Gender Dimensions of DDR – **Beyond Victimization and Dehumanization: Tracking the Thematic**

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Abstract

In much of the early literature on gender dimensions of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) processes – from the 1980s and 1990s – the focus has been on women as victims in conflict and DDR processes. This article reviews the literature on gender dimensions of DDR processes, entering into its many different topics – such as discussions of the combatant definition, the political economy of DDR processes, group identity, cultural contexts and masculinity – while focusing the discussion on the representation of female and male combatants of armed groups along the victim-actor axis. It furthermore analyses the consequences of these representations on the way DDR processes are structured, and on who are allowed to participate in them. Finally, the article questions the strive towards normalization in DDR processes and the neglect of progressive changes in gender relations within armed groups during war.

Keywords

Demobilization, reintegration, gender, victims, actors, normalization

INTRODUCTION

In much of the literature on armed conflict and gender there is a tendency to victimize women and to dehumanize men – neglecting women as important actors and referring to men mainly as perpetrators of violence and architects of atrocities. The literature on gender dimensions of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) has contributed somewhat to nuance this image of the two genders, particularly the literature from the Global South. Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 on Women Peace and Security (WPS), passed in 2000, brought more attention to the topic of women in peace processes as well as to DDR and gender (UN Security Council 2000). Since the new millennium and particularly from around year 2010 the literature on DDR and gender have included thematic approaches like combatant definition discussions; female empowerment; the political economy of DDR processes (including education), gender and group identity, DDR and masculinity and child soldiers and gender (Coomaraswamy 2011; Jennings 2009; Hauge 2008; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001; Theidon 2009; Tonheim 2017; Mackenzie 2009). Only a few of these studies highlight the role of women as actors in conflict, and even fewer the role of men as victims. However, in recent literature there is a tendency towards a more balanced representation of women and men in diverse roles during DDR and post-conflict processes. This article reviews the literature on DDR and gender with the main focus on the period after the new millennium. It enters into the different thematic approaches of the literature – reflecting on the gender views underlying the discourse within each category – and on the practical consequences of this for female and male ex-combatants. Finally, the article discusses the strive towards normalization after conflict and the challenges this represents to the use of new-won and improved gender relations from the war period.

NEW AND OLD TOPICS IN DDR AND GENDER RESEARCH

SCR 1325 calls on the international community to include women in all matters of international peace and security. It acknowledges women's contributions to the prevention and resolution of conflicts and their vital roles in post-conflict reconstruction (Tryggestad 2009). Since it's adoption the WPS agenda has gradually made its marks in the spheres of UN peacebuilding, including in the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF). In 2010 the Secretary-General's report on *Women's Participation in Peacebuilding* and the *7-Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding* was published (UN 2010). However, an independent thematic review of the PBA and gender responsive peacebuilding a few years later concluded that a considerable gap between commitments and action still remained (O'Gorman 2014).

Much of the literature on gender and UN peacebuilding published during the PBA's first 4-5 years of existence originated from individual experts, NGOs and think tanks closely associated with the transnational advocacy network on women, peace and security (Tryggestad 2009; Klot 2007, NGO Working Group on WPS 2005 and 2006). They reflect a period of intense lobbying and advocacy work to have gender language integrated into the formal documents, to secure gender competence within the PBSO, and to secure funding for women-specific peacebuilding projects and activities in countries benefitting from the PBF (Tryggestad 2009).

Around 2010 and onwards, new directions and topics within DDR and gender also became visible on the research agenda. However, much of the academic literature has been quite detached from the policy discussions in the UN and has focused on a series of separate challenges in DDR. Even after the UN Inter-Agency Working Group on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (IAWG-DDR) developed a set of international standards for DDR (IDDRS) in 2006, the academic literature has not been able to sufficiently integrate the discussion about these standards and hold them up against experiences from case studies on DDR and gender (UN 2014). In the following, the most important of the themes characterizing

the discourse on DDR and gender from the beginning of the new millennium, will be presented and analyzed.

Women – Victims or Actors? The Importance of Definitions

In a book chapter on women, girls and DDR, Mazurana and Cole ask the question about why DDR traditionally has tended to overlook the presence of women and girls "who have filled diverse roles in armed forces and armed groups" (Mazurana and Cole 2013). The authors point out that women and girls in general have been present in most non-state armed groups. In addition, women and girls usually constitute a higher percentage of the guerrilla group than their counterpart in the government armed forces and militias. McKay and Mazura (2004) highlight the relevance of this problem with an example from Mozambique. It is now more than twenty years since the peace agreement in Mozambique was signed. Shortly after independence in 1975, conflict broke out between RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) and the governing party FRELIMO (Mozambican Liberation front). The war lasted from 1976 to 1992, when a peace agreement was signed between FRELIMO and RENAMO in Rome (Minter 1994). Mazura and McKay state that "thousands of girls who had willingly joined and those who had been tricked and abducted into the Renamo and Frelimo forces somehow remained invisible to the international DDR planners and child protection agencies," and that "the early efforts to assist child soldiers were only made on behalf of boys." (Mazura and McKay 2004)

Another example of women and girls that participated in armed groups, but that were not recognized as combatants, is found in Sierra Leone. The armed conflict in Sierra Leone broke out in 1991, when Revolutionary United Front (RUF) attacked the country from its neighboring bases in Liberia, and lasted until 2002 (MacKenzie 2009). In her article about female soldiers and the reconstruction of women in post-conflict Sierra Leone, MacKenzie points out the

importance of the definition of a combatant. Few women and girls were recognized as playing an active role in the Sierra Leone conflict, but even for those few that were recognized, a variety of titles were invented to avoid calling them soldiers, including “camp followers, abductees, sex slaves and domestic slaves,” or “girls and women associated with the fighting forces” and “vulnerable groups associated with armed movements” (MacKenzie 2009, 255-256). MacKenzie’s article is based on fieldwork including more than fifty personal interviews. Her interviews reveal a different reality than much of the general literature on Sierra Leone. During her fieldwork MacKenzie asked the following question to her interviewees: “Would you define yourself as a soldier?” (MacKenzie 2009, 248) She received positive answers: “Women were quick to point out which armed group they were a part of, what rank they held, and what roles they carried out”; one woman identified herself as a commander within the RUF; another woman specified that she was a soldier “because [she] was given one week training on how to fire a gun and subsequently became active.” (MacKenzie 2009, 248-249). Another woman identified herself as a soldier because she “took part in the most horrible activities of the evil conflict in SL, and “several women admitted that they voluntarily joined a particular faction”(MacKenzie 2009, 248-249). Female ex-combatants also reported that they had gone to places like Burkina Faso for military training.

Marhaban describes yet another example, the conflict in Aceh, where female participants were largely excluded from the DDR process. The armed conflict in Aceh began in 1976, when Gerakan Aceh Medeka (GAM) (the Free Aceh Movement) was established in a response to excessive human rights violations and unfair exploitation of Aceh’s resources by the Indonesian government. It ended with the signing of the Aceh peace Agreement in 2005, which gave Aceh greater autonomy. The insurgency movement in Aceh, GAM, had its own female wing, the “*Inong Bale Battalion*” (Marhaban 2012). This group consisted of approximately 500 women and its main activities were in logistical, medical and intelligence support. Although very few

of its members carried arms, they had undergone combat training (Marhaban 2012, 197). Despite *Inong Balee's* important contribution to GAM's struggle, GAM did not acknowledge its existence during the peace negotiations, when it provided the "official" number of 3,000 male combatants (Marhaban 2012, 198). These 3000 men received financial reintegration packages. In comparison, the female *Inong Balee* members, as a consequence of not being registered as combatants, received nothing. In contrast, financial compensation was given to civilian groups, including to widows of men killed during the war. The Aceh case is a strong example of the tendency to focus on – and assist women – only when they can be considered victims of the conflict.

That many women are active combatants in conflict does not mean that they cannot at the same time also be victims, and sometimes they are only victims (Skjelsbæk 2001). Several researchers have pointed out that empowerment of female fighters in armed groups often includes a downside, referred to as "ambivalent empowerment" (Alison 2003; Coomaraswamy 1996, 2011; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001). Coomaraswamy emphasizes that feminism should be linked to humanism and non-violence if it is to provide society with an alternative (Coomaraswamy 1996). The use of female suicide bombers by the LTTE in Sri Lanka comes out badly in this light. In general many feminists have questioned the ideology of women's liberation as it was used by the LTTE, while challenging its militant and militarist nature as inherently anti-feminist (Alison 2003).Critics have also pointed out that even though women often join an armed group voluntarily, they are mainly used as soldiers and sent to the front lines, but rarely take part in the command structure of the armed group (Coomaraswamy 2011, 3).

However, on the positive side, Coomaraswamy, who served for nine years as the UN Special Representative for violence against women, also states that military life gives women an ambivalent agency where they become self-confident and sometimes also obtain leadership

skills (Coomaraswamy 2011). She and many other researchers from the Global South have thus contributed to provide a more balanced picture of women in conflict, being partly victims and partly agents and achieving their empowerment with this ambivalence.

However, although new literature in general have brought more focus on women as actors in conflict, still more attention is given to women as victims. A recent working paper by Henshaw relates the lacking focus on women as actors directly to challenges of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (Henshaw 2017). Henshaw argues that in the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the international community focuses too much on women as victims in need of protection. In her words,

"This narrative overlooks the reality that women are frequently agents of political violence, acting as supporters or combatants in the majority of armed groups. By seeing these women and making their voices heard in peace processes and post-conflict transitions, we can craft outcomes that are more inclusive" (Henshaw 2017, 1).

The Political Economy of Gender and DDR

Even when female ex-combatants are being allowed into the DDR process, the litearature reveals that they often meet unfavorable conditions.

In an article on the political economy of reintegration in Liberia, Jennings (2009) argues that there was a fundamental assumption underlying the reintegration program in this country, as unemployed and "idle" male ex-combatants were equated with instability. The other side of the coin was that women were not viewed as constituting any security threat. "It is evident that women's "inability" to be idle is integrally related to their roles as caregivers" (Jennings 2009, 481). The economic implications of this are disadvantages for women in the DDR process, not

least when it comes to post-conflict recovery projects and economic support. In Liberia there was a very high level of women registering for DDR programmes, but just over fifty per cent of these women actually accessed the reintegration programmes, compared to almost seventy per cent of men (Jennings 2009, 480). Liberia has had several periods of armed conflict, but the most recent one, between the government of Charles Taylor and various opposition groups lasted from 1999-2003. President Taylor finally resigned and went into exile in August 2003, and left to his vice president Moses Blah to negotiate a peace agreement with the opposition groups LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy) and MODEL (Movement for Democracy in Liberia). The peace accord was signed in Accra, Ghana in 2003 (ICG 2003).

Also in Nepal, where the participation of female combatants in the war was acknowledged, and where the female combatants largely were included in the DDR process, several women had to face different types of problems during the DDR process (Kolås 2017). The armed conflict between the Government and the Maoist Communist party of Nepal (CPN CM) broke out in 1996. A comprehensive peace accord was signed in 2006. The DDR process in Nepal was special, as the ex-combatants stayed as long as six years in the cantonments before they were reintegrated. This had several implications (Upreti and Shivakoti 2017). As described by Bleie (2012), when women became pregnant in the cantonments, the Maoist leadership opted for a scheme of three years of maternity leave, giving the female combatant the right to retain her monthly allowance when on leave. This was an option that left the women very much on their own with the responsibility for the child, without any kind of day-care arrangement or involving male combatants in this. The consequence of this was that while senior female officers stayed with their families, the younger female officers moved to communities outside of the cantonments. The long period of leave often had the effect on the female combatant that it seriously diminished her rank mobility as compared to a male combatant (Bleie 2012).

In Sri Lanka the female combatants of the LTTE did not go through any traditional DDR program, as the war ended in a military victory for the government forces, and there was no negotiated settlement. The ex-combatants of the LTTE had to participate in government designed reintegration programs that were quite gender-traditional (Friedman 2018). In spite of some courses and training, many of the female former combatants – and particularly in the north – did not find employment, as they became stigmatized and neglected in the local communities where they reintegrated (Azmi 2015; Friedman 2018; Martin 2017). In the north, there are also over 40,000 war widows struggling to survive. In spite of significant economic investments of several billion dollars in the Vanni region, the war widow headed households have not benefited from this (Perera 2013). The fastest growing sectors - banking, real estate, transport, construction, fisheries, and hotels/restaurants - are all male dominated and the employers in these branches discriminate against women in hiring (Ibid). The situation was also made more difficult through the securitization of the area by government forces, slowing down the transition phase and functioning as an obstacle to a genuine healing process. This contributed to intensified stigmatization of the female ex-combatants and made also their material survival more difficult (Azmi 2015; Friedman 2018).

In addition to the disadvantage women often have in DDR processes and particularly in the reintegration programs, there are structural factors in many war ridden societies that work at a disadvantage for women, such as increase in female households, gender discrimination in employment; land and property regulations; gender discrimination through sex industries and trafficking networks[1] (Hauge 2008).

DDR, Masculinity and Male Victims

Male combatants can be considered in the same way as female combatants, along the actor-victim axis, although in the case of men the concept actor is often equalized with perpetrator in the literature, and the topic of men as victims has largely been ignored. However, some research actually concludes that there are greater differences with regard to the use of violence within each sex than between them (Vess et al. 2013). Men's propensity to violence is also mediated by social environment and context. As stated by Vess et al (2013,3), "Violence is ultimately learned and encouraged in the social environment – which suggests that it can also be unlearned."

There are quite a few studies that discuss why men become violent during conflict and post-conflict phases, but fewer studies that analyze what is being done in DDR programs to counter this tendency. One explanation for the violence is a lacking feeling of masculinity resulting from problems with providing economic sustenance for the family (Vess et al. 2013; Theidon 2009; Bleie 2012; Woodbury 2011).

An article by Laura Woodbury (2011) on the cultural construction of masculinity and how it is manifested within conflict is based on a study of young men in sub-Saharan Africa. Woodbury's expressed intention is to prepare for a discussion about the needs of male ex-combatants and how these can be integrated into DDR programming. She emphasizes that gender is socially constructed and intricately tied to the culture it resides within. In many communities within sub-Saharan Africa it is common that males undergo a specific ceremonial process – or a rite of passage – to symbolically make the transition to adulthood. In some cases the ceremony may emphasize a specific set of skills important to the source of livelihood within that culture. It is often related to the ability to attain some kind of financial independence, employment or income and finally starting a family. Within a war context, certain elements of traditional masculinities are highlighted and adjusted to support the armed struggle. Woodbury argues that this is particularly so within conflicts where political motivation and ideology is less obvious, and that

the worst types of violence tend to happen exactly in these conflicts where there is a political vacuum and violence becomes an end in itself. She argues that "Conflict provides the opportunity for alternative interpretations of masculinity, particularly in situations where traditional ideas of masculinity and malehood are under threat from lack of economic opportunity" (Woodbury 2017,27). As a response to this, she adds that post-conflict societies that want to achieve a sustainable peace and community healing need to "eradicate the normalized use of violence" and also to disconnect the use of violence from masculinity. In general also nonviolent involvement in politics and other forms of civic engagement should be emphasized in the DDR process.

Other reasons for men's violent behavior are found in the experience of the war itself, or in military service, due to traumas, disturbed mental health, militarization and indoctrination. During her fieldwork on DDR in Colombia, Theidon and her assistant interviewed 137 male and thirty-three female ex-combatants from the paramilitary group AUC, and from FARC-EP and ELN (guerrilla organizations). The armed conflict in Colombia began in the 1960s with several guerrilla groups emerging. The ELN (the National Liberation Army) was founded in 1964, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in 1966 and the M19 emerged in 1971. Colombia also had several paramilitary groups, like the right-wing AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia). After several earlier efforts on peace negotiations failed, a peace agreement was finally signed between the Colombian government and FARC in November 2016. Negotiations with ELN are ongoing. In her article "Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demoblization and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia", Theidon introduces what she terms "the political economy of masculinity"(Theidon 2009, 22). She finds that most of the male ex-combatants that she has been interviewing have a shared class background – coming from relatively poor and marginalized groups – and with few other resources than their body as an instrument to gain respect and (in their eyes) sufficient

masculinity. “Their bodily capital – and the high premium placed on physical force and prowess with a weapon – may be all they have to trade on the labor market” (Theidon 2009, 23). This as they have little access to civilian symbols of masculine prestige, which for example education, legal income and decent housing may constitute.

An important question is therefore how the DDR programs respond to men’s quest for masculinity and to their (often) subsequent use of violence. As already mentioned, in the example from Liberia, the fear of men’s idleness after conflict (among DDR planners) indicate that men are not considered as potential actors in the form of family caretakers, like women are. This is so, even though the study from Colombia reveals that the family actually is extremely important to the male combatants and the reason why many of them decided to demobilize (Theidon 2009). This points to an unused potential for DDR programs. In her article, Theidon also suggests that there is a need to “disarm masculinity” – that is – to unlearn some of the emotional and bodily adaptations to hardship and the use of violence. In the same vein Theidon asks for more focus on the non-violent men, and questions how to identify social spaces where “violence is not a central component of manhood” (Theidon 2009, 33).

As mentioned initially in this section, the perspective of men as victims has largely been ignored in the literature. This is so, although some recent literature suggests that sexual violence against men and boys is widespread (Féron 2018; Ngari 2016). Féron points out that although women and girls make up the majority of victims of this type of violence, “empirical evidence collected in recent years suggest s that in conflict zones such as Syria and Eastern Congo, men make up a third of all victims of violence” (Féron 2018, 3). Some of this violence is committed during or after raids on villages, but it often takes place in the specific context of detention, where the objective is “to extort confessions, to demoralize or to crush an opponent” (Féron 2018, 3). Researchers agree that men are less likely to express their experiences of sexual violence and that due to the taboos surrounding this issue, empirical data and evidence on wartime sexual

violence against men is extremely difficult to collect (Féron 2018; Ngari 2016). However, there is also a set of particular explanations to why sexual violence against men is less reported. First, in reports of commissions of inquiry and investigating bodies, sexual violence against men is often recorded as torture and 'not explicitly as instances of sexual violence against men' (Ngari 2016, 3). The opposite is true for violence against women. Thus, men's experiences of violence are desexualized, while that of women's are depoliticized (Féron 2018). The problem is furthermore compounded by destructive cultural stereotypes. Thus, men are viewed as sexually dominant and women as submissive, and "male victims who have been subjected to any form of penetration therefore risk being labeled as "less manly" or in some contexts as homosexual" (Ngari 2016, 2). In addition to this barrier for men to report abuses, the criminal codes in many countries also function as barriers. Whereas these codes in some African countries for example allow male victims to seek redress under charges of sexual assault or indirect assault, they do not allow this under charges of rape (Ngari 2016). As emphasized by Ngari, this is because the criminal codes "fail to define rape in gender-neutral forms' (Ngari 2016, 5).

DDR, Identity and Gender

This literature is relatively scarce. The debate about the representation of women in armed conflict partly touches upon the issue of identity, but it does so only superficially, as is the case with much of the literature.

In a study of social and political participation among female ex-combatants in Guatemala, Hauge seeks to explain why some of the women became socially and politically active after their reintegration, whereas others did not (Hauge 2008). The armed conflict in Guatemala broke out in 1960 and a peace agreement between the government and the guerrilla movement URNG (The National Revolutionary Guatemalan Unity) was signed in December 1996. The

DDR process began in 1997 (Hauge 2008). Hauge found that much of the explanation for the female ex-combatants' post-conflict social and political activity was hidden in the balance between identity and how the reintegration was organized. Several of the female fighters from the Guatemalan armed conflict chose to reintegrate into cooperatives together with their fellow male and female ex-combatants.

The article from 2008 is based on a study where Hauge interviewed forty-four female ex-fighters from different guerrilla organizations in Guatemala, women that chose different modes of reintegration – individually – or collectively into co-operatives. It came out that the most socially and politically active were the women living in the co-operatives. The only exception was that women with higher education, whether reintegrated individually or collectively, were the most active of all. However, the women with higher education were quite few. Guatemala is a country with high socio-economic inequality and this was an ideological war, in which some of the main aims of the insurgency movement were socio-economic changes and land reform (Hauge 2008). The second most important condition for the female fighters' social and political participation was therefore the social factor that gave the female ex-combatants the possibility to continue building on their new won identity from the war – by living together with their fellow ex-combatants after the conflict. On the basis of these findings Hauge emphasizes the need to balance the focus on security in DDR processes against the need for a post-conflict peacebuilding process focusing on group identity and sustainability, and a reconstruction of the political process in the country involving the participation of ex-combatants, not least female ex-combatants.

Another approach to identity is found in an article by Fox (2004), which focuses on girl soldiers. Normally the literature on girl soldiers is located within the discourse on child soldiers, but Fox highlights the brutal gendered abuses of girl soldiers as females, and asks if their primary identity is that of a female or that of a child. As her article constituted a relatively early

contribution to this topic, it came at a time when the main assumption still was that child soldiers were mainly boys, and their DDR process was organized accordingly.

These studies of gender and identity reveal the complexity of the identity issue. Much depends on the internal dynamics of the armed group during the war, and the main basis of recruitment to the armed group. As seen from these studies, identity can also be a strong asset in the post-conflict transformation process.

Identity and the Contextual Aspects of Reintegration

This literature discusses various aspects of reintegration, such as how the genders are represented in the DDR process in the particular society in focus, and issues related to cultural and social characteristics of local communities and regions where ex-combatants are going to be reintegrated. Bleie, for example compares Somalia and Nepal, and illustrates the important role of social and moral gatekeepers in local communities for the acceptance and peaceful reintegration of ex combatants (Bleie 2012). However, this literature also looks at national political contexts and on international contexts and the role of international actors.

In Sri Lanka several of the female recruits had been attracted to the LTTE by the speech about gender equality and female liberation within the armed group. It is debated how deep these equality and liberation ideals actually were but clearly there were strict internal rules against sexual violence and discrimination within the LTTE, and females reached high ranks and became cadres. This was much different from what most of them could have aspired to within traditional Tamil society and culture (Azmi 2015). However, whereas the practice of more gender equality was possible during the war, the female ex-combatants of the LTTE experienced a strong neglect of their new-won independence and leadership roles upon return and reintegration to their Tamil local communities, particularly in the north. The Sri Lankan

government also strengthened and pushed for this tendency through the design of extremely gender-traditional reintegration programs and military presence in the area (Friedman 2018; Azmi 2015).

In her study of African conflicts, Hudson (2010) uses the tools of African feminism and questions essentialist approaches to analyzes of women in peace and conflict. She emphasizes that women's identities are complex and cannot be understood without reference to context. African feminism is characterized by a balance between universal normative principles of gender equality and traditional values.

Azkue explores how the different approaches within feminist theory on war, DDR processes and post conflict peacebuilding have been applied to the work of women's organizations in El Salvador and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Azkue 2014). Azkue argues that the representation of the role of women in peacebuilding created by international aid organizations is based on essentialist stereotyping of women as naturally inclined towards peace, and that this view configures in the debate in a way that prevents the exposition of the complex relationship between identity and gender, and the important role that class and ethnicity plays in this. The book is based on a study of the experiences of women's organizations during post-conflict reconstruction phases, covering the years 1992-2009 in the case of El Salvador and 1995-2009 in the case of Bosnia Herzegovina. The author compares the characteristics and contexts of the participation of women's organizations in political, social and economic processes since the signing of the peace agreements in El Salvador and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Azkue highlights the differences in the international responses to these two conflicts, the El Salvadorian taking place in the context of the Cold War (1980-1992) and the Bosnian after the Cold War, being characterized as a "new war," and with a much larger international presence than in El Salvador. The war in Bosnia Hercegovina was fought in the period 1992-1995 between different groups of Serbs, Bozniaks (Bosnian Muslims) and Croats over the control of the Republic of Bosnia

Hercegovina (Wallensteen and Sollenberg 1998). Azkue's study is based on a series of interviews during the years 2006-2009.

Azkue argues that liberal feminism is the approach that has influenced donors of international aid the most – as this current is well placed within the liberal ideology of western and US policies in general. Other approaches like socialist, radical and postcolonial feminism – although important in the empirical world – is not in the same way accorded space in the international discourse. These trends were important in El Salvador, where the post-conflict women's organizations – that were quite autonomous but highly ideological and with close ties to the FMLN – gradually became stronger and initiated a political strategy to influence the government and the political parties. In comparison, the post-conflict women's organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina played an important role with regard to the civilian population, and especially in the assistance to the victims of violence, but did not have any political leverage (Azkue 2014). In this way – while the women's organizations in El Salvador were associated with actorness – the organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina focused on the victims. The author argues that the organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina have remained without much capacity for political action and autonomy towards international actors and adds that the unequal distribution of resources seems to have fallen out of the female organizations' agenda, which is – on the other hand – dominated by preoccupations for identity conflict. In general the international organizations and donors' work for gender equality in Bosnia Herzegovina seem to have strengthened international cooperation more than the women's organizations in the country. Although there were many atrocities and rapes of women during the war in Boznia Herzegovina, and transitional justice processes were needed, international actors' tendency to highlight the victimness of these women may also in the long run have diminished the possibility for pressure that women in this country potentially could have exerted on their authorities and on the society in general – to positively change gender relations. Considerations

about security and normalization seem to be part of the foundations of this thinking among international actors.

Protracted Conflict and Different Types of Transitions

Several of the armed conflicts discussed in this article were protracted conflicts. In particular should be mentioned the internal conflict in Colombia (lasting more than 60 years), Guatemala (36years), Aceh (29 years), Sri Lanka (26 years) and Mozambique (16 years). The implications of such long-lasting conflicts are many, but the long period of isolation, development of a strong group-identity and loss of education and employment experiences are key (Barth 2002; Hauge 2008, Shekawat 2015). DDR programs seldom take these challenges sufficiently into account (Hauge 2008)

Many of the cases discussed in this article are conflicts that ended in negotiated peace agreements with traditional DDR processes. In some of the conflicts the peace agreement has been reached with the assistance of international mediators or facilitators, like in Colombia, whereas other negotiation processes have been more home grown, like in Nepal. However, in some cases the armed conflict also ends with a military victory for one of the parties, like in Sri Lanka. This has particular implications for the ex-combatants in general and for the female ex-combatants in particular. The Sri Lankan conflict was also a protracted conflict, lasting 26 years.

Although the reintegration experiences of female ex-combatants in Nepal and Sri Lanka have some similarities, the experiences in these two countries are marked by some fundamental differences related to the political situation and the way that the conflicts ended. While several female cadres and combatants of higher rank achieved important political positions in the Maoist party of Nepal after the DDR process (Subedi 2019), the military victory of the government forces in Sri Lanka made such a development difficult for female ex-combatants

of the LTTE in Sri Lanka. (Friedman 2018; Azmi 2015). In Nepal 104 female ex-fighters were also included in the national army after the DDR process. Actually, the term DDR was deliberately excluded from the Nepalese peace agreement. Instead the official term for referring to the combatants was "Byahastapan ra Samayojan" or "Management and Integration", as the Maoists were interested in finally restructuring the army and the security sector, aiming to have the ex-combatants absorbed into the government security force (Subedi 2018, 83). Although 104 female fighters was a small amount, it was still an important achievement compared with what the female fighters of the LTTE in Sri Lanka achieved. Most of them were, as mentioned earlier in this review article, included in extremely gender-traditional reintegration programs and ended up disappointed and disillusioned (Azmi 2015; Martin 2017).

In general, the international discourse on DDR is located within the peacebuilding and security literature, as is also the security sector reform (SSR) debate. However, the distance between the international discourse on DDR and national and local level discussions on DDR, is large. One of the strongest examples of this is found in the discourse on child soldiers and their participation in DDR processes. The lack of context specific and local understanding found in the international discourse on child soldiers, as well as the lack of a gender perspective, has had particularly strong impact on girl soldiers. This discourse is dominated by UN resolutions, regulations and standards. For example, the UN standards on DDR (IDDRS) encourages family reunification and reintegration back into their local community for former child-soldiers (UN 2014). However, research has revealed that local communities are often not happy to see former child soldiers reintegrate back into their community and girl soldiers in particular tend to become stigmatized and isolated, as by becoming a soldier, they are often considered to have broken with local norms, gender-traditions, culture and values. (Torres Hernández 2017; Tonheim 2017).

FEMALE AND MALE EX-COMBATANTS – LIVING THE CONSEQUENCES

The literature on gender and DDR in general reveals that the way in which female and male combatants are perceived of and treated in the DDR process affect them in many ways – economically, socially, politically and psychologically.

The literature has revealed that even when female fighters are registered, the vocational training and assistance offered them during the DDR process are not adapted to their needs, but rather tailored for the needs of male soldiers (Hauge 2008; Upreti and Shivakoti 2017). Psychological assistance is mainly not available for any of the genders, but men in particular are seldom viewed as victims and their needs in this sense are often completely neglected. This is a way of reinforcing existing gender patterns and strengthening the macho ideal of masculinity. It keeps the female combatants at the victim end of the axis and the male combatants at the actor/perpetrator end.

In the reintegration process, female ex-combatants often experience stigmatization, social exclusion and expectations to reintegrate back into traditional gender roles as housewives, although this is no longer perceived of as appropriate or satisfactory by many of them (Hauge 2008). It deprives them of economic independence, career development and personal respect and dignity based on the sacrifices they have made during the war. Stigmatization and pressure on men to fill certain roles also exist, but to a lesser degree than for women. We have seen in the literature that many local communities have their own "moral gatekeepers" that determine what is acceptable and not with regard to gender roles in the local communities. However, they tend to be particularly demanding on women.

Some recent articles focusing on the Colombian peace process point to process related characteristics that could serve as examples on how to meet some of the above mentioned challenges. Women in Colombia have been disproportionally affected by the conflict, but as

described by Menochal and Domingo (2015), they have also made strong efforts and progress towards empowerment. Women have been critical and strategic in their engagement with the formal political system as well as with civil society and have been able to ensure that the manner in which Colombia responds to the conflict reflects the particular experiences and challenges faced by women (Patiño et al. 2012).

Women participated at the negotiation table in Havana, both in FARC-EP's delegation and in the government's delegation (Salvesen and Nylander 2017). During the peace process a subcomission on gender, peace and security was established to work on gender aspects of the peace agreement text. This commission consisted of representatives from the parties themselves (Salvesen and Nylander 2017). The establishment of such a commission during peace negotiations was unprecedented. In addition, the commission decided that it should be represented in other mechanisms established by the negotiating table. Thus, as pointed out by Salvesen and Nylander (2017,3) representatives of the commission also participated in the Technical Subcommission to End the Armed Conflict. Here, representatives of Colombia's armed forces and FARC-EP commanders discussed a bilateral ceasefire, the end of hostilities and lying down of arms. Thus the gender commission was also able to influence the agreement on the DDR process in Colombia. In addition, the negotiation table in Havana received visits from representatives of female groups and organizations from Colombia – and not least – from victims of the war, many of them female. This is an example of a recent experience on how female participants can influence the content of a peace process, and thus also the basis for the DDR process.

AN END TO WAR – AND A NEW BEGINNING OF WHAT?

As observed from the many case studies mentioned in this article, the variety of experiences of female and male ex-combatants from DDR processes is large. The examples highlighted in this article illustrate the need for a context analysis of each armed conflict to better understand the particular needs of female and male ex-combatants in DDR processes. In research on DDR processes, much attention has been given to women as victims – and to men as perpetrators – and thus mainly to the negative consequences of both genders' lives and actions during armed conflict. However, far less attention has been given to the transformation of gender roles that has taken place in armed groups during the war, including new types of tasks performed by female soldiers and skills acquired during the armed conflict.

In some cases, the gender equality within armed groups has been relatively good and better than the balance of gender roles in the countries where these groups have been fighting. This is particularly the case with conflicts in some Latin American countries, like Guatemala and El Salvador, but also in a country like Nepal (Azkue 2014; Hauge 2008; Upreti and Shivakoti, 2017). In such cases the changes obtained within the armed groups during the war could represent a potential asset for post-conflict changes in gender relations in that society – if only recognized and supported. However, often national and international actors fear a strong group identity among ex-combatants and through this attitude they also neglect the positive asset this may represent.

For example, in Guatemala USAID was against reintegration of ex-combatants from URNG into cooperatives (Hauge 2008). In addition, the Guatemalan government made life difficult for the female and male ex-combatants that wanted to live together in cooperatives, as these ex-combatants had to buy the land at a high price and became heavily indebted. Still the female ex-combatants that opted for the cooperatives fared better than their fellow female ex-combatants that had to manage on their own, or together with their family (Hauge 2008). Guatemala represents a case where asymmetry between the conflicting parties and the security

and normalization concerns of international actors made conditions for positive spill-over effects from changed gender relations during the war very difficult.

Other types of progress acquired by armed groups during war have encountered cultural obstacles during the transition phase. This was the case with the practice of inter-caste marriages within the Maoist Army during the war in Nepal. This practice represented a break with a repressive aspect of Nepali religion and tradition. However, as described by Upreti and Shivakoti, couples that entered into inter-caste marriages during the war had to face a hard time post-conflict as they met cultural disrespect and local condemnation, and had no or few mechanisms of support to resort to (Upreti and Shivakoti 2017). The initiation of this practice within the Maoist army during the war is one type of progress that, if actively observed, appreciated and communicated by international actors – as well as by national authorities – could have represented a strong asset for positive change in the DDR and post-conflict process.

The literature reveals that such assets tend to get lost in the DDR process when female and male ex-combatants are considered through a traditional gender lens by national and international actors and thus pushed back into traditional gender roles – often unhealthy both for the female and male ex-combatants. The idea that the particular moment of transition involves a great possibility for change – from something that has not worked to something better – is generally neglected. At that point, everything is about getting an end to war and reaching some kind of normalization (Hauge 2008; Marhaban 2012). Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration leading to "normalization" is not a priori a good thing. Even though armed groups have participated in war activities, the literature on armed conflict reveal that several groups have achieved ethically better intra-group conditions for discriminated persons and better gender equality than in the society where the war was conducted.

CONCLUSION

This article has discussed various aspects of the literature on DDR and gender and has its main focus on the period after the new millennium. It has focused on the definitions of a combatant; female empowerment; the political economy of DDR processes, group identity, the context of DDR and masculinity. The representation of women as victims or actors has been a crucial topic in the article. The literature has revealed that both men and women can be victims as well as actors, and that the potential for post-conflict changes in gender relations also depend on the internal group dynamics between the genders during the war – and on to what degree these are allowed to play themselves out during the transition phase.

War is generally perceived of as an evil by politicians and international actors, and therefore some kind of normalization is on top of the DDR and post-conflict agenda. Wars imply much suffering, but normalization is, as emphasized in this article, not a priori a good thing. There is a tendency to forget that wars are fought for certain reasons, often with strong injustices and discrimination involved. Research has revealed that it is not only the ex-combatants of the armed group that need to change, but the whole society. The members of an armed group are rarely viewed as an asset. However, as revealed by several of the studies referred to in this literature review, the members of an armed group may in several cases represent a strong and positive asset for change. This is the case not least with regard to the potential for change in gender relations in very traditional societies with strong macho cultures.

Academics and activists, particularly from the Global South, have contributed to nuance the stereotypical view of women as victims and men as actors and perpetrators, but much more remains to be done. As seen in this literature review, there is a lack of communication between policy discussions and academic findings and discourses. The challenge is if and how academics potentially could conduct more in-depth research during the transition phase itself

and how such research eventually could be applied to the DDR process by international actors and facilitators, not least the UN. The transition phase is most often scheduled to take place fast in order to reach "normalization" quickly and is often described in detail with a calendar of implementation in the peace agreement itself. The transition phase would – in a research perspective – be ideal for interviews and surveys with the ex-combatants in order to understand their background, the gender-and social dynamics of the armed group, their skills and their dreams for the future. Eventual intra-group violence and tensions could also be mapped during such research contributing to a more solid basis in search for suitable solutions to be applied during the DDR process and post-conflict. Involving academics with knowledge of the particular context of a conflict during the phase of conflict termination could contribute to provide important analyzes with recommendations for use in policy processes with potentially wide-reaching consequences for the future of countries in the DDR phase of a conflict.

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