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Beating the Odds: Ex-gang Members in Guatemala

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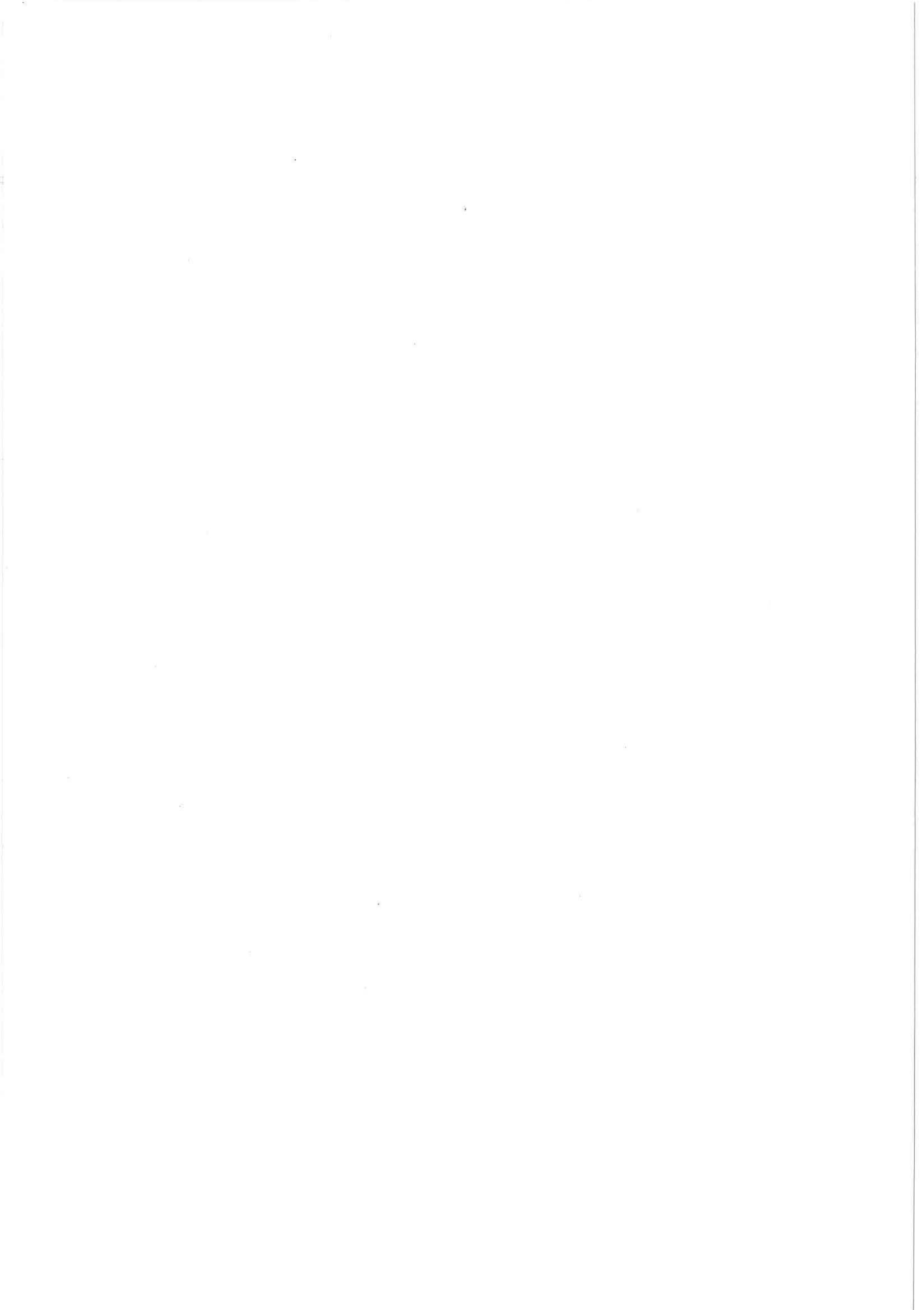
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This research is dedicated to the ex-gang members; gang member and family and friends of gang members that feature here and whom I thank for their intelligence and wit.



I wish to thank APREDE, the Programa Alianza Joven and Miriam, who opened their doors in Guatemala to make this research possible. NPH Honduras for early inspiration and finally, my former colleagues who show continued dedication to this important issue.

Viva Guatemala.

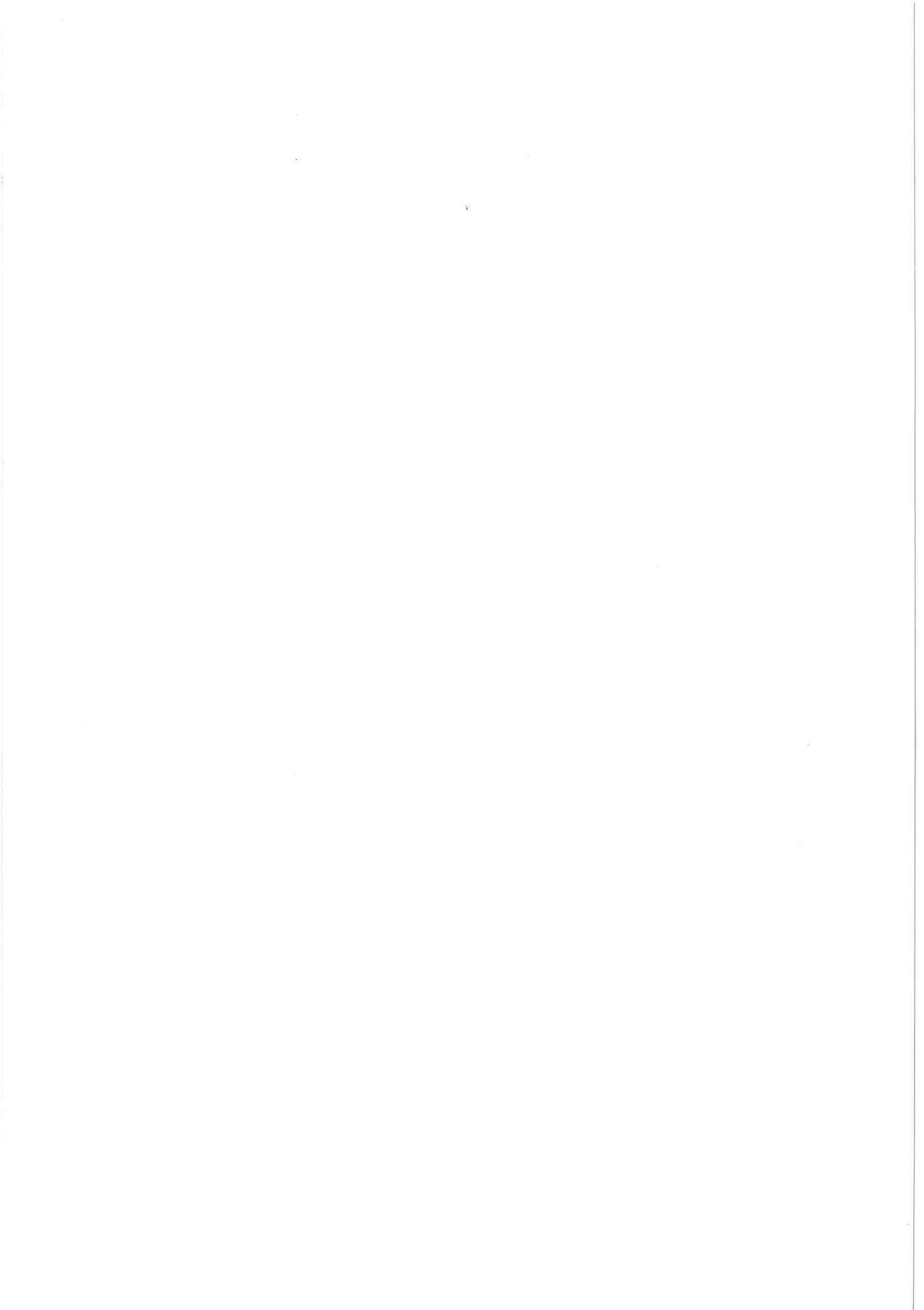


Table of Contents

Table of Contents	iv
Tables and Figures	vi
List of Acronyms	vii
Chapter 1 Background of this Study	1
1.2 Why this research now?	3
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Methodology	6
1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study	7
1.6 Organisation of the Paper	8
Chapter 2 Analytical Framework	9
2.1 Inequality and Social Exclusion	9
2.2 The State and the Instrument of Violence	10
2.3 The Gang and its Characteristics	12
2.4 Society and Citizenship for the Gang and Ex-gang Member	15
Chapter 3 Guatemala: Violence as the Operative Term	18
3.1 Condoned <i>Low Intensity Warfare</i>	18
3.2 The Phenomenon of the Gang and its Emergence in Guatemala	19
Chapter 4 Case Study: APREDE	23
4.1 A History of APREDE	23
4.2 Generation One	24
4.3 Generation One Methodology	26
4.4 APREDE at a Cross-Roads	27
4.5 APREDE Now	28
4.6 Conclusions	30

Chapter 5 The Ex-Gang Member's History and Life Inside of the Gang	32
5.1 Family History	32
5.2 Economics	34
5.3 Education	36
5.4 'Adentro'	38
5.5 Conclusions	40
Chapter 6 The Way Out	42
6.1 Not a Single Step	42
6.2 The Social Impact of Transition	43
6.3 Society for the Ex-Gang Member	44
6.4 Life Now	46
6.5 Integration & APREDE	48
6.6 Conclusions	49
Chapter 7 Concluding Perspectives and the Way Forward	50
Bibliography	58
ANNEX A	66

List of Tables and Figures	Page
Table 1: Table of Interviewees	5
Figure 1: Structures beyond and within the Guatemalan state and positive and negative relationships to the gang	11

List of Acronyms

APREDE	Asociación para la Prevención del Delito (Association for the Prevention of Crime)
CAII	Creative Associates International Inc.
CALDH	Center for Human Rights Legal Action
CEG	Casa Eddie Gomez
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (US)
CJUPREDE	The Youth Coalition for the Prevention of Crime
CONJUVE	National Commission for Youth
COPREDEH	President's Office of Human Rights
CSP	Civil Society Project (USAID)
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America (UN)
EDH	Escuela para Derechos Humanos (School for Human Rights)
GDA	Global Development Alliance (USAID)
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service (US)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAC	Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (Civil Defense Patrols)
PAJ	Programa Alianza Joven (USAID)
PDH	Ombudsman's Office Human Rights
UFCO	United Fruit Company
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	The World Bank
WFP	World Food Program

Chapter I

1.1 *Background of this Study*

The activist Tom Hayden opens his book *Street Wars* (2004) with a potent anecdote on the gang crisis over three decades in the United States; 'If twenty-five thousand white people killed each other in ethnic wars; you can be sure that Americans would pay attention'¹ The gang crisis is not bound to developing or developed countries. In parts of the world not considered war or post-conflict zones, critical or even borderline areas, social exclusion² has pushed marginalized youth³ to join gangs. (Hayden, 2004; Vigil, 2004; Winton, 2004) This research project aims to contribute to the academic and practitioner debates on the topic of *ex-* youth gang membership⁴. What lies ahead when violence has led to exhaustion, the gang is no longer livable and youth affront prejudice, persecution, and exclusion on the outside? This study focuses on youth who have sought to exit the gang in Guatemala, where an estimated 20,000⁵ members of youth gangs struggle to survive political, social and economic violence in a place where violence is as old as the state itself. This research focuses on a micro-setting, one country out of a handful where two particular gangs (Mara 18 and Mara Salvatrucha⁶) have gained unprecedented membership levels, largely in response to conditions of poverty, inequality and social destitution.

¹ Estimate is of gang death count in the US as researched by the author.

² People who, 'do not have, at all, or sufficiently, the conditions of life—that is, the diets, amenities, standards and services—which allow them to play the roles, participate in the relationships and follow the customary behavior which is expected of them by virtue of their membership of society' (Townsend 1987:130).

³ Ascribed status, most youth gang behaviour committed by males between 14-18 years of age. (See Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983, Oliver 2003.)

⁴ 'Ex' gang member differentiates between a youth who has made the decision to leave the gang and is in a process of seeking economic and social support beyond the gang, and a gang member; a youth who has not made this decision.

⁵ Universidad Centro Americana (UCA) 2004 places at 20,000, one interview estimates 8,000 at time of study.

⁶ *18th Street* gang were former Mexican Mafia members who spilt into their own gang in the 1970's. MS was formed in Los Angeles by refugees of civil war in El Salvador in the 1980's. Both gangs exist in the US and across Central America.

The prevention of gang violence is an area on which academics and practitioners have rightfully focused. Youth who have “crossed the line” and become gang members have been a less common target group⁷. This study asks; who is the ex-gang member; where does he⁸ feel he stands vis-à-vis society; and what is his process in seeking a social, economic and political existence after the gang? The term, *integration*⁹ of ex-gang youth is analysed. Both the NGO in the case study featured here and society more generally, use this term. The ex-combatant of war is *reintegrated*, a process that has been well documented by the academic world. (Alden, 2002; Colletta, 2000; Summerfield 2000; Utas, 2005) The literature is far less developed when it comes to the ex-gang member. How can the term *integration* be defined in the context of ex-gang members—from what to what? The notion of citizenship is relevant to this question. With dedication to a common civic-national political project (Purvis and Hunt, 1999: 465) lacking in Guatemala, is membership of an overall political community¹⁰ applicable to the socially excluded citizen of Guatemala? What kind of membership/citizenship does the gang offer? Lastly, what roles do the state, practitioners and donors play as youth seek a social, economic and political existence after the gang?

Youth gangs have been defined as groups, alliances, conspiracies, having geographic, economic and criminal turf and who engage in a course or pattern of criminal activity.¹¹ These definitions leave out all factors in the formation and endurance of gangs—the family, neighborhood, solidarity and economic need that creates them and ensures that they persevere. (Hayden, 2004: 3) The mere notion of the ‘gang’, is a construct that is value-laden and assumption-filled. (Scott, 2004: 111) Echoing the findings of recent participative works on gangs and the informal networks that surround

7

⁸ Estimates place female gang membership at 4-15% of all members. (Campbell 1991,1990; Curry 2001;Miller 2001, 2002) There is evidence that girls age-in and age-out of gangs earlier than do boys.

⁹ Alden defines integration as, embracing the normative requirements of ‘social peace’ in addition to political representation and economic stability. (2002:351)

¹⁰ Definition citizenship by Giddens. (1985:210)

¹¹ Definitions taken from those used by the US State of Illinois and the US Office of Criminal Justice in defining gangs. US State of California uses following three definitions to set up files on suspect youth: (1) *subject admits being a member of a gang.* (2) *Subject has tattoos, clothing, and gang paraphernalia* (3) *Subject has close association with known gang members.*

them (Hume, 2004; Moser and McIlwaine, 2004; Winton 2004), this paper sees gang members as architects of a new social space.¹²

This research looks critically at the lived experiences of seventeen ex-gang members and one current gang member (aged 17-33) who have been the recipients of various services of the NGO APREDE in Guatemala City, Guatemala. APREDE has guided the psychosocial and integration processes for ex-gang members since 2001. Views of family members and a friend of ex-gang members with regard to the experiences of ex-gang members, also appear.

1.2 Why this research now?

In the first half of 2005, more than 1,200 persons, many between the ages of 20-25, were victim to social cleansing campaigns at the hands of 'security forces' in Guatemala. (GAM, 2005) In Guatemala and across Central America¹³, NGO's and youth alike wage a desperate battle against time in a war with no foreseeable end. In large numbers, youth flee into a life in the gang in order to survive. Guatemala's social and economic fabric is so weak that it cannot compete with the gang as an alternative provider for youth. Of every 100 students entering primary school in Guatemala, 44 actually make it to secondary education (UNDP, 2003). Not only can many not access education or employment opportunities; persecution is a daily reality. Hardcore anti-gang laws in four countries of the region make it possible to jail a youth based on his or her physical appearance or suspicion of affiliation with a gang. Many youth who choose to leave the gang, don't live to complete the process. Researchers claim a generation of youth is already likely to be lost and future ones will prove hard to save from gang violence. Almost 40% of Central America's population is under fifteen. (Moser and Winton, 2004) The age at which gang members are being recruited is dropping.¹⁴ This study is a departure from the repressive focus of society on youth in general as potential deviants.

¹² See Vigil 2002: 5

¹³ Government estimates place number at 100,000, are notoriously high.

¹⁴ Development may have to do with the inability now of members to leave the gang and greater demand for new members.

(Winton, 2004: 98) In a society like Guatemala where the generous character of limits of state-sponsored violence allow non-military state agents as much liberty to act as men in uniform (Holden, 1996: 451), one must ask whose line is being crossed when a young person joins a gang.

Violence as a method—in all its forms—poses inordinate danger to human development. A learned method is copied; from one regime to another, from one community to another and from one person to another. It is rooted always in the gaining and maintaining social and economic power. (Winton, 2004: 86) The state of Guatemala is a tragic example of violence as a historically developed cultural form (Blok, 2002: 104) permeating all aspects of life. Violence has continued breathing after peace accords have been signed¹⁵, after decades have passed and international assistance has started pulling back. Victims of state-sponsored violence know its perpetrators equally as, bureaucrats, professional politicians, judges and non-state agents who enjoy access to state power. (Holden, 1996: 451) Where once youth and gang members were threatened and killed by police, now they are exterminated by communities.

Finally, gangs and the youth drawn to them have become the prey of policy makers that reach easily for the term, 'terrorist'.¹⁶ Youth is a highly misunderstood stage of the life whose occupants are seen as passive, problematic beneficiaries of the services of society; (Winton, :2004) rather than being seen as on the threshold of life, messengers of social, political and economic change and possibility.

¹⁵ 1996- Guatemala secured peace after a 36 year guerrilla war cost the lives of 150,000 and 200,000 Guatemalans, many of whom were of indigenous descent. A great number of the judiciary reforms, economic and social reforms that accompanied the accord have not been implemented.

1.3 *Research Questions*

What are the opportunities and constraints for ex-gang members when exiting the gang?

The following sub-questions shall be assessed;

1. *What has been the practice of the Guatemalan NGO, APREDE in providing services to ex-gang members?*
2. *What does the term integration define in the context of ex-gang members—from what to what?*
3. *What are the roles of the state, practitioners and donors as youth seek an economic, social and political existence after the gang?*

¹⁶ In 2004, an FBI gang unit was sent to El Salvador to stem US worries that gangs could have Al Qaeda terrorist connections.

1.4 Methodology

This study has at its core, the experience of ex-gang members themselves and required primary research in a representative, clearly delineated context. APREDE, a local NGO in Guatemala, offered access to all sources interviewed here and is case study. My research sample was prepared in collaboration with management and staff of the NGO and is depicted below:

Type of Interview	Male	Female	Total No. Interviews
Ex-gang members (includes widow)	14	3	17
Current gang member	1	-	1
Family of gang members/vulnerable youth ¹⁷	-	2	2
Friend of gang member/vocational instructor	1	-	1
APREDE Staff	1	2	3
<i>Programa Alianza Joven (PAJ) Staff</i>	2	-	2
<i>Guatemalan government/US Embassy LED/NAS</i>	1	1	2
Total No. Interviews	20	8	28

Interviews were carried out in Guatemala City between July 20-August 10, 2005. (Exceptions are one phone interview and an interview with an ex-gang member in April 2004.) (See Annex A) All interviews were semi-structured; 40% devoted to the respondents' life history before joining the gang and 60% to the processes of transition from the gang. In the case of interviews with family members of ex-gang members and a friend of gang members, a variation of the above was adopted. With the exception of one respondent, interviews were completed in a single session of about two hours. All

interviews were conducted in Spanish and registered in shorthand. Observational data has been taken with caution, recognizing that the role of the listener as audience can be influential during the interview process and the recall of memories. (Sherif and Sherif, 1967, Pasupathi, 2001: 61)

Primary reference is made to interviews with ex-gang members and one current gang member. Where appropriate, interviews with family members and a friend of ex-gang members, are brought in. The main sample (17 ex-gang members and one current gang member) are not equally representative of the rival gangs being studied in this context.¹⁸ Three female ex-gang members were interviewed (One of these was a widow). Ages of respondents ranged between 14-33. The names of youth appearing in this study have been changed in the interest of their safety.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The case-study APREDE is relevant to many local organisations in Guatemala working in an implementation context of high demand for services and a rapidly changing political context which can mean changes in the services provided. Experiences are transferable to many local NGOs working on the issue of youth or with ex-gang members in Central America. It is hoped that the experiences of APREDE as a relatively seasoned provider of services can inform the paths of other organisations. Lastly, it is hoped the paper informs youth locally of the life-trajectories and hardships of fellow youth. This paper does not treat the issue of migration¹⁹ and gangs, though this aspect is increasingly important.

¹⁷ APREDE defines vulnerable youth as those living in high-risk violent zones in extremely poor homes where domestic violence and abuse are probable. (Interview Margarita Perez, 27.07.05)

¹⁸ Two members of Mara Salvatrucha or *MS* were interviewed versus twelve members of the *Mara 18*. Though the exact number of gang members is unknown; Mara 18 counts more members in Guatemala.

¹⁹ Since primary research for this study, one ex-gang member interviewed has immigrated to Spain. Another respondent was interviewed by phone from abroad.

Limitations have been faced in conducting this research. The case study which is analysed here is an NGO known to the researcher²⁰. This was seen as an asset and a limitation. On the one hand, the researcher inspired a level of trust which facilitated access to interviewees and information. On the other, it required making clear a very different role as researcher of this project. The period of primary research, was a short three weeks. Language was a concern. Ex-gang members provided me a crash course in phrases and terms describing how the gang is organised. A final limitation was a restricted ability to leave the premises of the NGO and visit the homes of ex-gang members and their families.

1.6 Organisation of the Paper

This chapter has explained the thrust of this study in general terms. Chapter II describes the gang, its origins and birth in Guatemala. Chapter III offers a framework with which gang membership and the exit from the gang, can be seen. Chapter IV introduces the NGO case study, and the services which it has offered to ex-gang members. Chapter V analyses ex-gang members' family, economic and educational histories; and their entrance into the gang and life inside. Chapter VI explores the exit from the gang and youth's quest for a new social, economic and political existence. Chapter VII, concludes with the opportunities and constraints ex-gang members face and offers thoughts on the way forward.

²⁰ Between 2002 and 2004, employed by CAII, researcher supported the USAID funded Civil Society Project (CSP) which extended funds and technical assistance to APREDE.

Chapter II

Analytical Framework

2.1 Inequality and Social Exclusion

Poverty is not the primary cause for gang membership. It is among the mutually reinforcing factors of broader exclusion, including but not limited to; lack of education, unemployment, ecological factors and lack of understanding in the home. (Moser and Winton, 2002: 28; Thrasher, 1927: 339; Vigil, 2003: 231) To analyse the opportunities and constraints of ex-gang members requires considering notions of citizenship from a position of social exclusion. We must understand the relationship between individuals and the state and between society and the individual (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1994). From there we can explore the value of the gang as a competing provider of social, political and economic security.

Townsend has characterized social exclusion as the inability to obtain at all or sufficiently the conditions of life which allow people to play the roles, participate in the relationships and follow the customary behavior which is expected of them by virtue of their membership of society.²¹ (1993) By Townsend's definition of social exclusion, ex-gang members would be disqualified as members of society, but more on this later..

Aspects of poverty and inequality lead to certain experiences of exclusion, which eventually lead to persistent multiple disadvantages. The definition of social exclusion as a dynamic process characterized by descending levels, is useful. (Laderchi et.al., 2003) The multiple marginalities involved in gang membership (and ex-gang membership) are strongly cumulative in nature.²² Youth follow descending trajectories. From an impoverished and abusive home they may be forced to live on the street; where they may

²¹ Conditions of life referred to are diets, amenities, standards and services. Membership in society determined by adequate resources to obtain access to conditions of life, i.e., non-poverty.

²² Model showing sequential cumulative linkages among sociogenic and psychogenic elements and actions in looking at causes gang membership/violence. See Vigil 2002.

group informally for security; finally joining the gang for social and economic survival. Equally, a youth from a middle class background may experience social or economic shock that pushes him to seek employment; which for lack of work may lead to reliance on illegal means of income; that causes him to spend time on the street and eventually, to become involved with the gang.

This research is grounded in notions of the relativity of deprivation; the immutability of identity; and the terms of incorporation (Gore, 1995: 5) of the individual into society, all of which are treated by the concept of social exclusion.

2.2 *The State and the Instrument of Violence*

Despite recent dogmatic anti-statism in the era of structural adjustment, the state remains imperative to the task of poverty alleviation (Abel and Lewis, 2002: xxiii) The state acts however, as the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of a single race—free from foreigners and deviants who have entered society and are its ‘by-products’. (Foucault, 1997: 81) Impunity is a steadfast aspect of the Guatemalan state whose judicial system is characterized by inefficiency and facilitates the obstruction of human rights investigations and the rule of law. (Snodgrass Godoy, 1999: 425) Selective repression and ‘social cleansing’ operations against particularly vulnerable sectors of the population – among them urban youth and children—are well documented. (Amnesty International 1997, 1998; GAM, 2005; USDS, 2001).

Transformations of criminality and new and particularly diffuse forms of criminal violence are owed to the demise of social institutions. (Tavares-dos-Santos, 2002: 127) The public’s reaction to violence is oriented by an irrational fear of crime and a moral panic says Young (1999:46). Illegal and illegitimate violence are invoked through the ‘penal social control state’. (Melossi, 1992; Pegoraro, 1999;). In the name of ‘citizen security’, the police-justice-prison model²³ is put to work. First, it ensures social production of the feeling of insecurity. This is epitomized in the media’s daily coverage

²³ See Arriagada and Godoy, 1999: 27.

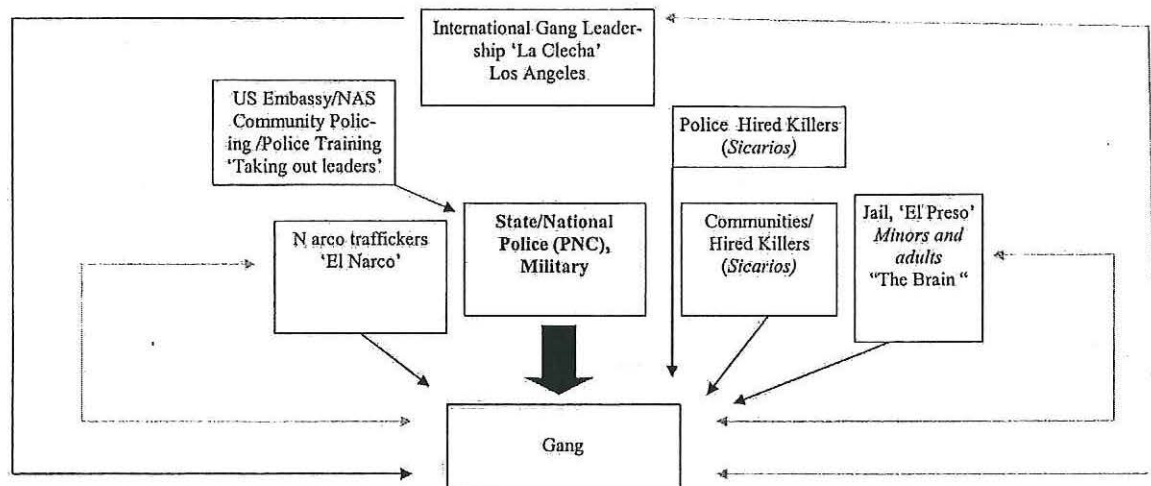
of the fruits of Guatemala's *Mano Dura* (Iron Fist) anti-gang policies allowing police to arrest and detain a youth on suspicion of affiliation with a gang²⁴ and allowing officers to rely on ambiguous cues and stereotyping in trying to identify the enemies. (Skolnick and Fyfe, 1993: 114). Second, young populations of socially excluded young men or 'failed consumers' who live in the street are imprisoned. (Bauman, 1998: 26). Lastly, a highly selective judicial system ensures continued marginalization. The notion of citizen security here can never be equated with the social construction of a democratic, non-violent and multiculturalist police organization that sees policing as concerned for the groups and sets of citizens in their daily lives. (Tavores-dos-Santos, 2002: 132)

Violence will in the course of this paper, be considered in a number of important, though loosely bound (Remijnse, 2002: 24), levels. Political state-sponsored violence features prominently; violence as an economic and military strategy is important. The role of criminal violence as an economic and social strategy, (both perpetrated by the gang and by other actors) is important.²⁵ Past violence weaves into present violence. Political and criminal violence overlap and can often not be discriminated. Increased numbers of police and community -hired killers of gang members are active in Guatemala. Agents of violence overlap with targets of violence. The gang is situated in the middle of this distorted context.

²⁴ Tattoos or clothing, are enough to guarantee a spot in an over-capacity prison block.

²⁵ For model of violence, see Moser and Winton: 2003 p.ix.

The diagram that follows illustrates structures beyond and within the Guatemalan state and positive and negative relationships²⁶ to the gang:



* Dark arrows depict negative relationships and light arrows, positive relationships.

2.3 The Gang and its Characteristics

The gang is typically judged as an entity of violence and characterized in terms of being directed at attaining a set of 'senseless' ends. We can best see physical violence as a tool through which respect is obtained when force becomes a substitute for the ultimate power of money. (Sánchez-Jankowski 2003: 195) Political, economic and social violence are historically developed cultural forms. (Blok, 2001: 106)

Gangs have their historical origins in the resistance to foreign rule and have served as social and political forces who have propagated nationalist sentiments, protected plots of inner cities and sought a role in the illegal economies from which they were forced to live. (Hagedorn, 1998)

²⁶ Negative relationships could include the use of excessive force, blackmail and extortion. Positive relationships include income generation, material and intellectual support and human capital.

Academics have referenced a breakdown of the social contract and social ties, provoking phenomena of 'disaffiliation' and a breakdown of relations of otherness, diluting the bond between oneself and the other (Tavores-dos-Santos, 2002; Castel, 1998; Bauman, 1998; Jameson 1996). Some experts describe a new mutation of social relations where social integration processes are increasingly threatened by social fragmentation processes. Rosanvallon (1995: 9) includes among these crises, the lack of a framework for thinking about the excluded. These discussions are interesting because they inevitably reference a process of massification alongside individualization in society. (Tavores-dos-Santos, 2002: 127) Here, individualization may be seen as the stronger phenomena and solidarity is sometimes discredited.

Bayat characterizes the *quiet revolutionaries* he explores in a study on the politics of 'informal people', as having two aims; the redistribution of social goods and attaining cultural and political autonomy. (1997:59)²⁷ The gang—though it does not fit Bayat's exploration—has at least partially realized these aims in a larger society that has denied them. I prefer we consider the *political banditry*²⁸, the complex realm of operation and relationships of dependency and protection which the gang demonstrates. Consider the well-armed bands who claimed as their domain large areas of Sicily in the nineteenth century; 'He ruled absolutely, interfering in every kind of affair, Grisafi relied on a network of assistance that had grown wide, thick and strong in the course of time...(involving) 357 persons in all, whom 90 were in his hometown alone.' (Mori, 1933:,130-4)

The principles and symbols that underlie the gang as a social, political and economic entity are relevant. These are its foundation and are largely discredited—in stark contrast to the state of Guatemala who has yet to be discredited for the perpetration of violence. In testimonials from ex-members; equality as experienced in the gang, is a returning

²⁸ See Blok 2001:19. Hobsbawm in the 1950's developed a body of work on a universal phenomenon that was a primitive form of organized social protest of peasants against oppression. They were united in kinship, friendship and patronage, and were regarded as the out-laws of the state and the heroes of the peasant class, he called this 'social banditry.' See *Primitive Rebels*: 1959.

concept. It begins in the notion of the *barrio*²⁹ as a place for all. Social equality, but also economic equality and a measure of redistribution, can be seen. Reciprocity is another important concept within the gang. It can be suggested that the gang is a *collective action setting*, where individuals do not necessarily adopt a materially calculating posture but a reciprocal one. Individuals are moved by honor and altruism and contribute to public goods when others behave cooperatively, even without the inducement of material incentives. (Kahan 2002:3)

Social autonomy is evident in the gang. The neighborhood goes from being a series of streets and houses tied to the land itself to something that can be communicated with a flash of hands, with graffiti on a wall, or in tattoo on a face, back, or neck. (Phillips 1998:361) The tattoo in their irreversible forms are, a kind of biographical accumulation – a dynamic, cumulative instrumentality representing the palimpsest of intense experiences which define the evolving person. (Rubin 1998:14) In tattoos and in graffiti, various symbols communicate luck, protection, sadness, death and an undying love of the mother. Social autonomy bolsters the gang's political autonomy which from structures of governance at the micro level of the *clica*³⁰; to the macro level of the gang in far away countries—is clear. The *clica* is managed by a hierarchy of two or three with very specific roles. They are voted in. The gang is governed by complex structures including a constitution, this research found.

Why is gang membership a temporal state that ends in premature death or in a virtually inaccessible process of dismembership and exit? It may be useful to return to the analysis of banditry and Koliopoulos (1987:239). He explains in relation to Greek banditry, 'Banditry was not even an extraordinary venture but almost an unavoidable practice'; Koliopoulos goes on, 'many of them hoped for a way out of banditry, a return to legality by amnesty of pardon.'

²⁹ *Barrio*, Spanish for neighborhood. It refers to more than just the territory of the gang, but also to an ethos of brotherhood, loyalty and life as a homie.

³⁰ The *clica* is the substructure of the gang and can count up to a few hundred members, they are all members of the larger gang and have a fixed *barrio*.

2.4 *Society and Citizenship for the Gang and Ex-Gang Member*

A principal concept for this study is that of society.³¹ Is the gang a part of Guatemalan society or does it exist as an alternative society? Taking Townsend's definition of social exclusion, ex-gang members are not members of society because they do not tend to have the adequate resources to obtain at all or sufficiently, access to diets, amenities, standards and services to play the roles, participate in the relationships and enjoy sufficiently the conditions of life of full citizenship. (1993) Marshall has defined citizenship as, a status that requires encompassing a full set of civil, political and social rights.³² (Marshall and Bottomore, 1992) His attribution of these rights to citizenship; does not fit Latin America's history or present. (Salman, 2004: 856)

The places where *official rights*, are at stake and where citizens may theoretically encounter support for their complaints about actual rightlessness, are exactly the places the poor majority feel they do not have a trespassing permit. (Salman, 2004: 861) Human rights—let alone civil rights—are not upheld in court by judicial systems. Exclusion makes it impossible to hold office but for the landed rich. The political system is so skewed that voting is an alienating experience for anyone not among the powerful elite that appear on the ballot. Judicial, electoral and political reform have not been achieved, human rights violations are rife, polarization has become increasingly entrenched and impunity repeatedly provides security to corrupt political leaders--- facilitating the levels of violence described in this study. In the 1990's average voter turnout was second only to war-torn Colombia.³³ Social rights due to near disintegrated social welfare systems are inaccessible; doubly so for the stigmatized who have suffered long-term exclusion. Latin

³¹ A group of people who share a common culture, occupy a particular territorial area, and feel themselves to constitute a unified and distinct entity. (Frisby and Sayer:1986) Here, society is not seen as separate from the nation-state.

³² *Civil rights* are those recognized as belonging to all individuals in a society which can be upheld by an appeal to the law and are subject to arbitrary denial by individuals and the state. (Protection of individual from the state.) *Political rights* are those that grant citizens access to political participation including the right to vote and to run for political office.. *Social rights* include a rights to education, equal employment, physical and mental health and individual security.

³³ UNDP, 1998, p. 227.

American democracies have formally removed restrictions to citizenship, but citizenship and citizen's rights are divergent. (Bickart, 1999: 23)

Turner (1993: 2) provides an effective definition of citizenship as; 'practices which define a person as a competent member of society, and which as a consequence shape the resources', that are accessible. What are practices that define a person in Guatemala? This research recognizes social exclusion as imposed through hierarchical power relations which make it impossible to move between social spheres. The boundaries of spheres are protected by market exclusion, especially by labor market exclusion manifested in open unemployment, insecure types of labour market insertion; and exclusion by non-wage employment.³⁴(Gore, 1995:14) There is a condition of social closure for the excluded. Exclusion is founded in identity based deprivation. The immutability of class and race (Saith, 2005) are especially relevant in the context of gang and ex-gang membership. A concept of citizenship which dismisses the social relations through which identities are constituted, reproduced, and potentially transformed—threatens to legitimize maintaining the oppressions which these identities endure. (Purvis and Hunt, 1999: 461)

Alden (2002: 351) defines integration as embracing the normative requirements of 'social peace' in addition to political representation and economic stability. There are major limitations in using this term when it comes to ex-gang membership in a heavily polarized context, where citizenship holds little promise. Utas (2005: 139) in his analysis of reintegration among Sierra Leonean youth describes a process of *re* marginalisation alongside reintegration. 'Multiple realities' which invoke potentially conflicting social and normative interests (Long, 1992: 27) exist for gang members. Elias's (1939) notion of social change taking place in 'a long sequence of spurts and counter-spurts' is relevant in the context of transition from the gang.

³⁴ Guatemala unemployment rate is more than 40%, many of the country's majority youth resort to informal and underground markets; their labor power being the only asset they have. See Dasgupta 1993:484.

Utas (2005: 141) describes the participation of ex-combatant youth in the Liberian Civil War as, 'a means of strategic upward mobility to obtain respect and status by taking command rather than being commanded.' These interviews show many youth who have grown into an internal position of command in the gang, managing operations and sometimes hundreds of youth at an early age. Where does upward mobility lie for the gang member after gang membership, especially in a society so devoid of civil society activity? To what use can the ex- member put his managerial and organizing skills given his immutable identity?

City dwellers, 'need, more than ever, to reconstruct a social universe, a local turf, a space of freedom, a community', says Castells. (1983: 18) Are ex-members expected to 'reconstruct' a universe in a vacuum of rights so profound that it essentially bars discussion of citizenship? What can the ex-gang member construct in this void; what are the insurmountable obstacles in his way? Leading voices for youth advocacy have put it well; youth see no need to delay full citizenship and real problem solving, they look to weave together learning, work –preparation and engagement— throughout their lives.³⁵

³⁵ Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2003).

Chapter III

Guatemala: Violence as the Operative Term

The story of Guatemala is an account of violence infused over more than four-hundred years of state history. From the time of its conquest by the Spaniards; the rule of law has been null and void; ethnic discrimination to the point of extermination has prevailed; export-driven economic growth has consistently fuelled inequality and external interference has forfeited national identity. Violence has been Guatemala's predominant social policy.

In the colonial era, the patron-peon relationships of large-scale farms and plantations facilitated oligarchy by the use of centralised violence against the Indian peasant. (Jonas, 1991: 18) Broad administrative functions were run by the military (Loveman, 1993: 96) By the 1930's, military commissioners were posted to villages, labour movements were crushed and local government power, curtailed. (Remijnse, 2002: 66) After decades of overt economic plundering of Guatemala's export resources, the CIA³⁶ carried out the counter-insurgency operation in 1954. In the name of expelling Communism, the US stomped out a revolutionary regime that it claimed would, prevent the expansion of its capitalist interests and allow worker's movements to grow.

3.1 *Condoned permanent low intensity warfare*³⁷

Between 1954 and 1986, thirteen military dictatorships ruled Guatemala. (Jonas1991:61) The epoch consolidated the military superstructure that manages state sponsored violence today. Paramilitary troops were trained with US help including through the US School of the Americas, whose military graduates have had, "key roles in nearly every coup and major human rights violation in Latin America in the past fifty years" (Nelson-Pallmeyer, 1997: 9) Clandestine groups enjoyed impunity and worked with government leaders drawing up death lists. (Jonas1991:63) Rightist massacres took the lives of 8,000 workers and peasants in zones of guerilla activity by 1970. (Jonas, 1999: 63) Anyone not

³⁶ United States Central Intelligence Agency

³⁷ Term used by Dirks and Kruijt 1999 to describe Guatemala's state of violence between 1954-1996

loyal to the government was considered an enemy, insurgent, criminal or communist. (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999: 48) This facilitated new recruits for the guerillas. Industrial growth expanded, yet workers were paid no more than \$1.15 a day. (Jonas, 1991: 65) It was the beginning of cheap labor policies that culminated in this summer's signing of the CAFTA agreement. A rural subsistence crises that has only deepened today, appeared in earnest in the 1970's.

Between 1980 and 1985, the civil war cost 100,000 civilians their lives, 60,000 peasants were relocated, thousands disappeared and half a million Guatemalans were forced to emigrate.

(Koonings and Kruijt, 1999: 49) It spelled a permanent rupture of Guatemala's social fabric. In 1982, 900,000 men were enlisted in a system of paramilitary civilian defense forces (PACs). (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999: 50) Starved peasants received food, housing and jobs if they joined the PACs, and were killed if they did not. Beginning in 1991, counterinsurgency tactics were largely transferred to civilian governments. Guatemala's civil war ended 'formally' in 1996. Civil society grew up in the words of Pearce (1999: 54), in the shadows of state violence. Voices for social and political reform that were incipient in the 1930's in the form of associations of skilled workers organized by trade, never advanced. The strongest voices for reform continue to be subjected to hierarchy, paternalism and weak internal accountability protected by authoritarianism rather than by representative democracy. (Biecart, 1999: 179) Did we expect a sudden shift of gear?³⁸

3.2 *The Phenomenon of the Gang & its Emergence in Guatemala*

The appearance of gangs in Guatemala was not coincidental, they were never a home grown phenomena. When the first gangs appeared on Guatemalan streets around 1992³⁹, the gang wars of Los Angeles were raging. Civil unrest in US cities produced the beginning of SWAT units. Repressive police tactics resulted in the Rodney King riots in

³⁸ Presentation by Jenny Pearce at conference; CONFRONTING THE STATE, ENGAGING THE STATE Civil Society Building Under Adverse Political Conditions, The Hague, May 10, 2005

³⁹ Date is inferred by the researcher through primary research, questions to various ex-gang members regarding first appearance.

Los Angeles in the 1990's .⁴⁰ On LA streets, the Mara Salvatrucha⁴¹ or 'MS' was formed by refugees of the civil war in El Salvador as a new rival of the Mexican Mafia. The Mexican Mafia emerged as a brotherhood of social response in the 1950's when the neighbourhoods of Mexican immigrants in LA were displaced and police abuse and surveillance increased. In Vietnam War's aftermath, the poor were neglected. They transformed their exclusion into a separate identity; a whole new culture of neighbourhood, language, dress, and economy. (Hayden, 2004: 28) Alongside *La Eme*, a movement grew to defend farm workers' rights and to unionize them, but there was no socio economic progress and disenfranchisement deepened.

By 1980, more than a million El Salvadorans fled right-wing death squads. In El Salvador death squads were killing 1,000 people a month (Ucles, 1996: 17) operating in large part through US funds.⁴² Young refugees touched down in LA's neighbourhoods. They were children of war who had seen their family disappear or die or had themselves been recruited as soldiers. Many entered the US illegally and were deported.⁴³ If they stayed, survival was tough. Youth were persecuted by other Latinos in the congested barrio. White youth wore nicer clothes and called them 'wetbacks' to refer to their illegal status. (Hayden, 2004: 28) The only place they found camaraderie was on the street, with each other. The Mexican Mafia expected rent from MS and the *18th Street* gang⁴⁴ also ruled on the streets. Los Angeles police became infamous for anti-gang activity including beating and conspiring to deport gang members and youth who witnessed police misconduct.⁴⁵ Groups grew violent. Fist fights turned to gun fights, which turned to full-scale battles. The battles were quickly exported as the US engaged in massive deportation. At the peak of INS policies, 40,000 criminal illegal immigrants were sent

⁴⁰ The African American man Rodney King was severely beaten by four LA police officers. When officers are cleared of the crime, riots in Los Angeles claim the lives of 42; 5,000 people are arrested. Exposed ongoing severe injustice and racism within the police system.

⁴² El Salvador's guerrilla war ended after more than a decade and 300,000 deaths in 1991.

⁴³ US recognized asylum status to some Salvadorans, many who entered did not to receive legal status. More than 4,000 young Salvadorans were forcibly deported between 1993 and 1997. (*New York Times*, August 10, 1997.)

⁴⁴ *18th Street* were former Mexican Mafia members who spilt into their own gang titled after their barrio.

⁴⁵ See Hayden p. 227 and Bjerregaard 2003:177. The Community Resources Against Hoodlums (CRASH) unit operating in Los Angeles was notorious for arrest of minority youth on suspicion of membership, military equipment and tactics, profiling, mass detentions and beatings.

back to Central America, between February 2003 and March 2004, the United States deported 78,000 criminal illegal immigrants, most young men and most to Central America.⁴⁶

When MS and the 18th Street gangs appeared on the streets of Guatemala youth were organised loosely as *cholos*. Capital streets counted thousands of war orphans who sought to avoid abuse and even murder by security forces. The Peace Accords ending three decades of civil war had just been signed, A national police (PNC) was established and became a repository for counterinsurgency forces from the war. Weapons were in good supply and the US continued approving arms as a part of 'nonlethal' military aid packages.⁴⁷ (Broder and Lambek:1988) Ultra-right sectors strongly opposed peace and sought to jeopardize it by any means. (Jonas, 1991: 234) Though there had been democratic elections in 1985 and an early transition (Biekart, 1999: 166) was taking shape, the climate of insecurity, anxiety and fear, flourished.

Relative levels of disparity in Guatemala have been ranked the third highest in the world⁴⁸. The early 1990's were characterised by massive economic failure. A dangerous combination of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies; the re-engineering of the agricultural sector preventing farmers from relying on their crops for subsistence; socially, sectorally and spatially restricted health and education sectors (Abel and Lewis 2002:25) combined with state dismissal of social and civil rights of the non-elite, severely entrenched poverty and inequality. Open unemployment increased more than 600%. By 1989, the labor market could absorb just one in every five youths looking for a job. (ECLAC 2000) In the 1990's in the 18-25-year age group, higher education enrolment rates in Guatemala stood at 6%. (ECLAC 2000) There were additional factors, protests

⁴⁶ See New York Times, September 26, 2004. Shuttling Between Nations, Latino Gangs Confound the Law, Ginger Thompson.

⁴⁷ In 1989, to commend president Cerrezo's commitment to the peace process, 20,000 arms were approved for sale by the US who had just increased military aid to Guatemala from \$5 million to \$9 million.

⁴⁸ See Inter-American Development Bank. *Facing Up to Inequality: Economic and Social Progress in Latin America, 1998-1999 Report* (Washington DC: IADB and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 13, Figure 1.3; Gini index is measured on a scale ranging from 0 percent (perfect equality—everyone receiving the same level of income) to 100 percent (a single person receiving all of a nation's income). The higher the percentage, the greater the levels of inequality.

emerged against the civil defense patrols or PACs.⁴⁹ A 1993 rally caused the brutal death of its organizer and countless violent acts against civil patrollers, who at the height of the war counted more than 900,000 men between 18-60 who were forced to join. (Remijnse, 2004:214) As Remijnse explains, it was a period where no 'mechanisms of negotiation' remained, the resort to violence had become a normality in Guatemala.⁵⁰ The Guatemala of the 1990's offered all of the uncertainty that allowed youth gangs to take root.

I have traced a history of pervasive cumulative social, economic and political violence in Guatemala. Violence is built into the structure of society and showed up as unequal power and consequently, as unequal life chances. (Galtung, 1969: 171) In the next chapter, I lead into the unequal life chances of ex-gang members and look at how these chances have been addressed by the NGO case study.

⁴⁹ PACs set up by military to protect villages against guerilla attacks during the war. Before being abolished in 1996, they counted more than 900,000 men and were used as severely repressive surveillance mechanisms that carried out thousands of murders.

⁵⁰ Remijnse 2004:22

Chapter IV

Case Study: APREDE

This study probes the opportunities and constraints of ex-gang members when exiting the gang and the practice of APREDE, an NGO that has been lending services to ex-members. In latter chapters I refer to *Generation One* beneficiaries of APREDE and *Non-Generation One* beneficiaries. The distinction owes to very different processes of exiting the gang. Generation One was part of a collective process of exit at APREDE and Non-Generation One is currently exiting the gang through a far more individual experience. The distinction in services must be explained. I will present two windows; the initial generation one period and the current period of work with ex-gang members.

4.1 A History of APREDE

The history of The Association for the Prevention of Crime⁵¹ (APREDE), can be traced to 1995. In that year, its current general director and founder, Emilio Goubaud, a former Minister of Sports and Culture, conducted a study in a Salvadoran prison that tested sports and culture to prevent violence in prisoners. A project with youth prisoners in twenty jails followed. Their drug consumption levels came down and personal development became a focus area. In 1999 Goubaud was approached by human rights NGO, CALDH⁵² to set up a project for vulnerable youth that would work in partnership with the government social secretariat in violent neighbourhoods in the capital, in detention and transmit centres for minors and with released prisoners.(APREDE: 2005a) He invoked the help of two youth who were serving sentences in the one centre. Eduardo and Gabriel became youth facilitators, ensuring that largely through personal development, youth stayed out of prison on release. The ex-members, would become the heart of the organisation APREDE.

⁵¹ Last year APREDE became an independent association, previously it had been, the *Alianza para la Prevención del Delito* (The Alliance for the Prevention of Crime), a consortium of four NGO's: CALDH, ICCPG, FADS and AMPEGUA.

⁵² Center for Human Rights Legal Action

In September 2001, development contractor Creative Associates International (CAII) was awarded a new project in Guatemala. Funded by USAID, the Civil Society Project (CSP)⁵³ would strengthen civil society through grants, technical assistance and training by bringing together alliances of local NGO's. APREDE started work under the program area 'public security' in December 2001.

4.2 *Generation One*

When APREDE began working, its objectives were to; 1. Achieve decreased levels of juvenile delinquency, through attitudinal changes in youth that were integrated—or *those that could become integrated*⁵⁴—in youth gangs and to; 2. Help youth with drug addiction problems recover through community action developed by local committees for citizen security, committees of neighbours and community social actors. (APREDE, 1996: 6) At the heart of these activities were Eduardo and Gabriel, well-known ex-members of the Mara 18 and Mara Salvatrucha respectively, and APREDE's facilitators.

The first project would strengthen the bonds between youth and their families and communities. A second project would create spaces for conflict mediation where principle actors in the community, local authorities and groups of youth could interact and build consensus on important issues. I shall refer primarily to the work of the former project with ex-gang members. By promoting values and increasing possibilities for personal development, APREDE sought to 'create spaces' through sports, cultural and educational interactions. The NGO believed that it could start to make dents in gang membership in neighbourhoods. Essentially the streets and few common areas of

⁵³ The CSP was a three year, \$7 million project that worked with alliances of local NGO's in the areas of *Transparency/Anti-Corruption, Public Security, Combating Ethnic Discrimination and Congressional Strengthening*. The CSP contributed to USAID's Strategic Objective (SO) No. 1, "A More Inclusive and Responsive Democracy."

⁵⁴ APREDE considered high risk youth those in marginalized areas, with few resources, children of broken homes, children where domestic violence was present, and those with low levels of schooling.

*barrios*⁵⁵ were the place of work. The facilitators knew where gangs were most severe and where they could begin to change the tide. I shall refer here primarily to the first project;

How did APREDE obtain its Generation One beneficiaries? Facilitators (who functioned as multipliers) engaged in *educación de calle* or street education. They worked with ex-gang youth to try and get them to come to listen to talks or take part in activities. They spoke to them about choosing a different path. One interviewee remembers APREDE in his barrio, 'I didn't believe in the sports competitions, the talks, a guy painted as a clown, I didn't relate to it. I never participated.'⁵⁶ (He became a beneficiary after losing a job and source of social support.)

An interview with facilitator Eduardo demonstrates how street education functioned to in a way 'demobilise' the gangs. In 2002, coordinated efforts by Eduardo and Gabriel led to a reduction of numbers of members in the barrio Colofnia Costacuca.

*We started with 100 18th street members and 50 MS. A lot went to other municipalities looking for work. When we hit 50 on each side the conflict was greater. We did agreement, some body leaves in both when we hit 50. We figured out that we kept getting down to 25 members on either side.*⁵⁷

For every one gang member that left in Colofnia Costa Cuca, four were replaced as a result of recruiting from schools. APREDE presented a proposal to work on prevention in schools and with parent committees, prevention became a key area of work.

⁵⁵ Spanish for neighborhood, also depicts the physical and existential space of the gang.

⁵⁶ Interview Elio, 28.7.05.

⁵⁷ Interview Eduardo, 8.8.05.

4.3 *Generation One Methodology*

APREDE developed the *School for Human Development (EDH)* methodology for work with ex-gang members and vulnerable youth. Three modules underscored human development and character formation; leadership development and the analysis and the resolution of conflict. APREDE project documents describe the EDH as:

*A gradual discovery of potential, capacities, personal worth (without exploitation).. turning their intelligence to a process, by way of an attitudinal change that will improve their conditions of life, teach youth to reflect on their reality, know themselves better and analyzing critically the meaning of their lives, improving their self-esteem and character.*⁵⁸

The EDH was put to use immediately. By the summer of 2002, APREDE was accompanying ex-gang members through a process it termed *inserción*.⁵⁹ A full-time psychologist was seeing ex-members sometimes several times a day to accommodate psychosocial needs, educational options were sought for ex-gang members. Rosa remembers; 'In the morning we went to a farm to work, the next day we were at APREDE, they helped us a bit with money. Everyday there was something to do'.⁶⁰ Many ex-members lived with APREDE facilitators Eduardo and Gabriel and with Emilio Goubaud.⁶¹ Eduardo explains it was a constant experience of personal adaptation and improvement for ex-gang members. Generation One respondents describe many hours of talking to staff, but perhaps most importantly of talking to each other.

In September 2002, APREDE secured twenty, one-year training and employment slots for ex-gang members to become human rights educators at the Office of the Ombudsman for Human Rights, the PDH. Ex-members described the new jobs as having been a 'rescue'. The Ombudsman jobs did not represent its only effort to find employment for

⁵⁸ APREDE 2005a: p 2

⁵⁹ Spanish verb, translates most closely to integration. Main requirements of ex-gang members were that they had to show a strong will to change and could not be using drugs.

⁶⁰ Rosa, 8.8.05.

ex-gang members. Between September 2002 and September 2003, it was able to 'insert' fifty youth into jobs with various parts of the private sector, among these were those at the Ombudsman's office. (CAII,2004: 35) Fifteen youth worked in maquilas or sewing factories; ten in carwashes and several in a metal and car workshop opened directly by APREDE. This latter venture did not prove successful, it was targeted repeatedly by police who would arrest members on suspicion of 'illicit activities' without any evidence.⁶² Equipment is still on premises, but the workshop was forced to close, causing several gang members to be abruptly pulled out of the insertion process and at least one member to go back to the gang for needed income.⁶³

The Ombudsman jobs have been the most successful attempt at securing a large number of employment places at once. This is an extremely important point. During APREDE's funding under the CSP, of the twenty youth placed at the PDH, four ex-members have been working there for more than three years. For a number of reasons, this success has not been duplicated with another employment scheme.

4.4 APREDE at a Cross-Roads

In February 2003, youth facilitator and ex-gang member Eddie Gomez was brutally killed in the last of nine murders of ex-members affiliated with the APREDE project. On two bodies of ex-gang members notes of warning were found which were linked to social cleansing efforts.⁶⁴

The murders occurred at a time that repressive new anti-gang policies emerged. APREDE's working relations with the police became severed, in some neighborhoods, more than 80% of project beneficiaries were jailed. (CAII 2004: 32) The killings

⁶¹ Eduardo, 8.8.05.

⁶² Interviews with APREDE staff and ex-gang member Luis, 3.08.05.

⁶³ Luis, 3.8.05

⁶⁴ Emilio Goubaud, 21.9.05.

generated distance between ‘the street and the program’ in the words of one facilitator.⁶⁵ February 2003 marked a turning point. APREDE ceased activities to rethink its objectives. Street education, a key tenet of work, formally ended with the death of Eddie Gomez and eight other beneficiaries. When APREDE reopened, it made a conscientious decision to separate itself from public security. It chose not to continue fighting to get youth out of jail and fighting with the police, but to turn its attention to getting youth opportunities and to prevention work.⁶⁶

In 2003 APREDE and CSP staff were exposed to a model home for vulnerable youth⁶⁷ where youth were trained, received psychosocial support and were from there, inserted into jobs. In March 2004, with considerable private sector support, Casa Eddie Gomez (CEG) was opened in Guatemala City by new president, Carlos Berger. The center would provide vocational training in computer science and other trades while also being a place of psychosocial support and accelerated primary and secondary school. The CEG changed APREDE’s service provision and was perhaps a peek into its future.

4.5 APREDE Now

APREDE is no longer an organization dedicated to a majority profile of ex-gang members. At the time of this study four ex-gang members were accessing APREDE services at one of its training and education facilities and three others were employed through the organization. They access isolated services that are generally limited to employment, training or education.

⁶⁵ Eduardo, 9.8.05.

⁶⁶ Goubaud terms this type of prevention collectively as, social prevention of crime.

⁶⁷ APREDE defines vulnerable youth as those living in high-risk violent zones in extremely poor homes where domestic violence and abuse are probable. (Interview Margarita Perez, Director CEG 27.07.05)

When the CSP project ended in September 2004, CAII and APREDE collaborated on the USAID/GDA⁶⁸ funded *Programa Alianza Joven* (PAJ)⁶⁹ or youth alliance project. Its aim is to prevent vulnerable youth from entering a lifestyle of crime by improving communities' abilities to offer safer, more productive social and economic alternatives. The PAJ brochure notes that the project is one of, 'prevention targeting youth at-risk and vulnerable youth.' But that it also benefits 'ex-gang member youth who have solicited an opportunity for training and employment and are interested in constructing a different future'.⁷⁰ CAII and APREDE are co- implementing agencies. CAII is helping to strengthen local crime prevention councils and is working with the private sector to increase their involvement in the issue of vulnerable youth by organising roundtables and public events. APREDE is 'professionalizing'⁷¹ the services of the Eddie Gomez model and two new *casas*, all of which provide daytime vocational training in computer science and other trades while also being a place of support and accelerated primary and secondary schooling for vulnerable youth. One new centre is in Antigua and the other is the Finca Santo Tomas. President Berger has lent this facility for vulnerable youth who need acute care in the form of boarding.⁷² The facility was struggling to make ends meet at the time of this interview but has received new promises for increased government support. On the common work agenda of APREDE and the PAJ is the Central American Coalition for Crime Prevention, a regional effort to mitigate youth violence in which APREDE has come to play an important role.

At the time of this study, APREDE was not formally working in the *School for Human Development (EDH)* methodology, its modules of personal development which are conducted by a facilitator and in groups. Project funding for the program psychologists and additional social workers was not available to carry out this method.

⁶⁸ GDA is an office of USAID that matches private sector funding for development projects.

⁶⁹ The PAJ was funded by USAID/GDA for \$750,000. It requires a one to one private sector match in funding and is scheduled to close in March 2005.

⁷⁰ Project brochure, USAID PAJ.

⁷¹ Ensure funding for proper psycho social care so the complete EDH can be offered to beneficiaries, an adequate number of trainers and social workers. (Interview Emilio Goubaud, 21.7.05.)

⁷² At present some of the beneficiaries come for daily classes and training, others are internal, per January 1, 2006 all beneficiaries will be boarding for one year at Finca Santo Tomas.

Since the launch of the PAJ, 990 vulnerable youth have sought the training and education services of CEG, 378 have completed a cycle of training.⁷³ This implies high demand for services but at the same time leads to the question, why are youth not completing training cycles? APREDE cites that many youth lack the economic means to travel to the centre from long distances.⁷⁴

4.6 Conclusions

I return to my first sub-question which probes the practice of the NGO APREDE in providing services to ex-gang members. Between December 2001 and February 2003, APREDE was as an organisation working with ex-gang members on a process of integration, defined as, 'something you have to establish, the breaking of paradigms.. a process that only works at the individual level.'⁷⁵ The EDH methodology targeted the 'individual level' while collectively ex- beneficiaries boosted each other. Generation One beneficiaries may have helped each other to transition, as much as APREDE helped them. Some were gainfully employed as well, but some *fell harder* the second time they were in the gang because employment failed. A 2002 CSP annual evaluation read; 'A key design problem derives from the lack of a strategy for linking the project's crime prevention activities with work and productive re-insertion'. (Alvarado, Espinoza, and Maldonado, 2002: 7) Three years later, APREDE still battles the employment issue. Since January 2004, twenty-eight jobs have been found for vulnerable youth attending youth education and training centres.⁷⁶ The ex-gang members currently at APREDE do not benefit from a collective process of integration with ex-gang member peers.

An increased focus on prevention and vulnerable youth, originated in the period following the murder of beneficiaries in 2003. A change in developmental imperatives⁷⁷ (Edwards, 1996:4) occurred thereafter. Was the turn from ex-gang members to prevention

⁷³Harvey Taylor 8.8.05

⁷⁴ Emilio Goubaud, 9.8.05

⁷⁵ Emilio Goubaud, 5.8.05.

⁷⁶ Margarita Perez 27.7.05.

and vulnerable youth a natural response that has deepened over the years as a result of the institutional environment and subsequent deeping violence in Guatemala? It is interesting to consider that violence may have won not just by taking the lives of nine youth fighting hard for a productive existence, but also by directly and indefinitely impacting the help ex-gang members can be offered after such an event.

The evolution of APREDE's work has been important to grasp. In latter chapters we will be able to assess what kind of existence the ex-gang member has been able to construct and what the insurmountable obstacles have been.

⁷⁷ What an agency should be doing to fulfill its mission statement. See Biekart 1999: p77

Chapter V

The Ex-Gang Member's History and Life Inside of the Gang

In order to comprehend the ex-gang members' transition, we must understand who he is. Certain circumstances which were influential in his entering the gang are likely crucial after he exits the gang. I will analyse three categories of data⁷⁸ addressing the background of ex-gang members; aspects of family history, economics, and education. These three aspects emerged as I considered the *conditions of life* Townsend (1987:130) refers to as inaccessible to the socially excluded. In considering ecological, sociocultural, and socioeconomic forces leading to gang membership (Vigil, 2003: 231), the literature has attributed family and economic history as among key factors of influence. (Hayden, 2004; Moser and Winton, 2002; Vigil, 2003) Education is crucial because its uneven distribution has caused worsening inequality in Guatemala. (Nef, 2003)

5.1 Family History

I interviewed a fourteen year-old girl who lost two brothers to gang violence (Her third brother joined the gang for revenge), and asked what the solution to gangs would be, 'Help them, give them affection, the love of a mother or father.'⁷⁹ Three quarters of interviewees made direct reference to acute levels of violence in the home, most referenced this as a prime reason for leaving the home. More than half of respondents were from broken homes. Stories of abusive fathers and stepfathers in the home surfaced in more than half of my interviews; 'My stepfather burnt the inside of my hands completely with a candle, for two weeks they were open.'⁸⁰ The father figure was referenced as an alcoholic in several cases and on two occasions rape in the home was cited. Participatory work by Moser and McIlwaine (2001: 59) has shown that fear of rape is a critical preoccupation especially among young girls in Guatemala. Ex-gang members

⁷⁸ The categories under which I will present and analyse findings conform exactly with those used during the interview process and were viewed as the most efficient means to derive answers to the research questions that this study addresses.

⁷⁹ Maria, 29.7.05.

mention use of alcohol before leaving the home, two respondents reference drug use; 'At eight years old, I went to school but I preferred drugging myself. I saw other kids' parents pick them up from school and I had no attention.'⁸¹ In a study of youth's views of mitigating violence in Guatemala last year, lack of attention was cited repeatedly as a cause for gang membership. (Winton 2004:88) Winton notes that this failure to spend time with children and youth is, 'itself caused by principally economic problems'.

Major disruption to family relationships make it even more crucial that children's experiences at school are able to compensate for environmental risk. (Spratt, Jenkins and Doob, 171: 2005) Can these experiences be compensated by the Guatemalan education system? This study found that key in the family histories of ex-members was the uprooting of families. A number of respondents mention having had to uproot many times; 'My mom and I moved to another part of the city, we were hiding from him (father), I was eight. I was obligated to go out and look for work and survive.'⁸²

Very importantly, this research found in a number of cases the gang member does not leave the home before joining the gang.⁸³ He stays on in the home for a time, while active with the gang and may only leave the gang once membership becomes a risk to the family;⁸⁴ 'You could go out with your sister and they might kill her. Why would I cause them problems, I left them and went to the other family.'⁸⁵ Manuel told me he never left the home while active in the gang; 'just when I moved in with my wife'.⁸⁶ This research has found that though there was an almost overwhelming perception of a lack of love by the family in the home and that this was cited as a main reason to leave, those who may stay on in the home are an important group. Later sections will demonstrate that the *original* blood family may remain important to the gang member.⁸⁷ Is the original blood

⁸⁰ Julio, 26.7.05.

⁸¹ Ricardo, 22.7.05.

⁸² Jorge, 5.8.05.

⁸³ Staying on in home did not surface with female respondents, conceivable that because many join gang as a result of a boyfriend in the gang and many girls may carry out household responsibilities in home, that this finding may not qualify in the case of girls/young women.

⁸⁴ Both family members of gang members interviewed explained this, as did ex-gang members.

⁸⁵ Manuel, 3.8.05.

⁸⁶ Interview 14.11.05.

family more important to those respondents who lived at home while in the gang or is this not an influential factor?

5.2 *Economics*

Given the effect of poverty as a mutually reinforcing factor of gang membership⁸⁸, (Moser and Winton, 2002: 28, Thrasher, 1927: 339, Vigil, 2003 :231) this research sought to explore income differentials of gang members. Fourteen estimates of income before gang membership and during membership offered the researcher comparative material. Of respondents, 79% experienced extreme poverty⁸⁹ in the home before joining the gang. The remaining 21% came from middle class families and experienced acute economic and social shocks making it impossible for them to stay in the home.⁹⁰

A few important observations; First, the effect of poverty is demonstrated here. Thirty-six percent of respondents who experienced extreme poverty in the home explained having to beg on the street and bring income to their families.⁹¹ This indicates direct exposure to the street as a result of family economic need, more so it may be indicative of early social stigma that could stay with the youth for life. In one case, parental abuse followed if not enough money was robbed; subsequently leading to greater animosity, more abuse and eventually; to the youth leaving the home.⁹² Next, of the 21% of respondents coming from middle class families, these experienced acute economic and social shocks causing them to leave the home. Guatemalan society can be said to have little to no protection against these shocks. Widespread poverty, lacking social services and potentially thin support structures in communities would make it almost impossible for a family to recover at least economically from shocks.

⁸⁹ Guatemala WB poverty line at \$585.23 and its extreme poverty line at \$259.07. The researcher is not inclined towards either of these methods of poverty measurement, broader discussion on poverty in this study, including on shocks and vulnerability, should make up for this narrowness.

⁹⁰ Interview Elio, 28.08.05; and Patricia, July 27, 2005, respectively.

⁹¹ Ages at which begging took place varied, 6-11.

I'd like to move to findings regarding income of youth while in the gang.⁹³ Findings showed that 38% of respondents counted a monthly income while in the gang that was less than the poverty line in Guatemala. I'd like to qualify this with the remainder of the sample. The remaining ex-gang members reported earning between five and eight times more per month than the poverty line income. These extreme findings would be confusing if I didn't explain them.

The gang (through the micro-system of the *clica*) is reported by interviewees to practice a generally egalitarian salary system of salary after having covered fixed expenses like legal assistance, food, rent and weaponry.⁹⁴ Throughout the 1990's gang member income was lower as a result of less robust crime and theft and the pre-extortion era. Jesus remembers robbing when he joined in 1992; 'We started robbing stores for sugar, cigarettes, they were expensive back then. We'd take the stuff home on our shoulders.'⁹⁵ Income levels have undergone drastic changes in the last few years in Guatemala. A profound change in income has been *renteo* or extortion practices. An ex- member explains that the history of this practice can be traced to Guatemalan military extortion practiced during the civil war.⁹⁶ It has become a coping strategy in recent years⁹⁷ and allows gang members to charge businesses fees to provide 'protection' while risking less physical exposure than through robbery. Manuel describes his *clica*'s forty client businesses brought in a daily income of \$2,710⁹⁸. Not surprisingly, extortion is not just practiced by the gangs, one *clica* was forced to pay 'renteo' to the police at \$678 a day.⁹⁹

In the gang, economic incentives seemed to be present. One interviewee explained, '(We would) bring back more than \$2,000 in one week—some would come back after two or

⁹² Julio, 26.7.05.

⁹³ Thirteen ex-gang members provided stats.

⁹⁴ These were among the fixed expenses reported to me.

⁹⁵ Interview 2.8.05.

⁹⁶ Gabriel, 14.11.05.

⁹⁷ Less physical exposure than through robbery, began around 2000.

⁹⁸ Manuel, 3.8.05.

⁹⁹ Interview 28.7.05.

three days. It was responsibility for the barrio. Like an NGO that's not strong without funds, with them, it is. In three weeks there'd be \$7,000 and then 15 days of rest.¹⁰⁰

These high sums of income are crucial because they must compete with a formal economic structure that is in the worst case not accessible at all to the ex-gang member—in the best case wages are low and undependable. Three of the four ex-members who provided their current income are earning just thirteen dollars higher than the extreme poverty line after three years at their place of employment. The fourth interviewee is employed in the same place and earning more because he works two jobs. Three ex-gang members had just found jobs, one after 2.5 years unemployed though he searched consistently. He describes having to live *with one leg inside the gang and one out*, referencing a way to put food on the table.¹⁰¹ Two remaining ex-members surveyed on current income are working at APREDE. One is earning a stipend while the other was expected to begin to earn a salary as a baker but had been without an income between April and September 2005.¹⁰² This research showed that if an ex-gang member cannot access a legitimate salary he will turn to illegitimate means of income.¹⁰³

5.3 Education

Research related to the educational track of ex-gang members revealed important findings. Twenty-three percent of those surveyed had not attended school at all before entering the gang. About the same number reached sixth grade before entering the gang. It could be seen that those who reached grade six, entered the gang at 11 and 15 years of age respectively. It is not known whether there is a relationship between higher grade levels reached and later subsequent entry into the gang.

¹⁰⁰ Jesus, 2.8.05.

¹⁰¹ Miguel, 29.7.05.

¹⁰² Interview with director Casa Eddie Gomez, 27.9.05.

¹⁰³ Roberto, 30.8.05 and observation of a youth not interviewed here.

The most important education finding is that twenty-one percent of ex-gang members interviewed, had studied for the duration of the time they were in the gang.¹⁰⁴ This is notable, education schedules are not necessarily compatible with gang life.¹⁰⁵ Patricia's boyfriend in the gang paid her school fees for two years before he was killed.

Respondents attached great value to education; 'Sometimes I think, If I'd never been in gangs I'd be graduated now, I'd be in university.'¹⁰⁶ One youth tells me, 'the difference between you and I is schooling.'¹⁰⁷ Miguel tells me if he didn't attend school his fellow gang members would, look at him with 'a crooked eye'. He graduates from high school this year.¹⁰⁸

The only current gang member in this study, is due to graduate junior high school this year through APREDE's educational services; 'I am in the gang, but I can avoid it. They call for you, I can ignore it. They (the gang) have told me they will kill me for not being there.'¹⁰⁹ He has not consistently attended classes. Nine respondents in this sample were currently following accelerated primary and early secondary classes with APREDE. Most are following accelerated primary school level courses where it is possible to study three grades in a single school year. Goubaud notes that though APREDE's facilities accommodate up to early junior high only, the goal is that students graduate high school.¹¹⁰ He has found scholarships for a few students through late junior high and high school levels outside of his own facilities. It is not known how APREDE would help additional students pay fees.

If students graduate with the primary and early secondary levels, it is questionable whether they will complete high school. Little more than 40% of students have secondary access in Guatemala.¹¹¹ In the age group 18-25 (assimilated to higher

¹⁰⁵ Patricia, 27.7.2005.

¹⁰⁶ Patricia, 27.7.05.

¹⁰⁷ Emanuel, 1.8.05.

¹⁰⁸ Miguel, 29.7.05.

¹⁰⁹ Roberto, 30.7.05.

¹¹⁰ Emilio Goubaud, 2.8.05.

¹¹¹ ECLAC 2000.

education), enrolment expanded by four percentage points in the 1990s to reach 6%.¹¹² Guatemala's state education record is abysmal, making it hard to conceive of how it will ever accommodate high-numbers of youth excluded from the system. Twenty-four percent of all primary aged girls are not enrolled in school, 19% of boys of primary school age are not. Repetition rates are massive, 22% in the early grades. Only 1% of non-poor tenth graders repeats a grade, as against 22% of poor students.¹¹³ Says Melinda; 'Take some of the salary of all those Congressional representatives and invest it in education.'¹¹⁴ Melinda was granted a scholarship through APREDE, the mother of four holds straight A's; 'The first I show my grades to are my children. I can't tell them I'm changing and not show them something.'¹¹⁵

Previous sections on family history, economic background and education have sought to answer the question of why youth join the gang. Respondents show a history of poverty in the home, or acute economic shock from which there was no recourse. Family history commonly showed abuse in the home and almost unanimously a perception of a lack of love; both were cited as final impetuses to leave. Education levels show variation before entry into the gang; the value attached to education is noted. The ability of Guatemala's education system to have a transformative impact on the condition of both the gang member and the ex-gang member is highly questionable.

5.4 'Adentro'¹¹⁶

A recurring phrase in describing experiences in the gang by ex-members is 'unity'; something that was not found to exist in society by respondents. 'You feel trust, they will defend you, that is the difference from family, explains Julio.'¹¹⁷ *The barrio*, is the gang's ethos.

¹¹² ECLAC 2000.

¹¹³ ENCOVI 2000.

¹¹⁴ Melinda, 5.8.05.

¹¹⁶ Spanish for 'inside'.

¹¹⁷ Interview 26.7.05.

A homie will die for his barrio at all costs, initiation to the gang consists of enduring a beating of a set period of time.¹¹⁸ From there the gang is a world of hierarchy, with characteristics of a representative democracy.

The *clica*¹¹⁹ is managed by two or three levels of leadership, who are voted in. The gang has to reach consensus. Voting occurs before big missions, if one *clica* fuses with another, and for other strategic purposes. The leadership divides manage finances, weaponry and preside over members in meetings. A gang member explains, 'you can never refer to yourself as a leader, that's prohibited.'¹²⁰ New strategies for the *clicas* are designed and management styles are shared and duplicated. Leadership takes care of the security of homies in jail, 'The accountant knew, the guys in the prison had to be well, to have a mattress'. In the same *clica*, the kids and family of deceased gang members were helped; 'They grow with this idea, my father was murdered extra judicially.... this was so they don't have to live what we live'. The gang is governed by *escritas* that cannot be violated; 'Like a book of acts it would stay in a house that no one knew. For ten months we wrote it, it was like the articles in the constitution, you live the rules.' One former leader tells me, 'I gave them the school; I'd speak the word to them.' The constitution is respected when a gang member is on another *clica*'s sovereign territory.¹²¹ How does the alternative, the Guatemalan state, compete with this structure?

In each interview, there is a notable evolution of the experience in the gang over time. Perhaps this corresponds to levels of violence as experienced by the gang member over time. Bloodshed is associated with transitions, the crossing of boundaries between life and death, which inevitably involves pollution. (Blok 2001;110)

Tire from the violence that accompanies gang life was unanimously expressed as a reason for exiting. Respondents describe the early days in the gang as more fraternal and with

¹¹⁸ Female gang members are often given the choice of sex with a gang member or the beating, the latter earning her more respect in the end, according to one female ex-gang member.

¹¹⁹ *Clica* is the substructure of the gang and can count up to a few hundred members, they are all members of the larger gang and have a fixed barrio. Top positions of the *clica* are guys may be very resistant or may have killed a lot, they have to be voted in to move on to a test.

¹²⁰ Gabriel 14.11.05.

low levels of violence; ¹²²‘Before it was less violence, pure fights. We gained respect, we had guns, but we didn’t use them.’¹²³ Escalating levels of persecution and violence against gangs in Guatemala, are likely to have directly influenced their internal use of violence for protective purposes. Hatred is expressed to born while witnessing abuse in the family home and to have evolved while in the gang; ‘I was uncontrolled in a period of a lot of killing, the hatred came, you wake up and take one leg out of the bed and touch a cold floor, you wake up hating.’¹²⁴

5.5 *Conclusions*

The opportunities and constraints for ex-gang members exiting the gang may be heavily influenced by the family, social and economic contexts and the experience of the gang itself as a resolution of those contexts. Family history may in terms of early socialization through begging, witnessing or experiencing abuse in the home and dire economic circumstance, have long-term developmental consequences. This study’s finding that 60% of respondents joined the gang after living on the street first, is not insignificant. Early incarceration was found to key. It is not uncommon for an ex- member to have dozens of experiences in jail by the time he nears twenty.¹²⁵ Overcoming psychological damage from these contexts is a lifelong constraint—even for the gang member who holds a job and has found a semblance of social stability. Stigma is lasting.

It is useful once more to think of exclusion as a dynamic process characterized by descending levels. (Laderchi et.al., 2003)

This study reveals that as an experience of social inclusion— where loyalty, equality, participation and unity are powerful though temporal experiences—gang life is treasured as unequalled. Enrique told me proudly of his clica paying food and medical bills while he

¹²¹ Jesus, 2.8.05.

¹²³ Roberto, 30.7.05.

¹²⁴ Ricardo, 22.7.05.

was in a coma for months in the hospital.¹²⁶ There is evidence of opportunity to advance in the leadership of the gang, to attend school and to provide economically, not just for oneself but for the community. In contrast, the cumulative experiences of violence, are not survivable and cast a heavy shadow over the gang and possibly, over the ex-gang member. Is the method of violence the ultimate constraint of the gang?

¹²⁶ Enrique 4.03

Chapter VI

The Way Out

This chapter analyses the complex process that leaving the gang represents for ex-members. When the ex-gang member leaves the gang he is theoretically in the place where *official rights* (Salman, 2004: 861) are in place, where he can lay claim to those rights and in doing so, begin to establish a new social, economic and political existence after the gang. Or can he? What are the constraints, what are the opportunities?

6.1 *Not a Single Step*

'I wanted to change and dying trying to change was fine'.¹²⁷ Many gang members who wish to leave the gang, die trying. Fifty-percent of ex-gang members interviewed did not experience a single exit from the gang, rather they returned to the gang after having left it.

The most interesting evidence for return is economic. Sixty-percent of returning ex-gang members did so as a result of direct economic shock resulting from loss of income after a failed micro-enterprise project. In 2001, APREDE initiated a metal workshop that interviewees reported did great business initially. Before long, police arrived at the workshop, 'If there was a robbing somewhere else, they came and the police would take some of us. You'd spend 100 days in jail.'¹²⁸ Three interviewees tell me there were never substantiated charges, just arrests. Discrimination by authorities became pervasive and the workshop closed. The experience in micro-enterprise was not APREDE's only one. Currently a car-wash outside the capital city employs vulnerable youth. APREDE has befriended the Chamber of Tourism and other businesses in order to protect itself from discrimination and build new opportunities. It seems a difficult battle. One ex-member worked a night shift in a homeless shelter and had to watch out for patrolling

¹²⁷ Marcos, 23.7.05.

¹²⁸ Jesus, 2.8.05.

police cars who sought his cell phone number so they could identify him as a gang member.¹²⁹ Basic rights including among others, the right to life, security and recognition before the law¹³⁰, are severely denied.

Social stigma impedes basic social interaction for an ex-gang member, let alone establishing a social network. Tattoos and suspicion leave them excluded also from the job market and marked for authorities that may recognise them. The impact of stigma can be significant; 'One side of you doesn't want anymore, on the other side, no work, no money. People still think you are bad, the only option you have is again the gang.'¹³¹ This research shows that with no recourse and if access to legitimate forms of income are closed off, the ex-gang member will seek illegitimate means—by turning back to the gang. Continuation of the transition is crucial, 'If it's just three months its worse afterwards. If you get used to that new life and it disappears you end up dead, because of the police and your own gang.'¹³²

6.2 *The Social Impact of Transition*

Added to the economic impact of leaving the gang, there is significant social impact. First, there is the network that is left behind; Marcos said, 'I knew that leaving was having no family.'¹³³ Indeed ex-gang members may be losing a *family* for a second time.

A second point is that social connections to the gang can persevere and even strengthen. When a female respondent left the gang with her boyfriend because she was pregnant, she describes; 'We were too involved with them, we were their connection to society...in a process of change, we were a connection between the two worlds. It was very normal, like a family that you help.'¹³⁴ Another respondent describes; 'I learned to be sociable but, I wanted to go back, my relation with the clica was stronger even though I wasn't

¹²⁹ Jesus, 2.8.05.

¹³⁰ Among those rights declared by 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

¹³¹ Elio, 28.7.05.

¹³² Manuel, 3.8.05.

¹³³ Marcos, 23.7.05.

¹³⁴ Melinda, 5.8.05.

with them.’¹³⁵ Only one of these respondents finally returned to the gang—only after economic shock forced him to. The first respondent, who now has a family, school and work and whose partner is also an ex-gang member, maintains social connections to the gang.

There is a last important point to be made on the social impact of transition from the gang. Social shock can be an independent cause of return. Julio, returned to the gang when he had moved to a small village hours from the capital and apprenticed in a job; ‘I was bored there but I knew that my friends were dead. I’d leave the house there were no disco’s, no friends, a population of maybe 800.’¹³⁶ He describes an experience of dilemma, returning many times before finally remaining with the gang again. If employment is not accompanied by an adequate social network, social shock can pull youth again towards the gang. Churches in Guatemala are playing a role in the transition of ex-members. The evangelical Protestant Church has actively targeted gang-members for ‘rehabilitation’. (Winton, 2004: 93) Some gang members preach religion as a way for other gang members to transition. This research noted important regard for the Church. Winton raises an interesting similarity between the gangs and the church in that both have exclusive, dense social bonds among their members and are separate “communities”. Could churches become major practitioners in the gang crisis in Guatemala?

6.3 Society for the Ex-gang Member

The majority of ex-gang members cited the gang as, it’s own society’ where there is no discrimination and there is more solidarity than society. One respondent believed she has always been a part of society; ‘We never didn’t belong, that we became estranged is another matter.’¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Elio, 28.7.05.

¹³⁶ Julio 26.7.05.

¹³⁷ Melinda, 5.8.05.

There was an almost unanimous feeling among the fourteen interviewees that society was not letting them in; 'The gang takes me as part of society, yet society sees me as a gang member.'¹³⁸ This limbo is associated with isolation by interviewees.

The main—and most tragic—window on society is the police and justice system. Elio, who had a gun put to the head and a month's salary robbed by a police officer, expressed constant fear of being recognized by an officer and harassed or abused.¹³⁹ Interviewees volunteered experiences with the police including theft, verbal harassment, physical abuse, blackmail, rape and even sequestration. One ex-gang member remembers;

One day I was going to class. Police on the street accused me of being a gang member. They started hitting me on the street and said, 'It's better to burn him, kill him'...I woke up in a dark room and didn't know how long I had been there. There were rats, I was naked, they had taken my clothes....officers said, 'I'm going to pin shit on you so you go to Pavon (jail), you'll die a gang member.'¹⁴⁰

Zero tolerance anti-gang amendments to legislature make it possible for a police officer to accuse any youth of pertaining to a gang 'who looks like it' in Guatemala. Police violence and the *unrule* of law have functioned in a total vacuum of human rights; Melinda knows a girl who was raped by a whole police unit and then paid for her freedom. A female ex- member explained to me that while in the gang, she was, 'not aware that that a police officer was not allowed to touch her'. She describes a feeling of Guatemalans being cheated because they don't know their rights. Stories of corruption surfaced. Manuel was written up and charged falsely with the possession of eight bags of marijuana tells me; 'Supposedly jail is a rehab experience, not a basketball was let into that place, but the drugs, yes.'¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ricardo, 22.7.05.

¹³⁹ Interview 27.7.05.

¹⁴⁰ Interview 29.7.05.

¹⁴¹ Interview 3.8.05.

6.4 *Life Now*

In asking about ex-members' about their lives now, I wanted to return to some of the concepts use to ask about their history. Their current job status would provide an early indication of the level of economic and social stability after the gang. From there I wanted to probe what the term integration really means and finally, and in closing this chapter, what the APREDE experience has meant.

One respondent did not have gainful employment at the time of my interview.¹⁴² Edwin was studying and had been working at APREDE for several months as an apprentice. APREDE did not have the funds to pay him.¹⁴³ At first glance, only one unemployed ex-gang member may be seen as a strong record. I want to make a point on the instability of employment. Two respondents found a job days before I interviewed them. Miguel had just been hired by a pharmaceuticals company after 2.5 years of unemployment. A third respondent found a job in a factory in the week that I interviewed him.

Respondents employed for the longest consecutive period of time in my sample, are youth who stem from APREDE's Generation One. Three of them were hired by the PDH in September 2002 and are still working there three years later. One of APREDE's facilitators, Eduardo, works at the Ministry for Sports and Culture and at the Secretariat for Well-Being. The other is working with gang and at-risk youth outside of Guatemala.

An invaluable point; of those ex-gang members interviewed regarding current employment, 83% are working in roles as educators; as a teacher; civic educators on the divulgation of human rights; women's rights; indigenous rights and with street children or on drug prevention. All organize public meetings, and travel to schools or to associations to give presentations; 'My personal life experience, sensitises, it only works this way. Miriam tells me; 'When I left here, I'd see the guys, now I pass them in that gang to see if they are well. I get them medicine or get them to visit a center for a while.

¹⁴² Twelve respondents of the sample were interviewed regarding current job status.

When I see that they are very crazy I say, 'Don't drug yourself.'¹⁴⁴ One youth works with CONJUVE, the Presidential Youth Secretariat speeds past me during my research in a suit, tie and a broad smile. Marcos is writing down his ideas to eventually have a manual or book on how and why to combat gangs. Eight respondents are continuing their education while working, six of those through accelerated primary and secondary and junior high school through APREDE.

There is evidence that the *original* family remains important to the gang member and family ties can play a direct role as an impetus for transition in the case of Elio's mother; *'She had to come to the hospital, she found me almost dead. This is the part that gave me the energy to change.'*¹⁴⁵

Thirty-six percent of respondents have no remaining or re-established ties to direct family. Melinda explains of her and her partner; 'We have had losses, they killed three of his brothers who were in the gang very violently. When I was with APREDE, they killed my sister, it's almost been a year.'¹⁴⁶ There is some evidence that those respondents who do not have a family, tap into other networks of support. Noel who does not have a family, says that in the house where he rents a room the family helps him 'move forward'.¹⁴⁷ Given Guatemala's highly fragmented social base and pervasive distrust within and among communities, the question of social network establishment and support for ex-gang members, is highly contentious.

Discomfort set in when asked about the future. Jesus remarks, 'When I think about my future, I think about the difficulty in obtaining it.'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Elio, 28.7.05.

¹⁴⁵ Elio, 28.7.05.

¹⁴⁶ Melinda, 5.8.05.

¹⁴⁷ Noel, 9.8.05.

6.5 *Integration & APREDE*

How do respondents define integration? Self-improvement is a resounding theme.¹⁴⁹ Miguel says integration, 'Happens in the heart, institutions are not integration, even if they give you opportunities'.¹⁵⁰ APREDE's former facilitator offers the broadest definition; 'Everything possible to be accepted by the community and work'.¹⁵¹

I asked APREDE's former facilitators to share the most positive and negative aspects established by the organisation. APREDE had, 'developed a system of attending guys' and provided 'visibility' to children's rights. It publicly denounced social injustices and generated an alternative to violence. Eduardo sees a much better climate for work today; 'More people are interested, there are more opportunities now'.¹⁵²

Some ex-gang members expressed regret at a perceived shift in the profile of youth being assisted, from ex-gang members to vulnerable youth; 'They are preventing but what about the others'. Respondents from APREDE's Generation One who are still working at the Ombudsman's Office are clear to differentiate the role that APREDE played by facilitating their job and the role that their employer has played since. The organisation is described by one respondent as having been like, 'a trampoline'.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Interview 2.8.05.

¹⁴⁹ One respondent gave an elaborate list of improvement; 'Stop robbing, extorting, killing, love myself, respect people, be able to express myself; when I can say something is bad I fix it, that I am accepted by society that though I am not perfect, grants me a second chance.

¹⁵⁰ Miguel, 29.7.05.

¹⁵¹ Eduardo, 8.8.05.

¹⁵² Eduardo, 8.8.05.

¹⁵³ Jesus, 2.8.05.

6.6 Conclusions

Before I move to the paper's main conclusions, I want to return to a question asked in Chapter two with relation to Turner's (1993: 2) 'practices' defining a competent member of society. I asked in that chapter, 'What are the practices that define a person in Guatemala?' They are far removed from the, *official rights* of Salman (2004: 861). The *way out*, as this chapter is titled, does not lead to rights or to a clear social, economic and political existence after the gang.

Predominately for economic reasons, the exit from the gang is in many cases, not a single step. Social shock, including the inability to encounter a social network; an ex-gang members' addiction or the pain that comes with mourning, could be sufficient independent reason however, for a youth to turn back to the gang.

Many respondents looking for a political existence after the gang, cannot rely on ties to family members, even more difficult is the establishment of new networks. The true definition of integration, which was equated with 'improvement of the self' by ex-gang members and earlier as, 'breaking the paradigms' by APREDE; is at the mercy of structural conditions originating in Guatemala's disregard for the rule of law and basic human rights. This is plainly illustrated by testimony on police abuse by respondents.

What is a successful exit from the gang? Ex-gang members working at the Ombudsman's Office can be plausibly recognized as having successfully exited the gang in that they have attained a measure of economic and social stability. Their economic, social and political existence however—because it is not supported by rights—is another question.

Concluding Perspectives and the Way Forward

This study has sought to consult ex-gang members themselves to ask why exiting the gang is so difficult. Findings reaffirm largely inescapable conditions of social exclusion—the inability to access the conditions that allow participation in society—as the reason. Past chapters have looked at the role played by family history, poverty, access to education and other factors in the ex-gang member's life and where these factors determine opportunities and constraints and have been guided by the ex- member and practitioners like APREDE. We bring these findings to the macro level where the term 'integration' was conceived and the state, practitioners and donors are the final arbiters of the ex-gang members' transition. The following are main perspectives:

1. Earning a legal, sustainable income is extremely difficult

Economic stability is a permanently daunting aspect of life after the gang. Fifty-three percent of respondents experienced a period as stable salaried employees in the formal market. Almost all however are working with the Ombudsman's Office where APREDE negotiated employment spots in 2001. The relative success of this post of employment deserves to be commended and is an example of a positive experience for other employers. However, relatively few employment opportunities have been realized for ex-gang members. Many of the respondents in this sample who I do not categorise as stably employed, had been employed for a few days or were to start a new job at the time of my interviews. One had been unemployed for two and a half years and had lost count of how many times he tried to find a job. If access to legitimate forms of income are closed off, the ex-gang member will seek illegitimate means of income. Irrespective of the phase of ex-gang membership, sustainable employment provision is a key foundation for the ex-gang member.

Mitigating the economic constraints which ex-gang members face requires a number of immediate steps. Responsibility for the growth of fierce discrimination that essentially dismisses the profile of a non-elite adolescent Guatemalan youth and potential worker

without a second look—lies foremost with the state who has used discrimination for its own exclusionary purposes and has allowed social cleansing campaigns to take place. It must be asked what kind of economic existence is sought for ex-gang members, and poor Guatemalans more generally? Respondents who provided current income are earning little more than the extreme poverty line. It is time Guatemala constructed a middle class by providing fair salaries to labourers, allowing them to organize and taking a tougher stand on foreign businesses who are ill-taxed and ill-regulated by the state. Counter to current practice, these propositions require lending the social agenda greater importance than the free-market business agenda.

The Guatemalan state must lead efforts to create employment opportunities. These efforts should be supplemented with technical and monetary assistance from donors and NGOs, as they are in Guatemala today by the *Programa Alianza Joven* (PAJ), the youth alliance project. As Rettberg (2004 pp: 4-5) has found, the likelihood for peace to be built and consolidated depends significantly on the domestic private sector's willingness to share responsibility for peace building. So too if the gang crisis is to be mitigated in Guatemala. Finally, small enterprise development has been noted as an important opportunity for ex-gang members both by practitioners and in this study, by the gang itself. At present, pervasive discrimination may greatly limit the success of these schemes.

2. Opportunities to establish a social network after the gang are very limited

Just as lack of economic opportunity can propel an ex-gang member back to the gang, lacking social support systems can have the same effect—even if the ex-gang member is earning an income. Social support and network establishment is highly contentious for any Guatemalan given a fragmented social base and pervasive distrust within and among communities. It is at least doubly difficult for a discriminated ex-gang member to establish a social network. The question that should be asked is whether persisting social relations with the gang by ex-gang member should immediately be seen as negative? This study found instances where social affiliation with gang members was likely to be

negative for the ex-gang member—only where there was an economic need involved. When it comes to ex-gang members and their social networks including other ex-gang members, this research found abundant evidence of this. There is reason to believe that the nature of that contact may be positively reinforced by a shared history as an ex-gang member, but also as young adults who experienced an intense transition from the gang in a collective context, therefore establishing a significant, productive bond.

Opportunities for ex-gang members to establish social networks require that Guatemala confront immediately what has been a long and complex social fragmentation. This means reconstruction of the country's social fabric beginning with the provision of adequate social services across the ethnic spectrum. Before social bonds can be strengthened, public policies to realise social service provisioning have to address inequality and social exclusion and aspire fundamentally to poverty reduction through the redistribution of resources. This study included female ex-gang members. Gender role expectations in Guatemala are immensely skewed and the effects of deep poverty adversely impact women who endure exorbitant levels of domestic violence and rape. Progress can be made in the further development of civil society bolstered by the elements of a government that practices regard for the rule of law and which dismisses impunity and corruption and delivers social services.

Urban experiences of life after the gang and how both economic and social needs can be realized in these contexts must be considered. One ex-gang member explained to me that a youth not building a social network in a rural area may put him in danger of becoming involved with organised crime sooner than in an urban area. Irrespective of the setting, expanding opportunities for ex-gang members to establish a social network, means ensuring that ex-gang members themselves become a greater part of society—beginning with serious and immediate condemnation of social cleansing practices.

3. Despite a deep regard for education; ex-gang members have few opportunities to pursue appropriate training and education

Research related to the educational track of ex-gang members revealed remarkable results. Several ex-gang members studied throughout the time they were in the gang. All gave incredible value to the education. Eighty-three percent of ex-gang members interviewed regarding current employment are working in roles as educators. Some while in this role are attending accelerated schooling. A teacher at an APREDE facility expressed his greatest dream, was to open a school. Education goes further than the wish to study, it extends to the wish that others may study as reflected in an ex-gang member who started a school for illiteracy while he was in prison. Ex-gang members are writing about the process of leaving the gang so the experience is put to use by others. If society does not capitalise on the desire of the ex-gang member to be educated, it is not only cheating the ex-gang member out of the economic, social and political existence he or she seeks, but it is cheating itself of economic, social and political prosperity.

To expand educational and training opportunities for ex-gang members the national education budget must be reconsidered with a view to expanding access to secondary education and reallocating funds now biased to the primary and university levels and to elite institutions. Especially given the recent drop in ages of children recruited into gangs, the hours of schooling provided need desperately to be extended so that children and youth spend less idle time on streets. Consideration should be given to emphasis on non formal education vs. formal education in Guatemala and the trajectories these youth are offered. Are there jobs in these trajectories?

The government in Guatemala has shown interest in absorbing ex-gang members into posts in social service provision; a solid commitment should be made to help train and absorb a greater number of ex-gang members to work with gang members and vulnerable youth as peer educators, social workers and in other capacities. Finally, a robust government-led, private and public sector sponsored scholarship initiative for disenfranchised youth is needed.

4. Continued violations of basic citizen's rights by security forces do not assist in breaking the general perceived rule 'once a gang member, always a gang member'

The notion 'once a gang member, always a gang member' is reflected in police persecution; persistent discrimination and finally, in social cleansing campaigns confirmed to be killing thousands of youth annually. Reconciling the identity of having been a gang member in a complete vacuum of basic rights, is impossible. Anti-gang legislation in the hands of a corrupt police and intelligence system, embodies abject discrimination that youth who seek a new law abiding existence, cannot escape. Ex-gang members expressed deep regret in this study at being seen as delinquents and gang members by zero tolerance laws; 'Give us a card for those that want to be out.. who knows how someone gets out of this.'

To create a climate where basic citizens' rights are upheld, the active persecution of youth—gang or ex-gang—by security and intelligence forces must end immediately. The international community should ensure the ability to impose sanctions against states like Guatemala which have signed numerous human rights treaties yet have broken their clauses in developing repressive legislature to persecute youth.

Civil rights including the right to alternative sources of information and freedom of expression—should be ensured to all Guatemalans. The media could hardly be less of a counterbalance to power than it is in Guatemala. The interests of the state, business and media entrepreneurs, converge in this sector where they control what citizens know; what they don't know and what they should be afraid of.

5. Coordinated efforts between government agencies, practitioners and donors are required

During this research, respondents questioned why an NGO, was even responsible for service provision to ex-gang members and vulnerable youth. The multi-national problematic of youth gangs and youth violence requires coordination that is reflected in nascent initiatives like the Central American Coalition for the Prevention of Youth Violence and other efforts. There is no time to reinvent the wheel, misspend limited funds and lose sight of inequality and exclusion as the real ills that should be collectively addressed.

It cannot be overstated that woeful levels of inequality impede any effort to improve the well-being of Guatemalan youth. Guatemala's private security sector and the arms trade require immediate intervention and regulation by the state to curb the perpetration of mass violence. The national police force must be fundamentally reconceived to reflect a commitment to well-being rather than to repression. The government of president Berger has placed itself behind the issue of vulnerable youth in Guatemala by lending a presidential property expressly to provide opportunities to youth. What of sustainability? His commitment is the promise of a finite administration.

Practitioners will continue to shape the way the constraints and opportunities of ex-gang members are addressed. The cross roads at which APREDE finds itself is relevant to practitioners more generally, all of whom navigate their agendas amidst local and national constituencies, government climates and in the shadow of mighty donors. APREDE has experienced new momentum as a result of the government's support of its activities. Where NGO's may be increasingly competent and expected to 'do more', they may also encounter new levels of interference by government. (Smilie 1995:74) The shift in profile which APREDE has undergone is unlikely to have occurred at the initiative of APREDE alone, but to be influenced by the donor community and local Guatemalan social and political climate. How do such shifts occur, what makes that aspects of programs are preserved by practitioners? Is the prevention agenda enough? I borrowed

earlier from Utas' notions of 'upward mobility' (2005:141) and asked where upward mobility lies for the ex-gang member. The value of ex-gang members who have successfully exited the gang, as facilitators, designers and practitioners of programs addressing the gang crisis, may well be unparalleled. Finally, the church in Guatemala has been cited in this study as a major potential force of change as a practitioner in this crisis.

Donors play a pivotal role in expanding opportunities for ex-gang members. When APREDE came under the CSP in 2001, USAID chose to support a project unlike any it had done in the past, and unparalleled to other work it was supporting in the civil society arena outside of Guatemala. The chance it took allowed this project to evolve.

Winton (1994:98) posits that a community-wide youth focused development initiative committed to youth welfare is needed more than working with a particular section of youth. Donors must ensure development programming across sectors recognises inequality and social exclusion and that programs aspire fundamentally to the redistribution of resources—whether land, education, health and sanitation, or employment. Equality must be rooted and reflected in the rule of law. The funding of police training in environments where human rights infractions by police forces are rife and where the rule of law is not upheld, must be discontinued.

Riots this summer in Guatemalan jails exposed one of the least understood and most important lynchpins of the gang phenomenon and one that the state is not capable of confronting alone. Donors should engage in penitentiary reform projects, making it possible for the state and other stakeholders to begin to address systems that are actually strengthening the gangs. Conflict mediation and efforts to demobilise gangs that bring together key institutions are important. Successful micro level initiatives have been conducted previously and should be studied.

Ex-gang members are making remarkable efforts to transform constraints to opportunities as they exit the gang. Have they found a measure of social and economic stability after leaving the gang? Yes. Can we as states, practitioners and donors take full credit for facilitating that success? Not likely. This research illustrates that constraints far outnumber concrete opportunities to ex-gang members, a reality that we have constructed and must take major pains to change.

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ANNEX A	
List of Youth Interviewees	
1. Enrique	04.04*
2. Edwin	22.7.05
3. Ricardo	22.7.05
4. Marcos	23.7.05
5. Julio	26.7.05
6. Elio	23.7.05
7. Patricia	26.7.05
8. Elio	28.7.05
9. Miguel	29.7.05
10. Roberto	30.7.05
11. Maria	30.7.05
12. Yasmin	1.8.05
13. Emanuel	1.8.05
14. Julio	2.8.05
15. Manuel	3.8.05
16. Melinda	5.8.05
17. Byron	5.8.05
18. Eduardo	8.8.05
19. Gaby	9.8.05
20. Noel	9.8.05
21. Gabriel	14.11.05 (<i>phone interview</i>)

Note- The names of all youth respondents have been changed for purposes of their safety.

*- *Enrique was interviewed for previous research.*

List of project, government interviewees	
Emilio Goubaud, general director APREDE	21.7.05/ 2.8.05/ 5.8.05/ 9.8.05
Margarita Perez, director Casa Eddie Gomez (CEG)	27.7.05
Harold Sibaja, director Proyecto Alianza Joven (PAJ)	28.7.05
Raymond Campos, technical advisor US Embassy LED/NAS	1.8.05
Eugenia Rodriguez, director operations APREDE	2.8.05
Sylvia Vasquez, Guatemala Sub-Minister of Governance	5.8.05
Harvey Taylor, co-director Proyecto Alianza Joven (PAJ)	8.8.05

