

The Wrong Side of the Street

Examining Urban Violence and Resilience in Managua, Nicaragua Through a Spatial Lens

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy

Master of Arts in Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning

THESIS

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January 3, 2013

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THE FLETCHER SCHOOL

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

The terms “violence” and “(in)security” represent both deep analytical debates and urgent policy problems. Insulation from violence is fundamental to any conception of security, and security has become the holy grail of much political, development, and humanitarian pursuit. Yet both terms are contested. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as **the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.** Understanding violence to include the use of power to harm or deprive is an expansion of traditional definitions, which focus on the use of physical force.

At the same time, the concept of security has been expanded in many academic and policy circles to include a wide range of concerns and challenges. These range from traditional inter-state relations to broader understandings of individual and collective human wellbeing such as health, environmental sustainability, education and economic opportunity (Alkire 2003). These expanded definitions bring previously less-analyzed issues to the fore, including land tenure, the intersections of formal and informal economies, “natural” disasters, and the multiple kinds of crime and violence that influence everyday life in much of the world (UN-HABITAT 2007). At its most basic, security may be understood as **the perceived or actual absence of threats to life and wellbeing.**

These issues gain urgency as populations become concentrated in urban areas as never before. As of 2007, for the first time in history, over 50 percent of the world’s population lives in cities (UN-HABITAT 2007). By 2030, an estimated 81 percent of the

population of the Global South will be living in urban zones (Abrahamsen, Hubert and Williams 2009). Chronic violence—as distinguished from the violence of interstate or civil conflict or war—is now a major cause of mortality in many countries (UNODC 2011), and the problem is unlikely to diminish as cities grow larger and income disparities widen. As policymakers struggle to effectively confront this challenge, urban residents struggle to adapt their routines and livelihoods to cope with the fear and insecurity that pervade daily life (Abrahamsen 2009; Koonings and Kruijt 2007; Pecaut 1999). Some make different decisions about everyday navigation through their cities; other change their residence, workplace, or daily habits to avoid areas perceived to be too dangerous. Some avoid contact with the state and its agents, particularly police and other state security services, who are often perceived to be equal or greater threats than other violent actors. Some make alliances or become actively involved with violent groups as a self-defense strategy or an attempt to build their own power over their situation.

While violence and insecurity are present in every urban area worldwide, Latin America is now commonly regarded as the most violent region in the world, and Central America its epicenter (Moser and McIlwaine 2004). In a region once known for its protracted civil wars, “everyday” violence has now become so pervasive that its causes, consequences, and potential responses have become central themes of policy meetings and debates in the regional and international arenas. Whereas poverty and economic development once took center stage, violence now commonly dominates the discussion; this is particularly true as the multilayered relationship between violence, poverty, and inequality becomes increasingly clear. Security from violence—along with its other manifestations—is now understood not as a precursor or corollary to progress, but as a

central theme. It is both cause and consequence of development, and its absence is the most pressing challenge facing urban residents in Latin America and other regions today.

Nicaragua is often declared by its leadership and investors as the safest country in Central America, leaving residents of the capital city of Managua to attempt to reconcile daily experiences of violence with that official rhetoric. Managua is a city already fragmented by two centuries of dictatorship, civil war, willful mismanagement, and plain lack of interest due to the continuing dominance of a national narrative centered on rural culture and livelihoods. New forms of violence further splinter the city, restricting mobility to individual neighborhoods and social networks, and disrupting and forcing rearrangement of residents' perceptions of security and stability. Some of those new forms of violence, such as narcotrafficking and youth gangs, are instantly recognizable, as they are often the focus of both sensational media stories and heated international policy debates. Others, arguably more common, languish in the shadows within homes and other private spheres, and are only rarely even included in discussions of urban violence. Nicaraguans have prided themselves for decades on their cooperative spirit and the participatory political ethos that pervades civic life. Chronic violence in its many forms challenges this spirit in new ways, with some wealthier residents acquiescing to consumerist security approaches centered on fortified and guarded spaces, others taking individual pains to avoid perceived threats, and still others actively engaging with their neighbors and social networks to galvanize the Nicaraguan cooperative spirit and confront those threats directly. This diversity of impacts of violence and methods of resistance to it make Nicaragua, and particularly Managua, a useful target of inquiry into how violence is shaping and reshaping urban life in rapidly growing cities in the Global South.

This thesis is based on a case study of Managua, originally as part of a larger study of urban violence and resilience in the Global South, entitled *Urban Resilience in Situations of Chronic Violence* (URCV). This study was undertaken in 2011 by researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Department of Urban Studies and Planning (MIT/DUSP) and The Graduate Institute in Geneva, Switzerland, with participants from several other institutions such as myself from Tufts University. The genesis of this research on Managua was a course at MIT/DUSP entitled "Urban Development in Conflict Cities" in which the concepts of security, violence, and resilience and their place in the urban spatial, political, and planning arenas were debated and analyzed. One goal of the course and the overall URCV project was comparative analysis of cities that are understood as more or less violent, and more or less resilient; resilience is defined here as residents' ability to absorb, cope with, and adapt to the realities of insecurity and violence such that their lives are not consistently disrupted by it. Managua, with its relatively low crime rates, is seen as a positive case, particularly in contrast to its nearest neighbors and their skyrocketing homicide rates¹ and weak rule of law. The purpose of fieldwork, carried out in summer 2011, was therefore to further understand and analyze the situation, including Managua residents' perceptions of violence and security, contributing factors to violence, and examples and sources of resilience.

This thesis explores the ways in which citizens of Managua cope with and adapt to dynamic security conditions in their daily lives, and the interactions among institutions, actors and spaces that enable and constrain residents' resilience strategies. Despite the

¹ Homicide rates, while certainly an incomplete measure of violence, are the most commonly used indicator of violence rates across regions and countries. This is largely due to the fact that homicide is the type of crime most consistently likely to come to the attention of authorities (UNODC 2007).

Nicaraguan government's oft-touted assertion that it is the safest country in Central America, relatively little empirical research exists to document residents' quotidian experiences of insecurity or senses of agency regarding violence in their immediate surroundings. These gaps shaped my research questions: How are experiences and perceptions of insecurity shaped by the spatial and social configurations of urban life? How are they mediated by state institutions and non-state actors? What strategies enable resilience?

Underlying this case study is the observation—herein regarded as sufficiently accurate—that Managua has thus far avoided the dire urban security challenges facing many of its neighbors, particularly those to the north: Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. It does, however, face the same mounting security difficulties as all of its neighbors in the region: a spiraling struggle against corruption, narcotrafficking and other organized crime, a dearth of economic opportunities, and the legacies of intra-state conflicts.

While the legacy of civil war is an oft-cited factor underlying chronic violence, the correlation may be a spurious one. In fact, a central argument of this study is that the multi-layered legacy of the 1979 Sandinista revolution is not anathema to, but is the *basis of*, citizen resilience to current, entwined economic and security challenges. Such resilience is manifest in localized spatial and social loyalties that contribute to strong neighborhood identities, at the expense of a single broad urban identity. The main focus of this study is on how social and spatial factors interact to determine resilience: how and why a strong neighborhood identity – itself a fusion of social and spatial characteristics – is central to citizens' ability to cope and adapt in various ways.

All resilience strategies are not necessarily “good.” The actions people take to enable the survival and security of themselves and their families in the face of an array of daily threats are what those individuals see as necessary; that does not mean they are necessarily positive. Short-term survival strategies can cause exposure to different risks—for example, carrying a firearm or appealing for protection from a gang—and individual strategies may be at odds with the needs of the collective, be that the family, neighborhood, or urban population. Instead, these strategies must be understood to spring from inevitably imperfect sets of options under invariably constrained conditions. In a hypothetical final accounting, they might prove to be at least as detrimental to security conditions as they are beneficial. Resilience, however, like history, has no such end point toward which human beings, communities and governments can plan. Instead, they must constantly confront multiple stressors and constraints utilizing various dynamic options and strategies. Research inevitably offers only snapshot, a momentary freezing of the frame outside of which these various processes continue their constant cycles.

While there exists a great volume of political and philosophical polemics on Nicaragua’s historical and modern development, relatively few scholars—in either Spanish or English—have reliably documented current chronic security challenges. The lack of reliable crime statistics and the confusing and inconsistent manner in which crimes are categorized place significant limitations on this and other analyses. In addition, the dearth of specific and non-politicized data and analysis regarding broad physical and livelihoods security factors—including infrastructure, social services, economic activity and opportunities, and vulnerability to hazards and shocks—makes Managua ripe but particularly challenging for analysis.

This work is laid out in six chapters. **Chapter 1** consists of a literature review that contextualizes this research within the larger body of literature on urban violence and explores definitions and analytical approaches relevant to the study of chronic urban violence and resilience. **Chapter 2** locates Managua within its national and regional context, describing the physical and social development of the city itself and mapping key socio-historical events onto the geo-spatial layout of the city. **Chapter 3** describes the “official story” of current statistics and reported perceptions of violence, its most commonly cited causes, and the actors formally responsible for addressing it. This chapter introduces the role of the National Police force, itself deeply rooted in the 1979 revolution, as a key mediator of security and resilience. **Chapter 4** examines enabling and constraining factors of resilience in greater depth, including poverty and inequality, narcotrafficking, the “youth bulge,” and the gendered dimensions of violence. This chapter posits a distinction between “public” and “private” spheres of violence by which some types of violence are deemed socially problematic while others—namely, “domestic” violence against women and children—are treated as ordinary and commonplace. **Chapter 5** explores spatial and social aspects of resilience, focusing on how all of the above dynamics play out in two particular neighborhood contexts. This chapter discusses the reaches and limitations of overt state intervention, as well as implications of politicized organizing in diverse neighborhood contexts. The thesis concludes by offering a brief analysis of the sustainability of resilience in the Managua context.

This research was carried out in three phases. First, a desk review of available literature and qualitative and quantitative reports on crime and violence in Nicaragua and throughout the region took place in the spring of 2011. Fieldwork was carried out in

Managua in July and August 2011, utilizing qualitative methods focusing on semi-structured interviews with 37 individuals chosen through snowball sampling. Interviewees were primarily drawn from two neighborhoods: Colonia Máximo Jerez and Los Laureles Norte, which are described in depth in Chapter 5. The goal was to gain a greater depth of understanding of two historically, geographically, and economically distinct neighborhoods. The selection of these neighborhoods was not rigorous, however, but resulted from a combination of background knowledge of Managua and random fortune regarding informant connections. Four active-duty police officers of various rank, two retired police officers, two municipal officials, and four non-governmental experts were interviewed as well. Other research methods included systematic exploration and participant observation throughout the city, including intentional use of walking and public buses—rather than taxis or hired cars—as primary means of transportation throughout the urban area. The third phase, carried out in fall 2011, included further desk review of recently-released documentation and updated crime and violence data.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

My review of the relevant literature began in March, 2011 and continued throughout the research period, both before and after the fieldwork phase. Because time and space constraints limited the extent to which my research could delve deeply into the multiple fields and frameworks through which urban violence may be analyzed, and because the goal of this project is an urban sociological exploration of violence in the Nicaraguan context, I focused on the urban studies literature. I began by searching four major peer-reviewed journals of urban studies—*Environment and Urbanization*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *Urban Affairs Review*, and *Urban Studies*—searching for keywords including violence, insecurity, security, gangs, conflict, and safety, particularly in conjunction with the terms “urban” and “poverty.” I then drew on other sources including books, professional reports, journal articles, and media coverage by academics, international agencies, state institutions, and other researchers and journalists, particularly dealing with violence in the urban Latin American context. Some of the richest sources of this material include the United Nations (UN) and its various agencies, including UN-HABITAT, World Health Organization (WHO), UN Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Other UN affiliates and international bodies whose work has informed this research include the World Bank, the Geneva Declaration, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), the Small Arms Survey, and the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA).

Keyword searches of the four journals named above revealed that the number of articles focusing on urban violence and insecurity nearly quadrupled between 2000 and 2010 compared to the period between 1990 and 2000. Yet the overall number of articles remains low compared to other topics of concern to urbanists such as urban economic development, poverty, sustainability, and governance. As the literature makes clear, those topics are fundamental to the study of urban violence, yet it is only recently that those connections have begun to be explored. The criminal justice field has longer been interested in urban violence, but primarily through a lens of retributive justice, corrections, and criminal psychology rather than as a systemic sociological or development issue. In addition, the unfortunate “silo effect” of academic research has resulted in a lack of collaboration and comparative analysis between these approaches.

Studying Violence

The study of urban violence tends to coalesce around one of several themes in the academic literature. Many scholars focus on causes and drivers of violence, attempting to explicate vulnerabilities and risk factors that, by pinpointing and understanding them, might be diminished (see Vanderschueren 1996; Renner 1998; Brennan-Galvin 2002; Esser 2004; Briceño-León 2005; Leggett 2007; Serrano-Berthet and Lopez 2011).

Some argue that violence flourishes because of weak governance and the failure of states, particularly in fragile democracies (Koonings and Kruijt 1999). Pinheiro (1996) and Koonings and Kruijt (2004), recognizing the wide variance in spatial and social patterns of violence along neighborhood and class lines, point out that the so-called “failure” of states

to guarantee citizen security is perhaps better understood as selective “state abandonment.” The active involvement of institutions of the state or members of those institutions—perhaps most notably, in recent years, police and other law enforcement agencies—in extra-legal and violent activity further reflects such failure (ibid). Non-state actors may then step into those governance voids, creating further tension between themselves, citizens, and the state that leads to a cycle of ongoing violence (Grace 2011).

Bourgois (2001) argues that culpability for climbing violence rates lies in the exclusionary political economy of globalized neoliberal economic policies. Fajnzylber et al. (2002) find that inequality is strongly correlated with higher national homicide and robbery rates, while per capita income is not strongly correlated. At the same time, it must be noted that social exclusion is not a new phenomenon, particularly given the legacies of colonialism that have dominated the development of the Global South. The slave and indentured labor that allowed colonizing powers to generate vast amounts of wealth from their conquered territories both produced and was produced by systems of poverty, segregation, and second-class citizenship, particularly along lines of ethnic and tribal identities. In the latter part of the 20th century, the urban explosion followed those patterns of segregation, (literally) cementing them in the spatial arrangement of cities (Morenoff 2001). At the same time, neoliberal policies further enforced them.

These divisions of the urban landscape into poor and wealthy neighborhoods, with vastly different identities in terms of resident population, service provision, economic opportunity, and policing, and related dynamics of insecurity, have also given rise to a clear spatial dimension to violence (Portes 1989; Caldeira 2000; Moser and McIlwaine 2003). Reiss and Roth (1993) find that homicide offenders in the U.S. are disproportionately

involved in crimes near their place of residence and that such crimes are often not random, but that the offender and victim know one another or share strong social connections. Perhaps more significantly for the purposes of this research, there is often a territorial element to violence stemming from gang rivalries and other social enmities, be they gangs defending their neighborhood ground or armed guards ensuring the “safety” of elite-captured spaces to the exclusion of unwelcome elements (Rodgers 2004).

Structural inequalities spurred by histories of territorial or policy colonization and the absence—or antagonistic presence—of the state also contribute to drug trafficking, one of the most commonly identified drivers of violence, particularly in Latin America (Bourgois 1995; Cuevas and Demombynes 2009; Serrano-Berthet and Lopez, 2011). Cuevas and Demombynes (2009) find up to 70 percent higher homicide rates in Central American areas with intense narco-trafficking activity than in areas with minimal activity, even when controlling for numerous other factors. Fajnzylber et al. (1998) see similar correlation between drug production and homicides as well as drug possession and robbery rates at the national level, though it remains unclear how much these numbers are affected by crime externalities stemming from narco-trafficking activities.

Another approach to understanding the causes and drivers of violence has concentrated on legacies of inter- or intra-state conflict (Pereira and Davis 2000; Moser and Winton 2002; Vigil 2003; Esser 2004, Winton 2004a; Moser and McIlwaine 2004; Jütersonke et al. 2009). This approach is particularly prevalent in the literature concerning violence in Latin America (Serrano-Berthet and Lopez 2011) where armed conflicts and their ancillary effects and aftermath dominated much of the 20th century. These authors argue that past conflict may increase current violence because of the breakdown of social

capital and increase in animosity between social actors, increased numbers of weapons in circulation, and the establishment of violence as an accepted means of resolving conflicts. While the apparent normalization of violence in some contexts may be correlated to histories of armed conflict, Hume (2008; 61) rightfully warns against such “simplistic explanatory frameworks that risk pathologizing a people or rendering violence an inevitable outcome of history.”

On a purely practical level such linkages may be spurious; Cuevas and Demombynes (2009) find no significant correlation between current homicide rates and history of armed conflict, adjusting for a wide range of factors; in fact, they find negative association between war incidence and current homicide levels in some Central American locations. Nevertheless, as Moser and McIlwaine (2004, 4) note, countries with a recent history of conflict often experience a “proliferation of street gangs made up of former guerrilla or military members, a growing drugs industry with networks established during times of conflict, as well as an increase in domestic violence” that merits further analysis.

Contexts and Actors

Some researchers argue that identifying drivers of violence is useful only to the extent that they are analytically located *vis-à-vis* the contexts in which violence takes place (Esser 2004; Rodgers 2004; Sanín and Jaramillo 2004; Rodgers 2006), and/or the actors involved, particularly gangs (Vanderschueren 1996; Vigil 2003; Manwaring 2005; Small Arms Survey 2006; WOLA 2006; Jütersonke et al. 2009). Context is vital, they argue, to understanding how and why violence manifests differently in different places. The World Bank, for example, has attributed rising violence in Central America to “a complex set of factors,

including rapid urbanization, persistent poverty and inequality, social exclusion, political violence, organized crime, post-conflict cultures, the emergence of illegal drug use and trafficking and authoritarian family structures” (World Bank 2008, 3). Jütersonke et al. (2009) caution that such multifaceted problems can only be understood in their local contexts.

Narcotrafficking, for example, looms ever larger in the work on Central American violence (UNODC 2007; Jütersonke et al. 2009; Serrano-Berthet and Lopez 2011).

Ethnopolitical violence and a history of particularly weak state institutions may be far more salient factors in surging violence in Karachi and other major cities in south Asia (Esser 2004; Gayer 2007; The Economist 2011). The history of apartheid and the demobilization of ex-combatants contribute significantly to violence in South Africa (Simpson 1997). While these drivers and manifestations of violence may share characteristics across geographical boundaries, these authors argue, their salience only becomes clear and comparable in context at the national and even sub-national levels, so that the extent of their comparability is clear.

Urbanization itself may play a key role in violence, though the significance of the correlation is somewhat disputed in the literature. Many researchers have found linkages between rising crime, rapid urbanization, and high urban density (Buvinic and Morrison 2000; Brennan-Galvin 2002; Esser 2004; Moser 2004; Briceño-León 2005). Some attribute this correlation to conflict arising from conflict over scarce resources in very dense and overcrowded urban spaces (Brennan-Galvin 2002; Naudé et al. 2006). Disequilibrium between the growth of cities’ populations and their physical and economic infrastructure may also produce governance gaps that make it very difficult for cities to provide effective

services and security (van Dijk 1998; Gaviria and Pages 2002; Esser 2004; Small Arms Survey 2007; Davis 2008). Fajnzylber et al. (1998) find that homicide rates appear to have lower correlation to urbanization, but that robbery rates appear more strongly correlated. This may be attributable to economic necessity combined with the increased anonymity provided in larger, more dense urban spaces (Brennan-Galvin 2002).

Higher urban crime rates may also be due to lower social capital, which appears to be both a cause and effect of urban violence (Buvinic et al. 2002). Fear of violence may be as significant a part of urban security problems as violence itself, whether or not perceptions of crime rates are borne out by local statistics. Perceptions of insecurity lead to a variety of adaptations in social and spatial organization as people try to protect themselves (Briceño-Leon 2005). Such adaptations often take the form of physical barriers and the segregation of space enforced by high fences, gated communities, fortified “public” spaces such as heavily guarded shopping centers, parks, and government-controlled commons. Such fragmentation of urban space may enhance individualized perceptions of security, but it can also weaken urban identity and reduce community cohesion as well as highlighting class and racial inequalities (Vanderschueren 1996; Caldeira 2000; UN-HABITAT 2007; Jütersonke et al. 2009), further perpetuating insecurity rather than alleviating it.

Vulnerability and resilience

This thesis addresses not only urban violence, but also resilience to that violence.

Resilience has emerged as a key concept in policy circles in recent years, appearing in discussions of mental health, environmental protection, disasters, conflict, urban violence,

and other topics. Increasing recognition of rapid change and unpredictability in global climate, resource availability, and settlement patterns has shifted focus from threat-centered risk analysis to an emphasis on the socio-ecological concept of vulnerability (Oliver-Smith 2004). Vulnerability is generally understood as a lack of power or reduced capacity of individuals or groups to act in their own best interests when faced with threats to wellbeing (Baker, Hunt and Rittenburg 2007; Cardona 2004; Gentry et al. 1995; Hill 2001). This approach emphasizes the relationships between and among human beings and their environments.

The inverse of vulnerability is resilience, a concept Pelling (2003; 5) defines as “the capacity to adjust to threats and mitigate or avoid harm.” Resilience has longer been discussed by sociologists and psychologists, particularly those working in the field of child and adolescent mental health (Rutter 1987; Masten 2001; Bonanno 2004). However, both terms are gaining relevance today mainly in the literature on disasters and climate change (Adger 2000; Pelling 2003; Malone 2009), moreso than in the urban violence literature. Research on the concepts of vulnerability and resilience is rooted in the observation that individuals and communities often respond very differently to similar events and adversity. Agreement and clarity around these concepts, however, remain elusive. Within the climate field alone, definitions abound. Commonly cited definitions from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are:

- *Vulnerability*: The degree to which a system is susceptible to, and unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes. Vulnerability is a function of the character, magnitude, and rate of climate change and variation to which a system is exposed, its sensitivity, and its adaptive capacity (IPCC WG2 2007:883).
- *Resilience*: The ability of a social or ecological system to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self-

organisation, and the capacity to adapt to stress and change (IPCC WG2 2007: 880).

These definitions, like others based in ecology, emphasize the integration of physical and social factors as determinants of wellbeing. An advantage of the ecological approach to resilience is its inherent complexity and focus on systems, rather than the individualized focus of psychological resilience studies. Such complexity, however, keeps the systems approach highly theoretical. Disaster researchers who focus on resilience tend to emphasize vulnerability and resilience to particular hazards, focusing more on case studies (Cutter 1996). This approach may render findings less comparable across cases and fields, but also more concrete and digestible (Malone 2009).

Urban violence theorists and researchers have only more recently begun to adopt these concepts as a framework for understanding rising violence and crime levels in urban areas throughout the world. The definitions used by urbanists tend to be borrowed directly from the social-ecological analysis of climate and disaster researchers; few scholars have focused on resilience to urban violence,² though it appears on the periphery of some scholarly work. International institutions seem to find the concept more salient (UN-HABITAT 2007) though the focus settles more often on vulnerability and various attempts at its quantification than on resilience. Though attempts at measuring resilience are proliferating in the ecological literature, particularly in relation to disasters and climate change, it remains little explored by violence theorists.

Regardless of the definitions or measurements of resilience employed in the literature, certain barriers to resilience are more easily identified. One factor that

² The study in which this thesis originated was an effort at filling in this gap, though it made no attempt at actually quantifying resilience.

challenges resilience-building efforts as well as researchers attempting to examine the phenomenon is the sensitive nature of the topic of violence. Even where violence is acknowledged, it is often discussed only in general terms: something that happens to other people. Pride and reputation may play a role, where personal connections to violence imply involvement in narcotrafficking or other illicit activities.

Many researchers also point to “codes of silence” observed by those involved in violent and illegal activity as a significant challenge to in-depth examination of the topic by researchers (McIlwaine and Moser 2001; Dowdney 2003; Goldstein 2003; Jensen 2008). Such codes promise severe punishment of anyone who speaks openly of illegal activities, including members of gangs and criminal networks as well as bystanders who may be related to or live in the “territory” of such groups. They quite effectively serve to create a culture of fear of speaking openly about violence, particularly to outsiders. As a result, the true extent and causality of the problem often remains shrouded in mystery, making it more difficult for policymakers to address it head-on.

By their very nature, traditional social science research techniques are often at odds with the sentiments and expectations of the actors that violence scholars may attempt to reach. Individuals involved in crimes, drug use and trafficking, and other illicit activities are, “[b]y definition, individuals who have been marginalized socially, economically, and culturally” (Bourgois 2003; 12). They are far more likely to be distrustful of the social mainstream from which they have been rejected, and therefore less apt to discuss their personal experiences with any representatives of that society, regardless of how friendly or neutral the researcher believes herself to be.

Not all violence is considered equally important or abhorrent. This is another factor

that may contribute to a disconnect between those most vulnerable to daily violence and those with power to address it from policy and planning perspectives. Munck (2008) muses that a truly democratic society should have a “zero-tolerance policy” regarding all forms of violence; he also volunteers the extreme implausibility of that scenario, noting Weber’s description of the state itself as the entity which, at least in theory, maintains a monopoly over the use of violence. In reality, social, political, and analytical responses to violence vary depending upon *who* commits the violence and *what* shape it takes. Honest analyses of violence must concede that not all actors “recognize the same acts as violent, accordingly such acts may be justified in different and even contradictory ways” (Torres Rivas 1999: 286). The malleability of the label of (il)legitimacy may be useful to powerful actors who employ violence themselves and/or have cause or responsibility to respond to the violence of others, and likely undermines the resilience of those who lack access to the power to wield the label, or to effectively control or respond to it being applied to them. The eminent sociologist Charles Tilly notes this dichotomy in his examination of the “uncertain, elastic line between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” violence appear[ing] in the upper reaches of power” of the state itself; he warns against taking at face value the declarations of the state regarding power and criminality (Tilly 1985; p 173).

Hume (2008) notes that intra-family violence and violence against women are often treated very differently and more tolerantly by lawmakers, media, and mainstream cultural narratives than other types of violence. She argues that the performance and experience of violence, as well as socially “appropriate” responses to it, are inextricably linked to normative gender identities that legitimize male violence and female victimization, serving “both to construct and reproduce notions of “acceptable” violence” (2004: 71). The

supposedly acceptable includes that which is committed within households, families, and romantic partnerships, as well as against individuals whose behavior is deemed unacceptable by the state. Such violence—public and private alike—may be perpetrated by the very same actors who are employed or elected to positions of responsibility for public safety. As long as such double standards exist, these scholars argue, resilience will be continually undermined by the logical fallacy that enables some types of violence to be publicly decried, with millions of dollars spent on its suppression, and other (probably more common) types to be, at best, swept under the rug.

The power dynamics that enable such double standards regarding gendered violence also keep other aspects and types of violence from being closely examined. Carolyn Nordstrom is a “conflict anthropologist” who has written at length about the challenges of doing research in such marginalized spaces, or what she calls “the shadows” (Nordstrom 2004). She notes that one particular hazard for researchers is the need to protect the identities of sources, lest they be further endangered by having broken a code of silence of which the researcher may not even be aware. Such research also runs a risk, of course, of endangering the researcher. However, Nordstrom cautions that, while such physical danger may be real, it may also serve as a convenient excuse to avoid digging up difficult truths. She argues that powerful actors also have a personal interest in maintaining the shadows, because their exposure would require acknowledgement that illicit activities—like much gendered and intra-family violence—are far more common than most people would like to admit, making resilience much more complex and difficult to achieve.

Categories of Violence

Several writers have particularly informed my understanding of this topic and the analytical lens through which I conducted fieldwork. Chief among them, Caroline Moser is a social anthropologist and scholar of violence, poverty, informality, and gender who is often cited by other scholars and institutions for her contributions to the study of urban violence and insecurity. Moser has long argued for a holistic approach to understanding urban violence, recognizing the “complex, multi-layered” and “rapidly, dramatically changing” nature of the topic (Moser 2004) and the need to clarify and understand violence in terms of *categories* of violent manifestations, *causal factors* underlying and leading to those acts, and the *costs* of violence to individuals, communities and societies (Moser and McIlwaine 2006).

In order to address her argument for a holistic framework, Moser and, in various collaborations, Winton, McIlwaine, Rodgers, and Jutersonke developed a “roadmap” of violence categories (Table 1.2). They categorize violence in terms of its primary motivating factors, noting that such motivations may be conscious or unconscious, and that categories may shift and overlap depending on the specifics of a situation (ibid). Armed actors may, for example, be paid by one political party to stage an attack on a candidate of their opposition; the primary motivation of the agents of violence in this scenario is economic, while the violence must also be categorized as political. This roadmap has been an important contribution to the study of urban violence as it offers a common framework through which to analyze complex phenomena in a variety of urban, national, and globalized contexts.

Table 1.1. Urban violence

Category of violence	Perpetrator and/or victim	Manifestation
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State and non-state actors for political gain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guerilla and paramilitary conflicts ▪ Political assassinations ▪ Armed conflict between political parties
Institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State and informal institutions ▪ Agents of the private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extra-judicial killings by police ▪ Physical/psychological abuse by health/education workers ▪ Social cleansing of undesirable populations ▪ Organized lynchings and other vigilante justice
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organized crime ▪ Business interests ▪ Delinquents ▪ Robbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intimidation and violence as means of resolving economic disputes ▪ Street theft, robbery and crime ▪ Kidnapping ▪ Armed robbery ▪ Drug-trafficking ▪ Car theft and other contraband activities ▪ Small-arms dealing ▪ Assaults including killing and rape in the course of economic crimes ▪ Trafficking in prostitutes Conflict over scarce resources
Socioeconomic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gangs ▪ Street children ▪ Ethnic groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Territorial or identity-based “turf” violence; robbery, theft ▪ Petty theft ▪ Communal riots
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intimate partners ▪ Perpetrators of sexual violence (may be known or unknown to their victim) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physical or psychological male–female abuse ▪ Physical and sexual abuse, particularly prevalent in the case of stepfathers

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child abusers ▪ Intergenerational violence in the home/family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> but also uncles ▪ Physical and psychological abuse ▪ Incivility in areas such as traffic, road rage, bar fights and street confrontations ▪ Arguments that get out of control
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Adapted from Moser 2004

Understanding violence and citizen security/*seguridad ciudadana*

A concept that is particularly key to the Latin American and Nicaraguan contexts is that of *seguridad ciudadana*, or citizen security. Definitions of the phrase vary widely. While many authors agree that a condition of *seguridad ciudadana* is the absence of threats to the security of a person or group, there is no consensus as to whether it includes accidental harm, natural hazards, economic threats, or other dangers in addition to crimes (Peetz 2008). *Seguridad ciudadana* tends to be a strongly normative concept, in that it conceptualizes an ideal (probably unattainable) state of being based on a dominant narrative of what constitutes a threat and *who* constitutes the persons or groups worthy of protection (ibid). It is distinguishable from other security concepts including national security (focused on the integrity of the state and its territory) and also from—though perhaps a subset of—human security, a broader conception of security against economic, social and environmental threats to individuals, groups or societies.³ In Nicaragua’s 2009

³ The concept of human security gained traction with the 1994 UN Human Development Report, which argued that the concept of security should be expanded to include the following types of threats: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political. See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/>.

National Human Development Plan, *seguridad ciudadana* is defined as “the right of every person, Nicaraguan and foreign, on Nicaraguan soil to pursue his/her daily life with the lowest possible level of threat to his/her personal integrity, wellbeing and civic rights.”

Conclusion

As this chapter makes clear, the definitions of violence and security offered in the introduction raise many more questions than they answer. Academics and policymakers agree that violence and the associated ideas of security, vulnerability, and resilience must be addressed urgently. However, the concepts remain underspecified and contested, as does the question of what actions should be taken. Of course, while theoretical debates rage on, both quantifiable levels of violence and perceptions of vulnerability to violence (i.e. insecurity) continue to rise. While it may be academically interesting to offer concrete definitions and theorize about commonalities and connections among sites of violence, such exercises will be useful only to the extent that they speak to individuals’ subjective experiences of violence and, ideally, ultimately contribute to their relief and resilience. In order to do so, those individuals’ voices must be heard, and their own understandings of their contexts, experiences, and needs documented and analyzed. The remainder of this thesis offers a small attempt.

CHAPTER 2

MANAGUA: CITY OF MANY FAULTS

Nicaragua has faced nearly every imaginable challenge and undergone several astounding cycles of transformation over the past generation. Since 1970, the country has experienced successful insurrection and popular revolution, counterrevolution and ongoing warfare (the *Contra* War) that resulted in 100,000 deaths (2.5 percent of the population), drastic economic fluctuations including hyperinflation reaching 33,000 percent, socialization and then privatization of the economy, a massive debt crisis,⁴ transitions between nine national leaders, and three debilitating natural disasters⁵ (Pisani 2003). Over that same period, Central America has gone from being a region of civil wars to a central corridor in the international drug trade, with major implications for the security of the region's citizens.

The combination of these factors has led to highly uneven social and economic development, as well as significant security challenges at the national and subnational levels. At the national level, growing violence and inequality have become huge development challenges, particularly in Nicaragua's neighbors to the north. The other countries in the region—Belize, Costa Rica and Panama—have fared better, despite Panama's decades-deep involvement in drug trafficking (UNODC 2007). Today, Nicaragua finds itself literally and figuratively caught in the middle. While its economic and inequality indicators remain the worst in the hemisphere besides Haiti, indicators such as homicide rates, gang participation and drug seizures show that Nicaragua is balanced on a precipice

⁴ Per capita foreign debt in 1990 was \$2,867, whereas GDP per capita for the same period was \$469. In other words, the foreign-debt-to-income ratio was 6.1 to 1.

⁵ The 1972 earthquake in Managua, Hurricane Joan in 1988, and Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

between its more secure and stable neighbors and those with much higher homicide and violence rates (Policia Nacional 2010; Bautista Lara 2011; Serrano-Berthet and Lopez 2011).

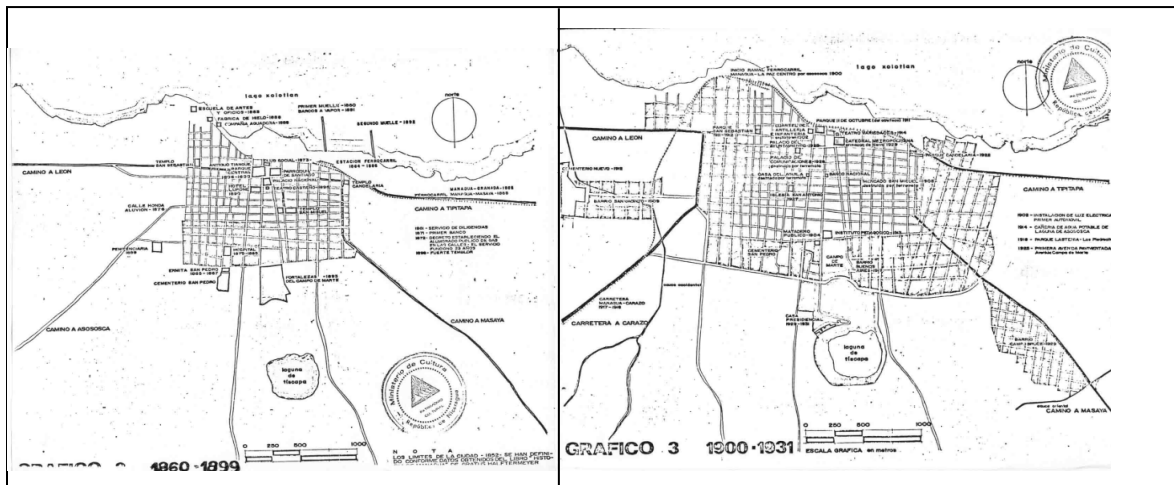
Managua is, by far, the largest urban area in the country. The city is home to approximately one quarter of the national population, or two million inhabitants; it is the second most populous city in Central America after Guatemala City. Far from being a modernized capital, it is a city at once sprawling and provincial, with no downtown, and a disjointed social structure in which the wealthy and powerful live a fortified existence seemingly removed from the rest of the population. Landing in Managua as a visitor is disorienting; it is easy to assume that one is on the outskirts when in fact s/he is in the center of the city.

Shadows of conflict in a city of contrasts

Managua's relatively brief modern history has been one of nearly continuous natural and political spasm. It became the national capital in the 1850s following a protracted dispute between the powerful Liberal (politically progressive) families of León and the Conservative (business elite) families of Granada over political and economic control of the country. Managua—geographically halfway in between Granada and León—remained smaller and less nationally significant throughout the 19th century. Nonetheless, it grew significantly in both size and importance throughout an era of national upheaval, which included tremendous economic growth as well as U.S. interventionist swagger: the U.S. Marines occupied parts of Nicaragua almost continuously—excepting nine months in 1925—from 1912 until 1933. Despite those challenges, Managua became the center of the

nation's growing agro-industrial complex, commercial trade networks and national politics during this period (Walker 2003), and the accompanying growth of the city was planned and orderly, expanding in a grid pattern away from the shores of Lake Managua (Figure 2.1).

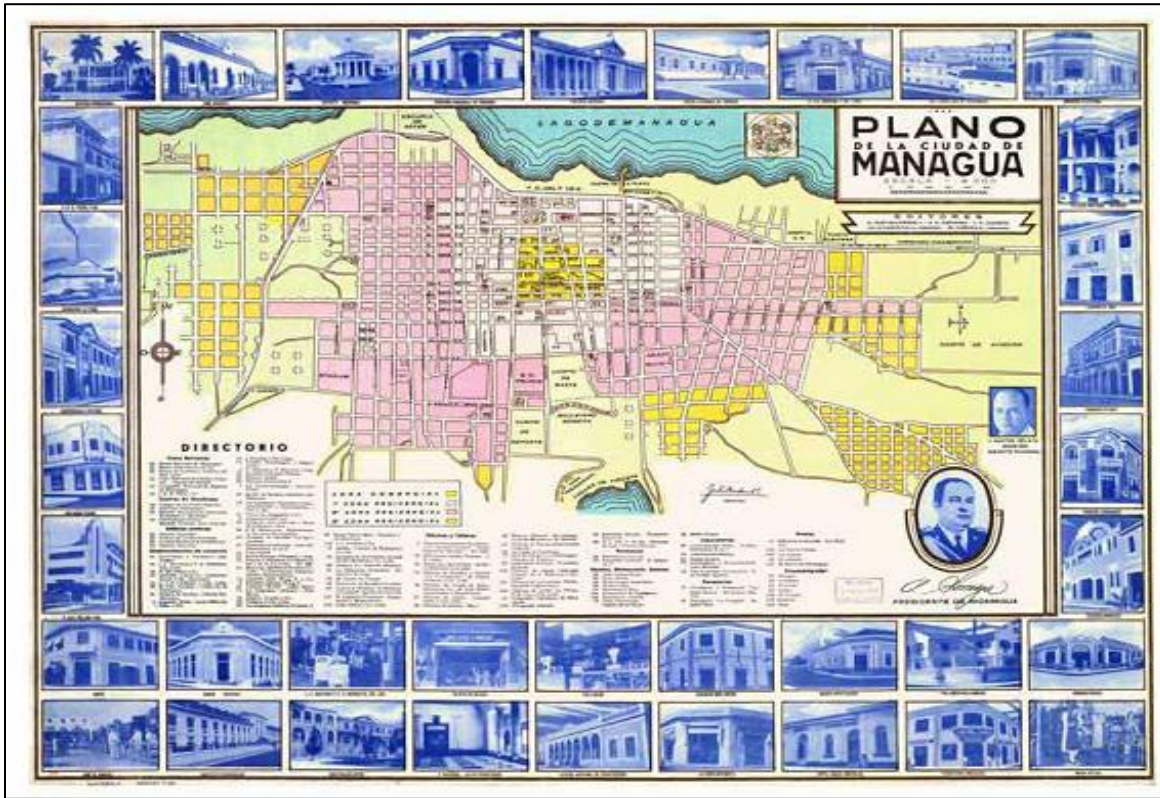
Figure 2.1. Managua city plans 1860-1899 (left) and 1900-1931



Source: Managua city archives

By the mid-1900s, Managua had an active commercial center and optimistic plans for growth, visible in Figure 2.2. These plans were particularly sanguine given the city's location in the middle of a highly active seismic and volcanic zone, for which seismologists predict a significant earthquake to take place every 50 years on average (USGS 2012). The city suffered tremendous damage in a major earthquake in 1931, which killed 2000 people and destroyed or severely damaged most of the city's buildings (USGS 1973). It is unclear how much of the city's built environment survived the earthquake, and how much of the 1942 city plan was directly related to post-earthquake reconstruction needs.

Figure 2.2. Managua city plan 1942



Source: Managua city archives

The earthquake of 1931 was only a foreshadow of future disaster. At midnight on December 23 of 1972, an earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter Scale, and two aftershocks measuring 5.0 and 5.2, struck at a shallow depth below the city. The quake destroyed 13 square kilometers in the city center and severely damaged 27 more. Many of the city's buildings simply crumbled, particularly its small business and residential areas, which consisted of older timber frame and clay or plaster houses (USGS 1973). Mortality estimates range widely, from 5,000 to 20,000, partly because the extremely inadequate municipal response infrastructure and fear for public health meant that many victims were immediately buried in mass graves, and no official count of deaths took place (Kates 1973). Approximately 250,000 people were made homeless and at least that many left jobless, as

many buildings that had not been destroyed were declared unfit for occupancy, and 70 percent of government facilities were rendered inoperative (ibid).

The city recovered slowly from this disaster, largely unaided and often impeded by the Somoza government, which busied itself diverting the large flow of aid money into its own coffers and exploiting every aspect of the disaster for tremendous personal enrichment (Walker 2003). The Somoza family had tightly ruled Nicaragua in a father-son kleptocracy since 1936, after the father—Anastasio Somoza—was installed in power by the departing U.S. military in 1933. The elder Somoza outmaneuvered his political opponents to take over the presidency, assassinating revolutionary leader Augusto Sandino along the way in 1936. Sandino's legendary fight against U.S. occupation had already turned him into a hero of the *campesinos*; his assassination by Somoza's National Guard made him an instant mythical figure. Eventually, Marxist and other opposition movements coalesced under the banner of *Sandinismo*⁶ in the mid-1900s, adding a third stream to the ongoing Liberal-Conservative power dual that had long controlled Nicaraguan politics.

The Sandinista guerilla movement fought from the northern mountains beginning in the early 1960s, while at the same time, wealthy and middle-class opposition to Somoza grew in the cities. The 1972 earthquake and the Somoza government's profiteering response to it, however, were the watershed events that eventually led to Sandinista victory and Somoza's downfall in 1979. After the quake, the government simply declared 640 blocks of the ruined city center off-limits. Private investors—Somoza cronies—focused instead on newly valuable vacant land on the city's outskirts, "leapfrogging" over land that was more difficult to acquire or to clear of rubble, and building wherever was most

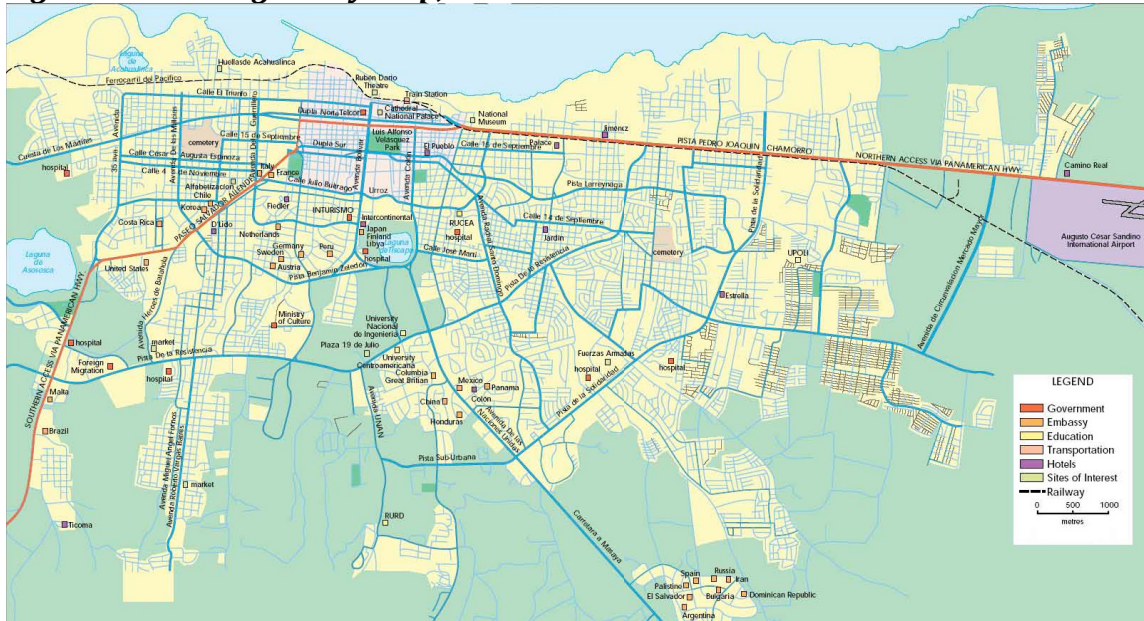
⁶ *Sandinismo* is a political concept or ideology, and *Sandinistas* are those who adhere to the ideology put it into action.

convenient for a quick profit (Chamorro 1973). As a result, downtown Managua was never rebuilt, and the physical layout of Managua today is a strangely disjointed set of neighborhoods with no urban core, and no clear organizing principle(s). A chaotic scattering of poor and informal settlements abutt wealthy neighborhoods, sprawling markets, upscale modern shopping malls, and large tracts of derelict, unreconstructed open space, leading one observer to compare the spatial layout of Managua today to “a deformed octopus” (Wall 1996).

Managua’s relative abandonment and extortion at the hands of the Somozas make it an illustration—in its built environment, and the lack thereof—of the political storms that have shaped society over the past century, even while the city itself saw little combat in the Sandinistas’ war against the regime. The subsequent Sandinista government’s war against the *Contras* and the neoliberal transition of the 1990s abandoned Managua to spurts of haphazard growth. While the Sandinistas created two ambitious urban plans for the city, the *Contra* war diverted most of the country’s attention and resources throughout the 1980s, and the plans were never realized (Chavez 1987).

Managua today

Figure 2.3. Managua city map, 2011



Source: Managua city government official website

Managua's fragmented layout and history, so closely tied to the country's turbulent political past, have resulted in equally fragmented patterns in population and services. This fragmentation has important implications for violence and resilience in the city today.

Managua's population, according to the 2005 national census, was 835,335 in the municipality and 1,093,760 in the department (hereafter, "Managua" and "the city" refer to the municipality alone, unless otherwise specified) (INIDE 2005).⁷ The rapidly-growing municipality's population was estimated in 2010 at 1,014,384 (IEEPP 2010), who are

⁷ The department—analogueous to a state or province—of Managua includes eight other municipalities, ranging in population from 8,777 to 82,808. Lines are blurring, however, as the metropolitan area expands and overtakes other municipalities in the department.

governed by an elected mayor whose power varies depending upon which party occupies the presidency.⁸

Settlement patterns and their administrative structure are also fragmented. The city is structured in seven irregularly-shaped administrative districts and law enforcement districts (Figure 2.4). From 1989 to 2009, the municipality was comprised of five districts (II-VI) while District I corresponded to Ciudad Sandino to the northwest. In 2009, redistricting carved the city into seven districts. Ciudad Sandino incorporated as its own municipality, and Managua authorities created a new District I in the middle of the city whose purpose was partly to capture major government offices as well as many tourist and historic sites in one district. However, rhetoric and reality remain fragmented as well. After a year of existence, the district had only a skeleton staff and no offices, and remained largely “invisible” to state institutions.⁹ By March 2011, the requisite representative to the municipal government was in place, but major public works projects in a number of neighborhoods were far behind schedule, if they had even begun.¹⁰

⁸ In Nicaragua’s current political climate, the Sandinista mayor of Managua is widely believed to be a figurehead, while the national government holds the purse strings and exercises real dominion over the city.

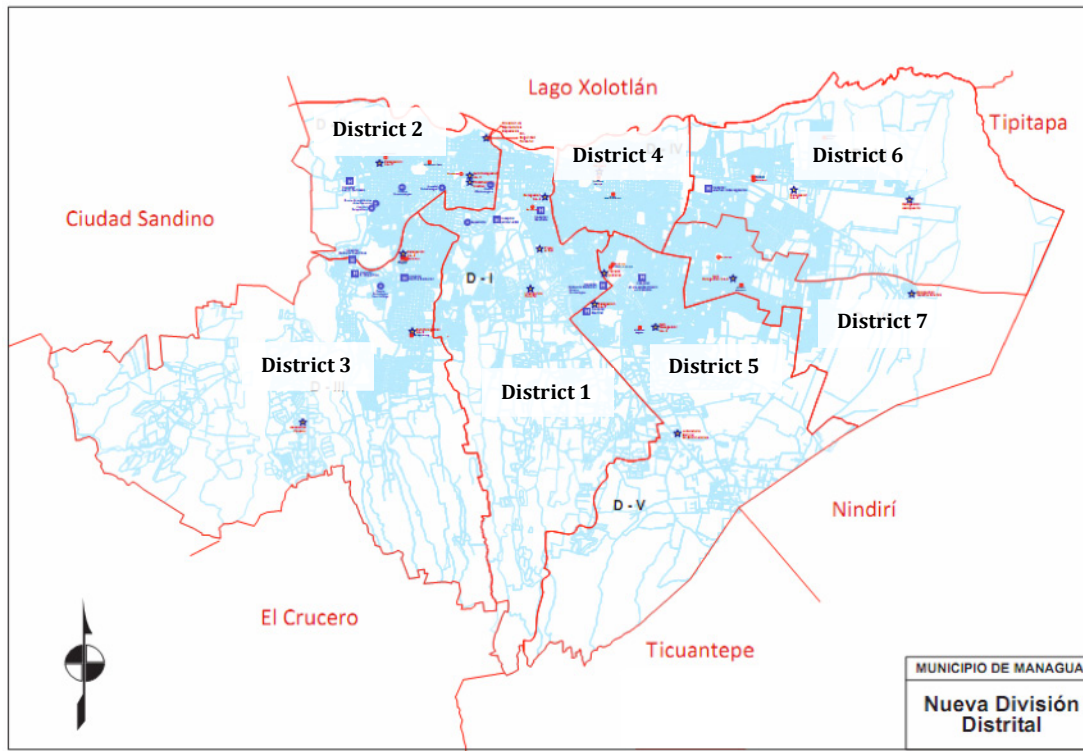
⁹ Distrito Uno de Managua “invisible.” La Prensa, February 10, 2010.

<http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2010/02/11/nacionales/15877>

¹⁰ Paralizadas obras en Distrito I de Managua. La Prensa, March 8, 2011.

<http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2011/03/08/nacionales/54148>

Figure 2.4. Managua's seven administrative districts



Source: Retrieved 12/9/11 from http://www.managua.gob.ni/images/managua/estaciones_policia.jpg

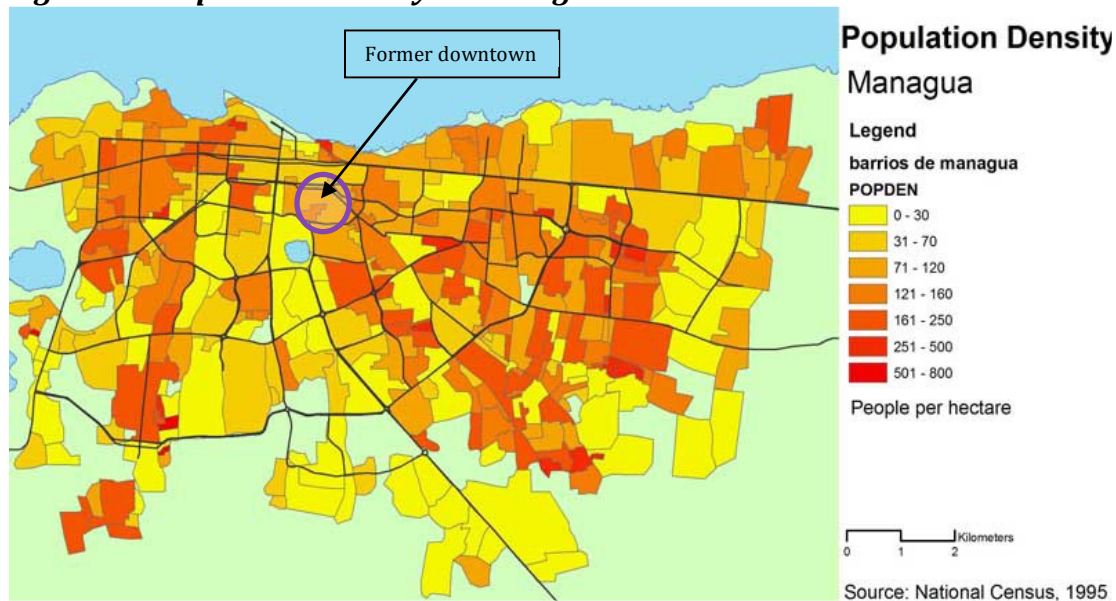
Managua has over 600 recognized neighborhoods: 137 *barríos*, 94 *residenciales*, 134 *urbanizaciones progresivas*, 21 *comarcas*, and approximately 300 *asentamientos humanos espontáneos*. Neighborhoods in Managua generally have one of seven designations:

Table 2.1. Neighborhood designations

Managua neighborhood designations	English approximation
<i>barrio</i>	neighborhood
<i>residencial</i>	residential district
<i>villa</i>	fancy/wealthy subdivision
<i>urbanización progresiva</i>	urbanizing section
<i>comarca</i>	region/area
<i>reparto</i>	less wealthy subdivision
<i>colonia</i>	colony
<i>asentamiento humano espontáneo</i>	squatter settlement

Translation by author

Figure 2.5 Population density in Managua



Source: Brown and Bornstein 2006

All neighborhoods are certainly not created equal: population density varies widely across the city, as depicted in Figure 2.5. Such irregular settlement patterns make provision—most of which is still state-administered—difficult and expensive. Water and sewer lines, transportation and other infrastructure are more difficult to provide and link together over the deformed octopus pattern than they would be in a grid. Drainage systems built—often hastily—in the aftermath of the 1972 earthquake are now more than 30 years old, and were designed for a city with less than half the current population (de Castro 2006). The water, sewage and drainage systems are significantly overloaded, leading to shortages, system breakdowns, and increasing danger of future flooding in low-lying parts of the city (ibid).

The large portion of the population that lives in economically and politically marginalized formal neighborhoods and *asentamientos* has particularly poor access to services, in many cases relying on fragile and illegal connections to water and electrical infrastructure (Parés Barbarena). Lack of access to and high costs associated with basic

services are significant concerns for the majority of residents (Table 2.2) (Bautista Lara 2011). These have been pinpointed as a major contributing factor to insecurity in the city, as they contribute to greater daily struggle at the household and neighborhood levels to meet basic needs, and to diminished senses of social stability and institutional efficacy (ibid).

Table 2.2. Satisfaction with basic services (percent)

Service	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
Trash collection	66.7	31
Consistent water and electricity	60.3	39
Municipal management	58	37
Citizen security	56.3	42.7
Environmental management	50	48.7

Source: Borge and Associates, as quoted in Bautista Lara 2011

Movement through this sprawling city remains difficult for the majority of residents, who lack vehicle ownership or access. Neighborhoods are connected by a “fortified network”¹¹ of a few bicycle-spoke-style thoroughfares, enhancing connectivity throughout the city for private vehicle owners and forcing everyone else to travel long distances by foot, taxi, or the chaotic and often dangerous bus “system.” Buses are operated by private owners through contracts with the municipality and the state, utilizing a variety of buses ranging from discarded U.S. school buses (Figure 2.6) to newly-arriving modern vehicles donated by Mexico and Russia.¹² Routes are neither regulated nor published, though there

¹¹ Rodgers posits that Managua’s smaller scale has allowed for the construction of fewer “fortified enclaves” that Caldeira and others have observed in other major Latin American cities such as Sao Paulo or Buenos Aires, but instead resulted in the development of a “fortified network” centering on high-speed roads and roundabouts linking businesses and services catering to the small elite. This fortified network, according to Rodgers, constitutes an important form of spatial regulation and segregation disconnecting the wealthy from the general fabric of the city. Rodgers, Dennis. 2004. Disembedding the city: crime, insecurity and spatial organization in Managua, Nicaragua. *Environment and Urbanization* 16(2): 113-124.

¹² Pérez Rivera, Ana. “Llegan más buses rusos” La Prensa July 27, 2011. <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2011/07/27/nacionales/67986>

exists a somewhat accurate “wiki” website listing the stops on each route.¹³ Buses are often extremely crowded and fail to run on any reliable schedule. Crime on buses—mainly pickpocketing, but up to and including several homicides in recent years—is a serious problem and source of insecurity for residents who have no other affordable transportation option.

Figure 2.6. Typical Managua city bus



Source: La Prensa newspaper website; unattributed photo

The lack of nodes and connectivity in the network also means that roads are often crowded and traffic bottlenecks are common. The whole transportation system is located in a geologically vulnerable area and depends upon limited access points, making it highly vulnerable to hazards and disruption in the likely (according to Nicaraguan and U.S. geologists) event that another major earthquake or other hazard strikes Managua in the next several decades.

¹³ Very few residents own or have regular access to computers or the internet, however, so the website is not a useful resource for them. I stumbled upon it through internet searching, but none of my interviewees or acquaintances in Managua—even those with regular internet access—were aware of its existence.

As a result of the city's disjointed layout and the lack of accessible transport, much of the population is quite geographically restricted in its daily economic and social activities, and is far more confined to individual neighborhoods than it might be in the presence of more diversified transportation options. With the addition of uneven service provision among many neighborhoods, a picture emerges of the urban segregation and stratification defining Managua today. As Brown and Bornstein (2006) point out: "[a]n examination of the overall urban form of Managua, its transport links, growth areas, and urban problems suggests that many of the elements that contribute to the re-integration of the city around new axes and commercial centers simultaneously are leading to fragmentation and dis-integration as certain groups, places, and networks operate in distinct 'disembedded' ways" (see also Rogers 2004).

The roots of Managua's currently fragmented political and spatial economy stretch back to 1972 and beyond, but are most obviously manifest in the country's radical policy shifts following the Sandinistas' fall from power in 1990. Structural adjustment policies steered the economy quickly and firmly away from the socialist policies of the previous decade. The government "dominated the economy in 1990; by 1991 the state had retreated by 83.5 percent as measured by government expenditures" (Pisani 2003). State subsidies and bank loans were directed away from cooperatives and toward private exporters, as the post-Sandinista government focused on privatization and the return of redistributed land to its previous owners (Spalding).

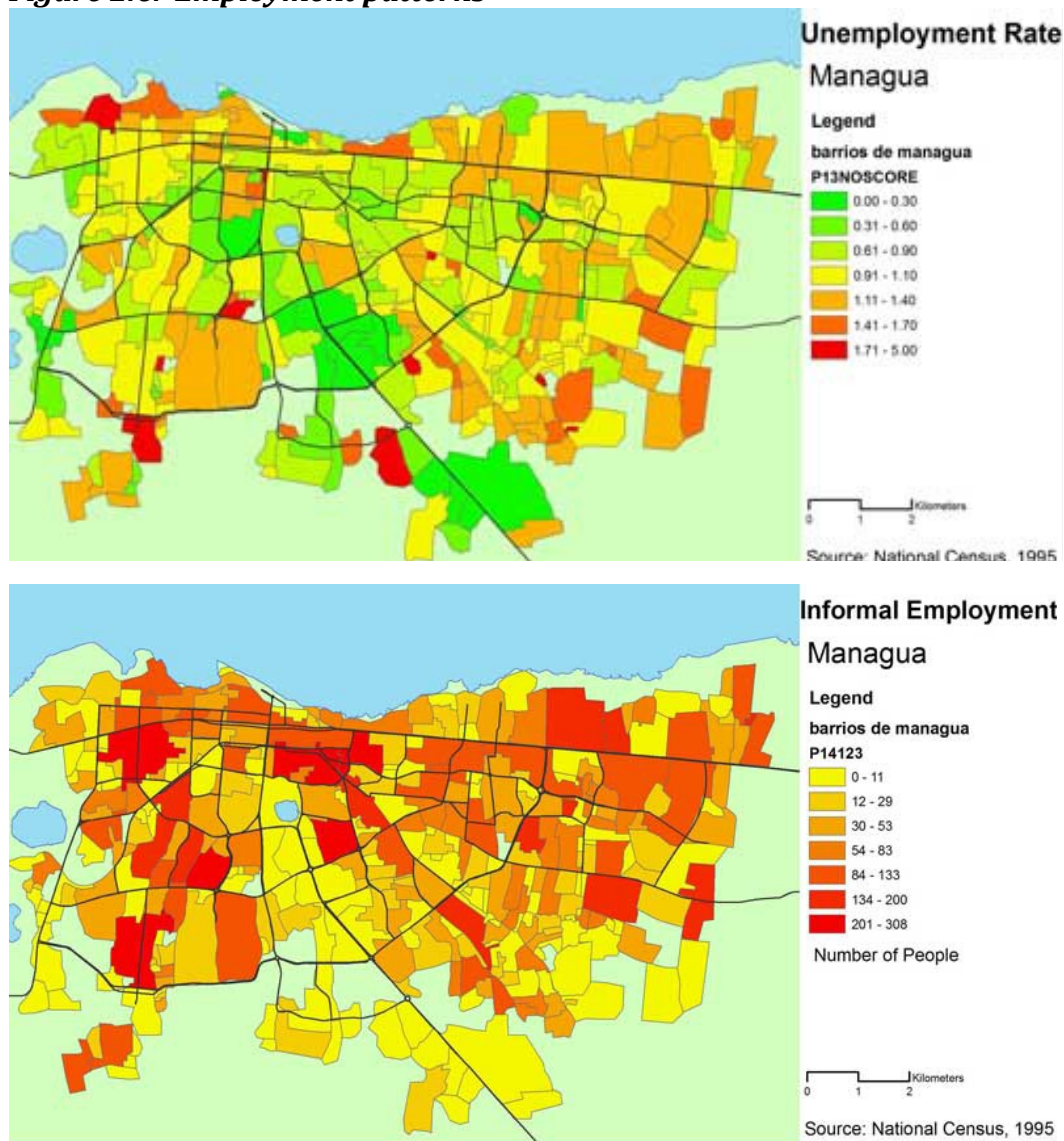
Such a sudden and enormous shift had tremendous implications for all sectors, but particularly for the informal sector. The formal sector shrank overall, and the informal sector grew as urban workers were forced to find new livelihoods and many rural

producers migrated to the city following the collapse of agricultural cooperatives. The physical size of the city also grew tremendously during that time. Some authors have traced that growth to the deepening of structural adjustment policies (Babb 1997). Over the course of the 1990s, a period in which Nicaragua signed ten agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), informal employment not only grew but also became a much more precarious livelihood strategy, as wages for men in the informal sector declined by 42.9 percent, and for women declined by 53.6 percent, compared to 4.7 and 9.5 percent declines for each group in the formal sector (Pisani 2003). Real per capita income fell from US\$469 in 1990 to \$410 in 1998; by 2010, it had recovered only to \$430 (Serrano-Berthet and Lopez 2011).

Figure 2.7 offers a snapshot of official unemployment¹⁴ and informal employment in Managua in the middle of that decade of transition. Informal workers are mainly clustered around the city's major markets: Boer, Oriental, Roberto Huembes, San Miguel and Mayoreo.

¹⁴ Unemployment is calculated by dividing the number of people available and looking for work but not actively working by the total workforce, which includes the former category together with those actively working in the formal sector.

Figure 2.6. Employment patterns



Source: Brown and Bornstein 2006

Conclusion

The realities of such atomization in the city's internal structure, layout, and access to opportunities and services, combined with the aftermath of severe social trauma in the form of earthquakes, dictatorship and civil war, have eroded what sense of urban citizenship may have previously existed in Managua. With no urban center, the typical

core-periphery urban model is shattered; all of Managua is peripheral. The downtown was not only *not* rebuilt following the earthquake, it was cordoned off and declared a dead zone; indeed, it was literally a grave for thousands of people. Public imagination was forced to turn inward and narrow its focus in that historical moment. Discrete neighborhoods offered convenient spatial boundaries for both a traumatized public and an incoming revolutionary movement that depended upon grassroots social organization for the coalescence of support around its political aims. The earthquake destroyed broad urban identity and the Sandinista Revolution reinforced small-scale neighborhood identity, leading to the socio-spatial fragmentation that defines Managua today.

CHAPTER 3

VIOLENCE AND SECURITY IN MANAGUA TODAY

This chapter employs two types of categorization of violence and crime,¹⁵ one scholarly and the other governmental. The scholarly view includes Moser's suggestion of five broad types of urban violence: political, institutional, economic, economic/social, and social.¹⁶ While every type of violence in Moser's framework has been present in Managua, some are far more easily identified as a part of the urban landscape than others.

Political violence, for example, is widely considered to be relatively rare in Managua. Violent acts perpetrated by the government and between political and ideological factions have occurred during various periods, to be sure, but violence in Managua has been largely individualized. Managua was the site of targeted assault and killing of the government's political enemies during the Somoza years. During the Sandinista revolution, there were highly strategic attacks from both sides—what would likely now be labeled terrorism—aimed mostly at eliminating certain enemy actors and/or generating a particular emotional response among city residents. However, most combat occurred in the countryside and other cities. Even more recent violent protests surrounding elections have mainly taken place in León and other urban areas with histories of open conflict. What most clearly afflicts Managua today is increasingly common economic and social violence (Bautista Lara 2011).

¹⁵ Crimes should be understood as a manifestation of violence; the terms are related but not interchangeable.

¹⁶ See Moser, Caroline O.N. "Urban Violence and Insecurity: an Introductory Roadmap." *Environment and Urbanization* 2004, 16(3), p5.

Moser's typology is included here as an additional analytical lens through which to examine the crimes and violence reported to be taking place in Managua and to add another dimension to the reporting categories provided by the National Police (the governmental view). This typology is distinct from statistical categories utilized by law enforcement and other agencies within and outside of Nicaragua. While less exacting than the "hard numbers" of crime statistics, the scholarly categories may be no less useful, not least because statistics on crime and violence are notoriously unreliable in general, and particularly questionable in Nicaragua due to the lack of resources devoted to data collection (Rodgers 2004).

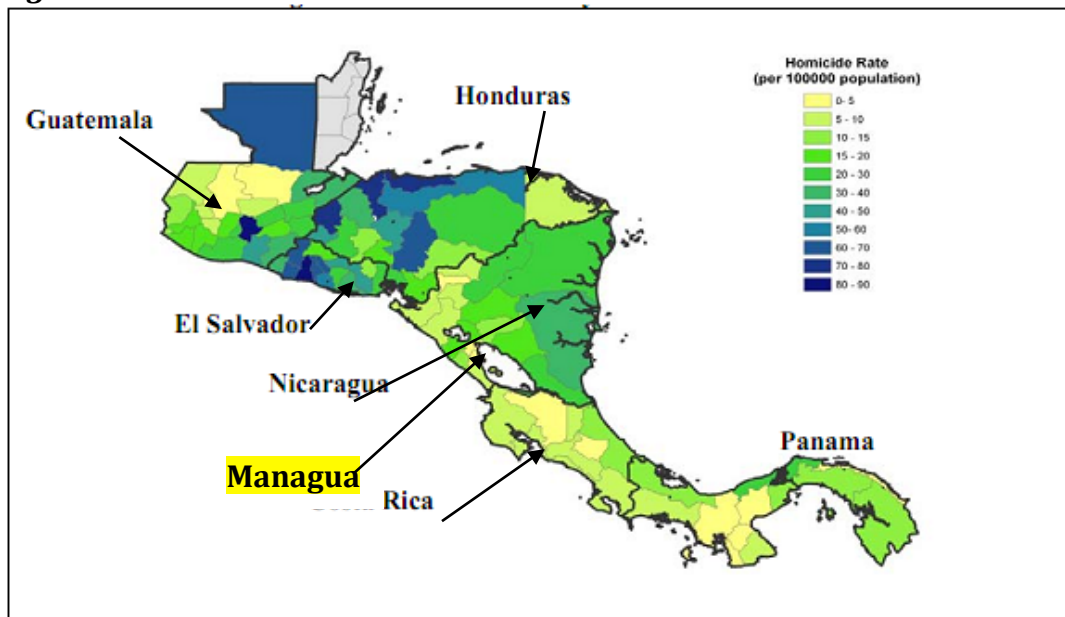
Overall crime statistics certainly underrepresent the number of crimes that take place and the multiple types of violence that impact people's lives, as many crimes—including homicides—go uncounted. By some estimates, approximately half of all crime victims do not report anything to the police (UNODC 2007). Several major factors contribute to the underreporting of crimes. Criminal activity is generally secretive, and crime victims may have their own reasons for minimizing their interaction with the state. Also, the processes for reporting crimes may be cumbersome, time-consuming, and unpleasant, and the perceived potential gain very low. In Nicaragua, where patrolling officers are few if there are any at all, reporting a crime most often means going to a district police station, which can require significant investment of time as well as bus or taxi fares. There, it is often necessary to wait for hours in crowded waiting rooms with other crime victims as well as accused perpetrators—some bleeding, some in handcuffs, some under the influence of alcohol or narcotics—and speak with multiple officers simply to file a complaint, nearly half of which are never resolved.

Overall homicide rates in Managua remain far lower than in other parts of Nicaragua or in the country's northern neighbors, where gang and drug violence represent more severe problems (Figure 3.1). The municipality had 17 homicides per 100,000 residents in 2010. In contrast, the most violent¹⁷ part of Nicaragua, the Southern Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS), where government and police presence are minimal and narcotrafficking activity is high, experienced 40 homicides per 100,000 in 2010, on par with some of the highest homicide rates in the region and the world (Policia Nacional 2010).

Other crime statistics tell of greater insecurity in the city. Managua's robbery rates far exceed those of any other part of the country: 1,079 per 100,000 people, whereas the national average is 489 per 100,000 (Policia Nacional 2010). Perhaps most critically, the statistics paint a somewhat different picture when disaggregated by city district and then compared nationally. Districts IV, V and VI represent some of the highest homicide rates in the country, comparable to those in the RAAS and other extremely high-crime departments (IEEPP 2011). Districts IV and VI had the highest overall crime rates in the country in 2008: 671 and 615 crimes per 10,000 residents, respectively (ibid). There is no single clear explanation for these localized variations by district in Managua, though some potential factors will be presented and discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁷ As measured by homicide rates.

Figure 3.1. Homicide Rates in Central America



Source: Cuevas and Demombynes 2009

In the absence of reliable data, it is difficult to categorize Managua’s crime and violence problems according to Moser’s typology, not least because many crimes may not fit neatly into single types. Gang violence, for example, which will be discussed below, has both social and economic aspects. It is also increasingly taking on political dimensions as observers find links between the current administration of President Daniel Ortega, gangs, and the supposedly spontaneous uprisings of “Sandinista youth” against the political opposition, particularly during Presidential and parliamentary elections in 2006 and 2008, respectively (Rocha 2006).

What is clear is that crime incidence, including personal and property crime, has skyrocketed, particularly in certain parts of the city (Table 3.1). Crime rates in all districts jumped between 2005 and 2008; they have since largely leveled off, but have not decreased. Districts III, IV and VI witnessed smaller increases in crime rates than other Managua districts between 2008 and 2010, their crime rates remain the highest overall in

the city. District IV, geographically the smallest district, has some of the most crimes reported, while the geographically large District I has relatively few. It is unclear to what extent these changes are due to increased reporting versus increases in actual number of crimes. However, the four police officers (of various rank) and two municipal officials interviewed for this study reported a widespread belief that, while reporting rates may have increased somewhat, crime rates have accelerated much more, particularly in certain neighborhoods. That is, they do not believe that increased reporting is creating a false impression of rising crime.