Is recognition the answer? Exploring the barriers for successful reintegration of ex-combatants into civil society in Northern Ireland and Colombia

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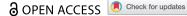
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ABSTRACT

This article explores the barriers faced by ex-combatants in Northern Ireland and Colombia as they reintegrate into civil society. It focuses on analysing three key aspects for a successful reintegration process: access to education opportunities after demobilisation, inclusion and participation into the civilian economy, and the exercise of equal citizenship in order to guarantee social and civic reintegration. The article presents the results of fifty-four interviews with former combatants from both countries. It is argued that for the purpose of developing effective and inclusive reintegration processes for ex-combatants, it is crucial to address claims for recognition as a central dimension of reintegration. The paper concludes that the recognition of ex-combatants' social expectations during the demobilisation stage, and the acknowledgement of their experiences of marginalisation in the course of the reintegration process, is vital to enable former combatants to achieve the self-realisation of their civilian identity.

Introduction

This article will explore and compare the barriers faced by ex-combatants in Northern Ireland and Colombia as they have sought to reintegrate into civil society. The paper demonstrates the utility of recognition as an aid to reintegration. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes are a complex series of mechanisms with interrelated political, military, security, humanitarian, and socioeconomic dimensions. A key part of DDR is to support former combatants in their transition to civilian life.[1] This is achieved by disarming fighters and fighting units, disengaging individuals, helping them reintegrate socially, politically, and economically into civil society. Existing literature on DDR, and particularly on the reintegration of ex-combatants, has identified the problems

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[1]Massimo Moratti and Amra Sabic-ElRayess, 'Transitional Justice and DDR: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina', *Research Unit International Center for Transitional Justice* (2009): 1–39.

of violent spoilers, lack of economic stability, and the security dilemma that combatants face when they disarm and integrate into society as crucial obstacles to consolidating peace.[2]

Reintegration problems encountered by ex-combatants worldwide have included a lack of educational opportunities, the absence of suitable career options, insufficient psychological support and a limited understanding of their needs and interests after the war.[3] According to recent studies, it has become clear that the traditional approach to reintegration has been to offer ex-combatants simplistic programmatic support through funding from international and national agencies; addressing reintegration as a programme, not as a process.[4] This approach fails to properly engage with the social expectations and the lived reality of former combatants, highlighting the need to draw upon different theoretical perspectives to improve our understanding of processes of post-conflict reintegration.

The article is divided into four key sections: the first section provides insight into existing work that has been set out to aid the theorisation of reintegration. The second section establishes the relevance of the concept of recognition as a key dimension to address the category of reintegration. It is argued here that peacebuilding processes can benefit from the recognition of the social expectations of former combatants during the demobilisation process in order to tackle issues of misrecognition, injustice, and inequality. The third section presents the results of our analysis: the experiences and social expectations of former combatants in Northern Ireland and Colombia regarding access to education opportunities after demobilisation, inclusion and participation into the civilian economy, and the pursuit of equal citizenship as a feature of civic reintegration. We confirm in our findings the value of the concept of recognition to better understand the key challenges confronted by ex-combatants during their reintegration process in both countries. The final section concludes with a discussion on the crucial role of recognition as a reincorporation tool, and the lessons that both case studies can offer to other peacebuilding processes in the future.

Exploring reintegration

Emerging after the Cold War period as an element of the United Nations supported peacekeeping operations, reintegration is a relatively recent concept in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding literature.[5] From a normative approach, reintegration can be understood as the process by which ex-combatants return to civilian life and

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[2]Stephen John Stedman, 'Spoiler problems in peace processes', *International security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5–53; Barbara F. Walter, 'The critical barrier to civil war settlement', *International organisation* 51, no. 3 (1997): 335–364; and Oliver Kaplan and Enzo Nussio, 'Explaining recidivism of ex-combatants in Colombia', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 1 (2018): 64–93.

[3]Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson, and Mats Utas, *Young female fighters in African wars: conflict and its consequences* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2008); and Fredy Cante and Hartmut Quehl, *Handbook of Research on Transitional Justice and Peace Building in Turbulent Regions* (Hershey, USA: IGI Global, 2015).

[4]Kimberly Theidon, Kelly Phenicie, and Elizabeth Murray, 'Gender, conflict, and peace building', *USIP Peace Briefing* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2011); and Virginia Bouvier, *Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process* (New York: UN Women, 2016).

[5]Mats Berdal and David Ucko, (Eds.), *Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict: Politics, Violence and Transition* (Routledge, 2009); and Murillo Luis and Restrepo Lina, 'Reintegration and forgiveness to ex-combatants in Colombia', *Development Studies Research* 8, no. 1 (2021): 36–48.

obtain sustainable employment during the post-conflict recovery period. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) defines reintegration as assistance measures provided to former combatants that would increase the potential for themselves and their families' economic and social reintegration into civil society.[6]

The first United Nations operation supporting the reintegration of ex-combatants was in Uganda in 1992. Since then, the United Nations has carried out approximately thirty reintegration initiatives for ex-combatants in over twenty countries, providing reintegration assistance to more than 232,000 ex-combatants.[7] The United Nations has established three key aspects of an effective reintegration process in peace operations: i) the need to link reintegration to political dynamics, ii) the shift towards community-based approaches, and iii) the strategic importance of local partnerships.[8]

Following recent literature,[9] we can argue that successful reintegration relates to three types of transformations in an ex-combatant's life. First, ex-fighters change from combatant to civilian; a *social identity transformation*. Second, former combatants stop utilising violent means and are engaged in cultural, political, and economic activities sanctioned by the community; a *behavioural transformation*. Finally, for successful reintegration, ex-combatants must increase their communication with local communities and reduce their contact with former militia networks. On a political level, ex-fighters might participate at the local, regional, or national level, either by simply voting, or by actively participating within a political group. In economic terms, success is evident when ex-combatants can gain long-term employment.

While there are many pieces of empirical research on reintegration, as a theoretical concept it has been a relatively underdeveloped topic.[10] This lack of scholarly attention is surprising given the centrality of reintegration in peacebuilding and in the study of post-conflict societies after war. A small number of academics have offered thoughtful reflections on this problem and potential ways to address it.[11] These attempts to improve our understanding of reintegration through novel theoretical perspectives have utilised wider theories from across the social science canon and applied them to the field of reintegration. For instance, a number of scholars have attempted to borrow an insight from criminological studies of rehabilitation to enhance our understanding of the processes involved in reintegration.[12]

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[6]United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). *Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants in a peacekeeping environment: Principles and guidelines*. (New York, 1999).

[7]United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). The Changing Landscape of Armed Groups: *Doing DDR in New Contexts*. New York: DPKO – the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), (2018).

[8]United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). The Changing Landscape of Armed Groups: *Doing DDR in New Contexts*. New York: DPKO – the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), (2018).

[9]Alpaslan Özerdem, 'A re-conceptualisation of ex-combatant reintegration:'social reintegration'approach', *Conflict, Security & Development* 12, no. 1 (2012): 51–73; Stina Torjesen, 'Towards a theory of ex-combatant reintegration', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 63, no. 2 (2013); and Sally Sharif, *A Critical Review of Evidence from Ex-Combatant Reintegration Programs* (New York: City University of New York, 2018).

[10]Torjesen, 'Towards a theory of ex-combatant reintegration'; and Sally Sharif, *A Critical Review of Evidence from Ex-Combatant Reintegration Programs* (New York: City University of New York, 2018).

[11]Alpaslan Özerdem, 'A re-conceptualisation of ex-combatant reintegration:'social reintegration'approach', *Conflict, Security & Development* 12, no. 1 (2012): 51–73; Torjesen, 'Towards a theory of ex-combatant reintegration'; and Murillo Luis and Restrepo Lina, 'Reintegration and forgiveness to ex-combatants in Colombia', *Development Studies Research* 8, no. 1 (2021): 36–48.

[12]Kieran McEvoy and Peter Shirlow, 'Re-imagining DDR: Ex-combatants, leadership and moral agency in conflict transformation', *Theoretical Criminology* 13, no. 1 (2009): 31–59; and Alpaslan Özerdem, 'A re-conceptualisation of ex-combatant reintegration:'social reintegration'approach', *Conflict, Security & Development* 12, no. 1 (2012): 51–73.

From a sociological perspective, the notion of reintegration can be understood as a form of civic participation and a means of developing social relations with members of the broader community; consequently, it can act as an important means to help ex-combatants back into mainstream society.[13] Addressing social psychological literature on citizenship and on the theory of social representations,[14] using the idea of reintegration can limit or expand the ability to comprehend how members of local communities can participate as citizens in diverse social contexts. In other words, the concept of reintegration is useful to analyse the construction of social dynamics and the social fabric inside communities affected by armed conflicts or war.

Another perspective of how the social sciences cannon has been to support the conceptualisation of reintegration has been by analysing practices of everyday citizenship experienced by ex-combatants themselves. Citizenship practices in violence-affected, segregated, and polarised societies can highlight the role of sociocultural contexts in allowing, but also impeding, processes of social inclusion and reintegration, and with this, the construction of new social identities after armed conflicts. Following this angle, and in order to fully understand reintegration as a notion, it is necessary to understand how ex-combatants themselves make sense of their move from war and violent conflict into the mainstream of civil society.[15]

Torjesen[16] has pushed this agenda further through bringing wider social science theories into the study of reintegration processes. The author highlights the value of political economy theories in order to explain the manner in which former combatants derive opportunities from networks forged during the period of conflict. Her work also suggests that sociological theories pertaining to the formation of group identity can provide insight into the pressures upon former combatants as they move towards identification as civilians. In this context, we seek to build upon this research, in order to establish the importance of the concept of recognition as a key dimension to address the category of reintegration.

Recognition has been a key feature of academic literature devoted to understand the needs and aspirations of victims of conflict, yet the framework has rarely been applied specifically for the purposes of facilitating the reintegration of former combatants.[17] It must be recognised of course that the recognition framework does not easily sit alongside our understanding of combatants who are often depicted as perpetrators rather than victims of war. However, it must be understood that the vast majority of those drawn into participation in conflict are victims of war themselves, and that in periods of post-conflict, former combatants face distinctive forms of marginalisation.[18] In order to

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[13]M. Rodríguez López, E. Andreouli and C. Howarth, 'From Ex-Combatants to Citizens: Connecting Everyday Citizenship and Social Reintegration in Colombia', *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3, no. 2, (2015): 171–191.

[14]Serge Moscovici, 'The phenomenon of social representations', in *Social Representations, ed*. R. Farr & Serge Moscovici (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; 1984): 3–69; Caroline Howarth, Juliet Foster, and Nike Dorrer, 'Exploring the potential of the theory of social representations in community-based health research – and vice versa?' *Journal of Health Psychology* 9, no. 2, (2004): 229–243.

[15]Rodríguez López, Andreouli, and Howarth, 'From Ex-Combatants to Citizen', 171–191; and Jaremey McMullin, 'Integration or separation? The stigmatisation of ex-combatants after war', *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 2, (2013): 385–414.

[16]Torjesen, 'Towards a theory of ex-combatant reintegration'.

[17]Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni, 'International Recognition of Victims' Rights', *Human Rights Law Review* 6, no. 2 (2006): 203–279.

[18]McMullin Jaremeyer, 'Integration or Separation? The Stigmatisation of Ex-Combatants after War', *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 385–414.

consider the relevance of recognition within the DDR processes, we have drawn upon the work of Axel Honneth to provide a theoretical basis for our own analysis of reintegration in the cases of Northern Ireland and Colombia. In the next segment, we will consider how this theoretical framework of recognition can be put to use to further our understanding of reintegration processes, focusing on ex-combatants' social expectations and needs after the war.

Recognition and reintegration

In the previous segment, we have identified emerging trends in academic literature that make efforts in pursuit of a deeper theoretical basis for our understanding of reintegration. From here, we outline our case that the concept of recognition might contribute a further dimension to this emerging agenda. We argue that in order to fully comprehend reintegration, it is useful to focus upon two particular dimensions that recognition can offer us. First, a *normative dimension*, addressing the positive affirmation of particular political identities and the social expectations of ex-combatants during processes of reintegration to resist forms of social misrecognition.[19] Second, a *prescriptive dimension*, underpinning reintegration as a social component in the politics of respect, stressing the idea that in order for individuals to be able to achieve individual and collective self-realisation (in this case, ex-combatants), there must be a social system of rights, that enables them to respect each other and themselves.

This theoretical approach is built upon Axel Honneth's concept of struggle for recognition.[20] Honneth emphasises the idea of access to universal human rights initiated in the twentieth century where the categories of equal dignity, social justice and political respect have been developed as central dimensions of recognition.[21] These categories highlight a juxtaposition between the demand for human rights in the public sphere, and the correct implementation of processes of reintegration in post-conflict societies. It is our contention that the concept of recognition can be useful to help us better understand the relationship between the categories of respect, social expectations, self-realisation, and human rights for the reintegration of former combatants. Recognition is a framework that gives an important place to issues such as equal protection, difference-blindness, state impartiality, and individual freedom.[22] Hence, for the protection of

[19]Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "the politics of recognition": An essay by Charles Taylor* (Princeton, NJ, 1992); Nancy Fraser, 'Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation', in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Fraser, Nancy and Honneth, Axel (New York: Verso, 2003a): 7–109; Nancy Fraser, 'Distorted Beyond All Recognition. A Rejoinder to Axel Honneth.' in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Fraser, Nancy and Honneth, Axel (New York: Verso, 2003b): 198–236.

[20]Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); Axel Honneth, 'Redistribution as Recognition. A Response to Nancy Fraser', in *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Fraser, Nancy and Honneth, Axel (New York: Verso, 2003): 110–197; Axel Honneth, Recognition 'as Ideology', in *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory, ed*. Van den Brink, Bert and Owen, David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 323–347; Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundrib einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011); and Axel Honneth, *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (London: Polity, 2012).

[21]Margaret R. Somers and Christopher NJ Roberts, 'Toward a new sociology of rights: a genealogy of "buried bodies" of citizenship and human rights', *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 4 (2008): 385–425; and Changrok Soh, Daniel Connolly and Seung Hyun Nam, *Time for a Fourth Generation of Human Rights?* (The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), 2018).

[22]Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundrib einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011); and Axel Honneth, *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (London: Polity, 2012).

fundamental human rights of ex-combatants, the state must work towards their imple-mentation and respect. These ideas also help us to think about the reincorporation into the society of former combatants after peace agreements and their pursuit of self-realisation as individuals.

Our approach emphasises the role that fundamental rights should play in protecting individuals' rational choice, autonomy, and freedom during peacebuilding processes. By protecting this autonomy, (the individuals' rational choice of ceasing conflict), the state, in processes of socio-political reintegration of former combatants, plays a vital role in building respect and recognition. From a moral responsibility and rational autonomy perspective, the concept of recognition can only be implemented through treating others as bearers of rights. Where rights do not exist, respect and recognition are not possible. In this context, drawing upon Honneth's ideas, we principally argue that four distinctive elements of the concept of recognition can be used as part of a toolkit to help us better understand reintegration: equal protection by the law; inclusion and respect of ex-combatants' social expectations; opposition to discrimination; and the impartiality of the state.

Honneth argues that 'the mutual granting of recognition' can lead towards forms of moral progress if certain conditions are established.[23] Modifications from one recogni-tion order to another, or transformations of the way in which recognition norms are interpreted can amount to progress if at least one of the following two criteria are met: first, such transformations have to increase 'social inclusion', and second, if transforma-tions lead to 'increases in individuality'.[24] Following this argument, it can be suggested that reincorporation processes of former combatants which take-into-account the pro-motion of inclusion and social expectations can be considered as a form of moral progress in post-conflict societies.

Conversely, we found three aspects that can undermine the concept of recognition as a key dimension to address the category of reintegration: humiliation, injustice, and discrimination. It is important to express that the normative expectation of being treated with respect and recognition becomes most obvious when we observe extreme forms of humiliation, injustice or discrimination, in which particular groups (in this case former combatants) are symbolically and materially excluded from society. One of the main consequences of long-term wars is that in particular moments of conflict, different actors including civilians, profiteers, politicians or soldiers are treated like animals or objects, in order to justify military actions against them. Those actions of dehumanisation deny people their 'humanness'. Furthermore, facing extreme humiliation or experiencing drastic forms of injustice and discrimination can destabilise basic notions of respect (and self-respect), trust, recognition, and morality. For reintegration purposes, tackling these extreme forms of injustice or discrimination is important to support former combatants in their pursuit of a civilian identity.

This highlights a two-pronged argument for our case: on the one hand, reintegration processes can benefit from the insights of recognition. On the other hand, recognition is an important condition for equal citizenship. Without sufficient focus on the social

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[23]Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).
[24]Honneth, 'Redistribution as Recognition. A Response to Nancy Fraser', 110–197; Axel Honneth, 'Recognition as Ideology', in *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, ed. Van den Brink, Bert and Owen, David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 323–347.

expectations of former combatants, and an active process to tackle issues of misrecognition it may be impossible to work towards justice, and equality. In short, if we accept Honneth's ideas, we can establish a coherent dialogue between reintegration and recognition. This connection is about making collective decisions on matters that have a significant impact on ex-combatants social expectations and the pursuit of equality. Honneth neatly captures the key issues at stake when he states that 'the real task is to equip the "generalised other" with a "common good" that puts everyone in the same position to understand his or her value for the community without restricting the autonomous realisation of his or her self'.[25] This is a useful and novel idea to bring to the study of post-conflict reintegration and peacebuilding.

In the next section, we will present the key findings that have emerged from our research exploring the barriers faced by ex-combatants in Northern Ireland and Colombia to effectively reintegrate into civil society. We have focused upon three key aspects for a successful reintegration process: access to education opportunities after demobilisation; inclusion and participation into the civilian economy; and the exercise of equal citizenship in order to promote social and civic reintegration. The aim of this exploration is to test the idea that for the purpose of developing effective and inclusive reintegration processes for ex-combatants, it is crucial to address the category of recognition as a central dimension of reintegration.

Results: understanding recognition as a central dimension of reintegration

This initiative has drawn upon a qualitative research approach,[26] developing semi-structured interviews, to explore the barriers faced by ex-combatants in Northern Ireland and Colombia to effectively reintegrate into civil society. A key objective was to comprehend processes of reintegration for ex-combatants, focussing principally on their social expectations during the demobilisation stage, and their experiences of marginalisation in the course of the reintegration process.

For the Colombian case study, we carried out, from 2017 to 2021, forty-two semi-structured interviews with former FARC combatants at six Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCR,[27] for its Spanish acronym) across Colombia. Specifically, interviews were conducted at the ETCR of *Montañita, Mesetas, Pondores, Mutata, Manaure* and *Iconozo*. To provide insight into the experiences of former combatants in Northern Ireland, we conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with ex-political prisoners between 2017 to 2019. These interviews captured the views of former combatants from both republican and loyalist paramilitary groups. Despite their ideological differences, there were distinct commonalities of experience between both British and Irish ex-combatants. The broader literature on former combatants in Northern Ireland tells us that loyalist political prisoners had generally struggled more

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[25]Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 123.

[26]Kristin Luker, *Salsa Dancing Into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); and Gregory Hancock and Ralph Mueller, *The reviewer's guide to quantitative methods in the social sciences* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[27]The ETCR are councils located in rural areas of Colombia for the implementation of the reincorporation policy, based in territories that used to be controlled by FARC-EP. These twenty-six councils across Colombia are also responsible for coordinating the work of authorities, communities, and international organisations around the reincorporation needs of FARC-EP ex-combatants.

with reintegration due to a sense of rejection from their communities. Conversely, nationalist political prisoners were accorded greater status in the community as a result of their suffering on behalf of the political cause.[28] Yet despite these differences in terms of communal acceptance, both groups of former political prisoners had shared narratives and overlapping grievances in terms of access to employment opportunities following their release from prison. The ethics and research committees at EAFIT University, in Colombia, the University of Huddersfield and at The University of Leeds, in the United Kingdom, had provided the ethical approval to conduct this research.

We developed a qualitative approach taking into consideration that it is an accurate method to collect ex-combatants' social experiences, perceptions, and perspectives before and after the armed conflict. Analysing ex-combatant's narratives, using the framework of reintegration as recognition, was a novel methodological strategy to reconstruct socio-cultural experiences; and a valid way to combine theoretical ideas and qualitative data to facilitate the interpretation of variables, concepts and participants' reminiscences. The main outcome from using this approach was the in-depth documentation of former Colombian and Northern Irish combatants' experiences before and after demobilisation, and the reconstruction of motivations, reasons, expectations, and understandings behind the decision to reincorporate into civil society.

Despite their ideological differences, there were distinct commonalities of experience between both British and Irish ex-combatants. Whilst at first sight this may seem like a relatively imbalanced case study due to the larger number of interviews carried out with former FARC combatants, this is mitigated by the fact that there is a significant body of existing academic research on ex-political prisoners in Northern Ireland.[29] As a result, we have utilised a relevant range of academic material and an expansive pool of journalistic content in order to ensure parity between the respective case studies.

Furthermore, there are two areas of commonality that serve to provide a strong basis for comparison across the two studies. Firstly, both conflicts were civil wars in which ex-combatants are required to participate within the same civic space following the cessation of large-scale violence. This creates particular challenges for reintegration in these situations given the potential for old rivalries to resurface following initial peace accords.[30] Secondly, both of these conflicts were fought over generational time spans. The period of the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland is generally understood to run between 1969 and 1998, though it must be recognised that the conflict had deep historical roots and is still manifest to some extent to the present day.[31] In Colombia, the hostilities were even longer: the conflict between the government and the FARC-EP lasted between 1960 and 2016.

[28]Shirlow, Peter, Tonge, Jon, McAuley, James and McGlynn, Catherine *Abandoning Historical Conflict? Former Paramilitary Prisoners and Political Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Manchester University Press 2010).
[29]Bill Rolston, 'Demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants: The Irish case in international perspective', *Social & Legal Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 259–280; Kieran McEvoy and Peter Shirlow, 'Re-imagining DDR: Ex-combatants, leadership and moral agency in conflict transformation', *Theoretical Criminology* 13, no. 1 (2009): 31–59; and Peter Shirlow Jon Tonge James McAuley and Catherine McGlynn, *Abandoning Historical Conflict? Former Paramilitary Prisoners and Political Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Manchester University Press, 2010).
[30]Kees Kingma, 'Demobilization of combatants after civil wars in Africa and their reintegration into civilian life', *Policy sciences* 30, no. 3 (1997): 151–165.
[31]Marisa McGlinchey, *Unfinished business: The politics of "dissident" Irish republicanism* (Manchester University Press, 2019).

In the Colombian case, it remains to be seen whether this peace accord will hold, given many incidents of continuing violence between ex-FARC combatants, transnational crime organisations, the Colombian army, and right-wing paramilitary groups. Also, the return of mass killings is threatening Colombia's fragile peace deal in some border regions.[32] Another problem is the questionable commitment of the present administration of Colombian President Ivan Duque to fully implementing the terms of the peace accord.[33]

The sheer length of these internal civil wars has served to create deeply ingrained barriers in both societies that make reintegration a more challenging task. Many of the ex-combatants were raised in warfare, participating in conflict from a very young age. This means that they tend to have had little opportunity for participation in civilian life prior to their roles in armed combat. Consequently, the comparison of these two cases makes for a particularly interesting study into some distinctly difficult reintegration processes.

Education as a bridge to reintegration

To begin with, let us review a selection of responses from ex-FARC combatants as they discuss their participation in educational pathways as part of the Colombian reintegration initiative. These data fragments serve to provide an interesting insight into the social expectations of these participants:

> I am studying four hours every day to get my qualifications in the future, two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon. We are 30 comrades working so hard to present the ICFES (Colombian A-level exams) next September. This is why I believe in this peace process, because we have now the opportunity to study! I want to be a doctor in the future, this is my dream, and I want to help people and to build a more equal society in Colombia (FARC ex-combatant, Montañita Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

> I want to be a lawyer. You can laugh as much as you want but this is my main goal after the demobilisation process. This is why I am in the process to present my A-levels this year thanks to the support of UNAD (Open University of Colombia). One of the reasons to be part of FARC-EP was to fight against capitalism and injustice, and I think that being a lawyer can help to improve the social conditions of Colombia. I want to be the lawyer of the people that cannot afford a lawyer; I want to be a socialist lawyer! (FARC ex-combatant, Manaure Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

The enthusiasm for educational provision and the expectation that it will facilitate integration in the post-conflict society stands out across this range of quotations. In addition to the more formal academic pathways discussed in the quotations above, former combatants also discussed a range of vocational training opportunities which are being seized upon enthusiastically. This is evident in the quotations below:

[32]Camilo Tamayo Gomez, 'Colombia's fragile peace deal threatened by the return of mass killings', *The Conversation*, February 15, (2021). Available at: https://theconversation.com/colombias-fragile-peace-deal-threatened-by-the-return-of-mass-killings-154315

[33]David Maher and Andrew Thomson, 'A precarious peace? The threat of paramilitary violence to the peace process in Colombia', *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 11 (2018): 2142–2172; and José Antonio Sánchez, 'Se cumplió la promesa de campaña de hacer trizas los acuerdos de paz?' *El Tiempo*, 22 October, (2020).

> During my years as a combatant, I always dream to have a good education … we used to study Marxism with my fellow comrades in the Bloc, but I wanted to learn agriculture because I love the land and my family are peasants, so I want to learn more about how to grow vegetables better than my parents. This is why I am studying technologies after the demobilisation process at SENA; I want to create new technologies to help my family and my comrades to work the land better and contribute to the peace of Colombia (FARC ex-combatant, Icononzo, Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

> As a result of the peace agreement, I have taken courses in bakery and clothing patron. Also, I have some qualifications in human rights, solidary economy and sustainability. I spent ten years in prison for being a revolutionary, and I learned that access to proper education is the first step to achieve true peace and reconciliation. I am studying agriculture now to help the development of the cooperative at my ETCR. I want to learn more every day to help my comrades and achieve peace (FARC ex-combatant, Icononzo, Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

From those quotations, it seems evident that there are educational opportunities available to ex-FARC combatants and that they are being accessed by the participants. In these narratives, the desire to use education to foster a better society is a recurring theme. This provides a useful insight into the social expectations and the aspirations of our participants. The interviewees exhibit strong enthusiasm for study and aspire to use education as a medium to facilitate their own reintegration process. Education is providing former combatants with a route towards reintegration. When we carried out interviews with former combatants in Northern Ireland, we asked them to look back on their aspirations and expectations during the peace process that began in the late 1990′s. Again, the pursuit of educational attainment was high on the list of things that the participants discussed.

In the Northern Irish case, former political prisoners sometimes found their pathways to education blocked as a result of their participation in conflict. The respondents spoke of their aspirations to use education as a means to facilitate their own reintegration. However, as these participants reminisced about their experiences, it was evident that some had found pathways into education impeded due to their roles in the conflict. This is evident if we consider the quotation below taken from an interview with a former (P)IRA combatant who worked to help others reintegrate into civilian life. The following quotation comes from a discussion looking back on his experiences of the peace process:

> People were wanting training to be teachers in the Irish language and in the English language. We had people who wanted to be physiotherapists and a range of things really, but within about a year we started to find all of the blockages. For instance, a friend of mine wanted training to be a physiotherapist, so he applied to get onto a course for that. He had the qualifications, but he was refused, not because of his qualifications, but because of his imprisonment. We queried it, but because of his political imprisonment he was 'potentially a threat to others', I remember thinking 'what the hell'? ((P)IRA ex-combatant, personal interview).

This experience crossed the ideological divide with participants from both republican and loyalist communities discussing their common dissatisfaction with the extent of educational provision as part of their reintegration process:

> Queen's University was a major stumbling block for us, we were blocked from a lot of courses at Queen's. They didn't want us there, we were never getting a foot in the door. St Mary's Training College in Belfast, that was okay, and some people did eventually get on to courses. (UVF ex-combatant, personal interview).

An interesting distinction emerges through the comparison of these quotations. Firstly, we see that in the Colombian context, former combatants perceive themselves to have been facilitated to participate in educational programmes through the reintegration programme. This suggests some recognition of the expectations and aspirations of the ex-FARC combatants. In Northern Ireland, there was a mixed experience. Former combatants discussed their pursuit of educational opportunities but found certain pathways blocked. This brings us now to consider our respondents' expectations of inclusion and participation in the civilian economy. Here we find a range of distinct commonalities that we might understand as forms of marginalisation and humiliation.

Misrecognition: barriers to employment

When discussing the opportunities and difficulties associated with finding employment in the civilian economy, participants in both case studies spoke of experiences that we might consider to be forms of misrecognition. The interviewees commonly constructed this theme around narratives of dehumanisation, stigmatisation, and criminalisation. This is evident in the quotations below in which former FARC combatants explain their experiences of seeking employment in post-conflict Colombia.

> I went to Ibague City to looking for a job last month. When potential employers read in my CV that I am a FARC ex-combatant, they immediately said: 'No. No way, we do not want to hire killers in our company' (FARC ex-combatant, Icononzo, Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

> It was so humiliating . . . I went to a job interview to Florencia City just to receive insults . . . assassin, murderer, scumbag, were just a few of the words that the people at the recruitment agency used to referred to me. Never again (FARC ex-combatant, Montañita Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

This type of experience was echoed in a number of places throughout the interviews with ex-FARC combatants. Most of the participants had a story about impediments to economic participation. These accounts could be understood as a form of misrecognition deriving from the attitudes present in wider society. A common theme was the denial of their humanity due to a perception that the former combatants were bloodthirsty terrorists. This experience of misrecognition emerges clearly when we consider the quotation below:

> In Riohacha City, when I was looking for a job, the people said to me: 'well, you look like a nice chap, but you have blood in your hands. You will never have a job here because you have blood, the blood of innocent people in your hands, and you are a terrorist, a disgrace', and that is when you realise that this is a long-term process, we need a process to demobilise the stigma against us from Colombians' hearts (FARC ex-combatant, Pondores Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

The suggestion that misrecognition in the form of discriminatory attitudes was a barrier to participation is similarly found when we review the data taken from Northern Ireland. The Northern Irish experiences of blocks to economic participation corresponded with those of the former FARC combatants, though the participants from Northern Ireland had a particular emphasis upon criminalisation. This theme arose in response to the fact that most of the respondents had been imprisoned due to their participation in conflict and had 'criminal' records. Their most common assertion was that they were not criminals, but legitimate participants in the conflict. These discussions can be understood as claims for recognition. Firstly, let us consider the following quotation that was taken from a public media interview with Tom Roberts, Director of Ex-Prisoners Interpretative Centre (EPIC), an organisation that works on behalf of former Loyalist combatants in Northern Ireland:

> I can understand some of the opinions of some of the people and parties in Northern Ireland have always been very retributive in nature. I can understand that to a certain extent, but in terms of being pragmatic, is it wise to have 30,000 people economically inactive? Perhaps their offspring as well, they're having difficulties in becoming economically active. I can imagine it would be better if all of these people could fulfil full citizenship roles and become productive members of the society that we live in.[34]

In this statement, Roberts outlines what he perceives as a barrier to economic participation based upon negative opinions directed at former combatants in Northern Ireland. In our interviews, this type of discussion would often be paired with issues related to the criminalisation of former combatants. Participants rejected this label as a form of misrecognition. This is evident if we consider the quotation below which derives from an interview with a former (P)IRA combatant:

> If we were to fill in an application form for a job and it asks quite clearly 'do you have a criminal record?' If we say no, which we don't, because we claim that we don't have a criminal record: we are not criminals, then we have lied. We can be dis-employed which has happened to many a person. If we say yes, we will not get through the vetting procedure, but we do not consider that we have a criminal record ((P)IRA ex-combatant, personal interview).

Partially in response to these forms of perceived misrecognition, a common strategy adopted by former combatants is to seek alternative avenues to economic participation. Most often, this is achieved through working in community ventures that are explicitly linked to their own experiences as combatants, or self-starting businesses along with former comrades-in-arms. Examples of this type of endeavour can be seen in COISTE's walking tours of Belfast in which tourists are introduced to important sites related to the 'troubles' by former combatants. Similarly, former FARC-EP combatants have started business ventures that introduce tourists to the jungles of Colombia while explaining the horrors of the conflict that took place in these locations.

In this sense, these ex-combatants identify in a manner that straddles their roles in conflict and peace. This correlates with the discussion in Torjesen's[35] research in which she suggests that the political economies and group identities formed in warfare provide

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[34]Tom Roberts of the Ex-Prisoners Interpretative Centre discusses his views in an interview with Cormac, C. 'Former Troubles prisoners need help to "civilianise"', *Irish Times*. (2016).

[35]Stina Torjesen, 'Towards a theory of ex-combatant reintegration', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 63, no. 2 (2013).

the foundations for post-conflict participation. For structural reasons, former comba-
tants are often driven towards certain pathways in the employment market. These issues
were discussed in our interviews in which the participants reflected on the reasons why
they chosen these routes in a context of misrecognition and social stigma. The first
quotation here is taken from an interview with an ex-(P)IRA combatant in which he
discusses the reason that so many ex-combatants have chosen to work in the community
sector and in peacebuilding initiatives:

> The actual acknowledgment of it being a DDR process was never entered into by the British
> government, so what you had was the European Union prepared to put money for what they
> called peace projects, which funded community led projects. Then, political ex-prisoners,
> because of their barring in many other situations were then entering into these organisations
> ((P)IRA ex-combatant, personal interview).

While the community sector and peace-work has proven an effective route for some of
the former combatants in Northern Ireland, it was also very common to find narratives in
which highly qualified people were driven towards professions that they deemed to be
menial in nature. Respondents commonly cited stigma as their perception of the cause of
this situation. These interviewees seemed to suggest that misrecognition had not have
prevented them from participating in the civilian economy but had restricted their access
to roles that corresponded with their educational attainments. This is captured in the
quotation below that was taken from an interview with an ex (P)IRA combatant:

> I could only get kind of low-level jobs. I was working for a long time in bars and clubs. In
> prison I had studied, ya-know? I had qualifications, but I was working as a kitchen porter or
> as a doorman. There was no one that would employ an IRA guy. I remember in one job I was
> asked to leave because people found out about my past. They weren't comfortable working
> with me anymore ((P)IRA ex-combatant, personal interview).

In the Colombian context, our respondents also highlighted the manner in which ex-
combatants had chosen to work in particular sectors using self-start-up methods to
facilitate their pursuit of employment and reintegration into the civilian economy. The
quotations below highlight aspirations to participate in peaceful enterprises and discuss
certain barriers that they have faced in pursuing this approach. The first quotation here is
taken from an ex-FARC combatant who has been working with former comrades on
a collectivised agricultural project in order to facilitate reintegration:

> Our ambition is to provide work, quality jobs and decent income to 4,000 fellow comrades.
> Our dream is to have 164 cooperatives around the country in 2020. We want peace for
> Colombia, and the first step is to guarantee a minimum economic income to our comrades
> in this new chapter of our revolutionary dream (FARC ex-combatant, Mutata, Territorial
> Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

However, similarly to the situation in Northern Ireland, respondents spoke about their
perception of blockages to equal participation in the civilian economy. The quotation
below highlights the suggestion that certain avenues to economic participation are either
denied or made more difficult for former combatants seeking to participate in the regular
economy:

> I have a lot of experience working the land, you know? Before I joined FARC, I used to work as a potato farmer, and I want to go back to do this. The problem is that the private sector does not want to help our reintegration process. I asked three different companies of the region for help and they replied saying that I do not have enough experience and qualifications' (FARC ex-combatant, Icononzo, Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

Across these contributions, we can discern a selection of commonalities in the experiences of both ex-FARC combatants and those of former political prisoners in Northern Ireland. In both cases, the former combatants have sought employment opportunities as a means to achieve self-realisation and to aid their own reintegration processes. In both cases, respondents have highlighted their perception of attitudinal barriers built on varieties of misrecognition. Themes of humiliation, dehumanisation, and criminalisation are particularly common across these responses.

In Northern Ireland and in Colombia, a common strategy of resistance is to work in particular sectors of the economy that depend on self-help and the maintenance of in-group solidarity. While these avenues have meant that there are certain opportunities available to former combatants who can successfully organise in these endeavours, this experience has left them in a twilight between their identification as combatants and civilians. Denying them the opportunity to participate equally after conflict has served to inhibit their full reintegration. However, this situation has not simply arisen as a result of discriminatory attitudes towards former combatants. In both cases, there are legal, structural barriers that have served to undermine the pursuit of equal participation. This takes us into the final section of our data showcase in which we present narratives about the formal legal barriers to equal citizenship that are faced by ex-combatants.

Barriers to equal citizenship: legal discrimination and economic marginalisation

While the previous section has considered the barriers to participation in the civilian economy experienced by former combatants as a result of widely held societal prejudice, it is important to note that attitudinal problems are given substance by legal frameworks. Many of our contributors raised these types of problems as an issue. These legal impediments to equality of participation create a situation in which the state has failed to recognise and take steps to ensure equality of citizenship for former combatants reintegrating into the post-conflict society. This highlights one of the key points of crossover between the misrecognition of individuals and flawed attempts at the reintegration of former combatants. This becomes evident when we consider the quotation below in which an ex-FARC combatant discusses the specific hurdles that he has had to face in order to find employment in the civilian economy:

> When the employers have seen that my identity card has been issued in La Montañita, they said that I need to have the 'special selection process'. That means that they will double, or triple, check with the authorities if I have a police record or if my name is in a terrorist database list. Here, if you say that you are from La Montañita the people say that you are a terrorist … this stigma is making it impossible to get a job here (FARC ex-combatant, Montañita Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space, personal interview).

In Northern Ireland, despite the more advanced nature of the peace process, former combatants similarly speak of enduring legal barriers to their full reintegration into society. The quotation below that was taken from an interview with an ex-(P)IRA combatant serves to stress the manner in which legislative impediments have hampered former combatants in their attempts to find employment:

> The British government still have their five pieces of legislation in place against us. We are legally discriminated against! For instance, we can be stopped from travelling to certain places. Certain jobs are completely off-limits to us. Even our ability to spend money is restricted, we can't purchase home insurance and car insurance. It's an inhibitor. We can't get business loans. We have managed to get people to give us home insurance, but it's difficult. It all adds up to making things more difficult for us, than for everyone else. ((P)IRA ex-combatant, personal interview)

In both of these cases, it seems evident that particular forms of marginalisation experienced by former combatants come in the form of legal discrimination. Our interviewees argue that this has made full participation into civil society problematic. In this sense, the state is perceived as failing in its duty to ensure equality of treatment to all citizens. Through placing this type of legal restriction on former combatants, it can be argued that the state is effectively hampering their reintegration. This type of treatment fails to take account of their social expectation for equality of treatment and provides a legal basis for their misrecognition in the post-conflict society. In the next final section, we will offer conclusions for this research, considering the crucial role of recognition as a useful reincorporation tool, and the lessons that both case studies can offer to other peacebuilding processes in the future.

Conclusion

This article began by outlining theoretical antecedents regarding the importance of recognition for post-conflict reintegration. Our aim was to argue that recognition is an important condition to exercise equal citizenship in the public sphere. The paper went on to stress that peacebuilding processes can benefit from the recognition of the social expectations of former combatants during the demobilisation process in order to tackle issues of misrecognition and civic inequality. The article has analysed the experiences and social expectations of former combatants in Northern Ireland and Colombia. The interviews largely focussed upon access to educational opportunities after demobilisation, inclusion and participation into the civilian economy, and the exercise of equal citizenship in order to guarantee social and civic reintegration. The evidence highlights the value of recognition to understand better the key challenges confronted by ex-combatants during their reintegration process in both countries. To conclude, we are going to present five lessons that the case studies can offer us to understand the crucial role of recognition during reintegration processes and how this can help other peacebuilding processes in the future.

Firstly, the majority of ex-combatants expressed a strong desire to facilitate their own reintegration into civil society based on the recognition of their needs. The analysis suggested that former combatants sought self-realisation through education and full participation in the civilian economy. Additionally, the data has identified how the pathway to full integration might be blocked due to varieties of misrecognition. In the

Northern Irish case, the respondents spoke of their experiences of criminalisation. In Colombia, respondents focussed upon narratives of dehumanisation. In both cases, stigma has played a role in preventing former combatants from accessing certain opportunities available to the wider body of citizens. In this sense, it could be argued that misrecognition has contributed a barrier to attempts at reintegration into civil society. This tendency is given substance by the legal impediments that former combatants face as they seek to integrate into the civilian economy. Across the data there have been a number of references to forms of legal discrimination that have prevented respondents from equal participation in the post-conflict society. The disconnection between social expectations of former combatants seeking to reintegrate into civil society, and their experiences of marginalisation, highlights another way in which recognition can be adapted to help illuminate problems on the path to reintegration.

Secondly, former combatants are facing distinctive barriers to equality of citizenship and participation that are not shared by other citizens. It has been seen that the respondents have often found themselves seeking equality of recognition in a similar fashion to other marginalised groups. While combatants may be perceived as relatively powerful during times of war, those lower down the chain of command often find themselves side-lined during the peace process. These ex-combatants are perhaps not easily identified as the type of marginalised group traditionally associated with claims for recognition. Yet their transition from conflict to peace requires them to give up sources of status, security, and income. In many cases, former combatants find themselves ill-suited to roles in the civilian economy and face rejection as they seek to integrate into their society. In this sense, we can argue that they are a group that faces barriers to equal participation.

Thirdly, reintegration processes can be helped by recognising the social expectations of former combatants as they move towards the self-realisation of their civilian identity. Peacemakers could seek to investigate what ex-combatants hope to achieve during their reintegration process. Reintegration measures could be understood as a means to facilitate former combatant's attempts to self-realise. This is by no means a simple process: the ex-soldiers may harbour unrealistic expectations. Furthermore, it is a difficult task to capture the full range of aspirations across diverse groups of individuals. However, it is important to give ex-combatants a full voice in their reintegration process, and to provide them with the opportunity (wherever possible) to become autonomous in this endeavour.

Fourthly, it is important for future peace processes to explicitly recognise the common humanity of former combatants. This might be facilitated through a concerted effort from the state and supra-national participants in the peace process to ensure that this message is pushed as widely as possible. Public education programmes could be used to make it clear that the rhetoric of warfare in which opponents are painted as 'bloodthirsty' or 'monsters' serves to misrepresent participants in conflict. This is not to suggest that individual atrocities should be glossed over: war criminals must face justice. However, it must be recognised that not all combatants can be categorised in this way. In addition to top-down peace-marketing processes, it is necessary that reintegration builds contact between former adversaries in order to tackle the dehumanisation process.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the state must recognise its key role in working towards equality and recognition for ex-combatants. This means making efforts to remove the legal barriers to participation that are faced by former combatants. Placing additional legal restraints upon this group only serves to further marginalise them from the wider society. It is understood that in the immediate aftermath of conflict there may be practical reasons to place certain legal restrictions upon the movements of former combatants. Indeed, it may be necessary for the security of the wider population and for the interests of peacebuilding to create specific legal constraints. However, if real integration is to be achieved, such measures must be limited to a set timeframe or until clear goals have been met in the peace-building process. Hence, where there are legal restrictions upon former combatants, it needs to be clear how long such measures will be in place, or what former combatants need to do in order to see them lifted. The case in Northern Ireland highlights a situation whereby certain activities are still off-limits to former combatants despite the advanced stage of the peace process. Peacemakers in Colombia would do well to recognise the potential of these measures to inhibit reintegration and to entrench marginalisation. Recognition matters.

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