There exists a long tradition of works drawing on life histories within the field of gang studies. Beginning with the pioneering volumes by Chicago sociologists Clifford Shaw (*The Jack-Roller*, 1930) and Edwin Sutherland (*The Professional Thief*, 1937), through to more recent works such Ralph Cintron’s *Angels’ Town* (1998), Marie-Hélène Bacqué and Lamence Madzou’s *J’étais un Chef de Gang* (2008), or Robert Gay’s *Bruno* (2015), they constitute an important sub-genre, moreover often centrally integrated in more ecumenical studies of gangs, including for example Frederic Thrasher’s foundational *The Gang* (1927), William Foote Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* (1943), or Mark Fleisher’s *Dead End Kids* (2000). Carles Feixa and César Andrade’s volume *El Rey: Diario de un Latin King* [The King: Diary of a Latin King] is a welcome and original addition to this corpus of work. It however offers us something different to most of its predecessors, as it is in many ways something of a hybrid composition, less a life history *per se*, but rather the transcription of a dozen conversations between Carles Feixa (sometimes accompanied by others) and César Gustavo Andrade Arteaga, aka “King Manaba” of the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (ALKQN). Taking place over an extended period of time, between 2005 and 2019, these conversations constitute an exemplification of what Feixa labelled in his 2018 book on *La Imaginación Autobiográfica* [The Autobiographical Imagination] a “dialogical imagination”.

The result is that *El Rey* is unlike most previous gangster life histories, insofar as rather than being curated into a single, seamlessly sequential narrative, the conversations presented in *El Rey* do not constitute a linear account, for example sometimes repeating or approaching the same issues from different perspectives, even if overall the twelve conversations are organised chronologically, and the book is further divided into three parts corresponding to the different statuses that a Latin King has to pass through in their search for enlightenment: the “Primitive” King, the “Conservative” King, and the “New” or “Reborn” King. The overarching focus of the book, however, is Cesar Andrade’s trajectory from growing up and becoming a youth gang member in a small town in Ecuador, to his being crowned “King Manaba” of the Latin Kings, his immigration to Spain and subsequent imprisonment for drug dealing, and finally his efforts, after having purged a 5-year sentence, to institutionally legalize the Latin Kings. Inserted between the conversations between Feixa and Andrade are testimonies from different individuals – fellow members of the Latin Kings, academics working on gangs, social workers in the USA, Ecuador, Spain, and Europe, even policemen – about their encounters with
“King Manaba”. Andrade has furthermore curated a selection of photographs, as well as a glossary, and has also written a self-reflexive epilogue that reflects both on his trajectory from the vantagepoint of the present, but also the very enterprise of putting the book together.

In this regard, one of the great originalities of the book is the way that it also chronicles the relationship between Feixa and Andrade. We can see it evolve over time, from an initial wariness (on both sides), through a growing mutual respect and affection, to a strong friendship and a more institutionalised collaboration through Andrade’s formal implication as a researcher in Feixa’s ERC-funded transgang project, which focuses on transnational gangs as agents of social mediation. This evolution from subject of study to colleague is as far as I know unique, but at the same time not necessarily surprising, particularly when we consider that Andrade’s life trajectory can in many ways be said to embody the focus of the transgang project (it is also interesting to note how Andrade’s discourse about himself, the Latin Kings, and gangs more generally changes over time, and becomes in many ways more academic!).

At the same time, El Rey offers us much more than just a detailed and temporally evolving depiction of one exceptional individual’s trajectory, but also a nuanced depiction of the Latin Kings as a transnational organisation. The multi-sited and longitudinal nature of the narrative further offers windows on to the broader dynamics of the Latin Kings in different places – Ecuador, Spain, and Catalonia – and at different times, something that is also quite unique, insofar as most previous studies of the Latin Kings have generally focused on specific city or national iterations of the group. El Rey provides details about the origin and spread of the Latin Kings across several different countries, and the way that the group combines elements of religion, identity, and particular patterns of behaviour. Of particular interest, perhaps, is the way the notion of “Nation” unfolds, allowing us to understand it both as an identity and belonging, on the one hand, and a practice and form of organisation, on the other, as well as a transnational ethos. We also see up close – and very personally – the changing relationship of the Latin Kings with local communities and the state in different places and at different times, as well as the tensions involved in their encounter with both “zero tolerance” and more inclusive policy responses to gangs and youth delinquency. More generally, El Rey also offers revealing insights into “bigger” themes such as Latin American emigration to Europe – both the reasons driving it as well as the reaction of host societies – the relationship between crime and criminalization, racism, and issues of labour and exploitation.

The way that the book is organised does leave us with a number of questions, however. Despite the dialogical nature of the conversations, Feixa’s
perspective on both Andrade and the Latin Kings is arguably somewhat underplayed. To a certain extent this is normal, since the volume is first and foremost about Andrade, but one of the main criticisms of life history approaches is their perspective bias. A strength of works such as Shaw’s *The Jack-Roller* or Bacqué and Madzou’s *J’étais un chef de gang* is the dual – and often contradictory – commentary on events they offer, of both of the individuals involved in their crafting – Shaw and “Stanley”, Bacqué and Madzou. Indeed, the value of writing reflexively about such an exchange emerges very clear in Paloma Gay y Blasco and Liria Hernández’s recent book *Writing Friendship* (2020), about their almost three decades of “reciprocal ethnography”, which like Feixa and Andrade involved Hernández first being the subject of Gay y Blasco’s research before becoming a friend, and eventually a collaborator. A more explicit self-reflexive commentary of this sort would also allow for explanations to various tantalising throwaway comments made in *El Rey*, including the fact that Andrade “baptised” Feixa as “King Book”, and what this meant for Feixa’s relationship with both “King Manaba” and the Latin Kings more generally. It would also allow for a more critical representation of certain elements, including the Latin Kings’ relationship with crime and delinquency, which is somewhat avoided, as well as their links with other “gangs” such as the Ñetas or the *Mara Salvatrucha*, which are presented in a somewhat a Manichean manner. Having said this, considering that *El Rey* is being conceived by Feixa and Andrade as the first volume in a trilogy about the Latin Kings, there will surely be future opportunities to engage more reflexively with such issues, and enhance this already superbly informative and very welcome contribution.

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