Rethinking urban youth violence in Central America:

An exclusion approach

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List of acronyms
FLACSO- Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
IDB- Inter-American Development Bank
PAHO- Pan American Health Organisation
UNDP- United Nations Development Program
UNODC- United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
WB- World Bank
WHO- World Health Organisation

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Introduction

The first decade of the XXI century was a decade of economic growth, prosperity and poverty reduction for most countries in Latin America (World Bank, 2013). Yet, despite the great gains of the past decade, violence continues to increase in the region. In the first decade, there was an 11% increase in homicide rates, whilst in most other regions of the world the rates decreased (UNDP, 2013: V). This increase coincides with citizens’ perceptions of fear, who see crime and violence as one of the main threats to their lives and their daily activities (UNDP, 2013). Latin Americans’ concerns over crime and violence has tripled in the last decade. Consequently, citizens have withdrawn from public spaces, and community cohesion and institutions have weakened in the region (Perez Sainz et al., 2015: 5). Economic growth and poverty reduction have not challenged, in the short-run, the problematic of urban violence in the region.

The past century in Latin America history was marked by regional and civil wars, driven by territorial disputes and leftist guerrillas. In the XXI century the ‘new face’ of violence in the region is urban youth violence and particularly male youth violence. Men under 35 years old committed 80% of the crimes in the region and there is an increased proportion of the number of crimes committed by 14 year olds and under (Imbusch, Misse and Carrion, 2011: 14). The homicide rate among urban youth is two times larger than the total homicide rate in the region (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights cited in UNDP, 2013: 2). Nevertheless, these acts of violence are not widespread, but localized within nations, cities and territories. There are noticeable differences between countries in Latin America. Homicide rates in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala surpass 30/100,000, meanwhile in the southern cone of South America the rate is lower than 10/100,000 (UNDP, 2013: 4). Within these countries violence is concentrated in the built environment. Violence in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants in El Salvador and Guatemala, concentrate over 60% of homicides in 2011 (Nowak, 2012: 1). These cities are often in marginalized areas that have limited access to basic services, high levels of youth unemployment and little or no opportunities of social mobility (Imbusch, Misse and Carrion, 2011).

The prevalence of violent acts in particular territories and its recurring pattern found in particular demographics, presents a deep-rooted problem that beckons a new analytical lens; a lens that goes beyond the traditional focus of urban violence that currently underpins most policy responses throughout the region. This dissertation will focus on the northern triangle of Central America the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.
(Figure 1). These countries’ levels of violence have increased sharply since early XXI century and the increase is often associated with youth gang activities (UNODC, 2007). In 2012, according to the last available data from the UNODC, Honduras was the country with the highest homicide rate in the region, presenting a staggering 104/100,000 rate. Meanwhile, El Salvador and Guatemala were in sixth and eighth places reporting a rate of 44/100,000 and 40/100,000, respectively (UNODC, 2014). In this year, the world homicide rate was 7/100,000 and the regions average 19/100,000, which shows the dramatic levels reached in the northern triangle of Central America¹ (UNODC, 2014).

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the underpinnings of violence in predominant policies that address youth violence in the northern triangle of Central America and to understand the reasons to their lack of effectiveness. Subsequently, it proposes an alternative framework to understand youth violence as a consequence of a multiplicity of exclusion, presented in three spheres: socio-economic, institutional and spatial. The analysis will use secondary data and case study analysis from the three countries of Central America. It will be organized in three sections. Chapter 1 presents a discussion on the definition of violence and introduces the problematic of youth violence in Central America through an analysis of youth gangs. It also presents the ecological model, which is the dominant model for urban youth violence analysis adopted by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), one of the key players that address violence in the region. Chapter 2 discusses the dominant policies introduced in the three countries and how they have attempted to address the problem of youth violence. Two case studies, mano dura in El Salvador and Jóvenes Adelante in Guatemala, illustrate the approaches and serve to clarify the aims and consequences of the dominant interventions in the countries analysed. Moreover, an analysis on the impact of the policies will be presented. Finally, the last chapter presents a new model for analysing urban youth violence based on three spheres of exclusion, (socio-economic, institutional and spatial), which are considered the root causes of violence.

Chapter 1: Defining violence

This chapter presents a broad theoretical discussion on how diverse disciplines understand violence and how different underpinnings have changed through time. It also discusses a categorisation of the different kinds of violence following Moser and Winton (2002). It introduces the case of Central America youth gangs and finally presents the ecological model of urban youth violence as the predominant model used to analyse urban youth gang violence in the region.

Violence is commonly defined as “the use or threat of physical or psychological force with harmful intent on a recurrent basis as a way of settling conflicts” (Arriagada and Godoy, 2000: 112). However, the interest of this dissertation, rather than acknowledging the different expressions of violence and

¹ Full table in Figure 5 in Appendix 1.
violent acts is to identify what are the drivers of violence. Different disciplines analyse the causes of violence through three main levels: structural, institutional and individual (McIlwaine, 1999: 456). Economists explain the individual level, violence as rational cost and benefit analysis, the opportunity benefit should be greater than the opportunity cost (Fajnzylber, Lederman and Loayza, 2002). The biomedical and psychological theories have also centred their analysis on the level of the individual, researching the causality of psychology, genetics or physiology to violent behaviour (McIlwaine, 1999). Psychologists have proposed two main explanations for violent behaviour, developmental theory and social learning theory. The first explains violence from child-parent relationship, whilst the second focuses on learning violence through imitation of role models (Moser, 1999: 38). Epidemiologists have linked the “spread and prevention on violence to disease” they attempt to identify the risk factor associated to violence (McIlwaine, 1999: 456). On the other hand, political scientists have scaled up the analysis, and have focused on the institutional and structural levels. Yet, other disciplines such as sociology, history, urban planning and geography have seek a better link of causality often rejecting the premise of the biomedical and psychological theories of violence at the individual level and constructing relational causes of violence (McIlwaine, 1999).

To understand how violence is defined it is important to identify how this definition has been constructed through time. McIlwaine presents an interesting account on the evolution of the study of violence and crime, through the context of development studies. She argues that in the 1960s the predominant study of crime and violence was rooted in the modernist approach (McIlwaine, 1999). The analysis was focused on the individual level predominantly on rural-urban migrants who faced various challenges when urbanizing. Therefore, violence and crime were driven by the individual’s incapacity to cope with the “urban anomie” (McIlwaine, 1999: 450). In the 1970s-1980s and with the emergence of dependency theory, the analysis shifted from individuals to the institutional and structural level (McIlwaine, 1999). In this period, crime and violence were considered the outcome of uneven power relations, within and between countries, as well as part of the legacy of the colonial rule (Summer, 1982 cited in McIlwaine, 1999: 457). Violence and crime were considered “forms of resistance among economically and socially disadvantage individuals” (McIlwaine, 1999: 450).

Expanding the proposed timeline, Rodgers argues, in the context of Central America, that at the end of the Cold War, the expansion of globalization and economic liberalization, the state lost its “ability to command the monopoly over the use of violence” (Rodgers, 2009: 950). He considers that the end of the Cold War marks the end of political violence in the region and also the shift towards “non-political brutality”, which appeared from the “shadows of the weakened state” (Rodgers, 2009: 950). Rodgers analysis coincides with the World Bank, which considers that in this period (early 1990s) the nature of violence in the region changed (1999). Now, the predominant form of violence in the region
is present through delinquency and crime (World Bank, 1999). According to Rodgers, the shift from political to social and economic violence can be explained by the “crisis of governance” of Latin American countries (2009: 950). This analysis continues to be at the level of the structure and institutional arrangements, as in the 1970s-1980s. The new era of urban violence is Central America has been characterised by high homicides rates in cities Nowak found that cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants concentrate 68% of homicides in Guatemala and 65% in El Salvador (2012: 1). Homicides that are many times attributed to the expansion of youth gangs in the last 20 years (Rodgers, 2009).

To be more precise in the analysis it is important to clarify the nature of Central American northern triangle youth gangs’ violence. The work of Moser and Winton is useful to distinguish the different kinds of violence depending on its motivations and manifestations (2002). The categories proposed are: social violence, political violence and economic, described in Figure 2 (Moser and Winton, 2002: 9).

**Figure 2: Categories of violence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Manifestation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Mainly interpersonal and pretends to obtain or control social power</td>
<td>Physical or physiological abuse to females, children and elderly, as well as sexual assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Violence that pretends to obtain or control political power and control</td>
<td>Guerrilla or paramilitary warfare, political assassinations and violence perpetrated by the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Material gain</td>
<td>Street crime, carjacking, extortion, drug trafficking and kidnapping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Moser and Winton (2002), pg 9*

As it will be described later in following chapters, youth gang violence in Central America can be seen as predominantly economic, in the forms of street crime, extortion, and drug trafficking. Therefore, this paper will focus its analysis in economic violence. It is important to note that although categorising kinds of violence is helpful, analytically different kinds of violence have ‘reinforcing linkages’ in practice (Moser and Shrader, 1999: 11).

**1.1 Urban youth and gangs**

There are several theories regarding the emergence of young gangs some of the early theories include the classic studies of Thrasher in 1927, which discuss gangs in Chicago (Rodgers, 1999). Some authors consider that youth gangs replaced social institutions, families, schools and even labour markets, as a
consequence of the social and administrative decay in the region in the 1990’s (Rodgers, 1999). Whilst others, argue that gangs are examples of subcultures, part of growing up and identity building, or even individuals with “sociopathic personality traits” (Rodgers, 1999: 4). Rodgers made an important effort in identifying five main characteristics of youth gangs in the region. First, that most youth gangs emerge in contexts of urban poverty found primarily in *barrios* and *favelas* (Rodgers, 1999). Even though, most literature argues that gangs emerge in poverty, there is not a causal association between poverty and gangs (Rodgers and Baird, 2015). Second, research has shown that most gangs have strong community ties. To some extent, these ties are due to different services that gangs provide for their communities, especially security services. Gangs have been known for maintaining the social order in the absence of the state, in many instances filling a void left by the state (Rodgers, 1999). Nevertheless, authors like Rodgers and others also argues that community members are often the most affected by clashes between opposite gangs. Third, in Central America there is an unclear link between drug dealing and gangs. According to some authors youth gangs provide security to organized cartels from South America and Mexico, while other have concluded that these now play a more active role in the drug trafficking business. However, it is clear that violence has become more acute with the increase consumption of drugs by gang members. This has also led to a change in the relationship between local communities and gang members (Rodgers and Baird, 2015). Fourth, the deportation of youth from the US to Central America, primarily, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, had a great influence in the levels of violence exerted by youth gangs (Rodgers, 1999). Finally, the characteristics states that gangs are very country specific as is their link and degree of involvement in violence (Rodgers, 1999).

In Central America, youth has long been associated with urban gangs. In the early 1990’s *pandillas* originated in the aftermath of the peace treaties in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, when demobilized youth returned to their communities (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009). They organized and formed *pandillas* as “localized self-defence groups that attempted to provide order in their communities” (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009: 6). On the other hand, Central American *maras* (youth gangs) originated in Los Angeles, California, growing exponentially with the arrival of Central American refugees escaping from the civil wars during the 1970s and 1980s (Rodgers and Baird, 2015: 4). There are two *maras* with strong presence in the region *mara* 18 and *mara* Salvatrucha who have been long standing rivals since their appearance in California (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009). Maras’ expansion to Central America is a consequence of the 1996 US Congress ‘Illegal Immigration Reform’ and ‘Immigrant Responsibility Act’ that deported 50,000 convicts and 160,000 immigrants back to the region (Rodgers and Baird, 2015: 4). American authorities did this in an attempt to control the rising level of youth gang violence in California. The main destination of
these deportees, close to 90%, were Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, where they replicated their gang structures and incorporated local youth from pandillas (Rodgers, and Baird, 2015).

In general terms, there is a lack of reliable information about youth gang formation and youth gangs activities in Central America. The official information on the number of mara members varies widely and is not verifiable (Rodgers, and Baird, 2015). Some estimates on the number of youth gang members concluded that they outnumber the military personnel in Central American countries (Jutersonke, Muggah and Rodgers, 2009: 4). Whilst, the United Nations estimates 14,000 gang members in Guatemala, 36,000 in Honduras and 10,500 in El Salvador (UNODC, 2007: 60). The majority of youth gang members are male (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009). In a survey conducted in El Salvador it found that 95.3% of the gang members were males, similar estimates can be found for Guatemala and Honduras (WOLA, 2008: 2). Average age of involvement in the gang varies between countries. In El Salvador the age of entry is 15 years and average age 20 years while, in Guatemala and Honduras the age ranges between 12 and 30 years (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009: 4-5). Asked about their reason to join a gang 40% of the respondents answer to hang out, 21% because of other gang member friends, and 21% to get away from family problems (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009: 5).

To what extend Central America youth gangs have transformed from local youth groups to semi-criminal organization is contested. However, it is clear that they are now marked by a more frequent and intense use of violence and involvement in organized crimes (Moro, 2006: 144). Research on their activities has concluded that they are mostly involved in small-scale, localized crime and delinquency, which includes extortion for protection and racketeering of buses and taxis (Rodgers and Baird, 2015: 5; UN Habitat, 2007: 64; Moser and Winton, 2002). Their involvement in drug trafficking has changed in the last 15 years, as part of the increased drug trafficking in the region and as consequence of criminalization programs (discussed in the next chapter) led by local governments (Rodgers and Baird, 2015). It is estimated that 80% of cocaine trafficking from South to North America goes through Central America (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009: 11). Their role in trafficking is primarily associated with safekeeping and small scale local operations (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009). Despite local youth gangs in the region being affiliated to one of the two maras there is no clear “chain of command” or even an “umbrella organization”, allegiance seems to be more symbolic and historic than a real link (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009: 11). The next section will discuss the link between youth gangs in Central America and violence through the ecological model.
1.2 Ecological model

The ecological model\(^2\) is going to be used to analyse the link between youth gangs and violence in Central America. The model has been the predominant tool for violence analysis in the region promoted by the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO). The PAHO has been a key regional actor involved in the development of policies to address the growing problematic of urban violence in the region since early 1990’s (PAHO, 1996). The model, which has been used for violence analysis since late 1970’s, was introduced for youth violence in the Americas late 1990’s (WHO, 2002; 13). The ecological model argues that no single factor or cause can be used to explain violence. The occurrence of violence is the combination of a number of different factors (Moser and Shrader, 1999; IDB, 2010). It attempts to explain the relational and dynamic causes of violence, moving away from a static definition of the phenomenon. It is “flexible in identifying the pre-determinants of political, economic and social violence, without reducing the analysis to one single type” (Moser, 1999: 8).

The model classifies the factors\(^3\) that cause violence into four different levels (IDB, 2010). First, it starts at the level of the individual where factors are associated with biology and education. Second, the relational level, how individuals relate to close social circles and peers. Third, the level of the community where they live and its characteristics. Finally, socio-economic structures. In the community and society structures, violence has a strong link with marginalized neighbourhoods that have presented rapid demographic change, immigration, urbanization and change in social policies (WHO, 2002 cited in IDB, 2010: 5).

The ecological model was used to identify 11 different factors (summarised in Figure 3) that explain the appearance and expansion of maras in Central America (Cruz, 2005). Following the same structure presented above: at the individual level, the difficulty of identity building can be identify as one factor associated with youth gang violence. In the Central America context, youths shape their identity through the use of violence as a “consequence of the lack of positive role models” (Cruz, 2005: 1161). At the relational level, Cruz presents three different factors (Cruz, 2005). Dysfunctional families, that are characterised by mono-parental household, due to immigration or abandonment, high levels of domestic violence or abuse, and constant movement of the family (Cruz, 2005). Second, the presence of gang members in communities or in schools, and lastly a social dynamic of violence that fuels and reproduces violence to solve confrontation (Cruz, 2005). The first two levels of the model are centred

\(^2\) The ecological model was initially introduced by Bronfenbrenner (1979) to explain the changes in human development. It was later adopted by various scholars and international agencies to explain the causes of violence.

\(^3\) It is important to make a distinction between triggers (facilitators) of violence and causes of violence. Drugs and alcohol consumption are both considered triggers of violence, rather than causes of violence (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005; UN Habitat, 2007: 66; Winton, 2004: 87).
in the individual, associating youth violence with the lack of supervision and/or domestic violence (IDB, 2010). However, it is important to note that both of these factors are closely linked to socio-economic conditions of parents and households. Moser and Winton’s research on domestic violence in Nicaragua found that domestic abuse was significantly associated with poverty, size of the family and living in an urban area (2002: 13). The IDB also found that belonging to mono-parental households and/or low income household increase the probability that children and youth perpetrate acts of violence (2010: 5).

Furthermore, at the community level two main factors are identified: the lack of community cohesion that limits community involvement in local problems and the lack of trust of other community members. Second, the presence of drugs that leads youth to drug consumption and drug trafficking networks (Cruz, 2005). Finally, at the social-structure level four different factors are identified. The process of social exclusion that is evident in the social-economic decay, communities that lack basic infrastructure and services, quality employment opportunities or suffer from unemployment, and a low level of training and/or educational attainment (Cruz, 2005). Second, a culture of violence that has a strong links with the civil wars in the region, the availability of guns, and the patterns of use of violence as a means to resolve conflicts (Cruz, 2005). A third factor, is the rapid growth of cities that has surpassed the capacity of municipalities and the state to provide services, and public recreational space (Cruz, 2005). Finally as already mentioned, the influx of deported youth from the United States that accelerated the process of gang expansion and the use of violence (Cruz, 2005).

Until this point we have characterised youth gangs in Central America giving some context of their appearance and expansion. We have also concluded that they are predominantly involved in ‘economic violence’ motivated by material gain that is manifested through: petty crime, kidnapping, drug trafficking and assault. Using the ecological model as an analytical tool eleven different factors that explain the rise and link between youth gangs and violence were identified. The next section takes a step further by presenting the dominant policy approaches implemented in the region.
Figure 3: Ecological model for urban gang violence

Chapter 2: Interventions

In Central America before the turn of the XXI century, there was no policy or intervention consistently adopted (or applied) to address urban youth violence by local governments (Moro, 2006). The first state-led strategies were implemented to persecute youth gangs (Moro, 2006 and USAID, 2006). On the other hand, preventive and rehabilitation programs had been flourishing since mid-1990s mostly led by local and international NGOs and civil society organizations (USAID, 2006). To classify these interventions it is useful to use Moser, Winton and Moser classification (2005). They separate interventions into two groups: sector-specific approaches and cross-sector approaches (2005). The first group is made up by: criminal justice, public health and conflict transformation (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005: 145-6). The first two mainly target economic and social violence, whilst conflict transformation targets political violence. The second-group, cross-sectoral approaches, are composed of: crime prevention through environmental design, community security, and community driven development (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005: 145-6). The three approaches target social and economic violence.

The dominant approaches fall into criminal justice and public health, in the first group (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005). These aim to address economic violence that as discussed is the predominant manifestation of urban gang violence in the region. First, the sub-chapter 2.1 presents the two dominant approaches using Moser, Winton and Moser (2005) classification, which include two short-case studies to illustrate the analysis. The sub-section is followed by a discussion of the public discourse about youth gangs and policy prescription.
2.1. Sector-specific approaches

2.1.1. Criminal justice approach

The criminal justice approach is the most common and widely applied intervention to address urban violence (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005). The approach is rooted in the belief that violence is created by “outlaws and thus who deviate from civil norms”\(^4\), therefore they must be punished (Turpin and Kurtz, 1997: 208). In the ecological model this would fall into the individual risk factor. Policies that arise from this approach have focused in controlling violence through the use of force and the judicial system (IDB, 2010). This ‘quick fix’ for violence leads to higher rates of arrests and convictions, and more severe punishment for deviants (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005). The approach makes three underlying assumptions. First, that to stop violence a “superior force” must be applied i.e. more violence (Turpin and Kurtz, 1997: 210). Second, perpetrators are considered evil, which links back to individuals’ psychological or mental issues, and thus must be stopped through intimidation or punishment (Turpin and Kurtz, 1997). Finally, they debate against gun control claiming it has no impact on violence mitigation (Turpin and Kurtz, 1997).

In Central America, the criminal justice approach has been widely applied by governments against youth violence since early XXI century. Governments in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, launched the ‘war’ against *maras* with the ‘iron fist’ and ‘zero tolerance’ interventions (Moro, 2006: 150). These interventions were centred in the persecution of gang members, increasing resource allocation to police, and more severe punishments and law reform to prosecute minors as adults (Moro, 2006). The legacy of these interventions are widely criticized as having disastrous consequences for the countries.

Using El Salvador as an example, the intervention was labelled ‘iron fist’ as it was characterized by “aggressive police patrolling” to counteract youth gangs actions in the country (Moro, 2006: 150). The anti-*mara* Law criminalized youth gang membership with up to six years in prison and allowed gang membership to be determined based on tattoos or the use of hand signals (WOLA, 2008). The Law was declared unconstitutional on April 2004 (Moro, 2006: 150.) However, from July 2003 to April 2004 roughly 20,000 youngsters were arrested nation-wide (Moro, 2006: 150). Following widespread criticism and under a new president, the program was relaunched in September 2004 as ‘*super mano dura*’ (super iron fist). The new intervention had three different spheres of action: punishment for perpetrators, crime and violence prevention, and rehabilitation for former gang members and drug

\(^4\) This includes, in some instances, a psychotherapeutic model that considers that individuals are “maladjusted and require treatment”. They have to be treated for aggressive personality disorders. (Turpin and Kurtz, 1997: 208).
users (Moro, 2006). Despite its claims of being designed to prevent and rehabilitate, the plan led to similar outcomes. 11,659 youth were apprehended from September 2004 to July 2005, while only 20 were part of the rehabilitation program (Moro, 2006: 200). Records from both ‘iron fists’ programs (2003-2005) show that 84% of the youth apprehended were released and acquitted a few hours or days after their apprehension (Moro, 2006: 163). Most of them, were apprehended because they fit a profile of age, residence and appearance. Many youth were apprehended and released numerous times during the application of the plan.

The program had three major consequences (Moro, 2006). First, because of the onset of the state against youth gangs the structure of gangs in the country transformed leading to what has been labelled as a ‘professionalization’ of youth gangs (Moro, 2006: 163). Due to the deficiencies of the prison system, gang leaders continued directing gangs from inside the penitentiaries. Gang leaders conformed ‘assemblies’ in the detention centres and improve the structures of gang’s nation-wide. According to WOLA, it is from “within the prison system that the most powerful gang leaders work” (WOLA, 2008b: 5). Second, the expansion and upsurge of violence. As discussed by Turpin and Kurtz, the criminal justice approach “perpetuates an upward spiral of violence” (1997: 211). This was evident as acts of violence from gangs became more frequent and more complex, they were no longer isolated spontaneous actions but became more sophisticated (Moro, 2006). Homicide rates in El Salvador rose from 33/100,000 in 2003 to 56/100,000 in 2006 (WOLA, 2008b). Finally, it led to a process of greater confrontation and ‘generalized violence’, which derived in ‘social cleansing’ targeting youth (Moro, 2006: 168).

2.1.2. Public health approach
The second dominant approach is the public health approach that is focused on identifying some of the risk factors associated with violence (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005). The approach uses epidemiological, mapping and risk identification as the main tools for policy prescription. Turpin and Kurtz, frame this approach as a “traditional liberal position...that imposes reason on chaotic forces and aims to stop violence with legal progress and procedures designed to implement rational order” (1997: 213). It is centred in the belief of the prevalence of the rational thought of the individual (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005; Turpin and Kurtz, 1997). It argues for maintaining the rule of law, to protect human rights, and at the same time proposing the implementations of programs or policies that help “technically at risk population” (Turpin and Kurtz, 1997: 213). Risk factors are identified as the lack of opportunities in employment, education, use of drugs and even behaviour modification (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005: 37). It has a much broader and relational understanding of the causes of violence than the previous approach, incorporating the ecological model relational approach in the
analysis. The focus is on the individual as an agent of change overlooked the wider social causes of violence.

Interventions have been predominantly undertaken by local government, communities and NGOs (Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009). These different agents have focused primarily in training, vocational, recreational, artistic and cultural activities (Moser, Winton and Moser, 2005: 149). The central idea is to create opportunities and promote positive behaviour in youth, exposing them to “mainstream values and encourage them to adopt them” (Rodgers, 1999: 20). It is interesting to note that in the continent 71% of the countries have national action plans to address youth violence and 62% of the countries have national action plans to address gang violence (WHO, 2014: 24). These shows that the practice of the ‘public health approach’ is widespread through Latin America.

Jóvenes Adelante is an interesting ‘public health approach’ project implemented in Guatemala city, Guatemala that aimed through education to “raise the quality of life of young people, both socially and culturally, as well as economically, which strengthens family, social and community integration” (Winton, 2004b). Three youth centres in different parts of the community served as the meeting space for youth that hold weekly meetings with a coordinator (Winton, 2004b). In the centres, they had access to recreational space, training to become voluntary teachers, student and community organization, and technical work-training (Winton, 2004b). The programme itself allowed youth that completed three years of cycles to be directly employed as a program coordinator (Winton, 2004).

According to their proponents Jóvenes Adelante gave participants a sense of belonging, promoted the potential of youth and encourages them to be agents of change in their communities (Winton, 2004b). The project evaluators argue that it was successful in declining gang activity in the community (Winton, 2004b).

Analysing the public health approach, in interventions like Jóvenes Adelante, Winton argues that successful interventions have four components: human component, that aims to creating a positive collective and individual identity, an academic component, focused on assisting those who attend school and help finance school for those who can afford it, labour component, providing job-training and finally a recreational component, given youth a space for interaction and recreation (Winton, 2004b: 98). However, she claims that a comprehensive study done by FLACSO in El Salvador found that only 2 of 75 interventions contained the four components (Winton, 2004b: 98). This could shed some light into why despite the numerous programs being implemented very few are considered ‘success stories’. Winton also noted that the disappearance of similar programs led to increase gang activity in that community, questioning the long lasting effect of these interventions (Winton, 2004b). In general terms, what is questioned in the public health approach is the extent of their influence and
how effectively there are to address the problem of youth violence, as there is no substantial evidence that the programs are achieving systemic social change by being focused in individuals (Barnes, 2007 cited in Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009: 19). In a more negative note it has been found, for example in Nicaragua, that many of the programs were “highly cosmetic” and were aimed at “pleasing potential donors and raising international funds” (Rocha, 2007 cited in Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009: 19).

2.2. Public discourse about violence

The two approaches discussed in the previous sub-chapter give a good account of the predominant policies undertaken in Central America to address youth violence. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the policies is widely contested and in the case of ‘iron fist’ it is criticized for the brutality of the police response and the escalation of violence (Rodgers and Baird, 2015). Moreover, it reveals a very limited understanding by authorities of what underpins violence, essentially abandoning the ecological model and its multi-causality analysis. On the other hand, although the public health approach recognises the need to assist youth, they fail to address the underlying causes of youth violence. For example, Jóvenes Adelante addresses the lack of access to education and training, which is one of the multiple exclusions youths in Central America face. Therefore, the success of the interventions can only be partial, it has a limited impact if the communities are still submerged in the same conditions of exclusion and marginalization (ERIC et al., 2007). Although they identify ‘risk factors’ with the ecological model, they fail to address the multiple causes of violence and articulate them with broader processes of social inclusion (Aguilar and Carranza, 2011). Moreover, the approach has also been criticised for being fundamentally individualistic, failing to link the community into the programs (Turpin and Kurtz, 1997).

To understand why these policies are predominant (Rodgers and Baird, 2015), Huhn, Oettler and Peetz, argue it is necessary to analyse the dominant political discourse around violence in the region (2006). They conclude that the political discourse equates youth gangs with violence. The message is retransmitted by local and international media that portrays youth gangs as the main ‘threat to security in the region’ (Huhn, Oettler and Peetz, 2006: 27). Aguilar and Carranza, argue that the media has played a fundamental role in “stigmatizing and demonising youth gang members” (Aguilar and Carranza, 2011: 14). These reports many times overestimate youth gangs’ capacity, the strength of their transnational networks, and the degree of their association to criminal activity and violent acts. In particular, in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, youth gangs are deemed the “great responsible of every crime committed many times with no real evidence to support their incrimination” (Huhn, Oettler and Peetz, 2006: 28). Research of murders of young people in Honduras found that in 2006 only 15% of deaths could be attributed to mara violence, in Guatemala of 427 murders that occurred
in January 2006 only 58 were related to gang activity (UNODC, 2007: 60). Youth gangs are the ‘scape goat’ of violence in the region, an image that is constructed by politicians and media. Hence, in the eyes of the public the disappearance of youth gangs is the only plausible solution to stop violence (Huhn, Oettler and Peetz, 2006). It reduce the multi-layered analysis of the ecological model to a stereotype of youth gang members focusing on the individuals as criminals, disregarding the multiplicity of causes that have driven youth to violence.

The social constructionism theory is useful to strengthen the link between the political discourse and the policies prescription in Latin America. The political discourse, evident in the policies, legitimises the action against youth gangs by labelling youth gangs as the source of violence (Eyben 2007). The label allows the “simplification of the phenomenon” (Eyben, 2007: 37), equating youth gangs with violence. The result is a complete “de-contextualization of youth gangs” capacities and realities (Krauskopf, 2000: 15). This leads to a particular understanding of youth gang violence and hence how it is addressed by authorities. Ultimately, youth that are part of gangs are singled out as the source of violence, which limits the scope of the interventions (Eyben, 2007: 39). It was evident in El Salvador where youth that fit a particular stereotype were targeted by authorities. Policies are not centred in addressing the levels of violence, but targeting youth as the enemy of social well-being and development. The criminalizing approach labels youth gangs as drivers of violence “failing to understand the broader structural causes that brings them to commit violence” (Eyben, 2007: 39). On the other hand, preventive measures and programs follows a similar individualistic understanding. They identify risk factors but fail to link these interventions to the broader social context. Therefore, youths bear all the consequences of the socio-economic decay that leads them to violence. The framing of youth gangs as the cause of violence have proven unsuccessful at addressing the “layered factors, and myriad connections among these, that drive violence” (Lind, Mitchell and Rohwerder, 2016: 11). Ultimately, the adoption of the ecological model has not lead to effective policy prescription.

Chapter 3: Rethinking youth urban violence
The previous discussion demonstrates the reasons for the failure of the predominant approaches that deal with youth gang violence. It concluded that they have not been capable (or willing) to address the deep-rooted structural causes of violence. This is in part due to a narrow understanding of the ecological model. The model is a very valuable analytical tool that presents a multi-layered understanding of the causes of violence. However, its adoption has not translated to more effective policies. There is a need to step back and rethink violence in a framework that can deliver more strategic policies that clearly define the root causes of youth violence and how to address them. This
section presents an alternative model of exclusion that argues for rethinking the causes of urban youth violence. It is rooted in the belief that urban youth violence is fundamentally a cause of a multiplicity of exclusions. To address urban youth violence, three spheres of exclusion, which cause a dysfunctional social dynamic and thus, limit urban youth participation as equals in society, need to be addressed.

3.1 Social exclusion

In Latin America, exclusion has historically been deep-rooted and expressed through various forms of stigmas against races, ethnic origins and gender (Marquez et al., 2007). However, it is now affecting a homogeneous group of people characterized for not being part of “a more modern and prosperous society” (Marquez et al., 2007). These are groups of people that live in precarious environments, with low educational attainment and little prospects of formal employment, and that are fundamentally unable to participate as equals in society. Exclusion as a framework enables us to understand the process and its multidimensionality as a dynamic phenomenon (Marquez et al., 2007). Youth that join youth gangs and are linked with economic violence are in the centre of this multidimensional dynamic of exclusion. They are part of a “dysfunctional social dynamic” that perpetuates them in process of exclusion, which “limits their functioning⁵, resulting in their diminished well-being” (Marquez et al., 2007: 5).

In order to link the dynamics of exclusion to violence, it is beneficial to re-consider the definition of violence. In redefining violence, the work of Carrion is valuable as it defines violence as the product of “conflictual social relations that emerges as the consequence of multiple factors” (2004: 27). He claims that the outcome of the ‘conflictual social relation’ can only be expressed through the use of force (Carrion, 2004: 27). His definition is open and encompasses broad social, political and economic structures that lead to violent behaviours (use of force). As in the ecological model this definition is dynamic and defined by the social relations (constructs) in society. However, it differs from the ecological model by being centred in the structure of society rather than on the multilayers of the model. This can be considered one of the limitations of the ecological model as it gives the same weight (incidence) to every layer. It does not recognize differences in incidence of the factors that lead to violence. For example, factors in the individual layers in Central America are a consequence of structural factors. As argued by Jutensonke, Muggah and Rodgers gang violence cannot be reduced to “rational choice or endogenous factors” as it has been done in the individual layer of the ecological model (2009: 8). Thus, it would be strategic to first address the structural factors, instead of addressing

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⁵ Here the author refers to the functioning following Sen’s (1999) definition in Development as Freedom. Functioning as social interaction and exchanges in which individuals or groups engage in order to achieve a certain outcome, rather than their ability to engage in interaction. (Marquez et al., 2007: 5).
the individual layer first as it has been done. The exclusion model wants to give a much clearer understanding of the root causes of violence.

Moreover, the theory of rupture helps characterise Carrion’s argument of ‘confictual social relations’. This theory proposes that violence comes as a consequence of a breakdown of social order that “dissolves the traditional social control mechanisms and generates a gap between aspirations and the socially accepted mechanisms” (Martinez, 1990 cited in Arriagada and Godoy, 2000: 112). Economic violence appears as the only mechanisms to resolve the long-standing problems, such as inequality and exclusion (Arriagada and Godoy, 2000: 112). It is through economic gain that youth achieve upward social mobility by getting resources that are otherwise unachievable because of the structural forces of society. As it was argued in Chapter 1, political violence aiming for political change in the region ended with peace agreements in the end of the XX century. Youth gang violence is not a political project but a co-optation of economic resources. The objective of violence is “an instrument to obtain different goals” (Angostini et al., n.d.:2). The exclusion model explains why violence exists and how it is can be understood as a consequence of the lack of opportunities in a given society. Thus, violence is the response - as a use of force - to the lack of opportunities (social and cultural aspirations) in a given society. In contrast, the ecological model, which considers violence as the result of different factors that arise from multiple layers.

The proposed definition of violence suggests a new link between violence and youth in Central America in two main ways: that the main cause is exclusion and the spatial link between urban youth and marginal territories. First, it recognizes the crisis of urban violence as a phenomenon that is rooted in exclusion. Thus, it must be analysed as a consequence of a wider structure that creates and re-creates a particular set of conditions that lead to violence. It proposes violence rooted in a multiplicity of exclusion that pushes urban youth to join youth gangs and use force in different forms (crime, drug trafficking, kidnapping, etc.) (Imbusch, Misse and Carrion, 2011). As described by Imbusch, Misse and Carrion, violence is a response that seems to offer a way out of the circle of poverty and exclusion (2011). Violence becomes the ‘social norm’ a “legitimate practice in the attempt to achieve social mobility” and to escape the circle of poverty and exclusion (Alvarez, 1994: 7). Second, it allows us to analyse the spatial links between urban youth and marginal territories. Urban youth violence is usually expressed through gang membership in marginal urban territories in cities (Imbusch, Misse and Carrion, 2011). It becomes a “ruthless Darwinian competition” to survive (Jutersonke, Muggah and Rodgers, 2009: 5). Urban youth don’t seem to choose violence, but violence chooses them (Carrión, 2004: 37). The spatial dimension allows us to ground the analysis in the territory and understand the degree of exclusion of youth groups in particular communities, of particular neighbourhoods in particular countries.
The intersection of the three spheres of exclusion (socio-economic, institutional and spatial) leads to violence. To clarify the interaction between the different spheres and their importance, the concept of intersectionality by the Minority Rights Group International is used (2004). The concept recognized the incidence of multiple forms of exclusion, in this case three, that “do not operate independently” but intersect and reinforce each other (Minority Rights Group International, 2004: 11). The consequence of the intersectionality is an accumulation of exclusion, caused by every sphere and by the intersection of the different spheres at the same time. It captures the structural and the dynamic consequences of the different forms of exclusion (Minority Rights Group International, 2004). It also demonstrates why the three spheres must be addressed in conjunction and not independently as has been attempted in previous interventions (particularly by the public health approach addressing the socio-economic sphere). In the following section the three spheres of exclusion are presented in an attempt to illustrate in more detail to what extent Central American youth are excluded. A summary is presented in Figure 4.

3.2. Exclusion: three spheres that lead to youth violence

3.2.1. Socio-Economic Sphere

One of the most relevant findings in the literature on violence in the region is that there is a clear correlation between inequality and violence (Agostini et al., n.d.; Arriagada and Godoy, 2000; Imbusch, Misse and Carrion, 2011; IDB, 1999; Rubio, 2007). Higher incidence of gang violence in Central America was found in communities that fall in quintile 2 against the quintile 1 of income (IDB, 1999). According to numerous authors it is not extreme poverty what drives violence, but highs levels of inequality (Jutersonke, Muggah and Rodgers, 2009: 5). The nation income distribution by quintile in urban areas in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, shows a concentration of over 70% of national income in quintiles 4 and 5 for the three countries in mid-2000 (ECLAC, 2016a). Berkman suggests that the decline in economic opportunities (employment) combined with consumer culture and the inability of youth to acquire certain goods creates economic incentives for youth gang violence (Berkman, 2007). The changes in income distribution in the last decade have had a clear effect on the level of violence (Heinemann and Verner, 2006). A study by Heinemann and Verner found that a one point increase in the Gini coefficient of a country leads to a nearly one point increase in the homicide rate (2006: 12). According to ECLAC estimations the Gini coefficient in Honduras increased from 0.56 in 1999 to 0.60 in 2006, which would explain, in part, the increase levels of violence in the country (ECLAC, 2016b). Moreover, Heinemann and Verner also found that the nature of economic growth in the region has been exclusive, which has further marginalized groups, which will explain why the

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6 Minority Rights Group International define intersectionality as a term that recognizes the different interactions of discrimination (2004: 11). Here intersectionality is used to recognize the interaction of the spheres of exclusion.

7 El Salvador: 72.2% in 2004; Guatemala 78.0% in 2006; Honduras 76.2% in 2006. Full table in Figure 7 in Appendix 2.
economic growth and poverty reduction in the first decade of the XXI century did not lead to a reduction in levels of violence (2006).

Furthermore, Angostini et al. focused on the link of violence and inequality and argued that violence is a reaction against the frustration and ‘moral outrage’ of the opulence of reduced members of society (n.d.). Savenije reached the same conclusion, he found that people in El Salvador often reacted more violently due to their frustration and stress in context of increased inequality (2009: 86). In a context of high inequality, the lack of employment exacerbates the conditions of urban youth. There is a high level of unemployment of urban youth, particularly males who have no access to formal job markets or can only access low quality employment. In 2004, when police were detaining youth in cities in El Salvador 16.3% of 15-19 year and 25.9% of the 20-24 years old living in cities were not in education or employed\textsuperscript{8} (ECLAC, 2016c). Similar levels are found for Guatemala\textsuperscript{9}, 12.6% and 18.8%, and Honduras 14.8% and 21.0%, respectively. Additionally, urban youth with low training can only access employment in the ‘less formal’ service sector of the economy (Alvarez, 1994: 7). According to ILO close to 85% of all new employment opportunities in developing countries are created in the informal economy UN Habitat, 2010: 25). Analysing the structure of employment in the three countries we find that in 2010 in El Salvador and Honduras more than 60% of the employed population worked in low productivity industries\textsuperscript{10} (ECLAC, 2015). Similarly in Guatemala in 2006\textsuperscript{11} the 62.2% of the employed worked in low productivity industries (ECLAC, 2015). The lack of quality employment further alienated these groups, as they are unable to fully integrate with society from both a social and economic standpoint (Arriagada and Godoy, 2000; Moro, 2006). The breach in access of employment is effectively the exclusion of a substantial proportion of the population leading to higher levels of income inequality, as the exclusion barriers to access employment and quality labour markets are never broken.

3.2.2. Institutional sphere
The second sphere address the role the state and government institutions play in the exclusion of youth. In this analysis two predominant sources of exclusion in the institutional sphere were identified: the institutional decay and the isolation of democratic processes. First, the decay of the institutional structure in the region and its government’s inability to provide, deliver and monitor services has had a great impact in in the younger generations that grew up in the post-structural adjustment period. Sanchez argues that under neoliberalism there is a radicalization of inequalities

\textsuperscript{8} Full table in Figure 8 in Appendix 2.
\textsuperscript{9} Data corresponds to 2002 for Guatemala.
\textsuperscript{10} According to ECLAC classification, low productivity industries include: agriculture, commerce and services. Full table in Figure 9 in Appendix 2.
\textsuperscript{11} Closes available data point.
that “expressed socially in the institutional structures” (2006: 180). The socio-economic exclusion is exacerbated by the divide in “access to education, health, clean water... and basic public services such as electricity and sewers, yielding huge disparities in assets, opportunities and voice” (Sanchez R, 2006: 180-1). Second, the second predominant source of exclusion found is the isolation of youth from democratic processes and practices. Many of the countries in the region returned to democratic governments in the 1990s after a long period of instability, predominantly, in the 1970-80 that was marked by military dictatorships (Savenije, 2009). Angostini et al, categorise that institutional exclusion comes from a crisis of governance (n.d.). According to them, the crisis is a consequence of “clientelist politics, corruption and internal power struggles within the state” (n.d.:26), which coincides with the findings of Heinemann and Verner that considers that the “impunity and corruption, racism, perceived lack of justice” in the region all contribute to the appearance of violence (2006: 15).

One of the flagship of institutional exclusion in the region is education. This is evident in the low quality of education, the number of students, and the role education plays in social mobility (Carrion, 2004). Even though education coverage in the region in urban areas is high, research in El Salvador found that in marginalised territories close to 24.0% of the children suffer from educational deficit of up to 3 years (Savenije, 2009: 75). This means that almost one in every 4 children is three years behind in their educational attainment in comparison with their age. In 2002, almost 30% of 20-24 years old in Latin America had not completed primary school (UN Habitat, 2010: 22). Disaggregating the information for 13-19 olds by household income quintile in cities, it was found that male school attendance in 2004 for El Salvador was 12 percentage points higher for quintile 5, compared to quintile 1, and 15 percentage points higher between quintile 5 and quintile 2 (ECLAC, 2016d). Interestingly, there is a higher school attendance in quintile 1 than quintile 2, which could possibly reinforce the argument made in the socio-economic sphere regarding youth gang involvement being associated with inequality and exclusion, rather than poverty12. A similar trend can be found for Guatemala and Honduras for 2006. Unfortunately, one of the strongest links for gang involvement is not being enrolled in school or abandoning it (Rubio, 2007). In Guatemala, Ranum interviewed jailed gang members and found that 7.7% of then had never studied, 46.1% left school before or during the third grade, and that 40% deserted school between fourth and sixth grade (Ranum, 2006: 9). Only 4% of the interviewed had attended a grade higher than sixth (Ranum, 2006: 9). This creates a circle of inequality and exclusion that is difficult to break, leaving little options for marginalized youth. Their

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12 This would assumes that the lower attendance in quintile 2 in comparison with quintile 1, can be directly attributed to gang membership which is not possible to verify due to limitations in the dataset. Full table in Figure 10 in Appendix 2.
capacity to compete in a globalized world with high level of specialization is minimal, making them in many instances, unemployable (Carrion, 2004).

Furthermore, a second great institutional deficit in the region is the State’s inability to provide security for its citizens particularly its most deprived citizens. The high incidence of crime and violence in marginalized territories is partly a consequence of the lack of public security in cities. This is in partly explained by the rapid rate of urbanization, local and national authority’s failure to expand public security services effectively at the same growth rate (Heinemann and Verner, 2006). In more affluent areas, the lack of public security is covered by private companies and gated communities. Studying Latin American violence, Londoño and Guerrero found in 1999 that private spending in security was already equal to public spending in security (Londoño and Guerrero, 1999). Whilst, in marginalized territories this has meant that there is no public security or that gangs take on the role of security providers. In El Salvador, youth gangs play an important role as ‘social protectors’ and even security providers in the territories they control (Perez Sainz et al., 2015). Paradoxically, security forces are only present to repress gangs stigmatizing the people living in the area (Pereira Leite, 2008). The lack of public security services is reinforced by lack of trust in the police, military and the judiciary. The institutions that are called to monitor and enforce public safety are not trusted by the population living in marginalized territories because of their “ineffective and corrupt forms of law enforcement” (Hojman, 2004). According to the world competitiveness report, the judicial system’s efficiency and public confidence, in the opinion of its users, puts Latin American judiciaries in the bottom 20% in the world (Heinemann and Verner, 2006: 15). Whilst, Latinobarometro surveyed to 16-25 years old regarding trust in armed forces shows that in 2015 in Guatemala 55% of the respondents have little or no trust, 60% in El Salvador and 48% in Honduras (Latinobarometro, 2015a). There is a deep rooted crisis of institutional trust in security forces, which exacerbates violence.

Finally, the institutional exclusion has derived in the alienation from the decision making process. Marginalized youth don’t participate in democratic processes because of their fragmentation from society (Imbusch, Misse and Carrion, 2011: 43). More generally, Latinobarometer survey on governance reveals the degree of mistrust in the institutions and governance. According to their survey in the three countries close to 70% believe in 2015 that their countries is govern to favour powerful groups (interests) (Latinobarometro, 2015b). Moreover, asked about their political involvement 16-25 year olds, similarly close to 70% responded that they have never worked in favour of a particular candidate or political party (Lantinobarometro, 2015c).

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13 Full table in Figure 11 in Appendix 2.
14 Full table in Figure 12 in Appendix 2.
15 Full table in Figure 13 in Appendix 2.
they consider that voting has an impact in the future, 44.4% of 16-25 year old in El Salvador said no, 36.7% in Guatemala and 38.1% in Honduras. This suggests that the return to democracy in the early 1990’s has had little impact in people’s lives and that a great proportion of the population in the country is not actively involved in the election of representatives and authorities. Also, it suggests that despite their discontent there is no interest in addressing it politically. Unfortunately, due to limitations in the date it is not possible to further disaggregate the information and analyse to what extend differences in income and education and residence impact their responses.

3.2.3. Spatial Sphere

According to UN Habitat, the marginalized territories are the ‘face of inequality’ in the region because of the multiplicity of deficiencies found that replicate the processes of exclusion and poverty (UN Habitat 2014). Their location in rundown depressed central areas, areas of environmental risk and degradation, both inside and outside the city has a direct impact on the participation of its inhabitants with the rest of the city (UN Habitat, 2014: 105). According to a survey conducted by UN Habitat, people living in marginalized territories see marginalized territories and gated communities as the two main generators of inequality in the cities (UN Habitat, 2014: 111). Agostini et al argue that, there is “a systematic exclusion of marginalized groups by the elite” who use urban space and planning to “divide and exclude them” (n.d.:30). There is a fragmentation of the city a spatial separation between citizens and the opportunities they have. Interviews by Interpeace in El Salvador argue that the area has had a long standing stigma of “high risk and criminal gang presence” (Interpeace, 2014: 8). According to them the social stigma outdates the presence of gangs in the community and has reduced the provision of “State-sponsored services” (Interpeace, 2014: 8). They argue that the only State presence of the area was violent incursions of the police that “increased the stigma and reinforced the encirclement of the gangs in the territory” (Interpeace, 2014: 9). The process of spatial exclusion has separated rich and poor, leaving the poor to ‘survive as best they can’ (Koonings and Kruijt, 2006: 83).

The socio-economic isolation of residents in marginalized, gang controlled, territories in El Salvador is greater as residents are associated with gangs and violence (Perez Sainz et al., 2015). Living in a marginalized territory in the city perpetuates the socio-economic condition. In El Salvador, people living in marginalized territories have to lie about their place of residence in order to avoid being excluded from selection processes when looking for jobs (Savenije, 2009: 77). Interviewes by Interpeace in El Salvador community of San Jose del Pino claim that the stigma against their

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16 Full table in Figure 14 in Appendix 2.
community made it more difficult for community members to find employment or contact services (Interpeace, 2014). It seems that the solution to the exclusion is to leave their homes.

High levels of violence are confined to particular territories. In Guatemala youth gang activity has been focused in the metropolitan region of City of Guatemala and the southern and nor-occidental regions (Ranum, 2009: 7). To illustrate the difference in homicide rates in 2004 departments in Guatemala like Solola have a homicide rate of 6.5/100,000, whilst Izabal and Escuintla rates surpassed 80/100,000 (Ranum, 2006: 27). Meanwhile, in the metropolitan area of Guatemala City, where 42% of homicides occur, the homicide rate reached 74.4/100,000 in 2004 (Ranum, 2006: 27). Similarly, in El Salvador three central departments report the highest levels of violence in 2013, these are Cabañas, Cuscatlán and La Paz, which reported a homicide rate of 50-60/100,000 (Eguizabel et al., 2015: 257). Eguizabel et al., found that homicides of youth are located in and around the capital city of San Salvador (Eguizabel et al., 2015: 257).

Moreover, as mentioned in the socio-economic sphere the change in the economic structure, to a service economy, has reduced the sources of quality employment for the poorer segments of the population (Katzman, 2001).Spatially this has meant that city centres are no longer the centre of employment opportunities, less qualified labour is excluded to the peripheries of the cities (Katzman, 2011). The periphery is characterized by having pockets of population that have little possibilities of long-term quality employment (Katzman, 2011). This also has a negative effect on their communities as they lack information and personal contacts that could lead to employment opportunities (Katzman, 2011). The rapid expansion of cities to peri-urban areas signifies an “increased risk of social rupture” leading to new and deeper forms of social and spatial fragmentation (UN Habitat, 2014: 105). Ultimately, spatial exclusion translates into reinforced forms of exclusions.

Finally, authorities have used the lack of land titles or formal land ownership as a justification for abandoning marginalized territories (Savenije, 2009). Going back to the case of San Jose del Pino in El Salvador, interviewee commented that the community settled in the 1970’s and since mid-1980’s their neighbourhoods has received little support in infrastructure of service provision by the State (Interpeace, 2014: 7). This is a clear link between marginalized territories and the lack of service provision. In the interview they also commented that “the gangs in the communities in San Jose del Pino (El Salvador) originated in precarious socio-economic contexts that lacked social services, infrastructure and assistance that should be provided by local and national governments” (Interpeace, 2014: 6). UN Habitat has identified the lack of service provision in these territories that are many times characterised by the lack of resources such as public goods, equipment, basic infrastructure and lack of urban planning and public space (2014: 104).
Conclusion

This dissertation argues the need to rethink youth urban violence in the northern triangle of Central America. It begins by introducing different understandings of violence and characterises urban youth violence as a form of ‘economic violence’. It presents the ecological model as the predominant tool used to study youth urban violence in the region. The model proposes a multilayer understanding of the causes of violence, ranging from individual to structural factors. Using the model, eleven different factors were identified to explain urban youth gang membership and their association with violence. Chapter 2 introduces the main approaches implemented in Central America to address the problem of youth violence. The analysis focused on how these interventions are classified and is the outcome of their application. It found that the criminal justice approach brought disastrous consequences for the region and the ‘war against maras’; the professionalization of urban youth gangs, an upward spiral of violence and a process of greater social confrontation and use of violence. On the other hand, although the public health approach has no destructive consequences, the programs targeting youth are only partially successful, having little empirical evidence to proof their long-term impact.

The main criticism to the two predominant approaches is against its failure to recognize the underlying structural causes of youth violence. The political discourse around urban youth violence has been centred in ‘labelling’ youth gangs as the cause of violence and hence, their disappearance as the only plausible solution to stop violence. The label of youth gangs as the ‘bearers of all evil’ by local authorities and media gives a decontextualizing of youth violence and fails to question the underlying causes of violence. Therefore, this study rejects this frame and instead, proposes to understand youth gang violence as a consequence of exclusion, to rethink how violence is defined. The new definition of violence is centred on the lack of opportunities and understanding violence—as a means to an end-
as a response. As argued by Vanderschueren, violence is not spontaneous but the “product of a society characterized by inequality and social exclusion” (1996: 96). In the case of the countries analysed in Central America, the mobile for violence are urban youth gangs. The concept of exclusion is presented within a framework of three spheres and how their ‘intersectionality’ reinforces each other accumulating exclusion. Hence, in order to effectively address urban youth violence what must be tackled are the three spheres of exclusion.

One of the underlying principles of the spheres of exclusion is that policies must be centred in incorporating excluded and marginalised territories into ‘the rest of the city’. This includes not only urban upgrading, but also confronting long-lasting deficiencies in service prohibition, land legalisation and fostering community-led approaches. At the same time, it is a call to have inclusive economic growth that gives youth real quality employment opportunities. Institutionally this translates in tackling corruption, strengthening cooperation between national and local actors, and regaining ground in security and judiciary. Undoubtedly, the feasibility of addressing all forms of exclusions is limited, to say the least. It needs economic and political commitment from local, national and international actors. However, it is essential to have the right starting point that identifies the causes of urban youth violence, and that comprehends the drivers of youth gang membership and leads them to commit violent crimes. More importantly, to stop policies that have brought devastating consequences for the construction of peaceful societies. Rethinking the causes and redeveloping policies is crucial for the future of a region that is entangled in a long fight with urban violence. The consequences of having more than 20 years of extreme violence in the streets are yet to be seen. At the moment the region’s future is far from being promising.

Finally, a last concern is the growing involvement of youth gangs in drug trafficking and drug consumption. As mentioned by Moser, Winton and Moser, the separation between maras and drug trafficking networks is disappearing (2005: 134). This can only bring catastrophic consequences for the region, the countries and the communities. The experiences of Brazil and Colombia leave extensive evidence of dealing with youth involved in drug trafficking and the power and resources these groups can accumulate. The strategical location of Central America makes it a hot spot for drug trafficking and organized youth gangs can take the next steps in becoming more powerful actors in the drug trade. Having stronger cartels in Central America would further weaken the institutions that are trying to cope with youth violence in the countries. It is also time to rethink and reframe international drug policies?
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Appendixes

Appendix 1

Figure 5: Homicide rate per 100,000 (Top 10 Latin American and Caribbean)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional average 19
World average 7

Source: UNODC 2014

Figure 6: Homicide rate per 100,000 evolution 2000-2012
Selected countries

Source: Data from UNODC 2014
Appendix 2

Figure 7: Distribution of national income (percentage) by quintile (Urban)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Quintile 1</th>
<th>Quintile 2</th>
<th>Quintile 3</th>
<th>Quintile 4</th>
<th>Quintile 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ECLAC 2016

Figure 8: Young in cities aged 15 to 24 years not in education or employment (percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>El Salvador</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>15-19 12.6</td>
<td>20-24 18.8</td>
<td>15-19 14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>16.3 25.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20-24 21.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ECLAC 2016

Figure 9: Employment structure in percentage points by economic activity level of productivity (urban)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Employment structure</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Low productivity (Agriculture, commerce, services)</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid productivity (manufacturing industry, construction, transport and communications)</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High productivity (Mining, electricity, gas y water, Financial and real estate activities)</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not especific</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Low productivity (Agriculture, commerce, services)</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid productivity (manufacturing industry, construction, transport and communications)</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High productivity (Mining, electricity, gas y water, Financial and real estate activities)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not especific</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Low productivity (Agriculture, commerce, services)</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>61.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid productivity (manufacturing industry, construction, transport and communications)</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High productivity (Mining, electricity, gas y water, Financial and real estate activities)</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not especific</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ECLAC 2015
Figure 10: Male school attendance in percentage points by quintile of income per capita (urban)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EL Salvador</td>
<td>Quintile 1</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 2</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 3</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 4</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 5</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Quintile 1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>85.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Quintile 1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintile 5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ECLAC 2016

Figure 11: Trust in armed forces (percentage points)
Age group 16-25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of trust</th>
<th>El Salvador</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plenty</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Latinobarometro 2015

Figure 12: Is the country govern by a few powerful groups benefiting themselves (percentage points)
Age group 16-25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who is the country govern for:</th>
<th>El Salvador</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Powerful groups own benefit</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common good</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/No response</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Latinobarometro 2015
**Figure 13: Frequency of working for a political party or candidate**  
*Age group 16-25*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How frequently do you work for a political party or candidate:</th>
<th>El Salvador</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very frequently</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Latinobarometro 2015*

**Figure 14: Can the way you vote influence the future?**  
*Age group 16-25*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can the way you vote make a difference in the future</th>
<th>El Salvador</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How you vote can make a difference</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter how you vote things will not improve</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Latinobarometro 2015*