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The article provides a wealth of statistical information on homicides in Latin America and on some of the correlates traditionally discussed in the criminological literature. This information originally appears rather chaotically in different sources, and the author presents them here in an organized way, which has great merit for the debate on the issue and represents a huge research effort. Among the correlates are poverty, level of schooling, employment, family structure, and urbanization. Other traditional correlates, especially youth aspirations and religion, are treated at a more conceptual level. Even so, their treatment systematizes ideas which are not necessarily original, but which form a valuable theoretical framework.

Another highly traditional quality, yet still noteworthy in the overall context of Latin American sociology, is the fact that the article is based on a dialogue between theory and data, which naturally launches a disciplined debate. It is thus a source of satisfaction to encounter such a paper for these reasons. Following these remarks, we now approach our critical sociological position towards the study.

As for the simple information on homicides, a very important recent trend, already recognized in the literature, escapes the battery of data provided by the author, namely a highly significant *drop* in homicides in some key cities, like São Paulo (37.0% in five years), Bogotá (from 80 to 23 per 100 thousand in seven years), and Cali (25.0% in nine years) (Kahn T, Zanetic A. Personal communication; 2005). These decreases are relevant for the issue, since they may result both from successful public policies (Kahn T, Zanetic A. Personal communication; 2005), as well as cyclical historical trends^{1,2}, or both, and they find no echo in the argument presented by Briceño-León.

The discussion on cities and urbanization provides theoretical elements that are not mistaken, but which are far from constituting a basis for what the author calls a “*sociological framework for the explanation of violence*”. The

discussion at stake is limited to the assertion (as evident as it is un-analytical) that the cities are not what we wish they were, and are what we wish they were not. The affirmation that “*Latin America cities were a place of hope for security and law, hence the great rural-to-urban exodus in the 1940s and 50s*” simply fails to agree with the data³. In the latter study we find that in Colombia the attraction exerted by cities is equivalent to only 10.0% of the explanatory power of expulsion by demographic pressure and agricultural technology, the most important factors at the time. The etiological literature on migration generally did in fact contemplate the security issue, but in a localized way and in specific cases, and it has generally never been considered a determinant factor in Latin America.

The problem with the author’s structuring of a sociological framework in three causally different dimensions (macro-factors that “originate”, meso-factors that “foment”, and micro-factors that “facilitate” violence), begins when he abandons the causal epistemological status *proper* to each of the three traditional levels of analysis for crime: micro, meso, and macro. The traditional effort in the literature working with causal links between these levels is very clear, beginning with Sutherland⁴ in 1924, moving on to Cloward & Olshin⁵ in 1960, and reaching the “integrated models” in recent years (where the explicit objective of analysis is to work with this issue). This is what is at stake in terms of an epistemological framework, and not the three *ad hoc* dimensions of Briceño-León. It is true that the “violentological” and criminological specificity of Latin America should be understood at the macro level, which would justify placing this specificity as having originated at this level of aggregation. But contemporary urban violence in Latin America is not such a unique legacy for our continent, as shown by Gómez-Buendía⁶. The links are much more complex.

As for the author’s empirical analysis, it is generally limited to presenting data on each aspect or variable separately, after which, based only on their approximate contemporaneity, (!?), he derives conclusions on their causal nexus with homicides. In other words, the author’s empirical analysis contains practically no *relational* factual evidence where we might observe some types of co-variations or associations. The case in which the author approaches a relational empirical methodology is his analysis on the relationship between poverty, urbanization, and homicide rates. We do not refute that in a broad and generic sense, these

phenomena and their interactivity (correctly emphasized by Briceño-León) may be associated in some way. However, at least based on the Brazilian studies on the subject, we know that the relationship between poverty and homicides is not linear, and that extreme poverty levels, including those in urban areas, are not the ones that stand out as factors for homicides. Following the level of spatial-temporal aggregation that Briceño-León intends to adopt, rightfully and pertinently, the treatment of the hypotheses raised is virtually worthless, methodologically speaking. In fact, based on a simple visual inspection of Table 6, invoked by the author, one cannot conclude in favor of the rigor of his hypothesis. Based on a superficial test using the author's own Table 6, these relationships, as I will illustrate next, prove to have very little explanatory power, even though they may be interesting. Based on the data from Table 6, we calculated the following multiple regression equation:

$$H = a + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + b_3 X_1 X_2 + E,$$

where H represent the homicide rates and X_1 and X_2 represent poverty and urbanization, respectively. Despite the calculating problems based on $n = 16$ (very small), the results are: a precarious adjusted R^2 of 0.074; the betas, even with the model's precarious overall adjustment, are interesting and lend some credit to Briceño-León's theory: -1.67 for poverty, -0.76 for urbanization (both negative!), and finally a positive beta of +1.59 for the multiplicative interactivity term. None of the coefficients is significant at 0.05.

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From various social spaces, members of society have called attention to the gap between 1) the magnitude and omnipresence of violence in the lives of Latin American peoples and 2) the level of output of systematic knowledge and capacity for social and political response to such a disturbing phenomenon, which blocks the potential of individual and societal projects. This situation calls for a renewed social and political commitment by researchers and society at large.

The combination of the categories violence, the urban, public health, and Latin America and their interrelations constitute a highly suggestive set. This combination appears to be in the minds of many researchers, but few have dared (like the author) to propose an alternative that links (within a single view) the question concerning the threatening nature of the Latin American city and the growth of violence.

The author's distinction between two levels of social life as the point of departure for establishing an explanatory framework for social reality represents an important methodological wager. To a major extent it corresponds to the need to relate the structural and situational dimensions in order to propose explanatory connections for violence. The author tackles the trends that propose explanatory theories focused exclusively on the social structure and others that rely on the situational to establish linear causal equations.

What really stands out is the proposed explanatory structure between the three levels of social event, i.e., macro, meso, and micro-social, with a differential explanatory potential between that originating violence, that which foments it, and that which facilitates it. The limitation is that these categories are treated with a high level of generalization and with such a nonspecific empirical reference that it would be difficult to reach agreement among researchers on the pertinence of the proposed levels of determination and about which factors belong to one category or another.

Focusing on the basic concepts, we emphasize the field's complexity and the need to establish Latin American consensuses on the basic concepts, in order to spawn rapid and productive exchange among the researchers. The perspective that violence does not represent merely a pathological event produced by various factors that are exogenous or alien to the development of societies and their collective existence, but on the contrary, that it is a phenomenon that accompanies the development