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Elana Zilberg. *Space of Detention: The Making of a Transnational Gang Crisis between Los Angeles and San Salvador.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 344 pp. $89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-4713-2; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-4730-9.

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In her deeply interesting work, *Space of Detention: The Making of a Transnational Gang Crisis between Los Angeles and San Salvador*, Elana Zilberg critically examines the oft-used category of analysis, âtransnationalism,â in relation to policing practices, gangs, and former gang members in the United States and El Salvador. Zilbergâs book aims to show the process of creating a transnational gang crisis. She argues that the much-talked-about crisis (and related violence) is a result of U.S. policing polices, rather than the cause of them. At the macro level, Zilberg examines how the United States has influenced both violence and policing strategies in El Salvador. On the local level, she considers how those policing and immigration policies have shaped the lives of young men targeted by the system. One of the best aspects of *Space of Detention* is that it clearly illuminates the ways in which the priorities of the nation-state have led to a particular type of transnationalism surrounding gangs. She highlights the unnatural and constructed character of these young menâs lives, and thus of the gangs, by examining how the United States deported El Salvadorian immigrants from Los Angeles, forcing them into living transnational lives, but also sharply regulating their movements in space.

Space of Detention is primarily about the period after the end of the El Salvadorian civil war, but briefly reaches back to the Cold War history of U.S. involvement in El Salvador. Then, the United States played a crucial role in El Salvadorâs civil war by ensuring the El Salvadorian government did not fall to the Left. Zilberg argues that the United States continued to shape politics and policing methods in El Salvador long after the civil war by exporting the war on crime and policing tactics and by deporting gang members in a manner that enmeshed youth gangs in Los Angeles and San Salvador in a transnational âsecurityscape.â These policing practices have created the idea of a transnational gang crisis where one did not exist before. Moreover, Zilberg argues that these strategies have actually increased rather than eradicated violence in both Los Angeles and San Salvador.

The first half of the book focuses on Los Angeles. Zilberg begins with the 1992 riots, examining media-constructed images of Latin Americans as looters who have contributed to the deterioration of the neighborhoods affected by the riots. She also analyzes the rebuilding process and its connection with new anti-gang policies. She argues that during the reconstruction process, agents like the Los Angeles Police Department used narratives of community preference to justify both the anti-gang policies and the specific methods of rebuilding. Yet,

Zilberg argues that their community samples were not representative of the masses of urban poor living in the area. Moreover, anti-gang measures, particularly zero-tolerance policing, made it extremely difficult for gang-peace activists to operate in the area to help remake the neighborhoods. This discussion is at the heart of her argument about the effect of zero-tolerance policies and the ways in which they do not necessarily help the local communities. LAPD tactics involved harassing activists, most of whom were former gang members themselves. She focuses on Homies Unidos and it is here that her rich ethnographic research comes out, as she spends much time detailing the stories of the organization and some individual participants. These stories clearly illustrate the constraints placed on the organization by the policing tactics and several stories highlight the human costs of such tactics.

The constraining effects of such policing tactics on peace activism become even more acute in the second half of the text, where Zilberg focuses on San Salvador. Here, she argues such zero-tolerance policing tactics have been exported to El Salvador and she examines the consequences of those policies and of new U.S. deportation practices. Like in Los Angeles, those who are involved in peace activism–whether gang members, former gang members, or not–found their activities extremely constrained as zero-tolerance policies made their very activities illegal. With the remilitarization of police forces, those constraints only became greater. In one example, she discusses a bakery that aimed to provide an employment option for youth outside of gangs. Yet, the bakery sometimes found itself unable to operate due to being the target of the police or soldiers–the bakery could not guarantee employees had no gang ties–despite official police approval of the project. Zilberg also argues that zero-tolerance policies and militarized policing have increased the violence of the gangs in San Salvador by driving gangs further underground and leading them to develop new tactics. That rise in violence has only further constrained the efforts of those attempting to promote reform and peace.

Space of Detention has many virtues. Zilbergâs ethnographic research is impressive and clearly demonstrates the harmful influence of policing tactics on gang peace activists and deported youth. These tactics, she asserts, cut off avenues for change and ruin lives; combined with the violent responses of active gangs, they contribute to a spiral of violence. In her ethnographic research, she repeatedly meets the same people in Los Angeles and San Salvador. She is thus able to show how for those young men who spent most of their lives in Los Angeles but were then deported to El Salvador because they were convicted of felonies, the experience of living in San Salvador could be extremely disorienting and even dangerous. The work shows just how impossible these combined factors make it for youth to leave gangs or a criminal past no matter the insignificance or geographic distance of their past crimes. Her research provides stories that bring to life her argument about how deportation and policing policies create transnational connections between gang members and increase the violence that police are supposedly aiming to stop.

The book is less effective, however, at exploring the development of the government policies that she discusses. Zilberg frames her work as âfrom the vantage point of the political history that constitutes the very ground that obsession works to obscure: namely, the ongoing participation of the United States in the production and reproduction of violence in El Salvadorâ (p. 2). Yet she does not fully explore the direct connections between policing tactics and the rise in gang violence or clearly explain the political/criminal connections she points to on the government level. Her main research is her impressive and thorough ethnographic work with gangs and gang-peace activists. Because her research focuses so heavily on these groups, the connections she draws between policing tactics in the United States and El Salvador are more assumed than demonstrated. The bookâs contribution, especially for political and international historians, is therefore much more illuminating of the experience of these youth than of broader, policy-level causal connections.

Gang members are rarely treated sympathetically in contemporary public discourse, making it easy to ignore their claims of injustice. Zilberg's book makes clear the importance of listening to those voices when assessing the influence and consequence of new policing and immigration polices in both the United States and El Salvador. The writing is jargon-heavy at times and thus suitable only for advanced undergraduates, but the book will doubtless be useful for experts and graduate students interested in gangs, policing, international relations, and transnational lives in these two areas.

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