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REPORT ON VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

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In most Latin American countries the level of violence is far higher than in Europe, the United States and Canada. These countries' histories are also different and their social inequalities far more pronounced. The means of containing and controlling violence cannot therefore be the same.

Where violence in Latin America is concerned, there are four points to be emphasised: the higher level of violence compared with Europe, the regional disparities, the trends and finally the impact of homicides on life expectancy, particularly among young men.

- The level of violence in most Latin American countries is very high, considerably higher than in Europe. Measured by homicide rates¹, according to Interpol, the level of violence in South America stands at 26 people murdered per 100 000 inhabitants in 2002, and at 30 per 100 000 in the Caribbean. In South-East Europe the homicide rate is 3 per 100 000 inhabitants and 2 in western Europe. In Brazil for example, the mortality rate per 100 000 inhabitants due to the use of firearms is 66 times higher than in France. Violence is not only committed by criminals; the police are also responsible: in Brazil in 2007 over 1,300 young people were killed by the police in Rio de Janeiro and some 500 in São Paulo. Comparing this with the number of people killed by the police in the whole of the United States, which is around 200 (*Folha de São Paulo*, 23.12.2007), gives us an idea of the scale of police violence. Police violence is not only to be found in Brazil; it is present in many Latin American countries.

- The level of violence differs greatly from one country to another in Latin America. It is extremely high in Colombia, reaching 84.6 homicides per 100 000 inhabitants, 43 in El Salvador, 33 in Venezuela, 31 in Brazil, 12 in Mexico, 7 in Argentina and in Costa Rica, which is slightly less than in the United States but more than in Canada (2). In each of these

¹ Violence is, *a priori*, difficult to measure. While it is possible to arrive at a figure for a certain proportion of violence using statistics published by the police or judicial authorities of different countries, the remainder - and by no means a lesser proportion - is difficult to evaluate and dependent on the level of confidence one may have in the police and the judiciary, which is generally not very high in South America. Another problem in quantifying this phenomenon is that there are different degrees of violence. These, ranging from intentional homicides to drug-related offences, and including sex offences, bodily harm, armed robbery, swindling and counterfeit money offences for example, make it difficult to arrive at overall figure for violent acts (see Heinnemann A., Dorte V., 2006). To overcome this difficulty and the problem of differing classifications or perceptions of the same act, we have opted to take into account only *intentional homicides*. In the international classification of mortality drawn up by the World Health Organisation, intentional homicide is defined as any death caused by the deliberate action of another person. This definition excludes deaths caused by accidents, medical errors, civil wars and suicides. Margins of error do exist but are narrow. This statistic is relevant in measuring the scale of violence as it corresponds to the most extreme degree. For other types of violence, victimisation surveys are more reliable than statements made to the police but, by definition, these exclude homicides.

countries, violence is unevenly distributed and tends to be concentrated in certain cities (Recife, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in Brazil, Cali, Medellin and Bogota in Colombia) but it has recently been spreading to large towns.

- The number of homicides has been falling since 1994 in one or two countries like Mexico and Colombia where it has dropped dramatically in cities like Medellin (1517 homicides in 2004 compared with 5284 in 1994), and Bogota (1571 homicides compared with 3664 for the same dates) whereas in Cali it has remained at the same level overall between 2004 (2402 killed) and 1994 (2498 killed) according to the data of the Central Directorate of the Colombian Police (DIJN). In other countries, the level of violence as measured by the homicide rate is on the increase. Homicides have shown a distinct increase in Brazil, rising from 26.6 per 100 000 in 1995 to 31 per 100 000 in 2002 for example.

- The reduced life expectancy due to homicides applies virtually exclusively to men, and more specifically to men aged 15 to 44 years: life expectancy for men at birth in 2000 is lower by 2.89 years in Recife, 2.21 years in Rio de Janeiro, 2.48 years in São Paulo, a distinctly greater discrepancy than in Belo Horizonte (1.18) or in Porto Alegre (1.12). At the age of 20, life expectancy is lowered by 2.42 years in Recife, 1.76 years in Rio and 2.01 years in São Paulo. At the age of 50, on the other hand, there is a very low likelihood of reduced life expectancy. Generally speaking, all ages taken together, the mortality rates in certain districts of Rio de Janeiro, Recife and São Paulo are higher than those observed in Colombian cities in the 1990s².

We cannot understand violence unless we consider the history of each of these countries. The manner in which they were colonised and the treatment of the native populations, slavery, the recent civil wars and the way in which they ended and the dictatorships all have their share of responsibility to differing degrees. Together, they form a base for the fresh upsurge in violence of the last twenty years. The State, considerably weakened by the crisis of the 1980s and caught up in the neo-liberalism of the 1990s, has partly relinquished some of its functions (infrastructures, schools, health etc) resulting in inadequate education and poorly controlled urban development. After handing over part of its role to the market, the State has even less control over the Nation, with the territory becoming *porous*. Owing to the State's withdrawal from certain areas (districts, regions), guerrilla organisations (in Colombia) and mafia groups are more often than not taking *de facto* power there. Parallel powers are developing, frequently linked to drug trafficking, illicit gaming or even illegal imprisonment. Because they are not *de jure* but *de facto*, these

² All these statistics are given in detail together with their sources in the appendix.

powers generate extreme violence. Finally, with the opening of markets to international competition and the rise of financial globalisation, the inequalities that are already extremely marked except in one or two countries are tending to grow. This context is a breeding ground for violence and its extreme forms, namely homicides.

Finally, Latin America has long ceased to be a continent to which people immigrate and has become, to varying extents according to the country, a continent from which people migrate to the United States and Europe. The issues of cultural diversity and identities are therefore not cast in the same terms as in countries of immigration. Today they focus on the recognition of the cultures of indians and black descendants of slaves imported from Africa.

It is only through analysing the situation of violence that we can begin to apprehend the cultural responses to violence in Latin America. We will demonstrate that Latin American societies are generally characterised by a high degree of exclusion and distrust of the relatively strong institutions (1st part) and go on to show that there are numerous causes of violence and this makes it difficult to implement effective policies (2nd part).

I. Highly exclusive societies, strong mistrust of Institutions

A. Exclusive societies

Inequalities between incomes are very pronounced in most Latin American countries, while this is not the case in Europe or the United States (Salama P., 2006). Social transfer policies and the tax system slightly reduce those inequalities in Latin America, but a good deal less than in Europe. Accordingly, the indicator of inequality or Gini coefficient³ is 0.52 before redistribution in Latin America compared with 0.46 in Europe on average and, after transfers and taxation, these values are 0.50 and 0.31 respectively. The figures before and after transfers and taxation are 0.56 and 0.54 in Brazil and 0.42 and 0.31 in France, for example (OECD, 2007). While the gulf is narrower, it is also closing faster in Europe than in Latin America, where the inequalities are not only very pronounced but also only marginally affected by social policies, in contrast to Europe.

According to the OECD (2007), 55% of those belonging to the poorest quintile of the population have access to secondary education compared with 93% for the richest quintile and 38% have sewer access compared with 85%. More generally, if we consider all social expenditure in the broad sense of the term, including expenditure not only on social security but also on education and health, it can be seen that the poorest

³ This indicator measures inequality on a scale from 0 to 1; the closer it is to 1, the greater the inequalities and vice versa.

quintile benefits from only 16% of all this expenditure, whereas the richest quintile absorbs 29.1% of it. The gap is particularly wide for social security expenditure, 2.5% of which goes to the poorest and 16.8% goes to the richest, which is what the poorest quintile receives for all social expenditure... and yet it is precisely these categories that need it most.

Access to rights is, for much of the population, still an abstract concept. There is a gulf between the political citizenship found in numerous countries and the social citizenship deeply marked by exclusion. Assistance policies aimed at the poorest categories which have been developed since the beginning of the 2000s have had little impact to date. The amounts allocated to transfer expenditure are negligible if compared with those earmarked for servicing the internal debt, in a ratio of around 1:15. As transfer expenditure is aimed at the poorest 20 to 30 % of the population and internal debt allocations are of benefit, *via* the banking system, to 2 to 3% of the population in particular, we can see just how this profoundly unequal system perpetuates itself. It may also be the cause of citizens' deep mistrust concerning the use of taxes by the State: in 2005 only 21% of Latin America's population thought that taxes were well spent (more specifically 12% and 15% in Brazil and Mexico and 37% and 38% in Chile and Venezuela respectively).

B. *Deep mistrust of the Institutions* evidenced by surveys

The survey carried out by *Latinobarometro* in 2007 yielded the following findings:

- While civil and political guarantees are regarded as being ensured by 76% of the population, social and economic guarantees are regarded as being ensured by only 43% of the population.

- In Latin America, only 22% believe that access to justice is the same for everyone, and the figure is only 10% in Argentina and in Brazil.

- Only 23% of the population thinks it is protected against crime (the percentage stands at 9% in Argentina and 12% in Brazil). More specifically, according to a survey carried out in 2005 by the same institute, 33.1% of the population has no confidence in justice and 33% little confidence. When asked whether life is safer on a "day-to-day" basis, 9% thought it was (2% and 6% in Argentina and Brazil respectively, which was less than in Colombia (18%)) and 63% thought that was not the case...

- Confidence in the police is low: 31% of the population has no confidence at all in it, 29.8% very little confidence, 24.9% little confidence compared with 12% who have confidence.

- and as to the question of whether corruption decreased from 2004 to 2007, 26% thought that it had been far higher in 2004 than the previous two years and a considerably higher percentage, 39%, gave the same reply in 2007.

Deeply exclusive societies and the inadequacy of public policies to tackle heavily pronounced inequalities, the State's incomplete control over the national territory and deep mistrust of the institutions are all factors that have paved the way for the growth of violence. As Alba Zaluar, Brazilian anthropologist, pointed out in an interview (2001) with *Ciencia* magazine: "certain types of crimes are clearly more concentrated among the poor, *but* that is due to a set of factors:.... it is precisely in the districts where drug trafficking is most present and on the biggest scale, where the police presence is scarce and where social policies are extremely rare that the crime rate is the highest", a fact conveyed to the Brazilian public by the film drawn from the 1997 book by P. Lins, *City of God*, based on interviews carried out by the team led by A. Zaluar. It is this "set of factors" that we are going to analyse.

II. The multiple causes of violence make it difficult to implement effective policies.

A. The diversity of forms of violence

The table below shows the diversity of forms of violence in relation to the motives, perpetrators and victims involved. There is a wide-ranging scale of violence: from domestic violence to thefts and attacks and ultimately homicides. The profiles differ accordingly. The offences at the lower end of the scale are acts by individuals or small "street gangs" whereas crimes at the higher end are more often than not acts carried out by professional crime gangs (for example, the « *Maras*⁴ » in Central America, the « *Zetas*⁵ » in Mexico, the « *Street gangs* » in the United States). The latter cases are generally linked to drug trafficking. Without going into detail, a distinction should be drawn between the gangs set up for the purpose of distributing drugs and those which control the transportation of drugs from one point to another. The former seek to

⁴ It is interesting to note that the *Maras* in Central America have their origins in the political decision to expel *en masse* the illegal immigrants among the heavily tattooed members of Los Angeles street gangs, involved in drug-related criminal activities back to their countries of origin. After their forced return, they established links with groups in the United States and consolidated. The so-called *mano dura* (firm hand) policies aimed at clamping down on them amplified the violence owing to the great mediocrity of the institutions (very heavy corruption in the police who are involved in trafficking and no strangers to killing in certain countries, a habit picked up during the civil war). See WOLA (2006).

⁵ The *Zetas* are members of a drug cartel renowned for their viciousness and funereal symbolism. Many of them were recruited from an elite police force set up in Mexico and trained in the United States to combat drug trafficking...

control their territory or even expand it at the expense of other gangs while the latter work on controlling drugs supply routes. The violence is not on the same scale. The instability of drug supply routes, resulting from anti-drug policies, and the very high profits derived from transporting drugs fuel "competition" between gangs, reflected in a very high number of homicides, particularly among gang members.

Table 1. Classification of Violence by Motive, Type, and Actors in Latin America and the Caribbean			
<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Type of Violence</i>	<i>Victimizers</i>	<i>Victims</i>
Interpersonal or social; domination, revenge, control, debts, disagreements, unknown intimidation	Domestic or interfamilial; physical, sexual, verbal, psychological deprivations, neglect	Male partners, fathers, relatives, friends, acquaintances	Female partners, children, seniors, relatives
Economic; crimes with little or no structure	Fights, injuries, homicides	Gangs, acquaintances, unknowns	Friends, acquaintances, unknowns
	Homicides, rapes, robberies	Common delinquents, gang members	General population, members of gangs or groups
Economic and power: organized crime	Homicides, injuries, assaults	Drug-traffickers, organized gangs	Leaders, judges, journalists, citizens, gang members
Politics	Homicides, massacres, kidnappings, injuries	Guerillas, paramilitary troops, government forces	Peasants, rural residents, guerrilla fighters, soldiers, police

Source: Berkman H., from studies by Concha-Eastman.

While this classification is instructive in many respects, it is not a diagnosis of the situation; the causes of violence are not analysed. We will seek to do this before going on to discuss, in a second section, possible remedies for this violence.

B. *The multiple causes of violence*

Is it because of poverty or substantial inequalities in income or trends in income that violence reaches such heights? Is it because of inadequate repression, understaffed police and a justice system that is excessively inefficient or lax that violence is unleashed? Is it because of the recent civil wars or dictatorships that have heavily marked the behaviour of both forces of law and order and citizens that the level of violence remains very high? Is it because whole populations have been marginalised

and their cultures and identities ignored that societies have so little cohesion and violence develops? Is this down to the production and selling of drugs?

An extreme case: Colombia

When a country falls into a state of extreme violence, it is *simplistic*, to say the least, to look no further than the economic aspects when seeking the causes. When solutions cannot be found to conflicts and violence perpetuates itself, when the drug industry becomes so lucrative for drug traffickers, paramilitaries and sometimes sections of the armed forces for example, when that industry manages to eat away at the State from within, violence takes on some singular aspects. Violence that is released and generalised in this way "cannot be put down to a political war or a social conflict*only a small proportion may be directly attributed to political causes or the actions of organised groups of drug traffickers, and most of it relates to account-settling or routine disputes*" (Pécaut, 1994, our italics). This violence, depoliticised, trivialised, generalised, in which the State no longer has "the monopoly of legitimate violence" (Max Weber), transforms itself into terror, according to D. Pécaut⁶.

In this section we shall try to establish causal links by looking only at the most extreme form of violence, homicide, for the aforementioned reasons. Without giving an exhaustive list, we will evaluate and discuss the causes of homicide.

Several researchers believe that poverty and inequalities do not lie at the root of violence. The apparent lack of a connection between economic aspects and violence is an idea shared by many researchers in the field of social sciences (for a general presentation, see Zaluar A., 2002). Peralva A. (2001, 2005 with Adorno S.), and a Brazilian sociologist notes for example that regional Human Development Indices (HDIs) in Brazil and crime rates are in inverse proportion: the better the situation in terms of HDIs, the worse the level of crime, which is paradoxical. Furthermore, when the waves of hyperinflation came to an end in Brazil (1994), the standard of living among poor people showed greater improvement than that of the other layers of the population for the first two years of relative price stabilisation, but the homicide rate continued to rise: from 40 per 100,000 habitants at around the end of 1992 to 70 by the end of 1995 in the metropolitan region of Rio and from 43 to 52 per 100 000 for the same dates in São Paulo (Viegas Andrade and de Barros Lisboa, 2000, p. 387).

So it is not the *degree* of inequalities or poverty that explains criminality. Generally speaking, the analysis is germane when we consider *trends* rather than absolute levels

⁶ "The moment when violence becomes terror is when its protagonists use means aimed at breaking the social bonds defining the specific characteristics of given sectors of the population, which are then trapped in a situation where they cannot call for help from any third party or recognised institution" (Pécaut, 1998)

and take into account a set of factors that may sometimes be counteractive such as urban development, schooling etc. These factors, and the respective trends in them, have different and varying degrees of impact on the homicide rate. So it is not a contradiction in terms that violence can increase over a short period at a time when poverty is decreasing.

An econometric study we carried out with Mamadou Camara (2003) sought to explain the trends in homicides in ten countries⁷ between 1995 and 2000. The variables used were: the effectiveness of the system for repressing crime, the share of the poorest 40% in disposable income and the share of the richest 10% in national income, the human development indicator, the rate of income growth, the rate of urban development, and the numbers of children in school at secondary level. We deliberately excluded "drugs" as a variable⁸. The findings of the econometric study were as follows⁹:

1/ Growing urban development appears to be a major cause of violence, not only because it is usually poorly controlled but also because, in towns, the solidarity that might exist in rural areas disintegrates and as soon as job opportunities become rare, informal activities aimed at sheer survival multiply and violence has more scope for development, probably more so for second-generation urban dwellers than for those who have just come in from rural areas. In the study carried out, urban development is the variable most heavily implicated in the rise of violence.

2/ A higher degree of inequality tends to accentuate violence probably because it is felt to be particularly unjust in countries where inequalities are already very pronounced. As the State's efforts to reduce inequalities are not deemed likely to alter that trend, there is a powerful temptation to "directly tax" those who seem well-off. However, this variable is less influential than urban development.

3/ *Inversely*, where the system for repressing crime is more effective, the homicide rate is distinctly lower. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that effectiveness of the system for repressing crime is not to be confused with heavier repression. The level of effectiveness is measured by the percentage of homicide cases solved. The effectiveness of the system for repressing crime therefore depends on how good the

⁷ Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela.

⁸ All countries are more or less affected by these criminal activities but in very different ways: some are primarily drug producers, others are above all places of transit to developed countries while others again are consumers. Each case generates specific crime organisations. Competition between them, to control a route or a territory, culminates in extreme levels of violence. It is not because we have ignored the links between the drug trade and violence that this variable has not been taken into account. It is because this violence-generating activity is difficult to measure (can it be measured by drug seizures? - but these do not always reflect the scale of the activity in the same way; arrests, trials? - but these are far from being significant; homicides? - but that would use circular reasoning).

⁹ For a detailed analysis of the equations and results, see Camara M. and Salama P. (op. cit.).

institutions are. If they are mediocre, heavier repression generates a backlash of violence.

4/ Increased economic growth brings with it a slight drop in homicides.

5/ An increased number of children in school at secondary level is accompanied by a reduction in homicides (Suarez Dillon Soares S., 2007).

This does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis of the causes of violence. It does not look at the historical causes that are sometimes distant (manner of colonisation) and sometimes more recent (dictatorships in the 1970s) and the lack of effectiveness of the judicial system and policing, despite the latter being particularly repressive, often showing little respect for human rights in many countries.

It is interesting to take a closer look at the question of urban development for two reasons.

Firstly towns are not always synonymous with violence. In many European countries the town has been a factor in bringing peace for a very long time (Bauer A, 2006)¹⁰. It was the rural areas that were violent, and it was only in the last decades of the 20th century that violence increased in the towns, firstly in the United States and then in Europe with what was known as the "inner city crisis". Poorly controlled urban development, the unravelling of bonds of solidarity¹¹ of new migrants seeking hard-to-find work and the monetarisation of social relations are the reasons most frequently cited. We have seen it for ourselves. This violence does not necessarily take on an ethnic dimension unless society is divided into communities, where there is a "match between territories and ethnic populations" (Bauer A., p. 23, p. 25).

Secondly it is in the towns that urban policies have been developed in recent decades and state intervention methods have been transformed. As Doytcheva M. (2007) points out in the case of France, which may be transposed to many other countries, social work is becoming "ethnicised", positive discrimination is becoming commonplace, the prime movers in communities are being co-opted by the institutions

¹⁰ "Towns have therefore civilised crime and violent crime in particular ...the wondrous universe of the rural *el dorado* imagined by city-dwellers has never existed" (Bauer A., p.23). This debunking of a widespread myth is to be seen in parallel with the views of Elias N (1969) on the interiorisation of violence as civilisation progresses in step with urban development in western societies: the specific stability of psychical self-constraint mechanisms ...is closely linked to the monopolisation of the physical constraint and the growing solidity of the central social bodies" (Elias N., p. 188). The situation then changes with the rapid growth of towns and poorly controlled urban development in the developed countries. That change is even more radical in Latin America where megapolises have sprung up and in cases where the State has lost control over entire districts.

¹¹ Without going into this key issue here, we would just note that the disintegration of solidarity concerns family-based solidarity (shift to smaller or single-parent families), class-based solidarity (development of fragmented unofficial work where the offer of labour, generated by high birth-rates and heavy migration from the countryside to towns is not matched by adequate demand), and sometimes religious or ethnic solidarity. That disintegration leaves the way clear for fragmented and dispersed solidarities, maintained by membership of street gangs and founded on observance of certain codes. We will subsequently expand on this point.

(p. 13). This new multiculturalist approach characterising urban policy and reflecting a determination to be closer to citizens and their problems is "not only a matter of individual rights but also and above all of social justice" (p. 15). It targets specific populations. As these targeted urban policies have emerged in the context of the democratisation of recent years in Latin America and are not fully developed, it may be considered that fresh impetus should make it possible to curb current violence through better controlled urban development and greater consideration for the values and needs of the most excluded communities.

C. *The specific organisations of violence: the gangs*

Gang wars linked to drug trafficking have developed in most countries. This will be clear from our analysis of the gangs of young people and their extreme forms: the "*Maras*" in Central America (Rubio M., 2005, Cohen M. and Rubio M., 2007, Rodgers D., 1999, Wola, 2006). Street gang membership is very high: 500 per 100,000 individuals in Honduras, 153 in El Salvador. Recruitment is particularly high among young people from poor backgrounds and rejected by the education system but also, to a lesser but nevertheless substantial extent, among those who continue their studies¹². The effects of social origin differ, depending on whether the person is from a poor background and /or has suffered academic failure. For those in a situation of academic failure and no longer at school, the lower their income, the more likely they are to belong to a gang. Among young people continuing their studies, it is not the poorest or richest but those with middling incomes who are most likely to belong to a gang¹³. So the relationship is more complex than the frequently suggested one linking gang membership and criminality to poverty.

As Leggett Th. points out (in Rubio M. ed., *op. cit.*, p. 11), for the members of gangs and the *Maras*, the group "becomes the supreme institution in their life". The members of these gangs develop "microcultures" based on recognition (hence the importance of signs and codes) in territories controlled by violence and pursue activities which are either illegal or bordering on the illegal that may be highly lucrative. Indeed this is why people join gangs when they are young and then tend to stay in them for a long time. So gang membership is not a phenomenon of initiation or a passing fad of youth. As they move into serious crime, gangs become professionalised as they become adult.

¹² Around 5.5% of the students in Panama are members of gangs and 3% in Nicaragua. The "students" belonging to gangs are far less likely to commit a crime than other gang members especially where drug trafficking-related homicides are concerned (Cohen M. and Rubio M., p. 13 and 14).

¹³ Education reduces the likelihood of committing violent acts. Inversely, if it does not open the door to the employment hoped for and results in falling down the social pecking order, it may lead to violence.

"Gang microcultures": a few illustrations

We have already emphasised that gang crime is not all at the same level: some gangs commit minor offences while others are organised crime groups. Obviously, some gang members graduate from one type of organisation to another, although that does not mean that all of them are destined for a life of serious crime. Many leave the gang after a few years, either because they have been imprisoned, or they may actually have been killed, or because they have opted for another lifestyle. However, there is a growing trend in many countries to stay longer in gangs than in the past.

On the subject of young people and street gangs: The gang also empowers individuals who otherwise feel powerless: people look at you with fear, cross to the other side of the street to avoid you, acknowledge your existence and power. It is a turning of the tables, a way of getting back at society. Gangs basically fuel fear and feed off fear... in order to survive and not to be torn apart by dissent within, this kind of group needs conflicts with the outside, with local residents, other gangs, the police... finally, we must not overlook the fact that the gang is a domain of solidarity and conviviality. It fulfils a function of protection for its members in a universe dominated by street codes... " (interview with Marwan Mohammed, *Le Monde*, 10.12.2007).

According to Haut F. and Quéré S. (2001): "Gang microcultures propose values that are very different from the general social norms. Crime is regarded as the generally accepted method of increasing one's social standing and power" (p. 76)... "Gang life exalts comradeship between gangsters but rejects traditional values, study and work. Meeting up to hang out, drink or take drugs is a key value. A gang member also wants to prove himself as a man... through sexual prowess, ability to fight, being quick to defend his honour, his group or his friends" (p. 78)... "The cultural environment of gangs is made up of nihilism, fatalism and omnipresent violence" (p. 83). And in the same register, the authors add "Gangster rap is violent, aggressive, racist and sexist music » (p. 82). "Graffiti always has a specific meaning... to mark their territory... *street gangs* have been using graffiti for a long time... to indicate who controls a given territory and where its centre and boundaries are. Tags often throw down challenges or express a desire to dominate... gangs use graffiti to become known and glorify their identity" (pp. 88 and 89).

Finally, at a higher level, beyond the gangs making their debut, the interview run by the *O Globo* newspaper in November 2007 with Marcio Camacho (known as Marcola), leader of the Primer Comando da Capital group (PCC in São Paulo), in prison, shows how violence in the cities is developing into quasi urban guerrilla warfare run from prisons by the leaders of extremely powerful crime organisations: "...my soldiers are strange anomalies in the distorted development of this country. No more proletarians or unhappy or exploited individuals. There is something else ... educated in the most absolute illiteracy, graduated in prisons, like a monster alien hidden in the corners of the city. A new language has emerged, that's what it is, another lingo. We stand before a post-misery, it is begetting a new murderous culture assisted by technology, satellites, cellular telephones, Internet and modern weapons. It is shit with chips and megabytes. To a question concerning fear of dying: "It is you who are frightened of dying, not me. Here you cannot enter prison and kill me, but I can send people to kill you on the outside. We are men-bombs. There are one hundred thousand men-bombs. We are at the centre of what is beyond solution ... We are already a new species; we are like bugs, different from you; and to the question: "Is there a solution?" comes the reply: "You could achieve some success if you give up defending "normality". There is no normality. You have to be self-critical over your own incompetence... We are at the centre of what is beyond solution, except we only live within it and you have no way out... As the divine Dante Alighieri wrote: "We are all in hell".

Conclusion: The difficulties of implementing effective policies

Curbing violence at the kind of level it has reached in many Latin American countries is rather like trying to square the circle in terms of difficulty. What we can say is that there is a set of prerequisites for making society more cohesive and curbing violence: substantially lessen socio-economic inequalities, promote more egalitarian redistribution, develop high-quality basic and vocational education, improve the quality of institutions, in particular and above all the judiciary and the police, and devise town policies.

These new policies will not have an immediate impact on violence, which is why purely repressive responses may seem more effective especially for electoral purposes. The fact is that they do not have the expected impact in curbing violence¹⁴. In addition, for as long as the apparatus of repression continues to be eaten away by corruption from the inside, a substantial section of police continues to be involved in trafficking, another and sometimes the same section is marked by a heavily repressive past (dictatorships, recent civil wars¹⁵), and the Government adopts "blind" repressive policies, such as the "*mano dura*"¹⁶ in Central America, then repression can actually be a factor in increasing violence, through the legitimacy it lends to many young people who feel excluded.

The prerequisites have to be translated into policies, which then have to be implemented. *It is within this framework that we can deploy "cultural solutions"* through town policies, but also and more specifically in certain countries, through recognition of the rights and values of entire communities that have long been ignored¹⁷.

Cultural policies for towns are not easy to devise, and there are a number of pitfalls to avoid, two of these being to regard all gangs as equally criminogenic

¹⁴ We are not denying the need for repression but saying that it should be combined with improvements in the quality of institutions.

¹⁵ On this point, see WOLA (2006).

¹⁶ This policy entailed arresting individuals presumed to be members of gangs, such as the *Maras*, on the basis of outward signs like tattoos.

¹⁷ Recognition of identities is now central to the new claims and battles of communities which have been outcasts in the past, as can be seen from social movements in many Andean countries and also in Central America and Mexico. These communities have been under domination and their rights and values ignored for centuries. Today, the arrival of these communities in power in a few Andean countries raises again the issues of Nation and the building of a multinational State (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 2006) with the recognition of forms of representation linked to the old ways of choosing representatives according to custom (new constitution of Bolivia). These are very important questions relating to "refund" identities, not of minorities but, in the case of the Indians, majorities in certain countries. Clearly, this question would be denatured if we deal it with in relation to violence and it therefore goes beyond the framework of this report.

and to put all illegal activities on the same footing. Let us take these two points in detail.

1. Not all gangs are the same and their operating methods and aims are not comparable. As we have already seen, they are far from all being criminogenic even though they are more so today than in the past in some countries. The microcultures which have developed are far from being all antisocial or nihilistic. It is only when taken to the extreme that certain microcultures develop totally destructive themes and engage in morbid symbolism (Wola, 2006, on the Zetas in Mexico).

2. Hasty and, to say the least, erroneous generalisations are to be avoided. It is not because 40 to 60% of private sector jobs are unofficial or that many houses have been built illegally that we can conclude that all these communities are violent and establish a *continuum* between this form of violence and that of the gangs. These are qualitatively different offences. Working undeclared and illegally building homes are indeed violations of the law but they are different from violence more often than not directed at the poor and occasionally the rich. And this is also why the *favelas* are so different from one another (Wacquant L, 2007, Valladares, 2006): those made up mostly of poor people working in shops and workshops, those controlled by mafia groups which engage in various kinds of trafficking and demarcate their spheres of influence by marking out their respective territories by violence, and those situated at various levels between the two extremes. Breaking the law does not have the same meaning in these different cases¹⁸.

The different types of offence produce distinct cultures, sometimes known as "survival cultures" for these communities. Using the cultural modes of expression of underprivileged districts is not tantamount to adopting *the criminogenic microcultures* of certain gangs. It is important to draw this line; otherwise, to consider that violence is the dominant element on the pretext that a large part of the population breaks the law *de facto*, would be to underestimate the seriousness of violence committed against people.

¹⁸ As the economists point out, there is a distinction between "grey market" and "black market".

As Bui Trong L. points out: "in the difficult areas there is a real craze for certain cultural undercurrents and their message of revolt¹⁹" (2003, p. 43). It is not because certain modes of expression (music, clothes etc) are adopted by young people who are not organised in gangs that they should be considered as potentially dangerous. They are expressing, in their own way, a certain refusal of society as they feel it.

Town policy must therefore target districts and integrate *a cultural policy to take the place of the gang microcultures* that preach hatred of those outside the gang, often from a sexist viewpoint, sometimes combining corruption with extreme violence to defend their drug business and illicit gaming activities (see inset above). As part of that process, though, it must seek to integrate the cultures emerging from excluded communities mostly living an unofficial existence. There are some town programmes, for example, which encourage the expression of young talents from difficult areas.²⁰

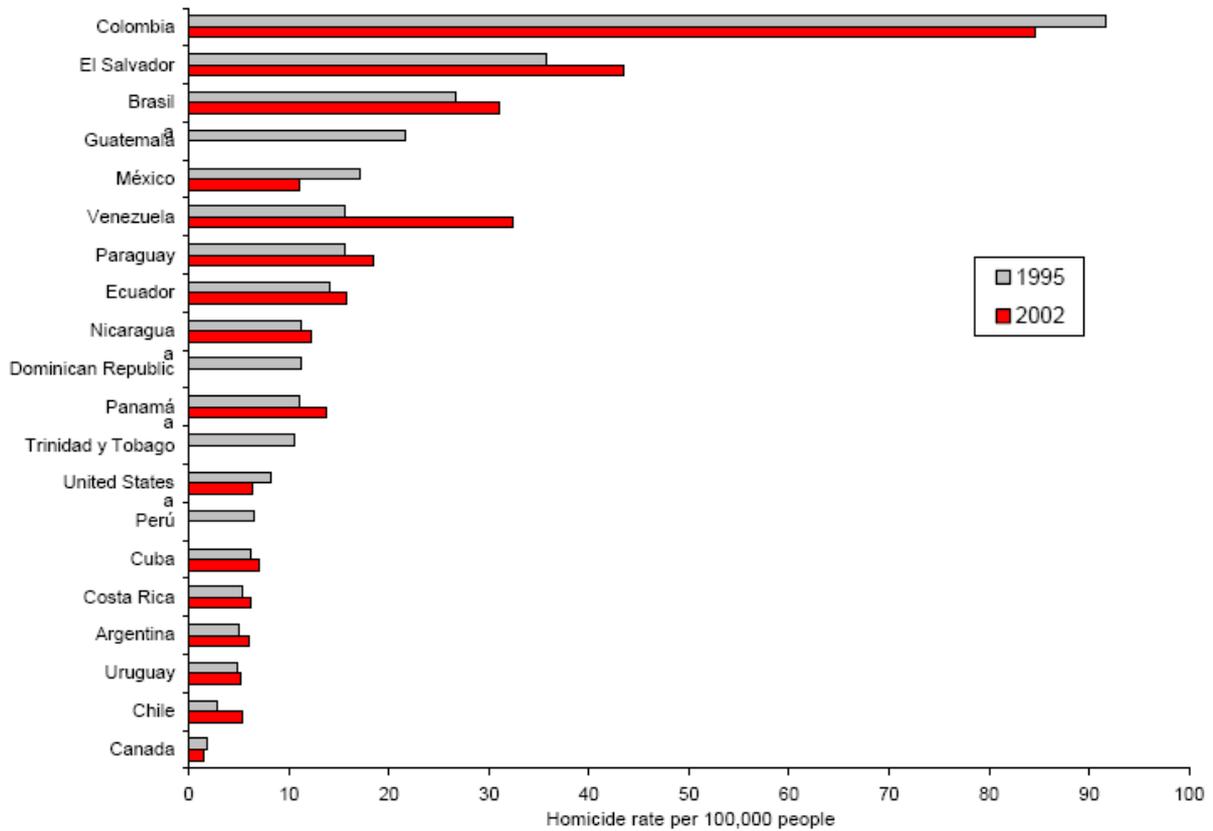
At a more global level town policy must also aim to provide equal access to universal rights for all citizens, be they rich or poor, indian, black, mixed race or white, based on the experience of communities and their modes of expression. The obligation of result may justify the introduction of positive discrimination, with regard to communities and the districts targeted. Not to practise this kind of discrimination would be to let fester a resentment justified by the scale of inequalities and the perception of universal rights as purely abstract, to allow violence to develop and to leave the way free for repression as a sole solution.

Appendices:

¹⁹ Can violence in art be censored? This is a very old debate, as Bui Trong points out, saying that Plato wanted to ban entry (for poets) to the ideal city to prevent them corrupting morals", whereas Aristotle stated that, far from encouraging violence, viewing Art would permit emotional catharsis (p. 50, *op. cit.*).

²⁰ As in the "Urban frescoes" projects in Philadelphia co-directed by Jane Golden.

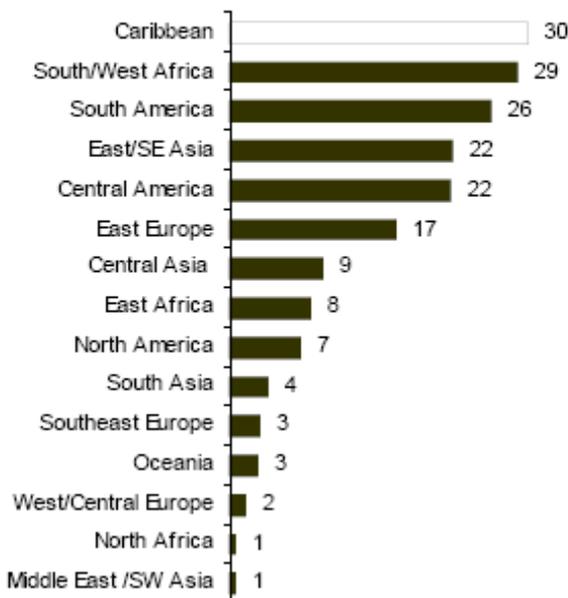
Figure 1. Homicide Rates per 100,000, Western Hemisphere, 1995-2002



Source: Berkman H (op.cit) and Cohen M and Rubio (op.cit) from Interpol and WHO data

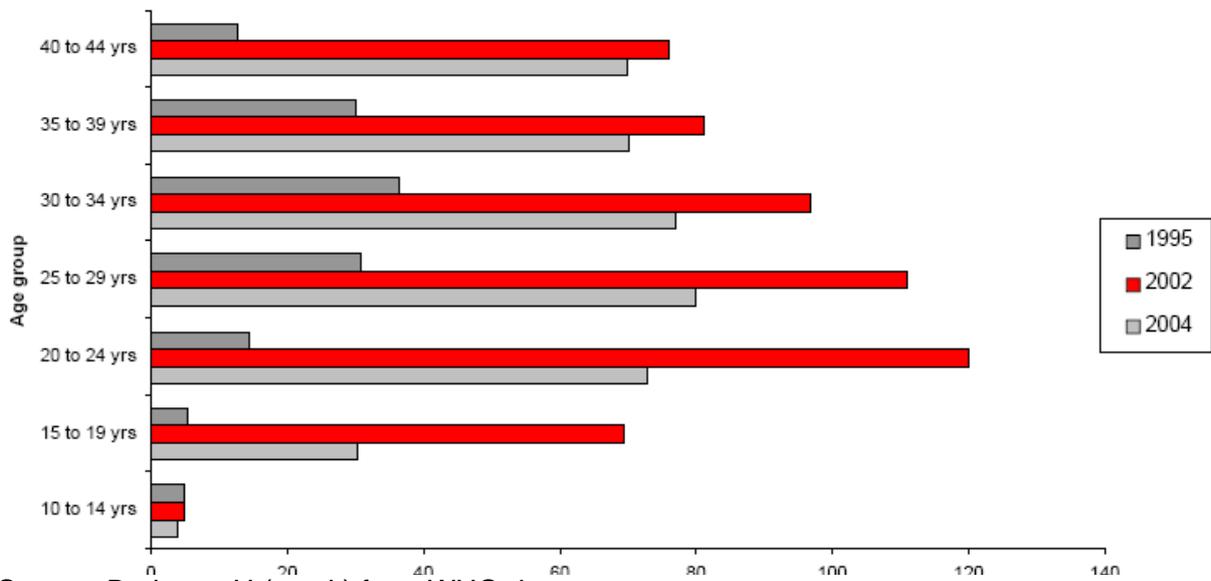
Figure 2:

Murder Rates by Region of the World



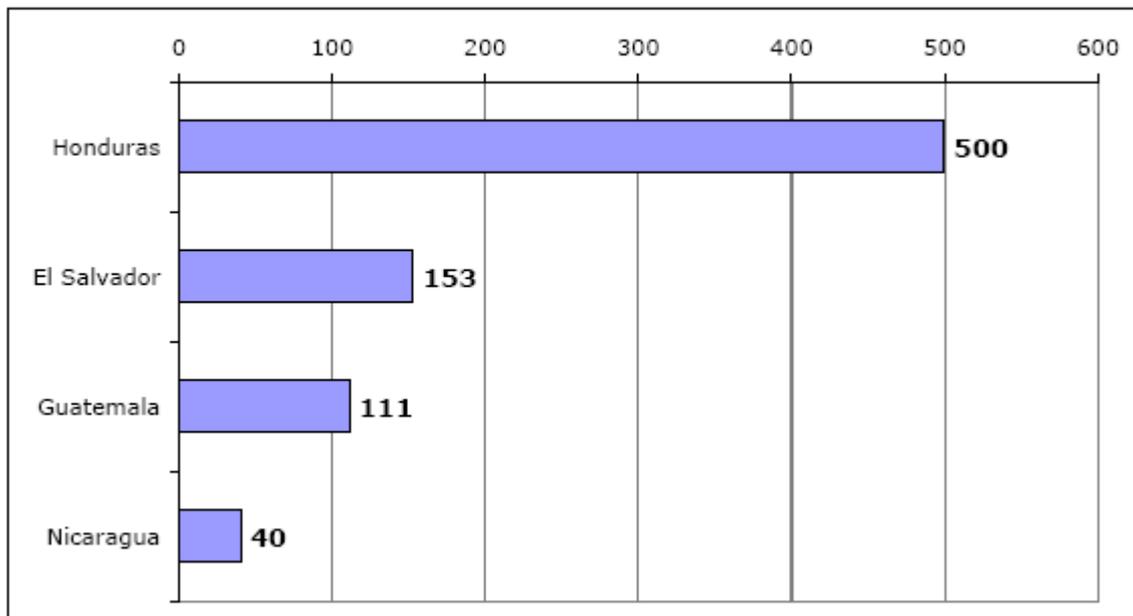
Source: UN crime Trends Survey and Interpol, 2002, in World Bank and UN (2007), *op. cit.*

Figure 5. Death Rates by Assault, by Age Group, Latin America and the Caribbean



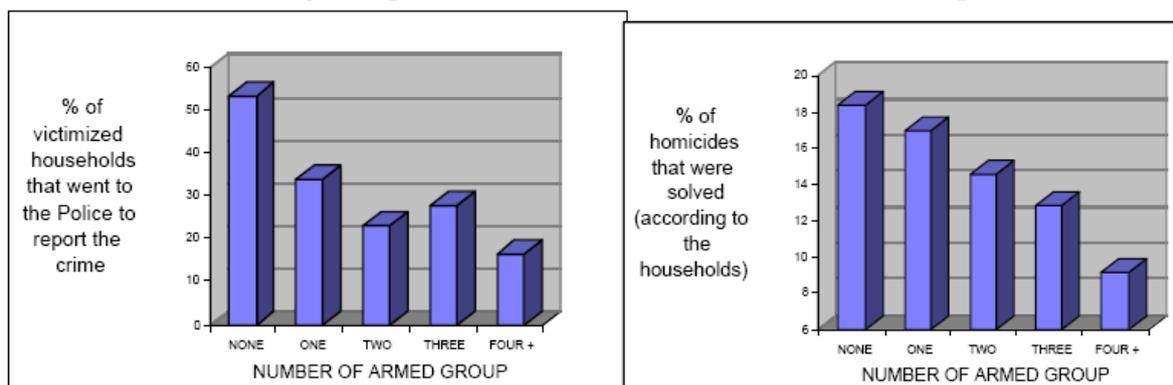
Source: Berkman H (op.cit) from WHO data

GANG MEMBERSHIP IN CENTRAL AMERICA
 NUMBER OF GANG MEMBERS PER 100.000 PEOPLE

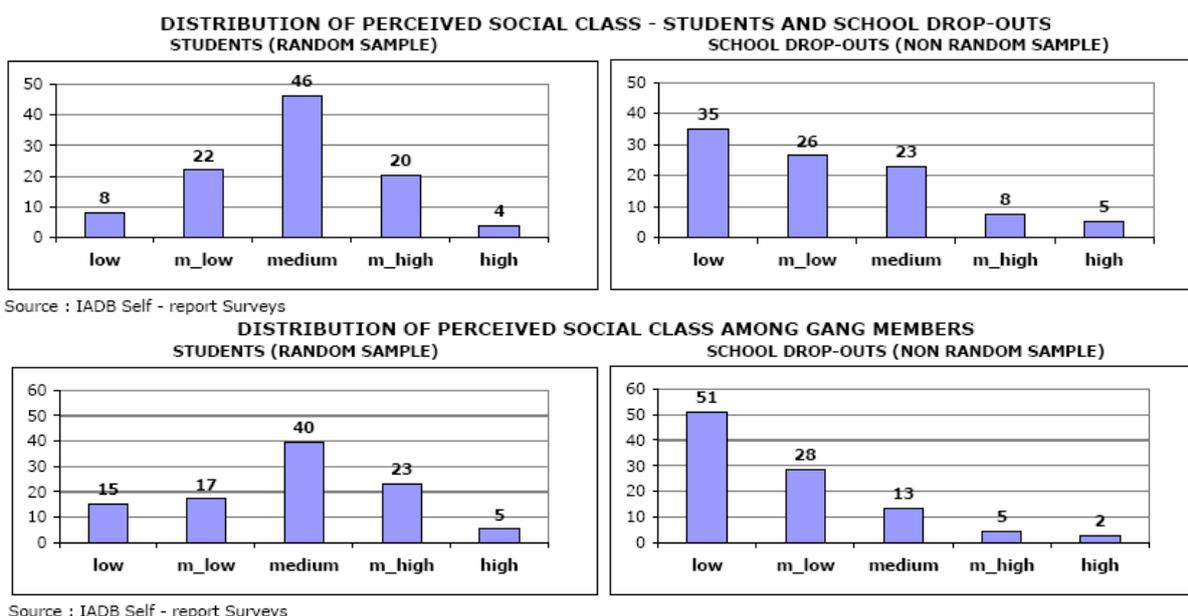


Source: Gang membership USAID (2006) - Population 2005 United Nations

Colombia - Armed Groups Influence & Criminal Justice



Source: in Cohen and Rubio (op.cit) taken from Cuellar (1999)



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