



Violence in Peace – Violencia en tiempos de Paz. Forms, causes and possibilities of limitation of violent crime in Central America. Leipzig: Prof. Dr. Zinecker, Institut für Politikwissenschaft, Universität Leipzig, 25.03.2009-28.03.2009.

Reviewed by Warnecke Hannes

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (December, 2009)

Violence in Peace – Violencia en tiempos de Paz. Forms, causes and possibilities of limitation of violent crime in Central America

Introduction

Now, more than 15 years after the signings of the Peace Accords which brought the Central American civil wars to an end, three nations in this region continue to rank highly among the most violent countries in the world.

The homicide rates of the region show these facts quite plainly: in 2006/2007 the average numbers of murders and homicides per 100.000 citizens were 56.2 in El Salvador, 46.2 in Guatemala and 37.5 in Honduras, demonstrating the current amount of violence is even higher than in the period of the civil wars in the 1980s.

Since the pacification of the region, political violence has been losing more and more its importance to the point of today's insignificance. Quite contrary to this, the violent landscape today is dominated by violent crime, which dictates the contemporary face of Central America.

Concurrently however, in the same region – with Costa Rica and Nicaragua – two countries do not face this amount of violence, quite contradictorily, offer moderate or almost inexistent rates of violence. In terms of homicides, Costa Rica counts 7.7, Nicaragua 14, although Nicaragua faced a civil war in its past as well.

These statistics figure out a clear gap between, on the one side the countries of the *âtriángulo del norteâ* – Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras – and, on the other side, the more southern countries Nicaragua and

Costa Rica. With the aim to explain this gap, Prof. Dr. HEIDRUN ZINECKER (Leipzig) organized in cooperation with the German Research Foundation (DFG) a conference which also finalized her research project *âForms and causes of violence in Central Americaâ*. She invited Central American scholars, exponents of the security sectors – among others the Honduran Minister of Defense – and former criminal violent actors to report the reasons of becoming violent and to figure out the differences between these countries. Furthermore, social scientists of different professions and different countries – from the US, Europe and Mexico – have been comparing cross-regionally and interdisciplinary the causes and forms of the occurring violence in today's Central America. Finally, a roundtable discussion of all participants and representatives of the German Development Coordination (GTZ) should provoke answers how to face the violence and how to develop violent crime reducing possibilities and policies.

Conference's proceeding

In her introductory speech, Zinecker distinguished enabling structures from preventive structures of violent crime. Enabling structures offer the ground for violence, whereas preventive structures avoid violence, even if there are enabling structures present. The high amount of remittances in the region now leads to a deep societal change. Through remittances, which are transforming the economic structure of the recipient countries in regard to foreign exchange and income, rent economy is persistent. In rent economies violence can always be a

common substrate getting access to the more or less monopolized market and therefore, relative deprivations affect the non recipient households, which further produce violence.

On the other hand, Zinecker mentioned the poor performance and repressive nature of the security sector, which she describes in terms of regime-hybridity. This situation leads to almost inexistent preventive structures, hence violence cannot be avoided. Explaining the gap between the violence ridden countries in the North and on the other side Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Zinecker noted that even remaining enabling structures are repelled by, in the case of Nicaragua, lower remittance flows and thus enduring preventive structures. These could be established through a proactive and preventive police system, which is in addition encouraged by a community-level self-organizing civil society and a participating entrepreneurship in cooperation with the security sector.

According to Zinecker, this example demonstrates the possibility of containing violence without overcoming underdevelopment and poverty. This is, in contrary to mainstream crime discourse, an example as well, which shows, that the roots of crime cannot be searched in poverty, but in rent economy and regime hybridity. One resort could be described as the enforcement of local investment production leading to empowerment of labor, and effective criminal prosecution impeding impunity finally leading to a non repressive security sector.

In response to this speech, PETER WALDMANN (Augsburg) criticized the structuralist position, hence the concentration on political and economic aspects. On the one hand, Waldmann challenged the use of the rent concept in regard to remittances. Remittances should in his view rather be seen as a family-intern distribution system, while already produced surplus in the host country of migration will be transferred. The utilization of the rent concept will lead to a demonization of remittances, especially in regard to the USA. On the other hand, he opposed Zinecker's regime-hybridity concept. Hence the inefficiency of the security sector seemed him to be evident, but in spite of suggesting a relationship between democratization and decreasing violence which in his view would be integral to regime-hybridity, he proposed the concentration on sociological and socio-cultural aspects of violence. Therefore, neither abstract nor complicated theoretical buildings would be necessary.

After this cross-national introduction, now regional specialists turned to each country to deepen the argumentation and to transfer the main questions to their

area of activity.

Concerning Guatemala, NADINE JANSSEN (Guatemala) concentrated on youth violence. With the changing law basis in the US since the 1990s, criminals without US citizenship have been deported in its countries of origins. Arrived in Guatemala, the youths are facing integration problems without public support and, evidently, without public integration programs. The only persisting structure absorbing deported adolescent persons are youth gangs (pandillas). These forms are not new and could be found in historical periods of Guatemala as well, but, nowadays, youth gangs acting more violent and in specific forms. Evidence could be found in the enormous brutality and abusiveness. Facing these problems, the state can't react adequately; notwithstanding, police and military forces are patrolling, delinquency seems to rest on constant high levels. Additionally, the lecture assumed the existence of extrajudicial executions. Explaining the youth violence, Janssen harked back to the psychological theories: Therefore, the subjectivity of gang members is created in an environment of migration and discrimination which leads to specific situations of uncertainty. In those angst-ridden situations, violence is produced and reproduced through the gang members. Insofar, violent actors, such as youth gangs, must be described as non-political actors contrasted to guerillas or paramilitary associations based on ideologies.

Commenting Janssen, SABINE KURTENBACH (Hamburg) encouraged the focus of investigation on disruption and continuity of violence. She agreed to Janssen concerning the long history of youth gangs in Guatemala, mentioning the student participation in the era of Ubico. On the other hand, there are also ruptures regarding the development of violent acts' brutality of today's gang members. In addition, youth violence will be instrumentalized as scapegoat of all forms of violence. This leads, so Kurtenbach, to a criminalization of youth and poverty.

Confronting the high levels of violence, the region adopted a zero tolerance strategy of tough hand (mano dura), even partly with popular support. These strategies were criticized by JULIETA CASTELLANOS (Honduras). According to her, already successfully completed progresses in regard to civil rights have now been cutting back. Evidence shows empirical data of trust in popular institutions. In a survey of LAPOP, 207 out of 1522 respondents answered, that they had been victimized of any sort of crime. The mistrust in popular institutions will be explicit regarding crime denunciation. 79% of

the respondents did not denunciate their assault. 51% said, that there is no use of denunciation, 19.7% actually feared repression. Castellanos drew the conclusion that institutional mistrust could lead to impunity and vigilant justice. Moreover, today's Honduras is facing a change in the structure of violence. The old political violence would be detached by new forms of organized crime, drug and arms trade, which are now one of the leading violent actors.

One of the principle problems dealing empirical data in development countries mentioned PETER PEETZ (Hamburg). In his commentary on Castellanos, first he compared homicide data produced by World Health Organization (WHO), which states in Honduras 13.8 homicides per 100.000 habitants in 2004, whereas the Observatorio de la Violencia talks about some 32.2 homicides in the same year. Taking empirical data from the WHO, in contrast to data from the Observatorio, would therefore imply already same levels of violence compared to Nicaragua, one of the countries with undeniable low violence and crime rates. Second, he emphasized the inhuman situation of the penal system, with special regard to prisoners' conditions. While the political elites of Honduras do not recognize the disastrous situation of the countries' prisons, violence is omnipresent inside. The elites' unwillingness also leads Peetz to the conclusion, that the evaluation of the possible change in future must be negative.

An analogue picture could be drawn from El Salvador. In recent years, the Government intensified more and more the repressive nature of the security sector. MARLON CARRANZA (San Salvador) even went so far to call the regime 'authoritarian populism'. During the last years, the government has introduced the anti youth gang laws (ley anti-mara) just as well as the politics of *mano dura*. Despite the fact that even some of these law enforcements have been proved to be unconstitutional, these laws have been applied, partly with popular support. Nevertheless, violence and crime still is persistent, if not increasing. Investigations of the Salvadoran public opinion will show that the perception of the security system's credibility is very low. Therefore, Carranza mentioned, that the population has to see concrete results in their daily life which have to be applied by a democratic government with democratic politics.

HELEN RUPP (Leipzig) criticized the foundation of Carranza's argumentation concerning the increasing violence. She accented, that the relation between decreasing rates of trust in the police and crime kept ambiguous.

On the other way round, it could also be possible, that first the trust in police decreased, what then could have provoked higher crime rates. Basically, she pointed out that the concentration on homicide rates would exclusively respect forms of violence which lead to death, and therefore would recess forms of violence below homicides, such as injuries or particularly domestic violence. Subsequently, the low level countries came to the fore and the discussion concentrated on the question why, in the case of Nicaragua actually with a seemingly similar history, nowadays, Costa Rica and Nicaragua do not face these amounts of violent crime. But, increasing rates of violence could be found in Costa Rica as well even though on a much lower level than in the northern countries of Central America. RODOLFO CALDERON (Costa Rica) tried to explain this change focusing on institutional resources. In his argumentation one reason of increasing violence could be seen in the unequal access to those resources like formal employment, social security and public services. Since the 1980s, a more or less oligarchic group has been establishing through social organizations a monopoly situation in which this group now is able to control the overall use of institutional resources. Therefore, a much greater group of the population in terms of quantity could not participate in these institutions, affecting education and finally the society's inclusionary capacity as a hole. Summing up, Calderon described this situation as program of cultural integration through consumption, existing for years, but now provoking exclusion, thereby relative deprivation which finally leads to higher rates of violence.

In his comment, WOLFGANG GABBERT (Hannover) concentrated his critics on the methodological work of Calderon. The operationalization of the term 'social inclusion' through formal employment would neither respect informal employment nor subsistence production which would lead itself to the exacerbation and further marginalization of the informal sector well just because of its negative discursive connotation.

SERGIO CUAREZMA (Managua) attended to Nicaragua's situation. Here, as in the introduction mentioned, violence rates are lower than in the countries of the 'triangulo del norte'. But in recent years violence is returning back to society, although through other links. In the first place, youth gangs would have to be treated in another way. Nicaragua has a longstanding tradition of youth gangs, but with special differences compared to those in El Salvador or Guatemala. In these countries, youth gangs are more incorporated in organized crime, drug and arms trade. In Nicaragua, *pandillas* are

bound back to their families and neighborhoods. Here, the youth gangs compensating essential state functions. Youths are integrated in society through youth gangs, but, and this refers to violence, pandillas are cooperating even sometimes with the police. Secondly, the police and moreover the whole security system never passed through a period of repression as an answer to high crime rates. Contrary to this, Nicaragua's police forces are acting in prevention. But, and this leads to the question of increasing violence even in Nicaragua, Cuarezma argued that violence occurs not in organized forms, but localized and often invisible regarding violence against women.

With this speech the conference left the country centered part and turned to a broader view upon the whole region. The preceding contributions underlined particularly institutional arrangements. Therefore, the police strategy seems to be one of the central parts of the explanation of high crime rates. In comparative terms, VINAY JAWAHAR (Princeton) disputed the relationship between the police's actions and the legal system affecting violence. His hypothesis therefore was that arbitrary and sometimes even illegal authority's practices passing through the legal framework would produce civil mistrust vis-à-vis state institutions which would finally be leading to violent behavior. This would be caused through a change in people's perceptions regarding costs of delinquent actions. Delinquency therefore could be described as a low cost situation, at least lower than following the legal framework. One principle point then will be the acceptance of police's as nearest institutional perception of the legal system's attitudes compared to society. Thus, Jawahar mentioned the preventive and community based approach of police work in Nicaragua whereas El Salvador and Guatemala are facing repressive approaches (*mano dura*) and illustrated this on arrestment rates. Additionally, high arrestment rates led to overcrowded prisons which in turn would reproduce criminal activity and violence. This coherence is much more apparent in the case of Guatemala and El Salvador where crime organizations are now controlled out of the prisons. Beside of methodological critics, JONAS WOLFF (Frankfurt) demanded for intensified research for questions of evolving police strategies. Why are the Nicaraguan police today in such a different status, than these of the northern countries of Central America?

GEOFF THALE (Washington) further deepened this question. His main focus of attention laid in the jointly low violence rates in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Firstly, he criticized the main treatment of violence in the term

âhomicideâ although violence is appearing in different forms. This led him to separate distinctive forms of homicides to demonstrate the different roots of violence. This, finally, would also affect the policy solutions. Every certain policy must therefore be developed in appropriate manners to every distinctive form of violence. The list headed first homicides linked to drug traffic, secondly followed by organized crime other than drug trade. On third place, Thale mentioned homicides caused by youth gangs, fourthly common delinquency, and, finally, domestic violence. To treat all these different forms of violence with the same methods, hence with the same attendance would not impede its occurrence. Secondly, Thale compared the Central American countries with special respect to the low violence countries. Pointing out the security system, Nicaragua and Costa Rica could report a much more professional and nonpolitical police force. In addition, although there are youth gangs in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, they are not as strong as in quantitative terms, and differ, as in the case of Nicaragua already mentioned, in qualitative terms compared to the countries of the âtriangulo del norteâ. This point could be illustrated with the number of deportations of youths from host countries which has happened more frequently in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Finally, but more speculatively, the political culture of Nicaragua and Costa Rica impede violent outbreaks through the communitarian organization and therefore stronger values as in the cases of the northern countries.

The communitarian path following, MO HUME (Glasgow) stated, that violence seemed to be socially accepted and had been in various historical situations self reproducing. Today, this reflects the profound role of violence in education and inside the domestic space. Therefore, violence could also be seen as a only partially perceived problem, partly accepted and even in some parts of the society politically exploited. According to Hume, the political class of El Salvador has successfully created an image of violence to which the youth gangs are the only derived enemy.

As violence is constructed as a social problem, Hume's thesis about the created image of violence could be mentioned as an attempt of retention of power that would imply certain adopted strategies to control violence. A good fortification of this thesis would be the zero tolerance strategy (*mano dura*) in El Salvador. Consequential of this logic, Hume stated that poverty would be criminalized by linking it with violence and delinquency. MICHAEL RIEKENBERG (Leipzig) picked up Hume's argumentation with regard to the dynamics of violence. In

his perspective the main focus of research should not lay in the study of the causes of violence, but in the dynamics and thus the narrative of violence. Finally, this implies a change of perspective away from macro investigations more to an anthropology of violence orientated on every day live and more to the strategies of people living in a violent context.

Finally, a round table should provoke practical answers how to the emerging issues of high and in some cases even raising violence rates. Three basic points can be mentioned, which upon all participants agreed.

First, the politics of zero tolerance (*mano dura*) failed in fighting against violence and crime. Contrary, these political issues even deepened the region's problem, now facing the highest crime rates ever before. However, secondly, the Nicaraguan good example should be used to come back to a communitarian preventive police strategy. Third, special attention should be spent to the transnational element of the contemporary crime situation, leading particularly from drug trade. Resolving this should also provoke, for instance, transnational reactions. Finally, some of the participants mentioned the correlation of crime and development. Central America even today is one of the world's poverty ridden regions, which one the one hand, do not offer adequate income possibilities but, contrary to his, posses one of the highest income inequality. These situations could also be one of the links producing violence.

Final Remarks

Unfortunately, the research landscape concerning violence is still divided into two very distinctive positions. One the one hand, a structural perspective talking about the state, economic relationships and relative deprivations in the tradition of Durkheim and Merton could be separated from a more constructivist position mentioning the social construction of violence, the tolerance of some forms of violence whereas other forms are contested and finally the perception of violence and politics and their influence on people's attitudes. Intermediary positions between these currents are rare. The conference made clear, that this antagonism still exists. On the one hand, structuralist analysis were broad into field, which accentuated the role of social structures and their change, rent dynamics in the economic system and migration affecting both remittances and their influencing capacity on families at home. On the other hand, constructivist analysis emphasized the social construction of violence. Some kinds of violence in this perspective would not be recognized as violence itself, demonstrated, for instance, in the case of domestic violence. Moreover,

the perceptions of violence seem to be important in this view. How does a certain situation produce through the perception a sentiment of insecurity?

These are both useful tools to analyze violence, but nobody tried to benefit in linking these academic views. Definitely, for example youth gangs are founded on social structures in a changing social environment, and definitely, they produce sentiments of insecurity which could be used for power politics. But, and this seems to be the culminating point, they also produce their cultural space, their appropriate rituals, which, in certain examples, involcrate the neighbors, the police, the state, etc. This in turn offers dynamics to understand the violent spiral and their confronting elements. Therefore, one interesting research question should also be how the people confronting violent situations in their daily lives, react, answer, and reproduce their own ways living with or containing violence and how these micro elements of violence are linked to macro elements such as politics and economics. This position could gain from both, the structuralist and the constructivist violence approach. Finally, for everybody still interested in the conference's subject, the conference anthology will be released in early 2010.

Konferenz-Åbersicht

Wednesday, 25.03.2009

chair: Heidrun Zinecker, Institute of Political Science, University of Leipzig

welcome: Wolfgang Fach, Vice-Rector for Teaching and Studies, University of Leipzig

Discussion with:

Angel Edmundo Orellana Mercado, Minister of Defense, Republic of Honduras

Gabriel Aguilera, Ambassador, Republic of Guatemala

Edgardo Mallagray Suarez, Ambassador, Republic of El Salvador

Karla Luzette Beteta Brenes, Envoy, Embassy of the Republic of Nicaragua

Lothar Brock, Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt am Main

Alfrono de Toro, Ibero-American Research Centre of the University of Leipzig (IAFSL)

Matthias Middell, Global and European Studies Institute, University of Leipzig

Andreas Anter, Institute of Political Science, University of Leipzig

chair: Michael Riekenberg, Department of History, University of Leipzig

opening speech: Heidrun Zinecker
 comment: Peter Waldmann, University of Augsburg
 \$
 Academic Perspectives from Central America
 chair: Sven Schaller, Institute of Political Science,
 University of Leipzig

Presentations and Comments by:
 Nadine Janssens, STRATEGOS Guatemala
 Sabine Kurtenbach, German Institute of Global and
 Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg

Julieta Castellanos, Universidad Nacional Autonom
 de Honduras (UNAH)

Peter Peetz, German Institute of Global and Area
 Studies (GIGA), Hamburg

Malron E. Carranza, Instituto Universitario de
 OpiniÃ³n PÃºblica (IUDOP) Universidad Centroameri
 cana âJosÃ© SimeÃ³n CaÃ±asâ, San Salvador, El Sal
 vador

Helen Rupp, University of Leipzig
 Rodolfo Calderon, Institute of Sociology âSan Pedro
 Montes de Ocaâ, University of Costa Rica,

Wolfgang Gabbert, Institute of Sociology and Social
 Psychology, University of Hannover

Sergio J. Cuarezma Teran, Judge, Supreme Court,
 Nicaragua / Instituto de Estudio e InvestigaciÃ³n
 JurÃ¡dica, (INEJ), Managua

Thursday, 26.03.2009
 External Perspectives
 chair: Kristin Seffer, Institute of Political Science,
 University of Leipzig

Presentations and Comments by:
 Geoff Thale, Washington Office on Latin America
 (WOLA)

Sven Schaller, Institute of Political Science, Univer
 sity of Leipzig

Mo Hume, Department of Politics, University of Glas
 gow

Michael Riekenberg, Department of History, Univer
 sity of Leipzig

Vinay Jawahar, Department of Politics, Princeton
 University, N.Y.,

Jonas Wolff, Peace Research Institute (HSFK), Frank
 furt am Main

Ailsa Winton, Institute of Geography, Universidad
 AutÃ³noma de MÃ©xico (UNAM)

Ingrid Wehr, Arnold Bergstraesser Institute, Freiburg

Perspectives of Central American ex-violent Actors
 chair: Kristin Seffer, Institute of Political Science,

University of Leipzig

Presentations and Comments by:

Humberto Gonzales, HIV Prevention Project, Aso
 ciaciÃ³n Panamericana de Mercadeo Social (PASMO),
 Managua

Gustavo Cifuentes, AsociaciÃ³n para la PrevenciÃ³n
 del Delito (APREDE), Guatemala

Ronaldo Jovel Miranda, GeneraciÃ³n X, Honduras
 Ulrike Purrer Guardado, Research Academy Leipzig,
 University of Leipzig

Friday, 27.03.2009

Perspectives from the Security Sector

chair: Ricardo Gomez Pomeri, Deutsche Gesellschaft
 fÃ¼r Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Nicaragua

Presentations and Comments by:

Eric Alfredo Chirino Sanchez, Judge, Tribunal de
 CasaciÃ³n Penal del II Circuito Judicial de San JosÃ©,
 Costa Rica

Kurt MÃ¼hler, Institute of Sociology, University of
 Leipzig

Aida Lz Santos Escobar, Judge, Centro Penal Inte
 grado âIsidro Menendezâ, San Salvador, El Salvador, In
 stitute of European, International and Public Law, Uni
 versity of Leipzig

Angel Edmundo Orellana Mercado, Minister of De
 fense, Republic of Honduras

Lothar Brock, Peace Research Institute (HSFK),
 Frankfurt am Main

chair: Wolf Grabendorff, Ravensburg

Presentations and Comments by:

Aminta Granera Sacasa, National Police of Nicaragua
 Wolf Grabendorff, Ravensburg

Hamyn Gurdian A., National Police of Nicaragua /
 BID Program, Nicaragua

Peter Kreuzer, Peace Research Institute (HSFK),
 Frankfurt am Main

Alejandro Giammattei, Gran Alianza Nacional
 (GAN), Republic of Guatemala / Ex-General Director
 of the Penal System of Guatemala

Ulrich BrÃ¼ckling, Institute of Political Science, Uni
 versity of Leipzig

Saturday, 28.03.2009

Round Table: Violence Prevention in Central Amer
 ica: Whatâs to do?

chair: Heidrum Zinecker, Institute of Political Sci
 ence, University of Leipzig

Ricardo Gomez Pomeri, Deutsche Gesellschaft fÃ¼r
 Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Nicaragua

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Warnecke Hannes. Review of , *Violence in Peace – Violencia en tiempos de Paz. Forms, causes and possibilities of limitation of violent crime in Central America*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. December, 2009.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=28849>

Copyright © 2009 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.