
War on Gangs

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Gang Issue in El Salvador

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Abstract

This study seeks to understand how gangs and gang members are represented in the hegemonic discourse in El Salvador, how the discourse has become how it is and the possible consequences of the representation of gang-members. Scholars, international institutions and governments have gradually showed more interest in how especially the media and political actors in Central America, and in particular in El Salvador, have identified the gangs as public enemy number one. The growing gang issue in El Salvador is not new nor are the causes of their existence unknown. What has now become familiar as La Mara Phenomenon (Salvadoran for Gang) is highly researched and the hottest topic of discussion both nationally, regionally and internationally when it comes to the subject of crime issues in Central America. By using the Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough, this study analyses the speech of the President of El Salvador, Sanchez Cerén, together with news features from the three biggest online news platforms in El Salvador; El Faro, El Blog, and La Página, in order to identify the hegemonic discourse on gang members, understand its circumstances of production, and finally to explain, on the basis of a theoretical framework, the effect of the discourse in relation to the gang issue. The theoretical framework for the analysis included the theories on normalisation of violence, representation of social media, and the impact of organised crime on state social control by, respectively, Hume; Huhn, Oettler and Wolf; and Lambrechts. This study identifies that the gangs are represented through an extremely negative stereotype, which depicts the gang members as violent, criminal, murderers, irrational, inhumane, cruel and the single biggest threat to the public security and prosperity of El Salvador. The gang members are represented as one, homogenous group, why all the aforementioned characteristics are attributed to all the gang members. In addition, the discourse represents the gang members as the 'evil other', and consequently a narrative of an "us" (the government) versus "them" (the gangs) is created. The analysis furthermore shows that there are four main causes to the above representation of the gang members; 1) The Civil War, which created a hostile environment where violence became the norm of conflict resolution. 2) The failure to address socio-economic issues properly. 3) A culture of violence which is deeply embedded in the Salvadoran society. And finally, 4) The hegemonic discourse in the media exaggerates and over-generalises the violence in El Salvador and furthermore portrays the gang issue as a consequence of individual pathological tendencies.

In conclusion, this concludes that the representation of the gang members generates the spread of fear and consequently an inclination towards more punitive policies and strategies, which, in turn, enables further exclusion and marginalisation. Furthermore, it legitimises the use of violence against the gang members as a resolution to the violence committed by the gangs, thus, generating a self-reinforcing cycle of violence, where more and more extreme measures are perceived as necessary to win the battle between the gangs and the government. Hence, the hegemonic discourse represents that power battle, and is therefore used as a tool by the government and the media to win.

Keywords: *El Salvador, critical discourse analysis, gangs, violence, representation, othering, stereotype, machismo, hegemonic masculinity.*

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«Estos criminales (los mareros) han llegado al extremo salvajismo y perdida de toda sensibilidad humana... No entienden otro lenguaje que la violencia.»

– Sánchez Cerén, *The President of El Salvador*, 2016

“Those criminals (gang members) have reached extreme ferocity and have lost all human sensitivity... They do not understand any other language than violence.”

– Own translation

1 Introduction

In 2015, El Salvador ranked as the most murderous country in the world among countries that are not involved in any official war. That year, the country experienced a 70 percent spike in violent deaths, and according to local police reports, at least 6.657 people were killed violently (The World Bank, 2017, pp. 36-37). This death toll was the highest recorded since 1983 during the Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992) fought between the left-wing guerrilla army, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the US-backed, military-led government (Bell, 2013, pp. 27-28).

The high number of violent deaths has been attributed to the increasing gang problem the country is now experiencing. The Salvadoran government seems unable to put an end to the violence, and to prevent the growth of the country's two most violent gangs; La Mara Salvatrucha (also called MS-13) and Barrio 18. The two gangs, or "*La Mara*", as it they are called in El Salvador, are in an open street war, competing to gain control over the growing drug routes passing through El Salvador from Colombia to the cartels in Mexico. Civilians in marginalised and poor areas in El Salvador find themselves not only caught in the violence between the two gangs, but also in the violence and killings between the two gangs and the police or military that takes place in the streets.

The causes of gang-emergence in El Salvador are well-understood, and extensive research on the topic has identified several factors contributing to gang-issues and to difficulties regarding their resolution. One major cause is found in the history of El Salvador, namely the Civil War and with it, the history of violence.

Prior to the Civil War, violence was institutionalised and served the interests of the oligarchy in El Salvador. The violence served to repress rebellion was sustained by a highly militarised and authoritarian political system. This along with a large socio-economic inequality led to the beginning of the Civil War in 1980 (Arnson, 2012, pp. 79-83). When the Civil War began, violence was no longer institutionalised but depolarised between the combating revolutionary movements and the elite-backed military (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004, pp. 157-158). More than 75.000 people were killed during the Civil War, which included the deliberate killing of civilians by death squads, uncountable human rights violations and the forced recruitment of child soldiers (only boys). The violence was extreme from both sides, but according to the United Nations, 85% of all killings of civilians were committed by death squads from the elite-backed military (United States Institute of Peace, 1992). After 11 years of civil war, the Chapultepec Peace Accords were signed in 1992, and is one of the most significant historical events of the twentieth century in El Salvador; the country had undergone a larger process to

be able to formally declare peace with demilitarisation and a democratic state in place (Arnson, 2012, pp. 81).

In the wake of the Civil War, social inequality and marginalisation of people residing in poor areas still reigned the country, despite of the promise of a better and more equal El Salvador after the peace accords were signed (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004). Institutions, such as a functional police force, were still to be firmly established, so fear of violence and lack of trust in the newly established democratic system paved the way for the creation of youth gangs. Just two years before the signing of the peace accords, the United States changed their immigration politics, which led to the deportation of criminal immigrants to their home-countries (Migration Policy Institute, 2006, pp. 81). Close to a million Salvadorans had fled to the United States during the war and had already created new lives, but the policy change meant that already established criminals, including Salvadoran youth gangs, were deported from Los Angeles and back to El Salvador (Migration Policy Institute). The youth gangs continued to exist in the war-torn El Salvador. Lack of opportunities, marginalisation, exclusion and a general insecurity that was not addressed by the newly established government made it seem a meaningful choice, if not the only, for the youth, to join the youth gangs which served as both protection and as a social safety net to the many children who were left orphaned and without many opportunities after the war (Oetller, 2007).

Around 1994, public concern about low-intensity security rose within the Salvadoran population, especially in poor areas. However, the gangs remained in the background of the debate and out of focus of political attention (Oetller, 2007). A few years later, youth delinquency grew to become an even bigger issue with ever more brutal violence and homicides, and it drew, to a higher degree, political attention in the late 90s.

In 2003, President Flores presented his anti-gang policy "*La Mano Dura*" (The Iron Fist) which launched a crackdown on the criminal youth and emphasised police-raids and detention of gang-members as means of combating the issue. In 2004, the political campaign evolved around a discourse on the monstrous and violent youth gangs that the competing parties, if elected, would combat and eventually eliminate (Oetller, 2007). The politicians have since then had a focus on eliminating the symptoms instead of eliminating the aforementioned causes of the issue.

In March 2012 the two gangs came to a truce-agreement both between themselves and with the government which led to an immediate decrease in the rate of homicides. The truce constituted of the promises made by both gangs to not kill civilians, women and children, while the government in exchange promised benefits for gang members and to engage in dialogue

instead of uncontrolled police raids. This truce changed the general view on the gangs; they were human too, and in contrast to a repressive and aggressive approach, the politicians and the discourse in society started to open up for a more soft-emphasis approach (Dudley, 2013). Even though the truce had a positive impact on El Salvador's social situation, the truce also sent a dangerous message to the population; the government could be held hostage by coercion with violence and murders which consequently led to less trust in the government's capability of upholding the security and monopolising violence (Dudley, 2013). Due to a governmental shift through elections, the truce broke down in 2014 and homicide rates rose immediately and drastically. In conclusion, the normalisation of violence, lack of opportunities, corruption, poverty and exclusion are some of the many factors that impede putting an end to the gang issue today (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004). According to an local online media news agency, El Faro, negotiations continue to fail since the government is not willing to give into the demands of the gang leaders, while the gang leaders are not willing to give up the fight and dissolve the gangs (El Faro, 2016).

The Salvadoran government and the gangs are in an open war, fighting to demonstrate their power and control over the society and the people. As a result, the country seems divided between war-weary, civilian citizens and gang-members. This polarisation seems to be further reinforced by the discourse on the local news and by statements from the Salvadoran government, police and military, which constantly creates a sense of '*us*' (civilian citizens and the government) versus '*them*' (the gangs). As made evident by the high death toll, the gang issue has grown to the extreme, and only more and more people seem to join the gangs, unable to get out, once involved.

From the above, it is evident that historical events and politics have had a major influence on the discourse regarding gangs and as consequently on how the general view on gang members has changed with it.

The discourse concerning gangs and gang-members has evolved drastically throughout the past ten years, going from perceiving gang-members as human beings to seeing them as terrorists that must be exterminated from the Salvadoran society. As accounted for in the above, the causes of gang emergence and irresolvability of gang issues are already well understood and highly researched. However, an interesting aspect to examine more in depth, is the discourse centralised on gangs, since as pointed out above, it is an important factor when researching the gang issue in El Salvador. The discourse can have an evident effect on not only the perception of gang members but also the approach, both politically and socially, to the issue of gang violence. Hence, this research will elucidate this aspect.

In line with Fairclough, I believe that language always has to be considered and included into a social analysis, since it is an irreducible part of how we perceive reality (Fairclough, 2003). Language has the power to shape our beliefs and perceptions, moreover it has the power to exclude or include groups in society, to control, undermine and marginalise or involve, negotiate and accept. According to Fairclough, a critical discourse analysis of the hegemonic discourse concerning an issue can explain the underlying power relations and the effect the discourse can have on a society (Fairclough, 2003). In this case, a discourse analysis of the hegemonic discourse concerning gangs in El Salvador will reveal how the government represents the gang members, what power relation this reflects or creates and ultimately elucidate what effect this representation causes both in power-relations between the gangs and the government but also in regards to the gang issue itself.

2 Problem Formulation

In order to understand the effect of the hegemonic discourse on gangs and gang members in El Salvador, I will ask and answer the following questions:

“How are gangs and gang members represented in the Salvadoran government’s and the Salvadoran news’ discourse and why? What effect does this discourse have on the gang issue?”

Specifically, I will analyse the 2016 speech (Sanchez, 2016) of Sanchez Cerén, the current President of El Salvador, in addition with selected news features (El Faro, 2016; La Pagina, 2016; El Blog, 2017), since they all have the power to affect, contribute to and create a hegemonic discourse on gangs and gang members.

Cerén is a former guerrilla leader and part of one of the two leading political parties in El Salvador, the left-wing FMLN. From 2009 to 2014, he served as vice president under the Funes administration. He was elected in 2014 on the basis of provision of quality education and public security, and will be in office until 2019. The selected news features are from the online news agencies El Faro, El Blog and La Página. A transcript of Cerén’s speech as well the news articles can be found in the Appendix.

While the critical discourse analysis, presented by Fairclough, will help the understanding of what is being said in the discourse and the meaning of it, a theoretical framework can help put the discourse into the perspective of social factors, such as the ones pointed out in the introduction. By analysing the hegemonic discourse on gangs, I hope to elucidate the power dynamics behind the relations between the gangs and the Salvadoran government, thereby making this thesis a contribution to the overall understanding of the seemingly insolvable gang problem in El Salvador.

3 Methodology

This section seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the choice of subject, theoretical framework, and empirical data, and moreover to clarify the method of analysis that will be employed to examine and finally reach a conclusion to the problem formulation stated above. Furthermore, this section will discuss the implications of various choices regarding this thesis, and the limitations, which these choices might impose on the final outcome of the analysis.

3.1 Aim of Study

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of the gang issue in El Salvador. This will be accomplished by looking at the representations of the gang members in the hegemonic discourse and how it affects the perception of the gang members and gangs in the Salvadoran society. Moreover, the aim is to put into perspective how the discourse has changed over time, and thereby understand how the discourse affects the perception of the gang members and the gang issue in the country and vice versa how historical events and political approaches might have affected the discourse.

This study offers an in-depth critical discourse analysis of the hegemonic discourse regarding gangs and gang-members with a special focus on power relations, violence and representation. To the knowledge of the author, the existing literature on the subject primarily focuses on the analysis of case studies or interviews with the aim to explain the reasons behind the presence of the gangs, such as poverty, legitimisation of violence, politics, lack of opportunities, etc. This thesis endeavours to fill a gap in the literature concerning the explanation of how gangs and their members are perceived by looking at the issue from a socio-linguistic perspective and analysing how a discourse has the power to shape power relations, the perception of gang-members and subsequently the possibility of their re-integration into society.

3.2 Choice of Subject

The choice of focusing on El Salvador and its gang issues, derives from a personal desire to understand why so many Salvadoran citizens have come to perceive gang members as non-humans who have to be eliminated by force.

When studying in El Salvador from 2012 to 2013, I experienced a gap existing between gang members and non-gang members, formed by the fear and the anger from both sides. During the time I was staying in El Salvador, the truce agreement between the gangs and the government was in place, and even though the media still had a major focus on homicides committed each

day, the gangs were not portrayed as an epidemic or inhuman. However, when the agreement broke down in 2014 as a result of a change of government, the discourse, both in the political debate and in the media, changed drastically, becoming aggressive and intolerant towards gang members (see 1). The change in the hegemonic discourse manifested throughout the country, and it became evident that civilians became more aggressive when discussing (silently) the gangs. Typically discussions amongst civilians would end up revolving around the extermination of gang-members as the penultimate solution to the gang-issue.

My anecdotal experiences and relations to the country and people that live there sparked a desire to develop an in-depth understanding of El Salvador's maybe biggest social issue. However, as I already understood why the gangs are there, and why the issue is hard to combat, I wanted to understand the issue from a different perspective; namely why the hegemonic discourse has become the way it is, and how it can affect the gangs and gang members socially.

3.3 Theory of Science

When conducting social research, one can have different approaches and beliefs of how knowledge and reality is constructed and should be perceived. Ontology and epistemology both concern knowledge: Whereas ontology refers to the nature of knowledge, epistemology refers to how that knowledge is being produced (Wahyuni, 2012). Ontologically, one can perceive reality as being external and independent of social actors (objectivist approach) or as being dependent on social actors as they are seen to contribute to a given social phenomenon (subjectivist approach) (Wahyuni, 2012).

Ontologically, this thesis has been approached under the constructivist paradigm, which means the researcher believes that all research is interpretative and relativistic. Within the constructivist paradigm "knowledge is the outcome or consequence of human activity; knowledge is a human construction never certifiable as ultimately true but problematic and ever changing." (Guba, 1990, pp. 26).

In agreement with (Fairclough, 1992), I believe that reality is socially constructed and therefore, to understand the reality of, for example, the perception of gang members in El Salvador, it is necessary to look at qualitative data instead of quantitative data. For this thesis, it means that instead of looking at, for example, the frequency of violent acts against gang members, the number of gang members in jail or how many times negatively loaded words towards gang members are used in governmental statements, I have chosen to focus on how the gang members are being represented looking at social interactions and power relations through a discourse.

As a constructivist, I believe reality is socially constructed through human actions and experi-

ences, thus I have a subjectivist approach to epistemology since I, as being the researcher of this thesis, already have existing knowledge and personal experiences that I acknowledge will influence the choice of methods and theory and ultimately the thesis as a whole.

The process of the analysis and of the entire thesis is hermeneutic and inductive: Hermeneutic in the sense that I interpret a social phenomenon through a process (also known as the hermeneutic circle) where I, with my previous knowledge together with the knowledge I gain during the writing of the thesis, attempt to understand the reality, which is, in accordance with my research paradigm, socially constructed. It is inductive in the sense that I base my analysis on a number of texts to induce something general about how gang members are being represented and ultimately perceived in the Salvadoran society. As Guba defines it, the aim is “*to identify the variety of constructions that exist and bring them into as much consensus as possible.*” (Guba, 1990, pp. 26), while at the same time taking into consideration the social and historical context where the texts are constructed and reproduced.

3.4 Method of Analysis

In order to investigate how the Salvadoran government and the Salvadoran news represent the gang members in El Salvador, the critical discourse analysis will be used as a method. The critical discourse analysis is an interesting way of approaching the research question since it enables the understanding of not only the content of the discourse, but also the reasons behind its construction and reproduction and most importantly how it affects people in a social context and contributes to a social phenomenon.

The critical discourse analysis belongs to the qualitative study-tradition since it seeks to not only answer what is being said, but also why and in what context. Since I do not only want to know what type of representation is to be found in the discourse but also why this type of representation is being produced and how it affects the perception of the gang members, the qualitative method, critical discourse analysis, is highly suitable.

As with many methods, there are several ways of interpreting and using critical discourse analysis depending on different contexts and fields of study. However in social studies, it is used to not only interpret the sender of the discourse, but also to “[...] *understand and interpret socially produced meanings*” (Howarth, 2005, pp. 183). Jørgensen and Phillips furthermore argue that the objective of the critical discourse analysis in social studies also is to “... *and define power relations in society*” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 1999, pp. 11). Fairclough puts the aim of critical discourse analysis in this way; “*The aim of Critical Discourse Analysis is to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and*

dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use.” (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 8).

This means that the discourse contributes to establishing power relations between, for example, the gangs and the government. Therefore this method is valuable and necessary to understanding the distribution of power defined and affected by the hegemonic discourse pertaining to gangs in El Salvador.

3.4.1 The Critical Discourse Analysis

To understand this method of analysis, it is important to first of all understand what is meant with the concept of discourse. Fairclough explains a discourse (written or oral) as being not only a text produced and consumed by society, but also as a tool of power to maintain or put different social classes in a superior or inferior position. A discourse has then, according to Fairclough, the ability to control power relations between different groups in society, such as the power relations between gang members and the government in El Salvador. In this way, the critical aspect in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) consists of uncovering social structures, power relations and inequality created, changed and/or maintained through the hegemonic discourse in society (Fairclough, 1995).

According to Fairclough, the social structures and the hegemonic discourse interrelate and are inseparable. However, in order to make a critical discourse analysis, it is necessary to separate the interrelation into three different aspects; the text (oral or written), the discursive practice, and the social practice (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 26).

3.4.1.1 The Text

In this first part of the analysis, the CDA looks at the discourse (in this context both a written text and an oral text) with a micro perspective where the elements of the text is broken into pieces and analysed almost word-by-word (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough draws upon Michael Halliday’s linguistic analysis. It is at this first level the type together with the message of the text is determined. This is done by making a linguistic and detailed analysis of the text to determine the main characteristics of the discourse; the use of words, the meaning of the words, references, politeness or rudeness, modality, non-verbal language, metaphors, the way of speaking (for example accent), presumptions and cohesion (Stecher, 2009).

In this way, a textual analysis of, for example, the speech of Sanchez Cerén, can determine the representation he is giving of the gang members, the identity of the type of discourse (ideologically, politically and personally) and the meaning of the discourse (the reason, the measure and the aim).

3.4.1.2 The Discursive Practice

This second part of the analysis focuses on the identification and examination of the processes of production, consumption and distribution of the discourse (Fairclough, 1995). In society, there exist an uncountable number of different discourses that all co-exist, contrast and even often compete within the sociocultural practice in which they exist.

The discursive practice serves as an intermediary between the micro perspective (the text) and the macro perspective (the social practice; see 3.4.1.3) of the critical discourse analysis. It is at this level that the type of discourse is determined based on the textual analysis from the level beneath, and in comparison and relation to existing discourses in the given context (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough points to four elements that produce a discourse; genre, type of activity, style and discourse (Stecher, 2009). He describes genre as being various established conventions that are associated with a specific type of activity, for example a speech, a clip from the news, etc.

Based on the association we have with a specific activity, we determine what type of genre or activity it is we are hearing, reading or seeing. In this way, the genre together with the style of that genre, define the discourse, however, the discourse also defines the genre: A discourse is a way of presenting and constructing a theme or an idea, so the discourses can be shaped within the different genres, but at the same time one genre can represent various discourses. This is what Fairclough refers to as interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 1995). In practice, interdiscursivity means that when a discourse is constructed, there are certain socially established resources that are available within that discursive order, meaning that a discourse always includes elements from other hegemonic discourses; this does not necessarily refer to exact words or expressions, but could also be ideas or ideologies that influence the production of a given discourse.

Fairclough stresses that in order to fully understand the discourse in a critical way, it is necessary, at this level, to look at and analyse the interdiscursivity which the discourse is part of. It is also important to see the discourse within the discursive order that exists within the particular genre the discourse belongs to, and to look at whether the discourse reflects and reproduces the hegemonic discourse or whether it opposes to the norms of that particular genre and discursive order within that (Fairclough, 2009). In this way, a discourse uses other discourses (interdiscursivity) to create a different discourse that either maintain or change the dominant discourse within that particular genre or topic (discursive order). An analysis of the interdiscursivity of the discourse is useful to determine the communication strategies that govern the discourse and the norms that the text represents.

3.4.1.3 The Social Practice

The third level of the CDA, the social practice, is where the discourse is analysed in a social context. This puts the discourse into a macro-perspective where the social context is analysed in relation to the discourse and vice versa. In order to analyse the social context, Fairclough argues that it is necessary to base this part of the CDA on a theoretical framework that can support and help explain the context of the discourse.

In the context of this thesis, the theoretical framework for this last part of the CDA is explained below (see 4). The social context is for example the cultural, political or social structures of El Salvador and moreover the circumstances under which the discourse has been produced. In this macro-context, Fairclough argues that there exists a hegemony between the discursive orders, and that the different discourses compete to gain power over either social aspects or to create certain relations between different parties or groups in society.

The existence of a hegemonic discourse makes it harder to create opposing discourses or just different discourses since the hegemonic discourse dominates the discursive order (Fairclough, 2009). According to Fairclough, the combination of interdiscursivity and hegemony in a discourse always has the effect of social, ideological, political or historical change or simply the maintenance of status quo. In this way, this last part of the CDA looks at the discourse as being a part of processes or even a tool for power within a matrix of power relations.

Going through all three levels of the CDA, one will be able to understand what is being said in the discourse, what it means, why it is being said the way it is, why it is being said at all, and ultimately what effect the discourse will have in its societal context. To get an overview of how the three levels interrelate and overlap, see Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 1992).

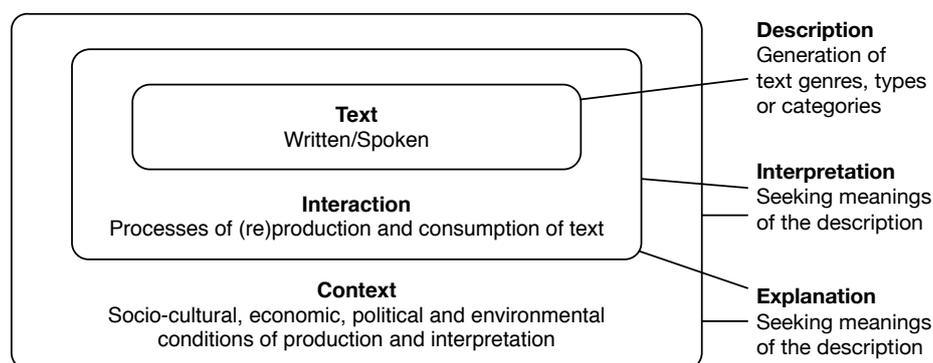


Figure 1: Discourse as text, interaction and context (after Fairclough (1992)).

In conclusion, the CDA will enable an analysis of the hegemonic discourse on gangs and gang

members in El Salvador to understand it not only as a text, but as a product of a social context that also has the power to affect and shape the perceptions of reality.

3.5 Choice of Theoretical Framework and Empirical Data

As mentioned above, the CDA requires a theoretical framework that can support and shape the analysis especially on the social practice level, in which other social theories are necessary to fully understand the context, reason and effect of the discourse in a historical, socio-cultural and socio-political context. Bryman explains theory as being an explanation of regularities (Bryman, 2012) and it is employed in this thesis to guide and influence both the collection and analysis of data. The theoretical framework, in tandem with the CDA, provides coherence to the thesis and to ultimately answer the problem formulation in an adequate and fulfilling way.

The first part of the theoretical framework explains the concepts '*Hegemonic Masculinity*', '*Machismo*', '*Representation*', '*Social Representation*', '*Stereotypes*' and '*Othering*'. The concepts are used in the analysis since they all are identified as being key to the understanding of the discourse. Clarifications and definitions of these concepts are mandatory since there exist many different and contradicting definitions and understandings of these concepts. Thus, when reading the analysis it is important to understand and distinguish between what exactly is meant when referring to these concepts.

The rest of the theoretical framework explains three different theories that will help shape and support the analysis, especially in the final part of the analysis. The first theory chosen is by Mo Hume, who proposes a theory that explains the violence committed by gangs, and even by the government in El Salvador, as being normalised and accepted as a key element in masculine behaviour. Mo Hume is well known for her extended research particularly in El Salvador, and thus the choice of this theory was obvious. The second theory is developed by Wolf, Oettler and Huhn who explain the influence of media representation in El Salvador, which is highly useful for understanding the effect the discourse presented in gang-related news has on the Salvadoran society. Since CDA is about uncovering power relations, it is necessary to have a theoretical framework that can help explain the power relation that is created through discourse and how it affects both the legitimacy of the state and also the gang issue in El Salvador. Deric Lambrechts has proposed a theory on how organised crime impact the state's social control in the country, how the gangs challenge the power of the state and what this does to a society. All three theories guide and support the analysis of this thesis to ultimately answer the problem formulation in a satisfactory manner.

The basis for this thesis has been an extensive literature research on the subject, where rel-

evant, secondary literature has been gathered and used as information sources to this thesis. The literature was primarily found online on search engines such as Google Scholar and the Aalborg University Online Library, by using key formulations and words such as '*Gangs in El Salvador*', '*Central American Gangs*', '*Power Relations*', '*Discourse Analysis*', '*Gang Policies*', etc. The relevance of the articles was identified by reading the abstracts or associated keywords. Besides articles and reports from peer-reviewed journals written by scholars, the secondary data also included books on the subject, news articles and government statements. The data reviewed was in English, Danish and in Spanish. The inclusion of relevant sources in Spanish has contributed to further insight and understanding, given that a considerable amount of information was available exclusively in Spanish. The knowledge used for this project have mainly been retrieved from studies done by Oettler, Huhn and Wolf on the hegemonic discourse on gangs in El Salvador. Furthermore, studies done by Van der Borgh and Savenije together with the books by Arnson, Ascher and Mirovitskaya have contributed to the understanding of the political, economical, cultural and social history of El Salvador.

As aforementioned, the primary data for this project consists of the speech of Sanchez Cerén, the President of El Salvador, given the 29 of March 2016. This specific speech has been chosen, first of all, because it is the most recent one available online he gave addressing the topic of gangs directly, and second of all because he, as president, represents, with his speech, the opinion, approach and plan of the Salvadoran government regarding gangs and gang members. Lastly, the speech was selected based on its content: It is in this speech, the President, for the first time announces his plan on how to combat the gang-issue. He has been elected to represent the government and the people, and therefore what he says automatically creates, controls and reflects the dominant discourse. According to (Davies, 2012), the news media is also one of the more influential platforms when it comes to creating and maintaining a hegemonic discourse given the nature of their discursive power in the form of authority and legitimacy. Therefore, three different news features in the CDA are included as a contrast or a parallel to the speech of Sanchez Cerén, to demonstrate a broader picture of the discourse on gangs that is currently dominating the Salvadoran society.

In addition, I have chosen news features from the three biggest online news sources on gangs in El Salvador; El Faro, La Página and El Blog (the latter two also exist as printed news papers). In accordance with the hermeneutic circle and the constructivist paradigm, the theoretical framework has guided the analysis, and as the analysis took form, the theoretical framework was adjusted accordingly to be able to better understand the findings.

3.6 Limitations of Study

A noticeable limitation to this thesis is the limited time frame and limited (economic) resources given to this thesis. If the time frame had been different, and if the economic resources necessary had been available, it would have been interesting to conduct interviews among the population of El Salvador both from gang members and non-gang members, to investigate the exact effect of the hegemonic discourse on gangs on the civil population. It would have been interesting to conduct the interviews with the purpose of understanding the perception of gangs from the point-of-view of non-gang members and compare it to the self-perception of gang members themselves in relation to the hegemonic discourse. A comparison to other hegemonic discourses on the subject from other countries with gang-issues, such as Guatemala, Honduras or Mexico would also have been highly relevant to better understand how the Salvadoran hegemonic discourse fits into a much broader, regional discourse. However more lenient temporal and financial constraints must be present in order to conduct such extensive research.

4 Theoretical Framework

In order to adequately answer the problem formulation, it is necessary to conduct the analysis in relation to a suitable a theoretical framework. The first part of this section will explain key concepts, which will be used later in the analysis. In the second part, the theories used to support and guide the CDA, particularly at its topmost level, the social practice, are explained. An in-depth explanation of the choice of theories is provided above in the methodology part (See 3.5).

4.1 Concepts

Since ambiguous definitions of the following concepts exist in the literature, concise definitions capturing their semantics throughout the scope of this thesis are provided here to avoid any ambiguity. The definitions are also applicable to the understanding of the theories presented throughout the remainder of this thesis.

4.1.1 Hegemonic Masculinity

In order to define the concept of hegemonic masculinity, it is prerequisite to first of all understand the concept of hegemony. The idea of hegemony was first coined by Gramsci as an explanation as to why the working class of the late 1920s refrained from revolt despite fascism being on the rise (Gitlin, 1979, pp. 514). Gramsci defined hegemony by:

“[...] dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the ‘spontaneous consent’ of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups.” (Strinati, 1995, pp. 165).

It can be understood as ‘common sense’, in which the dominant group spreads its ideology and practice either by peaceful persuasion or by coercion or a combination of both. As Simon describes it: *“[...] the practices of a capitalist class or its representatives to gain state power and maintain it later.”* (Simon, 1991, pp. 23). Thus, hegemony refers to a set of ideas by which the dominant group aims to secure the consent of subordinate groups in society to their leadership.

For example, the government of El Salvador, which during the Civil War tried to secure the consent of the population to their ideology and ideas with coercion. Before fully explaining the concept of hegemonic masculinity, it is important to note that masculinity does not refer to physical attributes associated with the biological sex of being a man, however it refers to an

identity-character bound up on gender that is socially constructed and therefore fluent. Connell defines the concept as follows:

“Different masculinities exist in definite relations with each other, often relations of hierarchy and exclusion. There is generally a dominant or ‘hegemonic’ form of masculinity, the centre of the system of gendered power. The hegemonic form need not be the most common form of masculinity.” (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, pp. 24).

In accordance with the definition of hegemony, the hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant position in a hierarchy that is socially constructed and that a certain social group claim as their domain. In line with Connell, hegemonic masculinity is often being referred to in the field of feminism, since hegemonic masculinity is constructed in a way that it ideologically and naturally legitimises the subordination of women to men and femininity to masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). In accordance with Donaldson, hegemonic masculinity includes some behavioural characteristics that normally comprise of violence, stoicism, courage, toughness, risk-taking, adventure, competitiveness, success and aggression (Donaldson, 1993, pp. 649). These characteristics are not associated with men but with the hegemonic idea of masculinity, the hyper-masculinity. The idea of what it means to be masculine is often represented through a cultural ideal of masculine behaviour, and it is therefore socially, historically and culturally constructed (Connell, 1987, pp. 334).

Hooper argues that war and violent conflicts are fundamental when understanding the structure and construction of a hegemonic masculinity in a given context. She explains that women are seen as life givers, while men are seen as life takers, hence men can only exist as ‘real men’ through conflict, war or situations of violence (Hooper, 1999, pp. 479). This entails violence as a vital part of how the hegemonic masculinity is constructed and sustained.

Violence then becomes a society norm as a consequence of the hegemonic masculinity that promotes a violent form of hyper-masculine behaviour. Hegemonic masculinity forms an important part in the hegemonic discourse in El Salvador, therefore the definition of it here, was important. The concept is also used with a high prevalence in the theories described later on.

4.1.2 Machismo

When looking at hegemonic masculine structures in the context of Latin America and in this case, El Salvador, the concept machismo is used as a form of hegemonic masculinity that is particularly related to this continent. Machismo is a form of male chauvinism embedded historically and culturally in Latin American society. It is the particular type of hegemonic masculinity that has been constructed and is associated with Latin American men (Morales, 1996).

Men are being perceived as superior to women, and in comparison to ‘normal’ male chauvinism, this superiority is an accepted part of the societal norms in Latin America. This means that it is not only men who perceive and accept men as superior, but also women share this view. The mentality of this stems from a traditional and, in particular, patriarchal societal construction (Morales, 1996) that, in the case of El Salvador, originates from how relations between men and women have been historically. Thus, there is a high coherence between machismo and the immense gender inequality found in the Latin American countries (Viterna, 2013). Typical behaviour and associations connected to machismo are aggression, subordination of women, potency and responsibility for the family (Morales, 1996). Machismo thus describes a sort of excessive and violent form of masculinity, closely linked to the hegemonic masculinity.

4.1.3 Representation and Social Representation

In line with Dervin, I define representations as being “*particular presentations of experiences, people, voices (or groups) [...] which are reinterpreted and represented and constitute our realities*” (Dervin, 2012, pp. 5). Hence, representations are what enable us to understand the social aspect of society and guide us when we interact with others.

In the context of this thesis, social representation is particularly important since, in relation to the problem formulation, this research is interested in identifying how the gangs are represented in the hegemonic discourse. Moscovici defines social representation as follows:

“Social representations are systems of values, ideas and practices which enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history.” (Moscovici, 1961, pp. 13)

So representations are embedded in the culture and are an image of what is agreed upon as the reality and norm (Howarth, 2006). Some representations have a macro aspect while others have a micro aspect, which means that there exist hegemonic representations that dominate the social discourse as well-known and accepted, while oppositional representations can be micro, meaning that they are less circulated and not accepted as the reality of things. The two types, hegemonic representation and oppositional representations, can compete against and influence one another (Dervin, 2012). This means that “[...] *representations do have an ideological component and that an exercise of power is always present in representations.*” (Dervin, 2012, pp. 6). This is consistent with the beliefs of Fairclough; that all hegemonic discourses always exercise power with the language. According to Jovchelovitch, this power relation emerges due to the notion that “[...] *representations emerge from the interrelations between self, other and*

the object-world." (Jovchelovitch, 2007, pp. 11).

In this way, power relations are essential when looking into how a certain group in a society is represented, however according to Dervin, it is also crucial to understand why this representation is given and accepted as reality by the majority. Representations are human constructions of reality, so in order to understand the representations one must understand why the given representation was constructed in the first place.

4.1.4 Stereotypes

Stereotypes are a typical image of reality that is constructed through a certain form of social representation in a hegemonic discourse. They are "[...] *a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a societal category of people (personality traits, attributions, intentions, behavioural descriptions, etc.)*" (Dervin, 2012, pp. 7). Dyer adds to this definition by claiming that "[*the stereotype*] *is what everyone – you, me and us – thinks members of such-and-such a social group are like*" (Dyer, 2002, pp. 247). Stereotypes are often described as having negative connotations, and even though Dyer describes stereotypes as being neither right, nor wrong, they tend to oversimplify minority groups, which normally are more complex and fluent than they appear from the stereotype (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2008, pp. 366).

Stereotypes are about power: Dominant groups in society create the stereotypes by enforcing their norms and beliefs onto subdominant groups in society, such as mass media in El Salvador talking about the gangs. This is why the stereotypes are hard to break, since the dominant discourse has the power to maintain the stereotyped group in their stereotype given they do not have the power or possibilities to change the image and break with the stereotype (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2008). According to Dervin, stereotypes can serve as a mean of showing the superiority of one's group over another group and to differentiate oneself or one's group from the group being stereotyped (Dervin, 2012). Bar-Tal calls upon the necessity of focusing not only on why stereotypes are being created the way they are, or what the particular stereotype is representing, but also on the social effect the stereotype has on the subdominant group. Furthermore, he points to the importance of being aware of not only the stereotype, but also what the stereotype says about the ones who represent it and the power relation that is then created between the two groups (Bar-Tal, 1989, pp. 170).

In line with Edgar and Sedgwick, I believe that stereotypes often are evident in mass media, news and statements from politicians, especially when it comes to stereotypes about criminals and groups that are perceived as being a 'problem' to society. The concept stereotype is therefore highly relevant when it comes to the analysis in this thesis.

4.1.5 Othering

Another concept I want to clarify and define in extension to the aforementioned is the concept of othering. It is another form of social representation, and is highly related to stereotypes. According to Dervin, othering consists of “*objectification of another person or group or “creating the other”, which puts aside and ignores the complexity and subjectivity of the individual*” (Dervin, 2012, pp. 8). In this way othering, together with stereotypes, allow us to create similarities and dissimilarities between other groups and one’s own group in order to affirm one’s own identity in relation to others. Thus othering is not only about the other but also about oneself (Dervin, 2012).

Othering is the separation of a minority group from a majority group by a representation that defines the minority group as “*others*”, meaning those who are different from oneself. As with stereotypes, the majority group often has a higher political power, why this groups’ ideas, self-perception and constructions of identity are promoted more broadly and therefore dominate. Stating that identity is socially constructed means that there cannot be an “*us*” if there does not exist a “*them*” (Bauman, 1991). Thus othering entails a construction of “*us*” versus “*them*”. Arrighi argues that “*otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself.*” (Arrighi, 2007, pp. 76).

In relation to this thesis, the analysis clearly shows that othering is an essential part of the hegemonic discourse, and a narrative of “*us*” versus “*them*” is being created between the gangs and the government, why the definition of this concept is included here.

4.2 Theories

In this part, the three different theories that have guided, shaped and supported the analysis, are all explained and discussed individually and in relation to each other.

4.2.1 The Normalisation of Violence

After having studied violence in El Salvador from 2000 to 2007, Mo Hume proposed theories about the meaning and omnipresence of violence in all layers of society in El Salvador. In her two articles “*(Young) Men With Big Guns*” (2007) and “*The Myths of Violence*” (2008), she describes and explains factors which have all contributed to what she terms as the normalisation of violence in El Salvador. Hume puts forth three historical links to the recent violence in today’s El Salvador: 1) The socio-economic and political domination by an oligarchic elite that has been maintained through an authoritarian state and extreme oppression with horrific

violence, 2) A hegemonic discourse articulated by the ruling power of patriotism and anti-communism used to provide a justification for violent repression and a re-writing of history that excludes the horrors committed by the state (the principle of forgive and forget) and 3) a state-orchestrated, forceful recruitment of individuals and entire communities to become soldiers (the kidnapping of young boys to integrate them into the army). The boys and men who participated in the war, all went through a system of discipline, provided by the military, to become cold-blooded. This system served to reinforce a hegemonic masculinity based on violence as a remedy to dominate and express power (Hume, 2008). According to Hume, these three aspects have played an essential role in the creation of a violent national identity where violence is perceived as the main resource to secure authority. In line with this notion, I have personally overheard a number of conversations between Salvadoran men, where they, with a sort of pride in their voice, express notions in line with “*we [Salvadorans] are violent*” and “*you do not mess with a Salvadoran*”.

(Koonings and Kruijt, 2004) argue that violence in El Salvador has become the ‘normal option’ of conflict resolution. Hume adds to this notion by pointing to a ‘culture of violence’ that has come to be through this acceptance of violence as a normal part of everyday life (Hume, 2008, pp. 61). Hume points out that “*high levels of crime and aggression have been linked to the exclusionary political economy of neoliberalism, the history of conflict and militarised violence, “fragile” democracies and weak or failed states, and issues of culture.*” (Hume, 2008, pp. 61). This signifies that acceptance of violence is a highly complex and multidimensional phenomenon that makes it impossible to single out one causal reason. According to Hume, the study of violence is about two main issues: “*the use of violence and the legitimization of that use.*” (Hume, 2008, pp. 60). She calls upon the necessity to uncover and address the hegemonic “*truths*” about violence which is best done by analysing the hegemonic discourse on violence and youth gangs, since, as Spivak points out, this can enable the understanding of the “*epistemic violence, in which systems of knowledge depend on silencing and alienating subaltern groups in order to normalize and naturalize exploitative system.*” (Spivak, 1988, pp. 275). Hume argues that the analysis of the discourse concerning violence reveals the tolerance of violent acts and also which violent acts are being legitimised and which acts are not. In line with this, a hierarchy of violence emerges in society, where certain violent acts are perceived as more/less legitimate than others. Hume points to the notion that the groups in power have created a hegemonic discourse that represents the Salvadoran youth gangs as the dangerous “*other*” and dehumanises them in order to make sense of a violent society filled with fear and distrust.

This hegemonic discourse legitimises the violence against these youth gangs, since it is for

a greater good. However, Hume argues that this creates a vicious circle of violence, where *“fear and chaos become legitimising agents for increased repression and a continuation of authoritarian measures and removes attention from other types of embedded violence”* (Hume, 2007, pp. 482-483), such as for example police and military violence against the youth.

As Hume bases her research on the notions of Feminism, her theory has a high focus on gender identities as an explicatory factor to the performance of particularly male violence in El Salvador. She argues that the high prevalence of gendered violence underpins dominant notions of maleness and it is this violent model of hegemonic masculinity that impedes the possibility of men solving conflict in a non-violent manner. She points to the notion of this hegemonic masculinity that *“individual men cannot be held responsible for conforming to socially prescribed roles”* (Hume, 2008, pp. 66). In this way, the acceptance of violence against women merely reinforces the patriarchal structures in the Salvadoran society and ensures their reproduction. The male dominance does not only show in a context of family, but underpins the entire society, and as Hume describes, the dominant discourse and the hegemonic perception of violence as being normal, influence the way people interact in a social context. Hume concludes that the normalisation of violence in El Salvador’s context has affected *“individual’s ability to recognise this harmful force, particularly its gendered expressions, which have become embedded in the construction of both men’s and women’s gendered identities.”* (Hume, 2008, pp. 63).

Thus, according to Hume, gender plays a central role in the reproduction of a violent hegemonic masculinity that involves machismo to a very high degree. However, she also points to the notion that the lack of official recognition of the violence executed during the civil war, has created a search for acknowledgement of past state brutalities carried out against subaltern groups in the Salvadoran society that despite ‘peace’ continues to suffer from marginalisation and are confronted with high levels of violence on a daily basis. These same groups are also the least likely to have access to formal channels of justice, why their only remedy becomes violence. Hume argues that the dominant discourse evolves around an epistemology of violence that has been constructed on the basis of exclusion/inclusion where there exists a clear distinction between what counts as violence and what does not. An important factor here is also the notion of who carries out the violence (Hume, 2007).

Hume outlines three key themes that make violence possible: First, *“[...] the degree of mistrust reveals deep divisions that may be rooted in history”*. Secondly, *“[...] the issue of feeling impotent against the enormity of violence”*. Hume argue that this second factor points to the structure of impunity that still runs through the Salvadoran state. Thirdly, *“[...] the issue of revenge and the perceived inevitability of violence”* (Hume, 2008, pp. 72). It is important to take these three themes into account when analysing the social practice level to understand

the discourse of Cerén and the media. As Hume puts it: “*The immediacy of violence and a respect for authoritarian practices that privilege order over civil liberties and human rights undermines the very possibility of a democratic project.*” (Hume, 2008, pp. 72).

4.2.2 Media Representation in El Salvador

In relation to the theory above which outlines and explains the factors contributing to the normalisation of violence permeating the Salvadoran culture and society, Oetler, Huhn and Wolf identify and theorise another aspect concerning the hegemonic discourse on gangs and violence. While Hume focuses primarily on historical and cultural aspects of the discourse concerning gangs, this theory has a focus on explaining the role of the media in relation to politics and the creation of an exaggerated hegemonic discourse evolving the gang issue (Huhn, 2008; Oetler, 2011; Wolf, 2012). The three different studies were all conducted before 2012, and can therefore serve not only as a theory concerning media representation in El Salvador, but also as background knowledge as to better understand the current discourse in the three biggest online news platforms in El Salvador, which, together with the 2016 speech of Sanchez Cerén, will be the subject of analysis in this thesis.

According to Wolf, the media has the power to influence citizens’ opinions and perception on political and social issues because of their communicative, authoritative, and supposedly objective role. McCullagh furthermore explains that the media has the power to select what news are important, how to frame them, identify causes and suggest solutions (McCullagh, 2002, pp. 26). Wolf points to the notion that there exists a relation between how people perceive social reality and the media content of their country (Wolf, 2012, pp. 39). According to her, “*communication research recognises that although media messages do not determine our understanding of the world, they shape it and make some interpretations more likely than others.*” (Wolf, 2012, pp. 39).

For example, Wolf argues that the media can either chose to portray crime as a consequence of socio-economic inequality, hence criticising the state’s ability, or as a consequence of individual pathological tendencies, where the state cannot possibly be held responsible. In the first case, Wolf points out that crime control strategies emphasising on prevention and rehabilitation are more likely to be supported and implemented, however in the second case, more punitive policies and strategies are likely to be perceived as the appropriate response (Wolf, 2012).

In this way, the media then has the power to impact policy-making. In relation to his studies on public opinions of the scope of the gang issue, Huhn adds to this notion, by saying “*the media discourse and the political discourse seem to play important roles*” (Huhn, 2008, pp.

24). He notes that anti-liberal positions dominate the discourses on violence, and punitive policies that are being supported by the spread of panic and fear by the media are dominating in Central America, and especially in El Salvador. Huhn explains that “*sensationalist treatment of violence and delinquent events can generate a climate of fear and strong feeling of vulnerability in the population, which is not always real, or corresponding to the observed level of violence*” (Huhn, 2008, pp. 9).

According to (Oetller, 2011), Latin American youth gangs, particularly in El Salvador, are said to having metamorphosed into a transnational network, which organises through a hierarchical system to control the trade of drugs. The media attributes the vast majority of crime to the gangs or la mara. Oetller claims that the fear and panic in relation to youth gangs spread by the media is essentially intertwined with national myths concerning violence. She explains a national myth as being “*a narrative synthesis of specific aspects of social life that is true for those who believe in it*”. Furthermore, she points to the notion that “*crime myths create fear and justify repressive social control strategies... myths often evolve from certain crime stories and then become both exaggerated and over-generalised.*” (Oetller, 2011, pp. 265). According to her, crime myths in the hegemonic discourse produce and reproduce patterns of social exclusion since they create a hierarchy around a cluster of power relations that places the perpetrators as the “*others*”. These “*others*”, la mara, are categorised as a homogenous group, which, according to Wolf, is a tendency typical for the media when talking about crime. Moreover, she argues that in the case of the media representation in El Salvador, “*a) gang members constitute an undifferentiated entity that is regularly linked to crime or violence, and b) everyone defined as a gang member is criminal and violent*” (Wolf, 2012, pp. 44).

As the media in El Salvador is rooted in oligarchic ownership structures, and as most information concerning gangs and violence is controlled by official sources such as the National Civilian Police (PNC), she notes the lack of critique of the political and socio-economic order (Wolf, 2012). The media serves as a reproduction source of the political opinion that fails to perceive the gang issue as a complex, multifaceted issue caused by socio-economic exclusion and inequality.

Wolf, Huhn and Oetller all come to the conclusion that the representation of gangs and the gang issue by the media plays a crucial role in combating and addressing the issue. The theory of the media being able to control and influence the citizens’ perception of the gangs and the scope of the violence proves to be of high importance in the analysis of the hegemonic discourse’s representation of gang members and how it affects society.

4.2.3 The Impact of Organised Crime on State Social Control

Lambrechts investigated the power relations that are being created between the state and organised crime groups, with a special focus on the impact of state social control. She defines state social control as “*the successful subordination of people’s own inclinations of social behaviour or behaviour sought by other social organisations in favour of behaviour prescribed by state rules*” (Lambrechts, 2012, pp. 778). In contrast, Mittelman and Johnston describe social control as criminal groups that are “*contesting the rationale of the state, especially in terms of its legitimate control over violence and the maintenance of justice*” (Mittelman and Johnston, 1999, pp. 104). Thus, organised criminal groups have the power to overtake social control to some extent and maybe only in some areas, depending on the power of the state.

Lambrechts points to the notion that in order for a state to persist, a number of elements need to be present and fulfilled. These elements include “*organisational capabilities of its leaders, population size, potential material and human resources available, and larger international configurations*” (Lambrechts, 2012, pp. 778). She furthermore argues that a state needs to have a high level of specific capabilities such as the capability to penetrate society, regulate social relations, extract resources, and the provision of political goods to its citizens. This last capability includes a variety of goods, however Lambrechts argues that the most important one for a state is the capability to provide human security. Strong states are the ones with high capability of maintaining and providing the above, while weak states are the ones with low capability that find it hard to provide for example human security for its citizens. She notes specific characteristics shared by weak states: “*A low level of state legitimacy, weak border controls, ineffective rules, limited to no economic and social provision for citizens and a lack of social control through ineffective criminal justice system.*” (Lambrechts, 2012, pp. 789). It can be noted here, the importance of impunity in undermining the criminal justice system, and in effect the social control of the state. However, the question is how the criminal organisations gain social control and ultimately power in the first place.

Lambrechts suggests that “*state collapse creates a void with regard to authority. This vacuum of authority can be filled by non-state or sub-state actors: Order and power fall down to local groups or are up for grabs*” (Lambrechts, 2012, pp. 789). This void can for example refer to the authority void in the aftermath of a civil war, where security and survival might not be provided by the state in poor or marginalised areas; thus citizens must take security and survival into own hands. In effect, gangs have the possibility to fill the vacuum of authority and take over territories within the state boundaries. She points to the notion that organised criminal groups often present their own set of survival skills where they operate with another ‘self-made’ justice system outside the justice system of the state. Hence, they make up their

own rules and power structures, and present those as an alternative survival strategy as a result of social control lost by the state. Lambrechts states: *“The structure of organised crime is a concentration of illegal power in society that can significantly influence political, economic and social life.”* She furthermore suggests: *“Organised crime usually involves power as part of a struggle for control and its activities are steered by meeting a demand or providing a specific service”* (Lambrechts, 2012, pp. 791-792). In this way, the state and criminal groups that have filled the vacuum of authority in some areas, are in a constant battle of power.

According to Koonings and Kruijt, these power relations are, in the case of Central America, expressed through structural, political and symbolic violence (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004, pp. 160-169). They argue that violence can be used to acquire or protect resources or to send a message to a broader audience. If the latter is the case, the violence can assume a symbolic form. They define symbolic violence as; *“A consensual coercion in which the dominated share the definition of the situation of the dominator and therefore perceive it as natural. Symbolic violence in this sense can refer to the power to influence the way people think, perceive and legitimise their situation of marginalisation and exclusion.”* (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004, pp. 161).

They emphasise that power is an essential element in symbolic violence, and it can be of an economic, social or political nature. In between the gangs, Koonings and Kruijt explain that violence is used to symbolise power, respect and to reinforce the dominance of the gangs in their territories and in relation to other gangs. They describe the gangs as being a perverse social organisation, which expresses a way in which social exclusion and violence are articulated. The opposite of perverse social organisations are the organisations that form social capital that is productive for the overall community. Perverse social organisations are only productive for its members. Normally the perverse social organisations yield more power in marginalised and poor areas than the productive ones such as organisations for community development or school boards. These productive organisations often find themselves severely limited when confronted with for example the gangs, as state institutions lack the power to enter into these areas and provide support (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004, pp. 164-165). For example, in the case of El Salvador, the police is often absent from these marginalised areas where the gangs basically act as the justice system. Koonings and Kruijt state that *“the presence of perverse social organisations causes fragmentation of the protective social structures and undermines productive social control”* (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004, pp. 165). To undermine the productive social control is to undermine the state control, as pointed out above by Lambrechts; hence organized crime impacts the power relations between the state and its citizens which in effect causes a battle for power, whether it being discursive or with violence.

4.3 Summary

In this part, the theoretical framework and the key concepts (hegemonic masculinity, machismo, representation and social representation, stereotypes and othering) which will be used in the analysis have been defined and explained. Furthermore, the three theories (the normalisation of violence, media representation in El Salvador, and the impact of organised crime on state social control) that will form the basis of the CDA have been explained. While the first theory can help to shed light upon the hegemonic discourse from a more historical and cultural perspective, the second theory examines the role of the media and an overall hegemonic discourse concerning gangs. The last theory explains the power relations that emerge when the state is confronted with organised crime and the measures taken from both sides to gain more power and social control. The theoretical framework will guide and support the CDA of this thesis with the purpose of answering the problem formulation in an adequate manner.

5 Critical Discourse Analysis

Applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis as a method, the following part will, based on the theoretical framework, provide an analysis of the 2016 speech by Sanchez Cerén, President of El Salvador, delivered just after Semana Santa (Easter), together with three news stories from the three biggest online news agencies in El Salvador: El Faro, El Blog and La Página. A transcript of the speech and the texts can be found in the Appendix. The analysis will go through the three dimensions of the CDA: The text, the discursive practice and finally the social practice. Lastly, a discussion summarising and interrelating the findings of each level will be provided in relation to how the discourse affects the gang-issue, bringing conclusion to the problem formulation.

5.1 The Text

As explained in the method of analysis (See 3.4.1.1), Fairclough describes the text level as where a linguistic analysis of the text is performed. This level sees the discourse in a micro-perspective where the small elements of the text are analysed to determine the type of text and the message. The linguistic analysis determines the characteristics of the discourse by looking at the choice of words and their meaning, relations, modality, metaphors, etc. In order to determine the genre and the meaning of the discourses, the textual analysis has been divided into three main themes identified from the findings: A Negative Stereotype, Depicting the Gangs as the 'Other', and Extreme Measures. All of the quotes used as examples, are translated into English by the author, however the original quotes in their source language, can be found in the footnotes and in Appendix.

5.1.1 A Negative Stereotype

When analysing the text that represents the hegemonic discourse on gangs in El Salvador, one of the primary observations is the creation of an overly negative stereotype of the gangs and gang-members. Starting with identifying the stereotype created in the speech of Cerén, a short overview of the speech is first necessary: Cerén starts his speech by making clear the purpose of it: To inform the public regarding governmental measures to be taken on the most pressing issue, which is, according to him, the security of the Salvadoran people: *"I am standing before you to share important decisions regarding the resolution of one of the problems that worry the Salvadoran family the most: the public security."* (Sanchez, 2016, 0:10)¹. He then continues to thank and congratulate the police force on their extraordinary contribution and effort to keep

¹«Me dirijo a ustedes para compartir importantes decisiones para enfrentar uno de los problemas que más preocupa a la familia salvadoreña: la seguridad ciudadana.»

the Salvadoran people safe during the Easter holidays held the week before his speech (0:36). During the 9 minute speech, he goes through the measures his government wants to implement to stop the criminals and make El Salvador secure again (the measures are explained below in 5.1.3). In relation to the topic of security, he acknowledges the presence of a threat. Cerén identifies that threat as being “*las bandas criminales*” (the criminal gangs) (1:16).

As Dervin argues, a stereotype is a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a group in society such as personality traits, attributions, intentions, behavioural descriptions, etc. (See 4.1.1). Cerén connects certain words to the characteristics of the gang members by using the following words; “*criminal gangs*” (1:16), “*those criminals*” (1:23), “*savageness*” (1:24), “*loss of all human sensibility*” (1:27), “*cruelty*” (1:42), “*irrational violence*” (1:52), “*murderers*” (2:39) and “*those cruel criminals*” (3:10)². They all carry negative connotations towards the gang members, who in his speech are referred to as one homogeneous group who’s members are all murderers, cruel, inhumane, violent, savage and irrational. Cerén underlines their cruelty by stating: “*They kill girls and boys, pregnant women, religious people, old people and even handicapped people.*” (1:37)³. He here mentions all the people that he considers to be the weakest. Hence, he argues that the gang members are ruthless when it comes to whom they murder. He refrains to mention that the police is actually doing the same when killing the gang members, as many gang members are children below the age of 18 and also catholic as the rest of the Salvadoran population (El Faro, 2014).

As Dyer points out, a stereotype tends to oversimplify minority groups (See 4.1.1), and this is exactly what the stereotype Cerén has created does; it oversimplifies a group that is a lot more complex and fluent. He neglects the fact that the gangs also form part of “*el pueblo Salvadoreño*” (the Salvadoran population) by not including the gang members when speaking.

Additionally, the oversimplified stereotype does not take into account the complex relations within the gangs; some of them are sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, etc. with a motivation behind their actions that in some cases and to some extent could be justified.

Historically, the stereotype that has been created to describe gang members fit well to the description Cerén gives in his speech; they are considered as one homogeneous group who are all criminal and highly violent without any reason other than their nature of inhumane and irrational cruelty (Wolf, 2012, pp. 44). They are men with tattoos, baggy clothes and vicious

² «*bandas criminales*» (1:16), «*estos criminales*» (1:23), «*salvajismo*» (1:24), «*perdida de toda sensibilidad humana*» (1:27), «*crueldad*» (1:42), «*violencia irracional*» (1:52), «*asesinos*» (2:39), and «*estos crueles criminales*» (3:10).

³ «*Asesinan niñas y niños, estudiantes, mujeres embarazadas, religiosos, ancianos y hasta personas con discapacidad*»

looks. This collective identity can be attributed to all the gang members. If the category ‘gang member’ is linked with crime and violence, it applies to everyone in that group (See 4.1.1).

The two online news agencies, El Blog and La Página, are generally relatively objective when it comes to reporting on news concerning gang members. Being online news, they have to be short and precise, and therefore they normally choose to focus on the facts. Regardless, once in a while, they do throw in words that reveal the newspaper’s opinion. In the news feature from El Blog, from the 3 of April 2017, the sub headline reads; “26 terrorists captured”⁴ (See Appendix, El Blog (2017)). The news feature is accompanied by a photo of 6 people, supposedly gang members, lying down on concrete facing away from the camera (See photo in the Appendix). The feature explains what happened to those 6 people; together with 20 other ‘terrorists’ or gang members, they were captured and are now facing detention and trial. As the newspaper is considered to be objective by the Salvadoran population, the word terrorists becomes much more powerful since it must be ‘objective’ and therefore the truth. As Wolf points out, the media has the power to select news stories, the words they use to describe it and thereby affect how the receiver perceives reality (See 4.2.2) The word “terrorists” is in line with how the current government sees the gang members, and by running this news feature, they show that the government is capturing the gang members, and by choosing this specific representation, the news feature feeds into the current political agenda; since March 2016 when Cerén held his speech and announced the extreme measures to be taken regarding gang members, his government now aims to prove to the population the successfulness of its plan.

La Página maintains its position as rather neutral; looking through their news stories from the past two years on gangs, they refer to them using only the words “*pandilleros*” or “*sujetos*” (gang members or suspects) (See Appendix). El Faro on the other hand, who are well known for being controversial, both have stories that portray the gang members as animals as well as reports that portray them as being the victims of a socio-economic inequality (See Appendix).

The former two, El Blog and La Página, merely reproduce the political opinion and fail to report on the gang issue as a multifaceted issue, as Wolf notes (See 4.2.2), they lack a critical view on the measures taken by the government. However El Faro does not fail in this aspect. Their most recent feature on gang members has the title “*What the government forgets is that by killing us, they are killing the very people who put them in power*”⁵ (See Appendix). In this feature, they are giving a voice to La Mara Salvatrucha (MS13). El Faro interviews the spokesman of MS13 which gives the gang a voice to reflect upon the extreme measures that Cerén’s government

⁴ «26 terroristas fueron capturados»

⁵ «Lo que se le olvida al gobierno es que a matarnos están matando a la gente que los llevó al poder»

put in place last year, and it furthermore presents the gangs with an opportunity to influence the hegemonic discourse and the dominant stereotype on gangs. The feature is from the 9 of January 2017.

El Faro seeks not to create a stereotype, but gives the people a voice; both the people affected by the gangs, and the gangs themselves. However, by looking at the feature from El Faro, it seems clear that the spokesman from MS13 believes he is talking on behalf of all members of MS13; “*Está hablando la Mara Salvatrucha-13*” (“*La Mara Salvatrucha-13 is talking*”) (See Appendix), thus creating the image that they see themselves as one collective group. Consequently, it is easier for the government and the media to create a stereotype, since as they refer to themselves as being a collective group, characteristics and opinions must apply to everyone. However, being a group does not necessarily imply homogeneity of its members.

Considering the abovementioned, it is not only the government, but also the online media, such as El Blog, that contribute to this negative and extreme stereotyping of gang members in El Salvador, El Faro being the exception, as they do not themselves create a stereotype, but let the people create the reality. When looking at stereotypes, it is highly important to pay attention to the one who reproduces the stereotype (See 4.1.4). In this case, it is important to note what Cerén says about not only himself, but also the Salvadoran population he is addressing, when creating highly negative connotations to the group of gang members. When he says they are irrational and cruel murderers, he implies that he himself and the rest of the Salvadoran population are in fact the opposite; namely rational, kind and not murderers.

The stereotype refers to the gang members as inhumane which is a remedy to show that the government and the “*normal, hardworking population*” (as he calls it) is humane and therefore superior. By maintaining that the gangs are inhumane and irrational, Cerén creates the image of them being inferior and should be treated accordingly. Furthermore, by saying this, he argues that they cannot be dealt with in a rational manner, why he calls upon “*medidas extremas*” (extreme measures) (3:21). Conforming to this, he also states; “*They do not understand other language than violence*” (3:28)⁶. They are not humans as the rest of the population; therefore extreme measures such as defeating them with violence are necessary. That exact sentence shows a key message in his speech; the violence executed by the State is rational and necessary: “*Nos asiste la justicia, la razón*” (We are assisted by justice, by reason) (3:03). Violence is being presented as the only measure possible, since he states that they do not respond to anything else than that.

As stereotypes are about power, and creates a sense of an us versus them (See 4.1.4), the

⁶«No entienden otro lenguaje que el de la violencia»

negative stereotype Cerén creates, and that the media reproduces (with the exception of El Faro), enforces the image that the government, and specially his government (as he refers it to be), is the hero that will save the Salvadoran population from “*estos crueles criminales*” (those cruel criminals).

5.1.2 Depicting the Gangs as the ‘Other’

In strong relation to the stereotype identified above, another discursive tool that is evident in Cerén’s representation of the gangs is othering. As pointed out in the identification of the creation of a negative stereotype, Cerén objectifies the gang members by claiming they are inhumane, which consequently creates ‘the other’, and ignoring the complexity and subjectivity of the individual (See 4.1.5). The stereotype of the gangs, makes them impossible to relate to, since most people will distance themselves from irrational murderers of children, elderly and handicapped people. When people cannot relate to a group, they distance themselves from “*them*”, which is what Cerén wants to achieve.

During his speech, he makes it clear that his words are directed to “*el pueblo salvadoreño*” (the Salvadoran population) (0:26), which does not include the gang members. According to Cerén, the gangs do not form part of the productive, hardworking population but is a threat to the citizens’ security, which is, with his words, “*one of the problems that worry the Salvadoran families the most.*” (0:23)⁷. He constantly refers to the gangs as “*estos criminales*” (these criminals) while he speaks about “*nosotros*” (we) referring to him and his government and the non-gang members in El Salvador. He furthermore implies that they are not included in what he refers to as “*our society*”: “*The criminal gangs have committed horrible murders which our society cannot tolerate*” (1:21)⁸.

In accordance with Dervin (See 4.1.5), the creation of the gangs as the ‘other’ is not only to represent the identity of the gangs in a certain way, but also to affirm the identity of the government and the “*us*” that is created in relation to the gangs. Hence, Cerén is implicitly representing himself, the government and the rest of the Salvadoran people as the norm and the rational group. In the following example, it is evident that he regards the gangs as not being part of ‘his’ society; “*This much cruelty against our people cannot continue... those criminals have a culture of indifference and intolerance.*” (2:43)⁹. Here he refers to them as having a whole other culture, a culture which is build upon irrational violence against ‘our people’, as Cerén states. Consequently, this ‘other’ imposes a threat against the ‘us’ which Cerén sees

⁷ «uno de los problemas que más preocupa la familia salvadoreña»

⁸ «Las bandas criminales han cometido horrendos asesinatos que nuestra sociedad no puede tolerar»

⁹ «Tanta crueldad contra nuestro pueblo no puede continuar... estos criminales tienen una cultura de indiferencia y intolerancia.»

himself as being part of. It is thereby evident that the narrative “*us*” versus “*them*” is created through contradistinctions between the representation of the gangs and the self-representation asserted in Cerén’s speech.

In addition to the creation of a threat, he blames the gangs for other urgent socio-economic issues in the country; “*The criminal gangs have put a cost on our society; on resources that could have been directed towards public health, education, the generation of employment, which are all priorities to my government*” (7:30)¹⁰. By stating this, he shifts the responsibility of these issues away from the government and redirects them towards the gangs, since he claims that combatting the gangs are requiring many resources, which could have been in better favour of the Salvadoran population. This statement shapes the recipients’ perception towards a reality where the gangs and not the government are to blame for social issues in El Salvador. Consequently, more hate and resentment will be directed towards the gang members, which reproduces and reinforces the sense of “*us*” versus “*them*”.

El Blog, La Página and El Faro do not have elements of othering, however it is important to note that when presenting photos together with the news features, all three platforms do tend to select photos that reinforce the stereotyping of the gang members as inhumane, cruel and with heavily tattooed bodies, which reproduce this sense of ‘othering’ and a narrative of an ‘us’ versus ‘them’. It is an active editorial choice to select photos that enforce the hegemonic stereotype of a gang member, however, according to the news feature from El Faro, this is also how the gang members want to be seen, or at least this is the image the spokesman from MS13 gives in his interviews with El Faro (See Appendix).

Since the sense of an “*us*” versus “*them*” is valid for Cerén, the government and non-gang members, this sense must also be valid for the gang members themselves. Only in the gang members’ perception, the government represents the “*them*” while the gangs represent the “*us*”.

The “*us*” versus “*them*” narrative between the gangs and the government is obvious in the final sentence of Cerén’s speech; “*Let us win this battle for the love for life, the tranquillity for the Salvadoran families and their happiness and prosperity.*” (9:00)¹¹.

¹⁰ «*Las bandas criminales han puesto a nuestro país un auto costo en recursos que podían ser destinados a la salud, la educación y a generar empleos que son prioridad de mi gobierno*»

¹¹ «*Ganaremos esta batalla de amor por la vida, la tranquilidad de la familia salvadoreña y su felicidad y prosperidad*»

5.1.3 Extreme Measures

As pointed out in the analysis of the text, Cerén presents his and his government's plan to combat the criminal gangs, which includes "*medidas extremas*" (extreme measures). He starts by explaining the purpose of these measures:

"The measures we are taking respond to one single goal: to guarantee the safety and tranquility for the entire population, indispensable factors to the progress of El Salvador." (0:41)¹². Hence, the measures are to secure the safety for everyone, but in this 'everyone' the gang members are implicitly not included, which again creates othering. He continues; *"In front of this irrational violence, we are forced to go to another level of response, to take urgent measures characterized as extraordinary."* (2:05)¹³. Thus he is justifying the extraordinary character of the measures, since he states that violence coming from the gangs is irrational, therefore the government are forced to take these extremes measures.

Before explaining the nature of the measures, he guarantees the government's respect for the human rights and that there will be no abuses (2:32). Here he also refers to the civil war; *"As government, we will guarantee the respect of the human rights and the freedoms which our people conquered throughout many years of battle. Those accomplishments are now threatened by the terror and violence generated by those murderers."* (2:40)¹⁴. In El Salvador, many people still remember the Civil War, however, Cerén fails as head of the government, to take responsibility for the continued violence in the aftermath of the war, and instead he attributes the violence and insecurity solely to the gangs, which consequently fosters, not only a deeper resentment towards the gang members in society, but also further hate directed towards the government from the gang members and the people in poor and marginalised areas who are affected by everyday violence from both gangs and police/military forces.

Halfway through the speech, Cerén starts to address what the extreme measures involve. The government, together with the Ministry of Justice, wants to implement extreme surveillance, control, registering of people and cut of telecommunication in the 7 penitentiaries with the highest number of gang population; *"It is because of the gravity of the situation that I this week ordered the immediate commencement of the declaration of emergency state by the Ministry of Justice and Security in the seven penitentiaries, where most gang members are to be found. This*

¹²«Las medidas que estamos tomando responden a un solo objetivo: garantizar a toda la población la seguridad y tranquilidad, factores indispensables para el progreso de El Salvador.»

¹³«Ante esta violencia irracional estamos obligados a pasar a otros niveles de respuestas, a tomar medidas urgentes de carácter extraordinario.»

¹⁴«Como gobierno vamos a garantizar el respeto a los derechos humanos y las libertades que nuestro pueblo conquistó en largos años de lucha. Esos logros ahora se ven amenazados por el temor y la violencia que generan estos asesinos»

measure is the first in a major process of strict control, permanent surveillance, registration and transfers of delinquents." (5:00)¹⁵. The government wants to cut through the gang structures and take back the territorial control of these 7 penitentiaries. The policy towards the gangs will be a non-tolerance policy: *"It is not possible to have a tolerant attitude towards those cruel criminals."* (3:15)¹⁶. He states, he has ordered the Ministry of Justice and Security to declare a state of emergency in the areas where most gang members are present, where the government will initiate the extreme measures in a process that has the aim to retake the territories controlled by the gangs. The plan involves the presence of the armed forces in the entire country, but mainly in the *"infected"* areas (5:58).

Until the government succeeds in controlling all territory, the measures taken in these areas will furthermore include the restriction of free movement for the people residing in these areas, since no one will be able to leave and communicate with internet/cell phone without the consent of the armed forces. Otherwise, the police has the power to detain people who goes against this. In extension to this, he pronounces; *"We hope to count on the support from the telecommunication business and the comprehension from the communities close to the areas, who might be affected"* (5:34)¹⁷. In this way, he is acknowledging that people residing in areas with gang members will find themselves affected by the extreme measures the government is taking to combat the gangs, however, he also reminds them that these measures are for *"el bien común"* (the greater good) (5:38) and therefore they will have to compromise their needs to combat the gangs.

Cerén stresses the importance of the people's trust in the institutions and the government; *"I invite the entire population to continue to give support to and have trust in the institutions of this country"* (7:03)¹⁸. His government will take back control of territories and hit the criminal gangs directly to secure the safety of the Salvadoran citizens. His government will not give truce to the gangs: *"We will not give truce to the criminals. We will not go back."* (7:50)¹⁹. He states that they will not take a step back, but move forward with extreme measures to finally put an end to the violence and secure a *"El Salvador seguro"* (safe El Salvador) (8:01).

The news feature from La Página is presenting the response from the gang members to the

¹⁵«Es a partir del agravamiento de esta situación, que ordené esta semana al Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad, la inmediata vigencia de la Declaración de estado de Emergencia en los siete centros penales, donde se encuentra el mayor número de miembros de pandilla. Esta medida en ejecución, es la primera de un proceso mayor de estricto control, vigilancia permanente, registros constantes y traslados penitenciarios.»

¹⁶«Con estos crueles criminales, no es posible tener una actitud de tolerancia»

¹⁷«Esperamos contar con el apoyo de las empresas telefónicas y la comprensión de las comunidades cercanas que pueden ser afectadas»

¹⁸«Invito a toda la población a continuar brindando su apoyo y confianza en la institucionalidad del país.»

¹⁹«No daremos tregua a los criminales. No vamos a retroceder.»

measures announced by Cerén. They present a video with a masked man, who announces the cessation of homicides committed by the gang members, if the government will end their ‘extreme measures’. La Página explains this video as being a threat to the government, and they highlight how the gang member accuses the Minister of Security and the Minister of the Armed Forces for massacres and other forms of violence outside the law; “*In the declarations made by the gang members today, they threatened the government*”²⁰ (See Appendix). Browsing over the headlines of both La Página, El Blog and El Faro, it is evident that news about gang members killing people are dominant in comparison to police killing gang members. The murders seem endless and without logic when portrayed in for example El Blog and La Página, who normally accompany their features with photos of killed people or captured gang members (8.1). In this sense, the fact that the media consistently reports on violence from gang members this way, helps to legitimise the extreme measures presented by Cerén and his government.

5.1.4 Sub-conclusion

The textual analysis reveals how the gangs are represented in the analysed text. It shows that the gangs are perceived through an extremely negative stereotype, which describes the gangs as violent, criminal, murderers, irrational, inhumane, cruel and as the single biggest threat to the public security and the prosperity of El Salvador. The stereotype prescribes the perception of the gangs as one collective and homogenous group; therefore the abovementioned characteristics are attributed to all who the government identifies as ‘gang members’. The stereotype does not address the complexities of the group ‘gang members’; it does not take into concern that some might have joined the gangs involuntarily or out of necessity due to e.g. poverty or threats to life or family members. By creating this collective identity of the gang members, the stereotype also implicitly indicates the identity of the people outside this group. What Cerén implies is that “*those criminals*” conform to this stereotype, while “*we*” are the opposite, namely human, good and rational people.

The stereotype created in the discourse leads to the perception of the gangs as being the ‘evil other’, which needs to be eliminated in order for society to function in harmony and prosperity. This creates the narrative of an “*us*” versus “*them*”. The online media reproduces this image, not only by using words, as for example El Blog using “*terrorists*” to describe the gang members, but also by constantly reporting on violent homicides committed by the gangs. As the gangs are represented as irrational in the stereotype, the foundation of relating to them is taken away, because without a reason behind their violent acts, they cannot be excused or ‘enter’ into society again. The causes of the gang issue is thereby neglected, since this representation creates the image that the gangs exist for no reason other than terrorising the people of El Sal-

²⁰ «*En las declaraciones de los pandilleros circuladas hoy, amenazaron al gobierno*»

vador. By stating this, the violence and the ‘extreme measures’ against the gang members from the state’s side are legitimised and any form of re-integration of the gang members is rejected by the representation.

5.2 The Discursive Practice

The second part of the CDA uses the findings in the textual level to determine not only the discursive order, but also the interdiscursivity of the discourse. Hence, this part will present an analysis of the processes of production, consumption and distribution of the discourse based on the intertextuality that points to the context in which the discourse exists. In this way, the discursive practice, as explained in the method of analysis, is the intermediary between the text and the social practice (See 3.4.1.3).

5.2.1 The Discursive Order

In accordance with Fairclough’s definition (See 3.4.1.3), the discursive order is the social domain in which the discourse is produced or reproduced and it entails the discourse’s genre. Within this social domain there exist rules and norms of how to produce a discourse which is considered as successful. In this case, two different discourses have been analysed; the speech of Cerén and three news features.

5.2.1.1 Political Speech

The first discourse belongs to the social domain ‘political discourse’, more specifically ‘a speech’. In order for the speech to be considered successful and to be accepted within this social domain, it has to fulfil the expectations, objectives and norms that are connected hereto. First of all, Cerén, being the president, is expected to address the issues of the country and how the government plans to solve them. He is expected to speak in a formal manner, and in such a way that the entire population will be able to understand his words. Secondly, he has to fulfil the objectives of a political speech, which, according to Uvehammer, is to “*Influence the behavior, attitudes, or political opinions of the general public or target audience... The main goal of political speech is to convince the listeners of the speech maker’s opinion by choosing the most powerful linguistic devices.*” (Uvehammer, 2005, pp. 24). Sharndama further adds that “*Political speech as a sub-genre of political discourse is motivated by the desire to persuade and convince the nation or society and familiarize the audience with their socio-economic policies, plans and actions.*” (Sharndama, 2016, pp. 16).

In other words, the discourse Cerén and his political party produces, has to reflect the majority of the citizen’s opinion on gangs, while at the same time influence their perception of the gang

members in such a way that his extreme measures are justifiable and desirable as a solution. Sharndama furthermore explains that political speakers:

“[...] need to appeal to the attitudes and emotions that are already within the listener. When the listeners perceive that their beliefs are understood and supported, the speaker created connections to the policy that they wish to communicate. When putting forward arguments a speaker has to communicate at an emotional level and take stand points that seem morally correct. Furthermore, the listener must perceive that the arguments are relevant for the issue.” (Sharndama, 2016, pp. 16).

According to Sharndama, these are the norms that need to be present in order for a political speech to be considered successful. As the findings of the analysis of the text show, Cerén appeals to the population’s emotions regarding violence; they are discontented and have had enough. In this way, he provides a justification of the extreme measures as a solution, in fact, the only solution to the issue of violence generated by the gangs. In addition, he communicates on an emotional level, as demonstrated by the example from the text: *“They kill girls and boys, pregnant women, religious people, old people and even handicapped people.”* Thereby taking the standpoint that the gangs are without any moral why extreme measures are prudent. The representation of the gangs not having any moral, becomes his main argument to convince the population of his policy plan.

In conclusion, he conforms to the norms in order to achieve the goal of his speech: To inform and convince the nation of his socio-political plans regarding the extreme measures he finds necessary to take in the combat of the violence generated by criminal gangs. Based on the textual analysis, the speech is in relation to the above considered as successful.

5.2.1.2 News Feature

The discourse represented by La Página, El Blog and El Faro, all belong to the social domain of ‘news media’, more specifically, ‘online, written news feature’. As explained in the Theoretical Framework of this thesis, the media has the power to influence the population’s perception on political and social issues, such as the gang issue, because of their communicative, authoritative, and supposedly objective role in providing the news (See 4.2.2). The norms connected with this discursive order, are concerned with providing information and facts in an objective manner to the population. Furthermore, by being online news, the news features have to be short, precise and straight to the point, since this platform’s objective is to provide the readers with a quick overview of the main news in their country. However, online, written news features also have the objective of being read in order for the news organisation to sustain its audience, relevance and news paper. El Blog and La Página provide their readers with a catching head-

line and a photo related to the news feature. El Blog's headline of its feature is, as noted in the textual analysis; *"This happened to the gang members in the photograph"*²¹. According to Welbers et.al., the social domain of online news are driven by the 'clicks' of the readers. In this way, El Blog, La Página and El Faro need to take into consideration, not only which news are relevant to them as news providers and to the population, but also how to frame the news stories in order to gain the most readers and 'clicks' (Welbers et.al. , 2015, pp. 16).

El Faro is not controlled by the same political agenda as La Página and El Blog: Wolf explains that those two medias are rooted in oligarchic ownership structures, and most information concerning gangs in these news, are controlled by official sources such as the PNC (the National Civil Police). Thereby their agenda is influenced and to some extent controlled by the political and socio-economic order (See 4.2.2). On the opposite, El Faro is controlled by the two journalists, Carlos Dada and Jorge Simán, and mainly financed by independent projects, documentaries and NGO's (El Faro.net: Acerca de El Faro). This makes El Faro less likely than El Blog and La Página to be controlled by political agendas.

According to the findings in the textual analysis, La Página conforms to the norms within its social domain, however El Blog does not show objectivity in providing the news, since, as noted in the textual analysis, they mark the gang members as terrorists. While El Blog and La Página are identified as conventional online news forums, El Faro is slightly controversial since it does not provide the readers with concise news, but presents news with an angle given by the people. However, the opinions are ultimately chosen by El Faro, since they control which opinions are included into the news features, thereby creating an angle to the story.

5.2.2 Interdiscursivity

As explained by Fairclough, interdiscursivity refers to the identification of other hegemonic discourses within the social order in which the discourse has been constructed and belongs to. A discourse always includes elements from other hegemonic discourses since the construction of the discourse always will be subject to the influence from other ideas and ideologies dominating society (See 3.4.1.2). This means that the speech of Cerén and the news features, are influenced by other hegemonic discourses, while at the same time influencing the overall hegemonic discourse within the discursive order concerning gang issues in El Salvador. Three hegemonic discourses that are evident in the analysed discourses, have been identified based on the textual analysis, and will be explained here in order to understand the interdiscursive context of Cerén's speech and the news features.

²¹ «Esto le sucedió a estos pandilleros de la fotografía»

5.2.2.1 La Mara Phenomenon

Looking at the findings in the textual analysis of Cerén's speech and the news features, it is evident that they reproduce and include elements from the regional hegemonic discourse regarding the gang issue in Central America and subsequently El Salvador.

As mentioned earlier, the gangs are, in the context of El Salvador, commonly referred to as 'La Mara', which in Salvadoran slang originally means 'the gang'. However, while the current meaning of 'La Mara' have negative associations and is strongly linked to MS13 and Calle 18, the original meaning of the word is referring to 'gang of friends' or just 'group of people', without any negative connotations. According to Oettler, 'La Mara Phenomenon' is a narrative that has been created in the hegemonic discourse by the media (See 4.2.2). It emerged by the end of the 1980s, first in Guatemala, and then spread to other regions. However, it was not until the 2000s that governments started to pay serious attention to the phenomenon. The discourse prescribes the sensationalist treatment of violence committed by youth gangs, and the media represents the issue as the most important and urgent one in El Salvador. In addition, the discourse represents the problem as uncontrollable and out of proportions, as the discourse showcases everyday violent acts committed by gang members and describes how youth gangs have infested Northern Central America, especially Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, with the "*spread of evil*" (See 4.2.2).

In the words of Wolf "*the maras were typified [in the hegemonic discourse] as a transnational threat and associated with organised crime if not international terrorism.*" (Wolf, 2012, pp. 45). This shows clearly from the findings in the textual analysis above: El Blog refers to the gang members as terrorists, and consequently reproduces the hegemonic discourse that dominates the Salvadoran media. Furthermore, looking at El Blog and La Página, it shows clearly that the dominant news stories on crime all are related and attributed to the gang members. In the news feature from La Página, the video accompanying the text is, as pointed out, of a masked man from MS13, which again represents the gang members with a stereotypical image that generates fear.

According to Huhn, the hegemonic discourse in El Salvador has a tendency to overstate the gang issue, which is the most discussed in the Salvadoran media, as to be a security threat against the sovereignty of the State (Huhn, 2008). Reviewing Cerén's speech, he clearly claims that the gang issue is by far the biggest security issue of the country, impeding the prosperity of El Salvador. He furthermore stresses the importance of reclaiming gang territory in order to re-establish state control and consequently security of the people.

The narrative that has been imposed onto la mara through the hegemonic discourse, spread

fear and insecurity both at a national level, but also at a regional level. Huhn furthermore explains that at an international level, the hegemonic discourse represents Central America as “*a violent, dangerous and chaotic place*” (Huhn, 2008, pp. 7) where la mara is one of the most discussed topics and la mara is explained as the cause to that image. Oettler concludes; “*While discourses on youth violence differ from country to country, with varying threat levels, patterns of attention, and discursive leitmotifs, they share the same monstrous image of brutal gangs (Mara Salvatrucha, Dieciocho) as the most vivid object of fear.*” (Oettler, 2011, pp. 262). Cerén uses this element from the hegemonic discourse, to create a general consent of his plan of defeating the gangs. He uses the image to legitimise the extreme measures, since the hegemonic discourse dominating in El Salvador on the gang issue, already has imprinted the image that extreme measures are necessary.

Both the analysed news features and Cerén’s speech, strongly reproduce the hegemonic discourse concerning gangs. Cerén’s speech furthermore shapes the hegemonic discourse by using the already existing elements to legitimise the extreme measures. This draws the hegemonic discourse towards a zero-tolerance policy on gang members in society. The news feature from El Faro, however, goes against the hegemonic discourse, to some extent. They do this by presenting an opportunity to the gang members to change the hegemonic discourse or at least give an alternative, in the sense that they are given an opportunity to speak for themselves.

5.2.2.2 A Repressive Political Discourse

Cerén’s speech also represents and reproduces elements from the hegemonic political discourse which forms the basis of the approach to handling the widespread gang issue in a repressive manner. This approach is, as mentioned earlier, the approach of la Mano Dura (Iron Fist). The Mano Dura programs were implemented mostly in the Northern countries of Central America, and they communicated war against the gangs. This message is the same in Cerén’s speech, where he also expresses a zero-tolerance against the gangs. However, not all countries in Central America have adopted a repressive approach.

Arnson points to two main approaches to la mara phenomenon: The first is the adoption of reintegration and rehabilitation programs, the second one is the adoption of zero-tolerance and Mano Dura policies. Arnson argues: “*One response is framed by the legality and formality of institutions devoted to justice and security. The second – less evident but probably much more decisive in the war against the maras – is illegal and covert; it is not entirely controlled by the formal instruments of state power, although it is facilitated by them.*” (Arnson, 2012, pp. 332). Nicaragua has adopted the first approach, while Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador the last approach. However, the repressive approach has been most evident in the political discourse of El Salvador (Arnson, 2012). Arnson explains; “*Mano Dura policies consist of police programs*

that have identified the maras and young people associated with them as Public Enemy No. 1, deserving of repression, control, and incarceration." (Arnson, 2012, pp. 333). With the other approach, gang members and youth related to these gangs, are seen as victims of socio-economic inequalities and therefore in the need of preventive programs.

It is evident that Cerén subscribes to the Mano Dura approach with a zero tolerance policy towards gang-members. As it shows in the textual analysis, he has identified the gang-members as the main threat to public security. And as concluded, by representing the gangs in a highly negative way, without having any rational reason for their actions, he legitimises the use of the repressive policies of Mano Dura. According to Ascher and Mirovitskaya, the Salvadoran think tank FUSADES which studies the root causes of violent crime, concludes that the repressive and extreme measures are ineffective. Some times they even have the opposite effect. Ascher and Mirovitskaya suggest: *"The country needs to implement preventive measures and generators of social capital in order to deal with the root causes of violence"* (Ascher and Mirovitskaya, 2012, pp. 89). But as the dominant discourse, which Cerén reproduces in his speech, evolves around gang members as irrational, inhumane terrorists, preventive programs become almost impossible, since as Cerén expresses; *"They do not understand any other language than violence"* (See 5.1.1). Arnson observes that when punitive policies are implemented, the success factor is measured by how many gang members have been captured and incarcerated (Arnson, 2012, pp. 333). This explains why El Blog, for example, have a news story which only content is how 26 gang members (or terrorists as El Blog calls them) have been captured.

As mentioned earlier, the hegemonic discourse of the media in El Salvador portrays the gang members as a consequence of individual pathological tendencies instead of victims of socio-economic inequality, which, according to Wolf, leads to support of punitive policies and strategies (See 4.2.2). In this way, Cerén represents the gang members in a way that legitimises the implementation of extreme measures, which most likely will be supported by the majority of the population. Hence, he is more likely to win votes in elections. Arnson furthermore explains that the Mano Dura policies were created to *"help governments gain legitimacy among populations disenchanted with their performance"* (Arnson, 2012, pp. 334). As Cerén's discourse is a political speech targeting the population, one of his main objectives is to explain the government's plan to gain political support.

5.2.2.3 Hegemonic Masculinity and Machismo

Another identifiable characteristic is the use of ideological elements of a violent hegemonic masculinity that involves machismo. As explained in the theoretical framework of this thesis, hegemony refers to a set of ideas by which the dominant group aims to secure the consent of subordinate groups in society (See 4.1.1). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form

of masculinity in society that entails the society's construction of what it means to be "*a real man*". When looking at the hegemonic masculinity in El Salvador, it is evident that machismo is dominating (See 4.1.2), also in the hegemonic discourse. Typical behaviour and associations associated with machismo are aggression, subordination of women, potency and responsibility of the family. This promotion of a violent form of masculine behaviour is constructed socially, historically and culturally. As explained in the introduction (See 1), El Salvador has a long history of violence, armed conflict and civil war, which together with strong patriarchal structures embedded in society, have promoted machismo and a violent hegemonic masculinity. Thus, as 'real men' are perceived only through conflict, war or situations of violence in El Salvador, violence then becomes a vital mean of resolution (See 4.1.1).

As the government in El Salvador still mainly consists of men (Bell, 2013), the hegemonic masculinity prescribes violent measures as conflict solving responses to the gang issue. Cerén reproduces the hegemonic masculinity by suggesting violent, repressive measures as a mean of conflict solving, which generates a violent response to violence.

In this way, a self-reinforcing cycle of violence is created and reproduced. The image that Cerén and the media create of the gang members, supports a narrative that associates the gang members with the image of them having a hyper-masculine behaviour: They are portrayed as violent, tough, risk-taking and aggressive. According to Donaldson, characteristics all of which are associated with the idea of hegemonic masculinity in El Salvador. In this way, the hegemonic discourse reproduces the image of violent hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, the media only shows photos of male gang members, even though female gang members also are prevalent in committing crime (United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, 2017), which reproduces the perception that it is men who are violent and aggressive, not women. Thus, machismo is evident in the discourse, since it represents not only men as the violent perpetrators, but also men as the problem solving group, since the president (a man) together with the government and the PNC (mostly men) want to provide security for the population, hence solve the gang issue.

5.2.3 Sub-conclusion

At this level, the discursive order has been identified and explained on the basis of the textual level. Cerén's discourse belongs to the social domain 'political speech' and conforms to the norms which prescribes the discursive order of this particular domain. The news features were identified as belonging to the social domain 'online, written news feature', and an explanation of this domain was provided. The investigation of the interdiscursivity of the analysed discourses based on the textual analysis, shows that the discourses represent and reproduce other

hegemonic discourses within the discursive order. The discourses use elements from la mara phenomenon as well as the Mano Dura and zero-tolerance policies. Additionally they represent ideas from a hegemonic masculinity that is based on the concept machismo. The discursive practice explains the discourses in the national, regional and international context, and subsequently it enables a more profound understanding to why the discourses are produced in that particular way and how they fit into the hegemonic discourse on the gang issue in El Salvador.

5.3 The Social Practice

The final level of the CDA, the social practice, seeks to analyse the discourses in a socio-cultural context. At this level, the discourses can be understood from a macro-perspective. In order to understand and explain how the discourses are affected by and affect the social context, it is necessary to base this part on the theories outlined in the theoretical framework for this thesis. The theories will help in explaining the processes in which the discourses take part in either maintaining or curtail power relations related to the gang issue. This part is divided into three different social aspects that explain the conditions of production of the discourses in a context, their interpretation and ultimately their possible effect on the gang issue in El Salvador: 1) Socio-Economic and Socio-Political Context, 2) A Culture of Violence, and 3) La Mara and the State.

5.3.1 Socio-Economic and Socio-Political Context

According to various researchers and studies (Ascher and Mirovitskaya, 2012; Koonings and Kruijt, 2004; Arnson, 2012; Hume, 2007; Van der Borgh and Savenije, 2014, pp. 333) the Civil War and the government's ability to address crime and violence in the aftermath, have proved crucial in the evolution of the gang issue and consequently the hegemonic discourse regarding this discursive order. As explained in the introduction of this thesis, the civil war was sparked due to a profound socio-economic inequality and violent repression by the authoritarian state which was controlled by the military. According to Arnson, the Chupaltepec Peace Accords, signed in 1992, did not address these socio-economic inequalities, hence, people in poor and marginalised areas still found themselves poor and marginalised after the war. The Peace Accords focused on the establishment of governmental institutions and de-militarisation in order for the newly established democracy to sustain. However, Arnson argues that to claim that El Salvador is a fully functional democracy, is premature. The government still struggles to control institutions and how they operate. In relation to the gang issue, the PNC have been criticised of having issues with internal control, technical capacity to investigate crime, and quantity and quality of resources, including training (Arnson, 2012, pp. 97). As a consequence, insecurity and crime rates have elevated to an extremely high level due to the prevalence of violent gangs.

To combat the gang-issue, the Salvadoran government has, since 1994-2009, had an approach towards the gang members in line with the Civil War approach to suppress rebellions (Arnson, 2012). According to Hume, the atrocities of the Civil War created a normalisation of violence which enabled violence as a resolution to conflict – also by the government (See 4.2.1). Even though the Mano Dura policies from 1994-2009 had the support from the population, it was strongly criticised by the juridical system, and judges refused to imprison gang members, if they were not presented with evidence of their criminal acts. This led to the almost immediate release of 95% of the arrests of gang members (Van der Borgh and Savenije, 2014).

As pointed to by the discursive practice (See 5.2.2.2), the punitive policies towards the gang-issue proved unsuccessful. In fact, they had worsened the issue, which was why the candidate, Mauricio Funes, running for presidency in 2009, aimed at gaining political support by presenting a new approach towards resolution of the gang-issue, namely a more inclusive and preventive approach (in line with the Nicaraguan model). Funes won the presidency in 2009, which broke the 20 years of consecutive rule by the ARENA party, and paved way for the opposing party, the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front). According to Van der Borgh and Savenije, the Funes administration faced various challenges in their good intentions of making a change: Increasing levels of violence during a too long implementation period of the new approach put a high pressure on the government's plans. This subsequently evolved into the news media-created hegemonic discourse that the Funes administration had a too soft approach to dealing with the gang-issue and that their plans showed no results (Van der Borgh and Savenije, 2014).

The necessity for employing more extreme measures came by the end of 2009: Funes authorised the deployment of military forces onto the streets to help the PNC in their combat against gang members. He furthermore employed the military to control the prisons. A war on gangs was declared and means of putting high pressure on the gangs were initiated. In 2012, the government, although they distanced themselves from the process, established a truce between the two gangs in order to reduce the high homicide rates. According to Van der Borgh and Savenije, *“It is clear that the gangs not only made promises towards each other, but also made promises and demands vis-à-vis the government.”* (Van der Borgh and Savenije, 2014, pp. 171). The truce broke down in 2014 with the election of a new government, Sanchez Cerén's government, and homicide rates rose to 15 per day (The Economist, 2015).

The political history above explains the political circumstances under which Cerén's discourse was created. He took office at a time where the government was highly criticised for giving in to the demands of the gangs, while still not eliminating the causes of the gang-issue. His key-issues during his campaign was combatting socio-economic inequality in the country by

focusing on education and the provision of security (Government of El Salvador, 2017). As identified in the textual analysis, security is a key word in his discourse. According to Pearce, the focus on security and extreme measures can be explained in relation to the unsuccessful establishment of peace after the Civil War. As mentioned earlier, violence was still present after the war, so 'peace' was never experienced by the entire population, but only by certain social groups in El Salvador. Pearce argues that the violence "*is a part of a broader crisis of governance*" (Pearce, 2010, pp. 289), which undermines the state's ability to exercise a monopoly on violence, which subsequently undermines its authority as a state. She furthermore argues that the Salvadoran state "*increasingly build their legitimacy on the basis of a lack of such a monopoly, by securitising certain groups and topics*" such as the gangs. She goes on by explaining: "*democracy is increasingly subject to the fears and insecurities of the population, enabling the state to build its authority not on the protection of citizen's rights but on its armed encounters and insidious collusions with violent actions in the name of security provision.*" (Pearce, 2010, pp. 289). The hegemonic discourse has privileged order over civil liberties and human rights, enabled by the representation of the gang members as 'inhumane and irrational who only understand the language of violence' (See 5.1.2). However, taking the strong criticism of violations against the human rights into account, it is clear in the textual analysis that Cerén wants to distance himself from those violations, by repeatedly making it clear that no human rights will be violated.

In the light of this, it is understandable why Cerén creates a discourse that enables an opportunity for him to show the power of the state by ensuring his commitment to making El Salvador safe from the gang members once again. As noted in the discursive practice, he refers to the gangs as the ones who are destroying the hard-earned peace, however, taking the post-war socio-economic situation into account, peace was not obtained in the marginalised and poor areas of the country where the gangs emerged and are now residing. His discourse is created in relation to previous policies to combat the gang issue, and as in the policies implemented between 1994 to 2009, he identifies the gang situation as critical to the security of the country, why extreme measures are legit and necessary. His discourse serves not only as a response to the problem, but also to the critique of the Funes administration of being soft on crime in order to show that Cerén's administration and government are 'doing something about the issue' in a manner that is popular among the majority of the population. Conclusively, his discourse and the hegemonic discourse on gangs both reflect and are produced on the basis of previous policies and socio-economic processes that have led to a legitimisation of extreme measures and exclusion of gang members, which, again, is reproduced and further justified by the media.

5.3.2 A Culture of Violence

The hegemonic discourse which is shaped by Cerén's speech and reproduced by the media, has a violent character when addressing the resolution of the gang issue. At the discursive practice, elements from a hegemonic masculinity that derives from machismo were identified (See 5.2.2.3). In accordance with Hume, together with historical events, the hegemonic masculinity in El Salvador is the main reason behind what she refers to as the normalisation of violence (See 4.2.1). The historical links, which have been explained above, have all contributed to the creation of a violent national identity, where violence is perceived as not only the 'normal' resolution to conflict, but also as a remedy to secure authority and symbolise dominance or power (See 4.2.1).

This normalisation of violence is highly reflected in the gang issue, as the gang members use violence to show dominance both in the hierarchical structure within the gangs, but also in the confrontation with rival gangs, citizens and the PNC or armed forces (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004). The lack of addressing the socio-economic inequality in the Peace Accords together with a combination of the PNC's lack of capability of sustaining the violence and continued "*social exclusion through inadequate economic policies*" (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004, pp. 159) have enabled the gang violence. Bourgois furthermore argues that the political violence exercised during the Civil War has been embedded into society in daily interactions (Bourgois, 2001), which shows in the political approaches outlined above in 5.3.1. In relation to Cerén's speech, there are two types of violence; the one that is necessary and legit and one that is irrational and nonlegal. The last one concerns all violence committed by gang members.

He does not address other forms of violence, such as violence against women, which, according to Hume, is a typical notion in societies with embedded structures of machismo. The only violence, according to Cerén's speech, that is a threat to social security, is the violence committed by gang members. According to Hume, the study of violence entails two main issues; the use of violence and the legitimisation of that use. As the findings from both the text and the discursive practice show, the violence committed by the PNC, which is authorised by the government, is legitimised by the narrative that it is 'for the greater good' and 'necessary' in combatting the gang members. Considering the social domain of Cerén's speech, his objective is to gain popularity among the Salvadoran people. In this way, the violence and negative representation of the gang members, becomes symbolic in the sense that the extreme measures are used not only to combat the gangs, but also to send a broader message to the population that says that Cerén and his government are in charge and are 'getting things done' (See 4.2.1). Cerén relates to the existing emotions of hatred towards the gangs which have been created through the hegemonic discourse (Oetller, 2011). The majority of the population share the perception of Cerén, and

the extreme measures and violence is therefore perceived as a natural and fair response. This is a way of legitimising the marginalisation and exclusion of a social group. As Hume's theory argues there are three key themes that make violence possible: 1) the degree of mistrust, 2) the feeling of impotency against the enormity of violence, and 3) the issue of revenge and the perceived inevitability of violence (See 4.2.1). Both the PNC and the Justice System of El Salvador, have been criticised heavily of impunity and corruption (Rosales, 2016), which explains why many might turn to violence, since lack of trust in the Justice System leads to the belief that for justice to be served, one have to take it into one's own hands. As explained with Hume's theory, a self-reinforcing cycle of violence has been created in El Salvador, and considering the key themes that make violence possible, it is evident in the political context that policies and discourses, including Cerén's discourse, have been highly affected by the enormity of violence and the urgent need to address it. As explained, when Cerén took office, the homicide rate rose to 15 per day, so in order for him to maintain his popularity and prove his worth as a president, immediate and urgent measures were the easiest way to handle the gang issue, and in addition, such measures generates immediate results, regardless of their sustainability.

As Spivak points out, this is a mean of normalising and naturalising an exploitative system: Cerén does not take responsibility for the issues in the country, but blames the socio-economic and public security crisis on the gangs. The constant exclusion of the gangs and the marginalised areas where gang presence is strong in the hegemonic discourse, generates violence.

As Hume points out, one factor that generates violence, is the normality of violence in these areas, however Koonings and Kruijt point to other factors such as frustration of living in poverty and exclusion of basic social needs such as education or health care (See 4.2.1). It is evident that Cerén's proposals of punitive measures are affected by a hegemonic discourse; on a hegemonic masculinity that generates violence as resolution, which consequently further marginalises the vulnerable groups in society who are the most likely to become gang members, if not already members. In addition, this group is also the one that is least likely to have access to a formal justice system, why they seem forced to resort to violence as resolution.

In line with what Hume proposes in her theory, groups in power, which in this case is the Salvadoran government, create a hegemonic discourse that represents the gangs as the dangerous other (identified in the textual analysis), and dehumanises them in order to make sense of a violent society filled with fear and distrust. In the findings of the textual analysis, it clearly shows that the media in El Salvador mainly focuses on violent crime stories committed by the gangs, which takes part in normalising violence as an everyday-thing in El Salvador. However, by excessively reporting on crime and violent gangs, the media also creates the image of El Salvador as a society where violence is everywhere, thus generating fear and spreading panic.

In conclusion, the theory of Hume on normalisation of violence in El Salvador, helps explaining that the extreme measures and the dehumanisation of the gangs, represent a hegemonic discourse that is produced on the basis of not only a violent history but also a culture where violence is viewed as a normal mean of resolution to conflicts. In this sense, the violence from the gang members is, to a high extent, a consequence of structures of machismo embedded in the culture and of marginalisation and exclusion by the State, which still continues in the hegemonic discourse today. Cerén's speech and the media's reproduction of a narrative that excludes, dehumanises and 'others' the gang members, worsening the issue rather than focusing on the root-cause of the issue.

5.3.3 La Mara and the State

According to Lambrechts, organised crime has a great impact on state social control, and she argues that it can undermine the authority by the state regarding its control over violence and the maintenance of justice (See 4.2.3). It is highly discussed whether MS13 and Calle 18 have transformed into a well established, organised criminal network or whether the 'myths of violence', as Hume calls it, have created a hegemonic discourse that exaggerates the scope of the gangs (Farah, 2012; Hume, 2008; Oetler, 2011, pp. 289). According to Farah, the MS13 gang have transformed into a transnational, organised network with an estimate of more than 80.000 members whose loyalty lays with the gang rather than with the Salvadoran government and laws. Farah compares this number to the number of the guerrillas fighting for FMLN during the Civil War, which was estimated to be between 9.000 to 12.000 (Farah, 2012, pp. 58-59). In the light of this, and if the gangs are as organised as news papers, governments and scholars say, the threat of the gang to state social control is real. However, the approach of eliminating the gang members instead of the cause of their existence have proven little effective, and as mentioned earlier, some scholars mean that punitive policies might even have had the opposite effect (Farah, 2012; Van der Borgh and Savenije, 2014; Rosales, 2016).

The hegemonic discourse that encourages these repressive and excluding policies, are thus focusing on the symptoms rather than the causes. Koonings and Kruijt argue that this type of discourse leads to social exclusion in marginalised areas, which then has contributed to the creation of parallel power structures made up by the gangs (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004, pp. 164-166). These areas have a high prevalence of violence and often police are absent or unable to provide basic security for the citizens. This inability undermines the social control and the power of the state and its law enforcement, which turns the discourse into a battle of power where the state must regain its authority (Koonings and Kruijt, 2004). This is evident in Cerén's speech as he puts a strong focus on explaining that the state will not tolerate the issue and extreme measures will be taken to win the battle. As explained in the theoretical framework,

Lambrechts states that the most important capability of a state is to be able to provide security for its population (See 4.2.3). This security must involve the entire population, however, in El Salvador, the security is not guaranteed in the entire country: People in marginalized and poor neighbourhoods find themselves excluded from the security provided by the state, and thus submitted under the parallel power structures run by the gangs. The insecurity after the Civil War created a vacuum of authority quickly filled out by the gangs, and which never really was regained by the state. As Lambrechts explains, these parallel power structures consisting of the criminal gangs, often present their own set of survival skills where they operate with another 'self-made' justice system outside the system of the state (See 4.2.3).

The gangs in El Salvador have in their 'occupied' territories, created not only a tax-system but also a justice system with simple rules; you obey the gangs or you pay the ultimate price (Hume, 2007). Koonings and Kruijt refer to the gangs as perverse social organisations that causes fragmentation of the protective social structures which then undermines the productive social control of the state. Cerén recognizes the huge problem of insecurity, which the state needs to address in order to provide it for the population. However, he does not recognize the marginalization and exclusion not only towards the gang members, but towards the people residing in these areas, who have to face police, military and gang violence on a daily basis.

According to Rosales), the extreme measures that Cerén speaks of in his discourse, facilitated new rules of engagement: The PNC and the military were given the permission to defend themselves with weapons against the gang members. Furthermore, they were instructed in shooting to kill, if they by any mean felt threatened (Rosales, 2016, pp. 1). This resulted in the total of 150 armed engagements between gang members and the PNC in the first 7 months of 2015. According to Rosales, the government and the news media referred to 'multiple homicides', when reporting on what Rosales refers to as 'masacres' (massacres) of gang members committed by the PNC. Multiple homicides is explained by the death of two or more victims. El Faro has recorded interviews where citizens in 'infested' areas (areas with high gang presence) have expressed incidents of supposedly death squads that comes in at night, killing entire families with ties to the gangs or who houses gang members. However, the government rejects any involvement in the existence of such groups (Government of El Salvador, 2017). Cerén, in fact, expresses repeatedly that no human rights will be violated in the battle against the gang members. Thus, he addresses the criticism directed towards the political approach in relation to reports on human rights violations. In the light of the abovementioned contextual aspects, the theory by Lambrechts explains how the vacuum of authority that was created after the Civil War, and which has been filled by gangs, undermines the state social control. Hence, the representation of the gangs in the hegemonic discourse is, in line with Fairclough's perception, a tool

of power used by the government to impact the power relation to the gangs in such a way that the government regains its power over state social control in the entire country. Cerén thus uses his discourse to undermine the power of the gangs by dehumanising them, representing their violence as irrational, and blaming them for the socio-economic issues in the country. Consequently, Cerén implies the rightfulness of the state and congratulates the success of the PNC, who then are portrayed as the heroes. An interesting, yet not that important, notion which I find mentionable in this aspect, is that in fact, the PNC has created a Facebook page named 'Heroé Azul El Salvador' (Blue Hero El Salvador) where they portray themselves as the heavy-armed heroes who are winning over the 'cruel and inhumane' gang members. This Facebook page only underlines the representation in the hegemonic discourse regarding gangs and stresses the existence of a violent hegemonic masculinity in El Salvador.

5.3.4 Sub-conclusion

At the social practice level, the social context, in which the analysed discourses have been produced and reproduced, have been examined and explained out of the perspectives provided by the theories from the theoretical framework. The analysis of the social practice shows that the discourses have been strongly influenced by the normalisation of violence which has been created through patriarchal structures including machismo and hegemonic masculinity, together with a violent history of Civil War, political incapability of addressing socio-economic issues and the use of structural marginalisation and exclusion. The normality of violence as resolution to conflict, has created a self-reinforcing cycle of violence, where the government uses the discourse as a tool of power to legitimise the extreme measures it takes in combatting the gang members by dehumanising them and representing them as the 'evil other' who are the cause of the socio-economic issues in El Salvador. This discursive battle reflects the power relation between the government and the gangs: The government has lost social control in marginalised areas, which has been taken over by the gangs who consequently created a parallel power structure outside the official Justice System of the state. As a result, the authority of the state is undermined, which shows in Cerén's speech in the way he is convincing the people of the government's authority by undermining the reason and power of the gangs.

5.4 Discussion

The critical discourse analysis has identified and explained the representation of the gang members in the social context in which it exists. It has explained the causes of that particular representation in connection to other hegemonic discourses, historical and political events together with cultural aspects. The analysis of respectively the text, the discursive practice and the social practice have been a progressive process to understand the discourse not only as a text

with a message, but also as a tool of power to shape reality and consequently policies and perceptions towards the gang members and the gang issue. The identified representation of the gang members is the hegemonic representation that is dominating in the hegemonic discourse; produced by the government and reproduced by the media. However, oppositional representations which are less circulated and not accepted as the reality of things, are competing to gain a position. The oppositional representations are the ones presented by the gang members themselves or NGOs, and to some extent El Faro, who portray the gang members as victims of socio-economic inequalities. However, as the government, the state and the media exercise a monopoly on dominating and shaping the hegemonic discourse in relation to the representation on gangs and gang members, the attempt to shift the power over to the gang members have proved unsuccessful in the discursive battle of power.

The hegemonic representation of the gangs has manifested itself in the Salvadoran society, and as long as the oppositional representations are not given a voice, they stand no chance to change the perception of gang members as the cruel, inhumane and irrational 'evil other' and the state's public enemy number one. As the analysis shows, and as Fairclough argues, the discourse's representation of gangs has the power to control the public perception of the gang issue, and consequently enable and legitimise how the government maintains a social class and a social groups in an inferior position by structurally excluding and marginalising that group from influencing public opinion or political decisions. Furthermore, by neglecting the responsibility of the State, the representation implies that socio-economic issues are a direct cause of the gang issue and not in reverse.

As pointed out in the analysis, the representation legitimises the use of violence as the only resolution to the gang issue. Taking into account the cultural inclinations towards violence as a response, the effect of armed military forces and the PNC, with order to kill if threatened, the only possible outcome is more violence, which, in turn, calls for more extreme measures. As the history of political approaches and implementations show in the analysis, only more and more extreme measures have been taking into action, which have only resulted in the escalation of the conflict from both sides and international accusations of severe human rights violations against the State of El Salvador.

One can ask, if the representation and the extreme measures are justified? It is a fact that gangs and gang members keep on committing horrendous acts of violence, distort people, keep women and girls as sex slaves, burn busses filled with people, and are the cause of a massive number of murders each year (regardless whether the victims are gang members or not). The government is forced to act, and forced to address the issue and dissociate themselves from the violence committed by the gangs in order to maintain the authority as a state and the respect,

loyalty and support of the rest of the Salvadoran population who are not involved in criminal gang activities. Given the cultural consent of male hegemony, violence as a resolution and consequently the othering of the gangs, seems like the obvious option in the context of El Salvador.

On the other hand, one can ask what other options do the people who submit to the gangs have? If social exclusion and violence have dominated the areas where the gang members rule, and if the government has only addressed these issues by using repressive violence instead of providing health care, education, and security, then criminal gang activity might seem as a justifiable mean of survival.

In line with various scholars (Oettler, Huhn, Wolf, Hume, Rosales, etc.) there exists a necessity of changing the hegemonic discourse evolving the representation and perception of the gang issue, for it to be combated. The change has to involve the identification and understanding of what causes people to enroll into the gangs, while the gang issue itself needs to be seen as a result of socio-economic inequalities. This realisation coupled with preventive programs to address these causes, might pave the road to a different perception of gang members.

As long as the hegemonic discourse depicts the gang members as the public enemy number one, re-integration of gang members into society is made impossible. Hence the effect of the representation of the gang members by the government, which is reproduced by the media, impedes the sustainable resolution of the gang issue. As Cerén states: «*Mantenemos nuestra posición: con estos crules criminales no es posible tener una actitud de tolerancia*» (We maintain our position: with those cruel criminals, it is impossible to have an attitude of tolerance).

6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to answer the problem formulation stated in the beginning:

“How are the gangs and gang members represented in the Salvadoran government’s and the Salvadoran news’ discourse and why? What effect does this discourse have on the gang issue?”

To answer the questions, the critical discourse analysis was employed as a method. The three different interrelated levels of analysis, supported by the theoretical framework, enabled an understanding of the analysed discourses in a social context and as forming part of and shaping socio-political power relations within the Salvadoran society.

The analysis of the text identified how the gangs are represented by Cerén and the three news platforms, El Faro, La Página, and El Blog. The findings here revealed the representation of the gangs through an extremely negative stereotype, which depicts the gang members as violent, criminal, murderers, irrational, inhumane, cruel and the single biggest threat to the public security and prosperity of El Salvador. The gang members are represented as one, homogenous group, why all the aforementioned characteristics are attributed to all gang members in general.

In addition, the discourse represents the gang members as the ‘evil other’, and consequently a narrative of an “us” (the government) versus “them” (the gangs) is created. The stereotype and the ‘othering’ of the gang members through the discourse, neglects the complexities of the gang members and the rationale of their actions, thus legitimising extreme and punitive measures in combating the gangs. The negative representation of the gang members is reproduced in the news features. The media represents crimes and violence as something committed solely by gang members. Furthermore, the excessive focus on violence by the media, represents an enormity of violence which spreads fear and insecurity throughout the population of El Salvador.

The second part of the analysis, the discursive practice, showed the interdiscursivity of the discourses by elucidating how the discourses use elements from other hegemonic discourses, both regional and international and also reproduce them. The first hegemonic discourse identified as having a strong influence on the analysed discourses, is ‘La Mara Phenomenon’, which refers to the sensationalist treatment by the media of the presence of gangs in Central America, not only by the regional media, but also at an international level.

The second hegemonic discourse reproduced by the analysed discourse, in particular by Cerén’s speech, is the repressive political discourse on the resolution of the gang issue. The repres-

sive political discourse is strongly present in the political approaches in the Northern Central America, but in particular, it has been dominant in the policies of El Salvador. La Mano Dura approach together with zero-tolerance policies have since 1994 dominated the political sphere in relation to gang issues. The discursive practice furthermore enabled the understanding of the norms committed to the social order of which the discourses belong to, which shed light on the objective of the discourses and subsequently the reason of their production and content from this perspective.

In the social practice, the discourses were analysed in relation to the social context in which they exist and impact. The analysis shows that there are four main causes of the representation of the gang members explained above:

1. The Civil War created a hostile environment, where a hegemonic masculinity with strong ties to machismo thrived and in which violence became the norm of conflict resolution. This has created a long history of punitive and repressive policies by the state, such as La Mano Dura or Zero-Tolerance policies.
2. The 1992 Peace Accords failed to address the socio-economic inequalities that caused the war in the first place, and this created a vacuum of authority in the areas that experienced continued marginalisation and exclusion. The vacuum was quickly filled by the gangs MS-13 and Calle 18, which have now grown to be organised, criminal gangs. The gangs undermine the state's social control and authority by challenging their monopoly on violence and control of territories.
3. With strong ties to the Civil War, a culture of violence is deeply rooted into the Salvadoran society, where violence has become the only mean to express power, control and dominance. This generates a self-enforcing cycle of violence, where violence is responded with more violence.
4. A hegemonic discourse in the media that exaggerates and over-generalises the violence in El Salvador and furthermore portrays the gang issue as a consequence of individual pathological tendencies, have resulted in a spread of fear and consequently an inclination towards more punitive policies and strategies, such as the extreme measures proposed by Cerén.

The effect of the representation of the gang members have so far had a negative effect to the resolution of the gang issue. The study showed that the representation of the gang members generate the spread of fear and consequently an inclination towards more punitive policies and

strategies, which enables further exclusion and marginalisation and impedes the re-integration of the gang members into society. Furthermore, it legitimises the use of violence against the gang members as a resolution to the violence committed by the gangs, thus, generating a self-enforcing cycle of violence, where more and more extreme measures are perceived as necessary to win the battle between the gangs and the government. Hence, the hegemonic discourse represents that power battle, and is therefore used as a tool by the government and the media to shape the perception of the gang members to ultimately win.

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Appendix

Transcript of Cerén's speech, see ref. Sanchez (2016)

Querido pueblo salvadoreño:

Una vez finalizado el periodo vacacional de Semana Santa, me dirijo a ustedes para compartir importantes decisiones para enfrentar uno de los problemas que más preocupa a la familia salvadoreña: la seguridad ciudadana.

Primero, quiero felicitar y reconocer la extraordinaria labor de la PNC y la Fuerza Armada, que con su esfuerzo nos garantizaron una vacación segura y tranquila.

Las medidas que estamos tomando responden a un solo objetivo: garantizar a toda la población la seguridad y tranquilidad, factores indispensables para el progreso de El Salvador.

Quiero reiterar mi firme compromiso de seguir trabajando por el bienestar de todas y todos, con la confianza en que juntos podemos construir un país en paz, con justicia y en convivencia armoniosa.

Las bandas criminales han cometido horrendos asesinatos que nuestra sociedad no puede tolerar.

Estos criminales han llegado a extremos de salvajismo y pérdida de toda sensibilidad humana, asesinan niñas y niños, estudiantes, mujeres embarazadas, religiosos, ancianos y hasta personas con discapacidad.

Tanta crueldad contra nuestro pueblo no puede continuar, le pondremos fin con la fuerza de la justicia, con absoluta determinación.

Ante esta violencia irracional estamos obligados a pasar a otro nivel de respuesta, a tomar medidas urgentes, de carácter extraordinario, con el fin de garantizar seguridad y tranquilidad a todos los salvadoreños.

El compromiso de mi Gobierno es con las víctimas, con nuestra niñez y juventud, con cada familia del país, con toda la sociedad, con todos los hombres y mujeres que queremos tranquilidad y una sana convivencia.

Como Gobierno vamos a garantizar el respeto a los derechos humanos y a las libertades que nuestro pueblo conquistó en largos años de lucha.

Esos logros ahora se ven amenazados por el temor y la violencia que generan estos asesinatos, y por una cultura de indiferencia y de intolerancia.

Estamos en la obligación de hacer uso de la fuerza que nuestro ordenamiento jurídico confiere al Estado, eso sí, sin abusos y con el pleno respeto a los derechos humanos.

Nos asiste la justicia, la razón y el profundo amor de nuestro pueblo por la vida.

Mantenemos nuestra posición: con estos crueles criminales no es posible tener una actitud de tolerancia.

Las comunidades, barrios y colonias, las familias, las trabajadoras y trabajadores honrados, están cansados y agobiados por estas bandas criminales que no entienden otro lenguaje que el de la violencia.

Es a partir del agravamiento de esta situación, que ordené esta semana al Ministro de Justicia y Seguridad, la inmediata vigencia de la Declaración de estado de Emergencia en los siete centros penales, donde se concentra el mayor número de miembros de pandillas.

Esta medida en ejecución, es la primera de un proceso mayor de estricto control, vigilancia permanente, registros constantes y traslados penitenciarios.

Este mecanismo solo se extiende por quince días prorrogables, por lo que necesitamos aplicar la segunda fase de medidas para prolongar su aplicación.

En esta siguiente fase, el día de mañana presentaremos el proyecto de Decreto a la Asamblea Legislativa que contiene las Disposiciones Especiales Transitorias y Extraordinarias en los Centros Penitenciarios y Granjas Penitenciarias.

Estas disposiciones tienen por finalidad adecuar la infraestructura, asegurar la eficacia del sistema y proteger a la población de manera permanente de las acciones delictivas que se originan desde los centros penales.

El decreto legislativo nos dará mejores herramientas para detener todo acto criminal que surja desde el interior o fuera de los centros penitenciarios.

Incluye medidas como la restricción o limitación de la libertad ambulatoria, la restricción o suspensión de visitas por el tiempo que sea necesario, y la suspensión y destitución de empleados que vulneren la administración de los penales.

El decreto establece también el corte de las telecomunicaciones en los espacios físicos donde están ubicados los centros penitenciarios.

Esperamos contar con el apoyo de las empresas telefónicas, y la comprensión de las comunidades cercanas que pueden ser afectadas.

No olvidemos que ante todo está la búsqueda del bien común.

Es momento de actuar juntos ante un desafío sin precedentes.

Por ello, llamo a la Asamblea Legislativa, al Órgano Judicial, a la Fiscalía General de la República, y a todas las instituciones a centrar su atención en el clamor de las víctimas y en la construcción de un El Salvador Seguro.

Adicional a esta segunda fase de medidas, mi gobierno prepara un conjunto de acciones de mayor cobertura para reforzar el control del territorio, mejorar la capacidad de respuesta y

golpear directamente a estos grupos criminales.

Vamos a realizar un mayor despliegue de nuestras fuerzas armadas en todo el territorio nacional.

He ordenado al Ministro de Defensa agilizar el proceso para convocar y contratar a mil efectivos, de la reserva experimentada del ejército, para actuar en funciones especiales.

Emplearemos todos nuestros recursos logísticos para contribuir al éxito del control del territorio.

Nos proponemos reforzar el acompañamiento de la Fuerza Armada en el despliegue territorial de la Policía Nacional Civil.

Estamos preparando otras medidas que comunicaremos en el momento oportuno.

Nuestro país demanda hoy respuestas efectivas.

Invito a toda la población a continuar brindando su apoyo y confianza en la institucionalidad del país.

Es tiempo de unirnos y actuar juntos.

Los criminales le han impuesto a nuestro pueblo un alto costo no solo en vidas y sufrimiento, sino también en recursos que podrían ser destinados a la salud, la educación, a generar empleos, que son prioridades de mi gobierno.

La lucha contra el crimen requiere recursos; sin embargo, es doloroso constatar que desde hace más de un año la Sala de lo Constitucional mantiene paralizados 900 millones de dólares en bonos.

En este momento hay en la Asamblea Legislativa una petición de mil 200 millones de dólares y para la cual esperamos que la oposición dé sus votos.

Recordemos que todos estos recursos son importantes para el efectivo accionar del Estado y echar andar estas y otras medidas que nos ayuden a garantizar integralmente la seguridad a la población.

Querido pueblo salvadoreño:

Mi gobierno asume con responsabilidad el combate contra la criminalidad.

No daremos tregua a los criminales.

No vamos a retroceder.

Nuestro compromiso es garantizar la seguridad y tranquilidad en todo el país.

No voy a descansar hasta ver que en nuestro querido El Salvador, tierra de gente trabajadora,

el pueblo de Monseñor Romero, viva con justicia y paz.

Unidos todos, gobierno y demás órganos del Estado, la Policía Nacional Civil, la Fuerza Armada, y sobre todo, con el pueblo, ganaremos esta batalla de amor por la vida, la tranquilidad de la familia salvadoreña, su felicidad y prosperidad.

Que Dios bendiga a nuestro país,

Buenas noches.

Article from El Blog, see ref. El Blog (2017)

Esto le sucedió a estos pandilleros de la fotografía
26 terroristas fueron capturados



La Fiscalía General de la República (FGR) reportó la mañana de este lunes la captura de 26 miembros de pandillas.

El operativo se realizó en la colonia Jardines de Selt Sut, en el municipio de Ilopango, indicaron las autoridades.

Asimismo, se incautó teléfonos celulares y \$932 en efectivo que estaban en poder de los miembros de pandillas.

A los sujetos se les acusa de la privación de libertad de dos personas y serán puestos a la orden de los tribunales correspondientes.

Article from El Faro, see ref. El Faro (2016)

MS-13 pide diálogo al gobierno y pone sobre la mesa su propia desarticulación

La Mara Salvatrucha pide hoy un diálogo cuya agenda pueda incluir la desarticulación de la pandilla, lo que implica un giro radical a la postura de hace cuatro años, cuando la cúpula nacional rechazó siquiera hablar de su posible desmontaje. Tres voceros de la organización criminal expusieron a El Faro una propuesta para discutir soluciones al problema de violencia en una mesa de negociación pública que incluya al gobierno y a todos los partidos políticos. El vocero de la Presidencia, Eugenio Chicas, dice que es una propuesta “a la que hay que darle taller”.



El 4 de abril de 2016, la Policía Nacional Civil y la Fuerza Armada desarrollaron un operativo conjunto en los alrededores de la cárcel de Quezaltepeque. El objetivo era borrar los grafitis con los que la Mara Salvatrucha demarca los territorios que controla. Foto Víctor Peña.

Voceros de la Mara Salvatrucha-13 –la pandillas más numerosa de El Salvador– se reunieron con El Faro a finales de diciembre pasado para exponer una nueva propuesta hacia la sociedad y el gobierno: la MS-13 pide la creación de una mesa de diálogo pública, en la que estén representados todos los partidos políticos, el gobierno, instituciones de derechos humanos y los líderes de las tres pandillas principales que operan en el país: 18 Sureños, 18 Revolucionarios

y la Mara Salvatrucha-13. Su propuesta, dicen, tiene por objetivo detener la crisis de violencia que vive el país y frenar la escalada bélica entre las pandillas y las fuerzas de seguridad, antes de que derive en una “guerra”.

Como punto de partida, la pandilla ha desbloqueado dos puntos de negociación que nunca antes habían estado sobre la mesa: el primero es la posibilidad de que el gobierno cree procesos que permitan a los miembros activos salirse de la pandilla: “Uno de morro (niño) hace cosas que no tiene que hacer, pero cuando se hace adulto y uno tiene hijos, la mente madura y eso que hiciste ya no querés hacerlo. Todo ser humano tiene derecho a cambiar, no toda la vida va a andar uno haciendo cosas ilícitas”, dijo uno de los dos líderes de la MS presentes en la entrevista, realizada al interior de una vivienda de una colonia del Área Metropolitana de San Salvador.

El segundo punto -que constituye la principal novedad del ofrecimiento- se refiere a la posibilidad de discutir la desarticulación de la pandilla. El Faro insistió sobre este punto durante la entrevista y en conversaciones telefónicas posteriores y los voceros de la Mara Salvatrucha-13 aseguraron que este es un tema que puede ser abordado si la mesa que proponen es tratada con seriedad: “¿Están dispuestos a discutir la desarticulación de la MS?”, preguntó este periódico. “Las FARC lo han hecho...”, dijo un vocero. “No podemos partir diciendo que nos vamos a desarmar, todo depende de cómo el gobierno reciba la propuesta y la seriedad que le dé”, añadió, para luego asegurar que la MS-13 ha visto como modélico el proceso que condujo al desmontaje del aparato militar de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. “Ellos después de andar matando gente, de ser terroristas, se van a reinsertar como ciudadanos”, dijo.

A diferencia de la guerrilla colombiana, la Mara Salvatrucha-13 creció en El Salvador como una estructura delictiva sin agenda política, sin cohesionantes ideológicos y sin buscar derrocar al gobierno para hacerse del poder. Sin embargo, desde que inició el proceso de diálogo que el gobierno del expresidente Mauricio Funes estableció con las pandillas en 2012, estas estructuras han ido articulando un discurso reivindicativo que busca justificar su propia existencia a través de la marginación social y la falta de Estado en las comunidades en las que crecieron y prosperaron.

La sola posibilidad de poner sobre la mesa la salida de sus miembros y su posible desarticulación como estructura marca una clara diferencia en la pandilla con respecto a la negociación de 2012, conocida como la Tregua. En aquel momento, la Mara Salvatrucha-13 fue muy enfática al señalar que la posibilidad de su desarticulación estaba fuera de cualquier discusión. Consultado sobre el cambio de postura, uno de los representantes explicó: “Hace cuatro años no había un rumbo muy claro de hacia dónde iba esto, la pandilla ha tenido su metamorfosis y ha venido madurando durante este tiempo. Eso fue lo que nos enseñó la Tregua”.

En el gobierno, el secretario de Comunicaciones de la Presidencia, Eugenio Chicas, dijo que él no podía responder si la administración accedería a sentarse a dialogar con pandilleros, porque hasta ahora la decisión es que esa no es una vía para resolver el problema de violencia de pandillas. “Hasta hoy la posición ha sido ningún trato con esos grupos. Pero el presidente tiene la autoridad para considerar cualquier otra condición”, dijo Chicas. “Es un tema al que hay que darle taller”.

El director de la policía, Howard Cotto, fue más tajante, al considerar que el gobierno no tiene

nada que negociar con las pandillas: “El único ofrecimiento de negociación de ellos es el seguir cometiendo delitos si no negociamos o dejar de cometerlos si negociamos y esa brújula es equivocada ... ¿qué ofrecen? ¿dejar de matar o dejar de extorsionar? ¿Y a cambio querés algo? ¡no! Solo déjenlo de hacer”, resumió.

A diferencia de comunicados públicos anteriores -en los que las pandillas anunciaban decisiones o cuestionaban la falta de voluntad de diálogo del gobierno- esta vez no son las tres pandillas las que lanzan esta propuesta, sino solo la MS-13. Sus voceros insistieron en que su llamado pretende también convocar a sus rivales históricos: las dos facciones de la pandilla Barrio 18.

Los nuevos voceros

El 24 de noviembre, uno de los reporteros de El Faro fue contactado por un pandillero de la Mara Salvatrucha, que proponía una reunión para, en nombre de toda la organización, exponer algunos puntos. En ocasiones anteriores, este mismo pandillero había servido ya como vocero oficial de la pandilla, junto con Marvin Quintanilla, conocido como "Piwa", a quien las autoridades acusan de ser el cerebro financiero de la estructura. Esta persona -cuyo nombre se omite como parte de los acuerdos que permitieron el encuentro- es parte de una larga cadena de reemplazo de liderazgo, que no implica que el poder dentro de la pandilla haya cambiado de manos, sino solo de quién lo representa en la calle.

En 2012, en el contexto de la Tregua entre pandillas negociada con el gobierno, la MS-13 creó una estructura de liderazgo fuera de los centros penales conocida como La Ranfla en Libertad o la Ranfla de la Libre, que representaba la autoridad de la verdadera cúpula pandillera, recluida en el sistema penitenciario. Los primeros miembros de esta estructura fueron integrantes de la cúpula en prisión que habían cumplido sus condenas y que tomaban el control de las acciones en la calle. Pero con el tiempo casi todos los pandilleros que formaron parte de la Ranfla de la Libre de la MS-13 han sido arrestados y enviados al Centro Penitenciario de Seguridad Zacatecoluca. Sin embargo, la pandilla ha sido capaz de reemplazar una y otra vez a los líderes en libertad.

El pandillero que se puso en contacto con El Faro es heredero de esa larga cadena de sustituciones y por lo tanto goza de la facultad de hablar a nombre de toda la estructura. Ha sido un vocero constante de la MS-13 durante más de un año y ha representado la voz de la pandilla ante los voceros del Barrio 18.

El encuentro tuvo lugar el 21 de diciembre, casi un mes después del primer contacto. El líder pandillero advirtió que él no estaría presente pero que delegaría a dos voceros que contaban con la autorización de hablar en nombre de la Mara Salvatrucha. La reunión tuvo lugar en una comunidad en la que esta pandilla ejerce un férreo control.

Los voceros aseguraron que el contenido de su comunicado representaba a toda la estructura y que ellos habían sido delegados para representar a la Mara Salvatrucha-13 ante este periódico. La lista de ideas venían anotadas en unas páginas sueltas y escritas a mano y uno de los voceros fue desarrollando punto por punto. El interés principal de la pandilla era negar que la organización haya decidido asesinar sistemáticamente a policías o militares como respuesta al

endurecimiento de condiciones de reclusión de pandilleros a partir de abril de 2016.

“La MS está respondiendo muy tarde. Al nomás empezaron los comunicados (del gobierno) a decir que la MS estaba en guerra con el gobierno, se tuvo que haber dado respuesta. Se tuvo que haber dado respuesta en la misma semana en la que empezaron los rumores de guerra”, inició el vocero.

Se refería a los hechos ocurridos durante la primera quincena de noviembre, en el que fueron asesinados 10 policías y 3 militares. El gobierno responsabilizó a la Mara Salvatrucha-13 de haber emprendido una guerra abierta contra policías y soldados. Por ello, recrudesció las condiciones carcelarias contra los miembros de esta pandilla y lanzó una ofensiva contra los territorios controlados por ella.

Los voceros de la MS-13 aseguraron que no existe una orden de la cúpula de la estructura para lanzar a sus bases contra los policías, aunque justificaron los asesinatos de policías diciendo que se trata de la reacción natural de líderes locales de la pandilla, palabreros de clica, ante el acoso de las fuerzas de seguridad.

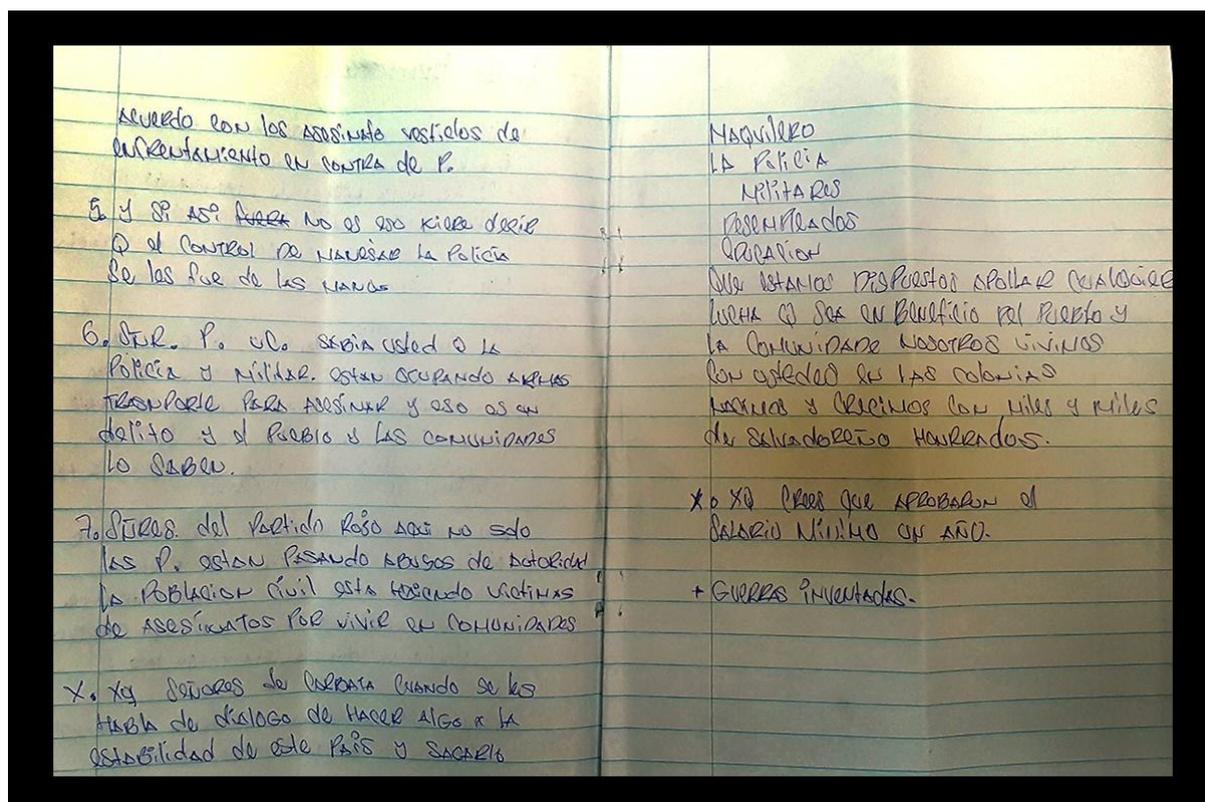
“Un policía que llega y te mata a uno, dos o tres miembros, o incluso a gente que no es miembro de la pandilla, ¿qué hacen las pandillas? Te reaccionan. Esa semana está comprobado: reaccionaron a tanto ataque... cuando alguien se dispara, tenemos que decirle: “Hey, tranquilos, bichos, no es así la onda, este desvergue no es así”. Pero imagínate cuando los policías vienen, por ejemplo en Quezaltepeque, y les matan a tres cipotes: ¿vos creés que no quedan más resentidos y con más ganas de matar a policías?”, justificó uno de ellos. Este es un punto en el que la pandilla ha insistido desde que se rompió la Tregua en 2014.

Aseguraron que para atajar la situación, su pandilla ha decidido hacer un ofrecimiento de diálogo: “Nosotros estamos proponiendo un diálogo. No lo queremos llamar tregua o negociación... porque la gente cuando le mencionás la palabra tregua o la palabra negociación interpreta que es a cambio de dinero, y no es así. Estamos ofreciendo un diálogo para este país”.

Los representantes de la Mara Salvatrucha-13 dijeron que su estructura ha pensado en una comisión en la que estén incluidos no solo el gobierno, sino también todos los partidos políticos. “Porque si solo un partido quiere hacer algo bueno por el país, los demás no lo dejan avanzar”. Piden que se incluyan también a “autoridades de derechos humanos y centros penales, familiares de reos y líderes comunales”.

Aseguraron que buscan que esta “comisión” desactive “al monstruo” que han creado en las comunidades. “Queremos abrir todos los canales posibles para que la población no sea víctima de las pandillas, te lo voy a plantear de esta manera: Si venís de San Martín y querés ir al hospital de San Bartolo... ¿cuánta gente no se está muriendo de un montón de cosas porque no tienen ese acceso? Hemos creado ese monstruo en las comunidades y en un sinfín de partes, y las personas no pueden ir a tal o cual parte”, dijo uno de los pandilleros.

El primer punto de su lista de temas a abordar en esa mesa consiste en “la reinserción obligatoria de los penales, los miembros de pandillas y las comunidades”.



Fragmento del manuscrito que sirvió como guía a los voceros de la MS-13 en la entrevista con El Faro realizada el 21 de diciembre de 2016, en la que expusieron la propuesta de diálogo de la pandilla con el gobierno. Foto Roberto Valencia.

El Faro preguntó: “Por reinserción entendemos mecanismos para que los miembros activos que quieran dejar de ser pandilleros puedan hacerlo. ¿Lo que piden es que se abran caminos oficiales para que sus miembros puedan dejar de ser pandilleros?”. Esta fue la respuesta: “Exacto, así es”, y abundaron en consideraciones sobre la posibilidad de enmendar errores: “Todo ser humano tiene derecho a cambiar. No toda la vida uno va a estar haciendo cosas ilícitas. Están la familia, los hijos, y es bueno querer lo mejor para ellos. ¿Quién da trabajo hoy a alguien que esté manchado (tatuado)? Nadie.”, dijeron.

Posteriormente, en una conversación telefónica con uno de los mismos voceros, este periódico volvió a insistir sobre este punto :

—¿Te das cuenta de que lo que proponen es en la práctica un camino para el gradual desmontaje de la pandilla?

—Así es. Lo que queremos es desmontar el desvergue que hay en la calle.

Contactado con posterioridad, el pandillero que concertó el encuentro repitió que este punto no constituye una promesa de entrada, pero que “todos los puntos pueden ser dialogados”.

Del “no” al “tal vez”

En octubre de 2012, en pleno apogeo de la Tregua gestionada por la administración Funes, El Faro entrevistó a la ranfla de la MS-13 –la cúpula nacional de líderes pandilleros– en el Centro Penal Ciudad Barrios.

Por aquellos días, los hombres más poderosos de esta pandilla habían sido trasladados del penal de máxima seguridad a penales regulares, como parte del acuerdo con el gobierno. Encabezados por Borromeo Henríquez (a) Diablito de Hollywood, el más icónico líder de esta estructura, una veintena de líderes conversaron durante más de cuatro horas con tres periodistas de este periódico. Aunque hubo momentos incómodos, el único punto que tensó el ambiente hasta una abierta hostilidad fue la conversación sobre la desarticulación de la pandilla, que provocó un gran revuelo entre los pandilleros y un rotundo “no”.

Uno de los líderes presentes en aquella reunión, conocido como el Chino de Western, montó en cólera cuando se les preguntó si, producto de la negociación que se abrió con la Tregua, estarían dispuestos a abrir las puertas a que sus miembros dejen la pandilla: “Ustedes quieren meterse mucho en la onda de la pandilla. ¿Y sabes qué? Con todo respeto, ustedes tienen un hasta aquí. O sea, vos tenés tu trabajo, yo quiero mi pandilla. Nos hacés muchas preguntas comprometedoras. Bien comprometedoras. ¿Vos tenías tres años cuando yo comencé a caminar en las pandillas! ¿Y creés que me va a gustar que tú vengás a decirme a mí si nos vamos a deshacer? ¿Que si nosotros vamos a deshacer las pandillas? ¿Sabes qué? Yo creo que ese derecho no lo tienes...”

En aquel momento, otro pandillero irrumpió en la conversación para cuestionar al reportero: “Con las dudas no hay pedo. Lo único es eso, que este siempre insiste. ¿Cómo vamos a... todo pandillero que quiera se puede salir? Eso creo que no, simón, eso es cosa de nosotros”.

Cuatro años después de aquella entrevista, tres voceros mucho más jóvenes que el promedio de edad de los hombres de la ranfla –que ronda los 40 años– hablan del tema con naturalidad y lo proponen incluso como parte de la agenda de negociación con el gobierno. Se trata, dicen, de un asunto de maduración en la pandilla.

Los voceros de la MS-13 dijeron estar conscientes de que este ofrecimiento podría ser tomado como un síntoma de debilidad de la pandilla y, previsiblemente, negaron que la estrategia del gobierno los haya afectado. “Decime en qué colonia que ustedes conozcan las pandillas han dado un paso atrás. La estructura sigue. La MS sigue sonando a nivel nacional”, dijeron.

El director de la policía, asegura que la estrategia de gobierno ha conseguido “debilitar un poco” el control territorial de las pandillas, aunque admite que “no en los términos que la gente espera, ni tampoco en los que nosotros esperamos, eso es muy duro y complicado y sigue siendo un reto enorme”, dijo.

Los pandilleros recordaron al gobierno que su partido, el FMLN, llegó a acuerdos con las principales pandillas salvadoreñas para obtener su respaldo electoral y les demandan retomar las conversaciones. “Si se abre una mesa de diálogo, y se brinda una mano para dar una vuelta a esta cosa, hay que aprovechar, porque se está derramando sangre de todos lados: gente inocente. Si muere un policía, las madres y sus hijos sufren. Si muere un pandillero, las madres y los hijos sufren”, argumentaron.

Eugenio Chicas: “Hay que darle taller”

El Faro consultó al gobierno por medio del vocero presidencial, Eugenio Chicas, sobre las posibilidades de que su política de confrontación directa contra las pandillas, anunciada por el presidente Salvador Sánchez Cerén en enero de 2015, dé un viraje radical para considerar el ofrecimiento de la MS-13.

La oferta de la pandilla fue expuesta a Chicas por El Faro el viernes 6 de enero.

“Me estás haciendo un planteamiento que tiene mucho fondo y que es bien serio y no se puede adoptar una respuesta ligera e improvisada. No soy el canal para una propuesta de esta naturaleza, esto lo debe ventilar el secretario de Gobernación, Hato Hasbún, quien es el que lleva todos los diálogos y entendimientos para la gobernabilidad”, comentó el secretario de Comunicaciones, luego de advertir que ni el presidente, ni Hasbún conocían la propuesta.

Sin embargo, Chicas dijo estar en capacidad de dibujar el panorama de posibilidades que esta idea tiene de prosperar. “La posición del gobierno sobre diálogo, entendimiento, conversación con pandillas es irreductible: ningún diálogo ni entendimiento ni conversación con estos grupos, ningún trato. Hasta hoy. Y digo hasta hoy, porque es lo que me consta. Si el presidente dice otra cosa, será él, y él tiene la autoridad para considerar cualquier otra condición”, matizó.

Según Chicas, las posibilidades de abrir un espacio de diálogo con las pandillas no son comparables con el proceso de entendimiento que el gobierno colombiano tuvo con la guerrilla de las FARC: “La posibilidad de encontrarle una salida política a un conflicto no se mide por lo cruento que puede ser el conflicto, sino por la expectativa de quienes están confrontando, que es lo que genera determinadas expectativas políticas. No es la violencia la que abre la puerta para el tratamiento político de un conflicto”.

Chicas cree que la posibilidad de que una exploración de entendimiento con la Mara Salvatrucha-13 depende de varios factores: uno, de la aceptación social del experimento; dos, de la convergencia de voluntades políticas del resto de partidos; y tres, de los recursos con los que se cuenta para financiar un proceso de esa naturaleza y de las consideraciones jurídicas que hay que hacer.

“Es un tema al que hay que darle taller. La sociedad salvadoreña tiene un claro rechazo no solo a cualquier perspectiva de diálogo o de conversación, sino a cualquier ventaja o beneficio a este tipo de grupos. Para un gobierno el medir a la sociedad es importante. Ese es un ingrediente, pero no es el único. Otro elemento es la posibilidad de entendimiento político entre las fuerzas que marcan la gobernabilidad, en este caso la gobernabilidad de este país está dada por el peso de la oposición y de otros actores sociales, que se reflejan en el Consejo Nacional de Seguridad. Ese es otro factor a tomar en cuenta y un tercer elemento es si la propia estrategia tiene las perspectivas de ofrecer mejores resultados en los tiempos políticos que nos quedan. Tomando en cuenta que los años que quedan son electorales”, expuso.

Chicas se refería a que el gobierno de Sánchez Cerén termina el 1 de junio de 2019, y tanto ese año como en 2018 hay elecciones. En 2018 los salvadoreños elegirán nueva Asamblea Legislativa y concejos municipales, y en 2019 votarán por la Presidencia de la República.

Agregó además que el país no pasa por un buen momento en términos de finanzas públicas y que este proceso podría superar las posibilidades de las arcas nacionales: “Hay otro elemento muy importante: hay una palabra mágica que hay que reflexionar políticamente y es que estos señores señalan que la presunta desmovilización de sus estructuras es un tema abierto pero en el contexto de un mecanismo de conversación. En este sentido yo me hago una reflexión: sabemos las propias dificultades que tienen las reivindicaciones y las demandas de los desmovilizados del conflicto armado. Ellos enarbolan una bandera de 12,000 dólares para cada uno, lo que con el número que ellos representan es un reto que el país hoy no lo puede resolver, no hay capacidad. Creo que cualquier gobierno responsable se debe de plantear las capacidades del país para asumir temas de esa naturaleza ¿de cuántas personas estamos hablando? Es muy muy complejo”, argumentó.

En un posible diálogo de gobierno con pandillas, quedaría descartada la consideración de dispensas penales a pandilleros debido a que la Sala de lo Constitucional, en una resolución de agosto de 2015, estableció que las pandillas son grupos terroristas y que el Estado no puede llegar a acuerdos con ellas para aliviarles castigos por los crímenes que cometan.

En los meses previos a las elecciones presidenciales que llevaron a este gobierno a la presidencia, distintos voceros del FMLN entraron en contactos secretos con las pandillas, a fin de buscar el respaldo electoral de estas estructuras. A cambio, el FMLN ofreció que -de llegar al gobierno- retomarían el diálogo que se abrió durante la presidencia de Funes. También ofrecieron 10 millones de dólares en microcréditos para que pandilleros montaran microempresas. Las pandillas han dicho en comunicados conjuntos sentirse traicionadas por el FMLN, que, luego de haberse hecho con el gobierno, rompió los canales de comunicación.

Chicas evitó comentar estos encuentros argumentando que su rol de vocero presidencial solo incluye los eventos ocurridos durante el ejercicio efectivo de este gobierno y se limitó a comentar: "no siempre el gobierno coincide con las decisiones del partido".

Article from La Página, , see ref. La Pagina (2016)

VIDEO: Las 3 principales pandillas anuncian cese a los asesinatos y piden al GOES parar medidas extraordinarias

Las declaraciones de los cabecillas se dan luego de que el gobierno anunciara una serie de medidas extraordinarias después del periodo vacacional, para combatir a las pandillas.



En un video que circuló hoy, las pandillas más numerosas, Mara Salvatrucha, y 18 “Revolucionarios” y “Sureños”, plantearon un cese a la violencia generada por sus miembros.

“Hemos girado línea a toda nuestra gente que son miembros de nuestras pandillas generales para que cesen todo tipo de homicidio a nivel nacional”, dice en la grabación un sujeto con la voz modificada.

La medida anunciada entra en vigencia a partir de las 00 horas de este sábado 26 de marzo, manifestó.

El anuncio se da luego de las afirmaciones del gobierno que implementará medidas extraordinarias a partir de la próxima semana para combatir a las maras.

El encapuchado afirma en el video que “no hay necesidad de poner medidas que solo vienen a violentar nuestra Constitución de la República y toda ley que depende de ellas”.

El vocero de las pandillas responsabilizó a los ministros de Seguridad y Fuerza Armada, Mauricio Ramírez Landaverde y David Munguía Payés, respectivamente, así como al director de la Policía, Howard Cotto por posibles homicidios, “masacres o algo que se dé fuera de la ley en nuestro país”, dijo.

Políticos de diferentes tendencias, así como diversos sectores de la sociedad civil, han mostrado estar de acuerdo con las medidas drásticas que anunció el presidente de la República, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, para combatir a las maras.

El mandatario en su último mensaje, el 7 de marzo pasado, se refirió a los pandilleros como “inhumanos”.

“Nos estamos enfrentando a criminales y hay que tratarlos como tales. No queda otro camino, no hay espacio para diálogo o treguas para entenderse con ellos. Son bandas criminales que han perdido todo sentido humano”, dijo el jefe de Estado.

En las declaraciones de los pandilleros circuladas hoy, amenazaron al gobierno “que no podrá terminar con las pandillas, ya que somos parte de la comunidad de nuestro país”, dijeron, y finalizaron con la siguiente sentencia: “Así hacemos ver que nosotros tenemos herramientas como para destruir la política de nuestro país”.