

PREVENTING THE ACCIDENTAL GUERRILLA SYNDROME:
REINTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION AS TOOLS OF WAR AND CONTROL

by

DAVID MORGAN

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Abstract

Conventional evaluations of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs suggest that the disappointing policy outcomes of DDR are largely the result of shortcomings in their design, and overcome through technical, apolitical, and ostensibly ‘developmental’ solutions. This perspective, however, overlooks the profoundly politicized nature of the post-conflict environment, in which political actors attempt to secure patronage networks and rents and reinforce or alter the balance of power in their favour. This paper will argue that, within this context, reintegration and reconciliation programs can be strategically introduced by the dominant faction in a conflict in order to further pacify its rivals and reinforce its control over the post-war environment. With specific reference to the war in northern Uganda, it will reveal how the amnesty and reintegration programs implemented became tools of the broader counterinsurgency effort, as they were designed to gain leverage over ex-combatants and prevent their return to the war as “accidental guerrillas.” In the process, the government of Uganda secured its monopoly over the means of violence in this region, thereby expanding its control over a historically “unruly” population. Reintegration and reconciliation were largely secondary to these underlying legacies of exploitation and structural violence, presenting numerous implications for post-conflict reconstruction and the international donors that continue to fund these initiatives. By locating the outcomes of peace-building initiatives within the broader historical processes of social conflict, this paper offers an alternative theoretical framework for considering the limitations of reintegration and reconciliation initiatives.

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Introduction

Within the literature on peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, considerable attention has been devoted to the disappointing policy outcomes of reintegration and reconciliation initiatives.¹ Referring specifically to the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants, many authors have criticized DDR programs for restricting their focus to military and security objectives, and “dismantling the machinery of war.”² Excluded from these strategic exercises, they argue, is any consideration of the social or economic implications of the ex-combatant’s return to the community. The reintegration phase thus represents the “Achilles heel”³ of DDR practice, as it typically fails to prevent demobilized fighters from reverting to the marginalization and lack of opportunities that previously motivated their mobilization into war. To avoid this cycle of “re-marginalization,”⁴ these authors endorse a broader development perspective that expands these post-conflict interventions beyond individual combatants to include the communities to which they return, thereby facilitating the achievement of reconciliation alongside reintegration.

¹ For example, Mark Knight and Alpaslan Özerdem, “Guns, Camps and Cash: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion of Former Combatants in Transitions from War to Peace,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 4 (2004); Sarah Meek and Mark Malan, “Identifying Lessons from DDR Experiences in Africa,” *Trends in Peacekeeping in Africa*, Monograph no. 106 (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2004); Roger Duthie, “Transitional Justice and Social Reintegration,” Paper prepared for the Stockholm Initiative on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration (SIDDR), 2005. <<http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/06/54/02/7545e870.pdf>>; Sami Faltas, “DDR Without Camps,” *Topical Chapter for the Conversion Survey* (BICC, 2005); Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, “Demobilization and Reintegration,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 4 (2007); Nat J. Colletta and Robert Muggah, “Context Matters: Interim Stabilization and Second Generation Approaches to Security Promotion,” *Conflict, Security, and Development* 13, no. 52 (2009); Robert Muggah, ed., *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Mats Berdal and David H. Ucko, eds., *Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict: Politics, Violence and Transition* (London: Routledge, 2009).

² Kimberly Theidon, “Transitional Subjects: The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, no. 1 (2007): 67.

³ Meek and Malan, “Identifying Lessons from DDR Experiences in Africa,” 12.

⁴ Mats Utas, “Building a Future?: The Reintegration & Remarginalisation of Youth in Liberia,” in *No Peace No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, ed. Paul Richards (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 139.

These criticisms therefore suggest that the negative policy outcomes of DDR programs are largely the result of shortcomings in their design, and overcome through interventions of greater ambition and scope. These programs, however, operate within a highly politicized environment, as competing political actors struggle to assert their influence over peace-building activities. This prompts an interesting research question: To what extent will the existing balance of power shape reintegration and reconciliation efforts? Will these initiatives generate the same exploitative relations and legacies of structural violence that facilitated the outbreak of war, or will they help marginalized groups gain a share in political power? This paper will argue that reintegration and reconciliation programs can be strategically introduced by the dominant faction in a conflict in order to further pacify its rivals and reinforce its control over the post-war environment. With specific reference to the war in northern Uganda, it will reveal how the amnesty and reintegration programs implemented became tools of the broader counterinsurgency effort, as they were designed to gain leverage over ex-combatants and prevent their return to the war as “accidental guerrillas.”⁵ In the process, the government of Uganda further expanded its control over a historically “unruly” population, thereby complementing the decades of forced displacement, human rights violations, and “social torture” designed to bring about the “subordinate inclusion” of this region.⁶ By locating the outcomes of peace-building initiatives within the broader historical processes of social conflict, this paper will offer an alternative theoretical framework for considering the limitations of reintegration and reconciliation initiatives.

This paper draws its inspiration from David Kilcullen’s conception of the “accidental guerrilla,” which suggests that local actors will “[fight] alongside extremist forces not because

⁵ David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶ Chris Dolan, *Social Torture: The Case of Northern Uganda, 1986-2006* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 220.

they support [their] ideology but because they oppose outside interference in their affairs.”⁷ To treat this “syndrome,” Kilcullen argues that a “population-centric” counterinsurgency strategy, aimed at protecting and building alliances with local communities, will help to reduce the pool of accidental guerrillas and isolate the extremist core. This paper will extend this argument and suggest that within the post-conflict period – a time of “politics as usual” when political actors continue to compete for power and resources at the expense of their rivals⁸ – co-opting these “reconcilable”⁹ fighters becomes a necessary component of securing patronage networks and rents and reinforcing or altering the balance of power in society. Reintegration and reconciliation initiatives can assume a highly politicized character within this environment, particularly as they provide these actors with access to previously mobilized constituencies of trained fighters and thus control over future sources of coercion and violence. In northern Uganda, the government actively attempted to recruit demobilized rebel fighters into the state military, in order to directly leverage its control over these former accidental guerrillas. Failing this, it reintegrated ex-combatants into internal displacement camps in the region, where its highly visible and controlling military presence effectively turned these individuals into “good inmates.”¹⁰ Both options contained these ex-combatants and prevented their return to the rebel ranks, while simultaneously reinforcing the government’s control over northern Uganda as a whole. The Ugandan government’s commitment to meaningful reintegration and reconciliation was largely secondary to this strategy, as it exploited these initiatives to further secure its monopoly over the means of violence in this region. The appropriation of reintegration and reconciliation for

⁷ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 38.

⁸ Pierre Englebert and Denis M. Tull, “Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa: Flawed Ideas about Failed States.” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008): 120.

⁹ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 114.

¹⁰ Christopher Blattman and Jeannie Annan, “Child Combatants in Northern Uganda: Reintegration Myths and Realities,” in *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War*, ed. Robert Muggah (New York: Routledge, 2009), 111.

political purposes presents numerous implications for post-conflict reconstruction, particularly by strengthening the exploitative relations and structural violence that underlie the “continuum of war and peace”¹¹ in northern Uganda.

The paper will proceed in five sections. First, it will discuss the conventional definitions of DDR and divide these between a “minimalist” and security-centric perspective and a broader “maximalist” and development-oriented perspective.¹² Second, it will explore these perspectives relative to the DDR process in northern Uganda, and will argue that neither offers an adequate explanation of the disappointing outcomes of reintegration in this case. Third, it will apply Kilcullen’s conception of the accidental guerrilla to the post-conflict environment and will propose an alternative theoretical framework that locates the outcomes of DDR within the broader historical processes of social conflict. Fourth, it will evaluate this framework with a detailed case study of the counterinsurgency effort in northern Uganda, and will reveal that reintegration and reconciliation were appropriated as tools of war and control in order to reduce the available pool of accidental guerrillas and expand the government’s influence over a historically hostile population. This paper will conclude with observations on this study’s implications for post-conflict reconstruction, relative to both the achievement of reintegration and reconciliation and the international donors that continue to fund these initiatives.

¹¹ Utas, “Building a Future?” 151.

¹² For example, Kathleen M. Jennings, “Seeing DDR from Below: Challenges and Dilemmas Raised by the Experiences of Ex-Combatants in Liberia,” *FAFO Report*, no. 3 (Oslo: FAFO, 2008), 6; Robert Muggah, “Introduction: The Emperor’s Clothes?” in *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War*, ed. Robert Muggah (New York: Routledge, 2009), 14.

Competing Definitions of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs are implemented in post-conflict environments and aim to establish security and stability so that the peace process can continue. They work primarily with ex-combatants, who are often left without livelihoods or support networks following the cessation of conflict. These interventions therefore seek to alleviate their potential role as spoilers to the peace process and manage their transition back into the community. Although a relatively recent idea, DDR operations are now widely heralded as a necessary element of peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction processes.¹³ However, scholars and practitioners have developed and advanced competing models of DDR, ranging from those endorsing narrowly-conceived targets to those envisioning operations of broader ambition and scope.

Building off the experience from numerous UN and national DDR programs in the 1980s and 1990s, the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO) first released its principles and guidelines to DDR in 1999. It defines ‘disarmament’ as the collection, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons of combatants and, if needed, of the civilian population. ‘Demobilization’ involves the downsizing or dismantlement of all armed groups, including both government and opposition forces, and the assembly, quartering, and discharge of former combatants, often through regulated cantonment sites. ‘Reintegration’ typically consists of two stages: reinsertion assistance in the form of pre-discharge orientation and counselling, vocational training, food and health assistance, and often some form of monetary compensation; and reintegration programs that strengthen the capacity of former combatants and host communities to achieve successful social and economic recovery.¹⁴

¹³ Muggah, “Introduction: The Emperor’s Clothes?” 4.

¹⁴ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Ex-Combatants in a Peacekeeping Environment: Principles and Guidelines*, (New York: United Nations, 1999), 15.

In the short term, the disarmament and demobilization phases aim to reduce the risk of spoilers and prevent an immediate relapse into war, while in the medium to long term, comprehensive reinsertion and reintegration measures contribute to the consolidation of peace and the promotion of stability, eventually leading to reconciliation and development.

In practice, DDR programs have focused primarily on achieving their military and security objectives. This “minimalist” conception is favoured by security-oriented institutions, such as national military and defence establishments or the UNDPKO, who view DDR as an interim process designed to prevent unintentional security dilemmas from arising in the immediate aftermath of war.¹⁵ As a result, they typically focus on dissolving armed groups, dismantling their command structures, and providing an environment that reduces mistrust between rival factions, thus “making it more difficult for them to return to organized rebellion.”¹⁶ Designed for expedience, this minimalist and security-centric focus therefore “aspires less to creating a lasting impact in the lives of combatants and more to time-limited gains,”¹⁷ and leaves the social and economic reintegration of former fighters to the later stages of the recovery process.

This strategic approach has been criticized for reducing DDR to “guns, camps and cash” – guns are collected and tallied, combatants are registered, screened, and released through cantonment sites, and reinsertion packages are provided.¹⁸ In prioritizing these immediate and measurable objectives, critics argue that this predominantly technical exercise is unable to anticipate or address the range of concerns encountered on the ground. A security-centric focus,

¹⁵ Paul Collier, “Demobilization and Insecurity: A Study in the Economics of the Transition from War to Peace,” *Journal of International Development* 6, no. 3 (1994): 348.

¹⁶ Joanna Spear, “Disarmament and demobilization,” in *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements*, ed. Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 141.

¹⁷ Jennings, “Seeing DDR from Below,” 6.

¹⁸ Knight and Alpaslan Özerdem, “Guns, Camps and Cash.”

they warn, therefore inadvertently heightens the risk of remobilization among ex-combatants by failing to alleviate the grievances and frustrations of this volatile constituency.¹⁹ They have thus labelled the reintegration phase “the weakest link in the DDR chain,”²⁰ and argue for interventions of broader vision and scope.

This “maximalist” perspective primarily views DDR as an opportunity for development, and re-prioritizes reintegration as its “ultimate objective.”²¹ This approach is best encapsulated by the UN’s 2006 release of its Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), a set of policies, guidelines and procedures that attempt to expand the definition of reintegration and establish a new baseline for DDR. The IDDRS move beyond a singular focus on disarming and demobilizing combatants and emphasize instead “the long-term humanitarian and development impact of sustainable reintegration processes and the effects these have in consolidating long-lasting peace and security.”²² This entails the cooperation of stakeholders at the local, national, and international levels, in order to achieve reconciliation and “social cohesion” within communities²³ and to reinforce the legitimacy of public institutions.²⁴ This transformative reintegration agenda thus views DDR as a “catalyst for social change,”²⁵ and locates these interventions within the broader development and recovery process.

¹⁹ Ibid., 502.

²⁰ Faltas, “DDR Without Camps,” 1.

²¹ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*, (New York: United Nations, 2006), 4.30.3.

²² Ibid., 2.10.

²³ Ibid., 4.30.10.

²⁴ Muggah, “Introduction: The Emperor’s Clothes?” 14.

²⁵ Jennings, “Seeing DDR from Below,” 6.

This expanded model extends beyond the traditional security objectives of DDR to consider the economic and social implications of reintegrating ex-combatants into their host communities. From an economics dimension, it seeks to alleviate the process of “re-marginalization” that often occurs alongside the reintegration phase, as ex-combatants largely return to the limited opportunities that initially precipitated their mobilization into war.²⁶ Coinciding with the near consensus in the literature regarding the “structural roots” of civil war,²⁷ in which state weakness, poverty, low growth rates and a large population lower individual opportunity costs and create a constituency of frustrated and easily mobilized individuals, this approach attempts to break these fighters from the “conflict trap” that periodically recycles them back into violence.²⁸ This development perspective therefore seeks to improve the economic fortunes of ex-combatants by facilitating their access to civilian symbols of prestige, such as sustainable income, education, and decent housing.²⁹

To complement the economic reintegration of ex-combatants this model further prioritizes reconciliation alongside the achievement of reintegration, in order to ease the transition of ex-combatants into the community. Kimberly Theidon, for instance, warns of the “deep mutual fear” that often accompanies the reintegration process, as members of the community suddenly find themselves living beside past killers, while ex-combatants nervously

²⁶ Utas, “Building a Future?” 139.

²⁷ James Fearon and David Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 88. See also Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, “Understanding Civil War: A New Agenda,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no.1 (Feb. 2002); Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, “Greed and Grievance in Civil War,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004); Edward Miguel, Shanker Satyanath, and Ernest Sergenti, “Economic Shocks and Civil Conflict: An Instrumental Variables Approach,” *Journal of Political Economy* 112, no. 4 (2004).

²⁸ Collier and Sambanis, “Understanding Civil War,” 5.

²⁹ Kimberly Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities: The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 31 (2009): 22.

expect retaliation from their former victims.³⁰ Moreover, Rosalind Shaw argues that the reinsertion stipends provided to former fighters may provoke considerable anger and resentment in host communities, as noncombatants contend that this “special treatment” compensates perpetrators for their past crimes and human rights abuses while they, the victims, receive comparatively little in return.³¹ This combination of fear, suspicion, and resentment produces “deeply exclusionary consequences”³² for ex-combatants, resulting in their continued isolation from the societies they are meant to rejoin. More importantly, their social marginalization inadvertently produces powerful incentives for them to rearm in pursuit of the social status, respect, and wealth previously obtained through militarization.³³ Scholars and practitioners advancing a development approach to DDR have proposed a number of ways to mitigate these effects, including the provision of reparations to victims,³⁴ the launch of community action projects,³⁵ and the expansion of linkages with transitional justice mechanisms that articulate truth, justice, and reconciliation.³⁶

This maximalist framework thus locates the economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants squarely within the mandate of DDR and recommends a series of targeted interventions to stimulate development and recovery. In practice this approach has proven more

³⁰ Ibid., “Transitional Subjects,” 83.

³¹ Shaw, “Linking Justice with Reintegration?” 112. See also Duthie, “Transitional Justice and Social Reintegration,” 11.

³² Shaw, “Linking Justice with Reintegration?” 112.

³³ For example, Utas, “Building a Future?;” Theidon, “Transitional Subjects;” Henrik Vigh, “Social Death and Violent Life Chances,” in *Navigating Youth Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context*, edited by Catrine Christiansen, Mats Utas, and Henrik E. Vigh (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006).

³⁴ Duthie, “Transitional Justice and Social Reintegration.”

³⁵ Faltas, “DDR Without Camps,” 12.

³⁶ Theidon, “Transitional Subjects;” Shaw, “Linking Justice with Reintegration?;” Ana Cutter Patel, Pablo de Greiff, and Lars Waldorf, eds. *Disarming the Past: Transitional Justice and Ex-Combatants* (New York: International Centre for Transitional Justice, 2009).

challenging than its predecessors and bears greater risk. In particular, the administration of what amounts to “social engineering,” involving the resettlement and reintegration of ex-combatants and their dependents in potentially hostile communities, is “ambitious in the extreme.”³⁷ However, if practitioners are unable to satisfy the raised expectations surrounding this transformative reintegration agenda, the unfulfilled promises of DDR will only heighten the sense of frustration and thwarted entitlement among ex-combatants.³⁸ Although necessarily limited in scope, a minimalist approach avoids many of these potential pitfalls and leaves these challenges to the later stages of the recovery process. Notwithstanding the above concerns, DDR programming is increasingly gravitating towards this maximalist orientation.³⁹

For the purposes of this paper, this maximalist perspective offers a range of measures through which scholars and practitioners measure the success of DDR. Compared to the earlier security-centric approaches, this conception of DDR is broader and more ambitious in scope and should improve income-earning opportunities for ex-combatants, provide access to civilian symbols of prestige and social status, and encourage reconciliation within the community. Turning to the DDR process in northern Uganda, this paper will show that the language and expectations surrounding this initiative coincided with many of the above objectives. Accordingly, scholars and practitioners evaluating this process equally framed their analyses within this maximalist perspective. However, as will be revealed, in adopting a technical, apolitical, and ostensibly ‘developmental’ lens, they consequently failed to recognize the underlying political conflicts that mould and condition these interventions.

³⁷ Muggah, “Introduction: The Emperor’s Clothes?” 14.

³⁸ Jennings, “Seeing DDR from Below,” 6-7.

³⁹ Muggah, “Introduction: The Emperor’s Clothes?” 15.

The Limits of Reintegration: Technically Weak or Purposefully Undercut?

Instability and war have troubled Uganda since its independence in 1962. During the Obote and Amin regimes of the 1960s and 1970s, state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses led to the deaths of an estimated half a million people.⁴⁰ Coups and civil war followed the ouster of Amin in 1979, leading to the economic collapse of the country and its international recognition as a de facto failed state. Although relative peace has returned to most of the country since the rise of current president Yoweri Museveni in 1986, the Lord's Resistance Army has waged a low-level insurgency in the north for much of this time. This paper will restrict its analysis to this latest conflict, focusing on the government's counterinsurgency strategy and reintegration efforts during the height of the violence from 1995 to 2006, with a brief discussion at the end regarding the national reconciliation process in place since 2008.

A Brief History of the War in Northern Uganda

The war in northern Uganda has both political and spiritual roots. In 1986, the National Resistance Army (NRA), led by Yoweri Museveni, overthrew a government dominated by the Acholi people of northern Uganda. This sparked a series of insurgent movements in the north, which soon threatened Museveni's tenuous hold on power. By 1988, the remnants of several of these groups assembled under Joseph Kony, a spiritual leader combining a blend of Christian, Islamic and Acholi beliefs and rules. Together, they formed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel movement seeking both the removal of Museveni and the spiritual cleansing of the nation. The LRA initially enjoyed popular support in the north as a result of the lingering hostility felt towards the southern-dominated government. In response, the NRA, renamed the

⁴⁰ Robert Muggah and Anton Baaré, "Negotiating Reintegration in Uganda: Dealing with Combatants during Peace Processes," in *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War*, ed. Robert Muggah (New York: Routledge, 2009), 232.

Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) in 1995, organized civilians into local paramilitary units and, by 1996, had forcibly relocated an estimated 450,000 Acholi into 'protected villages' as part of a counterinsurgency strategy designed to safeguard civilians and deny the rebels access to food, information, and recruits. At the peak of the violence in 2003, the number of persons in these internal displacement camps had climbed to 1.8 million people, representing over 90 percent of the population of the north.⁴¹

Although the UPDF's heavy-handed tactics generated further hostility among civilians in the north, the LRA viewed the creation of the paramilitary units and displacement camps as evidence of their Acholi-brethren siding with the government. They retaliated with the widespread killing and mutilation of civilians, in what has been classified as "a war of the LRA against its own people."⁴² As its support waned, the rebel group came to rely almost exclusively on forced recruitment and abduction to build its ranks. From 1995 to 2004, an estimated 60,000 people were press-ganged into service, a third of which were children.⁴³ Although the majority of those abducted were male, girls and young women were also taken to become rebel wives, domestic servants, or fighters in the war. Despite the LRA's attempts to instil fear and obedience in the population, its ranks have been largely comprised of these reluctant recruits "with little lasting allegiance to the force."⁴⁴

The Ugandan parliament passed a blanket amnesty in 1999, in an attempt to encourage defection from the LRA and end the war. This act exempted from punishment or prosecution all those who, since 1986, either participated in combat or collaborated with or aided rebel

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, "Uprooted and Forgotten: Impunity and Human Rights Abuses in Northern Uganda," *Human Rights Watch* 17, no. 12 (2005): 13.

⁴² Dolan, *Social Torture*, 4.

⁴³ Blattman and Annan, "Child Combatants in Northern Uganda," 106.

⁴⁴ Erin Baines, Nadine Harris, and Kyle McCleery, "Death is painful so it is better to be holding a gun?: The socio-ecologically situated dis/rearmament decisions of formerly abducted persons in northern Uganda," *Conflict, Security, and Development* 10, no. 5 (2010): 628.

movements in the country, provided they reported to government officials and surrendered their membership to these groups.⁴⁵ However, in 2005 the International Criminal Court, at the request of the Ugandan government, indicted top LRA leaders with war crimes and crimes against humanity, attracting considerable international attention to the conflict. This provoked considerable debate both within Uganda and abroad. Local leaders argued that the arrest warrants would jeopardize the amnesty initiative and undermine their efforts to build the confidence of the rebels towards achieving a negotiated peace. The ICC, in contrast, contended that amnesty promoted impunity and ignored international law, and refused to withdraw its indictments.⁴⁶ These opposing sides failed to find common ground, and the amnesty initiative was eventually amended to exclude the five indicted commanders.⁴⁷

As these debates evolved, the Ugandan government continued to pursue a military solution to the conflict. In 2002, the UPDF, with the approval of the Sudanese government, launched Operation 'Iron Fist' and began conducting cross-border attacks on LRA bases in southern Sudan. By 2004, this counterinsurgency strategy, involving both military action and the forced displacement of civilians, had considerably slowed the number of rebel attacks and abductions. An informal truce was reached in 2006, followed by peace talks brokered by the government of Sudan. These negotiations, complicated by the involvement of the ICC and riddled with distrust on both sides, ultimately collapsed in 2008. Soon after, the LRA fled to its bases in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. Although the rebel

⁴⁵ Blattman and Annan, "Child Combatants in Northern Uganda," 110.

⁴⁶ Erin Baines, "The Haunting of Alice: Local Approaches to Justice and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, no. 1 (2007): 101-103.

⁴⁷ Anna Borzello, "The Challenge of DDR in Northern Uganda: The Lord's Resistance Army," in *Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict: Politics, Violence and Transition*, ed. Mats Berdal and David H. Ucko (London: Routledge, 2009), 148.

group is a continuing source of instability and violence in these areas, a relative peace has since settled over northern Uganda.

Amnesty and the Socioeconomic Limits of Reintegration

The reintegration process in northern Uganda evolved over the course of the conflict, shifting from a largely informal focus on returning combatants to a more comprehensive strategy involving both local communities and the national government. Rather than large-scale returns or demobilizations, the majority of returnees escaped from the LRA, while a smaller number were either released by the rebel group or captured by the UPDF. As a result, the reintegration process was at first largely ad hoc, as most ex-combatants either returned directly to their families in the displacement camps or received counselling and training through non-governmental organizations working in the area.

In 2000, the Ugandan parliament established an amnesty commission to administer the amnesty initiative and facilitate the return of ex-combatants, marking the beginning of the government's involvement in the reintegration process. With funding from the World Bank and the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program in 2005, the amnesty commission developed and advanced four objectives: the sensitization of the public and political leadership on conflict resolution and the promotion of dialogue between government officials and ex-combatants; the demobilization of fighters and the processing of amnesty applications; the provision of reinsertion packages and psycho-social and health assessments; and the launch of longer-term social and economic reintegration activities and support.⁴⁸ In practice, returnees were registered and questioned through UPDF barracks and then transferred to reception centres where they applied for amnesty and received skills training and reinsertion packages.

⁴⁸ Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program. *Uganda*. World Bank. <http://www.mdrp.org/uganda.htm>.

To complement the amnesty and reintegration program and avoid notions of impunity, religious and cultural leaders in the north further proposed the use of Acholi traditions of justice, arguing that these local efforts would facilitate the peaceful return of ex-combatants and help to build confidence in achieving a negotiated settlement with the LRA. Acholi justice mechanisms are premised on oral spiritual and cultural laws, and aim to achieve communal accountability, punishment, forgiveness and reconciliation through symbolic acts and spiritual appeasement. The most commonly known ceremony is *mato oput* (drinking the bitter root), in which elders act as neutral arbitrators in awarding compensation to the aggrieved party, before the involved clans reconcile through drinking the *oput* root and exchanging, cooking, and consuming food and drink.⁴⁹ Cleansing ceremonies, such as the communal “stepping on the egg” ritual, are also used to chase away evil spirits from the bodies of ex-combatants and promote the spirit of forgiveness.⁵⁰ As proposed by Acholi leaders, these traditional justice mechanisms and community rituals aim to restore social relations between ex-combatants and their host communities, thereby complementing the goals of the amnesty initiative and facilitating the reintegration process.

The language and expectations surrounding the reintegration process in northern Uganda therefore coincided with a maximalist perspective of DDR – skills training and reinsertion packages would improve the economic reintegration of ex-combatants, while traditional justice mechanisms and cleansing ceremonies would facilitate reconciliation and social cohesion within communities. At the same time, this process promoted dialogue between government officials, ex-combatants, and the public, thereby attempting to address many of the long-standing grievances between the north and the southern-dominated government. This approach thus aimed

⁴⁹ Baines, “The Haunting of Alice,” 104.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

to ease the economic and social reintegration of these former fighters while reducing their mistrust in the government.

In practice, however, critics argue that the DDR process in northern Uganda was minimalist in its implementation. Several studies, for instance, note that ex-combatants typically encountered few economic prospects upon their return to the community. One survey of roughly 1000 households in the north finds that ex-combatants are twice as likely to be illiterate and half as likely to be engaged in skills- or capital-intensive employment, while one-third have lower daily earnings than non-combatants.⁵¹ The authors conclude that the minimal skills training available through the reception centres was ultimately unable to address the education and production gap caused by an individual's time with the LRA. Consequently, food shortages, unemployment, poverty, and aid dependence were among the most common concerns raised by ex-combatants, prompting many to consider a return to the bush where, in the words of one former rebel, "things are got freely."⁵²

Similar concerns arose regarding the provision of the reinsertion packages. Christopher Dolan argues that this process was never adequately resourced and generated significant backlogs. As a result, only a small number of registered ex-combatants received this resettlement assistance, and often years after their return.⁵³ More seriously, Christopher Blattman and Jeannie Annan contend that these packages, when distributed, provoked considerable resentment, as they note that community members often commented on "how unfair it was that the returnees – abducted or not – benefited from services while those who are merely victims were left with

⁵¹ Blattman and Annan, "Child Combatants in Northern Uganda," 115-6.

⁵² Focus group discussion with male former abductees. From Baines, Harris, and McCleery, "Death is painful so it is better to be holding a gun," 639.

⁵³ Dolan, *Social Torture*, 99-100.

nothing.”⁵⁴ Although the line between victim and perpetrator often blurs in conflicts involving abduction,⁵⁵ this inequity adversely reinforced the divide between these two groups.

In addition to these challenges, other studies suggest that the DDR process equally failed to promote reconciliation within communities. Erin Baines, for instance, notes that community and family members viewed returning fighters with “deep suspicion,” due to their past participation in the violence.⁵⁶ In a later study, she argues that this stigma extended to the spiritual world, as fear of *cen*, the Acholi belief that the spirits of people who died violently will take vengeance on those responsible, further isolated ex-combatants as “violators of cultural taboos” and “a threat to the well-being of those around them.”⁵⁷ Although local religious and cultural leaders argued that traditional justice mechanisms and cleansing ceremonies would help to bridge this divide, in practice they were reluctant to push for the compensation arrangements offered through *mato oput* in fear that returning combatants would doubt the sincerity of the amnesty initiative.⁵⁸ The massive displacement caused by the war also led to the breakdown of the local economy and the rise of corruption, thus further “raising concerns about the neutrality and capacity of elders” to administer these mechanisms judiciously.⁵⁹ For these reasons, Baines questions the feasibility of these traditional justice mechanisms relative to the reintegration

⁵⁴ Blattman and Annan, “Child Combatants in Northern Uganda,” 112.

⁵⁵ For example, Erin Baines, “Complex Political Perpetrators: Reflections on Dominic Ongwen,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, no. 2 (2009); Tristan Anne Borer, “A Taxonomy of Victims and Perpetrators: Human Rights and Reconciliation in South Africa,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 25, no.4 (2003).

⁵⁶ Baines, “Complex Political Perpetrators,” 167.

⁵⁷ Baines, Harris, and McCleery, ““Death is painful so it is better to be holding a gun,”” 638. See also Baines, “The Haunting of Alice.”

⁵⁸ Baines, “The Haunting of Alice,” 110.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 97. See also Borzello, “The Challenge of DDR in Northern Uganda,” 157.

process, suggesting that they were ultimately limited in terms of national scope and in need of substantial strengthening.⁶⁰

As opposed to its maximalist intentions, these critics therefore contend that the DDR process in northern Uganda was geared towards expedience. In particular, they argue that the disappointing outcomes addressed above were largely the result of the “serious financial and capacity constraints” of these initiatives.⁶¹ As a result, despite the amnesty commission’s clear mandate to advance a development-oriented framework, it had “little support to enable it to play this role effectively.”⁶² This ultimately limited its ability to respond to needs on the ground, provide reinsertion packages to all entitled ex-combatants, or anticipate or mitigate divisions in the community, leading to thwarted expectations and dissatisfaction with the “empty promises” of reintegration.⁶³ This maximalist critique of DDR thus highlights the technical limitations of this process, as these resource constraints subsequently led to the accumulation of various “push factors”⁶⁴ compelling ex-combatants to rearm. Accordingly, the best remedy is a technical one, involving an injection of resources and the interventions needed to facilitate socioeconomic reintegration and ‘pull’ these fighters away from rearming. Within this perspective, a development solution remains central to reinvigorating the reintegration process in northern Uganda.

⁶⁰ Baines, “The Haunting of Alice,” 98.

⁶¹ Arne Disch, Riselia Bezerra, Eirin Mobekk, and André-Michel Essoungou, *Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program: End of Program Evaluation* (World Bank, 2010), 74.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶³ Tim Allen and Mareike Schomerus, *A Hard Homecoming: Lessons Learned from the Reception Centre Process in Northern Uganda* (Washington, DC: USAID and UNICEF, 2006), 46.

⁶⁴ Baines, Harris, and McCleery, ““Death is painful so it is better to be holding a gun,”” 626.

The Construction of a 'Development Problem'

The transformative reintegration agenda of a maximalist approach to DDR thus rests upon the creation and resolution of these “development problems.” Although this model prioritizes DDR as a “catalyst for social change,”⁶⁵ in practice scholars and practitioners continue to highlight the technical limitations of reintegration, thereby emphasizing “technical, apolitical, ‘development’ interventions.”⁶⁶ DDR programming thus falls outside the realm of politics, focusing instead on such technocratic solutions as skills training and education, reinsertion and reparation payments, community action projects, and support for transitional justice mechanisms, among others. Accordingly, its measures of success rely on workshops held, payments provided, and community projects completed. Within this perspective, political nuances, such as underlying legacies of oppression and exclusion, are not considered parts of development’s “solvable problem” or of the mandate of DDR, and are consequently “evacuated, ignored, considered not to exist.”⁶⁷

The “myth of apolitical development,”⁶⁸ however, ignores the profoundly politicized character of post-conflict environments. Pierre Englebert and Denis Tull argue that this period represents a time of “politics as usual,” as political actors view reconstruction as “the continuation of war and political competition for resources by new means.”⁶⁹ Their factions compete in shifting and complex alliances, each striving to maximize their political fortunes and

⁶⁵ Jennings, “Seeing DDR from Below,” 6.

⁶⁶ James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development,' Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28.

⁶⁷ Peter Uvin, *Aiding Violence: The Development Enterprise in Rwanda* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1998), 45.

⁶⁸ Paul Nelson, *The World Bank and Non-Governmental Organizations: The Limits of Apolitical Development* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 9.

⁶⁹ Englebert and Tull, “Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa,” 118-120.

produce institutional arrangements enabling them to secure their patronage networks and rents.⁷⁰ Rather than a product of technical design, peace-building thus reflects the interests and ideologies of the actors struggling to assert their influence over this activity. The existing balance of power is renegotiated or reinforced accordingly, thus shaping the ongoing progression of the peace process. Viewed from this perspective, peace-building is not apolitical or technocratic in nature, but rather another chapter in the broader historical processes of social conflict.

Rather than a “development problem” abstracted from these underlying social relations, DDR interventions equally assume an intensely politicized character “precisely because they purposefully redistribute power and alter an existing status quo.”⁷¹ Moulded and conditioned by the broader competition for state power and resources, its outcomes can only be properly understood by situating them within this politicized environment. This offers an alternative theoretical framework for considering the limitations of reintegration and reconciliation, as it suggests that these initiatives may be largely secondary to the broader processes of social conflict and ultimately sacrificed to reinforce or alter the balance of power in favour of one faction or another. With reference to David Kilcullen’s conception of the “accidental guerrilla,” this paper will now consider how these “reconcilable” fighters can be co-opted within the post-conflict setting, thus offering political actors control over the future sources of coercion and violence in society.

⁷⁰ Lee Jones, “(Post-)colonial state-building and state failure in East Timor: Bringing social conflict back in,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 10, no. 4 (2010): 551.

⁷¹ Colletta and Muggah, “Context Matters,” 431.

The Accidental Guerrilla's Dilemma

Drawing on field observations in several theatres of the “War on Terrorism,” Kilcullen suggests that local actors come to fight alongside extremist forces “not because they support [their] ideology but because they oppose outside interference in their affairs, because they are rallied to support local tribal or community interests, or because they are alienated by heavy-handed actions of the intervening force.”⁷² This “accidental guerrilla syndrome” is a cyclical process that takes place in four phases – infection, contagion, intervention, and rejection. During the “infection” phase, an extremist movement enters a remote, ungoverned, or conflict-prone area and begins to establish its presence, often through the co-optation or intimidation of local tribes and community leaders or through a loose agreement with the state. In the second phase, “contagion,” the extremist’s influence spreads, affecting the region or country at large and attracting national or international attention. This provokes the “intervention” phase, during which national or international actors attempt to contain the extremist threat and the spread of subversion and violence emerging from this area. Although local actors may have initially opposed the extremist presence, this outside intervention prompts them to coalesce in defence of local interests and “clos[e] ranks against the external group.” This represents the “rejection” phase, during which local actors become “accidental guerrillas” fighting alongside extremist forces in opposition to outside interference in their affairs.⁷³ Despite the intervening force’s attempt to protect residents from the extremist threat, this shift in the local dynamic compels it to fight the whole of society.

These “accidental guerrillas” thus represent “reconcilable” fighters that, if carefully co-opted and won over by the intervening force, can be isolated from the “irreconcilable” extremist

⁷² Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 38.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 34-38.

core.⁷⁴ The American counterinsurgency effort employed in Iraq in 2007 best portrays this “population-centric approach.”⁷⁵ The accidental guerrilla syndrome in Iraq slightly differs from the above cycle, as it began with the invasion of the US and its ‘coalition of the willing’ in 2003. The popular backlash to the American intervention opened the door to infiltration by extremist forces, culminating in “an accidental guerrilla syndrome run riot.”⁷⁶ Rather than fighting for political or religious reasons or in support of the extremist’s ideology, most of these “accidentals” participated in the violence defensively, “out of a sense of threat and because of a belief that they had no alternative but to fight to the death to protect their communities in a terrifying and brutal environment.”⁷⁷ Faced with a situation spiralling out of control and thus operating from a position of weakness, the US launched the “troop surge” in 2007, which restructured its counterinsurgency strategy to focus on providing civilians with viable alternatives to violence. Kilcullen, as one of the primary architects of the surge, explains that:

what matters is providing security and order for the population, rather than directly targeting the enemy – though this type of strategy will also effectively marginalize them. And by engaging directly with the people, building local allies at the grassroots level, we could re-create the leverage we needed to stabilize the environment.⁷⁸

The US strategy thus aimed to build a “local ‘coalition of the willing’,”⁷⁹ thereby reducing the pool of future accidental guerrillas and denying the extremist fringe the ability to continue exploiting this population.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 128.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 130.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 165.

This embodies the accidental guerrilla's dilemma, as it must choose between two opposing and potentially hostile sides in a conflict. Importantly, these local fighters do not need to abide by the ideology of those they join; rather, they must simply view the interests of this faction as best coinciding with their own. Political actors will equally attempt to secure the support of these accidentals or, at a minimum, prevent their collaboration with their rivals.⁸⁰ This notion of "reconcilable" combatants extends beyond Kilcullen's analysis of the War on Terror. Stathis Kalyvas, for instance, notes that within civil wars, political actors with substantial territorial control can protect civilians living within that territory, "giving survival-oriented civilians a strong incentive to collaborate with them, irrespective of their true or initial preferences."⁸¹ Factions that are better financed, organized, and armed accrue more support, particularly as they offer greater security and order within the uncertain environment of insurgency. In a later study Kalyvas further adds that, irrespective of the strong preferences typically associated with ethnicity, "a substantial number of individuals collaborate with a political actor explicitly opposed to their own ethnic group."⁸² Clan or tribal ties, local cleavages, coercion, material incentives, and revenge are all motivations for "ethnic defection," as these civil wars instead "turn into contests for the loyalty of the population."⁸³ The offer of protection and various other material and non-material incentives thus factor into the tactical dilemma confronting these accidental guerrillas.

This dilemma similarly carries into the postwar environment. Faced with limited economic prospects, the threat of reprisals within their host communities, and an uncertain future

⁸⁰ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 12.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., "Ethnic Defection in Civil War," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 8 (2008): 1050.

⁸³ Ibid., 1055.

upon their demobilization, the need for security prevails among these former accidentals.⁸⁴ Consequently, if reintegration fails to alleviate these concerns, ex-combatants may return to armed groups remaining in the area⁸⁵ or seek protection through patron-client relationships or “war-networks” comprised of former commanders and combatants.⁸⁶ Mats Utas, for instance, observes that Liberian veterans, in exchange for protection and some income, often assumed the lowest echelon in patronage networks involving former commanders and government officials. As a result, they were then used “for boosting political rallies, [and] carrying out illegal activities such as busting business of rivals’ stores.”⁸⁷ For political actors in Liberia and other postwar settings, these reconcilable fighters represent a resource to be co-opted, thereby enabling them to achieve political ends, secure patronage networks, and reinforce their factions in the event of future violence.

The accidental guerrilla thus remains an important source of violence and coercion within the postwar environment. This paper will now show that DDR, in particular, provides dominant factions with access to these previously mobilized constituencies of trained fighters. Consequently, these programs may be exploited to reinforce or alter the balance of power in their favour. Returning to the case of northern Uganda, it will reveal that the amnesty and reintegration initiatives implemented became tools of war and control, designed to increase the government’s leverage over ex-combatants and expand its containment of a historically hostile population. As opposed to technical shortcomings in the design of DDR, as discussed earlier, this alternative framework instead highlights the government’s limited political commitment to

⁸⁴ Baines, Harris, and McCleery, for instance, cite the lack of personal security as the most common reason for rearming among ex-combatants in northern Uganda. Baines, Harris, and McCleery, ““Death is painful so it is better to be holding a gun,”” 630.

⁸⁵ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards*, 4.30.3.

⁸⁶ Utas, “Building a Future?” 139.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

meaningful reintegration and reconciliation, which compromised the eventual outcomes of these processes.

Preventing the Accidental Guerrilla Syndrome in Northern Uganda

From the beginning, the Ugandan government's counterinsurgency strategy in the north actively attempted to reduce the available pool of accidental guerrillas. The LRA initially enjoyed popular support by "feeding off the deep hostility in the region towards the southern dominated government."⁸⁸ Although most northern Ugandans did not explicitly support the rebel movement or its ideology, for many residents intensifying government oppression in the region meant that "there was no other way of surviving than to join the insurgency groups in one way or another."⁸⁹ To prevent this 'contagion' effect from spreading, the UPDF therefore organized civilians into local paramilitary units and forcibly displaced the population into the 'protected villages,' thereby depriving the LRA of potential recruits. Although the displacement camps were ostensibly designed to protect civilians, Dolan suggests that:

this juxtaposition of a concern with protecting peoples' physical security and a suspicion that these very same people might be supporting the rebels – and therefore in need of containment – reflected fundamental ambiguities in the relationship between people in northern Uganda and the southern-dominated government.⁹⁰

The formation of the camps, premised on an innate suspicion of the north, thus reinforced the resentment of many in the region towards the government. However, as the LRA retaliated to this strategy with the widespread killing and abduction of its Acholi-brethren, this counterinsurgency approach ultimately proved successful as support for the rebel group soon waned. Despite their prevailing hostility to the south, many of the potential accidental guerrillas in the north remained on the sidelines of the conflict.

⁸⁸ Borzello, "The Challenge of DDR in Northern Uganda," 146.

⁸⁹ Sverker Finnström, "Reconciliation Grown Bitter? War, Retribution, and Ritual Action in Northern Uganda," in *Localizing Transitional Justice: Interventions and Priorities after Mass Violence*, ed. Rosalind Shaw and Lars Waldorf (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 139.

⁹⁰ Dolan, *Social Torture*, 108.

The Ugandan government subsequently had to choose between pursuing a negotiated settlement with the LRA or continuing its military approach.⁹¹ These options entailed a trade-off between cost and risk. On the one hand, a population-centric strategy designed to settle the long-standing grievances of the LRA and the north, through political exchanges, economic development, and the protection of the population, could ultimately lead to the achievement of national reconciliation. However, this would also involve a significant injection of resources across the region, a particularly challenging enterprise as the Ugandan government derived over 50 percent of its annual budget from foreign aid⁹² and thus had “little in the way of economic power with which to exercise this control.”⁹³ On the other hand, a continued military approach could contain the violence and decisively defeat the rebel movement, but at the risk of further alienating the northern population. Following a military victory, the government could then redirect its resources to reconciliation, without the high initial costs of winning over the local population in the midst of an insurgency.⁹⁴

With the extremist threat largely isolated the Ugandan government operated from a position of relative strength, allowing it to choose the latter approach. Whereas the amnesty initiative – favoured by local leaders in the north as a means of securing a negotiated settlement to the conflict – suffered from a lack of government funding,⁹⁵ the UDPF in contrast enjoyed a

⁹¹ Ibid., 49.

⁹² Joel D. Barkan, “An African ‘Success’ Past its Prime,” in *Uganda: An African ‘Success’ Past Its Prime?: Proceedings of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Africa Program* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), 10.

⁹³ Dolan, *Social Torture*, 17.

⁹⁴ Robert Powell describes a similar trade-off between military expenditures and domestic spending or, alternatively, between “guns and butter.” He argues that once war eliminates one state in a bipolar system, military spending no longer has any instrumental value. Consequently, the victor can devote all of its resources to its domestic ends. Robert Powell, “Guns, Butter, and Anarchy,” *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 1 (1993): 117.

⁹⁵ Dolan, *Social Torture*, 52.

generous defense budget for the duration of the conflict.⁹⁶ Rather than declaring the war an exceptional case, the government thus treated the conflict as “a test of the efficacy and legitimacy of a ‘tough’ approach to threats to order in general,” thereby authorizing increased military autonomy and the ability to use coercive force.⁹⁷ Allegations of torture, rape, and indiscriminate violence against civilians by the UPDF have been widespread, leading critics to argue that this force has “committed crimes against civilians with near total immunity.”⁹⁸ Within this context, the government’s “lack of political will” in relation to amnesty and reintegration further undermined these initiatives.⁹⁹ Instead, they served only to bring in and co-opt the remaining reconcilable fighters, thus further isolating the extremist core and bringing down the scale of violence in the region.

Faced with a government “comport[ing] itself as an occupying force in hostile territory,”¹⁰⁰ the north became increasingly alienated from the polity. In a 2003 national survey, Carolyn Logan et al. observe that the north was “deeply disaffected with the political and economic system,” noting that only 33 percent of respondents in the north agreed with the statement that Uganda was a full democracy or had minor problems, compared to 68 percent in the west of the country and 55 percent in the east and centre.¹⁰¹ They further find that only 30 percent of northerners trust president Museveni or his intentions, again compared to 82 percent

⁹⁶ Robert Pinkney, *The Frontiers of Democracy: Challenges in the West, the East and the Third World* (Cornwall: Ashgate, 2005), 121.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Uprooted and Forgotten,” 2.

⁹⁹ Dolan, *Social Torture*, 52.

¹⁰⁰ Willet Weeks, *Pushing the Envelope: Moving Beyond ‘Protected Villages’ in Northern Uganda* (New York: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2002), 12.

¹⁰¹ Carolyn J. Logan, Nansozi Muwanga, Robert Sentamu, and Michael Bratton, “Insiders and Outsiders: Varying Perceptions of Democracy and Governance in Uganda,” *Afrobarometer Afrobarometer Paper No. 27* (March 2003): 5; 10.

in the west and 60 percent in the east and centre.¹⁰² As a result, in the presidential elections in 1996, 2001, and 2006, the north pointedly refused to vote for Museveni or his southern-dominated government.¹⁰³ These stark regional differences portray the northern population's increasing disillusionment with the government, as a result of its heavy-handed military solution to the conflict.

Within this context, the limited outcomes of the amnesty and reintegration initiatives failed to galvanize the support of the north, let alone that of ex-combatants. This latter group deeply distrusted the government, despite the promises of the amnesty commission to promote dialogue between government officials and former combatants. Many returnees were instead frustrated with the terms of amnesty, largely due to its "one-sided request for their surrender."¹⁰⁴ In effect, this established the government as the "*superior*" party to the conflict and thus "the ones to forgive the *inferior* party,"¹⁰⁵ thereby absolving the government of any accountability in the violence in the region. Others feared the government's commitment to the amnesty act, believing themselves to be in danger of persecution or abuse once the fighting stopped.¹⁰⁶ However, ex-combatants equally feared the prospect of re-abduction into the LRA, believing that they would be killed for previously escaping.¹⁰⁷ The lack of personal security in the displacement camps compounded these effects, leading many ex-combatants to consider rearming rather than "face a 'painful' and inevitable death" as civilians.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Ibid., 39.

¹⁰³ Borzello, "The Challenge of DDR in Northern Uganda," 148.

¹⁰⁴ Finnström, "Reconciliation Grown Bitter?" 151.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁶ Baines, Harris, and McCleery, "'Death is painful so it is better to be holding a gun,'" 632.

¹⁰⁷ Allen and Schomerus, *A Hard Homecoming*, 13.

¹⁰⁸ Baines, Harris, and McCleery, "'Death is painful so it is better to be holding a gun,'" 625.

These ex-combatants thus represented potential accidental guerrillas, as they supported neither side of the conflict but had strong incentives to collaborate with them. Indeed, as Baines, Harris and McCleery note through a series of qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with ex-combatants, there was “a discernible split between those who would choose to join the UPDF and those who would rejoin the LRA,”¹⁰⁹ suggesting they are motivated more by the offer of protection than by their personal allegiance to one side or the other. Although the government’s counterinsurgency strategy explicitly attempted to reduce the available pool of accidental guerrillas, this approach inadvertently heightened their incentives to rearm, thus posing an ongoing security challenge in the region.

Through the reintegration and reconciliation initiatives, however, the government could leverage its control over ex-combatants and prevent their return to war as accidental guerrillas. As returnees had to register for their amnesty and reintegration packages through the UPDF barracks, this offered the government considerable control over their eventual destination. In many cases, the UPDF attempted to recruit these former fighters directly into its ranks. In a survey of nearly 900 formerly abducted persons, Tim Allen and Mareike Schomerus observe that most returnees were asked to join the UPDF. Although the majority of respondents reported that they were not pressured, many stated that UPDF soldiers often emphasized the limited prospects available in the displacement camps or offered immediate cash incentives for joining.¹¹⁰ A similar report by Human Rights Watch finds that other returnees were aggressively persuaded to join. One returnee reported that:

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 633.

¹¹⁰ Allen and Schomerus, *A Hard Homecoming*, 31.

Soldiers would tempt and taunt us, insulting us for being in an army like the LRA which only runs away during the fighting. ‘Be a real man, fight with a real army now like the UPDF. You will get money for your work, a gun and a uniform.’¹¹¹

Many returnees ultimately opted to join the UPDF, leading to the formation of the 105 Battalion in 2002, comprised entirely of former rebel recruits.¹¹² The DDR process provided a channel through which the UPDF could actively recruit these ex-combatants, thereby preventing their return to the rebels in exchange for protection and income.

Recruitment into the UPDF offered two benefits to the government. First, in addition to their previous training as soldiers, these former rebel fighters have knowledge of the LRA’s tactics and hideouts, and have therefore been used to track down the rebels and hunt out arms caches.¹¹³ Jason Lyall, in a case study examining the links between ethnicity and violence in Chechnya, further points to the “coethnicity advantage” available through the use of coethnic counterinsurgents, as he finds that pro-Russian Chechen soldiers use their intraethnic networks to identify insurgents within the population and to issue credible threats against civilians for noncooperation.¹¹⁴ This suggests that coethnics, including the Acholi fighters recruited into the UPDF, are thus better equipped as counterinsurgents, thereby providing the Ugandan government with an additional resource to exploit in this conflict.

Second, and more importantly, recruitment of these ex-combatants leveraged the government’s control over these former rebels, thereby preventing their possible return to the LRA. Danny Hoffman argues that the barracks serve to organize labour, by “concentrat[ing]

¹¹¹ Focus group discussion with male former abductees. From Human Rights Watch, “Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda,” *Human Rights Watch* 15, no. 12 (2003): 57.

¹¹² Borzello, “The Challenge of DDR in Northern Uganda,” 159.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Lyall concludes that the “coethnicity advantage” results in a 40 percent decrease in subsequent violence relative to similar Russian-only operations. Jason Lyall, “Are Coethnics More Effective Counterinsurgents? Evidence from the Second Chechen War,” *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010).

bodies ... and subjects into formations that can be deployed quickly and efficiently to any corner of the empire.”¹¹⁵ The barracks therefore operate as a mode of assemblage, containment, and deployment, used to move these labourers into circulation in the commission of the state. In northern Uganda, the “bodily capital” of ex-combatants, predicated on “the high premium placed on physical force and prowess with a weapon,”¹¹⁶ thereby passed from one employer to the next. With control over the means of violence in the north, the government thus leveraged these accidental guerrillas as another tool of war within the broader counterinsurgency effort.

Failing this strategy of recruitment, the Ugandan government managed the transition of ex-combatants back into the displacement camps, where the highly visible military presence provided another source of control over these demobilized fighters. Giorgio Agamben, referring specifically to Auschwitz, argues that the formation of the concentration camp represents the moment when a state of emergency “begins to become the rule,” as its inhabitants are confined outside the rule of law, stripped of every political status, and “wholly reduced to bare life.”¹¹⁷ Within this space, the police reign supreme, and “whether or not atrocities are committed depends not on law but on the civility and ethical sense of the police who temporarily act as sovereign.”¹¹⁸ Hoffman continues this thought, arguing that above all, the camp is “an institution with the capacity to effectively police and manage its borders and internal functions,” thus allowing for “processes of classification, containment, and if necessary efficient extermination.”¹¹⁹ The displacement camps in northern Uganda equally became “prisons in a

¹¹⁵ Danny Hoffman, “The City as Barracks: Freetown, Monrovia, and the Organization of Violence in Postcolonial African Cities,” *Cultural Anthropology* 22, no.3 (2007): 402.

¹¹⁶ Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinity,” 22-23.

¹¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 169-171.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹¹⁹ Hoffman, “The City as Barracks,” 407.

very real sense,” as the heavy military presence restricted any access to land outside the camp and contained the population under threat of imprisonment or death.¹²⁰ Their inhabitants were “explicitly denied a livelihood,” and deprived of any political, economic, and social rights.¹²¹ Within these centres of organization, containment, and control, the reintegration of ex-combatants became a “process of turning young men and women into good inmates,”¹²² effectively limiting their escape from the government’s grasp.

As a tool of control, reintegration in this context complemented the broader processes of exclusion and oppression in the north by reducing the region’s capacity for future violence. Following their forced displacement, inhabitants of these camps were offered minimal government assistance, resulting in poor sanitation, the rampant spread of disease, and “one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world.”¹²³ The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre concludes that these camps failed to protect those living in the north from physical harm and human rights abuses, and instead served only to “[entrench] the Acholi people’s sense of political and social marginalization.”¹²⁴ Dolan extends this argument and suggests that the camps are a form of “social torture” perpetrated against the north, as “in the name of protection, the population experienced on a mass scale, the key elements of torture, most notably violation, debilitation, and humiliation.”¹²⁵ People’s rights to livelihoods, health, education, and physical

¹²⁰ Blattman and Annan, “Child Combatants in Northern Uganda,” 111.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ United Nations Radio Interview, 8 May 2005, www.un.org/av/radio/unandafrika/transcript47.htm, quoted in Anna Borzello, “The Challenge of DDR in Northern Uganda: The Lord’s Resistance Army,” in *Reintegrating Armed Groups After Conflict: Politics, Violence and Transition*, ed. Mats Berdal and David H. Ucko (London: Routledge, 2009), 145.

¹²⁴ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Uganda: Uncertain Future for IDPs while Peace Remains Elusive* (Geneva: IDMC, 2008), 4.

¹²⁵ Dolan, *Social Torture*, 17.

security were systematically denied, resulting in their physical, psychological, and cultural impoverishment and their “thwarted” aspirations and expectations.¹²⁶ The effect on civilians, Dolan continues, could “barely be described as post-traumatic,” as “for most people there is no end to the circumstances which caused the trauma.”¹²⁷ The camps thus provided the government with a “sense of control” over this historically “unruly” population without the high costs of national reconciliation, as “rather than excluding the Acholi from the national polity, it would ultimately bring about their subordinate inclusion.”¹²⁸ As Agamben suggests in reference to Auschwitz, the “state of exception” implemented on the basis of a factual danger thus became a “permanent spatial arrangement,” from which human beings were “so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime.”¹²⁹ By leveraging its influence over ex-combatants and thus controlling the means of violence, the government further removed the north’s capacity to resist its subjugation and reinforced the broader processes of exclusion and oppression in this region.

As tools of war and control, the reintegration and reconciliation initiatives implemented in northern Uganda complemented the government’s broader counterinsurgency effort in this region. With the extremist threat largely isolated, the government operated from a position of relative strength, allowing it to avoid the high initial costs of reconciliation in the midst of an insurgency. Consequently, it had minimal stake in the socioeconomic outcomes of the amnesty and reconciliation initiatives, and instead used these mechanisms to leverage its control over ex-combatants and prevent these potential accidental guerrillas from returning to the rebels. This complemented the broader historical processes of social exclusion in northern Uganda, thereby

¹²⁶ Ibid., 191.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 220.

¹²⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 169-171.

containing this population and further reinforcing the balance of power in the government's favour. This paper will now consider the implications of this study for post-conflict reconstruction, relative to both the achievement of reintegration and reconciliation and the international donors that fund these initiatives.

Implications for Reintegration and Reconciliation

In contrast to the “population-centric” approach advanced by the US in Iraq, which saw national reconciliation as possible once communities could “feel the boot come off their necks” and confidence between rival factions was restored,¹³⁰ the processes of exclusion and “social torture” visible in northern Uganda preclude any conception of meaningful reconciliation between the north and the south. The Ugandan government was instead concerned with controlling the means of violence in the future post-conflict environment, in order to ensure the inclusion of this population on a subordinate basis. Within this context, the amnesty and reintegration initiatives implemented enabled the government to leverage its control over these potential accidental guerrillas, thus securing their ‘bodily capital’ and reducing the north’s capacity for future violence. These reconcilable fighters therefore became a resource to be co-opted, as reintegration and reconciliation were largely secondary to the containment and exclusion of the north.

The conflict in northern Uganda may be unique in its progression, but its implications in relation to the implementation of reintegration and reconciliation initiatives are far more extensive. The growing literature on DDR has increasingly shifted towards a maximalist orientation, which views these interventions primarily as an opportunity for development. However, by locating the outcomes of DDR within the broader historical processes of social conflict, the alternative theoretical framework presented in this paper has revealed the profoundly politicized character of these operations. Viewed from this perspective, the limitations of reintegration are not solely technical in nature, nor solved by technical means. Rather, these programs are shaped and moulded by the broader competition for state power and resources, which necessarily affects their eventual design. As seen in northern Uganda, a faction

¹³⁰ Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla*, 126.

exercising considerable control over these initiatives may subvert this process to reinforce the balance of power in its favour, thereby reproducing the same exploitative relations and legacies of structural violence that facilitated the outbreak of war in the first place. This, of course, does not imply that the disappointing outcomes of DDR are always political in nature. Instead, by broadening their level of analysis, this paper suggests that scholars and practitioners may uncover similar political undercurrents in other post-conflict reconstruction contexts.

Although this paper restricted its empirical focus to the limitations of reintegration and reconciliation in northern Uganda, its insights also present broader implications regarding the international donors that continue to fund these initiatives. As the number and scale of operations increased during the 1990s, a growing number of members of the aid community committed to supporting DDR. By the end of the decade, over 20 UN agencies were actively involved in dozens of countries, in addition to bilateral donor governments, non-governmental organizations, and civil society actors.¹³¹ The World Bank, in particular, assumed an increasingly central role in planning and financing demobilization and reintegration programs. In 2002, for instance, it launched the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP), encompassing over 300,000 ex-combatants in seven countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Uganda. Mobilizing over 450 million USD in financial support, the MDRP was the largest DDR program in the world at the time of its close in 2009, demonstrating the considerable investment of the World Bank and other international donors in these processes.¹³²

These international donors have firmly advocated a maximalist approach to DDR, particularly as these “development problems” can be solved “by just the kind of aid that the

¹³¹ Muggah, “Introduction: The Emperor’s Clothes?” 8.

¹³² Disch, Bezerra, Mobekk, and Essoungou, *Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program*, 1.

World Bank or any other development aid institution happens to possess.”¹³³ However, in promoting and funding these technical solutions, they have ignored the politicized nature of these interventions, and have thus inadvertently “financed much of the machinery of exclusion, inequality, and humiliation” in these countries.¹³⁴ In Uganda, for instance, the World Bank’s MDRP granted 4.2 million USD to the Ugandan government in support of its amnesty and reintegration initiatives. Despite its concern with the government’s lack of political will and its overall negative impact on these processes, the World Bank failed to exert its considerable leverage in “overcoming the narrow and particularistic agendas of the authorities-in-power.”¹³⁵ Instead, it widely disseminated an image of Uganda as “the main example of successful African post-conflict recovery,” praising the country’s high rates of economic growth and its commitment to structural adjustment.¹³⁶ Situated in a technocratic realm outside politics, the World Bank and other international donors avoided adapting their policy prescriptions to political realities, and wilfully blinded themselves to the government’s heavy-handed approach to the conflict and the underlying legacies of political exclusion and oppression.¹³⁷ They thus became “complicit bystanders”¹³⁸ to the structural violence in northern Uganda, at the expense of meaningful reintegration and reconciliation in this region.

¹³³ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 44.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

¹³⁵ Disch, Bezerra, Mobekk, and Essoungou, *Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program*, 69.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Dolan, *Social Torture*, 237.

¹³⁷ Uvin, *Aiding Violence*, 45.

¹³⁸ Dolan, *Social Torture*, 1.

Conclusions

Since the collapse of the peace talks in 2008 and the subsequent withdrawal of the LRA to its bases in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic, a relative peace has settled over northern Uganda. As a result, with the LRA threat all but silenced, the government's efforts to reduce and control the available pool of accidental guerrillas have since receded. Instead, the government has largely held to the spirit of the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation negotiated during the peace talks, which advocates the establishment of a truth commission, the promotion of national trials, and the reinvention of traditional justice mechanisms.¹³⁹ Most of the displacement camps in the north have consequently been dismantled and their residents resettled in their home villages, while government resources have begun to flow into the area. However, the decades of forced displacement, human rights violations, and social torture, perpetrated with the complicit support of the international community, "have left deep wounds within the society and a sense of bitterness and alienation, particularly among the younger generation."¹⁴⁰ These legacies continue to resonate through the north, representing another chapter in the broader historical processes of social conflict. Within this context, meaningful reintegration and reconciliation may continue to elude former accidental guerrillas and their host communities, instead pulling them back into the continuum of war and peace that prevails in northern Uganda.

¹³⁹ Erin Baines, "Spirits and Social Reconstruction after Mass Violence: Rethinking Transitional Justice," *African Affairs* 109, no. 436 (2010): 410-411.

¹⁴⁰ Weeks, *Pushing the Envelope*, 7.

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