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Insecurity and Violence as a New Power Relation in Latin America

By

MAGALY SANCHEZ R.

This article shows the growing activities related to the existence of three types of urban violence: the structural violence inherent in the existing social inequalities in Latino American countries, radical violence, and criminal violence. Neoliberal policies generate more inequality, exclusion, poverty, and alienation, which yield a rising tide of criminal and radical violence, which triggers more state violence and coercion, which, in turn, encourages more resistance from below. Violence and security have become a key link in the economic arena characterizing the Latin American metropolis.

Keywords: violence; youths; inequalities; kidnapping; security; paramilitary groups; structural adjustments

Violence has been a prominent social response to the application of structural adjustment policies throughout Latin America. As the nation-state has become less able to negotiate socially and politically with mobilized sectors of society, it has increasingly imposed violent measures of social control. The nation-state refers to a particular segment of global geography characterized by distinct cultural forms, social structures, political alliances, societal negotiations, and market interventions (Poulantzas 1978). Increasingly, states have had to resort to violence to maintain order or simply to justify their own legitimacy, as indicated by the growing presence of the military in the streets of Latin American cities. The application of state force is inherent in the politics of economic austerity, and its ubiquity throughout the region suggests that, at the very least, it constitutes a necessary condition for the incorporation of nations into the global market economy under neoliberalism.

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As the coercive power of the state has come to be applied more widely, it inevitably has affected the interests and well-being of the middle and professional classes, whose members, in turn, have risen in resistance along with other segments of the population that historically have been segregated and excluded in Latin America. Their opposition takes diverse forms, ranging from quiet public protests (e.g., Argentina's Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) to massive political mobilizations (The anti-Toledo demonstrations in Peru) to radical expressions of violence through terrorism and armed revolt (the Zapatista uprising in Mexico). A paradoxical consequence of structural reform thus appears to be that to maintain "democratic order" in the face of unpopular economic and fiscal policies, regimes turn to force. As a result, nominally "democratic" states find themselves relying on violence to maintain political control and achieve stability, contracting their own ideology of democracy and human rights and ultimately undermining their own legitimacy.

A paradoxical consequence of structural reform thus appears to be that to maintain "democratic order" in the face of unpopular economic and fiscal policies, regimes turn to force.

The social expression of violence in Latin America occurred in three historical moments, each characterized by its own form of violence. First came *structural violence*, the rampant economic inequality, social exclusion, and persistent poverty arising from the imposition of neoliberal economic policies. In response came two other kinds of collective violence, one political and the other criminal. As the urgency of circumstances facing middle- and working-class people increased, many turned to *radical violence*, leading to successive waves of strikes, demonstrations, and insurrections throughout the region. At the same time, the situation of the poor and the young deteriorated, and many of them turned to *criminal violence* in the form of youth gangs, criminal mafias, and drug cartels. If "unstable social equilibrium" refers to the tenuous stability under which the powerful negotiate political compromises with diverse interests to maintain social control, then rising violence and growing insecurity suggest a new "social disequilibrium" and a progressive loss of control throughout Latin America. In the region's largest cities, disorder and violence become part of daily life.

This situation has created a self-feeding cycle whereby neoliberal policies generate high rates of inequality, exclusion, poverty, and alienation, which yield a rising tide of both radical and criminal violence, which triggers more state coercion, which, in turn, encourages more violent resistance from below. The end result is a militarized elite facing a mobilized and hostile population made up not just of the urban poor and unemployed but also disaffected technical, managerial, and professional classes who have found their living standards eroded by the devaluation of wages and the accompanying decrease in purchasing power. Under these conditions of generalized discontent and instability, the institutions of democracy lose flexibility, and the paternalistic state of old reemerges to offer models of authoritarian repression and militarized violence to establish order.

Thus, a situation marked by poverty and exclusion leads increasingly to urgent circumstances and radicalized responses, causing people and classes to interconnect and integrate in multiple ways to oppose the structural violence of the state. Neoliberalism thus ends up producing more polarization and less democracy than the state-centered development models prominent in Latin America during earlier periods (Portes and Hoffman 2003). Understanding popular violence as a consequence of structural violence focuses attention away from the repercussions of violence toward its social and economic causes. Rather than demanding harsher and more repressive measures to “restore law and order” and “punish lawbreakers,” a structural perspective views the reform of the state itself as the best means to reduce violence and restore social stability; but it requires policy makers to abandon journalist dichotomies such as formality-informality, legality-illegality, victim-attacker, and criminal-citizen (Galtung 1998; Hernández 2002).

From the Formal to the Informal and Back Again

Prior research has demonstrated the growing polarization of Latin American society stemming from global changes that have widened the gap between those with access to technology and those who are excluded from its benefits. Greater inequalities of wealth and income are expressed socially in the institutional structure of the metropolis and spatially by the fragmentation of neighborhoods along the lines of class, race, and ethnicity (Castells 2000; Korzeniewicz and Smith 2000; Sanchez 2000a, 2000b). Within the past fifteen years, this structurally embedded inequality has generated a sequence of increasingly violent phenomena. Under conditions of extreme social exclusion and economic isolation, interpersonal relations and institutions adapt to the daily realities of crime and disorder to render violent behavior common and socially legitimate.

The nations of Latin America and the Caribbean exhibit some of the highest rates of socioeconomic inequality in the world (Hoffman and Centeno 2003). Highly unequal with respect to income, nations throughout the region are also characterized by divided access to education, health, clean water, safe food, and

basic public services such as electricity and sewers, yielding huge disparities in assets, opportunities, and voice. In the region today, the richest one-tenth of families earns 48 percent of total income, whereas the poorest one-tenth earns just 1.6 percent (de Ferranti et al. 2003). Statistics and experience coincide in revealing that poverty and inequality are more serious problems today than when the foreign debt crisis first broke out in 1982 (Pedrazzini and Sanchez 1998).

Current expressions of violence are properly understood in the context of structural adjustment policies and their consequences. I argue that violence in Latin America follows directly from underlying inequalities brought about by the imposition of neoliberal policies. The proliferation of street children and youth gangs in Latin American cities are but one expression of structural exclusion, and if it continues new and more dramatic forms of violence can be expected to arise and spread, touching the lives of millions more.

It is not that people are violent because they are poor. Rather, the long-term segregation of people within neighborhoods of concentrated poverty produces, across the generations, ways of life and household strategies that necessarily adapt to conditions of deprivation. They come to rely on violence as a basic tool for survival. The emerging space of violence was taken up first by radicalized and disenfranchised young people but has since spread to other sectors of society in the form of arms trading, drug trafficking, and kidnapping rings, which now abound in countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and Brazil. These activities together constitute a growing criminal economy (Castells 1998; Rementería 2003).

Rather than viewing violence as a personal deviation from societal norms, it is more appropriate to consider it a product of structural inequalities, a social phenomenon in which multiple actors resort to the use of violence under similar social circumstances and in mutually reinforcing ways, not as isolated individuals. The expansion of the criminal economy occurred within a context where urban residents had already lived for generations under "illegal" circumstances, having acquired their dwellings through informal processes of squatting and land invasion. Urban slums were always considered violations of the legal norms of private property, title, and ownership. Despite their widespread *de facto* existence throughout Latin America, poor slum dwellers have often been repressed through forced removals and state-led redevelopment programs. Nonetheless, after decades of economic crisis slums have become so common and so endemic to the structure and organization of the Latin American metropolis that it is presently impossible to consider them as a violation; they are the norm.

At the same time, in the economic sphere, informal activities expanded to compensate for the reduction of employment opportunities in the formal sector. In the course of this shift, the boundaries between legal and illegal, formal and informal, legitimate and criminal have blurred. In many ways, informal activities now constitute an essential and integral part of urban economic structure in Latin America. By the end of the 1990s, the informal sector accounted for 44 percent of workers in Brazil, 40 percent in Mexico, and 41 percent in Venezuela (Portes and Hoffman 2003). In a world where formal banks exchange currencies at artificially set rates, informal money changers are essential to maintain liquidity. Likewise, formal

organizations subcontract jobs to informal service workers, and manufacturers rely on inputs obtained through informal, unofficial, and illegal channels. In the end, it is difficult to know the exact origins of most products, and the informal blends into the formal. Seemingly innocent goods and services may thus be tied directly though not visibly to violently or criminally obtained resources.

A key justification for imposing structural adjustment programs in Latin America is the ideology of the free market, and in an open market anything and everything is conceivable and possible, yielding countless examples of links between the formal and the informal. Over time, these links became institutionalized as a regular feature of the social structure. Relationships with shady characters and criminal elements that once seemed impossible became socially acceptable and valid among those forced to interact with them as a matter of economic survival. According to data from the United Nations, seven out of ten jobs created in Latin America between 1990 and 1997 were in the informal sector; and by the year 2000, nearly three-fifths (59 percent) of all urban workers were informal, compared to a figure of 40 percent two decades earlier (Briceño-León and Zubillaga 2002).

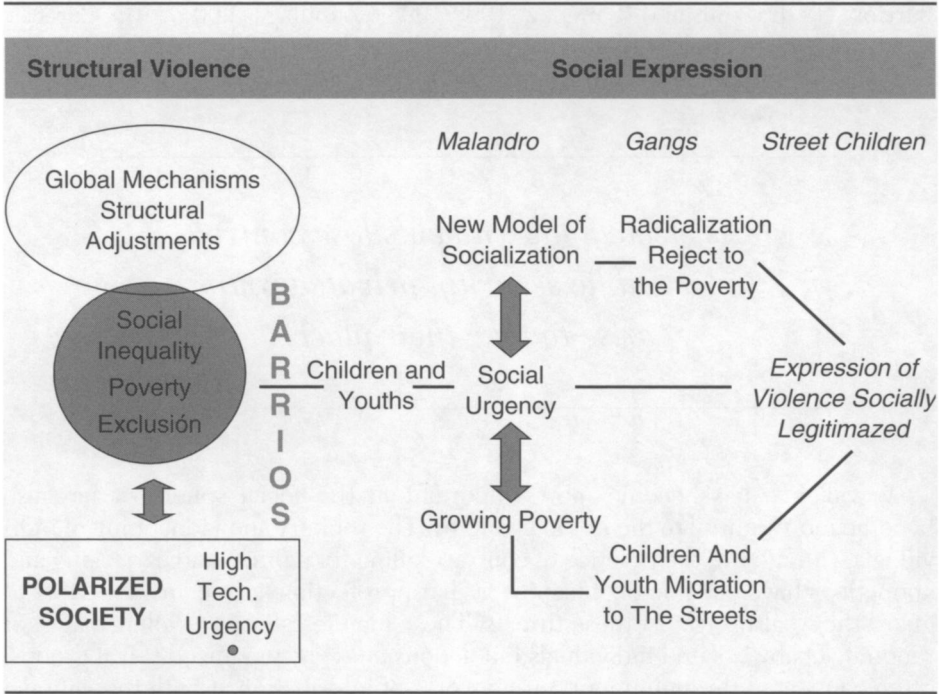
The new spaces that have been created in Latin American cities not only constitute economic niches but also operate as socialization systems. Socialization into the beliefs, practices, and values of surrounding people and groups is inherent to the human condition. When the surrounding social environment is violent, therefore, those coming of age within it will themselves be violent, often more so. Children born into popular urban barrios typically lack birth certificates, making them technically “undocumented” in their own land. Without identification documents, they cannot receive state services, notably health care and education, and are thus relegated to learning on streets where they come to be identified as “predators” because they do not fit within the “established order” of the state, which has no way of taking them into account (Pedrazzini and Sanchez 1992/1998).

Under conditions of prolonged informality and illegality, and without official documentation, the structural violence of neoliberalism produced new expressions of violence. Street boys point to their lack of legal documents as the “reason” they “violate the law” and live as “dirty and uneducated” on the streets rather than attending school. Among teenagers and adults, the combination of no documents and concentrated poverty explains the rise of more advanced and radicalized forms of violence (Sanchez 2002).

The spiral of violence is well indicated by the homicide rate. In recent years, it has risen dramatically. The regional average is now twenty murders for every hundred thousand people, making Latin America one of the most violent regions in the world (Portes and Hoffman 2003). By 1998, violence had become the leading cause of death for those aged fourteen to forty-four in Latin America and the Caribbean (World Health Organization 1999; Huggins 2000; Briceño-León and Zubillaga 2002).

Only by studying violence in context, without eliding its relationship to historical processes, can we justly evaluate and analyze the issue. If we can distinguish between various types of violence and relate them to specific positions in the social structure, then we can understand how it proliferates and expands to

FIGURE 1
STRUCTURAL ORIGINS OF VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA



assume an infinite variety of forms. The exclusion of larger numbers of people from the formal economy and society in the wake of neoliberal reforms gave authorities fewer options to achieve social and political control. The usual mechanisms of integration were no longer relevant because a growing number of people lived within chaotic spaces outside of government influence, within which any form of radicalization or anarchy is possible.

My conceptualization of the structural origins of violence is illustrated in Figure 1. Owing to the skewing of income distributions and the geographic concentration of poverty, spaces within the city have become less and less “controllable.” As inequality has deepened, differences between neighborhoods have become extreme. Each day, the number of people in chaos and exclusion grows, making it ever more difficult to control them using traditional mechanisms. The unstable equilibrium of the past is breaking down. In the age of information, integration cannot be maintained using old formulas; new mechanisms of social inclusion need to be developed.

Until now, schools offered authorities one means of control—discipline and class formation—but this mechanism is presently failing and is being rejected by a growing number of young people who are forced by circumstances to devote their time to survival and work, and not study. The situation of exclusion facing children in the Latin America metropolis forces them to incorporate from early

ages into violent public spaces to work and exchange. As a result, violent deaths have become increasingly concentrated among youths living in the poor urban barrios (Pedrazzini and Sanchez 1992/1998; Zubillaga 2004). In Caracas, Venezuela, for example, violence accounted for the loss of life of 1,057 adolescents between September 2002 and August 2003 (Periera 2003).

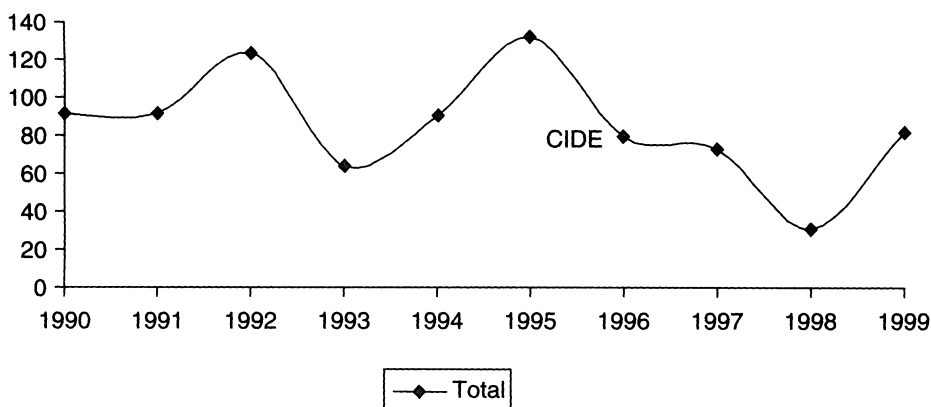
*As elected governments lose control
over public security, private groups
arise to take their place.*

As violence has become more important in the social sphere, it has also become more central to the urban economy. The robbery and kidnapping of individuals with money, the practice of contract killing for a price, and carjacking and abductions have become big business, as have protection and security services to guard the wealthy against these threats. These manifestations of violence are not random acts by isolated individuals but actions taken by organized social groups, often connected through important networks of information at both the national and international levels, at times yielding great accumulations of capital. It is free enterprise with funding from illegal sources that reproduces and continues to generate violence in Latin American cities.

The kidnapping industry has become widespread in nations such as Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and Brazil. It generates significant profits for abduction rings, with the quantity demanded per kidnapping now at an average of \$180,000. My canvassing of newspaper articles in the newspaper *Diario de la Nación* revealed that from 2000 to 2002, a total of thirty-four persons were kidnapped in eleven regions of Venezuela, and only seven of the victims were ever freed. One prominent Venezuelan businessman was freed only after extensive negotiations with one of Colombia's most powerful paramilitary groups and the payment of a large sum of money, completely bypassing the formal relations of power and security offered by the nation-state. This triumph of the paramilitary over the state only encouraged additional kidnapping, which became ever more frequent.

Although kidnapping traditionally offered individual criminals a way to extort relatively large sums of money from wealthy families, a new practice of kidnapping has evolved and become institutionalized to extract money from the middle classes on a regular and ongoing basis. Known popularly as "express kidnapping," it involves the abduction of random citizens from the streets and then taking them to the nearest ATM where they are forced at gunpoint to withdraw their daily limit in cash before being dumped in some isolated neighborhood. Sometimes, if the abduction is late in the day, victims will be held until midnight and then

FIGURE 2
PERSONS KIDNAPPED IN SAO PAULO AND RIO DE JANEIRO,
BRAZIL, IN THE 1990s



SOURCE: Secretaria do Estado de Seguranca Publica; Anuario Estadistico do Rio de Janeiro; CIDE = Fundação CIDE (Centro de Informações e Dados do Rio de Janeiro).

forced to withdraw the next day's limit as well before being abandoned. The remarkable frequency of such kidnapping in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro is illustrated in Figure 2. Coinciding with peaks in the economic crisis, kidnapping surged to a frequency of 120 in 1992 and 130 in 1995 before declining during the late 1990s. Nonetheless, the number of abductions was once again on the increase by 1999.

Identifying the different forms of violence generated in different contexts enables us to understand what kind of insecurity and danger they produce. When violence is no longer a solitary act but a social phenomenon, the system's equilibrium is indeed under threat. Violence and its sequela have become a major business activity and led to the creation and expansion of private police forces, militias, and soldiers of fortune, yielding even more instability and violence along with terror. It is thus essential to discern differences in the historic processes that have generated the violence in Latin American cities today and in the past.

To study violence as a social dimension, it is crucial to understand it in social, political, and ideological terms. It is important to view and acknowledge its content not only in terms of the act alone but in all of its dimension and social repercussions. This is the only way to know whether violence is no longer an isolated act but part of a social cycle that directly affects the equilibrium of the established social order. Contemporary inequalities cannot be understood solely in terms of traditional contradictions and oppositions (Schteingart 2000). Current social antagonisms within Latin America yield new extremes of social tension, such that the "unstable equilibrium" of the system is in danger of losing its center and generating even more violence.

A rising tide of violence not only engulfs the excluded but also those who possess wealth, power, and social control. As elected governments lose control over public security, private groups arise to take their place. The inability of the state to control public violence accounts for the emergence of private security groups, whose services are increasingly purchased by the wealthy to protect themselves from criminal predators. Throughout Latin America, private security firms have become a huge economic activity, not only including legitimate groups that provide security services for buildings, shopping centers, and urban residential areas, but also paramilitary groups with ties to the criminal economy. Private security enterprises may thus be formal or informal, legal or illegal.

A good example is the five-thousand-strong United Self-Defense Forces led by Carlos Castaño of Colombia, one of the most important paramilitary groups in the nation, one that has been accepted and substantially legitimized by the state while being connected to international companies (Resource Center of the Americas 2001b). However, when elite groups in rural areas hire private security forces to protect themselves from other paramilitary forces, they often only reproduce the cycle of violence. Rural areas of Latin America tend to be dominated by large landowners engaged in the commercial production of cattle or cash crops. It is impossible to say exactly when insecurity and violence began to function meaningfully in the reproduction of social relations, as many other factors intervened in the process simultaneously. However, once paramilitary groups linked to the production and distribution of drugs became established in rural areas, they sought to expand their economic reach by requesting a *vacuna* from local cattle ranchers. Literally translated, a *vacuna* is a vaccination; but colloquially it refers to money that ranchers have to pay for each head of cattle to “protect” them from harm at the hands of thieves or rustlers. These side payments for protection—as much as \$1 per head per month—combine with the normal costs of feeding and raising cattle to yield production costs that risked pricing many farmers out of the market. Facing a never-ending cycle of payoffs in an expanding protection racket, ranchers and landowners hired their own paramilitary forces to protect them at lower marginal cost.

Violence is thus expanding throughout the region, calling into question the legitimacy and relevance of the police and military as agents of social control. The proliferation of insecurity and the criminality as basic features of economic life occurs in multiple ways. For example, in many areas rural *campesinos* (country people) are no longer interested in traditional agrarian activities. They receive much better pay from the cultivation of narcotics than for the production of traditional rural products. Rural workers have increasingly become small-scale entrepreneurs within a larger global drug trade, establishing new relations of production and reproduction with new centers of private power. Even when peasants continue to produce traditional agricultural products, it is the cultivation of drugs that provides most of their income and allows their reproduction as a social class.

The picture today is thus very complex, with multiple formal and informal connections between legal and illegal groups, so that it is difficult to distinguish between legitimate security firms and paramilitary groups running protection

rackets. The drug industry clearly contains criminal elements, but it also incorporates otherwise legitimate actors at all levels of society, ranging from small entrepreneurs who cultivate coca leaves to large landowners who rent their land for coca production, and embracing a multitude of workers and independent agents engaged in transport, packaging, protection, and street sales within cities.

Throughout the region, activities associated with the production, distribution, and commercialization of drugs are gaining economic and social space. Although paramilitary organizations and private security groups began operating initially in rural areas, they have progressively spread to the urban sector to create closer ties with arms traffickers, kidnappers, thieves, pirates, and extortionists in the city. It is impossible here to derive the precise dimensions of the current situation with respect to illegality and criminality. What is important is to note that activities connected to drugs and arms trafficking interact dynamically to increase violence and insecurity in other venues of social life. Private groups moving back and forth between the formal and informal, legal and illegal worlds thus constitute a new nexus of power in Latin America.

Children without a Future or a Return

A growing number of children are born and raised in impecunious conditions and live on the streets of Latin American cities under conditions of social exclusion. In the information age, the process of economic globalization is associated with a tendency toward the social exclusion of the planet's youngest inhabitants (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998). Countries throughout the region are characterized by this duality, yielding networks that are at once transnational yet at the same time excluded from the core economy and society, although the share of people so situated may vary from country to country (Castells 2000). In Latin American countries, especially, the conditions of poverty and social urgency are severe, precluding millions of young people from formal participation in society while simultaneously and perversely pushing them closer to radical actions, crime, and death (Sanchez 2002).

Children growing up under conditions of concentrated poverty and social isolation become differentiated from the rest of society culturally, socially, and technologically. They are alienated from the new technologies of information and blocked from the formal mechanisms of participation within society. The growing phenomenon of street children is perhaps the most dramatic expression of structural violence. Their "undocumented" condition illustrates their incongruent situation, being in society physically but unable to return to it socially because, lacking formal documents, they cannot access school, health care, or formal sector jobs. Laws passed to deal with the problem of undocumented children have so far been unable to solve the problem because they overlook the inability of children raised on the streets to adapt to formal institutions upon entry. Policies need to be transformed and thought through from a new perspective.

When the number of street children was small, efforts to suppress them and remove them from public spaces by force might have constituted a reformist position, but current numbers render this strategy impractical and infeasible, for

some estimates place the number of Latin American street children in the millions. According to a recent report by UNICEF (2002), as of 2002, 83 million Latin American children younger than the age of twelve lived in poverty, representing 59 percent of that age group. Among adults aged twenty to thirty-four, the rate of poverty was only 44 percent. Although most of these poor children do not live on the street, the sheer number of poor children indicates the potential scale of the problem.

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At this point, at least two generations of Latin American children have grown up on the streets—young boys and girls, teenagers, and adolescent mothers with babies. These children live in abject misery, and new legislation is required to regularize their status, grant them last and first names, and provide them with legal identification. Amending laws and constitutions to enable the integration of those who are condemned to misery at birth because they lack documentation is an urgent priority; reforms must be enacted before yet another generation is forced to grow up in irregular circumstances (Sanchez 2002).

In the informal life of the streets, improvisation is part of the knowledge learned from childhood in response to the impossibility of a formal way out. Children get hooked into the alternative world by the urgency of their situation as well as by socialization. Ultimately, however, the informal sector offers them the only realistic possibility for long-term employment. Their school is the street corner, as it was for parents and siblings before them. The gang becomes the child's "family," and "work" involves "dealing" of some sort—the sale and distribution of any type of arms, drugs, or stolen property that can be exchanged for money and survival.

In addition to theft, kidnapping, robbery, and carjacking, a recent innovation is an institution known as the *sicariato*, derived from the Latin word *sicarius*, which in ancient Rome referred to young people hired to kill with a dagger or knife. The *sicariato* was established as a social form during the 1980s by leaders of the Medellín drug cartel, who established schools to train sicarios to kill for a wage. The *sicariato* has extended in usage throughout the region to refer to any form of paid homicide. Street children become sicarios because they know from

an early age that death looms over them as a shadow of life and that the future exists only in the present time (Salazar 1992).

Generations growing up on the street lack a foreseeable future and thus, totally rejected by the conventional world of work and family, they work to earn quick cash and live a dream that never quite arrives. The dire circumstances of poverty and homelessness create a unique sense of urgency within youth in urban neighborhoods and peripheral slums, a sense that yields an alternative path of socialization associated with the street (Bourgois 1998; Anderson 1999; Pedrazzini and Sanchez 1992/1998). The street corner substitutes for the classroom and overrides traditional models of family, school, and work. Formal education is irrelevant to children who lack practical opportunities in the formal sector and who see many more possibilities in the illegal economy.

Youth in the barrios of Latin American cities learn the tricks of the trade early, mastering the signs and codes of the impoverished and violent world that they encounter. In the street, they encounter their first opportunities and potential for social mobility; and in the streets, they live their teenage years and their short adult lives. In Latin America, 35 million persons aged thirteen to nineteen live in urban zones with unfavorable conditions. Assuming that 90 percent of these teenagers somehow satisfy their basic needs without engaging in crime, that still leaves 3.5 million youths vulnerable to a violent life. In Caracas, Venezuela, 27 percent of the teenagers aged fifteen to eighteen neither work nor go to school (Briceño-León and Zubillaga 2002).

The process of social exclusion and the lack of means to integrate poor children socially yields a perverse process of integration wherein crime becomes a job and entering the labor force means becoming a part of the criminal economy (Castells 1998). If new mechanisms of inclusion are not created, the only integration that will take place will be in the only sector where integration is possible: the informal and criminal economy. For poor children growing up in zones of exclusion, job networks extend not to trades or factories, but to illegal and violent activities that dramatically increase the risk of injury and death.

Violence as a New Dimension of Power

The streets have given rise to a new set of power relations. Social inequality and spatial fragmentation generate specific kinds of social violence, sometimes legitimate and sometimes not, and the expression of this violence endangers the security of sectors that control power, resources, and businesses. At the same time, it also threatens the safety and security of the most vulnerable sectors of society. The inability of the state to control this violence and maintain the unstable equilibrium of prior negotiations has led to the privatization of security, which has only served to reinforce boundaries between the excluded and the included and created new spaces for insecurity, violence, and terror to flourish.

The U.S. government administers a program known as Direct Commercial Trading that issues licenses to permit private groups in specific countries to

purchase arms freely from American companies without governmental intervention. In 1997, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean were approved for import licenses valued at nearly \$1.1 billion. For example, the program allowed purchases worth \$711,891,695 in Venezuela, \$125,439,680 in Guyana, \$146,671,738 in Mexico, \$81,579,485 in Argentina, and \$75,941,338 in Brazil. Together Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador purchased between \$20 million and \$40 million (Isacson and Olson 1999).

The privatization of social control is associated with considerable corruption. In some cases, governments have been known to sell security services to private interests, police officers manage their own security business, retired officials work as licensed guards, and retired police officers and soldiers discharged for prior infractions are incorporated to clandestine security groups. Private security agents also work with military officials to create “death squadrons” that roam the countryside and patrol the city to eliminate people they view as threats, at times organizing “hunting parties” that pay a bounty for dead street children (Resource Center of the Americas 2000).

In this way, violence generated by the juvenile groups seeking to defend their territory and control space for “dealing” has been augmented by an alarming amount of private violence undertaken with the approval of the states, thereby generating jobs for “para-police” while terrorizing society’s most vulnerable members. After the outbreak of violence in Venezuela during 1999, the demand for private security increased by 20 percent, and the number of private security guards increased to two hundred thousand guards. Table 1 draws on several reports prepared by the Resource Center of the Americas (2000, 2001b) to estimate the number of private security guards in selected countries. In addition to the two hundred thousand in Venezuela, we find fifty thousand in Argentina, two hundred thousand in Mexico, and four hundred thousand in Brazil. In Argentina, the number of private security officers is double the number of public police. The privatization of public security is consistent with an ideology that Wacquant (2001) has labeled “punishing the poor.” From the private forms of security to the most organized military groups internationally, the poor are disproportionately targets and victims of the new violence.

The emergence of private security groups has expanded the informal economy to yield a large accumulation of profits; but simply by existing, private security confirms the incapacity of the nation-state to guarantee public order. As with any economic activity, the security industry generates new jobs, often incorporating those who are violent as well as excluded. In many cases, young street children are recruited from corners in poor neighborhoods to join private militias.

As the private security for the wealthy grows, so does the demand for arms and security devices. Sales of guns, alarm systems, and vehicles with tinted windshields increase. As never before, public spaces and traditional neighborhoods are transformed into secure fortresses surrounded by walls and gated checkpoints. According to Huggins (2000), private defenses such as these can add up to 20 percent of the monthly costs of living for middle class families. With the privatization of security for the middle class as well as the wealthy, social control within the system becomes unstable as private interests increasingly conflict with

TABLE 1
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECURITY SECTORS
IN SELECTED NATIONS OF LATIN AMERICA, 1999

Country	Security Groups or Firms	Number of Private Guards	Number of Public Officers
Argentina	N/A	50,000	25,000
Venezuela	N/A	200,000	N/A
Mexico	7,000	200,000	N/A
Brazil	1,200	400,000	N/A

SOURCE: Resource Center of the Americas (2000, 2001a).

the state in preserving public order and serving the interests of the private sector (Huggins 2000).

In sum, the growth of economic activities linked to private security is directly proportional to the degree of poverty and exclusion in society, which are themselves connected to activities in the illegal economy, yielding an ongoing cycle of daily violence that reproduces poverty and stratification in a vicious cycle. Among the affluent, public security is replaced by private security, while the middle class arms and barricades itself and the poor create their own violent gangs in response. In this scenario, the strongest prevail, and the power and legitimacy of the nation-state is further diminished. Within zones of delinquency and violence, new arenas are created where new social forces develop, expanding networks of organized crime and illegal activities to further isolate impoverish poor communities (Briceño-León and Zubillaga 2002).

Violence and International Migration

The dynamics of insecurity and violence are connected to migratory processes as well, for sometimes the only means of escape from urgent circumstances is physical departure. The structural violence and ensuing insecurity associated with private militias have brought about the forced migration of a growing number of displaced people from their places of origin. For example, the extreme violence that has taken place in Colombia since 1985 has resulted in 2.7 million forced migrants; and some 300,000 to 400,000 new migrants are forced to leave their homes each year. This involuntary migration has made available to military groups abandoned agricultural lands while bringing about an agglomeration of displaced people within urban areas (Piedrahita 2003).

People fleeing violence and persecution not only seek refuge in cities; some attempt to migrate internationally and seek legal asylum or undocumented entry into other countries (Van Selm and Newman 2003). In 1999, along the border between Colombia and Venezuela, fifty thousand agricultural workers were left without a livelihood or any possibility of return because paramilitary forces

appropriated and fenced in their lands, causing them to seek refuge across the frontier. They had no possibility to return to their lands due to the paramilitary claim of that territory with fences. Likewise, along the border between Colombia and Ecuador, fifty thousand agricultural workers were forced to leave their lands as a result of massive fumigation effort to eradicate cocaine (Terra 2003).

Of course, some of the people who leave their country in response to rising levels of violence do not proceed to adjacent nations but go to developed nations in Europe or North America, with the leading destination for Latin Americans being the United States. Those who migrate to try their luck in the north are willing to face serious obstacles for what they see as considerable opportunity in “*El Norte*.” Owing to the urgency of their circumstances at home, they view U.S. metropolitan areas as ideal places that provide significant opportunities for advancement as well as an immediate exit from danger. Violence and exclusion are by no means the only, or even the most important, factors explaining emigration to the United States; but in the age of information, values from the north are spread massively southward to offer desperate young people the dream of “making it” in the north (Hernández León 1999).

However, attempts to enter the United States as undocumented migrants leads to other forms of violence along the Mexico-U.S. border. Some migrants simply trade in one form of concentrated poverty for another, as they are trapped in areas of concentrated poverty and violence in Mexican border cities such as Tijuana and Juarez. In the border region of Juarez, for example, 320 women were killed between 1993 and 2002, 90 of them by professional killers (*El Paso Times* 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003).

Another type of violence stems from the extreme security measures implemented by U.S. authorities along the border. Beginning in 1987 but accelerating dramatically after 1993, the U.S. Border Patrol undertook a massive militarization of border enforcement that dramatically increased the number of border patrol agents and the physical and financial resources at their disposal. The enforcement effort was naturally concentrated at the busiest border crossings in the urban areas of Tijuana and Juarez, forcing undocumented migrants to cross in more remote areas in the mountains, deserts, and untamed sections of the Rio Grande River. As a result, the number of violent deaths (from drowning, thirst, exposure, heat exhaustion, and accidents) along the border has skyrocketed, with the rate of death tripling between 1993 and 2000 (Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). According to data from the Border Death Project at the University of Houston’s Center for Immigration Research, the number of deaths at the border climbed from 175 in 1993 to around 375 in 2000, an increase of 114 percent in just seven years (Eshbach, Hagan, and Rodriguez 2003).

Young Latin American immigrants from urban backgrounds arrive in American cities with important knowledge that set them apart from their rural-origin counterparts. Urban-origin migrants were born and raised in an informal world where “adventurer” was a part of the routine associated with most survival activities, improvisation was a fundamental part of their behavior repertoire, and ingenuity was required for daily subsistence, traits that serve them well in the segmented labor markets of urban America.

This “informal knowledge” represents a kind of human capital that migrants may apply to advance their interests in the United States. At the same time, the social networks in which they are embedded offer a rich source of social capital, and together these two forms of capital facilitate access to jobs, services, and other benefits in poor neighborhoods of U.S. cities (Fernández-Kelly 1995). Learning and experiencing the informal world of work in U.S. labor markets, migrants slowly become incorporated into the formal systems of the north. Street children who become migrants are no less undocumented abroad than at home, and the dynamic economy of urban America offers them more opportunities for economic advancement and less exposure to violence and insecurity.

In essence, they move from a nonfunctional and informal Latin America metropolis that lacks services and employment to a fully functional U.S. city. The identification with others in poor neighborhoods and the streets, as well as the cultural background of improvisation they bring with them from Latin American cities, yields an important advantage that enables them to overcome the difficulty of achieving mobility in a new city, where symbols and signs are in an unfamiliar language. But these obstacles do not prevent radicalized youth from Latin America from integrating into jobs and neighborhoods in the United States. They move from a daily space of improvisation, insecurity, violence, and insufficiency to an urban space of demand, services, opportunity, and work. Identity conflicts are less important because of the emergence of new transnational identities that root migrants simultaneously to places of origin and destination.

As a result, emigration from the Latin American and the Caribbean continues to grow larger, and the importance of the Latino population in the United States grows steadily, not only because of the presence of Mexican migrants but also because of newer arrivals who are fleeing violence and urban poverty in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Ecuador (Portes and Hoffman 2003). This new immigration represents globalization from below and is part and parcel of the broader internationalization of the economy (Portes 1996). Globalization and internationalization has truly generated “worlds in motion” (Massey et al. 1998).

Conclusion: Possible Scenarios

The grimmest scenario for the future follows from the indefinite continuation of current conditions—with a decline in security not only for those already structurally excluded but also for professional and technical sectors that are becoming excluded, forcing nation-states to militarize their societies as the only way to maintain order and continue policies of structural adjustment. The criminal economy will continue to expand both domestically and internationally and will involve larger swaths of the formal (in addition to the informal) economy. The number of migrants will grow and move internationally as well as internally to create new transnational institutions and complex multinational identities, trends that are already in evidence. These new social forms will overcome international boundaries to transform social, cultural, and political identities in receiving as

well as sending nations. The continuous loss of population, especially young people and professionals, will undermine the capacity of Latin American nations to find a way out of the current crisis, and they will become more deeply mired in poverty and violence, reinforcing the cycle of disadvantage that already exists.

A second possible scenario is less dramatic and envisions a reconsideration and renegotiation of the structural adjustments in the region while fortifying the nation-state to establish new alliances and more direct political interventions that provide young people with options other than the informal or illegal economy. These interventions will need to be innovative and effective to bring about the inclusion of urban youth and deflect them away from lives of crime. They will comprise a broad-based set of state actions to regularize the status of undocumented street children, grant title to the de facto inhabitants of urban land, enroll students in schools and health clinics, and finally provide employment in the formal economy.

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