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Security practices and inequalities in Caracas. New drivers for an old logic?

Julien Rebotier

Abstract

Caracas is one of the most dangerous cities in Latin America. Security practices are broadly spread across the city and can be seen in urban landscape, land use and mobility, and social relations. Beyond the distribution of such practices (like neighbor watching, reduced mobility, defensive groups), the meaning they are given and the way urban insecurity is represented are rooted in inequalities. Actually, misrecognition more than distributive inequalities seem to work at full blast in the framing of security practices and its socio-spatial meanings. Urban insecurity cannot be ignored in Caracas. But obviously, it is unevenly prioritized across society. An overview of security practices embodied in different logics of actors allows characterizing them beyond similarities at first sight. Therefore, stigma and dominant discourses are grounded in the context of Caracas, stemming from unequal cultural and social relations. They are driven by, as well as they frame, unevenly implemented and socially driven security practices. Here is a politicized dimension that needs to be assessed so that security practices and its implications can be fully understood in a deeply unequal urban context.

Keywords: Urban insecurity; Representations; Discourse; Place-based assessment; Order

Introduction

If we followed the overall view of Diane Davis (2006), Latin America has become both a preferred theatre and laboratory for studying an omnipresent and invasive urban insecurity since the “lost decade” and crises of the 1980s (Carrión, 2005; Briceño León, 2007; Kessler, 2009). Insecurity is a master narrative structuring urban life, replacing progress, development or modernity, as well as a fundamental category of urbanity understood as an historic condition of socio-spatial relationships (Boudreau, 2011). Insecurity and the fear it inspires have well-known consequences beyond just Latin America, in North and South America alike: seclusion, fracturing, segregation, and the retreat from public space (Tuan, 1979; Davis, 1998; Low, 2005; Capron, 2006; Pain and Smith, 2008).

Caracas teeters at the top of the list of the most dangerous cities since the harshly repressed social explosion in February 1989 known as the Caracazo, to the beat of political unrest and the economic shudders (closely tied to the petroleum market) that have shaken the country for 30 years. The recent political polarization of Venezuelan society adds a cyclical economic dimension to the urban insecurity that soared again in the early 2000s (Ellner and Hellinger, 2003; Briceño León et al. 2009). It is in this context that we have examined the security practices in the city and their links with various types of inequalities in Caracas.

The practices reflect the stakeholders, their intentionality, and a certain materiality. However, we know how important insecurity - its representations of insecurity and related discourses - can be in Latin America (Caldeira, 2000; Kessler, 2009) and Europe alike (Smith, 1986; Beaud and Pialoux, 2003). We will then consider security practices in Caracas in the social, political and cultural contexts that frame them. Finally, this thematic issue of *Justice Spatiale – Spatial Justice* invites us to think about security practices in the city from the perspective of justice. According to Young (1990) and Fraser (1995), justice is conceived of on the practical basis of redistribution as well as on more symbolic bases of social and cultural recognition. Thus, in addition to the distribution of security practices in Caracas, we will consider their meanings and their implications by emphasizing the underlying mechanisms related to the inequalities of redistribution and recognition alike.

On the ground, one notes that the broadly disseminated security practices respond to an urban insecurity that is distributed differently in the space. Close comparison of the observed practices and insecurity does not present any obvious connection. Two questions emerge from this observation: What can be said about the apparent homogeneity of the widespread security practices throughout the city beyond the undifferentiated master narrative of urban insecurity in Caracas? How should the disparities be interpreted? By analyzing security practices in their context and from the perspective of the concepts of redistribution and recognition, the assumption is formulated that the security practices contribute to the reproduction of powerful inequalities in the urban space. From there, we maintain that the cultural aspect and the representations that underlie the practices, and the meaning given to them, constitute fundamental drivers of inequalities and beyond that, of a territorialisation process which gives shape and meaning to the social space.

In order to test these assumptions (to indicate the links between security practices and inequalities and to situate the importance of these practices in the production of urban space), we propose a three-stage reflection process. First, a diagnosis of socio-spatial segregation in Caracas will be laid out as well as the unequal distribution of the acts of urban insecurity. Second, emphasis will be placed on security practices, their similarities and differences. Finally, after having compared the contextual data related to security practices, we will attempt to explain the disparities through the discourses and representations that condition these practices and give them meaning.

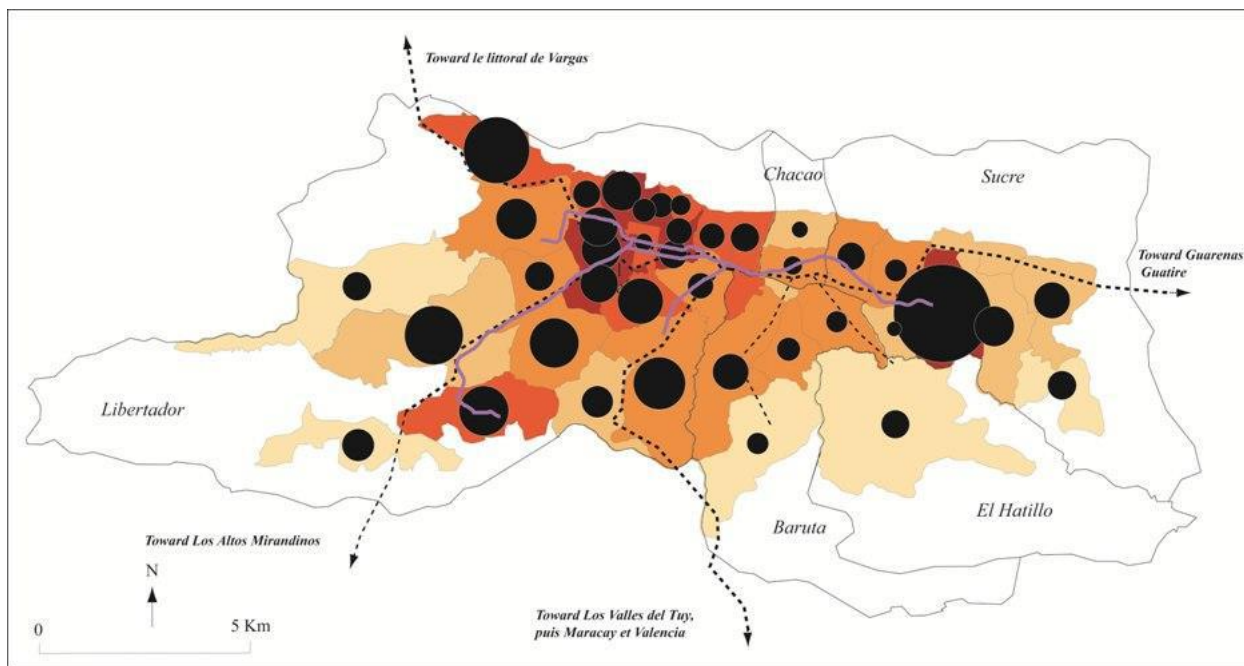
Social segregation and the unequal distribution of insecurity in Caracas

The study is concerned with the agglomeration of Caracas, which clusters more than 3 million inhabitants in the San Francisco valley, within the boundaries of the 5 municipalities forming the Metropolitan District (DMC).

A valley wide socio-spatial meridian configuration

Across the DMC as a whole, we can distinguish a meridian demarcation (Map 1). In the western segment, we find relatively high-density over-representation of poor populations¹. However, in the eastern portion, densities are lower and there are fewer poor populations, even if the large working-class area, Petare, clearly stands out to the east (significant density and poverty). This demarcation forms an East-West axis structuring the urban functions, and is made tangible by a subway line (in purple) and a highway (thick broken line). Moreover, there is greater socio-economic heterogeneity in the centre-west populations, the areas where the first urban expansions occurred in the early 20th century. These are multi-functional spaces (residential, infrastructure, transportation, and formerly industrial), along another less important line that meets Los altos mirandinos, underscored by a subway line and the start of a highway. Conversely, in the western segment (excluding Petare), the socio-economic homogeneity of the populations appears much greater and much less correlated to the secondary communication lines toward Baruta to the south and El Hatillo to the southeast (light dotted area).

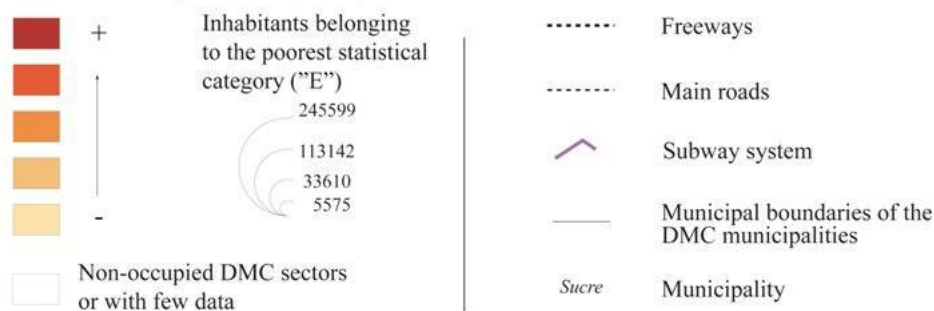
¹ The national statistical institute (INE) censuses distribute the population over 5 categories from A (richest) to E (poorest).



2001 relative densities (source: INE census)

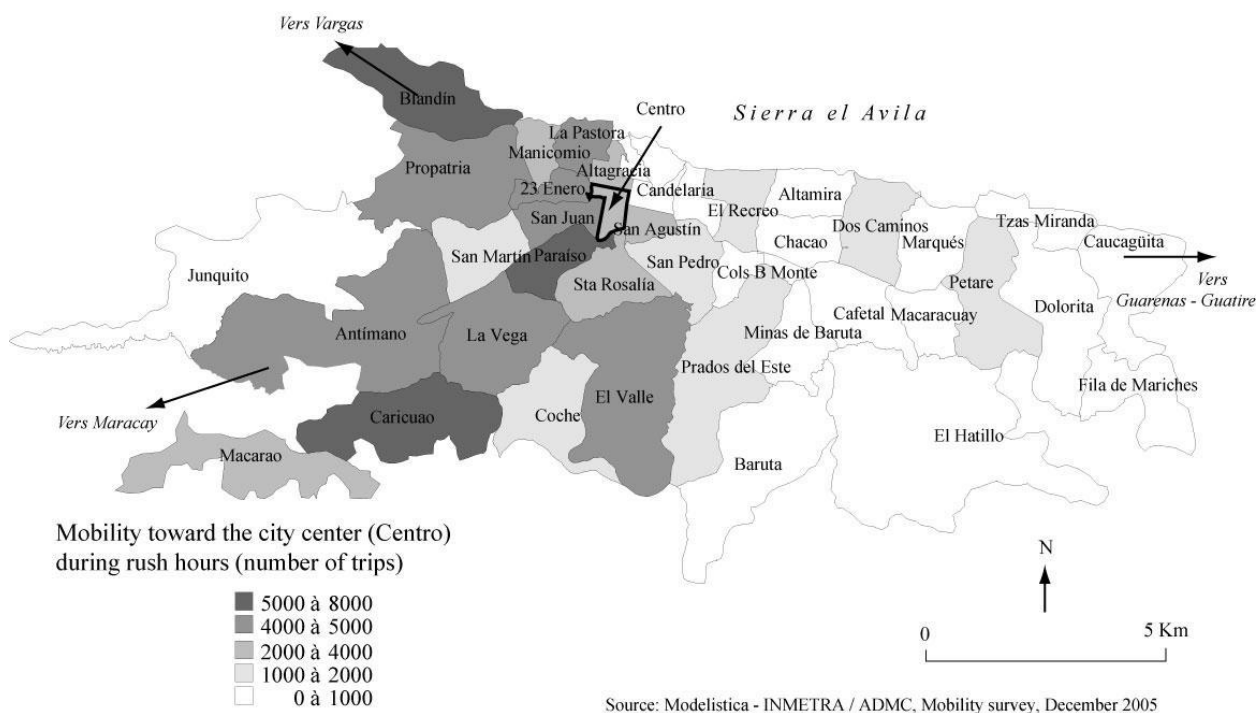
Source: Own elaboration, with Modelística (2005) data.

Phlcarto - <http://perso.club-internet.fr/phlgeo>



Map 1: Socio-spatial distribution and density of the DMC population

Socio-economic distinction is underscored by differentiated territorial practices. Despite the functional east-west line from the "Centro" (historic centre) to Petare (Map 2), it would appear that whether one frequents the east or west side of this line is based on one's place of residence. Depending on whether one is from the east side or the west side of the city, one will frequent the east or west side respectively of the continuous and transversal line going through the various areas. Thus, travel in the DMC to the historic centre (outlined on Map 2) primarily originates in the western sectors of the agglomeration of Caracas.



Map 2: Urban segregation through territorial practices

However, the East-West demarcation and the relative homogeneity of the eastern part of the DMC must be nuanced on a large scale. Segregation along a meridian through the agglomeration forms a checkerboard of the urban landscape in a subtle socio-spatial intermingling with sharp contrasts. (García Sanchez and González Tellez, 2008).

The large-scale urban landscape mosaic

The agglomeration’s social geography is ever recurrent on the ground. Quebradas, ravines carved by fast-running streams, slash the city on the often-sharp slopes occupied by barrios de ranchos (literally “shack neighbourhoods”). Mainly self-built by squatters, these shanty towns have consolidated over time. The invasion of the quebradas can go into the core of the wealthiest neighbourhoods crossed by the torrents, like the Chapellín barrio in the Country Club area, or the Santa Rosa barrio, near Plaza Venezuela (Photo 1, right). In addition to the obvious spatial proximity, connections exist between these heterogeneous urban sectors, whether it be for business purposes, related to employment (in offices, servants, occasional services), or alternatively, the supply of illicit goods (Baby-Collin, 2000). Yet, this flow cannot hide the symbolic social distance and the obvious contrasts that occasionally distinguish one side of the street from the other. In fact, until the late 1990s, the barrios scarcely appeared in many urban management documents even though they housed nearly half the agglomeration’s population (Baby-Collin and Zapata, 2006). Moreover, depending on whether they are occupied by barrios or by the more official residential habitations, the city’s hills are called cerros or colinas, respectively.



Source: Image Google Earth, et cliché de l'auteur (2005)

Photos 1: Birds'-eye view, view from the ground, the strong contrasts of the Caracas urban landscape

Image of the Las Minas and Santa Cruz del Este barrios, and the Terrazas sector of the Club Hípico [Hunt Club] Photo at right: View of the Plaza Venezuela and the Colinas de Bello Monte (background) behind the Santa Rosa barrio

In terms of status, there is also a great deal of contrast between the rank of each of these various areas. When the barrios are not ignored in urban planning, the more privileged classes do not go to there; the barrios are feared and even overtly stigmatized following the socio-political problems of the 1980s that culminated with the Caracazo (Lopez Maya, 2003). In the aftermath of this bloodiest episode of Venezuelan democracy, an obvious atmosphere of suspicion seems to have settled permanently in Caracas between the middle classes and "those who came down from the hills [cerros] covered with ranchos" (Rotker, 2005). To date, the urban segregation process is fed by this morphological and symbolic configuration of contrast.

An urban space with its reinforced lines of segregation, inequalities and conflict, made clear since 1989 will be the setting of our examination of the distribution of crimes and misdemeanours as one of the markers of urban insecurity.

Distribution of urban insecurity: Functional and social determinants.

Some will acknowledge that the collection, use and interpretation of insecurity figures is sensitive and that this information is susceptible to spin and bias. In Venezuela there are no major information gathering projects nor any systematic investigation of victimization, as may exist in Argentina, to give a coherent image of the situation in Caracas. The autumn 2009 reforms driven by the national police reform commission (CONAREPOL), are for the purpose of correcting the fragmentation and gaps in security-related information; the commission's work has been a source of unanimity among the country's political and social actors. However, many of the NGOs, civil and university associations that are frequently committed to civic activism²,

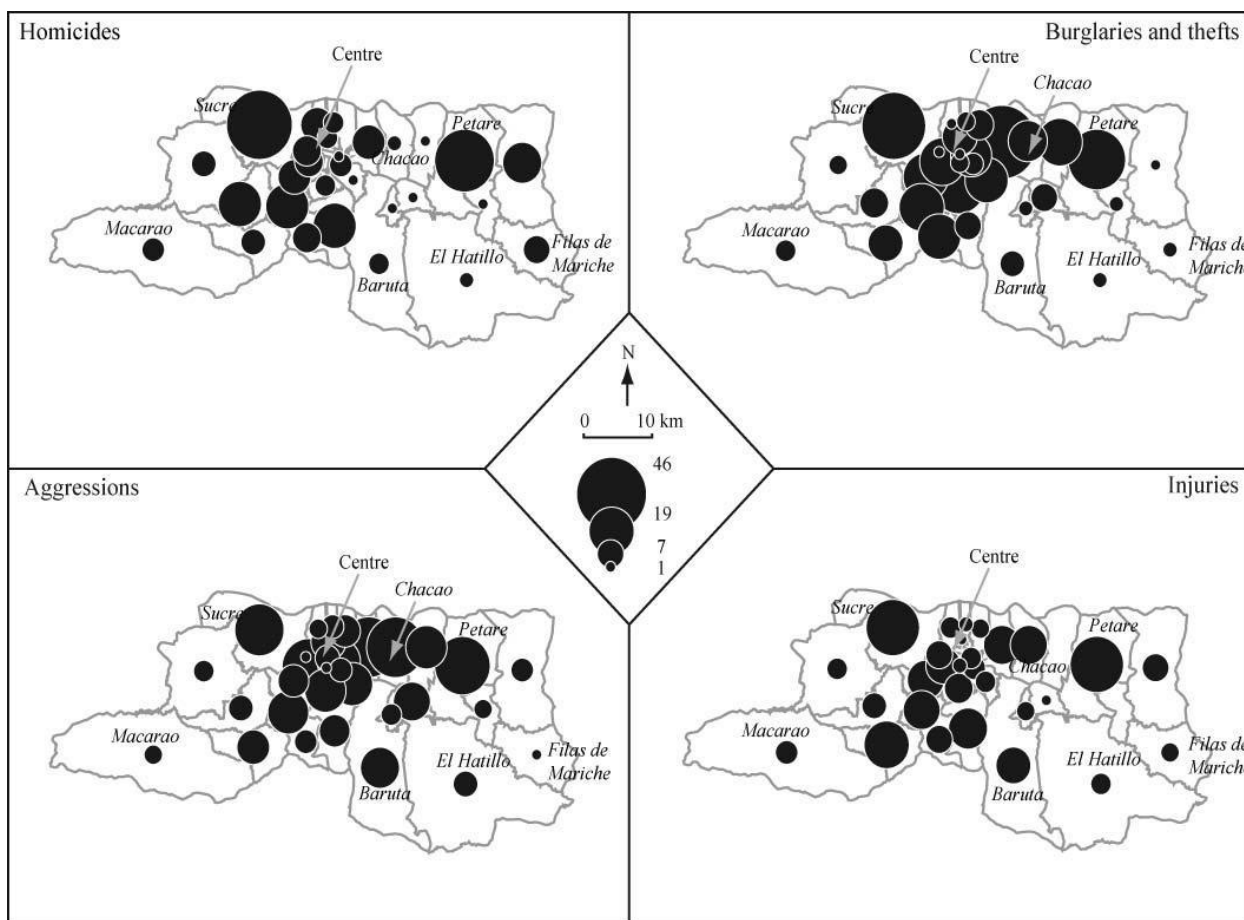
² Consideration is given here to the Observatorio Venezolano de la Violencia, social sciences laboratory at the Universidad Central de Venezuela, led by sociologist Roberto Briceño León; the Centro por la Paz y los Derechos Humanos, at the same university, directed by Ana María San Juan; or the NGO Paz Activa chaired by another sociologist, Luis Cedeño.

produce data on the topic. Moreover, these figures from the NGO PROVEA³ “security” component’s “[annual] report on the human rights situation in Venezuela” are often those quoted in the media or taken up by various stakeholders.

The following paragraphs do not seek to assign responsibility nor to judge how acts of insecurity have evolved. Their purpose is to give a contemporary picture of the distribution of crime and misdemeanours within the DMC. To do this, the DMC security secretariat’s partial databases were consulted; the security secretariat collects [data on] the crimes and misdemeanours reported in the District. The information available pertains to 7 non-consecutive weeks between August 14, 2006 and January 28, 2007. A breakdown is made of the number of homicides, thefts, assaults and injuries reported over this period (Map 3). Although the government figures are limited and incomplete, they do have the merit of pinpointing where the acts occurred.

The distribution of theft and assaults, and to a lesser degree, injuries and homicides followed the main, regularly visited east-west line observed. Moreover, a secondary line is distinguishable starting from the historic downtown toward the Southwest, which also corresponds to a commercial, regularly visited line, marked by major communication arteries but occupied by populations that are more socio-economically heterogeneous and occasionally working class. Finally, two points are added to these two strong lines where homicides, theft, assaults and injury stand out. These are the working class areas of Sucre and Petare. Furthermore, the social logic of how the acts of insecurity are distributed (the poorest sectors are the most exposed) ought to be more noticeable since crime is under-reported in working-class areas compared to better-off areas due to fear of retaliation or mistrust of the police (Briceño León et al., 1999). This trend toward over-exposure of working class areas is more obvious still with regard to the distribution of homicides. As a general rule, in fact, homicide victims in Caracas are primarily young, non-white males who are poor and live in the barrios (Briceño León et al., 2002). Conversely, the wealthiest sectors in the South East, far from the intensely frequented lines, report relatively fewer acts.

³ Programa Venezolano de Educación-Acción en Derechos Humanos – Venezuelan education action plan in human rights.



Source: Own elaboration, with 2006-2007 data from the DMC secretary for security. Philcarto. <http://philgeo.club.fr>

Map 3: Distribution of crimes and misdemeanours reported in the DMC during the 7 non-consecutive weeks from August 14, 2006 to January 28, 2007

Despite the incompleteness and limitations of the data available, the information is in agreement with regard to the social and functional logics of the location of the acts of insecurity in Caracas. It is this context - that of a segregated city and the differentiated distribution of urban insecurity - that we examined the security practices these various stakeholders develop.

Security practices that are widespread... and wide-ranging?

The security practices adopted by various stakeholders juxtapose a well-to-do area in the DMC's southeast, the working class areas of the barrios to the west, deteriorating high-rise apartment buildings, and local police departments in the city's east end (municipalities of Chacao and Baruta – Map 1).

Initiatives in the affluent Santa Clara area

Santa Clara is an urbanización of single-family residences in Baruta's El Cafetal area that is home to about 200 families. The urbanización is a form of neighbourhood units characteristic of the urbanization of Caracas beginning in the 1930s when coffee hacienda properties in the valley

were gradually divided into more or less exclusive residential lots (Baby-Collin and Zapata, 2006). In terms of security practices, Santa Clara is among the favoured areas of the city where access control began in the early 1990s with the introduction of gated communities (García Sanchez, 2004). According to the person responsible for the urbanización's Communal Council⁴ (CC), "gates were installed to block the street in 1992. ... In 2004, guard houses were installed. There are three of them for eight streets."⁵ CCs are made up of committees, one of which deals with security and "continues the work begun by the Santa Clara neighbourhood association in the mid-1990s." The purpose of these access control and surveillance measures was "to reduce thefts in this hot zone, which is a strategic passage between Baruta and Petare. Thefts were down 90% in 2008 from 2000 levels."

In addition to systematic use of grilles on windows and doorways and frequent use of electrified fences on properties, the urbanización's protection includes blocked streets, guard houses, guards and video cameras, the images of which can be viewed by local police. Santa Clara permanently employs five guards selected by residents. But "the problem with managing insecurity without the government is how expensive it is!" Bypassing a security firm cuts the monthly cost by a third for day service and by about a quarter for night service. In addition, guards can choose to sleep on-site (and "save on transportation"); they are also provided with a uniform and coffee, as well as food (but only for the team supervisor). These are "employment benefits granted by Santa Clara residents."

Of the 200 families, 110 collaborate and contribute (unequally) to cover the cost of the service. A group of "separatists" independently manages a cul-de-sac of the urbanización with their own gate. Guard selection remains a sensitive process that involves "not selecting the best, because they leave very quickly." The person in charge of the CC explains the recruitment strategies:

"We chose middle-of-the-road people, with limited abilities, who can manage to carry out simple, manual tasks, as long as they are told what to do often. We took borderline people, 'half-idiots'. These are the ones who always turn up. However, we chose a Colombian computer technician as team leader. His mother is a nanny for one of the neighbours. He is black, tall, heavy, marvellous ... everyone loves him. He has no papers. It's kind of a way to keep him on. There are also two other Colombians without papers. They are in the process of going through the system, but it can take up to four years."

In working class areas: Security is just another problem

Two types of working class areas have been observed. Before presenting the case of the barrios, we will address the Horno de Cal area, in the Libertador municipality, near Parque Central.

The information concerns Tower A of a largely impoverished housing complex. The president of the Communal Bank (BC)⁶ confides that in the "Work and Earth" CC of Tower A, the housing and apartment committee is most active. "1,600 people live in 242 apartments [condominiums, few

⁴ A participation-based, community-organized local institution that took over from neighbourhood associations in 2006 (Compagnon et al., 2009).

⁵ Quotations on Santa Clara are drawn from an interview conducted on November 3, 2008, under the ANR – METRALJEUX program.

⁶ One of the participation-based institutional mechanisms that allows the CC to apply for public funding and to manage those funds.

are rented out]. Children stay with their parents, for lack of a housing solution.”⁷ One of the main issues, for example, is repairing the elevators, “all of which have been out of service for four months” in this building over 20 storeys high.

While the building features a double gate in the foyer to separate the street from street-level common areas, there are fewer security practices than in Santa Clara and those it does have considerably affect social relations:

“The CC does not have a security committee. On the section of highway right next to us [Horno de Cal is located between the western highway and the hills of the San Agustín barrios], there is a lot of theft. They come down from the [San Agustín] cerro and steal, but not on the sidewalks [near the towers]. Not inside, oh no. There is confidence. But even so, no one wants to stick their neck out with a security committee.”

The person responsible for the BC says she lived for a time in the Marín barrio, in the San Agustín area, and has no particular fears about barrio dwellers, who include “lawyers, professors and economists.” However, she does show mistrust toward police officers “[who are] often stool pigeons who enforce neither laws nor regulations.” No one dares to report another, “otherwise the police officer will say, ‘that person reported you!’” What’s more, the barrio landscape is pretty tough:

“In the cerro, you never know when they are going to start shooting at each other. There are more weapons than police, and it’s the paramilitaries who have the guns. But we know who is who. We’re careful of the ways in which paramilitary members can get into the CC.”

In areas that are just as poor, but within the barrios, insecurity is also an issue, among numerous other concerns. It involves highly concrete practices (such as the inevitable profusion of gates and grilles protecting homes and padlocked doors at the entrance to some alleys) but also significantly shapes social rapports.

The barrios Briceño Irragory, La Cruz, Niño Jesús, La Trilla and Santa Rosa were visited. They are located respectively in the areas of Propatria, San Martín, El Junquito, Altigracia and El Recreo (Map 2). The information used is drawn from the results of 118 individual questionnaires designed to elicit the objective conditions of environmental risks and the risks identified by the respondents in the place where they live, the management approaches considered, the expertise developed in crisis management or prevention, and more general representations concerning the public and private stakeholders involved in the risks and their management (Rebotier, 2008). From these results we extracted the answers to three questions dealing with medium-term priorities and concerns, projects being considered for the next five years, and the ranking of perceived immediate threats. It is significant to point out that the questionnaire was neither about insecurity nor the sense of urban insecurity, but rather on the vaguer notions of “risk”, “threat” or “danger.” Questioning respondents about insecurity without using leading questions is an important precaution to observe when collecting data (Kessler, 2009).

From the 114 series of usable responses, the finding is that insecurity ranks as the third stated priority in the medium term, behind housing and work concerns. Better housing conditions and higher income are also the main objectives for the next five years in over 40% of the responses. Perceived immediate threats include landslides and flooding due to a poor, or non-existent, water drainage system. The average estimation of the respondents’ sense of insecurity for both

⁷ Quotations on Horno de Cal are drawn from an interview conducted on December 9, 2008 (ANR – METRALJEUX).

threats is 0.3.8 The threats of delinquency and urban insecurity, flooding, and earthquakes rated respectively as 0.44, 0.45 and 0.46. Among barrio residents, who are the foremost victims of urban insecurity, the material conditions of day-to-day life count the most.

Despite this finding, which is nuanced based on barrio profiles (level of consolidation, length of occupation, type of population), security practices are no less marked, and insecurity is far from underestimated. Protection (gates, grilles, locks, iron doors) are everywhere, just as elsewhere in the city, but are not systematic and not as imposing as those in the Santa Clara urbanización. In Santa Rosa, the residents install gates to block off cul-de-sacs. But these are not systematically locked. Security is based on other practices: "We keep watch, there is always someone in the street, anyway,"⁹ confides a popular leader who lives in the barrio. "People know one another, but you have to be careful. There are hooligans [malandros] who take drugs, we know who they are. At night, when you leave, it's best not to linger in the street."

Thus, in Horno de Cal as in the barrios visited, insecurity is not the residents' chief priority, although it remains very present. The same types of protection and security practices are found here as elsewhere in the city, but in different forms and presentations. The focus is on interpersonal rapports, on the people one knows or doesn't know, on those who represent insecurity or not within the perimeter of one's own neighbourhood or living environment. Gates are but a physical and random marker of an assortment of security practices. Indeed, they are not consistently closed and can be counter-productive – in the event of a sudden evacuation due to flooding, for example.

On a wider scale, whatever the area in question, security practices are also affected by the action of municipal police. In order to sketch a comprehensive picture of security practices that may be similar in form but whose varied meanings we are beginning to understand, we will examine a number of police practices in Baruta and Chacao.

How local police forces affect and view residents' security practices

The small but very wealthy municipality of Chacao has more police officers who are better paid and better equipped than those in other DMC municipalities. The mission of the Polichacao is confined to the municipal territory and consists of upholding "the reign of order and public peace"¹⁰ within the frameworks set by the Ministry of the Interior and Justice. Community ties are established through the representatives of neighbourhood associations and, more recently, by the chairs of CC security committees. After several officers travelled to Israel for training, Polichacao is now looking to transition from a reactive collaboration with residents to a proactive one. This turns residents into stakeholders with joint responsibility for public security, for example, through "brigades of seniors who monitor and report acts of incivility, suspicious behaviour or any other irregularity." Finally, according to the officer interviewed, no particular

⁸ For values ranging from 0: Sense of absolute insecurity, to 1: Sense of total security. Responses were initially benchmarked from 0 to 5, but the results were standardized from 0 to 1 in order to calculate indices for all questionnaires.

⁹ The quotations that follow are drawn from discussions related to the application of one part of the 118 questionnaires in the Santa Rosa barrio, with a local leader, in July 2005.

¹⁰ Quotations and information on Chacao police are drawn from an interview conducted on November 27, 2008, with a public relations officer (ANR – METRALJEUX).

problem hindered relations in the few barrio areas of this affluent municipality, although some vagueness remains as to the nature of the Polichacao's relations with these areas.

For one Polibaruta commissioner, police action is rational, stemming from an analysis of the situation developed through the work of the municipality and the organized communities.¹¹ Beyond the battle of numbers in Baruta—a municipality that is more spread out and whose population is more heterogeneous than Chacao's—the commissioner emphasizes one major concern: the spread of weapons in society. "Of course, the middle classes are also armed in the urbanizaciones. But the problem is when there are robberies. The thieves take the weapons with them into the barrios, which means the number of guns in circulation continues to rise." After making a distinction between weapons in the "right" and "wrong" hands, the commissioner points to the existence of units dedicated to "communities ties" and "citizen services." Public meetings and workshops are organized with the neighbourhood associations and the CCs on the topics of safe behaviours, prevention measures, and the needs expressed by residents. In addition to making direct telephone lines available, Polibaruta operates with a system of 400 radios with unequal distribution among the neighbourhoods: this is of little concern to the poorest areas, "since the cost of buying the equipment [borne by the community] is too high."

These varying perspectives show the degree to which security practices unequally structure relations among stakeholders and how these practices occupy the space. The dissemination of security practices (protection, organization of surveillance, reporting) does not necessarily reflect the traits of the segregated city, whether at the level of the DMC or locally. On the other hand, the meaning attributed to these practices interests the researcher. In a city where the master narrative of insecurity has now become structuring (Rebotier, 2011), more than through the widespread use of gates, use of a surveillance service or control of street access, it is through the representations of insecurity and the meaning assigned to security practices that the inequalities in recognition come strongly into play.

Inequalities and representations, driving forces and products of security practices

Beside the inequalities in the distribution of the facts of insecurity and various areas' ability to deal with it, we put forward that inequalities in recognition, i.e. the representations of insecurity and the meaning given to the practices of insecurity both affect and reinforce a differentiated territorialisation process in Caracas.

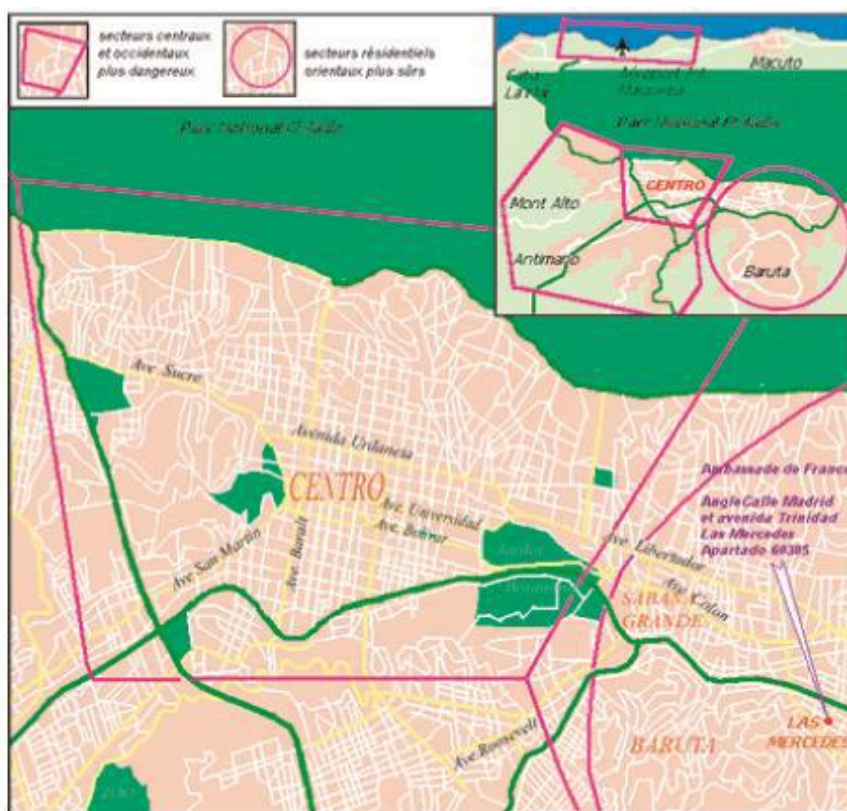
Differentiated socio-spatial representations

Similar security practices mean different things for stakeholders based on their representations of insecurity, their place in society or alternatively, their social environment. In fact, depending on if one is in an affluent area on the city's east side (Santa Clara) or in working class areas (the barrios on the west side or Horno de Cal), insecurity is not ranked the same among the inhabitants' priorities nor with regard to the social relationship it affects. The broad dissemination of insecurity and the practices resulting from it are not in contrast to the unequal representations that underlie it. For example, the Polibaruta [the Baruta police] interpret arming oneself for protection differently, depending on whether this involves the middle class residents of the urbanizaciones or the inhabitants of the barrio. Securing urban space is construed on the

¹¹ Quotations and information on the Baruta police are drawn from an interview conducted on November 6, 2008, with one of its commissioners (ANR – METRALJEUX).

basis of significant disparities in recognition (Davis, 1990). Certain discourses dominate and marginalize, introducing significant disparities that distinguish between security practices.

The location of areas designated as “safe” and “dangerous” that the French ministry of foreign affairs gives (Map 4) in the online heading “Advice to Travellers” is a way to illustrate the dominant discourses using a map. In Caracas, we come across this “crime discourse” (Caldeira, 2000) among the affluent areas, media coverage of insecurity or the urban landscape that identifies areas that are “safe” and those that are not. The delineation of the boundaries of Chacao, indicating the entrance or exit (photo 2, above), is normally accompanied by the statement “Chacao, territorio seguro [tr. safe area]”. In fact, landscape markers of security practices associated with the differentiated representations of social space thus conveyed make more sense when they are tied to the characteristic traits of socio-spatial segregation than when they are compared to the distribution of crimes and misdemeanours in Caracas (Maps 1 through 4).



Source : French ministry for foreign affairs webpage, consulted on December 2008, http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/conseils-aux-voageurs_909/pays_12191/venezuela_12312/index.html

Map 4: The “safe” west end areas (mauve circle) and the central and east end “more dangerous” areas (pinks polygons) according to the French ministry of foreign affairs

The territorialisation of insecurity helps give meaning to security practices in that it concerns a permanent process of space production. This process brings together the tangible and intangible, with shapes and facilities forming a landscape, and likewise, forming an identity,

control or belonging. It sets out the spatial dimension of social organization through which the space creates meaning and takes shape (Di M eo and Bul on, 2005). In the context of security practices, representations play a fundamental role on the basis of how insecurity ranks in the organization of space. The broad dissemination of security practices affects the production of urban space while by the same token the socio-spatial and political characteristics specific to Caracas in turn shape numerous aspects of these practices.



Source : Cliche de l'auteur, Caracas 2005 et 2008

Photos 2: Urban landscapes and spaces marked by insecurity

Top to bottom, left to right: Designation of the exit from the Chacao area (heading toward Las Mercedes); Gated community entrance at las Lomas de San Rafael; security architecture and equipment (gates, towers, video cameras, electric wires) in Alta Florida

The different meaning attributed to similar security practices carries on the strong characteristics of a segregated urban order. The territorialisation of insecurity makes it possible to realize that there is a performative dimension of security practices for social space. More than a simple marker, their differentiated status in terms of recognition makes them an important driver for reproducing the elitist socio-spatial order in Caracas.

Security practices and inequalities: mutually constructed relationships

Signs, gates, grilles, guards and video cameras – security practices make the regime of the invisible visible. They also structure the urban order of Venezuela's capital.

It is a good idea to once again stress that in Caracas, the importance of these practices in urban mobility - the territorial practices and the relationship to the city - pre-dates the emergence of insecurity as a fundamental social and political issue (starting with the Caracazo). On the occasion of a brief trip through Caracas after having stayed in Bogotá, Claude Bataillon reports on how security was already conditioning a portion of the recommendations of Venezuelan colleagues in the mid-1960s:

"... the cities were already brutally modernized, with their crowd of engineers and technocrats (some of which were foreign), their highly prosperous middle classes, already completely enamoured with travel in planes or in cars on impeccable modern highways. While in Colombia I could easily use old-fashioned downtown hotels for travelling salesmen; however, in Venezuela I was advised against similar hotels in downtown areas reputed to be dangerous, and I had to resign myself to staying in the large, modern luxury hotels from which one had to take a taxi to get to the far-away buildings of the universities and government services." (Bataillon, 2008 : 66).

A social geography is recognizable as is the insecurity in which the run-down and dangerous "centre" emerges (the centro, in the working-class west side of the city). In this testimonial, insecurity is construed against the modernity of the large luxury hotels and buildings typical of the urbanization that was gaining ground at that time on the east side of the San Francisco valley.

In the late 1980s, another line of tension than the one pitting the east and west sides of the city against one another was built around insecurity and the practices that stem from it. The urban riots of February 1989 were a threshold in the representations and relationship to the city of Caraqueños (Lopez Maya, 2003). The Caracazo put an end to the myth of the "outstanding democracy" that the country supposedly experienced between 1958 (the end of the dictatorial regime of Pérez Jiménez) and the 1980s, the pillars of which consisted of a social, civil and military peace, political calm and a prosperity that was unequalled on the continent. This society, closed off by oil profits and the game of a democracy formed by pact, does not stand up to close examination, owing to the crisis of the 1980s and the inequalities that in reality have always existed (Ellner and Tinker Salas, 2007). The emergence of social tensions long held in check upset relations in the city in certain areas:

"The decade of the 80s ended with the latent terror that the privileged areas of Caracas had always felt becoming tangible: the terror of the day when the poor from the hills surrounding the capital, who were exhausted from their own destitution, would descend to take the city. On February 27, 1989 the two-day people's uprisings took place, repressed by the government at the cost of the greatest number of deaths in the country in 100 years. ...The slender thread that held the social bond together began to fray." (Rotker, 2005 : 171).

The Caracazo is also known as "el día que bajaron los cerros [the day when the cerros came down]". Again we have the distinction between cerros and colinas, danger identified as coming from the cerros covered with barrios. These are working-class areas labelled as threatening, the place where danger originates. In response to this label, the visible security practices (today justified) reinforce the pre-existing and subtler forms of distinction and distancing that the generalization of these practices must not conceal. Most of the affluent neighbourhoods present with a "customized socio-spatial form...which has enabled this population, assisted by the

geography of the valley, to live on the hills (colinas) and not the cerros, independently and away from the large collections of shanty-towns" (Maldonado Brito, 2006: 414).

At the end of the analysis, we stress that security practices are a product but are also one of the drivers of Caracas' historically segregated settlement and its reproduction. In the dominant discourse, a commingling takes place between the representations of insecurity and the most disadvantaged areas. We find therein the typical traits of socio-spatial segregation. There is a fine line between portrayal and stigma. Less through their forms than through their meanings, the security practices are affected by significant inequalities for many. Once established, the origin of insecurity – neighbourhoods, populations – presents with all the characteristics of a scapegoat, again underscoring their banishment (Douglas, 2001).

As a matter of fact, following the major demonstrations and lockouts in 2001-2002 and the coup d'état in April 2002, García Guadilla re-erected these types of logic through defence practices in the crisis context. She specifically pinpointed in Caracas the designation of an "external" enemy along classist, racist and political lines. The "community defence plans" intended for the middle classes and consulted by the author, state that "[translation] domestic staff, particularly day staff, should not be believed. Remember that many of them have been manipulated and that some of them are starting to see you as the enemy." ((2007: 149). Security practices widen the gap with various "others" construed as so many threats, whether "oligarchs", "savages", or "anti-democracy" - a fact particularly true in times of crisis - based on structuring divisions that tend to replay rather than emerge in a context of inequality and major confrontation. These practices bear the mark of the social and political tensions and disparities that frame them; they are a vector as well as a driver thereof today, front and centre on the urban stage won over by "security fever".

Conclusion

Insecurity translates into – but is also realized through – security practices and representations. Certain forms of appropriation of space, the impact of public policies, private initiatives or the type of urban landscape are the marks of these practices. But the representations that accompany these practices, and occasionally produce them, cannot be overlooked in as much as they help to signify them. The production of insecurity through links between practices and representations reproduces and reinforces certain aspects of social injustice.

Territorialization, associating tangible and intangible drivers, makes it possible to accentuate the cultural aspect and social statuses that intervene in the construction of the "crime discourse" (Caldeira, 2000) as well as in the nature and meaning of security practices. Territorialization helps to connect the security practices to a socio-spatial context, thus going beyond the simple observation of practices to understanding the logic of their construction and to rerecord them in the persistence of power relationships, diverging interests and singular games of scale.

Widespread and apparently homogeneous security practices are not incompatible with an unjust social order and underlying inequalities. In fact, all are not equally victims nor even exposed to urban insecurity. These inequalities do not necessarily become visible through surveillance, gates and fencing, the modification of territorial practices or the use of public spaces and mass transit. They more subtly but no less fundamentally translate into the different meaning given by the stakeholders to security practices, like resorting to weapons for self-defence (discussion with the commissioner of Baruta) or the completely relative importance placed on delinquency in working-class areas; on the other hand, using fear to leverage social

and spatial regulation which enables certain social behaviours to take root (Pedrazzini and Sanchez, 1998) or legitimizes segregation, distancing, or indeed, stigmatization.

The master narrative of insecurity and the broad dissemination of security practices flattens inequalities and conflicts. However, the analysis of the incidental meaning that these practices cover (as developed by Douglas, 2001 or Wacquant, 2006 with regard to stigma, the outsider or the outcaste) makes it possible to see the deciding relationships of injustice that greatly pre-exist the emergence of urban insecurity as a fundamental question. Security practices produce the space. They are operational or instrumental when they legitimize actions or intentions (occasionally foreign to the problem of insecurity alone), and are performative when they give shape and meaning to reality. The criminal, like the malandro (Pedrazzini and Sanchez, 1998), and the security practices that follow in his wake inevitably echo all "the world's injustice" (Pedrazzini and Desrosiers-Lauzon, 2011), starting with that of Venezuelan society.

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