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The concept of *Political Reintegration*

in current peace research

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Abstract

A large component of peacebuilding efforts today are the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs that target ex-combatant populations, in an attempt to smooth the transition to civilian life and alleviate security risks in the transition phase. Research that today deals with the political aspect of reintegration has only done so in a rather limited and under-theorized fashion, and it is usually unclear why certain aspects have been chosen over others to represent *political reintegration*. I would argue that this limited conceptual understanding of what political (re)integration means has impaired research within this field. For instance, when political reintegration has been investigated there has not been a systematic identification and differentiation based on the level of analysis. This paper scrutinizes definitions of political reintegration both within the policy community and the academic community, clarifying what level of analysis is applied. Finally, this paper suggests that we need to explore political reintegration (at the micro level) in terms of two dimensions: the extent of ex-combatants' political voice (i.e. political involvement) and the content of the ex-combatants' political voice (i.e. democratic values and norms). Bringing conceptual clarification to the concept of political reintegration also helps us identify additional research agendas within this field.

Keywords: political reintegration, ex-combatants, political parties, political elite, citizens, definitions

Introduction

A large component of peacebuilding efforts today are the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs that target ex-combatant populations, in an attempt to smooth the transition to civilian life and alleviate security risks in the transition phase. These are large endeavors that have become increasingly integral to UN practices in post-war societies. While the DDR concept is relatively new (1980s) (Muggah 2009, p. 4), and emerged in a specific global-political context, the challenge and methods involved in DDR are not new; dealing with returning soldiers has been a societal challenge before (see Allport 2009 for one example of the challenges of dealing with returning soldiers after World War II in Britain; or for details concerning the G.I. Bill in the US after World War II, see Sampson and Laub 1996;

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Bound and Turner 2002; Mettler 2005), and especially in terms of the political consequences. For instance the American Secretary of War Henry Stimson expressed a deep concern about the returning veterans after World War II and their acceptance of the democratic system (Waller 1944, pp. 35, 89f).[1] Muggah notes that since the late 1980s, the world has seen 60 DDR programs worldwide, and that in 2008 alone, 18 such programs were in force (Muggah 2009, p. 6). Roughly 1.4 million combatants were involved in 24 programs around the globe between 2005 and 2008, even if most of them were located in Africa (Caramés et al. 2006; Caramés et al. 2007; Caramés and Sanz 2009). Despite the extensiveness of the phenomenon, the research community is still lagging behind in terms of understanding and categorizing these processes. This paper problematizes research related to Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programs with an eye to the political dimensions of this phenomenon, especially in terms of reintegration.

While the concept and goal of reintegration has increasingly widened during its practice (Muggah 2009, p. 6), it is an area that generally suffers from being under-conceptualized:

> reintegration is singularly under-conceptualized in policy, research and practice. […] there have been few attempts to generate a coherent and comprehensive understanding of what reintegration actually means, how it might be implemented and appropriate indicators and means of monitoring them over time (Muggah and Baaré 2009, p. 228)

Indeed, definitions of DDR and reintegration have been noted to vary to such an extent (Kingma and Muggah 2009, p. 3; Muggah 2004, p. 24), that such definitions have been categorized along a continuum between minimalist (more security orientated) and maximalist definitions (more development orientated) (Muggah 2004, p. 27f). However, while this is true for reintegration generally, I would argue that the political dimension of reintegration has largely been ignored or forgotten even more. Notably, definitions of reintegration vary related to their inclusion of the political dimension of the concept, often limiting the process to the social and economic sphere (among others Gleichmann et al. 2004, p. 65; cf. Knight and Özerdem 2004, p. 500; see also Nilsson 2005, p. 27; Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2006, p. 23), consequently these areas have also been given more attention (Özerdem 2010, 2012).

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[1] Underlying the rationale of these programs is the concern that former fighters are a threat or a problem of sorts that needs dealing with; whether or not that is the case is an open empirical question that this paper does not address. There is often an assumption that combatants embrace military norms setting them apart and making them inherently problematic (see e.g. Kingma 2002, p. 192), but we really do not know how extensive or enduring such effects are (see e.g. Jennings and Markus 1977).

The problem is that definitions matter, not just in the academic world, but because they have repercussions on the ground. Poor conceptualization of reintegration has been noted to influence design, implementation, expectations, coordination practices, financing, monitoring and ultimately, also, our understanding of what drives and explains success of DDR programs (Kingma and Muggah 2009, p. 5f; Muggah and Baaré 2009, p. 228). Thus, part of the confusion and the mixed results concerning the impact of DDR overall, also relates to what is actually meant by *reintegration*. Failing to recognize the complexity of the concept of reintegration, and not differentiating enough between, for instance, social, economic and political reintegration risks masking our understanding of how DDR works and does not work.

Research that today deals with the political aspect of reintegration has only done so in a rather limited and under-theorized fashion, as it is usually unclear why certain aspects have been chosen over others to represent *political reintegration*. I would argue that this limited conceptual understanding of what political (re)integration means has in turn impaired investigations of the political impact of these programs. This paper will therefore give an overview and critique of how this has been dealt with in the past. Starting with the policy community, this paper makes clear how the political dimension of reintegration has largely been overlooked, yet political and democratic norms are implicit in the policy discourse about DDR. Secondly, this paper explores how political reintegration has been dealt with by the research community, especially through either viewing it as a macro-level issue or more appropriately, in relation to DDR programs, as a micro-level issue. Finally, this paper concludes with a conceptual discussion, proposing how *political reintegration* should be defined and thereby studied. Importantly political reintegration needs to be considered in two respects: firstly, as the degree of any political involvement, and secondly and separately as the embrace of democratic norms among individual ex-combatants.

Policy Goals

To begin, we need to look at how this aspect has been understood by the policy community. The established definition, especially within the UN community is:

> Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility and often necessitates long-term external assistance (Secretary-General 2005, p. 1f).

This same definition is also reflected in the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) (UN DDR Resource Centre 2005), and as such, unfortunately, this definition has also seeped into the academic community. The focus on social and economic dimensions here has ultimately led to more research dealing with these issues, and ignoring other facets of reintegration. Muggah and Baaré have noted that this economic bias in understanding reintegration, has resulted in a view of ex-combatants as economic actors, as "*homo-economicus*", and rational choice models of DDR (Muggah and Baaré 2009, p. 229). Similarly Guáqueta has noted that: "By highlighting the economic dimensions of civil wars, the new conceptual lens has portrayed fighters as greedy individuals who do not have a legitimate political cause and, therefore, can or should not be politically reintegrated" (Guáqueta 2009, p. 12). Similarly, the focus on economic questions has allowed the policy community to evade the normatively more complex questions of politics (Bhatia and Muggah 2009, p. 126).

Confusion at the central level, or rather the failure to be explicit, also leads to competing interpretations at the local and implementing level, creating confusion in its wake, as well as poor implementation, and competing agendas on the ground. Experiences in both Uganda and Afghanistan testify to this (Muggah and Baaré 2009, pp. 226-8; Bhatia and Muggah 2009, p. 139), and in the Afghan case this is in part reflected in the three narratives of how DDR should be understood: "as *reward*, as economic *reintegration* and as *threat*" (Bhatia and Muggah 2009, p. 139).

Surprisingly the IDDRS do not identify specific indicators of these goals. In fact, this was consciously done, as it was believed that such indicators are inherently context dependent, and could therefore not be authoritatively and universally declared (UN DDR Resource Centre 2005, p. 14). Thereby the onus to establish reasonable indicators of success fell on the multitude of actors in a war termination/peacebuilding process instead. This creates difficulties in comparing the outcomes of DDR processes, and adding crucial and time-consuming work for actors already bogged down to get the peace process moving. This lack of specific indicators and specific definitions has been described by others as *alarming* (Muggah 2005, p. 243).

However, this does not mean that there is a consensus within top tiers of the policy community. Other major actors have been more inclusive in their definitions of reintegration, and some have also pointed towards indicators of success to a larger degree. Muggah and Baaré for instance, note "that there are considerable (if at times unacknowledged)

disagreements over what DDR is intended to achieve and the role and function of reintegration" within the UN community as a whole (2009, p. 227). The IDDRS purposefully excluded the political dimensions of reintegration, despite a preference within UNDP and think tanks to the opposite (Pugel 2009, p. 78).

In comparison, the EU community seems to embrace a more inclusive view of DDR and reintegration: "DDR needs to be part of the political and social developments and will be most successful when linked to […] democratic governance issues" ("EU Concept for support to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)" 2006, p. 4). Similarly, the Stockholm Initiative on DDR (SIDDR) has expressed support for reintegration programs that "make it more likely for ex-combatants to eventually reintegrate into civil society on economic, social and political levels" and noted that one indicator of political reintegration is the participation in democratic processes (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2006, p. 23), clearly including the political dimension in their understanding of reintegration.

Implicit Political Dimensions

There is also recognition within the policy community that DDR programs feed into larger political processes during these transitions. The political aspects seem mainly to come in at the execution level of DDR, where it is a question of political will among the elite actors of the parties involved in the conflict. This said, the UN community also expresses that DDR should contribute to the overall peacebuilding and recovery processes (UN DDR Resource Centre, pp. 1-2, 6; see also Muggah 2005, p. 245; Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2006). Synergies between DDR (as a part of peacebuilding) with development and democratization are thus expected. Clearly, DDR programs are expected to at least do no harm in areas that relate to democratization, which could include undermining the political voice of ex-combatants. Baaré has noted the DDR sits in the midst of four meta-objectives of post-conflict processes, namely: "security, well-being, justice and governance." However, it seems most of the conversation concerning DDR has in the past been along the dimension of security objectives in comparison to social and economic well-being (Baaré 2006, p. 24f).[2] Baaré's graphical and conceptual representation of DDR, indicates that DDR can speak more effectively to issues of governance and participation as well as justice and reconciliation than is commonly recognized. At the same time, DDR should not bee seen as a *magic bullet* (Muggah 2005), but admitting this does not negate the idea that it should at least not result in

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[2] This is also reflected in Muggah's discussion of minimalist and maximalist definitions of reintegration, which also highlights these two specific perspectives (2004, p. 27f).

'harm' and that it has the potential to create synergies with other larger and complicated processes of transition, such as democratization.

While the UN has not been explicit in terms of the political dimension of DDR, and especially in terms of reintegration, there are indications of implicit democratic goals with DDR and reintegration activities overall. The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) indicate several democratic ideals at the macro level of DDR if nothing else. For instance, such principles as inclusion in decision-making concerning DDR and implementation, and participatory and deliberative ideals permeate the discussions of reintegration programs (UN DDR Resource Centre 2005, pp. 4, 12-14, 27f, 34f). The IDDRS also highlight the usefulness of ex-combatants formally organizing themselves, using channels of representation to voice their concerns (UN DDR Resource Centre 2005, p. 12). There are also indications of the transmission of democratic norms and ideals being envisioned during reintegration programs: "Training can also help break down military attitudes and behaviour, and develop values and norms based on peace and democracy." (UN DDR Resource Centre 2005, p. 28). This is quite a strong statement, firstly because it assumes that military attitudes and behavior outlast the period of active enrollment, secondly because it assumes that military attitudes and behavior are not democratic, thirdly because it is assumed that norms of peace and democracy are mutually supportive, and fourthly it clearly underlines the implicit democratic goals of reintegration. However, we are given no indication of how such a transformation is supposed to happen. Ex-combatants are thought to need education on political issues (rights, responsibilities and norms), advice on their new political role in society, help with personal decision-making (as opposed to the collective and military decision-making they are used to) (UN DDR Resource Centre 2005, p. 21), in order "to encourage the participation of ex-combatants in democratic structures." (UN DDR Resource Centre 2005, p. 29). Hence, while the political dimension of reintegration is not included up-front in the definition of reintegration, there are clearly implicit political (and democratic) ideals in the Integrated DDR Standards.

The policy community also seems to assume that political reintegration is an automatic byproduct of social and economic reintegration. Meeting the social and economic needs of the ex-combatants is thought to reduce the incentives for using violence for political means, and similarly if the ex-combatants' economic and physical security are guaranteed they are thought to lack incentives for re-arming (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2006, pp. 14, 19).

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Actual Implementation

The failure to recognize the political dimension adequately at the policy level has also meant that the issue has been poorly dealt with at the local level by implementers of reintegration programs. Hence, ignoring or forgetting the dimension at the policy level trickles down, and leads to the dimension ultimately being ignored at this level as well. While, this area is only explored in a limited sense here, through looking at the Liberian case, the following should be seen as indicative of the general disposition of DDR implementation and implementers (see also comments related to the Ugandan and Afghan case earlier).

After the peace agreement was signed in Liberia, implementers of DDR spent two months producing strategies and a plan for how to conduct DDR in Liberia; clearly this important process was heavily conditioned by time and information constraints. Again, the job of defining reintegration, and its relevant indicators, was largely left to this process. Yet again, we see that the social and economic dimensions of reintegration were given serious consideration. In fact, in the document that details the strategy and implementation framework for the Liberian Disarmament, Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration Programme (DDRRP) these two dimensions are given their own subheadings (The Draft Interim Secretariat 2003, pp. 31-34) and indicators of success are given in the annex (The Draft Interim Secretariat 2003, p. 40). Pugel notes, however, that the document still fails in terms of specificity for the economic indicators of success, and even more so in terms of the political dimension (2009, p. 73). Pugel also notes that the problem of undefined indicators has been recognized by the UNDP, and in fact, been termed as "a major weakness" (2009, p. 77). In fact, I would argue that the document does not contain *any* overall political objectives of the reintegration component, the closest thing might be a formulation that speaks of the ex-combatants' participation in the general reconstruction process of the community (The Draft Interim Secretariat 2003, p. 28). However, in Annex H, which is concerned with the management information system, in the section on evaluating the DDR program, the document notes that risk mapping should be carried out with an eye to the risk of rearmament among ex-combatants as well as the "*Socio-political instability risk*", understood as organized political demonstrations fuelled by discontent and unmet expectations among the ex-combatant community (The Draft Interim Secretariat 2003, p. 78). From a political empowerment perspective, such organizational choices could be construed as a positive indicator that they are in fact using their political voice, rather than construed as a threat. This document clearly demonstrates a lack of understanding of the importance of the political dimension of reintegration, and when politics of ex-combatants are discussed it is phrased in

terms of risks, i.e. a mainly negative definition - what political reintegration is not. An article written by policy implementers in Liberia, reflecting on the lessons learned from the DDR experience in Liberia, also leaves out the political dimension of reintegration, except in terms of the use of violence among ex-combatants (Tamagini and Krafft 2010).

It is therefore not strange that political reintegration was not taken seriously by program partners in Liberia either. While civic education components were often included, these were often of poor quality and poorly thought through. My own interviews with program partners of the UNDP in Liberia, those responsible on the ground for ex-combatant training, similarly reveal a lack of awareness of any potential political repercussions of the reintegration program.[3] It also seems as if any political gains were assumed to follow automatically from social and economic integration.

Current Research Taking Up the Challenge?

So if the policy community has largely failed to take this dimension seriously, what can be said of the research community? In general, the issue seems to be largely ignored here as well (see e.g. Anaya 2007; Muggah 2004; Borzello 2007; Mazarire and Rupiya 2000; Jennings 2007; Williamson 2006). Recent work has, however, called for more attention, as well as more considered and broader conceptualizations of political reintegration, partly through moving beyond the issue of formalization of political parties (Berdal and Ucko 2009, p. 7f). Here, I agree with Berdal and Ucko when they note that understanding DDR in relation to political processes requires more, a lot more, than simply remarking that its success is dependent on *political will* (2009, p. 2). Similarly, Guáqueta notes that political reintegration has been downplayed and avoided in both policy and research communities (Guáqueta 2009, p. 11). Fortunately, there is a growing body of work that talks about politics and political reintegration, albeit in conceptually somewhat muddy ways. For instance, there has not been a systematic identification of the level of analysis used. The work related to DDR that speaks to political reintegration can be divided into roughly three areas: a) research that look at the general political consequences of DDR programs; b) research that focus on the transformation of armed groups into political parties; and c) research that discuss political reintegration at the individual level. In the sections that follow, these three areas will be discussed in turn.

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[3] There were a few exceptions however (see Söderström 2011b).

A) General Political Consequences

Several researchers have observed how DDR in general conditions larger political processes in the societies where they are conducted (see e.g. Özerdem 2003, p. 84).[4] Kingma, for instance, notes that the reintegration of ex-combatants has the potential to influence such issues as good governance and democratization (2002, pp. 185-187), similarly Nussio notes that DDR programs can contribute to statebuilding through (re)establishing confidence for the state (2011, p. 227), and a lot of work note how DDR interacts with and shapes elite politics as well as institutional building in the post-war context (Muggah et al. 2009a; Bhatia and Muggah 2009; Muggah and Baaré 2009).

In a report that attempted to draw together the lessons from DDR experiences up until 2004, notably three of the four areas of neglect noted in the report were related to political aspects. While the report continued to exclude the political dimension of reintegration, it did note that DDR programs feed into political processes: "DDR is about social engineering; it is also about politics" (Pouligny 2004, p. 6). The other neglected areas of attention related to understanding how local politics shape how DDR programs are received and implemented, and how the political will among implementers shape DDR, particularly in terms of commitment and funding (Pouligny 2004, pp. 4, 11f, 19).

Another example of this general approach to the political consequences of DDR programs is found in work on Uganda. Here, politics concerning transitional justice shaped and were shaped by DDR goals/policies (Muggah and Baaré 2009, p. 237). In general, DDR is also recognized as a policy that confers both power and legitimacy to actors in post-war contexts, in both inclusionary and exclusionary ways. The local political environment is said to both structure DDR, as well as be structured by DDR attempts (Muggah et al. 2009b, p. 271).

These programs come with large amounts of money (for both the implementers and the targeted groups), they offer a channel for rewarding past efforts during the war, and they structure the security dilemma the armed groups face in the early phase of the peace. DDR undoubtedly has political impacts for the various actors involved in implementation and running of the programs, and may shape political relations between different levels of military structures and military actors for instance. The study of such side-effects should not be ignored, but these are ultimately a question of *side-effects* or unintended consequences. In

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[4] Another political aspect of DDR as a whole, is the relationship with Security Sector Reform (SSR), and ensuring that military groups are under civilian control, can also been seen as a transformation at the political level (see Özerdem 2003; Muggah 2005, p. 243). This relationship is, however, not explored here.

fact, how peacebuilding in general is conducted is likely to structure these processes as well. This area of investigation, however, does not speak to the political impact of reintegration programs on the target groups themselves, i.e. the rank and file combatants. If we are to understand what is meant by political reintegration, this is the area we need to turn to.

B) Group Level Measures

A fair amount of work related to ex-combatants and DDR talk of *political reintegration*, but essentially deal with the political process of armed groups transforming into political parties. Here, again, there is an agreement that this is a neglected area of study (Guáqueta 2009; Torjesen and Macfarlane 2009; Söderberg Kovacs 2007, 2008; Berdal and Ucko 2009). I would argue that within this field there is a common understanding of what is at stake at least (see e.g. Guáqueta 2009; Torjesen and Macfarlane 2009; Söderberg Kovacs 2007, 2008; Berdal and Ucko 2009; Pouligny 2004; Vines and Oruitemeka 2009; Giustozzi 2009; Marriage 2009; Schafer 1998). The cumulative work in this area has established a wealth of case studies on this kind of transformation process. There is even a series devoted solely to this purpose published by the Berghof Foundation (Transitions Series), and several edited volumes with specific case studies (Berdal and Ucko 2009; De Zeeuw 2007). While it is difficult to estimate the total number of successful transformation (to say nothing of the failed attempts), we know that 30 of the 216 peace agreements that have been signed between 1975 and 2011 included provisions for transforming the armed group into a political party (Högbladh 2012).

As noted before, the report by Pouligny did not include political reintegration in its definition of reintegration overall. Yet, the report does conceptualize "political conversion", i.e. the transformation of armed groups into political parties, as an indicator of success of DDR programs. In addition, the report also hints at the importance of electoral participation by individual ex-combatants as an important indicator of success (Pouligny 2004, p. 17f). This mix of micro and macro perspectives on political reintegration does not add clarity, and similarly the report also sees DDR as not only an individual process, but as a collective one. It remains unclear, however, how DDR programs as such are meant to feed into this.

Another example of work that takes on this macro perspective of political reintegration is the edited volume by Berdal and Ucko. Here, we are invited to take a closer look at how armed groups struggle and deal with a transformation toward viable political entities (Berdal and Ucko 2009). In Ucko's study of Iraq the issue at stake is the political reintegration of entire armed groups. In terms of the elite levels of the militias, the author notes that the Shia

leaders were given preferential treatment while the Sunni were excluded from influence. In fact, Ucko claims that instead of being reintegrated, the soldiers were "deliberately alienated" (2009, p. 91), overall resulting in what the author terms a *false process of political reintegration* (2009, p. 96). Again, this process was influenced by the macro-relations of foreign involvement in Iraq, where certain actors gained influence and legitimacy by the structure and choices made by peacebuilding activities, such as DDR, highlighting the need to understand more thoroughly who you are working with and not, at the local level (Ucko 2009, p. 109).

Another example of a study that understands political reintegration through the lens of political party transformation is Vines and Oruitemeka's work on UNITA in Angola. In this study we are given insights into some of the challenges UNITA faced in this process, and the similarity with challenges facing opposition parties generally in Africa (Vines and Oruitemeka 2009). Similarly, other studies in Berdal and Ucko's volume speak to this level of analysis, helping to bring out the dynamics of such transformation, often in relation to politics concerning DDR implementation (Giustozzi 2009; Marriage 2009).

In Guáqueta's study of Colombia we are given a comparison between the processes of political reintegration of the guerrilla group M-19 and the paramilitaries. Concerning the creation of political parties, she notes that the process in Colombia has highlighted the normative question of whether armed groups can and should become political parties. Does such transformation require a political core of the armed group in question? In Colombia, the political legitimacy of the group in question has been a large determinant of the success of political reintegration (Guáqueta 2009). In conclusion, she notes that DDR programs can contribute more to the viability of these processes, which ultimately may also feed into whether violence is resumed or not, if more focus is given to building political capacity and knowledge among those involved (Guáqueta 2009, p. 37).

In Söderberg Kovacs' work on the transformation of armed groups into political parties (the FMLN in El Salvador, Renamo in Mozambique, and the failure of RUF in Sierra Leone and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia), she suggests that the success of such a process is largely dependent on three things: 1) the internal cohesion of the group itself; 2) the group's popular support; and 3) the degree of legitimacy accorded from the international community (Söderberg Kovacs 2007, pp. 8, 196). Clearly, DDR programs can influence all three factors, but particularly perhaps DDR implementation makes the degree of legitimacy accorded by the international community visible to the local actors. Poignantly, Söderberg Kovacs notes that the reasons for being granted international legitimacy varies; at times there are pragmatic

reasons and at other times legitimacy is related to the degree of political claims made by the group (Söderberg Kovacs 2007, p. 199).

Another way of exploring political reintegration, at the macro level, is not in relation to the creation of political parties, but of ex-combatants building civil society associations. An example of a study dealing with this is of AMODEG (the Associação Moçambicana dos Desmobilizados da Guerra) in Mozambique (Schafer 1998). Schafer investigates different forms of representation (a democratic criterion) in relation to AMODEG, and how well the association of demobilized combatants managed to meet them. She also considers the types and content of the civic education the association involved itself in. Particularly challenging for this association was the combination and accommodation of both Renamo and Frelimo combatants in their membership. Schafer concludes by noting that it is not a given that such associations are promoters of democracy, nor effectively represent their members (Schafer 1998, p. 222).

While the transformation of armed groups into political parties is an important process, and a challenge that raises the question of whether they should become political parties, I argue that such studies are ultimately a question of political reintegration at the macro and elite level. Understanding political reintegration of armed groups as the transformation into political parties, makes sense when the level of analysis is the macro level. While such processes may well be shaped by the DDR process, as well as the overall peacebuilding context, transforming armed groups into political parties is not the end goal of DDR itself, and often specific support is allocated for this particular endeavor in peace processes that is not linked to the DDR program. In addition, the transformation of armed groups is not necessarily obvious at the individual level. Such transformation relates to the level of elites within the armed groups and organizational structure and purpose, but it is not the object of the DDR process. While this aspect is also interesting, it is quite different from asking questions about the political involvement of individuals, albeit ex-combatants. The reintegration of ex-combatants may be affected by whether or not the armed group transforms into a political party or not, but it is not a measure of *political integration* at the micro-level in and of itself. In any case, even if the armed group transforms into a political party, that may not enhance the political involvement of the rank and file ex-combatants, this is still an open question that has not been considered enough. This may especially be the case as the political culture within some of these armed groups have been noted to be "militant, hierarchical, sectarian and internally undemocratic" (Söderberg Kovacs 2008, p. 135). Thus, if we want to explore and

measure whether individual ex-combatants are politically integrated examining how well armed groups have transformed themselves into political parties does not address that issue.

C) Micro Level Measures

Finally, then, let's turn to how the concept of political reintegration has been understood at the micro-level. In Kingma's work from 2002, political reintegration is never defined, but we are given indications that it is seen as linked to the process of democratization, and in particular processes of democratic decision-making and the use of non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms. Building on this, Özerdem claims that political reintegration is "the process through which former combatants and their families become full part of decision-making processes," exemplified as voting in elections and taking on responsibilities of political representation (2003, p. 83, 2010, p. 23). This underscores that there are implicit democratic assumptions in the definition of political reintegration. Similarly, Porto, Parsons and Alden measured political reintegration through exploring areas of electoral participation: namely, knowledge of elections and parties, whether voting is seen as a right or obligation, past and future participation in elections (voting, campaigning and candidacy) (Porto et al. 2007, p. 71). The focus on elections as noted by Porto *et al*, is not unreasonable but it does limit reintegration to a very narrow field of politics. It also sets the bar quite low, as voting is often done *en masse* in post-war societies.

In a study of political reintegration in Ethiopia, the concept is not clearly defined, although firmly placed at the micro-level. Here, the authors indicate that it is a question of "a healthy political connectivity" (Muggah et al. 2009a, p. 194). The lack of definition may in part be explained by the fact that this study relied on emic data, focusing on the discourse among those interviewed to structure the data. However, we are given little help in understanding their approach in the field, as they only note that the political dimension was measured through "livelihood timelines (to assess political reintegration)." (Muggah et al. 2009a, p. 195). When commenting on the results of the study, we are given additional clues as to how political reintegration is understood, although this is not stated explicitly: "many veterans considered themselves to be 'empowered' and 'accepted' by their families and communities and not unduly discriminated against by political authorities." (Muggah et al. 2009a, p. 197). I agree that the question of feeling empowered could be seen as a sign of political reintegration. However the last part, i.e. whether the individual is feeling discriminated by political authorities, I would argue is rather an indication of something that speaks to the systemic progress, rather than a characteristic of the individual as such. Of

course, systemic issues are important, but they are not good as indicators of the micro-level impact of DDR as these do not vary between individuals but are rather measures of the political system as such. Similarly, the authors also seem to suggest that whether veterans' organizations are discouraged or supported may speak to the level of political reintegration (Muggah et al. 2009a, p. 199), but again this is a measure situated at the systemic level rather than something we can measure for the individual ex-combatant. The authors also suggest that the various dimensions of reintegration feed into each other, for instance they note how failed economic reintegration may feed into lower social status and community acceptance (Muggah et al. 2009a, p. 201).

In her work on Colombia, Denissen notes that political reintegration is an important component of the reintegration of ex-combatants, and talks about this as a question of *exercising citizenship*, and that the process of political reintegration turns soldiers into citizens. While I agree that the emphasis on such issues is motivated, the article is not explicit in terms of what that entails, except for general references to political participation (Denissen 2010, p. 329). Denissen does recognize, however, that we need better indicators of when this process can be said to have been completed (2010, p. 339). In the Colombian case, we also see that options at the macro-level shape and direct the political voice at the micro-level, where the lack of options created a desire for different and newer channels, ultimately feeding the creation of new guerrilla groups (Denissen 2010, p. 330).

In Pugel's work on Liberian ex-combatants the political dimension of reintegration is clearly indicated as important, and as we have seen earlier, this dimension was largely ignored by the DDR implementers. In Pugel's definition of reintegration we are told that this is a question of ex-combatants being accepted as "fully-fledged citizens" and that the process of reintegration overall has political prerequisites (2009, p. 79). Again, we move from a rather limited theoretical definition of political reintegration to examples of how it was operationalized. Here, Pugel used the following indicators of political reintegration: 1) "Confidence in local community mechanism for dispute resolution", 2) "Sever all social/economic ties with former faction members", and 3) "Confidence in democratic, non-violent political expressions to effect change" (Pugel 2009, p. 85). Claiming that the second indicator is a good measure of political reintegration, I find problematic. It might be more reasonable to see this as linked to measures of demobilization, i.e. a de-activation of military networks, but particularly this indicator is related to social and economic dimensions, rather than the potential political influence of their military network. The other two, clearly refer to what options of political participation are pursued and which ones are seen as viable. Here,

again, however, we see how democratic assumptions are embedded within the notion of political reintegration, but also that these indicators are dependent on the environment where the ex-combatants exist. We need to be able to differentiate between progress made in terms of overall political institutional development and integration of the individuals themselves if we are to truly capture political reintegration at the micro-level.

But before we discuss this in detail, let us also consider a very similar approach as seen in the work by Humphreys and Weinstein in Sierra Leone. Their work in Sierra Leone also recognize the relevance of the political dimension of reintegration: "we conceptualize reintegration as multifaceted, with factional, economic, political and social dimensions" (Humphreys and Weinstein 2009, p. 50). While they take on a clearly micro-level approach to studying this, they recognize that this builds on an assumption that effects of DDR at the individual level lead to more aggregate and societal developments, but that DDR may also shape aggregate levels without working through the individual (Humphreys and Weinstein 2009, p. 48). In their attempt to fill political reintegration with content, they depart from the policy community's priorities, noting that most important attribute is that of ex-combatants using non-violent means to pursue their objectives, and thereby they see confidence in democratic forms of participation as the ultimate test of such transformation (Humphreys and Weinstein 2009, p. 50). This is then measured through preference for voting and contacting officials as compared to protests, use of violence or non-governmental channels of influence (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007, p. 541): "The measure takes a value of 1 if an individual believes that exercising voice by voting in elections or approaching governmental officials, either locally or nationally, is the most effective way to deal with community problems. Alternative choices included protests, complaints to NGOs, reaching out to traditional leaders or factional authorities, or taking up arms to fight." (Humphreys and Weinstein 2009, p. 55)

The measure of confidence in democratic channels for participation, however, as noted in relation to Pugel as well, conflates evaluations of the political system with political reintegration. Ex-combatants can be more or less politically reintegrated independent of whether the society as a whole has made democratic progress. Perhaps there are real problems with the political system in place, is that then really a good measure of the political reintegration of the ex-combatants? Perhaps those who express a lack of support for using elections as a way to express their political voice are in fact politically more savvy, because they recognize the limitations and, depending on context, perceive problems with the electoral process? In any case, non-governmental channels of participation and protests are not necessarily undemocratic, even if their direct target is not representative channels. Research

has suggested that often it is the same people who participate in all forms of participation, and it is more a question of their degree of involvement, and that such a division between one group of people doing one thing and another group doing other things as suggested by Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) does not really occur (Verba et al. 1978).

Importantly, however, Humphreys and Weinstein recognize that the different dimensions of reintegration are firstly explained by different things but also that such explanations may not always be mutually supportive. Reintegration in one area does not unequivalently lead to reintegration in another area (2007, pp. 543, 548; Humphreys and Weinstein 2009, pp. 48f, 56). While economic, social and political reintegration are important goals of DDR, and ideally they should be mutually reinforcing, that is not necessarily the case, nor may the same things be decisive for their achievement, and Humphreys and Weinstein's work suggests that distinct processes may underlie the success in each area. Similarly Pugel finds that economic and social indicators do not cluster together; they are altogether different things (Pugel 2009, p. 78)

In an article on youths in Liberia, Maclay and Özerdem discuss two dimensions of integration, namely horizontal and vertical. Horizontal integration refers largely to what is meant by social integration, while the vertical is connected with the more political dimension: "Vertical integration involves the engagement of the individual in the more visible vertical institutions of social capital such as decisions-making, both at community and at national level" (Maclay and Özerdem 2010, p. 348). Again, we see the implicit democratic content of the concept of political reintegration, notably being involved in decision-making structures. Critically, however, the authors note that the context in Liberia does not really contain institutions that listen and are responsive to such participation (Maclay and Özerdem 2010, p. 351). Again, we see the interdependency between political voice and the context in which it is expressed. If we are to explore political reintegration, we need to strike the right balance here. Clearly, the behavior of individuals is dependent on the context in which they find themselves, but our measure of political reintegration needs to capture variations that depend on the individual herself, rather than on the potential openness of the political system in question.

Also, here the alternative to inclusion in decision-making processes is framed as using other channels of expression, namely those outside the legitimate system, such as violence and ultimately returning to war. Thus, while noting that "war is their voice" if all else fails, the authors also critically remark that ex-combatants are not the cause of war in themselves, but rather the *gunpowder* and not the *spark* (Maclay and Özerdem 2010, p. 350f). Using

violence in politics and regular representative channels are, however, two extreme points in a continuum of how one can engage in politics, where a lot of variation in-between is possible. The authors also note that economic reintegration can feed into social reintegration (Maclay and Özerdem 2010, p. 349).

In Mitton's study of the RUF in Sierra Leone, we see another attempt at dealing with this concept. The author notes that evaluating the degree of success in this area, needs to look beyond the absence of violence and electoral participation. The voting experience, although engaged in *en masse*, has rather fed political disengagement among ex-combatants, particularly due to extensive corruptive practices and because violence was seen as an integrative feature of electoral politics (Mitton 2009, pp. 185-188; see also Mitton 2008). In particular, the author suggests that in order to evaluate the extent of political reintegration we also need to consider "the extent to which ex-combatants hold faith in the political system, and peace generally, to deliver solutions to problems of social and economic disparity or decline, and the extent to which ex-combatants themselves are shaping this process" and that political reintegration does not equal "political participation per se, but rather requires specific *forms* of political participation, which reinforce the primacy of peaceful political interaction over and above other means for affecting change" (Mitton 2009, p. 173). Put another way, measuring political reintegration "must include less tangible indicators such as the faith of ex-combatants in political interaction to deliver results, and the foundations upon which such confidence is based" (Mitton 2009, p. 191). Mitton makes several important observations, particularly concerning the limits of seeing political reintegration as solely a question of electoral participation. Elections in these regimes are not necessarily the democratic expression we would like to think (see e.g. Söderberg Kovacs 2008, p. 142). Past work on ex-combatants' electoral participation has also made clear that it is not always an expression of democratic ideals. For instance, Söderström has showed how convoluted and varied ex-combatants' endorsement of electoral participation in Liberia can be (Söderström 2010, 2009, 2013b), calling for nuance in terms of which political options are pursued and a deeper investigation of the political values and attitudes underlying political behavior, be it electoral participation or otherwise. Similarly, ex-combatants' heavy involvement in the elections in Sierra Leone in 2007, as shown by Christensen and Utas, does not necessarily reflect democratic values, but rather cynicism and an opportunity for personal gain as well as the inherent place of violence in elections (Christensen and Utas 2008, pp. 528-536). These observations highlight the importance of uncovering the values and norms behind political behavior, in order to truly understand what they signify. While I believe Mitton recognizes

this, the focus on external efficacy (as evidenced by Mitton's focus on the ex-combatants' faith in the political system) is problematic because once again this is highly dependent on the system within which one acts politically, rather than reflecting an evaluation of the individual's engagement in politics. Of course the individual ex-combatant's perception of how accessible different forms of participation are may vary between ex-combatants. Using this to evaluate the individual's standing only makes sense in an essentially democratic society where we know that objectively these are real existing options of political action. This is not the case in most post-war societies where the question of political reintegration has been actualized.

In addition, the failure at the macro-level of RUF to transform into a viable political party, does not seem to have negatively influenced the political reintegration at the micro-level, in fact Mitton suggests that it is rather an expression of the opposite dynamic, as the ex-combatants found alternative channels for political voice in Sierra Leone (Mitton 2009, p. 180). Mitton also notes that the ex-combatants' political voice is conditioned by the political environment in which they are immersed (Mitton 2009, p. 189). This again, shows the difficulties we will have in establishing a concept of political reintegration that is not dependent on the context in which the process occurs.[5]

Conceptual Clarification or Another *Essentially Contested* Concept?

The above discussion has highlighted some common denominators in how this concept has been understood in the past. Whether because it allows us to structure empirical research, or because it structures reality in itself, language matters. Definitions are important. But let us depart from the concept itself in this section, to see how we should understand it. When addressing this challenge, it seems wise to remember what Oppenheim noted about defining concepts: "Political concepts are held to be contestable because they reflect rival value commitments and because they are inherently vague, open-ended, and ambiguous" (1981, p. 182), and similarly Gallie noted that some of the defining criteria of essentially contested concepts are their appraisive character, their internally complex character and their open-endedness (Gallie 1956, p. 171f). Perhaps *political reintegration* is an essentially contested concept.

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[5] For an example of how the local environment and concerns about peace influences political attitudes, ex-combatants embrace of pluralism and tolerance in Liberia is a clear example (Söderström 2011a). Here, it is noted that while the ex-combatants value pluralism and tolerance, they are still hesitant about embracing such values in regular political life, preferring to limit political debate considerably, partly because there is a lack of faith in the political system overall and because of concerns for the stability of the peace.

Firstly, we need to establish what the referent object of political reintegration is, as our choice of definition also depends on what phenomenon we want to explain (Oppenheim 1981, p. 182). In this paper, I have argued that if we are trying to understand DDR processes, political reintegration needs to be understood from the perspective of those participating in the programs, i.e. individual combatants. Hence, the individual combatants are the referent objects of political reintegration. Political reintegration is thus taken as a process occurring at the *micro-level* or individual level, and it is therefore at this level of analysis that we need to define the concept and consequently measure it. This does not mean that *political reintegration* cannot be used in relation to armed *groups*, but at this level of analysis, we are talking about something profoundly different. Making this distinction between these levels of analysis, also allows us to see how these two levels impact on each other more clearly. Having said this, I do think there is more clarity in terms of what is meant at the macro-level with political reintegration, as relating to the transformation of armed groups into political parties, than has been the case at the micro-level.

The inclusion of the prefix 're' in political *re*integration is problematic. This seems to suggest that the concept refers to a process of returning to pre-war levels of something. Others (researchers and policy makers alike) have noted the absurdity of such a view, as many combatants were too young pre-war to have any recollection of politics, and because society itself has changed over the course of the conflict (see e.g. Kingma 2002, p. 183; Mitton 2009, p. 175; Maclay and Özerdem 2010, p. 345; Baaré 2006, p. 22f; UN DDR Resource Centre 2005, pp. 1, 3). The prefix also alludes to the idea that the combatants have departed from legitimate realms, and that the process is about bringing them back to something normal and legitimate (see e.g. Bøås and Bjørkhaug 2010). Another question is of course if returning to pre-war types of politics is desirable, as they may often have been quite exclusionary (and undemocratic) and in fact fed the conflict itself. There is a large agreement in the literature, that the term *re*integration is a misnomer, and in fact we are simply referring to *integration*. However, as the praxis within the field is to refer to *re*integration, this paper will also use this terminology.[6]

However, the usage of the term integration may also suggest that an overall harmonization process occurs between different segments of society, as integration refers to how the parts fit in with the entire entity. Should all segments of society act and think about politics in the same way? This type of interpretation of the term is unfortunate, and at the very

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[6] This problem is relevant for discussions about economic as well as social reintegration as well, as has been frequently noted (see e.g. Kingma 2002, p. 183).

least making it difficult to evaluate, as the level of involvement becomes a moving target that is related to the involvement of the rest of society. However, I still think we need some point of comparison in order to make sense of this process, the question is what that point of comparison should be. We will return to this issue shortly.

The open-endedness of the reintegration process in general has been noted before as well, and it is equally applicable in the political dimension. It is not about achieving a fixed target, where we can say that we have arrived, now we are *politically integrated* with absolute authority. Thus, I agree with Muggah *et al* when they argue that reintegration needs to be viewed as a process rather than an outcome, at a fixed level (Muggah et al. 2009a, p. 194). This does not mean that we are unable to establish indicators that indicate whether we are more or less integrated politically; it does suggest, however, that the goal is an ideal rather than something routinely and easily achieved. This open-endedness of the concept reminds us that perhaps *political reintegration* is an essentially contested concept.

Through implicitly embedding democratic expectations in the concept of political reintegration, previous research has made evaluating the concept more difficult. There is no guarantee that a post-war society will also be a democratic society, and that the type of political involvement society as a whole is engaging in, is democratic. So, the question: *Reintegration into what?* is truly crucial. In a post-war context, we face an inherent tension between democratic practices and simply political practices. Often democratic practices are a challenge for the entire society at this stage. Thus, I argue that we need to conceptualize political reintegration as political involvement (democratic or otherwise). In part, the democratic involvement of ex-combatants is dependent on the development of politics at large in the post-war society, and it is problematic to assume that reintegration programs will also rehabilitate entire societies. This is particularly problematic when we include measures of political reintegration that in actual fact are evaluations of the system itself (which is assumed to be democratic), rather than measures relating solely to the individual. Surely the ex-combatants can be *political*, yet neo-patrimonially so, or in an authoritarian way or even in a corrupt way. Hence, the different outcomes span from lack of involvement (in which case democratic traits matter little), to involvement with undemocratic traits, and finally to involvement with democratic traits. Of course, ideally reintegration programs would promote the latter outcome, but the other alternatives cannot be ignored as possible outcomes. If we are to truly capture the effect DDR programs can have on political reintegration, or the ex-combatants' relation with politics, all of these outcomes need to be considered and understood. While there may be an implicit democratic goal of DDR among practitioners, this

is never really scrutinized thoroughly. This does not mean that it is unreasonable to assess reintegration against normative goals as well, but this needs to be done more explicitly than what has been the case in past research. Also, *political reintegration* does not conceptually contain democratic assumptions *per se*. The concept itself only implies being increasingly involved in politics on the same terms as everyone else in the polity, but these terms could be a question of *equally bad* terms.

I argue that political reintegration is essentially about political involvement, and this is important in and of itself. If DDR conditions ex-combatants' relation with politics in any way this is interesting and important to know and understand. The important aspect of political reintegration is the understanding of it as *a process whereby political channels are increasingly seen as viable for handling societal problems for the individual ex-combatant.* What channels are seen as appropriate and legitimate channels, however, will vary from case to case, and over time. Thus, here, all forms (and all channels) of political participation envisioned by the ex-combatants are indications of an increased level of political involvement; *indicators of the extent of their political voice*. This definition, also highlights that the ex-combatants' sense of internal efficacy should be seen as an indicator of this, as internal efficacy refers to an individual's rating of their own capacity to influence and participate in politics. Of course, the choices of which channels are seen as appropriate for political action are not completely independent of the political regime, but this way of understanding political reintegration is at least less biased in this respect than measures of political reintegration that speak to the ex-combatants' confidence in democratic channels. Political involvement then reflects the degree to which the ex-combatants feel that they have a political voice, no matter how that voice is articulated.

As noted before, we do need some point of comparison, however, in order to make sense of political reintegration more normatively: what values and political content hide behind the ex-combatants' political involvement? In past research, democratic assumptions have been an implicit part of our understanding of political reintegration. I argue that evaluating political reintegration in terms of democratic criteria needs to be done more coherently and explicitly. By noting that the ideal goal of political reintegration is democratic integration, we can formulate an ideal point of comparison, namely democratic values and norms. I suggest that we can use the literature on *democratic citizenship* (see e.g. Krishna 2008; Nie et al. 1996; Finkel 2003; van Deth et al. 2007), to do this more transparently, but also more in-depth than has previously been the case. This literature has long tried to capture what such democratic engagement entails, and insights from this field should be well poised

to inform current DDR research. For instance, such a take on the democratic involvement part of political reintegration requires a closer look at *the extent at which democratic norms and ideals are embraced by ex-combatants*. In particular, this calls for an examination of such things as views on tolerance, pluralism, equality and inclusivity of politics. The embrace of such democratic values are certainly indicative of a positive political reintegration.

Hence, I propose that we need to explore political reintegration in terms of two dimensions: the extent of their political voice (i.e. political involvement) and the content of their political voice (i.e. democratic values and norms).

A Tentative Definition allowing for New Research Agendas

In this paper we have seen how the concept of reintegration, and in particular political reintegration, has been (mis)understood, or underplayed, by the policy and research community respectively. The exclusion of the political dimension from policy guidelines is unfortunate, as it only serves to mask the political objectives that are there in any case. This results in challenges on the ground for policy implementers, but it has also lead to a limited understanding and examination of the political consequences of DDR programs.

Fortunately, there is a growing consensus that political reintegration needs to be taken seriously and empirically investigated. However, as there is a lack of a common understanding of what political reintegration means, especially in terms of what level of analysis is appropriate, this is an issue that still needs advancing. If we are to take the impact of DDR programs seriously, I suggest we need to focus our attention on the micro-level connotations of political reintegration. As reintegration programs are targeted at individual ex-combatants, we need to have an understanding of political reintegration at this level of analysis. This does not invalidate the understanding of political reintegration at the macro-level as a question of armed groups transforming into political parties, but it does clarify where such a take on political reintegration fails to meet our needs in understanding the effects of DDR.

We should also be careful of definitions that overlap with the other dimensions of reintegration. For instance, being alienated from families and social structures is very different from feeling alienated from political structures. And while individuals may not be 'free atoms' in relation to their social networks, in relation to political structures they may be. If we do not uphold strict distinctions between these dimensions, we will not be able to study and understand how these processes feed into each other either. Thus, political reintegration should be defined in ways distinct from definitions of social reintegration, as well as

economic reintegration. Indeed, any hierarchy between social, economic and political reintegration for instance, is an empirical question requiring systematic study.

We need to take the political consequences of DDR seriously, good or bad, intended or unintended. In order to do that, however, we need a measured and explicit definition of what political reintegration is all about, and appropriate indicators that truly reflect the degree of political reintegration at the individual level. In this paper I have suggested, that one way of doing this is through examining *political involvement* and *democratic values and norms*, where political involvement is the *conditio sine qua non* of political reintegration (the extent of their political voice), and the second element more accurately reflects, and allows for an explicit and separate examination of, the ideal behind the notion of political reintegration (the content of their voice).

Something which has also become obvious in this paper is that we still have a rather limited understanding of how DDR may influence this. Clearly, DDR programs are not the only thing shaping ex-combatants' relationship with politics; the broader institutional environment plays a large role in this. The different expressions of political engagement that have been observed in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Uganda, for instance (Blattman and Annan 2009; Christensen and Utas 2008; Bøås and Hatløy 2008; Söderström 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2013b), may reflect differences in overall environment, as well as differences related to who became a combatant and in what manner they became ex-combatants (this is also in part noted by Blattman 2009, p. 245). The transformation of armed groups into political parties may also shape the political voice of ex-combatants, but this dynamic is still underexplored in my view. Also, in terms of DDR programs there seems to be an assumption that social and economic reintegration will lead to political reintegration automatically. However, this view has been challenged by some of the studies noted in this paper (notably Humphreys and Weinstein 2009; Humphreys and Weinstein 2007). I believe this is where the field needs to advance next: how does DDR feed into political reintegration, whether positively or negatively so? Having clarified what political reintegration entails, not only can we examine the extent of political reintegration among ex-combatants in various post-conflict contexts better than before, but we can also start to take the next question serious, namely: how do DDR-programs shape the political involvement of individual ex-combatants and their embrace of democratic norms. Are norms transferred with DDR-programs, and if so, how? This is where the field needs to advance next (see Söderström 2013a for a tentative theoretical framework for such an analysis).

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Having a better understanding of what political reintegration is may of course also help policy makers design DDR-programs. Recognizing the democratic ideals more openly and explicitly should help inform policy choices as well as implementation on the ground, and perhaps allow this aspect of reintegration to be taken more seriously at all levels of policy articulation and implementation. The role ex-combatants play in post-conflict societies is shaped by many things and the resort to violence (as a channel of political influence) needs to be examined more thoroughly. The knowledge we have today suggests that social and economic reintegration are not enough to moderate this choice, yet again calling for more research that examines other factors shaping and coloring the political behavior of ex-combatants.

Taking it one step further: Research agenda within post-war democratization

The division between levels of analysis as suggested by this paper can be useful in order to structure research in areas beyond DDR-programs, namely in relation to post-war democratization processes in general. Conceptual clarity is important, in part because it allows us to structure empirical research better, but also because it allows us to see other patterns of similarity and dissimilarity across levels as well as linkages between concepts better.

There is a growing body of work that address politics and political reintegration in the aftermath of war, and if we look beyond DDR, we can see that this research can be divided into three areas: 1) research that focus on the transformation of the military elite to a political elite; 2) research that focus on the transformation of armed groups into political parties; and 3) research that discuss political reintegration at the individual level of rank and file combatants. Through differentiating between different referent objects for political reintegration, as seen in Table 1 below, we can systematize and clarify the research agenda further. Political reintegration can thus occur at three different levels, or in relation to three different referent objects: the military elite, armed groups and individual combatants. Each level has its specific end goals, justifications, challenges and explanations.

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Table 1: Post-War Political Reintegration at different levels of analysis

Level of Analysis	End Goal	Justification	Challenges	Explanations*
1. Military Elite	Political elite (Elected representatives).	Stake in the peace (avoid spoilers).	Human rights abuses. War crimes.	– Economic incentives – Recognized as justified representatives of group, domestically and internationally – Influenced by political reintegration of other levels
2. Armed groups	Political Parties.	Address conflict causes.	Freezes conflict lines, perpetuating the conflict.	– Part of peace agreement – Peacebuilding – Internal cohesion of the group – Legitimacy accorded by the international community – Popular support – Funding opportunities – Influenced by political reintegration of other levels
3. Combatants	Citizens (Democrats).	Equal participation for all.	Risks giving ex-combatants precedence in political life in contrast with more disadvantaged groups, such as war victims/survivors.	– Byproduct of socioeconomic reintegration – Procedural effect of peacebuilding (DDR programs) – War experience – Influenced by political reintegration of other levels

*The list includes examples of explanations, but it does not provide an exhaustive list.

Firstly, the end goal of political reintegration at these different levels will vary. For the military elite successful political reintegration is equated with becoming a political elite instead, whereas for armed groups this is equated with becoming political parties, and for individual combatants this is equated with becoming functioning citizens in the new regime (which should be measured through the extent of their political voice, and the content of their voice, as noted earlier).

These levels of political reintegration may of course impact on each other. The reintegration of individual ex-combatants may be affected by whether or not the armed group transforms into a political party or not, but it is not a measure of *political integration* at the micro-level in and of itself (a difference sometimes not recognized enough in past research).

Even if the armed group transforms into a political party, this may not necessarily enhance the political involvement of the rank and file ex-combatants, this is still an open question that has not been empirically scrutinized enough. Thus, if we want to explore and measure whether individual ex-combatants are politically integrated, examining how well armed groups have transformed themselves into political parties does not address that particular issue. Similarly, whether an armed group manages to transform itself into a political party depends in part on the conduct of its military elite, as well as its ability to attract followers (some of which are likely to be former combatants of the armed group), but it cannot be equated with successful political reintegration of its rank and file members or its political elite. Thus, while the different levels impact on each other, success at one level cannot be equated with success at another level.

Political reintegration at the different levels of analysis is also motivated by different concerns. Hence, the argument in favor of including the military elite (warlords and military commanders etc) in formal and representational politics is rather different from the argument in favor of allowing former combatants to participate in politics. Ensuring that previous military strongmen have a reason to support the peace and avoiding spoilers, have often been an important incentive behind their entry into formal and representational politics. At the same time, their war history, which sometimes includes human rights abuses as well as crimes against humanity, makes their inclusion in democratic politics as elected representatives rather uncomfortable (see among othersStedman 1997; Darby 2006). Thus at this level, there are serious tradeoffs to be considered in terms of forwarding the peace and democratization processes, dilemmas that are not as pronounced at the other levels.

In contrast the justification for transforming armed groups into political parties is that they then can become functional vehicles for addressing the root causes of the conflict, offering a formalized channel for politics to continue through that is commensurate with democratic politics. However, the challenge here is that these parties may then perpetuate the conflict that was at the center of the war, in a way that freezes the conflict lines rather than eventually moving beyond them. Instead of moving beyond the conflict, the post-war society may have to deal with politics that is structured around the same divisions for a long time to come. At the same time, this potential tradeoff also speaks to the main justification for such transformation: it allows the various actors to channel the grievances that fuelled the conflict and address the conflict causes in a legitimate manner.

The main justification for the political reintegration of individual ex-combatants is the ideal of equal participation of all citizens in a polity. Ex-combatants are not an exception here, even if their participation in politics may cause concern among survivors and victims of the war.

Finally, separating political reintegration at these three different levels also allows us to see how different explanatory factors may operate differently (and similarly) at the various levels. Clearly, the different levels in themselves may be important in explaining the outcome at another level. For instance, the group's popular support can be based on the former armed members of the group. Where the internal cohesion of the group is missing, this might not hinder individual elite members to survive in peace politics even if the party as such does not become a viable party. Signals related to the group's legitimacy are often transmitted via the peacebuilding interventions and behavior of the international community, e.g. as made visible through the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) programs targeted to the individual ex-combatants. The list of explanatory variables offered in Table 1 is not exhaustive by any means, but should be seen as indicative of some of the similarities between the levels, but perhaps more important highlight that certain factors may be more important for explaining a successful outcome at one level that at another. For instance, the war experience itself for individual rank and file combatants (including recruitment) may be particularly important for political reintegration at the individual level. Similarly, as noted earlier, the potential impact of DDR is most likely centered at this level as well, as this is where the target group is situated.

Contrasting this overview of the concept of political reintegration with the research that has been carried out in this field can help us see gaps in the current literature. Differentiating political reintegration with respect to different referent objects in post-war politics thus offers ways to both see new research questions, as well as ways of structuring them.

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