

Beyond Reintegration: War Veteranship in Mozambique and El Salvador

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes the concept of ‘war veteranship’ to better understand war veterans’ positioning in and engagement with post-war societies and state-building processes. The study is based on ethnographic research with former insurgent movements, specifically the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) in Mozambique and the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador. The concept of war veteranship allows for the exploration of trajectories of former combatants not necessarily, and certainly not exclusively, in terms of reintegration, but rather in relation to the manifold ways in which the status and connections associated with armed group participation may hold currency in the veterans’ lives, and particularly in relation to political processes. The article argues that war veteranship is best understood as a distinct type of post-war citizenship. Integral to the political accommodations that shape post-war societies, war veteranship involves the construction, negotiation and contestation of the societal status of different categories of war veterans. Drawing on the analyses of political struggles of war veterans in RENAMO and FMLN over two decades, this study’s findings underscore the *longue-durée* socio-political relevance of war veteranship, extending above and beyond reintegration efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Societal accommodation of former soldiers is commonly studied in terms of the notion of reintegration. Coupled with disarmament and demobilization, reintegration constitutes a key ingredient of the peace intervention package deployed by international agencies such as the United Nations (UN)

Ralph Sprenkels unexpectedly passed away on 14 September 2019, shortly after this article was accepted for publication. Ralph was an inspiring colleague and friend with a profound knowledge of El Salvador and a strong dedication to human rights and critical scholarship. This article is one of the many ways in which we will remember him and his academic work. Research for this article was made possible with funding provided by the Dutch Organization for Science (NWO) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nikkie Wiegink wishes to thank Tessa Diphooorn, Chris van der Borgh, Dirk Kruijt and the anonymous reviewers for comments and corrections on earlier versions of the manuscript.

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and World Bank since the early 1990s (Humphrey and Weinstein, 2007; Torjesen, 2013). Although the notion of reintegration has been subjected to criticism and scrutiny from academics as well as practitioners, it continues to be the orthodoxy for studying and dealing with former combatants of warring parties (McMullin, 2013; Munive and Stepputat, 2015). The extensive literature on the role of former combatants in the aftermath of war is mostly policy oriented and dominated by the concerns of international interveners (Autesserre, 2014; Chandler, 2013; Richmond, 2016). By and large, this literature tends to view war as a destructive force, a break from normality that needs repair. Accordingly, this literature conceives former combatants as needing reintegration into civilian life (Muggah, 2009; Özerdem, 2015).

In contrast, as exemplified in Charles Tilly's 'war makes states' paradigm (1992), historians and historically inclined sociologists emphasize how war contributes to the creation of new societal orders. Beyond destruction, war and different forms of participation in the war effort create new and different forms of economic, political and institutional capital (Armitage, 2017; Kalyvas et al., 2008; Wood, 2008). War protagonists often become new elites — or, alternatively, post-war outcasts. War's political legacy is also exemplified in the wide number of studies addressing the transformations of armed groups into political parties (Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz, 2016) and — particularly in African contexts — the role of big men and informal networks based in wartime governance (Spreight and Wittig, 2018; Utas, 2012; Wiegink, 2015).

Even though reintegration might capture some of the challenges former combatants face when building post-war lives, it fails to account for other aspects, such as their continued reliance on wartime networks and their roles in post-war political arenas (Duclos, 2012; Metsola, 2010; Pinaud, 2014; Wiegink, 2015). So-called reinsertion or reintegration programmes may help war veterans tackle short-term post-war challenges, but they constitute only a small portion of the individual and collective efforts war veterans engage in to shape their position in post-war society. This article proposes the term 'war veteranship' as a more comprehensive conceptual approach to former combatants' post-war trajectories. It considers war veteranship to be a specific form of post-war citizenship that may be ascribed and aspired to; one that is concerned with the struggles of veterans in terms of political influence, identity construction and rights and privileges as well as veterans' efforts for collective action. The study applies it comparatively to two case studies, the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) in Mozambique and the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador, and demonstrates the heuristic usefulness of war veteranship for grasping different dynamics and challenges regarding the post-war status, roles and activities of former combatants. The case studies show that war veteranship is not something an individual or a group has or doesn't have, but rather that it is a political category that is constructed, aspired to, acquired or attributed (or revoked) in a particular social, political, economic and historical

context. It is shaped by (post-)war politics, peace agreements, the accommodation of armed actors and memory politics. War veteranship involves the construction, negotiation and contestation of relationships *among* veterans and *between* veterans and the state (or state-like institutions) to establish a distinct form of post-war citizenship.

To elucidate this notion of war veteranship the article draws on ethnographic data on the trajectories of former combatants from two different contexts: Mozambique and El Salvador. Nikkie Wiegink conducted 14 months of fieldwork with former combatants of RENAMO in central Mozambique between 2008 and 2010, followed by subsequent shorter fieldwork periods with policy makers, veteran associations and ex-soldiers of the Mozambican Armed Forces. In this same period, co-author Ralph Sprenkels conducted fieldwork with the FMLN in El Salvador, in addition to several shorter research visits. In both cases, fieldwork involved semi-structured interviews with war veterans, their family members, political leaders and government officials, complemented by life history documentation and by being physically present.

At its outset this study was not a comparative project. Instead the idea for this article came about when discussing findings about the continuation of RENAMO and FMLN veterans' networks and encountering several striking parallels. With similar timelines (armed conflicts which lasted for over a decade and ended in the early 1990s), both cases offered the possibility to look back at the *longue durée* of reintegration. Comparative analysis of the two cases was further enabled by the fact that both armed groups became formally established political parties soon after the war ended. However, RENAMO and FMLN also demonstrate fundamental differences, for example in ideology and level of electoral success, and these movements operate in cultural, political and economic contexts that are dissimilar in many ways. Despite these differences, this article argues that in both cases war veteranship played an important role in shaping post-war politics and livelihoods.

The section that follows provides a short overview of different strands of critique on reintegration. The next section then elaborates on the notion of war veteranship, outlining a preliminary theoretical framework. Following this, the article applies this framework to the Mozambique and El Salvador case studies. The final section discusses the implications of the study's findings for war veteranship as a theoretical concept, by providing a preliminary research agenda on the topic of war veteranship.

CRITIQUES ON REINTEGRATION

Concurring with the UN's increased engagement in global pacification efforts, the reintegration of former combatants emerged as an international policy concern and field of practice in the early 1990s (Doyle and Sambanis, 2010). Defined as 'the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian

status and gain sustainable employment and income' (UNDP, 2006: 8), reintegration — often coupled with disarmament and demobilization — quickly developed into 'a necessary feature of twenty-first century peace support and post-conflict recovery packages' (Muggah, 2009: 8). At the time of writing, there were 11 UN-led Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes underway around the world. Many more have been implemented over the past two decades.¹

Criticism has been rising regarding reintegration programmes and can be broadly subdivided into a policy branch and a theoretical branch. Within the policy branch, the majority of the critiques relate to the many practical difficulties of actually achieving the sustainable employment and income that the UN emphasizes in its definition of reintegration. Ex-soldiers in poor countries face daunting socio-economic challenges and reintegration programmes rarely succeed in providing them with sustainable, non-violent livelihoods (e.g. Humphrey and Weinstein, 2007; Lively, 2014; Zyck, 2009). This leads McMullin (2013: 246) to qualify prevalent outcomes as 'reintegration back into poverty'. Others point to the dilemmas raised with turning former soldiers into peace beneficiaries, by which perpetrators might be favoured over victims, and thus indirectly rewarded for participation in armed action (Casas-Casas and Guzmán-Gómez, 2010; Podder, 2012), privileging the often male combatants over the needs of the most vulnerable and dispossessed groups such as women, children and refugees (Folami, 2016; Mazurana and Eckerbom Cole, 2013). This, so it is argued, potentially undermines transitional justice efforts, and may harm the moral grounding of the peace process (Shaw, 2007; Theidon, 2007). A final strand of policy critique focuses on the bureaucratization of reintegration at the hands of an expanding international professional community, turning DDR into an industry with the consequent vested interests in further growth (Sprenkels, 2014: 4).

A more theoretical critique centres on the idea that reintegration, and in particular the suffix 're', implies a return to the status quo. This is problematic, not only because it presupposes that the pre-war society is an integrated one (Torjesen, 2013: 3), but also because it ignores the profound impact of war on society. It oversimplifies the dynamics of war and perceives combatants as being wholly separated from society. By implying that the military and the social are two separate spheres, wartime social processes are ignored, including the interactions between combatants and civilians and the blurring of these very categories (Kriger, 2003: 16; Peters, 2006: 135; de Vries and Wiegink, 2011). This also ignores the 'governance' role of wartime institutions in ordering and creating social relationships and political structures with lasting impact in the post-war period (e.g. Arjona et al., 2015; Sprenkels, 2018; Utas, 2012; Wood, 2008). The post-war importance of such war-shaped relationships has been documented and analysed in cases

1. See: www.unndr.org/countryoverview.aspx?continent=1 (accessed 5 October 2017).

like Zimbabwe (Kriger, 2003; Moyo, 2011) and Namibia (Metsola, 2010), where veterans of the independence wars played prominent roles in post-independence politics. As will be detailed further in this article, in the case of both RENAMO and the FMLN formal and informal networks of war veterans continued to be of central importance in the post-war social, economic and political lives of former combatants.

Several authors (Jennings, 2008; Torjesen, 2013) furthermore point out that the available literature pays scant attention to the actual underpinnings of reintegration as a social process. With international support programmes taking individual soldiers by the hand and leading them from combat to citizenship, reintegration functions less as a theory than as a parable for the country's imagined post-war transition. Reintegration programmes instead can be viewed as a sort of bargaining tool (Sprenkels, 2018: 98–102). They stand as a good example of what David Mosse (2004: 663) refers to as a 'mobilizing metaphor': a policy concept 'whose vagueness, ambiguity and lack of conceptual precision is required to conceal ideological differences, to allow compromise and the enrolment of different interests, to build coalitions, to distribute agency and to multiply criteria of success within project systems'.

WAR VETERANSHIP

Acknowledging these critiques, this article proposes the notion of war veteranship to conceptualize the individual and collective social-political accommodation of former warring party participants in post-war societies in a much more comprehensive manner than reintegration. Building on Bryan Turner's definition of citizenship (1996: 2), this study defines war veteranship as a political category constituted by the set of practices which designate the status and position of (specific subsets of) war veterans in post-war society, consequently shaping the flow of resources to war veterans. Acknowledging the dual dimensions of the veterans' 'self-making' and 'being-made' (see Ong, 1996: 737), war veteranship comprises individual and collective efforts at the transposition to post-war societies of wartime socio-political identities and associated hierarchies amongst soldiers.

The notion of war veteranship here as a distinct form of post-war citizenship resonates with a longer tradition that views military service in relation to notions of citizenship, as soldiering may be an obligation to the state (i.e. military conscription) (Theidon, 2007) and may also be regarded as the ultimate sacrifice for the nation (Anderson, 2006: 145–48, 159). This understanding of war participation as an extraordinary kind of duty is tied in with the idea — commonly put forward in post-war societies — that wartime contributors are entitled to moral and material recognition. Furthermore, former combatants tend to be more politically active than the average person (Blattman, 2009; Wood, 2015), which underlines that they will not 'fade

away' (Alden, 2002: 341) or become 'like everyone else' as reintegration programmes seem to suggest (see also McMullin, 2013). War veterans often have particular, and often privileged, roles in post-war state building, since they are in a unique position to lay claims on the state having put their lives on the line (Kriger, 2003; Metsola, 2010; Sprenkels, 2018). Furthermore, they may have accumulated organizational skills and authority (Mampilly, 2011) and may embody a threat of renewed violence (Wiegink, 2013).

Not all veterans are perceived, appreciated and rewarded equally. Whether or not veterans are seen as entitled to some kind of post-war privilege or support is strongly correlated to the outcomes of the war and to the perceived contribution of veterans to these outcomes. This perception is also linked to processes of negotiation and contestation of the status of veterans by relevant actors such as political parties, the state or the UN. Some former fighters might not obtain any societal recognition as veterans (e.g. those labelled as terrorists). As the societal position of veterans is highly contingent on the politics of historical interpretation (Trouillot, 1995), ex-soldiers often seek to represent themselves as having made extraordinary contributions to the nation's birth, defence, survival or modernization, acting as key stakeholders in the discursive 'battle for memory' that unfolds after war (Ching, 2016; Kansteiner, 2006; Sprenkels, 2011). Veterans may be glorified as heroes of great victories, but they may also be considered a reminder of failure, guilt and shame that is rather (selectively) forgotten, or as something in between (Duclos, 2012; Metsola, 2010; Wiegink, 2013, 2019). As Metsola (2010: 590) points out in the context of war veterans in Namibia, 'such historical interpretations are not merely a matter of national imaginary. They are highly significant to current socio-political relations defining terms for inclusion and exclusion'.

The contours of war veteranship may be further defined by the creation of 'bureaucratic combatants' by DDR programmes (Munive and Jakobsen, 2012: 364) as well as by governments that, through policies and benefit programmes, engage in the creation of categories of 'eligible' veterans. Such benefits may involve pensions or demobilization allowances, which are often highly coveted by war veterans. Several studies have detailed the problems associated with manipulation and corruption in relation to such funds (Munive, 2014; Wiegink, 2013). Another consequence is that the categorization of war veterans is often subjected to strong contestation. Moreover, ideas about who is a legitimate war veteran and who is not may change and be (re)negotiated over time. Even though reintegration programmes tend to take place over a relatively short timeline, contestation around veteran benefits can be a part of post-war politics for years (even decades), as the case studies here will illustrate.

The organizational dimension of war veteranship is expressed most clearly in initiatives like veterans' associations and veterans-based pressure groups. The DDR literature regards the organized political activity of former combatants mainly as a security threat (McMullin, 2013: 240), and thereby

disregards the importance of wartime networks in the social and political lives of former combatants. In contrast, many recent studies indicate that former military networks tend to transform and endure, and undertake collective efforts, for example in party politics and electoral campaigning (Christensen and Utas, 2008; McGregor, 2002) or governance and public office (Martin, 2018; Rutten, 2001; Sprenkels, 2018). Former combatant networks have spawned political entrepreneurs (Deonandan et al., 2007; de Zeeuw, 2008), peace activists (Dietrich Ortega, 2015), disciplined work forces (Hoffman, 2011), trafficking networks (Persson, 2012), private security operations (Christensen, 2017; Diphoom, 2016), and also violent action and renewed warfare (Cívico, 2015; Themnér, 2012; Zyck, 2009). Together, these studies demonstrate how wartime networks are able to reconvert into a variety of post-war institutions and collective endeavours. War veteranship draws attention to the content and dynamics of such networks, often but not exclusively characterized by relations of dependency, patronage, force and prestige, and shaped by friendships and a sense of belonging, solidarity, shared historical and ideological references, and moral obligation. The ways in which veterans engage (or fail to engage) in organizational efforts and in collective action further shapes war veteranship as a collective project.

The notion of war veteranship acknowledges that wartime participation constitutes a distinct form of social, political and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which may be moulded into an asset or a liability. This calls for the analysis of the trajectories of former combatants not in terms of reintegration (as ‘new’ or ‘renewed’ civilians), but in terms of how the accumulated status, experience and relations of former combatants remain of importance for the kind of post-war citizens the veterans become. It highlights the interactions between veterans and their former wartime institutions (e.g., army or former rebel movement), as well as interactions between the veterans and the state, including the roles of veterans in matters of state formation and post-war politics. The unfolding dynamics of war veteranship as a distinct form of post-war citizenship will be explored in the following sections on Mozambique and El Salvador, with each case highlighting the three dimensions elaborated above: historical interpretations of the war, material benefits for veterans and struggles over these, and veterans’ efforts regarding collective action and associations.

WAR VETERANSHIP IN MOZAMBIQUE

This section focuses on war veteranship and former combatants of RENAMO, a Mozambican insurgent movement that fought the government in a civil war that lasted 16 years (1976–92). RENAMO was founded by the Rhodesian military and was later supported by the South African Defence Forces to destabilize the government of recently independent Mozambique, run by the Mozambique Liberation Front — Frente de Libertação de

Mozambique (FRELIMO) (Emerson, 2014). At the same time, RENAMO gained popular support among Mozambique's rural populations, especially in central and northern Mozambique (Morier-Genoud et al., 2018). The war ended with the signing of the General Peace Accords in 1992, which paved the way for a UN-led DDR programme and multi-party elections, in which RENAMO was to participate as a political party.

At the end of the war in 1992, RENAMO presented approximately 32,000 combatants for official demobilization, among which there were reportedly many non-combatants included to substantiate the claims RENAMO negotiators had made about the movement's military force during the peace negotiations (Alden, 2002). The majority of these combatants were male; only a few hundred women were registered in the DDR programme. Several thousand former RENAMO combatants were incorporated into the bi-partisan Mozambique Defence Armed Forces. A smaller number of combatants stayed in active service to serve as Presidential Guards of Afonso Dhlakama, the movement's leader, and to maintain RENAMO's military bases throughout the country (Vines, 2013; Wiegink, 2015).

The post-war accommodation of war veterans in Mozambique is often presented as a major component in the successful transition after the war. The swift and seemingly unproblematic reintegration of the former combatants of both RENAMO and the government forces was partially due to a DDR programme led by the UN Mission to Mozambique which was generally considered successful, yet costly, but it is also partly attributable to locally initiated reintegration rituals (e.g. Alden, 2002; Granjo, 2007). This focus on the success of reintegration and the 'fading away' (Alden, 2002: 341) of former combatants leaves little room for considering the social and political positions of former RENAMO combatants in the post-war period and the changing policies related to their status.

Historical Interpretations: Armed Bandits or Fighters for Democracy?

The UN Mission to Mozambique's DDR programme was careful not to distinguish between former RENAMO combatants and former soldiers of the Mozambican Armed Forces. But when the DDR programme and affiliated reintegration programmes ended, the FRELIMO-dominated government became responsible for matters pertaining to veterans and took a very different approach. Whereas the FRELIMO elite had reluctantly accepted RENAMO as a political party during the peace negotiations, its military past was deemed illegal, as were its combatants (Schafer, 2007: 124). The dominant FRELIMO narrative about Mozambique's recent past circles around the liberation war that FRELIMO soldiers fought against the Portuguese colonial administration. The civil war that followed after independence is largely ignored and silenced (Igreja, 2008). In the FRELIMO narrative of the civil war, supporters of RENAMO were, and continue to be, depicted

either as armed bandits or as puppets of foreign regimes aiming to destabilize Mozambique, thereby discrediting RENAMO as a political opponent (ibid.: 553) and rendering its former combatants as unworthy of pensions (Schafer, 2007: 124).

The RENAMO narrative of the civil war, widely shared by the former combatants who participated in the research for this article, regards the conflict in terms of a ‘struggle for democracy’. While such references have been discarded as a post-facto interpretation of the war (Schafer, 2007), they nevertheless form a powerful post-war discourse within RENAMO, providing former combatants with a sense of self-worth and a legitimate claim to status and benefits (Wiegink, 2015). One ex-RENAMO combatant summarized Mozambique’s recent history as follows: ‘FRELIMO brought us independence and we brought democracy’.² Such a view equates RENAMO’s war with FRELIMO’s struggle against colonialism, giving both wars similar moral connotations. Additionally, this equates former RENAMO combatants with the *antigos combatentes*, the FRELIMO veterans of the liberation struggle, who are regarded as privileged citizens of the Mozambican state. They continue to be celebrated as national heroes in, for example, a series of national days and numerous monuments and receive generous benefits from the state, such as pensions, free schooling for their children and burial allowances (Wiegink, 2019). The words of the former RENAMO combatant thus suggest a revalorization of the status of RENAMO veterans, who should be rewarded for bringing democracy in the same way that *antigos combatentes* are rewarded. War veteranship, in the eyes of RENAMO combatants, is thus profoundly shaped by the symbolic and material celebrations of *antigos combatentes*. Former RENAMO combatants’ claims and imaginations of war can thus not be regarded separately from other types of war veterans in Mozambique (ibid.).

Struggles over Material Benefits: Inclusive Policies and de Facto Exclusion

The branding of RENAMO veterans as ‘armed bandits’ excluded them from access to pension schemes created for *antigos combatentes* and veterans of the Mozambican Armed Forces.³ Initially, RENAMO veterans complained that they had a right to receive pensions as these were promised to them during the war, but the government claimed that it could not be held responsible for promises that RENAMO’s leaders had made to their soldiers. In 2009, the FRELIMO government’s stance toward RENAMO

2. Interview, former RENAMO combatant, Maringue, 9 September 2008.

3. An exception to this was pensions for disabled war veterans to which former RENAMO combatants were also entitled. Interviews with ADEMIMO (Mozambique’s Association of Disabled Soldiers) revealed, however, that only a few RENAMO veterans were registered as beneficiaries of such pensions.

veterans seemingly changed, however. In the run-up to the national elections, President Guebuza promised that all *desmobilizados* (demobilized people) would receive pensions. These promises resulted in the establishment of a new ministry, the Ministry of the Combatant, replacing the Ministry of the Antigo Combatente, which had dealt solely with the veterans of the liberation war (Wiegink, 2013). The new ministry was in charge of the distribution of 'survival pensions' for all *desmobilizados*, which initially took the form of a monthly allowance of 300 to 400 meticaís (at the time around 9 to 11 euros), depending on the years of service and military rank of a *desmobilizado*.

In practice, however, the vast majority of former RENAMO combatants were not able to receive a survival pension. This was principally a procedural issue: few RENAMO combatants are able to acquire the necessary documentation to apply for such pensions. For example, presenting evidence of years of service in RENAMO is a complicated process that involves a great deal of travel and documentation, which for those living in rural districts requires investments that most people simply cannot make. However, the exclusion of RENAMO veterans is also shaped by particular interpretations of the war and of its fighters. In 2010 Wiegink had a conversation with several government representatives at the office of the National Director of Reinsertion of the Ministry of the Combatant. The representatives characterized RENAMO veterans as illiterate and aggressive, and when asked about RENAMO's abilities to apply for pensions, one of them said that RENAMO combatants excluded themselves, adding that 'they do not feel comfortable being in public as they are linked to the past of destruction and violence'.⁴ These depictions of RENAMO fit the larger FRELIMO narrative that continues to frame RENAMO veterans as the 'dangerous other' and to legitimize their *de facto* exclusion from state benefits (Wiegink, 2019). Thus, while eventually former RENAMO combatants were given war veteran status by the Mozambican state, in practice they were not able to attain the position of beneficiaries due to procedural and economic constraints, as well as processes of stigmatization.

RENAMO Veterans and the Party

There are many veterans associations in Mozambique of which several explicitly incorporate veterans of the Mozambican Armed Forces (FAM) and of RENAMO (Schafer, 1998). However, the participation of RENAMO veterans in these associations is rather symbolic, as the actual organization of its veterans is through the RENAMO party structure, which is deeply shaped by wartime hierarchies. Until his death in May 2018, wartime leader Afonso

4. Interview, government representatives, Office of the National Director of Reinsertion of the Ministry of the Combatant, Maputo, 11 October 2010.

Dhlakama led the party and ran RENAMO as a military organization (Vines, 2013). Research at the district level revealed that past military affiliations were also central in RENAMO's local party structure, which was dominated by (former) RENAMO commanders and (relatively) more highly educated politicians (Wiegink, 2015). These higher-ranked and better-educated veterans were often offered the much coveted (short-term) job opportunities linked to the party. *Vis-à-vis* RENAMO's rank-and-file veterans these 'big men' acted as brokers in their relationship with the RENAMO party and as patrons of larger social networks. One of the main currencies of these vertical relationships were former combatants' expectations of being rewarded for their past military service with pensions.

However, for most rank-and-file veterans such desired state funds rarely materialized as they were well aware of their marginal position *vis-à-vis* the state (*ibid.*). Each election raised the hopes of RENAMO's veterans, but their party never won the national elections, resulting in increased frustration with the RENAMO party leadership and — in their eyes — the fraudulent electoral practices of the FRELIMO party (*ibid.*). In 2013, armed confrontations commenced again between state security forces and RENAMO's armed wing, which involved an unknown number of veterans from the civil war (Pearce, 2016). While this conflict was not necessarily caused by the exclusion of former RENAMO combatants, the promise of future rewards (such as pensions or a demobilization allowance) has become one of the driving forces behind RENAMO's recruitment strategies. In December 2016 a ceasefire was brokered which opened up peace negotiations. In addition to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, veteran pensions take up a central role in the negotiations, as a significant number of RENAMO's current recruits are estimated to be more than 40 years old (*ibid.*). The recent armed conflict between RENAMO and the Mozambican government reveals how war veteranship may play a role in ongoing and renewed armed conflict. RENAMO's experiences show how claims of war veteranship may evolve and change over time, and how the violent potential of former combatants may boost such claims.

WAR VETERANSHIP IN EL SALVADOR

During El Salvador's 12 years of civil war (1980–92), the FMLN developed into one of Latin America's strongest insurgent organizations (Castañeda, 1993; Crandall, 2016). Though it failed to topple the government, the US-backed Salvadoran military was also unable to defeat the insurgents (Montgomery, 1995). In 1992, the stalemate was resolved in a comprehensive peace settlement, which included political reforms, a strong reduction of the military, and the FMLN's demobilization to participate in electoral politics. Though the FMLN did not win the war, the leadership could plausibly frame the settlement as a partial victory.

The FMLN demobilized 15,009 participants who were military personnel, political personnel and disabled participants. Over 80 per cent of those demobilized were from rural backgrounds and close to 30 per cent were women (Luciak, 2001: 49–55). After the peace accords in 1992, the original five Marxist–Leninist organizations integrating the FMLN insurgency partially dissolved into a legally established political party structure, also named FMLN.⁵ The first peace-time elections in 1994 were comfortably won by the right-wing incumbent party, with the FMLN becoming the largest opposition force. Internal strife notwithstanding, the FMLN’s electoral success increased over the years. Eventually, FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes won the 2009 presidential election, making the FMLN Latin America’s first former guerrilla movement to take power by the ballot after failing to do so by the bullet.

Historical Interpretation: Revolutionaries and Saviours

The FMLN claimed that armed struggle had defeated the political stronghold of the military dictatorships and had forced the country’s traditional power holders to accept democracy. Though clearly the outcomes of the war were far from the utopian revolutionary cause of the insurgents, the post-war FMLN leadership continuously tried to convince its followers as well as the Salvadoran people at large that ‘the war needed to be fought and the gains were worth the many sacrifices’ (Ching, 2016: 202). Some leaders even framed the peace settlement as a ‘negotiated revolution’ (Sprenkels, 2019a: 544).

Overall, the FMLN leadership tried to position the peace accords as the foundation of a new tyranny-free nation in which their movement would now be able to work on societal transformation through democratic means. FMLN rank-and-file participants varied in their interpretation of whether the sacrifice of war had been worth it, both because they and their families had often borne the brunt of the violence and because the individual benefits they gained from the peace process were less generous than those that most FMLN leaders were able to obtain (Zamora, 2003).

Attempts by the UN Truth Commission to establish some fundamental truths about what had happened during El Salvador’s civil war were largely ignored by the country’s political elites, including the FMLN leadership. Instead, each of the former belligerent groups largely stuck to its own

5. The FMLN was formed from five different guerrilla organizations: the Fuerzas Populares de Libertación (FPL) — the Popular Liberation Forces; the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo F-16 Fundación 16 de Enero (ERP) — the People’s Revolutionary Army F-16 Foundation 16 January; the Resistencia Nacional (RN) — the National Resistance; the Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (PCS) — the Salvadorean Communist Party; and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC) — the Revolutionary Party of the Central American Workers (Sprenkels, 2018).

interpretation of the war (Sprenkels, 2011). Rather than something akin to an official story, public debate became characterized by a tense co-existence between contrasting interpretations. Former militaries, death squad leaders and guerrillas all presented themselves as heroes and saviours of the fatherland; but such representations only resonated with their own constituents (Ching, 2016).

Struggles over Material Benefits: The ‘Real’ Reinsertion

In evaluating the FMLN’s contribution to post-war reintegration programmes in El Salvador, the United States Agency for International Development pointed out that the demobilized combatants of the FMLN had been much more proactive than their counterinsurgent counterparts and were thus able to attract more funds — to the dismay of the agency, which had actually projected investing more in the demobilization of the army, the historical allies of the US (Sprenkels, 2018: 99). Nonetheless, with the exception of a protection fund for disabled veterans, peace and reintegration benefits started drying up for most ex-combatants one or two years after the demobilization process. El Salvador’s right-wing government often stalled or backtracked on the implementation of reintegration programmes and rejected granting any additional benefits for FMLN veterans (Garibay, 2006; Spence, 2004). The large group of FMLN beneficiaries of the land reform programme found that the assigned plots were frequently of poor quality or too small (De Bremond, 2007).

In the face of economic hardship, many FMLN veterans turned to their political contacts for help. As the FMLN became successful in municipal elections, scores of veterans asked their former comrades-turned-politicians for employment. Veterans often framed their demands as a call for ‘solidarity’, a core FMLN value during the war. These dynamics reinforced a personalistic and clientelist reciprocity between the FMLN politicians and the veterans, whereby the veterans helped mobilize support for the party or for certain leaders and demanded concrete returns for such services.

The search by veterans for concrete retribution intensified in the months after the triumph of FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes in the 2009 presidential elections. FMLN party offices across the country were flooded with employment seekers, most of them veterans who contended that now their ‘turn’ had come (Montoya, 2015). Many insisted that the FMLN owed them a debt because the electoral success of the organization had been made possible as a result of the wartime sacrifices made by combatants. FMLN government officials in turn wanted to hire people they could trust. These trade-offs were mostly mediated through personal contacts, and largely followed factionalist party lines. During fieldwork interviews in 2009 and 2010, some veterans expressed that now the ‘real’ reinsertion was taking place.

The FMLN veterans' associations received a strong new impetus as well. These associations rallied around the idea that post-war reintegration had been a failure, and that, with the government in the hands of the FMLN, it was the leadership's duty to now compensate the veterans for their wartime contribution. A presidential round-table initiative was set up in 2010 to discuss a benefit programme, including pensions and healthcare. The FMLN veterans' associations helped organize the government's official registration process of FMLN war veterans. The government framed the programme as dignified reinsertion for a marginalized group (Sprenkels, 2019b). FMLN veterans' associations used the programme to re-energize their networks and to strengthen their political leverage, and President Funes was eager to push the round-table process forward since he needed the veterans' support to strengthen his position within the FMLN.

The launch of the government programme in 2012 was celebrated as a major victory by the FMLN veterans. They subsequently started a new campaign to establish a formal veterans' benefit law, as they were aware that a government programme could be easily suspended or altered. This new campaign lasted several years. To overcome the opposition of right-wing political parties and the military, the veterans' law approved in November 2015 included both FMLN and armed forces veterans, stipulating substantial benefits for both.⁶ In subsequent years FMLN veterans and armed forces veterans together organized intense and sometimes violent street protests to demand that the government allocate sufficient funds for the law's implementation.

FMLN Veterans' Associations

In the first post-war decade the word 'veteran' was hardly used and held little political resonance. This changed in the early 2000s when it became clear to former FMLN combatants that setting up associations strengthened their status and political leverage. Since many former combatants had kept in touch with their former comrades-in-arms, formalizing these networks into membership associations was not difficult. The FMLN veterans' associations initially focused on getting more recognition and influence in the party and in institutions closely affiliated with the party, such as certain NGOs and communities. Later on, especially after 2009, FMLN veterans' associations started to mobilize extensively to target the state.

Early efforts by veterans took place in a context of intense factional strife within the FMLN (Allison, 2016). Following the dynamics of this internal conflict, groups of veterans became divided into 'officialist' groups of veterans who were loyal to the revolutionary-socialist FMLN leadership, and

6. See: www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Aprueban-ley-de-beneficios-para-veteranos-de-guerra-20151119-0111.html (accessed 23 September 2019).

dissident groups that consisted of followers of the weaker reformists. These dissident groups, who called themselves veterans of ‘the historical FMLN’, were critical and scornful of the FMLN leadership for its perceived lack of internal democracy and for abandoning the FMLN’s historical constituents (Garibay, 2006).

In 2009, when Mauricio Funes won the presidency on the FMLN ballot, the veterans’ associations gathered strength. The FMLN government offered unprecedented room for the veterans to organize, mobilize and gain recognition, influence and benefits. Factional differences and earlier strife were partly set aside, and the veterans increasingly operated with independence and critical distance from the FMLN, while simultaneously claiming the right to more influence within the FMLN. Male veterans dominated the associations’ membership and leadership, but female veterans also participated in the movement, albeit in a smaller proportion than the original demobilization rate of 30 per cent (Sprenkels, 2018: 261). This resonates with the finding by Viterna (2013) that after the war many rank-and-file female FMLN participants prioritized domestic life over political activism.

Since their rise in the early 2000s, the FMLN veterans’ associations have grown to become powerful forces. Leaning on claims linked both to wartime contributions and post-war socio-economic and political status, associations for the FMLN veterans exerted pressure on the government, negotiated trade-offs with the party and gained material and political benefits for their members. FMLN leaders perceived the veterans’ mobilizing capacity both as an asset and a threat, as the associations could use their mobilizing capacity for compliance with FMLN party orientations, but also for protest or other forms of dissent; they have done this increasingly in recent years to press for the implementation of the veterans’ law (Sprenkels, 2019a). Since 2017, veterans have also resorted to putting up road blocks and threatening violent mobilization on many occasions to convince the government to unblock funding for veteran benefits, albeit with limited success.

COMPARING OUR CASES

In war and post-war contexts around the world, former combatants obtain, aspire to or are ascribed particular positions within society, which we propose to understand through the notion of war veteranship. The case studies of RENAMO and the FMLN demonstrate how war veterans, political parties, governments and other political institutions engage in different efforts seeking to designate the status and position of war veterans in post-war society. Both case studies draw attention to the rise of expectations and entitlements of veterans that are used to make claims on governments (or institutions, such as the UN) in the direct aftermath of war (and sometimes during war), but also decades after war has ended. Albeit with different levels of success, veterans from both RENAMO and FMLN engaged in repeated efforts to turn

the veteran status into concrete material benefits. While initially the UN and international donors played an important role in this, in subsequent years such benefits derived mainly from the party or from the state. Benefits result from the drawn-out struggles by veterans for recognition in which political, legal and bureaucratic processes intersect to generate inclusion or exclusion of access to public resources based on the identities of former combatants.

The case studies detailed in this article show the importance of contextual factors, such as the particular way in which a war ends and the amount of resources that are available. But more important for the negotiation and contestation of war veteranship are the ways in which a conflict is interpreted and remembered by different actors. In both cases it was observed during fieldwork that specific categories of war veterans were framed as 'saviours of the nation' or 'fighters for democracy' by their own group but neglected or regarded as 'enemies of the state' or 'armed bandits' by other groups. The construction and negotiation of, and contestation over, war veteranship is thus tied to specific historic interpretations of armed conflict. Yet also within a particular group of war veterans there may be differences in who is worthier of or more able to negotiate war veteranship and who is not. Higher-ranked combatants within both RENAMO and the FMLN were able to obtain positions of privilege in the post-war political structure. Internal (military) hierarchies, gender, age and level of education may all be factors of significance in these processes of negotiation, including more individual traits such as war reputation.

The concept of war veteranship enables the analysis of how wartime participation may be the basis of post-war exclusion or persecution, as well as privilege and power, and helps to elucidate the roles of the multiple actors involved in this process, such as the UN, national governments, veterans' associations and political parties. The latter constitute a particularly pivotal actor in the social and political organization and identification of war veterans of both RENAMO and the FMLN, as (the possibility of) electoral success is considered key for acquiring status and benefits. In El Salvador, the FMLN's electoral win and eventual governing position opened up possibilities for (re)negotiating war veteranship and augmenting its political currency. The veterans emphasized that their sacrifices had made it possible for the left-wing leaders to eventually reach government. RENAMO's electoral decline (at least before the 2014 elections), in contrast, rendered the prospects for its former combatants bleak and marginalized their positions vis-à-vis the FRELIMO-dominated government.

Both case studies clearly show that within the same national contexts different groups of war veterans may exist, as they may for instance be affiliated to different warring parties or to different armed conflicts. However, this study notes also the transcending elements of war veteranship that connect these different categories. In Mozambique we observed that the gains in recognition of a particular subset of veterans — *antigos combatentes* who fought in the liberation struggle — also generated expectations and claims

from other subsets of veterans who may have attained a less favourable societal status. In El Salvador, the gains of FMLN veterans spurred armed forces veterans into action. In recent years, FMLN veterans' associations have frequently allied with armed forces veterans to jointly pressure for the implementation of the veterans' law that was approved in 2015.⁷ War veteranship is constructed not in isolation, but rather negotiated and contested in a particular social, historical and political context.

IN CONCLUSION: EXTENDING WAR VETERANSHIP

This concluding section outlines a preliminary research agenda for war veteranship by further exploring how and when this notion is conceptually and analytically productive, and how it contributes to debates on the transformation of armed actors beyond the usual framings of reintegration and war veteran politics. It proposes four agenda points, embedding war veteranship in a variety of academic debates and case studies.

First and foremost, this section argues that war veteranship can help expand and inform debates about the reintegration and reinsertion of former combatants by highlighting the political and social embeddedness of former armed groups. Rather than implying that former combatants would *return to society*, war veteranship places them *within* society, drawing attention to the governance roles of wartime institutions and the social and political trajectories of former combatants over the course of war and its aftermath. It suggests that DDR programmes and discourses are components of the larger negotiation processes around war veteranship which involve governments, policy makers, academics and (self-defined) war veterans. While DDR programmes are often bound to specific, short periods of time, war veteranship allows us to understand such interventions in a wider temporal outlook that, as these cases show, may span over decades (see also Kriger, 2003; Schafer, 2007) and that includes attention for changing networks, imaginaries, and modes of collective action of war veterans. Furthermore, moving away from reintegration as a central concern would also provide an opportunity to overcome persistent differentiations in academic as well as practitioners' thinking between former combatants in the 'global margins' who are worthy only of short-term reintegration assistance, on the one hand, and war veterans in 'Western countries' whose pensions schemes are rarely contested, on the other (see also McMullin, 2013). War veteranship could thus enhance dialogue between cases of the global South and global North.

Secondly, this study suggests that war veteranship could inform new research about the continued collectivity of former belligerents, highlighting the continuity and simultaneous transformation of networks and relations

7. See: www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Aprueban-ley-de-beneficios-para-veteranos-de-guerra-20151119-0111.html (accessed 23 September 2019).

among war veterans (Sprenkels, 2014), and drawing attention to the multiple ways in which these networks often remain salient and to how veterans move within them. While acknowledging social and political variation, this article argues that social networks based in a shared war experience have (potentially) a set of specific traits and play a particular role in the construction of war veteranship. Such traits include the continuation or reshaping of military hierarchies, including the broker roles that former mid-level cadres often play (see also Themnér, 2012) and particular in-group dynamics, such as war reputation (see also Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers, 2006). A focus on such networks also looks beyond military dynamics, and includes processes of identity construction and belonging, such as relationships of friendship, loyalty and solidarity, as well as dependency, coercion and conflict. In addition, more empirical work is needed to understand how war veteranship and war veterans' networks intersect with other social traits, such as gender, age and religion, and with different wartime roles (e.g. combatant and non-combatant roles).

This is related to the third agenda point which holds that the notion of war veteranship could contribute to debates on the transformation of armed groups into political parties, a common outcome of peace negotiations across the world (Berdal and Ucko, 2009; Spreight and Wittig, 2018; Themnér, 2017; de Zeeuw, 2008). The analyses of these processes are rarely sensitive to internal veteran dynamics, as the focus lies on the outcomes of peace processes (Curtis and de Zeeuw, 2009), electoral performance (Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz, 2016) or on the role of leadership (Themnér, 2017). But as Ishiyama and Batta (2011) show in their case study of the Communist Party of Nepal, rebel-to-political party transformations can only be fully understood by also studying the internal dynamics of the (former) insurgent group, such as regional cleavages and relations between 'old' and 'new' members. War veteranship draws attention to the political saliency of the interactions between political parties and war veterans, and their links with electoral success.

Fourth and finally, war veteranship contributes to theorizing about the role of violence in the veterans' claims making. On the one hand, violence and sacrifice may play a particular role as participation in war can be seen as 'a privileged site of moral production' (Lutz and Millar, 2012: 482), expressed in the willingness to die and, though often less explicitly mentioned, the willingness to kill (see also Anderson, 2006). Those who have put their lives in danger and have sacrificed their time, their safety and their well-being to serve a collective cause are in a position to claim moral recognition. The sacrifices made by veterans generate societal debts that need to be repaid. On the other hand, the proven capacity of veterans for violence may also be used to exert pressure in the claims-making process. This article considers popular assumptions about the inherent-violence threat of former combatants, especially when considered 'idle' and 'unemployed' (Mashike, 2004), to be simplistic and apolitical. Nevertheless, as revealed

by menacing protests and street blockades by Salvadoran veterans as well as the remobilization of former RENAMO combatants, violent agency can become an ingredient in negotiations over war veteranship, as veterans can revert to (the threat of) violence, either implicitly or explicitly, in their collective action (Wiegink, 2013).

The cases of Mozambique and El Salvador illustrate how war veterans obtain or seek to obtain a distinct type of citizenship. War veteranship does not simply exist as a spillover from war: it is an identity category constructed, negotiated and contested by and among war veterans themselves as well as between war veterans, the state and other societal actors. War veteranship can be fruitfully analysed by looking at the interconnected processes of claims making and recognition regarding historical contributions, struggles with the state, party and other institutions over material benefits, and the efforts of veterans to organize and mobilize. Rather than a label that a particular individual or group has or doesn't have, we regard this as a political category that is constructed, aspired to, acquired or attributed (or revoked), the relevance of which is highly context specific and may oscillate over time. Instead of focusing on how former combatants become 'like everyone else', this article argues that war veteranship is an integral part of the ways in which armed conflict transforms states and societies. Not just reintegration, but the veterans' actual position in society is at stake, and, by extension, the shape of the polity.

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