

Scientific Report “A paradoxical conflict over world heritage at the border between Cambodia and Thailand”

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Presentation of Main Research Results

1.1 Objectives of project

This project deals with civil society mobilisation and resistance around a world heritage, the Preah Vihear temple. It analyses, theoretically and empirically, how this type of conflict is unintentionally fuelled by international actors, unaware that the good intention are used by civil society players in a violent resistant way. The specific aim is to understand what new articulations of civil society-based resistance are fostered in regards to the globalised world heritage conflict over the temple. This is pursued against the contextual understanding that the conflict is performed by various actors at different levels with different powers and articulations. Interviews with relevant stakeholders will be carried out and policy documents and other material will be collected and analysed in order to identify how civil society's resistance is constructed in regards to the temple.

1.2 Project activities

The project activities up to today have included a comprehensive literature overview (of both policy documents as well as academic literature) on the question of the temple conflict. Field research (e.g. a pilot study) for the project was also carried out in Cambodia in 2012. We conducted interviews with media and representatives of international, national and local organisations in Cambodia working in the area of democracy and conflict resolution. Over and above this, we mapped different civil society organisations/networks in order to understand the shape of the Cambodian civil society. We have not listed the names of the organizations here, as the interviewees preferred anonymity. The results of the pilot study have been presented at an international conference. Publications have also emerged (and will emerge) out of the project. However, due to the short period of time this project has been going on, nothing have been published so far. New field studies will be accomplished during autumn 2013 and summer 2014.

In 2012 a PhD student, Niclas Lantz, was granted an employment position (doktorandanställning). However, due to personal reasons he quitted after a three of months. After a long announcement and application process a new PhD student was appointed in June 2013. Due to difficulties of engaging a suitable PhD student the project has been delayed. Thereby, all results suggested are temporary.

1.3 Main Results

One preliminary result is that civil societies are often treated as unitary actors and the conflicting struggles within the civil society sphere, not least when exposed to various globalising trends, are either overlooked or treated in vague terms. Thus, we find it important to emphasis the fragmented and contradictory nature of the resistance performed by different civil society actors. We have also found a number of strategies used by various civil society actors in regard to the temple issue that either fuels the conflict or have a peace building effect. Foremost, it seems like the strategies must be analysed in the nexus between resistance, power and memory. Or in other words, the construction of history and memories were central for many of our respondents' resistance. This was evident in terms of the ways in which the organisations addressed the temple issue as well as in the ways in which diverse media actors analysed the conflict. For example, in the pilot study carried out in Cambodia 2012, some of the respondents referred largely to a *misunderstanding* of the true version of history, when explaining the conflict over Preah Vihear. However, to resist this kind of power-loaded and naturalising approach to history, other civil society actors suggested a rewriting of history with Thais and Cambodians together, as a pathway to peace (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tnta0vv9Gr0&feature=youtu.be>).

List of References

Academic articles

Lilja, Mona, Baaz, Mikael and Katrina Hirvonen (2013) "History as a means of resistance: Understanding the Preah Vihaer temple conflict" (work in progress).

Conference presentations

Baaz, Mikael (2013) "A Paradoxical Conflict over World Heritage at the Thai-Cambodian border – Civil Society Resistance and the Preah Vihear temple", Presented at the ISA (International Studies Association), in San Francisco in April 2013.