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# Evil doers from the 'hood or disenfranchised citizens? A critical analysis of the media representation of the MS-13 gang

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ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF THE MS-13 GANG

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## ABSTRACT

In the past decade and a half, the criminalization of MS-13 gang members in public discourse has operated to further marginalize and criminalize underprivileged urban youth, a segment of the populace already ridden by high levels of socio-economic exclusion. Using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method, this study explores the social construction MS-13 gang affiliated youth in mainstream media in Canada, the United Sates, and El Salvador. This study indicates that while the current gang research is becoming more critical, conceptualizing gangs as a crystallization of broader societal problems, the social construction of MS-13 gang members as permanent criminals is still predominant, as it circulates through all of the selected media. The criminalizing representation of MS-13 gang members has significant implications, as it justifies increasingly punitive policing strategies, which in turn validate the vilified construction of gang-affiliated youth, thus creating a vicious cycle in which gang members are deemed irremediable criminals.

**Keywords:**
MS-13; gang; youth; criminalization; Mara Salvatrucha.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

In this day and age, we are constantly warned by sensationalist media that criminal organizations are thriving, and that they constitute a crime and national security issue in many global cities around the world. At the same time, politicians adhere to the fear of the criminal 'Other' and base their campaigns on accusations that laws are too weak in the face of crime and on promises of repressive, anti-crime strategies (Chevigny, 2003). As such, the criminal gang MS-13 has recently become especially prominent in North and Latin American media. In the past decade, and particularly in the post 9/11 era, public representations of the MS-13 gang as responsible for escalating crime rates, extreme violence, and even terrorism have proliferated in the Americas. These representations have been reproduced and given meaning through the discursive practice of academics, international organizations, states, and journalists.

Such popular representations have operated to regulate and normalize the image of the criminal 'Other' and have consequently legitimized increasingly punitive policies. For instance, the U.S has adopted measures such as the 'zero tolerance' policy, the Street Terrorism Enforcement Prevention Act (STEP), and increasingly repressive anti-gang policies, which have resulted in the increasing detention, deportation, and association with terrorism of many racialized, immigrant youth (Hume, 2007). Similarly, Central American countries have readily adopted the 'Mano Dura' ('Tough Hand') anti-gang strategy in 2003, mirroring the STEP legislation in the United States, which promotes an extremely repressive anti-gang tactic, such that it almost eliminates the possibility of prevention, rehabilitation, and social reintegration (Boerman, 2007). In addition, Canada has started to follow the steps of its Southern neighbours and has amended its Criminal Code in February 2009 to increase incarceration time for gang-related crimes and create new offences punishable by maximum penalty (Parliament of Canada,

2009). Thus, rather than conceptualizing the expansion of the MS-13 gang across national borders as an outgrowth of perpetuated structural violence and inequality and as a part of the broader internationalization of the economy under the current neoliberal regime, increasingly retaliatory discourses have transpired (Hayden, 2005).

The MS-13 gang is also known as the *Mara Salvatrucha*. The word 'mara' is a slang term for "gang" and is derived from the name of a fierce type of ant (Manwaring, 2007). The expression 'trucha' means 'trout' and is also a slang term for 'shrewd' or 'astute' (Manwaring, 2007). Therefore, 'Mara Salvatrucha' or 'MS-13' means a gang of shrewd Salvadorans. Lastly, the number 13 was included in the gang's name to pay homage to the Californian prison gang, the Mexican Mafia, 'm' being the thirteenth letter in the alphabet (DeCesare, 2003).

The MS-13 gang was formed in the 1980s in Los Angeles, California among refugees fleeing the civil war in El Salvador (Boerman, 2007). Approximately thirty percent of the Salvadoran population was forced to migrate to other countries and the majority of them sought refuge in the United States (Landolt, 2003). Feeling alienated, living in poverty, and marginalized by other immigrant groups, many Salvadoran youth started the MS-13 gang or became involved with other pre-existent gangs (Boerman, 2007). In response to the increasing levels of gang activity, the U.S implemented severe anti-gang laws in 1992 and began mass deportations of youth back to Central America. Between 1992 and 1996, 9,497 Hondurans, 7, 276 Guatemalans, and 9,767 Salvadorans living in the United States were deported back to their homelands (Rocha and Rodgers, 2007). These mass deportations had the counter-effect of escalating the organization, sophistication, and proliferation of MS-13 in Central America (Boerman, 2007). Since then, the lack of social support for these deportees, globalization, persistent poverty arising from the imposition of neoliberal policies, and the absence of political will to address this issue in a holistic manner have all contributed to the expansion of MS-13 throughout the Americas (Boerman, 2007). Nowadays, MS-13 is ubiquitous in the urban areas of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, the United States, and is attempting to establish a base in Canada (Boerman, 2007).

When examining the scholarly literature on this topic, a number of themes recur. One of the main themes in gang research is the evolution of the MS-13 gang, particularly the development, organization, and causes of this gang's proliferation. Most scholarly literature points out that growing global inequalities, structural exclusion, deportations, and globalization constitute critical factors in the proliferation of the MS-13 gang. The level of organization of the MS-13 gang is however, highly contested, as some scholars (Arana, 2005; Manwaring, 2005, 2006, 2007; Papachristos, 2005; Sullivan, 2006) argue that the gang is highly organized and constitutes a significant international threat, while others suggest that the organizational sophistication is overestimated (Hagedorn, 2005, 2007, 2008; Hayden, 2005; Rocha and Rodgers, 2008) .

Another prominent theme found in gang literature is the criminal character of the MS-13 gang. While many researchers consider the MS-13 gang to constitute a criminal organization, others focus on the social, economic, and political conditions that have helped shape MS-13 as a criminal group. The gang's link with terrorist organization has also been the focus of much research, as some scholars (Arana, 2005;Breve, 2007; Manwaring, 2005, 2006, 2007; Johnson and Muhlhausen, 2005) make such allegations the focal point of research, while others (Hume, 2007; Hagedorn, 2008; Hayden, 2005; Rocha and Rodgers, 2008) dismiss them as unsubstantiated rumours. Moreover, the kind and level of gang violence and the context in which it occurs constitutes an important theme in gang research.

Finally, the current literature on gangs is preoccupied with finding the suitable solution for the gang problem. While most scholars agree that current approaches have been largely ineffective, the appropriate combination of preventive and suppressive measures to be implemented to solve the gang problem is highly contested (Ribando, 2005).

In conducting this study, newspaper articles and TV news clips from regional media in the United States, Canada, and El Salvador will be analysed. More specifically, one broadcast from Canada, one from the United States, and one broadcast and a newspaper article from El Salvador will be employed. The selected TV broadcasts from Canada and the United States will be downloaded from YouTube and the Salvadoran newscast and chosen newspaper articles will be collected from the newspapers' online archives onto my computer.

The media representation of MS-13 gang members will be analyzed and compared using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method (CDA) and a postcolonial theoretical framework. More specifically, Edward Said's (1978) concept of positional superiority will be utilized to highlight the way in which the Canadian and U.S media support of repressive anti-gang policies enables the West to maintain the upper hand and legitimize an interventionist style of international relations and forms of neo-colonial domination under the disguise of fighting crime and terrorism. Moreover, this study will employ Said's (1978) standpoint regarding the representation of the 'Other' in order to emphasize how representations of the Central American gang MS-13 operate to perpetuate hegemony through the vilification of MS-13 gang members. Finally, Bhabha's (1983) concept of colonial hybridity will be will be integrated in the analysis of the Salvadoran media discourse on MS-13 in order to reveal how it is mirroring its Northern neighbours by adopting the construction of MS-13 gang members as a principal security threat within the regional discourse.

Some findings of this research indicate that all of the selected Canadian, American, and Salvadoran media employ criminalizing language when referring to MS-13 gang members, which signifies that media producers are drawing from a traditional criminology discourse. Additionally, the frequency and confidence of using such incriminating language suggests that the producers of the media and its audience, the Canadian, U.S, or Salvadoran society share the same normative ideology. While the Canadian broadcast stresses the gang's unprecedented violence and criminality, the main preoccupation of the U.S media seems to be with MS-13's potential terrorist link and the security threat they pose to the nation. Additionally, Salvadoran media further reinforces the image of MS-13 gang members as the main blameworthy actors through numerous criminalizing images and language.

When addressing the topic of the MS-13 in relation to migration, the selected Canadian broadcast highlights the presence of MS-13 gang members in Canada as a threat to the host society and considers the act of migration to be an ominous activity. Deportation of gang members is conceptualized as a just consequence of criminal activity and is ignored as a factor contributing to the continuation of such actions. The American newscast stresses the MS-13 members' immigrant status and their perceived ethnic and national difference. Furthermore, the producers of this media establish a link between the gang's criminality and its members' immigrant status. Also, the American newscast does not recognize Salvadoran migrants as refugees and their immigration to Canada is automatically associated with their gang affiliation. Additionally, the selected Salvadoran broadcast utilizes language that implies the producers' approval of the U.S Homeland Security Department' deportation of MS-13 gang member Saul Turcios Angel from the United States.

In regards to the media's interpretation of the responses to the MS-13 gang, the Canadian newscast indicates that current measures too 'soft' and tougher responses are necessary to stop the gang's expansion. The U.S broadcast reinforces the idea that the MS-13 gang should be treated as an international security threat. Finally, the Salvadoran news clip and article advocate that the most appropriate way of dealing with the MS-13 gang is through repressive law enforcement measures such as *Mano Dura* (Hard Hand).

## Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the MS-13 gang is a topic surrounded by much controversy. Researchers on this topic have developed two different viewpoints. On the one extreme, traditional criminologists and representatives of law enforcement and national security construct transnational gangs as a major international security threat and describe gang members as irrevocably immoral, wicked and violent. On the other end, critical criminologists, anthropologists, and non-profit organizations conceptualize the MS-13 gang as a reaction to increasing global inequalities and as a symptom of greater contemporary societal issues in the age of neoliberal globalization.

However, only a few scholars (e.g. Hagedorn, 2008; McDonald, 2003; Zilberg, 2007) go beyond the conceptualization of gangs as criminal organizations of disaffected youth to recognize the gang phenomenon as a form of cultural resistance against socio-economic marginalization. Thus, the concepts of agency and resistance as impetus for the MS-13 gang are generally overlooked in the current research on gangs. Moreover, the growing presence of MS-13 gang members in Canada has been largely ignored by scholars. Furthermore, due to the transnational character of the MS-13 gang, a more flexible, wide-angle lens that is able to compare the social constructions of the gang in the Canadian, American, and Central American contexts is better suited to study this phenomenon.

## Evolution and Institutionalization of MS-13

Development and Organization

The level of development and organization of transnational gangs such as MS-13 has been questioned by several researchers. Writing from a criminological standpoint, Papachristos (2005) states that some gangs, such as MS-13, Crips, Bloods, and the Latin Kings have expanded and evolved significantly from small, disorganized, and impermanent street gangs involved in petty crime to well-organized, permanent, transnational criminal gangs that engage in organized crime, an increased level of violence and brutality, and even terrorist activities. A similar, although more alarmist explanation of the expansion of MS-13 is provided by Manwaring, who suggests that the MS-13 gang has evolved significantly in its internationalization and sophistication, from a first generation gang, with loose leadership and engaging mostly in opportunistic and petty theft, to a second generation transnational criminal organization with a hierarchical and centralized leadership engaging in mercenary, drug, and human trafficking activities, and possibly to a third generation status gang, which can transform into "a state within a state", and pose a serious threat to the authority and sovereignty of a government. Mawaring (2005, 2006, 2007), warns against the destructive and growing potential of the MS-13 gang members, which he elevates to the level of insurgents interested in commercial profit and a national security.

On the other side, Sullivan (2006) challenges Manwaring's centralized gang organization hypothesis and maintains that a shift in the organization of transnational gangs has occurred, from centralized hierarchies to network forms of organization utilized to enable netwar, "an

emerging form of conflict (and crime) at societal level, involving measures of short war, in which protagonists use... network forms of organization" (p. 489). From a civil-military, counterinsurgency outlook the author establishes a typology of gangs that he suggests progress along a 'generational continuum', from first generation, to second generation, to third generation status. Sullivan estimates that MS-13 has increased significantly both in its reach and sophistication, from "turf-based entities, to drug oriented enterprises... to complex organizations controlling entire housing projects, schools, an blocks, that conduct overt political activity while actively seeking to infiltrate and co-opt local police and contract security forces" (p. 492). He attributes this evolution to the information revolution, which enables small groups to quickly expand their reach (Sullivan, 2006). Due to the transnational reach of such networks, Sullivan (2006) and Arana (2005) elevate MS-13 to the status of "substantial security threats" (Sullivan, 2006, p. 494).

The construction of gangs as hierarchical, efficient criminal organizations with members serving different positions constitutes in fact a negative reflection of law enforcement bodies. However, much research and scholarship of organizational theory contradict such suppositions (Hagedorn, 2008). Addressing the issue of gangs from a sociological perspective, Hagedorn contends that the notion of the centralized authority of a few principal gang leaders is a myth and that the organization of transnational gangs such as MS-13 is rather based on loose networks between different neighbourhoods (Hagedorn, 2008). The development and growing permanency of contemporary gangs can be attributed to what Hagedorn (2008) calls 'rationalized myths', i.e. ideas that gang members create about their structure and identities in order to inculcate in their members a belief in the group (p. 11). Rodgers (2007) further consolidates Hagedorn's argument by suggesting that the *maras* provide a source of identity for their members and exhibit an institutional continuity independent of the gang's membership. As such, the persistence of institutionalized gangs is due in part to the cultural beliefs handed down through generations, rather then an expansion in leadership or revenue form drug sales, as criminologists such as Arana and Manwaring suggest.

Furthermore, Hume (2007) and Hayden (2005) have also criticized Manwaring's works for lacking sufficient evidence to substantiate his arguments and for basing the proposal regarding the evolution of MS-13 to "third generation status" on mere assumptions regarding the potential of MS-13 to "take, control, or neutralize political power to guarantee the kind of environment they want" rather then facts (Manwaring, 2007, p. 21). In accordance, Jose Luis Rocha (2008) argues that Manwaring's articles are written with particular interests in mind and grossly exaggerate the evolution and connections between the gang and organized crime networks (p. 139).

Causes of Evolution

In explaining the causes of the evolution of MS-13, two theoretical positions prevail. On the one side, some scholars (Arana, 2005; Papachristos, 2005; Sullivan, 2006) highlight socio-economic changes caused by globalization and immigration as essential factors to the gang's evolution. For instance, Papachristos (2005) suggest that the proliferation of the MS-13 gang is due not only to the socio-economic isolation and the increased mobility of gang culture and activity caused by globalization, but was also fuelled by the mid 1990s U.S immigration policy, through which thousands of MS-13 gang members were deported to their homelands in Central America after committing a crime (Papachristos, 2005, p. 53). Having little or no connection to their 'homeland', many gang members either returned to United States illegally, or joined other deported gang members and recruited other youth to join MS-13. According to Sullivan (2006),

El Salvador has at least 10,000 gang members and approximately 20,000 associates, a significant proportion of El Salvador's 6.5 million population. As such, globalization and U.S deportations have facilitated gang members to establish transnational connections throughout numerous states in the Americas (Boerman, 2007; Montaigne, 1999; Papachristos, 2005; Rocha and Rodgers, 2008).

Zilberg (2007), Hagedorn (2008), and Hayden (2005) add that MS-13 is in fact an American creation formed in the neighbourhoods of Los Angeles by the children of Central American immigrants after they fled the US-sponsored civil wars in the 1980s. Thus, MS-13 has developed to a transnational level not because of links with larger criminal or terrorist organizations, but rather due to the interventionist U.S style of relations with Central America, which exacerbated violence through military and economic aid during the civil wars, and then established policies of deporting those the U.S forced to move in the first place (Hagedorn, 2008; Hayden, 2005, Zilberg, 2007). The U.S deportations of Central American gang members back to their homeland appears to be a significant factor in the proliferation of *maras* in Central America. The link between deportations and the expansion of MS-13 would also partly explain their absence in Nicaragua, which has different migration patterns (Nicaraguan migrants settle mostly in Costa Rica), higher naturalization rates in the United States, and consequently significantly fewer deportees (Rocha, 2006).

According to Rocha (2006), the link between immigration flows and the expansion of MS-13 should not be used to criminalize migration. Such simplistic suppositions overlook the roots of the problem, which are adaptation problems and xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants in the United States. Many of the MS-13 gang members had arrived in the United States in the 1980s, at a young age, but were not recognized as refugees by U.S immigration authorities and thus were denied legal status (Boerman, 2007, DeCesare, 2003). Finding themselves in a context of social and economic insecurity, many of them joined the MS-13 gang as a way of adaptation to a hostile environment (Boerman, 2007). Furthermore, it is deportations that need to be problematized rather than immigration, as the reinsertion of deportees into 'homelands' that are foreign to them is highly problematic. Zilberg (2004) notes that for Salvadoran deportees, notions of 'home' and 'abroad' are ambiguous and unstable, having been rejected from both. Furthermore, Zilberg (2004) finds certain commonalities between Salvadoran deportees' negotiation of their relationship between home and abroad, and Said's postcolonial analysis of how the relations between the colonizer and the colonized are produced in relation to each other (Said, 1993).

On the other side, Rocha (2006) cautions against treating globalization and immigration as the sole factors that contributed to the development of transnational gangs. Such an overemphasis is inappropriate as gangs are not a new phenomenon and actually predate globalization, a fact which unsettles theories that associate the beginnings of MS-13 with immigration and globalization (Hagedorn, 2008; Rocha and Rodgers, 2008). Rocha (2006) asserts that a multitude of gangs, such as *Tigresa* (the Tigress), *Angeles Infernales* (Infernal angels), *Escorpion* (Scorpion), *Zope* (Vulture), and numerous others have long been a feature of the Central American society, before migration amplified during and after the civil wars.

Consequently, no straightforward explanation can elucidate such a complex phenomenon (Hagedorn, 2008). While socio-economic changes associated with globalization, such as increasing global inequalities and exclusion, urbanization, immigration, and corrupt and weak states are evidently relevant to the propagation of MS-13 in Latin America, the increasing presence of MS-13 in the United States and now Canada, where the states are more efficient,

complicates simplistic explanations that associate the proliferation of MS-13 with the 'Third World'. As Rocha (2006) illustrates, the expansion of *Mara Salvatrucha* is not a direct by-product of poverty and exclusion, but has occurred due to the combination of a variety of political and social conditions, including migration, cultural mixing between the U.S and Central America, the availability of arms, labour insecurity, the de-legitimization of the justice apparatus in Central America, and the transnationalization of elites, among others. For example, even though Nicaragua has higher levels of poverty and exclusion then in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, MS-13 is absent in the country and Nicaragua's levels of youth violence are lower as well (Rocha & Rodgers, 2008).

**Criminalization of the MS-13 Gang**

The growing level of criminality and violence of the MS-13 gang has become a main concern for numerous academics, governments, and international organizations. This section addresses the three subject matters concerning the criminality of MS-13: the vilification of MS-13 gang members, their links with terrorist organizations, and their escalating violence

Scapegoating

The USAID 2006 gang assessment asserts that "notorious gangs such as MS-13 and 18th street" "are international criminal organizations whose criminal activities in the Americas have damaging effects on national security by increasing domestic crime levels and facilitating drug trafficking" (USAID, 2006, p. 7). Similarly, from a traditional criminology perspective, Manwaring (2006) suggests that the MS-13 gang generates instability and state insecurity and in turn, should be viewed as a larger national security issue. Despite identifying the perpetuated

conditions of structural inequality and violence in Central America, including circumstances of radicalized poverty, high levels of youth unemployment, minimal access to basic social, educational, and other public services, ineffective and corrupt justice systems, and easy access to weapons, Manwaring (2006) maintains his position that the focal point of analysis should be individual gang members, who are responsible for such violent and criminal acts. A UNICEF (2002) report revealed that since 2002, 83 million Latin American children are living in poverty, which represents 59 percent of that age group; the rate of poverty for adults between twenty to thirty-four was 44 percent. Thus, Manwaring deliberately minimizes the negative consequences of structural conditions of socio-economic exclusion in which underprivileged Central American youth grow up in. Furthermore, the author depicts MS-13 gang members as disaffected and holds them responsible for the dramatically increased violence in Central America.

In accordance to Manwaring's argument, Arana (2005) identifies MS-13 as "the most serious challenge to peace since the end of Central America's civil wars" (p. 98). Arana (2005) also highlights the numerous violent crimes of MS-13 and dubs it an "ultraviolent, notorious street gang" (p. 98). Furthermore, the author's portrayal of the Salvadorans deported from the U.S due to their gang affiliation emphasizes "their outlandish tattoos, their Spanglish, and their antiauthoritarian attitudes" and implies that their only objective once deported was to re-establish gang connections (Arana, 2005, p. 99). However, Arana (2005) fails to take into consideration that these deportees had no family ties in Central America, were less employable then ever, and were deported without ensuring that local social programs existed to receive and reinsert them into society (Boerman, 2007).

For Papachristos (2005), the MS-13 gang are a dangerous organization that represents a worst case scenario of what gangs can become. However, he suggests that the MS-13 is an

anomaly, and most gangs are no more than petty delinquents. He also adds that the stigmatization of gang members makes it almost impossible for gang members to successfully reintegrate into society. However, Rodgers (2007) contradicts the sensationalist accounts of numerous scholars and media that link MS-13 to international organized crime, migrant trafficking, and any other large scale criminal operations. Rather, he asserts that the MS-13 gang is mostly involved in survival crime such as petty theft and extortions. Furthermore, most of the violence they assert is actually against rival gangs, as the several prison wars between MS-13 and 18th street demonstrate (Rodgers, 2007).

On the other side, Hagedorn (2008) and Mike Davis (2008) argue against the inhumane representation of gangs as a remote enemy, or as irrational, savage groups of 'damaged' youth and instead maintain that transnational gangs such as MS-13 constitute the angry social reaction to historical inequalities, economic polarization, and free-market capitalism in the age of globalization.

Other scholars (Arce, Dominguez, and Cruz, 2005; Hayden, 2005; Rocha, 2006; Zilberg, 2007) also disagree with the alarmist portrayals of traditional criminologists such as Arana and Manwaring and provide a more sophisticated analysis of the criminality of the MS-13 gang. Zilberg approaches the gang phenomenon from an anthropological perspective and constructs the MS-13 as yet another example of the U.S and El Salvador sharing discourse of illegality. For Zilberg (2007), the vilification of *maras* is symbolic of El Salvador's and U.S's efforts to re-establish national sovereignty. The Salvadoran government's stigmatization of gangster deportees, who were already excluded by the United States, reflects the anxiety over the transnational expansion of MS-13, which fuels the desire for sovereignty of both countries (Zilberg, 2007). As Zilberg (2007) convincingly suggests, "in the face of their mutual contamination of each other, El

Salvador and the USA both need a criminalized alien, a 'contemporary savage' Other" (p. 48). Furthermore, she contends that the MS-13 gang constitutes the necessary scapegoat to establishing a new social contract with the people of El Salvador, as

> Gang youth has become the repository of fears over and criticisms of the 'liberal excesses' of democracy and anxieties attached to the new political inclusions and constitutional rights imposed by the Peace Accords (Zilberg, 2007, p. 44).

Arce, Dominguez, and Cruz (2005) suggest that the vilification of *maras* in the current scholarly, governmental, and media discourse operates to block critical reflection and to reduce the complexity of the social problem at stake. Instead, the institutionalization of corruption and the broad acceptance of impunity and illegality at the state level need to be considered in order to contextualize the criminalization of *maras*. The erosion of state legitimacy and the consequent loss of faith in the state have established the backdrop for various illicit actions, some of which are highly criminalized, and some of which go unpunished due to the social position of the person behind them (Rocha, 2006). As Rocha (2006) eloquently suggests, "those processed by the penal system are dangerous to society, unless their social connections prove otherwise" (p. 164).

Therefore, an approach that conceptualizes MS-13 as a form of cultural resistance generated by structural exclusion and inequality is more relevant. Hagedorn (2005) argues that institutionalized gangs such as MS-13 should be viewed as social actors reacting to conditions of structural inequality and oppression. These gangs have emerged in order to fill in the vacuum created by the retreat of states' social welfare policies. He further proposes that transnational gangs such as MS-13 are emblematic of "the price we pay for the failure of the modern project", as the vacuum left by the retreat of the state and the consequent loss of faith in modern

institutions have generated ideal conditions for the development of gangs (Hagedorn, 2005, p.164). Rather then prescribing to the tendency of other scholars to vilify delinquent youth, Hagedorn humanizes gang members by emphasizing their values of selflessness and solidarity, and the potential of channelling such qualities into broader social movements rather than into violence and self-destruction.

Terrorism and the MS-13 Gang

In the post 9/11 context, the fixation with the terrorist threat has led to accusations of links between al Qaeda operatives and the MS-13 gang. In 2005, Oscar Alvarez, Honduras' security minister started rumours of such connections by claiming that MS-13 leaders met in Honduras with a key al Qaeda leader in order to arrange the smuggling of immigrants into the United States (Hume, 2007; Zilberg 2007). While asserting that the link of gangs with terrorist organizations is generally overestimated, Papachristos (2005) suggests that MS-13 is one of the few gangs that do in fact have the transnational reach to commit terrorist acts. Numerous other scholars, including Arana (2005), Breve (2007), Johnson and Muhlhausen (2005), Manwaring (2005, 2006, 2007), and Sullivan (2006) are also directing attention to a possible link between the MS-13 gang and terrorist organizations. For instance, Manwaring (2006) perceives the MS-13 gang as a "triple threat" to state sovereignty, as it undermines the ability of the state to perform its security and public service functions; destabilizes the exercise of state authority and reinstates it with their own; and by taking control of neighbourhood territory, the gang has the potential of transforming into an authoritative body that resembles state authority (p. 520).

Despite the fact that such suppositions are asserted with certainty, they are based on mere speculations and have no substantial base. For instance, in spite of their accusatory statements, Johnson and Muhlhausen (2005) mention that "no hard evidence links them (MS-13) with terrorist networks" (p. 38). Similarly, it remains unclear why Arana (2005) continues to speculate on such a link after she states that "Central American officials quickly denied that such a meeting had taken place" (p. 102). Furthermore, Hume (2007) challenges the linking of the MS-13 gang with global terrorism by pointing out that despite the fact that claims of a meeting between MS-13 and al Qaeda operatives have been later denied, such allegations persist and rely on the creation of a particular image of gangs, rather then being based on actual evidence. Critical of the Pentagon definition of 'terror' for being all-encompassing and for establishing little distinction between numerous dissimilar criminal actors, Hume (2007) cautions that before readily accepting such a construction of the MS-13 gang, closer attention is needed to the way in which the framing of terrorist threats have been implemented in the Central American discourse on security in order to "reposition the 'seams' between police and military missions" (p. 743).

Similarly, Hayden (2005) suggests that allegations of a possible link of the MS-13 gang with terrorist organizations are unsubstantiated, as it is based on unconfirmed sightings and rumours, but no actual evidence of such meetings. Moreover, Hagedorn's (2005) study further challenges Manwaring's notion of gangs as a terrorist threat and supports Hume's dissatisfaction with the linkage of MS-13 with global terrorism. The author suggests that such a standpoint, supported by the U.S Justice Department's 'war on terror', is narrow and serves to polarize perspectives and studies on gangs (Hagedorn, 2005). Evidently, the construction of MS-13 gang members as a terrorist threat or as "the new urban insurgency" follows a one-dimensional logic that separates the world into 'good' and 'evil' and serves to distract from the root causes such as social exclusion and inequality that motivate youth to join gangs. As Rodgers (2007) asserts "gangs have thus become convenient scapegoats on which to blame the isthmus' problems and through which those in power attempt to maintain a particular status quo" (p. 185).

Consequently, by generalizing transnational gangs as an international terrorist conspiracy and by stigmatizing them as permanently violent and hostile, many criminologists exclude the possibility of including marginalized youth into social movements as a possibility to reach out to them and overcome their violent tendencies (Hagedorn, 2008).

Violence and Brutality

Gang violence has become the main focus of governments, international organizations, and academics, who have reported an upsurge of violence, which is attributed mainly to gangs. Hume (2007) for instance notes that the level of violence in El Salvador is higher now then during the 12 years of civil war. Similarly, Arana (2005) and Sullivan (2006) highlight the increased brutality of MS-13 crimes, providing as an example the 2004 attack in Honduras, when MS-13 opened fire in a bus, choosing their victims at random and killing 28 passengers. Additionally, Boerman (2007) draws attention to the increased viciousness of MS-13 gang members, who left bodies of decapitated victims in the streets with notes warning governments to cease persecution of gang members. While Arana makes a brief mention that this brutal attack was a reaction to the government's repressive anti-gang measures, Sullivan attributes the attack to the "cross-fertilization of criminal actors that results from internationalization" (p. 494).

While several studies agree that the MS-13 gang and its rival 18th street gang have become increasingly violent, Rocha (2006) and Hume (2007) attribute this shift towards violence on a major scale to the unregulated availability of fire arms. Additionally, the involvement of MS-13 gang members in the drug trade in Central America, which has become the transit route for 80% of the total traffic of cocaine between the Andean countries and North America, is an important contributor to the increasingly violent character of MS-13 gang members (Rodgers, 2007).

While identifying some of the conditions that perpetuate violence, Manwaring (2006) essentializes gang members as intrinsically violent, accentuating that "it is not poverty, injustice, or misery that willfully kill, maim, and destroy. It is individual men and women—and, sometimes, boys and girls—who are prepared to implement all kinds of horrible and coercive "intimidations" and "instabilities" in their search for status and well-being" (p. 515).

However, Sanchez (2006) disagrees with such a dehumanizing portrayal of youth, and argues that gang violence constitutes a strategy used as a basic tool for survival, as a way of adapting to conditions of structural inequality and deprivation. As such, Sanchez (2006) proposes an alternative model of conceptualizing violence: Rather than viewing violence as a personal deviation from societal norms, it is more appropriate to consider it a product of structural inequalities, a social phenomenon in which multiple actors resort to the use of violence under similar social circumstances and in mutually reinforcing ways, not as isolated individuals (p. 181).

Evidently, the analysis of the violence of *maras* cannot be conducted in a socio-political vacuum, but rather needs to consider the legacy of authoritarianism in El Salvador. Given that young people in El Salvador have been exposed to high levels of social, economic, political, and personal violence, they've learned to survive by reproducing the cycle of violence (Hume, 2007). At the risk of essentializing the history of Salvadoran people as intrinsically violent, Hume (2007) argues that since youth in El Salvador have been socialized into a violent environment, violence has become normalized "both as a form of political interaction and as an expression of identity" (p. 742).

However, Rocha (2006) notes that "youth violence is neither new, nor has it reached its peak" (p. 144). Instead, youth violence was much more pervasive during the civil wars in the

1970s and 1980s, when the military service recruited thousands of young people. Nonetheless, such violence was not conceptualized as 'criminal', as it was part of an institutional setting and had an ideological basis. Thus, the criminalization of gang violence can be attributed the fact that it is taking place outside of institutionalized or legitimate channels; and also to the "de-ideologization" of youth violence, as it is no longer influenced by political ideologies or conflicts, but is rather characterized by common crime, such as robbery, assaults, street fights, etc. (Rocha, 2006; Hagedorn, 2008). As such, Rodgers (2007) notes that contemporary violence in Central America is mainly criminal rather then political in nature.

While the media representation of gangs, with their focus on sensationalizing the criminal deeds and violence of MS-13 has been successful in fuelling the public perception of gangs as ruthless, violent criminals, it is important to shift the focal point to the conditions from which such gangs originate (Rocha, 2006). Rather than analyzing gang violence in a contextual vacuum, McDonald (2003) effectively frames the changes in the character and violence exerted by gangs within a shifting context from industrial capitalism to network capitalism. As McDonald argues,

> violence in the world of marginal young people is much more about securing self-esteem in a social world that makes increasingly powerful demands for it, while unequally distributing the resources necessary to achieve it. In this context, the demand for self-esteem sustains a strategy that seeks esteem from the other, and through this, one can achieve esteem in one's own eyes (p. 71).

By situating the present gang violence within a context framed by network capitalism and increased uncertainty, McDonald (2003) makes a strong case in arguing that contemporary gang violence constitutes a strategy of securing self-esteem and a sense of belonging in a world that increasingly demands self-identity while simultaneously undermining it through processes of social exclusion.

While Central American youth constitute an easy target for criminalization, it is important to problematize theories that regard gang violence as greater or more threatening. Rocha (2006) suggests that such proclamations stem from a middle-class discourse for which violence is legitimate if it operates under certain circumstances and which "sees the epoch of peace as a return to normality, the rule of law, where there are precise and unquestionable norms about which behaviors can be qualified as acceptable and which as deviant" (p. 145). However, such a discourse underestimates the historical continuity and impact of Central American civil wars and view *maras* as "a transgression of the standards that constitute the re-established normality" (p. 145).

### Responses to the MS-13 Gang

Most scholars (Arana, 2005; Breve, 2007; Boerman, 2007; Hayden, 2005; Hagedorn, 2005, 2008; DeCesare, 1998, 2003; Papachristos, 2005; Rocha & Rodgers, 2008) maintain that the current anti-gang discursive practice has been largely ineffective. Consequently, traditional criminologists and government authorities suggest that more repressive measures are necessary in order to achieve positive change and to prevent the criminal activities of the MS-13 gang. For example, Arana (2005) attributes the ineffectiveness of anti-gang strategies to Central American governments, who are accused of lacking political will, funding, and timing in addressing this issue. Arana's portrayal of MS-13 is rather alarmist, as she suggests that with every day that governments delay the implementation of harsher anti-gang policies, this gang will grow stronger and the danger it poses will spread in more regions (Arana, 2005). The author proposes that the U.S should intervene and take charge, as the most effective anti-gang approach comes from Los Angeles. While it is pertinent that Central American states are corrupt and have not dealt with the issue of gangs effectively, to point out their ineptness in this matter for the purpose of justifying

an interventionist style of international relations is not only deceitful as U.S anti-gang measures have also been inappropriate and ineffective, but it also signifies the continuation of imperialist practices in which the 'civilized' West is considered the sole arbiter and claims authority over 'backwards' underdeveloped countries. Not only does Arana (2005) justify the interventionist style of U.S international relations by regarding Central American countries as "tiny", "fragile", and incapable of addressing this challenge independently; but she also emphasizes that suppression is not sufficient to curb gang activity. Thus, she advocates for the invigilation of gang members after apprehension as a necessary measure in order to curb gang activity.

In a similar fashion, Manwaring (2006) suggests that anti-gang policies have not had any considerable impact on preventing the proliferation of MS-13. However, instead of acknowledging the faulty logic of this approach, the author attributes the ineffectiveness of such measures to the fact that suppressive responses were not strong enough (Manwaring, 2006). Furthermore, he validates the lack of attention and funding for preventive programs by contending that a 'get tougher' approach and more law enforcement are the only ways to address the MS-13 gang problem. In his more recent article, Manwaring (2007) also raises accusations that the Central American response to the MS-13 gang has been too 'soft' and condemns Central American governments for not raising the threat posed by gangs to the level of national security. He suggests that weak anti-gang approaches have actually had the effect of facilitating the rise of the MS-13 gang and the potential threat it currently poses.

However, Hagedorn's (2005) study contradicts Manwaring and Arana's assertions regarding the impact of repressive anti-gang approach. Hagedorn (2005) suggests that such a punitive strategy targets racialized, underprivileged youth and operates to legitimize the global re-division of wealth in the wake of neoliberal globalization. Due to the politicization of crime and human security, an unprecedented expansion of prisons and incarcerations of racialized, alienated youth has transpired. Consequently, Hagedorn (2005) suggests that the impact of the increasingly punitive anti-gang discourse is significant and is representative of a new form of social control and institutionalized slavery.

For Zilberg (2007), harsh anti-gang responses in El Salvador are representative of a rejection of the constitutional and institutional reforms enacted after the 1992 Salvadoran Peace Accords. Such responses reject 'softer' laws emphasizing the protection of human rights as only appropriate for those countries with a history and culture of democracy, not for those just emerging into democracy, such as El Salvador. Adding to Zilberg's argument, Hume (2007) suggests that repressive responses to the gang problem in El Salvador signal the return of authoritarianism in Latin America. Such legislations have had the negative impact of undermining democratic governance not only at the national level, but in the international arena as well.

Zilberg (2007) adds that El Salvador's appropriation of U.S 'zero tolerance' and anti-terrorist laws signifies not only the transnational mimesis and the sharing of discourses of criminality between the two countries, but also the historical continuity and structure underlying the U.S- El Salvador ongoing relations. While the previous collaboration between the U.S and El Salvador was motivated by "fantasies about communists, their contemporary shared fantasies are triggered by the menace of criminals and terrorists" (Zilberg, 2007, p. 44). Whereas suppressive responses such as the Mano Dura and the 'zero tolerance' legislations are based on a state of exception, such forms of state violence are "the most corrupt part of democracy precisely because it places violence in a ghostly space, a space that is hidden, where the law becomes its own transgression" (Zilberg, 2007, p. 47).

Furthermore, Boerman (2007) adds that the discourse on MS-13 not only has the negative impact of undercutting democratic governance, but it also operates to exacerbate the already existing marginalization of youth. Under this rhetoric, youth have become the central security threat in the Americas, and have consequently become increasingly criminalized. Moreover, Boerman's study suggests that the emphasis on repression and law enforcement has been enacted by national and international bodies to the extent that prevention and reintegration into society has become nearly impossible and no assistance is provided for those who intend to leave this lifestyle behind (Boerman, 2007). Indeed, the increasingly repressive responses to the MS-13 gang have only aggravated the problem, as they caused gang members to become more clandestine, savvy, and radical in their actions.

While the more violent behaviour of MS-13 gang members has been relentlessly condemned, less consideration has been accorded to the way in which responses such as the Mano Dura legislation in Central America and the "zero tolerance" policy in the United States has in fact intensified the violence of MS-13. Not only have the 'zero tolerance' or *Mano Dura* (Hard Hand) repressive policies been ineffective, but have also had the effect of promoting violent methods to resolve conflict. In addition, such hyper-punitive legislations have generated horrendous responses from MS-13, such as leaving decapitated corpses in the streets with notes warning governments to cease persecution of gang members (Boerman, 2007; Rocha, 2007). Evidently, a more comprehensive strategy that focuses on reducing global inequalities needs to be adopted by Central American and U.S governments for dealing with gang-related crime and violence. As Papachristos (2005) argues, even though MS-13 is considered by many as one of the largest threats to national security in the Americas, such institutionalized gangs constitute not just a criminal justice problem, but a social problem as well. Thus, repressive measures cannot

resolve the essential conditions that generate gangs and only serve to radicalize the MS-13 gang and precipitate a vicious cycle of violence. A starting point for developing a more suitable framework of dealing with the gang phenomenon might be Nicaragua's response to gangs. According to Rocha (2006), the lower level of gang violence in Nicaragua could be attributed at least in part to the non-criminalizing approach of the police, which has contributed to attenuating a vicious cycle of violence.

**Gaps**

However, in spite of the emergence of richer and more critical research on gangs, the notion of agency of MS-13 gang members, which is the ideas of possibility, change, and resistance are largely overlooked in the current research on gangs. As Shahjan (2005) eloquently suggests "agency is not just about resistance, but the will to change and hope" (p. 229). Only a few scholars (e.g. Hagedorn, 2005, 2007, 2008; McDonald, 2003; Zilberg, 2004, 2007) go beyond the conceptualization of gangs as criminal organizations of disaffected youth to recognize the gang phenomenon as a form of cultural resistance against socio-economic marginalization. Media representations of the MS-13 gang further consolidate the image of gangs as an irremediable evil that needs to be eliminated with no regard to human rights. A closer analysis of such media representations will reveal the biases and inaccuracy of such constructions and will contribute to constructing a more holistic conceptualization of the MS-13 gang, one that recognizes that gangs are not static, that they change through time, and that the prospect of gang members creating possibilities for themselves and becoming subjects of change constitutes a real possibility.

Furthermore, by analyzing the depiction of the MS-13 gang in the media, my research will problematize the socially constructed category of 'gangs'. By focusing on the cultural

dimension of this gang, this research project attempts to reveal its different nuances and meanings and to consolidate the emerging critical gang studies founded by scholars such as Hagedorn, who see beyond the stereotypes of gangs as groups of irrational youth involved in lucrative drug mafias. The importance of understanding the social construction of gangs in media representations lies in the fact that such depictions help establish and maintain the status quo in society, the boundaries between good and bad, self and the other (Phillips, 1997). As Phillips (1997) eloquently suggests,

> We need criminals because they are not us. Crimes are transgressive acts, committed not by normal people but by those we define as outside the norm. It would appear that the systematic reaffirmation of this distinction is fundamental to our society. Our ability to distinguish right from wrong enables us, as responsible citizens, to identify, prosecute, and punish outlaws— individuals who flaunt social values (p 11).

Additionally, the growing presence of MS-13 gang members in Canada has been largely ignored by scholars. While it constitutes a new phenomenon and their numbers are still insignificant in Canada, I suggest that the historical and contextual background of MS-13 indicates that it is not far-fetched to assume that the gang may slowly start to establish a solid foundation in this region as well. Evidently, the appearance of MS-13 in the Canadian context needs to be addressed from its inception. Thus, my study aims to help fill in the gap in research on the transnational challenge posed by MS-13 in the Canadian context and to understand the way in such phenomenon is mediated by discursive practices, mainstream ideology, and power relations in this region.

Furthermore, the transnational character of the MS-13 gang indicates that a wider-angle lens is needed in the examination of this phenomenon. My research project will satisfy this requirement, as I will integrate, compare, and contrast the current Canadian, U.S, and Salvadoran media representation of MS-13. In addition, this research project will attempt to be responsive to the diversity of environments in which the Mara Salvatrucha has spread, by taking into consideration how the context of multiculturalism in Canada, the exodus of Central American refugees to the American "melting pot", and the legacy of authoritarianism and colonialism in El Salvador has influenced the social construction of *maras*. This research aims to identify the similarities and/ or differences of the social constructions of the gang in these different contexts in order to determine whether a pattern of representation exists and, more specifically, whether a process of 'Othering' is present, and for what purposes.

**Theoretical Framework**

The media representation of MS-13 gang members will be scrutinized by employing the postcolonial theoretical framework, which suggests that colonialism does not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode in many societies (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1997). Thus, all post-colonial societies continue to be subject to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination. This theory also maintains that Western knowledge production of the colonized has the purpose of consolidating colonial hegemony, portrays the West as superior to the colonized 'Other', and is a sign of imperial power (Shahjahan, 2005). As such, knowledge production constitutes a site of contention between the interests of the West and those of the 'Other', as the West's instruments of knowledge production are also instruments for legitimizing various colonial practices. As Ashcroft et al., (1997) suggest,

> Because language is a discourse of power, in that it provides the terms and the structures by which individuals have a world, a method by which the 'real' is determined, notions of universality can, like the language which suggests them, become imperialistic (p. 55).

Thus, language can be employed as an imperialistic mechanism of control to promote certain perspectives and suppress others. Postcolonial writers also point out that with the globalization of

western knowledge, the West's view of itself as the center, the sole arbiter and source of legitimate and civilized knowledge is constantly reiterated (Shahjahan, 2005).

Postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1979) suggests that Western knowledge production of the 'Other' portrays the West as superior to the 'Other', and is ethnocentric, racist, manipulative, and ideologically embedded. He stresses that such colonial representations are not accounts of distinctively different people and societies, but rather constitute a mirroring reflection of European fears and desires under the guise of 'expert' or 'objective' knowledge. For Said (1979), the concept of Orientalism constitutes a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). The author introduces the concept of positional superiority, which enables the Westerner to maintain the upper hand in the relations with the 'Other'. Additionally, Said (1979) cautions against misrepresentations and marginalization in the Western knowledge production.

Moreover, Homi Bhabha (1983) describes colonial discourse as a rhetoric with the purpose of constructing the colonized as degenerate and inferior by virtue of racial origin, in order to legitimize domination and establish a hegemonic style of relations. Furthermore, he asserts that the colonial discourse is not unidirectional, but rather establishes both a measure of imitation and a mode of authority, thus controlling the imaginations of the colonized (Ashcroft et al., 1997). For Bhabha (1983), it is this ambivalence that ensures the persistency of the colonial discourse in changing contexts. This concept will be integrated in the analysis of the Salvadoran media representation of MS-13, which mimics the U.S and Canadian portrayal of gang-affiliated youth and constructs them as a principal security threat within the regional discourse.

Thus, through the theoretical lens of postcolonialism, I intend to reveal potential misrepresentations and marginalization in the production of knowledge of MS-13 through the media. Rather than emphasizing the violent and criminal acts inflicted by MS-13 gang members, a theme that has been covered thoroughly, I will scrutinize the media representation of this gang in order to determine its agenda, its intended and unintended effects.

## Conclusions

This review indicates that research on the MS-13 gang has developed two different standpoints. On the one extreme, traditional criminologists and representatives of law enforcement and national security adopt a military, counterinsurgency theoretical standpoint to construct transnational gangs as a major threat to state security and stability and describe gang members as irrevocably immoral, wicked and violent. On the other end, critical criminologists, anthropologists, and non-profit organizations such as Homies Unidos view gang members as "a symptom, a radicalized expression of contemporary unease, who find 'criminality' to be an ideal vehicle given the lack or inadequacy of languages to be expressed" (Rocha and Rodgers, 2008, p. 140).

Regarding the evolution of the MS-13 gang, there is a general agreement among scholars from different disciplines and viewpoints that increasing global inequalities, exclusion, deportations, and globalization have had a decisive impact on the proliferation of the MS-13 gang. On the other side, scholars' findings regarding the gang's level of organization and transnational reach is surrounded by much disagreement. While Arana (2005), Sullivan (2006), Manwaring (2005, 2006, 2007), and official reports such as the USAID 2006 Gang Assessment and Ribando's (2007) "Gangs in Central America" report argue that the MS-13 is highly organized and constitutes a significant international threat, academics critical of traditional criminology approach to gangs contend that the organizational sophistication and transnational reach of *Mara Salvatrucha* are overestimated.

Additionally, the theme of the criminality and illegality of the MS-13 gang is also surrounded by much controversy. While most researchers agree that the level and nature of criminal and violent activities has changed with the historical, social, and political context, there is a tendency of most scholars, law enforcement bodies, and the media to stigmatize and limit gangs to criminal groups. Such an imbalanced focus overlooks the complexity of gangs, their history, cultural aspect, and changing forms.

Regarding the appropriate solution to addressing the gang problem, there seems to be a general agreement between scholars that current approaches have been largely ineffective. However, there is substantial disagreement as to the reason behind the incapacity of such responses to address the problem and to what combination of preventive and suppressive measures must be implemented to curb gang activities.

As this literature review indicates, the current research on gangs has become more critical and developed in different disciplines, outside of the criminal justice domain. While traditional approaches to gang research, such as the theories of Arana (2005), Breve (2007), Manwaring (2005, 2006, 2007), and Sullivan (2006) remain highly influential in the academic and policy-making spheres, a more critical school of thought has emerged in different disciplines. By adopting sociological (e.g. DeCesare, 1998, 2003; Hagedorn, 2005, 2007, 2008, Hayden, 2005), anthropological (e.g. Zilberg, 2004, 2007; Arce et. al., 2005; Rodgers, 2007), political economy (e.g. Hume, 2007; Rocha, 2006), and liberation theology theoretical frameworks (e.g. Barrios, 2003) such scholars criticize traditional approaches to gang research for being rooted in Victorian values, ignoring dramatic structural changes in urban life, and constituting "a fundamentally moralistic critique of poor people's supposed predisposition to crime and disorder" (Hagedorn, 2008, p. xii). Thus, these academics condemn traditional criminological approaches to gangs on the grounds that they are shaped through federal funding; far from fulfilling standards of being scrupulous and empirical; tangled up in myths; and are heavily influenced by the priorities and prejudices of law enforcement bodies.

## Chapter 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

### Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to understand the way in which the transnational challenge posed by the MS-13 gang is constructed by mainstream media in Canada, the United States, and El Salvador. The media representation of the MS-13 should not be undermined and is important for several reasons. Firstly, research on the vilification of MS-13 gang members in public discourses exposes the duplicity of governments in establishing simplistic and increasingly incompatible dichotomies between legal and illegal, formal and informal, legitimate and criminal, in a time when the shift towards neoliberalism has blurred such boundaries (Sanchez, 2006). Secondly, the criminalization of MS-13 gang members operates to further marginalize and criminalize underprivileged urban youth, a segment of the populace already riddled by high levels of socio-economic exclusion (Boerman, 2007). Under this rhetoric, Latino youth growing up in conditions of radicalized poverty in El Salvador and in poor neighbourhoods in the United States and Canada are managed as a criminal risk instead of being provided with social services to recuperate from social misery (Rios, 2008). Such responses to the challenge posed by the MS-13 gang are powerful, as they create a climate in which underprivileged youth are deemed permanent criminals, and consequently result in intensified forms of social exclusion, marginalization, and criminalization.

Finally, by focusing on the close relationship between power and representation, and by taking into consideration that power relations cannot be consolidated without the production and functioning of a discourse, this study aims to reverse the focus away from individual gang members and towards the accountability of discursive practices in contributing to this problem. As such, this study aims to reveal that representation can be a form of violence in itself and to expose its powerful impact in order to encourage the development of more accurate and effective discursive and institutional approaches to the gang problem.

### General Objective

This study seeks to explore the social construction youth in the media, as related to the MS-13 gang in Canada, the United Sates, and El Salvador.

### Specific Objectives

1. To explore whether a pattern of construing a criminal 'Other' exists in the selected media.
2. To determine whether racism and xenophobia are reinforced in the media.
3. To reveal whether misrepresentations of the MS-13 gang and their purpose and implication are taking place in media.

### Theoretical Framework

This study will utilize Said's concept of representation of the 'Other', which asserts that knowledge production of the 'Other' has the purpose of consolidating colonial hegemony and that ideas, cultures, and histories cannot be studied without considering their configuration of power. For instance, Said (1979) points out that the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is one of unequal power relations, which has transpired in the West's discourse of the Orient. Similarly, representations of the Central American gang MS-13 operate to perpetuate hegemony through the vilification of MS-13 gang members and thus, to normalize the image of the deviant 'Other'. By scrutinizing Europe's representation of the Orient during the post-Enlightenment period, namely "Orientalism", Said (1979) reveals the West's superior, executive attitude in the creation of doctrines and thesis about the Orient and its people. Said also cautions against misrepresentations and marginalization in the Western knowledge production. By using

Said's approach to postcolonial theory, I will scrutinize the media discourse on MS-13 to identify questionable arguments, possible omissions, and unfounded statements about the gang.

In addition, I will utilize the concept of positional superiority, which constitutes the strategy which colonial discourse depends on, as it maintains the upper hand of the colonizer (Said, 1979). For instance, the discourse of Orientalism was dependant on the unchallenged centrality of a sovereign and hegemonic West, through the standpoint of which the Orient was examined (Said, 1979). Said's concept of positional superiority will be integrated to demonstrate the way in which the Canadian and U.S media's support of repressive anti-gang policies enables the West to maintain the upper hand and legitimize an interventionist style of international relations and forms of neo-colonial domination under the disguise of fighting crime and terrorism.

Bhabha (1983) employs the notion of colonial stereotype to assert that stereotype, more then constituting a false depiction which then becomes the basis for discriminatory practice, it is a much more ambivalent practice which involves " a splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse" (Bhbabha, 1983, p. 34). This study will also utilize Bhabha's (1983) interpretation of stereotype in terms of fetishism, which proposes that fetishism circulates in the colonial discourse and shifts between the recognition of cultural and racial difference and its rejection, "by affixing the unfamiliar to something established, in a form that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear" (p. 26). According to Bhabha (1983), the fetish allows in an identity which is based on both mastery and pleasure and on anxiety and defence, "for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it" (p. 27). The notion of the colonial stereotype will be applied to analyse the typecasting of MS-13 gang members in media discourse and the way in which their irreversible difference is construed.

Furthermore, Bhabha's (1985) concept of colonial hybridity shows that colonial power is not fixed but rather circulates, and can be appropriated by the colonized through the mimicry of discriminatory identities. As Bhabha (1985) eloquently suggests, colonial hybridity

> unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversions that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory (p. 154).

The concept of colonial hybridity will be integrated in the analysis of the Salvadoran media discourse on MS-13 in order to reveal how is mirroring and subverting its Northern neighbours by adopting the construction of MS-13 gang members as a principal security threat within the regional discourse and how the MS-13 epitomize this concept by utilizing violence and crime as a mechanism of claiming authority.

**Methodology**

<u>Data</u>

I utilized newspaper articles and TV news clips from regional media in the United States, Canada, and El Salvador. I employed one broadcast from Canada, one from the United States, and one broadcast and a newspaper article from El Salvador. While one media broadcast was to be originally selected from each of the previously mentioned regions, the lack of accessibility to online Salvadoran news broadcasts compelled me to select a short broadcast and a newspaper article instead.

This study ensured that the newscasts and the newspaper article are of comparable lengths. I only selected media reports publicized within the past six years. Samples were selected only from mainstream media sources, as the analysis seeks to uncover the ways in which dominant forces mediate the representation of the MS-13 gang through mainstream media. The

selected data was chosen from popular news channels and newspapers with a large viewership in order to make certain that the programs are representative of a large segment of the state's population, and thus to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Finally, the study only selected media reports publicized in the past six years as my analysis seeks to generate findings relevant to the current socio-political context in the Americas. As well, this time limit was imposed with the purpose of addressing the discourse of MS-13 in the aftermath of September 11, when the concern of security has come to the forefront of the political agenda of the United States, Canada, and El Salvador, to a certain extent.

Using the above mentioned parameters, the following data were selected by the study: from Canada, I utilized a broadcast from Global National News channel, titled "MS-13 Setting Up in Canada", dated May 2007; from the United States, a newscast from the Fox News channel was picked, entitled "Gangs with Terror Ties", dated June 25th, 2005; finally, I selected the video titled "El Trece en la Lista de los Mas Buscados" ("El Trece on the Most Wanted List"), dated February 10, 2009 and the article called "Presidente Flores pide a diputados aprobar Ley Antimaras" ("President Flores Asks parliament Members to Approve the Anti-gang Law") , dated August 28, 2003, both from the online newspaper Diario Co Latino.

Data Collection

The selected TV broadcasts from Canada and the United States were downloaded from YouTube and the Salvadoran newscast and chosen newspaper articles were collected from the newspapers' online archives onto my computer. I watched and read the chosen TV broadcasts and newspaper articles repeatedly in order to identify themes. When an understanding of a theme developed, I went back to the material and look for more examples in order to consolidate the theme. In the process of identifying themes, I paid attention to the type of language used, images,

silences, or sudden changes in style that may indicate conflict between different discourses (Fairclough, 1989).

Data Analysis

The Canadian, U.S, and Salvadoran media representation of youth as related to MS-13 gang activity were analyzed and compared by using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method (CDA). This study employed the methodological segment of Fairclough's CDA model and its three methodological steps, namely: description, interpretation and explanation. Linguistic properties of texts are described (text analysis), the relationship between the discursive practice and the texts is interpreted, and the relationship between discursive practice and social practice is explained (Fairclough, 1995a). In describing the language, this study focused on the vocabulary used, the grammatical features, and textual structures of the selected media (Fairclough, 1989). The focal point when interpreting the data was on the intertextuality and presuppositions present in the media, the interpretations the media producers are giving to the events, and the discourse types they draw upon (Fairclough, 1989). Finally, the third methodological step contributed to explain what power relations help shape the discourse on youth as related to the MS-13 gang, and whether this discourse contributes to sustaining or challenging existing power relations (Fairclough, 1989).

The questions that I explored when analyzing the data are the following:

1. How are MS-13 gang members represented?
2. What themes re-occur when reporting on MS-13 gang activity?
3. Is the image of the criminal 'Other' reinforced? How?
4. Which discourse type do the visual and print media draw from?
5. What other choices could have been made from among the options available in the discourse types which the media producers draw upon?

Research findings were presented thematically. The themes that will be analysed are the vilification of MS-13 gang-affiliated youth, the evolution of the MS-13 gang, the criminalization of migration, and responses to the MS-13 gang.

## Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Note: The emphasis is mine in all of the following quotations.

### MS-13 Violence, Vilification and Terrorism

#### Canada

The Global National newscast words the practices of the MS-13 gang from the perspective of those who oppose them. Vocabulary such as "brutal", "criminal", "bad", "ruthless", and "violent" are utilized to construct MS-13 gang members as irremediably evil.

> "They are the brutal, criminal gang other gangs fear"
> "MS-13, the most violent gang in North America"
> "They don't think they're bad people, they know they're bad"
> "its (MS-13's) ruthless sophistication"

Depictions of Hispanic, heavily tattooed young men are prominent throughout the newscast. Also, images and videos of police officers arresting and handcuffing gang members are frequent, reinforcing the image of MS-13 gang members as hardened criminals. The verbs "fear", "attacked", "shot", "killed", and "hacked" are mentioned consistently throughout the production. The violent character of MS-13 gang members is further reinforced by emphasizing their usage of machetes as their favourite weapon, which implies not only that they are extremely violent, but also that killing constitutes a sort of hobby or casual play for them, for which they pick a 'favourite' weapon.

> "They are the brutal, criminal gang other gangs fear"
> "they attacked a school bus"
> "they shot and killed 27 people and they hacked the women and children up with machetes"

"machetes are their favourite weapon"

Furthermore, the 3 minute clip contains several significant references to the youthfulness of both gang members and their victims. First, Jim Brown, a retired RCMP officer mentions that in the 2004 bus attack in Honduras, MS-13 gang members "hacked the women and children up with machetes". Secondly, when interviewing Six, an MS-13 gang member of the Toronto chapter, the speaker mentions that "he's not much older then his monitor". Additionally, the reporter states that "kids as young as 11 and 12 are being recruited from the streets and in our schools.

Additionally, the newscast mystifies and sensationalizes the MS-13 gang through the superlative "the most violent gang in North America" and statements such as:

> "They are the brutal, criminal gang other gangs fear"
> "They earned their reputation through blood and violence" and
> "(MS-13) uses a blend of street gang justice with Mafia like organization"

The implication that other gangs, assumed to be violent and criminal by character, actually fear MS-13 elevates its status to ultra-violent.

Furthermore, the producers' interpretation of the reported event is constructed as factual reality. The following authenticity claims with regard to MS-13 illustrate this fact:

> "They are the brutal, criminal gang other gangs fear"
> "They earned their reputation through blood and violence"
> "They're here (Canada) and they're serious"
> "the most violent gang in North America"
> "MS-13 is successful"

However, certain inconsistencies with regards to the vilified character of MS-13 gang members are also evident in the text. For instance, on the one side, the presenter constructs a solid image of MS-13 gang members as violent criminals through adjectives such as "brutal", "criminal", "bad", "ruthless" and verbs such as "fear", "attacked", "shot", "killed", and "hacked", among others. On the other side, when interviewed, Father Astudillo constructs gang members as

victims, stating that "If you have a child, if you have a youth crying in the corner of any street, he or she will be the first <u>victim</u>". While this statement may also construct that image of MS-13 gang members as predators, it also humanizes them, as it points out to the vulnerability of adolescents that associate with gangs.

In addition, the issue of agency is significant in this representation. For instance, the speaker states that "MS-13 members are in our jails". According to Fairclough (1989), this is an event sentence. Instead of wording this idea as and action sentence (e.g. "Corrections Canada officials have arrested MS-13 members"), the broadcast's producers choose to conceal the agency of law enforcers in putting MS-13 gang members in jail. What would more appropriately be represented as an action is represented as an event.

## United States

The Fox newscast, entitled "Gangs with Terror Ties", employs an abundance of oppositional wording. Criminalizing expressions such as "a new enemy for law enforcement", "super-gangs", "and extreme violence", "into drugs", "into violence", "national security threat", "potent criminal organizations", "destabilizing", "criminal threat", "national security concerns", "criminal elements", "transnational threats" are dominant and recurrent throughout the broadcast.

Furthermore, the broadcast features a high degree of wording referring to the criminal and violent nature of MS-13, often involving many words that are near synonyms. For instance, references to the criminal nature of *Mara Salvatrucha* include numerous expressions such as "potent criminal organizations", "criminal threat", "criminal elements" "criminal threat" in less then 5 minutes. The criminality of MS-13 gang members is strengthened through continuous illustrations of street fights, arrests, young men drawing graffiti's, Hispanics gesticulating MS-13 gang signs, and men heavily tattooed with MS-13 figures.

Moreover, this broadcast includes extensive references to MS-13 gang members' links with terrorism. This connection is conveyed through wording such as "fund terrorism and narco-terrorism", "extreme violence", "national security threat", "military background", "national security concerns", "weapons proliferators", "transnational threats", "threat to our borders", "threat to our internal security", and "may have already begun working with international terrorists".

The relation of *Mara Salvatrucha* with terrorist organizations is further reinforced by the newscast's title, "Gangs with Terror Ties". The newscast also features the recurring caption "ties to terror". A split video exemplifying the MS-13 gang on the left side and terrorist groups on the right side makes the gang's assumed connection with terrorism explicit. The producers' focus on the violent character of these two groups is made evident by the simultaneous depiction of gang members drawing graffiti and being arrested on one side; and of Middle Eastern soldiers training, and of Osama Bin Laden aiming and shooting a big firearm on the other side.

Numerous superlatives and adjectives that portray MS-13 gang members as out of the ordinary are used to express the extent to which they represent a threat to the United States:

"a host of <u>super</u>-gangs have infiltrated the United States"
"MS-13, known for its <u>extreme</u> violence"
"Immigration and Customs Enforcement just added an MS-13 gang member to its <u>most</u> wanted fugitive list"
"David Rivera is the <u>first</u> MS-13 member to be put on the (most wanted fugitives) list"
"the <u>biggest</u> fear to law enforcement is that the MS-13 may have already begun working with international terrorists"

Moreover, Mara Salvatrucha members are portrayed as being essentially violent and criminal due to their national roots. The statement that "they are born out of a war torn country" and "they are from areas where drug trafficking and narco-terrorism is active" appoints violence and crime as intrinsic to Central America and its people.

The criminal character of MS-13 gang members is also affirmed through categorical modalities, through which reported happenings regarding the MS-13 gang are represented as absolute truths:

"there is… a new enemy for law enforcement"
"they (MS-13) fund terrorism and narco-terrorism"
"not only are they into drugs heavily, they are into violence"
"(MS-13 members) have a military background"
"they are now actual national security concerns"

While these events are reported as categorical truths, suppositions regarding the link between MS-13 and terrorism are represented through expressive modalities, such as "may" and "might", which signify possibility:

"(MS-13) may be providing support to other transnational threats"
"the MS-13 may have already begun working with international terrorists"
"Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda militant groups … might try to infiltrate to the U.S from the South"
"they (terrorist groups) may use gangs to help them carry out their plans".

Furthermore, the pronouns "they" and "these" are used for referring to MS-13 gang members:

"they are into drugs heavily"
"they are into violence"
"they are born out of a war torn country"
"they are from areas where drug trafficking and narco-terrorism is active"
"they themselves are involved in drugs"
"they are a growing populations"
"they are now actual national security concerns"
"these criminal elements"
"they may be providing support to other transnational threats"

Moreover, the frequent employment of the pronoun "they" serves to establish MS-13 gang-affiliated youth as markedly different from the "we", i.e. American citizens, who the speakers of the broadcast claim to speak on behalf of:

"we saw an influx of people coming from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras"
"the first ones we saw was Mara Salvatrucha"

"As we look into MS-13's background…"
"I think we're in a grey area"
"What we do quite well is we understand the psyche, the mentality, the criminal mind"
"we understand difference between one group working on greed and the other group working as criminal patriot"

In addition, vilifying representations of MS-13 co-occur with expressions referring to law enforcement. The following statements place the MS-13 gang and law enforcers in direct opposition, suggesting that the two are intrinsically different

"enemy for law enforcement"
"MS-13, known for its extreme violence remains a top focus for law enforcement"
"the biggest fear to law enforcement is that the MS-13 may have already begun working with international terrorists"

El Salvador (Video)

Wording such as "most wanted", "the subject", "gangster", "the fugitive", the MS-13 leader", "homicides" predominate in the 55 seconds clip and serve to criminalize Saul Turcios Angel, an MS-13 gang leader and fugitive. Additionally, the representation of the MS-13 gang leader as a violent delinquent is reinforced by three displays of Angel's mug shots, two of which contain the caption "Saul Turcios Angel, El Salvador, MS-13 gang leader, charged with attempted murder, escaped from jail"; a picture of arrested gang members in a court house; three photos of the Parade magazine's "Who are the world's most wanted?" front cover article, showcasing Angel's picture; two displays of the fugitive list of Bartolinas prison in San Salvador; and four images of the Bartolinas prison guarded by armed police officers. Moreover, the clip starts and finishes with the same mug shot of Angel, displaying the caption "Saul Turcios Angel, El Salvador, MS-13 gang leader, charged with attempted murder, escaped from jail" (own translation).

Additionally, several grammatical features indicate that the agency of law enforcers is being concealed:

"this Salvadoran (Saul Turcios Angel) occupies a spot in the World's Most Wanted list" "El Trece appeared on the cover of Parade magazine close to Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden".

The first statement suggests that Angel intentionally put himself on the Most Wanted List. The latter assertion implies that the MS-13 fugitive deliberately came into view on the front cover of the Parade magazine, close to Bin Laden's photo. However, these events would be more logically conveyed through action statements that identify the role of law enforcers and the media in these events, such as "Officials included El Trece on the World's most Wanted list" and "Parade magazine showcased El Trece on the front cover of their magazine close to Osama Bin Laden's photo".

## MS-13 and Migration

Canada

The expansion of the MS-13 gang in Canada is negatively evaluated as "our (Canada's) problem". This statement not only has experiential value in terms of a negative representation of the MS-13 gang, but also has relational value, as it portrays the gang as a problem to be managed and resolved. Wording such as "left unchecked" and "we have to be on top of it" once again alludes to the notion that the MS-13 gang is something to be managed by Canadian authorities or 'experts'.

The language and images employed in the newscast also indicate preoccupation with the gang's migration into Canadian territory:

"The gang expanded through Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and eventually 33 U.S states"
"They've settled in Canada"
"They're here".

The above quoted statements highlight MS-13's presence in the United States and Canada through verbs such as "expanded", "settled", and "are". This information is coupled with the following assertions:

"they're serious"
"experts worry that the violence we've seen south of the border will find its way up here"
"Yeah, it can (get that bad here)"

These assertions, in collocation with the previous quotations, evidently establish the MS-13 gang as a threat to the Canadian society. For instance, the sentence "They're here (Canada) and they're serious" is composed of two main clauses ("they're here", "they're serious") and is linked by the connector "and", which indicates that both clauses have equal weight. Both clauses contain an assertion, the first one indicating the presence of MS-13 in Canada, and the second one pointing to the threatening character of the gang. Linked together into one sentence, this statement is employed to highlight the threat MS-13's migration to Canada represents to the host society.

Furthermore, the collocation "migrating threat", which constitutes the title of the map display explaining the spread of MS-13, is ideologically significant as the word "migrating" co-occurs with "threat", thus classifying the act of migration as an ominous activity.

The validity of the news is highlighted through the following assertions:

"Gang experts say they've settled in Canada"
"Experts worry the violence we've seen south of the border will find its way up here".

Through references to "experts", the producers of the clip are making an implicit authority claim, suggesting the broadcast has the capability to provide accurate information about the gang.

The broadcast contains two references to the gang members' ethnicity, specifically "their native El Salvador" and "they are Latino youth", which indicates that the broadcast's producers consider the gang members ethnic background to be important. Furthermore, the statement "Most

are Latino youth who have a hard time fitting into the Canadian society" indicates that

responsibility for not fitting into the Canadian society is attributed to the Latino youth

In addition, Constable's Scott Mills statement, "We have to be on top of it, we can't let

somebody, a gang like this come into our country and take over" features the inclusive pronoun

"we", which is relationally significant in that it incorporates of the speaker, the audience, and the

Canadian people. Finally, the verb "take over" indicates the producers' fear that immigrants, in

this case MS-13 gang members, will seize authority from the hands of Canadian 'people'.

Finally, the statement "the gang's founders were deported to their native El Salvador

where they used what they learned in prison to control the streets"implies that it is the gang

members' experience as graduated criminals that motivated them to continue their criminal

activities, rather than any other factors.

United States

The text contains numerous reminders of MS-13 members' immigrant status and their

perceived ethnic and national difference:

"in the country of origin, where they (MS-13 members) are initially from"
"before they (MS-13 members) came to the United States"
"associates (of MS-13) are not here in the United States"
"(MS-13) have international roots"
"(MS-13) is made up primarily of Salvadorians"
"influx of people from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras"
"the Mara Salvatrucha 13 with links back to El Salvador".

Moreover, the newscast seems to link the criminal aspect of the MS-13 gang with its

members' immigrant status. This linkage is made evident by the following expressions:

"many of these super gangs have international roots"
"(MS-13) is made up primarily of Salvadorians"
"people coming from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras… a lot of them took up the gang life"
"Mara Salvatrucha 13 with links back to El Salvador, not only are they into drugs heavily, but they are into violence"

"ICE, Immigration and Customs Enforcement just added an MS-13 gang member to its most wanted fugitive list"
"they (MS-13) pose a national security threat: they are born out of a war torn country, they are from areas where drug trafficking and narco-terrorism is active"
"these criminal elements (MS-13) are involved in smuggling activities"

The criminal– immigration link is further emphasized by the visual aids used in the clip,

including an image of the map of the Americas, with the title "International Gang Immigration",

displaying red arrows from Central America to U.S to indicate the gang's migration; a video of a

group of Hispanics showing MS-13 gang signs; a list titled "Background of Mara Salvatrucha,

with one of the sub-points "born in a war torn country"; and various depictions of illegal border

crossing, including two displays of three men jumping the U.S- Mexico border wall, people

walking in the desert, border officer arresting illegal immigrant in the dessert, and border officer

directing illegal immigrant in officer's car.

Additionally, the producers of the newscast depict the country of origin of MS-13 gang

members, El Salvador, as poor, corrupt, and violent. Two images of Central American slums,

with kids running with no shirt, in ripped and dirty clothes generate an impression of Central

American countries as poor and underdeveloped. Moreover, wording such as "members and

associates [of MS-13]… in the country of origin…feed them the drugs, help with the drug

proceeds" and "they are from areas where drug trafficking and narco-terrorism is active" suggests

that El Salvador and other Central American countries are first and foremost corrupt. Finally, the

expression "born out of a war torn country" and the displayed list "Background of Mara

Salvatrucha: Born in a war torn country" represents Central American countries as essentially

violent.

Finally, the sentence "some revolutions that were going on in South America" indicates that

the newscast's producers do not consider the conflicts in the region to be of much relevance to

the migration of Hispanics to the United States. The adjective "some" associated with "revolutions" leaves the event unspecified and undetermined, indicating that the producers of the newscast consider that the event does not deserve further specification. While the cause of Central Americans' migration to the United States remains unspecified, their arrival is automatically linked with their association with gangs:

> "they came to East L.A and they settled in the Hispanic community and unfortunately a lot of them took up the gang life"

## El Salvador (Video)

The statement "The U.S Homeland Security Department has taken disciplinary action against the gang member to avoid his return to the country" indicates that the producers of this newscast approve of the measures taken by the U.S security department to "avoid" that the MS-13 gang member return to the U.S. While this statement could have been more logically phrased as "The U.S Homeland Security Department has taken disciplinary action against the gang member to ban his entry in the country", the producers of this clip chose to employ the euphemism "avoid" in order to steer clear of any controversy that could potentially put the U.S security department in a negative light.

## Responses to MS-13

## Canada

The sentence "Even incarceration hasn't slowed their growth" not only emphasizes the gang's ferocity, but also implies that tougher measures then incarceration are necessary to stop their expansion. The interview with RCMP retired officer is employed to suggest that the current responses to the MS-13 gang have been insufficient or too 'soft' and to further advocate the idea that tougher measures for dealing with this gang are required:

Mike Drolet (Global National investigator): Do you think we're doing enough right now?
Jim Brown (retired RCMP officer): No.

However, the response of the officer is interrupted and the clip quickly moves to the next image.

## United States

The DA's statement "prudence requires us to take advantage of the intelligence to make the country safer than it is" in the context of this news subject suggests that law enforcers need to react to the MS-13 gang, as it is threatening the safety of the United States. This notion is further reinforced by the assertion that this issue prompted former president Bush and US Secretary Roomsvelt to carry out a security visit in Latin America:

> "Both President Bush and more recently US Defence Secretary Donald Roomsvelt went to Latin America for security visits".

## El Salvador

*Video*:

Images of the Centro Judicial Isidro Menendez jail, police officers guarding and conducting investigations, and of handcuffed MS-13 gang members reinforce the notion that the most appropriate way of dealing with the MS-13 gang is through repressive law enforcement.

*Article:*

This article indicates that the author of this news generally agrees with the Mano Dura legislation put in place to control the MS-13 gang. The segments "to eradicate the gang problem in the country", "eliminate the gang" and "control these criminals" signify not only that the MS-13 is perceived in a negative light, as being primarily a problem, but also that repressive measures are necessary to eliminate this 'problem'. The choice of wording "eradicate" indicates

that the MS-13 is perceived as an entity that is utterly evil, or as the ultimate enemy that needs to be dealt with in a way that completely exterminates it.

Furthermore, the following segment indicates that the *Mano Dura* legislation is promoted as the best solution for eliminating the criminal activities of MS-13:

> "Flores said that the results of plan Mano Dura have been efficient, and this has been proven by the massive captures of gang associated young men, over 1,300 captures." (*own translation*)

Moreover, the use of the verb "urged" when referring to President Flores' speech regarding the Mano Dura law indicates that the producers o f this news approve of the president's ideas and that the they accord great importance to his statements.

> "We need the Legislative Assembly to aprove the anti-gang law", <u>urged</u> the (president's) representative." (*own translation*)

However, a few assertions in the text are indicative of certain contradictions in the media's representation of the measures that need to be undertaken to address the gang issue. On the one side, the author of this article depicts the Mano Dura law, and repressive anti-gang measures in general as the most appropriate to deal with the challenges posed by MS-13. On the other side, the author includes one assertion stating that "of all the arrests, the majority of cases have been released due to lack of proof to keep them detained" and that oppositional parties consider the Mano Dura law to be unconstitutional. However, the article does not provide details to indicate why the Mano Dura law has been criticized as unconstitutional.

## Chapter 5: ANALYSIS

### Summary of Findings

The findings of this research study indicate that all of the selected Canadian, American, and Salvadoran media employ criminalizing language when referring to MS-13 gang members and construct MS-13 gang members as innately and permanently violent and criminal. While the Canadian broadcast stresses the gang's unprecedented violence and criminality, the main preoccupation of the U.S media seems to be with MS-13's potential terrorist link and the security threat they pose to the nation. Additionally, Salvadoran media further reinforces the image of MS-13 gang members as the main blameworthy actors through a criminalizing description of MS-13 gang member and fugitive Saul Turcios Angel.

In regards to the theme of migration as it relates to the MS-13 gang, Canadian media emphasize the presence of MS-13 gang members in Canada as a threat to the host society. Moreover, deportation of gang members is depicted as a fair disciplinary reaction to criminal activity. The American newscast stresses the MS-13 members' immigrant status and their perceived ethnic and national difference through several expressions referring to the gang members' Central American roots. Salvadorans in the United States are represented primarily as immigrants and their and their migration is automatically assumed to result in gang affiliation in the U.S. The producers of the U.S media clip also employ several collocations to convey a link between the gang's criminality and its members' immigrant status. The selected Salvadoran broadcast utilizes language that indicates the approval of the U.S Homeland Security Department' deportation of MS-13 gang member Saul Turcios Angel from the United States.

Findings regarding the media's interpretation of the responses to the MS-13 gang communicate that producers of the selected Canadian media consider that tougher responses are necessary to stop the gang's expansion. The U.S broadcast suggests that governmental authorities should treat the MS-13 gang as an international security threat. Finally, the Salvadoran news clip and article specify that the most appropriate way of dealing with the MS-13 gang is through repressive law enforcement measures such as *Mano Dura* (Hard Hand).

## Power Relations

Some features of the selected media have expressive value. According to Fairclough (1989), expressive values communicate the producer's evaluation of the reality it relates to, and have to do with subjects and social identities. Expressive values can be circulated not only through expressive modalities such as "may", "must", "can", "should", but can also be expressed through verbs in the present tense form. One example of such expressive modalities is that of authenticity claims, through which reported happenings are represented as uncontested facts (Fairclough, 1989). As revealed in the findings section, the Canadian, American, and Salvadoran media features numerous authenticity claims.

> "They're here (Canada) and they're serious"/ "MS-13 is successful" (Canadian media)
> "not only are they into drugs heavily, they are into violence" (U.S media)
> "In order to make the victory against delinquency permanent... we need the Legislative
> Assembly to approve the anti-gang law" (El Salvador article)

The verbs in these sentences ("are", "need") are in the simple present tense form. This is a way of expressing the producer's categorical commitment to the truth of the proposition, and thus a way of conveying the media's claim to knowledge (Fairclough, 1989).

The aforementioned authenticity claims and allusions to expert knowledge are in line with Said's (1978) analysis of colonial discourse. To elaborate, Said (1978) shows that the colonial system of representation construes the colonized as an absolute reality which is simultaneously distinct, and yet recognizable and visible:

> Philosophically, then, the kind of language, thought, and vision that I have been calling
> orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism; anyone employing orientalism...
> will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or
> phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality.
> The tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and
> strength. For all these functions it is frequently enough to use the simple copula is (Said,
> 1978, p. 78).

Thus, by representing reported events as categorical truths, the producers of these media support the construction of MS-13 gang members as essentially and eternally violent criminals as a categorical, transparent reality, without the need for further interpretation and representation. In addition, the allusions to expert knowledge in the Canadian and U.S media further reinforce the vilified construction of gang-associated youth as a fixed reality, while also indicating the North American producers' identification with "gang experts". These allusions further place these representations in a colonialist discourse, which also connotes a high-handed, executive attitude in reporting events regarding the 'primitive', colonized world and its people (Said, 1978). However, such statements conceal the complex and sometimes contested process of information gathering and interpretation, and the influence of ideologies embedded in the process of news production (Fairclough, 1989).

In addition, the extensive employment of the inclusive pronoun "we" in all of the selected media is also utilized as a mechanism to convey authority. For instance, in the Canadian case, Constable Mills' usage of the pronoun "we" in the statement "We have to be on top of it, we can't let somebody, a gang like this come into our country and take over" assimilates him into the Canadian people and to consequently grants him the authority to speak for others, in this case the Canadian society at large. Furthermore, this statement serves to pit the "we", i.e. the Canadian people and "somebody", i.e. immigrants directly against each other and to mark them as noticeably different. The employment of the modal auxiliary verb "can't" in this context has relational value. The negative modal auxiliary "can't" signals permission and thus indicates the authority of one participant ("we", i.e. Canadian people) over another ("somebody", i.e. MS-13). Such an outlook is disturbingly close to xenophobia and a concrete signifier of an 'Othering' process..

Further indication of asymmetrical power relations is provided by the Canadian media's framing of the presence of MS-13 in Canada as a problem to be managed, which is suggestive of a context in which a top-down mentality and unequal power relations between the gang and the Canadian society predominate.

## The Criminal 'Other'

### Criminalizing Depictions

Out of the three selected video clips and article, all of them focus solely on the criminal and violent aspect of the MS-13 gang. These media entail vocabulary, grammatical features, and images that indicate that the broadcast is produced from the perspective of those who oppose the activities of MS-13 and that its producers identify with the perspective of law enforcement officials. For instance, the Canadian media clip pointed out the increased vulnerability and innocence of the gang's victims in order to emphasize the gang's ferocity and brutality. Furthermore, by highlighting the young age of Six, a Toronto MS-13 gang member, and of other youth targeted for recruitment, the producers suggest that the vilified character of the gang is so strong, that it overpowers the supposed innocence of youth.

The representation of MS-13 gang members as intrinsically violent is in line with Ronsbo's (2004) findings, which show that Central American subjects during the last three decades have been centered around a discourse that conceptualizes violence as inherent to their character and to which the normal reaction is trauma. Hume (2007) also subscribes to this discourse, by suggesting that the legacy of the civil war in El Salvador has created a violent socio-political context in the region. Hence, youth in El Salvador have been socialized into a violent context and have which consequently adopted violence as an expression of identity. However, the construction of Central American people and their history as intrinsically violent fails to address the ways in which power relations are articulated in the postcolonial societies of Central America (Ronsbo, 2004).

In addition, the U.S clip features vocabulary and depictions which reinforce the image of MS-13 gang members as national terrorists, and show the producers' concern with the national security of the United States and their preoccupation with the violation of law by this gang. Furthermore, the title of the broadcast "Gangs with terror ties" indicates what the producers consider to be the most significant aspect of the news, in this case the association of gangs with terrorism. Furthermore, discussions in the U.S clip revolve around the perceived difference of MS-13 gang members from U.S citizens. Such representation reveals the producers' irrevocable faith in law and order and indicates an ideologically specific (and dominant) scheme which divides societal actors between good, law abiding citizens and criminals. However, such a logic and the conceptualization of MS-13 gang members as a terrorist threat follows a one-dimensional logic that separates the world into 'good' and 'evil' and serves to distract from the root causes of social exclusion and inequality that motivate youth to join gangs (Rodgers, 2007).

The Salvadoran news clip also features the incriminating language and video depictions to describe the MS-13 gang and its leader, Saul Turcios Angel, also known as El Trece. The fact that the news clip starts and ends with an image of Angel's mug shot, with the caption "Saul Turcios Angel, El Salvador, MS-13 gang leader, charged with attempted murder, escaped from jail" signals that the notion of Saul Turcios Angel as a dangerous, most wanted, escaped criminal is what the producers of the media want to convey as the main point of the broadcast. The importance of this information lies in the fact that it is this point, and its presupposition that Saul Turcios Angel is a dangerous, violent criminal, which will be retained in the memory of the audience, recalled, and alluded to or reported in other newscasts or articles (Fairclough, 1989).

Furthermore, the Salvadoran clip also establishes a link between MS-13 and terrorism through the assertion that the MS-13 leader appears in the magazine close to Osama Bin Laden's picture. While this connection is more subtle then the one emphasized by U.S news producers, it nevertheless serves as proof of yet another instance of the United States and El Salvador sharing "discourses of illegality" (Zilberg, 2007, p. 44).

The single statement that Angel's photo appears next to that of Bin Laden might have been ignored or dismissed in a different context. However, the inter-textuality of media depictions is significant here, as visual and print media representations accumulate or alter their meaning when they are understood in the context of other representations (Fairclough, 1989). The fact that the Salvadoran media clip is read in a context where the gang- terrorist link has already been hypothesized and publicly fomented by Honduran and U.S government officials and media adds meaning and importance to this statement.

The abundance of criminalizing vocabulary in all of the selected media is significant, as it has both expressive and relational value. According to Fairclough (1989), expressive value refers to subjects and social identities and indicates the producer's evaluation of the reality he/she relates to. The criminalizing wording present in the selected media mobilizes expressive values through the vilified representation of gang-associated youth in order to reach the persuasive end of convincing the audience that these youth are irremediably evil and that they constitute a significant threat to society. The frequent use of such incriminating language when referring to MS-13 gang members also reveals that the producers of the newscast are drawing from a traditional criminology discourse which vilifies gang-associated youth and maintain that the focal point of analysis should be individual gang members, who are responsible for such violent and criminal acts (Manwaring, 2006).

Additionally, the use of vilifying language in the selected media– and the failure to avoid it– has relational value, as it indicates that the producers of the broadcast and its audience, i.e. the American, Canadian, or Salvadoran society, share the same normative ideology. Relational values expose relations and social relationships and signal the ways in which are endorsed through the text in the discourse (Fairclough, 1989).

There also exists a tendency in all of the selected media to mystify and sensationalize the MS-13 gang. This is illustrated by statements such as "They earned their reputation through blood and violence" in the Canadian case, "we understand the psyche, the mentality, the criminal mind" in the U.S broadcast, and "this Salvadoran (Saul Turcios Angel) occupies a spot in the World's Most Wanted list", in the Salvadoran media clip. This supports Rocha and Rodger's (2008) argument that the gang debate often demonizes and mystifies gangs rather then recognizing ambiguity of the phenomenon and the fact that it constitutes a crystallization of wider forms of structural inequality, violence, and hegemonic domination.

Furthermore, such sensationalized representations of MS-13 not only serve to embellish the stereotype of gang members as violent criminals, but also reveals the producers' fascination with the criminal 'Other'. As Phillips (1997) points out, the representation of the criminal 'Other' as a fetishized object is employed to reaffirm the distinction between responsible, 'normal' citizens and outlaws. However, the representation of the vilified 'Other' also involves disavowal, as it allows the producer to indulge in the fascination of the criminal, while simultaneously rejecting it (Bhabha, 1983). Thus, the fetishized representation on MS-13 gang members as the criminal 'Other' allows a double focus to be kept, as what is described as perceptibly different, violent, corrupt, brutal, and cruel is at the same time rejected and enjoyed because of its perceived difference. As Bhabha (1983) emphasizes, this type of representation "allows for the possibility

of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs, one official and one secret, one archaic and one progressive, one that allows the myth of origins, the other that articulates difference and division"(p. 32).

Common Sense in the Name of Power

The way in which pronouns are used to refer in a reduced form to material previously introduced in the media also deserves further consideration. The pronoun 'they' is of particular interest in the present context because it is used extensively employed in all the selected media to refer to MS-13 gang members. The frequent use of the pronoun "they" to refer to MS-13 gang members is ideologically significant because the referents are not established textually in the context, but they are rather presupposed. According to Fairclough (1989), presuppositions can have ideological functions when what they presuppose is "common sense in the service of power" (p. 154). The MS-13 gang is only briefly introduced, and the presupposition of "gang members" makes a general appeal to background knowledge or "common sense".

Another example of such presuppositions is provided by the expression "migrating threat", used as the title for the map describing the MS-13's proliferation throughout the Americas. The collocation of the word "migrating" with "threat" has an ideological function, as it serves to naturalize the highly contentious proposition based on the assumption that immigrants constitute a threat to the Canadian society. Once again, this presupposition is not based on specific texts, but rather appeals to the audience's 'common sense'. According to Fairclough (1989), such assumptions are manipulative and have an ideological function, as they help to establish a 'common sense in the name of power" (p. 154). As such, this collocation indicates that this newscast is embedded in a discourse that considers migrants to be agents that threaten human and national security.

Evidently, this media representation of MS-13 has the effect of establishing an automatic association of gang members with violence and crime. This confirms Hume's (2007) findings, which assert that the role of the media in fomenting social panic has been paramount. This panic has been constructed by condensing anxieties around concerns related to youth, poverty, and violence into the public imagination in order to create a new threat to society. However, such associations are not based on evidence, but rather rely on the creation of a particular image of gangs (Hume, 2007).

The stereotyping of MS-13 gang members as violent criminals and as essentially different, be it through criminalizing language, presuppositions, claims to knowledge, or relational modalities, is apparent in all of the selected media. The significance of this negative construction of MS-13 gang members lies in the fact that it signals the construction of the colonial subject and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, for which the articulation of difference between the colonizer and the colonized is necessary (Bhabha, 1983). As Bhabha (1983) explains, this colonial discourse "seeks authorisation for its strategies by the production of knowledges of coloniser and colonised which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated." (p. 23). The oppositional evaluation of the law abiding citizen versus the brutal MS-13 criminal is signified by media producers through the construction of the following binaries: perpetrator/ victim, criminal/ legitimate, citizen/ immigrant, legal/ illegal, North American/ Salvadoran, developed/ underdeveloped, and corrupt/ decent. However, Sanchez (2006) points out that these dichotomies are simplistic and increasingly incompatible in the context of neoliberalism. Such boundaries become blurred, as poverty and structural exclusion leads to radicalized responses, causing

people and classes to adapt to this situation in multiple ways, through the informal economy, violence, and crime (Sanchez, 2006).

Furthermore, the criminalizing media representation of MS-13 gang members indicates gross inequalities of power. As Said's (1978) concept of positional superiority highlights, the ability to mark, classify and represent someone or something in a certain way constitutes a key mechanism in the exercise of power. In his study of how the stereotypical image of the 'Orient' was constructed, Said (1978) asserts that representation and the operation of power are deeply interconnected. He points out that Orientalism was the discourse "by which European culture was able to manage– and even produce– the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post Enlightment period" (p. 7). Similarly, Bhabha (1983) proposes that the purpose of colonial discourse is to construct "the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (p. 23).

Thus, the stigmatization of MS-13 gang members as immigrant criminals in Canada and as international terrorists in the United States, and the Canadian and U.S media's emphasis on the origins and ethnicity of MS-13 gang members could be conceptualized as a hegemonic practice through which North American authorities legitimize and preserve the upper hand in international relations with Central America under the guise of fighting crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism. Thus, this rhetoric constitutes a mechanism of power that yields economic and political advantages for the 'First World' over the 'Third World' (Ibrahim, 2005). This imperialist discourse legitimizes an increasingly dominant style of international rapports, as it establishes a false dichotomy of 'us', the Western, progressive civilization, versus 'them', the barbaric, violent, uncivilized foreigners. Thus, the imperialist assumptions that 'underdeveloped' countries are

experiencing conditions of social regression and that immigrants constitute a major challenge to the security of 'developed' countries operate to legitimize U.S hegemonic practices as legitimate measures of transforming conditions that produce push factors of migration.

## Exceptions to the Pattern of Representation

However, the Canadian and Salvadoran media also present signs of an ideological struggle. In the Canadian case, Father Astudillo constructs youth who join the MS-13 gang as victims. Thus, he seems to be drawing from a social justice and human rights discourse and thus contests the fundamentalist discourse adopted by the producers. However, the traditional criminology discourse seems to be predominant, as the newscast's producers employ Father Astudillo's statement to emphasize the potential of the gang, rather then the vulnerability of youth. This is evidenced by the statement that follows the interview with Father Astudillo: "It's that appeal of the street that worries law enforcement officials".

The article from the Salvadoran newspaper Diario Co Latino also presents indications of an ideological struggle. The inclusion of the opposition party's statements referring to the inefficiency and unconstitutionality of the Hard Hand legislation suggests that an ideological struggle may be present in the text. However, the article is written predominantly from the president's perspective, who advocates that MS-13 gang members need to be controlled through repressive measures. Furthermore, the statement that these assertions regarding the inefficiency and unconstitutionality of the anti-gang law belong to the opposition party operate to dissociate the writer from these expressions, and make it clear they belong to someone else: the president's, writer's, and assumed readers' political opponents.

Since the presence of ideological struggles signals that diverse ideologies are at play, it becomes evident that the predominant ideology in these two cases is that of the traditional

criminology, while the weaker one is drawn from father Astudillo's and the opposition party's sociological, human rights discourse. This indicates that it is the proponents of the traditional criminology stance who have the power to determine which meanings and norms are legitimate, correct, or appropriate (Fairclough, 1989).

**Agency and Omissions**

The way in which agency is featured or not in the media is ideologically significant. In the Canadian case, sentences are structured to attribute MS-13 gang members full agency for being present in Canadian prisons, even though partial responsibility would be logically attributed to law enforcement officials. By concealing the agency of law enforcers in putting gang-affiliated youth in jail, the wording of the sentence implies that they have willingly infiltrated in Canadian jails. Associated with the earlier mention of MS-13's roots in L.A prisons, and the constant reminders of their delinquent behaviour, this statement implies that MS-13 gang members belong to prison, that it is their natural environment, and consequently that they are innately and irremediably criminal.

Aside from discussing what is being said, it is also important to analyze what is ignored, inaccurately represented, or wilfully eliminated from the media clips and article. For instance, the selection of language used in this Salvadoran news clip reveals the producers' intention to highlight Angel as the main evil doer, while deliberately obscuring the agency of other actors, such as law enforcers and the media. The choice to highlight MS-13 gang members as the main blameworthy actors and the concealing of law enforcers' agency in putting them in jail or on the "Most Wanted" list indicates that the producers of these newscasts are drawing from a traditional criminology discourse, which reduces gang members to natural criminals. Furthermore, the news clip's focus on Angel operates to individualize the problem, rather then to point to a collective

phenomenon. This way, the numerous root causes behind the emergence and permanence of the MS-13 gang are easier to dismiss.

Another aspect that is not accurately represented is the impact of deportation of gang members. In all of the selected media, deportation is ignored as a factor contributing to the continuation of criminal activity. Media producers do not state the fact that MS-13 members were deported to countries they hardly knew and where they had limited or no family ties. Thus, the selected broadcasts and article deliberately ignore other conditions that played a factor in motivating the criminal actions of deported gang members, such as adaptation problems, the absence of social services to receive them, and high unemployment levels (Boerman, 2007).

In a similar fashion, the Canadian newscast' representation of Latino youth as responsible for not fitting in to the Canadian society is utilized to deliberately conceal other factors that may have impeded Latino youth from integrating. Moreover, this statement is also indicative of the producers' assumption that immigrants should eventually assimilate into the Canadian culture, which suggests the producer's presupposition of Canadian sovereignty and cultural superiority.

The interruption of RCMP retired officer when discussing need for more suppressive legislative measures to combat the gang issue provides yet another case in point of deliberately eliminating content relevant to the news topic. This interruption could have been employed either for practical reasons, such as time limitations, or to control the contribution of the officer and potentially eliminate any content that did not support the producers' ideology.

Furthermore, the selected media do not include the U.S funded Salvadoran civil war as a contributing factor to the gang problem even though the U.S government, involved through military and economic aid, served to further exacerbate the already present structural inequality and violence in El Salvador, generating a population traumatized and desensitized to violence and

producing a mss refugee population (Landolt, 2003; Boerman, 2007; Zilberg, 2007; Hagedorn, 2005; Hayden). Additionally, the Canadian and U.S media do not recognize Central American migrants as refugees, rather they are represented as immigrants and the causes of their migration in remain unstated. However, these Salvadoran migrants would have been more accurately represented as refugees. Due to the U.S military and economic support accorded to the Salvadoran state during the civil war, Salvadoran refugees were not recognized as a refugee population in the U.S, since such an acknowledgement would call into question the state's political involvement in its creation (Landolt, 2003).

Therefore, while MS-13 gang members are represented as the main wrongdoers, the agency of legislative authorities in contributing to this problem is largely overlooked. This denial of responsibility in creating disruptive conditions constitutes another sign of colonial authority at play, as domination is achieved by denying the unsettling presence of colonialist power in order to preserve the myth of evolutionism, in which the 'Other' is deemed inferior to the colonizer by virtue of its race and ethnicity (Bhabha, 1985).

**Colonial Hybridity**

While the Canadian broadcast suggests that more suppressive legislative measures need to be put in place, the U.S news clip reinforces the notion that this gang should be treated as an international security threat. Additionally, the producers of the Salvadoran article approve of President Flores' endorsement of the repressive policies enforced through the Mano Dura plan. As well, the Salvadoran clip's positive evaluation of U.S anti-gang measures has relational value. This appraisal depends on and helps create social relationships between the two countries (Fairclough, 1989).

This reproduction and endorsement of U.S 'zero-tolerance' anti-gang policing strategies in El Salvador is significant for several reasons. First, the endorsement of punitive policies is indicative of the efficiency of criminalizing representations of MS-13 gang members in institutionalizing a political and cultural ideology that is discriminatory and detrimental. The stigmatization of MS-13 members as irremediable, cruel delinquents in the public eye has achieved its function of legitimizing a hyper-punitive and discriminatory regime. As Bhabha (1983) explains, "what is visible is the *necessity* of such rule which is justified by those moralistic and normative ideologies of amelioration recognised as the Civilising Mission or the White Man's Burden" (p. 35).

Secondly, the importation of U.S 'zero-tolerance' policies in El Salvador is indicative of the influence of the United States as a colonial power. The supremacy of U.S suppressive anti-gang measures is upheld by the selected media, and by scholars such as Arana (2005), Manwaring (2005, 2006, 2007), and Sullivan (2006). As Bhabha (1985) suggests, by assuming a greater authority then the experience of the colonized people themselves, the prestigious and powerful imperial culture is able to control the imagination and objectives of the colonised. El Salvador's importation of repressive U.S legislation illustrates the hybridity of the colonial discourse, that is

> the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is the production of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority), the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects (Bhabha, 1985, p.154).

Thus, the upholding of repressive anti-gang legislation, as well as the criminalizing stereotypes perpetuated in Canada, United States, and especially in El Salvador indicates that colonial power is not unidirectional, as it is not possessed only by the colonizer, but by the colonized as well. To elaborate, the Salvadoran media's adoption of the same criminalizing

representation of MS-13 gang members and its promotion of similar suppressive anti-gang strategies suggests that it is mimicking the U.S and North American portrayal of gang-associated youth and thus demonstrates the concept of colonial hybridity (Hume, 2007).

Zilberg's (2007) findings further reinforce this notion, as she explains that the United States and El Salvador have a history of transnational mimicry. While this mimesis was once organized by the imperialistic, U.S funded Salvadoran civil war, in which Salvadoran and U.S governments collaborated closely to develop war strategies that were fuelled by a substrate of visions about communists, the notion of mimicry is now deployed around the subject of deported MS-13 gang members, who are considered by both states as criminals and terrorists (Zilberg, 2007). Thus, "this transnational mimesis, organized once by the Cold War, is now being reorganized by the War on Terror" (Zilberg, 2007, p. 49).

Additionally, the ambivalence of the colonialist discourse of the MS-13 media representation is demonstrated by the paranoid classification of MS-13 gang members as a terrifying, excessive entity, apparent in expressions such as "there's just no limits to what they'll do" (Canadian broadcast), "super-gangs", "extreme violence", and "destabilizing" (U.S media). This is in line with Bhabha's (1985) reading of colonial hybridity as an "ambivalent "turn" of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification– a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority" (p. 155). Thus, the panic surrounding MS-13's acts of violence and crime could be explained as a shocked response to the MS-13 gang who, from the position of the colonial 'Other', are articulating power and claiming authority, nevertheless through brutal violence and crime. This notion is further reinforced by Davis' (2008) analysis, which suggests that gangs, through their control of urban spaces, forge power for the otherwise powerless. Thus, for radicalized youth who are denied access to other resources, the

gang provides a way of claiming power and prestige in a modern society which puts more and more pressure on individual achievement and belonging to the broader consumer society.

## Chapter 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the scope of this study, I was unable to fully apply the third stage of Fairclough's (1989) critical discourse analysis method, namely the explanation step. The explanation stage of the CDA method requires the analyst to consider the relationship of discourses to social struggles and to power relations (Fairclough, 1989). While I partly satisfied the requisite of this step by addressing the unequal power relations that help shape this discourse, the time and scope restrains of this research prevented me from fully elaborating on how the media discourse on the MS-13 gang is positioned in relation to struggles at the societal and institutional level. Investigating this issue would have required the analyst to research the present and past relations between Canada, United States and El Salvador, a task far too multifaceted and extensive for the scope of this project.

Another limitation of this research is posed by the issue of generalization. While the quantity of media is appropriate for this research given the scope of it, an analysis of more then one or two media clips and/or articles from each of the regions of Canada, United States, and El Salvador would be necessary in order to take a broad view and to initiate change.

Thus, future research should address this topic by using a larger sample of data in order to draw comprehensive conclusions and to reveal the range of criminalizing media representations of gang affiliated youth and whether alternative representations or at least more potent ideological struggles regarding the social construction of the MS-13 gang exist in the media. Additionally, a discourse analysis of blog entries or commentaries of MS-13 related videos and documentaries posted on YouTube would reveal not only the ideology of society at large, but

also that of individual gang members who post their comments on the web. Finally, I suggest that future investigations should approach the topic of transnational gangs from an anti-racist feminist perspective in order to analyze gangs as a crystallization of machismo and to highlight the construction of race and gender as principal factors that influence the formation of gangs (Rocha and Rodgers, 2008). Female gangs constitute a significant, however under-researched topic that deserves further attention (Hagedorn, 2008).

This research illustrates that in the past decade, and particularly in the post 9/11 era, a new trend of vilifying gang affiliated youth through public discourse is transpiring at alarming rates (Hume, 2007, Zilberg, 2007). The criminalizing representation of MS-13 gang members has broad and significant implications, as it legitimizes increasingly punitive policing strategies, which in turn validate more suppressive anti-gang policies, thus creating a vicious circle in which MS-13 gang members are deemed irremediable criminals.

While traditional criminology approaches to gangs persist in the academic sphere, the current gang research, such as the works of DeCesare (2003), Hagedorn (2005, 2007, 2008), Hayden (2005), Zilberg (2004, 2007), Arce et. al. (2005), Rocha and Rodgers (2008), Barrios (2003), etc., is becoming more critical, in the sense that it acknowledges the gang issue as more then a criminal justice problem, but rather as a crystallization of broader societal issues.

However, this study indicates that the social construction of MS-13 gang members as violent criminals is still predominant, as it circulates through all of the selected media and serves to legitimize increasingly repressive anti-gang policies, which are also promoted in this media. By unpacking the media representation of MS-13, this research reveals that the gang members' 'Otherness" is reinforced by combining the fear of crime with the fear of the foreign enemy in the Canadian and American broadcasts, and by their assumed association with most forms of violence and criminality in the Salvadoran media. Unequal power relations and a racist undertone constitute common denominators throughout the analyzed media and confirm the continuation of colonialist practices through which North American authorities establish a false dichotomy of 'us', the Western, progressive civilization, versus 'them', the barbaric, violent, uncivilized foreigners and thus justifies an increasingly dominant style of international rapports. Furthermore, by presenting the endorsement of U.S repressive anti-gang legislation in El Salvador, this study demonstrates the ambivalence of colonial power, which is possessed not only by the colonizer, but by the colonized as well.

Based on this research, I conclude that mainstream media continues to draw from a traditional criminal justice discourse, even though it has been criticized by recent gang scholarship for ignoring dramatic structural changes in urban life, being tangled up in myths, and being heavily influenced by the priorities and prejudices of law enforcement bodies (Hagedorn, 2007). The current social construction of gang members and the increasingly punitive responses it generates intensify the already existent forms of social exclusion and criminalization. Such a perspective is neither accurate nor productive, as the MS-13 gang, and gangs in general cannot be analyzed outside their historical, political, and socio-economic context and cannot be reduced to permanent, violent criminals or international terrorists.

Finally, I conclude that the current representation of MS-13 gang members is flawed as it fails to consider the significant issues of uneven development, growing inequality, and exclusion, and is characterized by an over-focus on the repression of gang members by law enforcement, to the degree that it almost denies the possibility of prevention, rehabilitation and social reintegration. Instead of shrouding gang members with criminality and demanding more repressive measures to reprimand them, I suggest that it is more appropriate to abandon simplistic

dichotomies such as perpetrator/ victim, illegal/ legal, citizen/ immigrant, developed/

underdeveloped and conceptualize gang affiliated youth as a crystallized reflection of a society

characterized by increasing global inequalities and the inconspicuous persistence of colonial

practices.

Clearly, a more holistic approach to transnational gangs is necessary, one that would

discard the conceptualization of gang members as individual deviants from societal norms, and

would adopt a more pertinent approach which would acknowledge the accountability of Western

states for increasing the stark inequalities between the global North and South. Such an outlook

would entail a reconceptualization of gang members as the threatened rather than the threat,

would discard retaliatory discourses as morally and constitutionally wrong, and would recognize

that the basic rights that are being purchased in the name of the 'war on terrorism and crime' are

not special privileges but rather universally granted human rights to which both citizens and

immigrants are entitled to.

## APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION OF DATA

### Canada: Global National News (May, 2007). *MS-13 Setting Up in Canada.* (Video)

Kevin Newman: Hello there, thanks for joining us. They are the brutal, criminal gang other gangs fear: Mara Salvatrucha 13, more commonly called MS-13. They have spread from prisons in the U.S and Central America at an alarming pace, operating in 33 U.S states, where machetes are their favourite weapon. And now, they are our problem too. Mike Drolet, heading our Global National investigation:

Mike Drolet: They earned their reputation through blood and violence. Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13, the most violent gang in North America.

Jim Brown, retired RCMP officer: In 2004 in Honduras they attacked a school bus. In the attack, they shot and killed 27 people and they hacked the women and children up with machetes. There were just no rules, no limitations what they'll do.

Mike Drolet: MS-13's roots can be traced back to 1970s Los Angeles prisons. The gang's founders were deported to their native El Salvador, where they used what they learned in prison to control the streets. The gang then expanded through Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, and eventually 33 U.S states. And now, over the last 5 years, gang experts say they've settled in Canada, specifically in Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto and to a lesser extent to Edmonton and Calgary.

Six (MS-13 Toronto member): They're big enough.
Mike Drolet: Six is a member of MS-13's Toronto chapter. He's not much older then his monitor. He won't talk specifics about the gang, other then to say that they're here and they're serious.

Six (MS-13 Toronto member): They don't think they're bad people, they know they're bad.

Mike Drolet: Corrections Canada officials say MS-13 members are in our jails. But even incarceration hasn't slowed their growth. Kids as young as 11 and 12 are being recruited from the streets and in our schools. Father Fernando Astudillo has seen the gang's recent growth. He says most are Latino youth who have a hard time fitting into Canadian society.

Father Astudillo: MS streets is easily (unclear) because if you have a child, if you have a youth crying in the corner of any street, he or she will be the first victim.

Mike Drolet: It's that appeal of the street that worries law enforcement officials; that and its (MS-13's) ruthless sophistication. MS-13 is successful because it uses a blend of street gang justice with Mafia like organization

Mike Drolet: Do you think we're doing enough right now?

Jim Brown (retired RCMP officer): No.

Constable Scott Mills (Toronto Police/Crime Stoppers): We have to be on top of it, we can't let somebody, a gang like this come into our country and take over.

Mike Drolet: How many members are in Canada is unknown. Gang experts believe MS-13 has 100,000 members worldwide, including 10,000 in the U.S. Left unchecked, experts worry the violence we've seen south of the border will find its way up here.

Mike Drolet: Could you see it getting that bad here?

Six (MS-13 Toronto member) It can. Yeah, it can.

Mike Drolet: In Toronto, this is Global National's Mike Drolet reporting.

**United States: Fox News (June 25, 2005).** *Gangs with Terror Ties.* **(Video)**

Reporter: Here, in the United States, there's a new phenomenon at work and a new enemy for law enforcement. They're known as international gangs or super-gangs that fund terrorism and narco-terrorism here and abroad.

John S. Fernandes (Drug Enforcement Administration): When they're talking about gangs who have members and associates, be they fan members or what have you, in the country of origin, where they are initially from, before they came to the United States, they certainly rely on that network of associates that are not here in the United States to essentially help feed them the drugs, help with the drug proceeds as far as maybe getting some of the drug proceeds back out of the United States

Reporter: Many of these super-gangs have international roots.

Reporter 2: In about 1985, we saw an influx of people coming from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and some revolutions that were going on in South America; and they came to East L.A and they settled in the Hispanic community and unfortunately a lot of them took up the gang life. One of the first ones we saw was Mara Salvatrucha and that gang is made up primarily of Salvadorians.

Reporter 1: There are a host of super-gangs have infiltrated the United States, with names like 18th street or the Mexican gang Florence 13, but Mara Salvatrucha, MS-13, known for its extreme violence remains a top focus for law enforcement.

John Torres (Immigration Customs Enforcement): What we see is MS-13, the Mara Salvatrucha 13, with links back to El Salvador, not only are they into drugs heavily, but they are into violence and as we've seen historically, drugs and violence sort of go hand in hand.

Reporter: In fact ICE, Immigration and Customs Enforcement just added an MS-13 gang member to its most wanted fugitive list, David Rivera, wanted for questioning and connection for a string of felony convictions and murders in Los Angeles. He is the first MS-13 member to be put on the list.

Al Valdez (Orange County DA): There are reports from Central America that there could be as many as 80 to 100,000 MS-13 gang members in Central America, between El Salvador and Honduras and the rest of the Central American states there; so it is a big gang, MS-13 is reported in Canada, MS-13 has been reported in Hawaii, MS-13 has been reported in Alaska of all places so they are probably in close to 28, (unclear) suggests 28 to 31 different states.

Reporter: As we look into MS-13's background, there are serious concerns that they a pose a national security threat: they are born out of a war torn country and have a military background, they are from areas where drug trafficking and narco-terrorism is active plus they themselves are involved in drugs; and they are a growing populations, settling in America, Canada, and Mexico.

Mary Beth Long (Dep. Sec. of Defence, Counter-Narcotics): The criminal organizations represented by these gangs, in particular Mara Salvatrucha, have become so potent and so destabilizing that rather then being a simple law enforcement criminal threat, that they are now actual national security concerns. To the extent that these criminal elements are involved in smuggling activities, those are avenues and networks that are open not only to terrorists and narcotics traffickers, but potentially to weapons proliferators. They may be providing support to other transnational threats that are a threat to our borders and a threat to our internal security

Reporter: And the biggest fear to law enforcement is that the MS-13 may have already begun working with international terrorists.

Al Valdez (Orange County DA): I think we're in a grey area. I think there's been reported connections between Middle East terrorist groups and MS-13, but there's now way to confirm those connections, there's no way to support that they exist. But prudence requires as to take advantage of the intelligence to make the country safer then it is. I think that's probably the main reason why our American officials have contacted government officials in Mexico, Central America and Canada.

Reporter: Both president Bush and more recently US Defence Secretary Donald Romsvelt went to Latin America for security visits. With the central and south borders historically known as targets for smuggling and drug trafficking, there is concern Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda militant groups or other air tie western militants might try to infiltrate to the U.S from the South and they may use gangs to help them carry out their plans.

John S. Fernandes (Drug Enforcement Administration): What we do quite well is we understand the psyche, the mentality, the criminal mind, and as I've said earlier, we understand difference between one group working on greed and the other group working as criminal patriot and the fact that they are certainly capable of relying on them. Our concern, and I think in that region what's important to know, because of the proximity to the United States.

**El Salvador**

<u>El Diario de Hoy (February 10, 2009).</u> *El Crazy en Lista de los mas Buscados* (Video)

El rostro de este Salvadoreño ocupa un lugar en la lista de los mas buscados en el mundo. Se trata del pandillero Saul Turcios Angel apodado El Trece, quien recientemente apareció en la portada de la revista Parade, que circula en los Estados Unidos, muy de cerca al cabecilla de al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden. El sujeto se fugo de las bartolinas del centro judicial Isidro Menéndez en San Salvador en Diciembre del 2008. La policía internacional a girado ordenes de captura contra el cabecilla de la MS-13. Las autoridades policiales Salvadoreñas han asegurado que el prófugo estaría detrás del incremento de homicidios registrados en el país desde Diciembre pasado. En tanto, el departamento de seguridad interna de Estados Unidos ha abierto un expediente del pandillero para evitar que ingrese al país.

**<u>Diario Co Latino (August 2003). Presidente Flores Pide a los Deputados Aprobar Ley Antimaras.</u>**

A más de un mes que fuera presentado al la Asamblea el proyecto de Ley Antimaras y el paquete de reformas a los Códigos Penal y Procesal Penal, el Presidente de la República, Francisco Flores, exigió anoche la aprobación de la misma, en la Sesión Plenaria de hoy.

En un mensaje, en cadena nacional, anoche, el mandatario pidió a los partidos de oposición "no dilatar" más este tema en el congreso y se apruebe de una vez por todas la nueva normativa legal, que dé un respaldo jurídico al Plan "Mano Dura" impulsado desde el 23 de julio, para erradicar el problema de las pandillas en el país, conocidas como "maras".

Flores dijo que los resultados del Plan "Mano Dura" han sido eficientes, muestra de ello son masivas capturas de jóvenes pertenecientes, que sobre pasan las 1,300 capturas. No obstante, de esta cifra de capturados, en el mayor número los casos han sido liberados por carecer de pruebas para mantenerlos detenidos. A juicio de Flores, por la poca voluntad de la oposición al oponerse a la Ley.

"Para que este triunfo sobre la delincuencia sea permanente y logremos disminuir cada vez más los crímenes y asaltos, necesitamos que al Asamblea Legislativa apruebe la Ley Antimaras", urgió en su mensaje el mandatario.

Para Flores, el sólo hecho de pertenecer a las pandillas criminales "como la Mara 18 y la Mara Salvatrucha... que es prohibido ser miembro de una pandilla criminal, y que el mero hecho de integrar una mara criminal significa arresto, juicio y encarcelamiento".

Flores instó a los políticos, en especial a los diputados del FMLN, CDU, PDC y PCN, la aprobación de la normativa, más cuando Estados Unidos "ha anunciado un plan de deportaciones masivas de mareros criminales a El Salvador, sin la Ley Antimaras no tenemos la herramienta legal para controlar estos criminales al llegar al país... en la Asamblea de Honduras, todos los partidos por unanimidad han aprobado una fuerte Ley Antimaras, propiciando así una fuga masiva de mareros hacia nuestro país", puntualizó. "En la Asamblea hemos escuchado muchas excusas para dilatar y postergar las acciones necesarias para respaldar al Plan Mano Dura... los partidos de oposición quieren mandar al archivo la Ley Antimaras", se quejó Flores.

Luego del Foro convocado por el congreso, para analizar el proyecto de Ley, la oposición, e incluso representantes de instituciones públicas y privadas, recomendaron que el tema fuera enfocado a estudiar las reformas a los Códigos y mandar al archivo el Anteproyecto de Ley Antimaras, entre otras razones, porque es inconstitucional. Al respecto, Flores dijo que "necesitamos la Ley Antimaras y reformas hechas para proteger a los pandilleros delincuentes... algunos diputados, que no tienen que vivir esta realidad, pues el estado les proporciona guardaespaldas, están diciendo que cambios cosméticos en el Código Penal son suficientes para eliminar las maras. Esta es una fantasía que ningún salvadoreño trabajador puede creer". Sin embargo, la oposición considera que el plan antimaras del ejecutivo es por razones electoreras y cuestionan el hecho del porqué hasta ahora el gobierno anuncian un plan agresivo para combatir un problema que lleva más de 10 años en el país.

Se conoció que este mediodía el CDU y el PDC habían presentado una pieza de correspondencia para impedir que el proyecto de ley se fuera al archivo y que ARENA presentó otra para que se prohíban los tatuajes.

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