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Integration or separation? The stigmatisation of ex-combatants after war

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Abstract. Ex-combatant reintegration programmes are buttressed by a number of problematic assumptions about ex-combatants themselves; namely, that ex-combatants should not receive long-term support because such assistance would amplify the threat they pose to security and exacerbate community resentment towards them. The article uses data collected from Liberia to demonstrate that such thinking stigmatises ex-combatants and works against the objective of reintegration: it disrupts *integration into* the everyday social, economic, and political life of the post-conflict state and aims instead to render ex-combatants *separate from* communities. Integration will remain elusive unless assumptions about ex-combatants as programme beneficiaries are challenged.

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Efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants after war occupy a privileged position in the peacebuilding strategy of the United Nations and its implementing partners.[1] The 2006 UN Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) state simply,

> The sustainable social and economic reintegration of former combatants should be the ultimate objective of [DDR]. If reintegration fails, the achievements of the disarmament and demobilization phase are undermined, instability increases, and sustainable reconstruction and development are put at risk.[2]

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[1] United Nations General Assembly, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*: *Report of the Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* (2 December 2004), A/59/565, paras 227–8.

[2] United Nations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards* (August 2006), {http://www.unddr.org/iddrs} accessed 31 May 2011.

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But policy documentation on DDR is located firmly within a problem-solving paradigm, focusing on organisational issues such as coordination, fundraising, and integration between agencies instead of how to achieve sustainable social and economic reintegration.[3] Recently, an important critical literature has emerged, arguing that elevation and codification of DDR have glossed over contradictions, disagreement, and confusion about its definition, components, and objectives.[4] This literature also demonstrates that DDR programmes often fall short of achieving their objectives and have in some cases done more harm than good.[5] Their conclusions cast doubt over DDR as a policy tool and show that reintegration remains under-conceptualised and under-theorised. Problems with DDR accordingly are linked to a broader 'strategic deficit' in peacebuilding.[6]

This article extends the critical debate over DDR to suggest that confusion over the aims and objectives of reintegration, as well as programme failures, might be linked to the stigmatisation of programme recipients themselves. Donors and agencies are not just ill-equipped to assist ex-combatants after war; they are queasy about doing so. The article hypothesises that the discourse and practice of DDR stigmatises former combatants as 'unworthy' aid recipients. DDR, in this reading of ex-combatant reintegration, is not under-theorised. On the contrary, dominant (if unintentional) narratives of DDR reinforce problematic assumptions about ex-combatants, their character, identity, and motivations. This article isolates and analyses two such narratives:[7]

A. A *threat narrative*, which portrays ex-combatants as inherently and naturally threatening to post-conflict peace; and,
B. A *resentment narrative*, which emphasises the likelihood that communities will resent assistance to ex-combatants, thereby portraying communities as more deserving of aid than, and fundamentally distinct from, ex-combatants.

Both narratives filter the way in which the reintegration process is understood, implemented, and conveyed. Both result in the exclusion of ex-combatants from long-term aid, a consequence that is strangely at odds with the stated aims of DDR, further differentiating ex-combatants from their communities when the goal is to integrate them into communities. Well-intentioned implementers end up being suspicious of the group they are called upon to assist, and that suspicion hinders the integrative goal of DDR. To scrutinise the threat and resentment narratives, and to

[3] This is true of peacekeeping and peacebuilding more generally: see Laura Zanotti, 'Taming Chaos: A Foucauldian View of UN Peacekeeping, Democracy and Normalization', *International Peacekeeping*, 13:2 (2006), pp. 150–67.

[4] Kathleen M. Jennings, '"The Struggle to Satisfy": DDR through the Eyes of Ex-combatants in Liberia', *International Peacekeeping*, 14:2 (2007), pp. 204–18; Beatrice Pouligny, *The Politics and Anti-politics of Contemporary "Disarmament, Demobilization & Reintegration" Programs* (Geneva: CERI and SGDN, 2004); Robert Muggah (ed.), *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Robert Muggah, 'No Magic Bullet: A Critical Perspective on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Weapons Reduction in Post-conflict Contexts', *The Round Table*, 94:379 (2005), pp. 239–52; and Susan Willett, 'New Barbarians at the Gate: Losing the Liberal Peace in Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 32:106 (2005), pp. 569–94.

[5] Nat Colletta and Robert Muggah 'Rethinking Post-War Security Promotion', *Journal of Security Sector Management*, 7:1 (2009), p. 2.

[6] Kathleen M. Jennings, 'Unclear Ends, Unclear Means: Reintegration in Post-war Societies – the Case of Liberia', *Global Governance*, 14:3 (2008), p. 332.

[7] This list is not exhaustive but space constraints have led me to focus on what I see as the two most common and hegemonic narratives.

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demonstrate how they influence reintegration policy in post-conflict states, the article draws on empirical evidence collected in Liberia at the conclusion of the UN-supported DDR process there.

Before analysing the way in which the threat and resentment narratives stigmatise ex-combatants as aid beneficiaries, the article first discusses the methodological and theoretical framework underpinning the research and provides important contextual background on successive conflicts in Liberia and the post-conflict peacebuilding interventions implemented there. Then, section A of the article considers assumptions about ex-combatants as security threats, showing how the post-conflict association, unemployment, and character of Liberian ex-combatants have been constructed as *a priori* destabilising to the Liberian state. Section B examines DDR narratives about community resentment, focusing on constructions of post-conflict victimhood and aid dessert and considering the stated preference of the UN and its partners for 'community-based' programming rather than programmes that target ex-combatants only. The critical approach to ex-combatant reintegration suggested in Sections A and B can have a destabilising effect on DDR in ways that could be more emancipatory. Accordingly, the article concludes with a call to discursively recast ex-combatants, envisioning them as capable of being productive and socially active agents after war instead of unstable and unworthy beneficiaries of assistance.

Ex-combatants as a social category

Understanding how ex-combatants are constructed involves analysing what is written and said about them, and interrogating the way in which discursive constructions influence the practice of DDR. Methodologically, then, the article employs both written and verbal texts. It performs a discourse analysis of the key policy documents that have shaped reintegration design and implementation in Liberia. These are: the IDDRS, the UN Development Programme's 'Practice Note' on DDR, secretary-general's reports on the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), formal evaluations and audits of DDR in Liberia, and UNMIL field reports and assessments, including the 'Hotspots' security assessments carried out jointly by UNMIL's Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery (RRR) Section and Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC). Special emphasis is placed on the ways in which such texts frame ex-combatants and communities. This analysis helps to demonstrate that the stigmatisation of ex-combatants is not simply due to poor implementation (that is, disjuncture between policy guidance and practice in the field), but that such stigmatisation is also reinforced in these texts.

The verbal texts analysed are semi-structured interviews conducted over two trips (in April 2007 and June 2009) with all major DDR practitioners in Liberia (donors, UN officials, NGOs, and Liberian governmental representatives) as well as with community leaders, civil society representatives, and ex-combatants themselves. Interviews with practitioners were topical: questions were posed around clusters of ideas (long-term versus short-term support; targeted versus non-targeted, or 'community'-based, programming; relationships between ex-combatants and communities; notions of threat and security related to ex-combatants, and how programmes addressed these; and conceptions of DDR and peacebuilding success). Space does not permit an exhaustive breakdown of all respondents' answers; rather, what emerged were

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common themes and ideas that I have isolated to articulate the dominant claims of the threat and resentment narratives because these themes and ideas were: (1) frequently mentioned; and (2) contested. Contestation was observed at different levels: between respondents' subjective interpretation of practice and the 'textual record of DDR' (taken as the knowledge asserted in policy texts about ex-combatants); between different practitioner respondents who had different points of view about whether, how, and how long to help ex-combatants in post-conflict settings; and between subjects (practitioners) and objects (ex-combatants) of DDR.

The latter form of contestation is particularly instructive to identify how and why ex-combatants are constructed as unworthy beneficiaries of aid. The points of view of both subjects and objects are needed to elucidate details about context and to destabilise truth claims made about ex-combatants. My interviews included three focus groups with ex-combatants: one in 2007 with young ex-combatants enrolled in educational programmes in northern Liberia; one in 2009 with ex-combatant members of the NCDDRR; and one in 2009 with ex-combatants who had occupied the Sinoe Rubber Plantation but had subsequently been arrested and released without charge by local authorities. Each group challenged ideas about ex-combatants in Liberia that are taken for granted. All interviews with practitioners and ex-combatants are treated anonymously, not only for ethical reasons to protect respondents from retribution or criticism, but also in an attempt to move discursive analysis away from a 'he said, she said' format – and its fascination with the identity, subjectivity, or reliability of the respondent – towards an alternative presentation that foregrounds contestation itself, emphasising problematisation of the threat and resentment narratives.

The discourse analysis synthesises the narrative about ex-combatants and shows how this narrative is presented as fact, as if 'without history' ('all ex-combatants are the same within and across contexts'). How have these constructions come about? Who authors them? How are they allowed to persist and reproduce across contexts? It then destabilises the narrative by allowing counter-claims and ideas to take the stage.[8] The synthesis isolates constructions of the ex-combatant ('what kind of subject is being produced?') and the critique helps to reveal the discursive and systemic practices sustaining that production.[9]

Of course, the use of texts and interviews to problematise and critique DDR is not without its limitations. Opinions and beliefs about ex-combatants are dynamic, varied, and potentially infinite. Just as the article seeks to upset the truth claims made about ex-combatants, it would be unwise (and impossible) to present counter-narratives and counter-claims as alternative 'truths'. But that is also part of the point. Discursive representation of ex-combatants, if one digs deep, is dynamic and varied, yet the article demonstrates that some narratives are privileged over others, in ways that negatively impact upon the objectives of integration.

Similarly, although the article's focus on Liberia cannot be taken as universal or transferable, the threat and resentment narratives nevertheless have tended to be replicated across contexts. To mitigate in part the subjective limitations of the method employed, the article cross-references data that use alternative methods; it supplements

[8] Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (New York: Cornell, 1977), pp. 139–40.
[9] Peter Digeser, 'The Fourth Face of Power', *The Journal of Politics*, 54:4 (2002), p. 980; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), p. 49.

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textual analysis of my own data with available survey data collected by others. No method could study and map the theory and practice of reintegration in its entirety, but the method articulated here is aligned instead with critical methodological observation that seeks to 'explore particular corners or strands within a specific institutional complex in ways that make visible their points of connection with other sites and courses of action'.[10] The way in which *ex*-combatants are discursively constructed is influenced by the related construction of combatants, political violence, the role of natural resources in civil war, and changes in conceptions and interventions about post-conflict justice, all of which involve the production of categories and assumptions that, although already the subject of academic and policy critique, would benefit from additional scrutiny.

How and why DDR discourse frames ex-combatants

Theoretically, deconstruction and critique of ex-combatant framing borrow from social constructivism, critical theory, and from an analysis of the concepts of disciplinarity and governmentality. First, establishing the category 'ex-combatant' as a social construct is an important starting point for a fuller understanding of the challenges of the reintegration process. As Durkheim argued, categories do not communicate social facts but are themselves socially constructed (that is, categories not only express 'social things' but are also 'social things' themselves).[11] The category 'ex-combatant' has meaning quite distinct from the former fighters to whom it is applied. In the broader sphere of peacebuilding, there is increased recognition from practitioners and academics that nomenclature and semantics impact upon outcomes and understanding of key concepts.[12] International bureaucrats, politicians, and non-combatant citizens deploy the label 'ex-combatant' as shorthand, epithet, identity marker, and eligibility demarcator. Ex-combatants themselves adopt and eschew the label situationally (to blend in, lobby, protest, apply for benefits, gain acceptance, and make sense of past and present life experiences). This multiple usage implies that the category 'ex-combatant' has a rich and strategic meaning that is distinct from the individuals who are said to belong to the universe described.[13]

Second, the article accepts critical theory's insistence on examining and interrogating the post-conflict project. It isolates and interrogates the two narratives to inquire, 'What purpose do they serve?' To do so is to reject DDR as a neutral, technical endeavour and alternatively iterate its fundamental contours as an 'intensely political process',[14] and by extension an ideological process 'for someone and for some purpose'.[15] The analytical task of interrogating the origins and reasons for particular

[10] Marjorie L. DeVault and Liza McCoy, 'Institutional Ethnography: Using Interviews to Investigate Ruling Relations', in Dorothy E. Smith (ed.), *Institutional Ethnography as Practice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 17.
[11] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995), p. 441.
[12] Nat J. Colletta and Robert Muggah, 'Context Matters: Interim Stabilisation and Second Generation Approaches to Security Promotion', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 9:4 (2009), p. 426.
[13] Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1998 [orig. pub. 1952]).
[14] Mats Berdal, *Disarmament and Demobilisation after Civil Wars,* Adelphi Paper No. 303 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1996), p. 5.
[15] Robert W. Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 10:2 (1981), pp. 126–55.

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framing of ex-combatants both reveals and problematises a gap between a public transcript of 'successful reintegration' and a hidden transcript of the reintegration process as a lived experience often and sometimes starkly at odds with official assumptions and portrayals.[16] To say that ex-combatants are dangerous, apolitical, and resented is not merely to hurl insults. Rather, such assertions are the product of broader assumptions about ex-combatants (and, I would argue, about people in the global south) that are incubated, reinforced, and sustained through economic, social, and ideological structures that are asserted to be natural and given but that ought to be the subject of immanent critique.

Third, the concepts of disciplinarity and governmentality help to reveal how processes of reintegration are not designed simply to assist ex-combatant beneficiaries but to engineer them socially. DDR programmes seek to reward and punish particular behaviours.[17] DDR is not unique in this regard; the peacebuilding enterprise is structured as the transformation of disorderly states into orderly ones.[18] The article builds on this theoretical insight from the existing critical literature on DDR to demonstrate how processes of disciplinarity and governmentality contribute to the stigmatisation of ex-combatant beneficiaries by reinforcing ahistorical and apolitical understandings of the referent (both ex-combatants and the communities absorbing them after war). Not unlike Foucault's despot, the ex-combatant is constructed as 'the permanent outlaw' who represents a 'bundle of threats' unless he can be tempered by the post-conflict state under international tutelage.[19] DDR programmes limit the boundaries of approved and unapproved activity, define ideal and deviant behaviour, and proscribe acceptable expectations and 'realistic' aspirations for ex-combatants.

Before proceeding to a summary of the conflict and post-conflict context of Liberia, two caveats are needed. First, the article does not suggest that stigmatisation of ex-combatants is monolithic or petrified. In fact, considerable evolution in DDR thinking and practice has occurred. The adoption of the IDDRS, the 2011 report of the UN secretary-general on DDR,[20] and recent academic literature drawing on evidence from DDR programmes in several states[21] all emphasise the importance of historical and political context in designing reintegration programmes. Contextual distinctions apply also to recognition that different types of combatants might require differently tailored programmes (for example, government soldiers versus irregular or opposition fighters; armed combatants versus those who played supporting or auxiliary roles;

[16] James C. Scott is the architect of the distinction between 'public' and 'hidden' transcripts, and a proponent of the need to destabilise the hegemony of public transcripts by: (a) testifying to the existence of alternative, hidden transcripts; and (b) unveiling hidden transcripts and articulating their meaning in opposition to public ones. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

[17] Robert Muggah, Mats Berdal, and Stina Torjesen, 'Conclusions: Enter an Evidence-Based Security Promotion Agenda', in Robert Muggah (ed.), *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 269.

[18] Zanotti, 'Taming Chaos', p. 151.

[19] Ibid., p. 152. Here, Zanotti cites Michel Foucault, 'Lecture at the Collége de France of 29 January 1975', in Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni (eds), *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collége de France 1974–1975* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 81–107.

[20] United Nations General Assembly, 'Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: Report of the Secretary-General' (21 March 2011), A/65/741.

[21] Colletta and Muggah, 'Context Matters'.

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victorious versus vanquished; male versus female; adult versus child), and to the recognition that reintegration can often be a highly subjective, individual process.[22]

Many practitioners inside and outside of the UN system also have successfully argued that ex-combatants need more, not less, assistance, and have worked to design and implement innovative, multidimensional, and context-sensitive programmes of support for former fighters (the follow-up programmes of UNMIL/RRR in Liberia exemplify these traits). A critique of the ways in which problematic assumptions about ex-combatants persist, therefore, should not be misinterpreted as a refusal to recognise the ways in which peacebuilding thought and practice are dynamic. In unmasking the dominance and persistence of certain problematic assumptions about ex-combatants and contrasting those assumptions with observable counter-narratives from a particular context, the article foregrounds ideas that are often absent from stories about ex-combatants. The existence of these counter-narratives is subversive, destabilising the category 'ex-combatant' and the truth claims made about it.

Second, the article's critique is not intended to suggest that the ex-combatant experience in Liberia is identical and transferable to DDR contexts elsewhere. There is considerable variety in opinions about, and approaches to assisting, ex-combatants (between, say, reintegration programmes designed by the UN and the World Bank). Such variety necessarily limits and qualifies the inferences that can be drawn from the Liberian case; yet, the article will show that discursive constructions of ex-combatants in Liberia have been influenced by an overarching (if fluid) reification of a generic category, 'ex-combatant'. The experience from Liberia could in the future be compared with experience elsewhere in ways that might improve post-conflict integration and reconciliation, and that might lead to further critical insights about the way in which conflict and post-conflict actors are understood and assisted. The article's approach is consistent with complementary research on conflict actors arguing that the analysis of ostensibly very different conflicts and combatants could yield surprising insights into similarities.[23]

Ex-combatant reintegration in Liberia, 2003–9

From its founding in 1847 by freed slaves from America until 1980, Liberia was controlled politically and economically by an Americo-Liberian elite. This elite violently repressed and discriminated against the much larger, indigenous population. In 1980, Samuel Doe overthrew President William Tolbert to become the first indigenous president but was himself overthrown by Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in the context of a violent civil war that lasted from 1989 until 1997. The July 1997 elections established Taylor as president but in 1999, two anti-Taylor movements, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)

[22] Chris Alden, Monika Thakur, and Matthew Arnold, *Militias and the Challenges of Post-Conflict Peace: Silencing the Guns* (London: Zed Books, 2011); João Gomes Porto, with Chris Alden and Imogen Parsons, *From Soldiers to Citizens: Demilitarisation of Conflict and Society* (London: Ashgate Publishers, 2007); Stina Torjesen, 'New Avenues for Research in the Study of DDR', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 9:4 (2009), pp. 411–23; and Alpaslan Ozerdem, *Post-war Recovery: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008).

[23] David Keen, 'A Tale of Two Wars: Great Expectations, Hard Times,' *Conflict, Security & Development*, 9:4 (2009), pp. 515–34.

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and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), initiated a new civil war that lasted four years. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in August 2004 between Taylor's government, LURD, and MODEL ended the war. The 1989–1997 and 1999–2003 conflicts killed more than 200,000 Liberians and displaced many more.

These two conflicts have, misleadingly, been characterised as a greed-fuelled struggle for resources and one man's (Taylor's) destruction of the country. Both conflicts, however, were fundamentally about issues of political representation in the context of a long history of oppression of indigenous groups. Doe and Taylor exacerbated pre-existing dynamics of ethnic favouritism and repression, and wars in neighbouring Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire added a regional dimension. LURD, MODEL, and NPFL combatants committed massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law during the war, but were also playing out a political struggle over security fears that were both national and regional, over the right to be represented in and by the Liberian polity.[24]

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) arrived in October 2003 to implement the peace agreement and to lead DDR efforts, with reintegration programmes ending in July 2009.[25] Over 101,000 persons were disarmed and demobilised by November 2004, a great deal more than the 35,000 estimated based on projections of factional troop strength. The large increase was the result of a joint UNMIL and National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR) decision to loosen eligibility requirements. Benefits included Transitional Safety Allowance (TSA) payments and a 'reintegration opportunity' choice between vocational training and formal education. Vocational training included Monthly Subsistence Allowances (MSAs) of $30 per month for eight months. Formal education involved three years of support, with MSAs of $30 per month for nine months during the first academic year, $15 per month for nine months during the second, and no monthly support during the third year.

These programmes were scheduled to end in 2007 but a residual caseload of 7,000 ex-combatants had, through programming failures of implementers, not yet received reintegration assistance, so a residual caseload programme costing US $7 million and similar in design to the original programmes was launched in March 2008. UNMIL also used the aforementioned Hotspots assessments to monitor residual threats linked to incomplete ex-combatant reintegration. The Hotspots were initiated in 2005 to gauge potential ex-combatant reactions to the elections of that year. RRR

[24] Morten Bøås, 'The Liberian Civil War: New War/Old War?', *Global Society*, 19:1 (2005), p. 74. For more background on successive Liberian conflicts, see: Republic of Liberia, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report*, Vol. I, 'Preliminary Findings and Determinations' (2009), pp. 2–3, 48–53; Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (London: Hurst, 1999); Mats Utas, *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War* (Uppsala: Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, 2003); William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

[25] For more background on DDR programming in Liberia, see Jennings, 'Unclear Ends' and 'Struggle to Satisfy'; Jaremey McMullin, *Lessons Learned Study: UNMIL Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery (RRR) Section: Lessons from DPKO Involvement with Ex-combatant Reintegration* (New York: UNDPKO, 2009); Andrea Tamagnini and Teresa Krafft, 'Strategic Approaches to Reintegration: Lessons Learned from Liberia', *Global Governance*, 16:1 (2010), pp. 13–20; Wolf-Christian Paes, 'Eyewitness: The Challenges of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration in Liberia', *International Peacekeeping*, 12:2 (2005), pp. 253–61; and James Pugel, *What the Fighters Say: A Survey of Ex-combatants in Liberia, February–March 2006* (Monrovia: UNDP, 2007).

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and JMAC produced seven Hotspots: October 2005, November 2005, April 2006, April 2007, August 2008, January 2009, and May 2009. In addition, RRR and JMAC undertook bi-annual missions, jointly with ONUCI, to monitor the involvement of Liberian ex-combatants in Ivorian militias in Western Côte d'Ivoire. The Hotspots linked monitoring to recommendations for follow-up programming. Due in part to such recommendations, UNMIL/RRR, UNDP, and the World Bank followed up the original and caseload programmes with road rehabilitation employment projects and alternative skills training (for example, from rubber tapping to farming and ranching). Importantly, all follow-up projects included both ex-combatants and non-combatant community members, and were implemented in areas determined by UNMIL to be vulnerable (mainly rubber plantations and counties located in border areas).

A. Armed, angry, and apolitical: the ex-combatant as threat

Although DDR practitioners have highlighted the importance of contextual differences between distinct groups of ex-combatants, DDR discourse persists in asserting a generic category of 'ex-combatant' that is allowed to apply to fighting groups in every context. In Liberia, such generalisation can be seen via the way in which ex-combatants from the LURD, MODEL, and NPFL are aggregated, evaluated as equally, inherently, and naturally threatening to post-conflict peace in Liberia. Notwithstanding the increasing wariness of practitioners and academics to reduce the causes of war or war recurrence to single, monolithic variables (for example, the presence of natural resources), ex-combatants tend to be monitored and discussed in terms of how their dissatisfaction could lead to war recurrence independent of other variables that contribute to war, and independent of the extent to which ex-combatant dissatisfaction might be linked to these other variables. These assumptions about ex-combatants combine to produce a threat narrative in which the rationale for reintegration is not the integration or reconciliation of particular post-war communities and ex-combatants but the management and mitigation of ex-combatant *threats*.

The origins of the threat narrative can be traced to the discourse of New Barbarism, especially prevalent in news media framing of African conflict[26] and in academic studies and reportage of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone,[27]

[26] See, for example, Neil MacFarquhar, 'Angry Youths Become a Force in Darfur', *New York Times* (21 December 2008), A6.

[27] Critics such as Richards and Peters were inspired to counter claims made in Robert Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post-Cold War* (New York: Vintage, 2001). See Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*: *War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996); Paul Richards (ed.), *No Peace No War: Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005); Krijn Peters, *Re-Examining Voluntarism: Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2011); Jon Abbink and Ineke Van Kessel (eds), *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); and Angela McIntyre, Kwesi Aning, and Prosper Addo, 'Politics, War, and Youth Culture in Sierra Leone: An Alternative Interpretation'. *African Security Review*, 11:3 (2002). Their work has subsequently been the subject of further review and critique: see Ibrahim Abdullah, 'Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36:2 (1998), pp. 203–35; Ibrahim Abdullah (ed.), *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004); and Florian Leuprecht, 'Reading in Reverse: A Sociology of Academic Knowledge about the War in Sierra Leone', MA Thesis in International Studies and Diplomacy, School of Oriental and African Studies (2007).

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which constructs young Africans as angry and irrationally violent. Critics of New Barbarism have pointed out that such accounts 'pay scant regard' to insurgents' own claims about the ideas and politics that might underlie their participation in armed violence.[28] New Barbarism internalises the causes of war (the angry violence of young men, the corruption of individual leaders such as Charles Taylor), erasing the role of regional and international dynamics and structures that fuel conflict (international support and patronage, transnational small arms networks). For these depictions of ex-combatants to resonate, the discourse must construct the wars in which Liberians fought as unnecessarily violent, and simply unnecessary, an irrational reflection of the violent urges of rag tag groups of angry men.[29] The construct 'war in Liberia was not justified' objectifies ex-combatants as the authors of war (and the *sole authors of war*). Illegal and inhumane as the means were, the Liberian conflicts themselves were important vehicles of social reordering and transformation.[30] Nor is conflict in Liberia that aberrant: not unlike Western states,[31] the Liberian state has been made and remade via war.

The threat narrative can also be traced to the disciplinary and governmentalising logic of securitisation. That peacebuilding ideology and interventions have become increasingly securitised, particularly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the US, is well documented, particularly in terms of how underdevelopment and the instability of post-conflict transition are presented as threats that could contribute to terrorism, international criminality, or regional and international insecurity.[32] Similar to the ideological claims underpinning New Barbarism, the assumptions underlying this securitisation also locate security threats domestically within failed states, concentrating the peacebuilding gaze inward. Outsiders thus frame security as a process of taming, of both corrupt, domestic institutions and of unruly and criminal local elements. An alternative is to balance interventions targeting the domestic and local with reforms of the regional and international structures that shape, if not determine, security for poor states. Just as the problem and need for intervention is interpreted as originating nationally or locally, the solutions offered by top-down interventions are confined to the domestic sphere of the failed state. These solutions propose to tackle the economic challenges of instability, insecurity, and state failure via a menu of macroeconomic stability measures that are packaged as the fiscal sacrifices and discipline needed to 'ready' the transitional state for mature, adult interaction in the international system (disciplinarity), and security interventions that seek to increase and consolidate state control over territory and population (governmentality).

This section analyses the ways in which these discourses come together to produce and reproduce a threat narrative about ex-combatants, whereby *all* ex-combatant activity is monitored in terms of the risk it poses to war recurrence. Their post-conflict

[28] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, pp. xvi–xvii.
[29] Ibid., p. xx.
[30] Willett, 'Barbarians', p. 574; Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn, *African Guerrillas: Raging against the Machine* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007), p. 5.
[31] Charles Tilly, 'War Making and State Making as Organized Crime', in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 170.
[32] Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2004); Rita Abrahamsen, 'A Breeding Ground for Terrorists? Africa and Britain's "War on Terrorism"', *Review of African Political Economy*, 31:102 (2004), pp. 677–84; Paul D. Williams, 'Thinking about Security in Africa', *International Affairs*, 83:6 (2007), pp. 1021–38.

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association, unemployment, even – counter-intuitively – employment are all construed as security threats to the state. Additionally, dissent and protest about the nature of the post-conflict project is conflated with a threat to return to war. The threats that ex-combatant protests and dissatisfaction are said to pose are anchored to assumptions about ex-combatants themselves: their anti-social personalities and their lack of education, ideology, and political beliefs. They are portrayed as irrationally and barbarically violent, apolitical, greedy, and nihilistic. The wars they fight in are asserted to be unnecessary, and unnecessarily violent. And, after wars end, they are said to gravitate naturally and seamlessly towards lives of crime.

Analysis of the threat narrative in this section will proceed in three parts: first, a look at how ex-combatants are said to be capable of returning a state to war via violent protest or criminal banditry; second, an interrogation of the tendency of DDR discourse to securitise ex-combatant association in all of its forms; and third, an evaluation of claims that ex-combatant unemployment threatens the post-conflict state.

Assumption 1. Ex-combatants return states to war

The notion that ex-combatant dissatisfaction can return a country to war has underpinned DDR programmes since their early post-Cold War inception.[33] The UN secretary-general asserted that ex-combatant dissatisfaction following the first Liberian civil war in 1997 led to remobilisation in 1999.[34] But the exact sequence of events that led from dissatisfaction to a full-scale return to war is left vague, as is the subject of remobilisation; that is, to what extent were these the same ex-combatants, and to what extent did they remobilise in similar groups to 1997? The 'return to war' claim also relies upon a dubious causal chain. If ex-combatants cannot find new livelihoods, the claim asserts that they will protest violently or turn to crime to support themselves. The claim conflates street protests with widespread political instability and conflict. It pairs ex-combatant dissatisfaction with only one remedy (war-making) and universalises the popularity of that remedy among all ex-combatants. A 2008 US Institute of Peace survey found, however, that two-thirds of Liberian ex-combatants said they would never go back to war.[35] Another 2008 survey found that only two of 466 young ex-combatant respondents said they would join an armed group if fighting were to resume, and only one said he would join a conflict in a neighbouring country.[36] The return to war claim disregards the deep scepticism that most Liberian ex-combatants have about the future efficacy of war.

The return to war claim also erases politics from war-making, and the role of leaders in creating and sustaining wars. Although academics and policymakers understand war to be a complex phenomenon that results from deeply rooted and more

[33] Jaremey McMullin, 'Reintegration of Combatants: Were the Right Lessons Learned in Mozambique?', *International Peacekeeping*, 11:4 (2004), pp. 625–43.

[34] UNSC, 'Fifth Progress Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia' (17 December 2004), S/2004/972, para. 70; and, UNSC, 'Eighth Progress Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia' (1 September 2005), S/2005/560, para. 15.

[35] Richard Hill, Gwendolyn Taylor, and Jonathan Temin, 'Would You Fight Again? Understanding Liberian Ex-combatant Reintegration', US Institute of Peace, Special Report. No. 211 (September 2008).

[36] Morten Bøås and Anne Hatløy, '"Getting In, Getting Out": Militia Membership and Prospects for Re-integration in Post-war Liberia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46:1 (2008), p. 51.

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proximate causes, DDR discourse tends to present a simplistic picture of war as capable of being ignited through the 'spiralling up' of ex-combatant protests and/or ex-combatant banditry and criminality. The suggestion that the disgruntlement of ex-combatants in 1997 Liberia contributed to their subsequent remobilisation in 1999 fails to account for the policies of Charles Taylor, regional political dynamics, and the issues of identity and representation that analysts of the 1999–2003 conflict recognise as the precipitating and root causes of conflict. Re-recruitment into neighbouring wars is also said to follow ex-combatant dissatisfaction. Re-recruitment, however, does not mobilise ex-combatants into 'any old conflict' but rather into already-existing conflicts that have their own history, causes, and protagonists. The dissatisfaction of an ex-RUF combatant in Sierra Leone may have been a facilitating cause of re-recruitment among some expatriate fighters active in Liberian armed movements, and cause of conflict *exacerbation* in Liberia, but not a cause of the Liberian conflict itself. Research into reintegration dynamics elsewhere has proffered a more nuanced approach, deprioritising the linear association between dissatisfaction and war recurrence and instead emphasising how complex understandings of combatants' personal security influence whether reengagement with violence occurs, or whether other, non-violent strategies are pursued.[37]

In the threat narrative, danger attaches to the figure of the ex-combatant because DDR discourse biologically embeds violence in the character and disposition of ex-combatants. The secretary-general has referred to Liberian ex-combatants collectively as 'a volatile group'.[38] The lack of military discipline of the LURD, MODEL, and NPFL, along with their indiscriminate targeting of civilians, is presented as demonstrating a natural inclination toward barbaric violence. The narrative goes so far as to imply that ex-combatants are the font of all violence, regardless of whether or not it was initiated by ex-combatants: individuals who engage in violent intimidation in Liberia, if they are not ex-combatants, are said in the Hotspots to demonstrate 'ex-combatant behavior'. The May 2009 Hotspot Assessment contains two references to community 'mimicry' of ex-combatant violence. The first discusses the use of violence to gain control of rubber production on Guthrie plantation, and the second relates to general violence within communities:

> The rubber plantation workers were able to mobilize a substantial group of people most of whom were not ex-combatants. These incidents illustrate that citizens without a combatant background may have adapted a post conflict behavior and tend to react in ways considered typical for ex-combatants.[39]

> The past two decades of conflict have introduced violence as a common means of solving conflicts in Liberian society. This type of post-conflict behavior can be observed not only with ex-combatants but also with other citizens. As a result, citizens without combatant background may act in a manner considered typical of ex-combatants.[40]

In these excerpts, violence is compartmentalised from the social, political, and economic relations between, say, rubber workers and management, and is instead characterised as

[37] Enzo Nussio, 'How Ex-combatants Talk about Personal Security: Narratives of Former Paramilitaries in Colombia', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 11:5 (2011), pp. 579–606.
[38] UNSC, 'Eighth Progress Report', para. 15.
[39] UNMIL, May 2009 Hotspot, p. 6, emphasis added.
[40] Ibid., p. 24, emphasis added.

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behaviour modelled on (and therefore authored by) ex-combatants. The consequence is to conceal a long history of violence deeply embedded within Liberian society, reinforced through regional and international support to exclusionary Americo-Liberian regimes and through forms of violent economic organisation perpetuated by international and domestic plantation ownership. Ex-combatants become not simply inclined to violence; they are its font, its personification. To present all combatants as naturally violent is not only ahistorical but ignores the overt and subtle ways in which individuals during conflict, including those who were combatants, resisted violence through escape, subterfuge, and non-compliance.[41]

The threat narrative also presents combatants as unstable elements by constructing them as apolitical and greedy opportunists. In Liberia, numerous and apparently contradictory shifts in factional allegiance from one conflict to another were presented as evidence of combatant opportunism rather than as a natural outgrowth of the changing context of war.[42] In reality, it is likely that fewer mercenary fighters existed than initially suggested.[43] And assertions that Liberian combatants were greedy opportunists do not hold up to closer scrutiny. Only 4 per cent of ex-combatants cited 'money' as a reason for fighting in the conflict.[44] Two major surveys confirm that security (for ex-combatants' communities and families) was the predominant reason why fighters joined.[45]

The claim that ex-combatant criminality could 'spiral up' to threaten security in the post-conflict state relies upon the assumption that ex-combatants naturally and seamlessly turn to lives of crime after conflict. But in Liberia UNMIL found that the *non*-combatant community is just as likely to resort to criminal enterprise.[46] Liberia's own TRC concluded that domestic and foreign businessmen and political authorities, and not the ex-combatant rank and file, committed the most serious economic crimes during the war.[47] Associating ex-combatants exclusively with post-conflict criminality thus disguises the role of external, and Western, actors in the economic structures that sustain crime (trade routes, money laundering networks, and transnational brokerage systems).[48] Despite well-established complicity and involvement of external actors in resource predation during the Liberian conflict, UN-imposed sanctions focused on internal production and supply of timber, diamonds, and rubber, and not the transnational and international networks that converted resources into arms. Presenting wars in the global south as 'criminal' aberrations and ex-combatants as uniquely crime-prone after war overlooks the long history of criminal rent-seeking in all wars and neglects the ways in which criminality might be deeply embedded in the system of international relations itself.[49]

[41] Richard Maclure and Myriam Denov, '"I Didn't Want to Die so I Joined Them": Structuration and the Process of Becoming Boy Soldiers in Sierra Leone', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18:1 (2006), p. 129.
[42] Pugel, *What the Fighters Say*, p. 26.
[43] Bøås and Hatløy, 'Getting In', p. 44.
[44] Pugel, *What the Fighters Say*, pp. 35–6.
[45] Bøås and Hatløy, 'Getting In'; Pugel, *What the Fighters Say*.
[46] UNMIL, May 2009 Hotspot, p. 3; UNMIL, August 2008 Hotspot, p. 2.
[47] Republic of Liberia, TRC Vol. II, pp. 287–97.
[48] Willett, 'Barbarians', p. 574.
[49] Tilly, 'War Making', pp. 173, 184.

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Assumption 2. Ex-combatant association is threatening

The continued interaction of ex-combatant groups after war can sustain the violent legacy of civil war. Vulnerable young combatants can find themselves forced to pay bribes to their former commanders, or to work for them without payment. Groups of ex-combatants can intimidate local communities to consolidate commanders' economic and political status after war. But even non-violent forms of ex-combatant association, including collective economic ventures and formal and informal means of social interaction, are constructed as threatening to the peace process because any association is said to evidence 'residual chains of command' among ex-combatants.[50]

UNMIL conducted its Hotspots Assessments between 2006 and 2009 to analyse the extent to which ex-combatant chains of command remained intact and threatened state security after the war. UNMIL concluded that chains of command persist when 'ex-combatants continue to take orders from their former commander on a daily basis'.[51] Its interest in monitoring ex-combatant chains of command was motivated not only by the potential threats that quasi-mobilised ex-combatants would pose to the state but also by welfare concerns for vulnerable ex-combatants trapped in social structures leaving them open to manipulation and exploitation by former commanders. Although its initial estimation in 2006 was that persistence of command structures was a problem, by 2008 UNMIL had concluded that no nationwide networks existed among NPFL, LURD, or MODEL combatants. It also found, however, that commanders often maintained contact with former subordinates along personal, economic, and political lines.[52]

Although the Hotspots began with a narrow focus on the extent to which chains of command constituted an ongoing threat to peace in Liberia, and although they are careful to distinguish between national and localised forms of insecurity, the focus of analysis in successive Hotspots tends to conflate ex-combatant *visibility* in communities with *mobilisation*, and tends to present visibility as a *prima facie* threat.[53] High levels of ex-combatant organisation in economic and youth groups are taken as evidence that 'chains of command could be activated and very quickly become effective'.[54] It is unclear, however, on what basis the assessments reach this conclusion: how specifically do youth groups organised around trade and sport become 'quickly' mobilised for the purposes of violent conflict? There is no indication in the Hotspots as to what specifically makes non-violent youth groups a potential threat, other than the 'alarming' lack of respect they show to local authorities.[55] This assessment is curious given that, elsewhere in the Hotspots, not to mention most studies of pre-conflict Liberia, local authorities are singled out for their long history of exploiting and mal-treating youth, so an alarming lack of respect is unsurprising in context, and

[50] Erin McCandless, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations: A Contribution to the New Horizon Discussion on Challenges and Opportunities for UN Peacekeeping* (New York: UNDPKO, 2010), p. 26; UNDP, *Practice Note on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-combatants* (New York: UNDP, 2005), p. 43.

[51] UNMIL, May 2009 Hotspot, p. 5.

[52] UNMIL, 'RRR & JMAC Hotspot Assessment: Ex-combatants and Chains of Command in Liberia' (August 2008), pp. 1–2; UNMIL, 'RRR & JMAC Hotspot Update' (May 2009), pp. 5, 21.

[53] UNMIL, August 2008 Hotspot, pp. 2, 5.

[54] UNMIL, May 2009 Hotspot, p. 4.

[55] Ibid., p. 11.

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arguably exists within and because of a general legacy of abuses by security services and other agents of authority.

The Hotspots often imply that the mere presence of ex-combatants within a group becomes threatening. And they do so despite their own finding that 'most' organised groups in Liberia 'mobilize as social security or economic network[s] aimed at enhancing opportunities for trade in a certain area of commerce'.[56] The final Hotspots Assessment concludes that ex-combatants were included in civil society groups as 'ordinary members of the community' and 'not because of their combatants' skills' yet the same assessment then scrutinised these civil society groups as threats simply because they included ex-combatants. It argues that any civil society group, if ex-combatants or youth form part of it (which is, after all, an aim of social reintegration), could 'potentially be involved in incidents in the future', and listed numerous trade unions and youth groups as 'likely future threats to public order'.[57] Not 'possible' threats but 'likely'; association made synonymous with mobilisation.

Independent surveys and international guidance on DDR mirror the Hotspots' problematic constructions of ex-combatant association as threatening. A well-regarded 2008 survey found that 75 per cent of ex-combatants reported never going to their former commanders for financial aid or assistance, but goes on to say: 'Troubling, however, is the finding that 22% of the DDRR program completers sustain routine ties compared against the sample's population average of 14%.'[58] The study does not specify why this is 'troubling' – presumably it is that DDR itself can hurt demobilisation by giving ex-combatants incentives to stay in touch with former commanders, an activity represented as *per se* dangerous. The 2005 UNDP Practice Note on DDR argues that UNDP should 'only support associations of ex-combatants that emerge at the grass roots level within the context of the broader community'. More 'national' or 'top-down' associations risk perpetuating chains of command and individuals' self-identification as ex-combatants.[59]

Ex-combatants are sometimes sources of instability, but the threat narrative presents them as *likely* or *always* threatening even in the face of evidence that they are also *sometimes* sources of conflict management and resolution. Even when ex-combatants worked to diffuse conflict in Liberian communities, the Hotspots present such action as threatening. For example, the Hotspots observed that some community leaders approach former commanders to assist in problems involving ex-combatants (delinquent loans, domestic disputes, public disorder) but then presented such action in a negative light because it made ex-combatant leaders visible within communities and usurped the primacy of the police.[60] To assume *a priori* that association is always potentially violent denies ex-combatants the potential for non-violent association or agency over their own reintegration. Their association might sometimes reflect a desire to discuss problems, pool resources and information, or lobby governments and international agencies. One ex-combatant on Sinoe rubber plantation in Liberia told me, to the nods of dozens of others, 'Ex-combatants need to address the

[56] Ibid., p. 9.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Pugel, *What the Fighters Say*, p. 3.
[59] UNDP, *Practice Note*, p. 38.
[60] UNMIL, August 2008 Hotspot, p. 4.

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problems of reintegration together, especially employment.'[61] The threat narrative would securitise this assertion of a need for economic and political mobilisation.

The construction of association as threatening is specific to the global south. In the global north, 'veterans' (semantically and ideologically constructed as distinct from 'ex-combatants') can associate with one another without that association being construed as a threat. They form lobbying groups to pressure their governments for more recognition and assistance, and their mobilisation is constructed historically as evidence of pressure group dynamics in democracy and civil society, even after contexts of civil war and even if such lobbying results in violence.[62] Of course, civil war contexts and post-conflict transitions in deeply divided societies add dimensions of inclusion and exclusion to different groups' claims to rights of association. But the actions of both 'veterans' and 'combatants' during and after war are often markedly similar (the commission of atrocities during war and the post-war difficulties of alcoholism, domestic violence, depression, suicide, crime, and violence) and yet, despite similarities, rigid distinctions are maintained. The disjuncture involved in construing any *ex-combatant* association as automatically threatening, evidence not of pressure group politics but of residual chains of command, suggests that deep scepticism of association is less a comment on the type and legacy of war context confronted and more a judgment separating the ex-combatants of the global south from the veterans of the north.

Assumption 3. Ex-combatant unemployment and employment are threatening

The secretary-general warned in 2004 that the threat posed by over 100,000 Liberian 'unemployed, volatile and restive ex-combatants to security and stability in the country and elsewhere must be taken most seriously'.[63] Even though surveys find the same levels of unemployment among ex-combatants as the rest of the population, the ex-combatant unemployed are presumed volatile and restive until proven otherwise. Such framing is not unique to Liberia, and is especially common in literature on child soldiers. Even though the overwhelming majority of unemployed African youth do not fight in civil wars, they are said to be '*easily* be absorbed into violence, whether urban gangs, illicit business dealings, or rebel militias in new civil wars'.[64]

Discursive representations of unemployment as threatening confuse the significance of 'unemployment as disenfranchisement and marginalization' with 'unemployment as cause of war'. Unemployment and idleness matter a great deal but are not what *caused* Liberian youth to take up arms in the conflict. Youth overwhelmingly cited 'security concerns' as the reason they chose to fight.[65] They did not trust the Taylor regime to provide long-term security for themselves, their families, and their communities. Nor were Liberia's combatant youth idle or unemployed before conflict: 60 per cent were in school, and 25 per cent were working. Only 11 per cent reported

[61] Author's interview with ex-combatant, Sinoe Rubber Plantation, Sinoe County (10 June 2009).
[62] Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 111; Stephen Ortiz, *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).
[63] UNSC, 'Fifth Progress Report', para. 70.
[64] Alcinda Honwana, *Child Soldiers in Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 159, emphasis added.
[65] Bøås and Hatløy, 'Getting In', p. 50.

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having nothing to do.[66] Even though idleness did not credibly cause a 'return to war' in 1999 it is asserted to be capable of causing conflict at some unspecified future date.

In a counter-intuitive twist of the threat narrative, it is not just unemployment that is threatening. Employment is also constructed as a security threat, evidenced in the discourse surrounding the emergence of motorcycle taxi drivers in Liberia. Motorcycle taxi unions have sprung up around urban and semi-urban centres throughout sub-Saharan Africa to ferry passengers who cannot afford to travel via other means and over roads that are often un-passable in automobiles. In economies where few sectors thrive, motorcycle taxis are booming.

The boom is not without a downside, and one that is sometimes violent. Drivers have the reputation for being unsafe and for resorting to violence to resolve disputes between rival unions or between drivers and authorities, passengers, and automobile drivers. In post-conflict countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Burundi, motorcycle taxi unions tend to comprise many ex-combatant youth. In Liberia, the Bong MTU's 2900 membership is estimated to be 75 per cent ex-combatant. *Because* of their ex-combatant membership, MTUs are constructed not as presenting solely problems of public safety and order but as potential state security threats. Even though land disputes in Liberia (usually involving non-combatants) are more frequent and violent than incidents involving MTUs, ex-combatant membership in motorcycle taxi unions is classed as 'the greatest potential threat to public order' and 'an easy target for mobilization in the context of the 2011 elections' in the May 2009 Hotspot.[67] MTUs, according to this logic, are LURD and MODEL writ small.

MTUs have initiated violence against other MTUs and against the Liberian National Police (LNP). On 27 February 2009, the Bong MTU staged a violent protest in Gbarnga in reaction to the murder of one of its members and the perceived lack of response by the LNP.[68] The violence, according to UNMIL's own reporting, had nothing to do with the factional divisions of the conflict or the ex-combatant status of its members but rather implicated the new post-conflict order (namely, the perceived injustice of the LNP failing to respond to a murder in the community). UNMIL analysis nevertheless locates the threat within MTUs and not the LNP, even though the same assessment establishes that the LNP often behaves in a corrupt or exploitative manner towards MTUs (charging MTUs protection money or bribes). The paradox of framing MTUs as 'the greatest potential threat to public order' is further amplified by evidence that, elsewhere in Liberia, MTUs and the LNP have very good working relationships (some MTUs provide LNP officials with free transport in exchange for LNP-sponsored driver-training programmes). Furthermore, several UNMIL/RRR respondents characterised the MTUs differently from the Hotspot Assessments in interviews, citing them as evidence of ex-combatant reintegration and social and economic entrepreneurship. That the unions are also mixed between ex-combatants and non-combatant youth was cited as evidence of positive social reintegration.[69] Given these nuances, the tendency for formal assessments of MTUs to fall back on the threat narrative is problematic.

Contrary to the narrative's elevation of ex-combatant threats, post-conflict violence in Liberia has taken on a variety of forms. Secretary-general's reports detail

[66] Ibid., p. 41.
[67] UNMIL, May 2009 Hotspot, pp. 4, 12.
[68] Ibid., p. 19; Tamagnini and Krafft, 'Strategic Approaches', p. 17.
[69] Author's interviews with UNMIL/RRR officials, Monrovia (8–19 June 2009).

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politically motivated electoral violence, violence from vigilante groups in Duala market in Monrovia, ritual killings and violent community reactions to ritual killings, and property and land disputes between ethnic groups.[70] Threats specifically linked to ex-combatants do not rank in the top four reported sources of conflict in a 2007 UNDP survey (these were bad leadership, crime and lawlessness, land disputes, and unemployment and youth dissatisfaction). Even polygamy, 'idleness', and commercial sex and prostitution were ranked as bigger sources of conflict within communities than ex-combatant violence.[71]

This section has critiqued the threat narrative by showing, first, that it overstates the scale and scope of threats traced to ex-combatants. Second, its presentation of ex-combatants is deterministic and neglects other threats to post-conflict communities from, for example, the state's new security structures, political elites, and rubber plantation owners. Third, it structures reintegration to construe success as negative peace: success means the absence of ex-combatant violence and not the extent or quality of integration. But most problematically, the post-conflict potential of ex-combatants is *reduced to threat*, obscuring the possibility that after conflict some ex-combatants are sometimes sources of social capital and agents of reconciliation and reconstruction.

B. Community angels and combatant demons: the ex-combatant as object of resentment

While the threat narrative has its origins in assumptions about African civil wars and the securitising discourse of peacebuilding, the resentment narrative can be traced to developments within the field and practice of transitional justice, which tends to portray DDR as effecting 'tradeoffs' between security and justice, and to distinguish ex-combatant perpetrators from community victims. Pablo de Greiff has explained that a discourse of tradeoffs is inevitable if justice is construed in abstract terms of 'promoting justice', which comes to mean 'giving everyone his or her due' rather than as the process of achieving two 'mediate goals' (building recognition and trust) and two 'final goals' (reconciliation and democracy).[72] The language of tradeoffs might also disregard the extent to which 'justice' can be portrayed as an unproblematic good, when it essentially is an umbrella term involving processes that are contested, such as democracy, rule of law, and reconciliation.[73]

Tradeoffs also construct a hierarchy, where transitional justice efforts are portrayed (intentionally or not) as morally superior to DDR processes. In an earlier work, de Greiff, Ana Cutter Patel, and Lars Waldorf frame the relationship between DDR and transitional justice in their edited volume with these words: 'DDR programs are seldom analysed to consider justice-related aims; and transitional justice mechanisms

[70] UNSC, 'Eighth Progress Report', paras 15–24.
[71] Pugel, *What the Fighters Say*, p. 61.
[72] Pablo de Greiff, 'A Normative Conception of Transitional Justice', in *Dealing with the Past*, *Politorbis* No. 50 (2010), p. 18. Elsewhere, de Greiff treats this similar theme, arguing that 'the idea of compensation in proportion to harm as an unproblematic criterion of justice' ought to give way to a conception of 'three goals which are intimately related to justice, namely, recognition, civic trust, and social solidarity': Pablo de Greiff, 'Justice and Reparations', in Pablo de Greiff (ed.), *The Handbook of Reparations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 451–77.
[73] Christine Bell, 'Transitional Justice, Interdisciplinarity and the State of the "Field" or "Non-Field"', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 3:1 (2009), pp. 5–27.

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rarely articulate strategies for coordinating with DDR.'[74] At first glance, this complaint reflects a common refrain in the literature on peacebuilding, that practitioners working on discrete peacebuilding tasks do not always synchronise and integrate their approaches. But the juxtaposition also sets up a semantic and discursive distinction between DDR and transitional justice, which implicates DDR more than transitional justice: DDR fails to contemplate 'justice-related aims' whereas transitional justice is guilty of a lesser crime of 'non-coordination' with DDR. 'Justice-related aims' are the value underpinning transitional justice but parallel 'DDR-related aims' are absent in the tradeoff. DDR is stripped of its integrative aims via its presentation as lacking an underlying logic or value beyond security objectives.

The discipline and practice of transitional justice focuses analysis on the perpetrator, and by comparison neglects to problematise notions of 'victimhood' and its subsequent and reflexive association with 'communities'. For legal and political reasons, justice interventions are rationalised in terms of targeting those 'most responsible' for crimes against humanity and war crimes. Legal instruments and conventions codify protections for non-combatants from abuses by combatants during war and so contribute to the creation of distinct categories of perpetrators and victims. The result has been to frame violence in hierarchical terms that do not always correspond with bottom-up perceptions, especially among youth, of how violence existed prior to war,[75] and among both ex-combatants and non-combatants about the sources and nature of violence after war. The authors of transitional justice narratives construct competing and mutually exclusive categories where wars produce perpetrators *or* victims. Such assumptions become reproduced within DDR processes, where discourse reifies distinctions between ex-combatants and communities when in fact, blurry lines separate these two groups, and the goal of reintegration is in any case to relax the distinction.

Distinguishing between ex-combatants and communities is not a neutral project: communities are characterised as progressive actors that are the double victims of combatant violence during war and ex-combatant threat, violence, and criminality after war. Such characterisation is not new. Ex-combatants have been an unpopular beneficiary group since DDR programmes were first internationalised in the early 1990s. Initially, such programmes were pitched to donors and host countries in terms of a peace dividend, said to take the form of the fiscal savings states would see as a result of cutting military expenditures via demobilisation, savings that could then be spent on social services to promote peace.[76] The peace dividend rationale framed DDR from its inception not as a societal good in and of itself but as something that had to be justified to donors and post-conflict states in terms of its tertiary benefits, as if assisting former fighters was so unpalatable an act that only an appeal to the financial bottom line would persuade.

[74] Ana Cutter Patel, Pablo de Greiff, and Lars Waldorf, *Disarming the Past: Transitional Justice and Ex-Combatants* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010), back cover.

[75] Krijn Peters and Paul Richards, '"Why We Fight": Voices of Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone', *Africa* 68:2 (1998), pp. 183, 210; and Maclure and Denov, 'I Didn't Want to Die'.

[76] For an early articulation of the peace dividend, see Mac Graham, Richard Jolly, and Chris Smith, *Disarmament and World Development* (London: Pergamon, 1986); and Kees Kingma (ed.), *Demobilization in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Development and Security Impacts* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2000), p. 24. For evidence that peace dividend rhetoric persists, see World Bank, *MDRP Final Report: Overview of Program Achievements* (Washington, DC: World Bank, July 2010), p. 14.

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But such distinctions have taken on a new discursive formulation that fixes the unpopularity of ex-combatants as aid beneficiaries and can be traced to the late 1990s: that communities *resent* the DDR assistance ex-combatants receive because such assistance unfairly assists perpetrators of violence. Certainty about the existence and salience of community resentment was absent from programme evaluations of early 1990s DDR interventions (for example, Mozambique) but following DDR support to the violent and unpopular RUF in Sierra Leone the concept became entrenched, ubiquitous, and linear (resentment is community resentment of ex-combatants). There are 25 references to community resentment in the IDDRS. In contrast, Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Final Report conceptualises resentment as taking heterogeneous forms. Resentment is mentioned four times, but only one of these discusses community resentment of ex-combatants.[77] Two discuss youth resentment of traditional and ageist hierarchies as an important cause of conflict,[78] and the remaining reference discusses general political and ethnic resentment.[79] The assumption that resentment always flows from one direction, from communities to ex-combatants, obscures the dynamic and multi-directional manifestations of the processes for which resentment is merely shorthand: anger, defeat, responsibility, and expectation.[80]

The resentment narrative is discursively linked to the threat narrative explored in the previous section: resentment should be minimised because it could 'lead to war' – 'favouritism causes exclusion, exclusion causes war'.[81] Two principal assumptions underpin it. First, communities are victims of ex-combatant violence (the perpetrator thesis). This assumption relies on the myth that communities are innocent victims during and after war, and that ex-combatants are collectively guilty: all of them are perpetrators of human rights abuses, war crimes, and crimes against humanity during the war and violent intimidation of communities after the war. In this way, the resentment narrative is linked to New Barbarism because it frames the actions of ex-combatants as inherently and inevitably barbaric without being politically motivated or meaningful.

The second assumption is that communities are more deserving of assistance after war because it is unfair to give ex-combatants special treatment not afforded to non-combatant communities (the community dessert thesis). 'Why should ex-combatants benefit from DDR while communities receive nothing?' is a common refrain among practitioners and civil society representatives. The dessert thesis relies on the myth of a binary opposition between ex-combatants and communities. These assumptions lead to a third component of the resentment narrative – the increasingly fixed preference in DDR discourse for 'community-based approaches' and corresponding contempt for 'targeted approaches'. This section explores these aspects of the resentment narrative (that ex-combatants are perpetrators, that they are less deserving of assistance than communities, and that community-based approaches to reintegration are preferred). It also seeks to destabilise and problematise them by providing counter-narratives and counter-evidence.

[77] Republic of Liberia, TRC Vol. III Title II, p. 72.
[78] Ibid., p. 57.
[79] Republic of Liberia, Vol. III Title VII, p. 14.
[80] See de Greiff, 'Normative Conception', pp. 25–6. On these pages, de Greiff refers to Margaret Urban Walker, 'Resentment and Assurance', *Moral Repair* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 146.
[81] Stephen Archibald and Paul Richards, 'Converts to Human Rights? Popular Debate about War and Justice in Rural Central Sierra Leone', *Africa*, 72:3 (2002), p. 360.

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Assumption 1. Ex-combatants are perpetrators

Resentment towards ex-combatants for receiving benefits is asserted to be inevitable and to exist prior to ex-combatant return to communities after war. The UNDP Practice Note asserts that ex-combatants are '*likely to be* perceived as perpetrators and additional burdens on the community, rather than as an asset'.[82] The Practice Note goes further, arguing that resentment of ex-combatant perpetrators can irreparably harm reintegration:

> Civilian resentment at the special treatment of ex-combatants can become an impediment to successful and lasting reintegration. A key objective of the DDR programme must therefore be to ensure that all stakeholders understand that DDR is not about rewarding ex-combatants (except in the very specific case of wars of liberation, where ex-combatants are perceived as heroes).[83]

In the resentment narrative, there is no room for community solidarity with ex-combatants, except in 'the *very specific case* of wars of liberation'. The IDDRS modify the Practice Note's determinism by arguing that 'special treatment to ex-combatants *may* cause resentment among other groups who *may* view special or unique benefits to ex-combatants as an unjustified reward to the perpetrators of conflict'.[84] The argument nevertheless represents a decontextualising appeal to probability (because something *could* happen, it inevitably *will* happen).

The perpetrator thesis asserts collective guilt among all ex-combatants for the war's atrocities and ascribes collective future guilt to all ex-combatants in its aftermath (*they will turn to crime*, *they will pick up arms again if disappointed*). A common dehumanisation strategy, the assertion of collective guilt justifies the community's fear and jealousy of them. Discursively, then, it is consistent for a UN report on employment generation to refer to '[e]x-combatants and victims alike',[85] as if the opposite of an 'ex-combatant' is not a 'non-combatant' but is instead and self-evidently a 'victim'.

The perpetrator thesis presents resentment as existing prior to DDR, ignoring the ways in which the contours and duration of DDR themselves might shape and construct resentment. For example, negative experiences with cash payments in Sierra Leone led some donors to oppose cash reinsertion payments in Liberia. The lesson became, 'Cash creates resentment.' But in Sierra Leone resentment can be traced not to cash *per se* but to the programmatic modes of its dispersal: it was given at disarmament sites and not in communities of return, and was given in exchange for weapons or ammunition, which fuelled a market for small arms. In other cases (Mozambique, Liberia, and Burundi, for example) cash was not given in direct exchange for weapons and was spread out over several months in communities of return, minimising the problems encountered in Sierra Leone. Whether communities resent cash payments is also related to the success of information and community 'sensitisation' campaigns about the rationale and potential community gains of cash assistance to former fighters.[86] Other programmatic choices can similarly help to

[82] UNDP, *Practice Note*, p. 51, emphasis added.
[83] Ibid., p. 59.
[84] IDDRS 4.30, 4.10.
[85] UN, *United Nations Policy for Post-conflict Employment Creation, Income Generation and Reintegration* (New York: United Nations, May 2008), p. 13.
[86] Sigrid Wllibald, 'Does Money Work? Cash Transfers to Ex-combatants in Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Processes', *Disasters*, 30:3 (2006), p. 326.

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minimise resentment; for example, quick impact projects and employment generation schemes that allow ex-combatants and communities to interact and work side by side.[87] The resentment narrative is often presented as being static (communities will resent special benefits no matter what) yet these examples suggest that resentment is contingent upon the overarching design and implementation of DDR interventions.

DDR's demarcation between ex-combatant perpetrators and community victims corresponds to Makau Mutua's influential critique of human rights discourse, where he identifies a tendency to divide peoples into categories, pitting 'savages, on the one hand, against victims and saviors, on the other'.[88] In DDR discourse, ex-combatants are cast in the savage role (perpetrators to be resented), communities as victims (blameless, innocent, bystanders to conflict and therefore above it), and international actors as saviours (enlightened enough to ensure that DDR does not reward perpetrators or fuel resentment). Mutua argued that this discourse makes oppositional binaries possible: superior and inferior ('their ex-combatants' versus 'our veterans'), and barbarity and civilisation ('ex-combatant perpetrators' versus 'community victims').[89] Such constructions help DDR actors to mobilise resources by reassuring donors that they will assist sympathetic victims and not savages alone. The community is asserted to resemble the peacebuilding enterprise itself: liberal, peaceful, good. The community is constructed as the saviour's mimic, the civilised, good-hearted, cooperative entity, the colonial mission's reformed subject; the ex-combatant, in opposition, becomes the object of mockery, the colonial mission's threatening caricature.[90]

The tendency to demarcate post-conflict communities into separate categories of victim and perpetrator suggests that the bodies of ex-combatants might be uniquely 'docile' during DDR interventions because, more so than other 'war affected' or 'vulnerable' groups like refugees or IDPs, who are framed as *victims* of conflict processes, ex-combatants more closely align with Foucault's prisoners because of their construction as guilty perpetrators and potential menaces to society in need of rehabilitation.[91] As a result, they risk becoming a repository into which the international peacebuilding enterprise can dump its desires (to demarcate post-conflict populations as victims or perpetrators), its fears (to fix ex-combatants as frontline threats in the 'coming anarchy'), and its interests (to conflate the return of ex-combatants to lives of basic poverty with success, which distracts from the failure of the development regime to lift combatant and non-combatant populations alike out of poverty). This in turn underscores how (unintentional) stigmatisation of ex-combatants might prop up the (intentional) agenda of neo-liberal peacebuilding. If ex-combatants do not deserve long-term support, then peacebuilding interventions that favour 'self-reliance', macroeconomic stability, and entrepreneurship are reinforced, whilst investment in

[87] UNAMSIL, 'The DDR Process in Sierra Leone: Lessons Learned' (Freetown: UNAMSIL DDR Coordination Section, 2003), p. 8.

[88] Makau Mutua, 'Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights', *Harvard International Law Journal*, 42:1 (2001), p. 201.

[89] Ibid.

[90] These labels are taken from Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 131; see also Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85–92.

[91] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin New Ed edition, 1991 [orig. pub. 1975]).

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employment, public works, and state-provided welfare support to post-war populations are either deprioritised or else actively discouraged.[92]

In the Liberian context, the resentment narrative oversimplifies the community's role during conflict. Where did Liberian ex-combatants come from, if not from 'communities'? In Voinjama, Liberia, each of a group of ten former LURD combatants told me that their families and community leaders instructed and pressured them to fight.[93] Four of these reported being violently recruited, but still cited the security of their families and communities as a reason for their participation ('If I did not join, they would kill my family and friends'; and, 'even though I was forced to fight, it was the best thing to provide security for my family'). Their individual experiences mirror the conclusions of two surveys in which both ex-LURD and ex-MODEL said it was *for communities* that they joined armed campaigns.[94] For those young fighters violently coerced into fighting, the community is also implicated in failing to prevent their recruitment.

The community is deeply implicated in cycles of violence, and in each combatant's journey from civilian to combatant and back to civilian. Communities sustain complex structures not just of fighters but also of conflict's middlemen. As Nordstrom observed of simple perpetrator/victim dichotomies that reduce conflict to its constituent 'combatants':

> When I hear people referring to a war in terms of two opposing forces – Frelimo and Renamo in the case of Mozambique – as if that defined the totality of the war experience, I am puzzled and want to ask, 'What about the blackmarketeers, the arms merchants, the civilian collaborators, the roving predatory bands of quasi-soldiers and ex-militia, the mercenaries, the jackal profiteers who sell information to both sides, the private militias, and the foreign strategists – all of whom profoundly shape the dynamics of the war on the ground.'[95]

Moreover, communities can threaten ex-combatants after war; they can perpetuate the corruption and discrimination that exploited and endangered youth prior to the war.[96] They can also, as was documented in the Hotspots, exploit and victimise ex-combatants via illegal and exploitative labour schemes and extortion rackets.

The resentment narrative thrives despite the availability of destabilising counter-narratives. One counter-narrative is that the nature of the relationship between combatants and communities is more nuanced than the resentment narrative allows. After the conflict ended in Liberia, many ex-combatants from all factions migrated to rubber plantation communities because of the economic opportunities that rubber tapping presented. Ex-combatants (approximately 5,000 LURD ex-combatants at Guthrie and 500 MODEL at Sinoe) used intimidation and violence to assume

[92] See Mark Duffield, *Security, Development and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper, and Mandy Turner (eds), *Whose Peace? Critical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Peacebuilding* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Oliver P. Richmond (ed.), *Palgrave Advances in Peacebuilding: Critical Developments and Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Bob Deacon, Michelle Hulse, and Paul Stubbs, *Global Social Policy: International Organisations and the Future of Welfare* (London: Sage, 1997).

[93] Author's interview with former LURD combatants, Voinjama, Liberia (16 April 2007).

[94] Pugel, *What the Fighters Say*; Bøås and Hatløy, 'Getting In'.

[95] Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), pp. 46–7.

[96] Joseph Hanlon, 'Is the International Community Helping to Recreate the Conditions for War in Sierra Leone?' *The Round Table*, 94:381 (2005), pp. 459–72; Roger Mac Ginty, 'Indigenous Peace-making versus the Liberal Peace', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 43:2 (2008), pp. 139–63.

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control of plantation management and production, or else assumed positions of leadership within plantation security forces (for example, Taylor's militia on Cocopa plantation). Several plantation communities had good cause to resent ex-combatants. A 2006 report from UNMIL's Human Rights Section uncovered evidence of killings and sexual violence on the plantations, as well as deplorable living conditions for plantation residents. At Guthrie, in particular, plantation residents opposed the ex-combatant presence until UNMIL successfully relocated them by inducing them to join alternative vocational training programmes.

But on other plantations, the relationship between communities and combatants was more complex. At Sinoe, MODEL ex-combatants had links and family members already resident on the plantation, so the relationship between the ex-combatants and the plantation community was one where violent intimidation co-mingled with preexisting family and social ties connecting ex-combatants to non-combatant plantation residents. Even though the Liberian government failed to identify the rightful owners of Sinoe, the County Superintendent repeatedly tried to repossess it from the Community Welfare Committee (CWC), the organisation that former MODEL combatants had formed to manage Sinoe. The CWC, with support from the resident plantation population, resisted the Sinoe Superintendent's attempts. One such attempt, in August 2008, led to violent confrontations between the CWC and the Superintendent's representatives. The CWC's nine core members were subsequently arrested without indictment in October 2008 and detained illegally until February 2009. All of their assets were seized, also illegally and without compensation after the nine men were eventually released without charge. Additionally, plantation residents at Sinoe (ex-combatants and non-combatants alike) were routinely forced to pay bribes for concession rights and were illegally taxed for rubber processing. Numerous authorities at local and state levels were known to receive such payments from other plantation communities.[97] On some plantations, then, culpability and victimisation were not clear-cut: ex-combatants were both perpetrators and victims, with some communities (Guthrie) resisting them but others (Sinoe) demonstrating a complex combination of support, empathy, indifference, and opposition.

A second counter-narrative is that community resentment might not be as widespread and deeply felt as suggested. The Bøås and Hatløy survey found that in most cases communities welcomed the return of ex-combatants.[98] The majority of ex-combatants also report feeling accepted by communities in Liberia. In a 2008 UNMIL survey, 43 per cent of both ex-combatant and non-combatant respondents said ex-combatants are viewed with acceptance, and another 20 per cent went further, saying they are viewed with respect.[99] Several officials reported in separate interviews in 2007 that reintegration assistance helped to mitigate social tensions rather than exacerbate it.[100] Ex-combatants also returned in high numbers (58 per cent) to

[97] Information regarding plantations was obtained via author interviews with UNMIL officials, ex-combatants, Sinoe plantation residents, and local NGOs in Monrovia, Greenville, Sinoe County, and Sinoe Rubber Plantation (June 2009), and at Guthrie Rubber Plantation (April 2007).

[98] Bøås and Hatløy, 'Getting In', p. 49; Jennings, 'Struggle to Satisfy', p. 52.

[99] Hill et al., 'Would You Fight Again?' p. 5. See also Christian Bugnion, Luc Lafrenière, Sam Doe, Hirut Tefferi and Cerue Garlo, *External Mid-term Evaluation Report of the DDRP in Liberia* (Monrovia: UNMIL, 2 October 2006), p. 41.

[100] Author's interview with local county official, UNHCR coordinator, and NCDDRR official, Lofa County (16 April 2007).

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home communities.[101] These counter-claims match survey evidence from other DDR processes, suggesting that resentment might be overstated across cases.[102]

A third counter-narrative is that communities often help, support, and protect ex-combatants. The Hotspots found that several mining camps in Grand Gedeh and River Gee were unwilling to reveal ex-combatant identities or share information about them, with follow-up interviews stating that the cause for this unwillingness was not fear of reprisal but rather a more symbiotic relationship between former fighters and communities. Fourth, ex-combatants are also capable of performing conflict-mitigation and conflict-resolution roles in communities. As discussed in the previous section, members of communities often have approached erstwhile combatant commanders to help solve problems involving the rank and file.

Assumption 2. Communities are more deserving

The resentment narrative also relies upon appeals to equity, warning that 'too much' assistance for one group (ex-combatants) is unfair and could fuel social tensions as a result. But this argument is not premised upon equal entitlement to assistance between ex-combatants and communities after war; rather, it subtly implies that communities are more deserving of assistance than ex-combatants. At a conference organised by the UK government for parliamentary leaders from developing states, a prominent DDR consultant put it this way: 'Ex-combatants are not the beneficiaries [of DDR assistance]; communities are. Ex-combatants are the recipients.'[103] Ex-combatants do not (and ought not) *benefit*; they merely *receive*. The focus of assistance, and therefore dessert, is the community. In constructions of dessert, communities are granted agency over ex-combatants. Ex-combatants do not reintegrate; communities reintegrate them.[104]

Dessert constructions neglect the heterogeneous makeup of communities and of their experiences of conflict (different community members were affected differently by war) and the variety of roles played by communities during and after war. They also locate ex-combatants as outside of communities, and in so doing 'produce difference by differing'.[105] Yet Liberian ex-combatants are community members, too. Bøås and Hatløy emphasise how 'typical' they are: before the war, ex-combatants 'lived quite ordinary Liberian lives', and after the war were found to be 'like' other Liberians: 'poor, disenfranchised and without any access to or hope for upward social mobility'.[106] To attribute conflict to combatants alone negates 'the crucial role played through societal processes in the legitimation of war'.[107]

[101] Pugel, *What the Fighters Say*, pp. 2, 5.
[102] Peter Uvin, *Ex-combatants in Burundi: Why They Joined, Why They Left, How They Fared*, MDRP Working Paper No. 3 (Washington, DC: World Bank, October, 2007), pp. 20–1.
[103] International DDR consultant, conference panel, *International parliamentary conference on peacebuilding: tackling state fragility programme*, London (30 Jan. 2010). The UNDP *Practice Note* says the same thing (p. 11).
[104] UNDP, *Practice Note*, pp. 34, 37.
[105] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 48.
[106] Bøås and Hatloy, 'Getting In', pp. 33, 42.
[107] Vivienne Jabri, *Discourses on Violence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 17.

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Follow-up programmes targeted both combatants and non-combatant community members. Community leaders chose who participated and who did not, and were encouraged to include ex-combatants on the projects, as well as other special target groups (for example, women). Yet several practitioners in Liberia mistakenly assumed that follow-up assistance was for ex-combatants alone and accused UNMIL, based on that assumption, of being 'too obsessed with ex-combatants'.[108] A joint assessment commissioned by UNMIL, the World Bank, and UNDP included a 'suggestion' that public works projects 'employ all youth irrespective of whether they are former combatants or not', even though this was precisely what the programmes were doing.[109] Just as the threat narrative is totalising because it constructs the ex-combatant as threat regardless of whether the ex-combatant is employed or unemployed, the resentment narrative is similarly totalising because it stigmatises reintegration programmes even when they include community members.

External construction of community dessert tends to turn the 'ex-combatant' label into an epithet. Self-identification as an ex-combatant is assumed to be bad, a truth often presented as self-evident. A European UNDP official in Monrovia said,

> In most countries, ex-combatants hide their identities. Here, people want to be identified as ex-combatants, even those who were not ex-combatants. It is high time we stop that. We need every member of the community to see the urgent need to contribute to the community without discrimination, without regard to ex-combatant status, etc. That everyone in the community feels that sense of involvement.[110]

This contrasts with a Liberian NCDDRR official, who said, 'Ex-combatants do not want to be referred to as such. After all, many were forced into war.'[111] The difference in these two opinions is accounted for by individuals' strategic adoption of the label: before a UNDP audience, it is advantageous to adopt the label in order to qualify for benefits.[112] There is a programme on offer, with generous eligibility. Why would an ex-combatant not assert his or her combatant status? Meanwhile, in the community within which the NCDDRR official was embedded, the audience for ex-combatants was localised, creating incentives to discard the label to emphasise social inclusion.

To talk of communities deserving benefits more than ex-combatants underscores the way in which communities can also wield the ex-combatant label as an epithet for their own strategic reasons: to erase complicity for conflict, to scapegoat, and to articulate grievances against the international aid establishment. Digging deeper, however, communities often have complicated and contradictory feelings towards ex-combatants. A second NCDDRR official said,

> When something happens in a community, yes, ex-combatants are blamed occasionally, but [scapegoating] is not prevalent. For example, I ask communities, 'Name three of your best friends.' And then I ask if they were ex-combatants and they say yes … [Ex-combatants] have formed family relationships with [communities], they have also intermarried. But when tempers flare, the term 'ex-combatants' does come up.

[108] Author's interview with UNICEF official, Monrovia (9 June 2009).
[109] Harold J. Monger, *Impact Assessment Report on Infrastructure for Employment Projects* (Monrovia: Ministry of Public Works, UNMIL, World Bank, and UNDP, 2008), p. 31.
[110] Author's interview with UNDP official, Monrovia (15 June 2009).
[111] Author's interview with NCDDRR official, Monrovia (9 June 2009).
[112] Such strategic essentialism is well documented elsewhere: see Jessica Schafer, 'A Baby Who Does Not Cry Will Not be Suckled: AMODEG and the Reintegration of Demobilized Soldiers', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24:1 (1998), pp. 7–36; and Gayatri C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 298.

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When the community uses the term 'ex-combatant' as an epithet, it is possible that the community is doing so to scapegoat ex-combatants for more general societal problems. The application of 'ex-combatant' as a pejorative catchall to describe criminality, idleness, and menace linked to community resentment repeats across combatant contexts, albeit in different ways. That application, however, should be contextualised not as *evidence* of resentment but instead as the general tendency of many societies in the north and south to use epithets that express a generic distrust of youth, be it the 'long hairs' of the 1960s or the 'chavs' of today.[113]

Examples of community solidarity with ex-combatants further destabilise the resentment narrative. Some communities have rejected the labelling of ex-combatants to protect them. Teachers and school administrators in Lofa County explained in interviews in 2007 that they very carefully and purposefully referred to young ex-combatants receiving educational assistance not as 'ex-combatants' but as 'scholarship students', to reduce the separation of such beneficiaries from their peers.

Assumption 3. Community-based approaches are superior to targeted assistance

Advice to DDR practitioners frames community-based approaches to reintegration in positive terms while negatively depicting ex-combatant-focused reintegration programmes.[114] When the necessity of some targeted programming is asserted, it is almost by way of apology, or justification. The 2011 secretary-general's report on DDR states, 'Programmes should move as quickly as possible from individual, ex-combatant-focused reinsertion or reintegration to community-based reintegration: or, where possible, immediately adopt a community-based approach.'[115] The costs of not adopting a community-based approach where ex-combatants and non-combatant community members share benefits are said to be high: 'Failure to do so will result in ex-combatants continuing to identify themselves as belonging to a special group outside society, retarding their effective reintegration into local communities.'[116] An appeal to equity is predicated on the absence of parallel support to communities.

The mid-term evaluation of DDR programmes in Liberia found that they were unsustainable because there was 'no overall national recovery and development plan' and 'no parallel complementary programmes designed to operate at community level'.[117] My field visits to Voinjama in Lofa County in 2007 and Greenville in Sinoe County in 2009 corroborated that the most visible development assistance on offer was attached to DDR programming (although, as stated previously, this targeted both ex-combatants and non-combatant community members). Interviews with UNMIL officials verified that recovery assistance and development aid to communities affected by war has been slow to reach remote areas in the border regions and mining and plantation communities: poor infrastructure and insecurity were cited as the reasons. The resentment narrative would reverse the logic of the mid-term evaluation: rather

[113] Uvin, *Ex-combatants in Burundi*, p. 20; see also Owen Jones, *Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class* (London: Verso, 2011).
[114] UNDP, *Practice Note*, p. 52.
[115] UNGA, A/65/741, para. 9. See also IDDRS 4.30.4.11.
[116] UNDP, *Practice Note*, p. 5; see also IDDRS 4.30.4.11 and UNDP, *Report on the Reintegration of Demobilized Soldiers in Mozambique (1992–1996)* (New York: UNDP, 1997), p. 28.
[117] Bugnion et al., *Mid-term Evaluation*, p. 37.

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than blame incomplete reintegration on the failures of the international development regime, the lack of community assistance is blamed on DDR programmes. The 'quick move' from targeted to non-targeted approaches, therefore, becomes *de facto* a euphemism for a move from internationally provided support to no support.

Given that spending on DDR programmes is a fraction of the overall development portfolio of major donors, the resentment narrative fails to answer two questions. First, why are there not more post-conflict programmes assisting communities? Second, why is community assistance the specific responsibility of DDR programmes and not the general development mandate of UNDP, ILO, the World Bank, and bilateral donors? With DDR often the only assistance on offer in remote communities, resentment is said to be a function of the special assistance received by ex-combatants rather than an indictment of the failure of the international development regime to assist post-war communities. My suggestion is not that community-based programmes are a bad idea: interviews with local UN staff and independent programme evaluations of infrastructure employment projects both emphasised that having community members work side by side with combatants enhanced integration and reconciliation. The assumptions buttressing preferences for community-based programming, however, might further differentiate combatants from communities.

The case of Liberia, however, is also instructive about how hegemonic assumptions about short-term assistance for ex-combatants can be subverted, showing that the same actors who disseminate narratives about community-based programming are not monolithic. They also evidence the capacity to innovate and transform modes of assistance. Although the Hostpots Assessments reify some tropes about ex-combatants, they critically challenge others; they consistently articulate the need to design follow-up programming to assist vulnerable ex-combatants in areas that received little support during the formal DDR process. Within UNMIL, many actors opposed the assumption that reintegration assistance should be short-term. Resisting critics who said it was 'doing development' and over-prioritising ex-combatants, UNMIL/RRR (with support from the World Bank, UNDP, and other actors) implemented follow-up programmes targeting ex-combatants and non-combatants that successfully employed over 70,000 Liberians for a total of 2.5 million working days, showing that it is possible to design community-based interventions that do not shy away from assisting ex-combatants. A 2010 high-level UN review of DDR concluded, in part based on the success of RRR's employment programmes, that more resources and longer-term follow-up programmes for ex-combatants are needed.[118] More broadly, the UN system is also moving towards recognition that longer-term assistance for ex-combatants is needed. The secretary-general recommends at least three years of UN reintegration assistance in his 2011 report.[119]

Conclusion: towards integration?

Neither the threat narrative nor the resentment narrative is benign; each enables some viewpoints and objectives, and disables others. Each upholds an essential ex-combatant otherness that distinguishes former fighters from their post-conflict states

[118] McCandless, *Second Generation*, p. 4.
[119] UNGA, A/65/741, para. 26.

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and communities, and implies unique ex-combatant culpability for conflict and post-conflict violence. As such, the frames are not just a matter of language but have a power, politics, and violence all their own, impacting DDR programme duration and contours, peacebuilding policy and strategy, and social relations between ex-combatants and non-combatants. Of course, threats and resentment can *sometimes* be the case; the problem is that DDR discourse tends to construct them as being *mostly* or *always* the case. In this respect, they are totalising. The threat narrative makes all ex-combatants dangerous, whether employed or unemployed. The resentment narrative makes all ex-combatants unpopular, whether or not programmes included their communities.

This article has demonstrated that the narratives negatively impact the integration process. First, both narratives absolve international and national actors of responsibility. By naturalising the violent predilection of ex-combatants, the threat narrative scapegoats them and frees international, national, and local actors of their own complicity during conflict and post-conflict transition. The resentment narrative blames DDR programmes for lack of community recovery assistance and not the institutional and structural failures of the development enterprise. The juxtaposition of community saints against combatant demons blames ex-combatants for the state's conflict and post-conflict woes and ignores the community's role in producing and sustaining the structures that ignite conflict.

Second, the propensity of DDR rhetoric to divide post-conflict societies into perpetrators and victims is a form of ultimate othering. If everything ex-combatants do after conflict is potentially threatening simply by virtue of their ex-combatant status, then peace and success become equated not with ex-combatant visibility but with invisibility. Othering of ex-combatants also homogenises the global south. They are made to appear similarly threatening across very different post-conflict contexts. Ex-combatants in Liberia = ex-combatants in Sierra Leone = ex-combatants in DRC = ex-combatants in Burundi, etc. And, othering sustains divisions between 'their' ex-combatants from 'our' veterans. This becomes more evident when a close look at conflict context reveals that recruitment and mobilisation patterns – as well as the difficulties and challenges of return from war – for 'their wars' and 'our wars' are not as different as the narratives suggest; presumed distinctions between African ex-combatants and Western veterans reify African exceptionalism in ways that are meant to further separate 'their wars (brutal) and our wars (civilized)'.[120] The resentment narrative others ex-combatants in ways that mirror 'divide and rule' strategies of the colonial era. It fixes them as alien to the community, and establishes an in-group (the community) and an out-group (the ex-combatants).

Finally, the narratives rationalise securitised, short-term assistance. Assumptions about ex-combatants as inherently threatening securitise DDR interventions specifically and peacebuilding generally: they rationalise and justify reintegration assistance only as long as ex-combatants constitute a security threat. Ex-combatants are worthy of aid and relevant to peacebuilding *only if they are threatening*. Reintegration assistance is consequently operationalised as short-term, meant only to 'buy time' and 'facilitate security' for the macroeconomic stability measures that are the long-term

[120] Keen, 'Tale of Two Wars', p. 515.

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focus of reconstruction, development, and recovery. The community resentment narrative discourages targeted approaches and yet does not articulate sustainable, internationally financed and administered 'community-based' assistance, either. The contours of such assistance are left vague.

These impacts of the threat and resentment narratives matter not just for Liberia but also for other processes of post-conflict reintegration and reconciliation. If DDR actors are to narrate new stories about ex-combatants that foreground their *integration* into communities rather than their *separation* from communities, a discursive shift is needed. At the rhetorical level, space is needed to confront the social capital of ex-combatants as a potential resource for the post-conflict state, and not simply a problem. Together with non-combatants, they are the raw human material upon which states necessarily rely to rebuild and reconcile. But shifts in DDR programming are also needed. The UN's endorsement of at least three years of reintegration support is an important starting point in this regard. The suggestion that former fighters might benefit from longer-term processes of assistance might also lead to further debate about the different forms that assistance could take, in ways that challenge macroeconomic orthodoxy and acknowledge the policy and academic literature on DDR indicating that a shift towards labour-intensive strategies of reintegration is needed.[121]

To redress the stigmatisation of ex-combatants, however, is not simply about 'getting DDRR right'. Ex-combatants are not a resource for the post-conflict state only if the state and its patrons design and implement the right programmes; rather, ex-combatants' own efforts to situate themselves within their state, their families, and their communities make possible imaginative new ways to conceptualise and support reintegration programmes. But aligning programmes with ex-combatant agency necessarily insists as a first step that actors problematise the stigma currently attached to ex-combatants as programme beneficiaries.

[121] UNGA, A/65/741, paras 41–5; UN Office for West Africa, *Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa* (December 2005); Jennings, 'Struggle to Satisfy', p. 214.

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