This presentation explores the determinants and evolution of Nicaraguan gang violence, focusing in particular on the life history of Bismarck, a Nicaraguan youth gang member turned drug dealer turned legal entrepreneur. In particular, it examines the various economic activities that he has been involved in at different stages in his life, tracing their origins and dynamics in order to highlight not only how what might putatively be considered “formal” and “informal” behavior patterns in fact often overlap, but can also be interdependent and directly feed off each other. Bismarck’s story, however, underlines how the systemic iteration of such activities depends less on their form and more on the contingent articulation of the specific type of activity concerned, the particular trajectory of the individual social agents involved, as well as, ultimately, the nature of the broader contextual urban political economy.

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