

ONE Violence

CHOLOMA DRUNK

On the day that I moved to the maquiladora town of Choloma in 1999, I saw a man die. I was buying household supplies in a hardware store when I heard and felt a boom and the lights went out. I went outside to look, along with the owner and other customers, and saw a cable on the ground and a man lying motionless near a bicycle. The man began to convulse violently in what I assumed were death throes until I noticed that the cable was actually tangled around and underneath him, electrocuting him as I watched. A crowd gathered rapidly, and some men managed to drag the cable off him. I stood, impotent with the other onlookers, oblivious to the fact that we were blocking the way of the police and the ambulance. Back in the hardware store, the owner and a

customer got to chatting about the man on the bicycle. They agreed that the current couldn't have been that strong, because otherwise he would have been charred. The owner remarked that it was because the cable had been hung wrong. He had noticed it spewing sparks in the rain a few days before. The municipality never takes care of these things, but anyway, he said, the bicyclist was only a drunk.

HOW DOES VIOLENCE BECOME NORMAL?

Violence and death are familiar to Hondurans. Rocío Tábor, a sociologist and former deputy minister of the Office of the President, has noted that to speak of violence there "is to bring to the surface a web of memories and confusing and painful stories, in which the eras, dates, and causes of violence unravel to form part of a vital permanent experience of insecurity, fear and death."¹ Violence, insecurity, fear, and death crop up every day as themes in conversation and dominate the news media. While I was alarmed and angered by the preceding scene, for the people I was with, watching a man's electrocution provoked little more than curious gossip and speculation. It was a spectacle, to be sure, but not an exceptional event. This was not because of some sort of Latin American magical realism, embracing the absurdity of death. Rather, it can be understood as an example of the ways in which violence has become normalized for Hondurans through constant exposure—to the point that this victim of obvious municipal negligence was blamed for bringing about his own demise.

How does violence from without become subjectivity? What are the processes by which we incorporate the world around us into our own bodies, our own lives? How does a group of people come to understand violence done to peers (and to themselves) as violence deserved? In Honduras, there is not the sort of unifying nationalist agenda that exists in other Latin American nations. Hondurans do not have the kind of clear propagandistic answers to questions of identity available, for example, to Mexicans ("We Mexicans are *hijos de la chingada*; we are *malinchistas*; we are *la raza*").² When I ask Hondurans what it means to be Honduran, their answers emerge mostly in the negative: "We're not as advanced as

the United States," "We don't have any money," "We haven't yet learned how to control our violence," or simply, "We are behind." Hondurans' imagined community is one of violence and lack.³

The concept of symbolic violence—a subject's complicity in violence perpetrated against him or her—is a useful tool for comprehending Honduran subjectivities. I follow Bourdieu in using the theoretical framework of symbolic violence to address the kind of questions I raise in the preceding paragraph and in an attempt to avoid falling into the easy trap of blaming the victims of violence. The Honduran conviction that the essence of Honduranness is violence, that as a people Hondurans are less civilized than those in first-world nations, is a symbolically violent evolutionary trope common to colonialism. As such, this conviction complements economic and other forms of structural violence in Honduran processes of identification and subjectivation.

The theory of symbolic violence relies on another Bourdieuan concept—that of *habitus*, the structural and cultural environment internalized in the form of dispositions to act, think, and feel in certain ways. For example, *habitus* can be the bodily disposition to stand at different distances from people in different circumstances, or the disposition to act toward and react to people of different classes or ethnicities (and different *habitus*) in different ways. *Habitus* is acquired through enculturation into a social class, a gender, a family, a peer group, or even a nationality.

Habitus is also a central component of symbolic capital. As Bourdieu notes, "Symbolic capital, that is to say, capital—in whatever form—insofar as it is represented, i.e., apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition, presupposes the intervention of the *habitus* as a socially constituted cognitive capacity."⁴ To put it more simply, symbolic capital is the intrinsic knowledge of how and when to employ manners in order to achieve social distinction by demonstrating superior taste, and those manners and tastes themselves are embodied in *habitus*. Although *habitus* cannot be intentionally altered through consciousness-raising (since it is embodied and not a merely psychological state), its development is a continuous process.

In this book I argue that the symbolic violence resulting from the Honduran embodied obsession with certain forms of their own "real" (vs.

structural) violence is a necessary condition for the acceptance of a violent form of modernity and a violent form of capitalism.

EVERYDAY VIOLENCE

On July 6, 1997, my first day of fieldwork in the town of La Lima, I wrote the following: "On the way walking back [home] I stopped at a taco stand. The old woman seemed shocked that I sat down, and soon there were three of them and an old man crowding around and interrogating me. . . . They told me to be careful. People could see a girl like me and think I have lots of money and *pow*. Then came story after story of people who they knew who had been robbed, mutilated, killed, and otherwise wronged for no particular reason." After a few weeks, this conversation became so generic that I ceased mentioning it in my notes and focused on other topics. Talk of violence pervades nearly every conversation in Honduras, and violence holds a special relationship with the maquiladora industry—my original focus of study—in the popular perception. Many Hondurans point to a correlation between the growth of the maquiladora industry and rising levels of street violence and alcohol and drug consumption. As one young maquiladora worker stated in response to my question about the often-cited connection between violence and the factories, "That just comes along with progress. When you have progress, as we do, you get delinquency." Ironically, despite the perception of a link between maquiladoras and violence, many Hondurans locate that violence *outside* the maquiladora—in contrast to the factory interior, which is imagined as a space of untainted modernity and progress.

Honduras did not experience a war on its population on the scale that Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador did during the 1980s, although militarization (including a significant long-term U.S. Army presence) then, as now, was ubiquitous, and the specter of state violence was omnipresent. Disappearances were a common form of state-sanctioned political repression throughout the 1980s, and death squad activities continue to this day. The biggest fear of most Hondurans, however, is not state violence but gang violence and seemingly random "anonymous" violence.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes writes, "At certain levels of political-economic development . . . violence and threats or fear of violence are sufficient to guarantee the 'public order.'"⁵ "Random" violence in Honduras, while not officially perpetrated by the state, is a controlling process that has been cleverly spun by the state and private industry to serve many of the same functions of—and ultimately to justify—state violence.

MEDIA VIOLENCE

One of the ways in which the public order is maintained in Honduras is through a continuous media bombardment of images and tales of bloody, brutal deaths. Honduran media, owned by the same families who own industrial parks and produce elected politicians, is a powerful force in shaping Honduran identity (e.g., as a "violent" people) and subjectivities. Arthur Kleinman has observed that "the immense cultural power of the media in the world order enables appropriation of images of violence as 'infotainment' to feed global commercialism, while at the same time it normalizes suffering and turns empathic viewing into voyeurism [and therefore] a violence is done to the moral order."⁶

Observing the violence done to the moral order as a means of maintaining the social order in Honduras gave me a new embodied understanding of the English term *gut-wrenching*. On July 4, 2000, I wrote the following entry in my field notes:

Canal 6 . . . graced us with close-ups of three different gang murders yesterday during lunch, corpses of bloody young men stabbed or shot at close range the night before and yesterday morning in their faces surrounded by pools of their own blood, each one covered with flies and visibly festering in the noon heat. Apparently they are left at the crime scene until everyone has had a good long look, because the police stand around at each scene, ready with words on youth delinquency and the need for people to find God but in no hurry to remove the bodies.

In a paper on gang and state violence in a Tegucigalpa neighborhood, Jon Carter quotes a former gang member who states that police rarely interfere in gang fights, arriving at the murder scenes only to guard the

corpse(s) for the press after the surviving parties have dispersed.⁷ Scenes like the one I described in my notes can be viewed numerous times each day on television, and similarly bloody pictures appear frequently in the print media. Carlos Monsiváis has chronicled the existence of this kind of sensational depiction of mutilated human bodies in Mexico, and José Alaniz has used the term *death porn* to describe it in Russia.⁸ More recently, the linkage of pornography with grotesque photographs of death posted on the Internet by U.S. soldiers in Iraq, revealed in images from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, and shown in pictures taken by German soldiers in Afghanistan has added a new poignancy to Alaniz's term.⁹

While in the early 2000s these images were usually relegated to underground media in the United States, they were mainstream in Honduras. Such images are jarring to many viewers, but their recent incursion into mainstream media in the United States is evidence of their belonging to a continuum of violence in the form of media voyeurism rather than representing a break from more "civilized" media.¹⁰ Charles Baudelaire's observations about newspaper imagery (written in the 1860s) further attest to this continuum: "It is impossible to glance through any newspaper, no matter what the day, the month or the year, without finding on every line the most frightful traces of human perversity, together with the most astonishing boasts of probity, charity, and benevolence and the most brazen statements regarding the progress of civilization. . . . And it is with this loathsome appetizer that civilized man daily washes down his morning repast. . . . I am unable to comprehend how a man of honor could take a newspaper in his hands without a shudder of disgust."¹¹

The rhetoric accompanying death porn is just as important as the images themselves in shaping public consciousness on the issue. Hondurans' chronic fears of violence are both bodily and embodied—that is, violence to the body is that which is most feared and anticipated, and this fear is felt and expressed by Hondurans and others living in Honduras through their bodies. Fear affects all segments of Honduran society; as Green has found in Guatemala, fear is the "metanarrative" for rich and poor.¹² However, there is an awareness among the poor that their lives are thought of as dispensable. In the pervasive idiom of the *maquila*, with its high turnover and low-skill production methods, *replaceable* might be a

more appropriate term. While both poor and rich express similar embodied fears, the media and stratified practices of everyday violence reinforce the sense that only rich bodies count. On July 16, 1997, I wrote in my field notes: "Yesterday Gianni Versace was murdered at his house in Miami Beach. It was on the front page of *La Prensa*. While I was waiting for three hours in the office of CODEH, a human rights NGO, [a man] noticed the article. 'Who the hell is this Versace guy? Why on earth should I care that he died?' 'He's probably someone from the jet set,' responded the woman sitting next to him. 'It's more important when one of them dies.'"

In contrast to the "jet set," much of the immediate bodily violence experienced by the poor is portrayed fleetingly and impersonally in the media. Deeply sympathetic stories of individual ranchers and society women and men kidnapped for ransom remain front-page news for months, while violence done to the poor is shown in gory color images of dehumanized bodies, reported on but not individualized or remembered except by relatives and neighbors. As Susan Sontag has noted in the case of war photography, there is an interdiction against showing the naked face of *our* dead, whereas it is natural to do so for *theirs*.¹³

The sense of stratified bodily worth is reinforced at death and in illness, with bourgeois notions of bodily ownership keeping anyone who can afford it out of public hospitals. Mario Catarino Rivas, the largest such hospital in San Pedro, is locally nicknamed "*el matarino*" from the verb *matar*, "to kill." This reflects the well-founded fears of the indigent that a stay in the overcrowded and underfunded hospital could leave them sick, mutilated, or dead.

GANGS

Gangs, called *maras* in Honduran Spanish, held the nation in a panic throughout my years of fieldwork. Evidence of the 18th Street Gang (la Dieciocho), the Vatos Locos, and Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) was visible on every wall, in the sidewalk pavement, in the rapid hand signals of loosely clothed boys and a few girls, and tattooed on the foreheads and arms of hungry-looking children. Smaller regional gangs such as the

Mao Mao in Barrio Cabañas, where I lived in San Pedro, jealously defended their turf against the more renowned youth groups. A 2001 publication of the National Committee on Human Rights (CONADEH) reported that the National Police Force's Gang Prevention Unit estimated total gang membership in Honduras at 31,164.¹⁴ A newspaper article citing the same statistic added, "Even more alarming, these gangs have a total of 70,500 sympathizers, in other words, seventy thousand young people who identify with gangs and could decide to join one of them at any moment."¹⁵ Newspapers and television stations reported daily on gang killings, especially when graphic photos were available.

While gangs were not originally central to my research interests, I realized early on that they had a deep impact on Honduran processes of identification and subjectivation. Throughout my four-month stay in Choloma in 1999, the large municipal plaque welcoming visitors bore a graffiti message from the 18th Street Gang next to the population and elevation statistics. One morning when I stepped outside, I found "18" inscribed in the new pavement at my doorstep. I was warned daily against going to certain parts of town that were known gang strongholds. Over the years, I learned to habitually avoid certain areas and recognize gang signs, from the telltale graffiti tags and sneakers on power lines to hand gestures and coded speech. In learning the visual language of gangs and the appropriate embodied responses to it, I incorporated a part of Honduran habitus into my own.

GANGS AND FAMILY

A dramatic shift in family structure has accompanied the economic changes of recent decades in Honduras. In an agrarian economy—and even for wage laborers on banana plantations whose working conditions improved after the 1954 strikes—the gendered structure of labor allowed for a man to be the primary wage earner of his family. This permitted him to adhere to a particular definition of masculinity, one in which his control of the family was justified and earned economically. In a process similar to that which Bourgois describes as the transformation of *jibaro*

culture among Puerto Ricans in New York,¹⁶ the economic base of the patriarchy in Honduras has been radically transformed. Whereas the workforce was once primarily male, with the introduction of the maquila industry and the growth of the service sector, poor men find themselves with fewer job opportunities than women and scant opportunities to earn enough money to support a family. The inability of young men to fulfill their duties as *men* has important effects on masculinity (just as growth in the female workforce has implications for femininity) and on women's and men's roles in the family.

As women have moved aggressively into paid labor, many men have begun to participate in alternate economies to earn the money and respect that is denied them within the current legal economy. Some of these men join gangs, which offer them networking and economic opportunities, as well as protection against the emasculation resulting from economic dependence on women. Honduran women are increasingly taking on the role of the primary wage earners of the household, yet they are still expected to fulfill "traditional" roles, including child-rearing. In the face of a very changed family, the persistence of a patriarchal ideology relying on the idea of the male head of the household as provider has led many Hondurans to argue that the "breakdown" of the family, rather than the social and economic forces behind this transformation, is responsible for the growth of gangs.

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate some of the prevailing tensions and fears related to these gender shifts in Honduras. Figure 4, a photograph I took of a hand-painted cartoon on a Lima–San Pedro urban (Blue Bird) bus, contains the following dialogue:

ROOSTER: I am a cock!

HEN: But I am the one with the *huevos* [eggs/testicles]!

In this image, the male tries to flaunt his masculinity but is undercut by the fact that the female is capable, unlike him, of (re-)production and therefore, ironically, of true masculinity (*huevos*). In figure 5, drawn by the Honduran cartoonist Banegas, the hen, "Family," guilelessly incubates her eggs, "Gangs." This cartoon, published in *La Prensa* in August 2000, implies that the poor, female-led family, through negligence and



Figure 4. "I am a cock!" Cartoon painted on an urban bus.



Figure 5. Cartoon by Banegas, from "Linea Cómica," in *La Prensa*, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, August 5, 2000.

the lack of a strong patriarch, is to blame for gangs. The constant threat of bodily violence, inseparable from gangs in the popular perception, is hence the fault of the archetypal Honduran poor woman.

LIEUTENANT RODRIGUEZ

In fall 1999 I accompanied my friend Daisy to her psychology class at the National Autonomous University of Honduras. I had helped her design a cover for her term paper, a group project, on my computer, complete with a scanned-in color drawing of a menacing *cholo*. Daisy and her group gave a brief talk on the psychological profiles of gang members to their classmates, mostly well-dressed young women. In their presentation, they did not mention the gendered shift in the labor force or the paucity of gainful employment for young men as causal factors in gang affiliation. Instead, the young university women speculated that young Honduran men joined gangs because of inadequate parenting, low self-esteem, and related personality disorders. Having removed the effects of poverty and other forms of structural violence to the realm of family and disease, they then turned the floor over to their invited guest, one Lieutenant Rodriguez of the Gang Prevention Unit of the National Police Force.

Lieutenant Rodriguez outlined for the class the three main components of his unit's work: prevention, investigation, and rehabilitation. Unfortunately, he told us, there was no budget for rehabilitation, and he and his colleagues did not know how to approach prevention (he acknowledged to the group the need for input from psychologists), so his unit focused mainly on investigating gangs. He added that there were only three ways to get out of a gang: accepting evangelical Christianity, moving far away, and the grave. Given this, he told us, it wasn't really worth wasting money on rehabilitation anyway.

Lieutenant Rodriguez provided a brief history of gangs that emphasized their external roots, despite the existence of many small neighborhood and local gangs. Honduran gangs, according to the official police narrative, all originate elsewhere—especially in that bastion of delinquency, Los Angeles. During the 1980s, a number of Honduran gang

members were deported from the United States, many having spent most of their lives there, he told us. Some returned to form branches of their gangs in poor Tegucigalpa neighborhoods like la Kennedy. Gang members and aspiring gang members, he mentioned, also drew inspiration from the movie known in Spanish as *Sangre por Sangre*, imitating the speech and antics of its Chicano characters. "The truth," he told the class, "is that we Hondurans have a grave defect because we only know how to copy others."

THE HOLLYWOOD LOCOS

In late June 2000 I was living at the home of Doña Elodia in Barrio Cabañas, San Pedro Sula. The second largest city in the country with around five hundred thousand inhabitants, San Pedro Sula bills itself as "the industrial capital of Honduras." Like Colonia López Arellano in nearby Choloma, Barrio Cabañas is a poor neighborhood famous throughout the country for its gang violence. That year I was accompanied by Juli, who was filming our experiences (see figure 6). Having been exposed to so much talk and physical evidence of gangs and danger, we decided to arrange and film an interview with some gang members.

As it turned out, getting an introduction was easier than I had anticipated. Doña Elodia's thirty-something grandson Rafael had spent nine years in the United States, two in New York as a cabbie, before being deported for lack of papers. He spoke New York cabbie English with us. "Rafa" was working in that profession again with the help of a loaned taxi. He had been driving Juli and me around as a favor in return for my helping to get his brother Oswaldo asylum in the United States and for what I guessed was proper taxi fare (he never would tell me how much to pay him). Rafa arrived that morning at 8:00 o'clock sharp. In the cab on the way to get *baleadas* (a delicious Honduran food made with flour tortilla, beans, and cream), I asked him if he could take us somewhere where we could interview *mareros* (gang members). "Oh, sure, man—I can take you to the Colonia Rivera Hernandez. I know all the *mara* guys there. When you want to go? Now?"



Figure 6. Juli Kang filming Doña Elodia.

After our breakfast, we headed out on the highway toward La Lima and the airport for a few kilometers and turned into a road marked by a Blue Bird graveyard. We drove past two *quintas* (country clubs) that looked colonial and luxurious from our side of the gates. On the other side of the railroad tracks from the *quintas*, we drove down narrow dirt streets filled with haphazard dwellings and stores. Rafael narrated: "This part is the territory of the Mara Salvatrucha, up to here. This street is where the Vatos Locos begin. Over there is the Dieciocho."

"Oh, you mean this street is the boundary between Salvatruchas and Vatos Locos?" I asked.

“Yes, but last year they—how do you say it—*se unieron* [they joined forces] to fight the Dieciocho, so now they don’t kill each other anymore.” All three of these gangs, which have international ties, have roots in Los Angeles—as Lieutenant Rodriguez had been anxious to point out—although each was formed under very different circumstances.¹⁷

We pulled up alongside a house on a corner. Rafa made strange hand motions to a skinny young man with intense eyes and long fingernails that looked like claws. I wondered aloud to Juli if there were more to Rafa’s gang connections than he had indicated to us. Then Rafael announced that we were looking for “El Chinito.” A few more houses down, we stopped the car. Rafael pointed ahead. “That is my father’s house.” I now understood his gang connection; whether he was a member or not, it was clear that Rafael’s kinship and geographic ties to the neighborhood provided him with the cultural capital (the embodied dispositions, cultural goods, and institutional markers such as educational level that confer distinction to members of a social class)¹⁸ necessary to get us an audience. His *ability* to demonstrate his belonging—that is, his symbolic capital—reinforced this. Rafael made some more hand signals, and two young men standing under a tree, one of whom appeared to be El Chinito, responded in kind. They looked to be under fifteen years of age.

Chinito and his friend asked if we were with the police. I said no, that we thought gangs were unfairly maligned and that the police were violent and dangerous. Rafael vouched for us, so they agreed to be filmed. Within seconds, we were interrupted by an angry neighbor shouting somewhat incoherently at the camera: “The only one who died for us is Jesus! These boys are bad! They just come around and bother me! I have epilepsy!” As she went on yelling, I saw two of the boys making *loca* motions, circling their fingers around their ears. I rolled my eyes furtively in solidarity with them. With their confidence in us apparently increased, the group soon grew to six or seven boys, members of the local Vatos Locos. The neighbor returned to her house.

Our interview was chaotic. The boys competed with one another for the camera’s attention. They were very animated, telling us tales of police brutality, showing off their *manchas* (stains—slang for tattoos), and performing rapid contortions with their hands in a language I could not

follow. They were angry, they told us, about the favoritism that police accorded to rival gangs. Ten of their friends had been killed in the previous year by members of *Dieciocho* and the police. They arrived at this number through a process of naming each of their dead friends in a hectic chorus filled with scattered details (“*El Aguila*—they killed him over by the hardware store,” etc.), while one of the boys kept a tally.

When I asked the boys about *Dieciocho*, they told me, “*Sí*, *Dieyoyo* is over there. They’re bad—they have the police on their side. When they get caught the police treat them like kings—they’re out drinking sodas while we’re getting kicked in the head like this—”

“Or bashed on the foot like this—”

“Or they grab us by the elbows and twist, like this.”

A bit confused by their pronunciation, I asked, “So . . . *Dieciocho* is over there then . . . ?”

“Yeah,” one boy responded, “*Dieyoyo* is over there.”

“How old were you when you joined up?” I asked one boy named *Perezoso* (Lazy).

“*Yoyo*.”

“Huh?”

“*Yoyo*,” he repeated. I was baffled.

“*Ocho* [eight],” *Rafael* told me.

“We can’t pronounce numbers,” *Chinito* explained, as if this should have been obvious to me. Signs of peril are everywhere in a world where the ordinary is dangerous, and numbers are so symbolically charged (18, MS-13, etc.) that they had become too risky for these boys to pronounce. While such apparent idiosyncrasies bear the mark of superstition, they are grounded in real and present dangers. As I discuss in chapter 2, speech acts in Honduras can indeed be lethal.

In addition to their unique pronunciations, gang members often use words in everyday speech that most Hondurans do not recognize. *Daisy*’s class had giggled at the odd-sounding expressions that Lieutenant *Rodriguez* gave as examples of gang talk: *yerba/monte/mota* (marijuana), *me late que* (I think/I feel like/I bet), *ruco/ruca* (meaning old man/old woman but also used similarly to the English expressions “my old man” and “my old lady” to describe people of any age). I was surprised that these terms

seemed so rebellious, since, having lived in Mexico City where they are commonplace, they were quite familiar to me.

Words, of course, are not inherently dangerous. It is the power of secret knowledge that gives these terms their edge in Honduras. Although many of the terms used in Honduran gang speech approximate Mexican and U.S.-border Spanish, their use is anything but derivative. Gang members in different parts of the country have taken this vocabulary and combined it with their own mix of colloquialisms and neologisms, the result being a language that is truly their own. When embodied as *habitus* and deployed as symbolic capital, these elements of language—central to gang members' self-identification—also become central to their subjectivation.

One clear linguistic example demonstrates the ongoing influence of American imperialism in Hondurans' construction of subjectivity through language. In her interviews with Honduran gangs, Asma Jahangir found that the most respected gang member—the *capo*, in effect—earns the coveted title "Mister."¹⁹ This use of "Mister" is tied to the history of the U.S.-controlled banana industry in Honduras, when workers were made to call their North American and Honduran superiors by the same title. This practice is bitterly recounted in *Prisión verde*,²⁰ a Honduran novel about U.S. corporate domination of Honduras and plantation labor. Today workers are made to use the term "Mister" in *maquiladora* factories to address their managers and sometimes even line supervisors, regardless of the language their superiors speak. Thus, "Mister," usually used in English as a polite, formal term of address, has come to signify colonialist power in Honduras and is invoked by industrial bosses and gangs alike.

After our seated interview the youths pranced around in front of the camera pointing out their favorite graffiti tags. "Look! Over here! This is us—the Hollywood Locos!" Juli and I learned that the Vatos Locos gang in Colonia Rivera Hernandez was divided into various "*clicas*" (cliques), of which the Hollywood Locos was one. "Normandie" (named for the street in Los Angeles) was a few blocks down. The boys were impressed with the images on my digital camera.

"Look, Perezoso!" one exclaimed on seeing that boy's picture.



Figure 7. Young gang members pose with their tag.

“Hey cool!” Perezoso said. “I look so badass!”

They decided to pose for a group photo with their biggest tag (see figure 7), just as my memory card ran out. I fumbled around trying to replace it. “Hurry up!” they shouted, teasing me while I made them wait. “It’s hot up here!”

The Hollywood Locos navigated an ambiguous space between childhood and adulthood. According to Western legalistic understandings of those two categories, economic and criminal responsibility pertain to adults, not children. However, most children and teenagers in Honduras are economically active from a relatively young age, and some are involved in crimes. In times of heightened fear, dichotomous age-bound understandings of maturity break down with the need for a scapegoat, and children are often portrayed as adults.

Diego Vigil has written about how street gangs in Southern California have “arisen as a competitor to other institutions, such as family and schools, to guide and direct self-identification” for adolescents.²¹ In Honduras, the fears that the Hollywood Locos and other gangs provoked in the larger population obscured the fact that in many ways they remained children. Although their self-identification was indeed deeply influenced by their group, they shared with nongang kids a childish excitement at being filmed. Their performance for the camera and the gleeful pride they took in their tattoo and graffiti artwork and handcrafted *chimbabas* (rifles) reminded me of a school play or science fair. They spoke of the same concerns that other poor Hondurans (young and old) had—fear of being killed by gang members or by the police, fear of not being able to support themselves and their parents through a decent job. Some told me they were Catholic, some were Evangelical, some went to church and others didn’t. Simply put, in most ways they were not all that different from other Honduran youths.

Back in Daisy’s UNAH classroom, Lieutenant Rodriguez had given us a primer on how to recognize *mareros* (gang members). Among the signs were hip-hop jeans, loose sport tops, sneakers (“this means they are sympathizers”), baseball caps worn at high angles, *playera* music (a Caribbean beach-reggae style), rap, and reggae played fast and a little distorted. Today the immensely popular *reggaeton* genre would certainly be part of Lieutenant Rodriguez’s list. *Roqueros* (rockers), to whom Lieutenant Rodriguez referred as another type of *mareros*, could be recognized by their dress, “completely in black, as if they were always in mourning,” or by “Crips and Killers” insignia, cowboy boots, and a predilection for Aerosmith, Metallica, Marilyn Manson, and other “rock that incites Satanic worship.”

Lieutenant Rodriguez added that gang members had extravagant haircuts, like flat tops or a close-cropped cut with a shaved swoosh (symbolizing power). The typology he presented to the class represented his understanding of the cultural capital of gangs. However, his list was dangerous because it identified these characteristics as gang traits, despite the fact that many of the articles of clothing and styles of music and self-presentation he mentioned were widely popular in Honduras at the time.

As such, it encouraged the notion that there were many more gang members than actually existed, and imbued these items with a symbolic danger in the same way that for the Hollywood Locos members I met, otherwise harmless words were rendered too dangerous to pronounce.

The Hollywood Locos, who looked and acted like boys but saw themselves and were feared as men, drew on a wide range of products and symbols already existing within their social field to create a sphere within which they commanded respect.²² Their distinction lay not only in the material realm of clothes, music, and *chimbos*—aspects of their cultural capital—but also in their habitus and use of symbolic capital. They adhered to and embodied social customs that distinguished them from other Hondurans and gave them the power that secret knowledge and symbolism together with shared taste can provide. They combined loose clothing and tattoos with gestures and speech in the formation of group identities that were recognized from the outside as frightening, that is, worthy of respect. However, that which made them strong also made them vulnerable.

Honduran gang members live what might be called a hyperembodied existence. Marking themselves with their tattoos, gestures, and language does not make them “alternative” as it does in much of the United States today. It makes them downright dangerous. Those who identify themselves in this manner are rewarded with a tight network of allies and friends. However, in literally embodying their group identity, they place themselves at great risk to become victims of police, military, or other gang brutality. Just as other Hondurans do, gang members speak constantly of the danger they are in.

Gang solidarity, even if it sometimes entails violent practices, is a form of resistance against a social structure that fails to offer employment opportunities, education, or public and social services to young men. Until recently, gangs were among the few spheres in which poor young Honduran males had an opportunity to construct a defiant, positive self-image. However, it is important not to romanticize this resistance. Gangs in Honduras have no revolutionary agenda when it comes to the structural violence from which they—and all poor Hondurans—suffer. Because all of the Hollywood Locos boys I met have been killed since our first interview, I have not followed the customary practice of using pseudonyms here.

'BLOOD IN, BLOOD OUT': TELENOVELAS AND
HONDURAN SUBJECTIVITY

The Hollywood Locos repeated an origin narrative that I had already heard from many Hondurans, including other gang members, Rebeca and her family, and Lieutenant Rodriguez. They claimed that the movie *Sangre por Sangre*, more than anything else, was the watershed event in the formation of gangs in Honduras. This movie, they told me, inspired young people (including themselves) to form their own gangs imitating the Chicano gang lifestyle depicted in it.

The original, English-language title of movie, which was released in 1993 and screened in Honduras in 1998, is *Blood In, Blood Out: Bound by Honor*. It is an epic story of three cousins and blood brothers (played by Damian Chapa, Jesse Borrego, and a then-unknown Benjamin Bratt) in the *then-fictional* Vatos Locos street gang from East L.A. in the 1970s and '80s. The movie probes the violent identity quests of a brown man trapped in a white man's body, a former gang member turned cop who firmly believes in the American dream, and a victim of gang violence who turns to morphine to ease his pain and kills his little brother by mistake. All these young, handsome men share with all other Chicanos (it is implied) passion, *familia*, and honor.

While writing this chapter, I was surprised to find that *Blood In, Blood Out* is a cult classic in the United States as well as in Honduras. When I asked if he had heard of the movie, a young friend of mine who had attended high school in San Jose in the mid-1990s told me that he and his friends watched *Blood In, Blood Out* (along with *Scarface*) "every fuckin' day, man" and knew most of the lines by heart. Long after its release, the movie was popular all over California among people his age, especially Latinos. With the recognizably overacted drama of a Mexican soap opera (think: *The Rich Also Cry*), it is not surprising that *Blood In, Blood Out* became such an international hit among Latinos, although it hardly made a ripple among non-Latinos in the United States where it was made.

Telenovelas, as Latin American soaps are called, are different, and culturally much more important, than soap operas in the United States. They are headlined by big stars, often watched by the whole family, and

enjoy prime-time slots. In recent years, egged on by their racier Brazilian counterparts, Spanish-language soaps have ventured into such risqué topics as prostitution, teen drug use, and even government corruption. Unlike U.S. soaps, *telenovelas* are made as a series, with a beginning and an end. We follow the main character or characters through their fight to break taboos for themselves while validating the social structure that has kept them in place. One of the most popular plot lines is the story of the poor but virtuous servant girl who marries the master to become the lady of the house. Not-so-subtle cues tell the audience where she really belongs. First, she is white, a clear indication of her bourgeois destiny. Second, through her complete embodiment of feminine bourgeois values and mores (e.g., chastity and humility), she shows herself worthy of becoming (and in TV-land destined to become) wealthy.

Similarly, central male characters learn that immorality and greed do not pay off in the end and that virtue (especially that of their female kinfolk) must be protected and honor preserved at all costs. Much of the attraction of *telenovelas* lies in their predictability. Though the plot may contain twists and turns, unexpected pitfalls and challenges, *telenovelas* rely on recognizable gender and class tropes that leave no doubt as to the outcome. Throughout years of watching these dramas with Rebeca and her daughters, I was always amazed at the accuracy of their plot predictions.

Telenovelas, like *Blood In, Blood Out*, address the humiliations of poverty, offering the viewer the possibility of revenge and restored dignity. Hondurans know that, in contrast to their own lived experiences, for their favorite characters, virtue and hard work will pay off by the end of a five- or ten-month series. The poor girl will marry the rich man. Her evil wealthy rival will see her world crumble. The young hardworking man will attain more power and wealth than he started out with, and will get the girl. His evil wealthy rival will see his world crumble. Poor Hondurans I knew recognized and often subscribed to the notion that virtue and hard work lead to wealth and happiness, despite the contradictory empirical evidence from their own lives, just as people in the United States have so long subscribed to the achievement ideology in all its variations.

What do *telenovelas*, which are shown all over the world, have to do with *Honduran* violence and subjectivity? Soap operas, like fairy tales

and fables, serve as moral instruction wherever they are seen or heard, but the experience of watching them is situated in and interacts with Honduran subjectivities in unique ways. *Telenovela* subjects are never Honduran. They may be Mexican, Venezuelan, Brazilian, or Colombian, although in Honduras it is Mexican television programming that dominates. Mexican *telenovelas* viewed in Honduras take on a different character from the same shows seen in Mexico. They often take place in neighborhoods and regions that are familiar to Mexicans, and to most Mexican viewers the principal Other of the *telenovelas* differs from them in class and race (protagonists are almost exclusively wealthy or destined to become so, and white). In Honduras, however, nationality further separates viewers from characters.

In 1998 the news reached Honduras that an organization called Transparency International had ranked it as the third most corrupt country in the world. This statistic was frequently (and bitterly) cited to me by my subjects, who wrongly attributed it to myriad sources, including the United Nations and the World Bank. The implied inferiority of Hondurans—and their awareness of it—emerged in many forms. In my first months of field research in Honduras, I was often mocked for my “Mexican” accent and use of Mexican slang (the same slang I later learned was gang-speak there). I was repeatedly obligated to declare a preference for Honduras over Mexico in food, customs, people, and soccer, as if somehow the sanction of a *gringa* would smooth over the power imbalance between the two countries. Hondurans, like other viewers, identify with the main subject of a *telenovela* but also learn through this fantasy just how different they are. Much of this difference is attributed to nationality rather than class and becomes incorporated in Honduran embodied understandings of self and notions of inferiority.

In three hours of overacted drama, *Blood In, Blood Out* attempts to answer the question posed explicitly throughout the film: “What does it mean to be Chicano?” This question resonates with many poor Hondurans, experienced as they are in identifying with the Mexican subject position. Another reason for *Blood In, Blood Out*’s popularity is the fact that so many poor Hondurans have lived or are living in Los Angeles, where they experience the same racism, violence, and daily humiliations

from which the film's Mexican American protagonists suffer. The three main characters are flawed, but their flaws stem from dedication to honor and family. And this, depicted with the clear-cut morality and aesthetic of a *telenovela*, can only mean that these characters are noble and worth emulating.

The resistance and solidarity I saw among Vatos Locos members in Honduras was modeled, they told me, on the attitudes depicted in *Blood In, Blood Out*, as was their speech (not to mention the gang itself). I thought this ironic, since the chorus of "Chale, ese's" in *Blood In, Blood Out* and overrehearsed street-tough talk seemed to me more Hollywood than Border Spanish. In effect, Honduran gang members in the mid- to late 1990s and early 2000s were consciously imitating a poor imitation of imaginary L.A. gang members from the 1970s. Hollywood Locos, indeed.

'CARRO ASESINO'

The day after we first met the Hollywood Locos, I went with Juli to visit Doña Rebeca at her mother's home in La Lima. On my previous visit in January 1999, the streets had been reduced to wet mud, liquid for at least half a meter below the surface. I had had to cling to residents' cement fences to walk at all. On this day the streets were dry. We arrived at Rebeca's house and went inside, where I found her brother and his two-year-old son watching European soccer play-offs on television. Seconds later, I heard a shout from eighteen-year-old Sabrina, the second of Rebeca's three daughters. "Adriaaanaaaa???" I turned to see her running through the door, tears in her eyes. I told her she looked great. "But look!" she said, twisting her skinny leg for me to see with what I recorded in my field notes as "RuPaulesque flair." There was a bottle cap-sized black indentation on the side of her upper thigh.

"I can't be a model anymore!" she exclaimed.

"What did you do to yourself?" I asked.

"Hah! What did they do to me!"

Sabrina told me that in February she had been walking with her boyfriend, Adán, and little brother, Omarito, outside of her aunt Bianca's

house (where I had lived in 1997) when a car pulled up, opened the window, and fired sixteen rounds at them. Adán was shot through the upper left arm trying to protect Sabrina. Omarito was unharmed. She showed me the smaller entry wound on the back of her thigh. Sabrina said she didn't even realize she had been shot until she got home and felt the holes in her jeans. She related the rest of the story to me in comic fashion, making light of everything from her mother's panic at the impossibility of finding a Red Cross ambulance for them to losing track of her other family members on arriving at Hospital Mario Catarino Rivas ("*el matarino*"). The climax of her narrative was that she was attended by *tres doctores guapos* (three gorgeous doctors) at the hospital. "*¡Pero guapísimos! . . . One had his hand on my foot, another on my knee, and one was working on my thigh, like this!*" I commented on her good fortune.

Sabrina related her immediate reaction to the shooting in our conversation, which Juli videotaped:

A: So what happened to you, then?

s: Ah, what happened with my bullet wound?

A: With your bullet wound.

s: Yeah, there it is. I present to you my . . . [points to wound with dramatic flair] It was a .38. They say it was a .38, but others say it was a .22, but since I don't know anything about bullets . . .

A: You didn't find the bullet afterwards?

s: No.

A: You went running, more like it.

s: No, I just stayed there, stupefied, because, who would react? Who on earth would know that they were going to be shot at? Nobody.

Sabrina, Adán, and Omarito had been attacked by a *carro asesino*, or death car. These cars roam the streets of urban Honduras, shooting at young people. Kids wearing loose, hip-hop, gang-identified clothing are said to be at greater risk of being shot, but any young people can be targeted. Sabrina, Adán, and Omarito all dressed conservatively both in general and on the day of the shooting, and none of them had direct gang ties. The marksman of this particular *carro* was either a beginner or inept; the *carro asesino* shoots to kill and rarely fails. Sabrina and the others never found out who shot them.

It is the normalcy of such violence that is perhaps the most shocking. In my field notes, I wrote about another death car incident reported by a local San Pedro TV news program on July 17, 2002:

Next, we were treated to a story of the murder of two young girls (the viewer got to watch the bloody body bags going into a van for a good minute). As the announcer reported, and as Don Jacinto explained to me in greater detail, they were killed by the "red car," a.k.a. "*el carro asesino*," a sort of ethnic (read: social class) cleanser that roams the streets shooting gang members, anyone who dresses like gang members, and anyone else it pleases. As Don Jacinto put it, "It is a phantom that drives in the streets killing gang members, and if it sees women or children, it bathes them as well. It bathes them, that is to say, it fills them with bullets." . . .

A little bit later [ten-year old] Miguelito came in and sat down. "You know that girl who they showed on TV who was killed last night?" he said. His tone would have been no different had he been telling me about the results of a soccer match or the weather. "She was from right down the street. That happened here." "Right here?" I asked him. "Did you know her?" "Yeah, I knew her. She was ten years old. The other was three. They killed them both." "Who killed them?" I asked. "Some guys. People are always killing around here. Because of the gangs." He then saw my camera and, giggling, posed for a picture with our smaller neighbor.

From a very young age, Honduran children learn not only to expect violent death but also how to explain it. To Miguel, his friend's murder was the fault of gangs and was not in any way an extraordinary event.

COLD WAR DEATH SQUADS

The phenomenon of the *carro asesino*, while more visible in recent years, is but the latest incarnation of the social control tactics of the Honduran government with roots in the politics of the 1980s. The history of the death car is tied to important colonial forces that continue to shape Honduran subjectivities.

In 1981, when Ronald Reagan took office as president of the United States, the socialist Sandinista government was already in place in Nicaragua and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional

(FMLN) was fighting against the U.S.-supported military regime in El Salvador. By late 1980 the United States had already begun to secretly fund the training of Honduran anti-Communist forces in Texas and Honduras by CIA and Argentinean counterinsurgency experts—Argentina's own "dirty war" had left dead or *desaparecidos* (disappeared) tens of thousands of its citizens: 13,000 documented but probably a total of about 30,000.²³

While much of the U.S. money spent in Honduras was geared toward aiding the Contras and the Salvadoran government forces, some of Honduras's military funding and personnel ended up in Battalion 316, an elite death squad within the Honduran military in charge of preventing and suppressing domestic insurgency. Battalion 316 was created by General Gustavo Álvarez Martínez, a "hard-line, anticommunist crusader"²⁴ who had trained at Argentina's military academy as well as at the Office of Public Safety in Washington, D.C., and the infamous School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia.²⁵ In 1981 Álvarez was the head of FUSEP, the military's Public Security Force. That year, according to the *Baltimore Sun*, Álvarez told then-U.S. ambassador Jack Binns of his admiration for the Argentinean method of "taking care of" subversives.²⁶ When Binns expressed his concerns about Alvarez to the secretary of state, he was summoned to Washington and told not to report human rights abuses. In late 1981 Binns was replaced by the more cooperative John D. Negroponte. General Álvarez was appointed chief of the Honduran military forces when Roberto Suazo Córdova became president of Honduras a month later. Under Negroponte, U.S. cooperation with Álvarez increased. In 1981 U.S. military aid to Honduras, a small country with a population of 4.2 million that was not at war, was \$8.9 million. By 1984 U.S. military aid leveled off at \$77.4 million, earning the country the dubious nickname "USS Honduras."²⁷

Battalion 316 had the explicit sanction of the U.S. government, which included courses for several of its officers at the School of the Americas. In return, it used public terror tactics to control the domestic population while the Honduran military provided personnel and training for a U.S.-funded war against neighboring Nicaragua. Suspected subversives—including students, journalists, and union activists—were captured by

disguised Battalion 316 agents in unmarked vehicles, often in broad daylight. They were taken to secret jails, interrogated, tortured, and sometimes visited by CIA agents. The majority of the disappeared, at least 180 people, were never seen again. During Negroponte's tenure in office, the activities of Battalion 316 were covered by Honduran mainstream newspapers. Relatives of the missing bought full-page ads asking General Álvarez (who in April 1982 had become commander in chief of the Honduran armed forces) to release their family members.

The highly publicized disappearances, though far fewer in number than in Argentina and El Salvador, by and large had the effect Álvarez intended. The Honduran left, which had won small victories in achieving land reforms and other gains in the 1970s, was shattered during the 1980s. The mechanics of fear and surveillance were successful in controlling domestic insurgency, or, in Cold War terminology, in preventing the communist menace from spreading.

In at least two instances, the torture of prominent figures (the journalist Oscar Reyes and his wife and Inez Murillo, the leftist daughter of a military official) provoked Negroponte to step in and privately express his concern to Álvarez. However, in 1982, despite his knowledge of torture and executions by the Honduran military under the supervision of the CIA, Negroponte ordered a junior political officer in the embassy to delete information about Honduran military abuses from the annual Human Rights Report for Congress required under the Foreign Assistance Act.²⁸ In 1983 the Reagan administration awarded Álvarez the Legion of Merit medal for "encouraging the success of democratic processes in Honduras."

Hondurans were well aware of the violent U.S. involvement in their country; not only was it reported daily in the media, but it was visible on the streets in the form of U.S. soldiers and weapons. Whether or not they agreed that Álvarez's Battalion 316 was necessary to control the spread of communism, Hondurans were aware that the United States dictated their government's overall security policy. In sanctioning and honoring Álvarez, Negroponte and the Reagan administration sent a clear message that abduction and torture of Hondurans were acceptable means of achieving regional security.

In 1981, Rebeca was in high school in San Pedro Sula. She told me about that time in an interview.

- A: I'd like to know about your political activity, about the repression you said exists here and, well, how you have felt it directly.
- R: Well, I can tell you about my years in school, back in '81. Here in Honduras there was a lot of repression because all the student activities, they believed that it was—that we were—well, they accused us of being leftists, and there were even a lot of disappearances at that time.
- A: From your school?
- R: No, not from the same school but at the national level. Here in Lima we formed a student group. [Before that] I had been invited to participate in a student front called the FUD [University Democratic Front]. People said we were on the right, but in reality we were just a high school student group, nothing more. . . . The FUD at the university was on the right, and the FRU was on the left, but *compañeros* from both the FUD and the FRU joined the student group we formed.
- A: FRU?
- R: FRU. Yes, yes, University Revolutionary Front.
- A: Ah.
- R: So I became friends with [members of the FRU], but what they wanted was for us to belong to a leftist cell. And when they chose us, they invited us [to join] not at the high school level but outside, outside of school, so that we could be in a cell. And they took us to the university to have clandestine sessions. . . . But I had some classmates there who . . . were on the right, and they told me to get out. But at that time I was, I was practically still a little girl. I liked to learn new things and I got involved, I went to the university [for training]. But I finally began to be afraid when they told me I would belong to the armed branch.
- A: The armed branch?
- R: The armed branch of the FRU, an armed branch, a cell. And they told me that I had to go to the mountains because they were going to train me. When they told me this, I already had my baby, Vanesa Elisabeth, and the truth is I was afraid to die. Because at that time there was a sergeant, Sergeant Sosa. That man had lists, blacklists. And he put all the student groups there, he put them on his blacklist and I was there on the blacklist, and the truth is I was afraid because—
- A: And how did you know you were on the list?
- R: From a *compañero*, who is now a *diputado*, a *diputado* for the Nationalist Party. He told me that—I don't know if it was because he was afraid—I

don't know—he told me it was true, that in the DIN [Directorate of National Investigations] I was on the blacklist and to be careful because they could kill me and all my *compañeros* there. . . . I even had literature. At that time if they found leftist literature on you, you became a political prisoner. I had [my books] in my mattress. I ripped the mattress open and put them inside because we had to study a lot. But I left. I really left because I was afraid. Most of all it was fear for my family, not for myself; I didn't want anything to happen to them. Because in those days they'd ransack houses. They'd go in the houses to abduct people, and the truth is I did have a lot to lose.

A: Were there disappearances here in Lima?

R: No, here in Lima, no. In San Pedro there were a lot of disappearances, lots and lots. We even had a teacher named Landaverde, Landaverde was his last name. They killed him, they killed him in his car. They came with ski masks on and killed him and the man who was in the car with him, and they never knew who did it [Landaverde, a union leader, was in the car of Professor Miguel Angel Pavón Salazar, senator and San Pedro Sula chairman of the human rights organization CODEH, when both were killed on January 14, 1988]. And there were a lot of people who appeared in ditches, and there were clandestine cemeteries, and the truth is there was a lot of repression. There's repression now, but it's not—I think that [that kind of repression] is not in style anymore. . . . In those days it was very, very dangerous.

Rebeca had been briefly involved in the small leftist insurgency and perhaps had more reason to fear Battalion 316 than most. Her reaction to the threat, however, was representative. The very public nature of the tortures and disappearances—the unmarked cars, the dismembered bodies in open fields and pits, the testimonies of those who were tortured and released—served to constantly reinforce fear as not only the dominant metaphor but also the embodied state, as Linda Green stresses in describing the lives of Mayan widows in Guatemala.²⁹ As the repression became more public, Rebeca became more private in her resistance, hiding her books and ultimately leaving the movement. The knowledge that a blacklist monitored people's activities and could lead to abduction, torture, and execution served as a panopticon;³⁰ it was enough to make most Hondurans—rich and poor, since army abuses cut across class lines—monitor themselves, thus saving the state the trouble.

By the 1990s, the Honduran military no longer controlled the country. U.S. military aid had dropped from \$77.4 million in 1984 at the height of the Contra war to \$532,000 in 1994.³¹ In a 1993 report of the National Committee for the Protection of Human Rights (CONADEH), "The Facts Speak for Themselves,"³² the Honduran government acknowledged that it was responsible for the violent campaign against its own people during the 1980s. Soon afterwards, spurred on by the CONADEH report and by an investigative series on Battalion 316 in the *Baltimore Sun*, the Honduran government began prosecuting eleven military officers for their responsibility in tortures and executions that had taken place during the previous decade. The judge in charge of the investigation of the case, Roy Medina, began employing bodyguards after men in an unmarked car fired shots at his courthouse while it was in session, shouting for him to come out and be killed. The four-door Mazda sedan with tinted windows was the same kind of vehicle that had been used by Battalion 316 in the 1980s.³³

The tables were appearing to turn for the Honduran military. The Honduran Congress and President Carlos Roberto Reina, who had been elected in 1993 on a human rights platform (with the slogan "moral revolution"), approved a constitutional amendment declaring that the state security agency (DNI) should be abolished and a civilian police force (DIC) created. Reina's government also did away with forced military conscription in response to a spirited multiyear campaign, led by the feminist anti-imperialist group Movimiento de Mujeres Visitación Padilla and their many allies in the fight, including the Honduran Council for Private Industry (COHEP) and the Mennonite Church of Honduras.³⁴

In the first week of August 1995, in the midst of Judge Medina's military trial, Hondurans saw a new ad on the evening news, described in an article in the *Baltimore Sun*: "Images of bloody corpses on city streets. Images of electrical generating plants on fire. And there was a deep voice that explained, 'This is the decade of the '80s.' Filling the screen at the end was the name of the sponsors—the armed forces of Honduras."³⁵

The military was on the defensive in the Congress, the courts of law, and public opinion. However, as the eighth largest business owner in Honduras,³⁶ the military had the resources to fight back. The ad described

by the *Baltimore Sun* reintroduced Cold War rhetoric that blamed the victims for bringing torture on themselves with their communism and terrorism. Perhaps most important, the Honduran military had the tacit complicity of the Clinton White House and the CIA, which refused to hand over evidentiary documents requested under the Freedom of Information Act by Honduran human rights investigators, despite considerable pressure from U.S. House and Senate Democrats. In September 1998, after five years of pressure from the Honduran government and U.S. Democrats, the CIA finally released a 250-page report, "Selected Issues Relating to CIA Activities in Honduras in the 1980s,"³⁷ in which that agency acknowledged greater knowledge of Battalion 316's activities than it had previously admitted. However, little more than this admission was publicly disclosed; most of the content was censored, inked out with a heavy black marker.

Despite the dogged efforts of Honduran Human Rights Commissioner Leo Valladares, Judge Medina, and many others, in 1998, the First Criminal Court in Tegucigalpa ruled in favor of applying amnesty laws to military officers accused of having engaged in torture in the 1980s. There have never been serious repercussions for the human rights violations committed by the CIA and the Honduran military in the 1980s, an issue that was still being widely discussed and reported on in the early years of my fieldwork. In 2000, the Honduran special prosecutor for human rights, Wilfredo Flores, charged publicly that members of the police force routinely protected torturers among their ranks,³⁸ and such accusations continue. Impunity for those responsible for the disappearances, tortures, and executions of people who are considered a threat to society continues to send a clear message about the acceptability of these crimes today.

In early September 2001, U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings were taking place over the issue of whether to approve Negroponte for a new diplomatic post. Responding to Democrats Barbara Boxer and Paul Wellstone, who opposed his nomination because of his Honduran record, Republican spokesman Lester Munson said, "What the other side is engaging in here is trying to refight the wars of Central America of the 1980s—that they lost. The United States was on the side

of the angels in the 1980s, and history since then has borne that out."³⁹ On September 13, 2001, two days after the World Trade Center attacks, John D. Negroponte was quietly confirmed as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. On April 24, 2004, President Bush nominated him to be ambassador to Iraq, an appointment that the Senate overwhelmingly approved. On February 17, 2005, Bush named Negroponte the first director of national intelligence. Nearly two years later, on January 3, 2007, Negroponte announced he was leaving that post to become deputy secretary of state. But for a few lonely voices,⁴⁰ Negroponte's past is now all but forgotten in the terror-focused United States.

Whereas the Honduran military did not suffer grave consequences for its actions in the 1980s, General Álvarez himself fared less well. By 1984 many Honduran officers had begun to worry that Álvarez had gone too far with Battalion 316. In addition, he was accused of misappropriating military funds and being merely a pawn for U.S. interests. On March 31, an internal coup sent Álvarez to Costa Rica. Months later, he went with his wife and children to live in Miami, Florida, where he became a fervent evangelical Christian. In 1988 Álvarez said he had had a dream instructing him to go back to Honduras and preach the gospel. He became a street preacher and turned down offers for protection, claiming, "My Bible is my protection." On January 25, 1989, Álvarez's car was surrounded by five men dressed in blue and wearing hard hats; they fired at the car with machine guns. As he lay dying, Álvarez cried, "Why are they doing this to me?"⁴¹

DEATH SQUADS CONTINUED

In 1995, while the trial of eleven military officers involved with Battalion 316 was under way, COFADEH, a human rights organization made up of families of the disappeared, accused Luis Alonso Discua Elvir of reactivating Battalion 316. Discua, once the leader of Battalion 316, was head of the Honduran armed forces. There was no clear evidence that Battalion 316 itself had been reinstated. However, in the preceding year there had been at least twenty-one "terrorist" attacks on civilian targets and on

then-president Reina using materials like plastic explosives, which were not readily accessible to civilians. These attacks continued throughout Reina's presidency. In Honduras, this was understood as a clear message to leave the military alone.

In January 1996 President Reina appointed Discua to serve as alternate representative to the United Nations. Just weeks before President Bush announced his intention to appoint Negroponte to serve at the same institution in 2001, Discua was expelled from the United States, allegedly for living in Miami and neglecting his diplomatic duties. He has never been prosecuted for his central role in Battalion 316, which he has admitted to the Honduran press.

In January 1998, just before the end of Reina's term as president, the Committee for the Protection of Human Rights (CODEH) reported that death squad activity had once again been revived.⁴² Killings of civilians by the military and the police were much more common than in the 1980s, the group claimed, citing the 701 people who had been killed since 1990, many of whose bodies were found dumped in fields, mutilated or bearing marks of torture. The military, CODEH alleged, was taking advantage of a death squad structure still intact from the 1980s to carry out a social cleansing in which the main target was no longer alleged leftists but alleged delinquents.

According to Casa Alianza/Covenant House, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to the rehabilitation and defense of street children, 556 children and youths under age twenty-three were murdered, 47 by death car, in 2002 alone. From year to year, between 83 percent and 94 percent of the children murdered have been male. In 2002 Honduras was a country of approximately 6.7 million inhabitants, about 60 percent of whom were under twenty-three.⁴³ The total of 1998–2002 child killings recorded by Casa Alianza in 2003 was 1,568.⁴⁴ Tom Hayden points out in the introduction to *Street Wars* that the number of Honduran youths killed between 2000 and 2005, adjusted for population, would be equivalent to 40,000 U.S. youngsters.⁴⁵

It is not coincidental that the targets of these crimes, a large percentage of which are committed by members of the military and police force, are the same people already suffering the most from economic violence. The

same factors that threaten the masculinity of young men—lack of employment, lack of class mobility, and changes in family structure—also threaten their lives. Through a process of symbolic violence, Hondurans—most of them young and poor—have come to equate young, poor men with “delinquents.” Simply put, there is an “excess” of poor young men in Honduras, and this has become understood as a threat that is now being systematically removed. This so-called street cleansing is carried out by men who originate from that same social class, whether they are gang members using military bullets,⁴⁶ soldiers, private security guards, or policemen.

In 2002 the organized child killings clearing the streets of excess life and bringing “security” to a nation on a bumpy road to completing the demographic transition finally began to receive international media attention. As a result, they also received national media attention, along with what appeared to be promising steps toward ending military and police impunity. This was largely the result of a U.N. report by Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir, “Civil and Political Rights, including the Question of Disappearances and Summary Executions.”⁴⁷

From August 5 to August 15, 2001, Jahangir met with public officials, nonprofit organizations, gang members, and many other Hondurans who spoke to her about extrajudicial killings. Her report not only details the extent of killings between 1998 and 2001 but also provides penetrating insights into the processes of symbolic violence behind them. Jahangir notes (in the third person) that the authorities she encountered did not even consider the killings a problem in and of themselves:

There was apparent confusion among government officials in comprehending the specificities of the Special Rapporteur’s mandate. At the Ministry of Public Security and the Attorney General’s Office the Special Rapporteur was given figures for crimes, rather than extrajudicial killings. She was briefed about the socio-economic background of the minors killed by the security forces or other persons. However, there was no emphasis on the profile of the perpetrators and no clear information regarding the status of trials or investigations. Thus, the killing of juveniles was regarded and presented as primarily a question of poverty and juvenile delinquency. The entire emphasis was on the prevention of juvenile delinquency, with little thought given to finding means of preventing extrajudicial killings.⁴⁸

The framework espoused by Jahangir's government informants accords with a tendency to blame the victims of extreme structural violence, as happened to the Choloman cyclist I saw get killed by a power line. Perpetrators are literally and ideologically invisible, hiding behind the tinted glass of unmarked cars and the knowledge that, in the logic of Honduran justice, violent death itself is proof of guilt. Those who carry out such acts of violence, thus allied with the prevailing ideology, have been extended impunity. Jahangir expresses dismay over the fact that rather than address the issue of extrajudicial killings of children, key government officials focused on disputing the specific numbers of victims and told her repeatedly that Honduras was not the only country where such killings occurred. She blames the media for its role in sensationalizing gang violence. "These journalists," she writes, "further fuel the hate speech practised by some high-ranking politicians and business leaders who deliberately incite public sentiment against street children. In this way violence against and even the killing of these children is trivialized and encouraged. In the end, every child with a tattoo and street child is stigmatized as a criminal who is creating an unfriendly climate for investment and tourism in the country."⁴⁹

In agreement with the independent journalists she interviewed, Jahangir holds the mainstream media directly responsible for what she correctly terms the "criminalization of poverty": "The myths surrounding the lives of the *maras* are presented in such a way as to constitute a virtual licence to the security forces and other vested interests to kill street children. These are children who are already victims of a political, economic and social system which is robbing them of their childhood and youth. The poverty and injustice that surrounds them is the result of a harsh and irresponsible political system they are being forced to inherit."⁵⁰

As reporting increasingly focuses on violent crime and encourages media consumers to blame the poor, those reporters who resist this trend face censorship and violence. In a case reminiscent of the Reyes abduction of 1982, Jorge Pineda was nearly killed by masked gunmen outside his San Pedro home in 2000. A reporter for Radio Progreso, the radio station of the progressive Jesuit community in Progreso, Yoro, Pineda had been working on stories critical of local government officials. The television

station director and human rights advocate Germán Antonio Rivas (brother of the sociologist Rocío Táborá, then deputy minister in the office of the president) was killed in November 2003, following his exposés of cyanide pollution by a mining company and illegal coffee and cattle smuggling across the Guatemalan border.⁵¹ Although the *desacato*, or contempt, law that prescribed imprisonment for anyone who insulted a public authority or official was repealed in 2003 through the advocacy of then-Attorney General Roy Medina,⁵² attacks on journalists covering violence carried out by state actors continue.⁵³

In 2001 Jahangir wrote on the sources of impunity for murderers:

In the beginning of the mission, the Minister for Public Security briefed the Special Rapporteur about the root causes of extrajudicial killings on the presumption that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur included all forms of killings. The Minister was very critical of parents of street children whom he described as “irresponsible,” and blamed them for neglecting their own children. He said that the manner in which children led their lives exposed them to killings, which he felt had no bearing on the State. He had received no reports of police involvement in the killing of any child. The children, according to him, were killed in encounters because “they (the children) are out of their minds.” He recounted an incident where a child had raped his mother and sister as an example of children who were “mentally abnormal” and cautioned the Special Rapporteur in making comparisons in the behavior of children in the “first and the third world.” Children of the third world, according to his analysis, matured sooner and therefore deserved the same treatment as adults who broke the law. He also said that the police were not responsible for dealing with social problems, which were mainly the concern of IHNFA [Honduran Institute for Children and Families]. However, in his view, IHNFA lacked the resources and skills to deal with the problem of street children effectively.⁵⁴

In his discourse the minister created a monster of unbelievable evil and generalized it to all poor third-world children. A class of mother rapers certainly is beyond pity, even if the mothers (i.e., family) are ultimately responsible. Despite the fact that his allegations were an utter fabrication, the minister very confidently and without irony used them as the basis for an argument against the humane treatment of Honduran children.

This sort of Social Darwinist discourse in which the poor occupy a lower evolutionary rung is commonplace in Honduras, but it is all the more dangerous when espoused by someone in such a powerful position.

In her concluding remarks, Jahangir also had strong words for the Honduran government:

The action taken so far by the Government has not delivered a clear message to the police that they will be brought to justice for abuse of authority or for human rights violations. Neither have powerful groups suspected of having been involved in such crimes been apprehended or given a signal by the authorities that they cannot resort to murder under the pretext of trying to create a climate for economic revival. The Special Rapporteur wishes to remind the Government that it is ultimately the human rights record, stability and rule of law of the country that will inspire confidence among donors and investors, not high-handedness and violence by the powerful against the more vulnerable members of society.⁵⁵

In his blog dealing with human rights and politics in Honduras, Wilfredo Flores (no relation to the human rights lawyer of the same name) put it even more succinctly: "Hondurans should not allow for a policy of repression on the part of the state, which, painted as good will, is leaving us without youth."⁵⁶ The systematic killing of a specific group of Hondurans (poor young men), when masked as meaningless street violence, constitutes an ongoing genocide. I follow Nancy Scheper-Hughes in using the term to describe an "invisible genocide," which although not recognized as such by much of the international community is nonetheless very real for its victims and their loved ones.⁵⁷ This genocide received a tactical and ideological boost during the administration of President Ricardo Maduro.

MADURO'S 'ZERO TOLERANCE'

On January 27, 2002, Ricardo Maduro was sworn in as president of Honduras. His son, Ricardo Jr., had been killed in a botched kidnapping in 1997. Maduro had campaigned on a platform of zero tolerance on crime. In doing so, he borrowed both rhetoric and methods from Rudolph Giuliani,

who has served as a consultant for Maduro as well as for metropolitan police forces throughout the Americas. As a security consultant, Giuliani has consistently recommended applying the same strong-arm approach to law enforcement that he employed as mayor of New York City in very different cultural and political contexts.⁵⁸ Maduro outlined *his* zero tolerance plan in his inauguration speech at Copan: "The mandate of the people has been abundantly clear: I have been elected to fight first and foremost against insecurity. To fight against murder, against kidnapping and robbery. To fight a frontal battle without rest to bring down the delinquent who today feels safe. You can be sure that we will achieve it. Together, we will achieve it! Together we will build a secure future for all Hondurans. Nothing and nobody will distract me from the unshakable goal of transforming Honduras into a country that is secure for life, for honor, and for people's belongings."

Four days later, he declared his *Guerra Contra la Delincuencia*, or War on Crime. Maduro's war began symbolically with a speech in the impoverished Tegucigalpa barrio Campo Cielo. An article in *Honduras This Week*, an English-language newspaper, states, "Traditionally, Tegucigalpa's slums have been the scenario of cruel, criminal actions and gang warfare, a fact that drove Maduro to send out an appeal to all of society's sectors to join forces and become 'soldiers' in this war."⁵⁹

The rhetoric of tradition as used here is a central tool of colonialism. Labeling poor Hondurans as "traditionally" violent falls within this framework. Maduro's emphasis in his speech on the protection of private property points to the intended beneficiaries of this war. However, the language of war resonates with many poor people who tire of what Taussig terms "terror as usual,"⁶⁰ who tend to forget that they themselves will be the victims of a war on crime. The Honduran government exploits the population's fear of increasing violence. Poor people are more afraid of their own neighbors than of the repressive neoliberal state and industry, despite the fact that they are often themselves labeled criminals by virtue of class and geography.

The *Honduras This Week* article concludes with the following statement: "Surrounded by humble, poor people, Maduro encouraged everyone to cooperate with police stations and use the special crime reporting

telephone numbers. 'I am not evading my responsibility, I was elected to deal with the insecurity problem. I am aware that the only way to solve it in the long run is by eliminating the social causes of insecurity: the lack of an appropriate education, health care system and adequate housing. All this implies an economic reactivation as well,' the president emphasized. So far, the entire nation is applauding his actions against crime."⁶¹ Daily street violence, the type to be fought in Maduro's "war," can function to obscure the everyday structural violence that underlies it, some aspects of which Maduro alluded to in his speech.

What the *Guerra Contra la Delincuencia* meant in practice was a return to military policing. Soldiers were sent to patrol the streets, having been given "full discretion" by the president to do whatever it would take to maintain order. The president declared that there would be "zero tolerance" for any sort of crime, which itself was being redefined by the Honduran government.

'MANO DURA,' LEGALIZED VIGILANTISM

Maduro's implementation of Giuliani's zero tolerance was part of a larger coordinated crime control strategy referred to in Central America as "Mano Dura," or Strong Fist. These policies have had devastating social effects in the countries in which they have been applied while failing to decrease gang membership.

Article 332, an amendment to the country's penal code approved by the Honduran Congress in August 2003, authorized sentences of up to twenty years of incarceration for the crime of "illicit association,"⁶² regardless of whether targeted individuals commit any violent or otherwise illegal acts, and lowered to sixteen the age at which suspected gang members could be tried as adults. Under Article 332 (known as the *Ley Antimaras*, or *Antigang Law*), police and military power to monitor the poor "in defense of the society" became even broader than before. With this law began a phase of law enforcement that Maduro labeled "*Operación Libertad*," a slogan eerily similar to U.S. President George Bush's "*Operation Enduring Freedom*," carried out during the same period.

Mano Dura policies reflect an international trend in laws providing broader powers to law enforcement authorities, for example, the Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act of 2005 (H.R. 1279, Forbes [R-Va.]) and the USA Patriot Act (which Negroponte oversaw as director of national intelligence). The USA Patriot Act complements zero tolerance crime control policies by increasing the U.S. government's ability to monitor its citizens. The Honduran Antigang Law, similarly, represents a continuation of the way vagrancy laws have been used throughout colonial and postcolonial Latin American history to control, regulate, and discipline native peoples and the poor.⁶³

Again, the media came out in support of government violence. An editorial titled "Conquering Fear" in the newspaper *El Herald* (owned by the powerful conservative businessman Jorge Canahuati Larach) proclaimed that the penal code reform "should have the active citizen support: we must close ranks on violence, whether it is collective or individual, planned or irrational."⁶⁴ While similar praise for the Ley Antimaras dominated the mainstream media, this perspective was by no means universal. Former Honduran supreme court justice, José María Palacios, noted, "What we see is youth being punished for who they are, even if they haven't really committed a crime."⁶⁵

The persecution of suspected *delincuentes* (a stronger term than the English "delinquents") takes place in the public sphere. In July 2003, on a crowded downtown San Pedro Sula street, my friend Teto pointed out a young shirtless man who appeared to be break dancing. "Look again," he told me when I asked why the man would risk showing off his tattoos in public. In fact, he was not dancing but doing push-ups for a group of laughing police officers. Public humiliation of *delincuentes* reinforces police and military impunity and the powerlessness of poor individuals in the face of structural violence, as does the ongoing genocide.

Emphasizing the genocidal nature of Mano Dura, Flores refers to Honduran prisons in his blog as "concentration camps."⁶⁶ This is an apt description: on April 5, 2003, 68 18th Street members died in a prison fire at El Porvenir prison, and on May 17, 2004, 105 Mara Salvatrucha members died in a fire in the San Pedro Sula prison. The Honduran sociologist Julieta Castellano points out that in the latter case, of the 105 youths who

died, 28 were imprisoned for “illicit association” under the Antigang Law, and 33 had been accused of nothing at all.⁶⁷ There is ample evidence to show that both incidents were not accidents but the deliberate acts of prison guards in consort with the rival prison gang.⁶⁸

The front page of *La Tribuna* on Thursday, July 3, 2003, shows a picture of fifteen young men being arrested, shirtless and face down on the ground, while four military and civilian police point handguns and AK-47s at the men’s heads. The caption reads: “Gang members, interned in the National Prison, yesterday requested a dialogue with President Ricardo Maduro. Although they consider the measures taken against them to be unjust, they demanded that they [also] be applied to white collar criminals. Yesterday the head of state accompanied police in a sting operation in the *colonia* Bella Vista.”

As James Holston has pointed out, discourses of citizenship have been used by gangs to justify a range of activities even as the police use talk of citizenship and rights to deny large segments of the population access to full equality.⁶⁹ In requesting a “dialogue” with President Maduro to discuss disparities in the pursuit and sentencing of criminals, gang members were testing the limits of Maduro’s populist-sounding “Gran Diálogo Nacional” (National Dialogue) policy, which was widely referred to as a “monologue” in Honduras.⁷⁰

A cartoon by Roberto Ruiz (see figure 8) printed on July 4, 2003, in *La Tribuna* mocks Maduro’s political slogan, “*Maduro escucha*” (Maduro listens). In it, Maduro nervously acts as though he is listening to a hugely bloated, bomblike gang member (gang members are almost always depicted as skinny). The *marero* is being taken to prison by a well-armed policeman wearing a ski mask—safe by virtue of anonymity. Apparently afraid that the *marero* might detonate, Maduro listens without looking at him. On his chest and stomach, the *marero* has written or possibly tattooed the following: “Why don’t you apply the same punishment to the thieving politicians who get rich with the money of the people/nation and who have caused greater poverty.” The dollar sign replacing the *s* in the word *ricos* (rich) signals the *real* money of the politicians, implicitly contrasted with the small amounts of money that most gang members have access to. The huge, angry, politically astute *marero*/bomb in the



Figure 8. Cartoon by Roberto Ruiz, from *La Tribuna*, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, July 4, 2003. Reprinted with permission.

cartoon represents the potential for uprising that exists in Honduras today.

While newly defined crimes like having tattoos, loitering, and seeming suspicious were indeed being increasingly punished, by December 2003, not a single policeman or military officer had been sentenced for the murder of Honduran children.⁷¹ Maduro had declared soldiers “untouchable”; to lay a finger on a soldier, he said, was to attack Honduras itself. In their capacity as the embodied state, Honduran soldiers indeed became a frightening security force.

Nearly a year before the Antigang Law was passed, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a front-page story on Honduran gangs with the headline, “Dying Young in Honduras: Gangs with Roots in L.A. Are Largely to Blame for the Increasing Violence. But Another Group Has Blood on Its

Hands as Well: The Police.”⁷² Though written in English for a U.S. newspaper, the article presents a clear and uncritical summary of Honduran explanations for violence during Maduro’s presidency. In what follows I take advantage of the article’s summary of these arguments to analyze them in greater detail.

The reporter, T. Christian Miller, acknowledges the role of police, quoting Bruce Harris, then director of Casa Alianza on the effects of zero tolerance: “I don’t think the government has issued a policy to the military or police that says go kill kids. . . . But I would say that either through direct action or inaction, there’s state responsibility in the murder of children.” The validity of Harris’s argument is clouded in Honduras and in this article, however, by ideas of the *deserving poor*.⁷³ Given that it was covered much more honestly in Jahangir’s report four months before Miller’s article was published and that even President Maduro had acknowledged its severity, police brutality was hardly a shocking revelation. The bent of the article reflects the narratives that most Hondurans tell, beginning and ending with gang culpability.

“One reason for the deaths here is an explosion of gang violence during the last five years,” Miller contends. “Police estimate that 33,000 gang members stalk the country, most of them tied to Los Angeles-based gangs. They kill one another for points, for respect, or just for fun. . . . ‘It’s like a game of “Doom” to them,’ said Cesar Ruiz, the city’s chief homicide inspector, referring to a violent computer game.” Miller’s use of police estimates and rhetoric is specious. Honduran police have an obvious interest in inflating gang numbers—the more gangs, the greater the threat, and the more power allocated to police. Claims of international ties are also overblown; while many Honduran gangs share symbols with gangs in the United States and other countries, they are primarily local in nature. They do, however, experience structural violence similar to that which creates the necessary conditions for the growth of gangs in Los Angeles and elsewhere.⁷⁴ The implication of an organized, globalizing threat “stalking” the country is misleading, especially when analytically divorced from larger globalized threats to Hondurans such as the neoliberal fiscal policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. Finally, the suggestion that gang members kill out of caprice

is instrumental in the creation of a straw man—a young, poor straw man—who must be destroyed. Such a figure is reminiscent of the monstrous children described by the minister of public security to Special Rapporteur Jahangir.

Miller continues with a few vignettes about children killed by police but then returns to nonstate violence. He mentions the 1996 policy of deporting rather than trying undocumented (he uses the term *illegal*) U.S.-based Honduran gang members. He then mentions Hurricane Mitch, claiming that Hondurans' shattered livelihoods could have contributed to the violence. This argument is problematic because it is too simplistic; it ignores (as talk of "natural" disasters often does) the social causes of the hurricane's devastation. Most absurdly, Miller writes, "Finally, some blame the end of Honduras' military draft, in which the military often rounded up teenagers by force to serve their time. Now these young people find themselves with no job and nothing to do." He continues, "Whatever the cause, everyone agrees there is no easy answer to the gang problem. 'It goes to the deepest roots of society,' said Oscar Álvarez, the country's dynamic young security minister." Álvarez's cagey remark and Miller's adulation of him mask his own nepotistic relationship to violence in recent decades in Honduran society; among other things, he is the nephew of the late General Gustavo Álvarez Martínez.

The Honduran military is a violent and deeply corrupt institution with the sole purpose of controlling the domestic populace. The notion that *not* being forcibly conscripted into the military makes young men violent is a prevalent one. Lieutenant Rodriguez had complained of the same thing during Daisy's class on gangs. "Liberty has converted them into libertines," he said of the 1990s shift from a military to a civilian state. This claim is doubly ironic under "zero tolerance," where the boundary between military and gang has become increasingly blurred as both employ the same weapons, tactics, and language to describe their war.⁷⁵ The supposed inscrutability of gangs, harkening back to the "roots" of Honduran society, frames the question yet again in evolutionary terms. As for the officials Jahangir interviewed, young people themselves have come to replace violence *against* young people as the central problem. Hondurans, this argument implies, are uncivilized. Nobody likes state

violence, but given the utter lack of discipline that gangs have come to represent, it has become the only way.

The article ends with a visit to Project Victory, “a rehabilitation center in pine-covered hills,” where Miller discovers proof of the gangs’ culpability. “For [former gang members and drug addicts],” he writes, “there is no mystery about who is killing the country’s children. They are. ‘I sincerely believe that the police don’t have very much to do with this. The real reason is rivalry and hatred between the gangs,’ said a 22-year-old former gang member who asked to be called Alex.”

The confession is a powerful rhetorical device. In this case, it leaves unwritten the positionality of the subject, which would include the indoctrination he received in his rehabilitation program. Nearly all modern rehabilitation programs focus on the individual, obfuscating the social roots of many problems both practically and ideologically (as I discuss in the analysis of Alcoholics Anonymous in chapter 2). One of the worst mistakes an anthropologist can make is to take an oppressed informant’s assessment of his or her own culpability at face value, yet that is precisely what this journalist does. To one degree or another, everyone is complicit in oppression, and the oppressed are no exception—not by meriting their position, but by subscribing to a system of symbolic violence that makes it appear to them that they do. In privileging “Alex’s” opinion based on an immediate knowledge of gangs but an incomplete understanding of structural violence, Miller lends this interpretation a dangerous veneer of truth.

All the arguments used by Miller are familiar to Hondurans. Because of the article’s rhetorical structure, Miller’s acknowledgment of state violence and Maduro’s admission that it exists are all but moot. As in Honduras, despite the article’s revelations of police, military, and death squad killings, ultimately the blame goes to the victims.

MELISA

I never got to know Melisa very well. I first saw her on August 7, 1997. I was eating *tajadas* (crispy fried plantains) at a small neighborhood

restaurant with Rebeca's daughter Vanesa and Vanesa's friend Elysa. An androgynous black girl with a shaved head wearing a T-shirt that read "O.J. 100% NOT GUILTY" in African National Congress colors came in. Elysa, whose boyfriend had been deported from the United States for gang activity, flinched. "She's a Dieciocho," she told me. "Everybody's afraid of *la negra*." The girl sat down by herself and ate her *tajadas* contentedly.

Later, I asked Rebeca about Melisa. Rebeca knew all the gang kids. "They respect me," she had told me on various occasions. "I've known them all since they were this tall [motioning close to the ground]." Rebeca said that Melisa had suffered physical and sexual abuse and had been abandoned by both of her parents. Her participation in the gang, according to Rebeca, was understandable—as opposed to the other kids, who Rebeca said were just making trouble. There are many such exceptions to the rule that gang members are "evil." I was often surprised by the failure of the many examples of personal victimization to change the general understanding of gangs as inscrutably savage.

In January 1999, I was again in La Lima. Hurricane Mitch had struck Honduras a few months earlier, and La Lima was one of the places hardest hit. Piles of sand had been left on the side of the road by the municipality to absorb the excess liquid, but in typical Lima government fashion, nobody had moved the sand onto the roads themselves in the months since it had been delivered. One afternoon around dusk, I was busy working on a photo-essay involving a toy monkey, a pre-Columbian relic, and one of these piles of sand, when I was startled by two teenage boys I recognized as neighborhood gang members. I became nervous, having been warned time and again about being robbed or attacked by these children. I grabbed my camera more tightly and said hello.

"What are you doing?" one of them asked. I told them I was taking a picture.

"Do you need help?" the other asked.

I answered, "Well, yes," and let them position Sancho, as Sabrina and I had earlier dubbed the anthropomorphic figurine she had found after the hurricane, in the sand. They seemed to find this wildly amusing. As I continued back to the house, I chatted with them. We discussed the standard neutral topics—the mud, the weather, where I was staying.

"Oh, yes," they told me, "we know Doña Rebeca." A group of their friends was playing a few streets down, Melisa among them.

"You're taking pictures?" she yelled. "Take a picture of me! Look! I am Dieciocho! Take a picture of me in my shirt!" She turned around to model her basketball tunic with the number 18 on the back and beamed as I took her picture. After that, whenever I saw her around town, we would both smile and say hello.

In August 2002, seven months after Maduro's War began, I went to visit Rebeca and her daughters in La Lima. They had moved to a new house, and Sabrina came to meet me at the town square to take me there. I followed her through the streets of La Lima in a direction I hadn't expected to go. "You are living in La Mesa again?" I asked incredulously. "But what about the gangs?" After Sabrina and Omarito had been shot by the *carro asesino* in February 2000, Rebeca had barred her children from entering La Mesa—the poorest and most dangerous barrio in town (despite the fact that they had been attacked in one of the wealthier neighborhoods). At that time Rebeca's daughters had described La Mesa to me by quoting the saying "*Entre si quiere, salga si puede*" (Enter if you want, leave if you can). In addition to its problems with poverty and violence, La Mesa abuts territory belonging to the San Pedro Sula International Airport, the fields of which have been engineered to drain straight into that barrio during heavy rain. Flooding occurs nearly every year in La Lima, with low-lying La Mesa getting the brunt of it, its rivers of *aguas negras* (raw sewage) mixing freely with floodwaters.

In response to my query, Sabrina told me the gangs weren't a problem these days. I asked when the last flood had hit. "Last year. The water was up to here for six days," she said, drawing a line across her chest. Sabrina's family lost all their furniture yet again. In my notebook I jotted down, "Sometimes I wonder why they don't just give in and go plastic."

At the house, I tried to get a better explanation of how La Mesa had become safe. I wrote in my field notes:

I asked Rebeca how things were around the barrio and she told me that they were *tranquilo*, much better than before, that Maduro's "Zero Tolerance" policy had worked, that there were no more gangs here. The problem now, she said, is with the [new wave of U.S.] deportees. "But

how can that be?" I asked her. "There were so many gang members. What happened to them all?"

R: They killed them all.

A: Who? Who killed them all?

R: The same group of people killed all the different gangs.

A: But who were they?

R: A private group. Nobody knows. Everybody sees them do it, but nobody knows who did it. And they're in league with the police.

Rebeca told me how once the year before, her son Omarito had been hanging out with some friends at a neighborhood store when they were stopped by two armed men. All three of the boys were told by the men to lift their shirts. On seeing that he (and the others) had no tattoos, the gunmen said to Omarito, "*Te salvaste chico*" (You saved yourself kid), indicating that had it been otherwise, he would not have survived. Neither Sabrina's bullet wound nor this episode shook Rebeca's faith in *cero tolerancia*. It was, according to her, Sabrina, and everyone else I asked subsequently, an unequivocally good thing that these neighborhood children, many of whom had retained good relations with Rebeca and her family, had been slaughtered for the sake of security.

Still incredulous at the radical change in a town I had once found familiar, I persisted:

A: All of them? They killed every single one?

R: Yes, they're all gone.

A: What about *la negra*, the one who was in la Dieciocho?

R: Ah, that Melisa . . . Melisa moved to San Pedro when they started killing them all. She started going to church and everything.

A: [Excited] So she didn't get killed!

R: No. They went and found her. They killed her too.

WHY DOES NOBODY CARE? EVERYDAY VIOLENCE AND HABITUS

Over the next few days, I polled my friends and acquaintances to find out what they thought of the increase in the systematic slaughter of

youths under Maduro's reign. I was surprised to find that at that time (public opinion later became more critical) even the more educated and human rights-oriented among them had mostly praise for Maduro's policy. I tried to argue that the risk of killing innocent children was not worth killing hardened gang members (I had already learned that arguing for the value of *their* lives would get me nowhere in an argument with most Hondurans). Some of the reasons for my informants' acceptance of this policy were evident: first of all, Maduro's policy per se was not to kill thousands of young people; it was to achieve security by making the streets safer. By his and most Hondurans' measure, the streets *were* safer; gang numbers in many regions appeared to have been greatly diminished. Delinquents, that murky category of people previously assumed guilty and the subjects of his war, were thus kept under control—disciplined. "Private parties," as well as police and the military, perpetrated the majority of these killings as embodiments of the state, and because they were killing "delinquents" rather than regular citizens, there was no large-scale outcry. In general, most Hondurans I spoke with seemed to agree that they were better off without them. Teresa Caldeira has argued that in Brazil a profound disbelief in the impartiality of the justice system coupled with a history of state disrespect for poor people's rights led to popular support for a violent police force.⁷⁶ These forces were at play in Honduras in summer 2002; in my discussions with Hondurans, the possibility of relying on the courts or other forms of policing to deal with accused delinquents did not usually enter the discussion as a possibility unless I brought it up.

"Yes," my English-speaking friend Tomás said to me, "it is terrible. But we don't mind, because things had gotten so bad that, you see, it had to happen like this or the violence would never stop." He told me that thousands of people had been killed between January and August 2002 (the number of *children* killed for roughly that period according to Casa Alianza was 556) but that nobody complained because it was for their own security.⁷⁷ Another close friend, Teto, was angry in 2002 that I even questioned the need for the killings. Who was I, he said, to come here from the first world and tell Hondurans that what they had done to protect themselves from such violence was wrong? What right did I have to

say that gang members should live, when I didn't even know what it was like to narrowly escape being murdered by these people who didn't give a damn about human life, to see family members killed and not be able to do anything about it? Who the hell did I think I was?

In November 2002, at the American Anthropology Association meetings in New Orleans, I attended a session for Honduran scholars. In turn, each of the fifteen or so anthropologists and archaeologists there stated her or his current principal topic of interest. I mentioned my main concern: "What has made it possible for this level of class- and age-targeted killing, which I term genocide, to happen?" The one Honduran in the room immediately began explaining to me that gangs had come in the 1980s during the deportations, that they had spread throughout Central America, that they were getting more and more violent, and so on. I interrupted her to say that I knew full well the gang narrative; I was interested in the large percentage of extrajudicial killings that had not been gang instigated over the previous year. She denied, vehemently and counterfactually, that anything but the gangs could be behind the violence. I did not argue further, but later in the meeting she spoke up once more to tell me about a report on the violence of gangs that would explain the "real" situation to me.

Later, this scholar spoke with another colleague, who told me about their conversation. He said that she told him she recognized problems with her own argument but that "it is different when you are living it. You can't understand unless you're living with this much violence all around you."

Perhaps I could not understand it, a fact that points to the difficulty of articulating subjectivities. Since subjectivity is constituted through habitus and embodied lived experience, by definition I do not. I am still struck, however, by the vehemence with which so many of my Honduran acquaintances and colleagues, especially those with a strong sense of social justice and liberal—even radical—backgrounds, insisted that the War on Crime was justified when I challenged its logic. As in Jahangir's narrative of her interactions with officials, I found that the arguments in favor of the genocide followed a certain pattern of reasoning. The first line of reasoning, as in the case above, is to place all the

blame on gangs. When offered well-known and multiple exceptions to this, the emotional argument (“If you knew what it was like to live with this much fear . . .”) takes precedence. In this second tack, there is a subtle admission of the illogic of the first. The claim that fear alone justifies the killings leads most to further admit, when prompted, that removing gangs from the public sphere is indeed worth the killing of “innocent” people. The state, then, is given power to commit the very crimes for which it is killing gang members. Many Hondurans have bravely spoken out against officially sanctioned state brutality. Among these are the *diputada* Doris Gutierrez; Sara Saucedo Flores, whose son was killed by police; the former Honduran special prosecutor for human rights, Wilfredo Flores; the former internal affairs director of the Honduran police force, Maria Luisa Borjas; Itsmania Pineda Platero, president of the anti-crime, antidrug organization Xibalba; the human rights advocate Dr. Juan Almeyda Bonilla; and CODEH president Andrés Pavón Murillo. However, in summer 2002 those voices were drowned out by the steady media-led drumbeat for zero tolerance and *Mano Dura*. Maduro’s policy had led to increasing gang militarization in a war of escalation, thus creating a real version of the monstrous creature that had formerly been largely a product of colonialist imagination.

F E A R

Hondurans repeatedly told me that I could not understand their support for the War on Crime because I could not understand their fear. Fear is a very significant element in the development of *habitus* for Hondurans. In summer 2002 Teto, a strong, tall man with a serious disposition, told me something he had noticed about his country. He was always on edge, he said, because someone might try to attack him. If a man looked at him a second too long, or in an odd way, he would become afraid, especially since a group of boys he didn’t know had tried to kill him a year earlier as he walked home from the university one evening. Teto told me that a few days before our conversation he had been absentmindedly staring at a man when he suddenly realized that the man had been looking back at

him and feeling the same fear, thinking that Teto might attack him just because he looked serious.

Part of the normalization of violence in Honduran society lies in its embeddedness in habitus through constant exposure. With very few exceptions, everyone I know in Honduras has had a close friend or family member die a violent death in recent years. In addition to the grief and fear that this provokes, other factors, such as talk of gangs and death porn in the media, add to the general sense of what Maduro aptly labeled *inseguridad* (insecurity) in his inauguration speech.

Teto told me of his tension around other men, and of the dangerous politics of eye contact in a place where so many people share a similar embodied sense of fear. I myself wrote about this feeling, and how it affected my interactions, in my field notes on various occasions:

It is Monday, the 28th of July [1997], and I am in a terrible mood and I just want to be left the fuck alone. I want Dulce Cristina to disappear. She's the hovering type, always standing around nervously, looking over my shoulder, making inane observations. "You're reading?" "You're cooking?" I went into SPS [San Pedro Sula] today, and two terrible things happened. One, I was walking down an empty street and this guy walked straight toward me and grabbed my crotch, just like that. I hit his arm and said "*Pendejo*," but what could I do? It happened in a second, and I couldn't very well run after the asshole. What was I going to do? I just kept walking, feeling violated. And then I was so disoriented that I lost my only hat.

June 27th, 2000. We leave and Juli films in the park. I am nervous. I imagine every person is a thief. I become angry with myself for imagining every person is a thief. I can't decide if I'm racist, classist, or simply anti-Honduran. Or practical (just because I am paranoid does not mean they're not out to get me). I practice silly exercises trying to catch myself and remember each person I suspect. Juli only gets attacked once, by a man shouting in English, "I want to fuck you baybee," who hits her camera. The crowd is thick. "Are you okay?" I ask. "You're not too shaken?" "No I'm fine. What was with that guy anyway?" I wonder if I am losing perspective; I have always been the foolhardy one who gets chastised (by Hondurans) for not being careful enough. But my clouds all have aluminum linings—they don't bring great luck, but at least they repel danger. I don't know if that's true for her.

July 19th, 2002. When I got to 13th Street I walked up to 7th Ave. My whole body dragged. The heat was unbearable, block after block. When I got there I realized it was the wrong 7th Ave., so I took a deep breath and started going the other way, seeking shade wherever I could. It didn't take as long as I thought, and a little while later I had reached the sign [marking a building I had been looking for]. I looked through the gates and saw nothing. The gate was unlocked, so I opened it and went into the yard. "Hello . . . ?" I wandered into the back but got scared. It's funny how fear works on you. The first thing I think is, Would anybody hear me if I screamed? Then, How near is the closest escape, and given how fast I can run, is it near enough?

On each of these occasions I felt what could be thought of as a Cartesian tension. I was aware of my bodily/emotional reaction and aware that it probably exceeded the danger at hand and was unfair to those around me, yet I could not think it away. Apart from scattered pickpockets, a baseball cap snatched from my head, and a small child trying to rip a cheap watch off my hand by the San Pedro railroad tracks, I have only been assaulted once in Honduras, on the occasion of the first of the three field note excerpts above. I had forgotten entirely about the incident until I reread my field notes five years after it occurred. In Honduras I learned, as do Hondurans, to walk a certain distance from people, to make eye contact only in certain ways, to read gestures as language, as clues to habitus. Most of this learning was embodied; while I had forgotten the above episode, I believe my body had not. And while I learned to be afraid, my fear was that of an outsider, a white woman, a North American with a particular history. I was often accused of not being afraid enough—this was, in fact, a common admonition from friends and strangers alike. Given their logic, my friends were indeed right: I had not reached a level of embodied fear that made death squads seem justifiable.

The acceptance of the brutal War on Crime as an appropriate means to prevent crime and protect private property stems from the embodied fear that is central to Honduran subjectivity. The urge to control bodies in order to achieve "security" manifests itself and is in turn structured in many different arenas. One of the most visible of these is Christianity.

RELIGION AND VIOLENCE

On August 7, 2002, my Tegucigalpa–San Pedro Sula bus stopped at a roadside restaurant that had two stickers on the glass door. The first read, “NO to kidnappings, YES to the blood of Christ”; the second read, “Violence No, Holy Spirit Yes.” These slogans offered individualized solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems: the promise of personal agency in the face of endemic societal violence. Hondurans’ understandings of bodily violence is heavily influenced by Christianity. Alongside the War on Crime, Honduran Christianity sells a solution focusing on individual responsibility and blame, and many are buying.

When I returned to La Lima in 2000 to find that Sabrina had been shot, I was also surprised to discover that both of her sisters and her mother, Rebeca, had converted to Evangelical Christianity. With strong ties to U.S. missionary groups and industry, Honduran Evangelicals are a growing force in that country, more visible and vocal than—and in some regions outnumbering—Catholics.⁷⁸ While the youngest sister, Dulce Cristina, had dabbled in the church in the past, and their little brother, Omarito, had occasionally joined other youths at the local Church of Latter-day Saints to use their basketball court, Rebeca, Vanesa, and Dulce Cristina were now full-fledged members of their congregation. Head scarves and long dresses signified their transformation, and they had given up a number of activities they now described as sinful. Though the change was apparently religious, each of the three women had recently experienced traumatic events that led them to embrace the new lifestyle.

At different times since I have known her, Rebeca has worked in a maquiladora, at an airline food company, at a tortilla factory, at a car wash, and as a private cook, a personal assistant, an underground lottery “Chica” hawker, and an Avon saleslady. Rebeca’s husband, Omar, had never been much help. A former alcoholic, he had been sober for many years in 1997, cheated on Rebeca with other women only occasionally, and worked when he could as a mechanic. The little he earned, when added to Rebeca’s wages, kept a minimal roof over their heads and the children in school. In 2000 things had taken a decided turn for the worse. Sometime in 1998, Rebeca and her daughters told me, Omar had become

addicted to crack cocaine. He soon stopped working, became violent, and began demanding Rebeca turn over her wages to him. These being insufficient, he started selling their belongings in order to pay for the drug. They were all terrified of him, they told me. He hit all of them but was especially abusive to Rebeca, whom he beat in front of the children and who told me he had raped her on several occasions as well.

When I visited Rebeca's house, it was empty of furnishings, all of which Omar had sold. Vanesa, who had had to leave school to work in a maquiladora because they could no longer afford her public high school tuition, told me, crying, of how she had not been able to go to work for two days during the previous week because her father had sold her only pair of shoes. Rebeca told me she was planning to go to the United States, the only way she could escape Omar's violence. When I tried to convince them to turn him in to the authorities, they told me that he had already threatened to kill them all if they did. In addition, Dulce Cristina and Vanesa both told me that in the end, he was still their father, and they did not want to cause him harm.

In addition to the stress and shame felt by the family as a result of Omar's actions, fifteen-year-old Dulce Cristina was coping with another source of grief. One Friday night in August 1999, Dulce Cristina had brought her middle-school beau of several months, Melvin, home to meet her mother. Dulce Cristina was a shy girl and told me she had been very nervous about the encounter. However, Melvin had insisted. The meeting went well; Melvin was well behaved and doted on Dulce Cristina, winning Rebeca's approval as a boyfriend for her daughter. Dulce Cristina told me she had been thrilled about the result: her first love had been formalized as a serious romance. After spending a couple of hours with Dulce Cristina and her family, Melvin said good-bye and boarded an urban bus to San Pedro, where he spent weekends with his father. On Monday morning during recess, a classmate informed Dulce Cristina of the reason for Melvin's absence that day. On the way to San Pedro Friday night, he had been dragged off the bus and "*lo machetearon*" (a commonly employed verb in Honduran Spanish: "They machetied him"). That same day Dulce Cristina was brought in for questioning and held at the police station as a suspect, as one of the last people to have

seen Melvin alive. She claimed in 2000 to know who had done it—another group of boys who had threatened him in the schoolyard. No one was charged. Sabrina, with whom I was closest, told me that Dulce Cristina had been inconsolable during that period, although by the time I found out about it, almost a year later, Dulce Cristina recounted the details for me and the video camera without crying.

During the weeks we spent at Rebeca's mother's house in 2000, I saw a family I had known well two years earlier significantly changed. Rebeca seemed to me to have lost, for lack of a better term, her "spark." She had quit smoking and drinking and no longer allowed herself the marijuana soaked in alcohol that she had used as a medicinal balm for her arthritis when I first met her. She had gained some weight and repeatedly asked me in declarative form, "I am fat and old and ugly now. Right?" which I repeatedly denied was true. She no longer seemed to care about politics and encouraged Omarito to get a job as a propagandist for whichever party paid the best in the upcoming presidential elections. What struck me the most was the palpable grief that pervaded the household.

Vanesa, or Vane ("Vah-nay"), who had loved dancing, drinking, and getting dressed up, had begun attending church after her fiancé left her to marry his boss. One afternoon I came home to find Vanesa weeping. She was crying, it turned out, because she had been scolded by her church peers for wearing unladylike jeans rather than long skirts. She told me that she tried to live up to their standards because, after all, the church was the only family she had, with her home in such shambles.

Specific instructions vary from church to church, with congregations following different codes of dress and behavior, but most Honduran Christian churches emphasize restraint and obedience. Evangelical Christianity, state-sanctioned murder, and, as we will see in the following chapters, ideologies of alcohol and the maquiladora industry in Honduras all share a focus on disciplining the population and the body.

Rebeca, Dulce Cristina, and Vanesa all turned to the church after experiencing tragedy and consciously linked their conversions to those events in their narratives. The church gave them not only a sense of community but also, through discipline, a sense of control. While they claimed their

ultimate wish was to control their place in the afterlife, in the meantime the only thing these women *could* control within their church's ideology was their bodies. Under pressure from the pastor, their peers, and themselves, they controlled what they took into their bodies and how they presented their bodies to their family and to the world outside their home. They avoided alcohol and drugs, wore long unstylish skirts (a major sacrifice for Vanesa), and adopted mannerisms that demonstrated humility—speaking quietly, refraining from defending themselves from family violence (“turning the other cheek”), bowing their heads. The major problems plaguing them—an extremely abusive husband and father, a brutally murdered boyfriend, and the abandonment and betrayal of a fiancé—were not changed by their newfound discipline.

The effects of the extreme violence that Rebeca and her children had experienced were inscribed not just in their minds as fear but also in their bodies. Rebeca, Vanesa, and Dulce Cristina responded to their lack of control over what happened to their bodies from the outside by disciplining their bodies according to an institutional logic that to some extent protected them from fear, pain, and the anguish of their home lives.

Religion is also a common means for Honduran gang members to escape violence, as Jon Wolseth has written,⁷⁹ and as Lieutenant Rodriguez told Daisy's class. However, as public opinion turns increasingly against gangs, conversion no longer affords the protection that it did a few years ago; Melisa's case demonstrates this.

That discipline is a central aspect of Christianity is not a new finding. It is nonetheless instrumental to examine how Christian discipline can interact with other violent forms of modernity in the process of Honduran subjectivation. Facing their own lack of control over the violence that was destroying their lives, Rebeca and her daughters sought to control, at the very least, their own bodies. The kind of Christianity currently hegemonic in Honduras is of course historically, geographically, and politically situated. Christianity need not take an inward, disciplining stance, as is evidenced by the works of liberation theologians such as those at the Jesuit community in Progreso, Yoro. There, the radical anthropologist Fr. Ricardo Falla, along with other current and former priests, the journalist Pineda,

and a number of activists have fought for a broad range of human rights, land, and labor justice issues as part and parcel of their religious work.⁸⁰

How is it that collectively felt violence—with roots in the structures of colonialism and in widespread, externally induced poverty—comes to be understood in individualistic terms, which the primary victims of such violence embody as truths? To see discipline—Christian or otherwise—as the cure for societal ills allows the larger structural roots of those ills to remain unchallenged while at the same time strengthening the legitimacy of violent institutions.

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE AND THE COLONIAL MIND-SET

Genocide is possible because people feel such danger that they have come to view the killing off of an entire class of people as the only way to fix it, as my friend Tomás noted. This danger, which is located in the lower class, has become inextricable from it. Though there are many identities available to Hondurans, the one vision of community shared among all groups is the notion of Honduras as a space of violence. This notion is articulated in different ways in the different imagined communities in Honduras, but as President Maduro rightly perceived in inaugurating his War on Crime, it is something everyone can agree on. Only through such “security,” Maduro argued, can private property (and hence capitalist civilization) be protected. Though officially at peace, daily violence and its representations in Honduras have created a culture of terror, which, like all wars, defines the nation in terms of its common enemy—in this case, itself.

Hondurans are not irrational. But the War on Crime, combined with the antipoor rhetoric and practices of modern capitalist institutions, has engineered an amazing coup over humanism. This coup manifests itself in people’s very sense of self. The discourse of abject fear, like humanism, obfuscates class differences between participating subjects. In other words, while poor and rich alike share the reasoning behind the justification for genocide, it is primarily the poor who are harmed. Likewise, a

humanistic discourse ignores the fact that in simple economic terms, poor people simply are worth less.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon discusses the internalization of colonial tropes of criminality in Algiers. Fanon demonstrates that scientific proof of assertions such as “The Algerian frequently kills other men,” “The Algerian kills savagely,” and “The Algerian kills for no reason”⁸¹ is also proof of the need for outside rule. The irony of this logic is that—as Fanon notes—this outside rule is itself the true cause of daily physical violence in Algeria. He writes, “The Algerian’s criminality, his impulsivity, and the violence of his murders are . . . not the consequences of the organization of his nervous system or of characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation.”⁸² Fanon suggests that the only way for the colonized to free themselves of their disparaging self-understandings is through political violence matching that of colonialism itself.

In Honduras, the media and government officials make arguments similar to the ones that Fanon had earlier critiqued. These arguments are bolstered by official statistics on gang membership and crime. The legitimacy that the people of colonized or “developing” countries confer on these “facts” about themselves is symbolic violence. In repeating stories that carry the authority of Science and the State about their own violence and their inferiority to their national and international oppressors, poor Hondurans provide a necessary condition for their own subjugation. Where they *do* openly and explicitly resist—even if not by engaging in the kind of revolutionary violence Fanon recommends—they provide a window onto the forces of symbolic and structural violence obscured by these processes, and onto the process of subjectivation itself.

Let us return to the death I described in the first paragraph of this chapter. The nonchalance of a crowd watching a man die was symptomatic of the ways in which symbolic violence has shaped Honduran subjectivities. Although poor people in Honduras love their kin just as deeply as anyone else in the world, they learn different lessons about the value(s) of human life than do people in societies where death and violence are not such constants. They also learn, through their habitus and through the rhetoric and practices of modern institutions like

Christianity and the mass media, that they are less valuable than the wealthy. While the fault is not theirs, without the poor's active complicity, it would be impossible for the state to harm them to the extent that it has. By espousing these views, the poor legitimate a structure that—through negligence or on purpose—is lethal for them.