

La Dicotomía de la Familia..¹

Family within the context of poverty, violence and criminality in the lives of young children in *barrio* Sinai in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Author: Barbara Schoones

¹ Translation: The dichotomy of the family.

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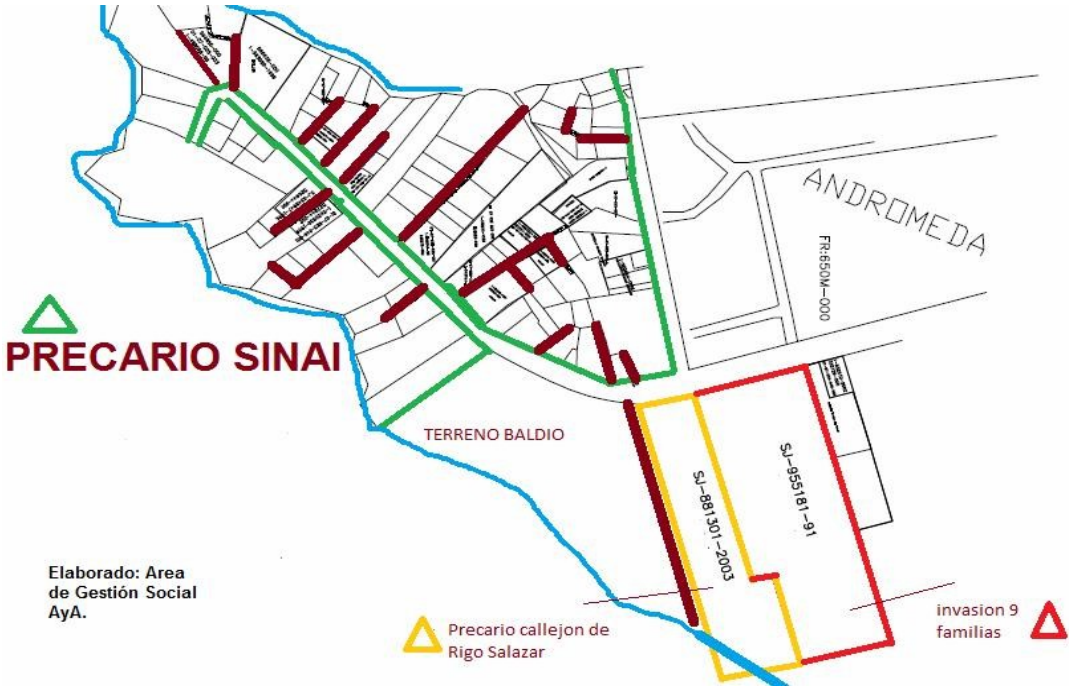
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Map of Sinai



Foreword

This thesis is the end product of the research I conducted for ten weeks during my last year at the University of Utrecht. This is not only the end product of this research, but also of my three years studying Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht. During these three years I learned not only a lot about Anthropology, but also about myself as a person. I am grateful to the University that they gave me the opportunity to go to Costa Rica in my second year to study a semester abroad. Without this opportunity that they gave me I would not have thought about conducting my own research in this part of the world. More importantly, without the help and support of my own University, I would not have gotten to know Latin-America the way that I have and I would not have fallen in love with this part of the world.

From the moment I set foot on Latin-American ground I had a strange feeling that I was home. I immediately fell in love with the people, the country and everything and everything I saw: I had found my home away from home. My interests in this part of the world started to grow even more and while I was studying at the University of Costa Rica I decided that I wanted to come back to this country as soon as possible: This is when I decided to conduct my final research here, where I felt most at home.

During my years studying Anthropology, thanks to the many interesting and inspiring professors I had during these years, my love and curiosity for the far and unknown was instigated in a great way. But I must not forget the people who made it possible for me to actually accomplish my own hopes and dreams. My parents, Ed Schoones en Corrie Schoones-Degeling, and my brother Mark Schoones, supported me during these last three years, who were always there for me and who gave me the means and possibilities to pursue these hopes and dreams. They did all this in their love for me, even though I know that it must have been extremely hard for them to have a daughter and sister with such desires and dreams.

Of course, without the help of my own supervisor, this research would not

have been conducted nor elaborated on in such a way without her help. She helped me think about all the experiences I had, helped me look in different ways at the topics I addressed, the theories I used and the data I collected and pointed out interesting cases within my data. Without her help, this research would be far less enriched than it is now.

I would also like to thank the people of *Alianza por tus Derechos* who made it possible for me to conduct this research. This thesis is the product of ten weeks of research and I would not have been able to do this research without the help of these people. I got to know a lot of special people because of this NGO and I will always be grateful for that.

Lastly, I would like to thank the people and children of Sinai, who were always kind to me, who were always willing to talk to me, who played soccer with me, who drew pictures with me and who were always honest and without shame in telling their personal stories. They let me into their lives, they let me be a part of their lives, even if it was for a very short period of time, like they will always be part of mine; I will carry these people with me in my heart, wherever I go, for the rest of my life. It is to all these people, that I dedicate this work.

Introduction

There is hope, we can sort it out if we try and just get the adults to listen to us - because we're the ones who are going to end up with the world aren't we? We're the ones who are going to inherit in a few years and we're going to be left with the mess to sort out

(A young girl's words from the 'When the Bough Breaks' Documentary).

Hopes and dreams for the future; something that all adolescents and children have. The possibilities to live up to those hopes and dreams are different for the children of Central-America than for those who grow up in other parts of the world. In communities in Central-America, violence, poverty, social exclusion and criminality rule the streets and it is up to young adolescents and children to cope with these often unbearing circumstances. Most of these poor communities are socially and spatially excluded which makes it almost impossible for young adolescents to improve their own situation, to improve their quality of life and to break the vicious cycle and to do better than their parents. This is the reason why most of these children reside themselves in criminality and violence to better the lives of their family and themselves. Even if this only lasts for a very short period of time.

They've been trying to kill me ever since I was on the street. I've been shot, macheted, by the Retiros, by hooded men, including two policemen. I survive, because I'm always thinking what could happen next (Green, D. 1998).

Adolescents and children in Central-America often accept these great risks because they lack other opportunities to do better. Society robbes them from their possibilities because these communities are socially and spatially excluded. Poor families often live in the same *barrios* that are mostly located, literally at the edge of society. These young children thus not only have to cope with poverty, violence and criminality, but they are also ruled out of any chance of doing better. Most of

the times, their own parents lived the same way that they are doing right now; their parents also grew up not having possibilities to do better in life, and now cannot offer their own children opportunities they never had; thus a vicious cycle exists.

Not having the possibility to follow your hopes and dreams can have devastating effects on children. By being spatially and socially excluded from society as a whole, groups of people lose their sense of identity because they are not acknowledged by the population and therefore do not obtain the respect and recognition that they long for. 'Adolescents recognize their lack of opportunities in life and want to do better, but they experience the impossibility to do this every single day'(Savenije W. 2009). Thus for these children, violence and criminality seems the only possibility to obtain the respect and recognition they so desperately long for. But this, as a consequence, aggravates their own marginalization. This everlasting and self-strengthening process of poverty, social exclusion, marginalization, seeing violence and criminality as the only way out of this process and therefore amplify their own marginalization and exclusion has become a downwards spiral in communities in Central-America.

Family is an important social concept in Central-America. Family is the only steady and stable building block in their lives; the only thing they can depend on. The concept of family provides a coping-strategy for those children growing up in poor communities in Central-America. When you look closer at this concept in Central-American society, you can see that family on the one hand is of major importance to these children and that they contribute to the little stability they have in their lives. And on the other hand you see that the same concept of family forms a big limitation and restriction on bettering their lives and destroying the vicious cycle they live in.

Adolescents are the future of any country. This implies that solutions for problems such as poverty, violence and criminality have to be embedded in the understanding of this particular group. By understanding the way of life of these children and their ways of coping with their social context we can try to fully grasp the origin and cause of these social problems. By using, among others, the anthropological research method participant observation, comprehending

their views on life and their life course have come within the reach of this research. By doing this we are one step closer to break the vicious cycle of social exclusion, poverty, violence and criminality.

The goal of this research is the understanding of the social life of adolescents and children in *barrio* Sinai in San Jose, Costa Rica. This research recounts their social problems, their ways of coping with these social problems and the way the concept of family fits into these strategies. This research has been conducted from the end of January 2012, till the end of April, in *barrio* Sinai in San Jose, Costa Rica among children between the ages of 6 to 15 who experience criminality, violence and poverty on a daily basis. The main research question is *how children cope with their social environment and their problems such as poverty, violence, social exclusion and criminality and which role the concept of 'family' plays within this particular social context.*

This thesis is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter I will address the theoretical concepts used in this research that I mentioned shortly above. In the second chapter I will describe the research population and I will place these theoretical concepts in the local context where I conducted my research. The third chapter focusses on the children and their ways of dealing with their social problems such as poverty, violence and criminality in *barrio* Sinai. My final chapter will focus on the family dynamics and the role it plays when it comes to coping and overcoming these social malicious circumstances these children have to deal with every single day. And, in the conclusion I will elaborate on and will bring together the theoretical concepts with the empirical data I collected in the field of research.

1. Poverty, violence, criminality and family. A theoretical framework

'El futuro de los niños depende del mundo en el que vivan..' ³ (Dicho)

This chapter will deal with the theoretical concepts and frameworks used to shape and mould this thesis. Important theories will be explained and elaborated on and the development of these particular concepts throughout the years within the discipline of anthropology will be commented on. Below I will discuss the thematic concepts concerning this research and I will shortly state the anthropological debates that form and shape this part of the anthropological field of study; a theoretical framework will take form in this chapter.

Understanding poverty, violence and criminality in Central-America or in any other community around the world requires a holistic awareness when studying these phenomena. Processes of development are at large in communities in Central-America where violence, poverty, social exclusion and criminality are parts of everyday life. And in order to fully understand this social environment, we look at these phenomena through the eyes of the people who have to live in these social circumstances every day and we try to understand their way of coping with these social problems. Children and children are the future of any country. So by focusing on children and children and their ways of coping with their social situation of poverty, social exclusion, violence and criminality we obtain better insights in the development and life course of the people in Central-America.

*Ama tu familia de principio a fin, sin medida, porque siempre, donde vayas, serás parte de una.*⁴
(Dicho)

The concept of family is one of the building blocks of any society, especially in the

³ Translation: 'The future of the children depends on the world they live in'

⁴ Translation: 'Love your family from the beginning till the end, without limits, because no matter where you go, you will always be part of it'.

region of Latin-America. When studying social life in this region, it becomes apparent that the concept of family plays a significant role. Therefore studying any social phenomena in this region entails the understanding of the dynamics of the concept of family and the meaning of this social construct in the lives of these children. This research looks at Costa Rica, one of the more developed countries in Central-America but which still suffers from social problems such as poverty, violence and criminality. The central question is how children *how children cope with their social environment and their problems such as poverty, violence, social exclusion and criminality and which role the concept of family plays within this particular social context.*

Development Anthropology

Development anthropology as an official part of the discipline is not very old; therefore development anthropology had to deal with a couple of paradigm shifts in the last couple of years. A clear conceptualization of development does not exist, as David C. Pitt states: 'There are many roads to development and many different conceptions of development' (Pitt, David C. 1976). Though when people think of development, they tend to think about economic development that sees improving the economic status of people and state economies as one of the major goals. The economic approach often includes a misinterpretation because, as Glynn Cochrane states in his book:

Little attention has been paid to what the people themselves might actually want. Nor is there any systematic attempt to find out how the people themselves would like to participate in the growth process (Cochrane, Glynn 1971).

The ways of thinking of the people themselves are often forgotten and not recognized in their wishes and needs. And this is exactly the part where anthropology can contribute the most and will concurrently constitute the exact focus of this research.

Edward C. Green states in his book that 'Development anthropologists, like their academic counterparts, tend to be defenders and spokesmen of the poor and the powerless' (Green, C. Edward. 1986). Development anthropology thus pays attention to the specific needs of the people it studies and looks at if and how

these people would like to participate in this growth. This particular view of development anthropology is called the “New Directions” and was defined in the early seventies. Anthropologists decided that 'centrally-planned, top-down, 'trickle-down' development' of the past needed to be replaced by a 'grassroots community-participation approach committed to meeting the 'basic human needs of the poor'-- even the 'poorest of the poor' (Green, C. Edward 1986).

Development anthropology thus changed during the last decades from one paradigm to the next and both of these paradigms have their own advocates and adversaries. But according to Edward C. Green the objectives of development are clear and are

.. tied to improving the general welfare of people everywhere by: managing population growth; improving health and nutrition; expanding educational and employment opportunities; increasing agricultural production; developing private enterprise; and generally boosting economies (Green, C. Edward. 1986)

This does not mean that there is just one way to achieve these objectives. But it is evident that in order to fully understand social concepts that are related to development like poverty, criminality, social exclusion and violence the focus has to be on the people who are studied. Only by understanding the thoughts and views on what these social concepts mean to the people themselves, who have to cope with these social phenomena every day we might actually be able to improve their social situations for the best.

Poverty

One of the key concepts that are related to development is poverty. 'Poverty is a multifaceted, heterogeneous phenomenon that is easy to perceive yet difficult to define adequately and explain theoretically in a comprehensive way or measure satisfactorily' (Kruijt et, al 2002). This sentence in the work of Kruijt et al describes the problems and difficulties of the concept of poverty encounters while being measured or defined perfectly. There are a lot of ways of measuring poverty; hence poverty can be measured by looking at income per capita, income distribution but you can also measure poverty by looking at housing, mortality rates and morbidity rates (Herrick B. and Barclay Hudson 1981). But Kruijt et al

states that all poverty measurements

...are empty without an understanding of the historical evolution of social institutions that led to the conditions of poverty being measured. Most concepts and measures of poverty focus narrowly on problems rather than the circumstances which created them or continue to sustain them (Kruijt et al. 2002).

Looking at the history of poverty, more interpretative skills of the researcher are necessary, but this is indispensable in order to completely understand poverty and the causes of this phenomenon.

Poverty is also a concept that encompasses emotions, feelings and experiences. Thus makes it a social, humanitarian concept. Kruijt et al argues that:

Poverty may not submit to logic, reason, or ready explanation. It incorporates and expresses the illogic, hopelessness, and resentment poor people feel about their present situation and most importantly, about their chances for improvement. (Kruijt et. al. 2002)

This argument is an important denomination that poverty is not only about capital, money, economic status and possessions but this means that we have to look at poverty as involuntary deprivation and a certain feeling/emotion. Thus poverty becomes something that

.. also incorporates a state of mind and a condition of being that transcends material conditions. Taken alone, the data reveal very little about why some people are poor and not others, or why some can and do take advantage of the limited opportunities available and others cannot (Kruijt et al. 2002).

Looking at the factors that cause poverty thus becomes more important than 'just' measuring poverty; it extends to the understanding of the state of mind and emotions that people experience when suffering from poverty.

Social Exclusion

A social concept that is closely linked to poverty and violence is social exclusion. When applied to a society or community they fortify and maintain one another. In other words, poverty leads to social exclusion which leads to more,

extreme poverty. Social exclusion and poverty are part of a vicious cycle which is very difficult to invalidate. David Byrne states in his book about social exclusion that the term social exclusion '...is inherently dynamic: exclusion happens in time, in a time of history, and 'determines' the lives of the individuals and collectivities who are excluded *and* of those individuals and collectivities who are not' (Byrne, David 1999). Byrne thus argues that the process of social exclusion affects the entire society especially when you talk about spatial exclusion, the most visible form of exclusion (Byrne, David 1999). Byrne argues that precisely this form of exclusion is of the utmost importance

...because spatial location determines access to crucial social goods, and in particular to different kinds of state education, which have enormous significance for future life trajectory (Byrne, David 1999).

The spatial location where you are born and where you grow up thus determines for a great deal the opportunities one shall have in later life.

There are multiple forms of social exclusion, but all exclusion is caused by poverty and malicious conditions. Studies show though that 'Short spells of poor condition can be handled quite well if these are set within a life trajectory which included spells of better conditions' (Byrne, David 1999). This means that people can cope with certain forms of poverty, bad conditions and exclusion as long as they can see the end and bettering of their conditions in the near future. David Byrne dictates another definition of social exclusion and uses the definition of Walker and Walker in his book:

Social exclusion as a more comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. Social exclusion may, therefore, be seen as the denial (or non-realization) of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship (Walker and Walker 1997: 8; original emphases in Byrne, David 1999).

Thus, social exclusion also has to do with the denial of all human rights; social, as well as civil and political rights. Social exclusion has become a more

significant and interesting phenomenon in the social sciences during the last few decades. And in the course of the exploration of this social phenomenon a new concept arose, the concept of 'Dual Cities'. A dual city concerns the duality of cities and societies where social exclusion operates. It regards cities as a dual, separated space where there is a significant segregation of the haves and the have not's. Some groups of people are more susceptible to exclusion than other groups. For example when examining the concept of dual cities in Central America we see that the younger population more often than not gets excluded from society. David Byrne gives a good explanation for this intensification of social exclusion for this particular group in society

.. if the social order changes, then the people who begin key phases in their lives subsequent to those changes will find that their lives are very different from those whose lives were set on track in an earlier era (Byrne, David 1999).

This means that precisely young people are the people who are being subjugated to poverty and therefore social exclusion.

Family

A "child" is defined as a person who is dependent upon other individuals (parents, relatives, guardians, or government officials) for his/her livelihood. (Tuttle,C. 2006) This means that a child *needs* other people to take care of them. Most families in poor *barrios* in Central America are single-parent households. One of the major problems is that men usually abandon their new families and leave their women so that they become the sole caretaker of their children. Because most men distance themselves from any financial obligations, most of the women have to go to work during the day (and/or night) in order to make a living. Which means that they have to depend on other people to take care of their children; mostly, they depend on their families. Grandmothers, aunts and cousins take care of their extended family and help each other out wherever they can. The concept of family thus means a secure basis of support for each individual family which no family member can live without; it is a safety net, a coping strategy, for individual members of the neighbourhood in order to cope with the social problems such as violence, poverty and criminality they are unable to escape. The

concept of family thus is one of the most important building blocks and coping-strategies of society as a whole.

But, the concept of family contains a dual character; on the one hand, family offers some sort of safety net when dealing with the social circumstances of everyday life in poor neighbourhoods in Central America. But this advantage and blessing comes with obligations and responsibilities that may not be forgotten. As Tiemoko states in Fleischer's article:

Extended family systems and strong kin and lineage relations remain important in most regions of Cameroon since they provide a sense of belonging, solidarity, and protection. However, they also involve expectations, obligations and responsibilities (Tiemoko 2004: 157 in Fleischer A. 2007).

In poor communities in Central America you often see that child rearing is a collective and social duty in which not only the parents are involved, but also the extended family like older siblings and other relatives. But helping each other out like this, taking care of one another's children and watching out for them also brings reciprocal kinship obligations for each individual family member. (Bledsoe and Isiugo-Abanihe, 1989 in Fleischer, A. 2007) This means that it becomes impossible leaving your extended family and creating a better life for yourself since you have a reciprocal obligation to fulfil towards your kin group; thus family can be a supporting factor to kin group members and actually help them improve their living conditions and leaving their poor conditions which is a wish that is mostly and profoundly pronounced by their family. But at the same time the family slows the same member down by obeying them to their kinship obligations and responsibilities preventing them from actually pulling through to accomplish just that.

Violence

Where there is poverty, violence often exists. People who experience reduced opportunities in improving their lives often look for other ways of bettering their lives or to obtain the respect and recognition they so badly long

for. According to Piguero, 'Adolescence is a critical period in the life course where children accumulate a variety of human and social capital that establishes future behavioural trajectories' (Piguero, A.R. Et al 2009). This means that adolescence is a critical period where people look for their own unique identities. Therefore the experience of reduced opportunities in life and exposure to violence is likely to have long term consequences for children. Violence does not exist in an isolated setting or context (Sutherland I, and J.P Shepherd 2002). This means that by studying the phenomenon of violence, multiple aspects need to be looked at in order to completely understand the use and consequences of violence, especially for children.

Vicious cycle of poverty, social exclusion and violence

Violence is often linked to social exclusion and poverty. More importantly, special attention has to be paid to the vicious cycle that these concepts form in societies all around the world. Poverty inevitably leads to social exclusion because the poor segment of the population does not have the opportunity to include themselves in society as a whole. Therefore they are socially, psychologically and spatially excluded from society. Social exclusion encompasses reduced opportunities to improve living standards and makes it impossible for people to obtain the respect and recognition that people look for in society. Therefore people look for other ways to obtain respect and to create better opportunities for themselves and these ways are often found in delinquency and violence. Especially children, who look for opportunities to better their lives, to break from this vicious cycle and to obtain the recognition that they long for, experience the impossibility to accomplish these goals every single day. As a consequence, they look for their recognition and respect on the streets, the only possibility they have, often ending up using violence and getting lost in delinquent behaviour (Savenije, W. 2009).

Exposure to violence at a young age also has implications for future behaviour. Sutherland and Shepherd state that family environment, peer influence and social exclusion are important for the explanation of adolescent behaviour (Sutherland I, and J.P Shepherd 2002). Research has proven that especially family dynamics are a key contributor to delinquency (Cauffman, E. 2008). Also, lack of

self-concern and low self-esteem are often indicators of delinquent behaviour (Sutherland, I and J.P Shepherd 2002). If young people are exposed to violence in their personal family circle it affects them in their way of thinking, their behaviour and their psychological well-being (Piguero, A.R. Et al. 2009). Piguero states in his article that exposure to violence can be associated with greater risks of running away from home, dropping out of high school, early pregnancies, attempting suicide and coming into contact with the justice system (Piguero, A.R. Et al. 2009). Children are especially vulnerable to the seeming benefits of delinquent behaviour and violence because they are excluded from society and thus try to find other ways to improve their living conditions. Piguero states that:

If perceptions of agency, social order and self-efficacy are immediately undermined by exposure to violence, as research suggests, then children exposed to violence may view themselves as having little personal control or agency over events that affect them. As a result, these individuals may be less likely to invest in future-oriented activities (e.g., delaying pregnancy, preparing for college) and more likely to attempt to escape the confines of adolescence where they view themselves as having little control over events in their lives (Piguero, A.R. Et al. 2009).

Self-exclusion

Children in Central America are often exposed to poverty, violence, and criminality and are socially and spatially excluded from society as a whole. They often see no other way to improve their social circumstances, thinking that they can never do better, to improve their conditions of life in a legal manner; this leads to the unfortunate result that these children resign themselves to their fate, often ending up reinforcing the vicious cycle of poverty, social exclusion and violence. There are numerous ways of resigning to your own fate. children and children use different strategies in order to cope with their social circumstances and their social environment which often consists of poverty, violence and criminality. Looking at the social environment of communities in Central America it becomes clear that certain neighbourhoods are not only spatially marginalized because of their poverty, but are often also socially marginalized. Savenije states

that there is an important interaction of social exclusion and self-exclusion, in which groups of children in Central-America are entangled. According to Savenije, this is a process of reproduction and it is aggravating the marginalization of the group and alarms the other groups of the population (Savenije W. 2009).

Coping-strategies

Children more often than not reinforce their own social, segregated position by not doing anything and resigning themselves to their own fate or worse, by joining the street and the delinquent behaviour it often concerns. By doing this these children exclude themselves even more from society and therefore implement 'self-exclusion'. 'Not doing anything' and resigning yourself to your own fate or joining the street and violence it entails are often coping-mechanisms in order to cope with these poor social circumstances. About coping mechanisms Rubenstein states in his book :

'... however: the presence of coping mechanisms which enable a population to establish a viable equilibrium with its environment. Although equilibrium means that some balance has been struck with environmental forces it does not imply that the solutions that have been worked out are the best of all possible worlds, that the population in question is thriving or even well-off using measurable criteria. Adaptations need only be 'good enough'..' (Rubenstein, H. 1987).

By being spatially and socially marginalized, groups of people lose their sense of identity because they are not acknowledged by the population as a whole and therefore they do not obtain the respect and recognition they so desperately long for. There are multiple ways of coping with these circumstances and this marginalization that groups of people use in order to obtain this form of respect and to improve their living conditions. One of these ways is resorting to violence; children recognize their lack of opportunities in life and want to do better, but they experience the impossibility to do this every single day. So they take refuge in violence (Savenije W. 2009). By joining a criminal, violent group, children have the opportunity to gain more money to take care of themselves and to obtain the respect and recognition that they long for, and thus create ways to do better in

life. They are prepared to take the risks of imprisonment, being exposed to violence, and even being killed just to do better for a short period of time since they lack other opportunities of improving their lives; thus for a lot of children and children violence and criminality seems the only way to do just a little bit better and as a consequence, aggravate this marginalization. This everlasting and self-strengthening process of poverty, social exclusion, marginalization, seeing violence and criminality as the only way out of this process and therefore amplify their own marginalization and exclusion has become a down spiral in communities in Central-America; a spiral that has proven to be almost unbreakable.

The next chapter will focus on the theoretical concepts and theories discussed above and will place them within the local context of this research. Thus we are going to look at poverty, violence, criminality, social exclusion and family in Central America and more particularly, in San Jose, Costa Rica.

2. Poverty, violence and criminality in *barrio* Sinai in San Jose, Costa Rica.

This chapter will focus on Latin-America and more precisely on the region where I conducted my research. This section of my thesis will focus on the theoretical concepts I discussed in the previous theoretical chapter and will place these concepts within the locality of the research; it will place the theoretical concepts discussed above in the context of *barrio* Sinai, in San Jose, Costa Rica.

Community solidarity

The spiral of poverty, social exclusion, marginalization, residing to violence and criminality discussed in the previous chapter is stronger in Latin-America than in other parts of the world because of the economic development that occurred in the last few decades. This region therefore offers great possibilities to do research. Duncan Green states in his book that:

One of the aspects of life in Latin-America and the Caribbean which continues to inspire outsiders is the energy, inventiveness and solidarity with which poor communities confront the difficulties that surround them (Green, D. 1998).

This community solidarity tends to be very strong in Central-America, as is the case in Costa Rica as well. Costa Rica, one of the wealthiest countries in Central-America still suffers from poverty related problems such as social exclusion, marginalization, violence and criminality. Costa Rica experienced an economic growth before the second world war which set their economy apart from the other Central-American countries. (Biesanz, M.H et. Al 1999) During the 80s the economy started to collapse because of the massive debts that the government and the population brought about during the decades after the second world war. The population experienced a massive downfall of their purchasing power during these years and they came to depend more on their own communities and families in order to survive. (Biesanz, M.H et . Al 1999) This is exactly the time when the concept of family became extremely important. Lack of employment in rural areas made people move to the urban areas in and around the capital, San Jose. This migration brought about more social problems; not only an increase in poverty in

urban areas, but also an increase in violence, criminality and as a result marginalization and social exclusion of certain communities or *barrios* around San Jose. (Biesanz, M.H. Et al. 1999) And this is exactly the case for the research location where I conducted my fieldwork: *barrio* Sinai.

Violence and criminality in *barrio* Sinai

Sinai is a small neighbourhood located near the centre of San Jose in the Central Valley of Costa Rica. The Central Valley in Costa Rica is known for the economic progress they made in the last decades and for the wealth of the people who inhabit this region. To be honest, this region does not contain a lot of these *barrios precarios*, neighbourhoods haunted by extreme poverty and violence, but *barrios* like Sinai still exist. The biggest problem in *barrios* like Sinai is substance abuse. Drug trade, drug related criminality and addicted parents are things young children and adolescents have to deal with on a daily basis. Also, abuse in any kind of form, think about physical, emotional and sexual abuse, are way too common in neighbourhoods like Sinai.

Adolescents in *barrios* like Sinai, often do not see other possibilities for them to improve their lives and take refuge in criminality and violence or substance abuse.. (Biesanz, M.H. et. Al 1999) The poverty gap has widened again since 1980 and has driven a big educational wedge between the rich few and the poor many. (Biesanz, M.H. et. Al 1999) Most of the young children and adolescents drop out of school by the time they turn sixteen. Because of the lack of opportunities of the many poor adolescents in the urban area in and around San Jose, most adolescents find refuge in criminality and violence, and others are still trying to improve their lives with the few possibilities that they have. This research will focus on these young children and adolescents in *barrio* Sinai, located in San Jose, Costa Rica and their way of coping with their social environment, in order to fully grasp the social problems that exist in the lives of young children and adolescents in Costa Rica. This chapter focussed on the localization of the concepts used in this research and placed the concepts of poverty, violence, criminality, social exclusion and family in the local context of *barrio* Sinai. The next chapter will deal with this particular social context of poverty, violence and criminality and will deal with the empirical data that I

collected during my fieldwork. The focus will be on what this social context exactly means in the daily lives of children growing up in neighbourhoods like Sinai.

3. 'I am an anthropologist.. Right?!.'

'I will miss you all very much.... Yes, I will be careful, like always... I will see you in four months!' I passed through customs and there I went... On my way to Costa Rica, back to my second home, back to the country I fell in love with last year during my semester abroad. I was happy and at the same time very nervous, because I was about to have my first fieldwork experience as a beginning anthropologist. I knew the country, I knew a lot of the people there, but nothing could prepare me for the experiences to come after I left for fieldwork on the 21st of January, 2012..

After I settled and after I got used to the tropical climate and the time difference, I entered the community Sinai for the first time. Sinai is a neighbourhood that you can only enter via '*la calle principal*'; there is no other way to reach this neighbourhood than via this road. The first thing I saw were the wooden shacks that appeared barely 200 meters on the right hand, behind the entrance of Sinai. The whole scene appeared surreal to me and my immediate thought was the resemblance this sight had with the well-known favelas in Rio de Janeiro. And then it hit me; my first anthropological fieldwork had just begun...

Alex and Felipe

I met Alex on one of the first days in Sinai. He is twelve years old, has short brown hair, dark brown eyes and loves to be outside. When he first saw me he could not stop staring at me, the tall, weird looking girl on the street. He was very interested in where I came from and in 'how that country far, far away looked like..' He loves to study, is interested and curious in everything he sees, just like a twelve year old should be. He spends the majority of his time outside of school with his brother, sister, niece and his mother or at church.

One of Alex's best friends is Felipe. A tall, skinny boy of twelve years old with black hair and green eyes. He loves to skateboard, together with Alex. Felipe lives with his mother on the side of the hill in a wooden, creaky house. He goes to school with Alex and his brother and he loves to draw and play with his mother. I

met Felipe through Alex and at first Felipe was very quiet and did not want to talk to me at all. Till I bought a soccer ball to play with; apparently, one of Felipe's biggest passions is to play soccer. 'In the future, I will play for Saprissa⁵!' (Felipe)

Violence, criminality and poverty; sense of insecurity in Sinai

"Eche todo!"⁶

Puzzled and confused about the entire situation, I kept staring into the barrel of the big, shiny, silver gun pointing directly at me.. It was the most intriguing yet most frightening thing I have ever seen in my life.. He repeated: *"Eche todo!"* and fired his gun once.. I felt the moving of air caused by the bullet against my left leg.. Frightened but calm, I looked back and forth between the two men on the corner of the street and the man pointing the gun at me... I dropped everything I had.. *"TODO!"⁷* he said and fired his gun for the second time.. Again I felt the moving of air, but this time a little higher up my right leg.. Slightly panicking I threw my last money at him realizing that this could actually get out of hand.. He grabbed the money off the floor and ran off leaving me standing there, puzzled and bewildered.. It took me a while, but then reality finally sunk in; I just got robbed and shot at....

That the feeling of insecurity expressed by the people in Sinai was completely justified became horrifyingly clear on this particular day. Violence in neighbourhoods like Sinai is extremely common which means that people live in a constant state of fear. During one of my first conversations with Kendry, Felipe's mother, she told me that she constantly carries around a gun in order to protect herself, her son and her property. The justified sense of insecurity is enforced by the constant presence of violent situations in Sinai. One of the main reasons why people reside themselves to violence is the fact that most of the people living in Sinai experience extreme poverty every single day and see no other way out.

Family-dynamics

Just like Felipe, a young boy of eleven years old who joined a street gang in order

⁵ Saprissa is San Jose's soccer team

⁶ Translation: Give me everything

⁷ Translation: Everything!

to do better in life. Cauffman states that especially family dynamics are a key contributor to delinquency, (Cauffman, E. 2008), also lack of self-concern and low self-esteem are often indicators of delinquent behaviour (Sutherland, I and J.P. Shepherd 2002). When we look at families in Central-America we see that single parent households are overrepresented, like is the case in Sinai. Ana, Alex's sister is 17 years old and has a daughter, Emily, who just turned 1. Emily's father is, like most fathers, absent and no longer in the life of his daughter.

I always knew that he was going to leave me as soon as Emily was born.. That is just the way it goes around here. I have a lot of friends who are mothers, just like me, and none of them consists of two parents. Their boyfriends all left them... Wait, Pamela is still together with her boyfriend, but he is not the baby's daddy.. (Ana)

Piguero states in his article that exposure to violence can be associated with running, away from home, dropping out of high school, early pregnancies, attempting suicide and coming into contact with the justice system (Piguero et. Al 2009) In fact, most of the children in Sinai drop out of high school by the time they reach seventeen, for girls this number is even lower. Ana is an example of these social dynamics that are present in neighbourhoods like Sinai. Ana became pregnant of Emily when she just turned sixteen. She told me that she knew that there was no way she would finish school because she had to take care of her child. There simply was no way to get her degree, so 'she might as well quit immediately'. She does not work and spends her day in her mother's house, taking care of her daughter Emily.

One day I hope to go back to school.. I really miss studying and I know that I can do better than this. I would like to study medicine. But right now I live here with Emily and my mother helps me taking care of my daughter. But I would love to move out of this neighbourhood, because there simply is nothing here. (Ana 17 years old, Alex's sister)

That the lack of a male role model in the lives of the children is not something rare in the lives of the children in Sinai becomes very clear when I think about all the families I met during my time there; Sinai consists of more than 400 families

and you can count the amount of families consisting of a father and a mother on one hand.

My father is not here anymore and I don't know where he is. My mom takes care of me...' (Alex, twelve years old)

That this is not without consequence becomes apparent when you look at the young boys growing up without a father in the neighbourhood. The lack of male role models in their lives often drives the sons to look for other possibilities to get male acknowledgement and respect and they often find this on the street within so called street gangs.

Street violence in Sinai

Sinai, like other poor neighbourhoods in Central-America, also had such a street gang. This gang was always present right at the entrance of the neighbourhood. At this point it is necessary to note that Sinai is a neighbourhood based on the side of a hill, only accessible via *la calle principal*⁸; the only road that goes in and out of Sinai. The fact that this gang always hung around the entrance of Sinai, and the lack of a school in the neighbourhood itself, meant that the children had to pass this gang at least twice every day in order to go to school. That this gang did not respect the fact that they were young, innocent children became clear when Alex, a twelve year old boy, told me about some of the things that happened in the last couple of years, passing this gang on his way to school.

I do not like these people. These people are bad. They always do bad things and they hurt people. One time, they made me smoke marijuana and I did not like it. And once, they threw stones at me. One of the stones hit me on the head. They say all kinds of bad things to me. They told me one day that I was gay because I like to skateboard.. I do not like these people.. They are bad people.. (Alex)

By saying this, Alex pointed out one of the other big problems in Sinai and in the rest of Central-America: Drug addiction. A lot of the adults I met were addicted to drugs and most of the time their children were also using. It was not very uncommon that I saw young children sniffing glue, using marijuana or using

⁸ Translation: Main road

heroin on the streets. Maria, Alex's mother told me that her mother was mostly absent in her life because she was addicted to drugs. When she became pregnant with her first child, she had no other option than to leave her house and her mother behind. These stories, unfortunately, were very common in Sinai.

That joining such a street gang was very attractive to young children became evident when Felipe's mother told me about the life her son led when she was still working during the day. Felipe joined the street gang about a year ago in order to do better, as he told me later on. Like Alex, Felipe also had to pass the street gang every single day when he was walking to school.

Most of the time they did not do anything.. But after a while they made me smoke marijuana and later they gave me cocaine.. Since that day they made me stop every time I passed them on the street and later they made me bring drugs to other people in the neighbourhood.. (Felipe)

The lack of a male role model made Felipe look for other ways of finding his respect and acknowledgement and found this in joining the street gang. When Kendry, Felipe's mother found out, she immediately quit her job to take care of her son full time. From that point on she did not let him walk to school by himself and he was only allowed to play near their own house.

I got so scared that I quit my job to take care of him full time. It is this time when I decided that I had to drop everything and everyone to take care of my only son. He is all I have. This neighbourhood has bad influences (Kendry, Felipe's mother).

Extreme poverty

The fact that Kendry had to quit her job in order to take care of her son points out another big social problem in Sinai; extreme poverty. Most of the families who live in this neighbourhood have to live in extremely bad living conditions. Kruijt et, al states that: 'Poverty is a multifaceted, heterogeneous phenomenon that is easy to perceive yet difficult to define adequately and explain theoretically in a comprehensive way or measure satisfactorily' (Kruijt et, al 2002). But that poverty, and especially the experience of poverty is a concept of emotions and feelings became clear when I witnessed extreme poverty for the first time in my

life, visiting the house of *Familia Mendieta* in Sinai .

It was a hot day in Sinai.. The temperature rose to about 35 degrees Celsius and nobody seemed to notice this except for me. I had to walk all the way to the back of the neighbourhood in order for me to reach the descent to the house of *Familia Mendieta*. I walked through the 'garden' of one of the other houses in order to get to the hill that led to the river. The garden was full with garbage, toys and I noticed some missing needles laying on the floor. I had to pay attention descending the hill so that I would not fall down the hill. I could smell the river from here.. A perperating smell reached my nose, it smelt like sewage and garbage, mixed together. I finally reached the house of *Familia Mendieta*.. A small, cardboard house loomed up.. It had an iron gate and the walls were covered with flies. I knocked on the cardboard and a small, dark-haired woman with one golden tooth walked to the door. She smiled and let me in.. The house seemed like a hallway, small and long. It contained a small fridge, a wooden table and two wooden seats attached to the cardboard walls. Peeking through the nearest and only passageway, I saw a mattress, lying on the floor.. It was the only thing in the room.. When *la Mamá* asked me if I wanted water, I noticed that the entire house was filled with flies and other bugs.. Cockroaches were running around like it were the permanent inhabitants of this house.. I could still smell the river in their home.. I looked at *la Mama* and said: "Yes, I would like some water please..."

The house of *Familia Mendieta* was one of the houses that struck me the most during my period, living in Sinai. But, as Kruijt et al states that poverty '.. also incorporates a state of mind and a condition of being that transcends material conditions. Taken alone, the data reveal very little about why some people are poor and not others, or why some can and do take advantage of the limited opportunities available and others cannot' (Kruijt et al. 2002). This means that understanding the state of mind and emotions that people experience when suffering from poverty becomes important in the studying of people suffer under these particular living conditions.

It is not only the lack of material and financial means that makes up

poverty in neighbourhoods like Sinai. It is also focussed and manifested in the lack of opportunities to escape their environment and the lack of ways to escape the violence and criminality experienced by families living in Sinai. Gloria, Alex's mother told me:

We are doing fine, my children have food, a roof over their head, a loving mother who takes care of them and the church to protect them. Even my grandchild has a good life here.. I am doing better than a lot of the other families here. I am happy and my children are too.. (Gloria)

Listening to Gloria I finally understood that the biggest poverty problem this family experienced was emotional; the lack of safety, the presence of violence and criminality and that it was mostly the feeling of unsafety that formed the biggest social, poverty related problem that they had. Like Alex's family, Felipe's family is haunted by the feeling of unsafety caused by the violence and criminality that these families face every single day. But, in addition to this, Felipe's family also has a lack of material/financial means. Kendry is haunted by worries about money and ways to keep her son in school.

It is hard. Every single day I worry about what will happen to him. I do not worry about myself, but I worry about him. Every single day (Kendry).

Inequality

Poverty often comes with social inequality; a division between the haves and the have not's. In Sinai this division becomes, even spatially, clear. *La Luz del Mundo*⁹ is a very strict church with a Christian doctrine. This social organization helps out its members and offers them financial and social help, but neglects the other inhabitants of Sinai. This creates a strong division between church members and non-church members. Church members are allowed to live near the church, where the best houses are, they have access to fresh drinking water, they have access to small financial help and sometimes the church hands out nourishment. While non-church members have none of the above. Plus, the morals of *La Luz del Mundo* seem to be very straightforward: No promiscuity, no incest and no homosexuality for both sexes and you can only marry someone who is a true

⁹ See Attachment I for a more extended review of the church *La Luz del Mundo*.

believer and follower of the church. The church believes that everyone who is not a true believer is doomed and cannot be saved. Thus a big division in Sinai exists: The people who belong to the church *La Luz del Mundo* and the people who do not. *La Luz del Mundo* condemns people who do not believe in their doctrine, this makes that hanging out and spending time with people who are not members of this church is forbidden by the leaders of the church. These segregational practices of the church divide Sinai spatially and socially.

That these segregational practices do not only divide the neighbourhood outside the family domain but also within this private domain becomes apparent during my first visit to Felipe's house.

Descending to Felipe's house was quite a task. I had to slide down the entire hill, right next to the church 'La Luz del Mundo'. Felipe was with me to bring me all the way down. He was fast, of course, because he would do this at least four times a day. I had to be careful not to fall though because of all the slippery rocks that formed the steps leading down to his house. During this decline I passed a couple of houses made out of wood. They were more like shack, small, crooked and not stable at all. Seeing all these tiny little shacks balancing on the side of the hill made me feel uneasy and uncomfortable.. I do not know why exactly, maybe because I was feeling ashamed for all the things I had and they did not.. Arriving at the small house of Felipe, greeting his mother and the child that she was taking care of at that time, I sat down at the kitchen table. The first thing I noticed was how good this house looked on the inside, when I compared it to seeing the outside. It was neat, it had a television, music was playing, the kitchen was relatively clean, I smelt food and the house consisted of three rooms, all attached together. While talking to Kendry, Felipe's mother, about the problems in Sinai, another woman walked in the house. I immediately recognized her as a church member since she was wearing a long skirt, long sleeved t-shirt and since she wore her hair long and in a ponytail. I knew this because I knew it was forbidden to cut your hair as a woman and a woman should always wear long clothes. The woman who walked in was Kendry's sister and indeed member of the church. Looking at this

woman I noticed that she was wearing better looking clothes, that she looked clean and fresh and that she was wearing shoes that were in good condition. "I am happy, I am poor, but I am happy. Not her, she has a better life.." (Kendry)

Talking to Kendry in the time when her sister was in the room, made the tension between church members and non-church members very clear.¹⁰ Even though these sisters were blood related and family, the inequality, the jealousy, the resentment and the disdain between the two sisters, and within Sinai as a whole, created by the church became identifiable.

Social exclusion

With social inequality comes social exclusion. Walker and Walker define social exclusion as:

.. a more comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. Social exclusion may, therefore, be seen as the denial (or non-realization) of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship (Walker and Walker 1997: 8; original emphases in Byrne, David 1999).

David Byrne states in his book about social exclusion that the term social exclusion:

..is inherently dynamic: exclusion happens in time, in a time of history, and 'determines' the lives of the individuals and collectivities who are excluded and of those individuals and collectivities who are not (Byrne, David 1999).

According to Byrne, especially spatial exclusion affects the entire society. When talking to *Tico's*¹¹ in San Jose about my experiences in Sinai, most of them did not

¹⁰ It is necessary here to state that I decided not to participate in any activities of this particular church. I did have contact with families who were part of the church, but it decided to stay away from the people who worked for the church since their practices and views were too extreme. I tried to stay in touch with families who were part of the church and families who were not, so that I would get a more extended and 'fair' view of society as a whole. But because of my decision not to get further involved with the church the data might be biased and thus of importance for the reader to know.

¹¹ *Tico's* are Costa Ricans

even know where this neighbourhood was. Even though Sinai is located just ten minutes away from the city centre. Sinai apparently is so spatially excluded from society that people who grew up in San Jose, only ten minutes away, have no knowledge whatsoever of the existence of this neighbourhood, nor of its problems. Byrne states that spatial exclusion is extremely important '...because spatial location determines access to crucial social goods, and in particular to different kinds of state education, which have enormous significance for future life trajectory' (Byrne, David 1999). And this is exactly the case in *barrio* Sinai; this part of San Jose is spatially excluded from society which makes it more susceptible to social problems such as poverty, violence and criminality.

This chapter has focussed on the social problems such as violence, criminality and poverty that exist in this particular neighbourhood and on the problems that these children with their families in Sinai have to deal with every single day. The next chapter will focus on the role of the family when it comes to dealing with these social circumstances in *barrio* Sinai.

4. The duality of family

Family.. A concept everyone knows but can mean different things in different contexts. Thinking about family, most people think about the blood related biological family that everyone is born with. And although these people often play a significant role in the lives of people, other non-blood related family often is more important than the blood related relatives, especially children. The problem starts when you look at the families in neighbourhoods like Sinai in San Jose. This chapter will focus on the duality of the family and will discuss the Janus-headed feature of this particular concept when we place this in the local context of poverty, violence and criminality in Sinai.

Childrearing

Children are people who are dependent upon others for their livelihood. (Tuttle, C. 2006) And when you look at their families you see that most families in poor *barrios* in Central America are single-parent households. Fathers, men, are mostly absent in the lives of young children. Because most men distance themselves from the financial obligations as well, most of the women have to go to work during the day (and/or night) in order to make a living. In Sinai this means that other people have to take care of their children; their neighbours, friends, people from church and/or relatives step up to help out.

I met Grandmother Laura during the first weeks of my stay in Sinai. I noticed this woman because she always walked the street with at least 8 children. One day, I walked up to her and I asked her if I could walk with her to drop the children at school. She said yes and I accompanied her out of the neighbourhood. During our walk back from school she invited me to her house, where I met the even younger children that she took care of. "This is my life now, I take care of the children.. But, only two are from my daughter. The rest are from families here in the neighbourhood. I take care of them every day so their mothers can work during the day. They love it here.." That the children loved it at Grandma Laura's place was obvious. Laura completely emptied the living room so that the

children could play soccer and ride their bikes inside the house. The only furniture they had was placed against the grey walls in order for the children to have more room to play.

"I don't like to let them play outside on the streets. It is too dangerous.. Did you know that 'they'¹² now carry guns?.." (Laura)

I met a lot of people like Laura during my stay in Sinai. People like Laura enable other families to make a small living in order to take care of their children. Almost every stay at home mother or grandmother takes care of other people's children; people like *Abuelita*¹³ *Laura* are indispensable in these kinds of neighbourhoods.

Neighbours, friends and family members all help to raise the children of Sinai. When asked people of Sinai define family as those people who are there for you and support you in your daily life. That family does not have to mean blood related family members and thus extended family members became clear to me when I met Alex's mother Gloria. Looking at Gloria's family and spending time with them I found out that their direct, blood related family did not play a very big role in their lives. Of course, Gloria, Ana, Emily, Alex and Manuel (Alex's older brother) were very important to one another; they all took care of each other. The boys took care of Emily when Ana had to do something else and Gloria was always around the house to take care of the household, cook dinner, clean and make sure that everyone was doing fine. But they did not spend a lot of time with their extended family. Gloria's parents passed away a couple of years ago and she had no contact with her siblings; thus, Gloria has no direct family members who can help her out. She told me that her mother could not help her raise her own baby and that she had to find another solution in order to survive and to make a living for her and her children. She found this solution in the church 'La Luz del Mundo'.

La Luz del Mundo

Gloria became a member of this strict, religious cult when she was eighteen years old.

I was pregnant with Ana and I my mother could not take care of me. My father was not there. And my mother was a drug addict and actually absent

¹² 'They' refers to the group drug addicts located at the entrance of Sinai.

¹³ Abuelita means grandmother

during my younger years. My grandmother took care of me. 'Father' and the people of the church helped me take care of my child. They saved me and my family from evil. They said they could help me build a house and that they could give me some money in order to make a small living. I lived with the people of the church for almost 6 months. I was so young.. They helped me take care of my daughter. Something that I will never forget.. These people are my family.. (Gloria)

La Luz del Mundo, the church that Gloria is a part of, condemns people who do not believe in their doctrine, this makes that spending time with people who are not members of this church is forbidden by the leaders of the church. The church members take care of each other, help each other where they can and make sure that everyone who is a church member is doing ok. This makes this religious community more or less like a family; setting the boundaries and creating a safety net for one another, causing Gloria to part from her own family.

Now, Gloria lives with her two sons, her daughter and granddaughter in a house next to the church. It is a neat house and one of the biggest I have seen in Sinai, She has no extended family, her parents died and she does not speak to her siblings anymore. Alex and his brother go to church every day at six o'clock to attend the daily mass. They play and talk to other boys at the church. Also, they spend time with the older boys who offer them a male role model they can look up to since their own father is absent, like in most families in Sinai.

Teen pregnancies

Ana, Alex's older sister, has a baby of her own, Emily. She has to raise her daughter without the baby's daddy, her boyfriend left her as soon as the baby was born. Her mother helps her raise Emily and provides for them. Also, her younger brothers help out when they get home from school. Looking at them I saw a caring family who loved each other very much..

I could not have done this without the help of my mother and two brothers.. They made my life possible.. They help me take care of my daughter..
(Ana, Alex's sister)

Ana is part of a big group of young mothers in Sinai and a lot of her girlfriends

from high school are now mothers, just like she is. Ana spends a lot of time with these girlfriends and young mothers. By doing this she gets support and understanding for her situation from her peers and this means a lot to her and to the other young mothers. When I was spending the day with this 'young mothers club' I found out a lot about the standard view of family life. Looking at all these young mothers together I found myself torn between two different positions; first I enjoyed looking at these families playing all together and it made me feel all warm inside. I could actually feel and see the love they have for their children and their friends.. On the other hand, I saw deeply sad people, lonely people, hardworking people, who try to make ends meet to try to give their children possibilities that they did not have.

The duality of family

The concept of family is thus defined as a group of people that surround you and who help each other out based on a relationship of reciprocity, which is not bound to blood related relatives. This concept of family thus offers a secure basis of support for each individual family member which no family member can live without; it is a safety net, a coping strategy, for individual members of the neighbourhood in order to cope with the social problems such as violence, poverty and criminality they are unable to escape.

But, the concept of family contains a dual character; on the one hand, family offers some sort of safety net when dealing with the social circumstances of everyday life in poor neighbourhoods in Central America. But this advantage and blessing comes with obligations and responsibilities that may not be forgotten. As Tiemoko states in Fleischer's article:

Extended family systems and strong kin and lineage relations remain important in most regions of Cameroon since they provide a sense of belonging, solidarity, and protection. However, they also involve expectations, obligations and responsibilities (Tiemoko 2004: 157 in Fleischer A. 2007).

In poor communities in Central America you often see that child rearing is a collective and social duty in which not only the parents are involved, but also the

extended family like older siblings and other relatives. But helping each other out like this, taking care of one another's children and watching out for them also brings reciprocal kinship obligations for each individual family member. (Bledsoe and Isiugo-Abanihe, 1989 in Fleischer, A. 2007) This means that leaving your extended family and creating a better life for yourself is impossible, since you have a reciprocal obligation to fulfil towards your kin group. This contradiction within the family confused me for a very long time. On the one hand, family members/parents are trying to make sure that their children do better in life. And on the other hand, they do everything to keep their children close, actually preventing them from leaving and removing themselves out of this neighborhood.

This contradiction became clearer to me when I spent more time with Gloria and her family. Gloria, like other parents made clear that she wanted her sons and daughter to do better in life and to make better choices than she did during her younger years. Her hopes and wishes for her sons were especially profoundly carried out:

My boys will become good people. Father will make sure of this. They will be great fathers, they will become the fathers that they never had.. They will take care of their own families, earn a good living and make sure their families and wife are doing ok.. (Gloria)

Gloria is fully aware of the limited options and possibilities in Sinai for her children. In conversations that I had with her and her daughter they expressed their concern about the future of their children and about the violence and criminality within their community.

I will always be grateful to my mother and my brothers for them to help me out with Emily. This is why I could never leave Sinai without them. They made my life possible.. I would love to leave this place, go to school and create a better life for my daughter and me.. But I know this will not be possible. I have my responsibilities here... Besides, I need my family... (Ana)

Fully aware of these limitations for her sons, Gloria limits their options even more by making them stay in Sinai.

What my sons are doing in couple of years? They will be working here at *la pulperia*. I already took care of that. Manuel will be working as truck driver to transport goods to and from Sinai. And when Alex is old enough he will be working for Manuel in the shop. They will make good money there to make sure that their families are doing ok... (Gloria)

The fact that Gloria took care of her son's futures illustrates the contradiction within the family. Gloria *told* me that she wanted better for all her children and I know for sure that she does, because she loves all her children and grandchild dearly. But on the other hand, she prevents, especially her boys, from leaving Sinai and from leaving this violent, criminal and poor circumstances in which they have to live.

Inequality and jealousy in Sinai

That the church community can form some sort of a family and a safety net for their followers became clear looking at Gloria's story. But that this family can tear another family apart is proven by the story of Kendry and her son Felipe. Kendry lives on one of the outskirts of Sinai, on the side of the hill. Felipe thus lives alone with his mother and does not have a lot of extended family that lives in the neighbourhood. The only family member who lives in this neighbourhood is Kendry's sister Maria. Maria lives on *la calle principal*, near the church, in one of the better houses in Sinai. Maria is part of the church *La Luz del Mundo* and is a firm believer. When I was at Felipe's house, talking to him and his mother Kendry, Maria walked in. I got introduced to Maria and Kendry told her sister that I was a student, conducting research in their neighbourhood. I immediately recognized Maria as a member of *La Luz del Mundo*. She wore a long skirt, covering her all the way to her ankles and a long sleeved t-shirt. I asked a couple of questions to Kendry and when I did, her sister completed some of Kendry's answers. Asking questions about the inequality in Sinai, one of the biggest tensions in Sinai became apparent; the division between church members and between non-church members; the division between Kendry and her sister Maria.

The church forms a big division. It helps the children. But not ALL of them, only the ones who go to church. They do not care about children like

Felipe. That is why I don't like them. The church only wants to take care of the children who belong to them; they expand the inequality in our neighbourhood. And my sister goes along with it, believing in their things.. Why wouldn't she? She is doing better now.. But they don't care about the other children here. I have to get out of this neighbourhood.. (Kendry)

The feeling of jealousy was overrepresented in the room when I had this conversation. Maria kept quiet and did not say anything to defend herself. Maria left shortly after this conversation and left me and Kendry alone in the house.

Kendry said:

I do love my sister, I just don't agree with her church. But I know she will always be there for me..(Kendry)

The strong division between believers and non-believers is very apparent in the neighbourhood. Church members live near the church, close to *la calle principal*, have stone houses and get a little bit of financial support from the church And non-church members have none of the above. In the case of Felipe, the church not only divides the community, it divides his family.

Thus family can be a supporting factor to kin group members and actually help them improve their living conditions and leaving their poor conditions which is a wish that is mostly and profoundly pronounced by their family. But at the same time the family slows the same member down by obeying them to their kinship obligations and responsibilities preventing them from actually pulling through to accomplish just that.

This chapter elaborated on the Janus-headed feature of the concept of family when it comes to coping with social problems such as poverty, violence and criminality in neighbourhoods like Sinai. On the one hand family forms a safety net for individual family members, supporting one another in every way they can based on a reciprocal relationship. And on the other hand it is this precise reciprocal relationship which makes sure that people growing up in families in neighbourhoods like Sinai are unable to escape their social, malicious conditions. The conclusions of this research will follow in the next chapter; connections

between the theoretical concepts discussed in the former chapters and the empirical data obtained from the field will be made.

Conclusion

Children between six and twelve years old in *barrio* Sinai in San Jose Costa Rica are continuous victims of social problems such as violence, criminality and extreme poverty. Most of the families living in Sinai live in conditions of extreme poverty with the constant sense of insecurity caused by continuous violence and criminality in their neighbourhood. Kruijt stated that

Poverty may not submit to logic, reason, or ready explanation. It incorporates and expresses the illogic, hopelessness, and resentment poor people feel about their present situation and most importantly, about their chances for improvement. (Kruijt et. Al 2002)

One of the concepts closely linked to extreme poverty is social exclusion. Social exclusion '...is inherently dynamic: exclusion happens in time, in a time of history, and 'determines' the lives of the individuals and collectivities who are excluded *and* of those individuals and collectivities who are not' (Byrne, David 1999). The children in Sinai are socially and spatially excluded from society as a whole. Sinai is a neighbourhood which lies at the margins of San Jose and little people are aware of the existence of this neighbourhood. Exclusion processes are also at large within Sinai when you look at the church *La Luz del Mundo* and their exclusionist practices, excluding the children who do not belong to the church from any financial or social support.

Violence and criminality is something that is continuously present in Sinai; gang violence, drug abuse and violence within the family are overrepresented in the lives of these children. Violence does not exist in an isolated setting or context (Sutherland I, and J.P Shepherd. 2002) which means that by studying the phenomenon of violence, multiple aspects need to be looked at in order to completely understand the use and consequences of violence, especially for children. Exposure to violence at a young age also has implications for future behaviour. Sutherland and Shepherd state that family environment, peer influence and social exclusion are important for the explanation of adolescent behaviour

(Sutherland I, and J.P Shepherd 2002). Research has proven that especially family dynamics are a key contributor to delinquency (Cauffman, E. 2008). Also, lack of self-concern and low self-esteem are often indicators of delinquent behaviour (Sutherland, I and J.P Shepherd 2002).

Children in Central America are often exposed to poverty, violence, and criminality and are socially and spatially excluded from society as a whole. They often see no other way to improve their social circumstances, thinking that they can never do better, to improve their conditions of life in a legal manner; this leads to the unfortunate result that these children resign themselves to their fate, often ending up reinforcing the vicious cycle of poverty, social exclusion and violence. Some of them resign themselves to criminality, ending up in the vicious cycle of violence, others create other opportunities by trying to leave their social circumstances.

One of the mayor ways to do better according to the children in Sinai is resorting to violence; children recognize their lack of opportunities in life and want to do better, but they experience the impossibility to do this every single day. So they take refuge in violence (Savenije W. 2009). By joining a criminal group, children have the opportunity to get more financial opportunities in order for them to take care of themselves and they also obtain the respect that they long for. Especially the boys are more susceptible to this since they lack a male role model in their lives. Thus, by joining this violent and criminal group they get to experience a form of identification with the group so that they can create ways to do better in life. They are prepared to take great risks such as imprisonment, being exposed to violence, and even being killed just to 'do better' for a short period of time since they lack other opportunities of improving their lives; thus for a lot of children and children violence and criminality seems the only way to do just a little bit better and as a consequence, aggravate this marginalization. This everlasting and self-strengthening process of poverty, social exclusion, marginalization, seeing violence and criminality as the only way out of this process and therefore amplify their own marginalization and exclusion has become a down spiral in communities like Sinai.

The concept of family is one of the building blocks in any society and

looking at Sinai the function of family becomes apparent:

Extended family systems and strong kin and lineage relations remain important in most regions of Cameroon since they provide a sense of belonging, solidarity, and protection. However, they also involve expectations, obligations and responsibilities (Tiemoko 2004: 157 in Fleischer A. 2007).

The definition of family extends the blood related relatives and regards the group of people surrounding a person who help each other out based on a relationship of reciprocity. Spending time in Sinai it became obvious that family forms a very important part of the coping strategies of the people living in Sinai. Especially when it comes to childrearing. Male role models are generally absent in the lives of the children of Sinai which ensures that the women have to do everything by themselves. In order for the women to work and make a living, they depend on their neighbours, friends, older children or church community to help them out raising their children.

In poor communities in Central America you often see that child rearing is a collective and social duty in which not only the parents are involved, but also the extended family like older siblings and other relatives. But helping each other out like this, taking care of one another's children and watching out for them also brings reciprocal kinship obligations for each individual family member (Bledsoe and Isiugo-Abanihe, 1989 in Fleischer, A. 2007). Daughters depend on their mothers and other direct family to help them raise their own children and thus the circle goes round. Family becomes indispensable in the lives of the young children. These forms of families form part of the coping-mechanisms and are part of the reciprocity relationship between the people living in Sinai; leaving the community thus becomes almost impossible.

The main research question focused on the role of the family within this context of poverty, violence and criminality. After the observations in Sinai it turned out that the concept of family plays a significant role when it comes to coping with these social problems such as poverty, violence and criminality. Sinai showed that on the one hand, families want better for their own children and on the other hand and that the family will do everything they can to get their

children out of these malicious circumstances; like the Felipe's mother, trying her best to get her son out of the community.

Like all parents, the people in Sinai express their wishes for their children to do better in life than they did. Depending on their families and social networks in Sinai they try to create a better life for their own offspring. Still, the contradiction exists when you look at the negative aspects of the family: Family will do everything they can to keep their children within this vicious cycle which makes this cycle almost unbreakable; like Alex's mother who arranges her son's futures when it comes to a job after high school. Family thus is a Janus-headed coping strategy: It can offer salvation and helps coping with the social problems that people have to overcome in neighbourhoods in Sinai, but at the same time ensures that you will never break the vicious cycle of criminality, poverty and violence. The concept of family can be a supporting factor to kin group members and actually help them improve their living conditions and leaving their poor conditions which is a wish that is profoundly pronounced by their family. But at the same time the family slows the same member down by obeying them to their kinship obligations and responsibilities preventing them from actually pulling through to accomplish just that. The reciprocity and obligations that comes with family support makes sure that these children will be stuck in their social circumstances for the rest of their lives; this has proven to be *unas de las claves de la pobreza*¹⁴; something that is essential to the solution of the problems that exist in extreme poor communities such as Sinai.

Dame los primeros siete años de vida de un niño y te diré lo que será el hombre del mañana¹⁵.

El futuro de los niños depende del presente que vivan.¹⁶ (Dichos)

¹⁴ Translation: One of the keys of poverty

¹⁵ Translation: Give me the first seven years of the life of a child and I will tell you what future man kind looks like

¹⁶ Children's future depends on the present they live in.

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Attachment I: La Luz del Mundo

The church first arose in Guadalajara, Mexico in 1926. It was undertaken by Eusebio Joaquín González. Eusebio states that he had a vision in which God/Christ told him that his name should be Aaron from now on. He claims that he brought back the 'real' church, the real Christian faith. Aaron died in 1964 and from this year on, his own son Samuel Joaquín Flores, followed in his footsteps. Till this day on Samuel still is the spiritual and religious leader of the religious sect.

In 1992, *La Luz del Mundo* claims to have 2 million followers. The temple that they built to practice their faith stands in the middle of the colony '*Hermosa Provincia*' in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. The doctrine denies the holy trinity of the bible. They divide Jesus Christ in two people. They state that Jesus is the man, the human and that Christ is God. They claim that Jesus was not Christ till he got baptized; after being baptized, Jesus became Christ and therefore God.

Baptizing is an essential factor for obtaining salvation and can only be executed in the name of Jesus Christ. Women are ought to have long hair and wear long skirts. Pants are forbidden for the female population. Using jewelry and make-up is also part of the banished goods for women. Inside the temple, women are ought to wear veils to cover up their hair as well. Men are supposed to have short hair and when they go to the service in the church they are being separated from women.

During service and prayer, no music instruments are used to praise the Lord. This because, according to their belief, God cannot hear music instruments. Outside of their church there is no salvation, everyone belonging to other religions or beliefs are doomed forever. Aaron states that before he had his vision, the Christian faith was doomed and he resurrected the 'real and truthful' church. Both of the religious leaders, Aaron and Samuel, are considered to be apostles of the modern age. Sometimes they are even compared with Jesus Christ himself.

From: *Loret de Mola, P.F.*

1995 *Origins, Development and Perspectives of La Luz del Mundo Church. Religion 25: 147-162*

Attachment II: *La dicotomía de la familia; Un resumen.*

Esta tesis es el producto de diez semanas de investigación antropológica en San Jose, Costa Rica. La pregunta principal que forma el fundamento de esta investigación es cómo manejan los niños y adolescentes sus entornos sociales y sus problemas como la pobreza, violencia, exclusión social y criminalidad y cuál parte desempeña el concepto de familia en este contexto social. El objetivo de esta investigación es entender la vida social de los adolescentes y niños y niñas en barrio Sinai en San Jose, Costa Rica. Esta investigación comprueba sus problemas sociales, sus maneras de manejar estas problemas sociales y se enfoque en cuál parte desempeña familia entre estos estrategias para

Para encontrar respuestas por esta pregunta realicé una investigación en un barrio precario El barrio se llama Sinai y está localizado en los margenes de la ciudad San Jose en Costa Rica. Allí viven muchas familias que tienen muchas problemas de la pobreza entre ellos consumo de drogas, violencia, criminalidad y pobreza extrema. Realicé esta investigación en conjunto con una ONG 'Alianza por tus Derechos. Ellos trabajan con los niños y niñas de las comunidades precarias. Ellos me dieron acceso a esta comunidad, así que podía realizar esta investigación.

Realicé esta investigación desde el final de enero 2012 hasta el final de abril 2012 en barrio Sinai, San Jose, Costa Rica debajo de los niños y niñas que tenían entre seis y quince años que encuentren criminalidad, violencia y pobreza al día. Los métodos que utilicé en mi investigación fueron variados. Utilicé los métodos antropológicos como la observación participante (*participant observation*), participar en actividades ocio (*hanging out*) y entrevistas/conversaciones informales.

En comunidades en América-Central, son violencia, pobreza, exclusión social y criminalidad que dominan las calles. Entonces son cosas de los adolescentes y los niños y niñas que tienen que sobrevivir en estas circunstancias malas. La mayoría de estas comunidades pobres están excluidas en la forma social y espacial, que complica las situaciones de los niños y niñas más porque no pueden mejorar la calidad de la vida. Porque estas comunidades están excluidas en la

forma social y espacial no pueden interrumpir el ciclo vicioso para que tienen más éxito en la vida que sus padres. Exactamente eso es la razón de estos niños y niñas para decidir que quieren participar en la criminalidad y violencia para que mejoren la calidad de su vida y de la vida de su familia. Aún será por un tiempo breve.

Familia es un concepto social demasiado importante en América-Central. Familia es la única parte de la vida social que es estable en las vidas de la gente; el único en que pueden confiar. El concepto de familia entrega una estrategia importante para que los niños y niñas que crecen en barrios como Sinaí pueden manejar sus problemas evidentes en sus vidas. En la sociedad de América-Central puede ver que familia puede contribuir a la estabilidad en la vida de los niños y niñas. Pero familia también puede formar una limitación y restricción para mejorar sus vidas y para destruir el ciclo vicioso de la pobreza, exclusión social y violencia.

Violencia y criminalidad siempre está presente en barrio Sinaí. Violencia de las maras, abuso de drogas y violencia a dentro de la familia está representado gravemente en esta comunidad y en las vidas de estas familias. Una de las maneras de mejorar sus vidas según los niños y niñas en Sinaí es participar en la violencia y la criminalidad. Los niños y niñas reconocen falta de oportunidades en la vida y quieren mejorar y crear estas oportunidades, pero pasan por la imposibilidad de hacerlo cada día. Entonces busquen otras maneras para hacerlo y lo encuentren en la criminalidad. Para muchos niños y niñas, violencia y criminalidad parece la única manera de escapar sus condiciones malas en que viven. Pero, para hacerlo y para participar en la criminalidad intensifican la marginalización de sus mismos. Eso es un proceso eterno de pobreza, exclusión social, marginalización, decidir que violencia y criminalidad es la única manera de escapar ese proceso y en consecuencia intensificar su marginalización y exclusión; Ese proceso forma un ciclo hacia abajo en comunidades como Sinaí.

La pregunta principal de esta investigación se enfoque en el rollo que forma la familia en el contexto de pobreza, violencia y criminalidad. Después de mis observaciones en Sinaí parece que familia forma un rollo significativo en los problemas sociales como pobreza, violencia y criminalidad. Sinaí presenta que la familia quiere mejorar las vidas de sus hijos pero que también hay una

contradicción; Porque la familia también hace todo para que sus hijos se queden en las circunstancias malas en la comunidad porque familia es todo lo que tienen en barrios precarios como Sinaí.

Entonces una contradicción existe cuando vea los aspectos negativos de la familia: La familia hace todo lo que puede para que los hijos se queden en este ciclo vicioso que lo hace casi irrompible. Entonces el concepto de la familia es un estrategia que tiene dos lados: Pueden ofrecer salvación y puede ayudar en manejar los problemas sociales que la gente tiene que superar en barrios como Sinai, pero en lo mismo tiempo eso garantiza que nunca va a escapar sus condiciones malas producido por pobreza extrema.

La reciprocidad y las obligaciones que son parte de las relaciones a dentro de una familia garantiza que los hijos estarán parta de la realidad social de pobreza, violencia y criminalidad en Sinaí por el resto de sus vidas. Eso es unas de las claves de la pobreza: Algo que es esencial por la solución de las problemas que existen en comunidades que son víctimas de la pobreza extrema.

Dame los primeros siete años de vida de un niño y te diré lo que será el hombre del mañana¹⁷.

El futuro de los niños depende del presente que vivan.¹⁸ (Dichos)

¹⁷ Translation: Give me the first seven years of the life of a child and I will tell you what future man kind looks like

¹⁸ Children's future depends on the present they live in.

