Youth Criminality and Urban Social Conflict in the City of Rosario, Argentina: Analysis and Proposals for Conflict Transformation

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The present article describes and analyses youth criminality in the city of Rosario, Argentina, between 2003 and 2006. Key actors' understandings of and responses to the conflict were investigated by means of semi-structured interviews, observations, discourse analysis of policy documents, and analysis of secondary data, drawing heavily on the experience of the author, a youth worker in Rosario. The actors examined were the police, the local government, young delinquents, and youth organizations. Youth criminality is analyzed with a conflict transformation approach using conflict analysis tools. Whereas the provincial police understand the issue as a delinquency problem, other actors perceive it as an expression of a wider urban social conflict between those who are "included" and those who are "excluded" and as one of the negative effects of globalization processes. The results suggest that police responses addressing only direct violence are ineffective, even contributing to increased tensions and polarization, whereas strategies addressing cultural and structural violence are more suitable for this type of social urban conflict. Finally, recommendations for local youth policy are proposed to facilitate participation and inclusion of youth and as a tool for peaceful conflict transformation.

1. Introduction

During the 1990s when citizens of the city of Rosario, Argentina, were asked what the main problems that affected their lives were, they replied that employment was their first concern, followed by security and education. In more recent years, however, security ranked as the most pressing concern. Incidents of violent robbery have risen and thus feelings of insecurity have grown dramatically. The number of youth who engage in violence or are victims of it (e.g. delinquency, fights between gangs) has risen since the 1990s. According to Ciaffardini (2006) this was due to a lack of social cohesion, a breakdown of family structures, high unemployment rates, the deterioration of the education system, and other factors. Responses to this situation and feelings of insecurity include: the creation of "private" neighborhoods outside the city, where groups of wealthier families build their houses surrounded by a wall or fence and safe-guarded by private security forces; the increase of private security companies and services; and avoidance of certain disadvantaged areas, slums, or poor neighborhoods of the city by police forces, citizens, and public transportation.[1] These reactions have deepened social fragmentation and conflict in the city; presently, there is an underlying polarization between those who are "in" the city and abide by its "civilized" norms of conduct, and those who are "out," criminals who defy law and order. The dominant discourse of politicians and media refers to control and reintegration of "youth in conflict with the law" and the need to reinforce the existing security apparatus. Insecurity is understood and treated as an issue of criminality and juvenile delinquency, not as a wider social conflict.

1 In Argentina slums are colloquially called "villas miseria."

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What is the urban social conflict in Rosario beyond the dominant discourse? This question led to others, including: What are the causes of this conflict? How do different actors define and understand the conflict? What are their proposed solutions? How can policy be a conflict transformer? These questions show that there is a need to research these phenomena and identify what good practices currently exist to respond to this type of problems. There is a need for research on public youth policies using a new paradigm of participatory democracy which considers youths as actors and resources, and not only as passive beneficiaries or troublemakers. The aims of this article are to describe and analyze the problem of youth criminality as an expression of urban social conflict and a response to structural violence in the city of Rosario, and to explore the responses of key actors to this problem, in particular to consider the existing youth policies of local and state government and the contributions of non-governmental youth organizations and to propose recommendations for improving current interventions. It is important also to note the limitations of this study. Given that no similar studies have been undertaken from a conflict transformation perspective, the analysis remains of an exploratory and descriptive nature, relying on qualitative methodologies. The aim of this study was not to test causal relations but rather to describe and understand how the main actors perceive the causes of criminality, whether they link this to wider social conflicts, and how they address the issue through their behavior and policies. Further research and testing of explanatory hypothesis are needed as detailed in the conclusions.

This article attempts to go beyond the predominant discourse that identifies the conflict as a "youth violence" phenomenon. We are dealing not with a single conflict, but rather a complex of conflicts which overlap and are intertwined with each other. There is an underlying macro-level socioeconomic conflict between those who feel excluded and those that believe that their prescriptions do not lead to exclusion. In this context, the issue of youth criminality is embedded in this larger inclusion-exclusion conflict, and in a generational one. In predominant discourses, young people are depicted as the problem; they are seen in a negative light, as criminals or as victims of unfair structures rather than as social resources. Within this discourse,

their engagement in violence is due to their deviation and anomie. In Argentina, repression is the main strategy of social control used by the police (CELS 2005). One conclusion of this study is that this response has been inadequate and has not improved the situation. The discourse hides the root causes of the conflicts, consequently hindering the search for effective solutions. This article argues that the observed direct violence – armed robbery, and violence during robbery – is a response to the presence of extreme structural and cultural violence. Therefore, no public policy based *only* on stopping direct violence will be successful. An effective answer to this problem must attempt to address structural and cultural violence. Although an intergenerational conflict exists, this conflict is not the only (or primary) one. The conflict is not only between "youth" and "adults" but rather between the "included" and the "excluded" of society.

This article aims to contribute to the fields of conflict analysis and peace studies by considering the views and perspectives of various actors in the conflict and their potential to be actors for peace. A conflict transformation framework is applied to a current policy issue in the city of Rosario, Argentina, and offers constructive proposals for the transformation of the conflict. Its relevance for the study of peace and conflict lies in its analysis of an urban-level social conflict, which is an intra-society conflict at the meso-level (Galtung 2004). The analysis of this type of conflict fills a gap, as conflict transformation and peacebuilding analyses are often contextualized in inter-state and intra-state scenarios. Although the analysis is specific to one particular medium-sized city in South America (population ca. one million), it is relevant for cities worldwide where similar trends appear, from the favelas of Rio to the suburbs of New York and the banlieues of Paris. The fact that social inclusion issues are relevant for most large cities worldwide shows that local-level conflicts between included and excluded represent a global issue of concern. Furthermore, this article contributes to the analysis of public policies in the fields of youth and violence prevention.

2. On the Conceptual and Methodological Approach
2.1. Youth
Even though there is a growing interest in youth, and development agencies, governments and non-governmental

organizations state that they work with or for youth, the concept of youth itself has been under debate in recent decades and has been redefined by various social and demographic changes. Youth refers to a heterogeneous group encompassing individuals with various ethnicities, religions, races, genders, and classes. "Some favor biological markers, in which youth is the period between puberty and parenthood, while others define youth in terms of cultural markers – a distinct social status with specific roles, rituals, and relationships" (USAID 2004). Historically, youth has been defined through age, as the period in between childhood and adulthood, marked by social rituals and customs. Adulthood is associated with marriage and forming a new family as the main indicator of maturity. In modern societies the period where childhood has been left behind but the responsibilities of adulthood have not yet been assumed has become longer. Adulthood is associated with entrance into the labor market and assuming civic and political responsibilities (Tavella et al. 2004). During this period, youth can stay longer in the formal education system and enjoy recreational activities which complement their social and cultural education. It is a time in which they can find their vocations, draw up their life projects and plan their futures, but most importantly, acquire technical skills to enter the labor market. This is linked to the idea of progress and industrialization processes which need a more qualified labor force. The concept of youth was constructed as a social representation of a future full of hope (when young people seemed to abide by the rules and buy into the dreams of progress and the established order) and as a future social threat or source of chaos (when youth challenged the established order and social values) (Tavella et al. 2004). This idea of youth constructed during modernity has been challenged, as the idea of progress itself is questioned. Modernity meant progress and the underlying idea was that a better future could be planned, so youth planned and invested time in their professional careers as this was expected from them to ensure progress of society.

However, presently this belief in progress is being weakened by the failure of socioeconomic paradigms, whether communism or neoliberal capitalism, to bring about development and prosperity. This failure, consequently, affects the concept of youth. In both systems, entrance into the world of work is the main channel for participation in a society. Unemployment, underemployment, exploitation, and child labor have produced disenchantment with a social system that is unable to provide this vital resource and human right. This has led to uncertainty and lack of trust in overarching social proposals; this disillusionment is a sign of our times.[2] This crisis of the idea of modernity and progress has an enormous impact on youth and the concept of youth. Youth cannot reach adulthood if they cannot find employment. Often youth find employment much later in their lives or are underemployed all their lives. In this sense, youth becomes a timeless category. Being young becomes an end in itself beyond age. Youth becomes a sociocultural model that influences all spaces of public and private life, as being an adult stops being an attractive goal and becoming old seems to be a curse. Being youthful is "cool" or "in," and it translates into fashion, entertainment, and cultural consumption in general, made possible by plastic surgery, cosmetics, and endless ways of looking and feeling young which only a few can afford. The idea that the future is now and that tomorrow is far away shapes the way young people see life and plan their life strategies. Culture is influenced by the idea that "anything goes" ("Todo vale") to be happy today. The context of this cultural and structural crisis associated with the impact of globalization processes is key to understanding why and how young people in Rosario are influenced, and influenced differently according to their position in the socioeconomic structures, how they understand their lives and justify their choices. While some youth are, and can be, youth longer,[3] in sectors of the society subject to deeper crisis or upheaval the concept of youth may radically alter as boys and girls are forced to take on adult responsibilities at a very young age.

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2 This crisis is associated with the postmodernist movement which called into question the ideas of progress, rationality, and objectivity upon which modernism was based. Authors like Jean Francois Lyotard, John Paul Saul, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida were associated with this movement.

3 In Rosario, demographic trends in the upper classes are similar to those found in developed countries, motherhood at thirty. The Council of Europe considers youth to last until the age of thirty.

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2.2. Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

Societies and individuals often respond to problems and conflicts using violence and force. Several debates exist on whether human beings are inherently violent and questions like: "Do young people 'naturally' respond to violence with more violence?" appear. In 1986 a group of scientists met in Seville, Spain, and drafted the "Seville Statement," whose purpose was to dispel the widespread belief that human beings are inevitably disposed to war as a result of innate, biologically determined aggressive traits.[4] The statement claims that "It is scientifically incorrect to say that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors. Although fighting occurs widely throughout animal species, only a few cases of destructive intra-species fighting between organized groups have ever been reported among naturally living species, and none of these involve the use of tools designed to be weapons. . . . It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behavior is genetically programmed into our human nature." This is an important starting point when studying youth who are condemned by media and society as violent and trouble makers. Contrary to certain popular beliefs and the opinions of some criminologists, young delinquents are not born "evil" and human beings are not by nature violent and criminals.

This analysis is nurtured and guided by a nonviolent peace-building and conflict transformation approach, mostly based on the work of Johan Galtung and his "Transcend" method (Galtung 2000). At the same time, Miall (2004) indicates that a diversity of approaches in peacebuilding is related to the changing nature of contemporary conflicts and reflects the need for new tools of analysis. Miall presents three fundamental characteristics of contemporary conflict: 1) they are asymmetric, marked by inequalities of power and status; 2) they are protracted, defying cyclical or bell-shaped models of conflict phases; and 3) these protracted conflicts disrupt societies affected both by local struggles and global factors. Miall argues that these characteristics challenge the approaches which focus on two

parties and win-win situations. This is particularly relevant for the case of youth in Rosario. The complexity of the situation requires the consideration of multiple actors in a long term and integrative social change perspective. Moreover, the three characteristics of contemporary conflicts mentioned by Miall are present in the urban conflict in the city of Rosario. First, the actors are not clearly defined. They are numerous, diverse, less organized, more elusive to cluster or group under one leader or one voice, and highly unequal in terms of power. Second, the conflict is ongoing, with periods of more or less intensity. It is not possible to identify one single event which started, triggered, or ended the violence, so the bell-shape model is of limited use for describing its dynamics. Thirdly, there are local and global factors which interact in the same space. What is important to clarify is that a conflict transformation approach which focuses on the transformation of relationships, interests, and discourses and deals with the root causes of the conflict seems more appropriate and relevant than those that focus on an agreement or "quick fix."

In this article, peacebuilding is understood as a process which involves a full range of approaches and interventions needed for the transformation of violent relationships, structures, attitudes, and behaviors. It involves creative and simultaneous political and social processes for finding transcendent solutions to the root causes of conflicts, dialogue, and efforts to change attitudes and behavior. Peacebuilding is multidimensional and it includes the full range of activities from post-war reconstruction to preventive measures. Peacebuilding encompasses all activities which aim to eliminate or mitigate direct, structural, and cultural violence. Peacebuilding and conflict transformation can only be possible if diverse needs, interests, and expectations are addressed, and if sincere and future-oriented processes of healing and reconciliation take place. Consequently, the interrelated approaches of conflict transformation and peacebuilding are the most appropriate to guide this conflict analysis as multiple actors are considered and the main focus is on dealing with the root causes of the

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4 The Seville Statement on Violence was drafted by an international committee of twenty scholars at the sixth International Colloquium on Brain and Aggression held at the University of Seville, Spain, in May 1986, with support from the Spanish Commission for UNESCO. UNESCO adopted the Seville Statement at its twenty-fifth General Conference Session in Paris, October 17 to November 16, 1989. The statement has been formally endorsed by scientific organizations and published in journals around the world. UNESCO is preparing a brochure to be used in teaching young people about the statement.

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conflict, changing relationships, structures, attitudes and behavior in a long term perspective, and building creativity and local capacities.

Another conceptual note should be made on the concept of conflict, which is often used as a synonym for violence and thus bears negative connotations as a fight or struggle, as a disagreement between people with different ideas or beliefs or as an incompatibility (or perceived incompatibility) of goals. Conflict can also be defined positively as a chance for actors to express their differences and become aware of others' perceptions, interests and needs, and thus represent an opportunity for change and growth. Conflict can also be seen as a natural process, part of life and relationships (Galtung 2000). According to Galtung's approach, conflict may lead to violence but it is conceptually different. At the core of a conflict, the root, there is always an incompatibility between goals, referred to as contradiction. While conflict means an incompatibility of goals, and is natural and necessary for human and social development, violence oppresses, destroys, and hinders this development. Violence is only one way of dealing with a conflict; it is destructive and rarely transforms the conflict positively. Three forms of violence are conceptualized by Galtung (2000): a) direct violence is an explicit act or behavior that physically damages a person or object; b) structural violence refers to the violence built into political, social, and economic systems that determine unfair distribution of power, resources, and opportunities, leading to actors feeling oppressed and unable to meet their needs; and c) cultural violence is violence entrenched in cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions that makes certain types of violence seem legitimate, accepted, normal, or natural. From this perspective, a high degree of socioeconomic inequality constitutes a feature of structural violence as long as this distribution of power, resources, and opportunities is unfair. Yet what constitutes "unfair" distribution is debatable. Extreme material poverty (lack of food, shelter, and health services) is commonly seen as unacceptable, but the debate is about the underlying reasons and structures that lead to poverty or impoverishment. Several historical

analyses of Argentina indicate the reasons why the present levels of socioeconomic inequality are the result of unfair distribution of resources, and a few indications of these reasons are mentioned in later sections.[5] Most importantly, the concept of cultural violence is key to understanding how an unfair distribution of resources is sustained and justified over time, especially when some groups appear to be structurally excluded. Social exclusion refers to limitations that some groups face in accessing resources and the perceptions that different groups have about being "part of society" or "out of society". In other words, there may be various degrees of socioeconomic inequality, yet some groups may feel or perceive themselves or others as socially excluded. Cultural violence is then the series of beliefs that justify the unfair distribution of resources and make social exclusion appear as natural or legitimate phenomena. For example, in Rosario, it is common to hear among the upper and middle classes the simplistic and narrow analysis that poor people are poor because they are lazy. This interpretation minimizes or denies flaws in the social system itself; instead it is the individual who is failing to be socially included. These distinctions are important as often only direct violence is analyzed and "treated," and other forms of violence are ignored. The impact of structural violence is often forgotten: "Empirical work should now be started to get meaningful estimates of the loss of man-years due to direct and structural violence, respectively. What is lost in the slums of Latin America relative to the battlefields of Europe during one year of World War II?" (Galtung 1971). In this article, special emphasis is placed on analyzing how these three interrelated types of violence manifest themselves in the urban space and in the reality of young people.

Critical Marxists base their analyses of urban political and social violence on conflict between classes, drawing on the labor theory of value and concepts such as exploitation, class and the accumulation of capital, and the social relations of production. Capitalism and urbanization are inextricably linked, but with no guarantee of social justice. One representative of this current, Enzo Mangione, states in his book *Social Conflict and the City* (1981) that in some Third

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5 For studies on social inequality and social exclusion in Argentina see Minujin et al. (1993), Analdi (1997), and Boron et al (1999).

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World countries and underdeveloped regions urbanization is still a massive phenomenon due to the persistent crisis of the countryside caused by the mechanization of agriculture and processes of industrialization. The city seems to offer opportunities for employment – or at least survival. As a result cities, especially their peripheries and degraded areas, are overcrowded by internal and international migrants. Often municipal governments cannot respond to this phenomenon with the needed services and urban infrastructure. The lack of housing, services, and basic living conditions leads to waves of social conflict and violence in its different forms. This overall trend has also been seen in various forms in Rosario throughout the twentieth century and up to the present day. Sassen (2003) explains that it seems to be part of the so-called phenomenon of globalization that economic and social flows concentrate in centers and create margins or less advantaged spaces. The increase in criminality and urban violence appear to be a global symptom of growing inequality, even creating "urban glamour zones" and "urban war zones" as she calls them. According to Bauman (2005) the whole system of global domination is based on the institution of urban insecurity that is, deliberately making people afraid and vulnerable so as to easily dominate them.

2.3. Citizenship and Democracy at the Local Level as a Framework for Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation and peacebuilding rely on values of cohesion, human rights, and non-violent political action. Which political frameworks allow these processes of peaceful structural transformation to take place in practice? Since long-term processes that deal with the root causes of conflict are necessary, the basic framework should be one of a democratic society in which the concept of citizenship has renewed meaning in terms of political, civil, and economic and social rights. The discussion about citizenship and democracy is relevant here as these concepts are typically used by policymakers, donors, and development organizations as "cures" for society's problems.[6] Formal or representative democracies

have huge problems in becoming social frameworks for conflict transformation. A deep crisis of representation exists when citizens do not feel that their concerns and voices are heard or taken into account. Although in principle everyone is "included" and part of political society, many actors are in practice excluded and deprived of equal opportunities. Only those with power are involved, excluding large parts of the population.

Violent social conflicts reflect society's failure to include all citizens in public life and to secure their basic rights, suggesting an insufficiently democratic system or a lack of democratic governance. In the context of Latin America, weak institutions are faced with higher demands and with a greater "burden" of implementing unpopular reforms and structural adjustments, whether by choice or external compulsion. These changes are devised to help regional economies fit into the global market economy in a competitive way, sometimes negatively affecting traditional livelihoods and industries. An institutionalized process of conflict transformation and peacebuilding represents a public policy that fosters and develops experiences of participatory democracy. This interaction requires common rules and respect for diversity, which if agreed together prevent violence and create mechanisms for conflict transformation. Borja and Castells (1997) closely relate the status of the citizen to the city. The city is where we live as civic beings; it is the urban environment that constantly realizes the sensation of belonging or not belonging to something called political society. This understanding of the concept of citizenship linked to the sensation of belonging is useful for studying the processes of social inclusion and exclusion. Youth who are excluded and feel "outside" of social and economic interactions try to find a feeling of belonging and acceptance among their peers, sometimes by joining gangs or through illegal activities. In the city of Rosario, and in particular among young people, citizenship remains unrealized. Political, social, economic, and cultural rights are key to the peaceful transformation of conflicts, but their full realization remains nothing but a promise.

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6 Citizenship is a status, social and juridical recognition that a person has rights and duties associated with belonging to a community, almost always based on a common territory or culture. Citizenship accepts difference but not inequality. All citizens are, in theory, equal. The concept of citizenship was first used in the context of the Greek city-states or "polis." Polis means place of politics. In Latin, "civitas" (city) is a place where civic values are exercised.

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### 2.4. Methodology and Tools of Analysis

This research uses three qualitative data collection tools: a) participatory observation by the author who is a citizen of Rosario and was a youth worker in Itatí neighborhood, a slum area in the South-West District, from 2000 to 2003 and continued to visit and observe the situation in a systematic way from 2003 to 2006; b) interviews conducted in December 2005 and January 2006 with four young people who live in the South-West District, three youth workers who work within the same district, and more particularly in "Itatí neighborhood", and three representatives of the local government, (Municipal Youth Center); and c) analysis of materials produced by youth workers and youth in slums, including articles of *El Ángel de Lata* magazine (Angel de Lata 2006) which is a social project that involves several youth organizations and institutions working on social inclusion of youth, strongly inspired and guided by the work of Claudio "Pocho" Lepratti.[7] This paper also draws on published studies on youth in Rosario and criminality in Argentina. It is important to note that no formal interviews were conducted with young people who were or are engaged in criminal activities as this would have involved investing time in building trust and the use of ethnographic methodologies that were not possible given the limited scope of this study. Rather the analysis draws on informal interactions of the author with other young people and on the reflections published in *El Angel de Lata*.

The main tools of analysis used are: a) Galtung's classification of the three types of violence (direct, structural and cultural); and b) the ABC triangle, which analyses attitudes, behaviors, and a conflict or contradiction (Galtung 2000). Attitudes are emotions, such apathy or hatred, and cognitions include how the parties map the conflict. Behavior is the spectrum of acts ranging from apathy to violence. The root of the conflict is the contradiction. Galtung states that negative attitudes and behavior are like metastases to the primary tumor. They may become

prime causes in their own right, but the root cause of conflict is the same: parties that have incompatible goals.

Figure 1: Map of Rosario. Irregular settlements are marked in red. Source: Municipality of Rosario
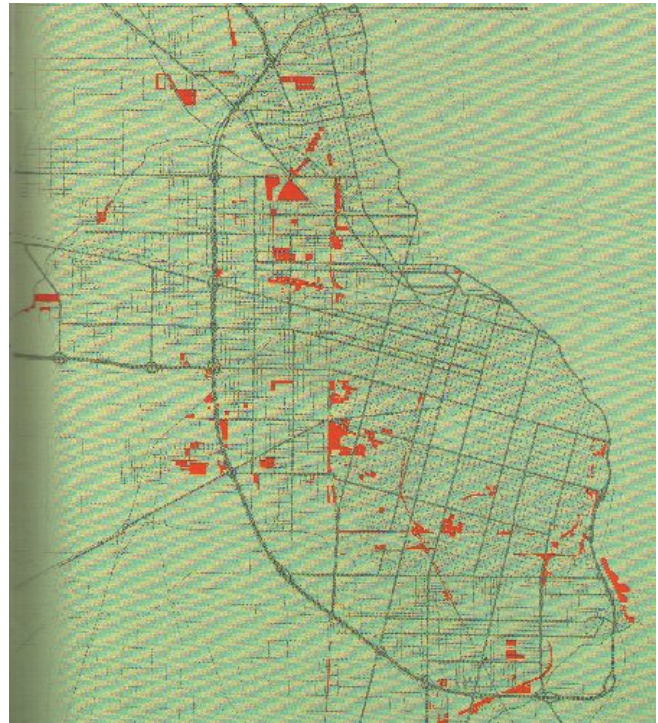
3. Understanding the Problem: Urban Social Conflict and Youth in Rosario

Rosario's neighborhoods follow the center-periphery model. The center is populated by high- and middle-income families, and is surrounded by a first circle of working class and low-income families and a second circle of slums, locally called "villas miseria." According to data presently available from the websites of the municipality and UN-Habitat (UN-Habitat 2006; Rosario Habitat 2006), approximately 155,000 people (13 percent of the population of Rosario) live on land which is not their property in ninety-one irregular settlements, occupying 10 percent of the city's area (see

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7 He was shot by the police on December 18, 2001, on the roof of the school where he worked. Human rights organizations and witnesses argue that he was shot because his activities mobilized youth and this was inconvenient for the police. "Pocho" was

a deeply committed social and youth worker who lived in the slum in Ludueña area and organized activities for vulnerable youth in the slum, and who started youth groups and networks. The Ángel de Lata project produces and distributes a magazine

and organizes workshops and social integration activities. At the same time, selling the magazine is an income-generating activity for street children and youth and their families.

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Fig. 1). However, a report published by the social movement Libres del Sur on December 5, 2006, estimates that almost one third of the population of Rosario lives in slums and irregular settlements. This situation was aggravated by a storm that left many homeless and led to the establishment of five new settlements. The living conditions in these settlements are extremely poor and the rates of unemployment are dramatically high. Most of these settlements are on public land left unused by the national railway system and some on abandoned private property. These settlements have poor access to public services such as running water or electricity.

This section describes the different forms of violence present in this conflict and show how youth criminality is an expression of an urban social conflict and a response to structural violence. Direct violence is an expression of structural violence in the form of social fragmentation and socioeconomic exclusion. Firstly, direct violence is analyzed as those acts or behavior that are easily recognizable and which most institutions typically consider and measure as violent. Secondly, the links between direct and structural violence in the lives of young people are analyzed. Lastly, the relationships between direct, structural, and cultural violence are examined, along with the way attitudes influence youth and state behavior.

3.1. Direct Violence in Rosario

Provincial police data indicate that in 2001, 39,654 crimes were registered in the Rosario department, with 43,815 in 2002, 41,497 in 2003, 45,294 in 2004 and 56,970 in 2005 (Santa Fe 2006). A report published by the Argentine Federal Police based on provincial police data, calculates that in 2001 61 percent of all crimes in Rosario were against property and 24 percent against persons (Policía Federal Argentina 2006). The increase is substantial when it is taken into consideration that many small thefts are not reported. Being robbed and attacked is a common experience in Rosario. Only a few of these incidents are reported, for reasons including mistrust of the police and the ineffectiveness of the responses that the police and judicial systems offer. In an interview published in January 2007 (Ángel de Lata 2007), "El Ale," a former street child who lives in a slum and now works in a social project, reported that 20 percent of those who live in the slum are involved in stealing or in drug dealing or consumption. He estimates that

out of every twenty pesos acquired from stealing ten are used for drug consumption and ten are given to the thief's family to cover basic needs. The upper and middle classes often perceive only the type of direct violence of which they are victims, while poorer sectors of society suffer harassment and violence perpetrated by the police. Journalist and social worker Osvaldo Aguirre considers that police brutality has increased, especially since 1999 when Governor Carlos Reutemann took office. He describes how the police operate in a system of impunity. The judicial system hides evidence, delays trials, and protects police officers, especially those of higher ranks (Aguirre 2006). The priest of Ludueña neighborhood, Edgardo Montaldo, who has been working in the poorest areas of the city for thirty-eight years, explains that the situation is dramatic. He summarizes it in a strong statement: "I am against abortion but also against this system of death: kids commit suicide, they kill each other or they are killed by the police" (Salinas 2006). Although political violence is not as serious as in the past or in other Latin American countries, human rights organizations such as APDH (Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos) claim that the seven persons who were killed by the police in Rosario during demonstrations on December 18 – 20, 2001, were targets of a deliberate attempt by the police to infuse fear among social and political activists (three were less than eighteen years of age, four others under thirty-five). There are many irregularities in the investigation and to this date no clear results. Only one police officer has been imprisoned (for the death of Claudio Lepratti), while investigations into other cases are slow or have been blocked (Biblioteca Lepratti 2005). The police role is perceived by youth, youth workers, and social activists as repressive and on the side of those who are powerful. Harassment and repression take various forms. The police target poor young people as criminals or potential criminals. Often they harass them in shanty towns to "keep them in line." An example of this is unjustified detentions of "suspects," usually young people of low income and aboriginal ethnic background, pejoratively called "negros villeros." Social activists are intimidated to promote fear and demobilize them. For example, human rights organizations claim that the deaths of December 2001 were meant to intimidate and send the message to social activists that social protests must stop and that the police could act with impunity. Social demands are delegitimized in public discourse and

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media. Protesters are often referred to as "troublemakers," "irresponsible," and "lazy people who do not want to work." The justice system is selective and corrupt. It punishes some crimes but allows impunity for "white-collar" crimes and corrupt practices at the higher levels of the political spectrum.

3.2. Structural Violence in Rosario

Ciafardini confirms in his recent study (2006) that even though statistics are scarce and inaccurate, there has been a considerable increase in crime that is intrinsically related to the negative social effects of neoliberal policies. According to this criminologist, several studies of Latin American cities show that those engaged in criminal activity are usually young males who come from the poorest and most disadvantaged neighborhoods. This is a tendency observed worldwide in processes of urbanization and industrialization and is consistent with gender roles; usually males are expected to obtain jobs and provide economic support to their families and are the "brave" ones (Clinnard and Abbott, 1973). In relation to the age of offenders, Ciafardini finds that during the 1990s in the city of Buenos Aires the average age of offenders decreased; a tendency also observed in other big cities in Argentina, including Rosario. Before 1998, crimes were committed mostly by people aged twenty-six or older. In 1998, the age of offenders started to decrease prominently and progressively, with a sharp increase in young offenders aged fifteen to eighteen, a phenomenon rare in previous years. Ciafardini describes in detail that the economic crisis is a determining factor in the increase of violent crime against property. He explains that there is no direct relation between poverty and crime, but between high levels of inequality and crime.

The relation is complex and various factors are present. It is not poverty in itself that provokes young people to rob, but a combination of relative poverty (increasing inequality) and social exclusion; in other words, becoming poorer and poorer in relation to others who become richer and richer, and feeling "left out." This exclusion is also aggravated by the abrupt deterioration of the socioeconomic conditions and the lack of opportunities and alternatives. Feelings of frustration and anger and sentiments of "I don't care" are most common in the sons of those who lost their jobs, who grew up hearing about a prosperous past and now live

in extreme poverty and marginalization. Exclusion from employment and educational opportunities, experiences of family crisis and even family violence, combined with social discrimination and racism, affect young people in devastating ways. They are deprived not only of tools to develop their life strategies but also of hope in the future. This is clearly shown in the Brazilian movie *City of God*, which depicts the equation youth + misery = violence. Other factors mentioned in Ciafardini's study include the increase in young people's spare time and the increase in their consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs. He notes that more than 13 percent of young people in Argentina neither study nor work, which reflects the alarming social exclusion they suffer. Most young people find great difficulties in entering the job market. Most study or are underemployed as a survival strategy, as described in the study about being young in Rosario" published by the National University of Rosario (Tavella 2004).

This exclusion of young people occurs in a context of social and economic crisis. In Rosario the impact of neoliberal economic policies was disastrous for the local economic structure, and consequently for local social cohesion. The introduction of imported products destroyed local industries. As a result unemployment in Rosario gradually increased during the 1990s to peak in 1995 and has since slowly decreased during the present period of recovery. According to the Ministry of Labour of Argentina, 31.9 percent of young people in Rosario were unemployed in 2004, a figure considerably higher than unemployment among other segments of the active population (Ministerio de Trabajo 2004) Access to education and employment opportunities varies from class to class. In lower income classes, the period of adolescence tends to be shorter, as young people are pushed to enter the informal economy, take up responsibilities, marry, or migrate.

The processes of social fragmentation and exclusion that constitute structural violence become evident in urban space. Research by Gizewski and Homer-Dixon (1995) refers to it as urban violence, in the form of criminal and anomic violence. This type of violence usually takes the form of armed robbery, assault, and in some cases murder, often when the victim resists the attack. The fact that there is a correlation between the increase in this type of crime in

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cities and processes of social exclusion is not casual. These crimes are not due to a deviation or the product of "evil" criminals' behavior; rather, it is the proximity of inequality and conspicuous indifference and unfairness on the part of those who are "included" that creates the tension. In this social space, inequality becomes evident by the different availability of services and infrastructure between rich and developed areas and poor or peripheral neighborhoods: lack of schools, hospitals and recreational areas, deficient transportation services, lack of running water and sewage systems, inadequate housing. It is exclusion not only from social and economic life, but also from the social space – a social distance reinforced and perpetuated by physical distance. It is a social contract which has been broken in terms of moral unity and physical proximity. Those who are left out live in slums, sometimes even separated by a fence or road that police often refuse to cross. Individuals do not feel related to society's rules or spaces any more. They are physically out.

Despite the heterogeneity of youth, young people can be divided into two groups: those who have access to basic human rights such as educational opportunities, health, and spaces of expression, and those who do not. Upper class, middle class, and working class young people have relatively good access to primary and secondary school education in the city as well as to basic health services. Secondary and technical education is accessible to low-income families as public institutions do not charge registration fees and public transportation is subsidized for young people (under eighteen) on weekdays. This education is valued as a guarantee for future employment. Most middle and upper class young people attend private or semi-private institutions. Access to quality education and other cultural services reinforces social inequalities and cultural differentiation among young people from different social and economic backgrounds. Language, cultural consumption and habits, and ways of dressing and interacting vary notably from one group to another. Youth are excluded economically, politically, and socially, and this is reflected in the physical space in certain neighborhood and slums. More specifically, Ben-Joseph and Southworth (2003) state that children and youth are deprived of the diversity of city life as there are few places that they can access and enjoy safely. Cities are not planned for children and youth; they lack recreational

spaces and youth-friendly participation policies (Driskell 2002). These trends can also be observed in the city of Rosario, as a dual city struggling to become a city for all. Young people in Rosario feel that society has left them out and they seek different ways to be included and survive.

The relationship between structural and direct violence is clear not only in statistics and sociological studies, but also in the life story of "El Ale." He is a young boy who grew up in the streets, robbed to survive, and consumed drugs. He had extreme experiences and now he takes part in a social project that produces a magazine sold by street children, called *El Ángel de Lata* (the angel of tin). He moved to Rosario from the northern province of Chaco when he was nine years old. He had never been to school. He started wandering in the streets and begging. He was mistreated and felt discriminated. In an interview, he explains: "I asked myself why I was poor, when this is a question that other people have to ask, not poor people themselves." He describes how humiliating it was to eat from the garbage and how he experienced incipient sexual harassment by those "who have money." He started to consume drugs at the age of twelve: pills, marihuana, cocaine, and alcohol. An analysis of the story of Ale shows how aware he is of the effects of social exclusion, the links between his lack of opportunities and alternatives and his behavior. Ignatieff's understanding of the concept of citizenship as being linked to the sensation of belonging is useful to the study of processes of social inclusion and exclusion. Youth who are excluded and feel "outside" of social and economic flows and interactions try to find a feeling of belonging and acceptance among their peers, sometimes by joining gangs and illegal activities.

In the city of Rosario citizenship remains unrealized, particularly among youth. Political, social, economic, and cultural rights remain a promise and the realization of these rights is a necessary condition for the peaceful transformation of conflicts. Ale is also aware of class structure; he is part of a "we" who are poor, and there is a "they" who are rich. The critical Marxist approach is helpful as urban conflict is also a conflict between those who are excluded and exploited and those who profit and manage the natural and economic resources. Capital in the present time does not need so many workers to reproduce itself and continue

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to accumulate wealth. The excluded constitute the "marginal mass" that can be functional if they become able to consume or enter the labor market. The system functionality of young people living in extreme poverty in the slums of Rosario is limited. They are not qualified workers and they are not consumers as their buying capacity is limited. Since their functionality is limited, in a Marxist interpretation, there is no need to include them in the system. Some criminological theories propose that they should be eliminated or kept contained in prison. These theories propose only the treatment of "direct violence" and acknowledge no link between direct violence and structural violence by the dominant class and its state apparatus.

3.3. Cultural Violence in Rosario

In order to reproduce and sustain direct and structural violence, repressive state violence must seem legitimate, accepted, normal, and natural. The legitimization of violence is subtle and hard to observe or deconstruct. Cultural violence is violence entrenched in cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions. These beliefs and norms translate into attitudes. Galtung's definition of attitudes refers to emotions and cognitions, that is, the way actors feel and perceive reality and how they map the conflict. As direct and structural violence are legitimatized by a system of beliefs that is expressed in attitudes and behavior, it is important to understand the attitudes of youth and the state in order to deconstruct them and build alternatives. The values and attitudes of young people and the state are explored in the following sections. To what extent is violence seen as a legitimate way of solving problems? To what extent is it seen as the *only* way to solve problems? To what extent is violence questioned? The purpose is to find reasons for their choices and behavior. Understanding the perceptions of the actors and their attitudes is important as if these do not change, solutions to direct violence will be temporary and ineffective in the long term.

3.3.1. Values and Attitudes of Youth in Rosario

As previously stated, youth is a very heterogeneous group. The analysis of the values and attitudes of youth in Rosario is based on several data: the sociological study *Ser joven en Rosario, Estrategias de vida, políticas de intervención y búsquedas filosóficas* (Being young in Rosario, strategies of life, intervention policies and philosophical search; Tavella

2004), interviews with young people and youth workers during 2006, and interviews published in *El Ángel de Lata* (2006). The main questions guiding this exploration of attitudes are: How do young people experience, perceive, and define the conflict? What do they see as the causes? In order to address these questions it is useful to understand first the predominant values of young people's lives, how the context shapes them and how they see their own situation. The first part of analysis is about actors' subjectivity, their motivations and values, based on the work of sociologist Tavella. This analysis seeks to determine the degree to which personal will and external factors determine youth's life strategies and behavior. The methodology is based on interviews with young people aged eighteen to twenty-five who lived in different areas of Rosario. Considering the social structure and stratification of Rosario the criteria for selecting interviewees were their type of housing and neighborhood.

Previous sociological studies have established a correspondence between levels of income and level of formal education and housing. Youth were clustered in three groups: low, medium, and high income, corresponding to young people living in slums and disadvantaged areas, peripheral neighborhoods, and the center/private neighborhoods. Young people in the three groups stated that family was the main value which organized their lives. Their experiences and projects were deeply shaped by their families, more than by other factors like personal or professional projects. The family connects the individuals to a larger group, including the extended family. The attachment of young people to their family is reinforced by the fact of structural unemployment. In general, young people live with their parents, even when they are employed and when they become parents themselves, as wages are low and unemployment is high. This is a strategy for sharing living costs. All cases that were studied had as their main life project to form a family and get married at around the age of thirty with an average of two children. Family seems to be a refuge in times of crisis and a way to belong to the group. As Ale states during his interview, half of what he obtained through robbery was for his family and the rest for himself. His family and his mother were the highest value in his view and what finally helped him to be able to change his life. Young people of middle and high income

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value the status of "student," and there is a social tradition that young people should study. For young people of middle and high income, studying is seen as a way of improving future employability and as beneficial for personal development. In contrast, among young people from low income families, studying is more a struggle than a reality. For example, Romina is still trying to finish her secondary education at the age of twenty-two, after having a baby. She dreams of becoming a psychologist or an English teacher, but her real possibilities of having access to university are few. The higher the income of the family, the more professional and educational choices related to vocation, and less to economic needs. Young people are to some extent aware that their entrance in the job market is strongly influenced by the global and national economic situations. They are aware that there is a general economic crisis. They are also aware that young people who are not qualified are not valued as a production factor. They know that if they do not have education they will have less employment opportunities. This realization generates insecurity in all social classes, but those who have access to education and are part of social networks deal better with the crisis and find their way. In general, they perceive exclusion from the labor market as a "social general problem," not as a personal failure. Those who are educated are aware of the limitations but still have hope. However, Manuela cannot see any future and tries to find temporary solutions to avoid frustration. She also expresses her disempowerment when she says, "I am silly, I can't learn," taking it as a personal limitation. This is how a situation provoked by structural violence is perceived as fate, natural, or normal, and the individual feels guilty for it. This perception is part of cultural violence. It puts the blame on the individual and prevents people from questioning the real causes of their problems.

During their free time, young people in Rosario spend a lot of time with their family, friends, and boyfriend/girlfriend. One common feature among the three groups of youth is the frequency of alcohol consumption. According to a survey conducted among 559 secondary school students of all social backgrounds in Rosario, published in August 2005, 71 per-

cent drink alcohol on a regular basis, especially at night, and 60 percent admitted having been drunk at least once. Most say that they drink "to feel good" and "to forget problems" (La Capital 2005). Police and official statistics denounce the increase in the use of drugs among young people of all social backgrounds in the city (La Capital 2006). These patterns of behavior become apparent at night. According to a study of youth behavior at night in the city of Buenos Aires, sociologist Mario Margulis (2005) states that the city at night is a new territory and offers a liberating illusion. Youth can free themselves of the weight of domination and rules that are imposed on them by school, work, and family. At night they can be themselves, feel accepted, and have a sense of belonging when hanging out with their friends in what are colloquially known as "urban tribes." Tavella's study also highlights a lack of interest in religion and other activities that have to do with reflecting on the purpose and meaning of their lives. There is little or no engagement in public life. There is no trust or belief in social solidarity or in belonging to a larger entity. These perceptions of young people show us some interesting facts. Economic crisis and structural unemployment create a high degree of uncertainty, helplessness, and indifference. Friends and family are a refuge, the only people in whom they can trust and on whom they can rely. Uncertainty also determines their choices for short term solutions, as well as the need to enjoy "today" and avoid thinking of the future, which promotes hedonism, that is, pleasure and consumption during free time for example. These attitudes are present in all young people, but they become more conspicuous in those who belong to gangs. The gang is the replacement for family; youths in gangs only care about today and feel that they have nothing to lose. In this context, the social crisis invades personal space, and creates in them the feeling that their destinies are determined by the changes in society, and not by their personal efforts. It is the "other" who is a failure, it is the society that has failed, so "why should I pay the costs?" they ask themselves. It is interesting to note that "El Ale" acknowledges that "even when there is poverty, mistreatment, there is a part within yourself that says "yes" [to drugs and robbery]".[8] He considers that his life choices were highly determined by his history of exclusion

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8 In Spanish, "Pero aunque haya pobreza, maltrato,
tenés un porcentaje del que dice sí sos vos."

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and poverty. At the same time he has the capacity to realize for himself what was good and bad for him, or perhaps his own choices in determining the future.

3.4. How Youth Perceive and Define the Conflict

When interviewed, young middle class people who live in South West District, a peripheral area in Rosario, said that violence (meaning direct violence) and a lack of security was the main problem in their neighborhood (as do mainstream media and public opinion polls)[9]. Some of them went on to mention police brutality, gangs, indifference of the citizens, and drug addiction, which are all related to the issue of violence and vandalism in the streets. They acknowledge that both youth gangs and police behave violently and that this is an undesirable way of behaving. It is interesting to note that young people who were gang members, like "El Ale," acknowledge the use of violence as a way to survive and live. When they are trapped by violence, they see it as the only instrument to become powerful, to be seen and taken seriously. They justify their actions by saying that their intentions are to steal only from those who are rich. They see that structural violence provokes them and prepares them to behave violently. In this sense, youth in gangs see violence as the only way to behave. They see violence as an effective and legitimate way of solving their problems.

Only some manage to question violence and acknowledge the links between direct and structural violence. When interviewees were asked about the causes of the increase in delinquency, they indicated both the lack of ways to stop the direct violence (not enough police) and the presence of structural violence (the lack of education and employment). There is awareness that the root cause of the social conflict is not simply inequality, but the feeling that this inequality is unfair. One of the answers also places blame on the individuals as criminals and drug addicts. It is important to highlight that the youth interviewed acknowledge the links between direct and structural violence and that they see that it is not in the nature of young people to be violent. Violence in all its forms is questioned. However, violence

used by the police to repress the "rebels" is sometimes considered desirable and necessary by the youth interviewed. The use of force by the state is seen as legitimate, although as a limited and short-term answer. All the interviewees point out that youth and state actors are responsible for what happens. Two of them included themselves as responsible as well. Cultural violence seems more difficult for young people to identify as a problem and it is usually not questioned or considered as "real" violence. Young people consume movies, video-games, derogatory language, and jokes in which violence is present, and there seems to be much higher acceptance of non-physical violence – it is socially acceptable to humiliate and verbally discriminate. Youth who live in the slums are often discriminated against because of the place where they live and often because of their skin color and appearance. There is a lot of subtle racism, especially against those who have darker skin. The most affected are groups of indigenous or mixed origin, mostly originally from the northern provinces and other Latin American countries (Bolivia, Peru, and Paraguay). In an interview published in *El Angel de Lata*, "El Ale" describes suffering from discrimination, which he acknowledges as a problem. At the same time, it is common among youth in gangs and youth of similar ethnic background to use racist insults with each other, such as "negro de mierda." There is tendency to neglect and deny their own identity and try to become "whiter" or look and act differently. Another alarming aspect of cultural violence is that there seems to be no acknowledgment of gender discrimination. This becomes evident in jokes, songs, and popular expressions we observed that contain derogatory words. It is interesting to note that female youth who were interviewed did not mention this as an issue.

4. State Discourses

On one occasion, "El Ale" was assaulted by an older man. He went to the police station to seek help, but the police did not believe him and even shouted insults at him ("villero de mierda") and threatened to keep him in jail. This shows how the police discriminate and stereotype, and how these perceptions legitimize the use of violence to respond

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[9] Similar answers can be expected from any other area of the city.

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to a perceived problem of criminality. The discourses and actions of the state on the issue of youth criminality are various and complex. The state intervenes in multiple and contradictory ways at both the provincial municipality levels, based on theories of social behavior and criminology. Often policies are not based on research and data that take into consideration the effects of the past application of policies based on these theories. This article focuses on analyzing the discourses and attitudes in two institutions as representative of existing discourses in all state institutions: the provincial police and the municipal government with its youth and social inclusion policies.

The responses of state institutions include both attempts to control violence using force (repression, jail) and policies of social inclusion and participation. Even though the use of violence is seen as undesirable, it is sometimes considered necessary by the police and policy-makers and the resources deployed and action taken do not always correspond to the promises and rhetoric. In reality, violence is still used as means of social control and, paradoxically, as a means to stop violence. The increase in crime has shown that this response has not been effective in solving the problem. Several criminology theories can be identified as the basis of the state's multiple, and sometimes erratic, responses to the issue of youth criminality. Ciafardini (2006) clusters them in four main currents. The first one is represented by Beccaria, and considers that crime should be "naturally" followed by a punishment; criminal problems can be solved by improving laws and increasing the amount of punishment. Beccaria's idea is that criminals do not feel sufficiently threatened by a possible punishment when they commit crimes. His ideas are still present in policies and state discourses. For example, the response to the problem of the "maras," youth criminal gangs in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, has been an increase in the length of jail sentences for gang members and leaders. In the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, similar "zero tolerance" policies have been applied. However, the

amount of crime and violence has not decreased in any of these cases. A second criminology theory is the one represented by Bentham and Lombroso. Criminals are socially or biologically ill, therefore, they need to be cured or reformed. If they cannot be cured or reformed, they should be excluded from society. Criminals have a natural or biological disposition for violence. Could the attempts to build walls around slums (un)consciously this theory reflect in practice? A third current is the one identified as the "sociology of deviation," to which sociologists like Durkheim and Merton have contributed. The general principle is that societies need to coexist with a certain amount of crime which is functional for the system. Criminals should be punished and, in this way, they provide a service to society by serving as an example – helping to prevent general social anomie. If crime increases to a level that the society cannot handle, social reform should be considered.

Finally, the last current is a critical one which appeared in Europe in the 1960s, inspired by Marxism. The root causes of criminality were seen in the negative effects of the capitalist system. Ciafardini concludes that a critical approach considers that capitalism, as a system that produces alienation and social injustice, must inherently bring forth crime.[10] There were no concrete proposals to respond to criminality; rather the proposal was to abolish capitalism as a whole, based on the idea that a new society with social justice and equality would not "produce" criminals, as capitalism did.

4.1. Santa Fe Provincial Police Discourses
The police are under the jurisdiction of the provincial government, which was run by the Peronist Party until 2007.[11] Two main approaches towards the problem of youth criminality are observable in police discourses and attitudes. The first is predominantly linked to the need for security and proposes as a solution increasing the police presence in the streets of Rosario. The second acknowledges a link between structural violence and the increase in criminality, and

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10 In the Spanish original, "el capitalismo tiene un efecto criminógeno."

11 The Socialist Party won the elections in 2007 and on December 10, 2007, Hermes Binner, former mayor of Rosario, took office as the first socialist governor of a province in Argentina.

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the need to respond accordingly to citizens' needs. Efforts are being made to transform policies and practices but authoritarian beliefs and practices remain in use, inherited from a long past of military dictatorships. Within the first approach, the ideology of violence is present and is considered necessary and legitimate whenever it serves to achieve certain ends. The use of force is considered the only possibility to control disorder and the undisciplined masses. According to the provincial police, hundreds of adolescents and youth congregate in the streets at night, especially during weekends and at night, with clear signs of alcoholism and use of drugs.

There are no specific studies that look into how the police analyze this problem, what they consider to be the main causes and ways to solve them. However, observations and general tendencies suggest that the treatment ranges from turning a blind eye to harassment and repression based on the underlying belief that some youth are inferior or exhibit deviant behavior and consequently consume drugs and are socially ill. This belief could be linked to Bentham's and Lombroso's theories. A second approach is also present. In a democratic society, the role of the police is understood by Chief Inspector Victor Sarnaglia, Director of the School of Cadets of Santa Fe Province, as the "caretaker of the citizen," as described in an interview with the author in May 2002. The police exist to protect and serve citizens and to ensure that the law is respected. In the official discourse, the police forces are subject to the control of democratic elected authorities. In fact, it is clear that this concept is not yet a reality. The first approach considers that the cause of the violence is the lack of moral conduct of the aggressors, their "wrong" and anti-social behavior which needs to be contained or reformed. There is a clear link both to Lombroso's theories and to the theory of deviation of Durkheim and Merton. The individual does not accept the rules of society and therefore exhibits deviant behavior. Thus, this is not a problem of the society but a problem of the individual. The cause of the conflict is that individuals fail to adapt to society's rules, therefore the response is to reform, cure, or

exclude the individuals. To understand this approach one needs to understand how the idea of the modern state was born and is justified. The state was needed to guarantee order and personal freedoms through having the monopoly of the use of force. Nevertheless, when these models are confronted with reality, we witness that citizens feel less secure; they feel that the covenant has been violated by the abuse of power, and therefore question obedience to an unjust system.

The second discourse is a democratic one; there is a need to promote human rights and social justice to prevent violence. This approach focuses on the link between criminality and the exclusion caused by unequal access to political spaces and economic resources – it is linked to the critical criminology which considers that the capitalist system itself produces crime by causing inequality. If the causes of the conflict are inequality and exclusion, therefore, the response is to diminish or eliminate them both. This has been shown by moderate social policies of socioeconomic redistribution and inclusion (employment, health and education) and democratic reforms of the school curriculum and the way the police operate. After the wave of democratization during the 1980s, the police and armed forces started introducing human rights elements in their training. In the case of Santa Fe province, a provincial law of 1987 mandated that all educational institutions of the province should introduce human rights education. Primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions introduced elements of human rights education in textbooks and in the curriculum, mostly limited to studying human rights documents and the constitution. In the case of police training, a specific one-year course called "Human Rights" was introduced in 1997 as part of the Study Program for Police Cadets.[12] The first module of the course includes the following topics: the historical development of law from a Jewish-Christian perspective; theory of law as a limit on absolute state power; the Bible; the position of man before God; the first, second, and third generations of human rights; the Second World War and its atrocities; and the au-

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12 It is worth mentioning that the police cadets' training program consists of three years of studies, while police agents' training consists of a minimum of three months up to one year depending on needs and resources and the particular part of the province where the school is located.

thoritarian juridical discourse; the phenomenon in Argentina. The second module includes democratic stages; the democratic government of 1983; different *discourses* about human rights violations during the dictatorship (1976 – 83); new phenomena (inequality, poverty, discrimination); the constitution of 1994. Reading the program of the first two modules, we observe that it is of great significance that new issues have been included, especially social and economic rights. It is also important to note a subtle wording: "different discourses about the violations of human rights." From observation and literature, we know that some sectors of political and police authorities still question the reality of the number of the "desaparecidos." They still believe in the legitimacy of the "dirty war" as a way to save the country from falling into chaos, disorder, and the threat of Communism during the 1970s and early 1980s. Inside the police institution, different currents and tendencies coexist, and are in conflict and compromise at the same time. Other positive achievements of the democratic approach are the organization of seminars and the publication of articles on human rights and building a society without violence in the official police magazine. Why do states which claim to protect their citizens often violate the rights that they are supposed to guarantee? These two discourses, the democratic and the repressive, both influence public policy and their forced coexistence creates ongoing tension.

Sociologist Loic Wacquant (2000) explains this phenomenon by describing how the state has traditionally taken up a number of apparently complementary roles that are in fact contradictory. The main challenge for the state is to constantly overcome this contradiction. These roles are: to develop national economies, to mitigate negative economic effects, and to maintain public order. To fulfill these roles the state needs a police force and a penal system to enforce the law. Nevertheless, the roles of the state have been redefined by neoliberal ideology.[13] This ideology maintains that markets do not need regulation, as they are a natural phenomenon and the most effective way to organize human activity. Under this ideology, states had to "liberalize"

markets and deregulate the economy. But these neoliberal recipes had disastrous effects: destruction of national industries, unemployment, increasing poverty, and careless privatization of public services which left the most vulnerable without access to water and other basic services. In the case of Argentina, neoliberal policies were aggravated by financial and economic mismanagement and corruption of the state, wrongly advised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In his book, *Las cárceles de la miseria* (Prisons of poverty; 2000), Loic Wacquant argues that

> The increase of carceral populations in advanced societies is due to the growing use of the penal system as an instrument for managing social insecurity and containing the social disorders created at the bottom of the class structure by neo-liberal policies of economic deregulation and social-welfare retrenchment. … The penalisation of poverty is designed to manage the effects of neo-liberal policies at the lower end of the social structure of advanced societies. The harsh police practices and extended prison measures adopted today throughout the continent are indeed part and parcel of a wider transformation of the state, a transformation which is itself called for by the mutation of wage labor and precipitated by the overturning of the inherited balance of power between the classes and groups fighting over control of both employment and the state.

As described in the previous section, many of the young people in Rosario who were left out of the neoliberal system and became unemployed turned to activities in the informal/illegal economy or got pushed directly or indirectly into criminal activities such as smuggling and drug dealing. The state reduced its social welfare provision and was forced to increase its police role to contain and tackle the "disorder" and the amount of illegal activities. Politicians want citizens to believe that the state is reacting to crime and insecurity in a determined way so they make speeches calling for the building of new prisons and more patrol cars and police on the streets. Politicians react to the demands of the people for more security and get elected through use of this dominant discourse. Politicians also use a moralistic discourse, calling for a return to moral values of honesty and obedience as crime increases. There is a strong tendency to think in a reactive way, rather than in terms of looking at and dealing with the root causes of the problems. On the other hand, some analysts fall into the

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13 One of the leading proponents of neoliberalism was Milton Friedman, http://www.ideachannel.com/Friedman.htm. For a more critical analysis, see Pierre Bourdieu, Le Monde, December 1998, http://www.analitica.com/bitblioteca/bourdieu/neoliberalism.asp

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trap of relating poverty and crime directly, when the situation is far more complex and poverty is not the direct cause of the increase in crime, as has been explained extensively by Ciafardini's study (2006).[14]

In conclusion, the dual discourse is produced by the fact that one part of the state's policy (the police and penal justice systems) is required to counteract or deal with the effects of another part of state policy, namely economic policy (Wacquant, 2001). This leads to a situation in which the police's role is to repress, contain, control, and manage these effects. In this scenario, police forces are trapped between clear demands from the political authorities and a democratic discourse of respect for human rights. This dual and contradictory discourse contributes to lack of trust by young people and citizens in general in their representatives, their police, and the justice system, widening the gaps and increasing social tension and fragmentation. A previous section described the various types of violence which young people are part of and affected by, and the way the youth and the police perceive the problem through their discourses and attitudes. Through the story of "El Ale" it has become evident how structural and cultural violence feed into the recurrence of direct violence, and how violence as a way to solve social conflicts has not been effective and has made the situation worse. The following section examines the response to the problem in further detail, looking at the policies of the provincial and municipal governments and the actions of youth organizations as possible ways of dealing with the complex issues of youth criminality and exclusion.

4.2. Santa Fe Provincial Policies: A Dual Response to the Problem

The province of Santa Fe is in charge of the judicial system (including the provincial ombudsperson and the human rights ministry), the police, education, health, and economic policy. Even though various governors express in public speeches the province's commitment to the reintegration of young delinquents and the need for social inclusion and

preventive policies, the budget allocated to these actions is limited in comparison to actions enhancing, expanding, and building new prisons, buying new police cars, and improving the repressive system (Santa Fe 2006). The province's programs put emphasis on building infrastructure, promoting economic development, sustaining the judicial system, education by means of building new schools and maintaining the existing ones, and social promotion (Del Frade 2003a). There is a small Youth Department which is part of the Community Promotion Secretariat. Even though the situation of youth in marginalized areas is alarming, there is no youth participation policy. A new project to work with young people in conflict with the law is being developed, but its implementation has not started yet.

Prisons and police are not prepared to deal with young people and prisons do not help young people to reintegrate into society, as evidenced by the number of reoffenders (Del Frade 2003b). The Supreme Court of the Province sent a report to the Governor on 21 October 2005 stating the alarming situation in prisons and police stations, which are overcrowded and where human rights are not respected. According to this report, for example, Rosario's police stations were holding approximately 1,400 prisoners where there was capacity for just 889. Another alarming fact is that there are 2,600 people, most of them young, were detained but not tried in court (Rosario 12 2005). This report was also a response to incidents in the main provincial prison in the city of Coronda during April 2005 where thirteen prisoners were killed, all of them under twenty-six years of age. It is interesting to note that the average age of the most dangerous prisoners is thirty. It is shocking that the age of offenders has been decreasing even to the extreme that children aged eight to twelve have been detained for crimes involving possession of arms (Vásquez 2006). *El Ángel de Lata* published a report on detention and rehabilitation centers for youth that belong to the Directorate of Minors in Conflict with the Law. The report indicated that according to calculations of employees of the centers

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14 Loic Wacquant adds: "To oppose the penalization of social precariousness, a threefold battle must be waged. First of all, on the level of *words and discourses*, one must put the brakes on the semantic drifts that lead, on the one hand, to compressing the space of debate (e.g. by limiting the notion of 'insecurity' to physical or criminal insecurity, to the exclusion of social and economic insecurity) and, on the other, to the banalization of the penal treatment of tensions linked to the deepening of social inequalities (through the use of such vague and incoherent notions as 'urban violence')."

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there are about two hundred young people under the age of eighteen in Rosario living temporarily in these centers.[15] According to the employees interviewed by the magazine, in general these young people commit crimes repeatedly. They confirm that social policy fails to integrate the different phases of rehabilitation for children and youth who have committed crimes. After they leave these centers, there is no follow-up or social safety net to support and help these children and young people. The employees criticize the lack of appropriate programs to guarantee that young people have social support and help them to find the work for which they were prepared in the centers. Employees of these centers see that their work is only a drop in the ocean and that their only tools are love and patience. Employees interviewed state that youth leave the centers with no prospects for the future and they rob again. Another employee of one of the centers says that there is no preventive work and that workshops which aim to promote the value of work, fail. What they "preach" is contradicted by the fact that they are often unregistered employees and their worker's rights are violated. According to Gabriela, "the state has abandoned its role of guaranteeing social solidarity." She suggests that follow-up policies need to be discussed in depth rather than pursuing quick and demagogic solutions of more repression. This repressive perspective became evident in a statement made by the Provincial Director of the Directorate of Minors in Conflict with the Law about young delinquents: "They do not want reinsertion, they want punishment" (Ángel de Lata 2006). If the state uses violence, it teaches through example that violence is an effective tool. This contradiction is often present in many state institutions: for example, the most common reaction of a teacher or headmaster to an act of indiscipline or "bad" behavior is to ignore, punish, or expel the student. The state is doing the same to its citizens; it is ignoring, punishing, and

pushing them further out of the system. This ideology and behavior is a threat to democracy and should be called into question and replaced by more peaceful alternatives. In the next section, some ideas for improvement are presented.

4.3. Recommendations for Improving the Provincial Government's Policy
Although there have been various improvements, some areas require immediate solutions structural changes at the same time. This section aims to indicate recommendations for improvement, although this list is by no means comprehensive. The security and judicial system should be reformed to include preventive measures, and not only to follow a repressive and reactive approach which seems to only worsen the situation of vulnerable youth. A new approach to security must be developed in which the state develops and commits to use non-violent means. More comprehensive approaches should be promoted such as the concept of urban human security based on the fulfillment of basic human needs at the local level. In relation to this, judges and police should be better trained to work with juvenile delinquents and psychologists, social and youth workers should have a more predominant role in public programs. Changes should be introduced in the overall process of training of all those working with young people, both in the content/curriculum and in the methodologies. Young people learn from example, so all state actions should be a model of non-violent behavior. Especially, police training should improve its human rights education to include conflict literacy, non-violence, and psychological aspects relating to drug addiction. Finally, cooperation between provincial and municipal programs and civil society organizations should be enhanced. All actors should engage in critically analyzing and deconstructing their discourses to identify and remove those assumptions and elements that lead to violent practices.

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15 In Rosario, there are four centers for minors in conflict with the law:
1) IRAR (Instituto de Rehabilitación del Adolescente Rosario or Institute for the Rehabilitation of Adolescents Rosario). It is the most strict center in a building similar to a jail but psychological help is provided. There is also a school and recreational workshops. There are fifty-six young people aged between fourteen and eighteen in four big rooms

(twenty new spaces were added in 2003 and more are planned). 2) Casa Joven is a medium-security farm situated outside the city where young people live and work. There is also a school of theatre. 3) Casa del Adolescente is a center where young people attend activities from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. They are offered breakfast and lunch and they attend workshops to learn practical skills (e.g. electrical work, shoemaking). There were literacy workshops

but there is lack of continuity. Social works do follow-up work with their families. 4) CAT (Centro de Alojamiento Transitorio y Liberación Asistida, Center of Temporary Lodging and Assisted Release) is a complement to the prisons for minors and rehabilitation centers. It opened in 2003. On average there are twenty-five illegally detained children in this center waiting for a decision of the judge. Police and other professionals are part of the staff.

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4.4. Rosario's Local Government Policies:
Steps Towards Inclusion and Participation

Rosario's municipal government (Municipalidad de Rosario 2006) has gradually increased its competencies since the 1980s and has become known nationally and internationally for its social inclusion and youth policies. The Municipality of Rosario has been led by the Socialist Party since 1990. Its progressive policies of inclusion, participation, strategic planning, and gender were key in meeting the challenges of the economic and social crisis. Rosario has challenged a model of exclusion within the constraints of its limited competencies as a local government. In 2003, the city won the UNDP award for exemplary local government in the region. Rosario's experiences have been an example for other municipalities as it has created the capacities to transform its social and physical space with a clear political project of participation and innovation (Experiencia Rosario 2005).[16]

The Municipal Youth Center and its programs were established by the Municipality of Rosario in 1998. Youth Programs are part of the Secretariat of Social Development. They aim to a) develop the recognition of the rights of young people; b) stimulate their participation in community life; c) promote spaces of expression, communication, and dialogue that help prevent social risks that affect young people; d) coordinate the involvement of young people in their programs with other departments of the municipality and provide accurate information about themes of interest and the needs of young people. The main activity of the Municipal Youth Center is to provide information and support to young people about employment, education, and health, especially HIV/AIDS prevention and testing. Furthermore, the Center organizes workshops and training seminars on identity and human rights, especially dealing with Argentina's past history of dictatorship and human rights violations, in cooperation with other areas of the municipality such as the Museum of Memory. Finally, it has developed the Youth Participatory Budget, which is a participatory process to involve young people in deciding

the use of part of the municipal budget for youth issues. The Coordinator of the Youth Center, Diego Berreta, and youth workers Romina Trincheri and Silvana Turra said in an interview in December 2005 that the main challenge for the Municipal Youth Center was to reach out more to all neighborhoods of the city with information, awareness-raising, and participatory projects. The Center is improving its strategies to make its activities more accessible and interesting for vulnerable youth. It has the potential to play a key role in mediating between the groups of young people, other local governmental and non-governmental institutions, and the judicial system as often there is no place for dialogue among these groups. The Youth Center, run by young people and professional social workers and psychologists, helps network these actors. According to the 2005 Activity Report, during that year, the center started a process of decentralization, aiming at implementing projects in all neighborhoods of the city. Thirty-four workshops functioned in cooperation with civil society organizations in all districts.

The main two activities during 2006 were the Projects on Identity and Social Insertion and the Participatory Youth Budget. Even though the activities are different the aims are similar: to promote youth participation using a rights-based approach, allowing personal as well as social development. The Participatory Youth Budget (PYB) was initiated in 2004 as a pilot project in South West District, in collaboration with the Municipal Participatory Budget staff and Educating Cities Latin America.[17] Now it is a formal space of participation, discussion, and decision-making organized by and for youth in which 1,496 young people participated in 2005. The project is aimed at young people aged thirteen to eighteen. They are invited to attend meetings organized in schools in each district. During these meetings municipal youth workers organize trust-building exercises and present the aims of the project to the participants. As a second step, youth workers facilitate discussions through which young people identify the main problems in their neighborhood and together design solutions for

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16 The city of Rosario is a leading member of networks of local governments, for example, Merco-ciudades (local governments of Mercosur) and the International Association of Educating Cities.

17 This pilot project was financially supported by GTZ, the German government's development agency.

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those problems. The PYB is a space for young people to identify common goals and rediscover goals previously perceived to be incompatible. Youth encounter a new reality and become actors in changing those aspects that bother them or that they believe are unfair. Needs and problems are analyzed and solutions are planned as a group. Discussions often start with the sharing of negative experiences but projects to change reality have to be developed. Youth understand that they are contributing to avoiding negative experiences for other youth in the future, and develop socially responsible attitudes. As the coordinators of the project explain (Berreta et al. 2006), this initiative is innovative as it differs from others in various ways:

· Most of the spaces of participation use an "adult-centric" frame. The PYB respects youth's ideas, concerns, ways of communication, and participation.
· Often public policies define an asymmetric power relationship between adults and youth such that youth are beneficiaries of projects. In the PYB, youth are protagonists and partners of the local government in the design and implementation of the projects.
· Often youth are considered the "future"; in the PYB young people have to make decisions and implement projects in the present. They become actors here and now.
· The PYB aims at integrating a youth perspective into all public policies. The PYB is a part of Rosario's Participatory Budget Program.

The PYB is an excellent example of how public space and policy can become spaces for conflict transformation. Youth have an opportunity to identify the problems in their neighborhood and in their city in a way relevant for them. Problems are discussed and solutions are sought jointly by youth and local officials in a spirit of cooperation. Youth are not manipulated, they are consulted and mobilized, but most importantly they are in charge and participate meaningfully and exercise their citizenship rights (Muñoz 2004). In this way, youth public policy promotes spaces where social conflicts become opportunities for constructive change.

4.5. Recommendations for Improving the Local Government's Youth Policy

The main challenges for the local youth policy are to sustain these innovative and participatory experiences involving more young people in all districts and neighborhoods and to open up or improve spaces for interaction, participation, dissemination of information, and recreation in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods and slums in the city. The municipal process of decentralization has opened public spaces through municipal centers in each district and these have started to host youth events. However, these activities should be organized on an ongoing basis.

The staff and youth workers of the Center are professionals and have been sensitized about human rights education and youth issues. However, it is advisable that youth workers and youth in Rosario complement their training with peace education understood in a broader sense (Cabezudo 2006, 5 – 8), including knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are relevant to dealing constructively with everyday conflicts relevant to the life of youth in our societies. Important skills to be included are conflict transformation skills (e.g. listening, communication, mediation skills). These skills could help and support the development of other youth participation activities as youth learn to listen to others with different opinions, to deal with their emotions and anger, to express their needs, and to engage in constructive dialogue, among other important skills. The Municipal Youth Center has not taken up the issue of reconciliation and methods to heal and close a painful past. This is a pending task not only for the Center but for Argentinean society as a whole which has difficulties in dealing with its own past and mistakes before looking into the future. Finally, in relation to juvenile delinquency, the municipal youth policy does not engage in accompanying or supporting youth who have been in jail or who have committed crimes. This is an area in which the municipal government could cooperate with the provincial government (police and judicial system). Their experience and human resources could help in designing programs to improve the reintegration of young delinquents into society through securing a social safety net, training, and employment opportunities.

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5. The Work of Youth Organizations

Several youth organizations work with and for young people in slums, both doing educational and preventive work and working with "young people in conflict with the law." Youth organizations offer valuable non-formal education opportunities which often are more effective than formal education programs as youth are closer to the reality of their peers. The importance of non-formal education was acknowledged in 1994 by UNESCO's International Conference on Education, which adopted proposals on education for peace, human rights, and democracy (Schell-Faucon 2003). Despite the negative image of youth – portrayed by the media as rebellious, unstable, and self-destructive – many youth organizations worldwide and in Rosario are examples of how youth are committed to changing the reality in which they live (Ardizzone 2003). Again, given the limited scope of this article, only two experiences are presented here.

5.1. La Vagancia Youth Group

La Vagancia Youth Group was established by a group of young people who were preparing themselves for the Roman Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation in 1993 in the Holy Family Community. Their name, "vagancia," means laziness and it plays with the idea that youth are considered lazy and indifferent. Their main thematic interests are child and youth issues, empowerment, political education, and communication. The activities they organize are youth camps; human rights, media, and Bible workshops; walks for human rights; and visits to other youth groups. They also edit and publish the youth magazine *La Nota* and contribute to the Ángel de Lata project and organize a youth music group for "murga" which has thirty to forty members. They reflect on their own approach and how their experiences have shaped their social activism. The following text is a translation of a text they used to describe themselves on their website.[18] I decided to try to keep its original style, as the words chosen and the rhythm of the text reflect the logic and way of thinking of these young people. It gives an idea of the value of their work building

social relationships and a social space of belonging, solidarity, and dialogue, both among young people and between young people in the slums and society as a whole:

> This is a way of being politically active; we understand this as a way to build spaces, to build humanity, that is, to make more human our social space, let's say, building the city. This is why it is important to learn to listen to each other, to understand each other, and to achieve this takes us a lot of time. We are excluded or we come from exclusion, and from the start we do not know what there is inside. We are outside. We are very beaten. The slum beats you. That makes us do things that we don't understand, that cannot be explained. We do not understand the reasons for those blows, of the bullets that knock us down, they kill us! With time we are going out, but the bullets are there, and that limits and bothers us in what we are doing. We know that this is like this, that we make other people suffer, but still it is painful when they do other stupid things to us. That is anti-politics, to break and destroy. This we understand but it is tiresome. We wait for time to teach us. However, people always surprise us and are more generous than we expect. As a group we lost several battles, the radio program we started, it was going well, but we could not sustain it, because we honor our name, but it was an important experience, interesting. As one of us said "we learn by ruining something". (La Vagancia, 2006)

It is important to highlight the level of awareness the group has about the links between direct, structural, and cultural violence. They know they are or were excluded. They acknowledge that they were hurt and that they hurt back, and now they want change. The most interesting aspect shown in this text is that they see themselves as actors, not only as victims. They believe in building a new social space and that the social conflict that they are part of and victims of is an opportunity for change. They are the change agents. They do what nobody else can do, express their own concerns, problems, and way of seeing reality and devise solutions that would fit them. They are self-organized and work in a horizontal structure promoting ownership, responsibility, and that projects are managed and implemented by the group. Their activities are non-formal schools of citizenship and participation.

5.2. Scout Groups in Slums

A second example is the work of two youth groups (Martín Miguel de Güemes and Itatí), which gather, respectively, in a room provided by a Catholic parish (San Casimiro) and a chapel (Itatí), in South West District. The Güemes group

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18 http://www.tau.org.ar/aa/images/blank.gif. For more information about "La Vagancia" youth group, see http://www.tau.org.ar/buenas_practicas.pdf.

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operates in a Catholic parish situated in a low-middle class workers' neighborhood in the limit with a slum. The Itatí group meets in Itatí chapel situated in the heart of the slum. These groups are part of the national Scouting association of Argentina, which is a member of the World Organization of the Scout Movement. The Scouts have been considered quite traditional in their values and methods, but the Scouts of Rosario decided to open youth groups in slum areas. They were inspired by new currents which place commitment and service to the poor at the center of their educational values. Traditionally, activities to help the poor were seen as a moral duty. This group considers that social injustice is the product of unfair social, political, and economic structures. Their main activities are educational. They organize workshops and meetings every Saturday where they prepare for other activities. Youth aged fifteen to eighteen built a small library and they help children, especially those who come from the slum, to do their homework and organize cooperative games. The aims of these activities are to prevent truancy and to keep children off the streets in a space where they can play safely and learn social skills. They organize camps and environmental activities in which children and youth from the slums interact with their middle- and upper-class counterparts. For example, since 2003 they have been involved in an environmental project to protect the River Saladillo and raise awareness about the pollution produced by companies and the negative effects on the health of people who live by the river. They walked and camped along the river. These moments were spaces for dialogue and ways of getting to know the "other." Their explicit aim was not actually to promote dialogue among youth of different social backgrounds, but it did anyway, and in an effective way too. Through their work, social conflict is talked about and is used as an opportunity for positive change. Youth are treated in a personal and caring way. They are offered a space to belong and simply "be" where they are accepted and respected as they are.

5.3. Recommendations for Improving the Work of Youth Organizations

The work of these youth groups, La Vagancia and the Scouts, shows the enormous and unique contribution of youth organizations to conflict transformation. Their potential is still not fully explored and their work is hindered by the lack of long-term resources and support. Youth workers are then the main initiators and they often become tired or disempowered by the difficulties and there is a high turn-over of youth workers and volunteers. Youth workers who are experienced and trained often leave. Consequently, there is a lack of continuity in the activities. The work of youth organizations should be supported so that their projects and actions are sustained over time, improved, and multiplied. Continuity is crucial in work with young people in the difficult phase of adolescence, and in long-term programs in general. Youth organizations should be supported financially by the state and the contributions of civil society. Participatory structures, such as youth forums, networks of youth organizations, students' associations, and self-organized youth groups should be encouraged as they have proven to be valuable non-formal education spaces (Schell-Faucon 2003). Youth workers should be supported through training, peer-to-peer counseling and coaching, and psychological help. Youth workers should acquire, develop, and shape conflict literacy skills, including for example, mediation, negotiation, and facilitation of group decision-making. These skills are fundamental for any community organizer, who may have to act as a mediator or facilitator of inter-personal, inter-group, or societal conflicts or discussions.

6. Conclusions

This article described and analyzed youth criminality in the city of Rosario as an expression of a wider urban social conflict and as a reflection of a situation in which structural and cultural violence are present. The first section explained the conceptual approach used, which is based on conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Conflict is understood as an opportunity for social change, which should not be avoided or suppressed, but dealt with in a constructive way. The second section started with a general historical background, both of Argentina and of the city of Rosario, and showed how socioeconomic inequality was deepened by neoliberal policies and deficient processes of democratic participation plagued by a history of dictatorships and violent political struggles. The problem of youth criminality was illustrated through statistics that show a clear increase in the amount of crime against property committed by young offenders. An alarming fact was that

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the age of offenders has been decreasing, even to the extreme that children aged eight to twelve have been detained for crimes using weapons. In order to understand the problem and its causes, it is necessary to describe not only the direct violence observed, but also other forms of structural and cultural violence. One important aspect is that social, economic, and political exclusion and the overall system's inequalities are given cultural justifications and accepted as normal or natural.

One of the main conclusions of this work is that urban youth crime is inextricably linked to social, political, and economic exclusion and marginalization of youth. Even if the media and society present it in a superficial way as a question of deviant youth, it is clear that this phenomenon is linked to processes of structural inequality and degradation of societal relations. Another conclusion is that inequality becomes more evident in cities where rich and poor live in close proximity and the feeling of being "in" or "out of" the system is exacerbated by the proximity of the "other." The main argument presented in this article is that the conflict is not only about "youth" versus "adults" or "rebellious youth" against society, and also not only about inequality, but rather between those who are included in society and those who are excluded from it. Youth who engage in gangs feel expelled out of society and see violence as the only way to become powerful and respected, and as a way to survive and take revenge. Youth are not born criminals, it is society which denies their rights to education, health, and a secure space to grow up. The actors' attitudes and the way they understand the problems help us to understand the reasons underlying their actions. The example of "El Ale" as a former young offender was a key illustration of how aware he was of the social exclusion he suffered and the choices he made in his life. The interviews with youth and youth workers were also helpful in showing that they are aware of the effects of structural violence in society and that solutions should aim to include people and bridge the gaps, instead of promoting tensions and polarization. All young people and youth workers interviewed agree that the responses so far have not worked. Policies which have limited their interventions to stopping direct violence have proved to be ineffective. The penal approach to youth crime has not improved the situation; on the contrary, it seems to promote

it. Repression and direct violence are seen by the police, both in their discourses and in their actions, as a legitimate way of solving or, at least, mitigating a problem. A double discourse can be witnessed in police and state institutions: on the one hand, the police's role is to guarantee security and the respect for the law; on the other, the penal system has served as a means of social control.

Even though direct violence is not desired by all the actors, they use it. From a peacebuilding point of view, there is an inherent contradiction between two facets of the state: the state as the holder of the monopoly of the use of violence and the state as a space for dialogue, deliberation, participation, and joint decision-taking for a more just and peaceful society. The response to the problem can continue to be dual, that is, on the one hand control and repression, on the other more democracy and social inclusion. However, this will not be effective. A non-violent, integrated, and coherent approach is needed. If social exclusion is not transformed, the levels of youth urban violence will continue to increase.

Public policy that works on the root causes of the conflict and addresses issues of direct, structural, and cultural violence in an integrated way would seem to be the most appropriate as illustrated by the municipal Youth Participatory Budget. This experience is an example of a good practice which should be further studied and multiplied. The experience of the Municipal Youth Center shows that the state can lead a conflict transformation process through its public policy. Its programs aim to avoid an "adult-centric" or paternalistic approach and to open up "youth" social spaces. As the inequality crystallizes in space, in the form of slums and private rich neighborhoods, public urban planning can help to unroll this tendency, and public space can be used as unifier and as a space for participation. The lack of space for young people to express themselves and develop sport and recreational activities was mentioned as one more form of exclusion. The city can create physical spaces which will become social spaces for interaction and dialogue.

Creating a better city will require a long-term multi-layer approach, with the involvement of all actors, especially youth. All actors should engage in dialogue and work jointly when designing strategies to respond to the problem,

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transcending the inequalities of power and status and using an intergenerational approach. Young people and youth organizations are an untapped resource, and they should be empowered to join this conflict transformation process. Seen as an opportunity for positive change, social conflict seems to open new paths instead of narrowing them down (as is the case when it is seen as a disease to be cured or a sick limb to be amputated).

Among the recommendations for improvement in public policy and action presented in this article, it is important to highlight the development of more participatory and appropriate youth policies which take into consideration the changing needs of young people and the changing environment. However, several questions remain unanswered and more depth in the reflection on youth policy is needed. The municipal government's youth policy – which was found to be innovative and participatory, especially the Participatory Youth Budget – has not been evaluated in depth and its conflict transformation potential has not been established. It is still being developed and the projects proposed by young people are still being implemented. It is difficult to determine to what extent the meaningful participation of young people in this program decreases the amount of violence and youth crime, and to what extent young people acquire and practice the mediation and community organizing skills through the proposed intervention strategies. The aim of this study was not to test causal relations and determine the factors that lead to variation of criminal behavior in youth, but to describe and understand how the actors perceive and address the phenomenon. Further research is needed about the causes of youth criminality and its changes over time, taking into account a more representative sample of cases in all neighborhoods and slums of the city. Other areas of possible research are: a) to what extent the Youth Participatory Budget promotes young people's empowerment and shapes their political culture, b) to what extent a gender perspective is included or/and whether gender mainstreaming is undertaken at municipal level and more specifically in municipal youth policy as this aspect was not discussed in this paper. In the second place, there is a need to analyze the quality and type of cooperation among actors in developing youth policy. A through mapping of all concerned actors could be a good starting

point, including the role of educational and religious institutions which were not part of this study.

Through my observations and the information gathered in the interviews it seems that cooperation among actors is scarce and embedded in the political tensions. However, no in-depth analysis of this has been undertaken. It would be important to look into the way the provincial and municipal governments cooperate in this field, for example, so as to devise more integrated strategies and avoid duplication. At the same time, there is a need to look into the type of intergenerational dialogue present in Rosario. A youth-adult partnership in implementation of peace and social development projects presents several challenges. Often adults tend to dictate or impose their diagnosis of the conflict, and consequently their solutions. Intergenerational cooperation and partnership need to be enhanced. Finally, municipal youth policy as a space of conflict transformation and peacebuilding should be further researched using an interdisciplinary approach. One important question is, to what extent can municipal governments and local actors deal with the root causes of violence found in unfair global structures of domination and inequality which exceed their capacities? How can local and global forces of change be better coordinated? Another issue which requires further research is the issue of reconciliation and healing. How can governments and youth organizations facilitate processes to deal with the past in local public space? Studies of public administration, youth, and conflict transformation have rarely been combined, so lots of work remains to be done. If social planners, politicians, youth workers, and public officials would learn to see conflict as an opportunity for social change, more innovative and better practices would be developed to achieve a peaceful society which values diversity and which builds a world where many worlds can fit.

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