raymond recounts, it was also a way to for them to make some money during battles in and around the city of The Hague. Rick was an especially talented, athletic dancer at a young age, earning him the nickname Mister Break, or Mr. B.

Although the name Call Us Cool well represents the expressivity of street coolness (Ilan 2015:102–125) sans any connotation to the world of criminality, CUC was about more than just dancing:

We went out since I was 12-years-old, off to battles in other cities and shit. And sometimes a battle ended in a fight. See, we wanted to be the best in everything: dancing, fighting, and banging. Banging was an everyday thang cuzz! That’s how we grew up. Neighborhood against neighborhood. Group against group, man against man, everything went. Growing up, getting challenged on the streets was a normal thing. You had to prove yourself, prove that you weren’t a busta. (Email conversation with Raymond, May 21, 2007)

From the age of nine, Raymond spend a lot of time on the streets, something he considers a normal part of the Surinamese culture. Hanging around with the youngsters of CUC, most of whom came from broken homes, they witnessed crime at a young age in both the local neighborhood and through the routine activities of various significant others. For instance, talking about his father, Raymond notes how “*he brought home a bag of straps (guns) in preparation for a bank robbery. I was 8 or 9 years old at the time. That was how we ate, so it was normal to me.*” As further evidence of this “illegitimate opportunity structure” (Cloward and Ohlin 1960), Nigel, Raymond’s older nephew, was already involved in robbing banks with his older brother and robbing people on the streets. Despite these criminogenic surroundings, the delinquent activities of the youngsters of CUC at that time were limited to fighting.

Around 1985, the abbreviation CUC changed from Call Us Cool to Crazy Underground Criminals. The usage of the words ‘crazy’ and ‘criminal’ could be traced to the sonic flows of street argot in (gangsta) rap music (Chang 2005). As rap music superseded breakdance as the most popular

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<sup>1</sup>When Suriname became independent in 1975, inhabitants were asked to choose between Surinamese and Dutch nationality. Many opted for the latter option and as a consequence they migrated to the Netherlands. In the 1980s, Surinamese youth drew attention because of integration difficulties that coincided with the introduction of heroin in major Dutch cities. Presently, youngsters of Surinamese descent seem well integrated in Dutch society.



representative of the hip hop subculture, CUC developed into a rap group. However, the changing name was, to some extent, also indicative of the erosion of the innocent character of the group and their activities:

Because we were hip hop pioneers in The Hague, we already were popular. So back then it was easy to roll up with a large click of people. Everyone wanted to join us. At the time, we rolled with at least 50 people to different cities and shit. Repping our city and doing whatever we wanted to do. And while repping our city, some did a little burglary job, a jack there, a fight here, a stabbing there, but nothing too shocking. No one had died until then, but I always felt that there would come a time eventually. It was just the whole way of life you know: staying late on the streets, challenging other groups, fighting, provoking the cops. That's just how it went. (Email conversation with Raymond, March 6, 2007)

In addition to these delinquent activities, the youngsters of CUC were involved in petty theft, vandalism, and the possession of weapons (Roks and Staring 2008:165).

### ***Criminal Underground Crips (1988–2003)***

Van Hellemond and Densley (2018) describe how stereotypical portrayals of American gang and street culture, for instance in *New Jack City* and *The Wire*, but also global rap icons, like Tupac Shakur, have inspired youngsters across the globe, providing them with blueprints for their lives. The youngsters of CUC were similarly enticed by the emerging global hip-hop culture in the late 1980s, which could be seen as the foundation of their group identity. In the origin story of CUC, and specifically, the transformation for Crazy Underground Criminals to Criminal Underground Crips, the movie *Colors* (1988) is pivotal. *Colors* centers on two white police officers who try to combat the ongoing violence between rivaling black gangs in Los Angeles. Some of the youngsters of CUC, including Raymond, saw the movie in 1988, in a movie theatre in the center of The Hague. After the movie ended, Raymond remembered running out of the theatre screaming: “*I’m a Crip!*” At first, most of the youngsters of CUC “*weren’t down*” according to Raymond, and “*they said it was copycattin’*”. Raymond, however, felt a deeper connection to the movie, because: “*they spoke our language. And that’s when that Crip-shit jumped off cuzz. I could identify with that niggaz.*” For some of the youngsters in The Hague, the depiction of young black men on the streets, in distinctive groups, involved in crime, mirrored their feeling of malaise, but also their experiences with socio-cultural exclusion in the Netherlands (Van Stapele 2003 :39–40).

Claiming Crip and appropriating parts of the characteristic Crip gang style, most notably the famous blue rags, initially started out as a joke on the streets of The Hague, but quickly grew into a statement, providing CUC with an additional attractive layer for their group identity. The emerging gangsta rap music genre, and in particular NWA’s (Niggaz With Attitude) *Straight Outta Compton* released in 1988, served as a lexicon for a specific street vernacular. For instance, on the song *Straight Outta Compton*, Mc-Ren raps: “*Just like burglary, the definition is jacking. And when I’m legally armed it’s called packing,*” terms Raymond used with increasing regularity.

An incident on April 2, 1989, marks a defining moment in the development of the Dutch Crips as a gang. After a fight had broken out during a rap performance by members of CUC earlier that day, a second fight in a club in the center of The Hague escalated. This brawl resulted in a lethal stabbing committed by the younger brother of Raymond. Until then, CUC could be seen as “an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously,” beginning as a playgroup of youngsters per Thrasher (1927:46). However, their involvement in this violent event meant an “integration through conflict” (Thrasher 1927:46):

The following days it became clear that there was no way back. We received many threats, which we were happy to answer. We started purchasing more and more *tools* to defend ourselves, knowing that we were no longer up against youngster, but adults. Especially the brother of the victim had already made a name for himself. Without realizing it at the time, this led to a development of the group. The pussies and other weaklings fell off, and stronger and more criminal youngsters joined. We became so tough that even the brother

declared that he wanted to settle the beef, because he didn't want to end up in a grave alongside his brother! For me, this was also the starting point of the criminal element within the group. We took advantage of the fear people had for us, and also the myth surrounding our group. We were seen as gangsters, as bad to the bone. That was now the new standard for members of CUC. You didn't just know how to fight, but you had to be prepared to die for the homies, to kill for the set, and do give a fuck about the 5.0. (Email conversation with Raymond, April 21, 2007)

In the aftermath of the stabbing, CUC was stripped down to a core of just a dozen members. Some young people left on their own in protest of the severity of the incident, while others were pressured into leaving by their families or the larger local Surinamese community.

Shortly after the incident, Raymond breaks off his intermediate vocational education, claiming that the stabbing represented a “*point of no return*” and he “*enjoyed the reputation*”. The focus of CUC was on “*doing dirt for the set*”:

We did with jacks, 211s (shop robbery), slanging of drugs, keeping the girls in the whore street safe, but our specialty, the thing we loved doing was jacking others criminals cuzz! No fuckin 5.0 (police), only gangsters one on one.... We already did jacks, but now we did it to the max. I remember hittin' up a jewelry in '92. We made about 100.000 guilders and bought a lot of straps with the money, including a M16 [assault rifle]. We were the first youngsters with that kinda firepower. (Email conversation with Raymond, May 2, 2007)

CUC made a real name for themselves on the streets of The Hague during the early 1990s. This was also the height of the Crips and Bloods phenomenon in the United States, which was now a real issue in the city of The Hague (HOF 1994). In a newspaper article, the local police of The Hague estimated that some 250 youngsters were active members in fifteen different “*jeugdbendes*,” the Dutch equivalent of gangs (Abels and Dwarkasing 1994). The groups carried American sounding names like Eight Tray Crips and East Side Crips (Van Gemert 2001).

In 1994, Raymond was interviewed for the weekly *Panorama* to comment on the disturbing new phenomenon of Crips and Bloods in the Netherlands. In the article, the then 24-year-old Raymond presented himself as the “*spokesman*” of the Crazy Undaground Crips, reiterating that the gang did not have a leader. Sitting on the top floor of the local Youth Center, Raymond told his story to a journalist, claiming the Crazy Undaground Crips were “*the oldest and most powerful gang of The Hague and the Netherlands*” (Viering 1994:37). The specific styles, symbols, and slang featured in the article, showed a remarkable resemblance to the Los Angeles Crips. Nicknames like LTC, MCB, Crazy C, AMG, Bullet, Bone, OG Rip, Raw, and Crenshaw – the latter, a direct reference to a neighborhood in Los Angeles, California – obscured the fact that this was a group of mainly Surinamese youngsters who migrated to the Netherlands with their parents.

The article in the weekly *Panorama* coincided with an interview for the late-evening current affairs show *Nova*. Raymond, as the spokesperson for CUC, saw the media attention as a way to promote CUC and further cultivate their reputation as a violent, dangerous gang. This marketing strategy seemed to pay off:

The article in *Panorama* drew the attention of the harder criminals on the streets, all the way into the *pen*, including the one who ordered the chopper. Through a mutual business partner, the ‘client’ and I met. With my mind on a large sum of *snaps*, I looked him up in the dreaded ‘Bunker’, a heavily guarded unit of the prison in Scheveningen. In my mind, I was think that a 187 (murder) might be the assignment, because at first I didn't know what the meeting would be about. We sat down in an unattended room to discuss business. It became the chopper proposal, and because of the good amount of money, it eventually became the chopper deal, you feel me? (Email conversation with Raymond, May 2, 2007)

Raymond was said to have received 100,000 guilders (approx. 55,000 US dollars) as an advance to the agreed upon million guilders. He took the proposal, to free a convict from jail, backed by members of CUC.



What followed was what Raymond described as one of the defining moments in Dutch gangster history. The idea was to hijack a helicopter to help a man escape from prison in Scheveningen. Although several members of CUC practiced extensively with ropes and ladders in the local Youth Centre, the attempt failed. Tarik, the CUC member who hijacked the helicopter, forced the pilot to land the helicopter in the nearby city of Zoetermeer and fled the scene (Van Stapele 2003:94). An insurance card in the bag Tarik left behind in the helicopter, eventually led to his arrest. *De Telegraaf*, a Dutch national newspaper, described the event as “*an ill-conceived attempt that never had any chance of succeeding*,” claiming that the prisoner “*did not have any luck in selecting his saviors, because they made one stupid mistake after the other*” (De Telegraaf, November 3, 1994). Four people were arrested and sentenced for hijacking the helicopter. Raymond was sentenced to four years in prison for masterminding the breakout. Tarik, who hijacked the aircraft, also received four years. Rick and his girlfriend eventually served three and two years, respectively.

In prison, Raymond “*promoted Crippin’ to the fullest*”. In addition to popularizing the Crips brand in the Netherlands, he also met several future members of the Dutch Crips while serving his sentence. With Raymond incarcerated, there were no members who could fulfil his leadership role and CUC became less active on the streets. However, CUC did not move “*for the streets to prison*” (Pyrooz, Decker, and Fleisher 2011). In general, Raymond tried to make the most out of his first prison experience:

In prison, I met a few prominent members, real killers. So with them as part of the set, my army could now only grow bigger and stronger. And that’s the attitude I brought from prison when I came out. Leader of the Crips, who spend at least 3 and a half years in prison with killers, jackers, and drug pushers. That acted as motivation for me, to even go harder. ... It was time for the next phase. I quickly earned my respect in prison. Not just because I solved every problem at once, or because of who I was there, but also for my dedication, my ideas, and views. I represented something that was happening in the streets amongst the youngsters. Most of the people in prison just tried to serve their time. Not me. I sat in prison, and learned constantly. I studied everything I needed to know for my next phase: professional. (Email conversation with Raymond, July 12, 2007)

Back in The Hague in 1997, Raymond reinvigorated CUC with his prison experiences and new network ties. With Raymond back in charge, they resumed their criminal activities, specializing in “*very violent jacks*” which resulted in several victims, also on the side of CUC.

### ***Rollin 200 Main Triad Neighborhood Crips (2003–2016)***

In addition to meeting a number of “*real gangstas*” in prison who Raymond recruited into the CUC, he came into contact with journalist Saul van Stapele who wrote various magazine articles about the Crips (Van Stapele 1998) and the aforementioned book *Crips.nl*. In the final chapter of the book, Van Stapele (2003:197–200) reflects upon how the core members of the Crips have all passed the age of thirty, but the gang was still active. In 2003, we see another symbolic name change: from CUC to Main Triad Crips:

Because so many people dropped out, I thought it was important to re-emphasize our unit. Only the strongest street soldiers were still standing, so I knew the set had to be reorganized. Also, I had built up a lot of respect in prison for the set and I used that respect to form Main Triad. The moment I got out of prison, I made sure that we moved full power ahead. Tightly organized, disciplined and with a clear goal: being able to support ourselves and our people as a set. In prison I learned that we were not really committed as CUC. Main Triad is now our future. (Raymond cited in Van Stapele 2003:198)

Main Triad Crips was a title reserved only for the most dedicated members of the group. ‘Main’ paid homage to the gang’s local surroundings, a direct reference to the long and busy road that borders the Forgotten Village. ‘Triad’ was inspired by Raymond reading, while in prison, about the close-knit nature and structure of the Chinese Triads.

Embedded in the subcultural repertoire of the Dutch Crips is the notion that gang membership is “*for life*” (Roks 2017a; Van Stapele 1998; Viering 1994). However, for the second time in the history of

the Dutch Crips, we see Raymond reference members leaving the gang. To understand this issue, the so-called “row-call” in the back of the book *Crips.nl* (Van Stapele 2003:205) is noteworthy: 79 names are annotated “Main Triad – Tray Luv”, while 19 names are followed by “R.I.P.” (Rest in Peace). In 2007, Raymond shared a new “row call” with the first author. This time, the “fallen soldiers” were referred to as “T.I.P.” (Triad in Peace), showing the year of their respective passing. The number of “dead homies” fell from 19 names in 2003 to 13 names in 2007. The active number of gang members also declined from 60 in 2003 to 50 in 2007; however, hinting at the intergenerational transition of gang membership, both Raymond’s and Rick’s young sons were included. Some of the names on the list were members who featured prominently in the book and earlier media accounts, but other names were new and not part of the 2003 “row-call”. The Main Triad Crips seemed to be reorganized, leaving only the most dedicated members who were already part of CUC or other Crip gangs in The Hague as part of the set. In 2007, when Raymond was asked how he envisioned the set for the near future, he responded: “*In my view, the older I get, the less I want it to grow*”.

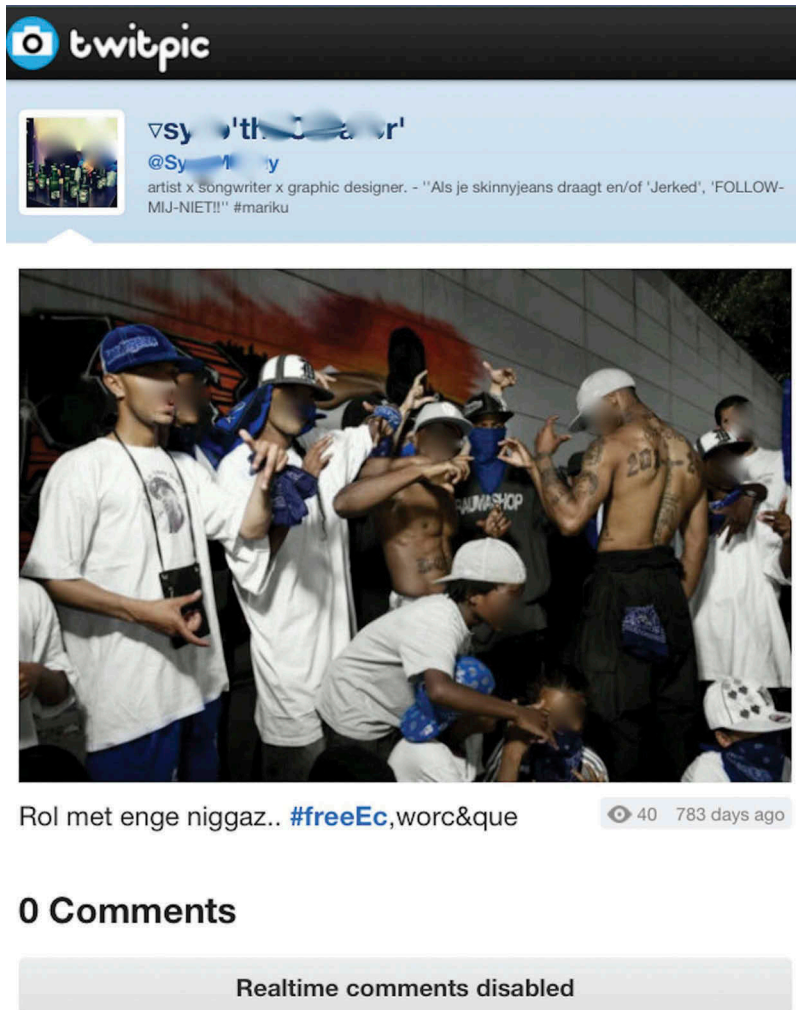
2008 was an important year in the history of the Dutch Crips. Two decades after they were first introduced to the culture of the Los Angeles Crips, and as part of the documentary *Strapped ‘N Strong* (Van der Valk 2009), several members of the Main Triad Crips visited South Central Los Angeles. By then, Raymond was already in contact with several gang members from the United States. The internet had facilitated contact between American and Dutch Crips, and gang members visiting the Netherlands as part of the entourage of famous Los Angeles rappers first played a role in establishing transnational contacts. The website Calohwagohmc.com has a brief section on the history of the Dutch Crips which cites correspondence with “*the most famous founder from his cell since the beginning of the nineties*”, Stanley “Tookie” Williams.

After visiting South Central, the Dutch Crips affiliating themselves with the Rollin 40s Neighborhood Crips, expanded their name from the Main Triad Crips to the Eastside Rollin 200 Main Triad Neighborhood Crips. This connection had a profound effect on their Dutch gang style. For example, the Forgotten Village had always been referred to as the “hood,” but it was renamed the “h200d.” By mixing the number “200” with “hood”, the Rollin 200 Crips followed the example of the Rollin 40 Crips from Los Angeles who use “h40d” to distinguish their hood from other hoods (Roks 2017b).

*Strapped ‘N Strong* was released in 2009. Organized around a series of personal – albeit thinly spun – biographical storylines, the film portrays an image of Dutch gang life that is violent and criminal. In the early minutes of *Strapped ‘N Strong*, individual gang members are introduced alongside their gang name and rap sheet. Scenes throughout the film show the movement of large quantities of cannabis, the preparation of cocaine for an upcoming transaction, bullets wiped for fingerprints, large sums of cash money, and a firearms cache. The documentary feels like an orchestrated criminal performance, Big Gang Theory in action (Felson 2006). For instance, in the last minutes of the documentary, we see the camera zooming in on two new gang members – 13 and 14 years old, respectively, the caption reads – with most of their faces covered by a blue rag, their preadolescent bodies straining under the weight of the fully automatic AK-47s they are holding. As the screen fades to black, however, a message appears stating the Crips are today pursuing non-criminal activities, namely the development of their own music and video production company; something that has been part of the narrative of the Dutch Crips from the very beginning (Roks and Staring 2008).

The documentary received some attention from crime control agents, in particular because of the frequent references to crime and violence. However, *Strapped ‘N Strong* also inspired young people from the city of The Hague, and even other parts of the Netherlands:

From there, I saw some movies online, like with the Crips in The Hague. So, I am a guy, I am kinda what you call a research guy. I asked around, made friends, so it took me about two months and then I got the location where they hang out. ... My friend told me he’d bring me there. First it was difficult. Uh Rick, you know Rick right? He didn’t want me in the hood, he say: yeah this dude looks like a bitch-nigga. I don’t want him in the hood. So I had to prove man. I had to prove a lot man. (Interview with Paul, November 6, 2013)



**Image 1.** Rollin 200 Crips circa 2010. Twitter account Fernando (August 12, 2013 (12:27)).

Historically, the Dutch Crips were a group of brothers, relatives, and friends from the Forgotten Village. Over the years, friends of friends joined the set, and prison became a place where new members were recruited. Kinship ties and selective environments helped the gang overcome any problems of adverse selection (see Densley 2012b, 2015). However, *Strapped 'N Strong* formed the basis of a huge expansion of the set, in part because the former rather strict membership policy was abandoned (see image 1). Looking back on this period, Marvin, someone who had been part of the set since the days of CUC, stated: “*That time was crazy. I was greeted by all kinds of youngsters, but I didn’t know who was who*”.

Around the start of the fieldwork in 2011, many of those Crips wannabes had already left the gang. The Dutch Crips, known as the Rollin 200 Crips for short at that time, consisted of some 50 active members, ranging in age from 15 to 40 years old, predominantly with a Surinamese background. Between 2011 and 2013, several of these members were incarcerated owing to their involvement in stabbings, assault of police officers, possession of illegal drugs, and weapon charges. Furthermore, the Rollin 200 Crips manufactured marijuana in residential housing, while several individual members sold various illegal narcotics on the street. However, many gang members

combined their criminal activities with school, a formal (often low paying) job, or they collected unemployment benefits to make ends meet.

The ethnographic research in this period put some of developments in the earlier phases of the evolution of the Dutch Crips into perspective. Being there “in the h200d” (Roks 2016), observing gang members on a daily basis and interviewing both active and former members, showed the anticipation of gang banging was trumped by a day-to-day reality that meant spending time hanging around the neighborhood, waiting, and doing nothing – a common fact of gang life (Klein and Maxson 2006). In addition, younger members of the Rollin 200 Crips received little financial compensation for the work they put in to the gang, which in the long run outweighed the benefits associated with being in the gang (Roks 2017a).

Toward the end of 2013, Rollin 200 Crips membership was declining rapidly. Most older members made sense of the sudden departure of their less embedded younger colleagues by claiming that gang life became “too real” when Sin, one of the members of the Rollin 200 Crips but also an aspiring member of the Dutch outlaw motorcycle gang (OMCG) Satudarah MC, was shot and killed in Amsterdam in August of 2012. While no former gang members interviewed for this study said that this violent episode was causal in their decision to disengage from the gang, studies show that violence associated with gang membership, particularly vicarious and direct victimization, can generate feelings of disillusionment and fatigue that push people out (Roman, Decker, and Pyrooz 2017). In a matter of 18 months, almost twenty members left the gang, stripping it down to a core of about a dozen members, most of whom had been claiming Crips since the late 1980s or early 1990s.

### ***Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC (2016-present)***

Rapid changes within the age composition of the Dutch Crips coincided with larger developments in Dutch street culture. For younger generations, gang identities based on stereotypes of ‘90s American gangs felt outdated and the phenomenon of the Dutch Crips as a street gang was starting to fade (Van Gemert, Roks, and Drogé 2016). In 2016, Raymond shared a new development: the merger with a local OMCG. Already from 2011 onwards, there were contacts between members of the Dutch Crips and (prominent) members of Dutch OMCG gangs Satudarah MC and No Surrender MC (Roks 2016). Back then, Raymond alluded to being asked to join these groups, but he declined. In 2016, however, the Dutch Crips merged with an OMCG called Trailer Trash to create the Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC.

This latest step in the transformation of the Dutch Crips raises several questions. Why did the Dutch Crips decide to strike up an alliance with a local OMCG? What had changed in comparison to a few years earlier? Because of a falling out between Raymond and the first author in 2016 (Roks 2017c), a first-hand account detailing the reasons behind the Dutch Crips evolving into an OMCG remain unclear. Secondary sources, most notably the online presence of Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC on Facebook, Instagram, and its own professional website, shed some light onto the circumstances leading to the merger with Trailer Trash MC. Part of the history of Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC is described on their website:

In early 2016, Raymond became friends with the founder of Trailer Trash. This friendship started because of a conflict inside and outside the motorcycle club, involving several mutual friends and family matters who were part of the motorcycle club. Raymond offered his help and soon got drawn into the MC world. The formation of Trailer Trash Main Triad MC was in full effect. (<http://calohwagohmc.com/history/>, accessed August 3, 2018)

Some of the founding fathers of the Dutch Crips, most notably Raymond, his brother Rick, and a nephew who was always peripherally embedded with the Crips, played a central role in resolving the abovementioned conflict. At first, Raymond’s presence led to in-fighting among OMCG members and Trailer Trash fell apart. Raymond, however, decided to continue the MC with the formation



of Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC – a hybrid street-outlaw motorcycle gang. On the website, both the colors of Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC and its symbolism are explained:

The colors blue and gold represent the Crips and the Travelers. There was a lot of debate about the creation and use of the colors. Because the color gold had been used by Trailer Trash for years, and the Rollin 40 NH Crips from LA, an alliance of Main Triad Rollin 200 NH Crips from The Hague, also used gold and blue, it became clear that Raymond would use these colors. The image on the mid patch image is a grim reaper, a design initially made by Raymond for gang tattoos for the Main Triad NHCs. (<http://calohwagohmc.com/history/>, visited on August 3, 2018)

Furthermore, the grim reaper on the three-piece patch symbolizes the Neighborhood Crip gang sign with his fingers ([Image 2](#)). Several photographs on the group's rather active Instagram account show



**Image 2.** Three-piece patch Caloh Wagoh Main Traid. Instagram Account Calohwagohmaintriadmc (May 20, 2017).



calohwagohmaintriadmc



 en 17 anderen vinden dit leuk  
calohwagohmaintriadmc Calo Sinto.

2 SEPTEMBER 2017 · VERTALING BEKIJKEN

**Image 3.** Calo Sinto. Instagram Account Calohwagohmaintriadmc (September 2, 2017)).

different OMCG members – your average biker (Blokland et al. 2017), but not your average gang member – throwing up hand signs traditionally associated with American gangs (Image 3).

The Dutch Crips were, for the most part, a local gang, limited to the h200d in The Hague, with an impermanent chapter in Amsterdam (Van Gemert, Roks, and Drogst 2016). However, in 2018 Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC had ten chapters in various cities throughout the Netherlands, and also chapters in Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Suriname. The Crips had solved their membership problem. But the transition to an OMCG also diversified the criminal activities that members of the Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC were allegedly engaged in. On June 28, 2018, Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* published an article debating whether “*Caloh Wagoh is working for the upper echelons of the organized crime groups in the Netherlands*”. Recently, members of Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC



were linked to three rather big cases: two murder in 2017 (in the cities of Breukelen and Spijkensisse) and an attack with a rocket launcher at the building housing the magazine *Panorama* in 2018.

On July 7, 2018, the “Presidente Mundial” of Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC gave an interview with the Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* to comment on the recent incidents. When Jeff, a former member of the Dutch Crips, was asked about members of Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC showing up in these high-profile criminal cases, he responded:

Don't jump to conclusions: they said that he shot that rocket at the *Panorama*, but that does not seem to be the case. They still have to prove that these guys did anything. If they did, they are responsible as individuals. We as a club no nothing about the assassination. The motor club cannot be held responsible for that. We have 200 members and two of them are suspects in a criminal case. That still means that 99% has nothing to do with it. If these two members are released, they will be welcomed with open arms. (*Algemeen Dagblad*, July 7, 2018).

When the reporter asked Jeff whether Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC was hired “to clean up the dirty work for other criminals”, he responded that it was not true, but also that the allegations have not been proven in court.

There are some additional noteworthy larger developments to put the transformation of the Dutch Crips into an OMCG in context. Amid aging and declining membership, merging with an OMCG provided the Dutch Crips with an opportunity to reinvent themselves. With American street gang identities like the Crips running out of style on the Dutch streets in the early 2010s, the Netherlands experienced a rapid expansion of Dutch OMCGs, both in the number of active OMCGs and the number of local chapters (Blokland et al. 2017; Landelijke Eenheid 2014). By blending street gang and OMCG styles and symbolism, the Dutch Crips established a new, fashionable, intimidating, and age-appropriate group identity. However, the seductive qualities of OMCG symbolism and values (e.g., Quinn and Forsyth 2009) have since attracted attention from media and government sources (see LIEC 2016b:9).

To elaborate, the transformation from gang to OMCG comes with increased law enforcement predation (Roks and Van Ruitenburg 2018:81). The rise of OMCGs in recent years has led the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice to prioritize them and institute more repressive crime control policies and practices against OMCGs (Van Ruitenburg 2016). Up to this point in the adaptation of the Dutch Crips, and in contrast to the gang talk in the United Kingdom (Hallsworth and Young 2008), both law enforcement agencies and Dutch government officials have framed and labelled the Crips phenomenon in a particular and seemingly less deviant manner. The term “youth” played an important part in this process: it highlighted the age-graded and transitory nature of the group activities, and simultaneously, expressed the somewhat innocent, childlike character of the phenomenon (Roks and Van Ruitenburg 2018:84). However, in its new form, the Crips are no longer referred to as a *jeugdbende*. Instead, Caloh Wagoh Main Triad MC is branded as an OMCG, a gang – a label that the group's core members have been using and aspiring to as Crips for years.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have charted the history and development of the Dutch Crips from its playful, recreational beginnings in the 1980s through criminal and entrepreneurial stages in the 1990s and early 2000s to its incarnation as an OMCG in the present day. Any case study is limited, of course, particularly when it relies heavily on one key “spokesman,” but the research has provided a detailed contextual analysis of the Crips gang, and opportunities to triangulate new and existing data, thus bringing us closer to an understanding of gang adaptation and evolution over time. This is important for a full appreciation of what gangs are and what their members do (Decker, Melde, and Pyrooz 2013), especially how the gang's key defining feature of “durability” is achieved (Klein and Maxson 2006).

The current study adds to a burgeoning literature on gangs in Europe and evidence of the global transmission of gang styles and symbols (e.g. Van Hellemont and Densley 2018). Further, the

findings lend international support to important group processes observed in prior gang studies, from Thrasher's (1927) seminal work on playgroups integrating through conflict, to Densley's (2014) research on actualization stages. This too is important because group process, particularly in respect to non-criminal behavior among gangs and gang members, has been described as a relatively large "omission from the inventory of gang research" (Decker, Melde, and Pyrooz 2013:18). We hope this contribution encourages more mixed-methods studies of gang processes over time.

While we must be cautious about over-generalizing the insights from our qualitative research, this study presents rare evidence of a street gang morphing into an OMCG, challenging conventional wisdom that street gangs and motorcycle gangs are separate entities (see Decker 2017). Street gangs tend to have younger members, shorter tenures in the group, and engage in a diversity of (typically non-purposive) crime (Decker, Melde, and Pyrooz 2013). Motorcycle gangs tend to have older members (at least old enough to ride a motorcycle), be more organized, and focused on a narrower range of (profit-driven) criminal offenses (Quinn 2001; Quinn and Koch 2003). However, what happens when the street gang members age-out of the street gang but still desire some form of (criminal) group identity? Does an OMCG offer a viable alternative? The current study suggests it can in some contexts, with the implication for future research that gangs and motorcycle clubs are at different ends of the age-gang curve (at the group level), or part of a continuum of criminal group formations.

Finally, the evolution of the Dutch Crips described in this paper relates to some ongoing larger developments in the Netherlands that contextualize the transformation of a street gang into an OMCG. For instance, the Dutch government has noted the existence of relationships between OMCGs and street gangs in the Netherlands (LIEC 2016a:2). In addition, the recent years marked the presence of various hybrid groups, like so called "brotherhoods, "look-a-like clubs", boxing clubs and support clubs (LIEC 2016b:5), that seem to combine the OMCG organizational structure with (parts of the) traditional OMCG symbolism (see Quinn and Forsyth 2009) and street gang styles and mannerisms (Roks, Blokland, and Weerman 2017:330–331). In Australia, a similar phenomenon is known as "Nike Bikies" (Lauchs 2017). This blurring of group boundaries facilitates the morphing from street gangs to OMCGs. Further facilitating this transition in the Dutch context is the fact that many Dutch OMCGs have members from diverse ethnic backgrounds, which is different from OMCGs in other countries, which are more ethnically homogeneous (i.e., comprised of working-class, Anglo males) and, in some cases, (symbolically) linked to white supremacist groups (Quinn and Forsyth 2009). Still, as illustrated by the fact that both gangs and OMCGs display symbols of membership, and share similar group processes, insights into gangs can arise from focusing on what makes them like other groups (see Densley and Peterson 2016), not just what makes them "qualitatively different" (Klein and Maxson 2006:11–12); and this is an important line for future research.

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