Bulletin of Latin American Research
JOURNAL of the SOCIETY for LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

Bulletin of Latin American Research, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 492–504, 2010

Discipline and Punish? Youth Gangs' Response to 'Zero-tolerance' Policies in Honduras

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The response of youth gangs to 'zero tolerance' policing in Honduras are examined with respect to territoriality. Focusing on two main gangs, the Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang, the ways in which state authority is challenged are assessed from an analysis of body territoriality, the respatialisation of organisational structures across urban neighbourhoods, and the production of new enclosed spaces of gang territoriality. These redefinitions of group territoriality strengthen the emotional bonds and sense of belonging towards the gang, enabling the emergence of a transnational/imagined community.

Keywords: gangs, gang territoriality, Honduras, marginal youth, zero-tolerance policy.

Introduction

In 2003, the government in Honduras introduced Mano Dura (Iron Fist) and the Ley Antimaras (Anti-gang Law). These were zero-tolerance policy initiatives resembling the former New York mayor Giuliani's 'broken window policing' or 'order maintenance' to control New York crime (Müller, 2009). In Honduras, Mano Dura and the Ley Antimaras aimed at reducing social violence and reinstating public security by incarcerating members of Honduras's two main youth gangs, the Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang. The government held gang members responsible for most social violence and public insecurity. Gangs' violent practices and involvement in crime and delinquency made them an obvious target for zero tolerance. As Peetz (2008) observes, the government defined youth and gang members as a threat or menace to society, which legitimised and justified their persecution.

Zero tolerance demonstrated poor results; not only did it fail to reduce crime and delinquency, but also it was unable to control or disband the youth gangs (Gutíerrez Rivera 2009). Gang members outwitted state authorities in the marginal neighbourhoods by altering their customary territorial movements and practices. In the jails, imprisoned members defied prison order and authorities by claiming areas, which led to brutal territorial disputes. Zero-tolerance policies reinforced gang territoriality and the gang community. On the one hand, territorial strategies became more refined, ensuring gang

sustainability and leading to the emergence of new territories. On the other hand, zero tolerance reinforced emotional ties and a sense of belonging to the gang, especially in prison where imprisoned members perceived the gang as a transnational community.

This article looks at youth gangs' response to zero-tolerance policies in Honduras. It focuses on gang territoriality and its sophistication in the face of state repression. Gang territoriality has not received much scholarly attention. Instead, studies on Central American gangs have focused chiefly on gang violence, the involvement of gangs in delinquency and crime, and reasons for joining the gang (Escobar, 1996; Smutt and Miranda, 1998; Concha-Eastman and Cruz, 2001; ERIC, IDESO, IDIES, IUDOP, 2001; Save the Children and Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes (ACJ), 2002; DeCesare, 2003; Liebel, 2004; Savenije and van der Borgh, 2004; Huhn and Oettler, 2006; Peetz, 2008; Savenije, 2009).

Honduran gangs have been the least studied despite having one of the highest rates of membership in Central America. Existing research focuses as well on gang violence and proliferation from a social disorganisation approach, which reinforces the criminalisation of the gang (Salomón, Castellanos and Flores, 1999; ERIC, IDESO, IDIES, IUDOP, 2001; Save the Children and Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes (ACJ), 2002; UNDP, 2003; Cálix, 2004; ERIC IDESO, IDIES, IUDOP, 2004a; Arana, 2005; ERIC, 2005; Sánchez Velásquez, 2008). Studies on zero-tolerance policies look at Central American governments' limitations in addressing the complexities of social violence and marginal youth (González, 2003; Blanco Reyes, 2004; Peetz, 2004; Hume, 2007; Rodgers, 2008). This approach explains the return of authoritarian practices, the weakness of state institutions, and the poor policy-making of Central American governments because of the oligarchic nature of the powerful groups. However, it does not address youth gangs or how they have faired under state repression.

Specifically, this article aims to understand gangs' territorial strategies under zero-tolerance policies. It examines how territorial strategies changed, and which new strategies and territories emerged. The empirical data supporting the analysis comes from three research periods spent in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, Honduras in 2006 and 2007. Data collection includes five informal conversations with gang members, participant-observation in gang-controlled areas in jails and analysis of newspaper articles from national papers from 2002 to 2004.

The article is organised as follows: the next section discusses youth gangs, violence and territory, drawing attention to the rise of social violence and gangs' relationship to territory. The third section analyses territorial strategies of the gangs under zero tolerance. It examines how territorial strategies are altered, the new strategies that emerge, and the meaning of the new territories. The last section reflects on the meaning of the appearance of new geographies of violence and exclusion, and the development of a transnational gang.

Social Violence, Gangs and Territory

In the late 1970s, Honduras witnessed an upsurge of unprecedented social violence. By 2002, the homicide rate was 35.1 per 100,000, placing the country third after Colombia with a rate of 84.4, and El Salvador with a rate of 50.2 (WHO, 2002). This new violence differed from the political violence that dominated the Central American region and that culminated in civil wars (in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua) in the late 1970s and 1980s. Social violence was complex and contradictory (Moser

and McIlwaine, 2004). It did not come from an organising group such as a social movement or insurgents, which mobilised the defence of common interests (Rotker, 2002). Rather, social violence was everywhere and targeted everyone. This 'ubiquity of violence' (Torres-Rivas, 1998) indicated the normalisation or 'democratisation of violence' (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999) in Latin American societies, which led to the emergence of fear and insecurity among the population.

The 'new' violence is a legacy of Latin America's long history of terror, violence and fear, which are deeply embedded in Latin American societies (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999). Poverty, inequality, globalisation and neoliberalism are also factors linked to social violence (Moser and McIlwaine, 2004). Both poverty and inequality generate difficult living conditions. In urban areas, this tends to result in an increase in crime and violence. Globalisation and neoliberalism have contributed to polarising societies and to the emergence of the 'new poor' (Moser and McIlwaine, 2004). Furthermore, because neoliberalism retracts the state from its social functions, the state is unable to respond to social conflicts associated with social violence such as drug trafficking, criminality and delinquency, and youth gang expansion. Paradoxically, social violence appears when Latin American countries are undergoing democratisation processes to abolish authoritarian regimes and practices and promote civil empowerment. As Koonings and Kruijt (2004) point out, democratisation in Latin America goes hand in hand with the proliferation of non-legitimate armed actors that threaten civilians.

Social violence in Honduras did not differ from what has just been described. Together with the rise in drug trafficking, crime and delinquency, studies observe youth gangs as new armed actors involved in social violence at the local levels, particularly the marginal neighbourhoods (Salomón, 1994; Salomón, Castellanos and Flores, 1999; Save the Children and and Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes (ACJ), 2002; ERIC, 2005; Sánchez Velásquez, 2008). Youth gangs became visible in the late 1990s, but their emergence predates this decade. Not much is known about the early history of gangs except that they appeared in schools during the 1960s and 1970s (UNDP, 2003). In the 1980s, youth gangs became more aggressive, but it was in the 1990s that youth gangs underwent a major transformation. Local gangs became members of two main gangs originally from the US, the Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang. Other changes included a fixed and structured organisational structure, the use of more defined and complex symbolical references, and the institutionalisation of violence.

Indeed, gangs around the world had undergone a transformation (McDonald, 2003; Vigil, 2003). As Hagedorn (1998) observes, the contemporary or post-industrial gang, which emerged in the 1980s, became more violent than the industrial or classical gang because of: (a) the economic function of contemporary gangs; (b) the need to regulate illicit commerce; (c) the proliferation of firearms; (d) the effect of prisons on neighbourhood gangs; and (e) mainstream cultural values of money and success. Ethnographic studies on gang-controlled neighbourhoods give details of gang transformation, particularly the use of sophisticated forms of violence. There is extensive literature that looks at the micro-level of gang violence in the USA (Horowitz, 1987; Vigil, 1988; Jankowski, 1991; Bourgois, 1996; Venkatesh, 1997; Hagedorn, 1998), Colombia and Mexico (Reguillo, 1991, 2002; Cerbino, 2004; Restrepo, 2007). Recently, this has received scholarly attention in Central America (Savenije, 2009; Rodgers, 2006, 2007; Rocha and Rodgers, 2008; ERIC, 2005, ERIC/IDESO/IDIES/IUDOP, 2004a, 2004b; Save the Children, 2002; Salomón, Castellanos, and Flores, 1999; Concha-Eastman and Cruz, 2001; Smutt and Miranda, 1998).

Studies focusing on the micro-level give rich details that help understand the transformation of local gangs and their increasing use of violence. For instance, most members come from violent households and drop out of school, learning to socialise in the streets. Street-corner activity – 'hanging out' or 'passing time' on the streets or bars – increases adolescents' and young adults' risk of joining the gang. In addition, the neighbourhoods where gangs emerge have high concentrations of people with low socio-economic income and high levels of social exclusion. Studies point out that underclass neighbourhoods are not served by enough state institutions such as schools, hospitals, and police (ERIC, IDESO, IDIES, IUDOP, 2001; ERIC, 2005). Furthermore, the high levels of distrust among residents and drug activity (trafficking and consuming) contribute to the increase of crime and delinquency and violence (ERIC, IDESO, IDIES, IUDOP, 2004b). Gangs are arguably a response to this crude setting or 'the shrinking range of possibilities in the urban areas' (Rodgers, 2006: 291). Gangs may thus impose local order or 'street level politics' through the use of violence, constituting a form of social structuration that undermines the existing local social fabric.

The deportation of former and/or active members from the USA, is another factor in the transformation of local gangs' organisational structure accompanied by the sophistication of violence. Deported gang members have brought and imposed the chicano-gang model, a highly vertical and hierarchical organisational structure that is complex and institutionalises the use of violence. However, this explanation simplifies and overlooks complex processes in the micro- and national levels that have contributed to the transformation of local gangs. For instance, studies often do not consider the lack of government programmes for receiving and integrating deported youth. Furthermore, little is known about the experience of these deportees or their involvement in the reorganisation of local gangs, and the circulation of Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang symbolism and imagery. An exception is Zilberg's (2003) study of deported Salvadorian youth. Deportation throws the already marginalised adolescents and young adults into a new and unfamiliar geography. Excluded from citizenship in many cases transnational deported youth are able to build a place for themselves. Zilberg's study focuses on the spatial dimension, which despite being an important feature of gangs, remains unexplored.

Virtually all gangs are territorial and usually are associated with a particular neighbourhood (Rodgers, 2003, 2007). For Venkatesh (1997), gang territoriality is linked to ties with the community. The relationship with the community ensures the gang's sustainability, that is, their integration into a local (and larger) community through social engagement, social relations of power, friendship, and solidarity (Jankowski, 1991; Venkatesh, 1997). Horowitz (1987) observed that gangs integrate through negotiation with community residents. The closer the link between residents and gang members, the more community residents are not only more reluctant to perceive a gang member as deviant, but also, in some circumstances, even to tolerate gang violence. Gang integration is all about achieving what Venkatesh (1997) termed 'legitimate community status', which has to be continually reconstructed. Gangs' territorial practices are central here, as they enable the gang to spatialise relationships. In doing so, the gang defines the possibilities of social interaction and experience for the residents. Furthermore, gangs demonstrate the ability to produce – following Lefebvre's (1991) terminology – social space, forming a 'symbolic map' for residents to follow.

Gang territoriality has become more violent because of gangs' involvement with drug trafficking, easy access to weapons, and macro-social factors such as increases in poverty and unemployment (Rogers, 2006). National policies also transform gang territoriality. Zilberg (2007) shows how the US immigration laws in the 1990s transnationalised

gang territories. The national security policies in Central America also changed gang territoriality. However, this spatial dimension has received little scholarly attention.

Gang Territoriality and Strategies of Policing Zero Tolerance

Analysing Gang Territoriality

Traditionally, gang territoriality has been understood as: the concentration of the gangs' activities within a 'turf'; that this turf is relatively bounded, and; that gang members defend the turf against invaders, usually the rival gang (Moore, Vigil and García, 1983). Underlying this notion of gang territoriality, however, is the understanding of territory – in this case, the turf as fixed or frozen. Furthermore, this notion does not take into account the gang's transformation in the past 30 years as a result of globalisation, increased migration and mobility of members, and relatively easier access to information technology (such as the Internet), which has reshaped turfs and led to the emergence of new gang territories.

Contemporary political geography theory criticises this non-static feature of territory and the circumscription or delimitation of space. Rather, territory is an active area where an individual or group attempts to influence the interactions of other groups or individuals (Sack, 1986). Territory is socially produced *and* is constantly transformed (see Lefebvre, 1991; Agnew, 1994; Brenner, Jessop, Jones and MacLeod, 2003; Brenner, 2004).

Framing the territoriality of contemporary gangs within this approach enables the understanding of the appearance and meanings ascribed to new gang territories under state repression in Honduras. Specifically, this article analyses how gang territorial strategies have changed, what new territories have emerged, what meanings have been ascribed to these new territories, and how these new territorial strategies have strengthened the gang.

Strategies and Territories of Resistance

Mano Dura and the Anti-gang law appeared under Ricardo Maduro's presidency (2002–2006) administration. Maduro, a businessman who was a member of the opposition party, the National Party (Partido Nacional or PN) was elected president after a successful campaign that promised to end insecurity and social violence.

Mano Dura appeared first in early 2003. The purpose was to incarcerate gang members for their delinquent actions. However, the government was already thinking of making more drastic changes:

> The government is seriously considering reducing the punishable age in order to stop the violence caused by more than 100,000 gang members of the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang. (*La Tribuna*, 25 Jan 2003)

In August 2003, after much controversy[1], Congress reformed the 332 Article of the Penal Code, famously known as the Anti-gang Law. The new article declared gangs to

1 The Union Democrática (UD), a leftist political party, and various youth organisations opposed the Anti-gang Law.

be illicit associations. This meant that the sole membership of any gang was a motive for arrest and incarceration.

Mano Dura and the Anti-gang Law were also attempts by the Honduran state to restore authority and rule, particularly in urban areas where it was perceived that the state had no control. Mano Dura and the Anti-gang Law had a strong territorial component because they aimed at controlling a certain group (gang members) and territories (marginal neighbourhoods). Police and military forces raided gang-controlled barrios looking for members hanging out on street corners and in their homes. Their constant presence in their neighbourhoods changed the gangs' traditional settings. Gang members were unable to move freely in the streets, hang out or meet on corners as well as defend their turf from the rival gangs. Their highly visible style – hip-hop or rapper clothes, tattoos, crew cut, *tumbao* (walk with swing or style) walk – made them easily identifiable to police forces. Gang members were forced to reconsider their appearance and rethink their territory in order to endure state repression.

Gangs began modifying their territorial strategies in order to reduce their visibility in the streets. They altered the territoriality of the body. A central feature of gang territoriality, the body is the first area where gangs establish possession and exclusion. The style and display of tatoos in a certain way indicate domination. The body is the assertion of property. Indeed, the body is the only ownership of the self in a world characterised by accelerating commodification and unpredictability. It is also the site of personal creativity, authenticity and truth (Benson, 2000). Tattooing registers a member's 'history' in the gang, indicates rank and file as well as the identity of the gang, clique and the individual. Under zero tolerance, however, gang members became aware that their appearance drew too much attention. Members started dressing differently; they wore clothes that covered their tattoos and gave them a more casual look. In addition, gang members stopped tattooing their bodies and restricted the use of tattoos to new members.

These territorial changes (the alteration of the territoriality of the body and movement in the neighbourhood) did not mean that a gang had lost control of the neighbourhood. For many residents, gangs still exercised a strong influence. A resident of el Carrizal, a gang-controlled barrio in Tegucigalpa, said that some store owners continued to pay the 'war tax', which was money gangs collected chiefly from non-residents such as taxi and bus drivers, pedestrians, and also shop owners in the barrio. A non-resident of el Carrizal, a teacher at a public school, also felt that gangs still ruled despite police presence:

> They [gangs] just do it differently. They don't dress the same. They stopped doing the usual *muecas* [gestures]. Some members are specifically on the lookout for police, so they know which areas to avoid. (Non-resident school teacher of el Carrizal in Tegucigalpa)

For imprisoned gang members, the story was different. Territoriality of the body was not only reinforced, but also taken to extremes. In prison, gang members flaunted and performed their gang identity. Customary practices such as head shaving, wearing hip-hop or cholo clothes, and tattooing became the gang's uniform.[2] The particular spatial distribution of the prisons contributed to strengthening the gang territoriality of the body.

2 Inmates in Honduran prisons do not wear uniforms, which is why gang style resembles a uniform in prison.

Honduran prisons' spatial fragmentation was not like Foucault's (1995) panoptic jail, which systemise and organise space for efficient control. For instance, jails are not count on individual cells for isolation. Individual prisoner confinement is absent in the Honduran legislation and the penal code system (CPTRT, 2004), which explains why guards do not enforce isolation on inmates. Instead, prison spatiality enables the grouping of inmates, which intensifies with overcrowding. Gang members were no exception. On their arrival, gang members from different cliques bonded to form a new brotherhood of *dieciochos* or *salvatruchos*, which were spatially concentrated in certain areas in the prison. Contrary to the neighbourhood, where grouping occurs in specific places, imprisoned gang members constantly share the same space and permanently perform roles as gang members for honour and respect from other inmates.

Zero tolerance policing increased gang members' mobility to other barrios, cities and, eventually, other countries. One member that I met in jail recalled that it became increasingly difficult to go out when Mano Dura and the Anti-gang Law came out. When I asked him how he ended up in prison, his story was one of movement and displacement:

> I was on a bus on my way to San Pedro Sula. I was going to visit my *carnales* (gang member). You see, originally I am from San Pedro, but I left and went to Tegucigalpa and then there things got bad and so I tried to go back to San Pedro to my carnales. (18th Street Gang member)

Meeting unknown *hommies* (gang members) in another city or country emphasised transnational belonging. As one gang member explains, regardless of which clique a *hommie* came from, they were not strangers:

> Interviewer: What's the difference between a dieciocho from Honduras and one from El Salvador?
> Gang member: None.
> Interviewer: No difference at all?
> Gang member: No, because we're a big family. If I go to San Salvador I won't have any problems because there I've got my *hommies*. (18th Street Gang Member)

Members perceived the gang and its numerous cliques as part of a large family. This sense of belonging to the gang, as well as the emotional bonds among members, was strengthened by mobility. Furthermore, it altered gangs' traditional notion of territory as enclosed space. Local – and national – boundaries were blurred and the 'barrio' was used to refer to the gang as a transnational and imagined community instead of a physical place.

Imprisoned gang members lacked the mobility of those in the streets. However, restricted mobility not only reinforced the territoriality of imprisoned gang members, but also enabled the emergence of new territories within the confined space. Many prisons in Latin America are overcrowded and suffer from a shortage of space (Ungar, 2003). In Honduras, this shortage of space forced inmates and prison authorities to establish a prison 'order' based on the negotiation of space as well as other prisoners' needs such as the selling of food and merchandise, receiving visitors and being given permission to do certain things. One reason behind this was that Honduran prisons do not have enough employees to supervise the inmates. There were 1,272 prison guards to attend to 10,300 inmates, meaning that each guard had 131 inmates under his supervision (CPTRT, 2004). This was, of course, an impossible task. In the heavily

populated prisons (in San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba and Tegucigalpa), prison guards appointed other inmates, called *rondínes*, to help with the monitoring of inmates:

> The inmates chosen (called *rondínes*) are assistants who help supervise in jail. They patrol and report any abnormal situation to the prison authorities. The *rondín* is chosen to perform this task because of his good conduct. (*El Tiempo*, 27 May 2004)

Inmates generally negotiated needs with the *rondínes*, who in turn bargained with prison guards. Gang members refused to enter this system of negotiation; neither did they acknowledge the *rondín* as an 'authority' figure. On the one hand, gangs follow other authority roles and ideals. A gang leader gains respect and honour from other members usually by demonstrating that he is strong and has no fear of fighting or even dying. The 'rifa del barrio', or territorial dispute, is usually a moment when gangs exercise and test their authority upon others. It is strongly associated with the use of violence. An intrusion into a gang's turf is considered a challenge to gang authority and, as one member told me, demands retaliation:

> My starting point is respect. I don't bother anyone so I expect no one to bother me. He could be from another gang – doesn't matter. As long as he doesn't touch me or disrespect me, everything's good. But if anyone threatens me, bullies or physically hurts me, well, I have to fight back, don't I? (18th Street gang member)

On the other hand, gangs do not negotiate. Their strict and vertical organisational structure does not make members open to intervention or dialogue. Instead, it builds the notion of the gang as a private and closed organisation:

> Everyone thinks they know what we (the gang) are. Well, they don't. Some people out there use our symbols, tattoos to make others believe they're one of us. We are a *pandilla* (gang) and that is a very private thing. (18th Street gang member)

Gangs became more hermetic under the zero tolerance policy, particularly in jail where gang members' refusal to negotiate and to be part of the prison order forced them to claim and fight for space. Claimed areas were filled with drawings, graffiti and murals that represented gang symbolism and imagery. The gangs transformed and produced space in order to make it look like their 'barrios' in the city. In addition, these areas were off limits for the rest of the inmates, imprisoned members of rival gangs, unknown visitors and, in some cases, even the prison guards:

> [The guards] stay on the outside, in the first gate. But this gate, the one you just came through, where my *hommies* are standing, you see them? They guard the entrance to *el barrio*, and we decide who crosses that gate. (Mara Salvatrucha member)

The enclosed nature of gangs' territorial claims in prison resemble Goffman's (1991) analysis of total institutions or asylums, which seal off inmates from the outside world, and stricktly regulate lives within a delimited area. A gang leader organises the everyday practices within the enclosed space. He assigns various duties, such as cooking, laundry and cleaning often to other members. Whether the leader assigns these responsibilities

according to a member's rank and file in the gang is unknown, as gang structure and/or hierarchy is rarely discussed with anyone outside the gang. The leader controls visitor access – not the visiting days or hours – to the 'barrio'. Those allowed to enter are usually family members, gang girlfriends or partners and their children, and members of church and youth organisations who come to give specific community service. The visitors inform the inmates about the outside world; family members connect imprisoned gang members with their neighbourhood by giving and taking messages, narrating barrio events, and bringing in money, food and clothes.

Rocha (2008) points out that for gang members, the jail represents the 'supreme test' of survival. It reinforces the gang by making various features more sophisticated and by professionalising gang members' status. Gangs are able to elaborate their territorial strategies, which (re)spatialise relationships in prison. Furthermore, the claimed areas emerge as places of non-negotiation and resistance, which not only defy authority (that is, prison guards and *rondínes*), but also set aside clique differences enabling the gang to act as a 'unified barrio' (Rocha, 2008: 64).

New gang spaces reproduce the model of turf confrontations, disrupting prison order and creating an atmosphere of permanent tension between inmates, *rondínes* and prison guards. In one jail, tensions reached such critical levels that prison guards, *rondínes* and gang leaders signed a *convenio de paz* (peace agreement). It did not work. In April 2003, *rondínes* prison guards, and gang members (of the Mara Salvatrucha) unleashed one of the worst territorial disputes ever experienced in a Honduran jail. For nearly an hour guards, gang members and *rondínes* exchanged gunshots in an attempt to assert power over a specific area. Sixty-eight inmates (mostly gang members) were killed. The transfer of 30 gang members from another prison allegedlly had triggered the riot. The new gang inmates, together with their *hommies*, started to harass the rest of the prison population, which the other inmates and *rondínes* perceived as defiance of the 'agreement'.

Prison riots are not unique to Honduran jails and take place in all types of jails, with both strict and more informal regimes. Useem and Kimball (1987) point out that prison riots generally occur when jails are in a period of transition or when existing prison practices are reformed. In this sense, zero-tolerance policies contributed to disrupting prison order and to produce more aggression – instead of reducing it – as the emergence of new violent territories were promoted. Gangs found ways to ensure their sustainability by emerging as a community beyond the physical spaces of the urban neighbourhoods and confined areas in prison.

Conclusions

This article is a contribution to understanding the territoriality of contemporary youth gangs. It focused on gang territorial strategies under policies of zero tolerance, Mano Dura and the Anti-gang Law in Honduras. It showed that the government's security polices contributed to strengthen gang territoriality through the alteration of existing territorial practices and the emergence of new territories in confined areas such as the prison. In addition, members consolidated their emotional ties with the gang, which stretched beyond the urban barrios and the prison walls, forming a strongly bonded transnational community.

The alteration of traditional territorial strategies gave new meanings to territory, particularly the barrio. Mobility and imprisonment forced gang members to view the

physical barrio less as the central shared reference or point of identification. Rather, a symbolic barrio emerged identifying the gang community. Moore, Vigil and García's (1983) study of chicano gangs revealed that 'barrio' and 'gang' had the same meaning; that is, the barrio is the clique/gang and both words are used interchangeably by gang members. This is also the case with Honduran gangs, except that the barrio not only blurs differences between cliques, it also represents a large, unified, transnational community.

New gang territories emerged, particularly in jail, indicating the gangs' ability to reshape territorial orders as well as to produce spaces of violence. Imprisoned gang members developed sophisticated and violent territorial strategies. They produced enclosed spaces resembling total institutions and built tightly knit communities that defied the prison order. Territorial claims, inmate grouping and prison violence are not unique to Honduran prisons. Poor administration and insufficient resources in prisons as well as weak policy-making, and a fragile penal code and judiciary system contribute to the emergence of such prison conditions (Ungar, 2003). However, Salvatore and Aguirre (1996) argue that the reason is historical. Latin American jails do not in general aim to reform or discipline individuals as North American and European prisons do. Rather, they reproduce social differences, that is, the separation of master and slave, white and coloured, civilised and barbarian, and, recently, rich and poor. The latter are viewed as vicious and ignorant and are criminalised by security policies such as zero tolerance.

Research into prisons and national security policies rarely takes the spatial dimension into account, particularly how this changes existing territorial practices, and respatialises power relations, movements and interactions leading to the appearance of new territories in jails and urban neighbourhoods. Furthermore, national security policies fail to disband youth gangs or reduce violence. Rather, they contribute to the sophistication of gang territoriality, the emergence of new geographies of violence and exclusion, and the formation of a transnational community among marginal youth.

Finally, the sophistication of territorial identity among Honduran gangs sheds some light on the spatiality of the Honduran state. Gang territoriality under state repression reveals the fragility of state strategies for imposing rule over certain groups and areas. Gutiérrez Rivera (2009) suggests that the government's restricted territoriality is linked to the Honduran state's historical inability to produce national political space. This may explain the absence of a clear strategy for organising and controlling national territory.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to M. Braig, M. Zapata Galindo, D. Kruijt, and M. M. Müller.

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