Ensayo de Reseña/Review Essay

Political Violence, Intrastate Conflict and Peace processes in Latin America

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In comparison to Africa and Asia there have been relatively few contemporary armed intrastate conflicts in Latin America. The use of violence by the military and political actors has decreased in the past decade. Authoritarian regimes in the Southern Cone that violated human rights on a massive scale have now made place for (more) democratic political regimes. In the 1990s the civil wars in Central America came to an end through successful peace processes. In other countries, the incidence of guerrilla movements has diminished sharply. After the decimation of Sendero Luminoso and Tupac Amaru in Peru, only Colombia and Mexico (Chiapas) are the countries now facing strong guerrilla movements. But this does not imply that Latin America has become a ‘less violent’ continent.

Despite the end of civil wars and the on-going processes of democratisation, violence (also political violence) has hardly disappeared. For example, the historical peace accords in Guatemala and El Salvador have not kept these societies from becoming even more violent. During the post-war years in El Salvador, there was an increase in the amount of people that died as a result of violence, making El Salvador one of the most violent countries in Latin America. In Guatemala there have been cases of civilians undertaking violent action against (supposed) criminals, thus reacting to the high crime levels. Drug production and trade has in its turn caused new forms and cycles of violence. This is not only the case in the areas of cultivation (Colombia), but also in the ‘tran-
sit countries’, or for example in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, where youth gangs control the drug trade.

The four edited volumes that will be discussed in this article give attention to issues related to (political) violence, peace negotiations, social and political conflicts, as well as reconstruction and reconciliation in Latin America. Each book has its particular focus, varying from peace processes, political violence and post-conflict issues. There are many overlapping themes, such as political transitions, the tenacity of violence and its transformation, as well as the heritage of fear.

*Comparative Peace Processes in Latin America* (edited by Arnsen) concentrates on peace processes in six Latin American countries: El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, Nicaragua and Mexico (in particular Chiapas). The articles analyse the political conflicts in these countries as well as efforts of conflict-resolution, peace making and peace building. The book is divided into two parts: Case Studies and Issues (part I) and Consolidating Peace and Reform (part II). About half of the sixteen articles in the book are case studies; the other articles discuss overarching themes such as the role of the UN in peace settlements, experiences of truth telling in Latin America, and the post-conflict political economy in Central America. The articles are informative, of high analytical quality, and the coherence between the articles is good. The introduction and conclusion discuss the main issues and common themes of the book. It is, however, somewhat remarkable that most articles in this voluminous book are followed by the reflection of a discussant. The added value of these comments is not especially clear. It would have been better to integrate these comments, where appropriate, in the articles.

*Politische Gewalt in Lateinamerika* (edited by Fischer and Krennerich) is on political violence in Latin America and bundles articles of mostly German academics. This volume is also divided into two parts. Part one, on causes, backgrounds and the appearance of political violence, starts with an introductory article on political violence in Latin America which provides for a clear theoretical framework of the problems to be discussed in the volume. It then follows with articles on violence in the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone and political violence and peace processes in Central America, as well as work on the cases of Peru, Mexico, Haiti and Colombia. Part two concentrates on the management of political violence, analysing peace processes, juridical reform and reconciliation.

*Societies of Fear* (edited by Koonings and Kruijt) discusses, as the subtitle denotes, the legacy of civil war, violence and terror in Latin America. It is the product of an international conference held at Utrecht University in September 1995. The book starts with an introduction about violence and fear in Latin America, discussing amongst others three cycles of violence in Latin America. The articles are divided into three parts: one part on social, political and ethnic dimensions of civil war; one on the long-term consequences of violence, terror and fear; and finally one part on the scope of peaceful democratic transitions. The volume encompasses a broad array of topics, varying from violence in post-revolutionary Mexico, the counter-insurgency campaigns in Guatemala and Peru, and crisis and transition in Cuba. The diversity of topics is broad, but it provides the reader with an interesting overview of (political) violence, its
different manifestations through time and mechanisms to deal with it in Latin America.

Violencia y Espacio Social (edited by Wilson), concentrates mainly on processes of rebuilding war-torn societies. It differs from the other books discussed in this essay because of its focus on the micro level and in the fact that it combines articles that deal with Latin America (mostly Peru and Guatemala) with cases in South Africa and Spain. The three sections of the book deal with the context of violent conflict, the social and spatial implications of violence, and the relationship between movement and social space. In the introductory article Wilson highlights two related concepts used by most authors in the volume: social space and movement. She uses Lefebvre’s concept of social space as a point of departure. The concept of social space is closely linked to the state’s need to impose its centralised power and its sovereignty, at the cost of other powers. It refers to the administrative capacity and the ‘nationalist project’, amongst others, which are essential ingredients for this process to succeed. Stepputat, author of an article on space, state formation and forced migration, writes about ‘abstract space’, or a ‘homogenous and transparent social space’ which makes possible the administration of peoples and the accumulation of capital. As becomes clear in this volume, in many Latin American countries this process is problematic and has only partly succeeded. The volume deals to a large extent with these localities that have been neglected by the state. The articles analyse processes of post-war rebuilding ‘from below’, which in many cases gives nuances to the views about conflict and peace as expressed in the above-mentioned books that concentrate on nation-wide processes. The emphasis is in most cases on the (spatial) changes that have been the result of periods of violence, as well as the persistence of (non-violent) conflicts at a local level.

This review essays deals with four issues. First, it discusses theories and analyses about political violence in Latin America. It gives particular attention to the question whether violence has become ‘less political’. Second, a number of experiences with peace processes in Latin America are discussed. Why were the cases of Guatemala and El Salvador more successful than Colombia and what can we learn about the role of external actors in these processes? Third, the issue of reconciliation, justice and truth in post-war societies is addressed. What can the Truth Commissions do? To what extent is reconciliation possible? Fourth, attention is given to the persistence of violence in democratic regimes.

Depoliticisation of Violence?

In some Latin American countries there is a collective memory of periods of intense (political) violence or (dirty) war. A well-known example is Colombia where ‘la violencia’ refers to the period between 1948 and 1958 – period of generalised violence when thousands of people died. But also in Ayachuccho, Peru, people talk about ‘la violencia’ when they are referring to the period at the beginning of the 1980s. The same is true for the Guatemalan highlands. Many Latin American countries passed through periods of intense political violence in periods of dictatorship, civil war or generalised political chaos.
Several of the authors of the volumes discussed in this essay have developed a theoretical framework to analyse political violence and its changing nature in Latin America.

Krennerich (in Fischer and Krennerich) gives an overview of four kinds of political violence. These are: violence between states (interstate violence); violence of the state apparatus and by paramilitary forces against their own population (repression); violence against the state (by insurgents); and forms of everyday violence or a more diffused or privatised form of violence. The author emphasises that this last form of violence is a less politicised kind of violence, as it is often not used for the pursuit of political power or for the defence or take-over of state power. But the author also notes that the limits between political and non-political violence are increasingly blurred. For example, criminal and political violence in Colombia in many cases overlap. Moreover, this violence often complements or ignores the state. Krennerich points out, however, that diffused or privatised forms of violence do have a political dimension. They take place in the public sphere and demonstrate the absence of an effective rule of law. These forms of violence can also undermine the legitimacy of (and transition towards) democratic governance.

Koonings and Kruijt distinguish three cycles of violence. The first cycle is the violence in the traditional order, serving the position of rather closed and restricted elites, while excluding the mass of the population from national projects. The authors emphasise that this kind of violence is not restricted to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is still present in many forms, one of its most important manifestations being the problem of the ‘private appropriation of public power’. The second cycle refers to violence in the period from the 1930s to the 1970s, directed at the ‘incorporation of the masses in the Latin American political process’. The authors state that in many countries to some degree ‘the problem of popular participation and social and political reform was addressed, its limits were reached, and a reaction followed in which the logic of political violence was brought to its most extreme consequences’. The authors recognise that not all experiences in Latin America fit smoothly into this second cycle. But they state that besides the Southern Cone countries, Honduras, Guatemala and Bolivia have also experienced this kind of violence. The third cycle deals with violence in post-authoritarian Latin America. The authors note that ‘violence increasingly appears as an option for a multitude of actors in pursuit of all kind of goals’. They also refer to a climate in which the use of violence by individuals or groups is seen as a normal option to resolve conflicts. This third cycle is identical to what Krennerich calls diffused, or privatised kinds of violence. Koonings and Kruijt also use several terms, such as ‘new violence’ and (cynically) a ‘democratised violence’.

In both analytical frameworks this ‘new violence’ is defined rather loosely. It is a ‘black box’, including all kinds of violence used by either individual or collective actors, and while it does not explicitly serve political goals, at the same time neither is it non-political. Without a doubt, the authors point at an important development in Latin America. However, many questions about this new violence remain unanswered within their framework. It might be asked, for example, whether these manifestations of violence are really ‘new’. Should this violence not be considered as a phenomenon that has always been present in Latin American history and that now comes, in a new form, to the
fore again? Another question to be asked is whether there is a relationship between the new violence and incipient processes of political democratisation (combined with a waning belief in the political process), economic restructuring and globalisation. Or should we look for a more social or even cultural explanation (violence, political or not, always breeds violence)?

One of the authors that addresses some of these questions is Daniel Pécaut in his highly interesting chapter (in Koonings and Kruijt) on violence and terror in Colombia which analyses the ways violence has become ‘generalised’ in Colombia. Pécaut shares the idea that the boundaries between political violence and other forms of violence are difficult to draw. Although statistics suggest that in 1987 political violence constituted only seven per cent of total violence in Colombia, Pécaut emphasises that the actions of drug dealers have at least some political dimension, for example when they intervene in judicial or electoral processes. On the other hand, he gives nuances to the political role of guerrilla movements when they, for example, practise kidnappings. Pécaut therefore prefers to talk about a political dimension of violence: ‘the everyday violence, which takes the form of foul killings, settling of accounts and revenge killings, can be said to have a political dimension, to the extent that it too may express a sense of social anger, and may result from the weaknesses of the police and judiciary’.

Pécaut also addresses the issue of continuity and discontinuity of violence. On the one hand he makes it clear that violence has been a constant factor in Colombian history for over a century. This is illustrated by an example from the municipality of Trujillo. Pécaut depicts how a local landlord maintained his position by a strategy of constant terror. Later, a guerrilla front and a drug trafficker became important players in this area, both building up constituencies and using violent means to secure their positions. When tensions built up at the beginning of the 1990s, the Colombian army and the paramilitary killed over one hundred ‘suspects’. Hence, violence appears to be a tool that is used by all social and political actors.

On the other hand Pécaut makes it clear that the goals of violence and the actors involved have changed. Drug production and trade is one of the factors that has heavily affected the course and nature of the conflict. Pécaut states that political ideologies and beliefs have become less manifest. Organised violence has ‘entered in a reciprocal relationship with random violence, which has led to generalised violence, affecting social and interpersonal relations and changing the workings both of institutions and of established values’. In fact, it is impossible to disentangle the different kinds of violence.

Pécaut’s work concentrates on changing violence in a protracted social conflict. From his analysis it becomes clear that violence is both deeply rooted in Colombian history, repeating old patterns of domination, while simultaneously changing in form. The explicit political goals have become less important in the Colombian conflict and violence itself has become endemic. Nevertheless, violence still has a political dimension. One might even argue that the core cause of the violence in Colombia is political.3

What about other Latin American countries where violent political conflict has been ended by peace accords, but where violence still is widespread, as in the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala? This question is not addressed in any of the articles in the books reviewed, but one may expect that the explanations
of Pécaut will partly serve to clarify these cases. The rule of law has historically been weak in the Central American states (except for Costa Rica), with violence being an important element for maintaining order in the oligarchic regimes. In the 1970s and 1980s violence also became an accepted means for the opposition to achieve its goals. Nowadays it seems that violence has become endemic and in the post-settlement era it has proved difficult to end the spiral of violence. Hence, as in the case of Colombia, violence has become less political and more individual and criminal. This obviously points to the problems in building effective state institutions as well. There may even be a vicious circle: It is difficult for new institutions of the state to tackle endemic violence because it can damage their image and, more generally, the trust in democratic transitions. This is exactly the case with the newly established National Civilian Police forces in Guatemala and El Salvador.

**Peace Processes and Interventions**

In the case of Latin America there have been three ways, generally speaking, to end the massive use of political violence by state and/or non-state actors. These are: a) political liberalisation and a (gradual) transition or return to democracy; b) peace negotiations between warring parties, mostly followed by a transition to (greater) democracy; and, c) a military victory by either state or non-state parties. Obviously, the three options do not exclude each other. For example, although peace negotiations put an end to the civil war in Guatemala, the military had in fact already beaten the guerrilla movement years before, and political violence had diminished since the notoriously cruel early 1980s. Some authors convincingly argue that the process of political liberalisation that followed from the second half of the 1980s onwards did in fact pave the way for peace negotiations to take place. Hence, the three options may all play a role in processes of pacification. It should be stressed that none of the options mentioned will be able to put an end to all political violence, but the chances for the third option (military victory) appear to be particularly limited. The cases of Sandinist movement in Nicaragua and the capture of Abimael Guzmán in Peru demonstrate this, for very different reasons indeed.

The 1990s faced a number of peace processes and negotiations, some being more successful than others. The peace processes in Guatemala and El Salvador have been praised by many, whereas the case of Haiti has largely failed. Colombian governments have had a long history of negotiations with different guerrilla fronts, but they have not succeeded in ending the now endemic violence. Why is it that Guatemala and El Salvador were successful and why do other countries such as Colombia remain unsuccessful? The aforementioned question itself is one of the principal questions in the volume of Arnsón, with authors discussing the cases of Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Chiapas, Colombia and Peru. A number of articles in Fischer and Krennerich also deal with peace processes in Central America, Haiti, Colombia and Mexico (Chiapas).

The peace negotiations in both Guatemala and El Salvador were made possible, as Krennerich points out, by important changes in the international and national context. At the international level there was the Esquipulas Agree-
ment (1987) between Central American governments. Later, détente between East and West gave more room for manoeuvring by the UN. At the national level, in El Salvador the stalemate between guerrilla and military was important, whereas in both El Salvador and Guatemala an incipient process of democratisation supported the peace process (and was itself strengthened as a result of this process). The importance of this last point is not only emphasised by Krennerich, but also by Azpuru who analyses the case of Guatemala. She states that the process of democratisation ‘took on a life of itself after 1984 [and was] not necessarily linked to the peace process’. She even concludes that ‘the peace process itself would not have been possible without the parallel progress made in the process of democratisation, and the full consolidation of democracy in Guatemala would not have been possible as long as the armed conflict continued’.

In both the peace processes of Guatemala and El Salvador, the UN played an ‘irreplaceable role in their successful outcomes’, states Whitfield (in Arnson), in a preliminary comparison of the two cases. However, there were important differences in the experiences of both countries. Whitfield points to the fact that when the peace agreement of El Salvador (1992) took place, the UN ‘appeared ideally placed to take on the role of world troubleshooter’. Moreover, the peace negotiations in El Salvador were the result of a stalemate between the warring parties and took place in what UN mediator Alvaro de Soto called ‘almost laboratory conditions’. Guatemala’s peace treaties (1996) took a much longer time to negotiate, while in that year the role of UN was increasingly being questioned after the debacles in Rwanda, Bosnia and Somalia. As a consequence, ‘the Guatemalan peace process had been something of an orphan within the UN hierarchy’. This led, amongst other things, to fewer resources for the Guatemalan UN mission (MINUSAL). From Whitfield’s interesting account it appears that the UN was the key to ending the wars in both countries, through its good offices and verification services. It is stated that the UN mission in Guatemala had learned from the experience in El Salvador, for example in the field of co-ordination with other international actors and the importance of social-economic reform. A critical analysis of (the degree of realism of) the rather ambitious and far-reaching agenda of political and socio-economic reforms of these missions is, however, lacking.

The experience of El Salvador and Guatemala contrast sharply with the case of Colombia, where negotiations are much more complex and take place among multiple forms of violence as Chernick (in Arnson) writes. Nevertheless, this author gives, after an informative exposition of the history of armed struggle in Colombia, differing explanations of political violence and an account of two decades of negotiating peace in Colombia. He says that peace is possible in Colombia. He mentions six basic issues that will have to be addressed: a) agrarian reform, thus recognising that ‘rural inequalities continue to be one of the principal motors of political violence’; b) dismantling of the paramilitary groups; c) reorientation of the strategic mission of the armed forces and police; d) incorporation of guerrillas and other community actors into the local structures of state and elective politics; e) reasserting primary control over the nation’s natural resources; and, f) the need for a truth and reconciliation commission. Chernick also emphasises the necessity of bringing outside actors into the peace process, as the government cannot be both media-
tor and party in the conflict. The question is, however, which outside actor has the credibility to play this role. The role of the US was crucial in Central American, where it first opposed and later supported the peace processes. In Colombia such a role is not feasible at the moment, as the US is supporting the highly disputed Plan Colombia.

Although most analysts will acknowledge that there is a basic choice to be made in Colombia between a militarised solution and peace negotiations, they also agree that the heterogeneity and complexity of the Colombian conflicts make a peace agreement extremely difficult, and, according to some, unlikely. Krumwiede (in Fischer and Krennerich) is one of them. The author is sceptical about the possibilities for peace in Colombia, stressing the different conditions in Central America. He also wonders to what extent the parties in the conflict are willing to negotiate, stating that the chances are limited for the guerrilla movement to win a substantial share of political power in elections. Neither does he see a fair chance that there will be considerable social-economic concessions (land reform) as a result of peace negotiations. And the fact that, contrary to the case of Central America, guerrilla movements have their own material interests and are independent from external resources makes peace negotiations even more difficult. Furthermore, as the paramilitary movement shows, the state does not have a monopoly on violence, which considerably weakens its position and legitimacy.

The position of the paramilitary is the subject of an interesting article by Fischer and Cubides (in Fischer and Krennerich). As the paramilitary are responsible for the majority of the violations of human rights, the question of their position in peace talks is of great importance. Whereas Chernick argues that the idea of two negotiating tables – one with guerrillas and one with the paramilitary – should be explored, Fischer and Cubides are more sceptical. They state that, for the guerrillas, their military struggle was originally the continuation of their political struggle (at least in its early years), but for the paramilitary, politics has meant the broadening of their military struggle. According to the authors, the paramilitary still have problems in making clear their political position, but they have discovered that the military-political strategy provides them with more power. The authors state that more clarity is needed about the relationship of the state vis-à-vis the ‘paras’, whereas the paras should make clear in what way their political ideas differ from those of the government.

**Reconciliation, Justice and Truth, or Fear?**

The end of civil wars and political violence, either through peace negotiations or a return to democracy, also has psychological and emotional dimensions. The violation of human rights, the suffering, fears and traumas of large parts of the population are not taken away with a change in regime. All volumes discussed in this essay include articles about reconciliation between former opponents and the clarification of committed crimes and atrocities by all parties involved. Attention is given in particular to the use of Truth Commissions as a means of fostering reconciliation. Hayner (in Arnsen) gives a good introduction in the processes of justice, truth and reconciliation, which, as she stresses,
are three parallel but overlapping processes. Truth Commissions are defined as ‘official truth-seeking bodies that document a pattern of past human rights abuses’. To date there have been approximately twenty of them, ranging from less well-known examples in the Philippines and Sri Lanka, to the ones in Argentina, South Africa and El Salvador. In her comparison, Hayner combines experiences in Latin America with the experience of truth telling in South Africa. Two other authors, Zalaquett (in Arnson) and Fischer (in Fischer and Krennerich), compare Latin American cases only.

From these articles it becomes clear that the processes of truth telling in Latin America are different for each country. As Zalaquett shows, it depends, amongst other things, on the kind of previous crisis in each country and the nature of the transition, whether or not there was a Truth Commission and how it was organised. The Truth Commissions in Argentine and Chile were formed by a broad spectrum of representatives that reflected different political sectors in their societies (amongst them human rights NGOs). These were therefore more ‘national projects’ of reconciliation than were the cases with the commissions in Guatemala (composed of a representative of the UN, of the government and of the popular movement) and El Salvador (an international commission), which were established as a result of the peace accords in these countries. The cases of Uruguay and Haiti contrast with the aforementioned ones. In Uruguay president Sanguinetti did not establish a Truth Commission (though there was a parliamentary commission that investigated some disappearances). According to Zalaquett, he privately assured the military that there would be no trials. This gave rise to massive protests and a plebiscite on the repeal of the impunity law, which was finally lost. The Haitian Commission de la Vérité, established in 1994, was not able to support a process of reconciliation due to a lack of documentation and co-operation (by both national actors and the US), as well as the fact that the political situation in Haiti had all but stabilised.

All Truth Commissions deal with similar problems. An important point of debate is whether Truth Commissions should make public the names of those persons that violated human rights. Some Commissions (the Argentinean and, to some extent, the Salvadoran) decided to do so, while others did not (Chile, Guatemala). As Fischer points out, giving out names is often supported by human rights organisations that expect to see the chances increase that these cases will come to court. For that reason, most perpetrators plead for anonymity. Where (some) names were mentioned as in Argentina and El Salvador, this led to negative reactions by the military – in both cases the principal perpetrators of human rights violations – and as a consequence they closed ranks. In the case of El Salvador the Truth Commission was criticised for publicising only a limited and incomplete list of names. Moreover, an amnesty law was passed through parliament days after the report was published. It shows that Truth Commissions play a limited role in processes of justice and reconciliation.

This leads to the important question whether Truth Commissions ‘make amnesties easier and prosecution less likely’, as Hayner mentions. The cases of El Salvador (amnesty) and Guatemala (where the commission was prohibited from having any judicial effect) support this statement. However, Hayner argues that in Argentina the Truth Commission directly supported the high-level trials. She stresses that the room of manoeuvre of Truth Commissions depends
upon the political dynamics and the limitations imposed by other forces with the position of the military being paramount. The fact that courts themselves have played a role in the system of repression may be another obstacle in bringing perpetrators to trial. On the other hand, Hayner continues, Truth Commissions can shed light on this very role and often do contribute to making justice more likely in the long term. All in all, Truth Commissions can be a vehicle in the transition to peace and democracy, but they are, as Fischer also emphasises, definitely not the panacea.

Reconciliation is in fact a process that can take many decades, with old cleavages and fears being less manifest but still there. This becomes clear in several of the articles. Silva (in Koonings and Kruijt) shows that ‘the old saying that the past lives on in the present is painfully true in present-day Chile, where the goal of national reconciliation is mixed with fear, distrust and hate’. He shows how ‘political’ traumas heal slowly and can be reactivated at critical moments, such as at the detention of Pinochet in London. Silva points out that the consensus in Chile’s political system is partly built upon fear by ‘both parts’ of Chilean society. National reconciliation will be difficult without the reconciliation of the two opposing versions of the country’s recent political history.

Articles on Guatemala and El Salvador in Wilson’s Violencia y Espacio Social show that at the community level, tensions between former opponents persist. González, who conducted fieldwork in the village of San Bartolomé Jocotengo in the war-torn department of Quiché, depicts a fractured community with open wounds and fear that has not yet disappeared. Local people, amongst them the economically more powerful who had been involved in the violence and terror and who had had connections with the military and had organised the Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PAC), did not lose their powerful position. It is not only the memory of atrocities themselves, but in particular the fact that the survivors were not allowed to have velarios or to bury their dead. People still suffer from these indignities, and González shows that it is still very difficult for them to talk openly about these events. The words of a villager who said that ‘en San Bartolomé no ha cambiado nada’, contrast sharply with the opinion of many analysts that there has been a sea change in Guatemala. The author concludes the article with the problems of how to reach peace without clarification of the local truth and changes in the local power structure. The article in fact shows that not only was the war experienced very differently in different parts of the country, but that the same is valid for the peace process. An open question, not addressed in any of the articles, is to what degree have the Catholic Church (with its RHEMI project), the UN or NGOs been able to foster reconciliation in these still polarised communities?

Another example of how polarisation continues in a war-torn community is Rönsby’s article (in Wilson) on a soccer game in a village in western El Salvador. Rönsby argues that in this very game the civil war was ‘re-edited’, analysing the meaning of soccer in the creation of strategic alliances and social relations between men of the same generation. In particular the article gives attention to a match played during the championship of 1996 between the teams Las Vegas and Fuerza, both from the community of Santa Domingo. Las Vegas was formed by ‘los arriben˜os’ of the community, amongst them many children of political activists that had been murdered at the beginning of the 1980s. Fuerza was made up of ‘los bajen˜os’ from the lower part of the community with more
ladinos, some of them children of those formerly involved in the paramilitary Patrulla Civil. The Patrulla had been instrumental in the killings of approximately fifty (supposedly) left-wing activists at the beginning of 1980. Fuerza not only consisted of ‘local players’, but its ‘owner’, the person who also owned the pitch where the match took place, had hired some good players from outside. During the match, emotions flared up. For example, one spectator shouted in the heat of the match at a Fuerza player: ‘Mató a nuestros padres – hoy te vamos a matar’ (he killed our parents – now we are going to kill you). Although the ‘ladino-team’ won the match, Las Vegas had played well and many felt that they were the moral winners. The emotions of the ‘owner’ of Fuerza became clear when he shouted at the end: ‘Ya no voy a dejar entrar a esos indios comales’ (I won’t allow these uncivilised Indians to enter [the pitch] again).

Reconciliation is a difficult and long-lasting process. In the case of Central America the peace negotiations led to some level of reconciliation at the elite level, where former opponents were brought closer together. The Truth Commissions revealed (part of) the truth of the atrocities committed by both parties with the military being the principal perpetrators. Truth Commissions may give relatives of the disappeared and murdered some feeling of justice. They also provide the state with more legitimacy to govern, after having been involved in violations of human rights. However, the scope of the Commissions is limited, in particular in cases where the judiciary is weak. Moreover, it may be argued that the symbolic meaning of the work of Truth Commissions is of less importance in war-torn rural areas where social relations have hardly changed. Reconciliation will be a process of many decades.

**Democratic Governance and (New) Violence**

In many Latin American countries political democratisation was the way to diminish or end the use of political violence by the military, paramilitary and guerrilla forces and, eventually, to manage conflicts without violence. Several articles deal with the problems of democratic governance, in particular with the persistence of violence in (more) democratic regimes. This violence is different from the political violence during authoritarian rule and civil wars, and is for that reason called new, privatised or diffused. It appears that democratic transitions in combination with economic reform packages (which affect the role of the state) may result in new forms of violence. This is the case in different parts of Latin America, such as in the Southern Cone, Central America and Mexico.

Pansters (in Koonings and Kruijt) discusses the transition of Mexican authoritarianism and the problems it has encountered. He gives particular attention to the cultural and practical dimensions of politics, which according to the author, have to be taken into account in order to understand the nature and limits of the democratic transition in Mexico. Mexican political culture is imbued by primordial loyalties (clientelism, caciquismo), not only in the PRI (camarilla politics being a case in point), but also in political culture in general. Other political parties, as well as syndicates and NGOs, reproduce these practices. Pansters therefore refers to the ‘painstaking task of constructing citizenship in a universe where the forces of clientelism are (still) operating’. The relationship between democratic transition and violence is sketched rather ru-
dimentarily in this chapter. In the conclusion it is stated that the reordering of political and institutional arrangements have generated new forms of violence in Mexico. Elsewhere the relationship between the decomposition of personalistic networks, political change and neo-liberal reform are said to have resulted in an increase in violence in all societal levels. It does not, however, become fully clear to what degree the violence in the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas and the increasingly violent nature of camarilla politics can be traced back to the same set of causes.

Koonings (in Koonings and Kruijt) also writes about the threat of violence in contemporary Brazil. One of the conclusions of his article about the political transition in Brazil is that ‘it is not so much the legacy of past repression and political violence that may pose a threat to the consolidation of legitimate democracy, but the near-endemic nature of peculiar forms and pockets of social violence today’. Brazil is, according to Koonings, a typical example of the ‘new violence’ in Latin America, in stating that violence has become a common option for all kinds of actors, amongst them landowners, gangs, drug lords and law enforcement officers. Two factors explain this violence. One relates to high crime rates, particularly in the larger cities (Rio de Janeiro representing an extreme case) and the fear it creates. The crime problem is related to the problems of upholding the rule of law, a situation that has been worsened by the fact that members of civil and military police themselves have been involved in criminal activities. The other factor explaining this violence is the ‘deeply engrained pattern of social inequality and exclusion’. Particularly in Brazil – the society with one of the most skewed income distributions in the world – social exclusion works against democratic consensus and stability. However, it may be asked whether state violence against the landless movement (MST), which serves as an example in the article, should be seen as an expression of ‘new violence’.

Krennerich (in Fischer and Krennerich), writing about Central America, also sees poverty, as well as social (and ethnic) injustice as possible triggers for renewed violence. He states that in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador large sections of the population are economically worse off than in the period before the 1980s, and observes that there is still a large conflict potential. Despite the widening political space, however, social conflicts have become less ideological, as the belief in social change through political action has diminished. Krennerich also notes that the violence has not disappeared. The societal, economic, political and cultural structures still ‘contain’ a high degree of ‘structural’ violence.

This notion of structural violence seems somewhat static, but when understood as the ways in which violence is embedded in the changing structures of society, it appears an important concept in our understanding of post-authoritarian violence in Latin America. Nevertheless, our understanding of violence in post-authoritarian regimes and the structures that support this violence is still ad-hoc. Its origins and dynamics, as well as its relationship with economic reform, (incipient) democratisation and more deeply embedded cultural practices, are not fully understood yet. A more thorough understanding of the causes and dynamics of violence will be necessary in order to be able to curtail this violence.
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Notes

3. Colombia can be seen as an example of a Complex Political Emergency (CPE). This concept was coined at the beginning of the 1990s in order to explain the small wars in the post-Cold War era. The concept is often criticised for not having any analytical merits. CPEs are typified by their hybrid forms of conflict, political origins (competition for power and scarce resources) and protracted duration.
4. The latter part of this statement suggests that there is a ‘full consolidation of democracy’ in Guatemala. This is questioned by many, as one of the main problems in both Guatemala and El Salvador are related to this process. In the conclusion of this article, the author appears to share these more critical visions, stating that this consolidation will face extremely difficult challenges.
5. Truth Commissions should be distinguished from international tribunals, as in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia. International tribunals function as a court, whereas Truth Commissions focus primarily on investigation.
6. The case of Haiti is discussed in the article ‘Diktatur, UN-Intervention – was nun?’ by Bohrsen et al. (in Fischer and Krennerich).
7. See for example the article of Azpuru ‘Peace and Democratization in Guatemala: Two Parallel Processes’, (in Arson).
8. The issues of impunity and the (difficulties of) juridical reform are addressed in two interesting articles by Ahrens and Ambos (in Fischer and Krennerich).