

Urban Violence: Building Safe and Inclusive Cities in Latin America

Wednesday, May 13, 2015

Opening Remarks

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Introduction

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EXCLUSION, VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITY RESPONSES IN CENTRAL AMERICAN CITIES:

Guiding policy by explaining variation

by FLACSO-Costa Rica and FLACSO-El Salvador

Description of the project

- *Research question from SAIC:* Why urban communities with similar conditions of social and economic exclusion, have different levels of violence?
- *Main hypothesis of our research:* In urban marginal communities with similar conditions of social exclusion, different levels of violence can be explained because communities capacities to face violence.
- *Methodology:*
 - Nine communities in urban areas (metropolitan and no metropolitan areas).
 - Three communities in Costa Rica and six in El Salvador.
 - Mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques of research.

Three basic thoughts for policy making

- The existence of a community, as social actor, cannot be taken for granted.
- The necessity to identify different types of violence and to balance their importance.
- In the Salvadoran cases, the *maras* are an ambiguous phenomenon.

FIRST thought:

The existence of a community, as social actor, cannot be taken for granted

- Factors that hinder collective action and organization:
 - Territorial factors
 - Social factors
 - Factors associated to violence
- Consequences for policy:
 - Interventions are unavoidable exogenous to the territories.
 - Interventions should also aim to constitute the community as an actor.
 - Factors that can foster or hinder the constitution of the community as an actor: leadership; types of organization; women participation; political clientelism and presence of institutions and especially of local governments.

SECOND THOUGHT:

The necessity to identify different types of violence and to balance their importance

- Contextual violence
 - Micro markets of drugs in Costa Rica and *maras* in El Salvador.
 - The importance of exogenous factors:
 - Social exclusion (extreme disempowerment in labor markets and the territorial absence of the State).
 - The transformation of Central America as a new corridor for international drug flows.
- Profit seeking violence and social violence
 - Profit seeking violence (*assaults, theft, burglary, etc.*) emerges as the most dangerous form of violence in the social imaginary.
 - Social violence (*intra-domestic and among neighbors*) happens in daily basis but it is silenced and tends to become natural and invisible.
 - The necessity for the re-equilibrium between these two types of violence.

THIRD THOUGHT:

In the Salvadoran cases, *maras* are an ambiguous phenomenon

- Nature of ambiguity:
 - The *maras* have the monopoly of violence in the communities: economic extortion, rape of young women, recruitment of children, etc. Do not forget the victims.
 - But, they offer protection against external violence and they intervene regulating social violence.
- Policy choice in terms of citizen security:
 - Social reinsertion versus repression of *maras*.
 - Factors that may affect the policy choice:
 - Presence or absence of institutions that challenge the monopoly of violence by the *maras*.
 - (Un)sustainable economic projects for ex-members of the *maras*.
 - Hidden agenda by the leaders of the *maras*.
 - Moment of the prevalence of the logic of reinsertion or repression.