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# angels, bandidos, outlaws, and pagans: the evolution of organized crime among the big four 1% motorcycle clubs

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This paper outlines the evolution of the Big Four one percent motorcycle clubs—Hell’s Angels, Bandidos, Outlaws, and Pagans—from near-groups to well-organized criminal confederations. The insights of criminological theory unify a variety of journalistic and scientific sources into a holistic picture of the development of these organizations. The interaction of members’ psychological needs with group dynamics and mainstream social forces lead to periods of expansion as core values shift to emphasize dominance over rivals. The resulting interclub tensions encourage the creation of organized criminal enterprises but also attract police attention. Internecine rivalries were eventually subordinated to these enterprises as their profit potential was recognized and intergroup warfare took its toll. Core biker values were reasserted as certain aspects of club operation became less countercultural in order to assure the future of the subculture and its basic components.

## INTRODUCTION

Motorcycling associations form a broad spectrum ranging from conventional, American Motorcycle Association (A.M.A.)

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sponsored groups to “one percenters” who do not fit in any setting except those provided by their outlaw clubs and saloon society milieu. The A.M.A. promoted the idea that outlaw clubs were typical of only one-percent of the American motorcycling population after the alleged biker takeover of Hollister, CA, in 1947. Clubs like the Hell’s Angels quickly adopted this disclaimer as a mark of distinction. Use of the term then spread to other motorcycle clubs (MCs.) that were fearless enough to defend it and alienated enough to exalt in it (Barger 2000:41, Thompson 1966:13,18; Wolf 1991:7).

One percenters, however, are not a homogeneous group: “radicals” are deeply involved in criminal enterprise while “conservatives” seek only the freedom of the lifestyle and the camaraderie of their “brothers” (Wolf 1991:102–103,272). These two types often coexist within the same organization. In some groups there is a friendly balance between these biker ideologies that may alternate over time. In many clubs, however, one faction or the other has complete hegemony and makes acceptance of their perspective a condition of membership. These groups are consistently radical or conservative over long periods of time. Hegemonic radicalism at critical turning points in the development of a club is a significant determinant of its eventual commitment to organized crime (Wolf 7–8,23,266–270).

The Hell’s Angels, Bandidos, Outlaws, and Pagans are the largest, and most consistently radical of all 1% clubs. Within the subculture they are known as the “Big Four” clubs.<sup>1</sup> They are also deeply involved in both organized crime and internecine violence (Barger 2000:37, Rosenberg 1980; Wolf 1991:268, 272).

Abadinsky defines organized crime groups as: (1) nonideological; (2) hierarchical; (3) with a limited or exclusive membership; (4) pertuitous; (5) possessing a specialized division of labor; (6) monopolistic; and (7) governed by rules and regulations (Abadinsky 1989:5). Abadinsky classifies biker gangs as a form of organized crime and devotes a chapter to them in his text on the subject (1989:24–40). While bikers do have a sort of ideology, they meet all the other criteria of this definition of organized crime.

The idea that some 1% M.C.s are heavily involved in organized crime has been widely accepted by law enforcement for decades (Barger 2000:214–252; Clark 1981; Clark, & O’Neill

<sup>1</sup> The Hell’s Angels no longer use the term “one percenter” (Barger 2000:41) but are certainly well described by it.

1981 1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1981d; Clawson 1983; Davis 1982; Domey 1996; Draffen 1998; Frisman 1981; Hell's Angels 1979; Hell's Angels shift gears 1973; Linder 1981; O'Brien 1997; Royal Canadian Mounted Police (R.C.M.P.) 1980,1987; Wood 1979). One Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (A.T.F.) agent (in Clawson, 1983:4) referred to the Big Four clubs as "priority A.T.F. investigation targets" describing them as "the largest—and best armed—criminal organizations in the nation." He asserted that they specialized in narcotics, prostitution, and murder while a former Bandido linked topless bars to that club's finances (Clawson 1983:4). More recently, the U.S. Attorney General described the Hell's Angels as one of the most notorious crime cartels in the nation (O'Brien 1997). Canadian authorities have linked biker gangs to the drug trade, prostitution, smuggling, auto theft, extortion, and other rackets (Nickerson 1998).

Federal and state organized crime statutes have long been used against these groups. The Racketeer-Influenced and Corrupt Organization (R.I.C.O.) Act prosecutions of the Hell's Angels have been unsuccessful (Barger 2000:214–221; Cooney 1981) but prosecutors were more successful in proving allegations against the Outlaws (M.C. Outlaw gang, 1983, pp. 9-A). Fourteen Florida members of the Outlaws M.C. were convicted of R.I.C.O. violations in 1994 and 1995. More recently, federal task force efforts have resulted in indictments against members of the Hell's Angels (O'Brien 1997), Pagans (Draffen 1998), and the Outlaws (Quintanilla and Murphy 1997).<sup>2</sup> Convictions are hard to obtain under R.I.C.O. and the propriety of its interpretation by prosecutors in these cases is beyond the scope of this paper. Use of the law is nonetheless criminologically significant because prior analyses have avoided the organized crime aspects of biker gangs.

## PAST INQUIRIES INTO THE 1% SUBCULTURE

Most social science examinations of 1% ers have focused on small, relatively conservative groups (Montgomery 1976,1977; Watson 1980,1982; Wolf 1991). Thompson (1966) and Reynolds (1987) described the multifaceted nature of a Big Four club, and Thompson (1966) and Wolf (1991) have tried to place 1% motorcycle clubs

<sup>2</sup> The Outlaws and Bandidos M.Cs. are focused on their European war with the Hell's Angels, described later in this paper, and have not attracted significant police attention in recent years in the U.S. The recent cancer death of the Bandidos' president may also contribute to their inactivity as might their partial merger with the Outlaws.

in a holistic context. Reynolds (1967) was a semi-retired club member with all the attendant prejudices and loyalties when he wrote his book in 1967. Thompson's (1966) work is dated in many respects, but historically valuable and Wolf's (1991) data are pertinent mainly to a conservative Canadian club.

Barger (2000), a well-known leader of the Hell's Angels, recently published his autobiography. He sheds some light on the inner machinations of that group but also vehemently denies the group's involvement in organized crime. He maintains that groups of members sometimes engage in conspiracies that do not involve the club as an organization. Simultaneously, however, he demonstrates that being part of a Big Four club dominates one's life to the exclusion of virtually all other concerns. The contradiction between the two themes is never reconciled.

Other writers have focused more narrowly on topics such as the values of members (Watson 1980, 1982), their sexual behavior (Quinn 1987) or their treatment of women (Hopper and Moore 1990). Despite their limited focus of their work, these writers have revealed much about the norms and dynamics of these clubs. Danner and Silverman's (1986) analysis of the backgrounds of imprisoned bikers is an exception to the usual ethnographic focus on one or a few clubs in a single area. They used official records and survey responses to describe the backgrounds of bikers imprisoned in Virginia. While the more detailed, scientific efforts have focused largely on conservative clubs, journalists have stressed the activities of Big Four clubs and similarly radical groups. The most significant contributors to this literature are listed in Table 1.

Thompson stressed the fact that bikers are "very respectful of power" and "intensely aware of belonging, of being able to depend on each other" (1966:101). They conceive of themselves as modern outlaws (Barger 2000:7) and their identities are closely tied to both their bikes and their clubs (Wolf 1991:31–32,126). Much of their behavior and attitudes can be traced to their desire to uphold this image (Barger 2000:9, 21–22, 39, 254–255). Both Montgomery (1976,1977) and Watson (1980,1982) use status frustration to explain this fascination with power. Reynolds (1967), a former officer of the San Francisco Hell's Angels and Barger (2000) a national leader from the Oakland, California chapter, implicitly support this view: Bikers are outsiders both by choice and by socialization. Their response to this marginalization mixes extremes of retreatism, rebellion, and innovation in combinations

**TABLE 1** Scientific and Other Detailed Examinations of 1% Motorcycle Clubs

Writer/perspective	Year	Club(s) described	Area(s) of activity
Thompson (Journalist)	1966	Hell's Angels	San Francisco, CA
Reynolds (Chapter officer)	1967	Hell's Angels	San Francisco, CA
Montgomery (Sociologist/participant-observer)	1976, 1977	Road Gypsies	Toronto, Canada
Watson (Sociologist/participant-observer)	1980, 1982	Two small clubs from Tennessee, one regional group from North Carolina and two large national club	Mid-South & Southeast U.S.
Danner & Silverman (Sociologist/ archival and survey data)	1986	Bikers imprisoned in Virginia	Southeast U.S.
Quinn (Sociologist/participant-observer)	1987	Pagans	Southern & Eastern U.S.
Hopper & Moore (Sociologists)	1983, 1993	Local-regional clubs	Mid-South/Gulf Coast
Wolf (Anthropologist/participant-observer)	1991	Rebels	Central & Western Canada
Barger (Club officer)	2000	Hell's Angels	Oakland, CA/ U.S. generally

that vary across groups, regions, and time periods. Thompson cogently describes 1%ers as:

urban outlaws with a rural ethic and a new, improvised style of self-preservation. Their image of themselves derives mainly from celluloid . . . [movies and television] have taught them most of what they know about the society they live in (1966:332).

Wolf (1991) concurs that bikers are products of technological urban society who adhere to their own version of a wild west ethic and are driven by a sense of alienation and anomie (see also, Barger 2000:21). These writers believe that social trends that threaten lower class white men drive the growth of the biker subculture. In

the 1960s, such anomic trends consisted of the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam protests (e.g., Barger 2000:119–124). More recently they have resulted from various threats to the economic viability of factory workers. Club membership helps resolve the stress created by such threats by creating an alternative elite in which bikers can attain supremacy (Wolf 1991:340–341).

Like Barger (2000) and Reynolds (1967), Wolf (1991) insists that individual bikers see themselves as loners and define their organizations as mutual protection associations of like-minded isolates. Their bonds to one another and their clubs are intensified by the rejection of the mainstream society as well as by constant, intense interaction. Their loyalty to one another is almost as intense as the distrust of the outside world that guides their impression management (Barger 2000:39; Wolf 1991:37).

The extremes to which bikers go to establish and maintain their public image as dangerous, unpredictable, and outrageous is a product of status frustration that also functions as a method of exercising power. It provides them with a marketable commodity that allows them to obtain both legal (e.g., concert security) and illegal (e.g., debt collector for loan sharks) employment (Wolf 1991:266). They also enjoy “freaking out the citizens”<sup>3</sup> (Berger, 2000:74, 157; Wolf, 1991:116, 120; Thompson, 1966:149, 256) whenever feasible. Reynolds (1967) proudly described himself and his “brothers” as “the most illiterate, degenerate bastards that ever walked the face of the earth” (1967:97). Watson more cogently claims that bikers deliberately present themselves as bitter and dangerous outlaws with nothing to lose. However, this image is more commodity than reality. Many 1%ers have families, most hold normal jobs, and virtually all have much to lose despite their episodic recklessness (Barger 2000:33; Thompson 1966:73–75; Wolf 1991:257–265).

The primacy of brotherhood, the joys of motorcycling, and respect for mechanical skills are the central values of the subculture. Barger devotes a full chapter of his autobiography (2000:49–65) to his experiences and opinions of various aspects of the construction and modification of Harley-Davidson motorcycles over the last 40 years. Watson lists five characteristics that define a righteous biker:

<sup>3</sup> Anyone who is not a 1% biker, or affiliated with a club (e.g., ol’ lady, friend of the club), is defined as a “citizen.” The result is a stratified world view consisting of righteous bikers, their associates, and citizens.

1. Owns and rides a bike (Harley-Davidson)
2. Has an appreciation for, and skill with, the mechanical aspects of bikes
3. Has a lifestyle in the biker subculture and treats other righteous bikers as bro's
4. Fits the general cultural model of masculine in outlook, behavior, and sexual orientation
5. Is free in the sense of 'outrageous' nonconformity to worldly values while conforming to [this] lifestyle (Watson 1982:334).

Wolf's lengthier and more recent analysis confirms the priority of these values within the subculture (1991:82). "Righteous," in biker society, is the functional equivalent of "outrageous" in conventional society. The concept also includes nearly unconditional loyalty to Harley-Davidson motorcycles, one's club, and one's "brothers."

Interaction as well as image helps to support the norm of outrageousness that is so closely associated with this subculture. Montgomery (1977) recognized that, like the street gangs studied by Yablonski (1973), M.Cs. tend to exaggerate or caricature individual quirks that would be tempered or extinguished by a conventional lifestyle. Exacerbation of the traits that originally discouraged participation in mainstream society increases the intensity of the club experience. This, in turn, strengthens the group's role as the exclusive reference group for its members (Barger 2000:109). Thus 1% clubs can demand unflinching conformity to their own peculiar norms (Barger 2000:71; Wolf 1991:272), which are derived from their core values along with lower class focal concerns (Watson 1980).

Individual clubs select, and are selected by, members on the basis of a modal style or orientation. During and after the proving period in which membership is earned ("striking" or "prospecting"), intense and prolonged social learning processes within the club further magnify these traits (Wolf 1991:97). Each club thus has, to some extent, its own unique persona (Wolf 1991:60). For example, the Hell's Angels are famous for their elitism (e.g., Barger 2000:141, 146, 226–227, 254), the Outlaws for their exuberance, and the Pagans for their calculating coldness. This persona, along with status and strategic concerns, is critical when an entire small club is "chartered" by a Big Four club, a common method of achieving rapid territorial expansion (Barger 2000:35–36, 103).

Watson (1982) describes the 1% subculture as a secularized sect made up of clubs that meet their members' psychic needs in a manner analogous to a faith community. Yinger (1970) notes that sect membership relieves status deprivation by allowing members to substitute alternative forms of achievement for conventional success. This almost inevitably occurs in a context of isolation from the mainstream and intense intragroup interaction. These dynamics create a level of emotional intensity among club members that facilitates both social learning (Ben-Ze'ez 1996) and further behavioral extremes (Quinn 1987).

The extremity of these traits among radical-led clubs experiencing territorial growth, over a long period of time, is a necessary prerequisite to the evolution of organized crime. This same extremity also makes such clubs almost impenetrable by outside observers. Therefore, ethnographers have largely neglected the development of major illegal economic enterprises among these groups. The Rebels described by Wolf (1991), as well as the clubs examined by Montgomery (1976, 1977) and Watson (1980, 1982), can be characterized as predominantly conservative and somewhat retreatist. Their goals are hedonism, camaraderie, and self-preservation. They minimize contact with mainstream society, have little desire to expand and see club membership as almost entirely social-recreational. Their rebellion is limited to maintenance of their public image and marginal criminality such as minor drug deals, barroom brawls, and traffic violations. Economic innovation is rare and plays only a secondary role in the dynamics of these clubs when it does occur.

The generalizability of earlier analyses is limited by these factors and, for Wolf (1991) and Montgomery (1976, 1977), their Canadian context. Some of Watson's (1980, 1982) observations focus on what is clearly a Big Four M.C. but are limited to large public events where criminal activity (and references to it) would be minimal. While these analyses provide excellent descriptions of the 1%er their lifestyle and values, they avoid the serious criminality with which many 1% clubs are associated.

Most bikers have learned through personal or vicarious experience to conduct their business in a way that helps protect the club from direct prosecution. Barger maintains that while individual members often create and operate criminal enterprises of varying sizes, the club is not involved beyond its role in bringing them together and providing the locus of their identity (Barger 2000:214). Indeed many of the operations referred to here may loosely fit that

description, making their appropriateness for R.I.C.O.-type prosecutions questionable. The complicity of members at the chapter level, however, and the sporadic aiding and abetting of the club, seems to be undeniable given the intensity of personal involvement at this level.

## **ORGANIZED CRIME IN BIG FOUR MOTORCYCLE CLUBS**

Organized crime, be it at the chapter or club level, is a central source of income for some of these groups and has played a significant role in the development of the subculture (Clark 1981; Clawson 1983; Domey 1996; Frisman 1981; O'Brien 1997). The emergence of the Big Four clubs is at least partially attributable to the combination of retreatism and rebellion occurring in the socially isolated 1% subculture that creates a sense of entitlement and criminal pride (Walters 1990; Yochelson and Samenow 1976). However, these traits can motivate deep criminal involvements or act as a rationale to avoid them depending on interpersonal and regional contingencies.

One critical contingency is the degree to which club leadership alternates between periods of growth and retrenchment, guided respectively by radical and conservative interpretations of core biker values. Conservative bikers are reluctant to employ economic innovations within the organization while radicals focus much time and effort on them. Thus, it is the mode of adaptation to strain chosen by an individual biker that determines his orientation. Radicalism tends to increase in popularity during anomic periods, which are also associated with subcultural growth. This is largely due to the intensity of the interclub rivalries engendered by such widespread expansion. Prolongation of such periods within a club or region creates demands on the membership that encourage organized crime.

It is difficult to set a single precise time line for these changes because they proceeded at varying rates within different segments of different clubs. Such a discussion must account for both regional and club-specific variations because bikers' opportunity structures are regional in scope. Nor is this development steady within a single club or region; groups will often progress toward greater organization for a period of months or years and then regress, wholly or partly, for an equal period. Nonetheless, a few generalities can be noted at the regional and club level. The Hells' Angels moved the most rapidly with clearly organized operations

coming to light by the mid-1970s (Hell's Angels shift gear 1973; Newsweek 1975). In the northeast and midwest, Pagan and Outlaw enmeshment in sophisticated enterprises began a few years later and became evident to the authorities by the early 1980s (Clawson 1983; Frisman 1981; Kerre and Vogt 1981; Linder 1981; Organized crime 1980). Developments in the southeast lagged a year or two behind those in the rest of the nation (Miami News 1983).

This pattern of trends being initiated on the west coast and being adopted in the industrial midwest and northeast before finally spilling over to the south is generally typical of the subculture. For example, the Angels set the tone for the subculture from their San Francisco bay area base in the 1950s. This tone, in modified form, was quickly adopted by the then-Chicago-based Outlaws<sup>4</sup> and the Pagans in the northeast. The Texas-based Bandidos did not emerge until 1966 (Barger 2000:37; Alabama Mississippi Chapter of the Bandidos MCs.).

A plethora of local near group MCs. emerged during the Anomic post World War II era as returning veterans used their severance pay to buy motorcycles and party in taverns (Thompson 1966:80–82, 89–91). The anomie induced by the end of the war was crucial to the formation of the subculture; the relative affluence of the postwar years was even more vital to shaping its structure, image, and norms (Barger 2000:29–38). Simon and Gagnon (1976) have pointed out that widespread prosperity undermines social integration and regulation by making the symbols of success so accessible that the need to conform to obtain them is devalued. Such an anomie of affluence was both economic and cultural in terms of the warm reception given returning World War II veterans. This was a predisposing factor in the formation of the subculture. Thrill-seeking attracted some returning veterans to choose a saloon society lifestyle centered around motorcycles. Positive views of military experiences, and the intense camaraderie they bred, also made such a lifestyle attractive (Barger 2000:22–23). In some cases, combat roles became master statuses for veterans who could not tolerate military discipline but linked their self-image to the small-group camaraderie and risk-taking of military service. Conventional activities offered no acceptable alternatives and these men were threatened with a loss of identity, companionship, and security as military involvement ceased.

<sup>4</sup> The Outlaws recently relocated their national headquarters from Chicago to Detroit.

The Hell's Angels emerged as the hegemonic power in California by the mid-1960s era chronicled by Thompson (1966), Reynolds (1967), and von Hoffman (1968). Their hegemony seems best attributed to (1) the extremism of their tactics and solidarity (Barger 2000:35–37, 141, 146; Reynolds 1967; Thompson 1966), and (2) their deliberate and prolonged efforts to build a well-integrated, international scale organization (Barger 2000:103, 254; Clawson 1983; Elfman 1982; Mellgren 1996; Thompson 1966). The intensity of these early struggles cemented the Angels into a cohesive group in precisely the manner described by group conflict theory (Vold 1980).

Fueled by media glorification of the early Hell's Angels (whose chapters were autonomous and sometimes even unknown to one another [Barger 2000:27–31]) and the anomie of affluence, many other 1% MCs. arose throughout the continent. The Pagans, Grim Reapers, Devil's Disciples, and Satan's Slaves originated in the 1950s but their memberships expanded most rapidly between 1965 and 1975 (Barger 2000:35). This anomic era of civil rights activity and anti-military sentiments posed major status threats to young, working class whites. Demographically, this is precisely the modal background of 1% club members (Danner and Silverman 1986; Thompson 1966:196; Wolf 1991:30). Rampant drug use and sexual liberation added to the anomie and contributed to the emerging norms of the biker subculture (von Hoffman 1968).

### **Club Expansion**

Returning veterans provided a large pool of new recruits driven by threats to their social status and material welfare. The concept of anomie is well suited to explaining the effects of macrosocial trends on the subculture. Status frustration was addressed through rebellion and retreatism as intergroup rivalries and the subculture's dominance within saloon society encouraged a sense of uniqueness and criminal pride. The social isolation of club life and the intense intragroup interaction it facilitates further deepened the sense of rejection by the mainstream while providing an alternative that assured success to club members. Combat-oriented norms, along with the ethos of criminal pride, personal entitlement, and self-aggrandizement, led to a tribal outlook and paramilitary tactics among the 1% M.Cs.

This subcultural formation process contributed to the popular image of the biker and created a set of core values that still guide the activities of members and the development of the subculture

(Barger 2000:30–39). The boundaries of the subculture and its component groups were loosely established during this initial era as well. The development of extraordinary loyalty to and pride in one's club ameliorated interchapter rivalry and fueled interclub rivalries. These sentiments were initially a reaction formation to mainstream rejection but were later used to promote interclub solidarity and end the near-group phase of development (Barger 2000:147–150; Thompson 1966:57–62). While extreme loyalty and pride compensated individuals' for their status frustration it also generated intense antagonism between clubs. Personal and ideological differences between the members of various clubs led to the distinctive outlooks and behaviors of modern clubs. Interclub conflicts were usually manifested as territorial disputes and remain one of the most volatile forces within the subculture (Wolf 1991:307).

Unlike street gangs, bikers generally define territory in terms of entire cities, metropolitan areas, or states (Hahn 1973; Wolf 1991:314–315). The close proximity of clubs of roughly equivalent stature leads to suspicion, and a cycle of victimization and vengeance seeking almost inevitably develops. When macrosocial forces encourage expansion of club membership, as they did in the 1965–1975 period, these sorts of tensions create a siege mentality among 1%ers. The intensity of this mentality keeps emotions and solidarity high which deepens intraclub learning and bonding processes while intensifying interclub suspicion and violence.

This intensity provided the impetus to use the clubs' geographically dispersed chapters and contacts to build organized crime networks and helped assure the secrecy of these operations. The felt need to stockpile weapons and fortify properties initially motivated organized crime involvements. Drug trafficking, extortion, theft, and other rackets spread beyond the Angels, and territory came to be equated with economic profits as well as power. The status of a club, its ability to influence the biker subculture and saloon society milieu, and the amount of practical resources it can muster are all contingent on the ability to claim and hold territory (Wolf 1991:315). Local and regional responses to status contingencies were critical in determining which clubs would take radical or conservative positions and thus gravitate toward or away from organized criminality.

A reciprocal relationship between conflict and club expansion quickly developed into a vicious cycle in some radical-led clubs as the desire to fund these wars encouraged the extension of

membership. Men who would normally have been peripheral to the club, were often able to coast into membership if they could help it gain an advantage over an immediate rival. Simultaneously, club organizational networks were employed to facilitate profit-making activities, many of which were criminal (Quinn 1987). While many clubs relaxed their membership standards during the 1965–1975 period, the overcrowding of the 1% scene by less than righteous bikers was always attributed to rival clubs, never to one's own organization (Wolf 1991:111). One Pagan described a rival club to this writer, saying "They'll take any mother fucker that can hold up a Harley and swing a chain." The desire to dominate rivals temporarily decreased the power of the subculture's core values among many clubs while increasing their reliance on organized criminal activities. As the extremes of violence used in internecine warfare escalated (Quinn 1987), however, these activities could no longer be concealed by the milieu's code of silence (e.g., Barger 2000:183, 210–214, 247; Cycle gang 1975:4). It was only at this point that law enforcement agencies finally began to take these clubs seriously.

Exemplary of the link between organized criminality and violence is the bitter war between the Hell's Angels and Bandidos that is currently plaguing Scandinavia. The Bandidos have very close ties with the Outlaws and are determined to break Angel hegemony in Northwestern Europe. This situation is exemplary of the expansionist mode of thought. These hostilities have involved military ordinance as well as automatic weapons: At one point the Angels launched a grenade at a jail holding an enemy leader (Ibrahim 1997). Other attacks have occurred at the Copenhagen airport and on the streets of a resort town as well as at clubhouses and homes (Andersson 1997; Ibrahim 1997; Moseley 1997).

While such extremes of violent bravado are typical of expansionist radicalism (Quinn 1987), the development of organized crime is quite evident to Scandinavian authorities. "We don't call them bikers," said a spokesman for Stockholm County Police. "We call them criminal gangs. As far as Scandinavia goes, we believe the bikes are only a camouflage" (Andersson 1997:7). The manner in which the war is being fought is only slightly more extreme than what occurred in the U.S. in the 1970s. This would seem to reflect the growing sophistication of these groups and the increased ease with which military ordinance can be obtained by their organizations. Similar hostilities now plague the Quebec area (Nickerson 1998).

## Retrenchment

The biker leaders who inspired and led the interclub wars of the 1970s were selected for their toughness and reckless "class." This helped individual clubs to establish effective reputations within their own local saloon societies. As these leaders were driven to ever more outrageous exhibitions of these focal concerns, many were eliminated by police, rival clubs, other saloon society actors, or their own recklessness (Quinn 1987; Thompson 1966:82–86, 148, 220). By the late 1970s local police and federal investigations began to expose the involvement of many 1% M.Cs. in drug trafficking, theft, extortion, and prostitution rings (Clark and O'Neill 1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1981d; Clawson 1983; Frisman 1981; Hell's Angels shift gear 1973; Linder 1981; Wood 1979).

The demise of these club and chapter leaders often brought biker purists into power. They had survived the era of expansion by relying on smartness instead of toughness and immediately sought to rid their groups of what they felt to be less than righteous bikers. This new cohort of leaders feared the subculture's demise through the disintegration of subcultural values, mutual annihilation, and police efforts. Thus, immediate paramilitary supremacy was often devalued in favor of quietude and retreatism in order to restore the subculture's core values and facilitate criminal enterprises. This leadership was more utilitarian than that of the previous era and generally more conciliatory than its predecessors toward both rival clubs and the mainstream culture (Beisert 1988). Some clubs did not undergo changes in role occupants but had leaders who changed with the demands of the era. When entire clubs shifted to such neoconservatism, subcultural idealism and retreatism became the hallmarks of the clubs' persona. Where radicals retained power, as in the Big Four clubs, retrenchment was motivated by the desire to increase profits from criminal enterprises and retain subcultural status by adhering to subcultural values.

Subcultural retrenchment began in the mid to late 1970s but the exact time varies by both region and club. As before, retrenchment began on the west coast and spread to the east, north, central, and northeastern areas before affecting southeastern clubs. The late 1970s also saw the demise of many radical but small 1% M.Cs. Some of their members joined larger groups, and others left the subculture entirely. Large clubs also began to limit the number of chapters they supported during this period in order to avoid too great geographic dispersion. Their members either

transferred to more sustainable chapters, joined other clubs, or retired from club life. Only clubs with organized criminal activities could offer economic support to members. It was primarily in these groups that some members relocated to maintain their affiliation with the club as it consolidated its territory. Some clubs collapsed under the weight of internecine violence and police investigation.

As a phase of biker history, retrenchment was characterized by (1) a return to the subculture's core values, albeit in a form modified by the acquisition of new wealth and greater organization; and (2) a reduction in the size and spread of the various groups (e.g., chapters, clubs) that make up the subculture. This was observed as a single phase in the development of the Big Four clubs. However, in both conceptual and operational terms, the components of purification and consolidation are separate processes. For example, the Angels never really had to purify their clubs because of their elitist membership standards. They did, however, allow some consolidation of their territorial claims by giving up efforts to gain a foothold in the midsouth (Wolf 1991:312).

The retrenchment phase saw two pivotal developments occur in the Big Four clubs: a shift in the relative import of smartness toward primacy over concern with toughness; and a greater emphasis on finances leading to spiraling involvement in illegal enterprises. This last development led to an increasingly specialized, and therefore stratified, organizational structure to coordinate social, paramilitary, and economic operations within these clubs. Surviving small clubs with radical inclinations increasingly came to operate as components of larger clubs' criminal operations but some retained smaller scale enterprises of their own. Outrageous actions and impulsive violence remained a part of the 1%er's behavioral repertoire (Barger 2000:87). However, more care was taken to help the club and subculture avoid publicity because of organized crime involvements (Quinn 1987).

As the scale of their drug, theft, prostitution, and other enterprises grew throughout the 1970s, peace became more valuable to the Big Four clubs than the constant publicity which had fueled their growth and inspired these organized criminal operations. In fact, several of the Big Four clubs have made deliberate efforts to present a positive image to the mainstream society (Harper 1982; Marlowe 1983) and even publicly contributed to charity (Bread 1985). This trend was facilitated by the firmness with which the outlaw biker's public image had been established in the public mind

by various mass media (Barger 2000:67, 150–155). Nonetheless, Yinger points out that countercultures must eventually gravitate to a more subcultural position vis-à-vis the mainstream or risk extinction. This shift is usually accompanied by a change from expressive to instrumental values (Yinger 1982:43–46). The trend is only a superficial one that mainly facilitates the efforts of club attorneys (e.g., Barger 2000:157).

During the latter stages of expansion and throughout their retrenchment, Big Four club leaders were increasingly selected for their ability to operate efficiently on the fringes of conventional society (e.g., traditional organized crime, marginally legitimate businessmen). This bifurcation of role demands within the subculture have remained relatively covert for two reasons. First and foremost, the image of the illiterate and degenerate gang member is a very useful one for this subculture. It reduces the frequency of violence within saloon society because of the widespread, but only partially true, assumption that to affront one gang member is to risk the permanent ire of all of his “brothers.” (“All on one, One on all” expresses this idea in Angel doctrine while (Thompson 1966:96) “God forgives, Outlaws don’t” is the comparable motto of their chief rivals.) Wolf, however, affirms this writer’s observation that such solidarity is more the ideal than the reality (1991:94–95). Second, club operations usually make a good income for the club or chapter. In many cases legitimate businesses are also controlled, if not owned, by the club or its members (Do the Bandidos 1981).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, many clubs have legally incorporated which makes them especially fearful of R.I.C.O. Act prosecutions (Gorney 1979; Wood 1979).

Each club has an inner circle of members who are much more aware of the extent and details of the club’s criminal operations and profits than rank and file members. Some of these club officials feel less pressure to hold a job or hustle as do their “brothers”<sup>6</sup> (Do the Bandidos 1981). Rank and filers are generally on the hustle constantly—meaning that they work sporadically, sponsor or pressure their female associates into prostitution, steal and sell

<sup>5</sup> The Hell’s Angels ([www.bigredmachine.com](http://www.bigredmachine.com) or [www.hellsangelsmcworld.com](http://www.hellsangelsmcworld.com)), Bandidos ([www.vivaredandgold.com](http://www.vivaredandgold.com)) and Outlaws ([www.crossedpistons.com](http://www.crossedpistons.com) or [www.outlawsmc.com](http://www.outlawsmc.com)) have websites that display t-shirts and other merchandise with their logo on it and provide their perspective on various issues.

<sup>6</sup> Despite his adamant denials of organized criminal involvement, Barger’s own narratives provide evidence that he may well be an example of such a biker (2000:63, 81, 90, 129, 175, 180, 183, 193, 210–211).

motorcycles, and so forth. Increasingly, however, such hustles can be at least coordinated with, if not directly subsidized by, group criminal endeavors.

Rank and file members of Big Four clubs do not seem to object to the profiteering of their leaders whose lives are wholly devoted to club business. Core members may conceal the magnitude of club profits from rank and filers but adhere to their own consensus on their division. These core members are also the bikers most constantly and seriously in danger of arrest by police or assassination by rivals. Much of the skimmed money is redistributed as loans or gifts, or indirectly through donations to the club or chapter (e.g., alcohol or drugs, a new or refurbished pick-me-up truck, a pool table for the clubhouse). The loyalty of rank and filers to their officers is thus maintained through ties of gratitude and indebtedness (Sahlins 1963).

Rank and filers expect their club's elite to display superiority in their behavior and lifestyle. Their material success is symbolic of a club's inherent superiority (Wolf 1991:169). Because biker elites are entirely composed of diehard subcultural purists, their expression of material wealth does not diverge from subcultural values. Indeed, their holdings often function as group rather than personal property. Thus, subcultural values remain dominant, interpersonal relations are supported, and the organization's quest for power and status are advanced.

## CONCLUSION

It should not be inferred that illegal business operations are the central function of any 1% M.C. Devotion to Harley-Davidson motorcycles and a powerful sense of camaraderie are the central motivations to subcultural participation for all currently active club bikers. Indeed, most 1% clubs are led by conservatives who avoid serious criminality and seek only to be left alone to ride and party with their "brothers." However, radicals lead the Big Four clubs and many of their members are deeply involved in drugs, prostitution, racketeering, stolen goods, extortion, and violence. It is the development of these organizations that has been the focus of this sketch of the subculture's evolution.

Anomic conditions that especially affected lower middle class white men gave birth to the outlaw motorcycle subculture. These clubs provide an outlet for the status frustration of their members that is facilitated by their isolation from the mainstream. The forces

that lead men to join these groups are exacerbated by the intensity of their internal dynamics and the social isolation of the subculture. Because of their intense pride, loyalty, and bravado, these clubs are fiercely competitive and intergroup conflicts are inevitable. The intensity of these conflicts is extreme enough to create a siege mentality that further deepens members' isolation from extra-club sources. Isolation intensifies bonding processes while creating a world view and emotional tone that encourage violence.

Radical leaders of large clubs became seriously involved in organized crime to finance interclub warfare as the subculture expanded. These activities, along with the violence of interclub conflict, increased legal scrutiny which ultimately led to retrenchment in conservative biker norms. However, the profits and power provided by the criminal activity became a goal unto themselves within some clubs. In part this transition also marks the counterculture's tendency to drift toward accommodation with the mainstream. This is most clearly seen in the seeking of positive publicity for 1% clubs and the subculture as a whole. It can also be discerned in the lower profile kept by most modern 1% clubs in the U.S. today.

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