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„Examining Non-State Actor Territoriality- The Case of the *maras* in El Salvador“

Verfasser

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Abstract

El Salvador´s youth gangs, the *maras,* employ similar strategies as the state to classify, communicate and control territory. These processes, which are summarised in the concept of territoriality, previously have only been ascribed to the state. Interpreting the *maras´* territoriality in the context of state policies highlights the understudied role of non state actors´ power to impose their identity on urban space. By analysing the nexus between territorial control and power in the urban neighbourhoods, the gated communities in San Salvador, the prison or the tattoos of the body, it reveals that neither the state nor the *maras* can claim exclusive control over the examined areas. Thus, it is argued that the processes of territorial acquisition and control need be regarded as dialectical in which both, the state and the *maras*, contest the finite urban-, body- or prison space. Both actors marginalize 'the other' to enforce territorial rule respectively. These struggles pose challenges to a peaceful cohabitation in the former civil war- torn country. Moreover, the still prevailing state centrism in the literature on theories of space, territory or territoriality is criticised since it neglects the *maras´* potential to impose their identity on former state territory. Only if the gangs´ strategies to expand their territorial control are understood and respected in academia or by policy makers in the country, a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of the *maras* will be possible. The reader is thus invited to critically reflect upon one- sided accounts of the state as sole actor of territoriality.

Abstract

Jugendgangs in El Salvador, sogenannte *maras,* nutzen ähnliche Strategien wie der Staat um sich nationales Territorium anzueignen, diesen Vorgang zu kommunizieren und es anschließend zu kontrollieren. Dieser Vorgang der sogenannten Territorialität wurde in der Vergangenheit ausschließlich dem Staat zugeschrieben. Indem man diese Prozesse im Kontext der Staatspolitiken interpretiert, wird die bisher zu wenig erfasste Rolle von nicht staatlichen Akteuren deutlich. Anhand des Beispiels der *maras* zeigt sich deren Einfluss, ihre Identität auf umkämpftes städtisches Gebiet aufzuerlegen. Die Verbindung zwischen territorialem Anspruch und Machteinfluss wird besonders deutlich in den städtischen Wohngebieten, den bewachten Wohnanlagen in der Hauptstadt San Salvador, den staatlichen Gefängnissen oder den Tattoos auf den Körpern der *mara* Mitglieder. Hierbei zeigt sich, dass weder der Staat noch die *maras* als alleiniger Herrscher über Territorium regieren. Daher wird argumentiert, dass dieser Prozess der Territorialität als ein dialektischer Prozess zu betrachten ist, in denen ein Wettstreit zwischen Staat und den *maras* im begrenzten städtischen Raum oder im Gefängnis entsteht. Demnach wird das Gegenüber marginalisiert um den eigenen territorialen Anspruch zu verdeutlichen. Diese Kämpfe führen zu großen Herausforderungen eines friedlichen Zusammenlebens in dem immer noch vom Bürgerkrieg erschütterten Land. Dabei verhindert der fortwährende Staatszentrismus in der Literatur zu Raum, Territorium und der Territorialität eine umfassendere Analyse des Verhältnisses der *maras* zu ihrem kontrollierten Gebiet. Nur wenn man die Strategien zur territorialen Expansion der *maras* in der Wissenschaft sowie in der Politik mit in Betracht zieht, ermöglichen sich umfangreichere Analysen zu den Jugendgangs. Der Leser wird daher ermutigt über die andauernde einseitige Auffassung von Staatsterritorialität als einzige Form zu reflektieren.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ALBA	Alianza Boliviana para los Pueblos de Neustra América
AMSS	Área Metropolitana de San Salvador (metropolian area of San Salvador)
ANSP	National Academy on Public Security
ARENA	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Nationalist Republican Alliance)- a right wing conservative party in El Salvador
Barrio 18	18th Street Gang
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IACHR	Inter American Commission Human Rights Report on the Human Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas
ICPS	International Centre for Prison Studies
IUDOP	*Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública*
MS-13	*Mara Salvatrucha*
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children´s Emergency Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States of America

1. Introduction

"In order for people to analyse the phenomenon of the street gangs here in El Salvador, they have to understand their history and their relation to the state. Everything you see here, all the public places and barrios, they are contested by the two gangs, la 13 *and* la 18*, as well as the state. You know, there is no such thing as ungoverned spaces here in the country. The territory is subdivided and controlled with violence and the ones who are caught in the middle is the population".*[1]

Such commentary by a Salvadorian high ranking government official of El Salvador, who prefers not to have his name published, pinpoints the connection between territory and power. Moreover, it depicts one of the most common popular media perceptions of the Central American isthmus where the population is kept in suspense by the enduring violence.[2] Frequently, the youth gangs, or *maras,* are used as scapegoats by the media and the state as the origin of all evil and allegedly perpetuate the deadly struggles over control.[3] Underlying this environment of insecurity, it is not only the battle between the two biggest street gangs, the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) and the *Barrio Dieciocho* (18th Street Gang) over territorial expansion and control, but also the state against the *maras.* All three actors have a special relationship towards territory, which is reflected in one of the names of the second biggest gang in El Salvador, *Barrio* 18, which can be translated into English as "district 18" or "neighbourhood 18".

In the aftermath of the civil war in El Salvador (1980-1992), the *maras* developed into influential groups, which successfully challenged the state´s monopoly of power.[4] Via extortions or spread of fear, they achieved to acquire and control territory, which was previously under the administration of the state. The conflict over territory culminated when the state responded with repressive policies, which targeted alleged *mara* members and led to a mass-incarceration of the

[1] Interview conducted with a high ranking government official in San Salvador, 17.02.2014, free translation
[2] Andara Velásquez 2009:4
[3] Bruneau 2011:1
[4] Al Valdez 2011:25

youngsters.[5] Nevertheless, these crackdown policies remained inefficient in re-gaining control of the urban neighbourhoods, where the *maras* mainly operate. Thus, this inability of the state raises the fundamental question about the *maras´* ability and strategies to successfully contest state territory and impose their identity on the newly acquired space.

The emerging body of theories surrounding space, territory and territoriality provide for an appropriate lens through which the *maras´* territorial strategies in annexing their '*turf*' (territory) and the counter response by repressive state policies can be analysed. While the phenomenon of the *maras* has been studied extensively, choosing a spatial perspective allows for a new perception on this pressing issue. The concept of territoriality essentially aims at explaining how national territory is constructed, administered and controlled.[6] In simple terms, territoriality therefore refers to the acquisition, communication and control of territory, as well as the ability to shape and control the daily socio-economic interactions of the citizens.[7] Territoriality thus lies at the heart of each nation-state, since there is no state without territory and vice versa.[8] In order for territoriality to be effective, the acquired state territory requires constant control and regulation of the area.[9] While these theories yield important insights into the construction of state territory, most of the authors[10] neglect the role of non-state actors, such as the *maras*. Considering the noteworthy ability of the streets gangs to impose their control over parts of the El Salvador, it is necessary to investigate by which means the gangs successfully challenge the state.

The cardinal question, which will guide the reader through the entire thesis reads as *To what extent and how do youth gangs in El Salvador acquire and organize territory and space beyond- or within the control of the state?* A related sub-question is *In how far can this spatial ordering of territory be regarded as response to the repressive anti-gang policies?* The analysis of the thesis is based on an extensive desk study and a field trip to El Salvador in early 2014, in which interviews have been conducted with

[5] OAS 2012
[6] Brenner 2004:453
[7] Sack 1986: 6
[8] Lefebvre 2003: 84
[9] Brenner 2004: 453
[10] Neil Brenner, John Agnew, Nico Poulantzas

government officials, representatives of international NGOs which work with the *maras,* citizens of San Salvador and inhabitants of a gated community.

Throughout the thesis two major arguments will be made. First, it will be argued that the *maras´* territoriality can only be understood when examining the context of the repressive *(súper) mano dura* policies in the beginning of the millennium, which aggravated the faultlines within society and has made a peaceful co-habitation between *maras* and the other parts of society impossible. Second, it will become obvious that eventually the *maras* territorial strategies hardly differ from state territoriality, since both employ similar means to classify, communicate and exclusively control their area. Hence, acknowledging the *maras* as equal actors of territoriality extents the existing perspective on the construction and administration of territory beyond the prevailing theoretical state centrism.

In order to convey these arguments, the thesis is divided into four major parts. The opening chapter provides a general background on the gang phenomenon in El Salvador, tracing their origins to California, depicting the criteria for gang membership, differentiating between *pandillas* and *maras* and highlighting their evolution since the 1990´s. The subsequent chapter gives an overview of the state of the art on the scholarly endeavours on the *maras* and depict the underlying methodology of the thesis. The theoretical underpinning of territoriality and space in the third part of the thesis will reveal and criticise the enduring state centrism when examining the theories surrounding space, territory and territoriality. The analysis in the fourth part is sub-divided into three units of analysis, where *mara* and state territoriality is expected to conflict. Thus, the urban neighbourhoods where the *maras* mainly operate are juxtaposed to the gated communities, the struggle over territorial power in the prison facilities, as well as the territoriality of the *mara* members will be highlighted. The thesis will use an urban focus and will mainly examine the *maras´* territoriality in the department and capital San Salvador since the absolute number of *mareros* is highest here. Nonetheless, this does not mean that their presence is restricted to this department only as the map underneath illustrates.

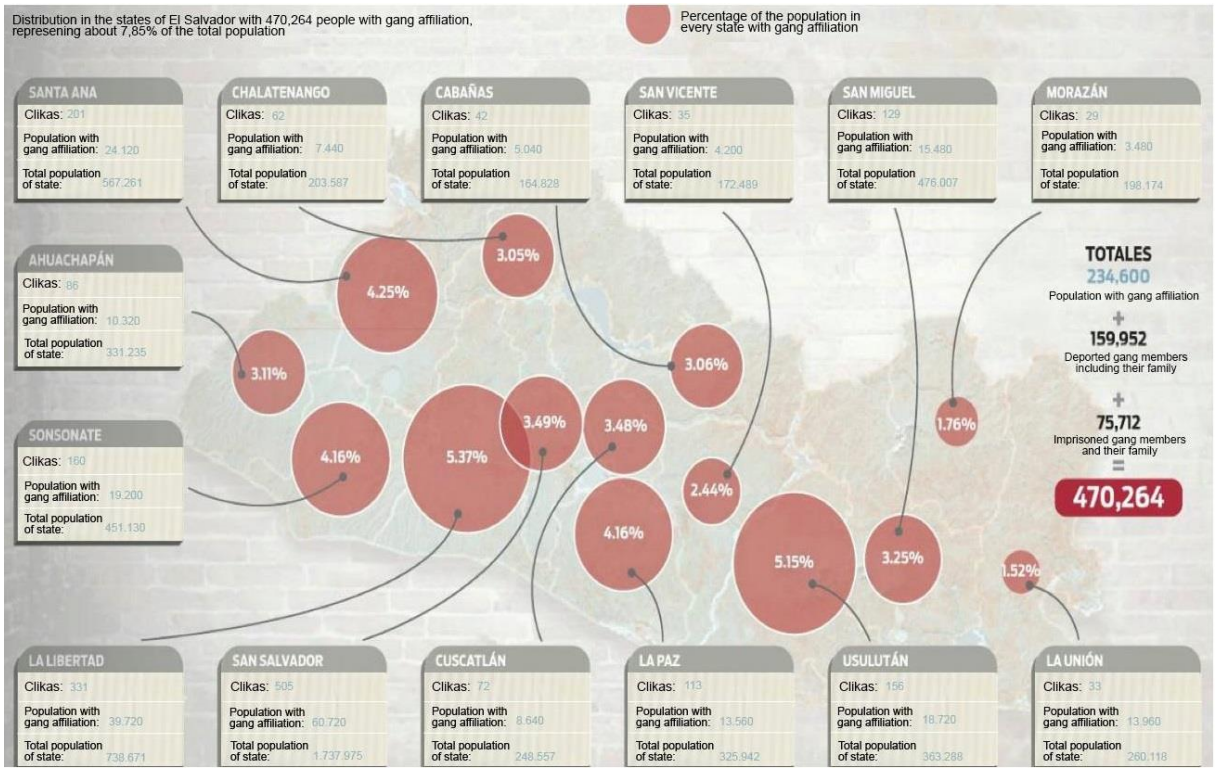

Figure 1: Departments in El Salvador with reported *mara* members and affiliates, Source: Ministry of Security in Alonzo and Bolaños 2013:137, map created by the author

2. Gangs in El Salvador

In the following, the necessary background information relating to the gangs´ territorial affiliation in El Salvador will be presented. The first sub-chapter on the origins of the *maras* explains the strong attachment to land and the desire for self-determination. The subsequent sub-chapter will briefly trace the evolution of the *maras* in three generation, which explains the changing relationship and importance of their local *turf*. The third part serves to illustrate why the marginalized youngsters seek alternative forms of protection from the state and in some cases also a replacement for the own family. Including this micro perspective in the analysis helps to deviate from the security lens through which the *maras* are frequently portrayed and framed as sole source of urban insecurity. When examining the territorial expansion, it is inevitable to acknowledge the differentiation between local *pandillas* and *maras* with a transnational heritage, on which this ultimate sub-section will touch upon.

2.1. Civil War, Forced Migration & Gang Formation

Territorial youth gangs on the Central American isthmus are not a new phenomenon. Already in the 1950s, gangs set up their presence in the streets of Guatemala City, San Salvador and Tegucigalpa. Yet, it was only 40 years later that the two most influential gangs *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio Dieciocho* changed the gang landscape in the Northern Triangle of Central America, including El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Due to the devastating civil war in El Salvador between 1980 and 1992, thousands of families saw themselves forced to flee the country and many migrated to the United States. Most of them settled in Los Angeles, where they awaited their permission for asylum. However, the immigration policies by President Reagan were not known for openly welcoming the refugees from the civil war torn Central American countries. Hence, in many cases the families had to live without legal documents in the poor Latino neighbourhoods of Pico-Union in Los Angeles.[11] Having escaped the mass killings in their home country, most migrants faced an environment of discrimination by the local population, culture- and language barriers, grave living conditions and joblessness or exploitation. Additionally, a constant fear of expulsion aggravated their situation and led in some cases to drug abuse, neglecting of children and domestic violence.[12]

In order to seek some form of protection from the continued discrimination, more and more Salvadorian juveniles joined either already existing local street gangs or founded new ones. The *Barrio 18* and the newly formed *MS-13* soon became the most powerful gangs.[13] Originally, the former was founded by Mexican immigrants in the 1960´s and welcomed the newcomers from El Salvador and Guatemala. The *Mara Salvatrucha* was formed by Salvadorians in defence of the *Barrio 18* in the second half of the 1980s. The name originates from the Salvadorian slang words *salvadoreño* and *trucha*, which refers to quick thinking or sly.[14] The German political scientist, Peter Peetz, suggests that the name *Salvatrucha* was given to newly arriving El Salvadorians in the

[11] Johnson 2006
[12] Wolf 2013:150
[13] Does 2013:4
[14] Rodgers et al. 2009:7

1980s to express the discontent by the already settled Latin-American immigrants who feared losing the few existing jobs.[15]

Apart from other incentives to become a member of a youth gang, most Central American migrants sought membership of such a group to "feel included as outsiders in the United States".[16] New hope arose when the civil war in El Salvador came to an end in 1992 and numerous families could return to their home country. However, hardly any of the gang members agreed voluntarily to leave their new home, since they had developed a strong affiliation with their local *turf*. In 1996, the US American congress introduced the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which enacted the deportation of incarcerated non-US citizens to their home countries.[17] Ever since, about 500,000 people, of which 80 percent were Central Americans, were expelled and had to return to their home countries, where high unemployment rates and lack of opportunities posed a challenge for successful re-integration.[18]

Upon arrival of these re-immigration waves, numerous small local gangs already populated the streets of San Salvador. With the influx of thousands of Salvadorians to their former home country, previous Los Angeles gang members 'imported' the US-American gang structures and lifestyle. Henceforth, the *maras* were organized in local sub-chapters, so called *clikas*, each with their respective territory.[19] Today, the returnees only account for a minority in the youth gangs in El Salvador, since the *MS-13* and *Barrio 18* have successfully recruited new members, especially in the urban neighbourhoods of the grand cities like San Salvador or Ilopango in the east of the country.[20]

[15] Peez 2004:51
[16] Rodgers, Muggah and Stevenson, 2009:7
[17] Jütersonke et al. 2009:380
[18] Peetz 2004:51
[19] Goubaud 2008:36
[20] Interpeace 2014:5

2.2. Three Generations of Gangs

Apart from the distinction between localised *pandillas* and *maras,* several authors[21] have stressed the evolution of youth gangs in El Salvador and classified them in three generations according to their level of organization as well as their activities. Even though it is acknowledged that the reality on the ground is distinct from this theoretically homogenous evolution and categorization, this section serves to underline the changing affiliation of gangs with their territory.

The first generation of youth gangs was loosely organised, *turf*- oriented, localised and engaged in minor criminal activities.[22] In El Salvador, these youth gangs had a strong internal cohesiveness and controlled some of the urban neighbourhoods and public spaces. Most of the gangs enjoyed friendly relations with the local community and even served as watchdogs of protection.[23] This configuration of the gangs was altered with the returnees of the civil war from Southern California, which turned some of the *clikas* into gangs of a second generation, as classified by *inter alia* Oliver Jütersonke or Al Valdez.[24] Henceforth, they worked more profit-oriented and the importance of the territorial bond was replaced by the orientation for *rentas* (income). The adoption of Californian gang identities and behavioural patterns fostered the emergence of two confederations of gangs- the *MS-13* and *Barrio 18*. Not only territorial control for selling drugs played a role, yet was exacerbated by deadly conflicts over identity.[25] Even though these reasons unquestionably contributed to the hostile situation, scholars until today discuss the main historic roots which led to today´s enmity. It was during this period that many young Salvadorians expressed their gang affiliation via tattoos in a more drastic and visible way, which will be analysed in more detail in one sub-section of the analysis.

[21] Bruneau 2011; Savenije and Andrade Eekhoff 2003; Tager 2013; Winton 2012
[22] Valdez 2011: 36
[23] Savenije and Andrade Eekhoff 2003
[24] Jütersonke et al.2009:379 and Valdez 2011:36
[25] Cruz 2009:8

Typically, these second generation gangs operated nationally.[26] In contrast, the third generation gangs are highly structured and financially oriented with ties across the national borders. Their activities surround the acquisition of money and power via sophisticated criminal activities.[27] In the case of the *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio 18,* it is commonly acknowledged that both gangs have active *clikas* in countries of Northern- and Central America as well as across the Pacific with minor presence in Europe.[28] Following the assessment of some frequently cited scholars[29] on street gangs in the region, the *MS-13* and *Barrio 18* would possess the capability to move from second generation street gangs to a more sophisticated transnational organized crime group of the third generation.[30] Regardless this potential, no convincing evidence for a decisive role of the *mara*s in the powerful transnational organised crime cartels has been presented so far.[31] Hence, when assessing the *maras´* bond to their territory, most *clikas* of the *MS-13* and *Barrio 18* possess characteristics of the second generation.

2.3. Gang Membership

In order to analyse the *maras´* territorial strategies, it is vital to know the background of the gang members and their motivations to engage in the often violent struggle with the rival gang or the state over a certain district of the city. The overall majority of the potential and *de facto* gang members are male youngsters. Only very few female-only gangs operate in Guatemala and Nicaragua.[32] According to a 2001 study by the *Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública* (IUDOP) in El Salvador, most gang member had entered the gang at the age of 15 and the average age of the gang members was twenty years.[33]

Naturally, the reasons for joining a gang varies from case to case and it seems that most scholars who examine Central American gangs have not yet agreed upon which factors are most

[26] Franco 2008
[27] Ribando Seelke 2011:4
[28] Valdez 2011: 37
[29] Bruneau 2005; Logan and Morse 2007
[30] Bruneau 2005; Logan and Morse 2007
[31] Wolf 2013: 151
[32] Tager 2013:25
[33] Santacruz Giralt and Concha-Eastman, 2001

determining for the underlying motivations to commit to gang membership. The IUDOP report stated that about 40 percent of the juveniles claimed to join gangs in order to "hang out", about a fifth of the respondents noted that they had gang member friends and 21 percent indicated to dodge family problems.[34] Rodgers and Muggah dismiss any "stereotypical determinants" for gang membership such as "family fragmentation, domestic abuse, or a particular psychological make-up", since no empirical data could proof such claims.[35] Additionally, the IUDOP study also found a potential correlation between unemployment and gang affiliation; 66 percent indicated to be currently "unemployed", whereas seventeen percent named their status as "employed".[36] As a means of comparison, the national unemployment rate lay at ten percent in 2001. Even though most current figures of 2013 indicate a drop to 6.3 percent, a great part of the working force is underemployed. Youth unemployment remains a pressing issue with current numbers of 12.4 percent for the age group of 15-24 Salvadorians.[37] Summarizing, it can be cautiously assumed that unemployed youngsters have a higher risk to turn to youth gangs in order to seek appreciation or financial revenues to avoid living in poverty.

2.4. Differentiating between *pandillas* and *maras*

So far, throughout the thesis no distinction has been made between street gangs, the *maras* and *pandillas,* even though there are differences, especially when applying a spatial and political-geography focus. During the time of the civil war between 1980 and 1992, *pandillas* extended all over the Central American isthmus, which were characterised by loose organisation patterns and localised groups without a transnational character.[38] Post-civil war *pandillas* are defined by their enhanced hierarchical structures as well as the more violent appearance, which could partially be reasoned with the skills of the usage of firearms gained during the civil conflict.[39] In the *postbellum* era, the combatant youth in Central America faced economic uncertainty, the negative impacts of

[34] Santacruz Giralt and Concha-Eastman, 2001
[35] Rodgers and Muggah 2009:5
[36] Santacruz Giralt and Concha-Eastman 2001
[37] CIA World Factbook 2014
[38] Jütersonke, Rodgers and Muggah, 2009:379
[39] Rodgers 2014 in Does 2013:4

fragile statehood and high crime rates. As a consequence, they organised in vigilante self defence groups to protect their families and the local community- a significant feature of the first generation of gangs.[40]

Maras on the other hand have emerged later, mainly in the 1990s. Contrary to the *pandillas*, they have transnational roots and emerged due to migration flows, especially from Los Angeles.[41] In the case of El Salvador as well as Honduras and Guatemala, *maras* like the MS-13 or *Barrio 18* have almost exclusively replaced the former local *pandillas,* which could sustain their presence only in Nicaragua and to a minor degree also in Costa Rica where they are known as *chapulines.*[42] Given this development, the thesis will only examine the territorial strategies of the *maras,* since hardly any *pandilla* groups are present on the streets of El Salvador today.

3. State of the Art and Methodology

Various scholars have published on issues surrounding youth gangs in the Americas. Alike the policy makers in the region, most scholars approached their research from a criminological angle. Especially in the literature published in North America, youth gangs are closely linked to organized crime, delinquency and serve as scapegoats for the severe homicide rates on the Central American isthmus.[43] Nevertheless, more and more scholars seem to acknowledge the lack of scientific evidence for a strong bond between highly organized crime groups such as the Mexican cartels and the local *clikas.*[44] Scholars with a conflict resolution focus have published frequently cited works on the relationship between gangs in Central America, urban violence and security interventions. Especially Oliver Jütersonke, Robert Muggah and Dennis Rodgers from the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding of the Graduate Institute in Geneva stand out with their detailed and sound analysis of urban street gangs in the Central American region.

[40] Rodgers and Muggah 2009:5
[41] Ribando Seelke 2011:4
[42] Jütersonke et al. 2009:379
[43] Manwaring 2007; Brevé 2007; Hagedorn 2008
[44] Wolf 2013; Ribando Seelke, 2011

Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh from Harvard University, among others, has examined the social organization of youth gangs and their relationship to the local communities, which has led to controversies among scholars whether the *maras* can be regarded as source of protection or threat for the inhabitants.[45] On a regional scale, some scholars seem to disagree on the transnational character of the *Mara Salvatrucha* and the *Barrio 18*. Stephan Johnson and David B. Muhlhausen for example base their claims on the underlying notion that youth gangs are transnational actors with ties between Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Honduras. The Director of the Central American Youth Program of the international NGO, Interpeace, which runs a program in El Salvador to support the fragile ceasefire between the gangs, Isabel Aguilar Umaña, and Dagan Rossini disagree. According to the two scholars, the gangs are loosely organized groups without social cohesion which act on a local scale.

Few research have been published so far which makes use of a spatial focus. The Honduran scholar Lirio Gutiérrez Rivera has published her studies of the relationship between public security, the state and marginalized youth groups in her home country. She argues that the state territorial strategies remain powerless to combat the complex forms of social violence Honduras. A study with a related disciplinary background was published by the Mexican Alisa Winton on the global- as well as local outreach of the youth gangs. In a noteworthy article, she concludes that transnational identity formation of the *maras* are produced and enacted on a local level, so that the global and the local scale interact and mutually influence each other.

Arising from this, it is acknowledged that even though extensive research has been conducted in the past, it frequently disregards the spatial focus of how the *maras* acquire territory, allocate and impose their meaning to this *turf* and thereby shaping the space. As will be argued in the following part of the thesis, traditionally state-centric theories of territoriality neglect the *maras´* ability as non-state actors make use of similar approaches as the state to extent and mark their territory. Consequently, the paper at hand contributes to the controversial debates not only

[45] Venkatesh 1997

in academia, but also in the daily news of Central America, by rejecting the criminological approach. Moreover, the spatial dynamics and practices of the *maras* will be illustrated. Hereby, an alternative understanding of the phenomenon surrounding the issue of marginalized youngsters with gang affiliation in El Salvador shall support the voices which call for a more inclusive policy of the gang members into the El Salvadorian society. This is deemed necessary since it will be claimed that the continued marginalisation of the *maras* have tremendously influenced their relationship towards territory and caused them to retreat into their own spaces.

Methodology & Limitations

In order to analyse the spatial practices of the most prominent youth gangs in El Salvador, this thesis employed a two-tier methodological approach. In a first phase, an extensive desk study was conducted, assessing academic works, official government documents, newspaper articles as well as studies by non-governmental and international organizations. Subsequently, this desk research was extended by a series of semi-structured individual interviews. During a fieldtrip in the month of February 2014, I was able to collect material and interviews in the Central American region. Since the focus of this thesis lies on the territorial expansion of the *maras* in the urban neighbourhoods of San Salvador, most of my time during the field research trip was spent in the capital of El Salvador. Interlocutors were academic scholars, government officials, residents of urban neighbourhoods in San Salvador, staff of local non-governmental organisations and journalists. The interview questions were posed in an open manner with respect to the complexity and multi-layered phenomenon of the issue. Neither wanted the interlocutors be quoted in this thesis, nor have their names been openly stated, due to the fragile security situation surrounding the topic of the youth gangs´ presence in the country. Since most meetings were held in public places, it is assumed that the interviewees were reluctant to speak openly with regard to the full extent of their knowledge. Due to personal safety concerns, the field research did not include a personal visit to any of the penal institutions in the country.

Alike other research endeavours in the context of security and justice, the data and information presented throughout this thesis shall be read and interpreted critically. As I experienced during the field trip, the topic of youth gangs in the country was and remains highly politicised by almost all actors involved. It has to be noted that the field trip was conducted in the course of the heights of the presidential electoral campaigns, which terminated in March 2014. While all information gathered were cross checked, the thesis at hand does not claim to be bias-free. Equally, it does not stand to derive universal applicable insights on spatial and territorial practices of youth gang behaviour. The conducted study seeks to illustrate the special case of the *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio 18* in the case of El Salvador. Without doubt, such limitations restrict the general validity of the findings and curtail the regional outreach. As it is argued throughout the thesis, generalizations of local acting gangs remain controversial and will hopefully be subject of further studies of the topic.

4. Territoriality and Space

The thesis at hand adopts a spatial perspective in order to examine the *maras'* strategies to control the territory beyond the state´s influence. Hereby, special attention will be devoted to the relationship that the *maras* establish towards their *turf* in the local neighbourhood by imposing their territorial strategies over the local population and public spaces within a specific area. As it will be argued in this chapter, prevailing theories on space and territoriality remain too state-centric, thereby neglecting the role of powerful non- state actors such as the youth gangs in the case of El Salvador. The understudied territorial strategies and control of space by the *maras* have fostered uncritical views on the production of space as well as the actors involved in controlling and expanding territory. The academic disciplines of international relations, political science or security studies examined the territorial practices of the modern state in all detail. It was only during the last decades that scholars in the field of political geography have openly doubted and challenged the prevailing state centrism in the exclusive production and shaping of territory and space. Thus, since contemporary political geography is expected to yield insightful

understandings of territory, territoriality and space, these central concepts will be dissected in the following.

The emergence of the state´s attachment to its national territory in Europe can be traced back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which is generally argued to bring about the birth of the modern sovereign nation-state.[46] Henceforth, territories were organised according to territorial units, which were controlled and communicated by boundaries.[47] This perspective of a relatively stable interstate system with sound boundaries and static political territory dominated the view of international relations and political science for decades. John Agnew and other political geographers challenged this notion of the naturalization of the (inter-) state system and especially the presumption that territory is fixed.[48] Other scholars such as David Harvey, Neil Brenner or Henri Lefebvre came up with relevant theories, which all shared the underlying notion of non-static territories, which are to be seen as non linear as well as the product of socio-political struggles.[49] Moreover, they argued that this state- territory nexus is subject to constant alterations over time. Every institutionalisation or centralization of state tasks is contested by various actors, as will become obvious in the case of the *maras* as well as the inhabitants of the gated communities and the private security firms in El Salvador. Thus, the scholars note that the state is permanently constructing and conserving political territory, as well as its sovereignty. Alike territory, the latter is not given and static, but requires the constant struggle between different actors throughout history. It shall be acknowledged that most theories used in this thesis were developed by scholars from the Global North and remain Western-centric. Nevertheless, they are deemed useful to illustrate the flaws of the latter and simultaneously offer valuable insights into territorial strategies in general.

[46] Brenner et al. 2003: 3
[47] Brenner et al. 2003: 2
[48] Agnew 1994

Although this thesis rejects state-centrism when discussing space, territory and territoriality, it is inescapable to examine the state´s role in the spatial ordering, since the argument will be made that the youth gangs´ territoriality is to some extent to be regarded as a consequence of the state´s repressive policies towards the *maras*. Moreover, it serves to illustrate a second line of argumentation, namely that state- territoriality, as discussed in the theories, hardly differs from the *maras´* approach to communicate, control and allocate identity to their territory beyond the state´s sphere of influence.

An important contribution to the understanding of the relationship between the state, space and territory has been offered by the US- American urban theorist Neil Brenner. He shares the perception that state space as well as national territory is the outcomes of socio-economic and political processes which occur in certain moments in time.[50] According to him, state space has three dimensions which are not to be seen as mutually exclusive. These dimensions include state space in the narrow-, integral-, and representational sense. Firstly, state space in the narrow sense stresses the state´s strategies to territorialize its power. This means that especially in the form of judicial and political institutions, the state exercises its political power within a specific territory. Brenner dates this back to the emergence of the post-Westphalia modern inter-state system. According to him, this led to the changing configurations of state territoriality due to the enhanced role of frontiers and territorial borders.[51] Again, Brenner adds that these territorial borders are not fixed and should best be conceived as "[...] a medium and result of historically specific political strategies intended to mold the geographies of social interaction both within and between states".[52] Nevertheless, the delimitation of territory in the form of drawing and establishing borders itself does not lead to the process of territoriality. This process has to be accompanied with the attempt to exercise social power. Robert David Sack adds in this regard

[50] Brenner 2004: 452
[51] Brenner et al. 2003: 8
[52] Brenner 2004: 452

"[t]his delimitation becomes a territory only when its boundaries are used to affect behaviour by controlling access".[53]

The second dimension, identified by Brenner, refers to state space in the integral sense. Accordingly, state institutions seek to regulate the social relations and socio-economic activities within its territory.[54] The regulations of urban living can only be done if the state fragments and homogenises space.[55] Henri Lefebvre adds that this production of state space, especially national territory, is generally a violent process.[56] Hence, the state imposes its territorial perception and authority to a specific area, which is called national territory. This materialisation of the state apparatus within the state territory, which the Greek-French Marxist political sociologist Nicos Poulantzas terms "spatial matrix", is most visible in schools, the army or the prison system.[57] Especially Poulantza´s last point will be taken up in the analysis again, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the "spatial matrix" in Salvadorian´s penal system.

According to Lefebvre, state space in the integral sense- so the mobilization of regulatory state institutions within a national territory- requires the establishment of spatial hierarchies. Accordingly, the state constantly attempts to exercise its domination over its territory by homogenizing, fragmenting and imposing hierarchies of space.[58] Consequently, it aims at creating small territorial units, which in the best case are interchangeable because they are homogenised. Whether this applies to the case of El Salvador, where the presence of the state has traditionally been far from all encompassing in all parts of the country, is subject to further examination in the analysis.

The third and last dimension of Brenner´s state space is termed as representational sense. Although Brenner puts the role of the state at the centre of attention in this dimension, it will be

[53] Sack 1986: 19
[54] Brenner 2004: 453
[55] Poulantzas 1978
[56] Lefebvre 1991: 13
[57] Poulantzas 2003: 72
[58] Lefebvre 2003:88

argued that especially in this dimension, the shortcomings of this state centrism will reveal when assessing the influence of the *maras* in El Salvador. Brenner indicates three major foci of state space representation. Thus, it involves the "power/knowledge relations involved in the construction of state territorial divisions", as well as the power by state spatial practices to influence the daily life of its citizens and "the ways in which social alliances are formed and mobilized on a territorial basis, [... to] promote particular interests grounded within already established, emerging, or potential state spaces".[59]

This third dimension highlights the resistance or counterpart in the process of creating state space, leading to the contestation of the state as the exclusive power holder in this process. As will be depicted in the analysis, the youth gangs are a powerful example that this dimension deserves more academic attention. Consequently, the analysis will come back to Brenner´s notion that "[...], all social actors are circumscribed in their projects to remake territory, space and place by geographical configurations inherited from the past, which serve simultaneously as constraints upon future developments and as openings for the latter".[60]

So far, the two concepts of territory and space have been used interchangeably, though many scholars suggest a clear differentiation between the two. Nevertheless, I agree with Brenner and Elden, Poulantzas and Lefebvre for whom both conceptions are inevitably intertwined, which can- and shall not be separated. Poulantzas adds his notion of state territory as "essentially political, in that the state tends to monopolize the procedures of the organization of space".[61] Henri Lefebvre contributes his understanding of the bond between territory and space by stressing: "The production of space, *the national territory,* physical space, mapped, modified, transformed by the networks, circuits, and flows that are established within it [...]. Thus, space is a material- natural- space in which the actions of human generations, of classes, and of political

[59] Brenner et al. 2003: 10
[60] Brenner 2004: 455
[61] Poulantzas 2003: 72

forces have left their mark, as producers of durable objects and realities".[62] This observation of Lefebvre that the state attempts to exercise control, administer and shape the national territory leads him to believe that state and territory become unavoidably attached to each other. Consequently, one of his major premises is that there can be no territory without state and vice versa.[63] Additionally, political territory can only be asserted by physical space, since this is where the state establishes its relationship with the territory over which it claims control through its institutions.[64] In order to do so, it requires territorial strategies, or territoriality, which will be discussed in the following.

One of the few authors who included so called non- state actors in his definition on territoriality is the US- American geographer Robert David Sack. According to him, territoriality is defined as *"the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.* This area will be called the *territory.*" He adds that "[...] territories require constant effort to establish and maintain".[65] So Sack aligns himself with the other authors who see territories as dynamic and flux entities, which remain subject to alterations over time. As aforementioned, for Sack, the simple act of determining boundaries does not create territoriality. Only when this territory is filled with meaning and control by a social actor or the state, one can speak of territoriality.

Sack identified three interdependent relationships of territoriality, namely classification, communication and the assertion of control over an area.[66] Since they are deemed useful in analysing the *maras´* territoriality, these three steps will guide through the analysis of this thesis. Classification refers to the action of claiming property of an area, which can be within the city or anywhere within the state. The second step of communicating the classified territory includes the symbolic marking via for example gestures, signs, graffiti or other visible territorial boundaries.

[62] Lefebvre 2003: 84 [italics as in original text]
[63] Lefebvre 2003: 84
[64] Brenner and Elden 2009
[65] Sack, 1986:19 [italics as in original text]
[66] Sack 1986:21

Obvious examples for this are the national frontiers or 'no trespass' signs. The third step of executing control over that territory is implemented by restricting or allowing access to the territory, thereby creating an in-group out-group constellation.[67] In order for territoriality to be effective, all three features must be present, according to Sack. However, as it will be argued, these efforts of territoriality by the state are under constant contestation by *inter alia* non-state actors such as the *maras* and the inhabitants of the gated communities, guarded by private security guards.

Another dimension of state spatiality, which also yields insights into the *maras* and the urban elite as private actors of territoriality, is scale. Like space and territory, scale is generally perceived to be non-static and subject to changes throughout history. David Harvey defines scale as the "nested hierarchical structures of organization".[68] Neil Brenner stresses the hierarchies of space by noting that:

> *The geographical dimensions of social life consist not only in the fact that social relations assume contextually specific forms in different places, localities or territories. In addition to this 'horizontal' or 'areal' differentiation of social practices across geographical space, there is also a 'vertical' differentiation in which social relations are embedded within a hierarchical scaffolding of nested territorial units stretching from the global, [...] and the national downwards to the regional, the metropolitan, the urban, the local, and the body.*[69]

Putting this rather complex quote into simple terms, Brenner in brief notes that social relations can be put in different hierarchies, reaching from the global to the body. These different levels of social relations are then called scale. Analyzing all scalar dimensions of the *maras* would exceed the scope of this work. Nevertheless, it serves to make the argument that the struggle of

[67] Sack 1986:21
[68] Harvey 1982: 422
[69] Brenner 2004: 9

territoriality between the *maras* and the state to influence the social relations in various scales occurs in the urban neighbourhoods, in the prisons as well as the tattoos on the *mareros* body.

Summarizing, It seems that various scholars agree on the presumption that neither territory nor space are given, yet remain subject to constant alterations of assigned meaning. Therefore, the limited space available is permanently contested by the state and its authority on the one hand, but as I will argue also non-state actors such as the *maras* or the gated community inhabitants in San Salvador on the other hand. Moreover, in this context, it will be claimed that both parties use similar approaches to identify, communicate and exert control over the territory. How effective the *maras* in El Salvador challenge the state´s control over territory and space will be examined in more detail in the subsequent analytical part.

5. Territoriality of the *maras* in El Salvador and the State´s Response

In the aftermath of the civil war in the 1990´s, processes of demilitarisation and democratisation raised hopeful expectations that the era of fighting had come to an end. I recall an informal chat with a taxi driver in San Salvador who explained me his perception of the current Salvadorian reality. "The country still finds itself in a situation of war, you know, only that the enemies have changed. Today, ordinary citizens who have done nothing wrong are shot dead, because they got between the front lines of the *maras*. Nothing has changed."[70] His statement reminded me of a quote by the Uruguayan sociologist Eduardo Galeano who put these observations in different words, by noting "since peace was declared the streets have become scenes of war, the battlegrounds of common criminals and youth gangs".[71]

When considering the macro changes which have occurred in the aftermath of the peace agreement in 1992, one can observe a more diffuse and disordered form of violence in El Salvador.[72] Dirk Kruijt and Kees Koonings, two Dutch anthropologists, argue that the post-

[70] Informal chat with a taxi driver in San Salvador, 20.02.2014, free translation
[71] Galeano 1998: 322
[72] Rodgers 2002: 2

Central American society has undergone a process of "democratisation of brutality and violence" in which all kinds of actors with different goals entered the undeclared armed conflicts.[73] Jenny Pearce, a British political scientist, agrees to these observations and adds

> *the idea that the region´s [Central America] conflicts have been 'resolved' may be true at the formal level of peace accords between armies and insurgents, but is less so at the real level of people´s everyday lives, which remain overshadowed [...] by violence, today of a more social and multifaceted kind than the polarized and political violence characteristics of the 1980´s.*[74]

Thus, the statement by the taxi driver who disapproves any visible amelioration of his personal situation in the everyday life seems to reflect a general trend in post-conflict El Salvador. Since the central focus of this thesis surrounds the territorial strategies of the *maras* in San Salvador and the implications for the citizens (in-) security, the city as a unit of analysis will be highlighted in the following. It is argued that it is especially the city with its urban neighbourhoods in which the new tug of wars for territory reveals. One central argument of the thesis is that the *mara*s´ territoriality is to be seen in the light of endured state repression and marginalization. In order to convey this claim, the urban neighbourhoods and the gated communities in San Salvador will be juxtaposed. Thereby, the gated communities were chosen in order to reveal that the marginalization does not originate from repressive state policies only, yet that especially parts of society perpetuate the expulsion of the youth gangs. Moreover, the spatial exclusion enhances the faultlines between parts of society and lead to a mutual alienation and creation of 'the other', by both the *maras* and the urban elite.

Having argued that the *postbellum* environment in El Salvador is characterised by an environment of insecurity which hardly differs from the decades of civil war, the thesis will in the following highlight further macro changes which are prevalent in San Salvador. This shall serve as a basis in order to argue that the repressive anti gang policies which triggered the violence in the

[73] Kruijt and Koonings 1999: 11
[74] Pearce 1998: 589

city and enhanced the divisions within society, are propelled by new urban wars. Contrary to other wars, these new deadly conflicts have no armistice or clear declared end, as it will become obvious also in the case of San Salvador.

5a. Setting the stage: Territoriality in the context of Urban Insecurity

The focus on the city as unit of analysis helps to overcome the prevailing state-centrism in the scholarship on youth gangs in Central America, especially when choosing a spatial focus. Alike national territory, cities are under constant construction and alter the territory even faster than the state. Thus, throughout the analysis the underlying notion that urban territory is not fixed will prevail. One of the leading scholars on cities in today´s globalized world is the American sociologist Saskia Sassen. In her essay "When the City Itself Becomes a Technology of War" (2010) she claims that whereas the old wars have been fought on the high sea or in the open fields, nowadays the frontlines occur within the cities. Since the analysis reflects various commonalities between Sassen´s observation and the examined situation in San Salvador, the relevant features of her claims will be presented briefly in the context of the current situation in the capital of one of the poorest Latin American countries.

In the past, according to Sassen, cities were able to triage conflicts via commerce and civic activities. However, processes of globalization have propelled new types of conflicts which the city was unable to evade. Such new conflicts include new asymmetric wars and urban violence, ignited by the intensified war between drug cartels for their respective share of parts of the city.[75] According to Sassen´s observations, these processes of reshaping the traditional urban- and national order are part of a larger fragmentation of existing territorial logics. Nevertheless, the nation state and the city are still the main markers of the geopolitical landscape and represent the

[75] Sassen 2008:1

material organization of territory.[76] This disassembling of the order is challenged by various globalization processes, of which she names the "urbanization of war" as one example.[77]

Asymmetric wars are defined by Sassen as "partial, intermittent and lack clear endings. There is no armistice to mark their end".[78] Moreover, Sassen concludes that "The urbanization of war and its consequences is part of a larger disassembling of traditional all-encompassing formats of our early modernity, notably the nation-state and the interstate system".[79] One feature of this new urban war expresses itself in the forms of gang- and police violence, which reflects a more severe breakdown than the often conjure of inadequate policing. As a consequence of this more repressive and violent approaches to reinstall order, Sassen argues that "the pursuit of national security can lead to urban insecurity".[80] The next chapter of the analysis will reveal that similar asymmetric battles between the law enforcement agents or the army and the youth gangs occur, which aggravated urban insecurity and led the *maras* to employ more drastic territorial practices.

In the Latin American region, the army has frequently been used in the attempt to reinstitute order, such as military juntas taking over total control after coups, or more recently as for example in the process of 'pacifying' the *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. One feature of this new contemporary war, which seems prevalent in less developed areas, is the so called de-urbanization or forced urbanization. In her analysis on "new wars", Mary Kaldor adds that the confronting parties avoid a direct military confrontation.[81] In order to control territory, 'the other' based on political affiliation, religion or tribal membership is expulsed via constant terror and atrocities. The consequences of such displacements have a decisive impact on the character of the city, which bears the risks of an accumulation of separate ghettos.[82] When examining the territorial strategies of the *maras* in the urban neighbourhoods in the following, the argument will be made

[76] Sassen 2010: 34
[77] Sassen 2010: 34
[78] Sassen 2010: 36
[79] Sassen 2010: 45
[80] Sassen 2010: 36
[81] Kaldor 1999:8
[82] Sassen 2010: 37

that especially these approaches of alienating themselves against the rest of society via the instalment of terror and atrocities.

In the following, these general observations will be embedded in the analysis on the occasionally violent process of classifying, communicating and controlling territory by the *maras* in San Salvador. It will become obvious that the consequences of these new frontlines within the city have shaped the urban spatial organization of San Salvador. The increasing fear of becoming a target in these new struggles over territory has prompted the elite in San Salvador to hide in "fortified enclaves" as termed by Teresa Caldeira. According to her, such gated communities are "[…] privatized, enclosed and monitored spaces of residence, consumption, leisure and work".[83] Even though different in its degree of security provisions, most of these communities are surrounded by a fence or walls with sophisticated technology of surveillance and round the clock security guards who protect the limited possibilities to enter and exit the enclosed urban entity.[84]

5b. Urban Neighbourhoods & Gated Communities of San Salvador

During my field research in 2014, I was permitted to stay with an upper- middle class Salvadoran family who lives in one of San Salvador´s "fortified enclaves". Even though the community only contained housing facilities and was not self-sufficient as in other Latin American capitals, other aforementioned features were prevalent. It enjoyed strict security measures, especially since it was located on the opposite site of the embassy of the United States so that the inhabitants could rely on an additional source of protection. It is not uncommon that these enclaves are located in the wealthier districts of a city, where international organizations have their local offices. In this case, in addition to the embassy, the United Nations, the German development agency GIZ or the politically left oriented Latin American confederation of states, ALBA, were located next to the community.

[83] Caldeira 1999: 114
[84] Rodgers 2004: 113

As a natural process of urban development, expensive western coffee- or fast food branches have transformed the local character and shape of the district, which has inevitably lead to a segregation of the poor population. In most cases the latter is unable to afford the increasing real estate and consumption prices. Consequently, these fortified enclaves lead to a transformation of the open public spaces of the city where access to certain districts is restricted. The US-British human geographer and sociologist David Harvey identified the "right to the city", which is denied to parts of the population in San Salvador who do not meet conditions such as wealth, social class or residency in a certain area.[85] As outlined in the previous part on gang membership, the youngsters who have joined a gang unsurprisingly do not posses these attributes and have thus only restricted access to parts of the city.

In the following, the thesis will be structured along Robert David Sack´s three steps of acquiring and controlling territory via the classification, communication and assertion of control. These three steps will guide the juxtaposition between these gated communities in San Salvador and the urban neighbourhoods, which are controlled by the *maras*. This juxtaposition will reveal the close ties between the middle- and upper class and the state´s urban-planning, which tend to favour the wealthy areas. Even though I believe that there is no such thing as ungoverned space in San Salvador, it has to be acknowledged that not all urban neighbourhoods in San Salvador are *mara* territories and are neither under constant control by them. Alike the underlying assumptions of Brenner, Lefebvre or Sack, the territories in the neighbourhoods are flux and subject to constantly alterations over time. Since the two major gangs, *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio 18* fight an ever enduring battle over control of certain areas and the boundaries within the city as hinted at by Sassen are altered on a daily basis.

Classification of the territory

In the case of the gated communities, the classification of the territory follows the ordinary state-institutional processes of acquiring real estates. However, this process can in cases also be a

[85] Harvey 2003 : 13

violent one, even though one might not expect it to be. In order to create these new districts for the urban middle and upper class, other settlements of the poorer population have frequently been 'relocated' which in most cases in Latin America meant the destruction of the fragile houses of the poor population.[86] In San Salvador, however, the case is different.

In her research for her dissertation on *barrios cerrados* (gated communities) in San Salvador, Sonia Baires traces the roots of self-fortification back to the *colonia de los militares* (residences of the military), which constituted the first forms of intended urban segregation. In the wake of the civil war, high ranking military officials shielded their family against potential attacks from the 'aggressors' and constructed check points with armed soldiers to control the access to the district.[87] Thus, it can be noted that the personal and collective security of the military officers and their families were the underlying motivation to the unprecedented move to claim districts of the city.

Not only people with power took measures to protect themselves during the bloody armed conflict, which kept the country in suspense for more than twenty years. Shop owners and 'ordinary citizens' who lived in proximity to military facilities also took similar measures. In their case, the main motivation was to seek protection in cases that an armed confrontation would break out.[88] Ever since the permanent perceived need to protect oneself against external aggressors has led to a *mentalidad seguritista* (mentality of security) which not only prevails until today, yet even intensified.[89] Giving this observation, it can be concluded that the marginalisation of the *maras* as potential violent actors finds its roots in the deadly civil war. Moreover, the inherited need for personal protection served as a legitimation to introduce the spatial separation.

One major effect of the closing off of certain parts of the city for one social group of the citizens is the privatization of public space. In this regard, Baires points at a worrisome blurring

[86] Séguin 2006: 26
[87] Baires 2006:70
[88] Baires 2006:70
[89] Baires 2006:70

of the concept of public space and *ciudadanía* (citizenship), which she had only observed so far in the cities of the western hemisphere.[90] This means that economic and political transformations, which delegated the planning and construction of the residential, industrial and commercial space to the private hand, have led to a re-shifting of the private- public nexus. Examples for the latter include the private enclaves, commercial shopping centres and public places. Accordingly, these developments of private urban planning, which were propelled by the neoliberal agendas of the 1990´s, have fostered the rising social exclusion and marginalisation of parts of society.[91]

The self-incarceration of parts of society has also long term implications for the cohabitation of the inhabitants of San Salvador, which is one central argument of the thesis. Whereas the mentality of security was already discussed, practices of social exclusion lead to enhanced faultlines between the inhabitants. Based on the argument of the rise of crime and insecurity, certain groups of society lose the sentiment of communal life, or as termed by the scholar on urbanism, Ángela Giglia, the "restriction of 'community' of small groups of person who live in these gated communities".[92] This observation was confirmed by the family members of the gated community I stayed with, who collectively shared great reservations against the people living outside the community, especially the *mara* members. Asked why they moved into one of the fortified enclaves, they replied "Could you image living in this city [San Salvador] where several murders occur on a daily basis? All these stories of kids being kidnapped and robbed on their way to school from criminal youngsters, no no. If you would have the possibility to live here [in the gated community], you would do the same." [93]

This statement, which was confirmed by other inhabitants in different occasions, illustrates two significant developments in the urban setting of San Salvador. First, the *maras* as criminal youngsters are portrayed in a negative stereotype and blamed for the enduring crime in

[90] Baires 2006: 67
[91] Baires 2006: 67
[92] Giglia 2001:8
[93] Interview in San Salvador with a middle-upper class family on February 27th 2014: free trainslation

the city. Second, as a mother she would not want her children to have any sort of interaction with 'the other', thereby passing on her *mentalidad seguritista* to the next generation. Consequently, the frontlines between the *mara* members and the "ordinary citizens" are strengthened, which makes a peaceful cohabitation of mutual understanding an enormous challenge. The degree of internalized fear and rejection of parts of the population was also revealed in another occasion. When asked about the local transportation system, none of the family members had information on how to move within the city without their private car. Moreover, they noted that none of the community members went anywhere alone, not even in taxi. Important to note in this regard is that these restrictions to move freely within the city can be observed with respect to other parts of the population as well. Whereas the family from the gated communities felt impeded in their free flow of movement, the privatization of public space in the fortified enclaves has the same consequences for the rest of the population who are denied access to parts of the city.

Relating this back to Brenner´s state space in the integral sense, one can conclude that it is not the state institutions which deny the social relations and socio-economic activities within its territory.[94] Accordingly, the urban communities which regulate the access to its small territory impede the free flow and Harvey´s "right to the city". Simultaneously, due to the perceived violence which originates, according to the inhabitants of the gated community, in the *mara* activities, the former is also restricted in its social and economic relations within the city.

Having highlighted the impact of gated communities to the urban territory, the first step of the *maras´* territoriality will be examined in the following. In their case, the classification of their *turf* is a violent process as well, though to a different degree as in the case of the gated communities. Apart from the *mareros´* identification of "subculture", which will be highlighted in a subsequent part of the analysis, the acquisition and control over territory is a process of sense-making. The Spanish word *barrio* can be translated into English as "district" or "neighbourhood". Hence, the classification of territory is of primary importance for the gangs, as reflected in the

[94] Brenner 2004: 453

name of one of the biggest gangs *Barrio 18*. In the logic of the gang members, the group´s reputation rises with the territorial extension and effective control.[95] Their conduct of violently taking their "right to the city" can thus be seen in the light of the aforementioned forced migration history of parts of the *mareros*.[96] Yet, the *mara*s´ struggle to classify territory is two-fold. On the one hand, the violent process of re-claiming their rights to the city is directed towards the state and its security apparatus and on the other hand against the rival gang, which both will be outlined in the following. Since a central claim of the thesis is that the *maras´* territoriality can only be understood in the context of the repressive anti-gang policies, they will be presented in the context of the research focus.

In 2003, the conservative El Salvadorian President Francisco Flores introduced his plans to implement heavy handed responses which targeted exclusively juveniles who had any sort of gang affiliation. The extra rights gained via the policies which became known as *súper mano dura* allowed the police to immediately put suspected gang members into custody.[97] These policies were reasoned by President Flores by blaming the *maras* for 40 percent of all homicides committed in El Salvador.[98] Moreover, the youngsters served as scapegoats for all political and societal evil, which the following quote by President Flores illustrates: "Criminal gangs have descended into dangerous levels of moral degradation and barbarism. We have all known cases of decapitations, mutilations, satanic acts and dismembering committed against minors, old people and defenceless*[sic]* women. It is time we freed ourselves from this plague".[99] Relating this back to the central argument, the nexus between the repressive state policies and the enforced and desired marginalization of the *maras* becomes obvious. Triggered by a top-down imposition, the *maras* are alienated and de-humanised as "plague", which strengthens the divide between the gang members and the rest of society.

[95] Peetz 2004: 52
[96] Harvey 2003
[97] Does 2013: 23
[98] Cruz 2011: 148
[99] Hume 2007:754

These anti-gang campaigns, which were continued even though Flores was not re-elected nine months after the announcement of these 'iron fist' policies, led to a mass incarceration to which the thesis will come back in the third part on territorial strategies in the prison. Hence, when examining the territorial behaviour of the *maras* in San Salvador, it is inevitable to equally reflect on the historic context. Even though they are by far not the only actors in the prevailing violence in San Salvador, the *mareros* are framed as 'the others' who are inherently dangerous. This marginalization serves as a legitimation for the spatial segregation and or as stated by Caldeira "public space […] is increasingly abandoned to those who do not have a chance of living […] in the new private, internalized and fortified enclaves".[100] This privatization of public space has led to an aggravated situation of the urban poor who are the most vulnerable part of urban insecurity.

Summarizing, it seems that the strict classification of territory by the inhabitants of the gated community and the *maras* have aggravated the cohabitation of the inhabitants of San Salvador and fostered segregations from both sides. Moreover, already in the first step of classifying territory, it was argued that the state attempted to create in-group out-group constellations which marginalized the *maras*. However, the classification is just the first step of territoriality, as noted by Brenner. The process of delimiting a certain territory does not automatically lead to effective territoriality, since the claimed space must be communicated and enforced in order to be sustainable. Thus, the second step of communicating the acquired territory will be examined in more detail in the following.

Communication of territory

In order for territoriality, so the acquisition of territory, to become effective and governable, the identified territory has to be communicated to externals. This step identified by Neil Brenner is vital to exercise social power or to put it in Robert David Sack´s words "[t]his delimitation becomes a territory only when its boundaries are used to affect behavior*[sic]* by controlling

[100] Caldeira 1999: 130

access".[101] In the case of the gated communities, the claim for the exclusive use of urban space is communicated by high walls and guarded gates. These gates serve not only to restrict the access to the private space, yet also supposedly promise intimacy, privacy, security and staying among like-minded people.

Frequently, the gated communities are connected to the urban traffic via roundabouts, which shall guaranty the safety of the inhabitants. It has to be noted in this regard that numerous armed robberies and carjacking have occurred at traffic lights, thus in order to protect the population, several Central American cities have constructed roundabouts on several roads.[102] The scholar Dennis Rodgers observed that the improvement of the roads as well as the construction of roundabouts occur mainly in the districts of the urban elites.[103] Thus, not only the gated community classifies its territory via high walls, though also extent it to the surrounding districts via the support of the urban policy makers, so representatives of the state. Again, this can be related back to the aforementioned claim of the blurring between the public-private nexus in urban planning.

The walls and fortification alongside with the armed guards perpetuate the in-group out-group constellations in San Salvador. Still, the urban elite and the policy makers, who occasionally seem to favour parts of society when it comes to urban planning, are not the only ones who contribute to this separation and marginalization. The territorial strategies of the *maras* to communicate their *turf* are nearly identical to the urban middle- and upper class. Alike the gated communities, the *maras* have installed walls and fences to protect- and exclude themselves from the rest of society. Legitimized by their own protection against the repressive state apparatus and

[101] Sack 1986: 19
[102] Rodgers 2004: 121
[103] Rodgers 2004: 121

rival gangs, they closed off parts of the city.[104] Furthermore, a decisive element of the subculture and proclaimed *la vida loca* (crazy life) includes the communication of the delimited *turf* via graffiti.

In their studies on urban graffiti as territorial markers, David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky noted that

> *Graffiti might be regarded, perhaps, as a rather whimsical element in the sum total of cultural baggage of interest to the social scientist, yet […] they provide accurate indicators of local attitudes and social progress in areas where more direct measurement is difficult.* […] *They manifest the distribution of various social attitudes and intimate subsequent behavior[sic] in space […]*[105].

Even though the authors´ article was published decades before the walls of San Salvador have been 'tagged' by the *maras,* their observation that the "[…] graffito represents part of 'a twilight zone of communication"' still holds true.[106]

[104] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation
[105] Ley and Cybriwsky 1974: 491

Figure 2: Graffiti by the Mara Salvatrucha in San Salvador ©www.jansocor.com, Accessed July 15th 2014

Such graffiti as illustrated above constitutes a central part of the lifestyle and transnational identity of the *maras*. Due to the forced migration history of the *maras,* the graffiti of the *Mara Salvatrucha* and *the Barrio 18* can be found across the walls of Los Angeles, Guatemala City, Tegucigalpa and San Salvador. They serve as territorial markers for the acquired territory and send a clear message to the rival gang, the law enforcement agents and the local population that this territory is under the control of the gang. The motives of the graffiti vary. In most cases, the graffito displays the name of the gang, but can also include images such as smiling clowns, monks, tombstones or crucifixes.[107] These images can also be found as tattoos on the *mareros* bodies, which will be examined in the second part of the analysis. In contrast to the ordinary graffiti, the gang members usually refrain from putting their personal (nick-) name on the wall.[108] This practice owes to the very strong 'We' and family sentiment among the *mareros* in which the community is higher valued that the individual. Only in cases in which a gang member has been a victim of a deadly attack by another gang or the police, the former member is mourned and remembered with a graffito with his nick name.[109]

The graffiti as a permanent form of communicating the *turf* under control is however not the sole expression of *mara* territoriality. Due to repressive *(súper) mano dura* policies, the *maras* were forced to alter their territorial behaviour and hide into clandestineness. Thus, the gestures and finger signs gained importance and were also used to express the gang affiliation as well as communicate to outsiders that this district of the city is under *mara* control. Moreover, a limited range of messages can be communicated via these sign as well.[110] Relating this back to the central

[106] Ley and Cybriwsky 1974: 492
[107] Peetz 2004: 54
[108] Lye and Cybriwsky 1974: 494
[109] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation
[110] Peetz 2004: 54

argument, the *maras´* territoriality can only be understood when reflecting on the context of the *mano dura* policies

. Another feature of the *la vida loca* lifestyle, which should be interpreted as a rejection of all middle-class behaviour and values, is the way of dressing and the hair style. Owing from the Californian *latino* street gangs, the *maras* dress in loose shorts and shirts without sleeves in order to display their tattooed bodies.[111] Most male *mara* members shave their head and sometimes even "re-paint" their hair via tattoos as illustrated in the picture on the bottom right.

Communicating with *mareros* as an outsider can be challenging since the *maras* have developed an own style of speaking, which is a left-over of English expressions which were adapted into Spanish. Examples for the latter include "*jomies"* which was taken over from the English word "*homie"*, or "*broderes"* (brothers) respectively. Furthermore, the meaning of other Spanish words is changed completely and another meaning is allocated. For example, "Aquí rifa la 18" communicates that this district is under the control of the 18th Street Gang, even though one could translate the Spanish *rifar* into to raffle or to quarrel.[112]

Figure 3: *Sharky*, leader of the *Barrio 18* in one of San Salvador´s prisons ©discoverychannel, Accessed March 1st 2014

La vida loca as expressed via graffiti, signs and gestures, hair and clothing style as well as the language aims at expressing their gang affiliation. The tattoos, language and gestures all create the strong "we" feeling, which characterises various *clikas*. Moreover, this creation of identity in an obvious and visible way is used to distance themselves from the rival gang and rest of society. Hence, each gang has their own codex and variety of tattoos, which are unique.[113] Since the *maras* were excluded and stigmatized from parts of the inhabitants during the *mano dura*

[111] Peetz 2004: 54
[112] Peetz 2004: 54

policies, they developed own ways to communicate the exclusive usage of territory and space within San Salvador. Consequently, the above identified perpetuation of in-group out group constellations are also propelled by the *mareros*.

Figure 4: Gestures showing the gang affiliation of MS-13 members in El Salvador ©www.lacronica.com, Accessed February 12th 2014

Apart from the visible approaches of communicating their *turf*, the *maras* have also made use of more drastic ways of using violence to ensure their respect within the local population of San Salvador. Gathering reliable data and information on the involvement of the *maras* in any sort of violence in San Salvador remains a challenging task. As hinted at in the quote by the former president of El Salvador, the government institutions used and still use the *maras* as scapegoats of all evil occurring in the country.[114] Additionally, the media is equally involved in sensationalist daily reports of violence, supposedly caused exclusively by youth gangs.[115] Thus, the following data shall be interpreted with caution and only serve the argument that even though it is impossible to determine exact numbers, one can assume that the *maras´* use violent and sometimes deadly approaches of communicating their territory.

[113] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation
[114] Does 2014: 22
[115] Andara Velásquez 2009: 36

El Salvador holds the third highest homicide rate in Latin America, which currently ranges at around 41.2 homicides per 100,000, though due to the fragility of the current truce between the *MS-13* and the *Barrio 18*, it remains subject to great fluctuations.[116] Figure 5 on the left illustrates the evolution of the monthly homicide rate in the country. One can observe a sharp decrease between January and April 2012, which originates in the ceasefire which the *Mara Salvatrucha* and *the Barrio 18* agreed upon.[117] Even though the *maras* are by no means the only source of homicides, the sharp drop in homicides following the truce hint at the conclusion that parts of the homicides are committed by rivalling gangs. Figure 6 on the bottom right locates the homicides according to the departments. It becomes obvious that along with Santa Ana, Sonsonate and San Vicente, the department of San Salvador struggles with rates with more than 75 homicides between March 2011 and February 2012. Hence, the question arises who

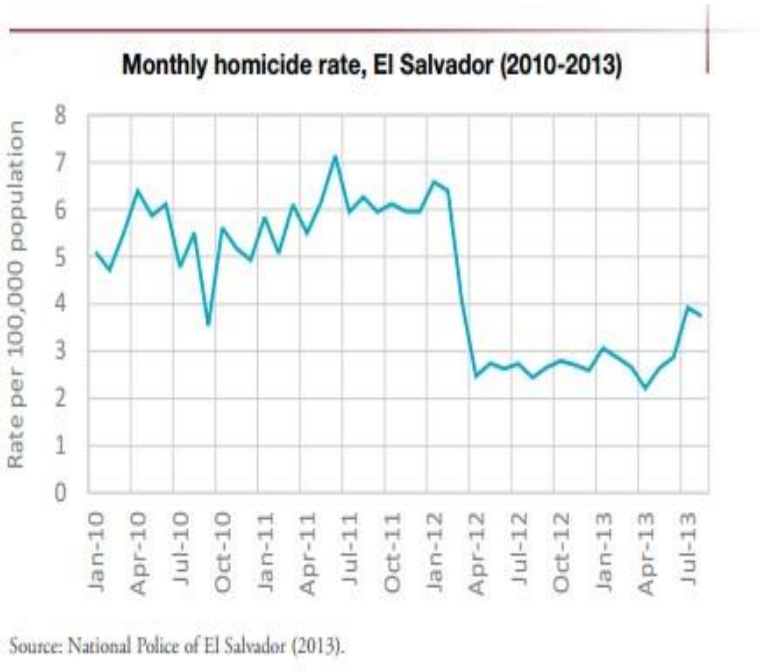

Figure 6: Monthly homicide rates, El Salvador (2010-2013), Source: UNODC 2013:45, Accessed February 2nd 2014

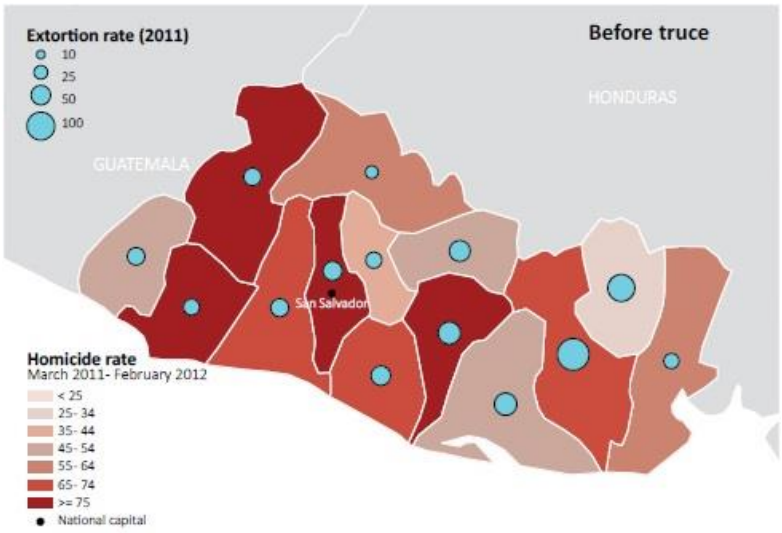

Figure 5: Homicide rates in the departments of El Salvador, Source UNODC 2013:46, Accessed August 15th 2014

[116] UNODC 2013: 24
[117] UNODC 2013:46

According to the UN World Youth Report on Central America, in 97.5 percent of all forms of violence are committed by male aggressors, whereas 92 percent of the victims are female. Most of the aggressors and victims are youngsters or young adults between the age of 15 and 29.[118] Marginal youth´s participation in the gangs is where the gendered effects of masculine violence become most visible.[119] *Mareros* of the two biggest gangs have institutionalized violence in their behaviour patterns. In order to join a gang, prospective youngsters have to bear severe beatings from their future "*jomies"* or even kill a rival gang member.[120] Other practices include drive-by-shootings of rival gang members, violent extortions, beatings, rape of female and male *mara* members.[121] These escalations of violence have fatal consequences for the rival gang, but also the Salvadorian society, which will be analyzed in the following. This shall serve the argument that these practices of the *maras* underline their territorial entitlements in order to alienate the rest of society as a response to the marginalization propelled by the anti-gang laws.

The term violence is "slippery", since it includes many meanings and different interpretations to different people.[122] Even though it is acknowledged that there are other forms of violence such as domestic violence or sexual abuse, the thesis restricts itself to social violence, which entails mostly delinquency, homicides and crime, which in most cases go along with public insecurity and fear. In a study on the Honduran society, which is equally wrecked by violence, the anthropologist Adrienne Pine observed that violence has become part of the Honduran "imagined community".[123] Borrowing from Bourdieu´s notion of symbolic violence, the latter is internalized and accepted via individual-subjective experiences such as threats, muggings or sexual abuse.[124] Mo Hume, who conducted several studies on gendered violence in El Salvador,

[118] UNICEF 2007
[119] Tager 2013:26
[120] SantaCruz and Concha- Eastman 2001
[121] Escobar 1996
[122] Hume 2008: 62
[123] Pine 2008; Anderson 1991
[124] Bourdieu 2010

adds that the experienced violence is filled with contradictions, which become evident in the state, yet also in the lives of the individuals.[125]

These observations of violence as part of the daily life were confirmed in personal interactions with some citizens of San Salvador. Violence is a topic in various daily conversations of Salvadorians, as one woman in the bus noted. In one occasion, I joined a family on the way to dinner. When I opened the window of the car, the driver yelled that I should close the window immediately since robberies and carjacking would occur on a daily basis. Thus, the internalized fear and constant distrust were confirmed and provided me with an account of how deep these anxieties are entrenched in the Salvadorian society.[126]

Summarizing the analysis of the second step of territoriality, it has been argued that the *maras* communicate their territory with similar approaches as the gated communities via the construction of walls and fences. Like the state communicates its national territory with check points and border controls, the *maras* use graffiti, signs and gestures to demarcate their territory. By closing off parts of the city, the *maras* control the access and exit of inhabitants of the urban neighbourhoods like the state regulates the in-and outflow of people. Moreover, it seems that certain *mara* members do not shy away from violently communicating their territory. Recalling Henri Lefebvre´s notion that the production of state space, especially national territory, is a generally violent process[127], it revealed that also non- state actors such as the *maras* use violent approaches to extend and communicate their territory. Even though it has to be noted and stressed that the *maras* are by far not the sole source of insecurity in San Salvador, they contribute to the constant fear of society, which has been internalized by great parts of society. Their *vida loca* collides with the lifestyle of the urban elite who prefer to stay among themselves and separate from 'the other' in their gated communities.

[125] Hume 2008:62
[126] Notes from my field trip to El Salvador in February 2014
[127] Lefebvre 1991

Control over territory

The first step of classifying the territory, followed by the communication of the latter as the subsequent necessary element of territoriality is insufficient, according to Sack and Brenner, as long as this territory is not effectively controlled. Hence, in the following, the last inevitable element of imposing authority over the social interactions and territory will be discussed. Hereby, it will be argued that the territorial strategies and means to govern the acquired space are similar in the cases of the *maras* and the gated communities. The claims by the aforementioned theoretical scholars that it is mainly the state which enacts territoriality will be relativised in the case of El Salvador, which represents the second major argument of this thesis.

In order to discuss the control mechanisms of the gated communities in San Salvador, one has to differentiate between at least three types of *barrios cerrados*. Based on different social classes, the degree of self-fortification varies. Since so far no high end gated community have been constructed in San Salvador, the analysis of the control of access to the elite´s territory will surround the second and third type of *barrios cerrados*. It can only be noted that some of the features of a so called first type of gated community include tennis courts, supermarkets and greatest security restrictions on the entrance of the community.[128]

The second type of prestigious urban complex of about 250- 500 housing facilities is reserved for the very small upper-middle class of San Salvador. In the case of San Salvador, these communities have to maintain the green areas as well as hire private security guards by themselves. Since in all cases these facilities are still equally guarded by around the clock security guards and physical boundaries to enter the community, the control of the access hardly differs from the first type of the gated communities.[129] In the case of the *barrio cerrado* where I was permitted to stay, similar security measures were adopted so that one could only access the enclosed complex via a single checkpoint. Still, when entering the facility I was never asked or checked by any of the guards, which most probably would have been different in the case of a

[128] Baires 2006: 73
[129] Baires 2006: 75

same-aged male Salvadorian. Even though the community enjoyed all of the above mentioned safety measures, the host family did- or could not refrain from their *mentalidad seguritista*. After small- talking to one of the neighbours, I was urged from the family to not even trust him due to compunctions about their and my security. Consequently, one could conclude that even the restricted control of the territory via the private security guards failed to calm parts of the residents.

The third type of gated community in San Salvador employs different control patterns as the aforementioned ones. Organised in *vigilantes* (collective defence units), these parts of the city are not privatised, but still restrict the access of vehicles and pedestrians. Most of these inhabitants are public employees or work in the private sector. These social classes feel most vulnerable of losing their social status due to feared unemployment, gradual impoverishment or the rise of violence.[130] The physical barriers to access the neighbourhood are much more modest than of the complexes of the first and second type. The priority of these inhabitants lie in enclosing the *barrio* via gates or private security guards which in some cases are only present during the night, depending on the general income of the inhabitants. Since receiving the public permission to close off roads via gates is only possible via high degrees of corruption or high fees, most of the residents constructed gates without any public authorization. In these cases, the practice of collective self- incarceration via *grupos de autodefensa* (groups of volunteers ensuring the collective security) aims at establishing or maintaining the security and value of their houses.[131] This lack of trust in the state as protector of the citizen´s security and wellbeing hints at a general trend which will be highlighted in the following after a preliminary brief summary.

Even though one has to differentiate between the degrees of controlling the territory of the urban upper and middle class, it revealed that all of them use private guards or *autodefensa* groups to shield themselves against the perceived and real violence occurring permanently in San

[130] Baires 2006: 77
[131] Baires 2006: 77

Salvador. One feature of the third type of gated communities by the middle class deserves special attention. Contrary to the claims by Brenner, Lefebvre or Sack, the inhabitants avoid and circumvent the state´s monopoly of power and administrative control by closing off streets without any state permission. Thus, one can conclude that territoriality, so the classification, communication and control over territory, is effective without any help of the state in the case of San Salvador. In accordance with Brenner´s notion of space in the representational sense, the daily lives of the Salvadorians are influenced by impeding the free flow of movement or the "right to the city" respectively not only the state or the *maras*, yet also by parts of the Salvadorian population. Relating this back to the central argument that non-state actors such as the *maras* are equally capable of effectively executing territoriality, one can infer that not only the *maras* and the state, yet also the inhabitants of gated communities are to be included as powerful agents of territoriality. This observation adds additional weight to the claim that overcoming the state centrism in the literature on space, territory and territoriality is inevitable.

Having portrayed the ability to circumvent the state´s influence in executing its control over territory, the thesis will in the following highlight an additional trend in El Salvador, which further undermines the notion of the state as sole powerful agent in the process of territoriality. Given the aforementioned high levels of homicides in the country, general confidence and trust in the state are very low among the population which explains the drastic measures of attempting to regain control over the neighbourhoods by the citizens themselves. As reluctantly admitted by one interview partner, who holds an influential post in the current Sánchez Cerén administration, the Salvadorian state is unable to exercise its power monopoly in parts of the country, "which has led to a worrisome privatization of security in the country".[132] This trend of 'outsourcing' public and individual security is prevalent in most parts of Latin America. Following the *mano dura* policies, the private security business became a booming industry. According to the Small Arms Survey of 2011, private security firms were worth $US 100-165 billion annually. Throughout the

[132] Interview conducted with a high ranking government official in San Salvador, 17.02.2014, free translation

Latin American continent private security personnel outnumbers police officers by at least eight to one, whereby the number in El Salvador is even higher.[133]

Due to the lack of transparency in the private security industry, reliable data on the number of private security firms in El Salvador remains a challenging task. According to the El Salvadorian government, 274 private security firms were registered in El Salvador- a country which counts about seven million inhabitants.[134] These 274 firms employ about 22,000 security agents and possess about 17,000 arms.[135] As noted by a government official, about 100 out of these 274 firms do not report back to the government, which deprives the government from any control about them.[136] As a comparison, the government of El Salvador announced to have 21,900 police officers employed in 2012.[137] Accordingly, it becomes obvious that not only the state apparatus with its law enforcement personnel controls the state territory, but the rise in security firms has led to a privatization of security in El Salvador. This development matters when examining the *maras´* territoriality, since the private security firms can be seen as an answer to the urban insecurity, which originates in the generalised fear of the *maras*. Simultaneously, this uncontrolled privatization runs counter to the state´s power to enforce control. Hence, this development contributes to the rather weak potential of the Salvadorian state as an actor of territoriality.

Both the police and the jurisdiction in El Salvador contribute to this trend of lack of control. After ten days of training, every Salvadorian can become an armed security guard.[138] Considering the socio-economic background of the *mara* members, it is obvious that it is mainly the urban middle- and upper class who can afford to pay for their personal protection via such security guards. Thus, in order to seek protection, the *mareros* turn into private security guards

[133] Small Arms Survey 2011
[134] Guzmán 2011:1
[135] Guzmán 2011:1
[136] Hernández 2012:1
[137] Hernández 2012:1
[138] Guzmán 2011:1

themselves to control their territory, which will be elaborated on in the following, after a brief summary.[139]

Summarizing the third step of territoriality, namely effective control over territory by the gated communities, it revealed that although one has to differentiate between at least three general types of *barrios cerrados*, similar patterns prevailed. The Salvadorian middle and upper class restrict the access to the land, which they perceive as a private part of the city. Under the umbrella of ensuring the security of the family, *autodefensa* or *vigilante* groups are installed to shield them from the "outside" violence. Due to the failure of the state to adequately respond to the rise of urban violence, private security mushroomed and even outnumbered the law enforcement authorities of the Salvadorian state. Yet, since the *maras* are unwilling and unable to afford such private security outsourcing, the last and vital step of territoriality is enforced by them, as will become obvious in the following.

One reason why the direct contact to *mareros* proofed very challenging during the field research was their reluctance to grant access to their lives to outsiders. Originating in their decade long marginalization by policy makers, most *mara* members retreated into their closed off *barrios* and avoided contact to the rest of society and vice versa. Consequently, it is physically impossible to access one of the controlled areas of the youth gangs due to tremendous safety measures which most, but not all, youth gangs in San Salvador have established, according to one interview partner.[140] The interviewee, who currently holds a leading position in an international NGO which works closely with the gang members to facilitate the truce between the gangs, agreed to meet me at a café in San Salvador. Noteworthy in this regard is that he preferred to meet in a noisy public place, where he could be sure that due to the upscale character of the café the chances of being heard by one of the *mara* members are as limited as possible. Regardless his safety measures, he insisted on moving to the children corner of the café where outside noises

[139] Muggah and Aguirre 2013: 4
[140] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation

would prevent others from grasping parts of our conversation. Given these precautions, one can comprehend the sensibility of the issue of youth gangs, not only for the state and its citizens, yet also for NGO workers. It would be too far stretched to conclude that *maras´* or the state´s control stretch even until the behaviour of everyone in the country. Still, this environment illustrates the respect for the surveillance mechanisms which are installed by both actors within the country.

According to the interviewee´s reports, some *clikas* pursuit a clear territorial strategy to exercise control over their demarcated area.[141] In case a non-member of the gang wants to access an area under the control of either the *Barrio 18* or the *Mara Salvatrucha,* a middle- or contact person is inevitable. Generally, the interviewee noted that one has to wait at a neutral place where the scouts of the *maras* inspect the vehicle and the person inside. In case the visit is approved and access is granted, one has to cross a huge iron gate which has been installed by the *mareros* in order to shield themselves against aggressors. Remarkably in this context is that solely high ranking youth gang members carry the key to this gate which closes off parts of the urban neighbourhoods. Thus, in order to access or leave the *barrio*, the inhabitants are required to have any kind of gang affiliation or favourable relationship with members of the *mara.*[142] Relating this back to the territorial strategies of classifying and controlling the territory of the urban elite and middle class, it reveals that all of these actors of territoriality follow similar behavioural patterns of self-fortification. Additionally, these developments can be regarded as representing the inability of the state to exercise control over its territory.

So far, the clearly cut faultlines within the city between the urban middle- and upper class and the *mareros* have been depicted. Nevertheless, the general picture of territoriality would be insufficient without also analysing the divide which occur within the controlled space of the

[141] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation
[142] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation

urban neighbourhoods. Since the relationship between the inhabitants of urban territory under *mara* control is ambiguous, it will be elaborated on in the following since it is argued that it reflects a decisive element of the gangs´ approach of controlling their territory.

In her studies on community tolerance of gang violence in a Chicago Chicano community, the Professor of Sociology at the University of New York, Ruth Horowitz, argued that the acceptance of violent actions committed by gang members varies in the degree and may be fragile.[143] In order to bring forth her argument, she relies on the differentiation by Lofland of positive and negative toleration. Accordingly, "negative toleration is the ability 'to put up with' another´s differences or potentially problematic conduct simply because of lack of awareness or limited contact between self and other". Positive toleration involves "the ability to maintain a relationship with another in open awareness and 'with at least a mild appreciation' of their personal behavioural differences".[144] Describing the social environment of the *barrio* and the family, Horowitz points at the close family ties between the gang members and the extended family, which in most cases reasons the tolerance of violent actions. Moreover, according to her, the gangs act as protectors of the urban neighbourhood and the families, which make them a viable source of personal security.[145] Whereas the strong ties between *mareros* may be prevalent until this day, the tolerance of the involvement of the *maras* in illicit activities vanished.

In the 1990´s, when the *maras* gained strength in parts of San Salvador, they enjoined a generally positive relationship with the local community. In fact, most *maras* were regarded as ensuring the control over the local territory or *barrio* by defending the local shop owners against extortions or other acts of delinquency.[146] Nevertheless, with the change from the first to the second generation of gangs, the relationship and the tolerance of violence of the inhabitants of the gang-controlled areas changed drastically. Henceforth, the *mareros* turned from the protectors

[143] Horowitz 1987: 437
[144] Lofland 1983:5 in Horowitz 1987:437
[145] Horowitz 1987: 448
[146] Savenije and Andrade-Eekhoff 2003: 264

to the aggressors and started financing their *vida loca* lifestyle by extortions, kidnappings and trade with illicit drugs such as marihuana, crack or cocaine.[147]

The gang wars of the past surrounded the regulation of social violence in order to transform neighbourhoods into safe areas for the local population. Consequently, these areas were turned into no-go zones for outsiders.[148] However, due to the transformation and more active engagement of the *maras* in the drug trade, such no-go areas would be counterproductive for the local drugs market. Among other reasons, these developments also contributed to the intensification of the severe tug of war between the gangs and the importance of their local territory as business market. This active engagement in selling and consuming so called hard drugs led to intensified deadly struggles between the gangs.[149] Following this argument, a decisive insight into the relationship between the *maras* and their relationship to territory reveals. According to one member of the *Barrio 18,* the acquisition and control over local neighbourhoods and *turf* follow economic principles solely. Thus, more territory means higher *rentas* (rents) since the gang can extort more shops or demand higher "war taxes".

In this context, *Sharky*, who leads a *Barrio 18* group in a prison of El Salvador, noted in an interview "This is why territory is so sacred, because territory means more rents. [...] There is no boss growing rich, everything we share. Whenever money comes in from extortions, all our needs are being covered from what is coming in from the streets."[150] Interestingly to note is that the same *Barrio 18* leader refused to comment on the remark that the gangs make the situation even worsen the situation in the district by extorting shop owners in the poor neighbourhoods.[151] Some authors tend to portray the *maras* as part of very powerful transnational organised crime networks which operate in Central America[152], yet so far, no persuasive arguments have been

147 Savenije and Andrade- Eekhoff 2003: 266
148 Rodgers 2002:8
149 Rodgers 2002:8
150 Ferrante 2013
151 Ferrante 2013
152 Manwaring 2007, Galdámez 2008

presented which proof the large scale involvement in for example the eastern Salvadorian smuggler group Los Perrones or the Texis Cartel in the North West.[153] Relating these findings back to the focus of this subchapter and the line of argumentation, one can conclude that the control as the vital third step of the *maras´* territoriality has evolved from solely outward looking protection from external aggressor towards shielding themselves against the state and the rival gang. They engaged in violent suppressions of the local neighbourhood in order to finance their gang life style. Even though it is argued that generally the *maras* and the state pursue similar approaches of territoriality, the degree of violence employed as noted by Lefebvre varies.[154] As it will be underlined in the following, some *clikas* do not shy away from brutal means to control their sphere of influence as the third step of territoriality.

The degree of control and spread of public fear could best be illustrated according to the traditional extortion profits, which the *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio 18* collect not only in El Salvador, yet also in Guatemala, Honduras, Peru and Colombia.[155] One major source of revenue for the gangs is extorting bus companies, which operate transnational, yet also within the cities. According to the Salvadorian newspaper *El Diario de Hoy*, the *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio 18* have doubled the extortion revenues in the past year (2013) to three million $US per month.[156] This amount accounts for about ten to 25 percent of the monthly income of the companies, which causes some of them to stop operating. Relying on the support of the state seems hopeless as one bus firm owner noted "If the transport companies report these acts to authorities, we haven´t even left the meeting before the street gangs double the fee as a reprisal".[157] An additional challenge for the companies is the multiple times of extortions, as the buses have to cross

[153] Wolf 2013:156
[154] Lefebvre 1991
[155] Parkinson 2014:1
[156] Sucesos 2014
[157] Parkinson 2014:1

through various districts of the city or municipalities, which are all controlled by different *maras*.[158]

One factor which is safe to assume to have aggravated the bus extortions is the lack of security in the public transportation system, which can be interpreted as weak territorial control execution by the state. Alike in the neighbouring state of Honduras, where equal problems keep the population of Tegucigalpa in suspense, the government of El Salvador introduced elite security forces agents on the city buses in order to protect the civilians.[159] However, due to overwhelming cost and lack of funding, the government had to announce the end of this safety measure. The ones who suffer from this are the citizens, which the event of June 21st, 2010 illustrates. On this day, in the district of *Mejicanos* in the suburban neighbourhood of San Salvador, allegedly some *Barrio 18* members stopped a city bus and set it on fire, leaving seventeen passengers dead and another nine heavily wounded. In the aftermath of this event, some media channels and politicians denounced the youth gangs´ extortion policies for the tragedy, as a reaction of missed payments.[160] In case these small businesses and bus extortions are committed as assumed, by the youth gangs, it would add to one very powerful approach of spreading fear among the population in order to enhance not only the income of the *maras*, yet also diffuse their control of the territories.

Summarizing this first main part of the analysis, the three steps of territoriality between the gated communities and the urban neighbourhoods under *mara* control were juxtaposed. It has been argued that the classification, communication and control of urban space and territory by the urban middle- and upper class in the fortified enclaves follow the same spatial strategies as the *maras*. Both actors close off parts of the city in order to protect themselves against violent assaults, by either hiring private security guards or, in the case of the *maras*, by becoming street soldiers themselves. Remarkable in this sense is that counter to the initial claims by scholars on

[158] Parkinson 2014:1
[159] Flores and Santos 2012
[160] Batres 2010

space, territory and territoriality, the state cannot be regarded as a powerful executer of territoriality, which achieves to effectively execute its power monopoly in the struggle over territory.

The new frontlines in the urban war, as observed by Saskia Sassen, seem to have aggravated the cohabitation also within the city of San Salvador. Mary Kaldor´s observation on the "new wars", in which 'the other' is constantly terrorized and victim of atrocities, has led to the accumulation of "urban ghettoization" of the fortified enclaves and closed off districts by the *maras*. Even though it has been noted that the *maras* have frequently engaged in deadly assaults in San Salvador and beyond, using the marginalized youngsters as sole scapegoat is too short-sighted. Only when considering the repressive (*súper) mano dura* policies, which have undoubtedly aggravated the security situation, one can grasp the territorial strategies of the *maras* in its entirety. Since, these policies have tremendously shaped the territoriality of the youth gangs also in the prisons, the following part of the analysis will be devoted to that.

5c. The Prison- The State´s Centre of Power?

I recall a former visit to the Bolivian city of La Paz, where one of the national detention facilities is located nearby the city centre. While waiting in the nearby park, I was approached frequently by various men who offered me to show me around in the infamous *Penal de San Pedro*. Guarded by only a handful of policemen, the prison looked normal from the outside, though these men promised access to an own society with rules being established and enforced by the inmates themselves. Later, I came to know that the prison was practically self-governed and had established shops, hotels and housing facilities for the families of the convicted male inmates. The prison was subdivided according to wealthier cells, ranging from ownership of hot tubs, yet also the simple concrete floor on which a great part of the inmates had to sleep. Even though the situation in El Salvador differs from the delineated situation in La Paz, similar patterns of self governance within the prisons reveal.

In the following sub-chapter of the analysis, the territoriality of the *maras* in the Salvadorian state prisons will be examined in more detail. Hereby, special attention will be given to the macro developments which have led to the rising number of inmates, which changed the power relations within the Salvadorian prison system with respect to the influence of the incarcerated *maras´* territoriality beyond and within the state control. In order to contextualise the developments in El Salvador within the Latin American sub-continent, the first section of the analysis will examine the arguments raised by Loic Wacquant on the rise of the penal state in Latin America in order to argue that most policies in El Salvador occur within a general trend in the region.

Examining territoriality of the *maras* inside the prison provide valuable insights, since it is argued that here the struggle between the state and the *maras* in communicating and controlling territory and shaping the space is most contested. The history of imprisoning and punishing outlaws is not a recent phenomenon, though prisons together with implementing institutions representing the rule of law, were established relatively late in Latin America, with Brazil being the first country in 1834.[161] In the beginning of the twentieth century, many Latin American countries did not rely on prisons to discipline or produce "docile bodies" as termed by Michel Foucault.[162] Reformist elites in Latin America then copied the prison system in order to modernize the state techniques of social control via punishment and forced discipline and regulate social interactions according to race, gender and class.[163] Nevertheless, these imported forms of prisons did not yield the desired success of social control by the elite. Traditional forms of 'enforcing justice' prevailed and led to public hangings, whipping or burning as attempts to ensure the social order, especially the divide between classes, race and gender.[164]

[161] Salvatore, Aguirre and Joseph 1996:18
[162] Foucault 1995
[163] Salvatore and Aguirre 1996:19
[164] Salvatore and Aguirre 1996:20

The neoliberal era in the 1970´s and 1980´s in Latin America added another aspect to the attempts to enforce peace and stability. Accordingly, one central feature of the rise of neoliberal politics and the accompanied "fabrication of social order" is the tendency to introduce politics of punishment throughout the Americas.[165] As observed by various scholars[166], these policies were reflected in a renaissance and reinvention of the prison, with rising prison populations and mass imprisonments as during the times of the (*súper-*) *mano dura* policies.[167] In line with the aforementioned scholars, these politics of confinement are interpreted as indications for the neoliberal agendas´ approach to fighting poverty and marginality by penalizing the poor, which for the case of El Salvador includes the *mara* members.

One of the main critics of these developments is the French sociologist Loic Wacquant, who published numerous works on the reinvention of the prison system as the main approach of 'governing' the marginalised and poor part of society. According to Wacquant, the neoliberal social order is governed by a 'neoliberal Leviathan', which takes the form of a penal state of "*punitive containment as a government technique* for managing deepening urban marginality.[168] Even though he concentrates his studies on the developments in the United States and Europe, he goes on to argue that the formation of the penal state as well as the penalization of poverty have become a global phenomena.[169] In the case of Latin America, this spread of policing urban poverty materialised in the 'zero tolerance' and *mano dura* approaches, on which the thesis will come back in this section.[170] These policies, according to Wacquant, "amount[.] to re-establishing a dictatorship over the poor".[171]

When examining the rise of neoliberal policies in Latin America, it is argued that they propelled the downsizing of the state and led to what Neil Brenner termed "urbanization of

[165] Neocleuss 2000; Müller 2012:57
[166] Barker 2009, Garland 2001, Sudbury 2005
[167] Müller 2012:57
[168] Wacquant 2010:204 [emphasis as in orginal]
[169] Wacquant 2000:22
[170] Wacquant 2000:22
[171] Wacquant 2001:408

neoliberalism".[172] Moreover, the free market practices fostered the urban social fragmentation and the informalisation of urban economies, which is still visible in today´s San Salvador as argued above.[173] Adding to Saskia Sassen´s argument that the new wars are fought within the city, various scholars support the argument of a "metropolization of crime".[174] This is relevant since the thesis relies on an urban focus on the one hand and on the other hand an estimated 70 percent of the Latin American population live in urban areas.[175] Thus, the securitization policies in the cities of not only San Salvador could be interpreted in the light of the attempt by the enforced neoliberal policies to attract potential investors. In this logic, the inhabitants of the marginalized neighbourhoods who struggled to make a living due to the cutback in social policies, were targeted and put into prison in order to free the cityscape from 'unwished beggars'.[176]

Relating these observations back to the focus of this subchapter, it becomes visible that along with the policies of *(súper) man dura*, El Salvador experienced a so called penal populism, which materialised in toughening of existing prosecution laws, introduction of minimum sentences related to organised crime affiliated acts such as drug trafficking, kidnapping, or extending the prison sentences for alleged gang members.[177] When examining the situation in Salvadorian prisons, it reveals at first glance that hardly any of the centres were designed to prepare the inmates for repentance or reintegration into society.[178] The State of El Salvador even openly stated that

> *the only Penal Centres that were built for that purpose are the Centro de Readaptación para Mujeres (Women´s Re-adaptation Centre) of Ilopango, the Maximum Security Penal Centre of Zacatecoluca, and the Izalco Penal Centre. The rest of them have been refurbished to serve as prisons,*

[172] Brenner and Theodore 2002:376
[173] Portes and Roberts 2005
[174] Castillo 2008:181; Koonings and Kruijt 2007, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 2008
[175] Müller 2012:61
[176] Müller 2012:62
[177] Dammert and Salazar 2009:15
[178] Aguirre 2007:46

[...][They] used to be coffee processing plants; [...] an annex to the Second Infantry Brigade and [...] build originally to be a school.[179]

Hence, only three out of twenty Penal Centres intent to reintegrate the detained *mara* members and other convicts. Under such circumstances, most of the Salvadorian prisons can only be regarded as unhealthy and extremely dangerous institutions, which house the least privileged parts of society, enhance prevailing social hierarchies inside the prison walls and strengthen the gendered, social and racial hierarchies of society. This notion was confirmed by the United Nation´s Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Ernesto Mendez, after his visit to the region by noting that "In Latin America [...] the situation is: put them in jail and close the door".[180]

Summarizing so far, considering that only three out of twenty penal facilities are designed for re-adaptation, one can conclude that the state lacks political will to reintegrate delinquent *mara* members into society once they have served their sentence. Even though one has to take the context of budget restraints of the economically weak Central American state into consideration, any arguments that this is the major reason can be dismissed when considering other examples from the region. The Dominican Republic for example gained praise for its penitentiary system as a role model in the region, regardless any budget restraints that the country faces.[181] Differently put by Ernesto Mendez, countries cannot blame their lack of resources for their weak prison system, since there are other countries in the world "that have an exemplary and dignified penitentiary system [despite the fact] that there is little money".[182]

According to the most recent figures of 2011, the twenty penitentiary centres in El Salvador work with an average of 299 percent of its official capacity, with a total of 25,400 inmates.[183] The International Centre for Prison Studies (ICPS) even speaks of a rate of 320

[179] IACHR 2012:166
[180] Wells 2014
[181] The Economist 2012
[182] Wells 2014:1
[183] Dudley and Pachio 2013

percent of the occupancy level of the prison.[184] According to the 2012 Report on Citizen Security in the Americas by the Organization of American States (OAS), this rate makes El Salvador the country where overcrowding is most severe in comparison to the 32 countries in the region.[185]

Figure 7: Prison cage, twenty miles outside of El Salvador, initially designed for a 72 hour holding cell. Some inmates claimed to be imprisoned in the pens for more than a year. ©Giles Clarke/Getty Images/ VICE Magazine, Accessed July 15th 2014

The OAS-Inter American Commission Human Rights Report on the Human Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty in the Americas adds: "In respecting and ensuring the human rights of persons deprived of liberty the most serious challenge currently affecting the absolute majority of the countries of the region is overcrowding".[186] This is not a new phenomenon in El Salvador, yet the situation was severely aggravated by the *mano dura* policies in the country in 2003. Along with the rise in the prison population, the conditions in the facilities worsened. Henceforth, two inmates had to share a bed with another person sleeping in a hammock right above their heads.[187] Considering the steady rise of the number of inmates, as illustrated in the table underneath, the

[184] ICPS 2014
[185] OAS 2012
[186] IACHR 2012: 156
[187] Dudley and Pachio 2013:1

described environment does not allow for a secure environment for incarcerated mara members not to mention the chance of re-adaptation.

Table 1: Prison Population in El Salvador 1992-2010, prison population rate per 100,000 of national inhabitants), Sources: Müller 2012:65 and ICPS 2014, table created by the author

Year	Number of inmates	Prison population rate
1992	5348	97
1993	5576	n.d.
1994	6025	n.d.
1995	7013	123
1996	7996	n.d.
1997	9302	n.d.
1998	8173	139
1999	6868	n.d.
2000	7800	n.d.
2001	9279	158
2002	12,113	n.d.
2003	n.d.	n.d.
2004	12,073	200
2005	n.d.	n.d.
2006	n.d.	n.d.
2007	18,509	274
2008	14,682	n.d.
2009	22,969	n.d.
2010	24,283	391
2014	26,796	424

Connecting the grave problem of overcrowding as well as the approach of penalizing the poor and marginalized to the research focus, it reveals that the state employed a heavy hand policy in controlling its territory with questionable outcomes. As a consequence of neoliberal reforms and the *mano dura* policies, the prison system in El Salvador illustrates the state´s attempt to impose social order to its territory and institutionalize the marginalization of parts of society. The results of these developments remind of Lefebvre's notion that state territoriality is a violent process.

In an attempt to gain control over the skyrocketing number of alleged gang affiliated inmates, the state decided to separate the inmates in different prisons according to the gang membership of *Mara Salvatrucha, Barrio 18* or non-gang member. According to figures from 2014,

gang members constitute about 36 percent of El Salvador´s current prison population. The prisons in San Miguel (Ciudad Barrios) and the San Francisco Gotera penal facility in Morazán house a total of 5,432 *Mara Salvatrucha* members, whereas the currently 4,486 *Barrio 18* affiliated *mareros* are detained in Chalatenango, Izalco (Sonsonate), Quezaltepeque (La Libertad) and Cojutepepeque (Cuscatlán).[188] The step of separating the gangs became necessary since the state was unable to prevent mass riots and the accompanied violence between the gangs. Relative peace came on the expense of other negative developments brought about by the amalgamation of the *mara* in the prison.

Uniting the gangs in the prison facilitated the territorial power, which the *mareros* could henceforth execute. Apart from enhanced and more direct ways of communication, it led to an even greater identity construction with strengthened gang loyalty, gang structures as well as cohesion.[189] Based on the weak rule enforcement following the massive influx of prisoners, the incarcerated leaders of the *clikas* implemented guidelines, strategies and code of conducts, which the *mareros* had to follow based on the strict hierarchical order.[190] In the aftermath of these *mano dura* policies, the gang, which still operated on the streets, questioned these claim for leadership from within the prison.[191] Nevertheless, the leaders extended their territorial outreach in the form of extortions and intimidations and could sustain their influence beyond the prison. Via the help of corrupt prison guards and the *mareros* families, they could obtain mobile phones in order to acquaint the street gangs about ordered homicides or guiding extortions from within the prison.[192] According to the Study on Police and Public Security: Incarcerated Population and Prison Violence by the National Academy on Public Security (ANSP), extortion trade inside prisons has risen by about 1,400 percent in the last decade. Accordingly, incarcerated gang members earned up to $US 600 to $US 1000 a month from extortions, which exceeds the

[188] Santos, 2014
[189] Bargent 2014
[190] Martínez 2010
[191] Wolf 2013: 154
[192] Savenije 2009:148

monthly average income in the country.[193] According to the Salvadoran prosecutor in charge of the anti-extortion unit, about 84 percent of all extortions in the country are coordinated and planned from within the penitentiary facilities.[194] Thus, one can conclude that the Salvadorian state is far from executing control over its territory in the prison as well as unable to prevent the great revenues from the gangs´ extortions. Thus, in this context, it reveals that the *maras´* territoriality proves more powerful that the state.

In an attempt to regain power of the situation and to control the state´s territory within the prison, El Salvador´s Security Minister announced to install measures to block cell phone signals in the country´s prisons, since 90 cell phones were found in a sweep of the Penal Centre of Cojutepeque by the end of 2013.[195] [196] According to an intelligence investigation, a cell phone worth about twenty $US outside the prison can be sold for up to $US 200 inside the facility.[197] In a previous move, the Salvadorian government fired 330 prison staff members for smuggling illicit drugs and cell phones into the penitentiary facilities.[198] The tremendous prices and dismissal of numerous prison staff members reflect the importance of these means of communication for ensuring the communication of territory as well as the territorial outreach from within the prisons. For *mara* leaders, sustaining their hierarchical position not only within the prison yet also in the urban neighbourhoods seems inevitable to be able to directly communicate with their fellow *mareros*. Only through these means, Sack´s third step of executing control on the streets can be accomplished.

Despite the attempts to prevent the extortions, ordered homicides and other illicit activities from within the prisons, it is argued that the Salvadorian state is unable to execute effective territoriality in its penal facilities. Following Sack´s three steps of territoriality, the acquisition as well as the communication via the high walls and entrance restrictions might be

[193] La Prensa Grafica 2014
[194] Dudley 2010
[195] Chávez 2013
[196] Marronquín Sucesos 2014
[197] Santos 2014a
[198] Insightcrime 2010

given, yet -as noted by the scholar- territoriality only becomes effective once the territory is controlled. Thus, as a preliminary conclusion, it is argued that the Salvadorian state´s territoriality in the prison, which is usually regarded as a place where state control is at its fullest extent, is not given.[199] Instead, the prisons seem to have transformed into command centres, which represents the territorial influence of the *maras* to circumvent the non- existent power monopoly of the state and even influence the territoriality of the *clikas* operating on the streets.

Given these inabilities by the state to provide for security within its penitentiary facilities, it comes as a surprise that by the end of July 2014, the Minister for Justice and Public Security, Benito Lara, announced to "end the separation between the two gangs in different prisons in the not too distant future".[200] He reasoned this move with the increased fracturing of the gang structures as well as the emergence of new camps within the gangs.[201] Considering the disastrous impact of a non-separated prison system in 2003, further violent territorial disputes, as described by Lefebvre, are expected to become more likely. Consequently, it would not only be the struggle over territoriality between the prison guards and the *maras* but also the *Mara Salvatrucha* against the *Barrio 18*. Additionally, *maras* and non-*mara* members will be opposing each other as observed in other riots in 2003.

This sub-section analysed the tug of war of territoriality between the state and the *maras* in El Salvador in the prison. Contrary to the initial hypothesis, the state seems unable to enforce territoriality within its own penal facilities. Instead, the overcrowding following the *mano dura* policies have fostered the hierarchies among the gangs and turned the penitentiary facilities into commando centres for the gang leaders. This newly acquired space was filled by the even intensified sense of belonging for the *mareros* where they acted and dressed as "*jomies"* on a 24 hour basis. Emotional ties between fellow gang members were intensified and propelled the in-group out- group constellations of *maras* and the rest of society. Additionally, it has to be noted

[199] Müller 2012
[200] Santos 2014:1
[201] Santos 2014:1

that the prison institutions do not aim at a sustainable re-adaptation of the former inmates, which aggravates the divisions and makes a peaceful cohabitation between *mareros* and non-*mareros* impossible. In this regard, Nicos Poulantzas assumption that the "spatial matrix", so the materialisation of the state, is most visible in the prison does not apply to the case of El Salvador where state control is far from all encompassing.

Plans by the current government to end the allocation of inmates according to their gang affiliation in separate prisons may led to an ever greater spiral of violence, due to the lack of the Salvadorian state to provide security and ensure its control over the territory. In this case, Henri Lefebvre's argument that territoriality is a violent process is likely to depict the truth for the Salvadorians. The environment of extortions, violence and stress hinder any attempts to re-integrate into society at a later stage. However, even if a reintegration into society would be desired by some former inmates, the stigma of the outer appearance, especially the tattoos, would pose major obstacles as will become obvious in the following. Moreover, the role of the state in determining the *mareros´* body as the smallest scale where territoriality can occur will be highlighted.

5d. Territoriality of the body

Having analysed the territoriality in the urban neighbourhoods of San Salvador, the gated communities and the prison facilities, the analysis will in the ultimate part shift to the smallest scale in which territoriality can occur- the body. Since the contest over power is also reflected on the *mara*-members´ body, special attention will be devoted to the tattoos as vital part of the inherited *latino* gang culture. Alike in Europe and other Western countries, tattoos also became popular among parts of Latin American society. Thus, I was surprised to see hardly any obvious parts of the body which contained tattoos in El Salvador. However, when examining the social meaning attached to the ink beneath the skin in the country, this observation remains unsurprising.

Tattoos play a vital role in the life of the mareros of the *Mara Salvatrucha* and the *Barrio 18*. Equal to the graffiti, *muecas* (signs and gestures) or the clothing style, they constitute a reaffirmation and identification of the culture of *la ganga* (gang).[202] The sociologist Alfredo Naternas Domínguez summarizes the importance of the culture of tattooing as

> *"El cuerpo juvenil urbano es un territorio y espacio mediado por la cultura y sus instituciones, en el cual -en algunos casos y dependiendo de la adscripción identitaria a la que se ertenezca- se hace visible el acto de la violencia simbólica representada a partir del tatuaje con una multiplicidad de sentidos y significados construidos social e individualmente.* [203]

Following this quote, this great variety and the multiplicity of ascribed meaning of the tattoos will be analysed. It is acknowledged that every *clika* has its own depictions and most of them vary accordingly. Nevertheless, since parts of the *mara* culture are shared even beyond the national boundaries, it is argued that some conclusions can be derived in order to analyse the territoriality of the body of the *mara* members.

As it became visible in the images of the *mareros* in the previous chapter, the tattoos display various elements of the lifestyle of *la vida loca*. Most if not all, depictions are attached to life changing momentums in the individual and collective life of a *mara* member.[204] The life in prison, which plays a vital part in the everyday life of a *marero*, is illustrated by a tattoo of a tower or prison bars. As noted by *Sharky*, the aforementioned Barrio 18 leader, there are three prevalent issues which summarize the life of a member: "la *mara,* el cárcel y la muerte", which is represented by a tattoo of three points.[205] Consequently, the ever present threat to die, as symbolised by a Christian cross or tears, plays an inevitable

Figure 8: Tattooed *mara* © Isabel Muñoz

[202] Naternas Domíngues 2006: 77
[203] Naternas Domínguez 2006:98
[204] Naternas Domínguez 2006:87
[205] Ferrante 2013

part in the culture of the body. Similar to the graffiti, fellows who have died in the battle with the police or the rival gang are remembered and immortalized in tattoos by the other *mareros*.[206] This attempt to hold on to decisive events or personal experiences plays a crucial role in the display of tattoos. Hence, the motive for incorporating the special event in the own body aims at remembering and sharing significant situations which made the person who she or he is or wants to be seen.[207]

Naternas Domínguez also argues that despite the true account of the mareros life, the tattoos in many cases portray only an image of how the gang members would like to be perceived by others.[208] Thus, tattooing one´s own body can also become a way of desired image within the gang. Yet, due to the high importance of tattoos for the identity of the gang, not everyone can get any tattoos at any time. As noted by an interview partner, copying tattoos from fellow gang members can only be done after previous consultation.[209] In most cases, there has to be a common agreement, since most tattoos reflect brave acts in which the member defended the interests of the gang. Images at parts of the body, where the tattooing procedure is most painful and visible such as the head, face or the feed are consequently reserved for life-endangering events and acts for the benefit of the gang. Thus, the tattoos can be interpreted as merits and acknowledgements, which have to be earned and indicate hierarchical ranks within the group.

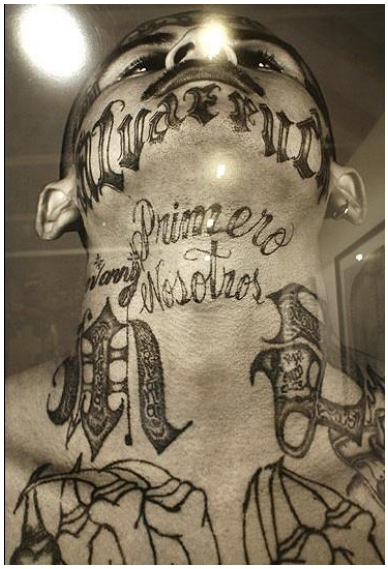

Figure 9: Tattooed *mara* © Isabel Muñoz

In the previous part of the analysis, it has already been argued that the territoriality of the *maras* lead to an intentional self-marginalization as reflected in the *la vida loca* lifestyle. Thus, the

[206] Peetz 2004:54
[207] Naternas Domínguez 2006:87
[208] Naternas Domínguez 2006:88
[209] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation

habit of tattooing one´s body can also be reinterpreted when considering not only the self-marginalization, yet also the rejection by the state and society. One could thus assume that the body, as the sole remaining element of life where the individual could express her or his desired lifestyle, constituted an important element of the gang identity, in which the state was unable to interfere. However, the validity of this pre-assumption will be contested in the following when considering the impact of the *súper mano dura* policies on the territoriality of the body. It will be argued that henceforth, the *maras* had to alter their territorial behaviour with respect to demonstrating their *vida loca* tattoos.

The *mano dura* policies, which were enacted in mid 2003, targeted youngsters with any (suspected) form of gang affiliation explicitly. Since changes in the legislation were required in the desired crackdown of the gangs, the *Asamblea Legislativa* (Legislative Assembly) adopted the *Anti-Maras* law in November 2003. Henceforth, alleged youngsters above the age of twelve could be incarcerated up until two to five years for publicly displaying gang *muecas* (gestures) or tattoos.[210] The Salvadorian president Flores reasoned the anti *mara* laws as "a matter of state pride, and [that] the state must display its strength in the face of gang violence".[211] As a consequence of the tightened legislature, 20,000 in parts under aged youngsters were sent to prison between July 2003 and August 2004.[212] Yet, due to rising pressure from Human Rights groups, which criticized the treatment of minors equal to adults in front of the court, the Salvadorian Supreme Court declared the *mano dura* policies as void and unconstitutional, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).[213] The release of about 95% of the 20,000 detained youngsters eased the overcrowding of the Salvadorian prisons slightly, even

[210] Rodgers and Muggah 2009:306
[211] Hume 2007:745
[212] Does 2013:24
[213] Hume 2007:746

though the situation remained severe as it has become obvious in the previous sub-chapter of the analysis.[214]

The *maras´* hope to flee from the status of subject of random prosecution soon vanished with the change in presidency to the conservative *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (ARENA) President Antonia Saca, who introduced *súper mano dura*. Focusing on legal reforms and police raids, this policy respected the UNCRC, but continued to incarcerate gang members for up to five- and gang leaders to even nine years.[215] Even though criminal acts of the alleged *mareros* had to be legally proofed, the number of inmates in Salvadorian prisons doubled within five years from 6,000 to 12,000, out of which 40 percent were assumed to be gang members.[216] Alike President Flores in 2003, President Saca stressed the connection between the tattooed *maras* and the high homicide rates in the country. One senior prosecutor, Guadalupe de Echeverría, even claimed that "murders could be almost entirely eradicated if only all gang members were detained".[217] Relating this back to the related sub-question of the research, whether the *maras´* spatial ordering can be regarded as a response to the repressive policies, it reveals that the discourse by parts of the governments attempted to frame the *maras* as scapegoats of all homicides. Contrary to the urban neighbourhoods and the prison, the *maras* were not successful in imposing their spatial ordering on their body, which will be elaborated on in more detail in the following.

As a consequence to the repressive policies, the gangs altered the territoriality of their bodies. Members started to dress differently and avoided tattoos at visible parts such as the face or the hands. New members of the gang were prohibited to get tattoos in order to not arouse suspicion on the entire gang. Moreover, the typical style of clothing with loose pants was changed

[214] Does 2014:24
[215] Rodgers and Muggah 2009:308
[216] Hume 2007; Does 2013:24
[217] Wolf 2011:43

into a more casual look, in order to escape the police patrols in the streets.[218] Contrasting these findings on territoriality in the urban neighbourhoods, gated communities and the prison, it reveals that in this regard the state was indeed able to execute its role of enforcing its own perception of territoriality on the *maras*. It accomplished to influence even the smallest scale of territoriality, so that the *maras* had to abstain from tattooing their bodies. Consequently, their last refugee where they could pursue their unimpeded lifestyle of *la vida loca* was lost to the state.

That the youngsters find themselves in a dilemma, which forced them to live with the permanent fear of being incarcerated due to their gang- affiliated tattoos on the one hand, but on the other hand the impossibility to be reintegrated into society due to stigmatizing tattoos, becomes obvious. Once the youngsters attempt to quit "the family of the gangs", their tattoos turn from source of identity and biographies of life into the origin of the societal rejection. As noted by one interview partner, the visible tattoos as well as the gang code of conducts make it impossible to speak of an *ex-marero.*[219] Thus, one can only speak of inactive *mareros,* who still face the permanent threat of being killed by a rival gang due to the gang tattoos. In fact, the only way of receiving acceptance and permission from the fellow gang members to become inactive is via the desire to take care of the family as well as "searching for the way to god". This near impossibility to permanently quit the gang is illustrated by the gang tattoo of a spider web.[220]

Figure 8: Tattooed *mara* © Isabel Muñoz

Summarizing the ultimate sub-chapter of the analysis, it revealed that examining the territoriality of the body of the *mareros* allow significant insights into the continued territorial struggle between the youth gangs and the Salvadorian state.

[218] Gutierrez Rivera 2010:497

[219] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation

[220] Interview conducted with an official of an international NGO which works closely with the *maras* in San Salvador, 14.02.2014, free translation

Prior to the *súper mano dura* policies in 2003, the *Mara Salvatrucha* and *Barrio 18* used their body as a last refugee from marginalization by the state and society. Here, they could express their territoriality via the bestowment of identity in the form of their tattoos, which highlighted brave acts for the *mara,* relation to other gang members or tell significant elements of their personal life. Being able to interpret the different tattoos can yield important findings on the study on youth gangs. The unsuccessful policies of *súper mano dura* led not only to an aggravation of the overcrowding in the prisons, but also to alter the territoriality of the smallest scale, namely the body, of the *mareros.* Henceforth, the *mareros* refrained from exposing themselves to the national law enforcement by dressing in a more casual way and avoid tattoos at obvious parts of the body. Thus, one can conclude that at this scale, the Salvadorian state succeeded in imposing its territoriality on the *mareros* bodies. Still, whether the retreat into even further clandestinely, has led to increased power of the state when it comes to its territoriality in the sense of providing national security and peace remains questionable given the enduring fragile situation in today´s El Salvador.

6. Conclusion

The thesis at hand examined the relationship of the youth gangs in El Salvador to territory and highlighted the struggle with the state over power and control over certain districts of the city, the prison and the body. The cardinal question which guided through the analysis reads as *To what extent and how do youth gangs in El Salvador acquire and organize territory and space beyond- or within the control of the state?* as well as the related sub-question of *In how far can this spatial ordering of territory be regarded as response to the repressive anti-gang policies?* In order to tackle the complex issue of non- state-actor territoriality in the civil- war torn country, three units of analysis have been depicted where the struggles between the state and the *maras* is most prevalent. Throughout the analysis of the urban neighbourhoods in juxtaposition to the gated communities, the prison as well as the *maras´* body, the thesis has brought forth two interconnected arguments.

First, it has been argued that the *maras´* territoriality should be understood and contextualised in the repressive state policies of *(súper) mano dura,* which aggravated the divide in society and made a peaceful communal life between *mareros* and non-*mareros* impossible. Triggered by the discourse from high ranking government officials, including the former presidents Saca and Flores, the *maras* were framed as a threat to national security in order to justify the mass incarcerations of alleged gang members. However, these crackdown policies backfired and propelled the *maras´* territoriality in the penitentiary facilities in the country and created commando centres from where the leaders of the *clikas* were able to order extortions or homicides. The state´s attempt to counter the severe undermining of its territoriality via the separation of the inmates according to gang affiliation, only enhanced the identity construction and communication ways among the fellow gang members. The plans by the current Sánchez Cerén administration to abolish the separation between the *Mara Salvatrucha* and the *Barrio 18* in the prisons are alarming, especially when considering the weak execution of control by the state in the prison. In that scenario, a direct confrontation between not only the state against the *maras*, but also between the *MS-18* and the *Barrio 18* will most likely lead to violent and deadly battles over territoriality within the prison.

Second, the thesis has criticised the enduring state centrism in the theories surrounding space, territory and territoriality. By neglecting the role of powerful non-state actors such as the *maras* in El Salvador, territoriality can only be examined in a non-holistic manner. The research has shown that in the case of the urban neighbourhoods and the prison, the *maras* employ very similar approaches of territoriality as the state. Alike the state and the gated communities, some *mara- clikas* installed physical boundaries such as gates or fences to classify and communicate their territory. The *maras* regulate and restrict the free flow of movement to the inhabitants and deny parts of the society their "right to the city". The perceived and real violence in the city has a strong impact on the daily social interactions of the citizens who retreat into gated communities if possible. Consequently, the spread of fear by the *maras* fostered the expansion of private security

firms which further undermined the state´s territoriality. It has thus been concluded that similar to the state´s law enforcement authorities, the *maras* do not shy away from using violence in order to impose their control over the territory, thereby making territoriality effective.

Extending the theories by Neill Brenner, Nichos Poulantzas or John Agnew to non-state actors could yield important insights into the still relevant theories when discussing the construction and administration of territory. In this regard, it has to be noted that drawing general conclusions from this very specific example contains pitfalls. Further research endeavours should thus focus on other potentially powerful non-state actors in El Salvador or other countries to confirm the arguments presented in this thesis. Since the *maras´* territoriality has only been studied with an urban focus on San Salvador, the prisons and the body, the other states in El Salvador where *mara* presence has been reported could prove a point of departure for a more comprehensive research (see Map 1 in the Introduction for an overview).

Given the entrenched *mentalidad seguritista* which is passed on by the civil war- traumatised parents to the coming generations, it is expected that the divide in society will prevail. This trend is already reflected in the self-fortification of the marginalised *maras* and the inhabitants of the *barrios cerrados.* Thus, the urban elite, the state and the *maras* will most likely continue the deadly contest over *inter alia* territoriality. Current efforts by a representative of the church and an ex-*guerilla,* who have negotiated a fragile truce between leaders of the *Mara Salvatrucha* and the *Barrio 18* in El Salvador, show a modest amelioration of the security in the country.[221] Apart from grave setbacks with a repeated rise in gang related homicides, these developments could be interpreted as an approximation of the *maras* to society and the state. Judging or drawing conclusions for the future of the *maras* and their special relationship to territory is nevertheless too early. The high ranking government official cited in the introductory chapter of this thesis agrees: "All three parties involved, namely the population, the state and the *maras* need to enhance their mutual understanding in order to overcome the divisions in society. Only in case there is an

[221] Martínez 2013:1

approximation between the state and the *maras* the deadly contest over territorial control will be eased."[222]

[222] Interview conducted with a high ranking government official in San Salvador, 17.02.2014, free translation

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Simon Schmitz

German, born May, 23rd, 1989

Master student with a background in three different educational academic systems in the *Erasmus Mundus* Program of *Global Studies- A European Perspective*, supported by the European Commission. Enjoyed the benefits of a multifaceted training in global politics, urban affairs with a regional focus on Latin America and Europe. Vested with an awareness of interconnectivity of new challenges as well as the firm belief in an innovative problem orientated working style.

Education and Training

Since 10/ 2013- present

Vienna University **Austria**
Global and European Studies Institut

- ***Master*** of Arts in Erasmus Mundus Global Studies- A European Perspective (joint Master Degree)
  - *Current GPA:* 1,2
  - ***regional focus***: Globalization processes in Europe and the Americas
  - ***thematic focus:*** Urban Insecurity, challenges of globalization
  - ***MA Thesis***: Examining Non-State Actor Territoriality- The case of the *maras* in San Salvador

10/2012- 09/2013 **Leipzig University** **Germany**
Global and European Studies Institut

- ***Master*** of Arts in Erasmus Mundus Global Studies- A European Perspective (joint Master Degree)

09/2009- 08/2012 **Maastricht University** **The Netherlands**
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

- ***Bachelor*** of Arts in European Studies
- *GPA:* 7.8/10
- ***Focus:*** EU institutions, History of Europe, EU Law, EU´s External Relations
- ***BA Thesis I***: The Integration Project of Mercosur: Following the Path of the European Union?
- ***BA Thesis II***: Bolivia´s Impaired Relationship with `The West´- Isolation or continued Dependence?
  (Maastricht University requires its student to write two BA theses)

Work Experience

01/2014- today **Initiative for Policy Research & Analysis**

- Junior Policy Analyst for Latin America

09/2011- 01/2012 **Konrad Adenauer Foundation- Foreign Bureau La Paz Bolivia**

- ***Internship***

- ***tasks***: drafting reports in Spanish and German, Conducting research for different occasions for the Head of the foreign bureau, preparation and participation in seminars and conferences, maintenance of the homepage

Distinctions, Publications and Extracurricular Activities

10/2012- present

tuition fee waiver scholarship holder

- awarded to successful and promising Master's level students by the consortium the Erasmus Mundus Master Program in Global Studies

09/2013- present

member of the editorial board at treffpunkteuropa

- ***multilingual Onlinemagazin of the Young European Federalists (JEF)***, which was awarded the European Citizen´s Price in 2012, awarded by the European Parliament, as well as the Europa-Lilie for European youth work, awarded by the Europa-Union in 2014
- ***Publications*** *inter alia*: „Die EU und Lateinamerika- Eine Beziehung am Scheideweg“ [1], „EU-Brasilien Gipfel: Zwei Wirtschaftsriesen gegen die NSA [2]“, „Der Ministerrat- Ausdruck des Demokratiedefizits der EU? [3]“, EU-Kuba Abkommen: Eine vorsichtige Annäherung“ [4]

12/2013

European Student Think Tank The Netherlands

- ***Publication***, co-ordinated by Leiden University „The Hypocrisy of the EU´s Engagement in Senegal- The Janus Face of the Normative Power [5]

2009-2012

United Nations Student Association The Netherlands

- ***active member***: preparation of the biggest continental EU and Model United Nations, EuroMun
- ***team member*** of the crisis committee of EuroMun: preparation and simulation of an ad hoc meeting of the UN Security Council

Competences

Languages — ***German***: mother tongue, ***English***: Proficient User (C2), ***Spanish***: Proficient User (B2), ***French***: Independent User (B1)

IT-skills — ***MS Office*** (Word, Power Point, Excel), ***Prezi***

Personal Interests and Activities

Personal — reading, volleyball, backpacking (e.g. Europe, Latin America, USA, Australia, India)