

Social and Political Fractures after Wars

Youth Violence in Cambodia and Guatemala

The 1990s saw the conclusion of numerous internal wars through negotiation processes. The resulting peace processes have been very fragile, however. A backslide into war is just one aspect of this fragility. All post-war societies are exposed to social and political fractures. The transformation process resulting from this correlation is threefold: it encompasses democratization, market reforms and pacification. Post-war societies show a great degree of variation coping with the resulting problems. The project assumes that the empirically observed differences in the incident of violence in post-war societies can be explained due to this context. We focus on youth violence in its collective form, because the situation of juveniles in post-war societies is exemplary for most problems post-war societies face. The comparison of two societies with differing incidents of violence (high in Guatemala, low in Cambodia) aims at developing research strategies for both the exploration of post-war societies and youth violence.



Tikal, Guatemala ©privat

Guatemala:
 Population: 12.3 million
 War: 1980-1996
 Victims: 200.000
 UN-Mission MINUGUA
 1994-2004
 First elections 1985
 Political system:
 presidential

Cambodia:
 Population: 13.9 million
 War: 1968-1991
 Victims: 2 million
 UN-Mission UNTAC
 1992-1993
 First elections 1993
 Political system:
 constitutional monarchy



Angkor, Cambodia ©privat

Although out of different regional and cultural contexts Guatemala and Cambodia do share a series of common features. The wars in both countries had high human costs and destroyed traditional systems of social relations. Both countries are demographically young, over 25% of the population are between 15 and 29 years old. The project wants to ask if this background can explain the different forms and quantity of youth violence. Therefore we are looking at the following issues:

Variations in the traditional role of youth: What are the central rites of passage? How are young people integrated in society? What role do peer groups have?



Maras, Guatemala ©AP



Thai riots, Cambodia ©AP

Forms of youth violence: Who is targeted and why? What is the role of political, social, ritualised, situational violence and violence for personal enrichment?

Consequences of war and war termination: How do juveniles cope with the experience of violence and the destruction of social relations? How are they integrated in the economic and political systems? What are their reference points in society? How did traditional forms of youth organisations change in the context of war and war termination? Are youth involved in discourses on civil conflict transformation?

Society's response to youth violence: Are adolescents integrated or criminalised? How do gangs relate to the political systems in Cambodia and Guatemala? What are the exit options? What can internal and external actors do to promote civil forms of conflict transformation? How does society treat the common past? Is violence legitimised or delegitimised?

Organisational forms of youth violence: What kind of organizations exist? Are they permanent? How are they structured? What is the factor of identification and what networks of protection do exist? Is there an active role of girls and young women? Do these organizations have connections with spoilers of the peace process? Are they involved in criminal or illegal activities?

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