

Gangs and Development in El Salvador

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Abstract

As crime and violence are increasingly recognized as barriers to development, the global gang phenomenon is also becoming a concern. El Salvador boasts one of the most extreme examples of gang violence in the world. Gangs represent a significant portion of youth perpetuating crime and violence on a large scale thereby inhibiting economic, political, and human development. Due to the myriad of ways gangs barricade development, research is imperative for improving endeavours to cease their continuity. In this thesis, I will examine efforts of prevention, suppression and integration employed to address gangs. I will show that the gangs in El Salvador are a product of underdevelopment. Drawing from the experiences of the youth, we will see that the gangs provide basic needs for young people when unable to attain conventional success. Thus, in order to address gangs, development must be addressed.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The interrelation of youth and development requires study as young people can act as both protagonist and antagonist for change. The presence of youth gangs¹ affects individual, community, regional, and national development. Crime and violence that they perpetuate contributes to citizen insecurity. Fear used by gangs to control people undermines an individual's freedom of movement, which limits the potential to build human capital through spatial restrictions (Winton, 2005, 180). Industry and economy also suffer with a lack of human labour power, or a drain on business resources for security (Goglio, 2004, 861), while government capacity is impaired, as funding is allocated to crime control and similar programs (Zilberg, 2011, 179). Thus, negative effects of youth gangs illustrate the impacts that young people can have on development when acting counter-productively. Drawing from the assumption that youth occupy an important space as the impetus for social change, the disruptive force of youth delinquency can take root in society and influence future norms and behaviours in a

¹The definition of what constitutes a gang continues to be a contested debate within academic studies. Current descriptions of gangs are much too broad. Gangs are understood as groups of people with a common identity (usually founded in resistance to dominant norms), that use certain forms of specialized communication with which to identify one another, are permanent social organizations, have a sense of turf, are involved in criminal behaviour, and organize in conflict with other groups (Thrasher, 1927, 57). The gangs in question for this thesis exhibit a number of the above mentioned traits. They have common identities, different identifiable characteristics, are territorial, organize in conflict against other groups, and perpetuate crime and violence for personal gain.

negative manner. Thus, directing attention to efforts that address youth gangs can help to ensure these behaviours will not become detriment to society as a whole.

The behaviour of young people involved in gangs is structured in response to larger social, political, cultural, and economic forces. These reactions must be understood in context. They are indicative of barriers that exist for youth in personal development, social and political engagement, and economic participation. The choice to join a gang is informed by these larger structures. Thus, the existence of gangs in a certain area represents a number of young people whose personal situations of marginalisation and impoverishment have impeded their life course. Of concern to this thesis is the groups of young people who react to opportunity structures in this manner. Due to the high rates of violence related to gangs, members often die young. While alive, they are managed by rules of war, inhibiting their movements and activities. Opportunities for youth involved are thus severely limited and governed by fear and insecurity. In light of the negative impacts that gangs have on both youth involved and broader society, addressing them is imperative to improve security and potential for society.

Hagedorn (2006) has identified that the structures responsible for the proliferation of gangs exist on a global scale. The conditions that generate gangs, such as poverty and urbanization, are common across the globe and between gangs. As a result, he argues that there is a need to study gangs in a global context to truly comprehend the worldwide phenomenon. Recent processes of urbanization have accelerated the conditions necessary for gangs to grow and thrive. Neoliberal policy, characterized by the retreat of the state, free markets, privatization, and deregulation, has resulted in social welfare spending cutbacks, thereby weakening the institutions that support citizens in need. These

processes have occurred worldwide, generating similar conditions of poverty and social exclusion on a global scale in urban settings unable to absorb excess labour. As a result, the underground economy has grown to thrive. The urban division of space, separating the wealthy from the poor, is often based on ethnic divides, and impoverished neighbourhoods, and slums have become host to violence and crime (Hagedorn, 2006, 184-186). The ethnic component has also emphasized an ethnic element to crime. Marginalized groups of people have emerged living in close proximity to privileged and often then create resistance identities, defined in a manner that affords that group power. These processes of identity creation have helped to spawn a global phenomenon of gangs.

Compounded for young people along with global neoliberal processes is neglect. The stage of development between childhood and adulthood is critical in the formation of a person; it is when personal identity is created by finding interests, abilities, and skills. Economic development in the 21st century has altered this process. Adulthood is sometimes defined in terms of economic independence, which is currently more difficult to obtain without an education. The labour sector is becoming more strongly dependent on technology, requiring higher education levels, thereby severely limiting the eligible candidates to those who are able to afford to pay for it (Bynner, 2005, 382). Although it has been recognized that neoliberal processes can barricade personal development through policies that further exclude many young people from higher education and engagement in civil society, it is difficult to address these phenomena. Inequality is a universal product of processes of globalization; it exists in different forms in different locales as a result of culture, politics, and social life (Hagedorn, 2007, 310).

Consequently, youth responses to environmental surroundings vary and thus must be understood as contextual and not uniform in nature.

Gangs that emerge in these situations of inequality take on numerous forms. They can differ from groups of youth in middle income neighbourhoods committing petty crime; groups of youth who come together to achieve a specific purpose, such as politically motivated youth; and large-scale organizations that perpetuate crime for personal gain. The central feature of each facet of the gang is that they are groups of the socially excluded (Hagedorn, 2007, 21). The exact behaviours they perpetuate are related to their sense of purpose and context (Akers and Sellers, 2009, 187). Due to this contextual character, theories surrounding youth gangs are not fully comprehensive, and require more attention in academic fields.

My research question is concerned with the effects of state responses to gangs. Using Cloward and Ohlin's theory of differential opportunity to understand the context of gangs, in what ways have gang control strategies been successful or unsuccessful in El Salvador? Responses to gangs are intended to reduce the impacts of violence on individuals and groups. Although the impacts of gangs on communities and societies as a whole is important, to best comprehend the manner in which they must be addressed is to better understand the needs of the youth involved. Therefore, I am concerned with the ways young people experience responses to gangs in El Salvador. Youth interpretation of their experiences will dictate their actions and the ways that they affect development and are in turn affected by it. It is these interpretations that will exhibit the ways that state responses affect gang members. My thesis considers methods employed between the years of 1992 and 2012 for the purpose of gang control and, using data collected through

research, critiques these measures and argues that security of Salvadorans requires the restoration human rights, including those of delinquent young people posing the risk to others.

El Salvador is an interesting location to study the gang phenomenon and its impacts on development because their effects on the citizenry are strongly pronounced. The activities of these street gangs are socially disruptive and contribute to widespread insecurity on national, public, and individual levels (Boraz and Bruneau, 2006, 38). The sheer volume of members in the country exhibits the need to recognize the forces that are pushing youth to engage in counterproductive behaviour. As a country that is continuing to develop, and struggling in many ways, the study of gangs in El Salvador is imperative for the purposes of increasing opportunities for both youth and others. Finding new, dynamic ways of reducing violence and engagement in gang activities can provide a lesson to similar situations across the globe, perhaps before they become as serious as what has existed in El Salvador.

The proliferation of gangs in El Salvador exhibits that the needs of young people in marginal communities are not being met. To stop the factors that contribute to gang membership, it is thus important to understand them. As a result it becomes imperative to conduct studies focused on identifying specific needs of youth in El Salvador and then addressing them. An abundance of literature exists to explain the reasons gangs exist on a global scale, which applies to the gangs in El Salvador in terms of the effects of globalization. However, I intend to consider the study on a much smaller scale. I am concerned with the lives that young people lead in their respective communities in El Salvador.

Literature regarding gangs in El Salvador is largely ethnographical. It provides a strong basis for understanding the reasons gangs exist, their structure and activities. However, often it has failed to include youth opinion in many projects concerning factors that contribute to risky behaviours. A common issue in development is that people become subjects rather than participants with active agency in projects concerning their lives. For this purpose, my research aims to engage youth on topics concerning their own experiences. I hope to better understand the needs of youth in risky situations in El Salvador in order to inform preventive programming in providing for those needs. My contribution to this body of literature is thus gathering the opinions and experiences of gang youth in El Salvador.

When analyzing the data collected from young people, I will take into consideration the ways that underdevelopment in El Salvador has conditioned their lives. Although the connection between crime and underdevelopment is clear, there is not macro theory that allows their study in strict terms of underdevelopment. Thus, I aim to show the ways that an inability to obtain education, or join the legal labour force, and a high exposure to violence (indicators of underdevelopment) must be addressed. In doing so, it will become clear that development is a significant issue in the proliferation of gangs and that the connection between crime and development should be further pursued.

Objectives

Main goal. My primary purpose for embarking on this research project is to identify areas of development that do not meet the needs of gang members in El Salvador. I intend to collect youth opinions concerning the barriers they face to conventional success in order to better understand how address those barriers. Although gangs exist on a global

scale as a result of neoliberal structures, small-scale studies can help to change situations for some disenfranchised people across the globe. My focus of study is gang members in El Salvador.

Sub-objectives. I intend to discuss different theories that are of relevance to this study, specifically an exploration of theories of delinquency. My objective with this pursuit is to begin this thesis with a comprehensive review of the existent knowledge base for the reader. A theoretical lens through which to understand delinquent behaviour can assist the study in understanding the ways that delinquent behaviour comes to exist. This chapter will indicate the red flags in individuals' lives that lead to criminal engagement. I will further discuss responses to gangs. Responses are built off of the reasons why gangs begin in the first place. My objective with the literature review is to identify the theory to study gangs in El Salvador.

Specific to understanding gangs in El Salvador is the historical context from which young people and communities have come. The legacy of violence from state oppression, civil war and continued human rights abuses sets the stage for the emergence of gangs in a specific form. The hyper violent behaviour of gangs in El Salvador is informed by the history of the country. Complex learning processes have occurred and the normalization of violent behaviour has been acculturated. I will identify the factors that have given rise to the gangs including the civil war, poverty, and the history of oppression.

Following the historical context, I will discuss state responses to gangs and how these methods have served to bolster gang practices and norms in the country. I will show

that state responses have ignored the needs of youth and contributed to the normalization of violence. State efforts have concentrated on suppression tactics. These methods have also served to encourage community responses in El Salvador to gangs. The narrative purported by these methods conceptualizes gang violence as chaotic and as malicious. Failing to comprehend the reasons gangs have emerged in this form and how their norms and values have come to be. I will make the connection between state responses and the general understanding of gangs. Thereby forming the specific atmosphere in which gangs exist in El Salvador.

I do not intend to argue that any of these situational characteristics of El Salvador are completely unique. However, I will show that the combination of historical context, continued use of suppression and the culture of fear have served to cultivate the gang phenomenon. These characteristics of underdevelopment are not solely present in El Salvador. Therefore, comprehending gangs in this context can help to inform other situations that experience similar contexts.

Research Design

The purpose of my thesis is to examine state efforts against gangs in El Salvador in order to better inform projects in the country and similar endeavours across the globe. For this study, I used a number of different research methods in order to understand the complexities of this situation. The case of the gangs in El Salvador, as it has been a significant development issue, requires that one understand the social effects of responses to gangs to predict individual behaviour. This can help to direct responses to gang violence and crime.

In my secondary research I accumulated resources regarding theories about delinquency and responses to delinquency. I was able to gather a strong base of literature regarding the social causes of this type of behaviour, as well as possible responses to it. This part of my research was extremely important because it provided me with a lens through which I could study the gang phenomenon in El Salvador.

Prior to my departure to conduct primary research I carried out secondary research for the purpose of understanding the historical context of gangs in El Salvador. I accumulated my resources through document searches on the Saint Mary's University library website. Much of my resources from this document database were academic works were ethnographical. They explained the structure and activities of gangs in El Salvador, helping me to understand daily practices and activities. Many academic sources were also concerned with analyzing state responses to gangs in El Salvador from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Quantitative analytic work provided me violent crime statistics. Due to the nature of the topic statistics related to gangs can often be manipulated for different purposes. Many academic sources had already triangulated data, saving me the time it would take to do so. The qualitative analytic work supplied a significant base for understanding the different arguments that exist concerning the gangs. Again, ideas about them vary significantly. Conducting secondary research gave me a strong understanding of the different approaches to gangs in El Salvador.

Primary Research Methods Used

Primary research was conducted in three departments in El Salvador due to the ubiquity of gang violence; San Salvador, Ahuachapán, and Santa Ana. Some locations

were chosen based on safety concerns, or for the purpose of maintaining anonymity. Research was conducted in El Salvador in April and May of 2012. Addressing gangs is a complex issue as it involves a number of different actors and is both sensitive and dangerous. As a result, I approached the research topic from the naturalistic method, which focuses on how people perceive their worlds (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, 3). I recognize that my biases are in part informed by the fact that I am a young, white woman, from Ontario, Canada, with two parents who are both educated at a PhD level. As a result, understanding the intricacies of the realities of young, Salvadoran boys in El Salvador who grow up in significantly different circumstances is not a natural process for me. As such, in my research I attempted to understand the circumstances of these boys through the methods chosen. I understand that the reality that young men face in El Salvador is strikingly different than my own. To this purpose, I structured my interview and focus group questions in a way that allowed me to better understand the way that these young men understand their worlds as part of an illicit and violent street organization, and in a marginalised economic and social position.

The naturalistic approach, thus, allowed me to better understand how these young people interpret their own experiences to help me to explore the circumstances of the choices they have made. There is a reality to the issue of gangs in El Salvador, however it is difficult to measure and understood differently by different actors due to discourses and ambiguous moral codes. My approach to researching this problem aimed to understand how different actors perceived the reality of the situation through discussing their specific experiences and thoughts in relation to it (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, 3). Gangs provide an alternative space for their participants from dominant society, with

different rules, norms, and values. While the state functions according to policy and law, that differs from those norms of the gang. As such, I intended to better understand the reasons that all actors choose to behave the way that they do and in reaction to one another in an attempt to analyze the process and make recommendations for other efforts.

Each person views their lives and reality through a personal lens conditioned by their own experiences, knowledge and expectations (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, 3).

Although the gang phenomenon can be measured to a certain degree in quantitative data - such as crime rates - there are numerous aspects that are subject to individual choice and behaviour and thus require qualitative research. I attempted to give a voice to the gang members, as they can very often be silenced in discussions regarding their own lives. Media, police, the justice system, and social oppression sideline young men. I attempted to offer a platform upon which they could speak openly regarding their experiences and knowledge in order to better inform approaches designed for them.

Interviews. I chose to use interviews as a tool for understanding this issue as they allowed me to question people's choices for a better understanding of the experiences and logic used to make them. The qualitative interview provides the opportunity to gain detailed information related to experience, personal knowledge, and stories (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, 3). Semi-structured interviews were used as they allow the researcher to enter the conversation with a series of questions aimed at understanding the interviewees perspective on the specific and different perceptions of the realities of gang members. They allow the participants to contribute personal experiences and knowledge, which is imperative to improve my understanding of their choices and reactions to specific events and circumstances.

The interview questions were concentrated on four core questions of relevance.

(1) Violence in El Salvador - What types of violence have you experienced, witnessed, or been exposed to? (2) Involvement in prevention, intervention, deterrence - In what ways are you involved in prevention, intervention or deterrence initiatives? (3) Efforts against gangs and effects - What impacts have efforts to address gang violence in El Salvador have you seen? (4) Best practices - What do you recommend should happen as the state and citizenry go forward?

In total, five interviews were conducted. Two were conducted with anonymous experts in the field, one with a representative from the PNC, one with a program administrator of both violence prevention and intervention programs, and the final one with a participant in a street-level intervention program. The program administrator was chosen for my thesis research because he is an advocate for the rights of the disenfranchised in El Salvador. He also had over 12 years experience working with gang members at the time of the interview. The program participant chosen for the interview had been involved in the administrator's programs for a number of years and was willing to speak about his experiences, both prior to and during engagement. Although he agreed to let me use his name in my thesis, I opted to provide him with an alias, due to recent violent action against program participants. He will herein be referred to as Victor. These two interviews provided me with the perspective of reality from either side of a tertiary program offered to gang members.

The anonymous experts were referred to me by other experts in the field. Due to their position as experts in the field, they wished to remain anonymous to avoid any type of negative repercussions. For my records, they were identified by the department where

the interviews were held, protecting the identity of the individual. Taking the necessary precautions to allow anonymity increased their comfort level in participation and permitted them to speak freely regarding the gang phenomenon.

At the time of my research, the police force was revamping initiatives directed to enforcing the law. The PNC official interview participant was directed to me after I submitted an official request for an interview at the police headquarters with the head of the anti-gang initiatives. I waited a month and a half after submitting my request for an interview, and weekly return visits to PNC headquarters to remind them, for this interview. The PNC official participant was not the official with whom I had requested an interview. However, she was well-versed in PNC participation and training in violence prevention programs, she was not able, however, to discuss extensively any changes that the PNC were making in applying the law to gangs.

This interview I conducted was especially helpful in broadening my understanding of the approaches to gangs in El Salvador. Gaining the perspective of the state through a one-on-one interview allowed me the opportunity to question the logic that drives state actions. This interview was particularly important because it gave me a much clearer idea of how police are trained to deal with young people. The tools with which state officials are provided strongly influences the ways that they are able to engage and address youth gang crime.

While my interview with a PNC official was helpful because I was able to hear the perspective of the state, my remaining four interviews were very helpful as they provided critiques of state actions. Three of them were from an official capacity in administration or other aspects that provided the interviewees with strong knowledge of

the different approaches to gangs and their direct effects on young people. The interview with the gang member was also very enlightening because he was an active member during the implementation of the *Mano Dura* and *Super Mano Dura*. He provided an interesting perspective on the ways that these policies directly impacted his life. The range of participants in my interviews was imperative in forming a well-rounded idea of the justification for specific initiatives, the ways that they are received, and the direct ways that they affect individuals' lives.

Focus groups. Focus groups consist of a group of people representative of a certain population of interest. As a group, they are able to answer questions regarding the topic in question. At the end of the focus group, they are expected to come to some sort of conclusion based on their experiences (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, 30). This is done with multiple groups and the same questions to find similarities and differences within the representative population. Focus groups are useful for youth in sensitive situations because bringing youth together in a group provides a more comfortable atmosphere for discussing controversial topics within a peer group. As a researcher, conducting these focus groups required me to understand my biases and set those aside in order to provide a safe space where young people are able to discuss sensitive topics.

All participants of the focus groups were incarcerated youth between the ages of 16 and 24. One group was conducted in the women's prison *Centro Femenino* in Ilopango, San Salvador. The five female participants were not all gang members, but came from similar situations as those that condition the existence of gangs - impoverished, marginal communities. There is no prison dedicated to female gang members. Four focus groups of between three and five participants were conducted in *El*

Espino, a juvenile prison for boys serving sentences for gang-related crime. This prison caters to members of *Barrio 18*. The participants hailed from five different departments: San Salvador, La Libertad, Santa Ana, Sonsonate, and La Paz. There was a mixture of rural and urban youth.

Barrio 18 has divided within its gang to form two separate sections, warring against each other. Since this split occurred, the prisons built to house its members had to be divided to avoid violence. Two of the groups were from Sector 2, which housed boys who were either ostracized by their gang for not following rules, or who had made the personal decision to leave. These focus groups thus consisted of inactive gang members. While the remaining two groups were from Sector 3, who identified as active gang members intending to return to the gang upon leaving prison. The juxtaposition between the two mindsets of participants was very helpful in identifying certain factors that motivate personal change.

The focus groups were imperative to my research. They allowed me to discuss youths' personal experiences with gangs and gain a window of sight into their choices and motivations. Questions were concerned with their experiences with violence, gangs, the police, and preventive and tertiary programming. The youth, when in a group, were comfortable opening up and telling their stories. When one person would share an experience, others would also speak of similar ones and compare knowledge and incidents.

At the end of the discussion, youth were asked to design their ideal intervention program. They were asked to identify a personal goal coupled with a practice or method of achieving said goal, and the reason why they think that goal is important. This activity

opened up discussions related to the purpose of the gang in each of their lives in relation to more conventional means of success. It also required the youth to consider personal development and how the gang may or may not be involved in generating that.

Due to the nature of the topic, trust is an important factor in these interviews. My research was dependent on quickly establishing trust with the participants. This required a number of actions on my part. First, I ensured to be introduced to the group by somebody who they worked with on a personal level and trusted. This helped to show that I had gained the trust of somebody with whom they had good rapport. I also took the time to meet many of them before the focus groups began in order to tell them what I intended to do when I returned and that I was looking for participants. This provided ample time to consider their willingness to participate.

I also strongly respected the need for anonymity of the participants. The focus groups allow me to interview a number of gang members and accumulate experiences, however it is difficult to identify any individual from the information taken. Many of the stories were similar and I do not use any identifiable data in my thesis. The boys also opted to sign consent forms using their gang aliases, largely unidentifiable by law enforcement, and often repeated or replicated from gang to gang, making it difficult to identify which “Shy Boy” signed the form.

The focus groups were a great addition to my research. They gave me the opportunity to speak directly with over 20 young gang members in El Salvador. The boys and girls were able to tell me about their lives and their perspectives on them. In some cases discussions were concerned with the justification of their behaviours, while others were concerned with making amends to society. The plethora of examples and stories and

opinions that came forth in the focus groups have given me a much greater understanding of the complexities of being a young person in a marginalised community in El Salvador.

Sensitivity and Safety. This particular topic is extremely sensitive². It is a controversial subject that is strongly rooted in the use of violence. As a result, research could have negative consequences including, but not limited to, violence, shame, feelings of guilt, or possibly judicial repercussions. Consequently, conducting research involving human beings required sensitivity and vigilance on my part, to ensure that the atmosphere in which interviews or focus groups were conducted was safe, for both the participants and myself.

The gangs are an illegal organization and criminal behaviour is ubiquitous in participants. Revealing information regarding criminal involvement can be a dangerous process for both researcher and participant. As a result, I ensured to explain to all participants that I was not interviewing in order to discover past criminal behaviour and that I was not interested in discussing crimes committed unless the participants felt that it was important to bring it up. In some cases, youth offered their experiences related to crimes freely³. However, for both my safety and to avoid any threat of judicial repercussions, I began each interview by explaining that their criminal behaviour was not what I was interested in hearing and that it was not of concern to my research.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic and the history of violence in El Salvador to opposition of the state, many people are reticent to participating and speaking openly

² As defined by Renzetti and Lee (1993), this topic is controversial and could place either the participants or myself in danger (Renzetti and Lee, 1993, 4-5).

³ On some of these occasions I was under the impression that they were telling me their stories as way to test me, to shock me into offering a response.

about their opinions on the subject. As such, the anonymity of two participants susceptible to responses from the state was a concern. The location of the interview became imperative, then, in order to ensure that the participants were not identified by anybody as contributing to my research project. This meant traveling to different departments in the country and holding interviews in crowded public places in order to blend in. The anonymity of the participants was very beneficial for my research as it allowed them to speak freely and openly about their thoughts, experiences, and opinions on state responses to gangs.

As a native English speaker, the language barrier also played a role in my interviews. I did not have a translator and recorded my interviews. Generally, I did not have an issue communicating with individual participants. However, the language used by the program participant, a gang member, was difficult for me to understand. His vocabulary consisted largely of street slang. For my own comprehension, I had to ask a number of clarifying questions. He was very patient and understanding of my barrier and answered my questions fully.

A major limitation in the focus groups was time. Many of the participants wished to share their stories and be heard for them. Since the purpose of involving youth in this research was to make sure their voices were heard, I had trouble moving the conversation along at times. As a result, the activity at the end of two of the focus groups was limited, as we had already gone well into their scheduled lunch time. However, their eagerness to share showed that we had built a space in which they felt comfortable to do so.

The time limitation also required that I build trust very quickly. I found that by making myself vulnerable in certain ways, the youth were more likely to open up to me.

The language barrier helped in this regard. Similar to my interview with the gang member involved in street-level tertiary programming, slang was dominant in the language used by incarcerated youth. I had to ask many clarification questions. Although this slowed down the conversational process, it helped to build a relationship between the youth and I, in that we were all able to laugh at silly mistakes that I had made and break the ice. Many of the young people were also interested in me, and what had brought me to that prison to talk to them, how had their lives become a part of mine? So I allowed them to ask me questions and I answered them in a way that would show them that I cared deeply about their situations and wished to write about them because of that. However, I refrained from answering any personal questions that were not directly related to my involvement in studying gangs in El Salvador.

Furthermore, although interviewers are usually expected to be neutral parties, I chose not to show neutrality in the focus groups, but rather to sympathize with gang members sharing their stories with me. I needed to build trust with them immediately, as with some participants I only had one hour. Due to the sensitivity of the subjects, it was important that they did not feel judged or scrutinized by me. I began my interviews with a disclaimer that I was not interested in bad choices that they had made, only the circumstances that led them to do so. However, in discussing their circumstances, many stories of victimization cropped up and I thought it was very important to show that I disapprove of the circumstances. This helped to relax many of the participants and show them that they did not need to defend themselves to me, and that I was not in any way an enemy.

Building trust was not only a factor with gang members, however; I was denied interviews by two separate actors. They did not give reasons for the denial. This could possibly be attributed to a lack of trust. At the time of interviews, the police had been active in entering street-level prevention and intervention programming; administrators may have been wary of the fall out for speaking about this contentious situation. Despite the fact that I was put in touch with these interview candidates via a trustworthy intermediary neither responded to my request for interviews.

Finally, because this issue is strongly rooted in violence, my safety was a concern. There have been incidents in the past when people researching this very topic have been publicly killed⁴. Due to the nature of the topic, the feasibility of talking to gang youth increased significantly through approaching them in prisons. Prisons offered a controlled environment in which to talk to young, possibly volatile people. There was a very small chance of the youth being armed or acting violently. Further, there were guards positioned near to my focus groups, ensuring that assistance would be near in case of an emergency. It should be noted, though, that I never felt anything but comfortable with the young people. They were open, honest, and respectful.

Scope and Limitations

My research is limited to the study of gangs in El Salvador. Differential opportunity structure, although it is not sufficient in explaining the myriad of factors that contribute to gangs, will be used for the purpose of finding specific social relations that influence gang behaviour. The global factors that lead to the proliferation of gangs

⁴ Perhaps the best known case was the shooting of Christian Poveda, a documentary filmmaker, in 2009 after he had undertaken researching for his second documentary about the gangs of El Salvador.

through the spread of neoliberal policy are not of concern in this thesis on a macro scale. I aim to consider the specific interpretations and experiences of Salvadoran youth in gangs and as such am concerned with specific local experiences. This is a study for the purpose of addressing local and regional factors of gang membership. As such, a theory that attempts to understand these specific factors is beneficial.

Significant literature outlining the reasons that people join gangs is available. Although it is applicable to the situation of El Salvador, I intend to gain a comprehension of the situation through the lens of differential opportunity structure in my secondary and primary research. This is beneficial because it requires me contextualize the gangs in El Salvador. I do not attempt to explain the gang phenomenon as every other gang in the world, but work to identify the factors unique to or present in El Salvador that have constituted the social fabric that has spawned the existence of gangs to this scale.

Summary

The field research I conducted allowed me to gain a greater sense of the depth of the gang phenomenon in El Salvador. The semi-structured interviews provided me with critical data regarding the ways that approaches to gangs have affected development in the country. Responses to gangs are concerned with stopping violence to improve security in the country as well as the lives of those that violence affects. The different perspectives on how this should be done came through in these interviews. State opinion, left-wing opinion, and the opinion of a participant varied strongly and interviews helped me to understand the differences between these.

Focus groups provided me with useful information about individual experiences and how those affect personal behaviour. Although my time with the youth was limited,

building trust with them occurred quickly, once I became more humanized to them as well. The focus groups provided me with a sense of their realities, of the violence that they have been exposed to, the way they reacted to it, and their hopes after they left prison. These focus groups gave me what a literature review could not, the personal perspective of gang members on their own lives. This is critical for the development practices. These ideas and opinions must be taken into consideration when designing methods of addressing them. The youth experience is unique and imperative for future development in El Salvador.

The methods for data collection were strategically chosen in response to the topic in consideration. My primary concern for this thesis is the effects that responses to gangs have on marginalized youth and whether or not they improve their lives. For this purpose, talking to youth was imperative. These conversations were only made possible by the support offered by FESPAD through helping me to network with valuable people and organizations that brought expertise and experience to my research. I was able to contribute an interest in these issues, a summary of my thesis for print at FESPAD, and my thesis.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is a study of the effects that gang control strategies had on delinquent youth in El Salvador. Research methods were concerned with gaining an understanding of the barriers and opportunities that delinquent young people experience in terms of prevention, suppression, and intervention initiatives concerned with youth gang violence. Youth focus groups with incarcerated gang youth provided the young people a space to discuss their experiences with violence, programming, the state, and the citizenry of El

Salvador and the impacts of these experiences and opinions on their life course. After these critical dialogues, they participated in an activity that allowed them to think about and articulate their goals in their life course and their needs for achieving them.

The following chapter will present my theoretical basis for studying gangs in El Salvador. It explores the importance of studying youth as an important aspect in development. I will discuss the ways that young people are able to play a role in these initiatives. Furthermore, I intend to emphasize the importance of understanding gangs as a counter-productive force in development for both youth and society. The different ways that gangs influence practices require that gangs begin to be addressed in development work. Youth gangs are a specific form of youth subcultures and thus require specific study to understand the ways that norms and behaviours are learned and transferred. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion related to solutions to gangs and methods of addressing them.

The third chapter establishes the context of gangs in El Salvador. It explores the history and timeline of the primary factors affecting security in El Salvador. The gangs emerged within a specific sociological, political and economic setting and it is here that I discuss the factors that contributed to their emergence as their specific form. State oppression, economic opportunity and the current structure of violence in El Salvador will be briefly discussed. I do not attempt to provide a complete picture of life in El Salvador for the past century. However, I will discuss important political events that exhibit the use of force for the purpose of control. As well, I will highlight the state structures that continue to use violence. The third chapter will finish with a discussion surrounding the efforts to address gangs in El Salvador. My emphasis will reflect the

emphasis of the state on the use of force and how state use of violence affects prevention and intervention.

The fourth chapter is an analysis and discussion of my fieldwork. In this chapter, I will show that state efforts to reduce gang violence have not been effective. They do not depart from an understanding that gangs in El Salvador have emerged in a situation of insecurity for all state members, including the youth themselves. The understanding of the gang phenomenon does not allow for young people to make use of programming initiatives. Furthermore, it neglects to remedy one of the most central facets of gang violence - the society in which it is situated. Young people and specifically young gang youth, can benefit from stronger support structures in their communities. With this change, they could be better able to contribute to positive progress in El Salvador.

In my thesis, I seek to understand the lessons for development from state efforts against gangs between the years of 1992 and 2012, and as such I provide a history of violence in the country and situate the reader within the specific context. The sociological background in the country is imperative to understand in order to fully comprehend the gang phenomenon, as the gangs emerged and evolved within a specific context of violence and insecurity. Youth have responded to larger structures in Salvadoran society by forming unique groups whose identity is founded in violence.

A key finding of my research is that these street gangs emerged not only out of situations of social exclusion, but that these situations are characterized by a long history of violence and human rights abuse. Their specific form is the product of the frequent use of violence in El Salvador by state and citizen actors. The prevalence of violence, then,

must not solely be understood as that perpetuated by the gangs, but of greater structures that have maintained violence. As a result, the response to gangs must comprehend these structures and work to provide alternative avenues of youth engagement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Youth, Violence, and Development

Youth and Development

Development, in its most basic sense, is purposed to improve the quality of people's lives across the world through processes of progressive change. In many cases, this aspiration is focused on the most marginalized and impoverished people. Beginning in 1965, a number of international actors, including the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the World Bank, identified youth as a group of people who experience marginalisation in a unique way and who thus deserve more attention within development (Chaaban, 2009, 33, 36). A series of declarations were passed in the coming years to emphasize the importance of youth participation in development.⁵ In development practice, youth must be considered to meet their specific needs.

The international recognition that youth receive is due to the unique place they hold in the social order; they are not children, and they are not yet adults. Their cognitive reasoning is more advanced than that of children, but as a result of peer pressure, identity formation and an underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex⁶, they respond differently to situations than adults (Cunningham, McGinnis, Verdu, Tesliuc and Verner, 2009, 4-5). Young people are more volatile and are still developing this use of reason and logic in decision-making. Cunningham, McGinnis, Verdu Tesliac, and Verner (2008) have argued

⁵ These include the Promotion Among Youth of the Ideal of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between People, International Youth Year (1985) where the focus was Participation, Development and Peace, and the Millennium Project as well as Millennium Development Goals (Chaaban, 2009, 33-34).

⁶ This part of the brain monitors cognitive and social behaviour, personality expression, judgment and decision-making (Schneider, in press).

that as this is a distinctive group, poised on the edge of adulthood and consequently the position to shape the future, it is imperative to help youth realize their potential for the sake of their well-being, but also for the long-term welfare of societies (Cunningham, McGinnis, Verdu, Tesliuc and Verner, 2008, 1).

Theories of development conceptualize society as a constantly evolving unit, with goals for improvement. Development occurs as the result of individual action within the whole of society (Parsons, 1961, 98) by which larger power relations structure individual actions and agency and thus opportunities for development (Jones, 2009, 32). The role of youth within power relations and development is to help generate change. Erikson (1961) argued that youth interaction in broader society has the potential to challenge and improve dominant norms and values in order to make positive change. However, he also pointed out that if youth do not live up to this potential, society will fail to transform positively over generations (Erikson, 1961, 22).

The importance of youth in development efforts can be considered from two dominant standpoints: (1) Youth as actors for social change, or (2) Youth as socially disruptive. First, we can assume that as the future generations of the world, youth will face many of the same problems the world faces today, and more. The concern then is how to prepare them to make positive decisions. The human capital model states that by investing in our youth, we can expect to gain a return on that investment in the future (Chaaban, 2009, 36-37). Through education, participation, equality, and support, which help to engage youth in building towards the future, it can be beneficial to entire regions, not solely the individual recipients. Supporting youth through education and encouragement to engage in society helps to form strong leaders, with a sense of social

justice (Christens and Dolan, 2010, 12; Cunningham, McGinnis, Verdu, Tesliuc and Verner 2008, 5). Enhancing these aspects of young people can help to ensure good leaders for the future and positive directions in development.

Alternatively, many argue the opposite of youth – that youth pose a threat to society. The global rise in violence is quite often connected to young people. Huntington and Heinsohn, theorized that the rate of violence could be directly linked to the number of youth in a country (as cited by Chaaban, 2009, 33). Due to the stage of development of youth, they are more likely to act irrationally. As a cohort, youth are more at risk in engaging in harmful behaviour (such as taking drugs, having unhealthy sex, committing crimes, etc.) than any other group, and as such pose a threat to themselves and society alike (Cunningham, McGinnis, Verdu, Tesliuc and Verner, 2008, 3-4).

As a result of these debates, youth occupy a contested space when conceptualizing development. Are they beneficial or restricting? They are both. The development community must understand that the potential of youth is immense, but that they can also act in contradiction to progress. Young people's adaptation to society in identity forming years is a result of context and socio-biologic factors. Therefore, development initiatives must pay attention to youth and address the specific barriers and power structures that they face in order to help facilitate positive youth development. Despite the general agreement that young people should be involved in community efforts to improve youth capacity to become positive development actors, little consensus exists around how to address issues of youth who act as counter-forces to societal development. Youth delinquency, an issue across the globe, continues to pose a threat to individuals, communities, and regions in both developed and developing nations.

Youth Delinquency and Gangs

Youth delinquency (engagement in crime, violence, and risky activities) is a socially disruptive force that negatively affects a spectrum of development initiatives (Ayers, 1998, 7-8). There is a global presence of young individuals and groups committing petty crime, as well as large-scale organizations of youth who perpetuate crime and violence on a grand scale. Regardless of the specific form, delinquent behaviour creates fear and insecurity in society. Insecurity, though difficult to measure, has very real effects on economics, politics, social welfare, among other things, and thus impedes development practices (Ayers, 1998, 8).

Youth delinquency in the form of street gangs is a specific practice of delinquency. The definition of a 'gang' often changes and can be used differently for different purposes (Shoemaker, 2009, 222). At the inception of gang definitional literature, gangs were identified based on involvement in youth delinquency as part of group identity (Lien, Gemert and Peterson, 2008, 5). This approach can be useful for law enforcement purposes, as a method of identifying gang members, but is much too general in the study of gangs. Curry and Decker (2003) and Thrasher (1927) agree that gangs should be defined as a social group that uses symbols of recognition, declares "gang-ness" through both verbal and nonverbal communications, has gang identified territory, a sense of permanence, and is engaged in criminal behaviour and conflict (Curry and Decker, 2003, 30; Thrasher 1927, 57). This method provides a distinction between groups of delinquent youth and groups of organized delinquent youth. Castells argues that self-nomination should be used as a method of identifying youth belonging to organized delinquent groups (as cited by Hagedorn, 2007, 301). However, this approach can be troublesome as gangster subculture has become more accessible to non-members through

technology. As a result, Hagedorn (2007) argues that the most important aspects of gang definition lie within the factors by which they identify: race and ethnicity, violence and organization, and involvement in the underground economy (Hagedorn, 2007, 305). Each group's identification with these characteristics differs depending on the context in which they emerge and the purpose of the gang (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 1-2). Elements that generate the evolution of gangs will thus result in unique formations according to context.

The appearance, activities and structure of gangs differs from group to group. It is important to recognize the specific manifestation of a gang when discussing it for academic purposes. The gangs of concern for this thesis are street youth gangs. These groups of young people do not often have higher ambitions, and are not typically concerned with politics. They operate for the purpose of personal gain, both economically and socially. Street gangs tend to operate on smaller scales, are territorial, and use violence for the purpose of attaining power. From this understanding of street youth gangs, I will need to account for the specific conditions that gave rise to this particular form of youth gang in El Salvador.

Conceptualizing gangs as a subculture is beneficial for this thesis. Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) theory of differential opportunity understands that gangs are concerned with alternative forms of success from dominant society, successes that are defined differently for different subcultures. Opportunities for conventional success are limited and unevenly distributed. Power structures (race relations, poverty, politics, etc.) in society define the opportunities to which an individual is exposed or able to take advantage of. The distribution of opportunity is often defined by a community's socioeconomic status. Subcultures arise as a response to the inability to attain

conventional success. As a result, systems of values and expectations for success are defined differently because they are not measured according to conventional and legitimate means. In these subcultures, young people are often exposed to illegitimate opportunity structures. These alternative norms and values are determined and defined in reaction to situational conditions of each group (Quinney and Wildeman, 1991, 69; Shelley, 1981, 10). Defining alternative values results in the ability of attaining success for those people involved.

I will use the theory of differential opportunity structure to examine the gang phenomenon in El Salvador. This theory is useful because it is concentrated on the specific forms that youth group delinquency takes in response to surrounding political, social, economic and cultural structures. Cloward and Ohlin used two research questions to define their investigation: “(1) Why do delinquent “norms”, or rules of conduct develop? (2) What are the conditions which account for the distinctive context of various systems of delinquent norms”? (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, ix). These inquiries recognize the influence of external stimuli in the creation of specific systems of behaviour. Departing from these questions, I can direct the study of gangs in El Salvador through the understanding of the specific historical, political, social, and economic context that gave rise to a national problem of crime and violence at the hands of youth. The answers to these particular questions will help to structure responses to gangs, and a concrete understanding of the specific conditions through which alternative values arise, can provide the appropriate approach for addressing gangs.

This theory is also useful for the fact that it can be transferred from culture to culture. Although it evolved in the Western world, under Western influence, it

conceptualizes delinquent behaviour in a way that accounts for differences in politics, economics, and culture. While other theories understand community in a Western way, differential opportunity examines structures like community to comprehend the way that different forms of it influence behaviour. As a result, this theory is more adaptable to other cultures across the world because it examines the roots of environmental influence, and does not assume they take any specific form. For this reason, other delinquency theories are not applicable to the study of gangs in El Salvador because they do not attempt to account for differences in cultural, political, or social systems.

Theories of delinquency attempt to explain the reasons why delinquent behaviour occurs and have emerged out of developed countries. They have evolved from understanding behaviour in terms of strictly psychological or biological problems to considering behaviour a result of learning processes (Quinney and Wildeman, 1991, 62-65; Van Dam, de Bruyn and Janssens, 2007, 764-765). Delinquency, thus, is a social problem. Young people learn to behave in delinquent ways and to identify the specific learning processes is to understand the emergence of delinquency.

Social learning theories assume that behaviour is learned in social settings, such as family, community, or peer groups (Hartjen, 2008, 24; Shoemaker, 2009, 111-112). The site of behavioural learning differs according to theory. Differential association asserts that social groups and associations are the situations in which learning occurs, through intimate and personal relationships (Sutherland, 1973, 8-10). However, the community has also been considered to play a large role in shaping a young person. Social disorganization theory conceptualizes the facilitation of delinquent behaviour on a larger scale and argues that it occurs through community instability. Community

disorganization or instability is characterized by poverty, unemployment, the presence of crime, and/or disrupted family structures (Akers and Sellers, 2009, 177-178).

Consequently, the practice of delinquent behaviour is a reaction to the social life of the individual, whether it be through associations, or a community atmosphere. These theories, however, fail to understand the impact of any structure outside of family, peer, or community on behaviour.

Delinquent subculture theory asserts that different subcultures emerge as a result of an inability for individuals to attain conventional success (Shelley, 1981, 9). Barriers to attaining conventional success could include economic variance or social discrimination. This theory assumes that when a group is socially or economically excluded from society it will adopt conventional values reflecting those of middle-class society, such as materiality, and attempt to attain them through unconventional and illegal actions (Curry and Decker, 2003, 176). Therefore, criminal behaviour is an attempt to succeed according to dominant norms by unconventional means.

Theories of delinquency help to explain the social contexts in which individuals choose to engage in crime. They have recognized the relationship between socioeconomic inequalities and criminal behaviour, concentrating on social determinants. The theories though remain underdeveloped to the study of gangs. Youth gangs are a specific manifestation of youth offending. For the study of gangs it is imperative to consider both the individual and the group (Sheley, Zhang, Brody and Wright, 1995, 54). Collective delinquency is a source of cohesion for the gang as it helps to build a group identity (Miller, 2001, 130). Gangs are more likely to commit crime than other groups, and they promote delinquency, thus facilitating criminal behaviour (Sheley, Zhang,

Brody and Wright, 1995, 53). The difference between individual delinquency and gang delinquency is the sense of connection with other youth based on delinquent behaviours.

These theories are useful in that they allow us to consider the different ways that young people may become involved in delinquent behaviour on a small scale. However, the global issue of gangs merits the study of larger forces that condition these types of violent responses. Though some conditions that motivate the emergence of gangs exist on a global scale, there are specific circumstances influencing unique gang structures. This thesis is concerned with the local factors that have influenced gang membership in El Salvador. Family, community, group cohesion, powerlessness, economic needs and more influence the structure of gangs in different ways in different places. Cloward and Ohlin's theory provides the tools with which to identify these differences. They identified the emergence of three subcultures after examining the "precise nature of the delinquent adaptation which is to be explained", the social make-up of the group, strains and barriers group participants might have endured in order to solicit their response, the purpose of specific activities, and what makes the adaptation stable or unstable (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 32). This approach recognizes the complex nature of the units and requires one to study the multi-faceted motivations for the emergence of gangs.

Cloward and Ohlin's three types of delinquent subcultures are, (1) the Criminal Subculture, in which the group is dedicated to theft, extortion, and other means of illegal income; (2) the Conflict Subculture, in which the use of violence is emphasized as important, and is a method of gaining status; and (3) the Retreatist Subculture, in which the consumption of drugs holds value (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 22-27). Although they separate the groups in text, in reality lines between the types of subculture are more

blurred and it often is the case that one can find subcultures that encompass two or three of the definitions above. These subcultural groups are distinctive from others because they require certain forms of delinquent behaviour for membership. The culture and norms of the delinquent subculture provide its members with the appropriate beliefs, values and norms with which to carry out delinquent activities (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 16-20).

It is important to understand why these different subcultures emerge. Cloward and Ohlin associate emergence with people's locations in social structures. Sex, age, race, and other variables affect the pressures to become deviant, however, the particular mode of deviance depends on the specific experiences of an individual as well as that individual's capabilities. As a result, marginalized individuals and low-income youth are more apt to join delinquent subcultures because they are more likely to be exposed to poverty, limited conventional opportunity, and social limitations. The decision to engage in delinquent subcultures is related to an individual's inability to achieve his/her goals through legitimate avenues of access, thereby pushing them to attempt to find success through alternative means (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 32-34).

Cloward and Ohlin depart from delinquent subcultural theory in that they do not understand that young people are working to attain conventional success, but rather seek to find higher status according to "lower-class values", which are defined in reaction to specific contexts. This translates into different opportunities for success. Where the underground economy is present, success may mean an individual's integration here. Where drugs abound as a method to disengage from one's surroundings, drug use may hold meaning. Finally, where the use of violence is understood as a meaningful tool for

gaining a sense of purpose and power, this may translate into success. As such, to understand different subcultures, we must understand the socioeconomic contexts from which they emerge. These situations differ across communities and the values and norms that they encourage define different forms of success (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).

Just as much as legal employment depends on a person's education, abilities and experience, so does the entrance to delinquent subculture. An individual must prove their ability to participate and contribute to the subculture. The process of meeting expectations occurs in every cultural group, delinquent groups are no exception (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 114-116). This occurs through learning processes whereby older members pass down knowledge to younger members, allowing for succession and the transfer of norms and values. The integration of different age groups provides a space for learning and social control. Young people even challenge the norms and values taught to them and help to evolve the subculture (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 190-193). Through these relationships the subculture is learned and evolves, ensuring its stability.

As a result, subcultures do not necessarily arise out of disorganized environments, because they are organized enough to pass on norms and values through learning processes. The expected behaviours in subcultures form an elitism of them. Behaviours can only be learned through intimate relationships, whereby new members have proved they can adhere to existing cultural traits and contribute to the group. Furthermore, becoming involved in these relationships depends upon a person's social placement, meaning that only people who have the connections to become involved in the underground economy can do so with an established organization. *Ipsa facto*, although subcultures arise out of a need for economic stability, they require similar elitism as

conventional success paths, however it may be defined by that group, and that elitism is not characterized by disorganization (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 150-152). This process, like any other which the end result is status, is elite. Just as youth from low-income communities find barriers to conventional success, youth from middle and upper class communities would find barriers to engaging in opportunities for illegitimate means of success.

Departing from differential opportunity structure, understanding the different forms of social interactions that influence the emergence of gangs in El Salvador is important. Not one form of structure is sufficient in explaining the emergence and configuration of a gang; it is the interrelation between all of them that result in the specific form a gang takes. That is to say, both small-scale socialization and learning processes, as well as large power structures must be considered for the purpose of understanding the processes that define youth reaction and behaviour.

Family structures and community play a large role in socialization processes. Where community and family structures are weak for youth, gangs can help to fill that void of social support networks (Hagedorn, 2007a, 23; Thrasher, 1927, 37-41; Vigil 2008, 111). The family is the primary unit through which a young person is socialized and taught values (Parsons, 1961, 102). In the absence of this, gangs emerge to replace the family unit (Hagedorn, 2007a, 23; Sheldon, Tracy and Brown, 2004, 204). As a result, gangs become a space for learning behaviours as well as finding support and validation.

The community is also identified as a unit that plays a particularly large role in youth development and the emergence of gangs (Davids, Schulpen, Verhoen, 2007, 102-

103; Thrasher, 1927, 37-41). While some theorists concern themselves strictly with disorganized communities and gangs, Curry and Decker (2003) point out that gangs can also emerge in communities with strong solidarity (Curry and Decker, 2003, 196). This indicates that gangs are not necessarily dependent on the community itself, but the community's relationship to larger social structures as conditioned by poverty, opportunity and social exclusion (Curry and Decker, 2003, 196; Vigil, 2006, 22). Racism, sexism and classism shape the way that young people engage with society economically, politically, and socially (Cartmel and Furlong, 2007, 2). These doctrines help determine individual and group success because they create barriers to societal interaction and solidarity in reaction to marginalisation.

Many gangs emerge in economically marginalized communities. Gangs have become a means through which people are able to meet their basic needs. Economically marginalized communities become host to these groups due to the inability to engage in the legitimate labour force for many people. Employment opportunities in many areas of the world have significantly changed in the modern era; employment is often contingent on one's ability to navigate information technology. Contemporary workforces are no longer strictly dependent on labour power, requiring higher levels of education for employment (Hagedorn, 2006, 185). Higher education, however, is not accessible for many people for many reasons. Gangs act as a mechanism through which people are able to attain material needs outside of conventional employment opportunities (Maclure and Sotelo, 2004, 425). Gangs, thus, can be understood to function within a class struggle, where lower-class youth use alternative means to achieve economic stability (Jones, 2009, 20-21).

Globalization is thus a pivotal aspect to the study of gangs in El Salvador. Trends in urbanization of the world have created slums and marginal communities, which are host to the evolution of gangs (Hagedorn, 2006, 181; Thrasher, 1927, 7-19). Youth gangs principally emerge in low-income areas that are characterized by social and economic marginalisation. Urbanization helped to compound the problem of economics and concentrated populations of people unable to find employment in specific urban communities. Many rural poor in El Salvador moved to urban centres to find work, and unable to be absorbed into the economy have resorted to the informal labour market, or low wage jobs (Giralt and Concha-Eastman, 2001, 34-35; Muggah, Rodgers, and Stevenson, 2009, 1). Facing these barriers helps to constitute gang identity (Winton, 2005, 168) through the resistance to conventionality (Hagedorn, 2006, 191). Young people who face social exclusion find trust and solidarity within one another; this relationship provides them with a space where they belong and are recognized as valuable individuals (Maclure and Sotelo, 2004, 424; Vigil, 2006, 21).

Gangs emerge from these situations of social exclusion and the powerlessness it incites in an attempt to regain a sense of value (Maclure and Sotelo, 2004, 426; Vigil, 2008, 95). Collective violence acts as a mechanism for gaining power through the control of territories, a need for protection, and through the subsequent generation of fear in community and regional contexts (Sheley, Zhang, Brody and Wright, 1995, 54). Shoemaker (2009) pointed out that in many cases, young people are surrounded by “white, middle class values” that emphasize materiality and education, a lower or working class youth might work to achieve these standards, might simply emulate them, or might become delinquent in a negativistic response. Violence is thus used as a method

of showing hatred to the things that a person cannot be or have, providing that young person with a feeling of power or control (Shoemaker, 2009, 245).

Membership in a gang thus facilitates connections with a collective, feelings of engagement, involvement in activities, and a belief system (Vigil, 2008, 96). The purpose of gangs can encompass a number of motives, including politics, materiality, or socialization, depending on the gang in question (Shoemaker, 2009, 221). They provide their members with the same things that other social groups achieve in conventional society - purpose and meaning. Hagedorn (2006) states that "gangs are being reproduced throughout this largely urban world by a combination of economic and political marginalisation and cultural resistance" (Hagedorn, 2006, 191). As a result, comprehending the ubiquity of social issues that generate the need to find meaning in forms of deviance is imperative to the study of gangs.

Individual and group marginalisation is particularly important in understanding gangs. Gangs provide members with a sense of purpose; conventional methods of integration do not offer this because they are less attainable to populations that are economically and socially marginalized (Sheldon, Tracy and Brown, 2004, 204). Powerlessness is a result of marginalisation, and many people will seek to find alternative means of finding self-worth and individual agency (Vigil, 2006, 22). In terms of the gangs in El Salvador, economic and social marginalisation is a pivotal aspect to the development of gangs. As such, the theory from which I depart when analyzing the gangs must consider the ways that this shapes gang activities and behaviour. Social learning and individual delinquency theories are thus inapplicable to the study of gangs in El Salvador

because they do not recognize larger social structures as an important factor in the development of delinquent behaviour.

Cloward and Ohlin's concept of opportunity structures is a good lens with which to examine the gangs in El Salvador. Salvadoran gangs blend in criminal, retreatist and conflict subcultures in that they function based on an importance justified by a sense of turf that is surrounded by enemies, as well as the use of criminal means for personal gain and use drugs on a regular basis. As such, understanding the context of El Salvador is pertinent for comprehending the social context from which the gangs emerged. Historical experiences, culture, and the political, social and economic conditions of a community, region or country help inform responses to gangs. Of concern is not how to deal with crime and violence as it is carried out, but rather to better understand the motivations of engagement in criminal and violent activities in order to change the structures that shape people's choices to engage. Based on this understanding, efforts of prevention, intervention and deterrence must depart from a comprehension of the factors that perpetuate gangs' existence.

Prevention, Intervention and Suppression

Responses to gangs have been designed according to theories of prevention, intervention and deterrence. In order to have an effective response to gang crime and violence, efforts along each of these methods of approach need to be directed at affecting the root causes of the phenomenon (Curry and Decker, 2003, 183; Sutherland, 1973, 132). However, the majority of operations in response to gangs have focused on the resultant crime and violence rather than the causes of delinquent behaviour. Prevention and intervention methods focus on the reasons why young people join gangs and then

attempt to address those through programming initiatives. While prevention occurs before a young person has engaged in gangs, intervention methods must address both the motivations to primarily join the gang as well as the effects of participation in such an organization, such as exposure to violence (Yule, 2008, 10). Deterrence efforts aim to discourage people from committing gang related crime through the implementation of punishments. The application of the law requires that crime be punished according to pre-determined doctrines dictating appropriate behaviours (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 3). This punishment theoretically results in influencing young people's decisions by deterring them through threat of consequence, or limiting their civil liberties once a crime has been committed (Shoemaker, 2009, 85). A thorough examination of the theoretical basis for each of these approaches is important to evaluate responses to gangs in ES.

Prevention efforts aim to address the structural conditions that influence engaging in gangs, to prevent criminal behaviour (World Bank, 2011, 25). In these efforts, then, the factors that cause gangs and gang membership are identified and methods to reduce the risk of engagement are then implemented (Sheldon, Tracy, and Brown, 2004, 241). These factors include socio-biological factors such as immaturity, unnecessary risk-taking, a lack of reasoning capability, the onset of mental health issues, and the underdevelopment of the pre-frontal cortex of the brain (Schenider, in press).

Social Provisioning prevention efforts are based on Thrasher's spatial analysis of gang involvement, and in response to social disorganization theories. Communities and community actors should create community solidarity and cohesion in order to provide a positive environment for young people through all stages of development. These efforts might include places for youth to go outside of their home and school, education

programs to help facilitate learning, and accessible support centres (Curry and Decker, 2003, 170-172).

Schneider (in press) outlined methods for social provisioning on the community level:

High Risk Youth	High Risk Areas	Already Involved Youth
Early interventions at home (parental and family support programs) Targeted school-based programs Conflict resolution training Cross-cultural youth life-skills and leadership Projects around gender and masculinity Mentoring Education and job training	Recreational and cultural programs School-based programs Programs to strengthen community capacity Slum upgrading and renewal Public education	Education Job Training Micro-credit and job-creation Social, health and economic support services Mentoring programs Life-skills and leadership training

This preventive approach is focused on both individual and community levels. They also aim to prevent re-offending. Specifically, however, the programming aims to address the young people who are directly at risk of criminal behaviour by increasing their resilience to the factors that may incite them to engage. Efforts to combat gang violence should be concerned with preventing membership and gang formation. Social provisioning attempts to do so by providing young people with the tools to avoid becoming involved in gangs (Schneider, in press).

The involvement of youth in designing these programs could help to create a sense of ownership and empowerment over their own lives, which counteracts feelings of

marginalisation. It has also been shown that the implementation of these types of programs help to incite feelings of safety within the community at large, thereby positively affecting interactions between youth and broader society (Henry and Lane, 2001, 212). This approach sees that youth development is not the problem of youth and parents, but a community issue where the effects of youth behaviour have a broader impact than the individual and family units.

A prevention program that has spread across countries for gang prevention is the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.) developed in 1991. The program is given to youth in grade seven, theoretically before the age of risk for engaging in gangs. The program is covered in eight lessons, which include topics of “victims’ rights and responsibilities, cultural diversity, goal setting, and personal responsibility” (Curry and Decker, 2003, 185-186). The program aims to give young people the tools with which they can avoid their involvement in violent behaviour in the future.

Suppression is a tactic used to eliminate crime from the streets. The utilization of this approach grew in the 1970s and 1980s, and it has forcefully re-emerged since 2000. These efforts are based on social disorganization theory and concentrate on removing criminals from the streets and limiting their freedoms (Hagedorn, 2007a, 25). They operate under the assumption that only certain people will commit crime, if you remove them, instances of crime will decrease. Also, if more “criminally-minded” people remain on the streets, they will be deterred by what they see happening to other criminals (Shoemaker, 2009 253-255). This approach has become notorious for its use in New York City under Rudy Giuliani as "Zero Tolerance" Policing. Police efforts emerged through stop-and-frisk campaigns, and being tough on petty crime, with the

understanding that it will decrease incidents of more serious crime. The results of these efforts have been highly debated, but it has largely been agreed that quality of life for specific ethnic and religious groups deteriorated with the implementation of this policy (See: McArdle and Erzen, 2001).

The general response to youth crime is a tendency to label young people as “problematic”, which justifies the use of suppression. Labeling approaches also tend to segregate youth depending on location, ethnic or religious background, and class. Although this control method is frequently used, it is also frequently ineffective. It operates on the assumption that young, racialized and classed deviants are malevolent. It does not attempt to understand the possibility that gang membership represents an alternative way for young people to challenge existing social and economic structures and entertain a sense of power and purpose (Maclure and Sotelo, 2004, 418), thereby compounding the marginalisation of specific groups of youth.

Deterrence efforts are under the umbrella of suppression but are informed by exchange theory, which assumes that individual behaviour is shaped by rewards and punishments. Deterrence theory assumes that all people act rationally (in their own self-interest), and that they accurately understand the costs and benefits of their actions (Geerken and Gove, 1977, 425). Thus, deterrence strategies (prison time, work sentence, etc.) would be an effective policy for inhibiting criminal action because any rational person would not want to suffer the costs of it (Charles, 2010, 507). People theoretically refrain from committing crime due to the fear of punishment, which also includes emotional punishment (social repercussions in relationships) and guilt. However, this theory does not always consider the benefits of crime for some people. Criminal

behaviour in street gangs is often a tool used for the purpose of maximizing one's profits, which some people may consider to be more valuable than costs of crime, including prison sentences or shame (Geerken and Gove, 1977, 426; Grasmick, Jacobs and McCollom, 1983, 361).

Intervention tactics are implemented after a young person has engaged in criminal behaviour as a method of helping them to change their practices. These efforts include much about encouraging gang members to talk and analyze personal experiences in order to have a better understanding of themselves and their choices (Maclure and Sotelo, 2004, 420). They can take the form of community organization, opportunities provision, or social intervention. Each of these responses attempts to reconcile the factors that push people to join gangs in the first place and often involve the participation of the community on some level (Curry and Decker, 169-177). Hagedorn proposed that the success of these programs is dependent upon the involvement of gang members themselves. Previous gang members should be trained and hired to run the program. This will attract more young people. Staff are then people that relate to gang experiences, with whom a bond might be easier to build, and people who gang members are more likely to respect (as cited by Curry and Decker, 2003, 187).

Rehabilitation is often part of intervention programs and aims to transform gang members into productive members of society who engage and adhere to dominant codes of conduct. This is achieved through intensive programming efforts that aim to address peripheral effects of having belonged to a gang. Programs may include but are not limited to drug counselling, art therapy, or anger management for spiritual and psychological development. These methods intend to change individual behaviour to use less violence

in problem solving and conflict resolution. Intervention programs are often costly and dangerous. Like prevention methods, rehabilitation programs are concentrated on opportunity provision models, the end goal of which is the reintegration of young offenders into society (Yule, 2008, 9-10).

Rehabilitation requires the engagement of local people and civil society for opportunity provision (Muggah, Rodgers, and Stevenson, 2009, 16-17). It is dependent on the offender changing his/her behaviour and society recognizing that change without stigma. In reintegrative shaming processes there is disapproval of the criminal act, but not disapproval of the person who committed said act, creating a positive space where the offender can rejoin society in a conventional manner (Charles, 2010, 507). Reintegration requires that the criminal offender participate in society in a productive way, but there also needs to be a space in which to reintegrate.

Homies Unidos is an organization that was created to provide intervention programming to gang members in both Los Angeles and San Salvador. It has since separated and the program in El Salvador is now called *Asociacion de Hombres y Mujeres en Inserción Social en El Salvador* (Association of Reintegration for Men and Women in El Salvador) (Zilberg, 2011, 174). The organization was started by inactive gang members with the aim to rehabilitate and reintegrate youth into society by addressing issues they may face through social programming, tattoo removal and labour training (Yule, 2008, 26-27). Furthermore, being a peer run NGO, staff were better able to connect with participants, theoretically maintaining the support structure found in gangs. However, in the end it was proven that the administrators did not have the

entrepreneurial skills to convince active gang members to change their lives (Wolf, 2008, 232-233).

Rehabilitation and reintegration models are created out of a response to differential opportunity theory. Agencies work to create more opportunities for marginalized young people, in order to help offer youth a legitimate means to attain success. These programs often involve educational training, job training, skill development, other methods of building human capital, and most importantly, personal development (Curry and Decker, 2003, 168-177). This is a positive method of helping youth to understand personal and structural barriers to better overcome them. It does not disempower them, or further marginalize them, but rather seeks success in the ways that youth want to succeed through legitimate means. However, these programs are the most expensive to operate, and subsequently the most scarce (Curry and Decker, 2003, 176).

Understanding reasons for leaving the gang is especially important to these types of efforts. This area of gang activity has thus far received little attention in research, but is imperative for recruiting young people to rehabilitation and reintegration programs (Shoemaker, 2009, 251-252). Some researchers have argued that leaving the gang is as fluid a process as entering the gang, where there are a series of steps a person must take until finally cutting ties (Decker and Lauritsen, 2006, 60-61). Jankowski has identified six reasons a member might leave the gang: by aging out, dying, going to prison, joining another organization, getting a job, or leaving as the gang subdivides (as cited by Decker and Lauritsen, 2006, 60). Whatever the reason, programs require an understanding in order to provide a comprehensive response through programming.

All of these approaches to gang theory and responses to it have originated in the Western world, typically in the United States. These theories are used to explain gang behaviour in the global South as well. However, del Olmo argues that this is not appropriate. The history, politics, and socioeconomic atmosphere are completely different in developing countries and so theoretical bases for understanding gangs and how to respond to them needs to be contextualized in order to be effective (del Olmo, 1999). There is, of course, a question if these approaches and theories can be transferred across borders at all (Hartjen, 2008, 23) and thus require further investigation into those specific contexts.

There is a strong research base on gangs in Central America (see: Carranza, 2004; Cruz, 2006, 2007). Information concerning the emergence, practices, and impacts of the gangs exists, as well as the factors that perpetuate them, such as justice systems, prisons, police, and socioeconomic factors. However, Central American approaches to gangs have largely been informed by activities carried out in the United States, partly due to the connections between Latin American gangs and gangs in the USA, and partly due to strong influence of the US government in Latin America (Zilberg, 2012, 6-10). The New York Model, developed by Giuliani, for example, has been adopted by Latin American states to stifle gang presence, despite blatant differences in social, economic and political context. Therefore, it is important to further study the gangs in their specific context with the theories that exist to provide policymakers and practitioners alike a better position from which to depart when addressing them.

Hagedorn (2006) has argued that the study of gangs should intend to understand the phenomenon in a global frame of reference, due to their emergence in all corners of

the world. He has suggested that Cloward and Ohlin's theory of differential opportunity failed to comprehend the international ethnic dimensions of gangs (Hagedorn, 2006, 181). However, for the purpose of this thesis, differential opportunity theory offers an appropriate lens with which to consider the gang phenomenon in El Salvador. Salvadoran gangs have not arisen due to ethnic tensions, but are Salvadorans poised against Salvadorans. They have emerged out of processes of urbanization and neoliberalism in the country and are distinct from gangs in more multicultural areas. Differential opportunity theory questions why this specific system of youth delinquent norms has materialized in reaction to situational conditions. The specific form of youth gangs is discussed in the following section. A thorough understanding of the structures that have given rise to this subculture will provide the backdrop with which I will analyze responses to youth gangs and their efficacy.

Chapter 3

The Context of Violence in El Salvador

El Salvador is one of the most violent countries in Latin America, part of the Northern triangle that is known for public insecurity (World Bank, 2011, 1). From 1979 to 1992 the country was ravaged by a vicious civil war forcing hundreds of thousands to flee for safety (DeCesare, 1998; Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 5). In post-war El Salvador violence has continued; with the homicide rate resting between 58 and 71 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, at times higher than at the height of the war (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 2; Tablas, Córdova and Figueroa, 2010, 17-19, World Bank, 2011, 1). Factors have been identified that contribute to the high rate of violence in El Salvador including weak democratic institutions, an ineffective judicial system, widespread poverty, unemployment, and easily accessible weapons. The quantity of violence cannot be defined as a result of one of these factors, but is a product of the combination. Understanding its complexity requires a thorough examination of the history of violence and the different social processes that it has inspired.

This chapter will examine the different processes conducive to the ubiquity of violence in El Salvador. In light of the Salvadoran historical context, the emergence of the gangs will be discussed as a distinctly Salvadoran process. Young people have reacted to structural forces determining their ability to interact with Salvadoran society. State use of force have focused on youth as a problem. The culture of fear will be discussed, to understand how this phenomenon affects the everyday person in the country. This chapter will situate the reader in the circumstances surrounding youth gang violence in the country of El Salvador.

A History of Violence: Repression and War

The history of El Salvador has long been defined by relations between the wealthy and the poor. An elite class of landholders, known as the ‘Fourteen Families’ was the primary landholders in the country, important for Salvadoran industry, which was dominated by coffee. The remainder of the population, largely landless peasants relied on wage labour often on coffee plantations (Moodie, 2010, 28-40). The Fourteen Families gained economic power through a monopoly on arable land used predominantly for coffee cultivation, which remained the primary industry until civil war broke out in 1979.

Civil war erupted in reaction to state-sanctioned oppression. Longstanding socioeconomic disparities led to one of the bloodiest civil wars in history, with over 75,000 deaths, and an unknown number of people disappeared (Carranza, 2004, 3; DeCesare, 1998). The left-wing forces,⁷ the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) (Popkins, 2000, 2), faced Salvadoran state forces, trained and supported by the United States in the School of the Americas.⁸ United States administration supported the Salvadoran state throughout the war on a number of levels to the tune of US\$6 billion (Moodie, 2010,1). This support manifested itself through training, personnel support, and provisioning of weapons.⁹

⁷ Consisting of the Community Party of El Salvador (PCS), the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), an offshoot group of the PCS, and People’s Revolutionary Army (ERP), and the National Resistance (RN) (Popkins, 2000, 2).

⁸ It was here that the mantra “Drain the sea, catch the fish” was translated into military tactics.

⁹ The US government refused to acknowledge throughout their participation in the Salvadoran civil war that they were funding a government that utilized death squads, and that this was in fact a governmental structure that the US originally helped to create (McCuen, 1985, 63.)

During the war, death squads¹⁰ operated under the command of high-ranking military officials, including Roberto D'Aubuisson, a former president and founding member of the right-wing *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* in 1989 (National Republican Alliance, or ARENA)¹¹ (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 13). Death squads were used to incite terror and fear, thus many maimed bodies of victims were left in public places to deter people from acting in contradiction with the government (McCuen, 1985, 12). Particularly important about the death squads, is that they were state-run operations leaving the public nowhere to turn for protection¹² (AI, 1988, 9).¹³

In 1992, a peace treaty was negotiated in Chapultepec, Mexico. Peace talks were concerned with both stopping the violence, and creating a more democratic environment that respected human rights for the long-term welfare of El Salvador. The negotiations focused on demilitarization and reformatting public institutions in a democratic fashion, such as the military and police (Popkins, 2000, 4).¹⁴ However, Alfredo Christiani, of

¹⁰ Death Squads: "Clandestine groups that operated with varying levels of state involvement or complicity on the part of state actors to carry out targeted killings of perceived enemies" (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 8.)

¹¹ For more on Salvadoran death squads, see: Amnesty International. El Salvador: 'Death Squads' - A Government Strategy

¹² A testimony from a former military officer showed that personnel involved did not distinguish the death squads from the military at all, and merely referred to the activities as 'missions' (AI, 1988, 15).

¹³ The United Nations Truth Commission found these groups' high rate of activity, as well as their close relation to Salvadoran socio-economic power structures, to have been a major source of fear and violence during the war. Between the years of 1979 and 1985 alone, over 40,000 non-combatant deaths occurred and were attributed to government paramilitary and clandestine forces (AI, 1988, 1; McCuen, 1985, 12; Moodie, 2010, 35).

¹⁴ The Ad Hoc Commission named 103 officers, including the Minister of Defense, for discharge or transfer. In response, the government cited the Commission as violating the officers' rights and failed to make the appropriate changes until foreign pressure from the United States, threatened to withdraw financial support (Popkins, 2000, 106).

ARENA, implemented a sweeping amnesty law days after the UN Truth Commission, covering military, security forces, death squad killings and FMLN crimes (HRW, 1990, 151; Popkins, 2000, 121). Disregard for the validity of the UN Ad Hoc and Truth Commission exhibits a lack of institutional responsibility, a critical aspect of peace-building processes. Thus, there has been a distinct failure to provide any redress to the victims of the war. This has evidently had deep-seated ramifications for the country (Popkins, 2000, 159-160).

The end of the war did not indicate significant change for El Salvador. ARENA maintained political office after the war until 2009, when the FMLN was elected. Military leaders were replaced, and the force decreased in size dramatically, but the military continues using tactics based on force and many personnel have since served in public office (Popkins, 2000, 5). The state disregarded the importance of justice for healing processes after the war. A lack of responsibility has informed a complex society where fear and insecurity have continued to be ubiquitous, even in “peace”.

Contemporary El Salvador: An Economic Overview

The most densely populated country in Latin America, El Salvador is home to 7.5 million people. The majority of people live in urban centres, and extreme poverty characterizes life in rural areas. El Salvador has one of the highest income disparities in the world, where the wealthiest 20 percent of the population have 58 percent of the country’s total income, and the poorest 2 percent of the population have 2.4 percent (Acosta, Saénz, Gutiérrez, and Bermudez, 2011; Kasper and Smith, 2011, 298).

In 1989, a series of neoliberal reforms were implemented (POLJUVE, 2009, 15). The structural adjustments intended to modernize the Salvadoran economy and expand

on previous land redistribution initiatives, to make the economic atmosphere conducive to individual participation. Changes included eliminating price controls, privatizing the banking sector, and deregulating interest rates, coupled with significant cutbacks in public expenditures. Due to the collapse of the coffee industry during the civil war, the coffee oligarchy has since been replaced by the banking oligarchy (Fielder and Smith, 2011, 298-299).¹⁵ One third of Salvadorans work in the formal working sector, making on average \$154 a month, while one half of the population earns less than \$2 a day (Fielder and Smith, 2011, 299)¹⁶.

Understanding the economy along with the trends of crime in El Salvador is extremely important. Studies have shown that crime occurs in times of economic hardships, within an individually based economic system. (Hagedorn, 2006, 191; Soares, 2004, 157). However, the state has approached this as an individual phenomenon and has distinguished between state responsibility to protect its citizens and individual responsibility to address it (Moodie, 2010, 54). The economy in El Salvador cannot absorb surplus labour. Therefore the opportunities for finding conventional success are extremely limited, which contributes to gang violence.

The Structure of Violence in El Salvador

In this section, the different manifestations of violence will be discussed in terms of the political, social and economic atmosphere. I draw lines of distinction between

¹⁵ The five highest-ranking banks have a combined wealth five times that of the government.

¹⁶ Approximately 17 percent of GDP currently consists of remittances; the number one export of El Salvador is labour. In between 35 and 40 percent of the population migrate to find work abroad. Regardless of the high cost of migration - monetarily as well as socially - the rewards are little to none. Many families are unable to make ends meet even with earnings through remittances (Abrego, 2009, 30).

different forms of violence and actors for the purpose of clarity. Regardless of the distinctions made on paper, each of these forms of violence interacts on various levels and together create the social fabric through which groups and individuals manoeuvre. Common crime, such as robberies, became frequent occurrences after the civil war and has been attributed to a number of conditions: the arrival of deportees and returnees from the urban USA, the process of rebuilding and redefining public institutions, and transitioning the public security system to democratic ideals.¹⁷ Citizens of El Salvador had to address the psychological effects of the civil war within the changing social landscape. While people were shedding fear of the war, they were rapidly gaining fear of something new, chaotic and meaningless violence. In effect, crippling the efforts of democratic transformation and compounding fear and feelings of insecurity.

Violent Crime. As previously noted, the homicide rate has been alarmingly high in post-war El Salvador. The year 2009 saw an average of 12 people die per day, a rate of 71 per 100,000 inhabitants (Tablas, Figueroa, and Córdova, 2010, 17-19), a number which is best understood in stark contrast with the global average of seven per 100,000 (Jutersonke, Muggah, and Rodgers, 2009, 375). Violence is concentrated in urban, impoverished neighbourhoods (CENSOMEV, 2011, 29).¹⁸ Young people who grow up in these communities are exposed to violence on every level - within their homes, on the streets, and in schools. The most likely victims of violence are males between the ages of 15 and 29 (CENSOMEV, 2011, 17).

¹⁷ Ideals that were continuously being undermined by actors and ideas from the old system, hindering any real progress (Cruz, 2006, 153).

¹⁸ The areas with the highest rates of homicides include San Salvador, Soyapango, Santa Ana, and San Miguel.

Reasons for ubiquitous violence are extensive, however, the accessibility of arms is of concern. It is estimated that there are over 450,000 firearms in the streets of El Salvador (Cobar, 2006, 45). Collecting arms after the war was largely ignored, and it is assumed that these arms are still possessed by citizens (Carranza, 2004, 19). Four out of five homicides are committed with a firearm (IUDOP, 2010, 29), but despite the correlation, laws surrounding gun acquisition in the country are lax (FLACSO, 2011, 6).¹⁹

Long-standing high rates of violence have served to normalize its presence. People often neglect to report it for this reason (World Bank, 2011, 3). It has also resulted in a lack confidence in the national policing body. Many young people lack trust in police officers and choose to avoid interacting with them (DeCesare, 2009, 37). Many citizens do not believe they will achieve justice if they report crime, indicating hopelessness for justice. People have no legitimate body to turn to for justice or protection.

The State

The history of the state of El Salvador is characterized by oppression. The role of the state, in a theoretical sense, is to ensure that all people who reside under it are guaranteed their rights (Paniagua, 2004, 22). The Salvadoran *Policía Nacional Civil* (National Civilian Police, PNC) was created post-war to address insufficiencies in law

¹⁹ The international drug trade also conditions violence in El Salvador. Central America is a major highway for drugs travelling from South America to the United States. The majority of drugs are run through Honduras, but there are pockets of increased traffic in El Salvador. A study carried out in 2011 showed that on average there are between zero and ten kilos of drugs, largely marijuana and cocaine, per 100,000 inhabitants. However in some areas, specifically Usulután, San Vicente, and La Paz, the rate is much higher at between 1,000 and 60,000 kilos per 100,000 inhabitants (World Bank, 2011, 13). These drug routes are controlled by drug cartel known as *Banderos* (Carranza, 2004, 34). Violence is often used as a means to assert authority and power through struggles to control territory and in conflict with the law; this economy lies outside of the law as does dispute resolution in relation.

enforcement bodies preceding the war and ensure law enforcement operated on ideals of peace and democracy. The Peace Accords outlined that the PNC was to be created of 60 percent civilians, and 20/20 representatives from both the FMLN and state military units. However the actual composition was 17 percent civilians, 7 percent FMLN representatives, and the remainder of previous state military units (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 36-37).²⁰ The state argued that experienced personnel in decision-making positions would be beneficial to the force, and eleven out of eighteen upper level positions were filled by ex-military employees (Amaya, 2006, 134). Generations of personnel connected to the heavy-handed right wing are embedded within the institution (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 41-43).

In the post-war period, the PNC responded to insecurity with force, privileging the rights of some citizens over those of others (Cruz, 2006, 159). High arrest rates became the focus of police work, instead of investigative practices. According to Reyes and Rodriguez, witnesses fear of violent retaliation, limiting reporting. As a result, it has become the tendency for police to pick and choose the cases that they would like to investigate (Reyes and Rodriguez, 2007, 63) thereby breeding long-standing citizen mistrust of the police (Amaya, 2006, 184; Cruz, 2006, 149). Criminal investigations, however, affect the efficacy of both the judiciary and prison system.

The judiciary of El Salvador has often been critiqued as being a primary cause of the civil war, and failing to constitute a body that is capable of protecting the rights of the

²⁰ More than 3000 National Guard soldiers and Treasury Police were transferred to the PNC two months after the signing of the Peace Accords, as well as a number of personnel from elite army battalions (Cruz, 2006, 155).

citizenry, or redressing human rights violations (Betancur, Planchart, and Buergenthal, 1993, 168-169; Popkins, 2000, 7). As a neutral body charged with guarding the freedoms of the people of El Salvador, the judiciary is largely ineffective. The influx of criminal behaviour over the past 20 years has led to an overflow in cases. Furthermore, it is often subject to external pressures from police, government, and citizens alike to solve the problem of violence (FESPAD, 2003, 23; Reyes and Rodrigues, 2007, 63). Unable to cope with the high flow of cases, external pressures, and inadequate evidence brought forward, the Courts can neither incite confidence nor effectively prosecute crime.

As a result, prisons are severely crowded in El Salvador. In 2008, there were 19,814 prison inmates in a system built to hold 8,227 (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 45). The system is divided into sections, with prisons for civilian inmates and prisons for gang-related inmates. The gang prisons are dedicated to either members of the *Mara Salvatrucha*, or members of *Barrio 18*, to limit violence. Service provision is also rare. It is outlined in the Salvadoran Penitentiary Code that all prisoners have the right to rehabilitation and reintegration programs, but due to the high volume of prisoners and the cost to maintain them, funding for these initiatives is severely limited (Yule, 2008, 17).

Youth. Youth in El Salvador are among the most disenfranchised groups. They are socially excluded, and their lives are characterized by a lack of access to educational, nutritional, or basic health needs (Paniagua, 2004, 22). Family life strongly influences youth development. As many as 40 percent of young people grow up in single-parent households due to migration trends (Abrego, 2009, 28), resulting in a shift in household

responsibilities (Giralt and Concha-Eastman, 2001, 34-35). Roughly 63 percent of 1.9 million youth attend school (POLJUVE, 2009, 27).²¹ Schools, family life and communities are characterized by insecurity and violence, structuring the learning environments of young people (Giralt and Carranza, 2009, 41).²² Exposure to fear and violence has been shown to affect brain function and thus decision-making skills, limiting people's ability to consider consequence of action (Clem and Haganir, 2013).

Youth Gangs In El Salvador: Origins, Structure and Activities

Gangs in El Salvador were originally formed as a result of an external cultural transfer. During the civil war, many youth fled the country for safety. The majority of which went to the United States²³ and took up residence in low-income, urban communities where there was a presence of racial identity-based gangs (McBride, 1999, 296). Salvadoran youth migrating under these circumstances that joined gangs found themselves aligning with either the predominantly Mexican, *Barrio 18* or the newly formed Salvadoran *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS 13). In the USA, gang practices included using violence as a means of protection and group identity.

The end of the war incited voluntary migration and forced deportation to El Salvador, many deportees being gang-related.²⁴ Little political consolidation, social capital, and few opportunities for young people made integration into Salvadoran society

²¹ Of this group, 98 percent have achieved some level of education, 30 percent of which have attained a postsecondary degree, while 21 percent obtained a primary education (POLJUVE, 2009, 27).

²² Over one fifth of youth involved in the study carried out by the *Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas* (UCA) experienced direct violence in their communities, while approximately one quarter any have also witnessed a number of violent offences in their communities (Giralt and Carranza, 2009, 108).

²³ Illegally or under Temporary Protected Persons Status (TPS).

²⁴ Over 74,000 Salvadorans had been deported from the US between 1998 and 2007 (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 51).

a difficult process (Muggah, Rodgers, and Stevenson, 2009, 8). Upon the arrival of youth from the United States, the territorial and organizational structure of the gangs in El Salvador changed (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 51; Wolf, 2009, 88), though the appearance of gangs in Central America was not entirely new. Gangs existed in El Salvador for a number of years prior to return migration. However, strategies of deportation helped to solidify contemporary gang structure. Norms and values were and continue to be transferred through individuals and increased access to information to inform the evolution of gang behaviours (Zilberg, 2004, 774).²⁵

Regardless of their origins, Salvadoran gangs are now uniquely Salvadoran, only 15 percent of gang members in 2004 had ever been to the United States. Many gang members from the US opt not to participate in El Salvador because they do not adhere to the same rules of conduct. Symbols, modes of expression, identification of the enemy, and the names of the gangs are the same as those in L.A. However, the motivations, manner in which they exercise violence, rules, and group experience are drastically different in El Salvador (Carranza, 2004, 6).

The exact structure and function of the gangs can be disputed. Illegal organizations do not practice transparency. As a result, data concerning gangs is not uniform. In 2010, the PNC estimated a total of 10,500 gang members in El Salvador, while the National Council for Public Security estimated 39,000 (Fariña, Miller and

²⁵ A good example of this is the divide within Barrio 18. In Los Angeles, part of the gang decided to align itself with the Mexican Mafia, while the other part declined, separating between the Southerners and the Revolutionaries, *Barrio 18* is now warring within itself. Despite the fact that there are no Mexican Mafia in El Salvador, one can find both Southerners and Revolutionaries, fighting against one another.

Cavallaro, 2010, 56). However, in 2011, 64 percent of all imprisoned gang members belonged to *MS13* (Cruz, 2011, 390). Drawing a conclusion based on this statistic, I assume that *MS13* comprises roughly two thirds of the total gang population in El Salvador.

The influx of the deportees from the USA influenced gangs to become more complex and vertical. Although *MS13* and *Barrio 18* differ in name, they do not differ largely between structure and activities. Both of the dominant gangs have emerged as units strongly influenced by the transfer of norms from gangs in the USA (Cruz, 2011, 381; Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 56-59). *MS13* and *Barrio 18* are built upon small subgroups, called *clikas*, manned by ‘soldiers’ and directed by local leaders (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 57). The PNC estimates that there are roughly 309 *clikas* in El Salvador (Carranza, 2004, 7). Whether or not these *clikas* operate in tandem with similar goals or as smaller, individual gangs that are aligned on the most basic level continues to be disputed²⁶.

Young people join gangs for both symbolic reasons and economic incentives (Maclure and Sotelo, 2004, 424-425). There is also evidence that joining the gang is not always voluntary, and that young people are threatened or pressured to join (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 68). This process is increasingly effective as younger people,

²⁶ Recent gang literature suggests that the gangs are transnational units operating on a grand scale throughout Central America and the United States (See: Boraz and Bruneau, 2006; www.ice.gov/communityshield/). This perspective has shaped and moulded new law enforcement responses to these gangs in both the US and El Salvador (Zilberg, 2011, 171). However, the command structure exhibits very little proof that it functions outside of small sub-cells; the transnational lens has been applied simply because they exist in more than one country (Franco, 2008, 5; Muggah, Rodgers, and Stevenson, 2009, 8; Wolf, 2010, 259).

usually between the ages of 11 and 15, are more easily persuaded to join gangs (Carranza, 2004, 9; Yule, 2008, 3). Gang membership is also hereditary and passed from parent to child (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 75). There is evidence that many older gang members advise youth to avoid joining (Carranza, 2004, 25); regardless, studies have shown that up to 15 percent of youth in gang-controlled territories become members (Muggah, Rodgers, and Stevenson, 2009, 4). However, joining either *MS13* or *Barrio 18* means very little. The configuration and rationale of both gangs do not vary. It is entirely dependent upon the location of where one lives to which gang one adheres (Cruz, 2009, 9). Ideology within the two gangs is almost identical in notions of group cohesion and a sense of power.

Initiation practices are extremely violent. New members must undergo violent beatings or rape, depending on one's sex. Female members roles' are highly sexualized in gangs. Although it varies from *clika* to *clika*, roughly 20 percent of gang members are female. Their role in the gang reflects the role of women in Salvadoran society at large; they occupy few powerful positions and typically suffer abuses at the hands of their fellow members (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 75-85).

The gangs are territorial and draw lines of allegiance based on previously constructed community boundaries. Gangs use these territories to define identity and activities. They dictate where members can and cannot go, on punishment of death. Territory is considered their responsibility to defend and thus justifies the use of violence for this purpose. Gang territories are not necessarily large. It is often the case that there is the presence of more than one gang within a few city blocks (Carranza, 2004, 7).

The use of violence affords young people power through the manipulation of fear. Gangs provide young people with purpose, counteracting the effects of social exclusion. Over 75 percent of gang members interviewed by Giralt and Concha-Eastman stated that through membership in the gang, they have gained a sense of power (Giralt and Concha-Eastman, 2001, 40). It has also been argued by theorists that violence for the purpose of gaining power is a natural reaction to oppressive forces.²⁷ Victims of violence naturally seek ways to become more powerful and shed the identity of the powerless victim (Goubault, 2009, 6). The collective identity founded on ideas of protection and justified violence afford gang members agency in their own lives.

Gang activities range depending on the *clika* in question. The gangs are involved in a constant war between one another for territory, justified in rhetoric concerning personal and community protection. Gangs are also concerned with meeting basic needs for members. They provide for members in terms of shelter, clothing, or food. Many of them are unemployed and living in poverty so criminal means are used to generate money for basic necessities (IUDOP, 2010, 31).

Gang identity is expressed through clothing, style, hand signals, tattoos and graffiti (Wolf, 2008, 17). It is also expressed by adhering to gang codes of conduct. Many gang members will use drugs recreationally (over 80 percent) (Carranza, 2004, 18). There is also a progression of criminal behaviour for the gang. The older a member is, the more serious offences s/he is involved in. Thus the gangs have a learning process for criminal

²⁷ See: Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

behaviour, where as you become more aged in, you progress to more serious crimes (Carranza, 2004, 19).²⁸

The gangs are extremely violent, especially in comparison with their counterparts in the United States. Over 70 percent of gang members in El Salvador have lost a friend to violence (Cruz, 2009, 13). Violence is used as a method of protection from enemies, justified in the rhetoric that the enemy is the opposite gang (Wolf, 2008, 17). The mere presence of gangs in one's community places a person at a much higher risk of violence. Although the majority of violence is directed within gang rivalries (Carranza, 2004, 19), they have very real affects on the security of Salvadorans. Cruz, (2007) conducted a study about gangs and social capital and found that in areas where there are significant populations of gangs the level of trust is significantly lower in institutions, interpersonal relationships, and in the general public (Cruz, 2007, 100).

Impacts of gangs on society affect an individual's ability to leave the gang. Many sources (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010; Yule, 2008) argue that leaving the gang is not an option; it is a lifelong commitment and desertion is punishable by death. However, it is the case that many people leave the gang. Leaving is a significant a process; a young person chooses a less violent lifestyle, but the member must also turn their back on their peers and friends (Decker and Lauritsen, 2006, 60-61). Thus, this process is complicated because it requires an individual to deny his/her support structure (Grialt and Concha-

²⁸ Although some organizations have speculated that the gangs are involved in drug trafficking, there is no evidence that connects the two. The gangs can act as security forces for bigger cartel, ensuring safe passage and maintaining control over territory (Rodgers, 2010, 17). Street level trafficking has also been identified as an income-generating activity. However, as far as distribution is concerned, the gangs are not major links in the international drug chain (World Bank, 2011, 13).

Eastman, 2001, 113). Leaving the gang is thus dependent on replacing that structure (Cruz, 2006, 69). An individual must find economic stability, social support, and self-empowerment via other channels.

Leaving the gang is particularly difficult because it does not necessarily translate into a decreased risk of exposure to violence. Gangs are illicit organizations that do not have official channels to announce the departure of one of their own. When a member becomes inactive it is difficult to inform other people, such as rival gangs or police, leaving that individual vulnerable to attack or arrest (Cruz, 2006, 410). The protection that the gang offers is removed while one is still marked by his/her affiliation with that organization.

Public Perception of Violence

Studies have shown that public opinion is affected by information presented by newspapers in El Salvador (Parducci, 2007). On average, two stories a day are published about gangs, increasing the perception of crime. Photographs are humiliating depictions of young men, which serve to dehumanize them. Sensationalized reporting reinforces existing stereotypes of what makes a criminal; the face of crime in El Salvador is the young, poor male. The generalization of "gangness" portrayed by the media has fuelled the stigmatization of youth in general in the country, contributing to their marginalisation (Parducci, 2007, 60-63). Newspapers have represented the gangs as the sole violent offenders in the country (Zilberg, 2007, 40) to play on the everyday person's existent fear and insecurity to manage behaviour in El Salvador (Moodie, 2010, 40). Widespread fear and insecurity thus characterize the social fabric, where 96 percent of the population feels unsafe (UNODC, 2012, 74) and helps persuade public support of suppressive measures.

Ellen Moodie (2010) examined how fear and insecurity alters people's daily lives by taking buses instead of walking a block, or changing their route to work, adding half an hour to their commute, in order to avoid a certain location (Moodie, 2010). Insecurity has altered daily behaviour. It is common for people in El Salvador to say that this era of "peace" is "worse than the war" (Moodie, 2010, 40). The focus of youth gangs as the main perpetrators of violence is a result of combined factors, especially the narrative perpetuated by the government and media to unite the people against a common enemy - everybody talks about and sees the problem of youth (IUDOP, 2010, 33).

State Responses to Violent Youth Crime: "Nos tratan como animales."

Youth gangs in El Salvador have been identified as a threat to development and security by politicians and academics alike (Boraz and Bruneau, 2006; Cruz, 2009; Winton, 2005). The political focus on gangs in El Salvador is the result of media and government representations of violence and youth. Youth gangs have been demonized and their activities made to seem completely chaotic (Moodie, 2010, 40). Perceptions of youth gangs have helped define responses to gangs and public support for them. Theories of prevention, suppression and intervention have informed responses to gangs. Approaches to criminal behaviour, though, must be contextualized in order to effectively create change within specific social, economic, political, and cultural climates (Curry and Decker, 2003, 183; Giralt and Concha-Eastman, 2001, 34-35). This chapter departs from the understanding of gangs in El Salvador presented prior. Here I will consider the measures employed in responding to gang crime. Of particular interest to this thesis is the role of the state in addressing gangs and the manner in which it affects youth and

development in the context of violence. I will show efforts have thus far ignored the history that has given rise to gangs in El Salvador.

Suppression. The Salvadoran government has emphasized the use of suppression in addressing gang crime. Public policy and law have repeatedly been transformed to toughen gang-related sentences, and increased police presence and power has afforded a greater ability to arrest and detain gang members. Efforts have been concerned with the eradication of a gang presence in the street. In this section, I will provide a comprehensive overview of the legislative changes in El Salvador that aimed to eradicate gangs by force.

PNC personnel argued that force was necessary to combat violent gangs. The citizenry, weary of longstanding fear and insecurity in post-war agreed; in 1996, a poll showed that 60.9 percent of the Salvadoran population approved of heavy-handed measures against gang violence (Cruz, 2006, 165) and online forums continue to show Salvadorans' support for hard measures against gangs (Samayoa, 2011, 211). Many citizens believe that rights-based approaches favour the rights of the criminal over those of the victim (Cruz, 2006, 165). In reaction to these sentiments, in 1998 the state passed the *Ley de Emergencia Contra la Delincuencia y el Crimen Organizado* (Emergency Law Against Delinquency and Organized Crime), which sought to strengthen anti-crime procedures. This law recognized the presence of groups to be indicative of criminal behaviour; a provision found to be in contradiction to constitutional guarantees and later struck down (Cruz, 2006, 164). However, this change in legislation foreshadowed the efforts that were to follow in the transformation of law.

The *Plan Mano Dura* (Plan Hard Hand) was implemented in 2003 by President Antonio Saca, of ARENA. Its intention was to increase security by implementing new anti-gang laws to capture and detain all gang members. The *Ley Antimara* (Anti-gang Law, LAM), included in the plan, extended police power to do so. The law effectively criminalized gang membership and legitimized preventive arrests.²⁹ Under article six, youth could be jailed for in between two and five years for belonging to a gang (LAM, 2003, 3-4). Hand signals, tattoos, and association in groups were criminal offenses under the LAM (LAM, 2003). It also extended to minors. The sentences to which minors were subject were in clear infringement of the Salvadoran Constitution, as well as the International Convention of the Rights of the Child, ratified to El Salvador in 1989.

In 2004, the Supreme Court of El Salvador ruled the law unconstitutional as it violated the basic principle of equality before the law (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 112). The LAM was founded on exclusionary principles, and passed judgment based on affiliation, association, race, ethnicity, or other identity-based factors. Vague identity-based factors were used to identify problem people in society, specifically in socially marginalised neighbourhoods (San Salvador, Soyapango, and Ilopango, for example) identifying problem zones based on the prevalence of violence (Paniagua, 2004, 24). As a result, the vulnerability of marginalised youth significantly increased. The LAM did not set out to distinguish between young people involved in gangs and young people in general from those neighbourhoods. Based on this understanding, the law perpetuated existing stigma related to low-income youth.

²⁹ Article 18 expressed that any person seen with a gang tattoo or making gang signs could be sentenced up to 60 days in prison (LAM, 2003, 5).

The *Ley Antimara II* (Anti-Gang Law II, LAM II) sought to resolve the issue of equality before the law, and thus aimed to address the delinquent activities of the gangs, not the gangs as units. The LAM II did not recognize tattoos or hand signals as a criminal offense, but did state that they could be used as indicators of gang affiliation. Sentences were significantly increased; being guilty of gang membership resulted in an increased sentence of between three and six years in prison. This overhauled law did not apply to minors, however it did clarify that a judge could personally determine whether or not a person between the ages of 12 and 18 was to be tried as an adult in court (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 114). This law was in effect for 90 days, in the interim of the *Mano Dura* and *Super Mano Dura* (Super Hard Hand).

Antonio Saca implemented the *Super Mano Dura* in 2004. It attempted to rectify the problems of its predecessor with the inclusion of social responses to gang membership. Along with harsh anti-gang measures, the state offered programs to address the rehabilitation and reintegration of inactive gang members (Wolf, 2008, 78). Government attention and resources, however, were directed at maintaining a strong presence in the streets, detracting from state support for these programs. Lack of funding resulted in the programs' ultimate failure (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 116).

The *Super Mano Dura* also incorporated permanent amendments to the Penal Code, the Juvenile Offenders Act, and the Code of Penal Procedure. The Penal Code was reformatted to make membership to an illicit association an aggravating circumstance in any criminal act, and increased associated sentences from three to five years in prison. Leadership of one of these organizations became punishable with up to nine years (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 117), which resulted in a greater ability for the PNC

to arrest and detain gang members based on association. Although it did attempt to reconcile the shortcomings of the *Mano Dura*, in its contradiction to international codes and the Constitution of El Salvador, the *Super Mano Dura* shadowed its deficiencies.

In 2007, the *Ley Contra el Crimen Organizado y Delitos de Realización Compleja* (Organized and Complex Crimes Law) was enacted and aimed to dismantle organized crime structures (Fariña, Miller, Cavalaro, 2010, 126-127). This tactic is similar to law enforcement approaches to large criminal organizations, such as the mafia, or cartel. It aims to identify criminal behaviour partly through money trails due to their economic engagement. However, gangs in El Salvador are not highly organized, economic units. Connection to illegal money is through extortion rackets, and although the possibility of earning a living through these rackets is real, it is not traceable in the same way as money collected by mafia and cartel. Approaching gangs in this manner is detrimental as it misguides police investigation, and incites fear in Salvadoran society by generating a false image of the gangs that affords them more power (Wolf, 2009, 92-94).

The high level of violence perpetuated by gangs in El Salvador requires the application of the law. The state of El Salvador undertook the task of creating extensions of the law through legislation to deal with the gangs. Intending to remove gang members from the streets through the use of vague, identity-based legislation has resulted in the institutionalized discrimination of personal characteristics, infringing on the human rights of Salvadoran citizens.

Approaches in Prevention. Prevention efforts for youth gang crime and violence in El Salvador are continuously evaluated and developed in response to factors that contribute to the choice to participate in gangs. Prevention necessitates constant review

and improvement to meet the changing needs of marginalized, disenfranchised youth. The majority of actors involved in this facet of gang response are nongovernmental, religious representatives, or civil society, emerging to fill the void of the state (Cruz, 2006, 65; Goubaud, 2009, 5; Yule, 2008). Administering prevention programs is difficult for a numbers of reasons, and many organizations have found themselves poised delicately between the gang and state actors in precarious situations (Zilberg, 2011, 179).

Funding is difficult to maintain (Yule, 2008, 10). Proving the direct correlation between prevention and a lack of interest in joining gangs is a challenge; incarceration, on the other hand, can be counted (Hartnett, 2006, 5). There are very few programs that are directly paid for by the Salvadoran state; international actors sometimes offer financial support, but often require quantitative evidence of success. Donor agencies also tends to be subject to trends in global development efforts, making the maintenance and progression of these programs difficult (Tvedt, 2006, 682-683). Subsequently, funding can be short-lived for many prevention efforts, and result in their periodic disappearance. Instability of these types of programs negatively impacts the way that they are viewed by the youth who attend and creates a barrier to building strong, reliable relationships.

State presence in communities is also imperative for improving preventative tactics because gangs are most likely to emerge in areas where there is an absence of the state (Savenije, 2009, 4). The state is present in marginalized communities in the form of military or police patrols. However, the presence of force is not sufficient in deterring membership in criminal organizations. Police are often associated with violence, so the patrols are thus not a resource for safety. They do not represent positive state-community interaction (Cruz, 2006, 151). Militarism and violence continue to characterize the police

force and pose a challenge to altering procedures in a fashion that is focused less on control through force and more on the maintenance of social order through positive relationships (Cruz, 2006). Police training is dedicated to maintaining human rights and dealing with youth. However, in the streets when faced with violence behaviour can change and revert to a reliance on the use of force. Better monitoring of high-risk areas could help to deter violence and delinquent activities.

Critical to decreasing the rate of violence in El Salvador is to reduce the availability of firearms. The streets are flooded with illegal guns; over 3,500 illegal weapons were seized in 2010 in El Salvador (UNODC, 2012, 65). Seventy-five percent of homicides between 2007 and 2011 a firearm was used (CENSOMEV, 2011, 19). Gun laws are lax, and the underground economy for sale of firearms is relatively accessible for many people (Cobar, 2006, 45; Savenije, 2009, 6). Police and military stockpiles of weapons have been identified as a major source of gun trafficking in the country.³⁰ The state must therefore focus on its own employees to stop the proliferation of the illegal weapons trade in El Salvador, because the reduction of firearms in the street would have a direct impact on violence.

The success of preventative methods is difficult to measure, as it can only be defined in terms of the numbers of youth who have chosen not to join gangs that might have otherwise, or the number of homicides that did not occur. That being said, it does

³⁰ In April 2012, the Attorney General of El Salvador ordered the arrest of eight military officials for the illegal stockpile of weapons for illegal trade. Many police or military officers will sell their weapons in order to supplement their income. Furthermore, although guns may originate in the US, flow into El Salvador is made increasingly possible by lax trade laws between countries in Central America. However, there are no definitive trade routes for weapons, and thus it is difficult to predict routes (UNODC, 2012, 63).

not make prevention a futile effort. It is possibly the most necessary endeavour in responding to youth gang violence. Efforts would benefit from more directed programming for youth that is relevant to their experiences, and with greater state support and participation. As a result, the state requires a stronger emphasis on violence prevention with a more clarified focus on the needs of youth and tangible causes of violence in contemporary Salvadoran culture.

Intervention. Tertiary programming is present in a number of different forms. Programs attempt to address causal factors of gang membership as well as effects on the individuals involved (ex. psychological effects of exposure to violence, violent behavioural patterns, etc.) (Yule, 2008, 10). Thus, the state's role in relation to tertiary programming is of particular interest for the purpose of dismantling the gangs. The Saca administration recognized a more holistic approach was required and committed to direct efforts at prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration programs. The *Super Mano Dura* included the *Mano Extendida* (Extended Hand), which encompassed a policy designed to address the needs of youth involved in delinquent behaviour (Yule, 2008, 29). The initiative aims to teach positive values and offers services including spiritual assistance, education and job training, health services, and tattoo removal (Wolf, 2008, 78). This program is offered to youth ages 15-24, and focused on 20 communities affected by crime and violence. The broad intentions of the program, however, make it less effective. Wolf (2008) also identified that the communities are chosen subjectively. First, high homicide rates are not sufficient in identifying gang territories, as gangs are not the sole perpetrators of violence. As well, some communities with severe gang problems were overlooked as warranting intervention and considered only acceptable for suppressive

tactics (Wolf, 2008, 80). The *Mano Extendida* is thus unable to provide adequate support to the high numbers of gang members in El Salvador.

A number of NGOs also operate which pursue similar goals. The individual NGOs are distributed throughout El Salvador. Often each organization has a single location within the country, which poses a number of problems. First, best practices and issues encountered are not shared between programs because each is acting on his/her own. Second, available services are not consistent across the country, and are largely inaccessible for many young people living outside communities in which they exist.

NGO administrators for intervention programming have expressed concerns that the support from the state does not exist. Many have reported that police intimidation has occurred with program participants (Wolf, 2008, 81). Police often argue that gang members join these programs as a method of manipulating people willing to help them to start a new life, and obtain a “safe zone”. Although this may be the case for some individuals, this is not the case for all of them. This attitude severely limits the possibilities of the success of these programs from the beginning.

Tertiary programming initiatives are underdeveloped in El Salvador. A lack of funding, limited access, and minimal cooperation between actors has barricaded their full progress and implementation. A lack of funding restricts the functionality of the programs and limits their length, thereby restricting access for youth. The locations of the programs further inhibits participation, due to mobility constraints for young gang members. The state has not offered support to initiatives financially or in a social capacity. As such, programming initiatives require more direct attention and support from the state of El Salvador.

Impacts: Violence and Youth

State responses to gangs were primarily concentrated on the use of force, which impacted rates of violence variably. Responses were designed by government officials and experts in the field, yet failed to address causes of the gang phenomenon. Although the crime rate decreased in some parts of the country, the overall crime rate remained high, and in fact elevated throughout El Salvador after the implementation of the *Mano Dura* and *Super Mano Dura* (Martinez, 2005, 411). Bodies of the state contributed to the occurrence of violence in the country by further marginalizing vulnerable populations.

The implementation of the *Mano Dura* significantly increased the power of law enforcement agencies to enact preventive arrest. Between the years of 2003 and 2004, the PNC made a total of 19,275 arrests³¹. Of that group, 17,540 arrestees were released without charges; over 16,000 of those were due to a lack of motive for the original arrest, and over 1000 were provisionally released for a lack of sufficient evidence for detainment. In the end, only five percent of the arrestees of this time frame judicially detained and underwent the appropriate criminal proceedings (Paniagua, 2004, 28). Arrests were not based on evidence of criminal behaviour and thus left judges with no ability to convict.³²

Arrests targeted both adults and minors³³ but did not result in a decrease in homicides in El Salvador. Between January and August of 2004, 1,797 homicides occurred, an average of seven homicides per day (Paniagua, 2004, 30-31). Regardless of

³¹ It is important to recognize that many of these were repeat arrests but have been counted individually.

³² What the efforts did accomplish, however, was an incarceration rate of 173 per 100,000 inhabitants by the end of 2003 (Martinez, 2005, 405).

³³ In 2001, 1,396 minors were arrested, and in 2004, that number more than doubled to 3,258 (Paniagua, 2004, 30).

police positioning, homicides were concentrated in low-income areas. Sonsonate and Soyapango had both the highest homicide rates and high concentrations of police patrols during this time (Paniagua, 2004, 31.) Although some communities were shown to have a decrease in violence, these communities exhibit there is not a direct correlation between police presence in the form of patrols and a decrease in homicide rates.

The *Super Mano Dura* proved to result in much of the same as the *Mano Dura*. Between August 9, 2004, and the publication of the text *Informe Annual Sobre Justicia Penal Juvenil: El Salvador 2004* (Annual Report on Juvenile Justice) 2,067 young people were arrested under the LAMII³⁴ (Paniagua, 2004, 33). Despite high arrests, homicide rates continued to grow over the following years. In 2006, data collected by the *Fiscalía General de la Republica* (Attorney General, FGR), *Instituto Medicina Legal* (Legal Medical Institute, IML), and the PNC registered a homicide rate of 65 per 100,000 inhabitants, and increase of almost 80 percent since the implementation of the *Mano Dura* in 2003. A rate which rose to 71 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2009 (Tablas, Figueroa, and Córdova, 2010, 17-19). The rise in homicides indicates an adverse effect to high levels of arrest. Targeting young men in low-income areas in fact fuelled violence in El Salvador, or ignored the perpetrators of violence in a mad dash to incarcerate all gang members.

Furthermore, the arrests made did not have the effect of eliminating or even targeting gang violence in the streets. The table below was taken from a report by the

³⁴ Eight hundred ninety-four young people of this group were prosecuted and served sentences, while 477 were dismissed or acquitted. A further 394 were placed in low-level detention centres pending a hearing, while 302 were given alternative measures to prison time (Paniagua, 2004, 33).

World Bank. It shows the number of homicides that were registered as a result of common crime, gang-related crime, unknown culprits, or other offenders.

Cause	2003	2004	2005	2006
Common Crime	57.4%	33.7%	23.3%	18.2%
Gang-Related	8%	9.9%	13.4%	10.7%
Unknown	28.9%	48.4%	59%	59.1%
Other	5.7%	8%	4.3%	12%

(World Bank, 2011, 16.)

These statistics indicate critical aspects of knowledge of crime and police investigative capacity in this time period. Gang-related homicides were registered significantly fewer times than both homicides carried out by unknown culprits and non-gang-affiliated individuals. The high number of unknown culprits of homicides shows a lack of ability or emphasis on police investigation. These statistics question the need for specialized legislation targeting juvenile delinquency as the most severe threat of violence in El Salvador when few of the homicides are able to be directly connected to gangs.

Gang crackdowns have resulted in an increase of violence overall in El Salvador. They compounded causal factors of gangs by targeting marginalised youth populations and encouraged fear of them. Police street sweeps under both the LAM and LAM II concentrated in low-income, urban areas targeted young men, typically no older than 23 (World Bank, 2011, 15). Over 90 percent of arrests made under the LAM and LAM II were arbitrary (Paniagua, 2004, 43). The anti-gang legislation targeted and criminalized typical youthful characteristics and as a result many youth were arrested arbitrarily.

Young men living in low-income or impoverished areas were identified as the problem population thereby compounding stigma associated with this group (Moodie, 2010, 178). Efforts were concentrated on indicators, such as gender and class that are not evidential of crime. Police resources and time were thus dedicated to a fruitless endeavour due to arrestees' prompt releases after arrests.

The emphasis on the use of force to remove criminals from the street resulted in police abuse of power. Over eight percent of people in El Salvador have been victims of police abuse (Cruz, 2009, 2). Furthermore, frustration may have led to the re-emergence of death squads targeting young people.³⁵ These findings show that in El Salvador, where criminal behaviour and victimization is strongly defined by socioeconomic status, the police have compounded violence that occurs in and around vulnerable populations.

Variably, youth from higher income neighbourhoods did not experience the *Mano Dura* and *Super Mano Dura* in the same way. However, notions of criminality permeated all spectrums of Salvadoran society as young, poor men.³⁶ Consequently, young people are brought up in a society where they are taught to be fearful and suspicious of others (Boraz and Bruneau, 2006, 39). Behaviours such as these reproduce the culture fear that governs people in El Salvador.

Summary

State responses to gangs in El Salvador have been concentrated in efforts to suppress their existence. Extended police power has provided police with the ability to

³⁵ See: Samayoa, 2011.

³⁶ This becomes evident in the reluctance to travel by public transportation or the tendency to wish people safe travel (Moodie, 2010, 90).

quickly arrest young people on the assumption that they have or might commit a crime. While state finances and energy have been directed to these initiatives, prevention and intervention efforts have suffered (Zilberg, 2011, 179). They are underdeveloped and underfunded, affording little ability for administrators to provide adequate programming. The efforts that exist operate on the understanding of root causes of gangs. However, their broad bases do not tackle the gang phenomenon specifically. Prevention programming cannot attract at-risk youth, while intervention programs have too broad a mandate. The lack of specialized attention to gang youth in responses barricades truly addressing the issues.

Furthermore these efforts have directly affected the rate of violence through the encouragement of stigmatizing young people in low-income areas. Emphasis on repression has served as a useful tool to exacerbate the marginalisation of impoverished youth. Social exclusion has been found to be a causal factor of young people joining gangs for protection, acceptance, and personal value. As such, police tactics for eliminating gangs should be cognitive of contributing to these factors. However, they either are not, or are not concerned with it. The longstanding history of state violence in El Salvador has been continued through police practices against the enemy, which is now young, poor, men.

The following section will provide an overview of the methodology of my fieldwork. It will show that I used a series of approaches to acquire a well-rounded perspective on this situation. My primary concern is gang youth and the way that they are able to benefit from responses to gangs. The analysis of my fieldwork will show that these responses to gangs are not able to provide the required opportunities or address

what the youth consider important. It is the youth's perceptions of these programs that will enhance development in El Salvador. It is imperative that responses arm young people with the skills to contribute to Salvadoran society, rather than barricade development.

Chapter 4

Analysis: “Tuvimos errores, pero si los pagamos”³⁷

In chapter four I will analyze the data collected in my fieldwork. Taking into consideration the history of violence and the specific context of youth in El Salvador, my conversations with research participants exhibited a strong comprehension of the complexities of the issue. However, what every participant discussed to an extent, but failed to adequately address, was the legacy of violence and possible measures for addressing it. Each participant acknowledged that the general population in El Salvador was strongly affected by violence and that they needed to heal before young people could fully integrate into society. Yet when it came to discussing suggestions for further action, the citizenry was ignored.

Development in El Salvador is dependent on citizens’ abilities to engage in labour, social networks, political networks, and civil society to generate progress and improve quality of life. Participation encourages the development of communities³⁸, which have been recognized for their important roles in development practices.³⁹ For this purpose, it is imperative to understand how gangs can be addressed because they impede the development of community solidarity and thus development initiatives. Gangs negatively impact business and entrepreneurship in El Salvador by extorting business owners. It makes many locations in El Salvador undesirable for businesses if there are

³⁷ Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012.

³⁸ I acknowledge that community is an abstract term and literature defining it is extensive. For the purpose of this thesis, community is simply a term to describe people of El Salvador.

³⁹ See: Bhattacheryya, 1995.

gangs around; clientele does not want to be harassed or assaulted. Furthermore, political issues that are imperative for development, such as improving education, access to clean water, health care, and addressing the prevalence of poverty, have been overshadowed by the problem of gangs. Politicians have dedicated ample time to addressing this in lieu of other matters and allocate a significant portion of state expenditure to managing crime and violence. Finally, personal development is severely impeded for both gang members and citizens alike. Fear and violence perpetuated by gangs serves to limit the mobility of citizens through constructed lines of territory. Fear often guides individuals as per which route they take, how far they can travel, etc. thereby limiting options for employment, and engagement on local, regional and national levels.

Furthermore, gangs represent a large cohort of the youth population acting counter productively to their own development, and the personal development of their peers. Youth are the emerging future generations of the society of El Salvador. They will be the next leaders. However, engaging in gangs that commit crime and use violence and fear to obtain materially does not provide the lessons and personal growth necessary for good leaders of communities. That is not to say that leadership does not exist in gang members, but it is not directed towards the betterment of communities or individuals, it is used for personal gain.

The gangs are a good indicator of what is lacking in El Salvador. They are reacting to structural forces including economics, politics, existing violence, and social opportunity. Development in these fields has not reached a level that meets the needs of a significant population of young people. Studying this phenomenon in El Salvador is important because it gives us an idea of what conditions the emergence of gangs to this

scale. It can help policy-makers, politicians, and academics understand an extreme situation of gangs, and apply knowledge to other situations in other areas of the world or other communities and regions in El Salvador.

The data collected for this thesis will show that young people have learned through exposure to violence and limited opportunities. Gang life teaches young people to use fear and violence for personal gain. However, they lack a full comprehension of the impact of the violence that they use. After consideration of the data presented in this chapter, I will show that youth gangs cannot be addressed until the general population is. Underdevelopment in El Salvador has produced the gangs and thus development needs to be addressed in order to affect change in the youth population. Youth are not brought into development efforts and do not have ample opportunity to join the labour sector, thereby limiting their opportunities to attain success. The data shows that approaches to gangs have thus far failed to appreciate these structures that inform violent behaviour in El Salvador. Therefore, approaches to gangs in El Salvador require the participation of the general population to address underdevelopment in a holistic manner.

My interviews confirmed much of my background research. All of the youth who participated had witnessed or experienced violence in the streets surrounding their houses and in their schools. The level of violence and the types of violence, however, varied for the young people from family violence, gang violence, state violence, to citizen violence (Focus Group, *Centro Femenino*, Ilopango, April 2012; Focus Groups A, B, C, D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012). All of the male participants grew up in gang controlled territories. One even mentioned that in El Salvador, it would be strange if somebody grew up without the presence of gangs (Focus Group D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012).

This comment indicates that some gang members have a limited understanding of the connections between gangs and poverty. Focus Group B concentrated on the violence they had experienced at the hands of the police, using this as the primary example of violence in their communities (Focus Group B, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012). During our discussions, the young people shared numerous stories that ranged from family violence to police abuse to gang justice.

What was very clear in these conversations about exposure to violence was its ubiquity in their lives. The youth confronted it at school, at home, in the streets, with authority figures, and with friends. This profound presence of violence in their lives is a good indicator of how their behaviour was appropriated. The opportunities to which young people in marginalised communities are exposed in El Salvador involved violence, thereby constructing the atmosphere in which the youth learn behavioural norms and values. However, it is important to acknowledge that very few of them showed total lucidity to the structures that inform their situations⁴⁰. Although police repression was often cited as a reason for needing to find a space with support, very few acknowledged the role of economics in their decision-making. For many of the boys, connecting tangible phenomena, such as physical violence, was the only way to understand their reasons to being in a gang. They are collateral damage in a war they do not understand.

In this chapter I will discuss initiatives in prevention, suppression, and intervention. Of particular importance is the way in which young people interpret their

⁴⁰ Victor did speak of state repression, and about how poverty got him to where he is (Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012). His participation in reintegration programming helped to educate him on these facts.

experiences with these approaches and the relevance they deem them to have on their lives. Regardless of what academics or politicians say, the reality of the young people is the most important aspect of programming. If the individuals likely to engage in gang crime and violence do not find relevance in support programs, then they are not applicable to the issue at hand. Thus, I have used the information ascertained in the focus groups and interviews to consider the current approaches to gangs in El Salvador. I will show that the current initiatives fail to address the opportunity structures available for young people. Furthermore, these structures are in part defined by fear and insecurity in the Salvadoran populace. A group which currently does not have a role in addressing gangs. However, space in positive realms such as the legal labour sector, school, community groups, etc. is necessary for integration of formerly active gang members, but is impossible without healing the populace. Development initiatives depend upon the effective integration of young people into society for the purpose of growth and inciting progressive change in current and future generations. Thus, actions to address gangs must consider the current barriers to integration, including the mistrust of citizens towards people who have committed harm in their communities.

Prevention

Prevention initiatives have existed in El Salvador in a number of forms for many years, however, there seem to have been few advancements in affecting gang membership and the use of violence. As previously discussed, sustainability for these programs is difficult to maintain. The programs that exist do not often have methods of maintaining records, of where money is spent and the effects that it has had on programming (Interview, Anonymous, Santa Ana, April 2012). Without the proof that

young people and community members find these programs beneficial, funding is difficult to maintain. Quantitative data is the primary indicator of program success. Program providers including NGOs and church affiliated organizations must show this, in order to maintain funding.

The state has also recently begun to provide prevention programming. My interview with Inspector Jefa Blanca Figueroa, the head of the *División de Servicios Juveniles y de Familia* (Youth and Family Services Division) of the PNC proved very educational in the role of the state in prevention programming for youth violence. Although the primary role of the police is the repression of criminal offences (Interview, Inspector Figueroa, San Salvador, May 2012), the police have become involved in various pursuits of prevention, primarily through police patrols and in-school programming. The patrols have long been part of police work since the inception of the gangs, and are justified with the assumption that police presence is a deterrent of crime. Many of these patrols are positioned close to schools that have high violence rates in order to make the walk to and from school safer for elementary school-aged children (Interview, Inspector Figueroa, San Salvador, May 2012).

The Youth and Family Services Division is responsible for prevention programming involving the police and they have worked to provide information to service providers as well as offering programs for youth for 17 years. In the department of Santa Ana, police are providing the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) and GREAT (Gang Resistance Education and Training) programs. These programs aim to build values and principles of nonviolence. The intention is to further the development of young people psychologically and physically. The programs aim to instil values related to

love and cooperation, thereby creating good leaders with strong positive values such as trust, support, and effective communication, which are transferable life skills (Interview, Inspector Figueroa, San Salvador, May 2012). The programs are currently only offered in the zone of Santa Ana due to staffing restrictions.

The PNC opted to be present in schools for another reason. Schools are an easy access point for young people, and gangs have recognized this as well often using them as a site for recruitment. Ergo the programs aim to deter membership through their presence, affording the PNC a measure of control in schools. This presence, however, has not helped police to build positive relationships with young people. They do not initiate conversation or try to build trust and rapport, but rather often ignore the young people except when in session (Focus Group, *Centro Femenino*, Ilopango, April 2012; Focus Groups C, D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012). Focus Group B also pointed out that the police positioned in their schools are the same police by whom they have felt victimized in the streets (Focus Group B, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012). Police presence in schools is interpreted as a means to intimidate young people by the youth involved. Presence, thus, may succeed in maintaining temporary peace, but fails to increase trust between young people and police.

These programs are not sufficient in preventing violence and the proliferation of gangs in El Salvador. The programs come from the specific context of gangs in the United States. They have been fully developed in an external context to that of the gangs in El Salvador. Therefore, the PNC is unable to reflect and adapt the programs according to their experiences (Interview, Anonymous, Santa Ana, April 2012). Although the gangs have their roots in the United States, they have evolved in a Salvadoran atmosphere, and

thus must be addressed differently. Approaches to the gangs in El Salvador need to be developed according to its specific history and context.

Furthermore, the programs understand the issue of gangs as an individual problem. By offering individuals the ability to be a good leader, that individual will make a better choice in the future. They offer young people transferable skills such as leadership and effective communication. However, they do not address the opportunity structures to which young people in marginalised communities are exposed. The skills they learn are thus applied to the opportunities that are available, as they are useful for subcultural engagement as well. Young people have effectively organized in gangs in El Salvador for more than 20 years, leadership is not missing, it is simply misguided.

Additionally, prevention programming is offered by NGOs and church groups for young people, though roughly 60 percent of focus group participants were not aware of programs in their communities. The remainder discussed religious programs and sports programs they had attended. Youth stigma, however, largely dictated the benefits from programming. The youth who had attended after school prevention programs discussed how out of place they felt, and stated that they could not make friends. Many cited this as the reason for not continuing to participate. Youth in Focus Group B also talked at length about the focus of issues being presented and found them to be irrelevant to their own experiences. Many of these young people faced violence in different forms daily, while the other participants in the program could not identify with these experiences, thus creating a division between the youth in attendance (Focus Groups A, B, C, D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012).

Although these may seem like everyday youth problems, the purpose of the prevention programming is to bridge this gap and make this space accessible to all people who wish to be involved, thereby exhibiting the failure of many programs to truly address at-risk youth. Focus Group A specifically discussed how the program administrators failed to listen to them and address their needs (Focus Group A, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012). Not every program will work for every person. However, these initiatives are intended to reach young people in the position to engage in gangs. It is thus imperative to listen to those youth who did engage in gangs and did not find something meaningful in prevention programs. Those are the young people who can help to define the specific needs of youth in opportunity structures of criminal subcultures.

The Salvadoran state has also embarked on strategies to renew urban spaces. The presence of a soccer field in communities is cited as prevention method, providing young people the opportunity to play and engage in an activity that is not delinquency. However, the girls pointed out that the fields are not always safe, especially in gang territory (Focus Group, *Centro Femenino*, Ilopango, April 2012), while 20 percent of the male participants admitted to having met their gangs through sports, or having played on teams with them (Focus Group C, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012). Gangs in El Salvador are not simply criminal enterprises, but are the primary social group for many young people. They are friends and peers with whom they spend their time. Thus, unsupervised open soccer fields do not constitute prevention against gang membership and violence because gangs also wish to play.

Prevention programming is severely underdeveloped. Aside from not meeting the needs of the young people who most require this type of attention, there is a lack of

sharing information between different programs and program administrators in El Salvador (Meeting, FESPAD, El Salvador, March 2012). This means that best practices are not shared and there is little support or networking between programs. The separation of programming acts as a barrier to effective administration throughout the country and could contribute to a lack of programming offered to certain gang-afflicted communities. Focus group discussions showed that the opportunities that gangs presented their members were more enticing than those offered by prevention programs.

The Application of the Law

The state of El Salvador has primarily approached the issue of gangs through the use of force. However, the creation of laws and legislation that afford the state more power and less due process requirements has not resulted in decreasing gang violence. The focus groups explored the different ways that state officials have used these methods as a manner of abusing young people. An anonymous expert in the field argued that what the police need to focus on, rather than repressing young people, is protecting the most vulnerable people, including the elderly, the LGBT community, and youth (Interview, Anonymous, Santa Ana, April 2012). However, the police force continues to obsess over gangs and repeat strategies. For example, the head director of the *Unidad Antipandillas* (Anti-gang Squad) launched in April 2012 was previously involved in the direction of the *Mano Dura* and *Super Mano Dura* (Interview, Anonymous, San Salvador, May 2012). New operations are connected to old philosophy, of limiting the rights of young people in order to uphold the rights of others in El Salvador.

Police training is in part dedicated to educating police how to better deal with young people and maintain rights (Interview, Anonymous, San Salvador, May 2012). My

discussions with gang members and the incarcerated young women exhibited that there continue to be a number of police who choose not to adhere to these rules. The female participants at the *Centro Femenino* do not speak to the police because they do not trust them after witnessing their treatment of young people (Focus Group, *Centro Femenino*, Ilopango, April 2012). The boys in Focus group D shared stories of being roughly searched by patrols and verbally abused. A participant in Focus group B showed off a scar on his arm and told me that police had cut him with a knife one day during one of these searches. The remaining boys all testified to being abused by the police at one time or another (Focus Group A, B, C, D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012).

The most striking story was told by an 18 year old boy in Focus group B. He was playing soccer with his friends and was recognized by the police as a gang member. They approached him and put him in the back of their truck, after taking his money and cell phone. They then drove him to an area of the city that was controlled by his enemy gang, and dropped him off. He interpreted this as an attempt at a death sentence for him at the hands of the police. He also told me that “*ellos son la ley, pues la ley no tiene sentido*” (they are the law, so the law makes no sense) (Focus Group B, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012). Which in this case, is true. They police are the body of the state that works to uphold the rights of citizens. This type of behaviour shows young people that they either do not hold the same rights as others, or that these rights are not worthy of being respected.

The prevalence of stories related to police abuse show that there is still much needed in education on rights and action in addressing police abuse in El Salvador. Although there are processes for addressing the misbehaviour of police, the fact that 24

young people, all from socially and economically marginal backgrounds, attested to either experiencing or witnessing abuse at the hands of police exhibits that it is still a substantial problem. The application of the law is necessary but to enforce it without infringing on human rights in the process is imperative. Further victimizing young people serves to bolster the fabric of the gangs by increasing threats to their well-being.

Police investigative capacity is also a concern in the application of the law. Focus Group D and Victor discussed at length the seeming reluctance on behalf of the police to investigate crime. The boys in the focus group testified that gang members are often arrested and charged for crimes they did not commit because police want to close cases (Focus Group D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012). Victor actually served over a year and a half in prison for a crime he did not commit. While in prison he was not the only innocent man (Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012)⁴¹. For the young boys, the reason that the police do this is because they do not believe that people can change. Once the police identify an individual as a criminal they will always be a criminal (Focus Group A, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, April 2012).

An issue that could play a role in these decisions is police pressures to adhere to dominant norms. It has been the case that some police officers have been demoted or placed in offices for administrative work after speaking out against certain police actions (Interview, Anonymous, San Salvador, May 2012). This can deter many police officers from speaking with left-wing organizations, or participating in research projects (for

⁴¹ I am aware that it is common for people to claim innocence. What leads me to believe the claims of the interview and focus group participants is their willingness to admit to committing crime in general. They told me about other crimes they committed, but were not convicted for those.

example my difficulty trying to get an interview). More importantly, this does not stimulate change in the police department. The inability to challenge dominant norms and practices stagnates the police force and maintains both positive and negative behaviours. However, an anonymous expert in the field emphasized that the PNC is still a relatively new organization and continues to develop and adapt to challenging situations. They continue to try and shed the practices from previous law enforcement agencies in El Salvador. The terrible and gruesome situations that they face on a regular basis, though, can take a toll, and can push a person to step over the line. Though these people do not represent the entire organization (Interview, Anonymous, San Salvador, May 2012) they are present enough to motivate mistrust of police officers.

Law enforcement in El Salvador requires significant change. The history of militarism and violence that characterizes the police force poses a challenge to altering procedures in a fashion that is focused less on control through force and more on the maintenance of social order through positive relationships (Interview, Anonymous, San Salvador, May 2012). Youth in marginalised communities continue to lack trust in police due to high rates of victimization. Many of these young people are unable to tell the difference between police violence and gang violence. A young man in Focus group C remarked that “*es lo mismo violencia*” (it’s the same violence) (Focus Group C, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012). Young people see no difference and thus learn that violence is a means of life. The application of the law is necessary, however the method in which it occurs has helped to teach young people that the use of violence is bad, but necessary.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Rehabilitation and reintegration are vital to the process of eliminating gang violence in El Salvador. Through these practices, people are able to change behaviour and rejoin society as productive members. Padre Toño, a pastor and the program administrator of *Servicio Social Pasionista* (Passionate Social Services, SSP), has identified four components necessary for rehabilitation and reintegration including psychological growth, professional training, preparation for reintegration, and follow-up. Rehabilitation is a method of examining one's own values and morals through personal development in order to better manage one's life (Interview, Padre Toño, Mejicanos, April 2012).

Departing from this perspective, the SSP provides one of the best known programs for gang member rehabilitation and reintegration. The opportunity lies in the operation of a bakery in Mejicanos, San Salvador. On average, about four homies attend this workplace everyday, Victor, being one of them. The bakery is an option for income generation for gang members wishing to become inactive with their gang. The primary prerequisite is a voluntary desire to change (Interview, Padre Toño, Mejicanos, April 2012). Victor decided this is what he wanted. He is on the bus everyday by 7AM and bakes until noon, when he goes out to sell the products of his labour. This is a difficult process in that some days he could sell nothing, which makes his income variable (Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012). It is clear when talking to Victor that he is grateful for having a place to go everyday and dedicate his energy, which is a sentiment he tries to pass onto the younger youth who also spend time there. Many at risk young people in the community hang out and help out while learning from Victor and the other homies, who speak about their lives. It is of no importance to which gang you belong, or

whether you are a gang member, everybody is treated the same. To participate, however, you must be willing to contribute (Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012).

Despite Victor's enthusiasm for the program, it faces significant challenges in operation. In times when he does not sell baked goods, he cannot buy more materials and the program must rely on international donors to maintain operations. The state of El Salvador offers no support, and in fact often attempts to disrupt program functioning. The police often harass program participants⁴² and have raided the bakery site on a number of occasions, undermining operations through the use of intimidation⁴³ (Interview, Padre Toño, Mejicanos, April 2012; Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012). In this way, the state is directly threatening the legal participation of young people in society.

The operations of SSP are not the only program that faces these issues. A meeting of program administrators, for both prevention and intervention endeavours, held at the offices of FESPAD on March 23, 2012, attended by seven different organization representatives, showed that they had all experienced harassment and intimidation by police. Police know that participants in these programs have used them as cover up and immunity to arrest for illegal behaviours (Interview, Anonymous, Santa Ana, April, 2012; Interview, Inspector Figueiroa, San Salvador, May 2012). However, it is in these

⁴² Victor spoke of often being harassed by police while trying to sell his baked goods. This should not be something that he has to worry about while working and trying to survive. He accedes to having made some grave mistakes, but does not believe that this should haunt him for the rest of his life, especially during his efforts to change (Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012).

⁴³ At the time of my research, the bakery was raided by police and two of the participants were arrested and held in detention. Padre Toño and many other advocates of rehabilitation were in the process of fighting to have these participants released. In a press conference regarding the event, Padre Toño discussed the effects that these have on the program and participants, generating a strong mistrust between both parties and also frightening community members. Participants especially find this disheartening and counter-productive (Press Conference, Buenos Aires, March 2012).

instances that police investigative capacity is imperative to ensuring that intimidation and harassment are not the sole tactics used to apprehend people responsible for crime. Inspector Figueroa pointed out that just as much as gangs have been around for 20 years, so have the police in trying to quell them; patience wears thin after time (Interview, Inspector Figueroa, San Salvador, May 2012). Despite patience, it is the responsibility of law enforcement to maintain the rights of all citizens. Thus, performing the necessary investigations before placing somebody under arrest. The police have used tertiary programs as easy access to gang members, rather than understood that they are dedicated to offering alternative opportunities to young people wishing to become inactive in their gangs.

Equally important are the opportunities to rehabilitate gang members while serving time to reduce the probability of recidivism. In-prison programming in El Salvador is severely underdeveloped. The focus groups discussed their experiences with programs in prison at length with me. Some of the youth involved intended to return to their gang after serving their sentences (Focus Group D) while others were making an effort to change while in prison. Although the intent of programs was to initiate psychological development and build skills, the delivery and focus did not meet the needs of youth involved. There is psychological support with psychologists in prison for inmates. As well there are *charlas* (formal chats) where inmates are brought together in large groups and asked to discuss values. However, many of the youth do not find this helpful. It is difficult for many adolescents to discuss these matters generally; aside from this these young people are surrounded by fellow gang members who hold one another to specific standards. They cannot say things that will make them look weak (Focus Groups

B, C, D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012). Although these discussions are necessary, the forum for them is ineffective.

There are also a number of programs used to build skills for labour integration, which are strictly gendered. The girls learn to crochet and make jewellery, while the boys attend lessons on growing food and tailoring. The girls identified that carpentry, mechanics, or cosmetology would be more practical skills and could lead to employment after time in prison (Focus Group, *Centro Femenino*, Ilopango, April 2012).

Reintegration, for many of the young people in the focus groups, was dependent on entry into the legal economic sector (Focus Groups A, B, C, D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012). However, despite all of the programs offered to young people to build skills for work, the problem is finding the ability to use those skills afterwards. There is very little space in the Salvadoran economy for new workers. The income of a baker is meagre, as well as a tailor or jewellery maker. The skills they learn will not lead to a stable income (Interview, Anonymous, Santa Ana, April 2012). These skill-building programs are little more than programs to stifle complaints; they will not end the cycle of poverty for these young people.

Furthermore, employment is dependent on the ability to be hired. Skills are one aspect necessary, while the other is opportunity. People are largely unwilling to hire anybody affiliated with gangs. Visible tattoos, which are common with gang members, further barricade one's chances of finding work (Focus Group C, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012; Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012). Many of the youth recounted how difficult it was to even talk to anybody in their neighbourhoods because they were affiliated with gangs (Focus Group, *Centro Femenino*, Ilopango, April 2012; Focus

Group D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012). The discrimination that these young people face often results in a return to the gang, where they can find support from their peers (Focus Group D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012).

Discrimination is a significant issue in El Salvador, however, the comprehension on behalf of the young people involved on the concept of reintegration was flawed. It is apparent that the youth, with the exception of one⁴⁴ participant, do not understand that the fear and violence they and their gangs used has helped to encourage mistrust and fear of young people. They do not understand that although they can change, people are still afraid of them for their previous actions. Victor does not experience discrimination in the community in which he works because there is an understanding of how he contributes. He helps mentor young people, and works hard everyday for his livelihood. This relationship, however, took time (Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012). Reintegration is dependent on decreasing the fear that society has of the young people involved in gangs.

Leaving the gang and reintegrating into Salvadoran society is not only scary in terms of meeting basic needs, but also because many people are still subject to violence without any form of protection or support. The young men all contested that their gangs do not penalize them for leaving. However, the police do not consider this nor do opposite gangs (Focus Groups A, B, C, D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012). For many

⁴⁴ After my session with Focus Group C, a particularly insightful young man stayed behind to talk to me more intimately about his ideas on the subject. He was the only participant who identified that social discrimination against gang members exists because the gangs have hurt a lot of people. The mistakes they made, in terms of criminal behaviour and the use of violence, informs public perceptions. He recognized that it is the responsibility of the gangs to better understand the experiences of their victims in order to end discrimination. This requires taking responsibility and recognizing that social stigma exists and is founded in the experiences of society (Focus Group C, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012).

youth, once they make the decision to leave, it does not translate into less exposure to violence. The decision to leave the gang thus makes them vulnerable to find both a livelihood and safety. Leaving the gang is not necessarily a moral decision, but rather a decision based the needs of young people. Rehabilitation and reintegration can only work if the factors that motivate gang membership are counter-acted with other opportunities such as work, safety, and meaningful participation.

Summary: Different Opportunities

Addressing gangs continues to challenge many theorists and practitioners across the globe. Accordingly, there are a number of glaring deficiencies in the methods used in El Salvador. Departing from Cloward and Ohlin's theory of differential opportunity, it is clear that the structures that condition young people's decision to join gangs are not addressed adequately. Social marginalisation, exposure to violence, and poverty condition the lives of the young men and women engaged in gangs in El Salvador. The gangs have not been understood in the wider context of Salvadoran life that has produced the limited opportunities to which young people are exposed (Interview, Anonymous, Santa Ana, April 2012).

Due to the prevalence of young boys in gangs, the majority of programming is directed towards them. Efforts to engage young people at risk of involvement in gangs have fallen short, considering the experiences of the young participants in my fieldwork. Rehabilitation and reintegration efforts must begin to concentrate on creating a space for youth in society by offering opportunities to integrate into the labour sector (Interview, Padre Toño, Mejicanos, April 2012). Without the creation of new opportunity structures, youth have very little choice except to return to a social group that supports them.

Competency training could concentrate on careers that the young people would want to engage in (Focus Group, *Centro Femenino*, Ilopango, April 2012) or that are wanting for labour in El Salvador. All of the youth identified work as a necessary factor to leave the gang. In El Salvador there exists workshop upon workshop upon workshop to build labour skills, however there is no place to apply them (Interview, Santa Ana, Anonymous, April 2012).

Continuity of programs and workshops is also a key barrier in addressing gangs. Program administrators pointed out that police intimidation deters young people from coming to programs not only because of the police, but because administrators are uneasy. This makes it difficult to maintain participants because the safety of the space is compromised, and without attendance funding is also at risk (Meeting, San Salvador, March 2012). Program administrators have argued that international participation is necessary for this purpose (Meeting, San Salvador, March 2012), however, Victor feels differently. He expressed irritation after my interview with him and explained that he had been interviewed tens of times by international actors interested in gangs in El Salvador. However, his life does not change. He will still work in the bakery everyday. He will never get a job outside of it. He sees no use in international participation because he sees no proof of change due to it (Interview, Victor, Mejicanos, May 2012).

A lack of collaboration between actors also barricades the full development of methods to address gangs. Aside from police efforts to threaten programming, program administrators do not have regular dialogue. Researchers, program administrators, gang members, and state officials need to begin to talk and work together so as not to pose as counter-productive to one another's efforts. An inter-institutional approach would benefit

the pursuit of ending gang violence (Interview, Anonymous, San Salvador, May 2012). This would provide actors the ability to ensure that all aspects necessary for addressing gangs are considered. Furthermore, collaboration and support is advantageous in this type of work to adapt and change with the problem. It is agreed that this cannot be solved with one facet alone, yet each facet continues to work in isolation.

Practically speaking, there are a number of small efforts that could offer significant change to the efforts to address prevalent violence. The availability of firearms and the lax laws that surround them are in need of significant revision (Interview, Anonymous, Santa Ana, April 2012). Prison release programs could help to ensure that a young person does not go directly back to his/her gang. Ensuring that inmates are treated with dignity⁴⁵ could ensure more personal development within prisons to decrease recidivism. These factors are difficult to achieve due to funding limitations and the overpopulation of prisons, however, they could have significant impact.

After discussion of context and problem, it is apparent that the restoration of human rights is imperative for efforts to deal with gangs. Young people in El Salvador are growing up in an age when people continue to be exposed to violence on a daily basis, where fear becomes a determining factor for many daily tasks and interactions. The relationship between young people who have criminal pasts and society must be healed (Focus Group C, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012). The rights of youth have been forfeited in order to uphold the rights of other citizens. However, from the discussions in my focus groups, it is clear that victimization of young people plays a large role in

⁴⁵ *El Espino* suffered a riot one day because the inmates were served maggoty tortillas.

fortifying the gangs. Protection from police and violence was cited as one of the primary reasons for joining the gang, as well as not leaving it (Focus Groups A, B, C, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012). Gangs exist in a reality that is defined by allies and enemies. The state is actively engaging in this war by openly declaring them enemies through the creation of specialized legislation or task forces. These excessive measures have served to fortify the identity of gangs and thereby justify their existence through the existence of their enemies. The application of the law is necessary. However, specializing in the elimination of gangs does not serve the purpose of breaking them apart.

What became a common theme in my interviews was the victims of gang violence. Inspector Figueroa pointed out that El Salvador was in a state of civil war, post-war, and now excessive street violence; a state of emergency is not new to the Salvadoran population (Interview, Inspector Figueroa, San Salvador, May 2012). Despite this, support for the psychological effects of living in states of high stress and fear have not been fully explored. The victims and the citizenry of El Salvador have been largely ignored in all of this. Young gang members understand the necessity of this and have outlined the need to end discrimination. This, though, requires that the communities that have been harmed by the effects of gangs have the opportunity to heal. Violence has a strong influence on people and the Salvadoran citizenry deserves to have the opportunity to shed feelings of insecurity and begin a process of developing trust in communities, strong social networks, etc. Reinforcing feelings of security will help to bolster efforts of development. Increased security will enhance one's ability to travel to interact with community members, increase employment opportunity and participation in political initiatives. Increasing security will allow for more choices and opportunities for

the citizenry and could spawn greater networks for local and regional initiatives in El Salvador.

It is necessary that young people take responsibility for their actions for the healing process for individuals and communities in the Salvadoran populace. However, true for many young people across the globe, it is difficult to take responsibility or understand the importance of doing so. The girls even argued that a separate school would benefit them so that upon their release they did not have to face their peers (Focus Group, *Centro Femenino*, Ilopango, April 2012). While the youth understand that forgiveness is necessary, they fail to comprehend that this requires asking for it, and accepting responsibility for the wounds they have inflicted.

Cloward and Ohlin's theory of differential opportunity requires that responses to illicit subcultures consider the causes of them and address those to facilitate change. Previous chapters showed that the development of the gangs in El Salvador was connected to the facilitation of opportunities as conditioned by economic marginalisation, stigmatization, and a legacy of violence. Departing from this understanding, responses to gangs must be concerned with creating space for young people in society and the legal economy while addressing the effects of longterm exposure to violent atmospheres for Salvadoran society. The combined effort to address these factors will help to facilitate an improved space for development efforts.

Although the prevention and intervention programs in place are designed to teach young people values and skills, they are not effective in that they do not attempt to break down the stigmatization of youth. Young people experienced discrimination in both programming efforts and for this reason found them discouraging. It is not the content

that is flawed, it's the delivery. For this reason, young people should be able to put forth their own ideas as to what is necessary for change. Strocka (2006) supports a social capital approach. Instead of designing the programming to "fix" youth, there needs to be an aim to "strengthen positive values and resources within the gangs" by using the gangs themselves (Strocka, 2006, 142). Gang members developing their own solutions to problems that they experience will "promote young people's leadership and participation in decision-making" (Strocka, 2006, 142). This will also allow the unique perspectives and understanding of reality of the youth to inform the programs built for them. They are not intrinsically flawed individuals, but are rather individuals reacting to the specific opportunities presented in their lives.

Gangs continue to provide young people with basic social necessities. They offer youth economic survival, social recognition, and support. The reality of this is that every person requires these aspects in their lives, but they find them through other channels. The criminal subcultural group of the gang in El Salvador exists because the conditions that structure young people's lives such as limited employment opportunities, social discrimination, poverty, and victimization push youth to look outside of the legal realm. As a result, prevention, repression, and intervention do not effectively address the issue of gangs in El Salvador because they do not have the capacity to address the reasons why gangs emerged with such force after the Salvadoran civil war. A method that focuses on healing communities in El Salvador would be more effective in order to break down discrimination against youth, help form a space for integration into the labour sector, and decrease instances of victimization. This requires that young people begin to take responsibility for their actions.

Efforts for development in El Salvador must consider these holes in the lives of young people. The problem of the gangs is not an isolated phenomenon from the state of the country. Thus, if development practitioners work to address the missing pieces as identified by gang members and research regarding gangs, they can begin to restore security to El Salvador. Providing the opportunities that young people meet in gangs, such as social recognition, livelihood, and purpose can help deter more young people from acting counter-productively to development. These needs are not new or innovative, but rather apply to all people in different respects. Thus, in order to stop gangs from harassing local business owners, or assaulting local citizens, or committing violence for the purpose of a street war where there is no winner, there must be the opportunity for young people to find meaningful participation in traditional societal realms. Providing these opportunities to youth does not only affect young people, but society as a whole in El Salvador. It limits the counter-productive behaviour and serves to generate bigger spaces for entrepreneurship, political activism, participation in hobbies and sports, education, and much more. The gangs currently serve as threats to many efforts and endeavours in El Salvador, and by limiting their impact through the creation of space for youth, development efforts then have the space to improve.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Conceptualizing the gangs via differential opportunity structure helps to situate their study in specific contexts. According to this theory, in El Salvador they are a combination of the three subcultures outlined by Cloward and Ohlin. The recreational use of drugs (Carranza, 2004, 18) indicates that they are a retreatist subculture, separating themselves from conventional society by altering their mind frames (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960, 22-27). The gangs are also criminal in nature as they practice extortion, the sale of illegal goods, and commit other delinquencies. This behaviour is the primary concern of the state and citizenry of El Salvador. Most obviously, however, they are a conflict subculture, built upon constructed notions of enemy and allegiance, and are in a constant battle to be the last one standing (Focus Group D, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012). Conflict, criminal and retreatist behaviours and the identities that they inspire are learned through a process of joining the gang. They are a response to social, economic, and political factors that surround young people in El Salvador.

Although there are a number of factors including urbanization, migration, unemployment, the availability of firearms, dysfunctional families, poverty, a culture of violence, and a loss of identity that contribute to the existence of gangs, I have focused on three: the legacy of violence, economic marginalisation, and social marginalisation. These factors create barriers to youth integration into Salvadoran society, specifically for impoverished, male youth. However, the implications for development expand to affect the whole of Salvadoran society. Daily interactions with gang youth withstanding, the implications of their actions affect social, political, human and economic development.

Thus impeding the development of El Salvador. However, in order to address the gangs, the legacy of violence, economic marginalisation and social marginalisation must be addressed. The gangs are reproduced because they are unable to integrate and further impede development by criminal, conflict, and retreatist behaviour. Although they contradict development efforts, they are produced by specific aspects of a lack of development. Ergo, development goals must be in line with criminal justice goals.

Therefore, development efforts must be concerned with the structures that inform gang behaviour. The ubiquity of violence in the country helps to teach youth that violence affords power and helps one achieve what they want. The state used it, and still uses it as a means to an end. The police force is the primary interaction that youth have with the state, and it continues to use excessive force. Regardless of the intention of the PNC, its officers are not helping to generate an atmosphere of positive growth for any citizen of El Salvador. Specifically, methods of arrest are concerning. Force is often used and human rights abuses have occurred (Focus Groups, *El Espino*, Ahuachapán, May 2012.) The treatment of these young men has generated mistrust of the state and fortified the rhetoric of the gangs in using the same violent treatment against others.

Economic engagement also conditions the ways that marginalised young people choose to behave. The economic sector in El Salvador no longer relies heavily on industry. Banking and technology have come to dominate and both of these sectors require higher levels of education. However, the barriers that young people in impoverished communities face barricade one's path to achieving this. Education levels in Salvadoran youth are not generally high (POLJUVE, 2009, 27; Maclure and Sotelo, 2004, 425). Those who live in socially marginalised communities are restricted to attend

public schools fraught with violence and gangs, and danger on the walk to and from school. This environment discourages youth from attending or attempting to achieve something (Winton, 2005, 169-171). The economy is simply unable to absorb the labour surplus in El Salvador (POLJUVE, 2009, 27). Employment, and a viable means to survive, are difficult to come by.

Social marginalisation contributes to economic problems for youth. It causes a circular pattern whereby young people do not hold the trust of their communities, are unable to get a job, but need to find a way to support themselves. Criminal behaviour offers a short term solution but creates problems in the long run when people are unable to find legitimate work because of their criminal pasts. So the cycle continues. Individuals weigh the opportunities available to them if they decide to join a gang (Jankowski, 1991, 22). The inability to find legal income helps to motivate young people to find alternative modes of success and sustainability.

The legacy of violence in El Salvador poses a challenge to building trust in communities in general and contributes to encourage the social marginalisation of youth. The civil war, post war, and street war have characterized the last 35 years with insecurity, violence, and fear. Daily behaviours change, relationships change, one's ability to engage in their surrounding world changes. This fear is currently defined by the existence of gangs. As a result, it becomes imperative for the purpose of integrating youth into a society that is plagued by a history of violence to address this legacy. Beginning a healing process from everything experienced in El Salvador may help to create an atmosphere conducive to generating trust and solidarity in communities, youth included. To address youth, we must address the communities that have been harmed.

The social structures that condition youth choices and opportunities are shaped by the different realms in which youth interact - the family, the community, the state, and peer groups. Accounts of interfamily violence are common, and parents often migrate for the purpose of finding income, thereby creating single parent households (Abrego, 2009, 28). Communities are coping with insecurity, and as such can neglect the needs of youth in stages of development. The state further contributes to young people's fear and insecurity in the streets. Thus, peer groups offer to fill voids that are found in these other realms in terms of support, purpose, and recognition. The continuity of the social marginalisation of youth from conventional family and community groups has ensured the continuity of the gangs themselves.

The methods employed to address the gangs have thus far been inadequate. The state has primarily used force, which has fuelled gang resistance identities by contributing to the conflict subculture. While prevention and intervention methods have been unstable and lacked the ability to address the breadth of the issues that young people face. Furthermore, the citizenry has been largely ignored in addressing insecurity and fear. Prevention and intervention do not offer the ability to reinstate security to all citizens in El Salvador.

Moving forward when addressing gangs, it is imperative to bring in communities that have been affected by them. Increasing security in communities can help to spawn development. The community has been cited by a number of youth as a major barrier for re-engaging with Salvadoran society, and is the primary site where this occurs. Thus, responses to gangs require a focus on addressing community needs as well.

Conventional methods - prevention, deterrence, and intervention - do not conceptualize the process to include community. As a result of the implications on development of gangs, restorative justice could offer an appropriate response. Restorative justice approaches require the participation of the community. These methods encompass numerous components including the victimizer and the victim. It requires a stronger understanding of the motivations involved in the situation, why the victimizer is acting the way they do and the impact these actions have on the victim(s). As well, the process is concerned with impacts on the surrounding community. The process of restoring justice depends on dialogue that helps participants understand that the deed does not define the doer. In this process of dialogue surrounding the event, the victims and the offender are in control (UNODC, 2006, 6). Restorative justice provides an alternative to incarceration; young people do not become wards of the state, but instead find solutions based on the rights of all people involved (UNODC, 2006, 9-11). This approach is dependent on solidarity within the community where the acts of delinquency or violence transpired (UNODC, 2006, 37).

Restorative justice approaches could help to situate all participants in the complexities of gangs and the factors that motivate and maintain this subculture and their behaviours in El Salvador. A greater understanding of this might foster an atmosphere in which youth could begin to make reparations for the harm that they have caused and build trust with their communities. Further, it allows the victims of crime to voice their experiences, which is a therapeutic process and does not ignore the ways in which the general population has been affected by the activities of the gangs. Gangs, though, cannot be addressed without development in other areas outside the criminal justice sector in El

Salvador. However, these other areas of development cannot be addressed without the consideration of gangs. Restorative justice could provide the forum in which this process begins.

Lessons for development

El Salvador is home to arguably the most extreme gang phenomenon in the world. The merit of this study is that we can see that neglecting the basic social and economic needs of young people can result in widespread violence and insecurity, thereby affecting an entire nation. Politics, economics, and human development have been disturbed. Gangs, though, exist because of problems in development. The concern now are the lessons we can take from the experience of El Salvador to apply to other situations. A better understanding of gangs in El Salvador could decrease the chance of similar situations arising elsewhere in the world.

Youth hold a unique position in society, as neither adult nor child, neither fully developed nor young enough to require constant guidance. This definitional grey zone makes it difficult to understand their place in development practices (Jones, 2009, 5-11). They are often ignored as viable actors. The danger of disregard is that they can become marginalised from development endeavours, sidelining their specific needs. Young people, though, have been recognized as a cohort that strongly influences the direction of social change by challenging the existing norms and traditions, or social and political structures, of older generations (Davids, Schulpen and Verhoen, 2007 35; Erikson, 1961, 22). Thus, bringing youth into development practices in meaningful ways can help to encourage development.

Young people occupy a mercurial space, it is thus imperative that we begin to better understand how youth fit into development initiatives. Without the input of young people social momentum for progress can be impaired (Erikson, 1961, 22). The gang phenomenon in El Salvador exhibits the ways that youth are able to impair development in an extreme manner and offers an example of a level that other countries do not wish to reach. High levels of insecurity, crime and violence are the results of actions of a group of young people in El Salvador. Young people require opportunities to engage in different ways in society. This requires that holes are identified and addressed accordingly.

Youth participation in interviews and focus groups showed that the community's response to them is pivotal in their decision-making. The community partly defines the opportunities available to youth. Community members are business owners, witnesses to crime, and support structures. The case of El Salvador has shown that if the wounds of crime and violence are not addressed, that it can be detrimental to the fabric of society. Fear and insecurity negatively impact the way that people live and engage. Therefore, victims of crime must be addressed for both the young people requiring more opportunities as well as repairing the damage to those harmed. Healing from experiences from the civil war and the following street war may encourage trust and encourage space in society for young people to engage. The community must be considered in approaches to gangs.

State efforts of repression have failed to consider the community and other structural forces conditioning the lives of the youth. Specific legislation has instilled fear by, in a sense, declaring war against the gangs. Endeavours which have been supported

by the media through over-reporting on youth and gang crime have strengthened support for repression through the use of fear. However, the strict use of repression does not stifle the problem of gangs. The pressure to arrest has motivated excessive force. Youth feel victimized by the state. Thus, although the application of the law is necessary, it's obvious that repression cannot be the sole method of addressing gangs. State efforts in applying specialized laws have served to limit the rights of youth, while disregarding the factors that condition one to choose to join a gang. This is a lesson for all countries across the globe addressing a problem of gangs. To apply the law is necessary, but not sufficient in stopping gangs because the factors that motivate one to join the gang continue to exist, ensuring their progression. Members that are taken to jail are replaced by other youth facing the same barriers to development and exposure to subcultural norms, ensuring the continuity of the gangs. Thus, addressing push factors for joining gangs is required in order to interrupt the sustainability of street youth gangs.

Applying the law as it exists is important. The creation of new legislation and laws that specifically target young people is redundant and ineffective. It encourages police to play a numbers game rather than apply effective policing. Specialized legislation also encourages fear and mistrust in the populace. It singles out the enemy and characterizes him as poor, male youth. The targets of the legislation become the enemy of the state, encouraging extreme measures against them. Good policing, according to the law as it exists, could help to fuel trust between communities and the state. This helps to encourage reporting and witnessing of crime by offering the populace hope for support when they have suffered a crime.

The case of El Salvador also exhibits that it is imperative to acknowledge the tangible factors that contribute to violence. Gun management requires greater attention in street-level distribution. The availability of firearms in El Salvador has fuelled violence but little has been done in terms of making obtaining a firearm more difficult. However, decreasing the availability of firearms could decrease the crimes committed with them.

In sum, El Salvador has shown that the affected community is just as important when responding to gangs. There must be more opportunities provided to youth to engage with broader society. Young people are a disenfranchised group yet are the future politicians, lawyers, activists, and teachers of societies. Ensuring that they have opportunities for integrating into society at a young age provides a longer learning process before they are afforded the responsibility of making decisions for development purposes. It is partly the responsibility of adults in positions of power to encourage positive participation of youth, which requires that there is a safe space and opportunity for young people to engage and learn. This requires that development in the community becomes a focus. An effort to heal feelings of fear and insecurity may encourage space for young people to engage, deterring the need to join an alternative subculture.

Moving Forward: Reconciling Development and Criminal Justice Goals

Gang violence and crime in El Salvador has had broad repercussions for all citizens. It is now imperative to address those that it has affected through the years. Victims of crime and communities at large must be given the option to heal. Restorative justice approaches could provide this forum, the opportunity for all parties to air grievances and opinions. The ability to share experiences between those harmed could help to encourage support and solidarity between individuals, building trust in society. It

might also generate a greater understanding of the breadth of the impacts of crime by the youth.

A defining part of the gang phenomenon in El Salvador is the stigmatisation of young people. The practice of open dialogue offers the platform to better comprehend the issues that the individuals involved are facing. Youth then have the ability to explain why they behave the way they do. Through this dialogue, more spaces for young people could open up to afford opportunity to grow in conjunction with larger society. These could be spaces which could help to spawn positive change and development in line with youth needs and desires, challenging existing norms.

Collaboration between bodies that address youth gangs is thus necessary. Not solely between NGOs, offering preventive and tertiary programming, but also with the state. The reaction of the state to tertiary programming shows a distinct misunderstanding of the needs of the practice. Dialogue regarding needs of the youth involved for their success is required. With the support of police in these efforts, the programs could be much more successful. Police must be better educated on the efforts and needs of the programs, and better educate programs on the efforts that would make them more trustworthy to police. Collaboration between police and programs would decrease disturbances in programming as well as encourage trust in participants and youth. The bakery in Mejicanos is a good example of misused policing. Frequent raids indicate illegal activity of participants to the surrounding community. Ergo, police raids generate fear and insecurity though the insinuation that participants have been acting illegally. Furthermore, they are not applying investigative skills, but are rather arresting those to whom they have easy access. This practice could deter other, new participants. Going

straight does not provide the safety that young people crave and believe they gain from their gang.

Thus, better collaboration is dependent on police ability to investigate crime. Police often raid tertiary programs because they assume that the participants are using them as an immunity clause against arrest (Interview, Inspectora Figueroa, San Salvador, May 2012). Increased emphasis on criminal investigation would ensure that arrests made in these programs are legitimate. Ergo, disturbances in programming would decrease, opening a space to build trust in youth participants.

Finally, what became apparent in the focus groups was that preventive programming was not reaching the at risk youth due to their lack of interest in what was offered. Programs could thus benefit from bringing youth in and designing initiatives based on their needs. Young people explicitly explained that they feel disconnected from Salvadoran society. Thus, programs should be designed around ways that help to break down social stigma of youth and help them engage with other Salvadorans. Preventive programming should be concerned with creating opportunities for youth in economic, social and political realms, so that they are able to direct their energy in a meaningful way that is not harmful to their communities.

Directions for future research

Although the gang phenomenon in El Salvador has been studied extensively in recent years, there are still a number of gaps in the information available. Primarily, the gendered aspect of the gangs. Gangs and girls have been intertwined since their inception, however, the different ways that girls experience gang life has not yet been explored in the Salvadoran context. Women and girls are not often addressed when

discussing methods of dealing with gangs, primarily because members are more often male than female. However, girls in gangs experience these relationships very differently than boys; often times, their role is highly sexualized (Fariña, Miller and Cavallaro, 2010, 75-85). As such, responses for young women and girls in gangs greatly differ than those for boys due to the sexualization of their roles. What it means to be male or female in the context of gangs in El Salvador with ideas of machismo has yet to be fully explored (Interview, Inspector Figueiroa, San Salvador, May 2012). Further study must be done as to how these experiences shape young women and affect their abilities to engage and develop in Salvadoran society.

For the purpose of addressing gangs, it would also be worthwhile to conduct a study of *calmados*, non-active gang members. An in-depth look at how they became inactive and why could shed light on program initiatives. Drawing from their experiences could benefit tertiary programming initiatives immensely. Although there is no record of it, many people have left the gang without the assistance of an organization. Programs could attempt to ascertain the specific needs met by certain steps of leaving a gang and then attempt to emulate them or reproduce the rewards for certain steps. Perhaps the consideration of real time and real life experiences could fill some current voids in programming.

Equally important is the study of how communities deal with and cope with gangs. A case study carried out within a specific gang territory in El Salvador. could help to provide a better perspective from friends, family, and business owners in the communities about real life experiences they have with gangs. This thesis illuminates what we know - that gangs impact development negatively by disrupting daily life,

economics and politics. However, by bringing in family and community perspectives we can gain a better understanding of the holistic impacts of gangs, on families, friends, peer relationships, as well as community relationships. This would allow us to situate the gangs within a smaller context and from this, draw an understanding of the community's relationship with larger structures and the specific ways that this influences youth delinquency in the community. This will reveal more specific reactions to larger social, political, and economic structures. The study should take into consideration methods of income accumulation, interaction with civil society, methods of coping with fear, and social support networks. Thus providing a more in-depth look at real life affairs with gangs in El Salvador.

Summary

In conclusion, my research has shown that young people are neglected in El Salvador and that due to this a subculture has arisen that challenges development practices and threatens day to day life. Although gangs are not the sole cause of violence, they are a concern because they represent a significant portion of young people acting counter productively to their own development, as well as the development of El Salvador. The fear and insecurity that exists in the country has impeded other people's ability to engage in economic and social sectors. After twenty years of gang violence, it is time to acknowledge that force and repression cannot address this phenomenon fully. Restorative justice approaches require the consideration of those harmed and could provide efforts in El Salvador with the ability to address the problem holistically, thereby serving to generate trust and social networks that provide positive opportunities for youth.

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Appendix

Interview: Padre Toño

How long have you been working with at-risk youth here in El Salvador? And more specifically, how many of those youth are members of gangs?

Can you please describe the intervention programs you offer for young people wishing to become inactive gang members? What are the requisites for gang members wishing to participate?

What happens if a participant commits a crime during their time in the program?

Where do you find funding for your programs?

The program offered by SSP is probably the best known program for young people wishing to become inactive in their gangs. However, it was raided last month. Can you please explain what happened and how it has affected the program?

Where do you find support for your program - the community, government?

Your website talks of a program of restorative justice. Can you please explain how you employ these theories to communities in El Salvador?

Do you offer psychological assistance to community members in need of that type of support?

What do current programs for reintegration of gang members lack?

Many people say that one of the biggest problems facing rehabilitation and intervention programs is public perception regarding the role of administrators. For example, sometime people mistake program administrators as accomplices to gangs. This sentiment creates a barrier to generating trust and support from the citizenry. Have you encountered this in your work? How have you dealt with it or changed public opinion?

Finally, the new plan to address violent crime announced by the government includes an antigang task force. Their goals and tactics are reminiscent of the tactics used in 2003 and 2004, like the Mano Dura and Super Mano Dura. What do you think might happen with a stronger force? How will gangs react to this new force?

Interview: Victor

Could you please describe the community where you grew up? What types of violence were present, and where?

You just mentioned having had problems with the police, could you tell me about one of those?

When a police knows somebody to be a gang member, does that mean they have more problems with police? What are interactions between known gang members and police like?

How do you feel in light of recent events with police raiding this program?

Many efforts in this country are focused on the prevention of violence. Do you know many programs for youth and the prevention of violence in the community where you're from? What do they consist of? And who offers them?

How did you come to participate in this program or rehabilitation?
How do other people become involved here? Is there a process?

Could you please describe the value of this program in your life?

What do rehabilitation and reintegration mean to you - how do you achieve this? What are important factors for you, personally?

Do you ever see yourself leaving this program? What is the next step for you?

Are there still gang members in this community? How does the community react to this program and its participants?

What is the most important aspect of a program to deter people from committing crimes?

Interview: Inspectora Blanca Figueiroa

Could you please tell me about the new anti gang task force? There is now a truce, as well as a task force. This new one, however, looks much like the old ones that were

applied during the Mano Dura and Super Mano Dura. How do they differ? And how can the police force justify using these methods again when they did not work the first time?

You have just spoken of prevention programs. It's interesting that these program are not offered in the department of San Salvador, in Apopa and Mejucanos and Soyapango, where gangs are the most prominent. Will police eventually be looking to offer programs in those areas as well?

The efforts in prevention that you have described sound a little bit like community policing. But there lacks the presence of the same police in the same places in order to generate relationships between police and community members. This tactic has proven effective in other situations of high occurrences of violence. Why doesn't the PNC employ these methods?

You have spoken about the necessity to provide reintegration and rehabilitation programs. However, just two months ago the police raided an effective program in Buenos Aires. The program participants have mentioned that the actions of the police show that they do not believe rehabilitation is possible, that change is not possible. There always seem to be these conflictive relationships between police and program participants due to a lack of trust. What then can the justification for these actions be?

Is there a process for police who have committed maltreatment? And in training are police educated on the rights of youth during their training?

I would like to know more about the connection between the FBI and the PNC. They are here with CAT, is their participation solely through information sharing? Or more?

Interview: Anonymous Santa Ana and San Salvador

Could you tell me from your wealth of experiences about programs related to gangs in El Salvador offered by the state or bodies of the state?

Does the funding for the programs come from the government?

What programs have shown you the best successes? What makes it different from others?

From your experience, what are the aspects of life in El Salvador that need to be addressed in gang control programming?

Can you talk to me about community policing and its role or lack there of in El Salvador?

What do you think of police actions against the bakery run by nonactive gang members and overseen by SSP?

What are your thoughts on the new anti gang task force? It appears much like efforts during the Mano Dura and Super Mano Dura.

What do you think the public perception is of the police?

The history of youth in El Salvador is of a marginalized population, from employment and civic participation. One of the most problematic situations, depending on the youth in question, is the police. Many of them fear interacting with police. Are there programs to teach police officers about youth rights and how to deal with young people in street situations?

How was the FBI involved in the formation of the new plan against gangs?

Youth Focus Groups

In the communities in which you grew up, was there a strong presence of violence? What types of violence and where?

Was there a police presence? Please describe where you encountered police. Did police presence offer feelings to security? Could you go to them if you had a problem?

What have your experiences with police been like?

Many efforts in El Salvador are focused on stopping violence, including through offering lots of prevention programming for youth. Are you aware of programs available for youth in your communities? What do they consist of? Who offers them - the state, the church, athletic groups?

Have you participated in any of these programs? Why or why not?

You have all participated in vocational programs in this centre, that have the intentions of preparing you for getting jobs once you leave. Can you tell me about these programs? What did you like about them? What did they lack? How will they help you in the future?

When you leave this detention centre, what kind of initiatives or programs would help you to avoid participating in delinquent activities or gangs?

If you could design a program specifically for what you want, what would it look like?