

**Scapegoat, Criminal and Hero:
The lives of Young Offenders in Rose Marie Tapia's Novel
*Roberto Down the Right Path***

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Estos chicos son seres humanos como sus hijos, nacieron buenos, la sociedad y el entorno los corrompió. [These boys are human beings like your sons, they were born good, society and their surroundings corrupted them].

--Rose Marie Tapia

Introduction

Rose Marie Tapia's *Roberto Down the Right Path* is a contemporary Panamanian novel that uses the story of a group of marginalized young offenders to represent a hostile space within Panamanian society, and to denounce the powerfully repressive control of violence, inequality and poverty (V.I.P). These are invisible children who grow up voiceless, abandoned to their own luck, and submerged in a world of hostility, anger, and antagonism. The hostile space into which many young offenders are born, and inhabit during most of their childhood, lacks the socio-symbolic shield which should have been provided to them by their family and nation. The result of various contributing factors such as unequal educational opportunities, a hostile environment, and rampant poverty, is a negative backlash to the exclusion. Thus, they start blaming what they consider "normal society" for their hardships, and consequently, this group finds its voice, its power, and its authority through the creation of its own subculture (gang life), its own laws (scapegoating, violence and revenge), and its own economy (drugs and guns).

Tapia is a contemporary Panamanian writer and social activist whose novelistic commitment is directed towards the exposure of social problems affecting Panamanian society and society as a whole. She entered the literary scene in the year 2000, and in her narrative discourse she uses the literary subgenre of the social novel in order to capture the lives of characters affected by social problems and degradations, such as powerful addictions and violence among women and youths. Her novel *Roberto Down the Right Path* was written in 2004 and translated to English in 2010 from the Spanish *Roberto por el buen camino*. It explores the causes and consequences of youth gangs, drugs, violence, poverty, and illiteracy in today's society.

The novel presents irresolvable dichotomies, such as: violence/peace and destructive/constructive behaviors, which give rise to the questions that, constitute the key focal points of this study. For example: What are the causes of violence and destructive behaviors? Why is there an imbalance in the socioeconomic status of social groups? This study analyzes the wide range of social issues articulated in Tapia's novel, focusing on the culture of violence perpetrated by the "outsiders" (rejected-marginal individuals) and the "underclass" (the lowest social class) due to three important phenomena in society: violence and destructive behavior, inequality in education, and poverty and the poor.

Crossing borders: Two life stories in *Roberto Down the Right Path*

The story in the novel commences with nine poignant words that depict violence and terror: "Don't move, man; if you breathe, you are dead!" (15). The plot develops one fatal night

in which the protagonist Tuti and his fellow gang members ambush, rob, and attack a young law student, Luis Carlos, and his girlfriend, Susana. Susana is shot twice and is instantly killed. Luis Carlos, although also shot and left to die, survives the ordeal. These young lives dichotomize the fairness (good) and unfairness (bad) of society. Tuti and Luis Carlos are oblivious to each other's existence, but in that moment they cross borders, their lives intersect and the spaces where they previously lived converge immediately.

The first group is compounded by the protagonist "Tuti", a scapegoated criminal, and his gang of young offenders. Tuti grew up in a world of violence and abuse, illiteracy, poverty and abandonment. After having been confronted for his crimes and lack of remorse, the defiant Tuti responded: "Remorse? You know, I've asked myself that same question several times these last few days. Where's the remorse from your pig society for having allowed me to be beaten and abused from childhood? They threw me in jail for nothing; they let me go hungry for days. What do you know about suffering?" (40). Tuti had a short life filled with violence; at thirteen, he was already initiated into a gang and addicted to drugs. By fourteen, his fame and crimes promoted him within the criminal world. He was invited to participate in murders, something that he accepted as "a great honor and privilege" (57-8). At the same time, he got his first "shiny new gun" that gave him instant power, and he started to command respect and authority among other gang members as well as his friends. Paradoxically, the silver lining was that he used that power to do good for his family. He was able to provide food for his siblings and protected them from the violence he endured at home as a small child, and was now perpetrating on others. He was also able to alleviate his mother's need to prostitute herself.

At an early age and during most of his childhood, Tuti had to endure physical and psychological abuse by his parents, an alcoholic and criminal father and a promiscuous mother. He suffered a series of violent acts at the hands of his father due to his father's own failures and frustrations: "Ever since I can remember, my mother . . . called me 'scum,' 'wretch,' 'dog,' . . . The one that said he's my father, though I never saw him as one because of all the beatings he gave me . . . You can imagine that my seventh birthday was the happiest day of my life when I saw they'd brought home my father's body with eight bullet wounds from the police" (40). Without being able to protest, Tuti unwillingly became the "*chivo expiatorio*" (scapegoat) of his family (reference to the concept of "scapegoat" will be explained further below). When he came of age, he became part of a gang, armed himself, and began inflicting violence upon others as revenge for what was done to him.

Finally, at seventeen, Tuti not only changed his path 180 degrees, he even changed his name to "Roberto" for a fresh start. Although, after living a long period of his short life engaging in violent acts, in spite of his recovery, he did not end up having the fairy-tale ending of "living happily ever after". The author depicts the sad realities of gang culture and violence; Tuti does not survive the rupture with his old gang. His reintegration into society was not an easy task. His old associates wanted him to go back to his old ways, but he refused. At the age of eighteen, Tuti's life was cut short by the very same group of young offenders to which he once belonged.

The second group, contrary to the first, is represented by law-abiding citizens who follow the laws of God and society. It is embodied by Luis Carlos, a young middle-class university law student, sheltered by his mother, María Cristina, his family, and society. María Cristina was a dedicated mother who passes through a period of pursuing revenge against Tuti for hurting Luis Carlos, which almost destroys both her son's life and her own. She later confronts reality, has a change of heart, and becomes determined to help the very same groups that she once despised

and hated. She becomes a strong pillar of redemption and helps many lives break free from violence, ignorance, and homelessness. Although her actions are inexplicable, she had a motive. She did not help Tuti out of kindness of heart; “She was looking for relief for herself. It was only later that she realized the only way to prevent others from suffering like she had, was to attack the cause of the problem and to help delinquents leave their world of crime” (73).

Luis Carlos and his family motivated Tuti to quit the gang, leave the streets, and become a good citizen. After Tuti’s murder, they created the foundation “*Fundación Roberto por el buen camino*” (“*Roberto Down the Right Path Foundation*”), in honor of the once-criminal Tuti’s transformation into the hero “Roberto”. The foundation was a place dedicated to rehabilitating juvenile delinquents and to rescuing homeless youngsters from the streets and from violence. The place became a safe-haven for young offenders. It provided food, shelter, and a vocation; besides the important sense of value, self-esteem, and protection.

In the novel, Tapia emphasizes the essential destructive facts that afflict society. Ruinous actions are performed by young adults who, as she demonstrates, are born good, but become scapegoats of society at an early age. Their surroundings corrupt them, and like a cycle, they in turn blame others and learn to use the same bullying tactics on people in positions of vulnerability, making them their scapegoats. As a consequence, young and promising lives are destroyed. Tapia explains that, in her novels, she captures the lives of those affected by the degradation of today’s society. She describes how everyone must cope with these consequences and suggests changes and solutions to problems that threaten to destroy human values and lives.

In her role as a social activist, Tapia has been interviewed numerous times by local Panamanian newspapers and has given many speeches in correctional institutions and schools. During these she has fiercely advocated for young people with problems as well as criticized injustices committed against them and their right to rehabilitation. For example, in an article published by the Panamanian leading newspaper *La Estrella de Panamá* in November of 2011, Tapia denounced the beating of young offenders by guards and law enforcement officers in a juvenile correction center in Panama. In her denouncements, Tapia argued that although some juveniles are delinquents and follow a life of crime, they are human beings. She indicated that her novel is a product of the reality encountered in society. She described that while writing *Roberto Down the Right Path*, she had the opportunity to deal with a group of young offenders, learned about their crimes but also about their efforts to pay for them and their desire to amend their lives and become better individuals.

Despite her determination through her work to denounce the observable facts of V.I.P. and the facts that *Roberto Down the Right Path* has been a best-selling novel and that Tapia has received awards and recognition in Panama for her social efforts and her literature, surprisingly no academic analysis and criticism has yet been applied to it. As a result, this work provides the first scholarly critical perspective to her work.

Analysis of Tapia’s literature from a psychological and sociological perspective

The role of V.I.P. in the lives of young offenders has been analyzed and evaluated by social science disciplines for decades. In order to explain how the minds and the worlds of young perpetrators of violence work, psychology and sociology analyze and explain the causes and consequences of violent acts, whether in family upbringing or societal surroundings. Whereas sociology studies socially unacceptable deviations and diversions of individuals in society, psychology analyzes the trauma and patterns of aggression received from childhood and how they affect the psyches. Literature, however, with its literary subgenre of the social novel,

incorporates another intelligible social device in order to expose and depict the reality of what social science investigates.

Tapia's novel not only depicts real social problems in a fictional and poignant way, it also exposes social problems affecting the most vulnerable individuals in an unequal society. Roland Barthes indicates that the role of literature "is not to resolve nor evaluate this world, but to present it in its raw state to an audience who must experience it as a provocation" (qtd. in Wolfrey 258). Tapia's literature stirs the readers' feelings and provokes them to not just to be passive observers, but to go one step further: to be proactive spaces of power, engaging themselves with society, taking control of lives with the ultimate purpose of becoming agents for social change.

Violence: Exploring youth violence

Violence and gang archetypes are explored through a psychoanalytic literary criticism, which helps explain and interpret destructive behaviors and helps to resolve psychological dysfunctions. It is important to understand that despite the fact that psychoanalysis of this kind of conduct is intended for real persons with real problems, it can also be applied to the interpretation of Tapia's novel because this analysis can help the reader understand the literary characters in a most insightful way. As critic Lois Tyson explains: "If psychoanalysis can help us better understand human behavior, then it must certainly be able to help us understand literary texts which are about human behavior" (11).

Studies have demonstrated throughout time that violence and aggressive dysfunctions are learned in most cases through first-hand observation during childhood. Classic Freudian psychoanalytic principles explain that the psychological history of aggressive and destructive dysfunctions begin with childhood experiences in the family or as the result of an early occurrence in adolescence (Tyson 12). Contemporary analyses of the psyche of young violence, such as the one presented by Canadian social learning theorist Albert Bandura, explain that aggressive dysfunctions are usually caused by a process denominated "behavior modeling", from observing others either personally through "parental modelling" or through the media and environment. (204-08). To be more specific, Bandura's "Bobo Doll" experiment found that children imitate the aggression of adults in order to first, funnel their inner rage and second, to gain the approval of others (or themselves) in light of the reinforcement or reward received. (Isom par. 1). This kind of behavior "aggression first – anger displacement later", correlates with the life of the protagonist in Tapia's literature.

The phenomenon of scapegoating

If psychoanalysis correlates patterns of violence and aggressive dysfunctions learned and experienced by children in their households with their aggressive contacts with others, then it is key to understanding the phenomenon of "scapegoating" and its powerful effect in society and in the novel. Before proceeding, and in order to understand the role of the "scapegoat" in youth violence, it is necessary to briefly examine the origin of the "scapegoat". The semantic symbolism of the scapegoat has its origin in the Old Testament of the Bible as an animal (a goat) that carried away (to the wilderness) the sins of the people: "But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat" (Lev. 16.10). The New Testament also refers to the action of taking on oneself the people's sins, referring to Jesus' actions. Although the actual word "scapegoat" is not mentioned in the New Testament, many religious and scholarly articles make reference to Jesus suffering as a "scapegoat." His divine sacrifice was planned for the people's

salvation, but the fact that he needed to suffer, sweat and even become afraid of his mission to take away humanity's sin--without any fault whatsoever--made Jesus' sacrifice, an analogy to a "scapegoat."

Throughout history, powerful situations of scapegoating have been portrayed as well. For example, in the case of Nazi-Germany, the Jews were made to be scapegoats. According to social critic and French philosopher René Girard, if the person or group that provokes hostility is not at hand then a scapegoat is chosen arbitrarily and is victimized: "When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited fury is abruptly replaced by another chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand" (2). Sociologist Martin Marger explains that minority groups in multi-ethnic societies "have served as convenient and safe targets of such displaced aggressions," adding that "if the frustration is continuous, we may begin to blame more remote groups or institutions like "the government," "bureaucrats," "blacks," "Jews," or "gays." (*Race* 85). Current manifestations of scapegoating in society against innocent groups have been seen in the United States and Canada. For example, back in 1989 in Montreal, scapegoating as displaced hatred was directed towards a specific group of female students in the *Ecole Polytechnique* where more than fourteen women were killed and fourteen more were wounded by a young man with a history of physical and verbal abuse in his household. It was considered to be an anti-feminist attack against women. The killer blamed his problems on women.

The symbolism of "scapegoat" is used in various forms when referring to victimization and violence: The "scapegoat" or the innocent victim who usually pays for someone else's problems; the "scapegoater" or the person or group who causes violence and pain to innocents; and "scapegoating" or the action inflicted upon a "scapegoat." In psychology, scapegoating signals a serious family problem where one member of a family is constantly picked on, put down or abused. As Simon Crosby states: "The age-old phenomenon of scapegoating shows up everywhere. It causes great anxiety and misery. Scapegoats are found in almost every social context: in school playgrounds, in families, in small groups, and in large organizations" (Par. 2). Psychologist Lynne Namka explains: "In scapegoating, one of the authority figures has made a decision that somebody in the family has to be the bad guy, The mother or father makes one child bad and then looks for things (sometimes real, but most often imagined) that are wrong" (Par. 1) These domestic dysfunctions are depicted in Tapia's novel.

The syndrome of scapegoating in all its structural grammar displays—the scapegoat and the scapegoater (as a noun), scapegoat (as an adjective), and the scapegoating (as a verb)--is clearly represented in *Roberto Down the Right Path*. For example: Tuti sees his father inflicting pain on his mother, on his siblings and on himself, therefore he models the learned direct patterns of aggression and violence, and becomes a scapegoater. He learns to use the same behavior on people in positions of weakness and to make them his scapegoats or "*chivos expiatorios*." Most of the young offenders depicted in the novel have suffered all kinds of abuse during childhood, so they experience impotence and discrimination. Marger indicates that the essential concept of scapegoating is a situation of "hostility arising from frustration." He explains that a disturbed person "in his or her efforts to achieve a highly desired goal tends to respond with a pattern of aggression. Because the real source of frustration is either unknown or too powerful to confront directly, a substitute is found on whom the aggression can be released. The substitute target is a scapegoat, a person or group close at hand and incapable of offering resistance" (*Race* 84). In the case of Tuti, he is initially the scapegoat of the family, and after feeling safe with gangs and

violence, he later reverses position and begins inflicting violence by scapegoating others--a full circle completed.

Sociologist John A. Winterdyk writes about violence in young offenders and considers that when young people commit acts of violence, although the main focus is usually placed on what they have done - the abuse committed, he states it is important to remember that "young people are also the recipients of a great deal of violence, not only from members of their own age group, but also from adults" (27). Tapia illustrates what violence and abuse do to children, the most vulnerable agents in a power relationship in Panamanian society, and denounces the same society for not protecting children from abuse. Sometimes it is too late for later recriminations. In order to provide a current representation of the scapegoating phenomenon as reflected in the nation of Panama, Tapia also portrays in her novels the powerful Panamanian dictator Noriega's twenty-one years of dictatorship, when thousands of people suffered as his "*chivos expiatorios*" and atoned for his own failure as a leader.

Youth gangs

Every time the subjects of violence and youth come together, the term that follows is: "gangs." But what does the word "gang" really mean? And why is it usually associated with youth violence and crime? A straightforward definition of "gang" is a group of people who hang out together and share a common purpose. It has been demonstrated that gangs are a group of young individuals who engage in either minor rebellious acts of violence such as street fights - looking for approval from or in defiance of their peers- or major violent acts and criminal offenses such as drug dealing, murder, rape, and other acts of violence (*National Crime Prevention Council*). Fred Mathews, in his study of youth gangs, observes that "gang" can be related to many things, and that the word itself has its share of ambiguity. For example, he explains that the word "gang" *per se* connotes fear, controversy and misunderstanding. It can be a "judgmental and overly negative term applied too liberally and inaccurately by adults to adolescent peer associations," or to "a group of friends who like to hang out and occasionally get into trouble" (220). He also points out that when that group of friends is involved in normal activities-- whether or not they adopted a distinctive name or location-- it is just a healthy part of growing up. Mathews considers that "There is nothing developmentally or otherwise unusual about young people hanging out in groups that, in themselves, should give adults concern; that is, unless they break the law or harm others or themselves through their activities. . . . Sometimes this line is crossed accidentally; sometimes deliberately" (220).

When a group of young people become violent or antisocial and break the law, it becomes what is commonly called a "youth gang." Mathews explains that, "A 'gang' in this context, would generally consist of at least three or more youth whose membership, though often fluid, consists in at least a stable core of members who are recognized by themselves or others as a gang, and who band together for cultural, social, or other reasons and impulsively or intentionally plan and commit antisocial, violent, or illegal acts" (221). John W. Santrock further clarifies that youth gangs' involvement in violence gives them power. He explains that youth gangs are composed primarily of male members, that in the United States alone there are more than 750,000 adolescents involved in gang activities, and that they do so in order to prove loyalty and commitment to their groups. Most of them are from poor backgrounds and come from ethnic minority groups, dealing with feelings of powerlessness, and therefore they participate in violent acts in order to obtain a sense of power (479-80). He also states that "Among the risk factors that increase the likelihood an adolescent will become a gang member are disorganized neighborhoods characterized by economic hardship, family members who are

involved in a gang, drug use, lack of family support, and peer pressure from gang members to join their gangs” (479). However, it is important to bear in mind that studies have also demonstrated that “Young people of all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds participate in gangs” (*National Crime Prevention Council*). Not only the poor or visible minority.

Mathews, in his analysis argues that gangs serve as “nonconformist alternatives” for young people as well. The feelings of alienation, isolation and discrimination from society are reasons for youth gangs and criminal behaviors because of their “few or no satisfying interpersonal relationships with others” (225). But also young people group together as an expression of acceptance and love. In the novel, Tapia states that “The kids from the poor neighborhood were attracted to gangs because they provided feelings of power and security against a threatening world they hardly understood. But before their souls became completely insensitive, like what happened when they had been the perpetrators of several violent acts, those boys wanted to be better people, to have an honest job, to care for their families” (74). She argues that the government, the media, TV programs and their audiences and society’s indifference all have a share of accountability in this social problem.

Another crucial element in the relationship of power in violence and gang activities is the peer pressure dynamic. Youth delinquents constantly face pressure from older or more experienced peers. Usually an older friend becomes a “mentor” and provides all the necessary information to his addition to the crime family. Tapia’s novel portrays it with Tuti and his encounter with the character “*El Muerto*” [“The Dead”] and with death itself. Tuti, through his friend nicknamed “the Dead”, learned an easy and fast way to ascend the ladder of power, that is, from being the poor and ignorant young boy to being the respected and admired authority figure: by the replacement of his “rusty gun” for a powerful 9 millimeter and by involvement in heavy gang activities and drug dealings.

Guns and shootings are a central part of gang activity as well. The feeling of protection against other rival gangs makes the participants carry weapons, especially if illicit activities such as drugs and robberies are on their to-do list. The need to protect themselves against other perpetrators of violence gives them, in their own eyes, “the right” to be armed. Sociologist Thomas Gabor, in a study about gun crime in Canada, analyses the use of guns in crimes committed in large cities. He cites Toronto as the most consistent place of gun-related violence in Canada. As an example he indicates that 300 people were murdered by guns in 2005. “Gun violence is a legitimate concern, particularly in various urban settings, given the escalation of gang violence and the brazenness [coldness] of many shootings” (147-48). Sociologists James D. Wright, Peter H. Rossi and Kathleen Daly, in an analysis on weapons, crime and violence in America, explain that the United States has more gun deaths than any other country in the world. They quote a study comparing the border cities of Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario’s gun related deaths: The “sister cities” ratio is approximately 100 to 3 cases. (2-3).

In the novel, for example, Tuti realizes that the acquisition of a gun, his desired weapon, gave him not only a sense of authority among his fellow gang members, where he climbed the ladder of power and changed from being at the bottom of the ladder to rapidly ascending towards the top, but he also found himself in the blink-of-an-eye not only the leader of his gang family, but the provider (through drug-dealing) and protector (through his gun) of his own family as well. The power that the gun anoints on Tuti, give him a sense of power and a dominant feeling. He became the leading party, imposing his will on and directing others, and not the other way around. He changed from being the oppressed to becoming the oppressor, from being invisible to becoming visible, from being voiceless to having a powerful voice.

Inequality and Poverty

Although the dissimilarity portrayed in the novel between the two groups (the group of young offenders led by Tuti, and the group of law-abiding citizens led by Luis Carlos and his mother) is manifested in large part through the dichotomy of violent and nonviolent circumstances, it is important to keep in mind that the protagonist's childhood--and that of the group of young offenders, for that matter--was not only robbed as a result of his status as family scapegoat and his violent upbringing, but also due to lack of opportunities for a better life. When referring to inequalities affecting the lowest link in a power relationship, as is the group of young offenders in Tapia's novel, the subject of "power" and how the powerful in society get the best of everything, including education, should be foremost in the discussion. French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault argues that there is power in all human contact because power is the thin film that covers all human interaction inside or outside institutional structures: "Power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitude, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (38). His philosophy clearly extends to education, the institutions that provide learning, and the society that delivers it. It helps to explain the persistence of inequality in education and the maldistribution of wealth.

Public education has come to be known as an institution founded on the idea of equal opportunity for education for all, not only for the privileged. But as Marger explains, the original idea of equality was ironically implemented by educational institutions themselves, becoming agents in sustaining the structure of inequality. Marger considers that one of the main factors that contributes to inequality is: "The relationship between education and socioeconomic status operates in a cycle that is perpetuated from one generation to the next: The higher the income and occupational status of the parents, the greater the amount and quality of the children's education. In turn, the greater the amount and quality of the children's education, the higher will be their income and occupational status as adults" (*Social Inequality* 206).

This relationship between education and socioeconomic status is presented by Tapia. She defines a series of patterns of inequality affecting the two groups depicted that indicate who has power and who does not. For example, due to the extreme poverty and ignorance in his household, Tuti is only permitted to attend school until the third grade. Luis Carlos, however, has the opportunity to attain the best education. As a consequence, when they crossed paths Tuti is nearly illiterate, he barely knows how to read, and is therefore unable to possibly attain any good opportunities in life, while Luis Carlos is an excellent student with a promising future ahead of him who later advances unto a university law career. The dichotomous factors of familial guidance versus familial abandonment also illustrate the pattern of inequalities encountered in societies.

In the novel, the two groups encounter unequal types of guidance and support at an early age that determine their lawful versus unlawful behaviors. Their familial and social class environments of which education--or lack thereof—is a key part, determine the encouragements and expectations that Luis Carlos receives and that Tuti does not. For example, Tuti does not have adult supervision or much-needed guidance and no one instills in him the importance of education; he only receives belittlement from his parents. On the other hand, Luis Carlos has his family as well as the society that surrounds him supporting his learning process. In the novel, after the two main characters cross borders, and get to know each other, Luis Carlos himself says: "How different things might have been if this boy would have an opportunity for a better education" (57).

Sociologist Jonathan Kozol explains that: “We are children once; and after those few years are gone, there is no second chance to make amends. In this respect, the consequences of unequal education have a terrible finality. Those who are denied cannot be “made whole” by a later act of government. Those who get the unfair edge cannot later be stripped of that which they have won” (180). Tuti’s lack of proper education and guidance forces him to enter the work force as a drug mule, dealing drugs as the main source of income for his household. A poor child like Tuti has had to become “the father” for his younger siblings, needing to work and to bring home the money. Luis Carlos lives an easy life without carrying the burden of needing to provide for his family. He is dedicated to his studies. Whereas Luis Carlos is protected and encouraged, Tuti is denied those important shields that should have been provided by family, educational institutions, society and government. Two lives are surrounded by a cluster of inequalities, and the life in a superior socioeconomic position produces better results.

Rose Marie Tapia portrays the manifestation of scarceness and confronts the readers with the harsh living conditions affecting poor communities. She demonstrates that a lack of resources and childhood abandonment are the primary sources of youth delinquency. The main message is clear and poignant: Tuti and the group of young offenders are victims of social inequality manifested in society. It is portrayed persistently throughout the chapters with dramatic, vivid examples. However, while making an implicit call for proactive action against the problem of poverty, Tapia issues an explicit challenging call to the readers of the novel: “If we all cooperate according to our responsibilities, I as citizen, and you as the media, the politicians, and the elected officials, don’t you think we could achieve something?” (76).

Finally, this study has clearly demonstrated and emphasized the interrelationship of violence, scapegoating, and gangs in correlation with unequal educational opportunities and poverty affecting the lives of young offenders. The reader can clearly see and understand the effects of these factors, not only on the mind and behavior of the fictional characters in Tapia’s literature, but also on the behavior of human beings in general.

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