

Central American Barras and Masculine Violence

By Mónica Geary



Guatemala *History*

The history of Guatemala is one of exclusion, violence and impunity. Like the other countries in Latin America, the Spanish conquest in Guatemala established unequal relations between the conquistadors, the mestizos and the indigenous. Much of the exclusion was related to land and the landless peasantry, and this is the exclusion that is still in existence today. Guatemala was also subject to the banana republics of the United States during the 20th century. These were areas of the country that were completely under the control of foreign countries such as the United States. Guatemala had a particularly interesting experience with the banana republics as they created exclusive relationships between the elite of Guatemala and the transnational companies of the USA, specifically the United Fruit Company. These relations, of course, further excluded the indigenous and the poor while simultaneously helping the wealthy obtain more wealth. This relationship came into play during the coup d'état against Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 and further influenced the emerging guerrilla movement of the 60s and 70s.

The origins of the civil war in Guatemala go back through nearly 500 years of violence and ethnic exclusion. The conquista created a plantation economy based on forced labor. Even after Guatemala gained Independence, the country continued to be governed by military dictators and the conditions of the indigenous continued to get worse. Kurtenbach describes that:

Guatemala's history since independence is characterized by three patterns that have continuously adapted to changing environments but still were upheld in their essence: exclusion and discrimination of the country's indigenous population, the use of violence in order to maintain the status quo and a resource extractive development model favoring the small and wealthy elite (2008, Page 3).

Under the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico between 1931 and 1941, the indigenous were also objected to the Vagabond Law which dictated that "All indigenous men between the age of 18 and 60 had to work at least 150 days per year, those who possessed some land for 100 days." (Kurtenbach, 2008, Page 9). This law was extremely harmful to the traditions of the indigenous people, as many related to the land and their ability to interact with it. When they could no longer work on their own lands because they always had to leave and work elsewhere on haciendas and in the banana plantations, and this damaged their ability to interact in the traditional ways with their own community.

In 1944, Juan José Arévalo became president via a coup d'état against Ubico. He was the first president in Guatemala to enact socio-democratic reforms such as land redistribution. These important redistributions continued through the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz until he attempted to redistribute land that had traditionally belonged to the US-owned United Fruit Company. This attempted change challenged the traditional relations between the elite of Guatemala and the businesses of the United States, so the CIA organized and supported a coup against Arbenz and with his deposal the socio-democratic reforms officially ended in Guatemala. This moment also began a 7-year contentious oscillation of military and civil government power in Guatemala which promptly ended in 1970 with a military junta. This military junta very strongly followed the National Security Doctrine proposed and supported by Ronald Reagan during the Cold War years.

National Security Doctrine dictated that Latin American countries always need to protect their borders and their land from external and internal enemies. Following this doctrine, the military elite created an anti-leftist campaign. “In the context of this structural background, the armed resistance was primarily directed against authoritarian and exclusive political regimes as well as against the economic and social marginalization of rural populations” (Kurtenbach, 2008, Page 11). However, at the same time, the leftist movement was growing out of the discontent that people felt due to the abrupt end of the social reforms. Many people still lacked land and a means of receiving a steady (if any) income. These things were happening simultaneously to the Cold War, the war in Cuba, and of course, the strong position of the United States against communism. Because of this, the struggle to contain the leftist sentiments in Latin America, and therefore in Guatemala, were especially strong.

The majority of the conflict between the military and the leftists was very low-intensity. However, after 1978 with the presidency of Fernando Romero Lucas García, there was a full fledged war against the guerrillas of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). The number of assassinations rose significantly with his presidency and because he preferred a strategy of non-discrimination. His presidency ended abruptly with another coup which put in power Efraín Ríos Montt which began a new phase of the war, one with more violence, and clear genocidal tendencies.

Ríos Montt was in power between 1982 and 1983, and his presidency marks the most violent and bloody period in Guatemalan history. The government and the army believed that the Mayans were the natural ally of the guerrillas due to their historic position of exclusion and poverty. Because of this assumption, the Mayas were targeted heavily by the government. In March of 1982, Ríos Montt created the scorched earth policy which implied the assassination and massacre of the indigenous population. The website Center for Justice and Responsibility (CJA) explains that “His reign from March 1982 to August 1983 was the bloodiest period in Guatemala’s history. During that time, the Guatemalan government led a campaign to wipe out large portions of the country’s indigenous populations: an estimated 70,000 were killed or disappeared” (*Guatemala*, 2016). This portion of Guatemala’s history is especially heartbreaking given that the majority of the indigenous people had no affiliation with the guerrillas and were simply trapped between the two armies.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the war against the guerrillas was deemed unnecessary and the US also simply lost interest in the politics of Latin America. The only things left on the agenda were the Peace negotiations and reconciliation between the army and the guerrillas and the armies and the indigenous. The Peace negotiations occurred in 1994 almost 10 years after the end of the war. Many countries, including the US and the UN as an organization criticized the government of Guatemala for their human rights violations. In 1996, Alvaro Arzu was elected president and enacted a purge of government and military officials and also finally signed the Peace accords to end the 36-year war. In total, 200,000 people died and 626 massacres in the Mayan villages took place. Because of this, and surprisingly given Guatemala’s history of complete impunity, Efraín Ríos Montt was put under house arrest in 2004.

Efraín Ríos Montt was convicted of the crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity on May 10, 2013. However, only 10 days later, the trial was declared null due to an administrative mishap. In her article for a special edition for the *Journal of Genocide Research*. “From heaven to hell in ten days: The genocide trial in Guatemala”,

Jo-Marie Burt analyzes the trial and provides statistics about the massacres against the indigenous during the war. The advantage of the positive verdict was that it provided a challenge to the impunity in Guatemala: “It was the first time a former head of state was prosecuted in a domestic court for the crime of genocide” (Burt, 2016, Page 144). The trial included testimony from 90 survivors and victims from the Ixil ethnic group. The testimonies proved to be extremely important in influencing the final decision of the court as they provided first-hand accounts of the violence that transpired during the scorched earth policy. Also of importance, the testimonies illuminated that the violence, and especially the sexual violence, were not simply isolated incidents where soldiers could not be controlled and that it was a strategy of the army that indicated a pattern of the violence experienced in the Mayan villages.

Today, and definitely due to the violence of the conflict and the failure of the reforms afterwards, Guatemala has many problems with violence, most specifically with the maras. There are two mara groups in Guatemala, the Mara Salvatrucha and the M-18. These armed groups have simply replaced the violence from the armed groups during the conflict. Sabine Kurtenbach explains that the Peace in Guatemala is a low-intensity Peace. Yes, the war has stopped, but there still exists a lot of violence. She argues that the legacies of conflict have destroyed the social structure and have damaged the state apparatus. She also states that poverty creates opportunities for and tendencies towards violent behavior because impoverished people rarely have other opportunities (2008, Página 25)

The other side of violence indicates that people do not have confidence that state institutions are able to protect them. “Driven by fear of crime and disinclined to confide in the police or courts, many communities have turned to what is commonly known as ‘justicia a mano propia’ (literally, ‘justice by one’s own hand’)” (Godoy, 2002, Page 644). The manifestation of ‘justice by our own hands’ in Guatemala has mostly been lynchings, and it has been argued that these lynchings and this form of violence are related to the violence of the conflict. Kurtenbach describes that “There is an unresolved debate on whether lynching is a result of the absence of customary law and forms of conflict regulation or whether it forms part of its judicial arsenal. An important feature of lynching seems to be that it shows an instrumental similarity with war-related violence...” (2008, Page 25). Alessandro Preti escribe que “In the period between July 2000 and July 2001, the UN mission registered 88 cases of lynchings, with 190 victims and 37 fatalities: ‘lynchings are taking place in particular in the communities that were most affected by the armed conflict’... (MINUGUA, 2001a)” (2002, Page 110)

In general, “The peace process has not been accompanied by sufficient attention to the creation of employment opportunities and equitable growth, while the expectations of indigenous groups and other formerly excluded groups have risen.” (Pillay, 2006, Page 13). In her article “Guatemala’s Crossroads: Democratization of Violence and Second Chances”, Julie Lopez talks about the corruption in the justice and security institutions. She also touches on the deficiencies of the Peace negotiations. For example,

The army didn’t generate a better quality of life for the combatants who returned home; this was not a provision included in the peace accords by State actors (Executive officials and military), or by the guerrilla commanders who participated in the peace negotiations. After the conflict ended in 1996, soldiers returning to civilian life without much formal education and few employable skills found very few opportunities (Lopez, 2010, Page 18)

Often, the only abilities and skills the soldiers had were skills useful in combat and for violence. Since they did not receive assistance in developing other skills after the war, many became impoverished, without opportunities other than to use more violence.

Today problems of violence within the excluded populations still exist, in the form of intrafamilial violence, gang (mara) violence, and even the violence exhibited by the barras bravas. The general state of affairs in Guatemala is extremely grave. Victoria Sanford asserts that “If the number of murder victims continues to rise at the current rate, more people will die in the first twenty-five years of peace than died during the thirty-six-year internal armed conflict and genocide...” (N.d., Page 367). This prediction seriously harms the postconflict reputation of Guatemala, and if true, prescribes a violent future for the country.

Barras Bravas

Guatemala is home to three different barra organizations: Ultra Roja, Ultra Svr and Sexto Estado. The Ultra Roja group supports the Club Social y Deportivo Municipal Football team from Guatemala City, and was founded on April 4, 1988.

La Ultra Svr supports the Comunicaciones Futbol Club which is also from Guatemala City. This group was founded in 1996 and its barra style is most similar to the groups in Argentina and Chile which are more infamous for their violence and use “chants, smoke, and flares at the beginning of their games” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). In addition, the Ultra Svr is the biggest barra organization in Guatemala.

The last barra group in Guatemala is the Sexto Estado which supports the Club Social y Deportivo Xelaju Mario Camposeco which is from Quetzaltenango.

El Salvador

History

The history of El Salvador is very similar to the history of Guatemala. Like in Guatemala, historically there was a lot of exclusion and poverty. El Salvador had a very small group of economic and social elites that were famously known as the Fourteen Families. “For nearly a century El Salvador has been dominated by a small group of families—the so-called Fourteen Families—who comprise the strongest and most compact rural bourgeoisie in Central America. These families own the best land for the production of the agricultural commodities which make up 75% of the country’s export earnings: traditionally coffee...more recently cotton and sugar” (Beverley, 1982, Page 55). Due to this exclusion, many people lacked land for survival and many people in the cities were impoverished as well. “A significant section of the urban population, however, is made up of marginados: poor people fleeing poverty and repression in the countryside but not finding employment in the capital intensive industrial or service sectors. They subsist in the city as petty traders, maids, prostitutes, temporary laborers, and so on” (Beverley, 1982, Page 56). This exclusion and poverty in the cities and the countryside contributed to the phenomenon of the maras and youth violence in general. In his article “El Salvador: Contradictions of Neoliberalism and Building Sustainable Peace”, Christopher J. Wade argues that “The roots of El Salvador’s civil war lay in historic socio-economic inequalities maintained by systemic repression of those who would seek to address these inequalities.” (Wade, 2008, Page 17).

The history of extreme violence began in 1932 with a revolution against the social, economic, and political elites (and the government). Agustin Farabundo Marti led this

revultion which was crushed quickly by the government who massacred 30,000 people in what is now called *la matanza* (CJA: *El Salvador*, 2016). The government of El Salvador has excessively used repression and terror to control the population, and the dictatorship of Maximillio Hernandez Martinez was especially repressive and violent. However, under his dictatorship, the people of El Salvador decided that they no longer needed to put up with the inhumane treatment by their government and they decided to rebel once more. “Within El Salvador, the struggles held in check in 1932 exploded in mass demonstrations in 1960 which threatened to bring down the whole structure of oligarchic rule” (Beverley, 1982, Page 60). During this time, the groups organized by teachers and laborers were especially strong and outspoken.

El Salvador’s civil war lasted from 1980 to 1992 and it is estimated that around 75,000 people died mainly by the hand of the army. The leftist guerrilla group, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) had numerous communist tendencies and was strongly supported by Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union. Furthermore, these countries helped to train the guerrilla army in Havana and Managua. The United States of America and Ronald Reagan’s National Security Doctrine elicited strong support for the government from the growing global power in order to prevent the spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere. It is estimated that the majority of the human rights abuses during the civil war were carried out by the government and the army of El Salvador but it cannot be forgotten that the FMLN was also culpable for many kidnappings, bombings and robberies (Allison, 2012).

In 1969 there was an extremely brief war between El Salvador and Honduras over the immigrants fleeing the conflict in El Salvador. This war is named the Soccer War since it occurred after an important qualifying match between the two nations.

In 1986 Jose Napoleon Duarte started Peace negotiations with the guerrillas. Unlike in Guatemala, the FMLN had reached a military stalemate with the army and it looked like neither had the upperhand or the ability to finish the war. Because of their military power and their position at the end of the war, Duarte had to make the negotiations tempting to the guerrillas so that they would cease the war efforts. In the end, they won a lot of substantial political power and were able to create a strong political party. Despite all the gains of the FMLN, there were some serious downfalls to the negotiations, for example, “The majority of the discourse after the war was controlled by the elites who participated in the war. Other points of view are necessary in order to provide impartial information” (Allison, 2012). In addition, “Peacebuilding has been undermined by the failure to address socio-economic inequalities, which has resulted in significant increases in emigration, crime and authoritarianism” (Wade, 2008, Page 16). Wade believes that the socio-economic changes were so small because they were left to the very end of the negotiations as a sort of last minute edition to tick all the boxes on the list (Wade, 2008, 21-22).

The NACLA provides a summary of the war in El Salvador on their website, and the most important piece of information that they offer is that:

Yet formative periods of El Salvador’s experience with violence, particularly the civil war (1980-1992), must not be analyzed in temporal isolation. Instead, serious reflection must consider the psychosocial consequences of the traumas, such as patterns of violence in conflict resolution and coping with the lingering ordeal of war. These traumas are exacerbated in El Salvador by widespread social and economic exclusion, which have generated more social violence in the postwar era:

youth violence; domestic violence; and increases in organized crime that elicit violent reactions by both the state and gangs. (Chávez, 1999).

They also argue that there exists no difference between social exclusion and social violence. Therefore, it can be argued that the majority, if not all, of the violence in El Salvador is related to social and economic exclusion.

Another important aspect of the war is the sheer amount of immigrants to the United States during the conflict. Many Young people left their homes in order to escape the violence of the civil war. The majority of them found themselves in Los Angeles where they encountered mara gang culture. Eventually the government of the United States deported these youths back to El Salvador (and Guatemala and Honduras) where they regrouped and integrated with the already existing gang culture and the culture of violence. Now, they compose the majority of the violence in their home countries due to the already high levels of crime and insecurity and the availability of weapons and inavailability of other resources. In his article “Security and Democracy in El Salvador: An Undeniable Connection”, Michael Wilkerson cites Susan Bergman who explains that ““With high unemployment and underemployment rates, the Salvadoran economy could not absorb the influx of young males trained to do battle.’ Despite Disarmament attempts, guns remained easily accessible, and with jobs scarce, the Salvadorans who spent much of their lives surrounded by war returned to violence as a means of sustaining themselves” (Wilkerson, 2008, Page 39). Diana Villiers Negro Ponte describes something similar and says that “Although the maras do not represent a united force, the number of young men and women who choose to join illegal gangs reflect the inadequacy of education, the low levels of job skills and the rejection of traditional, poorly paid trades” (Negro Ponte, 2012, Page 165). Lastly, Mo Hume asserts that the maras provide an alternative space for young people (2007, Page 742). Based on the observations and assumptions of all these authors, it can be said that the patterns of violence in El Salvador are a direct result of the historic social and economic exclusion. Many years ago, the violence resulted from the exclusion of the campesinos and after that, from the marginalized populations in urban areas, and today the violence still comes from those urban populations that face marginalization and exclusion on a daily basis. There are many people who do not have any other choices or opportunities and since they need to ensure their personal security, they act out in violent ways. Mo Hume also states that the treatment of the maras contributes to the high levels of violence. She explains that the Mano Dura policies further exclude the armed youth. “...youth gangs...are constructed under an ‘othering’ and dehumanizing discourse in order to feed a vicious circle of violence, whereby fear and chaos become legitimizing agents for increased repression and a continuation of authoritarian measures” (Hume, 2007, Page 739). In El Salvador, the Mano Dura policy has created another type of internal warfare, a war against the maras. The maras are basically deemed enemies of the state. Instead of provided necessary resources for survival, the government is marking the maras as criminals and nothing else. It is true that the maras do terrible things, but at the same time, they are still victims of structural exclusion (Sánchez R., 2006, Page 181).

Finally, in 2009, a member of the FMLN political party won the presidential election in El Salvador: Mauricio Funes.

Barras Bravas

Central American Barras and Masculine Violence

El Salvador has seven barras bravas organizations: the Ultra Blanca, Turba Roja, Super Naranja—Inmortal 12—LBC, Furia Calera, La Fiel Amarilla, Furia Pampera y Furia Escarlata. The Ultra Blanca supports the Alianza Futbol Club in San Salvador.

Turba Roja was founded in 1994 and supports the Club Deportivo FAS in Santa Ana. The barrabrava.net website says that “The Tigrilla barra (as it has been nicknamed) started as a group of enthusiastic fascists who would meet in a section of the Oscar Alberto Quiteño stadium between 1994 and 1995.” Later, between 1995 and 1996, the barra used more “...chants, flags, drums, caps, dressed in the FAS shirt...” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). According to this website, the Turba Roja barra has historically had problems with the barra of Alianza F.C. (La Ultra Blanca). However, the summary on the site, which was probably written by a member of the barra, says that “...the philosophy that Turba Roja maintains is that Football should be joyful, fun and spectacular, respecting the rival, and to be an exemplary barra that conducts itself well even though in the last several years there has been a turna round in the attacks from other barras and the police, incidents that are commonly initiated by other rival barras. Actually, the ‘Turba Roja’ is considered the best barra of organized football fans in El Salvador” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol).

The Club Deportivo Águila football team from San Miguel has three barras: Super Naranja, Inmortal 12 and LBC. Because of the amount of barras affiliated with the one team, “Águila is considered the team with the most affiliation in El Salvador, by which it is recognized as the club that has ‘half plus one’ of the fans in the country. In the same way, they say that ‘In every corner of the country there is an Aguilucho’” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol).

Furia Calera was founded in 2000 in support of the Asociación Deportiva Isidro Metapán. The only description of this barra is this quote: “we are a group of friends who demonstrate the love we and all the metapanecos have for our team in this way” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol)

La Fiel Amarilla was founded on June 6, 2012 in support of the Club Deportivo Once Municipal de Ahuachapán. Furia Pampera supports the Club Deportivo Luis Ángel Firpo de Usulután. Finally, Furia Escarlata supports the Club Deportivo Universidad de El Salvador in San Salvador.

Nicaragua

History

The case of Nicaragua is extremely different from those of El Salvador and Guatemala. In addition, the conflict in Nicaragua directly influenced the conflicts in the other northern triangle countries due to the success of the leftist guerrillas there. The experience of repression in Nicaragua was also very different under the reign of the Somoza dynasty, but like the other countries, the history of exclusion started many decades before the conflicts and before modern history.

In 1893, General Jose Santos Zelaya established a dictatorship in the country of Nicaragua. 16 years later, the USA helped the people depose Zelaya and the foreign power subsequently established military bases in the Central American country. Many people were extremely unhappy with the arrangement, especially Augusto Cesar Sandino who led a campaign against the military presence of the USA between 1927 and 1933. However, in the end the struggle failed and Sandino was assassinated by General Anastasio Somoza

Central American Barras and Masculine Violence

Garcia who, three years later, came to power and started what would be a 44 year dynasty of the Somoza family.

In 1956, General Somoza, was assassinated though his son Luis Somoza was able to inherit the presidency. Only 11 years after that, Luis died and his brother Anastasio inherited the presidency. An important instance during the presidency of Anastasio was the earthquake of 1972 which is estimated to have killed 5000-10,000 people. There has been a lot of evidence that has accused Anastasio of keeping the majority of the foreign aid for this earthquake while the people of Nicaragua were dying. In 1978, the assassination of the leader of the opposition party (Democratic Union of Freedom) influenced a strike as well as the creation of the FSLN guerrilla group to depose Somoza and his corrupt government.

The Sandinista cause was supported by three major beliefs 'the three legs of the stool of Nicaraguan revolutionary democracy'. The first, political democracy, meant that the Sandinistas supported a republican form of government, base don elections with universal suffrage. The second, participatory democracy, meant active citizen participation in government organizations, task forces, etc. Finally the third, economic equality, meant a communistic economy and complete equalization of wealth, incorporating both Marxist and socialist ideas (Schutz, 1998)

Finally in 1979 Somoza was ousted and the dynasty of terror and repression ended. In 1980 the FSLN, led by Saniel Ortega began the process of nationalizing all the land that the Somoza family had owned.

The Sandinistas created the Fundamental Law of the State which guaranteed the rights which had previously been ignored by the Somoza dynasty: "equal justice under the law, the right of freedom of expression, and the abolition of torture" (Schutz, 1998). 1982 marked the beginning of the contra attacks which were supported by the USA and in 1984 Daniel Ortega from the FSLN party officially became president. The state of Nicaragua suffered a lot under the rule of the Sandinistas due to the embargo of the United States and the general actions of the Sandinistas. The government enacted many things contrary to their fundamental principles. For example, the Sandinistas created a military junta to govern the country which does not imply participation by the people. The Sandinistas were definitely better than the Somozas, but only barely. They created a national literacy program which improved the literacy rate from 45% to 86%. They also created the Agrarian Reform Law to redistribute land, though at the same time this led to the persecution of the landowners and the rightists just as the leftists had been persecuted under the rule of the Somozas (Schutz, 1998). Basically, the Sandinistas became the same as the Somozas except on the left of the political spectrum instead of the right. The truth is that, "[the individual Nicaraguan] definitely gained some basic rights that had been deprived of them during the Somoza years. Moreover, they gained some say in government matters as well as in the workplace, where they now supposedly ruled. But most Nicaraguans were overwhelmingly poor, and too uneducated to enjoy these new rights" (Schutz, 1998).

Between 1987 and 1988, the leadership of Nicaragua created and signed the Peace negotiations with the contras. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nicaragua found itself with no ideational allies, so they decided to act in a way to gain favor with the non-communist world (i.e., the USA). So, they held a presidential election in 1990, but the FLSN los because many people believed (and were correct) that if the FSLN was no longer in power, the contra attacks would end. When the FSLN lost power, there was another wave of conflict due to the returning landowners who claimed they still owned the land that the FSLN had redistributed (Schutz, 1998). In the end, the Sandinistas did help with the

struggle against exclusion and poverty in the country, but only so much. Much still remains today.

Even though the conflict in Nicaragua was extremely different from those in the rest of the northern triangle, the country still has a gang problem. In Nicaragua, the gangs, called pandillas, existed in the 70s but largely disappeared in the 80s due to the appearance of the guerrillas. However, after the war, in the 90s, they reappeared with a fervor (Rodger, 2010). Also different, Nicaragua does not have a problema with the maras, because, unlike Guatemala and El Salvador, many of the people fleeing the conflict ended up in Miami, where there is not a strong mara culture. In addition, the rate of deportation of the Nicaraguans paled in comparison to that of other members of Central American countries (Rodgers, 2010). However, this did not impede the creation of gangs after the war:

Although there is no doubt that gangs are major actors in the contemporary political economy of violence in Central America, they are arguably less a legacy of past wars and revolutions and more a consequence of there having been no resolution to the many social, political, and economic issues that led to war and revolution in the first place (Rodgers, 2010).

Nicaragua also did not escape the modern problema with political and economic exclusion. Because of this, the pandillas provide a place of belonging:

The contemporary pandilla manifestation has its immediate origins in the aftermath of peace during the 1990s, when demobilized combatant youth in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala returned to their home communities and found themselves facing heightened uncertainty, insecurity and socio-economic flux. Drawn on what was effectively a traditional institutional vehicle for youth collective action, they formed pandillas as local vigilante-style self-defense groups (Rodgers, 2010).

For some Nicaraguans, the pandillas are the only thing that can ensure personal security. Many young people participate in and join gangs in order to provide security to their friends and families. The post-war has been full of insecurity and crime and though most of this violence is because of the pandillas, the state is also unable to provide protection to communities and because of this the pandillas take it upon themselves to protect their families and communities.

Another difference between Nicaragua and the rest of Central America is the absence of the Mano Dura policy. NPR says that “Nicaragua, the poorest of the bunch and with just as bloody a history, is one of the safest countries in the hemisphere. Analysts say it has to do with its approach to fighting crime” (Peralta, 2014). Nicaragua has juvenile education centers instead of prison for pandilla members. These programs provide education for the pandillas rather than arresting them, as well as providing different perspectives of the pandillas in place of alienating and stigmatizing them.

These programs in Nicaragua aspire to reduce the exclusion that causes violence and because of these goals, in actuality there exists less violence in Nicaragua. Especially in comparison to the rest of Central America.

Barras Bravas

Nicaragua has three barra organizations: Barra Cacique, Legión Roja y Negra, and Barra Kamikaze. The Barra Cacique was founded in 1996. This group supports the Diriangen Futbol Club in Diriama. “The ‘Barra Cacique’, loyal supported of Diriangen FC,

was born from the initiative of the youth in Diriamba at the beginning of the 90s, led by Napoleon Molia, alias ‘Polon’” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol)

Legión Roja y Negra supports the Club Deportivo Walter Ferretti in Managua and the Barra kamikaze, which was founded on July 25, 1999 supports real Estelí Futbol Club.

Honduras

History

The colonial history of Honduras is very similar to the other countries in Central America, but its modern history drifts a little. Honduras did not have a strong leftist group, and because they used strong repression to eliminate any opportunity for organization, the leftists could not organize a guerrilla group.

“Formed as a republic in 1839, it fell under the influence of US corporations which established vast fruit plantations on the northern coast in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was the original ‘banana republic’” (Harding, 2014). There was a lot of exclusion of the population of Honduras thanks to the companies of the United States. The people did not have direct control of their own government either due to 16 years of direct and uninterrupted military rule until 1981 which the US influenced a change to civilian government. “In Honduras, the process of militarization—defined not as the quantitative build-up of the armed forces and its weaponry but rather as the encroachment of military practices and control on civil daily life stretches back many years” (Norsworthy, 1994, page 42). Honduras became the regional base of operations of the United States in Central America for their involvement in the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. These bases were an integral part of the pattern of US influence in Honduras. “The determining factor in Honduran foreign policy over the past 15 years has been the tendency of the civilian and military leadership to define national interests as a function of US strategy for Central America” (Norsworthy, 1994, Page 15). However, not everyone was in agreement with the US hegemony within the Honduran borders, especially with respect to the training camps for other countries’ soldiers (Norsworthy, 1994, Page 21). At the end of the war, the US refused to accept responsibility for the contras and the demobilization of the training bases inside Honduras, which angered many people.

An extract from the book Inside Honduras by Norsworthy, explains the difference between Honduras and the rest of the countries suffering from conflict in Central America during the Cold War years.

Despite conditions similar to those that gave rise to the revolutionary left in neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala, Honduras has never confronted a sustained challenge from a guerrilla insurgency. In part, this is due to the success of the relatively sophisticated and intensive repression carried out in the early 1980s, which decapitated leftwing organizations through assassinations, disappearances, and exile. Others point to the left’s inability to present a coherent alternate capable of capitalizing on widespread popular discontent. Perhaps the most important factor mitigating against the possibility of a large-scale armed struggle has been the successful pursuit by the Honduran ruling class of a strategy of cooption, negotiation, and the use of limited reforms aimed at neutralizing the influence of progressive individuals and organizations” (Norsworthy, 1994, Page 51)

The government of Honduras was clearly not guileless in this situation either, as there were many disappearances of political oppositionists inside the country. “Confronted with this and other accusations of systematic human rights abuses during the 1980s...Honduran

civilian and military authorities contended that the situation in their country paled in comparison to the climate of terror that reigned in neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala” (Norsworthy, 1994, Page 25).

Many people fled the repression in Honduras in return for the freedom in the United States where, like El Salvador and Guatemala, they joined the maras MS-13 and M-18 (Harding, 2014). Like in El Salvador, these new mara members were deported and regrouped in their respective countries. The phenomenon of the maras in Honduras is extremely similar to that of El Salvador, in their article “Political Transition, Social Violence, and Gangs: Cases in Central America and Mexico”, José Miguel Cruz, Rafael Fernández de Castro, and Gema Santamaría Balmaceda say that “In Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, the common denominator associated with the *maras* is a repressive government response carried out through programs that formally and informally violate the public security institutions that have already been weakened in the wake of political transitions” (2003, Page 340). Honduras also uses the Mano Dura policy and also has high rights of criminality and homicide. The maras represent the population that has been systematically excluded by the government and they provide a means of escaping structural violence and poverty.

Barras Bravas

Honduras has six barra organizations: Ultra Fiel, Revolucionarios 1928, Furia Verde, Jaiba Brava, Marea Roja and Mega Barra. Ultra Fiel is the barra for the Club Deportivo Olimpia from Tegucigalpa and was founded on August 17, 1990. “The history of the barras bravas in Honduras commenced around the year 1987 when a group of youths entered the National Stadium through Sol Sur. In each game of Olimpia, these youths would meet with flags, bombs and trumpets...” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). In addition, “With the arrival of the Argentine goalkeeper Carlos Pronno to the Olimpia lineup, the manner of encouragement began to change, since he brought the ideas and styles of South American support to the country” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). This barra also had many problems with its members, because many were very young while others were older. Because of this, “Towards the end of 1999, the barra divided into a group of integral members (the majority adults) who were not in agreement with the manner in which the barra was being controlled and they decided to leave and form 12 Olimpista, the barra they began with great strength with 80% of the fans from the Ultra and all the sponsors they had” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol).

The barra of Club Deportivo Motagua in Tegucigalpa is the Revolucionarios 1928. This group was founded on September 29, 1998. The website barrabrava.net says about the birth of the barra:

The sacred band Los Revolucionarios 1928 is born of the inequality faced by many of these youths who wanted to change the way they supported their team from only standing yelling the name when someone scored a goal and immediately sitting back down. These youths had a truly revolutionary ideology and the official barra did not want to change to what these youth were proposing, to stand up in the stands, to support the team the whole game, and to be a barra following the style of the South American barras... (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol).

Furia Verde is the barra for the Club Deportivo Maraón in San Pedro Sula and was founded in 1986. “It began in 1986 with a group of students at the Instituto José Trinidad Reyes” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). The members have a lot of pride that the barra

was the first in Honduras. The other barra in San Pedro Sula is the Mega Barra which supports the Real Club Deportivo España.

Jaiba Brava was founded in 2003 to support the Club Deportivo Victoria in La Ceiba. The Marera Roja barra supports the Club Deportivo y Social Vida which is also from La Ceiba. Marera Roja "...was created by a group of young people who were influenced by the fans in countries like Argentina as well as fans in Honduras like Ultra Fiel and la Revo 1928" (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol).

Costa Rica

History

Costa Rica had the most different historical experience in Central America. Costa Rica did not have an internal conflict influenced by the Cold War, and also did not experience substantial repression of the left. This is not to say that Costa Rica had a perfect history without struggles, without exclusion and without violence, but it is to say that in comparison with the rest of Central America, the history of Costa Rica is the most peaceful and the most inclusive.

Costa Rica did not have haciendas during the Spanish conquest. "This absence, and relative wealth and stability, have given rise to a widespread 'myth of exceptionalism' that has wrongly argued that Costa Rica is a harmoniously democratic state, one that has emerged from a particularly egalitarian colonial and postcolonial history" (Marois, 2005, Page 104). However, this picture is not the whole truth. As in the other countries, there existed many class divisions, especially with the advent of coffee production:

The modern expression of this class cleavage became evident with the introduction of coffee production in the early nineteenth century, when the landed oligarchy solidified state power and labor shortages made large estates unfeasible. As a result, smallholder farming dominated production while the larger and wealthier growers dominated processing, financing, marketing and exporting, creating a commercial and financial oligarchy (Marois, 2005, Page 104).

So, while Costa Rica had a different experience with the Spanish conquest, there was still plenty of economic, political and social exclusion. According to the authors of Costa Rica: A Country Guide, thirty-three out of forty-four presidents between 1821 and 1970 were direct descendents of three original conquistadors in Costa Rica (Barry, 1990, Page 3). This phenomenon indicates that the political elites were basically the only people who were able to gain power.

Between 1940 and 1944, the president of Costa Rica, Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia introduced liberal reforms such as the recognition of laborer's rights and minimum wage. After his presidency, he tried to pick the next president, but people were aware of this and the fraud behind the election and so this incited civil war which lasted 6 weeks. After the war, the government created a new Constitution which gave women and those of African descent the right to vote and also abolished the national army. José Figueres Ferré became president and luckily continued with the liberal reforms started by Calderón Guardia, and he also began a socialist welfare program.

Social Security was probably the most important state sponsored program in Costa Rica. Mark B. Rosenberg explains that the presidency of Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia "...coincided with the personalist, antireformist dictatorships of Anastasio Somoza in

Nicaragua, Tiburico Carías in Honduras, Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez in El Salvador, and Jorge Ubico in Guatemala” (1981, Page 279). Rosenberg also states that “For [Calderón], the root of the social problem in CR was the low wages that workers received. Such workers found it increasingly difficult to confront abnormal circumstances, including sickness, invalidity and unemployment” (1981, Page 279). Because of this, he wanted to provide social guarantees to alleviate the problems of the lower working class and the middle class. However, there were many limitations to his proposed policies. He did not have an effective plan of implementation for these reforms. Logistically, there were great ideas such as

Congress set a salario tope of 300 colones per month for all categories of workers. This change is important because it revealed the mentality of the times towards the new social-welfare program: it was not to be a matter of redistributing income across classes, a purpose often mistakenly associated with social-security programs (Rosenberg, 1981, Página 287).

However, there were also terrible ideas, especially those surrounding the implementation and the places in which people would be able to receive help. It was easier for the government to organize the social assistance according to where it would be most easy to administer it rather than where the people who needed it most were (Rosenberg, 19981, Page 289).

The social security program continued until the 70s when it was interrupted by a large economic crisis. “In the late 1970s the Costa Rican development model began to crack due to widening trade imbalances and budget deficits and deepening balance of payment problems. The state was no longer able to pay its bills—opening the way for a conservative free-market or neoliberal attack on the entire social-democratic model” (Barry, 1990, Page 9). In 1982 Luis Alberto Monge was elected president and he introduced an austerity program which definitively put an end to the socialist experiment in Costa Rica. Also at this time, the world powers saw an opportunity to introduce neoliberalism to Costa Rica. Marois describes that there was a reduction in salaries, and in workers’ rights; there were many layoffs; there was an opening of the job market; and there was a reduction in social programs. In general, the programs of the previous devades were lost. The economic crisis also damaged the clean human rights record of Costa Rica (2005, Page 108).

As might be expected, the human rights situation in Costa Rica compares favorably with other countries in the region. However, the military and economic crisis that has assaulted Central America since the end of the 1970s has taken its toll on Costa Rica’s reputation for liberty and democracy. Human rights abuses, seen as arbitrary detentions, physical abuse and torture by security forces, repression of dissent, and the intimidation of political activists, became more common in the 1980s (Barry, 1990, Page 21)

Costa Rica is not as innocent as they would like to appear. The country’s history is not free from human rights violations, and it is not a paradise of iquality. Yes, it was more equal and more safe than Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras, but obviously it was not perfect.

In continuation with the summary of Costa Rica’s important historical dates, in 1986 Oscar Arias Sánchez was elected president and a year later the leaders of Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala signed a plan for opeace which was created by him. This led him to win a Nobel Prize.

Barras Bravas

Costa Rica has four barra organizations: Ultra Morada, La 12, Garra Herediana and Fuerza Azul. Ultra Morada supports the Deportivo Saprissa de Costa Rica, Sociedad Anonima Deportiva de San José. “Ultra Morada was founded in 1995, in the years that the Deportivo Saprissa went against the Catholic University of Chile in the Copa Intercontinental in a back and forth game. The Catholic University eventually won the tournament in additional time in San Carlos de Apoquindo, Chile” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). The barra changed the culture of football in Costa Rica. The barra “...marked a total sports commerce boom...which was a topic through all modes of communication and it was no wonder the reports on the barra, much less the many products that are made to commercialize” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). On the other hand, the barra was very violent. “The bad sports results and the accusations of violence, some of which were unjust, were damaging the image of the barra and making it more difficult to function...” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). Because of this, the younger members took it upon themselves to make some changes.

The barra of the Liga Deportiva Alajuelense in Alajuela is La 12. “In 1991 it began as a small group of fans, which has now converted into a numerous group, organized, faithful, devoted to the Liga Deportiva Alajuelense, actually known as La Doce, a group of fans of the ‘foolproof’ team” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). In addition, La 12 is very unique because “...it was the first barra in the country to leave Costa Rica” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol). In a focus group of San Sebastian for this investigation, some members of the barr La 12 explained that they are called La 12 because they are the twelfth player for the team.

Garra Herediana is the barra for the Club Sport Herediano in Heredia. This barra was founded in 1996 and “In its beginnings, the barra was under the control of one young man cllaed ‘panduro’ and it was him who gave the first steps and thanks to flyers and ‘gossip’ the news was passed around about the formation of a new barra and about the dates for meetings...It is now known that the barra has organized grupos within itself called ‘peñas’ and each one has its own leader who are also the general leaders of the barra and among themselves they organize activities to be done after hearing the views of the other members of the barra” (Barra Brava Hinchadas de Futbol)

The last barra in Costa Rica is the Fuerza Azul from Cartago. This barra supports the Club Sport Cartaginés Deportiva S.A.

Barras Bravas, Violence and Masculinity

An investigation of the barras bravas necessitates a parallel investigation of masculinity. While there are many women who participate in the barras, it is a principally male phenomenon. Norma Fuller conducted an investigation of middle class men in Peru for her article “The Social Constitution of Gender Identity among Peruvian Men” and she explains that:

The representations of masculinity of the interviewees appear in three different configurations that are not necessarily consistent with one another: the natural, the domestic and the ‘outside’ (public, street). The natural aspect of masculinity refers to men’s sexual organs and physical strength. These characteristics are, according to them, the nucleus of masculinity because they are based on features that are defined as innate and unchangeable (Fuller, 2001, Page 318).

According to this, it can be said that the affiliation with the barras can in some way satisfy the natural and public facets of masculinity. Fuller also emphasizes the importance of work in the construction of masculinity. “ According to the men interviewed in this study, work is the key dimension of masculine identity. Entering the world of work signifies achieving the status of adult, constitutes a prerequisite for establishing a family, and is the principal source of social recognition.” (Fuller, 2001, Page 323). Having a job is a way to prove to society that a man meets the expectations of masculinity. It is a means of saying ‘yes, I am a man!’

Another article qualified that masculinity is not a fixed concept. “Connell [1987] notes that hegemonic masculinity is not meant to be a description of real men; rather, hegemonic masculinity represents an ideal set of prescriptive social norms that are central to the way men manage their everyday activities” (Arxer, 2011, Page 391). Therefore, a small deviation from the norms and expectations can be allowed. However, larger deviations need to be remedied or compensated for. For example, if a man does not have a steady job, he might be able to compensate for this with more masculine behavior such as violence in soccer stadiums.

“Two constants, however, in the manifestation of masculinity in Latin America remain: the first is the persistent centrality of sexual conquest in notions of real masculinity; the second is the fact that as an identity, masculinity remains a label affixed to men by men, what Nurse describes as manhood ‘affirmed through homosocial enactment and male validation’” (Riofrio, 2008, Page 25). Men have more power in creating masculine identities than women do. In other words, men’s relationships with other men are more important in constructing masculinity than their relationships with women. Men are preoccupied with how other men perceive them, and therefore, their masculine projection is for the benefit of other men rather than for the women in their lives. An important sociological term to consider in masculinity studies is ‘homosociality’. Michael Flood explains that “Homosociality refers to social bonds between persons of the same sex and, more broadly, to same-sex-focused social relations (Bird 1996, 121). Masculinity studies argues for powerful links between homosociality and masculinity: men’s lives are said to be highly organized by relations between men” (2008, Page 341).

It can be argued that certain reasons for the violence in soccer stadiums relate to masculinity and its construction. One specifically, is that there are certain men who need to compensate for their lack of masculinity, or even just the perception that they lack masculinity. These men may not have jobs, may not have the respect they desire, or may not have a political voice, etc. In addition, Riofrio addresses father absenteeism and the effect it has on masculinity construction, implying that some members of the barras may not have masculine role models and look to the other members to learn from them. Regardless of the reason, membership in a barra changes and creates masculine identities. It can also just be a means of belonging somewhere. However, an important note is that exclusion and marginalization or the feeling of belonging are not the only reasons that someone might join a barra. Obviously, there are men and women who simply love football and a logical reason for joining a barra is the love of the game.

Continuing with this sociological analysis of masculinity, NAJ Taylor explains that “Football hooliganism is a subculture in which ‘us-them’ boundaries are constructed, sharpened and contested both within and between participating groups” (Taylor, 2011, Page 1750). The process of othering in the construction of Identity is not a concept unique to masculinity or to football. People use othering to construct national identities, community

identities and even personal identities. In football, othering serves two purposes: the first is to delineate a difference between the two teams and their fans. The second is to feminize and emasculate the other team while bolstering the masculinity of themselves and their own team. In a review of an article by Carlos Sandoval García, J.M. Arias explains that:

‘...when their own team wins, the fans use images of penetration against the rival fans. A victory or a loss is symbolized in terms of homosexual harrasment. Penetration is the greatest symbol of masculine respectability. The most threatening is to be penetrated, and the opposite is to penétrate the opponent. Penetration melds power and sexuality, and is a form of possession. The body converts into a port of respectability. It transgresses the limits of the body and is one of the principal means of exercision power or undermining the opponent’ (Sandoval, 2006, pp. 132-133). (Arias, 2008, Page 328).

The feminization of other fans helps to emphasize the masculinity of men. If there is a man without a job, he can compensate for this déficit with certain actions in soccer stadiums. Masculine ideals drive the manifestation of hypermasculinity. Just like how there are rules about certain masculine behaviors and achievements, there is a lot of pressure to achieve them and a lot of pressure when these standards are not met. Because of this, sometimes men exhibit a very strong reaction—and sometimes compensate with hypermasculinity—which can lead to violence in football staduims (and other places).

An interesting point about the implication of homosexual actions is that they notmally would not help someone in constructing masculinity. However, Carlos Sandoval García states that

As part of this homosocial sphere, football and possibly other spaces such as bars are some of the few public places where physical contact is allowed among heterosexual men. Both on the pitch and on the terraces, physical contact does not inspire homophobia, nor is it subject to censorship. Physical contact does not undermine male respectability because the stadium is a homosocial arena, where men can share with other men what they consider to be ideal masculine behavior and practices. Moreover, the gaze through which football is understood emphasizes mainly, though not exclusively, what men ‘do’ and not so much what they ‘are’.[24]” (García, 2005, Page 220)

Therefore, penetration, including the penetration of another man, is considered to be a masculine act within a group of only men. Because of this interesting phenomenon, penetration is not considered a homosexual act and does not diminish masculinity.

With this information, it is easy to see that soccer stadiums have the ability to reinforce feelings and perceptions of masculinity. In a region of the world where masculinity is a predominant aspect of the culture, the creation of identities through masculinity is extremely important. Masculinity is a means of measuring success of men in society; it is a means of proving usefulness to soceity. Football stadiums are one of the places that provide a unique space to construct and reinforce this sacred characteristic.

On the other hand, affiliation in a barra can be something more treacherous. “Traditionally, the barras have been associated with urban marginality and the consumption of drugs and alcohol. In general, in the most of Central America, the barras bravas are made up of young people between 14 and 25 years old” (cesar77 of Taringa.net, 2012). This description is very similar to most of those of the maras in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. In addition, an article from the Salvadoran press cited a Spanish newspaper that said that “The conflict brought on by the barras bravas in the stadiums in Costa Rica was

compared to the insegutiry and criminality that lives in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras by the hands of the maras, according to the Spanish newspaper El País.” (*El Pais...*, 2014). Barra affiliation provides an escape from exclusion of the youthful population and provides a group in which to belong. This also relates to the previous analysis about masculinity. “Existing in a state of social and economical marginalization, many soccer supporters possess a desire to reaffirm they indeed meet the community standards of masculinity as their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy tends to be perceived as ‘non-masculine’. This desire is satisfied in a highly visible public space (the stadium) and in a multitude of forms” (Parrish and Nauright, 2012, Page 3). Obviously, not all fans are excluded or poor. However, for those who are poor and excluded, the stadiums provide many opportunities to fight and prove that they are macho men.

The necessity to prove ones masculinity is derived from the existence of exclusion and marginalization in the countries in Central America. Carlos Sandoval García explains that

Given the fact that most of the cultural and symbolic capital required to intervene in politics is exclusive to certain elites, football becomes a site in which men, for the main part, feel free to speak. Forms of sociability and subjectivity crucial to the formation of collective imageries are constructed through this popular public sphere, which may even be more effective than the formal institutions associated with politics or socialization. (García, 2005, Page 214).

Many people don’t have a voice to communicate their needs and grievances. This structural violence occurs when people are continuously excluded due to their social position and their lack of resources. When this happens, people find other ways of communicating their needs to the government. It is true that affiliation with a barra is not going to change someone’s social position and it is also true that it won’t give them a direct line of communication with the government. However, affiliation gives them a space to express their problems. In the stadiums, they have a voice, they have a purpose, and these feelings provide an escape from the tragic realities of exclusion and marginalization.

Of course, it would be wrong to make generalizations or stereotypes. According to numerous articles and a focus group in San Sebastián, there are numerous members of the barras who have many economic resources. Cecilia Klein worked in Honduras studying the prisons, and while she was there she was able to study the barras a little as well. She explains that generally, the members of the barras had many more resources than the maras. She talks about a few differences between the groups, for example “Gang members generally view society as against them, criminalizing and discriminating against them, but barra members do not distinguish themselves from greater society.” (Klein, 2009, Page 6). She also asks,

Do the barras get away with public presence and disorder because of what they are or who they are? Why were barra members not subjected to the same social cleansing brutalities based on illegal association as mara members were? Is it because public officials have a stake in their favored soccer team and vicariously enjoy the rivalries playing out? Is it because the kids in the barras are predominantly from the middle class? Does this allow them to get away with acts that poor kids couldn’t? (Klein, 2009, Page 7)

Finally, she observes that the families of the barras are able to pay for private rehabilitation centers in order to get their children out of the justice system quicker (Klein, 2009, Page 7). There is this idea, that since the barras are violent, young and use drugs, they must also be

poor and delinquents. However, at the same time, there exist many affluent hooligans (Dunning, N.d., Page 138). In the focus group in San Sebastián, one 18 year old interviewee said that there are many ‘pipi’ barra members, which means to say that these members rely on the money of their parents and are generally well off. It is easy to see that despite the stereotypes, there are many differences between and even within the barras.

Since this study covers the barras in all of Central America, it is important to look at the influence of the maras on certain barra organizations. For example, Cecilia Klein talks about a girl she knew named Ana. “Ana grew up as an 18th Street gang member since she was 12 but she explained to me that the death threats had become too serious so she left the gang and found ‘something new to get into.’” (2009, Page 3). Ana cannot be the only person who changed affiliation from the maras to the barras. Therefore, more investigation should be carried out in order to learn more about this phenomenon. Klein also asserts that:

During the game I also noticed kids in groups walking the bleachers with empty water containers. They were assigned to gather collections from spectators to fund the barra activities. The leaders of the groups claim the collections are used to buy the banners and rent buses for away games but my friend described the drug business and some prostitution rings affiliated with the barras (2009, Página 4).

The relations between the barras and the maras in the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras need to be investigated. I believe that these relations can illuminate many of the reasons for the violence that surrounds the football games in these countries.

“Research conducted in the UK indicates, more or less organized groups try to initiate fights with rival groups. The aims of these riots are twofold. On the one hand, hooligans want to humiliate the competing gangs that support other club teams. On the other hand, they want to draw attention to their social background and express grievances related to it (Dunning et al., 2002)” (Braun y Vliegenthart, 2008, Página 800). Violence is an important aspect in barra membership. Since the barras are groups composed mostly of men, studies on collective violence can be used to explain some of the actions witnessed. In his article “Football Hooliganism as Collective Violence”, N.A.J. Taylor analyzes collective violence and its relation to the barras bravas.

According to Charles Tilly, the existing scholarship into collective violence may be classified into three alternative approaches: ‘behavioral’, ‘ideational’, and ‘relational’. The relational approach elevates the influence of conversational transactions between people and groups, such that ‘collective violence therefore amounts to a kind of conversation’... The ideational approach, most commonly adopted by those formulating preventative policy to combat football hooliganism, emphasizes the ideas and actions of the individual in instigating and maintaining violent incidents such that targeted, aggressive policies might ‘suppress or eliminate destructive ideas’. While the behavioral approach stresses the role of the individual, factors such as the primal instincts inherent within masculinity, the pursuit of respect from peers and a sense of belonging are considered as core drivers of collective violence. The behavioral approach is evident in the existing sociological accounts of football hooliganism, whereas the ideational approach is predominant in government and inter-governmental policy responses to combat violence at football matches (Taylor, 2011, Página 1753).

This quote identifies Collective violence as a dialogue between the groups which helps to construct masculine identities. The feeling of fighting with friends is a strong one. It is often said that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, and when many people share the same

feelings and the same likes and dislikes (such as the dislike of another team), it creates a strong bond. This bond is a feeling of belonging and oftentimes it is the only thing that some fans want. In addition, the discourse of violence is mutually constructed between the different groups. When members believe that the group wants violence, they act violently, and because of their homosocial relations, everyone supports this violence which only encourages more violence. This cyclic discourse of violence, the need to belong to a group, and the pressure of other members within the group influences the construction masculine identities through violence. It is a question of loyalty, and at the same time, the ability to prove oneself.

Further on the idea of belonging, F.C. Mena postulates that:

Football violence has four forms through which it is expressed, each one with special characteristics and specific moments. It can be said that it starts with *violence on the field* which provides the proper logic and essence of football and acts as a centrifugal force; *violence in the stands* follows and it is related to the fans of the teams; it continues with *violence around the stadium* which is produced immediately outside of the stadiums and into the cities; finally, the violence that is produced by society in general... (2013, Page 44-45)

Violence in the stadiums imitates violence on the field and violence in the stadiums continues outside. With each instance violence grows and ultimately becomes something very serious and dangerous. In the focus group of San Sebastián, the interviewees said that their group leaders do not allow violence. However, there exist certain 'bronceros' who want to fight no matter what. Regardless, they comprise a very small group of violent participants, and this small group is to be expected, because

To support a team means supporting acts of violence and being vicariously involved in them. Supporting one team means opposing another team, whose own supporters identify just as closely with their own team's efforts. The contest between supporters is aggressive, in both senses of the term: sometimes that can be transformed into violence. (Finn, 2005, Page 92).

Ultimately, it is easy to get caught up in the moment and to let your emotions take over control of your brain. It is easy to reduce inhibitions and let your feelings take control. This is a completely human phenomenon and it is easy to see why it can happen in the soccer stadiums as well.

An alarming thing that was brought to light by the interviewees in San Sebastián is that the police try to incite violence. They create peñales, or designated areas in the stands, and sometimes they make them too small. They advise the fans not to touch the police, but with the sheer number of barra members and the small size of the peñales it is kind of inevitable. Then, when the fans touch them they react violently. It is frightening that the police, who are meant to maintain the peace, are instigating violence in the stadiums.

This investigation has illuminated that it is and will be very difficult to characterize the members of the barras. There is not one type of member, and they don't come from a universal background. However, there are certain patterns that can be further investigated. It is possible that many people join the barras due to economic, political and social exclusion. The barras provide an escape from the world of marginalization and provide another world of acceptance and fun. It is also a homosocial space that can assist men who feel the need to prove their masculinity due to their lack of a job or something of the sort. Others simply want a group to belong to. In countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and

Central American Barras and Masculine Violence

Honduras, they can provide an escape from the maras and the associated violence but this could also lead to conflict between the maras and the barras.

The violence in the football stadiums, the barras and the soccer hooligans are not unique to Central America. They are not unique to Latin America. They are a worldwide phenomenon. The question of the barras is not a question of stopping the violence. Rather, it is a question of ending and ameliorating the conditions that force men (and women) to join the barras. It is a question of inequality, masculine shame, and social status.

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