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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Towards a theory of ex-combatant reintegration

Stina Torjesen*

This paper encourages the development of a theoretical framework for the study of the reintegration of ex-combatants after war. It takes the first steps towards this by proposing a new definition of reintegration, where the processes ex-combatants experience, rather than the programmatic support offered by international and national agencies, take centre stage. The article links the study of reintegration to two broader disciplines; political economy and sociology, and in particular to the two disciplines' account of power and group belonging. It argues that a political economy approach is particularly useful for making sense of the context in which reintegration processes unfold. The article also suggests some relevant research questions and highlights methodological concerns related to research on reintegration.

Introduction[1]

These are exciting times to do research and analysis on the re-integration of ex-combatants. Reintegration has long been the underfinanced and understudied third element in DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration). The field is, however, experiencing an upswing in attention, both in programing and in research. On the programming side, the UN has made efforts to revise and upgrade its guidance on reintegration in the Integrated Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS), while the shift away from 'minimalist' DDR towards more all-encompassing rule of law programmes may allow for larger components that address reintegration issues more forcefully.[2] On the analysis side, a small wave of well-researched publications have shed new light on reintegration processes in a number of post-conflict settings and some are also trying to bring in insights from other fields to enhance the way we study and handle reintegration (de Vries & Wiegink 2011; Munive & Jakobsen 2012; Podder 2012; Bowd & Özerdem 2013; Özerdem 2012). However, this body of work remains heavily geared towards upgrading programming efforts and tends to construct arguments around reintegration processes on the basis of single-case studies only (where the post-war experiences of Liberia and Sierra Leone dominate). Arguably, a key problem is that reintegration studies lack a useful theoretical framework to draw on. This article sets out to explore what a theoretical framework of reintegration may look like. It by no means completes this task, but it outlines a number of theoretical propositions, which can hopefully spark a debate and collective efforts among researchers to push the field of reintegration studies forward.

The article first discusses four problematic assumptions that are often associated with programming and analysis of reintegration and suggests alternative perspectives. It then

* International Research Group on Reintegration (IRGR), http://site.uit.no/irgr/
stina.torjesen@uia.no

moves on to provide a definition of reintegration and argues that reintegration studies do not need to provide 'scientific explanations' of reintegration processes, but that research efforts should concentrate on fostering an 'understanding' of reintegration where many causal factors are assessed, including how particular combinations of factors may account for why and how the process of reintegration has unfolded in the way that it has for different groups of combatants. The article also links the study of reintegration to two broader disciplines, political economy and sociology and suggests that their accounts of power, group belonging and context are particularly helpful. I end by briefly suggesting some relevant research questions and flagging three methodological concerns related to research on reintegration.

Rethinking core assumptions

Before embarking on a discussion of theoretical perspectives on reintegration, it may be useful to work through a set of problematic assumptions that have long riddled the study of reintegration.

Reintegration is a process, not a programme

DDR is a collection of project initiatives that come relatively early in post-war project interventions and aim to collect weapons, dismantle armed groups and assist ex-combatants (Muggah 2009: 14). Following on from this, reintegration has by some agencies been defined as a set of support activities issued to ex-combatants (Waldman 2010).[3] It is a mistake, however, to use the actual project initiatives designed to help some combatants as a starting point for research on reintegration. Such an approach directs scholarly attention away from larger social, political and economic processes associated with combatants exiting from armed groups, and towards short-term and narrow project activities. In order to best increase our knowledge of how ex-combatants come to take part in the social, political and economic structures of conflict-ridden societies we need to move away from technical and narrow assessments of project activities. Instead we need to start with the ex-combatants themselves and their encounters with social, political and economic challenges. These will typically go far beyond the realms of particular programmes. There are a number of individual contributions in the literature in this regard (see for example Nussio 2012), but more comprehensive scholarly efforts should be encouraged.

The trajectory of an ex-combatant in the province of Balkh in northern Afghanistan helps to underline the importance of avoiding bias in program activities. In one example, an ex-combatant was working as a low-paid cleaner in pharmacies and other smaller shops in the city Mazar-e-Sharif when I interviewed him in 2008 (Interview Mazar-e-Sharif 2008). There had been a large-scale DDR programme in his region and his commander and a select group of combatants had participated in it (UNDP 2006). The interviewee had not, however, had access to the benefits of the program. He stressed that the commander controlled who got access and that combatants with particular ties to him built on loyalty, rank and kinship were given preference.[4] The ex-combatant had served in a small close-knit guerrilla group that had largely been involved in hassling civilians in the area for money or other war contributions that they forwarded to their commander. They had raided people's houses and used violence frequently. After the war the ex-combatant maintained good contact with his few trusted comrades and they helped each other as best they could. Peace had many challenges for them. They no longer had the protection and benefits associated with working for the commander and they were acutely aware of the grievances that many of their former victims held against them. Using the large DDR programme in the area as starting point for investigating reintegration processes would likely miss many of the themes that surface when following the trajectory of my interviewee, in particular if such an assessment prioritised the ex-combatants that had taken

part in the formal program over those that were excluded from it.

'Re'-integration can be a misnomer

Persons who form part of armed groups are not always isolated from mainstream social relations and economic and political structures while war rages. This may certainly be true in some cases, in particular when armed groups must remain in hiding for long periods in remote locations (see Gjelsvik 2010 for an illustration of this in a Columbian context). However, sometimes the nature of warfare is such that combatants maintain close contact with their families and continue to function, at least part time, in pre-war roles. By way of example, in Lebanon young men who fought in the civil war commuted between their family homes and the front (Karamé 2009). In Afghanistan some of the combatants have maintained close relations with their wives and children in the years they have fought (Bahman & Torjesen 2012). Moreover, depending on the nature of conflict, involvement can in some cases enhance societal integration, rather than put it in jeopardy or give cause for it to be mended after war. Combatants may be adhering to expectations and demands from their home community when deciding to mobilise, something that could very well strengthen, not lessen their social integration.[5] Participating in warfare may also increase access to economic assets, which can also help foster social integration. One writer has highlighted how participation in armed groups has helped some poor young men access sufficient funds to enable them to get married (Utas 2005). It follows from these findings that 're'-integrating back into society is not always a major challenge. It may, indeed, in some cases constitute a serious problem, but it cannot be inferred to be a problem a priori.

Combatants gain skills and social capital during war

War is typically looked at as a time of despair, destruction and insecurity. Certainly, the loss of life, dignity and livelihood in war must never be underplayed. However, war also has a number of creative elements that must be recognised and built on, and some of these pertain to combatants and their roles. War, arguably, creates a distinct set of assets and opportunities for combatants (Keen 2000).[6] Combatants and commanders enlarge their networks, travel more widely and acquire new skills. By contrast ex-combatants are often portrayed one dimensionally as either idle youth that represent a security risk or as helpless victims unable to move on with their lives after the fighting formally ends (Jennings 2008, Munive & Jakobsen 2012). In both instances the conclusion seems to be that there is a need for considerable government or international assistance for combatants to function in society (United Nations 2007) . These perspectives tend to unjustly underplay the skills and resources that may reside with the combatants after war.

Home community cannot be treated as the default preferred 'return' destination

Sukanya Podder notes that a return to home community is often a normative given around which reinsertion and reintegration support is planned in DDR programmes (Podder 2012). Podder demonstrates, however, that in the case of Liberia return to home community could for many groups of combatants pose serious problems. The types of activities undertaken during war, relations to civilians and patterns of family support/rejection were among the variables that shaped the extent to which return to home community was a desirable option. Moreover, Podder highlights research that points to a pre-war agrarian crisis in some West-African countries, where youth in rural areas were marginalised in a stifling social order. This meant that 'in reintegrating successfully, returning youth ex-combatants needed alternatives to their erstwhile rural dependency and the exploitation due to stalled land reform measure of their labour by older land-owning patrons' (Podder 2012: 197). In turn, an anonymous

urban life was deemed more attractive for many ex-combatants. Indeed the promotion of a home community return could entail an unfortunate return to a pre-war status quo for them, which in turn might mean remarginalisation and renewed seeds of unrest (Podder 2012: 199).

Identifying relevant theories and concepts

Defining reintegration

Thinking through the assumptions above prepares the way for a definition of reintegration. In particular, the exercise above highlights the need to provide a definition that places the process of reintegration at the forefront while lessening the emphasis on programme activities.

It follows that reintegration can usefully be defined as a process in which fighters (1) change their identity from 'combatant' to 'civilian' and (2) alter their behaviour by ending the use of violent means and increasing activities that are sanctioned by the mainstream community. The change in behaviour is visible in three arenas: social, political, and economic. In social terms, combatants reduce their contact and reliance on the militia networks and enhance their interaction with mainstream communities and family. The political dimension involves ending efforts to achieve political goals through violent means. Instead, combatants enter into mainstream politics at the local, regional, or national level either as individual voters or as political advocates or representatives of a larger group. In economic terms, reintegration entails a move away on the part of the combatant from the livelihood support mechanism associated with the militia networks. Instead, as part of economic reintegration, combatants are able to obtain long-term gainful employment (formal or informal) or initiate other legitimate income-generating activities, including agriculture, which allows them to support him/herself and any dependants. It is important to stress that reintegration may often be partial, incomplete, or reversible.

This definition provides us with a distinct object of study: namely the experiences that combatants encounter as they end their violent identity and activities, where challenges linked to experiences in social, political and economic spheres are given prominence.

Trajectory is a related concept that refers to movements that combatants undertake as they depart from an armed group.[7] The time between departure until a full return to civil life can vary significantly and may involve complex patterns of movements. All combatants have a trajectory, regardless of whether or not the person has chosen to enter a formal reintegration programme offered by the government and international organisations. In a research setting, it is just as relevant to study the 'self-integrated' combatants as it is to study those who enrol in government- or internationally-run programs.

Trajectories can be mapped for particular individuals or groups. The movements can range from the very basic (such as departure to home village) to the more complex. Combatants may for example oscillate between departure and re-engagement a number of times. Moreover, and as highlighted in the discussion of assumptions above, the destination of combatants as they depart from a group may be very different from a simple return to a home village. It can include entering into other rural host communities, settlement in urban dwellings or short- or long-term migration out of the country. Activities may range from employment in the formal economy and local political participation to continued illegal economic activities.

Understanding reintegration

Identifying concepts and definitions is a first basic exercise in developing a theoretical framework. Efforts to develop theory can cover a wide range of initiatives: from providing loose conceptualization to formally modelling particular events or testing correlations between variables (Woods 1996). The aim in this article is to remain at the level of loose conceptualisations. This implies that we avoid providing 'explanations' of rein-

tegration, but instead work to enhance an 'understanding' of reintegration through theorization and empirical research.

Ngaire Woods draws a distinction between explanation and understanding, and stresses that explanation in the strict sense of the term is 'concerned with identifying what caused a particular event or state of affairs' and entails 'generating and testing hypotheses such as "a change in x caused y"' (Woods 1996: 11).[8] For the study of reintegration, however, it may be that a quest for enhancing understanding can be as productive as providing explanations. This means that less emphasis is placed on singling out individual and defining causal variables, as well as testing a set of falsifiable hypotheses on causal relationships. Since many causal factors are likely to be in operation in reintegration processes, it is more relevant to analyse how the various potential causal effects relate to each other, and how particular combinations of factors may account for why and how the process of reintegration has unfolded in the way it has for different segments of combatants. This is an exercise more akin to understanding than to strict explanation. Such an approach seeks to construct a plausible narrative for key traits of reintegration processes with an emphasis on grasping meaning as well as noting causal patterns.

Accounting for the reintegration context: war and the post-war situation

Reintegration is part and parcel of war and its aftermath. Indeed, the social world in which reintegration takes place is heavily shaped by the course of war and developments afterwards.

In order to address reintegration analytically, we need a framework that can help us make sense of the larger post-war situation. There is a large body of literature that discusses developments in post-conflict settings. Interestingly, however, much of this literature takes the international actors in these settings as the starting point for analysis. It is striking how few of these assessments can help us with a comprehensive ordering of the social world that we may find in a post-conflict situation. One strand in the literature is, however, a fortunate exception. Mats Berdal and Dominic Zaum have developed a political economy perspective on war and post-war situations. This approach espouses a distinct perspective on war: while much analysis on civil war have emphasised the chaotic and anarchic nature of war situations, a political economy perspective stresses that war entails the creation of an alternative system of power, protection and profit (Berdal and Keen 1997; Keen 2000). Put differently, war allows for new social orders to be forged, where the weaker actors, such as civilians and low level combatants, can be every bit as constrained and subject to formal and informal social control measures as they were in peace time. This is a perspective that brings one central feature of the war and post-war situation to the forefront: the issue of power. Zaum and Berdal are interested in how powerful formal and informal networks and institutions develop during war and post-war years and how these shape activity in economic and political spheres. They also pay attention to a central feature of the post-war situation, namely efforts by national and outside actors, to rebuild the integrity, authority and effective functioning of the state: this is a process that is often termed statebuilding. They describe a political economy perspective on statebuilding as one that:

> ...needs to be concerned with informal political and economic structures, in particular (but not exclusively) those arising from conflict. Thus...we understand the political economy of statebuilding to encompass the relationship between formal and informal economic and political structures in post-conflict environments. Our concern is both with formal political and economic structures and with the 'alternative systems of power, profit and protection' (Berdal and Keen 1997, page 797) rooted in war and conflict but certain to have mutated,

> adapted and survived into the 'post-conflict' phase. Such a perspective brings out not only the fact that those on the receiving end of statebuilding exercises are neither passive nor inert (Macginty 2011) but also that the international presence itself forms an important part of the political economy of statebuilding (and that by extension, policies and actions of outsiders fed back into and do themselves play a critical role in shaping the character and dynamics of conflict ridden societies) (Berdal & Zaum 2012: 5). [9]

Berdal and Zaum's framework helps us to identify key features of the post-war situation to which we need to pay particular attention. Their prioritisation has a number of advantages for the study of reintegration, especially when it comes to the economic and political challenges faced by ex-combatants.[10]

Above I noted that political reintegration involves ending efforts to achieve political goals through violent means. Combatants enter into mainstream politics at the local, regional, or national level either as individual voters or as political advocates or representatives of a larger group. Berdal and Zaum's perspectives remind us that this transformation will likely be no easy process. The breaking up of militia units has profound political implications, since many of the major war and post war power wielders are likely to be associated with these networks. It follows that individual combatants seeking to end violent activities and group belongings will need to navigate an intricate terrain, where some actors may encourage such a transition while others will work against it. Top level and mid level decision makers in militia units will be involved in an intense game for position and prestige in the post-war era, where facilitation of, or alternatively, the thwarting of low-level combatants' reintegration, is one important political bargaining chip. This profoundly shapes the reintegration prospects facing low-level combatants, and it needs to be factored in when researching political reintegration.

Above I also noted, that in economic terms, reintegration entails a move away on the part of the combatant from the livelihood support mechanisms associated with militia networks. As part of economic reintegration, combatants are able to obtain long-term gainful employment (formal or informal) or to initiate other legitimate income-generating activities, including agriculture, which allows them to support him/herself and any dependants. The political economy perspective of Berdal and Zaum highlights, however, that most economic activities are deeply connected with politics and power, and vice versa, in a post-war situation. The key (civil) war actors are likely to have controlled, participated or enjoyed the benefits stemming from the war economy (Spear 2006; Ballentine and Nitzschke 2005). They are also likely to transform and continue dominating a range of economic sectors, especially those with high profit margins, in the years after conflict (Torjesen 2013). The evolving patterns of domination, monopolisation or open competition in the economy will matter for low-level combatants as they seek to enter into mainstream economic activity. These considerations, in addition to formal economic assessments of growth, employment prospects and livelihood options, need to be factored in when studying economic reintegration.

Finally, above I noted that in social terms combatants reduce their contact and reliance on militia networks and enhance their interaction with mainstream communities and family. Here the political economy perspective is less relevant. However, it may very well be, as I argue below, that concepts drawn from other theoretical perspectives may prove useful.

Making use of established concepts

The reintegration process involves a number of experiences that resonate with key social mechanisms, which have been explored at length in the discipline of sociology. It is paramount that reintegration researchers

utilise these, while also tailoring them to the specificity of a post-war situation. Below, by way of illustration, I briefly suggest some central concepts that seem to hold potential for bolstering reintegration studies. However, the outline is far from exhaustive and both a stronger tailoring of these concepts to the post-war context and an identification of additional concepts is needed.

In this article I have defined reintegration as a process where fighters (1) change their identity from 'combatant' to 'civilian' and (2) alter their behaviour by ending the use of violent means and increasing activities that are sanctioned positively by the mainstream community. In the majority of cases this will involve reducing contact with, or departing from, the immediate fighting unit which the combatant has been part of during the war years. This fighting group can be seen as a typical 'social group', where the standard definition in sociology will be: 'a collection of people who share a common identity and regularly interact with one another on the basis of shared expectations' (Giddens et al 2007: 129). Antony Giddens et al. note that people who belong to the same social group identify with each other, expect each other to conform to certain ways of thinking and acting. Members also recognise the boundaries that separate them from other groups or people. If the fighting unit is small enough, it will function as a 'primary group' where a sense of unity will be particularly strong, supported by commitment and a potential 'merger of self into one personal 'we'' (Giddens et al. 2007: 121). The dynamics within groups encourage conformity and, by potentially installing a sense of belonging, may encourage continued participation in the group, even in difficult times. These basic and recurring features of a range of different groups are likely to play a part in the reintegration processes. In Afghanistan, many ex-combatants reported that they did not depart from their tightknit fighting units in isolation of their comrades. Rather, when realising that they wanted to change status from combatants to civilian, individuals made efforts to convince the whole group to make this change together, and they ended their violent activity only when the whole group did (Bahman & Torjesen 2012). This is a sign that group dynamics are crucial for understanding reintegration processes, in particular in cases where reintegration is occurring in an adhoc style or when it is being encouraged even as war and larger militia activities continue, as has been the case in Colombia and Afghanistan (Gjelsvik 2010; Torjesen 2012). In other cases, smaller fighting units may be dissolved as part of a full scale surrender of a large military faction or as part of a negotiated peace (Tajikistan's civil-war settlement is one example of this, see Torjesen, Wille and MacFarlane 2005). In these cases group dynamics are still interesting to trace, in particular in terms of the extent to which the smaller fighting unit remains a key reference point also in the post war period for the ex-combatants.

Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan have explored group dynamics in an in-depth manner in a related, although still significantly different field: the study of terrorist groups. The two writers draw on a range of studies of group dynamics among delinquent and crime groups. They find that a common theme in terrorism research traditions is the importance of social ties for engagement and disengagement from a group (Bjørgo & Horgan 2008). Individuals typically join a group or movement because their friends or family members are involved (Sageman 2004). The various research traditions share the view that individual decisions to join or leave are the product of a combination of factors and motivations that work together, and they identify unpleasant 'push factors' within the group or larger military faction that may motivate an exit (e.g poor leadership, physical hardship) as well as 'pull factors' outside in broader society that encourage departure (e.g. legal crack down, promises of amnesties, family expectations) (Bjørgo 2011). Bjørgo and Horgan note that there is increasing evidence that the processes involved in joining and leaving criminal or radical groups have similarities across country cases and types of

groups (Bjørgo & Horgan 2008). This raises questions as to whether one could also discover similarities in reintegration trajectories across country cases and militia groups.

Another central concept in sociology that may prove useful in reintegration studies is social capital (Bowd 2008). Robert Putnam sees social capital as the reciprocity and trust that can develop through social interaction, especially in (formal or informal) groups and networks (Putnam 2001). Putnam notes that norms of reciprocity have value both for people who take part in them (private returns), and, in some instances, for society at large (public returns) through increased cooperation. The private returns include a greater likelihood that your friend, neighbour or former fellow combatant will come to your assistance in times of need (Putnam 2001). High degrees of trust enable ex-combatants to cooperate and engage in (commercial) exchange, without needing cumbersome external enforcement of the 'contract'. Arguably, depending on the types of activities of fighting groups during the war years, it may be that groups of combatants enjoy high levels of social capital. This is a major asset for ex-combatants as they increase their political and economic activities. So far, however, little is known as to how social capital is utilised by fighters after the war, or if indeed its positive manifestations can be magnified so as to improve the situation of both fighters and the society at large. Indeed, the quest in research related to combatants' networks so far has been to map their potential break down, while, in programming, an explicit goal has been to sever old militia links (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007; Munive & Jakobsen 2012). This is a problematic bias and a grave omission in the current writings on reintegration. A more comprehensive discussion of the possible presence and potential of social capital, seems well overdue.

Asking the right research questions

The attention to reintegration as a process and the challenges faced by combatants in economic, political and social spheres opens up for the identification of a range of interesting research questions. Again, the point here is not to provide a comprehensive list, but merely to flag some initial questions that seem worthy of further investigation by reintegration scholars.

In the political domain, it may be interesting to assess the extent to which the subunits in former military factions remain in contact with one another, and whether this matters for the political leverage enjoyed by low-level combatants, mid-level commanders and top leaders. An important variable in this context will be the extent to which reintegration takes place in situations of continued armed conflict and insecurity or, by contrast, formal peace and a more secure environment is taking hold. Moreover, relevant questions seem to be how low-level, mid-level and top leaders manage the transition from armed violence to peaceful civilian politics, and the extent to which representatives from any of these three groups become either effective or marginalised players in the new post-war political game. Throughout such investigations, it will be useful to pay attention to, and uncover potential patterns associated with, different segments of combatants. Rank (low, middle and high-level) creates one type of segment. Other potentially relevant segments include age, geographical belonging, education, time period in which mobilisation happened and different types of grievances and motivations for joining. Finally, it would be interesting to trace how the question of support packages and the status and situation of the ex-combatants in society take on national political significance and become contested political issues for domestic politicians as well as for international actors, such as UN missions (Munive & Jakobsen 2012).

In the economic domain it will be interesting to trace the different economic strategies adopted by former combatants: are they sticking to pre-war economic roles, making use of new economic opportunities that come in the post-war economy, or remaining tied to economic activities that

have typically been associated with military factions?[11] Moreover, how do opportunities and constraints associated with economic globalisation affect combatants, such as national and international migration flows, seasonal work opportunities, investment flows and access to local regional or international capital flows? Finally, following the suggestion of a political economy perspective, it may be interesting to explore which political or economic actors dominate in different economic sectors (formal and informal) and how this may shape the prospects of combatants for competing or participating successfully in the new post-war economy.

In the social domain, a mapping of the social relations and groups that combatants form part of during and after war would be a first useful step. It would be particularly interesting to assess whether social relations with friends or family outside of military factions are maintained, and whether these actors motivate combatants to continue to be associated with fighting units or whether they act as 'pull' factors motivating them to depart and embark upon a process of reintegration. Due attention to whether reintegration happens on the backdrop of an individual or a formal collective decision from the top to end violent activities, and how this shapes reintegration processes, will be particularly important. Moreover, a better understanding of the mechanisms at play when friends and families receive and, possibly, facilitate, social reintegration into larger communities and networks would be particularly helpful in advancing reintegration studies.

Attending to methodological concerns

The theoretical perspectives and concepts outlined above may help to provide a framework for the study of reintegration. In addition, there are also some specific methodological concerns that apply to reintegration studies, and which may usefully be highlighted.

A key argument of this paper is that reintegration processes happen primarily independently of any project activities. It follows that research activities need to be devoted to the reintegration processes that different kinds of combatants go through in one or more of the three spheres (social, political and economic) and it may be particularly interesting to look at the interplay between the three spheres. Assessing the effect of a reintegration programme on individuals or groups of fighters is interesting and relevant, but not enough.

Moreover, in keeping with a political economy perspective, it is important to grasp local agency, both on the part of individual combatants and on the part of central power holders, such as commanders or political leaders. Local agency is best studied directly and not via assessments that have the performance of international actors as their starting point. This has an important practical methodological side to it. International researchers tend, in my experience, often to operate inside an international 'bubble' where resources (interpretation, internet access, transportation) and companionship (dinners and socialising) of the international organisations are drawn on liberally. This may introduce an unfortunate bias, in particular when assessing the relevance and importance of the international activities in relation to indigenous ones. Researchers in the field may want to consider whether they are operating sufficiently independently from the international circuit present in a post-war foci. Moreover it is highly preferable that the field work research is funded through independent sources and not tied to agencies or particular projects operating in the area as this may also steer attention away from larger societal trends and towards more narrow project activities.

Finally, researchers on reintegration need to move away from the overreliance on single-case study research and incorporate more ambitious efforts to assess distinct and detailed aspects of reintegration processes in multiple case studies. This will offer the field of reintegration studies new and relevant data that will allow for better comparisons and the identification of common trends associated with reintegration.

Conclusion

In this article I have provided a definition of reintegration and situated the study of reintegration within the field of political economy. I have also highlighted some useful concepts from sociology and singled out some methodological concerns. These are first steps towards establishing a theoretical framework for the study of reintegration. Needless to say, additional efforts are needed. Hopefully, recent increases in attention to and writings on reintegration, will continue. These could also include further attempts to build a theory of reintegration. Such a theory of reintegration may provide useful guidance for scholars and encourage not only a sharing of empirical insights, which the bulk of the literature does today, but also more systematic theoretical insights and debate.

Finally, it bears stressing that the call for more methodological independence for researchers, and for a move away from a narrow focus on programming to broader reintegration processes, is not an argument for greater separation and an end to dialogue between practitioners and scholars. Rather, the claim here is that the research community can be a better support to practitioners and programmers if the division of labour between them becomes more explicit. Reintegration research can contribute most when it provides new perspectives and insights for programmers that also go beyond programming in their choice of themes and time horizons. The competitive advantage of scholars rests not first and foremost with their ability to monitor and evaluate programmes, but rather with their ability to contribute original insights, which the practitioner community otherwise would not be able to generate.

Notes

[1] The author would like to thank the members of the International Research Group on Reintegration (http://site.uit.no/irgr/) for advice and support in developing this paper.

[2] The new UNDP Somalia programme 'Community Security and Armed Violence Reduction' is an example of a programme where reintegration concerns form part of larger stabilisation efforts. These are different from, and to some extent go beyond ideas of 'maximalist DDR' and 'second generation DDR' (UNDP 2013). For a discussion of maximalist and minimalist DDR see Muggah 2008.

[3] The US Army's Field Manual 3–07 Stability Operations defines reintegration by noting that participants receive amnesty, re-enter civil society, gain sustainable employment, and become contributing members of the population. The field manual also notes that reintegration includes skills training, relocation, resettlement support, basic and vocational education, and assistance in finding employment. FM 3–07 Stability Operations, October 2008, para. 6–107, quoted in Waldman 2010: 2.

[4] This resonates with the findings of Giustozzi 2008.

[5] Michael Vinay Bhatia uncovered in his work a range of motivations held by fighters that joined armed groups in Afghanistan. He found that many acted under the guidance of local elders and other established actors (Bahtia and Sedra 2008; Bahtia and Muggah 2009). This highlights, among other issues, differences in degrees of legitimacy that combatant and their actions may have, which in turn could matter for the ease or difficulty with which ex-combatants can operate in the community in the post-war years.

[6] While war includes two or more sides fighting over political goals, the war years are also signified by old and new power-brokers asserting control over economic sectors and entrepreneurs taking advantage of opportunities that come in the wake of war. Jonathan Goodhand identifies 'combat economies', 'shadow economies' and 'coping economies' as typical forms of economic activities that appear during war (Goodhand 2004).

[7] This definition of trajectories was developed by the International Research Group on Reintegration (IRGR) at a workshop in Nairobi in 2011, contributors included Tone Bleie, Tore Bjørgo, Percy Oware, Elisabeth Sandersen, Ingvild Magnæs Gjelsvik and Stina Torjesen.

[8] Woods draws on Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1991) when stressing that there is an important difference between explanation and understanding. Explaining entails rigorously asserting that a particular factor caused a particular outcome by studying several cases so as to test whether the factor singled out was indeed the likely cause, or merely a coincidental occurrence. By contrast, according to Woods, understanding focuses on grasping meaning and working with data in a narrative form. This distinction resonates with Bruno Bueno de Mesquita's (1996) notion of historical method: a focus on understanding particular events and a search to evaluate which variables were relevant in a given past case or sequence of events. By contrast, a social scientist (an 'explainer', in Woods' terminology) will have as a key aim to 'identify relations among critical variables that explain classes of events or phenomena' (Woods 1996: 11).

[9] This starting point allows Mats Berdal and Dominik Zaum to single out three dimensions as particularly relevant when assessing the state of affairs in post-conflict situations: 'the institutions and structures of the formal state, which are reformed and supported by the external statebuilding actors; the informal structures and actors which precede and/or emerge during the conflict… and which are often central to the organisation and exercise of power in conflict affected states, and which both complement and compete with formal institutions; and the international presence, with its peacekeepers, aid agencies, donors and consultants, who often exercise state functions (such as state provision of security) and who (whether intentionally or not) are participants in the politics and conflicts of post-conflict states' (Berdal & Zaum 2012: 5).

[10] Conversely, in-depth studies of reintegration processes will be able to shed important insights that hold broader relevance for the research agenda associated with the political economy of statebuilding. In particular, an in-depth understanding of the differing trajectories that ex-combatants embark upon as they exist armed groups will likely illustrate how war time networks in the economy, security and political spheres transform. Designated scholarly focus on the broader reintegration experiences will also highlight the relevance, or irrelevance, of international actors and how they shape and become shaped by local power holders. Similarly, the way state structures assist or impair former combatants in their efforts to reintegrate can provide interesting illustrations of how state institutions function in the post-war period and who controls them.

[11] The post war period may be a time of hardship, it could also offer a range of opportunities and growth rates are often high, see Collier 2009 and Torjesen 2013.

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