

A DOCUMENTARY BY STEFANIA ANDREOTTI

Vida Loca

Journey inside Latin American Gangs

WRITTEN, FILMED
AND DIRECTED BY **STEFANIA ANDREOTTI**

WRITTEN, EDITED
AND PRODUCED BY **GIUSEPPE PETRUZZELLIS**

PRODUCED
BY **APLYSIA**

MUSIC BY **DEMON DOCTOR - HAROLD BERMUDEZ BURGOS - 4C3 - SOLCARLUS - AMNIS - DK - VATE**

ADDITIONAL
PHOTOS **ALEXANDER PEÑA - OSCAR LEIVA - JOSE CABEZAS - DAVID A. PEDRONI - DEREK SNIDER - ZXC**

ADDITIONAL
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Press kit

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Introduction

Drugs, jail, death.

Three dots tattooed on the skin.

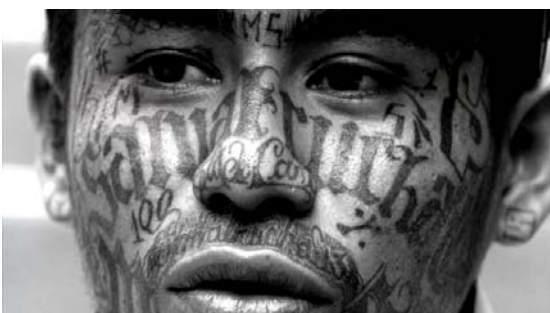
The only three alternatives for the *pandilleros*, the kids of the Latin American street gangs.

The two most violent gangs are the *Mara Salvatrucha 13* and the *Barrio 18*. These are rapidly expanding criminal transnational organizations, now found all over the world. The *MS13* and *XV3* are similar but different, bound together in an insane rivalry, fighting in suburbs from El Salvador to Los Angeles.

Young boys are recruited as teenagers and thrown into bloody fights for slums control. They are drug dealers, drug addicts, they steal and kill, while most of them aren't even 20 years old.

Forgotten by everyone, hunted by police, they live the "Vida Loca", an insane life hanging between lawlessness and death.

This is a journey inside and outside their world to try to understand these "notorious" teenagers.





Synopsis

"I believe in God as well as in the *Holy Death*, and this would be welcome if I had to protect the gang". During the interview, these boys don't hesitate a split second. "The gang is family, the streets are home and drugs are food".

"When talking about Latin American youth gangs you're talking about the *Mara Salvatrucha 13* (or *MS13*), and the *Barrio 18* (or *XV3*)", states Augusto del Pino, assistant general attorney of Chiapas, Mexico.

These gangs scare everyone: they are young, without rules, each day more numerous. It's a multinational criminal phenomenon, just like the Italian Mafia.

MS13 and *XV3* exist with the same name and same rules from El Salvador to the United States.

"They assault and rob the clandestine migrants that are trying to cross state borders illegally to reach the American dream", explains Francisco Aceves Verdugo (Grupo Beta del Sur for migrants assistance). "With that money they buy drugs for themselves or to sell in small doses like drug pushers at the bottom of the narcotics market".

They attack the weakest, they kill rival gangs' members with machetes, they torture those who leave the neighbourhood, they rape young women: society hates them.

To fight them, the FBI created the "Gang Task Force", The Central American states passed the "Antimaras" law, Mexico created the "Steel Group". But this tough repression hasn't had the desired results. It is estimated there are almost 200 thousand *pandilleros* in the world.





Alongside those who ask the army to solve the situation once and for all, others try to discover the reasons for this phenomenon.

"They are very young, some of them are only 10 years old", says Olga Sanchez Martinez, head of the shelter for injured people "Jesus del Buen Pastor". Each had a difficult childhood that led them to criminality. Sometimes they arrive here because they fell from moving trains together with the migrants they were trying to rob, but here we nurse them without discrimination".

There are results.

Like Yamilet, a young murderer that thanks to Mrs. Olga's organization has changed her life forever, leaving the gang behind her.

If there are few private projects there are even fewer state programmes. One of the few lucky ones to get access to one is Allan, the former boss of the *Barrio18* in Chiapas. Allan found a way to leave the gang after meeting Denice Lorena Lopez Solis, a member of the IDH (Human Development Institute – a state organization).

Once rehabilitated, Allan began working for the IDH as a mediator, to help other gang members get involved in the recovery programme. But after a substitution of the director of this government organization, the recovery project ended.

Allan lost his job and his important work had to stop.



Vida Loca

Interviewees 1/2



Barrio 18 pandilleros from Tapachula (Mexico)

Interviewees 2/2



Allan e Yamilet, former *Barrio 18* pandilleros



Francisco Aceves Verdugo
Grupo Beta del Sur
de Protección a Migrantes, Tapachula
(Mexico)



Augusto del Pino Estrada
Adjunto de Coordinación General
Ministerio de Justicia del Chiapas
ex Fiscalía General
(Mexico)



Olga Sánchez Martínez
Albergue Jesús el Buen Pastor
del Pobre y el Migrante
Tapachula (Mexico)



Denice Lorena Lopez Solis
IDH
Instituto de Desarrollo Humano
Tapachula (Mexico)



Further information

The *Mara Salvatrucha* (or *MS13*) and the *Barrio 18* (or *XV3*) gangs take their names from two streets in Los Angeles (the 13th and the 18th). This (LA - California) is where they were born.

It was during the 80s, when many emigrants from El Salvador arrived in the United States, escaping from the civil war. But in the North American slums they found new dangers: local gangs and white people. To defend themselves they formed groups that became violent. Once civil war in El Salvador was over, the US government sent these immigrants back to their own country. Here they recreated the gangs, finding new opportunities in the poverty, fear and social disintegration the war had left behind.

Soon these gangs crossed national borders, growing in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Mexico. They also managed to return illegally to the United States. The *MS13* and the *XV3*, despite their common origins and characteristics, continue to fight each other for fame and control of territory. .

In their gangs, the young members find the identity that social and family problems stole from them. It's an identity made up of unique language, gestures, aesthetics and rituality. To get into the *MS13* you have to survive 13 seconds of violent beating (18 seconds to get into the *Barrio 18*). The young *pandilleros* have tattoos that sing the praises of the gang, death and also religion.

In the first years of the gangs a "population" of 50 thousand *pandilleros* was estimated in Central America and 10 thousand in the United States. Today, despite tough repression, these numbers are constantly increasing. According to US government agencies, there are more than 82 thousand *pandilleros* in Central American states and 38 thousand in North America.

The United States is the major player in the fight against the Latin American gangs. In the summer of 2007 the US government admitted that the *pandillas* phenomenon is still a "very serious problem", "an important security matter". The basic strategy the USA is using to fight the gangs is the old method: deporting gang members who illegally crossed US borders to their original countries, to return them to be "productive in their original countries" (in other words - "it's not my problem"). As a result gangs are growing faster and faster, especially in Central America.

Prevention and recovery are the last of the priorities of the brand new "Strategy for Gang Repression" of Central America and Mexico.



Technical sheet 1/2

Directed by: Stefania Andreotti

Screenplay: Stefania Andreotti
Giuseppe Petruzzellis

Production: Giuseppe Petruzzellis

Production Company: Aplysia

Filmed by: Stefania Andreotti

Editing: Giuseppe Petruzzellis

Music: Demon Doctor
Harold Bermudez Burgos
4c3
Solcarlus
Amnis
[dk]
Vate

Mix: Giuseppe Petruzzellis

Additional photos: Alexander Peña
Oscar Leiva / La Prensa Gráfica, El Salvador
Jose Cabezas
David A. Pedroni
U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)
U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
Derek Snider
Zxc

Additional footage: Prelinger Archives
Deep Dish TV
Stevie Ruiz
Michael Kinard
Sean Cobb
Nathan Jahnke
Joseph Wilcox
Adrian Feiertag

Vida Loca

Technical sheet 2/2

Translations:	Stefania Zaghi Francisco Vazquez Heather Walsh Amaranta Cornejo
Category:	Documentary
Running time:	24'
Format:	MiniDV (PAL)
Aspect:	4:3 (letterbox)
Audio:	Dolby Digital 2.0
Languages:	Spanish (original)
Subtitles:	Italian / English
Nationality:	Italian
Year of production:	2007





Director's notes

This documentary was shot between January and February 2006 in Tapachula, in the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

This place was chosen because it is a border land, with an high concentration of *pandilleros* arriving along with the migrants.

About 30 gang members (males and females) were interviewed. Some were free and some detainees of the *Cereso 3* jail in Tapachula.

Many of them wouldn't allow a video recording of the interview, others allowed only an audio recording, so not all the interviews were used directly in the documentary. Nevertheless all the conversations with these *pandilleros* were useful for a better understanding of the problem.

Other gang members were pleased to grant video interviews, because media coverage adds to the prestige of the gang.

For each of them this was the first interview of their life: no foreign reporter had previously entered their slums.

The *pandilleros'* attitude was always collaborative and respectful.

Some police officers and some prison officers agreed to private meetings but wouldn't grant interviews, believing that press coverage could lead to an escalation of violence.





Production and editing notes

Editing material filmed in Mexico started at the end of September 2007.

Given that the technical quality of the film wasn't excellent (it was filmed with a not very new, not very expensive handycam Sony, a TRV25), it was decided to make the most of the various interviews, aiming at a sharp and fast style to get our message across. In some ways our inspiration was the creativity and style of the documentary *Surplus* by Erik Gandini and Johan Söderberg. The idea was to let the characters speak, without the use of voice-overs, aiming at a sharp rhythm, quick cuts and using a lot of music and additional footage.

The screenplay was completed in one month.

Another month was needed to find the additional footage and music. Here the *Creative Commons* licence proved invaluable as well as the community to which it belongs.

The web allowed us to search, request and then insert much audio/video material distributed with an "open" licence. Also, using internet, it was possible to contact numerous photographers, mostly from El Salvador. As before, many allowed us to use their work free of charge.

Thanks to this complex research and to the generosity of musicians, photographers and video makers we were able to produce a more complete work.

Using many different ideas and many different basic materials we tried to enrich the style and so communicate the message more powerfully. The cost was heavy in terms of time and workload (hours and hours surfing the net to find the right music or suitable photograph). On the other hand there was practically no financial cost, thanks to *Creative Commons*.

The total cost of this film is definitely modest (about 2500€ - mostly travel expenses) and this is thanks to the hundreds of hours of "voluntary" work the authors and co-workers invested in this project.

Once all the material had been collected, the editing took about 20 days. In the end the stories of the *pandilleros* interviewed in Tapachula were transformed into 24 minutes of images, sounds, music and words which make up this documentary.



Authors' biographies

Stefania Andreotti (Screenplay, Direction, Photography)

Born in 1977 in Ferrara, Italy, where she lives.

Fellow journalist and television author.

In Mexico she documented independent communities and ELZN activities. She also cooperated with PROMEDIOS project, teaching new technologies to the natives. At the same time she shot this film, her first documentary.

Giuseppe Petruzzellis (Screenplay, Production, Editing)

Born in 1983 in Carini (Sicily – Italy). After living in Palermo and Cefalù, in 2001 moves to Ferrara, where he graduates in “Communications Technologies” (B.A.) and in “Performing Arts and Multimedia Communication” (M.A.).

His thesis “Investigative reporting and new technologies” won the first prize in the “9th National Competition for Degree Thesis on Journalism”.

From 2003 he works on the technical, authorial and organization aspects in different independent productions (short films, musical productions, theatre performances, videoart works, documentaries, websites and multimedia productions).

From November 2007 he works with RAINEWS 24 as author and consultant, working on various international investigative reports produced by the Italian all-news satellite Television.

In 2007 he establishes APLYSIA: a project going under the pay-off “creative ideas development”. Independent documentaries production is one of the fields in which Aplysia is involved, creating new short circuits between creativity and techniques, shapes and contents.





Music & musicians

Track: Reggaeton Gansta-Malianteo 2
Author: Harold Bermudez Burgos
Production: Monsterreggaeton Productions
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Tracks: Neda
Boticelli
Tabernacle Cavern
Author: Demon Doctor
Album: Onliness v1.0.1
Contacts: <http://www.onliness.org>

Track: 0409
Author: [dk]
Album: Crack
Contacts: www.endk.com

Track: Endsville
Author: 4c3
Album: Reflect
Contacts: <http://ace.esinocente.org>

Track: Seuil de Disto
Author: Amnis
Album: Deuxième essai
Contacts: www.myspace.com/krishetan

Track: You are aqui
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Thanks to...

Ministerio de Justicia del Chiapas, *ex Fiscalía General* – Mexico

IDH (Instituto de Desarrollo Humano) – Tapachula, Mexico

Albergue Jesús el Buen Pastor del Pobre y el Migrante
Tapachula, MX

Grupo Beta del Sur de Protección a Migrantes – Tapachula, Mexico

Internet Archive (www.archive.org)

Flickr (www.flickr.com)

Jamendo (www.jamendo.com)





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