Fatal imaginations: death squads in Davao City and Medellín compared

Brenda Carina Oude Breuil, Ralph Rozema

HAL Id: hal-00535463
https://hal.science/hal-00535463

Submitted on 11 Nov 2010

Fatal imaginations: death squads in Davao City and Medellín compared

Brenda Carina Oude Breuil · Ralph Rozema

Abstract This article examines the role social imaginations play in legitimizing extrajudicial killings by death squads in the era of globalization. The role of popular imagining has expanded into a widespread social practice as people increasingly draw on images from all over the world via modern communication technologies. Drawing on Mary Douglas' concept 'matter out of place' and Nancy Scheper-Hughes' 'symbolic apartheid' we argue that to a certain extent, dehumanizing imaginations about socially excluded groups legitimize death squad killings. The article compares two case studies on death squads in the cities of Medellín, Colombia and Davao City, Philippines. We conclude that social imaginations in the era of globalization may be a driving force behind death squads in these and other major cities in the world.

Introduction

In about 10 years, the general attitude towards street children and youth gangs has changed dramatically in Davao City on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Not a cause of great political concern in 1995, a decade later the city's poor children are being frowned upon as "undesirables" (Mondragon, cited in [48], see also Preda Foundation Archives[1] [44]). They risk becoming victims of the summary

---

[1]PREDA is the acronym for the People's Recovery, Empowerment Development Assistance Foundation. The organization aims works to 'win freedom and new life for children in jail, trafficked into brothels, living on the street, for abandoned youth, and those mired in poverty (...) helping battered women, indigenous people and protecting the environment' (retrieved from the PREDA Web site, http://www.preda.org/intro.htm on 22 May 2008). The NGO is located in Olangapo City, the Philippines and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Price in 2001 and 2003.

B. C. Oude Breuil (✉) · R. Rozema
Department of Cultural Anthropology, Utrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands
e-mail: B.Oudebreuil@uu.nl

R. Rozema
e-mail: R.A.P.Rozema@uu.nl

executioners city residents refer to in whispers as the DDS—Davao Death Squad. According to a report of three Philippine NGOs [27: 13], the first DDS victim died in 1993. However, DDS killings were sporadic at the time and street children were not the usual targets. But starting in 1996, poor urban minors, some as young as fourteen, appeared on the lists of DDS victims with increasing regularity [43]. Although the death squads were said to only kill "criminals", child advocacy groups emphasize there is no way to know for sure that the unfortunate DDS victims had indeed committed any criminal act. They argue that poverty is the main reason behind gang member vulnerability to this form of violence [41].

Social cleansing by mysterious death squads of perceived "scumbags"—with the urban poor disproportionally represented in this imagined category—is not unique to Davao City. About 10,000 miles away, across the Pacific Ocean, similarly frightened residents of poor neighborhoods in Medellín in central Colombia recount how people disappeared at the hands of right-wing paramilitaries. 'It happens at night... They come in a red car without a license plate. They choose a house, take the residents and disappear in silence,' said a resident of Comuna 13 in 2004. Sometimes victims of paramilitary death squads were suspected of left-wing views, but they were often innocent civilians, usually from the poorest areas, as several residents independently confirmed (fieldwork notes Medellín 2004). The authorities seemed to be unable to crack down on the heavily armed paramilitaries, who were sometimes presumed to have the tacit support of the police. That was in 2004. Although the paramilitaries are now engaged in a peace process and security in the city has improved, armed groups that control the neighborhoods have not completely disappeared[2].

Despite the historical and cultural distance between the two cities and the 10,722 miles separating them, there are certain similarities between the violent histories of Davao City and Medellín, their death squads and the social imaginations about them and their victims. Our comparative study is based in part on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Medellín (2004 and 2006) by Rozema. The fieldwork was part of a broader research project on the local Medellín peace processes and included interviews with residents of violent neighborhoods, local authorities and former paramilitaries. For safety reasons, it was impossible to move freely in the violent neighborhoods. Respondents were selected via snowball sampling, which was a safe way to come close to the armed groups. The ethnographic fieldwork in Davao City (6 months in 1995 and a one-month follow-up fieldtrip in 2005) by Oude Breuil originally focused on poor urban youths and entailed participant observation, case studies of street gang members and unaffiliated poor urban street children, and interviews with these children and youths, residents of poor urban neighborhoods, social workers and politicians[3]. We have methodologically enhanced and elaborated on the data from the two sites via systematic literature and media analyses after the fieldwork periods, including studying

---

[2] For more about the political situation in Colombia and the role of paramilitaries in Medellín, see [29, 30].

[3] Oude Breuil conducted a twin study on gang boys and girls in 1995 in collaboration with Ruben Boers. See Boers, J. L. R. (1999) *Gevaarlijke jongens*, Utrecht: Utrecht University (unpublished MA thesis); Oude Breuil, B. C. (1997) *Girls just wanna have fun. 'Buntogs' in Davao City, Philippines*, Utrecht: Utrecht University (unpublished MA thesis).

scientific, policy and NGO reports and about eighty articles from local, regional and national newspapers and bulletins as well as international newspapers.

The comparison of the two research locations was not the original aim of our research. But once we had the two sets of findings side by side, we came across the striking similarities this article addresses. So far, studies on death squads have shown that global processes influence the practice and characteristics of paramilitary death squads (e.g. [21]). In this article, we link this finding to theoretical insights into the role and manifestations of social imaginations. We argue not only that the role and effect of imaginations on the urban social landscape have changed as a result of global developments, but that these imaginations are in turn globally reproduced. By comparing Medellín and Davao City and analysing local and national ways of viewing the urban social landscape and the "problem" of disorder via media analyses, we make an effort to shed light on the mediascapes citizens draw their images from about their social surroundings, or express some of their already existing images in. Some local ideas on death squads and their victims reappear, as we will see, in other parts of the world and suggest global patterns in social imaginations.

In this article we are not particularly interested in seemingly "objective", nominal data on death squads. We do not go into the figures on the casualties or the perpetrators of these crimes or the amount of harm done to society. We doubt whether this type of "hard" data is obtainable at all and if so, whether it would be as objective as it might seem in the first instance. Even more importantly, several studies (e.g. [6, 9, 15]) have shown that the amount of public interest in a social problem (criminality, death squad killings etc.) is often not directly linked to its objective dimensions. We prefer to focus on the images and meanings attributed to death squads, how people make sense of their urban surroundings, and the role of death squads there. Death squads legitimize their existence by referring to certain public needs. As we demonstrate in this article, people's meaning-making actions—in particular their imaginations on how their lives could be more secure—are central to our understanding of the death squads' rationale.

Death squads in a global perspective

Paramilitary death squads can be found in a wide range of places and have a long history. Various authors (e.g. [8, 34]) have enhanced our scientific understanding of the phenomenon. But since the nature of the death squads themselves is ever changing, mainly as a result of processes of globalization, so are the theories.

Campbell [8: 1] defines death squads as 'clandestine organizations, often paramilitary in nature, which carry out extrajudicial executions and other violent acts (ranging from torture to bombing) against clearly defined individuals or groups of people.' Death squads may have (tacit) government support, but can also be instigated and operate under the supervision of others, such as drug barons or warlords. What death squads have in common is that they operate in areas with government voids. Incomplete integration, as Durkheim [12, 13] argues, gives rise to anomie, one result of which is excessive criminality. In this kind of situation, the law is inadequate to regulate the interactions of various segments of society. The state fails to provide security for its citizens and armed groups step into the power vacuum.

The functions of the groups vary, Diehl [10] notes, according to the level of political development. In European history, paramilitary groups in Weimar Germany were closely connected to political parties and part and parcel of the national system: they killed for political reasons, and not to meet the needs or wishes of organized crime. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those Hobsbawn [20] calls "bandits"who are primarily connected to the world of crime but are not altogether "non-political" (ibid: 96). They constitute a nucleus of armed strength and are thus a political force and a potential source of rebellion.

It is often difficult to prove whether the authorities support or authorize the actions of paramilitary death squads in any way. Sometimes police officers work at a desk in a police station in the daytime and operate covertly as members of death squads at night, as has been the case in Brazil [28]. But this does not necessarily mean they are operating with the consent of their superiors. Sometimes independent paramilitary groups operate as death squads. In the event of political tension, some governments support the efforts of death squads to eliminate political opponents or supposed members of rebellious groups, as was the case during the dictatorships in Guatemala and Peru [23: 33]. With or without government consent, paramilitary groups in Latin America have eliminated leaders of trade unions and other social organizations suspected of threatening the public order, thereby sometimes playing into the hands of certain political goals. Anthropologist Michael Taussig [35: 1], living in a village with paramilitaries in southern Colombia, finds paramilitaries an elusive term for the very same reason of their obscure links to the government; they are 'soldiers who are not really soldiers but more like ghosts flitting between the visible and invisible, between the regular army and the criminal underworld of killers and torturers that all states seem to have no trouble recruiting when their backs are up against the wall.'

Ironically, members of death squads are often motivated by a sense of social responsibility [8: 7]. The key term is maintaining order, even if this means breaking the law. Death squads murder abandoned street children, prostitutes or drug addicts to socially "cleanse" society. They crack down on petty criminals to improve security in the city and thus respond to citizen's lack of faith in the formal government. In this sense, death squads can be perceived as highly ideological; at the same time, they instigate terror.

There has been a rapid increase in the number of death squads and other informal armed groups since the Cold War, mainly as a result of globalization [21]. Free trade agreements and the removal of trade barriers have led to the open markets informal armed groups have benefited from. Since illegal arms traders can more easily operate in the grey areas of the open market, arms are now widely available. The flourishing illicit drug trade enables informal armed groups to finance their operations. Globalization has made modern communication technology widely available, and local armed groups operating as death squads use this technology in their networks with similar armed groups or criminal gangs. In the case of Colombia local paramilitary groups formed a strong national organization operating with advanced communication techniques. Globalization processes have also changed the role of the nation-state as the primary organizing principle. Post-modern nations are increasingly confronted with individuals, capital, knowledge, technologies, media and ideologies that cross national borders [2], and are thus losing control over what

is happening in their own territory. The growing complexity of societies and international treaties and regulations require ever more regulating power from the state. Campbell [8: 16] notes that twentieth-century nation states 'have increasingly felt it necessary to reach outside themselves' to live up to this demand. He sees the trend towards "subcontracting" important political, social, and economic tasks that formerly belonged to the state as a contemporary explanation for the state's appeal to death squads.

Although these ideas might explain why states share their theoretical monopoly on violence with death squads, they do not address why the public condones their existence. We address the role of death squads in everyday life from the angle of the people's social imaginations on the death squads and their victims.

People as "matter out of place"

In the late 1990s, various authors observe a new form of spatialized socio-economic inequality on a global scale [5] as well as within cities [22, 39]. This spatial inequality is attributed to globalization processes in general and socio-economic polarization due to the negative impact of neoliberal economic ideology in particular [5, 39]; this leads to a widespread sense of insecurity and pervasive images of disorder, fragmentation and chaos [2] and consequently a strong emphasis on security and maintaining law and order [17]. These developments have caused sharp social dividing lines that are territorially reproduced, the authors argue, resulting in the idea that people of a certain socio-economic standing "belong" in a certain part of the city, where people of lower standing do not, and vice versa. Stereotyping and stigmatization processes help define the categories of people and thus the morally fixed territory or "proper place" where they belong.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas' theoretical framework on the concept of dirt as "matter out of place" [11] has, according to us, regained explanatory importance here. In her classical work (1966), she demonstrates how all societies have ideas about what is clean or pure and what is impure or dirty. Boundaries are central to these notions and inanimate and human substances only become impure once they pass a boundary, e.g. of the human body. Rituals linked to notions of purity and danger and the boundaries between them govern and organize the social environment; they help people create order in everyday chaos. We can stretch the argument and suggest that death squads aim to create order in chaotic urban social life by categorizing people as contributing, consuming, law-abiding, "normal" and worthy citizens or as unworthy "rest" or "unwanted (...) human waste" [31: 353]. By "removing" the latter category, the urban social order is maintained.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Daniel Hoffman [31] use this argument to explain the murder of Brazilian street children by death squads. They hold that the discourse on street children in Brazilian society facilitates the symbolic incarceration of poor urban children in the impoverished *favelas*. By separating them from "civilized" society—the authors aptly call this "symbolic apartheid" (ibid: 358)—citizens can uphold an image of their cities as modern and orderly. Since any identification or empathy with the outcasts is virtually impossible, in the long run symbolic incarceration can even legitimize violence. Once people are reduced to "matter out

of place", it might be only logical and legitimate to "clean up the place"[4]. Jeffrey A. Sluka [34] also hints at the link between imaginations and violence in his introduction to the volume he edited on death squads: "misrepresentations" of victims of torture, disappearances and murders precede actual (state) terror and these representations are "a justification for killing them without even due process of law" ([34: 5], see also [40: 340]). Aretxaga [3: 46–70] similarly observes that state officials produce "fantasies" about internal enemies to rationalize their own violence.

We wonder though whether "fantasy" is the right term for ideas and perceptions that are so real to the people who hold them that they incite violence and even murder. We prefer the term "imaginations". Ordinary people, as Taylor [36: 23] notes, "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms but conveyed in images, stories and legends. Imaginations can be shared by large groups of people. The social imagination is a common understanding that paves the way for common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy. We follow Arjun Appadurai [2] when he states that in contemporary global reality, 'imagination is (...) central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact and is the key component of the new global order.' In our own words, imaginations predefine how people ultimately act on their felt needs. Imagined lives do not remain in people's minds as mere fantasies, they trigger action or (more or less conscious) non-action. Imaginations create, sustain and redefine social order. Although Taylor emphasizes the positive strength of people 'who are meant to collaborate in peace to their mutual benefits,' we argue that imaginations may also lead to a further polarization of society, which can ultimately end in violence.

Although imaginations are not new, their role has changed with contemporary post-modern globalization. Four main changes in the act and context of imagining have emerged in globalization studies. Firstly, as anthropologist Arjun Appadurai [2] argues, imagination has increasingly become a social practice *everyone* engages in. In pre-modern communities, imagination may have been limited to artists, priests and visionaries, but the contemporary spread of media images and cultural values, ideas and habits enable almost anyone to actively imagine new ways of life, new kinds of friends, new rules and lifestyles.

Secondly, as a result of recent advances in transport and communication technology, people can easily *share* their imaginations—or "scripts of imagined lives" as Appadurai [2] calls them—with any number of people. This large-scale sharing of social imaginations can give them extra meaning and impetus. Let us take a short look at the role of rumors in this process. Dan E. Miller [25: 384] notes that rumors are 'situated social acts, involving the diffusion of information through informal social relationships.' They transform personal and interpersonal ideas, whether imaginary or real, into widespread beliefs and allow for a shared orientation and shared social action toward the object of the rumor [25: 383]. Rumors can thus be

---

[4] This does not necessarily mean the targets of the squads are powerless victims or, to stretch the argument, that the urban poor categorized as "unworthy" have no agency. Everyone is an agent in some sense, although always limited in his or her choice of behavior by structural factors. Bauman [5] illustrates in his book that the urban poor do resist ascribed labels and categories and rules that go with these ascriptions. This article does not however focus on potential death squad victims' strategies of resistance. We would applaud further research on this topic.

viewed as meaningful and purposeful social reactions to perceived dangers. According to Miller, rumors appear in situations of insecurity and ambiguity and help create order (ibid, 384). We might argue that rumors, urban legends and folk stories may also serve as veiled language for those things that are too dangerous to talk about, following a quote from Carolyn Nordstrom [26: 143]: 'When the truth is too dangerous to tell, people don't stop talking. Instead, they shape truth into stories.' With all the recent advances in communication technology, rumors can be assumed to have a wider range and increased importance.

Thirdly, the nation states that used to control and govern people's imaginations are losing this power in today's global era. The decline of their control over the knowledge and actions of their citizens has been widely discussed (see e.g. [18]) and need not be addressed here. What matters though is that other institutions, be they formal or informal, national or transnational, provide products and services that enable citizens to realize their imagined lives if the nation state is neither willing nor able to do so. If imagined lives include perceptions on what one's city should be like, e.g. safe from "criminals" and "subversives" and free of "human waste", it is easy to see how death squads may come into the picture.

Lastly, nowadays we have the conditions as well as the technology to increasingly realize our imaginations, or have them realized for that matter by non- or extra-governmental agencies without taking the needs of others into account. We have already referred to communication technologies such as the Internet, which make it easy to anonymously buy and sell goods or services we need or think we need, either legally or illegally. Porous national borders, the mobility of people and capital and the trend towards subcontracting make it ever harder to trace back the responsibility for whatever harm is done. In other words, the contemporary world allows individuals, groups and organizations to realize the imaginations of some and be careless about the needs of others (see also [5: 8]).

We argue that these changes in imaginations and the ways to realize them impact the activities of death squads and the social legitimizing of these activities. Imaginations about what society should be like, about the individuals and groups willing to put these social imaginations into effect, and about the rightful place of the "marginal other" in society are not limited to any specific locality. By comparing the social imaginations on death squads in Davao City in the Philippines and Medellín in Colombia, we argue that the social imaginations in the two cases bear striking similarities. Certain aspects of these imaginations might even be drawn from what Tharoor [37] calls "global imaginations". Contemporary changes in the acts and conditions of imagining affect the discourse on death squads in these localities as well as the ensuing social acts.

Medellín

Advent and decline of death squads in Medellín

The Colombian city of Medellín, with around two million inhabitants, has expanded rapidly in recent decades. Modern office buildings and shopping malls in the city centre are in sharp contrast with the poor areas in the surrounding hills. A modern and fast metropolitan train and cable car connect the two worlds. In the 1960s and 1970s,

Medellín was known as a prosperous industrial city, pleasantly located in the green hills and with a low crime rate. The tranquil atmosphere of the city changed in the 1980s with the advent of the Medellín drug cartel that employed hundreds of hired killers, *sicarios*, who operated as the first large-scale death squad in the city. The drug cartel is history, but new informal armed groups later started to operate as death squads, including left-wing militias, informal vigilante groups involved in social cleansing, guerrilla movements and paramilitaries with alleged government support. In 1991, the heyday of the drug cartel, the homicide rate peaked at 381 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. This figure had dropped by 2005 but was still 37 [1].

All the armed groups in Medellín operate within the context of the national conflict in Colombia. The main national actors, the guerrilla and paramilitaries, both invaded the poor areas of Medellín. The guerrilla movements FARC (originally a farmers' movement) and ELN (Cuba-oriented) strive for a socialist state. The paramilitary organization AUC, a national umbrella of local paramilitary groups, was established to fight the guerrilla and in its own words, to restore order because the national army was unable to do so. The paramilitaries, however, are held responsible for bloody massacres as they not only killed presumed guerrilla fighters, but also residents of areas with a guerrilla presence. In 2003 the paramilitaries began to engage in a peace process with the government. Nationwide more than 30,000 paramilitaries have now laid down their weapons. Since there are only limited resources to accompany their reintegration into society, their future is however uncertain. So far, a small segment of these former paramilitaries have formed new criminal organizations.

Medellín, already in the grip of various armed groups, entered a new stage in the 1990s when the guerrilla decided to expand the struggle from the countryside to the city and the paramilitaries followed suit. For years, urban warfare ravaged the poor neighborhoods of Medellín. When the guerrilla was finally expelled, the paramilitaries established their own regime in most of the city's poorer areas. From then on, paramilitary death squads went into operation. Marcia Romero, who lives in the Comuna 13, recalls how the paramilitaries created a state of fear among the residents. 'The paramilitaries had people disappear in the night, you never knew when they would come again or if you would be the next victim tonight. We lived in fear all the time.' Most surprisingly, the disappearances occurred within a fifteen-minute distance from the city centre. The municipal authorities did not take any steps to improve the situation in the poor, violence-ridden areas. This situation came to an end in 2004 with the first demobilization process of the paramilitaries and a new city government, which allocated a substantial part of its budget to the development of the poor neighborhoods [4, 16, 29, 30].

Imagination through the media

The image of the death squads in Medellín is complex, with various intertwining groups. At times they cooperated, like the paramilitaries and drug gangs, and sometimes even separate factions within the paramilitaries fought. Sometimes the groups operated in a hierarchic way, e.g. with the paramilitaries giving orders to youth gangs. It was often impossible for the residents and local authorities to determine who was operating in the name of which group. 'Small groups of masked men patrolled the

streets, but we didn't know whether they were paramilitaries, members of a youth gang or possibly the police,' comments a resident of Comuna 13.

The paramilitaries featured most prominently in the media accounts. The media portrayed them in contradictory ways: as heroes of the urban war, perpetrators of human rights violations, drug traffickers and shrewd negotiators with the government. Imaginations about the paramilitary death squads were sometimes invoked by descriptions of their leaders who were well known to the public. In Medellín Don Berna or Adolfo Paz, officially Diego Fernando Murillo Bejerano, was the leader of the main group *Bloque Cacique Nutibara* (BCN). He was nicknamed Adolfo Paz (Adolfo Peace) because he helped settle conflicts in several neighborhoods in Medellín, thus saving many lives.

But the media also portrayed his other sides. As one of Los Pepes, the group that challenged Pablo Escobar's drug cartel, he became one of Colombia's major drug traffickers. He also led a vast criminal organization in Medellín known as La Oficina (The Office), which employed hired killers to work on commission for whoever wanted to pay. For years La Oficina was no more than an urban legend known to everyone in Medellín, and only recently did the media reveal some of the details about it. The weekly Semana [47] compared La Oficina to Pablo Escobar's former network of hired killers, but with more sophisticated technology and tentacles in various branches of business. At the same time Don Berna, the leader of the paramilitary group BCN, presented himself as a man of vision who wanted an orderly and safe city. In an unexpected move, Don Berna agreed that the more than 800 paramilitaries under his command would be the first to enter a demobilization process, thus reinforcing his image as a peacemaker.

Contrasting imaginations of this kind continue to live on about the paramilitaries in the city and their leader Don Berna, the hero and scoundrel. During a visit to Comuna 13, a demobilized combatant showed off one of his new peaceful projects, a small zoo for the children of his community. Its name, Zoo Don Berna, was on his T-shirt. 'He is the man who defeated the guerrilla, he should be remembered as a hero forever,' he said. On that day Don Berna was already for some time in prison. In 2008 he was extradited to the United States on charges of drugs trafficking. Media reports link the discovery of mass graves directly to Don Berna [46, 49]. Since the discovery of the mass graves, the media have devoted more attention to the victims, who they were and why they were killed. In the past the media focus was on who the paramilitary perpetrators were and the backgrounds of the victims were virtually ignored.

Although the media openly reported on the paramilitary death squad activities and, if known, mentioned the perpetrators responsible for the disappearances, they did not tell the whole story. The presumed relations between the authorities and the underworld were a well-guarded secret. Paramilitary actions were conducted from within the institutions in the city centre, as a key respondent said on condition of anonymity. It is suggested that various members of the City Council (not the municipal government) and industrialists played a leading role in the paramilitary death squads. The earlier mentioned oficinas played a key role. Persistent rumors about these secret criminal organizations contributed to a preliminary understanding of the dangerous urban landscape; media publications (e.g. Semana [47]) confirmed these rumors.

The imagined community

The presence of paramilitary death squads created a permanent state of fear among the residents of the poor neighborhoods. They viewed the paramilitaries as oppressors who deliberately killed people while they themselves got rich from the trade in cocaine. However, teenagers without any prospects of a good job or education joined the ranks of the paramilitaries in the hope of a career there.

The elite visions about the death squads have changed. To the elite, the poor neighborhoods in the hills were like an alien planet to be avoided. More and more wealthy residents of Medellín chose to live in gated communities with enhanced security. They initially had a positive view of the paramilitaries, since they maintained some kind of order. As long as the killings did not happen in their own world, the sizable numbers of victims did not bother the elite so much. But as the paramilitaries' killings and disappearances in Medellín became more widely known, the elite's imaginations about them turned negative. This change coincided more or less with the start of the new city government in 2004 and its wish to develop the poor neighborhoods.

As the elite's imaginations about the perpetrators changed, so did their views on the victims. All the victims were initially anonymous and viewed as problem-makers, but now the elite was more aware of how many of the victims were innocent civilians. Some members of the elite participated in projects for street children who were once death squad targets.

The elite is also concerned about the image of Medellín as one of the most violent cities in the world and the financial consequences. In response to this negative picture, industrial companies tried to be positive in their advertisements to neutralize the uncertainty about the future or, in the words of Villa Martínez [38: 183], create a *comunidad imaginada*—an imagined community. In fact the industrial elite expressed a wish to transform the fragmented urban space into a more united city and increase its social cohesion. In another effort to leave the era of violence behind, the telecom company Orbitel advertised with the slogan, 'No more minutes of silence. Speak. Colombia will be what you want it to be' ('*No más minutos de silencio. Hable. Así Colombia será como usted quiere que sea,*' in Villa Martínez [38: 183]. Initiatives like this have contributed to a dialogue on violence in urban society, but the distance between the elite and the urban poor remains. The elite image of the poor as "unwanted citizens" has not changed that much.

Davao City

Davao City's violent history

As in Medellín, the death squad activities were not Davao City's first experience with extrajudicial killings and bloodshed. Davao City, with 1,400,000 inhabitants[5],

---

[5] Retrieved from The Official Web Site of Davao City, http://www.davaocity.gov.ph/about/business-leisure.htm on 10 May 2007.

had a strong tradition of paramilitary mobilization, counter-insurgency, vigilante groups and extrajudicial killings by death squads ([19: 129, 27: 11]). On the southern island of Mindanao, Davao City witnessed violent clashes between Muslim separatist rebels and the Philippine armed forces starting in the 1970s [24]. Its residents witnessed these clashes first hand in 1993 when Muslim rebels attacked the San Pedro Cathedral with three grenades in the middle of evening Mass (fieldwork notes 1995, [50]).

According to Pilgrim Guasa, a local NGO program officer, the people of Davao City are "desensitized" to violence by its 'history of being used as a laboratory for violence' (cited in [41]). She is probably referring to the fierce insurgency and counter-insurgency struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, during the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand E. Marcos[6]. His battle against the political opposition, especially the Communist Party of the Philippines and its New People's Army (CCP/NPA), included mass arrests, disappearances and extra-judicial or summary killings [19: 126].

The NPA guerilla units had a stronghold in Davao City. Their Sparrow Units eliminated anyone who committed "crimes against the people"—abusive policemen, militaries and common criminals [27: 13]. When these units, however, turned on civilians with their terror tactics, the anti-communist counter-insurgency movement Alsa Masa emerged, armed in part by the military [19: 138, 50]. Alsa Masa's terror strategies included intense intimidation and extreme violence, such as dismemberment and beheading. Agdao, one of the poorest quarters in Davao City and the centre of this battleground, was known at the time as "Nicaragdao" (fieldwork notes 1995, see also [41, 50]).

Davao City was thus a theater of violence for decades. The authoritarian, iron-fist regime of Marcos was eventually ousted, but the subsequent four presidents did not fully succeed in ending human rights violations by communist insurgency groups, nor could they end the kidnappings, torture and killings by Muslim militants such as the Abu Sayyaf Group [7]. It might come as no surprise that Davaoeños welcomed Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte, who promised to fight crime and restore order, in 1987 and re-elected him in 1992, 1995 and 2001. Duterte succeeded in reducing Davao's per capita crime rate to the nation's lowest [50] and on its official website, the formerly notorious Philippine murder capital now boasts of being 'the most peaceful city in Southeast Asia.'

DDS and Dirty Harry: imaginations of the safe and orderly

There is, however, a stain on Davao City's shiny reputation: an urban legend [42] or public secret that human rights advocates have struggled to bring out into the open. The Davao Death Squad (DDS), appearing for the first time in 1993, rid the city of suspected drug pushers and petty criminals by extrajudicially killing them. It is hard to get adequate and valid information, since none of the killers have ever been apprehended and witnesses do not dare to come forward. However, the following

---

[6] Pilgrim might also be referring to the view expressed in Hedman [19:126] that the Alsa Masa strategies of armed neighborhood patrolling were supposed to be an experiment adopting the 'low-intensity-conflict' doctrine of the Reagan era.

picture emerges from newspaper articles [41, 43, 48, 50] and a report written by local NGOs [27].

The DDS killings are carried out on the streets, often in the daytime. Two men on motorcycles appear, wearing black or military clothing [27]. While one of them serves as look-out, the other shoots the victim from nearby. The victims are often warned several days or weeks beforehand and told to stop their criminal activities 'or else they'll be dead' [41]. The identity of the DDS members and their possible link to legal institutions can only be surmised or imagined. Most press reports agree that the killers must be "professionals". They doubt the official assumption of the mayor and former director of the Philippine National Police that the killers are gang members [50], since they hold that gang killings are less organized and use different weapons[7]. The level of organization and use of professional arms suggest, according to some observers, that the killers are former NPA rebels; their strategies resemble the urban warfare tactics of the Sparrow Units in the 1980s [27: 13, 41]. Other rumors identify them as officers or ex-officers of the Philippine National Police[8] and militaries [27, 41], members of criminal syndicates [41], contract killers [41, 45] or ordinary citizens who take the law into their own hands [42]. Notwithstanding this confusing summary, the main line in the press reports as well as the allegations of local NGOs and human rights organizations is that since the perpetrators continue with impunity for so many years, there must have been some link between the DDS and the local or national government.

The allegations of mayor Duterte's direct or indirect involvement is part of a more encompassing urban legend about his persona, blending ambiguous admiration and fear into a heroic image of the "Dirty Harry of the Philippines" (fieldwork notes 1995 and 2005, see also [43, 48]. Other nicknames are just as colorful, such as "the Terminator" [43] or the Punisher [50]. In addition to the nicknames, several heroic and tough stories live on in the collective imagination. One story goes that in his early days in office (1980s), the mayor went to an NPA rebel camp in the Davao City hinterlands. He said he understood their cause, but told them to stay out of 'his city' (fieldwork notes 1995, [50]). His tough one-liners in interviews with the press add to the mayor's Dirty Harry image: 'If I win [the mayoral elections], more criminals will be killed because I have vowed to protect the people of this city' [43], 'criminals and rebels do not have a monopoly on evil' [50] and 'if I'm going out, I'm going out with my guns blazing' [50].

The nicknames, legendary stories and self-projected image of a mayor with a non-compromising attitude on crime all add to the rumor that he is directly involved in the DDS summary killings, telling "his men" whom to kill. The people of Davao City thus sometimes equated the DDS with the Duterte Death Squad (fieldwork

---

[7] Gang members often use *indian panas*, which are home-made catapult-like weapons that shoot rusty, pointed nails into the victim's body at close range (fieldwork notes 1995, see also Boers 1999, see note 3).

[8] In 2001, witnesses linked three police officers to the DDS because they were often near the execution scene. However, since no official testimony or complaint was filed, there was no official action. In 2005 the local newspaper *Sunstar Davao* reported that a confessed member of the Davao Death Squad was apprehended and charged with extortion. Although the report did not reveal the background of the perpetrator, it did mention that his companion was a police officer First Class. The Commission on Human Rights in the Philippines stated that the Philippine National Police is the worst abuser of human rights (in Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2004).

notes 2005, [50]) and various national as well as international sources linked the DDS to the mayor[9]. So far, however, there has not been any unequivocal evidence to confirm the rumors. There was a significant drop in summary executions in 2000, when Duterte stepped down as mayor of Davao City. This drop, however, could well have been a consequence of the fierce Internet and media campaign by the Preda Foundation at the time against the summary killings. The casualty figures rose again dramatically when Duterte won the mayoralty elections in 2001 [27: 12].

It is not our aim here to determine whether or not the rumors and allegations are true. The point is that the mayor's supposed involvement in the DDS is part of the collective imaginations about a heroic man who is not afraid to get his hands dirty to protect the city. These imaginations have helped certain segments of the Davao City population deal with everyday insecurities and the city's violent history. So it is not surprising from this angle that many Davaoeños are not too concerned about the extrajudicial killings in the streets. Some of them openly applaud the killings, which they say have made their city a lot safer and more attractive to foreign investors (fieldwork notes 2005). Duterte's third re-election as mayor in 2001, reinstalling his ten-year rule of Davao City, shows that most of the people of Davao City accept the mayor's self-proclaimed tough attitude on crime and apparent lack of concern about the DDS killings. As he stated in an interview, 'I am not at all interested in the killings of criminals, especially of people involved in drugs' [48].

This tolerance on the part of many Davaoeños has to do with the violent history of Davao City and its social imagination of a besieged city, with the urban poor considered dangerous "folk devils", to use Stanly Cohen's [9] famous terminology. To better understand this feeling, we need to also consider the imaginations about the victims of the DDS as well.

'We want society to be cleansed of its scum'

From our media-analysis we can conclude that the victims of DDS killings are generally felt to have been drug dealers, thieves or gang members. Especially in the short news items, the identity of the victims is generally accompanied by a remark like 'the local police has stated that the victim is a suspected drug pusher' (or some other reference to alleged criminal activities). Some victims are described as ex-convicts shot several days after their release from prison.

However, in-depth articles mainly written by foreign journalists [43, 48, 50] allow representatives of NGOs or child or human rights advocacy groups to voice an alternative view in which the DDS targets are not all adults, nor are they all criminals. An in-depth article published by the Philippine Centre for Investigative Journalism refers to the death of several minors at the hands of the DDS and to urban poverty as the underlying cause of what happens on the streets [41]. NGOs in Davao City also conclude from their statistics that at least 16% of the victims in 2001/2002 were minors [27: 12]; in 2005, 30% of the 200 victims are thought to have been children (Rogers, cited in [45]. Other in-depth articles and NGO and human rights organization reports state that it is not always certain that DDS victims were ever

---

[9] See for example the Dow Jones Reuters report of 27 May 2002.

involved in criminal activities [27: 13]; some were simply cases of "mistaken identity" [45].

These alternative imaginations draw a picture of the DDS not targeting criminals, but mainly the urban poor, in particular boys and young men. This picture is similar to the one Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman drew in their article on Brazilian street children [31: 353], stating that they were perceived as 'a blemish on the urban landscape and a reminder that all is not well' in Brazilian society. Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman attribute the fierce social exclusion of these children to the fact that they are visible proof of the Brazilian socio-economic crisis and belie the preferred collective imaginations about Brazil as a modern and prosperous nation-state. The same may hold true for Davao City. According to the coordinator of a consortium of child advocacy groups, the DDS killings are 'a systematic, dramatic effort to eliminate the undesirables in society' (in [48]).

The elimination of unwanted "elements" is euphemistically considered a clean-up, or a "process of expurgation", as a local tourist officer called it [48]. According to the president of the Chamber of Commerce, the process was good for business in Davao City, since 'we want society to be cleansed of its scum' [43]. The imagination about the victims as "matter out of place" is illustrated by his comment that 'these people are garbage and, just like any garbage, you have to dispose of them' [43].

This image of the urban poor as disposable combines with the public awareness of Davao City's violent history and the unrest in the hinterlands to create a picture of Davao City as calm and orderly now, but potentially violent and chaotic tomorrow. In a strongly socio-economically divided Philippine society, the urban poor are easily targeted as folk devils and considered disorderly, dirty and criminal. The collective imagination of the DDS killings reverberates around the idea—often confirmed by local media reports—that only criminals are killed and that it makes the city a lot safer. By imagining the DDS and the mayor as keepers of order, the public clings to a discourse that reduces everyday urban insecurities: there is danger, but at least it is being dealt with.

Medellín and Davao City compared: making sense of urban fears

"*Contemporary fears, the typically "urban fears', unlike those fears which led once to the construction of cities, focus on the 'enemy inside'. (...) The walls built once around the city now criss-cross the city itself, and in a multitude of directions.*"

(Zygmunt Bauman [5: 47–48])

The urban landscapes of Medellín and Davao City have an important aspect in common: they live up to the image of contemporary segregated cities so vividly described by [5, 32] and others, who hold that the fragmentation of city space is the result of a growing gap between the rich and the poor. City space is increasingly privatized and people who can afford to, buy space where they can live, work and spend their leisure time, excluding the urban poor with fences, "no trespassing" signs and armed security guards. In Medellín the city elites withdraw into gated communities, and in Davao City the poor urban areas are considered dark, disease-ridden places better

avoided by "decent" people (fieldwork notes 1995). The poor urban districts in both cities are physically nearby, but mentally very distant "Third Worlds".

In line with the ideas of Bauman [5] and Sennett [32, 33], Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman [31: 360] argue that struggles like this are not really about urban space, they are about class differences. 'The real issue,' they note when discussing unwanted Brazilian street children, 'is the preoccupation of one segment of Brazilian society (the middle class) with the "proper place" of another and poorer class of children.' Class-based battles like this are about power—the power to define and enforce what the city should be like and what role each citizen should play. So it is not surprising that in Medellín as well as Davao City, industrialists and businessmen should be the first to express an acceptance of the death squad killings, or at any rate fervently back the idea of a calm and orderly city. They are, after all, the ones with the most to lose from petty crime and a lack of safety, as their trade and industry would suffer most from a negative and violent image.

But it is not only industrialists and businessmen who imagine the city under a siege of disorder. We would like to add to the efforts of Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman to present imaginations like this as aspects of a class struggle the notion they may also cut across social classes. The urban poor live in some of the most impoverished parts of the city and experience limited government interest in their neighborhoods, dilapidation of the built environment and social marginalization on a daily basis. They too might well initially welcome the death squads as a power that could keep slum life from getting any worse. The imaginations of the two classes may thus converge, even though the underlying experiences and ambitions differ.

In Davao City as well as Medellín, local leaders are very partial to perceptions of their city as dirty and disorderly. Their popularity largely derives from their positioning themselves as the ones who will clean up the mess and make the city safer. The nicknames of the Davao City mayor, the Punisher and Dirty Harry, mainly reflect social imaginations about him as the person appointed to deal with "criminals", but paramilitary leader Don Berna's image as a peacemaker is more implicit. Rather than triggering associations with the "enemies within", it focuses on the city's ambitions for the future. Although this image may seem more democratic and friendly, both versions have helped legitimize the violent death squad activities by supporting the idea that cleaning the human waste off the city streets is a legitimate thing to do. Underlying the tolerance towards death squad violence, there is thus the dream of a city of peace and quiet (see also [5: 97]), a felt need for order. This need is felt by rich and poor alike, the poor long for order in the impoverished, insecure, marginalized daily life in the slums, and the rich yearn to join in the march of progress and ultimately rid the city of its Third World image. In the ideal elite version, the urban poor are "matter out of place", embodying poverty where there could be prosperity and representing abjection [14] where elites long for progress.

It is not surprising that the dream of order is so important in these cities. Davao City and Medellín have both had a history of violence that may explain why people there believe they are in constant peril. Global developments have probably influenced people's "imagined worlds" which, according to Appadurai [2], are increasingly fragmented and chaotic. Like urban legends or rumors, imaginations of a utopian city, of heroic leaders making a clean sweep and of death squads acting as janitors are creative efforts to elevate everyday urban insecurities to a safer level of

urban life. The question that remains is whether *any* imagination can be collectively shared and can serve to legitimize death squads. Or is there a special pattern to be discerned in the two cases under study?

Who defines the utopian city? Global imaginations and their impact

In our theoretical section, we note four main changes in the nature of imaginations in the contemporary interconnected world. Firstly, the act of imagining scripts of alternative lives has become a practice everyone engages in, now that communication technologies help show people other ways of life and stimulate the imagination. In our case studies, communication technology has indeed been an important stimulus to people's imaginations and to their expressing their dissatisfaction with their lives. In Medellín and Davao City, imaginations about death squads as keepers of order and about their victims as "garbage", are presented in the mass media, ranging from television, newspapers to the Internet. They vary from commentaries, mainly by the elite, to interviews with residents of rich and poor neighborhoods alike. In Medellín even illegal armed groups, including local branches of the paramilitaries, have their own web sites where they present themselves and their ideas about the future of the city. In principle, it seems as if everyone can take part in the collective imagination of what the city is and should be.

However, in the overall picture, the imaginations of some groups are more widely represented in the media than those of others. Local neighborhood organizations in marginal sections of the city have less access to the traditional media, whereas leaders of industry can easily present their ideas on television and in the newspapers or via paid advertisements. So even though everyone can take part in imagining ideal lives nowadays, some people's ideas are more hegemonic than others, reach further and exert more influence on collective imaginations and the ensuing action (or lack of action). This not only holds true for Davao City and Medellín at a local level, a similar mechanism can be discerned in the world at large, where the sharing of imaginations is subject to power hierarchies.

We are thus already focusing on the second aspect of contemporary imaginations, the larger scale they are now shared on. This sharing of information can serve as a source of power for formerly peripheral groups. Even in poor areas in Medellín, people have access to the Internet at the offices of local neighborhood committees and are able to share information with others. As regards imaginations in marginal neighborhoods about death squads and their victims, the message is often spread through rumors that are rapidly spread using new technologies, including the Internet and rapid public transport. We can thus confirm the notion that imaginations are shared more easily.

It should be noted though that the residents of Medellín and Davao City do not all share *the same* imaginations and if they do, their imaginations may not be based on similar experiences, cityscapes or ambitions. The elites picture the urban poor as the ultimate "other" and death squads as an effective way to deal with them, whereas most of the urban poor mainly view the death squads as another urban insecurity and a daily threat. The urban poor who initially see the death squads in a positive light do so in the hope that they can fill the void the city authorities left when they abandoned the poorest districts to fend for themselves. So even if the imagination of

an orderly city may be widely shared in the first instance by various social classes bonded by life in the same city, as soon as we scratch the surface of this imagination we see a different picture. The all-encompassing imagination of order conceals any number of realities, appreciations and ambitions related to city life. These realities are shared *within* groups that inhabit similar socio-economic spaces, not *between* them. We can see this more clearly if we expand our view to include both of the research sites. The imaginations of the elites in Davao City and Medellín bear a striking resemblance, since they both imagine their cities as "the place to be"—that is: for a selected group of people. Death squad victims are imagined as "out of place", morally inferior, and thus too different to have any sympathy with.

We might want to add a hierarchic, layered notion to the observation that imaginations are more extensively shared in the global era. As cities are fragmented and divided by criss-crossing internal walls, so are people's imaginations. The similarities between our two cases suggest certain globally reproduced imaginations, e.g. the urban poor as "human garbage", heroic leaders named after "global" movie and television stars, cities under siege and death squads as moral janitors, but not in the sense that they are *universally* shared, melting groups together harmoniously in a certain physical space. Instead of considering imaginations to be nationally anchored, as in the imagined communities of founding father Benedict Anderson, or city-based for that matter, we suggest focusing more on collective imaginations that are transnationally shared by a group of people in a similar socio-economic position with the everyday life experiences that come with that position. We are not suggesting a revival of the Marxist notion of a transnational proletariat, since this kind of fixed notion of class does not respond to contemporary social status insecurities. We would suggest transnational "groups" sharing similar imaginations simply because they experience similar life conditions and are ascribed similar "proper places" by others. This may have to do with their socio-economic class, age, skin color, ethnicity or subculture, or even their degree of resemblance to particular, mediatized "scumbag" images.

By devoting attention this way to the similar life experiences of people in comparable positions in the global social hierarchy, we can better understand why some imaginations, such as Dirty Harry as a noble fighter, reproduce themselves in contexts that in the first instance seem so utterly different. What do "global images" of this kind tell us about the hierarchic social position of individuals who support notions like these? What do they tell us about their ideas on how to cope with imagined "others"? In short, what do globally reproduced notions on deviance and how to deal with it say about power relations between different groups? And who do these groups consist of? These are pressing questions to address in future research.

In our theoretical section, we also note the contemporary failing of nation-states to control their collective imaginations. There is evidence in our two case studies to confirm as well as refute this idea. Paramilitary groups in Medellín and death squads in Davao City and the business elites in both these cities did undermine the local government control over the people's imaginations. In Medellín, the paramilitaries cruised the poor neighborhoods in their expensive luxury cars and motorcycles, which were powerful symbols, augmenting the popular belief that the paramilitaries and not the local government were the only ones with the power to bring about their ideal and imagined cities. At the same time, however, the local authorities in turn

would augment the existing imaginations and make them more alive and powerful, or maybe even create or co-create them for their own goals, as in Davao City. It thus seems too simple to conclude that the nation-state, or its local representatives play only a marginal role in public imaginations. Indeed, they seem to play an intricate role in the imaginations, using them as they see fit.

Several concluding remarks should be made about the fourth change in imaginations, the increasing opportunity to bring about what we imagine and get away with whatever negative consequences might ensue. Ever more complex liaisons between power groups make the setting for death squad killings vague and non-transparent. This is clear in Medellín and Davao City, where one can only guess who is really involved in the summary executions. In theory, people's imaginations, the stories they tell and the quickly spreading rumours should establish some manner of order in this daily jumble. However, our case study leads us to conclude that imaginations about death squads and their activities, leaders and victims only add to the daily urban confusion. It is difficult and unsafe for people to unravel the information on the death squads, which is spread by groups that each have their own goals and ambitions. What is more, their imaginations do not have full insight into the power struggles at hand or the motives of various of the parties. In fact, public imaginations on the death squads often increase rather than reduce daily urban insecurities. As the most hegemonic imaginations on the death squads in our case studies attribute them with the role of janitor, quite a heroic role keeping the city safe and orderly, the daily lives of most of the people only become more insecure.

To sum up, to a certain extent the dehumanizing imaginations about socially excluded groups legitimate the killings by death squads. Imaginations of this kind play an increasing role as more and more people draw on images from all over the world. Popular and elite conceptions of death squads and their victims are then constructed through complex interactions between locality-based groups, global communications and mass media.

In a way, the public imaginations in Medellín and Davao City protect the perpetrators of these killings. They serve as building blocks for the utopian city of some citizens and destroy the imagined, safe city of others. Some of these others are driven out of the imagined moral order and, as the death squads practise what the moralists preach, eliminated from the physical realm as well. In this way, imaginations about death squads as the rightful parties to clean up human waste may indeed become fatal imaginations.

References

1. Alcaldía de Medellín (2006). *Programa Paz y Reconciliación. Regreso a la legalidad*. Medellín: Alcaldía de Medellin.
2. Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalizations*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
3. Aretxaga, B. (2000). A fictional reality: Paramilitary death squads and the construction of state terror in Spain. In J. A. Sluka (Ed.), *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror* (pp. 46–70). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
4. Arnson, C. J. (2005). *The peace process in Colombia with the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia—AUC*. Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

5. Bauman, Z. (1998). *Globalization. The Human Consequences*. New York: Columbia University Press.
6. Blumer, H. (1971). Social problems as collective behavior. *Social Problems*, *18*(3), 298–306. doi:10.1525/sp.1971.18.3.03a00020.
7. Bureau of Democracy.Human Rights, and Labor (2004). *Country reports on human rights practices, Philippines*. U.S. Department of State.
8. Campbell, B. B. (2000). Death squads: definitions, problems and historical context. In B. B. Campbell, & A. D. Brenner (Eds.), *Death squads in global perspective. Murder with deniability* (pp. 1–27). Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire & London: Macmillan Press.
9. Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the mods and rockers*. London: MacGibbon & Kee.
10. Diehl, J. M. (1977). *Paramilitary politics in Weimar Germany*. Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press.
11. Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
12. Durkheim, E. (1933). *The division of labor in society*. Glencoe: Free.
13. Durkheim, E. (1970). *Suicide*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
14. Ferguson, J. (1999). *Expectations of modernity: Myths and meanings of urban life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
15. Goode, E., & Ben-Yehuda, N. (1994). *Moral panics. The social construction of deviance*. Oxford, UK & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
16. Gutiérrez Sanín, F., & Jaramillo, A. M. (2004). Crime, (counter-)insurgency and the privatization of security—the case of Medellín, Colombia. *Environment and Urbanization*, *16*(2), 17–30. doi:10.1630/0956247042309865.
17. Harcourt, B. E. (2001). *Illusion of disorder. The false promise of broken windows policing*. Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press.
18. Hedetoft, U., & Hjort, M. (2002). Introduction. In U. Hedetoft, & M. Hjort (Eds.), *The postnational self. Belonging and identity* (pp. vii–xxii). Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
19. Hedman, E. (2000). State of siege: Political violence and vigilante mobilization in the Philippines. In B. B. Campbell, & A. D. Brenner (Eds.), *Death squads in global perspective. Murder with deniability* (pp. 125–153). Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire & London: Macmillan.
20. Hobsbawn, E. (2000). *Bandits*. New York: New.
21. Kaldor, M. (2001). *New and old wars. Organized violence in a global era*. Cambridge: Polity.
22. van Kempen, R., & Marcuse, P. (Eds.).(1999) *The New Spatial Order of Cities*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
23. Kruijt, D. (1999). Exercises in state terrorism: the counter-insurgency campaigns in Guatemala and Peru. In K. Koonings, & D. Kruijt (Eds.), *Societies of fear. The legacy of civil war, violence and terror in Latin America* (pp. 33–62). London & New York: Zed Books.
24. McKenna, T. M. (2000). Murdered or martyred? Popular evaluations of violent death in the muslim separatist movement in the Philippines. In J. A. Sluka (Ed.), *Death squad: The anthropology of state terror* (pp. 189–204). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
25. Miller, D. (1992). Snakes in the greens and rumor in the inner city. *The Social Science Journal*, *29*(4), 381–393. doi:10.1016/0362-3319(92)90002-Y.
26. Nordstrom, C. (2004). *Shadows of war: violence, power and international profiteering in the twenty-first century*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
27. OMTC (2003). *State violence in the Philippines. An alternative report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee presented by Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, WEDPRO, Preda Foundation*. Geneva: OMTC.
28. Resende, J. (1995). *Operaçao Rio. Relato de uma guerra brasileira*. Saõ Paulo: Editora Página Aberta.
29. Rozema, R. A. P. (2007). Medellín. In K. Koonings, & D. Kruijt (Eds.), *Fractured Cities. Social exclusion, urban violence and contested spaces in Latin America* (pp. 57–70). London & New York: Zed Books.
30. Rozema, R. A. P. (2008). Urban DDR-processes: paramilitaries and criminal networks in Medellín, Colombia. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *40*(3), 423–452. doi:10.1017/S0022216X08004392.
31. Scheper-Hughes, N., & Hoffman, D. (1998). Brazilian apartheid: Street kids and the struggle for urban space. In N. Scheper-Hughes, & C. Sargent (Eds.), *Small wars. The cultural politics of childhood* (pp. 352–389). Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
32. Sennett, R. (1996). *Uses of disorder: Personal identity and city life*. London: Faber & Faber.
33. Sennett, R. (2003). *Respect in a world of inequality*. New York: W.W. Norton.

34. Sluka, J. A. (2000). Introduction: state terror and anthropology. In J. A. Sluka (Ed.), *Death squad: The anthropology of state terror* (pp. 1–46). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
35. Taussig, M. (2003). *Law in a lawless land. Diary of a limpieza in Colombia*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
36. Taylor, C. (2004). *Modern social imaginaries*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
37. Tharoor, S. (2004). Globalization and the human imagination. *World Policy Journal, 21*(2), 85–92.
38. Villa Martínez, M. I., Sánchez Medina, L. A., & Jaramillo Abeláez, A. M. (2003). *Rostros del miedo, una investigación sobre los miedos sociales urbanos*. Medellín: Corporación Región.
39. Wacquant, L. (1999). Urban marginality in the coming millennium. *Urban Studies (Edinburgh, Scotland), 36*(10), 1639–1647. doi:10.1080/0042098992746.
40. Walter, E. V. (1969). *Terror and resistance: A study of political violence with case studies of some primitive african communities*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Selection of Analysed Media Articles

41. Conde, C. H. (2002). Poverty and family abuse force Davao's children tot the streets [Electronic version]. *Our Latest Report, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*, pp. 23–24. December, 2002. Retrieved December 11, 2006, from http://www.pcij.org/stories/2002/davao2.html.
42. Estremera, S. A. (2005). Murder mainstreamed [Electronic Version]. *Sunstar Davao*, 22 May 2005. Retrieved May 10, 2007, from http://www.sunstar.com.ph/davao.
43. Marks, K. (2004). Philippines city flourishes under rule of the gun [Electronic version]. *The New Zealand Herald*, May 20, 2004. Retrieved May 10, 2007, from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/author/story.cfm?a_id=103&ObjectID=3567482.
44. Preda archives (2002). Davao Report [Electronic version]. *Preda Foundation*. Retrieved May 10, 2007, from http://www.preda.org/archives/2002/r02041401.html.
45. Preda archives (2006). City's poor stalked by fear. ITV NEWS 11.30AM, Mon Feb 6 2006 [Electronic version]. *Preda Foundation*. Retrieved May 10, 2007, from http://www.preda.org/archives/2006/r06020601.html.
46. Salgado, C. (2006). Don Berna reconoció las desapariciones en comuna 13. *El Colombiano*, October 6, 2006.
47. Semana (2005). Contra la oficina del terror. *Semana*, June 12, 2005.
48. Sipress, A. (2003). Some Filipinos see officials' OK in killings of criminals. *Washington Post*, December 4, 2003.
49. Yarce, E. (2005). Proceso a don Berna por fosas en Medellïn. *El Colombiano*, Oct19, 2005.
50. Zabriskie, P. (2002). The punisher. *Time Asia*, June 24, 2002.