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Why Is Liberal Peace-building So Difficult? Some Lessons from Central America

Sabine Kurtenbach

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Editor of the GIGA Working Paper Series: Anja Zorob <zorob@giga-hamburg.de>

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GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies /
Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien

Neuer Jungfernstieg 21

20354 Hamburg

Germany

E-mail: info@giga-hamburg.de

Website: www.giga-hamburg.de

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Abstract

The termination of war is mostly seen as a basis not just for recovery but for a fundamental transformation or change in development paths towards peace, stability and development. The Central American peace processes of the last decades were one of the first laboratories for the liberal peace-building paradigm which assumes that the threefold transformation to peace, democracy and market economy is a self-strengthening process leading to sustainable development. Although none of the three countries slipped back into war, serious deficits remain. This paper introduces an analytical framework that aims at interrelating the threefold transformation with the impact generated by four processes. These include the repercussions generated by the international system on a country's society, its historical, cultural and social foundations, the legacies of violence and the peace-building initiatives the country concerned has witnessed. The comparative analysis of changes in the public security sector, the political system, conflict resolution and the use of resources show why there is so much path dependency that can explain the deficits of transformation.

Key words: Peace-building, path-dependency, public security, political system, conflict resolution, resource use, Central America

Dr. Sabine Kurtenbach

is political scientist and Senior Research Fellow at the GIGA Institute of Latin American Studies (on leave). Currently she is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Peace and Development (INEF) at the University of Duisburg-Essen in a research project on youth violence in post-war countries.

Contact: <kurtenbach@giga-hamburg.de> or <skurtenbach@inef.uni-due.de>

Website: <<http://staff.giga-hamburg.de/kurtenbach/>> or

<<http://inef.uni-due.de/page/mitarbeiter.html/skurtenbach>>.

Zusammenfassung

Warum ist liberales Peace-building so schwierig? Erfahrungen aus Mittelamerika

Die Beendigung interner Kriege wird vielfach nicht nur als Möglichkeit für einen Wiederaufbau, sondern auch für eine grundlegende Transformation und einen Pfadwechsel zugunsten von Frieden, Stabilität und Entwicklung betrachtet. Die mittelamerikanischen Friedensprozesse der vergangenen Dekaden waren ein Versuchslabor für das Paradigma des liberalen Peace-building, das in der Annahme gründet, dass der dreifache Transformationsprozess bestehend aus Befriedung, Demokratisierung und marktwirtschaftlicher Öffnung einen sich selbst verstärkenden Prozess zugunsten nachhaltiger Entwicklung in Gang setzt. Obwohl keines der drei Länder in den Kriegszustand zurückfiel, weisen die Transformationsprozesse in allen drei Nachkriegsgesellschaften grundlegende Defizite auf, die weder als Erbe der Kriege noch als „normale“ Entwicklungsprobleme erklärt werden können. In dieser Studie wird zunächst ein Analyserahmen entworfen, der die dreifache Transformation mit den Einflüssen und Wechselwirkungen zwischen vier Prozessen systematisch in Beziehung setzt: dem internationalen System, den historischen, kulturellen und sozialen Grundlagen der betroffenen Gesellschaften, dem Erbe der Gewalt und den Initiativen der Friedensentwicklung selbst. Während die internationale Gemeinschaft grundlegende Reformen verlangte, zeigten die drei Länder unterschiedliche Fähigkeiten, mit den Herausforderungen der Transformationsprozesse umzugehen. Der Vergleich der Entwicklungen in den Bereichen öffentliche Sicherheit, politisches System, Konfliktbearbeitung und Ressourcennutzung zeigt, warum pfadabhängige Entwicklungen vorherrschen und diese die Defizite der Transformation erklären.

Why is Liberal Peace-building so Difficult? Some Lessons from Central America

Sabine Kurtenbach

Article Outline

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2. A Contextual Framework for the Analysis of Post-war Societies
3. Continuities and Fractures of Peace-building in Central America
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1. Introduction

Twenty years ago, on August 7 of 1987, the Central American presidents signed a comprehensive peace treaty which was the first important step to end the various internal wars. The Esquipulas-II-Treaty laid the foundation for the de-escalation of the wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala that had provoked a series of intrastate incidents and made the region one of the international trouble spots. During the following ten years peace accords were signed in Nicaragua (1990), in El Salvador (1992) and in Guatemala (1996).¹ War and violence took over 300,000 lives, caused the flight of two million Central Americans from their homes, and destroyed a significant portion of the already weak social and economic in-

1 For the peace processes at the regional and the national levels see Amson 1999, Child 1992, Dunkerley 1994, Isacson 1997, Rouquié 1992 among others.

frastructure. The formal end of the wars was seen as a basis not just for recovery but for a fundamental transformation of the region towards peace, stability and development. From a global perspective, Central America was one of the first laboratories for the liberal peace-building paradigm which assumes the threefold transformation to peace, democracy and market economy is a self-strengthening process leading to sustainable development.² Although none of the three countries slipped back into war, serious deficits remain that can be explained neither as a legacy of war nor as 'normal' development problems.

This paper tries to explain the current problems of the post-war societies as a result of the interdependency and interaction of the threefold transformation processes of democratization, economic liberalization and pacification. Post-war transformation does not happen in a vacuum but is a result of the influence of four processes that have different dynamics and time horizons. These include the impact generated by the international system on a country's society, its historical, cultural and social foundations, the legacies of violence and the peace-building initiatives the country concerned has witnessed. While the international community pressed for substantial reforms, the three Central American post-war societies showed a varying capacity to cope with the challenges these changes provoked. Most academic research as well as international cooperation assumes that the termination of war is one of the 'critical junctures' for development processes, opening a window of opportunity for reform and change in path-dependent processes. The Central American cases show that even ten years after the signing of a peace accord – the time span usually considered necessary to implement peace accords – many challenges remain unaddressed and the danger of slipping back into traditional development paths is acute. This paper argues that the problems of the Central American transformation are symptoms of systematic failures and deficits of the current peace-building approach. It falls short because it is based only on the experiences of post World War II in Europe and Japan which is inadequate for two reasons: First, the international framework has changed dramatically from a state-centered to a globalized system resulting in a series of fractures for the post-war societies that can not be overcome by today's limited peace-building efforts. Second peace-building strategies systematically underestimate the influence of local or national development features as well as of the competing dynamics favoring violence or peace that characterize post-war societies.

Taking Central America as an example this paper wants to demonstrate that the complex problems of and the differences between post-war societies are a result of the fractures and continuities encountered during the threefold transformation process. The structure of the paper will be as follows. The second chapter presents a conceptual framework which allows for an analysis of the fractures post war societies live with and on their capacities to cope

² On the concept of liberal peace see Paris 2004.

with the problems that have to be solved in the process. Based on this framework, the third chapter will then analyze similarities and differences in the main fields of peace-building in the three Central American countries. Chapter 4 concludes highlighting lessons learned from the Central American cases and suggesting some policy conclusions for strategies of peace building in general.

2. A Contextual Framework for the Analysis of Post-war Societies

The liberal paradigm in international politics promotes a threefold transformation process of democratization, economic liberalization and pacification as the foundation for peace-building. The underlying assumption is that the transformation processes will cause a positive feedback on each other. The theoretical framework is based on the historical experiences of Western Europe and the body of sociological, political and economic research developed in this context.³ But the reality of most post-war countries is quite different, showing a wide range from a direct backslide into war or armed conflict to the development of hybrid regimes that use formal democracy as a façade or renew traditional patterns of ‘mal-development’ and violence.⁴

The main body of the existing literature analyzes these processes from the perspective of external actors (mandate, duration, funding), in specific sectors (elections, aid, reconstruction) or in the form of case studies. Comparative and integrated approaches are nearly non-existent. The following contextual framework aims to contribute to close this gap as it allows the comparative analysis of post-war societies from different historical, cultural and regional areas. Its starting point is the fact that conflict is inherent to processes of social change and development. Both processes lead to fundamental changes of the structures of society and provoke realignments of the relations and the power distribution between central actors. In the 21st century these processes are influenced by the growing interdependence and the various influences the international system and the multitude of actors have all over the world. International norms and treaties, global economic trends, etc. have a growing impact that cannot be reduced to the actions of peace-building missions or international aid agencies. At the same time the degree and level of their influence is not unidirectional but depends on the historical, cultural and social structure of a given society. From this perspec-

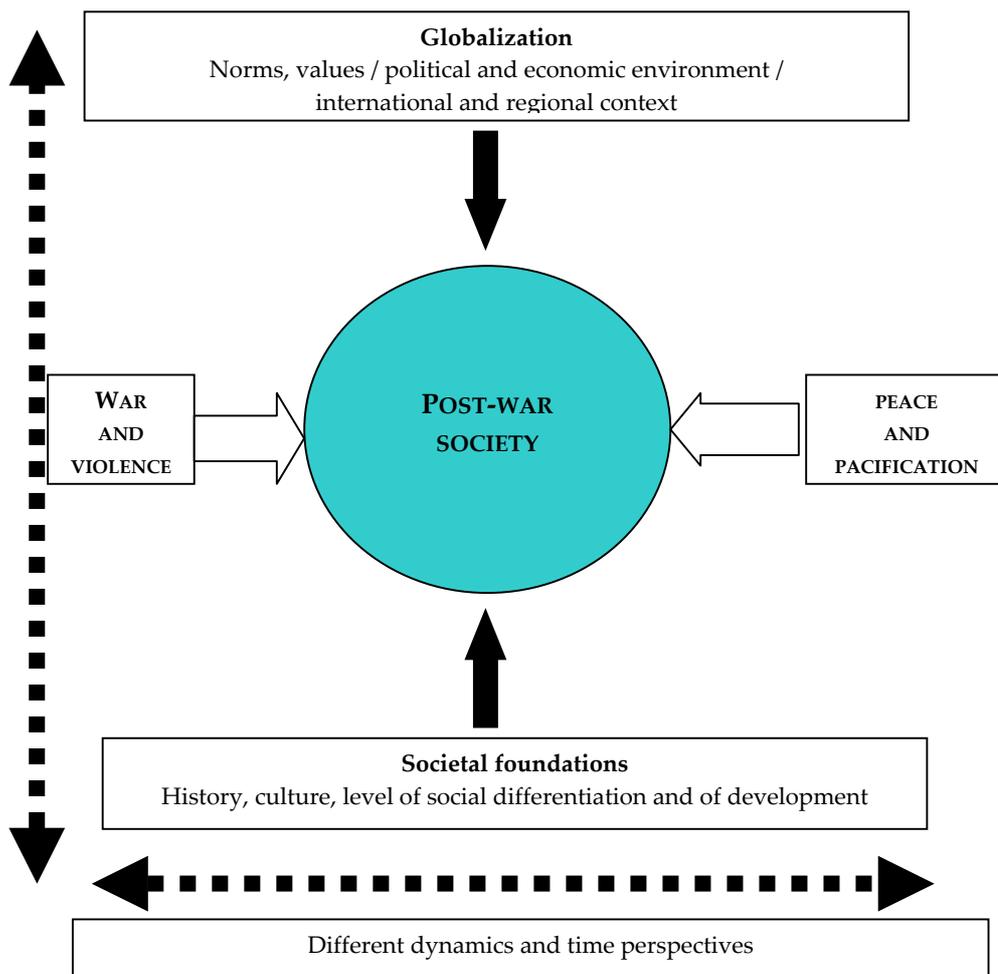
³ The theoretical bases of this are the theories of civilization and modernization of Max Weber, Joseph Schumpeter and Norbert Elias among others. The example of postwar Europe with a focus on nation-building is analyzed in Jennings 2003 and Mixin/Kasper 2003.

⁴ On the different aspects of problems in post-war societies see Licklider 2001, Doyle/Sambanis 1999, Pugh 2000, Crocker/Hampson/Aall 2001, Jeong 2002, Steadman/Rothchild/Cousens 2002, Walter 2002, Paris 2004, Junne/Verkoren 2005.

tive, the main focus of analysis for the developments in post-war societies should be the double intersection between the external requirements (supporting or blocking transformation) and the societal basis (enabling or hindering transformation) and the changes in society caused by the war and the process of its termination.

As a consequence peace-building should be seen as an intermestic issue that has to be analyzed as the outcome of the complex relations between these four processes (see Figure 1). While the interaction between the process of globalization and the historical and cultural foundations of a society is most relevant at the level of structures (institutions, models of development among others), the intersection between war and peace is highly relevant for the behaviour of the central actors (e.g. perceptions, options for action, strategies, alliances). The framework thus enables us to integrate the analysis of structures and actors in the process of change.

Figure 1: A Contextual Framework for the Analysis of Post-war Societies



Source: Author's compilation.

Compared to other approaches to post-war societies this research perspective has the advantage not to limit its analysis on the direct actors and categories of war but rather to start from the society as the most important analytical level. This is important as success and failure of the transformation processes can only be understood and explained when we look at and analyse the interplay between society, war and transformation process. Here the former war actors are important but not necessarily the most decisive players. This 'societal perspective' enables us to analyze long-term processes beyond current conjunctures and events by placing them in perspective. The analysis therefore follows a double tracked approach looking at longitudinal developments and at fractures caused either by war and violence or by the requirements of the transformation process.

Methodologically the concept relies on studies of path dependency that emphasize the importance of time and process.⁵ In our context the liberal peace hypothesis assumes that war termination can be a 'critical juncture' for pacification, democratization and development. The crucial question is then, whether – and under what conditions – this process is able to activate key variables in favour of the self-reinforcing process or remains stagnant, turns into hybrid forms or even falls back. So what are the key variables for the threefold transformation process?

Four fields of development in post-war societies are important in this respect and at the same time show the reciprocity and the interplay between the different processes:

a) The organization, operating mode and legitimacy of the public security sector: During war and before its outbreak usually there is no legitimate monopoly of force. In post-war societies the establishment of a legitimate (preferably democratically controlled) public security sector is thus a central condition or the key variable for pacification and law based regulations of conflict. Analysis thus has to include progress and limits of demobilization and reintegration, spoiler activities, as well as the upsurge of different forms of violence.

b) The development of the political system: The dynamics of war and violence support authoritarian and exclusive tendencies in the political system. Post-war societies thus face the challenge of liberalization and inclusion of marginalized sectors and the mitigation of polarized environments. Transformation theory⁶ formulates a series of conditions that are important for the transition and the consolidation of democracy like a majority of actors favouring democracy and a lack of viable alternatives. Actually most post-war societies are quite unlikely cases for successful democratization. Issues relevant in the post-war context include the

⁵ See Pierson 2004 and Mahoney/Rueschemeyer 2003 among others.

⁶ On transformation see Merkel 1999 and Merkel/Puhle 1999; on democratization of post-war countries see Kumar 1998, Barnes 2001, Hegre 2004, Call 2007.

transformation of armed actors into political actors, their social base, openness for and/or inclusion of other political forces.

c) The establishment of civil forms of conflict regulation has to be based on a process of delegitimizing the use of violence and force in conflict and the introduction of the rule of law. In post-war societies to deal with past violence is a central issue not only for the rehabilitation of the victims and the punishment of the perpetrators but most of all as a method to prevent future violence. This includes an analysis of how war and violence are treated in the education system as this is a crucial socialisation institution for the next generations.

d) The use of natural and human resources: The vast discussion about 'new' wars and about greed as an important incentive for violent actors has made an important contribution to the debate on the causes of war and the problems for peace-building.⁷ But the necessity to transform the main structures of war economies as a basis for peace-building has only recently been discussed. Sustainable peace-building needs a social basis that can only be built when human and natural resources are – at least in some significant part – used for the general welfare and not predominantly for private interest. The generation of taxes by the state and the structures of public spending are important indicators here. In post-war societies the question of the transformation of war economy structures and the existence of a 'peace dividend' are central issues of analysis. While the first can serve as a material basis for spoilers, the second should be the social foundation of reform and inclusion.

These four issues are clearly interdependent as for example the prevalence of war economy structures in many cases influences the political system and the public security sector via corruption. Deficits in 'dealing with the past' allow spoilers and reform adversaries to maintain their influence and make civil forms of conflict resolution more difficult.

Globalization as well as the regional and/or international environment have a mostly ambiguous impact as they can support the transformation process (e.g. in the field of human rights treaties) or restrict it (e.g. through the international criminal economy). The following chapter will analyze similarities and differences in the three Central American post-war societies from this perspective.

⁷ See Keen 1998, LeBillon 2000, Berdal/Malone 2000, Kaldor 2001, Collier et al. 2003, Pugh/Cooper 2004, Ballentine/Nitschke 2005.

3. Continuities and Fractures of Peace-building in Central America

Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala share a series of common features both at the level of the regional and international environment as well as in relation to the historical and cultural basis: The most important influences from the outside during the last decades can be summarized under the headings of transnationalization and democratization.⁸ Both processes have begun during the wars and were reinforced by the dynamics inherent to war.

Transnationalization was an economic as well as a demographic phenomenon. During the 1980s and 1990s the economic elites of the three countries diversified their economic basis from the traditional agroexport development model (coffee, bananas, sugar) opening up to new agricultural products (e.g. fruit and flowers) as well as to investment into the financial sector. Although the traditional oligarchies of the region were somewhat debilitated by war and in the case of Nicaragua the Sandinista revolution, this did not weaken them substantially. The differences between the three countries reflect the specific relations of power between status-quo-oriented and change-oriented actors. Thus the Nicaraguan revolution restricted the influence of the oligarchy and allowed for some mobility of new social forces around Sandinista networks while in Guatemala the power of the oligarchy remained nearly untouched. This process is also reflected in a growing dynamic of social change and a high level of poverty in all three countries (see Table 1).

The demographic transnationalization in the three countries was a result of war and violence that led to the displacement and migration of round about two million Central Americans inside and out of the region. At the same time the lack of social and economic mobility and the high levels of poverty constituted another push factor for mostly illegal migration to the United States. The so called *remesas* or remittances – money migrants send home to support their families – is nowadays the most important income in foreign exchange for the national accounts and has surpassed the traditional export earnings. While this is an important basis for survival for the most marginalized groups in these Central American countries, it also leads to a significant brain drain as the most educated and able people go north thus weakening the human resources for sustainable development inside the region.

Democratization began in the midst of war in all three countries as a result of international – mostly US – pressure. Although this led to an opening of the former authoritarian systems and to an expansion of options for the non-armed opposition, it also implied a series of restrictions:

⁸ See Robinson 2003 for transnationalisation; Paige 1998 and Vilas 1995 for changes in the agrarian sector and Córdoba/Maihold/Kurtenbach 2001 for democratization.

- Authoritarian enclaves were institutionalized,
- the military remained in charge of internal 'security', and
- participation remained restricted as long as the wars were ongoing.

Table 1: Indicators of Structural Change and Continuity in Central America

	Year	Nicaragua	El Salvador	Guatemala
Urban population (in % of total)	1975	48.9	41.5	36.7
	2004	58.7	59.5	46.8
Migration (Central Americans living in the United States, in thousands)	1970	16	16	17
	1980	44	94	63
	1990	169	465	226
	2000	245	765	327
Coffee (in % of total exports)	1990	20.4	37.9	25.9
	2000	23.3	10.5	18.8
Importance of agrarian sector (in % of economic active population)	1980	46.7	52.1	59.3
	1990	41.6	45.9	58.2
	2000	37.1	40.3	56.8
Importance of informal sector (in % of economic active population)		52.0 (1998)	44.3 (1991)	53.7 (1988/89)
Poverty rate (share of population living below the poverty line, in % of total population)	1980	62.0	68.0	63.0
	1990	75	71	75
	2001/02	69.4	48.0	60.2
Population living below poverty line (in millions)	1980	1.7	3.3	4.6
	1990	2.9	4.9	6.9
	2001/02	3.6	3.1	7.0
Remittances US\$ per capita	2002	130	310	140

Source: Author's compilation based on HDR 2006; UNODC (2007:43); PNUD (2003:134, 141); PNUD (2003:125); Sojo (1999:192); Vilas (1996:469); CEPAL (2005:34); IAD 2004.

Although the different peace treaties all did have regulations on the consolidation and deepening of democracy and the civilian control over the armed forces, the three democracies are characterized by structural defects that can be explained as a form of path dependency. While the traditional authoritarian systems were replaced, change was mostly restricted to form and did not include a change of attitudes or substance.⁹ The consequences of the transnationalization were another factor inhibiting the construction of stable reform alliances and a social basis for democratic change. These problems are reflected in the functional fragility of Central American states that are not able to fulfil central functions like the establishment of a legitimate monopoly of force or the delivery of basic social services to the population. Besides the common features that are mostly influenced by the global and regional dynamics, there are some important differences between the three countries that can be explained by the specific historical and cultural foundations as well as the varying dy-

⁹ For the variations between the three countries see the following section 2.2 on the political systems.

namics of violence and peace. To analyze this we will look at the four central intersections in the following chapters.

3.1. Public Security

In the sector of public security international actors promote demobilization and demilitarization. The key variable for transformation would be the establishment of a democratically controlled state monopoly of force while donors mostly focus on reforms that redirect the role of the military to the control of borders against external enemies and the establishment of civilian police forces to address internal security issues. These challenges met in Central America a history and culture where the security forces were the central pillar of a repressive state and where war and violence reinforced the traditional role of the military. The varying degrees of success and failure in the Central American countries can be explained by the different interactions and features of these processes.

A central aim of peace accords is an end of violence, the first step in this direction is a ceasefire followed by the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants. In Central America this process affected three groups: former guerilla members in El Salvador and Guatemala and combatants of the so called *contra* in Nicaragua, members of the armed forces in all three countries that were demobilized due to the substantial reduction of the armed forces in the decade following the end of the wars, and the huge number of members of the paramilitary forces that the governments had built as a 'civilian' support for the armed forces.

Table 2: Number of Former Combatants in Central America

	Nicaragua	El Salvador	Guatemala
Insurgent forces*	23,000	11,000	3,000
Military**	63,500	44,600	44,200
Paramilitary**	500,000	60-80,000	1,000,000

* Number of officially demobilized people; ** highest number during war.

Source: IISS Military Balance (several issues).

The demobilization of the guerilla and contra groups and the reduction of the armed forces is seen as the most successful part in the implementation of the Central American peace accords. Experiences differ from country to country: In the case of Nicaragua it took President Violeta Chamorro over 40 accords to satisfy the – overwhelmingly economic – demands of rearmed *contras* and *compas* (demobilized soldiers of the army). But in the second half of the 1990s the remains were reduced to a phenomenon of rural banditry acting mostly in the

northern regions of the country. In the case of El Salvador the most serious incident was the detection of arms the FMLN (*Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional*) had kept hidden inside Nicaragua. But the UN mission was capable to solve this problem rather fast so that it did not lead to a rupture of the whole process. In Guatemala demobilization of the former guerilla members was completed by 1998, while only the government of Oscar Berger (2004) could implement a substantial reduction of the military.¹⁰

All in all the variations reflect the differences in the structure and power relations of the opposing factions and show how the experience of war influences the outcome of transformation. While the Salvadoran guerilla was a quite homogenous and clearly structured organization with a common ideology, the *contras* in Nicaragua were a wild mixture of different groups opposing the Sandinista government for very different reasons and were held together mostly by financial support and pressure from the US. The Guatemalan guerrilla was the weakest of the insurgent forces as it lacked a substantial number of combatants as well as external support.

Concerning the reduction of the military, differences are even more pronounced reflecting variations in the degree of the military's historical and war-related autonomy in relation to the government. Central Americas' armed forces traditionally have been the central pillar of the state as – side by side with the Catholic Church – they used to be the only national institution with a presence in most of the territory and controlled the rural areas. Only in the case of Nicaragua was the traditional repressive state apparatus destroyed by the Sandinista revolution and substituted by a totally new force of former FSLN (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*) combatants. After the FSLN lost the elections in 1990 to the opposition professionalization and depolitization were the central mechanisms for the institutional survival of the armed forces. If they had tried to take sides in the political struggle between the Sandinistas and the new government, they most probably would have faced abolishment following the examples of Costa Rica and Panama. In El Salvador the war led to a process of militarization of the society under a civilian-military coalition but the military stayed dependent on foreign support (mostly US) as well as subordinated to the traditional oligarchy which was organized in the right wing ARENA party (*Alianza Republicana Nacional*). Rather different the Guatemalan military not only had sole control of the state until 1985 but even after the democratic opening it could retain its independence and autonomy from the oligarchy. The first elected president, Vinicio Cerezo, admitted that he had not more than 30 percent of the power – a feature that did not change till the end of the war in 1996.

¹⁰ For a discussion on civil-military relations and demobilization see Isacson 1997, Brenes/Casas 1998, for Guatemala see Schirmer 1998, 2002 and Keen 2003, for El Salvador see Stanley 1994, for Nicaragua Horton 1998, Lincoln/Sereseres 2000.

While demobilization was quite successful reintegration of former ex-combatants faced serious limits. Due to the lack of job opportunities in the formal economy many former combatants joined either delinquent groups or private security companies. In the case of Guatemala local analysts talk of about 126,000 men in private security enterprises, 80% of which are former members of the military, 15% former policemen. As of February 2007 of the 182 firms working in security only 28 are formally legalized.¹¹ The lack of control over a diversity of armed actors is one of the central problems of public (in-)security in the region. It is a result of both the deficits of the peace-processes and of the lack of opportunities in the formal economy.

Demobilization should have included the paramilitary forces in all three countries too. But although they were declared illegal or the decrees establishing them revoked, they were not disarmed. In all three countries this deficit is reflected in the extremely high numbers of small arms in the hands of the society. A recent UNODC study (2007: 16) cites reputable sources from the region which assume that there are about 500,000 fire arms that are legally registered and 800,000 that remain unregistered. This is another legacy of the wars contributing to the high level of violent crime all over the region. But there are some differences too: While neither in El Salvador nor in Nicaragua the paramilitary structures of the war survived, in the case of Guatemala they not only persist but are still a factor of repression, political pressure and in some regions of social control.¹²

Due to this context three interrelated issues dominate the public security agenda: organized crime (drugs among other illicit activities), delinquency and youth gangs. The high levels of poverty and exclusion as well as the everyday experience of violence explain the high levels of delinquency and youth gangs. The fact that the dimensions of these problems are lower in Nicaragua than in the other two countries is a result of the different character of the Nicaraguan police which is highly professional, oriented towards prevention and follows a community oriented approach.

As to organized crime there are differences too. Only in Guatemala has organized crime permeated the structures of the state as well as of the political system. This is a result of two processes that are related to the historical fragmentation of Guatemala's society and to the lack of control of the civilian forces over the armed forces and their allies. The reduction of the armed forces has not led to their disempowerment as an organized actor – as it has in El Salvador and in Nicaragua – but it has just heightened their autonomy and led to the formation of criminal networks (the so called parallel or obscure powers). Allegations that youth gangs are involved in drug traffic can not be substantiated or proven nor are they responsi-

¹¹ Personal communication, Guatemala 16.5.2007.

¹² See Peacock/Beltrán 2003, Kurtenbach 2006.

ble for the high homicide rates in the region. UNODC (2007: 16f.) cites a study of the Salvadoran Forensic Institute and a Guatemalan police study that hold youth gangs responsible for 8% and 14% of homicides respectively. This contradicts the common discourse of the Central American media and politicians.

Summarizing we can state that the establishment of a legitimate and democratically controlled public security sector as a central condition for pacification was most successful in Nicaragua and shows serious deficits in the case of El Salvador and even more so in Guatemala. This can be explained due to the impact first the Nicaraguan revolution and second the election of the opposition had on the public security apparatus. At the same time exclusion and poverty all over the region are the main structural causes at work responsible for the increase of violence and crime. While some – e.g. youth gangs – find a means of survival in the street, others work for the – mostly illegal – private security companies. This leads to a self-enforcing cycle of repression, criminalization and exclusion.

3.2. The Political System

Democratization of the political system has become the central demand of the various external actors for post-war countries. The third wave of democratization and the end of the cold war seemed to make democratization possible all over the world. Support from international donors centres mostly on elections while the main key variables for transformation are legitimacy and a social foundation of democracy. At the same time democratization is a very complex and conflictive process because it restructures the traditional power system. In the case of Central America the opening of the political systems was meant to enhance the participation of formerly marginalized or repressed groups. While the democratization is seen as a success of the peace accords, there remain serious restrictions due to a high level of path dependency that caused the establishment of rather hybrid regimes that are formally democratic but fail to offer an option for real change and inclusion.

The authoritarian structure and the systems of exclusion were central causes of ‘grievance’ in the three countries leading to violent forms of protest as there were no civilian means for change.¹³ The dynamics of war and violence led to a militarization in the three countries and supported authoritarian and exclusive tendencies in the political system. The democratic opening in the mid 1980s at least gave room for the work of NGOs and other civil society

¹³ In the case of Honduras the reform oriented policy of the military regime between 1978 and 1982 is mostly seen as a major reason for the lack of escalation. However, due to the role Honduras had at the level of the regional confrontation where it served as a basis for US support to the contras and to the Salvadoran regime, the country does share some of the features of the other post-war societies.

organisations mostly under the umbrella of the Catholic Church and in the fields of human rights. The first attempts at dialogue and negotiation took place in this environment, but could only prosper when there was evidence that military victory was not possible (the hurting stalemate) and due to pressure from international and regional actors to end fighting (Contadora-Group, United Nations and Group of Friends).

Only in Nicaragua was the end of war the result of a lost election of the Sandinista regime, while in El Salvador and Guatemala the comprehensive peace accords were the basis for general elections with the participation of all political forces. In neither of these cases did the insurgents come to power by the way of elections although the Salvadoran FMLN has constantly gained at elections at the local level and is an important parliamentary force. But in all three societies the development of the political system up today resembles the structure and the relations of power shaped by war, violence and international interventions.

The political system is the area where the developments of the last decades show the greatest impact of path dependency. El Salvador has traditionally been the society with the highest levels of organization along social lines. Only massive repression by the state and the support of the United States did prevent a revolutionary regime change during the 1980s. Although it was not successful militarily, the FMLN has been the strongest and best organized insurgency Latin America saw in the second half of the 20th century. The high level of social mobilization in El Salvador is a result of the fact that it is by far the smallest country in Central America, where land has been scarce and levels of urbanization high, both leading to a mounting pressure for social change that was suppressed by violence first in 1932 and later in the 1980s. This ignited to a conflict with a rather simple bipolar structure between the armed guerrilla and its civilian supporters on one side and the authoritarian regime and the armed forces on the other.

In Nicaragua the overthrow of the Somoza regime succeeded due to a quite similar constellation, but after the revolution the situation was complicated by the process of internal fragmentation leading to varying coalitions and the influence of the US and the second cold war. Only when the latter ended was there a possibility for a termination of war. While the *contras* did not have the means to overthrow the Sandinista regime militarily, their existence sufficed to delegitimize the revolutionary project on the political level and to make its social and economic goals impossible to achieve. At the height of the war the Sandinista regime 'invested' nearly 50% of the state budget into the war effort. The current structure of the Nicaraguan political system reflects the structure of war with two blocks of pro- or anti-Sandinista forces (FSLN versus different Liberal parties) and a small third force which was nearly squashed by a silent cooperation in favour of the status quo between the other two. Another path dependent element of the Nicaraguan system is its high level of personaliza-

tion. Even nearly thirty years after the revolution Sandinista politics is dominated by Daniel Ortega, while the Liberals are divided between supporters and opponents of Arnaldo Alemán (president from 1996 to 2002).

Politics in Guatemala also reflect the conflict structure as well as path dependent elements of political culture. While the reform oriented forces are unable to formulate and agree on a joint agenda for change, the Guatemalan oligarchy is nearly unaffected by fragmentation. Contrary to the Salvadoran oligarchy it does not have its own political party but finances and supports different parties that come up and disappear from election to election. A rather new feature of political representation has been the FRG, founded by ex-dictator general Efraín Ríos Montt. During the last eight years it was the best organized political force in the country based on a personalistic structure and a law-and-order-discourse that belied its own inclusion in criminal and corrupt networks.

At least under the perspective of political stability the transformation of armed actors into political parties seems to be an advantage as the differences between El Salvador and Nicaragua on one side and Guatemala on the other show. But the main reasons for the continuity and path dependency of traditional politics all over the region can be found in two processes that seem to reinforce each other. First, where the informal sector dominates, the establishment of a social base necessary for democratic consolidation is restricted. For a significant share of the population the main interest is day-to-day economic survival, which makes them opt for short time promises and not for strategies that promise change in the medium or long run. Second, the high level of everyday violence – that mostly affects poor and marginalized groups as the better-off can afford private security – leads to a prioritization of physical survival over other issues. The discourse of the mainstream media and politicians reinforces this by promising politics of ‘hard hand’, ‘super hard hand’ or ‘total security’. Youth gangs are a common scapegoat in all three countries. Violence is sensationalized and scandalized which allows politicians to avoid addressing the pressing structural problems of the marginalized majorities. The criminal networks and the high level of corruption are also important factors supporting the status quo of incomplete transformation and peace-building.

To sum up we can conclude that while the post-war political systems have been liberalized and at least at the formal level the participation of the population is institutionalized, this did not lead to a solution of the structural problems that caused the wars. At the same time currently there exists no alternative political system or a rivalling vision for society’s future serving as a reference point for oppositional social or political actors. While there was a transformation of the armed actors into political actors this did not result in the establishment of viable reform alternatives. Thus democratization has helped to address one side of

the regions' grievances but – at least up to the moment – has failed to give a perspective for social change and inclusion.

3.3. Civil Conflict Regulation

Democracy rests on civil conflict regulation for which the rule of law is a fundamental basis as it sets the rules of the game as well as sanctions deviant behaviour. At the same time the functioning of the judiciary and the rule of law are crucial for the establishment of trust in civil mechanism in post-war situations. The guarantee of basic human rights as well as the promise of dealing with past atrocities rest on a relatively independent judicial system.¹⁴ To achieve this goal international donors invest heavily in programs of the modernization of the judiciary and the rule of law as well as in capacity building for civil conflict regulation. While this is necessary the key variable for change in the form of conflict resolution is trust in institutions as well as in persons. In most post-war countries the question of dealing with past atrocities is a good indicator for change and shows how difficult it is to take action in the interplay between requirements coming from the international system, cultural and historical patterns, influence of violent actors and possibilities of peace constituencies.

At the international level various norms and conventions and institutions like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) nowadays impede total amnesties for gross human rights violations of the past. While most of the wars that end with a military victory by one side are followed by some forms of jurisdiction, internal wars that end with a peace accord face a much more difficult situation. Honouring former gentlemen's agreement and granting amnesties became nearly impossible due to the possibilities given to the victims by international law. At the same time the possibilities to bring the perpetrators to justice are heavily influenced by their remaining influence or their position as spoilers in the post-accord societies. Other legacies of war like the prevalence of violent mechanisms of 'problem solving', distrust and fear strengthen the influence of violent actors or other spoilers and are hard to overcome.

But dealing with past human rights abuses is not just important for the rehabilitation of the victims and the punishment of the perpetrators. Under a peace-building perspective it should be seen as a central mechanism of future violence prevention. The delegitimization of violence is a necessary foundation for civil conflict regulation and the empowerment of the rule of law. This process should also include the assessment of war and violence in the education system as this is a crucial socialisation institution for the next generations. At the same time dealing with the possibilities and limits of dealing with the past reflects the real

¹⁴ Since the publication of the Brahimi Report in 2000 international peace-building activities have given the rule of law increasing priority (see Plunkett 2004).

relations of power in post-war societies. Only where violent actors have been marginalized or where the international community plays an important role, there is at least a chance to bring perpetrators to justice.¹⁵

The three Central American countries show a series of common features in this respect. In the case of Nicaragua violence and human rights abuses have been rather low compared to the experiences of El Salvador and Guatemala. At the same time there has not been even the most rudimentary form of dealing with the past. In El Salvador and Guatemala there have been truth commissions that at least documented an important part of the human rights abuses but at that point the processes stopped.¹⁶ Only in some very prominent cases with a lot of international pressure – like the murder of Guatemalan anthropologist Myrna Mack – have there been criminal convictions of the direct perpetrators but not of the intellectual authors. The most prominent and representative figures of war and violence like Roberto D'Aubuisson in El Salvador and General Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala neither have been held accountable nor have they been removed as powerful actors in the political system.

The lack of dealing with past violence is consequently the reason for the existing deficits of the rule of law in the three countries. Central America does not have a tradition of law based regulations of conflicts, but rather a culture where those who have economic, social or political power are able to change and twist existing rules for their benefit. Recent developments in Nicaragua and Guatemala are a case in point. The two pacts between Daniel Ortega and Arnoldo Alemán during the last decade served as well for a change from the presidential to a more parliamentary system as for impunity for charges against Alemán (in relation to corruption) and Ortega (sexual abuse of his step-daughter). In the case of Guatemala the rule of law was not bypassed via dialogue but changed through violence. In July 2003 some 5,000 supporters of Ríos Montt took the streets of Guatemala City and pressed the Supreme Court to change the current jurisdiction to allow the General to be candidate in the presidential elections.¹⁷

The deficits concerning the rule of law and the lack of delegitimization of violence nourish the various forms of criminal and social violence which the state's security system is not able to handle. Under the perspective of peace-building these are the main obstacles for a progress in transformation of politics as well as in economic development and another reason

¹⁵ It is quite interesting that the prosecution of perpetrators is rarely discussed in the growing literature on transitional justice (for an overview see Darby 2006 and Borer/Darby/McEvoy-Levy 2006).

¹⁶ See Comisión de la Verdad 1993 and Popkin 2002 for El Salvador, CEH 1999 and ODHAG 1998 for Guatemala.

¹⁷ During the years before Ríos Montt could not be a candidate because he assumed power by illegal means (a coup) in 1982. The constitution of 1985 had a provision that denied those people the right to be president. The supporters of Ríos Montt argued that this was illegal retroactive legislation. Although allowed to run in 2003, he came in third and could not participate in the second round of the elections.

for the upsurge of violence in Central America where the level of post-war violence (e.g. homicide rates) is as high as or even higher than during the wars.

3.4. Use of Natural and Human Resources

While awareness of the importance of economic developments and globalization for armed conflicts has grown, the debate about the implications of these factors on peace is just beginning. International donors and research centered their interest mostly on curbing the trade with licit and illicit products of war economies (diamonds and drugs), the problems of reconstruction of the physical infrastructure and the economic reintegration of the ex-combatants. Most of the peace accords over the last decade did not address economic concerns directly but treated them 'with little or vague discussion' (Woodward 2002:184). While this is not enough for peace-building, there are other influences of globalization that have had rather negative consequences.

This is true most of all for pressures coming from the international financial institutions that rendered assistance conditional to the implementation of structural adjustment programs and the opening of national economies to the world markets.¹⁸ This led to a weakening of the state's options to offer employment in the formal sector that was needed for the integration of ex-combatants, migrants and displaced people. At the same time the privatization of state enterprises demanded in these reform packages favored traditional elites and those actors who gained their fortunes during and via conflict thus perpetuating and enhancing existing socio-economic disparities and inequalities. Another effect was the establishment of new monopolies partly based on criminal or violent networks. For sustainable peace-building the key variable here is a development model promoting social inclusion and overcoming at least extreme forms of inequality.

Developments in Central America are an interesting case in point but have been rarely analyzed under a perspective of resource use and war economy because they were mostly perceived as results of the cold war. The wars in El Salvador und Nicaragua were externally funded although in the case of Nicaragua limitations set by the US-Congress on aid to the *contras* led to the establishment of criminal networks to circumvent this.¹⁹ As Guatemala's military regimes did not receive foreign aid due to its gross human rights violations that not even the Reagan administration could ignore, the establishment of a war economy served as

¹⁸ In post-conflict contexts these politics are even more harmful than in other circumstances – because many times they contradict peace-building needs (see Kamphuis 2004).

¹⁹ The illegal supply of the contra with weapons was financed with the trading of drugs (see Scott/Marshall 1991).

a substitute. The control of the country's borders gave the military the control of different forms of smuggling (drugs and humans among others). In none of the countries have these structures been dismantled or destroyed after the wars ended. Criminalization is one of the fundamental problems all over the region (see UNODC 2007) and the inherent corruption and violence undermine all three processes of transformation.

At war's end financial transfers from international donors and/or diaspora groups are another factor that influences the access to resources. Although these transfers may help a lot of people to survive and improve their day-to-day living, they also relieve the governments from their obligation to pursue inclusive policy approaches. This limits positive effects for democratic legitimacy out of governance performance and at the same time leads to the establishment of rent seeking structures and the permanence of the social status quo.

In Central America social exclusion and inequality have not – or only marginally – decreased during the post-war years despite impressive growth rates and macroeconomic stability.²⁰ The informalization and criminalization of the region's economies and the related violence are symptoms of these underlying processes. At the same time traditional economic elites and international enterprises favor the modernization of the exclusionary model of development. Most investment in the region goes to so-called 'megaproyectos' in mining or energy which offer only a few jobs and where the profit is made by a small group of local or international entrepreneurs. At the same time these groups only pay minimal royalties and taxes. Thus natural resources are not used for the public good but for private enrichment, another process that can be interpreted as path dependency.

3.5. Lessons Learned

The comparison of the Central American case studies shows some interesting differences and similarities:

1. Path dependency seems to be strongest in relation to the political system and to the development model. Changes have been mostly superficial and due to international pressure (for democratization and elections as well as for market liberalization) and globalization. This led to a mere modernization of the traditional status quo where the majority of the population is marginalized and excluded, while a few are able to accumulate wealth.
2. The most important difference can be seen in the public security sector, where the consequences of war and in the case of Nicaragua the Sandinista revolution are more pro-

²⁰ For development in Central America see PNUD 2003 and Robinson 2003.

found. Neither El Salvador nor Guatemala succeeded in a comprehensive security sector reform although the international donors invested heavily in police. Corruption and criminal networks are the most serious security problems, while youth gangs serve mostly as a scapegoat. The comparison with Nicaragua shows that a policy approach of prevention and inclusion is able to control and limit youth violence.

3. The process of dealing with the past seems to have only a small impact on the level of post-war violence and is mostly a mirror of the relations of power between the different conflict actors. At the same time the lack of delegitimization of violence and the destruction of social and family networks seems to be one central cause for the upsurge of inter-familial violence in the region. The high levels of violence in the Central American societies renew trauma, fear and distrust. The success in the promotion of civil forms of conflict resolution will depend on the establishment of transparent and functioning forms of rule of law and sanctions against those who do not adhere. This must be the foundation for the (re-)construction of trust between people as well as in democratic institutions.

Thus developments in the Central American post-war societies do not provide proof for the self-enforcing positive cycle of liberal peace-building, but rather show elements of a negative cycle that can be described as follows:

The lack of social inclusion produces high levels of informality and criminality. This has negative consequences for the necessary social foundation as well as for the legitimacy of the political systems. In this context spoilers or adversaries to reform are able to use corruption and (mostly selective) violence to impede real changes. This limits the capacity of reform-oriented actors (inside and outside of the state) to establish inclusive forms of development and government.

4. Conclusion: The Need for Integrated Peace-building Strategies

As Central America was one of the first laboratories for liberal peace-building, the question remains what can be learned at a more general level for analysis of the problems of post-war societies as well as for the work of internal and external actors 'on the ground'. The comparative analysis of the Central American cases has shown the added value of the framework presented in Chapter 2 because it allows the identification of differences as well as similarities between the developments in different fields beyond oversimplification or excessive detail use. This leads to some general suggestions for peace-building strategies.

First of all, fundamental changes in path dependent developments are only possible if these changes have an indigenous base inside society. Otherwise external actors and the international community might strengthen internal actors in favor of transformation without being able to overcome structural or historical blockades. A strategy of empowerment of and alignment with reform oriented actors or 'drivers of change' can only be successful in the medium or long term. Short term strategies – favored by most external actors looking for exit strategies and needing to adjust their resources to global necessities or political priorities – are rarely sustainable and endangered by spoiler action. Hence peace-building strategies need to be aware of the fact that peace-building is an intermestic issue that can only partly be influenced by external actors.

Second, peace-building strategies are only one set of policies that influence the developments in post-war countries. The impact of economic or financial globalization usually outweighs the possibilities of peace-building programs by far. Thus a 'whole of government' approach is necessary to promote transformation and stabilization of post-war countries. This is difficult as time horizons and dynamics as well as the logic of these policies vary a lot and are seldom compatible.

Third, stabilization and transformation of post-war societies and post-war states are important. But unlike some critics of the liberal peace-building paradigm suggest stabilization does not need to rely mostly on the repressive capacity of the state (police, military) but should be based on inclusion and participation. Otherwise stabilization might either be a short interlude or lead to renewed conflict and violence. At the same time, the credibility of international conventions and institutions is dependent on the universality of fundamental human rights. Opting for a peace-building sequence of 'stabilization first, democratization later' is not viable in the global context of the 21st century. It would be a relapse to colonial paternalism where the 'developed' countries of the North decide what post-war countries are ripe for democracy. This should not be a serious alternative. Researchers and those working in and with peace-building missions should show a lot more creativity in overcoming existent obstacles for peace-building and transformation.

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