Understanding the Tipping Point of Urban Conflict:

Violence, Cities, and Poverty Reduction in the Developing World
The case of Santiago, Chile
Policy Brief

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY[1]

Urban violence is an increasingly significant global phenomenon. Over the past few years, a conventional wisdom has emerged within policy and research circles associating it with four key factors: poverty; youthful populations; the failure to consider women's safety as a specific concern; and the local-level absence of the state. Taken together, these different factors have underpinned a range of policy interventions in a variety of contexts. Urban violence has nevertheless continued to proliferate, suggesting that the conventional wisdom underlying such violence-reduction interventions may be flawed.

The proposed research project aims to re-think conventional assumptions and offer new insights into the determinants of urban violence, including in particular identifying context-specific circumstances under which everyday urban conflict becomes violent. The study focuses on four specific cities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America: Dili (Timor Leste), Patna (India), Nairobi (Kenya), and Santiago (Chile). A key hypoth esis is that urban conflict "tips" into overt violence principally as a result of qualitatively-specific "violence chains" rather than the quantitative factors. The project therefore aims to identify entry points to break linkages in these chains and foster new violence-reduction strategies both within poor urban communities and at the metropolitan level.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study approaches the phenomenon of violence considering two levels of analysis: i) a general profile of the city, and ii) an in-depth analysis at a sub-city level using Participatory Violence Appraisal (PVA) methodology.

City profile. At the city level, changes in the city's structure that have developed over the last 40 years, identifying the tipping points that have marked the process of a neoliberal urban development were analysed. The analysis of secondary information about violence in the city, disaggregated by district, shows that Santiago is a city with high levels of spatial segregation and social fragmentation.

Figure 1   Map showing the location of the three areas under study, Metropolitan Area of Santiago

La Dehesa

Contraloría

El Castillo
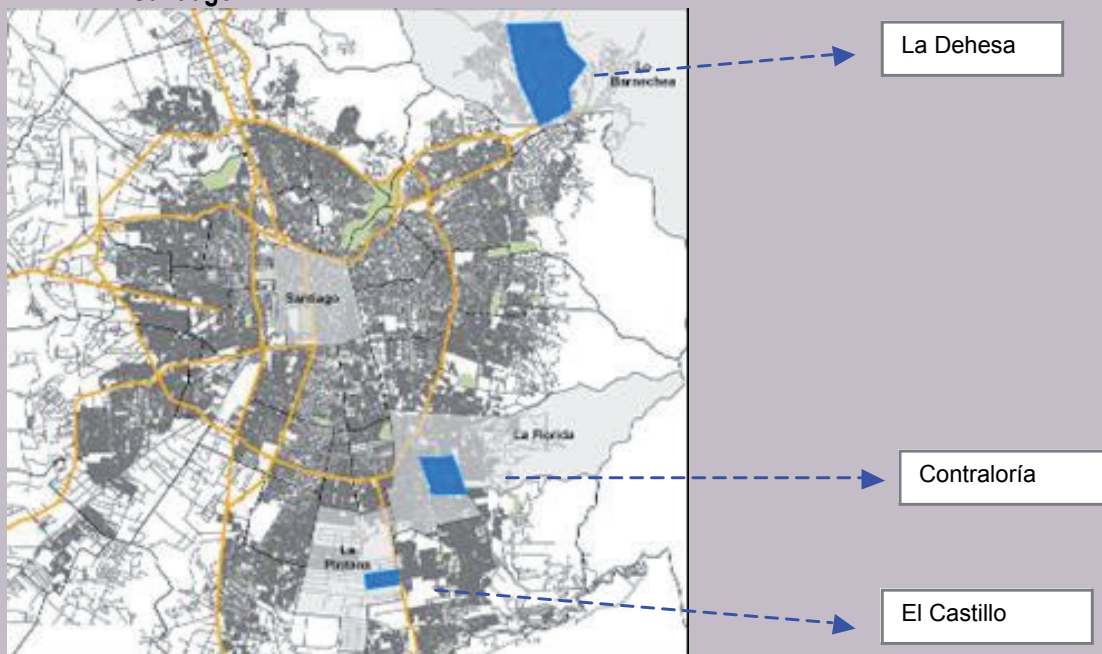
Source: Produced by the SUR team.

Sub-city study. The PVA was implemented in three urban areas of Santiago representative of distinct socio-economic sectors, the assumption being that the manifestations and impacts of urban and gender-based violence are not uniform across these sectors due to the specific characteristics of each area, according to place and class. The selected areas were: El Castillo, low income level, Contraloría, middle income level, and La Dehesa, high income level. All three areas are homogeneous in socio-economic terms and fairly new, they were developed after 1973, within the frame of neoliberal economic and urban policies. The sub-city study identified violence-related problems that affect women and men both in public places and in the home.

III. DEFINITIONS

City level. From the point of view of violence, Santiago is a civilly safe city: the figures for acts considered crimes are considerably lower than those for other Latin American cities.[2] In spite of this reality, Santiago is a socially insecure city, because current violence is related to a neoliberal model that has exacerbated inequalities already prevalent in Chile. This model features a structural conflict between winners and losers, which has led to different manifestations of violence.

Sub-city level. The UTP project introduces two concepts of particular importance in the violence studies, namely tipping points and violence chains.[3] The underlying assumption is that these two concepts provide added value and introduce new perspectives on an already much debated and contested issue, violence in cities of the South.

The notion of the tipping point refers to small shifts in human behaviour that result in radically altered circumstances within a short period. The project seeks to understand the nature of both quantitative and qualitative tipping points, identifying the way in which these can be measured and the processes that generate them.

The UTP project also explores how different forms of

2 The homicide rate in Santiago is 4.1 per 100,000 inhabitants (Policía de Investigaciones de Chile, 2011).

3 Moser, Caroline, Horn, Philipp, December 2011, *Understanding the tipping point of urban conflict: conceptual framework paper*, Working Paper #1, Understanding the tipping point of urban conflict: violence, cities and poverty reduction in the developing world.

violence generated by tipping point processes interact with each other, such that they form a violence chain. The notion of a 'violence chain' is used to highlight the way that violence operates systemically and involves a range of interconnected processes — that may not necessarily be immediately obvious.

According to Moser (2004), most definitions of violence say it is "the use of physical force that causes damage to others" in order to impose the will of the person inflicting it. However, she indicates that there are "more extensive definitions that go beyond physical violence and consider actions that cause psychological damage, material deprivation and symbolic disadvantages to be violence". This takes us to Galtung (2004), who proposes the existence of three forms of violence: direct (physical, verbal and/or psychological violence that is visible), structural (indirect violence associated to economic or social policies), and cultural (violence that legitimises a framework for structural and direct violence).

IV. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 Violence is not confined to poor areas

The rich information yielded by the PVA methodology demonstrates that, contrary to what is often thought, violence exists in all three of the areas investigated, which correspond to low, middle and high socio-economic strata. Violence is not confined to poor areas, as is often depicted by the media. Furthermore, victims as well as perpetrators can be found in every socio-economic level.

All the problems identified in these areas are related to the neoliberal model and its consequences — a set of severe economic and social inequalities that unleash diverse forms of violence and violence chains. This means exclusion and a lack of opportunities for some (El Castillo); accumulation of wealth and 'a fear of the have-nots' for others (La Dehesa); and an intermediate sector that struggles ceaselessly to improve its lot, dedicating a great amount of time to work and suffering high levels of stress and family breakdown as a result (Contraloría).

The results of the PVA highlighted the fact that all three city areas evidence manifestations of direct violence that are economic, socio-economic and social in nature. Participants reported the existence of violence against people (violence

Chart 1   Indicators of gains and losses

GAINS	LOSSES
Reduction of poverty	Concentration of income, greater inequality
Physical improvements in the city: better equipped infrastructure: drinking water, sewerage system, electricity	The city is for those that deserve (can afford) it. Cost of tariffs for public services
Reduction of housing deficit	New housing projects converted into ghettos
Greater education coverage: less illiteracy, more years of compulsory education	Education differentiated according to income Poor quality of public education
Greater health coverage: extension of services	Differences between private health care (Isapres) and public health care (Fonasa)
Greater life expectancy	Differences between pension fund systems
Increase in rate of salaried employment	Labour flexibility as a precarious form of work
	Small-scale drug trafficking in vulnerable neighbourhoods

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Chart 2   City Profile / Sub-City Level: Types, categories and expression of violence in Santiago, Chile

TYPE OF VIOLENCE (GALTUNG 2004)	CATEGORY (MOSER 2004)	EXPRESSION OF VIOLENCE	
		CITY LEVEL	SUB-CITY LEVEL
Direct	Social (violence against people) Economic (violence against property) Political-institutional	Direct violence: (classified as offences) figures are low compared to other cities in Latin America. High perception of insecurity Increasing reports of intra-family violence. People living in fear	Low income: Direct violence most severe and frequent. In home and in public places as part of a continuum. Middle income: Intra-family violence in the home as result economic stress. High income: less severe, less visible
Structural	Social Economic Political-institutional	Unequal income distribution in terms of access to public services and social security, among Social inequality expressed in the territory. Loss of welfare state. Socially insecure, indebted and consumption-oriented people. Young people excluded from employment.	Economic and social inequalities. Low income: The losers of the system. Lack of opportunities, education, employment and money. Middle income: caught in the middle. High income: the winners of the system
Cultural	Social Economic Political-institutional	Widespread individualism / private ownership. Social and spatial segregation. Legitimisation and valuation of profiteering. Individualist, classist and distrustful people. Male chauvinism, sexism. Violence against women based on unequal power relationships.	Illusion of integration via the market. Consumerism, individualism and machismo in the three barrios. The stress and pressure of the system in Contraloría and El Castillo. The winner culture and lack of values in La Dehesa

Source: Prepared by the authors.

against women, child abuse, sexual harassment and abuse, bullying, fights, shootings and drug-related deaths, robberies and muggings) as well as violence against property(assaults/damage and house burglaries and theft from cars). Also prevalent is political/institutional violence, exemplified by the overcrowded housing conditions in El Castillo, and by the fear and perception of a lack of safety that predominate in the three areas.

On a second level of analysis, the causes of the violence-related problems identified by the participants are: a) Structural violence, as evidenced by the profound economic and social inequalities that characterise the three areas, in addition to lack of opportunities, education and money, specifically in El Castillo; b) Cultural violence, taking the form of machismo, consumerism and individualism in all three of the areas; the stress and pressure of the system in Contraloría, and the 'winner' culture and a lack of values in La Dehesa.

4.2   Violence according to place, income and gender

In **El Castillo**, violence-related problems of an economic and socio-economic nature that affect men and women at home and in public were clearly recognised. Most mentioned were situations related to drug use, micro-trafficking networks, fights and shootings, and power struggles that generate high levels of fear, and impede the free use of public spaces. They also affect family life. Houses are not safe spaces either, as their small size and precariousness result in stress and frustration that lead to violence in family relationships, child abuse and violence against women.

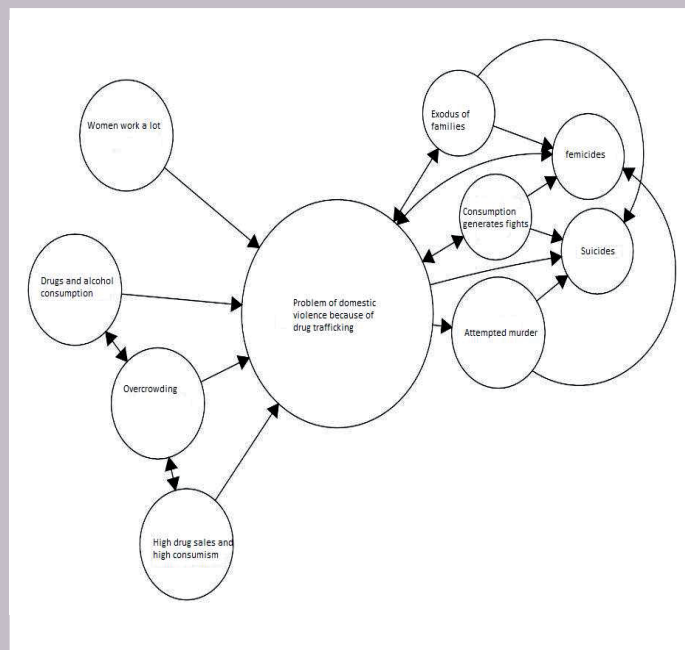From a gender perspective, the violence problems that affect men are related to fights, weapon-use (linked to

drugs), and conflicts between gangs, troublemakers and hooligans. Those that affect women are mainly tied to violence within couples, teen pregnancies (that later give rise to child abuse or mistreatment). Machismo was identified as the principal cause of violence against women.

A lack of i) opportunities, ii) education, iii) employment, and iv) money, were identified as the main causes of violence-related problems in El Castillo. Male and female participants connected these causes to the existence of a model that produces inequality and discrimination. The underlying problem, then, is one of structural violence. In the context of this situation, drugs are only the symptom: they constitute an escape from frustration and a possible route to easy money.

Contraloría. Here violence is predominantly social, taking the form of violence in family relationships and violence against women within couples. This was explained by the "pressure of the capitalist system" and the "stress that we live as a society" (structural violence) as the main causes of the problems identified. These forms of violence are intertwined with consumerism and individualism (cultural violence), which produces frustration, a workaholic ethic among adults, and a subsequent loss of authority and communication with sons and daughters.

Types of socio-economic violence mentioned were fights in public spaces, as well as young people's use of public squares for drug and alcohol consumption and having sex. The types of economic violence discussed were assaults and muggings that primarily affect women, but also boys and girls in the distinct places that they customarily frequent.

Figure 1 Flow diagram and chains of violence based on domestic violence because of drug trafficking

Source: Violence chain. Group of adult women, aged 35-56, El Castillo.

Figure 2 Flow diagram and violence chain based on mothers that are beaten by their sons, Contraloría
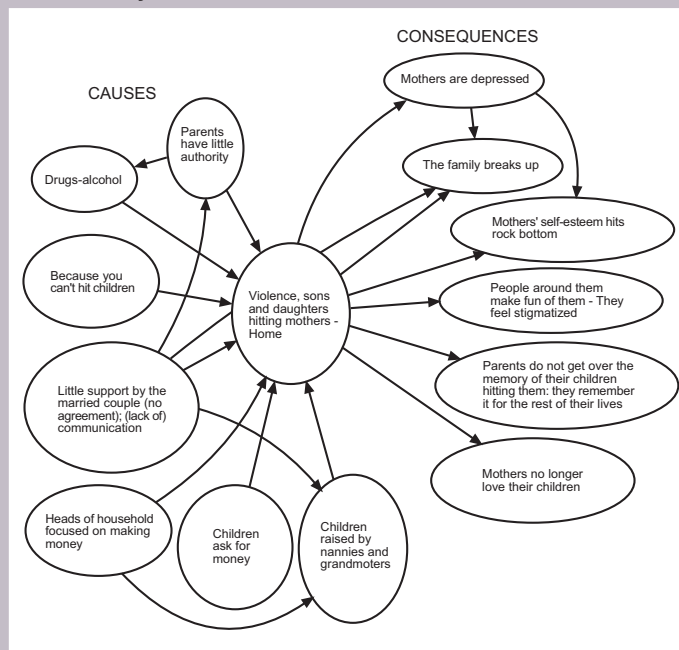
Source: Group of elderly women. Contraloría.

From a gender perspective, violence against women within couples, economic dependency, and uncertainty and discrimination related to employment are problems that affect women both in the home and in public places. In terms of causes, participants alluded to a machista culture and to men's resentment of women because of their increased autonomy.

La Dehesa. The participants referred almost exclusively to direct forms of economic violence, e.g. assaults, house burglaries and theft of and from cars. However, as participants discussed the issues in more depth, other violence-related problems in the area were disclosed.

Intolerance towards diversity and a fear of the 'other', as different, poor and violent, create powerful feelings of insecurity, and a perception that the community is unsafe. The response to these fears is to adopt protective measures. Life takes place inside the home or in enclosed places, not out in public spaces.

From a gender perspective, the problems identified were violence against women within couples, fights among young men for various reasons, discrimination and bullying at school and within the family. The importance of physical appearance was emphasised.

In relation to the main causes of the problems identified, participants isolated the prevailing economic model, social inequality and a paucity of social values. The notion of a culture of winners was discussed.

4.3 Dissatisfaction with Institutions

In all three of the areas investigated, there was dissatisfaction with the way institutions related to violence. In El Castillo, although there are a significant number of social interventions and programmes, both public and private, the perception is one of abandonment. Nobody is truly dedicated to the people: "There is no institution

mounting a counterattack to violence". In Contraloría, the actions of various institutions are deemed to be deficient in general. In La Dehesa, the institutions dedicated to private security were highlighted, but they are perceived as having a negligible capacity for real action. As such, community members' demands revolve around a greater police presence.

There are insignificant differences between the institutions identified in the three areas; primarily, they

Figure 3 Flow diagram and violence chain based on fights among young men for various reasons, La Dehesa
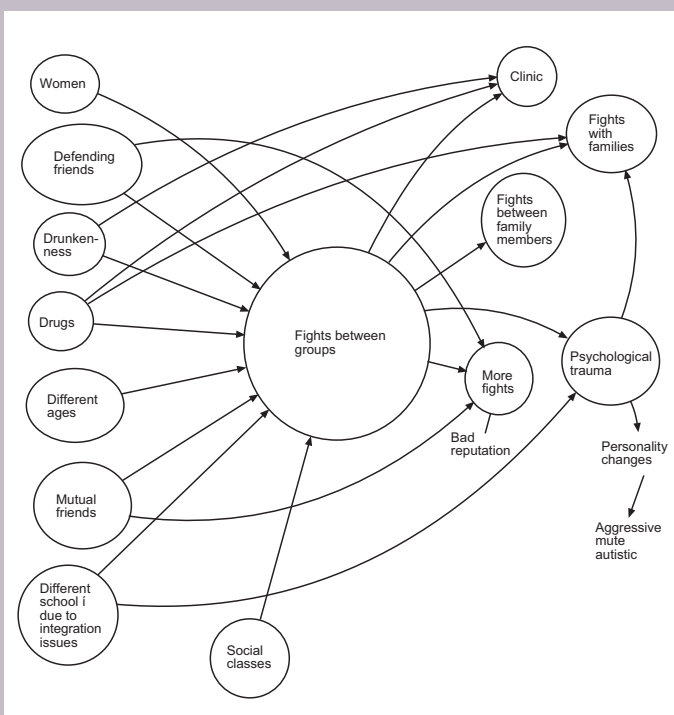
Source: Group of young women, aged 17-19. La Dehesa.

were institutions related to the police, health, education, community organisations and centres, programmes and services of the Municipalities and the State.

V. POLICY PROPOSALS TO REDUCE VIOLENCE

5.1 Sub-city level recommendations informing local and city level policy[4]

In terms of proposals to reduce violence at the local level, in El Castillo the focus was on the need for greater social services, more significant professional support, and improved access to information. Participants emphasised the need for more victim services offices and counselling centres for victims of violence. They also underlined the importance of promoting sport and developing workshops for women and girls. With regard to drugs, the proposals were aimed mainly to the improvement and participative management of public spaces, rehabilitation and self help activities with peers (ex addicts), and early prevention in schools and families. Regarding intra-family violence, the suggestions were to develop campaigns to make this problem more visible and to denaturalise it, and to talk about values in the family. Concerning fights, a "hug party in the park" was highlighted as an example to improve relations among neighbours.[5]

Similarly in Contraloría, the emphasis was on the need for greater resources, information and education; the development of workshops; the promotion of sport; and more professionals to service the community. Furthermore, participants voiced demands for a more significant police presence, more extensive links between institutions in the community, a greater commitment to education on the part of parents, and increased participation by Neighbourhood Committees. It was also proposed that violence on television be eliminated and that programmes dedicated to violence prevention be developed.

In La Dehesa, participants identified a need for more information on social institutions and programmes, a more significant police presence and greater organisation

on the part of community members. Participants also articulated the importance of developing a sense of community in the neighbourhood and getting to know their neighbours as a means to improve safety. Finally, there were proposals for improvements of the judicial and penal systems, including greater professional development for Carabineros; increased dialogue and support within the family, and with children; and the assignation of greater power to institutions involved in private security, given their limitations.

5.2 City and sub-city level recommendations informing city policy[6]

Urban violence is a complex phenomenon with several manifestations going beyond the issue of criminality. It is associated to economic, social and cultural factors. It is not limited to direct violence or to events associated to criminality or the fear of becoming the victim of a crime. In addition, urban violence is not exclusively limited to low-income barrios. Public policy solutions for urban violence thus require an approach that includes the city as a whole.

a) All violence must be made visible. By defining urban violence only as a problem of poor areas, other existing manifestations of violence become invisible. Urban violence, in Santiago is generally only seen as a criminal expression. This is shown by policies on violence and public safety in the city, which are based on or refer to crime statistics and come into play in territories and public spaces focused in order to reduce crime levels or insecurity perception.

b) Social cohesion, inclusion and citizen participation must be incorporated as crosscutting urban policy themes. Recognising socioeconomic and spatial inequalities, exclusions indicated at city and sub-city levels generate violence, distance between people, mistrust and fear. This implies policies directed to the following levels:

- **Inclusion, social cohesion**. Segregation in Santiago is the expression and cause of violence.

4 Recommendations stemming from PVA.
5 Final results sharing meeting in El Castillo, March 2012.

6 Results from a Santiago Workshop, March 2012.

Chart 3   Institutions in the three sectors, ranked by the number of times these were mentioned

EL CASTILLO		CONTRALORÍA		LA DEHESA	
Gangs	18	Police	23	Municipal programmes and services	8
Organisations and community centres	17	Other private institutions	15	Others	8
Police	14	Community centres and organisations	8	Police	7
Healthcare	10	Schools	8	Other institutions	5
Municipal programmes and services	10	State programmes and services	7	Private security	4
Other institutions mentioned	8	Healthcare	7	Schools	3
State programmes and services	7	Others	7	Community centres and organisations	2
Others	5	Churches	6	Family	2
Schools	4	Municipal programmes and services	5	Healthcare	1
Churches	4	Justice	2	Justice	1
		Family	1	State programmes and services	1
TOTAL	97		89		42

Source: Institutions named by 19 groups out of a total universe of 21 groups in El Castillo; by 18 groups in Contraloría; and by 7 groups in La Dehesa.

This has led to the "destruction of social capital and the establishment of a kind of social discipline made manifest in the city".[7] This requires policies that create fair conditions in terms of the population's access to land, urban goods and services; and contribute to social integration and a diverse social mix.

- **Citizen participation**. The role of the local community in the application of urban policies must be recognised in order to reinforce its identity and sense of belonging. This objective is met by increasing levels of democratisation and participation at a local and city level as an effective mechanism for creating quality of urban life. From this perspective, a public policy that incorporates citizen demands can contribute to the transformation of power relations in the city.

c) The focus of public policy responses should be violence instead of security. By making this charge from security to violence as the central focus of policies, three areas appear in which intervention is required in order to affect the chains of violence, the same that were emphasised in the PVA and at the results' devolution meetings. These are families, schools and barrios.

- **Families**. The subsidiary State has unloaded the weight of social welfare (healthcare, education, social security and safety) on families. This excessive burden becomes manifest in overly stressful situations and in violence affecting men and women differently, as well as the different socio-economic sectors.

- **Public and private schools.** School communities (teachers, parents and students) are important actors in the early prevention of violence, the treatment of violence in schools and in territories of influence. Their actions can help to reduce violence in the territories where these schools operate.

- **Barrios**. There are several social support programmes focusing on individual cases (families or persons) or considering work with the community. The challenge is to implement these with a territorial perspective, which is to say considering the specific characteristics, assets and failings of each sector.[8] From this perspective, the barrio is a territorial unit from which social cohesion can be reinforced.

5.3. Criteria for public policies[9]

We propose three criteria for the formulation of public policies regarding urban violence.

a) Changing what public policy is understood to be. "Public policy is not a specific intervention to solve a problem, but a space in which society agrees on how to settle the way its members wish to live together".[10] Public policy is therefore not a list of problems to be solved, but rather an agreement as to how to live together in society and how to build citizenry, transforming power relations: "a long construction process from a shared outlook as to what a society is". In this sense, PVA is an instrument that pools perceptions and proposals from communities.

b) A city-based public policy. The issue of territorial and social exclusion as a central aspect of urban living comes up in the discussion of the case of Santiago, together with the aspects of insecurity and segregation.[11] Proposals suggesting how to integrate, how to create a social mix and public policy agreements thus require physical-spatial and social expressions, which is to say city proposals.

c) Different uses of power are seen behind the different manifestations of violence.[12] Cities are a privileged space in which several different uses of power become manifest, evidencing a hierarchical and social discipline function: maintaining the structure of power. Cities are also a privileged space for detecting and reverting the chains of power existing in these.

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7   Presentation by Augusto Varas at the "Urban Violence in Santiago: What lies beneath the tip of the iceberg" seminar, Corporación SUR, Santiago, 28 March 2010.

8   See Caroline Moser, *Gente del barrio, vidas extraordinarias. Activos y reducción de la pobreza en Guayaquil, 1978–2004* (Santiago: Ediciones SUR, 2010).

9   Based on presentations and comments during the "Urban Violence in Santiago: What lies beneath the tip of the iceberg" seminar held in Santiago, 28 March 2010.

10   Presentation by Eolo Díaz-Tendero at the "Urban Violence in Santiago" seminar.

11   Alejandra Lunecke at the "Urban Violence in Santiago" seminar.

12   Augusto Varas at the "Urban Violence in Santiago" seminar.

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