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➲ Security Policies from a Spatial Perspective: the Case of Honduras

Introduction

Public insecurity became a central issue for many Hondurans in the late 1990s, as crime, delinquency and homicide increased significantly in the isthmus. Honduras had the second highest homicide rate (35.1 per 100,000) in the region after El Salvador (50.2. per 100,000) (World Health Organization 2002). This social violence triggered insecurity and fear, which was further accompanied by the overall perception that the state was unable of relieving or protecting the population.

In 2002, the Honduran government attempted to reduce social violence by introducing various repressive security policies known as *Cero Tolerancia* (Zero Tolerance), *Mano Dura* (Iron Fist) and the *Ley Antimaras* (Anti-Gang Law). These security policies aimed at stopping crime by incarcerating members of the violent youth gangs (*maras*) that were officially held responsible for social violence and public insecurity. These security policies soon proved to be inefficient: not only did crime and homicide rates remain high, but security forces were unable to impose control over certain urban areas – that is, gang-controlled *barrios* – as well as over gang members. On the one hand, youth gangs developed sophisticated territorial strategies which enabled them to defy state authorities in the neighborhoods and in prison (Gutiérrez Rivera 2009, 2010). On the other hand, state authorities had weak territorial strategies for controlling relationships in marginal urban areas.

This article looks at the failed attempts of the Honduran state to stop social violence and to control youth gang expansion by focusing on the security policies *Cero Tolerancia* (Zero Tolerance), *Mano Dura* (Iron Fist) and the *Ley Antimaras* (Anti-Gang Law). It understands security policies as territorial strategies that attempt to reduce social violence and impose control. Using a spatial-analytical framework, this article shows that the Honduran government's territorial strategies are fragile and inefficient because of the organization of urban space, namely because of the absence of territorial hierarchies and fragmentation. In using a spatial-analytical framework, this article expects to deepen our understanding of a weak state's failed attempts to control complex forms of social violence in a post-dictatorial setting.

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The structure of this article is as follows: the section that follows discusses the emergence of social violence, public (in)security and youth gang expansion in Honduras and Central America. This section also discusses studies on security policies in Central America and the importance of understanding them from a spatial perspective. The second section develops a spatial-analytical framework used to study security policies. The third section analyzes the above-mentioned security policies showing the attempts made by the Honduran authorities to territorialize power and the difficulties they experienced. The final section reflects on these failed security policies and territorial strategies in Honduras.

Social violence, (in)security, and security policies in Honduras and Central America

Security policies were introduced in Central America at the turn of the twenty-first century as a response to the wave of social violence in the region and the general perception of public insecurity among the population. Hence, security policies are closely related to the emergence of new and complex forms of violence, namely urban violence (see also Dirk Kruijt's article in this *Dossier*). This social violence differs greatly from the political violence that traditionally has characterized the isthmus. It did not come from an organized political group (Rotker 2002). Rather, social violence is ubiquitous and target indiscriminately everyone (Torres-Rivas 1999). Though affecting all of the Central American countries, the highest levels of violence are concentrated in the northern part of the isthmus: El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

Social violence is not new in Honduras. Newspapers first started reporting the various forms of new violence – such as delinquency, crime, homicide – in the late 1970s, and these forms of violence began to increase slowly over the following decades (Salomón 1993). The 1990s, however, saw a sharp rise in urban violence. Reports of delinquency and crime increased substantially between 1998 and 2000. By 2000, the homicide rate was at 46.31 per 100,000 in Honduras' main cities, San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa. San Pedro Sula witnessed a much higher level of violence than Tegucigalpa; the homicide rate there was 107 per 100,000, doubling Tegucigalpa's rate at 52 (Castellanos 2000).

Social violence in Honduras has a strong masculine component, as most of the male population participate in and/or fall victim to different forms of violence. Male aggressors make up 97.5 per cent of all aggressors, whereas male victims make up 92 per cent of all victims. In addition, violence is usually committed with heavy caliber firearms, which are used by the military. Nevertheless, arms such as AK-47s, Galils and mini-Uzis circulate widely in Honduras, a legacy of the civil war period of the 1980s.

These observations coincide with international reports on violence. The World Health Organization (2002) reports that Latin America, and particularly Central America and the Caribbean, have registered the highest levels of social violence in the world in recent decades. Furthermore, this report confirmed that most of the violence was carried out by male adolescents and young adults. Local studies indicate that the majority of these male teenagers and adults are members of youth gangs or "maras" (Salomón 1993; Salomón/ Flores/Castellanos 1999; Save the Children/Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes 2001).

Central American youth gangs have recently garnered scholarly attention. Although they emerged in Central America in the early 1960s as non-aggressive peer groups, gangs eventually turned into violent organizations in the 1980s and proliferated in the early 1990s (Salomón 1993; UNDP 2003). Studies show that youth gang expansion is closely associated with the rise of social violence in the region (Save the Children/Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes 2001; ERIC 2005; Rodgers 2006, 2007; Savenije 2009; Salomón/Flores/Castellanos 1999). This is due to structural factors on the macro and micro levels leading to the emergence of complex forms of violence. Gang activities such as territorial disputes with rival gangs, control over marginal neighborhoods and residents, and gangs' occasional involvement in criminal acts as well as drug distribution on a minor scale indicate how deeply embedded violence is in Honduran (and Central American) society. Though gang violence accounted for only 1.7 per cent in registered police reports (Cálix 2004), the general perception among Hondurans was that gangs were carrying out most of the social violence and inciting public insecurity. The latter was reinforced through constant media reports and, later, the presidential campaigns in 2001.

What were the structural factors behind the rise of social violence in recent decades and youth gang expansion in Honduras? Neo-liberal policies in the late eighties are one factor. Studies show that Honduras was one of the first countries in Central America to implement a neo-liberal agenda that enabled free trade and flexible labor contracts (Otazo Conde 2001; Jelín 1994; Robinson 2003). The country's limited state apparatus and institutions as well as the inability of the leftist and/or central-leftist parties to develop an alternative political project explain the minimal resistance that actors such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund encountered in Honduras. Robinson (2003) shows that neo-liberal policies increased poverty and retracted the state from traditional social services (like health care) despite energizing Honduras' (and Central America's) stagnant economy. Honduras witnessed the emergence of a new urban poor who had little or no access to social services and become more prone to violence, criminality and delinquency (Moser/McIlwaine 2004).

Social violence is also linked to the region's democratization process. Koonings and Kruijt (1999) point out that the democratization process established formal democracies which nevertheless continued to sponsor political violence and to militarize society and state institutions. This explains the prevalence of authoritarian practices in Central America. Scholarship on Honduras notices that an unfinished demilitarization process and an entrenched bipartisan system which tends to exclude various social sectors has hindered the establishment of a representative democracy – thus the prevalence of authoritarian practices and violence – and of a strong civil society (Maihold 1995; Torres Calderón 1998; Posas 2003). On the other hand, Zinecker (2008) states that the increase in violence is associated with changes in Honduras' "balance system". This balance system historically managed to exclude violence through negotiations and reforms. However, this system underwent political and economic changes in the late seventies and the new financial elite of the nineties turned it into a more "preventive structure", which, as it did not negotiate, was unable to deal with new forms of violence.

Youth gang expansion and gang violence in Honduras (and Central America) unfolded within the structural processes mentioned above. Gang membership rose among adolescents and young adults in the eighties (Salomón 1993). Furthermore, gang members became more involved in violent practices and criminality, partly because of alcohol and

drug consumption. Local gangs underwent considerable transformation, not only did they attract marginal adolescents and young adults, but their organizational structure also turned from loose and simple into complex and fixed (Salomón/Flores/Castellanos 1999).

Studies indicate that local gangs became affiliated to two large transnational gangs known as the Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang (ERIC 2005; Savenije 2009; Peetz 2004). Both gangs originated in Southern California's Hispanic neighborhoods and expanded to other cities in the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. This was because of migration, namely the deportation from the United States of former and active gang members to their 'homeland'[1]. Not much is known about the deportees' arrival in Honduras, however, studies suggest that deportees introduced new organizational structures and sophisticated forms of violence to local gangs (ERIC/IDESO/IDIES/IUDOP 2001; ERIC 2005; Save the Children/Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes 2001).

Initially, gangs used violence against their members (for instance, female gang members) or rival gangs (to defend their turf). However, in the 1990s, gangs started using violence against residents of the neighborhoods they controlled. They collected a "war tax", that is, money from barrio stores and residents in order to cover their own expenses, and attacked public transportation (taxis, buses) and pedestrians (ERIC/IDESO/IDIES/IUDOP 2001; Gutiérrez Rivera 2009).

Central American governments, particularly in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, responded to the proliferation of new social violence, public insecurity, and youth gangs with repressive security policies known as *Cero Tolerancia*, *Mano Dura*, and *Ley Antimaras*. Studies focusing on state repression and/or government security policies in a post-revolutionary or post-dictatorial setting have only recently started to appear. Security policies are generally perceived as the return – or prevalence – of authoritarian practices, the weakness of state institutions (particularly the judiciary institutions) and democratization processes, as well as the re-militarization of society (Blanco Reyes 2004; Cálix 2004; González 2003). An institutional approach has predominated in these studies. It has been useful for understanding the inability of recently democratized states to deal with complex socio-cultural phenomena, particularly the youth gangs or "maras". Furthermore, institutional analysis indicates the fragility of the judiciary system, as enforcement agents have demonstrated difficulties in carrying out and interpreting laws.

Other studies go beyond the institutional approach and focus on state institutions' involvement in the promotion – rather than the control/reduction – of violence (Hume 2007; Peetz 2008; Peetz/Huhn 2008; Huhn/Oettler/Peetz 2008). They show that official statistics tend to be exaggerated. Hence, violence, fear, and public (in)security are constructed and reproduced in various communicative spaces, most noticeably the mass media (newspapers, radio, television). In addition, security policies emerge within these discourses as an instrument which the state uses to construct the "other" through the dehumanization and criminalization of youth, thus legitimizing their persecution.

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[1] Gang members were deported to their country of origin even though they had never lived there. Hence, "homeland" is somehow ironic, as gang members did not feel they had arrived home. Indeed, they felt they were treated as foreigners (Zilberg 2003).

There has been hardly any analysis of security policies from a spatial perspective. Zilberg's (2003) study on US-immigration policies and Salvadorian youth comes closest. It shows how national policies are directly involved in the physical and geographical displacement of youth through forced migration (that is, deportation) and how deported youth is forced to build space and identity in unknown and unfriendly urban spaces (for instance, in San Salvador). Furthermore, national policies promote marginalization and strip youth of citizenship. Even if the precise focus of Zilberg's work lies elsewhere, it provides rich insight into the importance of using a spatial-analytical framework for understanding (failed) attempts at implementing security policies.

Understanding security policies from a spatial perspective

Drawing on contemporary political geography theory, this article develops an analytical framework that enables, on the one hand, an understanding of the modern state's logic towards its territory and, on the other hand, the perception of security policies as territorial strategies for imposing control.

All states are bound to territory. The state binds itself through its apparatuses and institutions which aim at monopolizing the procedures of capital accumulation and the organization of territory. Furthermore, the state exercises state power over specific territories and individuals (Poulantzas 1978). In the attempt to monopolize the social relations within a given area as well as to rationally organize space, the state emerges as an authority (Lefebvre 2003). The state develops and imposes territorial strategies in order to secure a particular outcome, for instance, the re-spatialization of capital, the (re)allocation of resources or peoples, or the production of national territory. Hence, state territorial strategies, or territoriality, are closely linked to sovereignty: "[A] given state does not just exist in space, it has sovereign power in a particular territory" (Lefebvre 2003: 101).

Brenner, drawing on Lefebvre's seminal works, perceives state territorial strategies as a "violence directed towards space" (1999: 49) in which the state seeks to dominate and control space by rationalizing, unifying, and homogenizing the social relations within social space. As Lefebvre points out, capitalist states *aim* to produce homogenized space – usually by hierarchizing and fragmenting space – for more efficient control, which means that states do not always produce unified and homogeneous spaces: "Each state claims to produce a space wherein something is accomplished, a space, even, where something is brought to perfection: namely, a unified and hence homogeneous society" (Lefebvre, quoted in Brenner 1999: 49).

State territorial strategies should be understood as a *process* through which the state attempts to monopolize and unify social relations and, eventually, expects to produce a specific spatial outcome. Contemporary political geography theory has criticized the perception of territorial strategies, or state territoriality, as a given or as ahistorical, observing that such notions have contributed to fixing geographical assumptions, such as that territorial strategies necessarily produce enclosed or encaged spaces or that they are organized on a national scale (Brenner/Jessop/Jones/MacLeod 2003; Brenner 2004, 1999).

This article therefore focuses on the territorial strategies of the Honduran state within a specific historical context: social violence and youth gang expansion of the past decade. Between 2002 and 2005 the Honduran state attempted to reduce social violence and stop youth gang expansion: to this end the authorities developed territorial strategies, namely security policies, to impose control. Proceeding from the view that security policies are territorial strategies that emerge within the context of social violence and public (in)security, this article analyzes the territorial strategies the authorities used to reduce social violence and to stop youth gang expansion, as well as the challenges they faced.

Territorial strategies are analyzed using Sack's definition of territoriality, conceived as a geographic strategy for enforcing control over objects and persons by controlling a specific area, "[territoriality is] the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area. This area will be called the territory" (Sack 1986: 19).

Territory here does not refer to the circumscription or delimitation of space. Territory is not fixed or enclosed; instead, it is an active area where an individual or a group attempts to influence the interactions of other groups or individuals. In other words, territory is an area of "socio-political struggles" (Brenner 2004) which change or transform space. In addition, these socio-political struggles are perceived as the territorial strategies of a group or an individual.

Sack identifies three interdependent relationships that reveal the logic of territorial strategies: classification, communication, and the assertion of control over an area. The first relationship refers to the classification of an area. Simply put, classification occurs when a group or an individual claims possession over anything (or some things) in a specific area. In addition, classification marks the inclusion and exclusion of others from entering or gaining access to an area. The second relationship states that a group or an individual must communicate the area it classifies. It is a way of symbolically marking territory. Territorial boundaries are the most common and powerful forms of communication. Signs or gestures are considered forms of communication. Like classification, communication indicates possession and exclusion of an area. Finally, the third relationship involves asserting control over a specific area. In other words, the group or individual attempt to influence the struggles and interactions within a given space usually by controlling access within an area or to people or objects outside the area.

Territorial strategies are not particular to the modern state. They are ubiquitous and can be carried out by non-state actors, who may also attempt to affect interactions and movements in certain contexts and circumstances. In the case of the state, territorial strategies not only aim to control the procedures of capital accumulation and to influence the peoples in a given space, they also have a symbolic purpose: that the state be acknowledged as the legitimate authority.

Here, Honduran security policies are perceived as an effort to influence certain territories and groups within the specific context of social violence. Security policies target gang-controlled areas and members of the Mara Salvatrucha and 18th Street Gang. Symbolically, these territorial strategies are a state effort to reinstate authority. The next section analyzes the territorial strategies of the Honduran state authorities as well as the challenges authorities encountered in implementing them.

Security policies as a territorial strategy: Imposing authority

In 2002, Ricardo Maduro of the *Partido Nacional* (National Party, PN) was sworn in as president after a successful campaign that crushed his main opponent, José Manuel Zelaya of the *Partido Liberal* (Liberal Party, PL).[2] His campaign, *Futuro Seguro* (Safe Future) promised to stop social violence by fighting crime in Honduras.

Once in office, Maduro declared war on criminals, announcing harsh security policies. In 2002 his administration introduced *Zero Tolerance*, and in the following year it approved first *Iron Fist* and, later in the year, the *Anti-Gang Law*. These security policies imitated Giuliani's "broken window policing" or order maintenance policing, brought in to control crime in New York in the mid-nineties. On a general level, these policies involved police, military, and security forces being actively on patrol and looking for criminals in neighborhoods with high levels of violence. The *Anti-Gang Law* specifically sought the disbandment of gangs by proclaiming them illegal associations and incarcerating their members. Most of the neighborhoods where the patrolling took place were located in peripheral areas of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. Furthermore, most of these neighborhoods were under control of the Mara Salvatrucha or the 18th Street Gang.

Maduro's security policies were territorial strategies, as they were intended to influence and control relationships and interactions in crime-infested urban areas by sending police and security agents to patrol their streets and incarcerate gang members. *Zero Tolerance* and *Iron Fist* aimed principally at controlling and imposing authority in gang-controlled neighborhoods, whereas the *Anti-Gang Law* targeted gang members. In the former, authorities clearly determined (or classified) and communicated (for instance, through main and local media outlets) the areas where "security" would be enforced. Raids and street patrolling were the government's territorial strategies for asserting control over these urban areas. A typical raid involved heavily armed police and security agents and the presence of president Maduro and his Secretary of Defense: "Maduro headed an impressive police raid in a barrio in Comayagüela. 250 police and military agents, with the aid of helicopters, did the raid. The area was militarized" (*El Heraldo*, 2 July 2003).

Raids like these became routine in 2002, and increased in 2003. The raids and street patrolling eventually led to the incarceration of "criminals and delinquents". Most of those arrested, however, were gang members of the Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang, who were officially held responsible for the social violence. Yet it became increasingly difficult to incarcerate them. As police agents were unable to prove gang members' "crimes", judicial authorities were forced to release them. At the beginning of 2003, government officials announced a reduction in the age of criminal accountability as a means of fighting crime and incarcerating gangs (*La Tribuna*, 25 January 2003). But this reduction never materialized, in part due to the disapproval in Congress of representatives of the leftist party, Unión Democrática (UD), as well as local youth associations and organizations. Instead, PN representatives proposed a change to the penal code. In August 2003, after a weekend of violence in Tegucigalpa, Congress approved this reform, also known as the *Anti-Gang Law*.[3]

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[2] José Manuel Zelaya (PL) would win the next presidential elections in 2005.
[3] Congress reformed Article 332 of the Penal Code. This came to be widely known as *Ley Antimaras* (Anti-Gang Law), although it was not really a law.

The *Anti-Gang Law* legitimized the incarceration of gang members on the grounds of membership alone rather than for any criminal action.[4] For state authorities, the *Anti-Gang Law* enabled more efficiency in imposing territorial control over crime-infested neighborhoods, as the subjects/criminals had been officially pinpointed. As a government official stated: "With the approval of the Anti-Gang Law, police work will be more efficient because now they will have more control over the 'mareros' [gang members] and they will not be easily freed" (*El Tiempo*, 8 August 2003).

The *Anti-Gang Law* allowed security and police agents to arrest gang members *in flagrante delicto*. As arrests could be based on appearance alone (instead of on criminal action), gangs' own visible territoriality such as hanging out on the streets and, particularly, their territoriality of the body (hip-hop style, shaved heads, and especially their tattoos) made them easily identifiable for state authorities. Shortly after introducing the *Anti-Gang Law*, security and police forces raided gang-controlled barrios arresting gang members and young adults who looked like gang members.[5]

On the symbolic level, the three main security policies sought to modify the state's tarnished image, which had suffered from its inability to impose its sovereignty where violence and security issues were concerned. Interestingly, police raids were given symbolic names that had clear references to territorial sovereignty or to claiming territory on behalf of the state: the police raids in 2003 were named *Operación Libertad* (Operation Freedom), for instance. Furthermore, the idea of "liberating" or "freeing" marginal neighborhoods from crime, violence, and gangs was reinforced with extensive media coverage. Newspapers and television news circulated images of security and police agents and top government officials, such as the president and the Secretary of Defense, "capturing" criminals. Symbolic territorial claiming was also the state's attempt to assert control and (re)establish new urban boundaries. As Newman observes, boundaries have power: "Once created, boundaries become almost mythical, inasmuch as they determine the sovereign and inviolable limits of the state, not to be transgressed by external powers" (Newman 2005: 92).

In conclusion, symbolically and physically, security policies attempted to affect interactions in crime-infested neighborhoods and among gang members by reshaping social space. However, as the next section shows, territorial strategies faced several serious challenges.

Difficulties of imposing territorial strategies

For various reasons, Honduran state authorities encountered many obstacles to their imposition of these territorial strategies. One of them was structural. State institutions have been historically weak, making institutionalized territorial enforcement challenging. Honduras' state formation processes in the 19th century did not consolidate an effi-

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[4]   The new Article 332 established gangs as illicit organizations and associations, thereby criminalizing gang membership. Additionally, ringleaders would receive even harsher punishment with twelve-year prison sentences and fines.

[5]   For instance, many young adults with tattoos who were not gang members were arrested.

cient state apparatus. Indeed, statehood was not achieved until the 1950s. In the thirty years that followed, military dictatorships sought to expand the state apparatus and to establish a more prominent role for the state. A precarious infrastructure of social welfare was set up (Posas/del Cid 1983), which was dismantled, however, with the neo-liberal policies of the nineties.

Another structural obstacle were Honduras' limited state resources, inseparable from the historical difficulties the Honduran state experienced consolidating its fiscal base, which left it structurally dependent on powerful capitalist states and, more recently, transnational actors such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Security policies required various resources (financial, physical, and spatial) that the government simply did not count on. Not only did security policies substantially increase government spending, the security apparatus also did not have enough manpower for territorial enforcement in the classified areas (Gutiérrez Rivera 2009).

The two largest gangs, the Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street were hard to control. Gang members challenged police and security agents with their own territorial strategies. As I have written elsewhere (Gutiérrez Rivera 2010), security policies reinforced gang territoriality, enabling gang members to outwit authorities in their neighborhoods or defy them outright in prison. For instance, members altered the territoriality of the body (they started dressing differently and restricted tattoo use) as well as their movements in the barrio streets: "[The gangs] are in a process of mutation, they have changed their styles and forms and are readapting […]. Since the [Anti-Gang] law, members do not tattoo themselves anymore, they don't dispute the barrio, they stopped walking down the street with their typical tumbao, and they do not hang around corners anymore" (*El Heraldo*, 17 May 2004).

The sophistication of gang territoriality was indicative of the ability of gang members' to respond to state repression by reshaping territory and producing new spaces in the neighborhoods. Gangs' territorial know-how highlighted the inability of the state's territorial strategy to affect relationships, objects, gang members, as well as to impose power. Whereas gang members demonstrated authority and knowledge of their local turfs and neighborhoods, police and security agents did not seem to know the areas they raided. This was in part because of the absence or limited presence of state institutions at the local level. The central authorities had virtually no partners in these areas. The absence or limited presence of the state in marginal areas has been thoroughly researched in previous studies (Wacquant 2001; Bourgois 1996; Zatz/Portillos 2000; Venkatesh 1997). On the one hand, this fragile materiality of the state has favored the predominance (and consolidation) of gang organizations over local community associations. On the other hand, it handicaps central authorities' policing efforts in marginal areas, as they have little territorial knowledge of the places in which they set out to impose rule.

The way in which the Honduran authorities organize space – that is, national territory and urban space – is central in understanding the territorial limitations on police and security agents' attempts to effectively implement security policies in marginal barrios. National territory is divided into departments, which are further fragmented into municipalities. The municipality is the smallest territorial unit in Honduras, and cities are territorially organized and administered by a municipality (Ley de Municipalidades, Honduran Constitution 1982).

Honduras' main cities, Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, are both cities and munici-palities. Although the *Catastro Municipal* (Land Registry) registers private property and the *Servicio Autónomo Nacional de Acueducto y Alcantarillado* (National Service of Aqueducts and Sewage, or SANAA) regulate urban construction, city-municipalities do not group neighborhoods and residential areas under local politico-administrations such as a district, county or locality. This non-fragmentation of urban space into smaller territorial units makes domination of certain urban territories – particularly in the mar-ginal areas where the state is absent – and the efficient re-spatialization of resources, objects, and individuals difficult. The analyse of the security policies clearly illustrated this, as security and police forces did not rely on local authorities such as town coun-cilors or local police agents who could help them gain access, knowledge, and control over marginal urban areas. The government sent agents to patrol streets which were basically foreign to them. Indeed, marginal barrios had a very different territorial logic which was imposed and dominated by the gangs. In addition, gang territorial strategies spatialized (through the use of violence) residents' relationships and movements, thus enabling gang members to gain control and dominance over turfs and/or neighborhoods and residents.

Conclusion

This article aims to explain Honduras' failed security policies by using a spatial-ana-lytical framework. Specifically, this article sought to answer which territorial strategies state authorities used to impose control and power and what challenges authorities faced. The analysis shows that state authorities were unable to develop a territorial strategy of sovereignty to control violence, reduce crime and delinquency, and control gang mem-bers of the Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang. One reason for this is the structur-al weakness of Honduras' institutions and its limited resources for territorializing securi-ty policies. The fragility of the Honduran state apparatus and the lack of resource infrastructure are linked to the country's state formation process. In addition, recent processes, such as neo-liberalism and market-friendly policies enabling more flexible capital and labor laws, have contributed to retracting the state from its social role.

Another factor is the gangs' response to security policies and general state repres-sion. Gang members developed their own territorial strategies demonstrating the weak-ness underlying the state's own territorial strategy for exercising power. In addition, the territoriality of the gang highlights the Honduran authorities' distinct way of orga-nizing political territory. For instance, Honduran state territoriality does not follow tra-ditional organizational procedures that lead to the formation of a predominantly "homogenous and unified" political space. The non-fragmentation of urban territories can be understood as the inability to fragment for more efficient territorial control. However, non-fragmentation of political (urban) space is also indicative of a different and non-traditional use given and ascribed to territory. Against this background, I want to close this article with a plea for more empirical research within a spatial-analytical framework to aid our understanding of urban spatiality in Honduras and Central Amer-ica and the role it plays in organizing or producing violence as well as in consolidating state power.

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