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By Kristian Berg Harpviken

Why do some refugees, upon return to their countries of origin, engage in violent action? This paper takes as its point of departure that in some refugee situations all those who return do not necessarily reintegrate peacefully; rather, a significant share engage in militant action. Amongst all refugee situations in the world, it is estimated that militarization is significant in some 15-20% of them, and post-return violent action seems particularly likely amongst those who were already mobilized while in exile. I will use literature on refugee warriors as my point of departure, and examine the relevance of the main factors emphasized in this literature to facilitate the understanding of what we may name returnee warriors. After a brief examination of the main contributions on refugee warriors, I will move on to look at three sets of explanatory factors: enabling environment, ideology, and organization. The paper draws primarily on insights from the three past decades of armed conflict in Afghanistan (see also: Harpviken, forthcoming). The main ambitions for the paper are to contribute to an expanding analytical framework for refugee warrior phenomena, and move towards an agenda for future research.

There are strong linkages between the reintegration of returnees, on the one hand, and the demobilization and reintegration of fighters on the other. As most observers point out, the successful reintegration of fighters is a precondition for fostering the security needed for the successful reintegration of returnees (see, for example, Faubert *et al.* 2005: 27). Thus, there is a strong need to invest heavily in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs, although this poses serious moral dilemmas:

DDR programs in post-war societies often arouse debate over whether combatants ... should be accorded special treatment over groups such as refugees and internally displaced people. (Sedra 2003: 16)

A portion of the returnees are (current or former) fighters; and, vice versa, a portion of the fighters are found among the refugees. Nonetheless, it is common to distinguish sharply between fighters and returning refugees. The two are seen as distinct rather than overlapping groups, and the return of refugees, all of whom are assumed to be ‘civilians,’ is seen to signify a successful peace process. Howard Adelman has examined the assumption that refugee return is a condition for—or at least a significant indicator of—a viable peace process, and he finds that that there is no relationship (Adelman 2002; see also Bhatia 2003; Chimni 2003; Eastmond & Öjendal 1999). More dramatically, however, is that the rapid return of refugees may threaten the viability of peace if they are actually fighters or are mobilized as fighters. In that case, the returnees themselves may represent a security threat, and hence undermine a peace process.¹ There is an

¹ This goes beyond the question of ‘absorptive capacity’, raised above, which focuses on the capacity of the community to assist and accommodate returnees, first and foremost in the economic domain.

understandable reluctance to realize that the same person may be a returning refugee and fighter—both victim and perpetrator. The 'refugee warrior' debate has yet to inform the analysis of return and reintegration.

'REFUGEE WARRIORS'

Forced migration contexts are fertile grounds for violent collective action. This may seem obvious from today's perspective, but when the term 'refugee warriors' was launched in the late 1980s, it was highly controversial. The term was coined by Astri Suhrke, and introduced through the collaborative work of Aristide Zolberg, Astri Suhrke and Sergio Aguayo (1986; 1989), particularly in the book *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World*. The term brought attention to an important, yet so far neglected, aspect of displacement. Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo define refugee warrior communities as:

highly conscious refugee communities with a political leadership structure and armed sections engaged in warfare for a political objective, be it to recapture the homeland, change the regime, or secure a separate state (1989: 275)

The refugee warrior concept challenges conventional images of refugees as victims, emphasizing their potential to be conscious subjects, even with a capacity for violent action. As such, the concept is also a challenge to international law, which is premised on the demarcation between refugees and activists. Despite a radical insistence on agency, however, the emphasis is on the root causes of conflict rather than on the mechanisms by which conflict leads to displacement—or to political mobilization amongst the displaced.

Believing that refugee warriorism is on the rise, Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo find the root cause of the phenomenon in a process of globalization where political and economic inequality becomes increasingly evident. Driven from their home by repressive political regimes, radical groups launch armed struggles to gain political power in their state of origin. In doing this, the support of other states—host countries and great powers—plays a crucial role. While such alliances between states and opposition groups based in exile are not new, they have grown more important in the post-World War II era for two reasons. First, there is the evolution of an 'international refugee regime that can sustain large-scale civilian populations in exile for years'. Second, what the authors refer to as the 'dominant ideology of democratic nationalism' implies that exile-based opposition groups depend on a civilian population for legitimacy (1989: 277).

Following the introduction of the term, there was virtually no work on refugee warriors for more than a decade.² From 2002 onwards, however, there have been three main contributions on the refugee warrior phenomena by Fiona Terry (2002), Sarah Kenyon Lischer (2002, 2004), and Stephen John Stedman & Fred Tanner (2003). All of these are framed within a larger debate on humanitarianism, in large part inspired by the

² The only exceptions known to this author are: Adelman 1998; Goodson 1990.

realization that the refugee regime sustained Rwanda's war perpetrators in the mid-1990s. A main concern is how humanitarian actors are to respond to the militarization of refugees. Analytically, however, there are significant differences between the three contributions:

- Fiona Terry, in 2002, published *Condemned to Repeat: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*. Her analytical focus is on the refugee regime. Militarized groups are assisted in misusing 'humanitarian sanctuaries,' which allow militants to hide and gives them independence based on humanitarian assistance. Finally, refugee camps facilitate control by militants who, in turn, gain legitimacy from their roles in camp management. For Terry, the humanitarian regime is both a necessary and sufficient factor in explaining refugee mobilization.
- Sarah Kenyon Lischer published the book *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil Wars and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid*, which came out in 2005. Lischer is also preoccupied with the humanitarian dilemma, but she takes a broader analytical perspective by comparing the contribution of refugee relief with other factors, including the supportive role of the host state and that of other states. While the refugee regime plays a central role in Lischer's account, the main factor that distinguishes refugee populations producing violence from those that don't is the supportive role of states.
- Stephen John Stedman and Fred Tanner have edited the volume *Refugee Manipulation: War, Politics and the Abuse of Human Suffering*, published in 2003. They note that militarization appears in some, but not all, refugee crises, and are skeptical of a root cause orientation. In the volume's conclusion, Stedman notes two pathways to refugee mobilization. In some cases, such as Afghanistan during the Cold War, state support would breed mobilization regardless of the refugee regime. In other cases, such as Rwanda in the mid-90s, humanitarian naivety was a sufficient factor for militants to mobilize successfully.

All of these authors privilege certain types of explanations: Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo the contradictory forces of globalization; Terry, Lischer, and Stedman & Tanner emphasize the role of humanitarian relief; and all the authors, with the exception of Terry, highlight the role of the host state as well as other states. In all these authorships, there is only scant attention to the internal dynamics of refugee mobilization. The main analytical focus is on the factors that allow or stimulate it. In the following, I will first look at factors that are part of the enabling environment for refugee mobilization, including the refugee regime and the role of state support, which figure so prominently in the existing literature. I will then move on to look at the role of ideology. Finally, I will examine organizational issues, and, on the whole, reflect on the relevance for our understanding of the return and reintegration of refugee warriors.

THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

With Charles Tilly's *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), the debate on political mobilization turned much of its attention to the role of structures external to the group in enabling or preventing mobilization. Formulated in rational choice terms, the question is how the movement is going to be able to raise the resources necessary for rewarding or threatening members to come aboard, what Mancur Olson had earlier described as the problem of producing selective incentives (Olson 1965). The focus on opportunities and constraints goes a long way in explaining how resource-poor populations may be able to foster powerful political movements. This is a main element in all the works quoted on refugee warriorism, the international state system and the refugee regime being the two main elements, while attitudes of host populations and geographical features play a more marginal role as explanatory factors.

The state figures prominently in most work on political mobilization, with a role not only as the main threat and adversary, but also as a structure that may be influenced constructively by various means from lobbying to unrest and violence. The refugees and many IDPs have moved to a territory which is not under the control of the state they oppose. This limits the state's ability to threaten contenders. It also narrows down the ways in which contenders may influence the state, with violent action becoming a primary option. The host state is key for the freedom to maneuver. Lischer (2005: 30-33) suggests that two factors are key for host state response: capability and willingness. The host state's relationship to the state of origin is essential, as is the extent to which the latter is in a position to threaten the former. Distant states, and great powers in particular, are also important factors (Zolberg, Suhrke & Aguayo 1986: 165), but their relative importance may have diminished with the end of the Cold War (Lischer 2000) as also indicated by the contrast between the massive refugee support to Afghans during the 1980s versus the dwindling support of the 1990s. Moreover, there is a fundamental difference between host states (and other neighboring states) in that they are tied to the fate of the conflict-ridden country by virtue of their geographic location, whereas distant powers may choose whether or not to engage. The role of the US in Afghanistan over the past 25 years, for example, has varied between virtually zero interest to being the major foreign power in the country.

After refugees have gone home, the former host state, or certain actors within the host state, may find it in its interest to maintain the relationships that were built while the refugees were in exile. In this, former host states may even find it useful to follow the refugees home and establish their own presence in the country of origin in the form of diplomatic missions, educational institutions or other assistance programs. For example, soon after the Afghan regime change in 1992, key actors in Pakistan's mujahedin-supporting apparatus popped up as active players on the Kabul scene. Such a presence may have multiple purposes: to provide political and military advice, to broker various kinds of material support, and to gather information on behalf of their own institutions. Ultimately, the purpose is to promote the installation of a 'friendly government,' and to prevent the coming to power of an unfriendly one. In protracted conflicts where armed interference through support to refugees has long been considered a legitimate tool, it is

dangerously easy to continue a similar policy in the post-return phase. It is easy to harmonize the interest of host states in securing as immediate a return as possible and in continuing political collaboration upon return.

A second dimension of the enabling structure, which offers both protection and humanitarian support, is the refugee regime. Zolberg and associates point out that once established, refugee warrior communities “tend to grow because they provide opportunities and even incentives for others to become politically active” (1986: 166). The ability of humanitarians to operate, of course, depends on the goodwill of host states. The willingness of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to compromise in the case of Afghans in Pakistan in the 1980s was, in part, related to the ideological climate of the Cold War, but also reflected that the agency had little leverage since the host country was not a signatory to the Refugee Convention (Lischer 2004: 60). In practice, humanitarian assistance was an integral part of support to the Afghan resistance since refugee documents were only obtained upon having joined one of the political parties recognized by the Pakistani government (Amstutz, 1986: 229). The distinction between refugees and fighters, so fundamental in refugee law, is far removed from such grim realities.

In relation to return, the most direct link is that a changing refugee regime prioritizes and encourages repatriation—in contrast to other solutions. In her case study from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarah Lischer suggests that third country resettlement and local integration are potentially effective responses to refugee mobilization (2005: 145). Similarly, both options, third country resettlement and local reintegration, would preempt the potential for returnee warriorism. The problem, however, is that these options seem increasingly out of reach (Chimni 2005). Upon return, the refugee regime, and the humanitarian regime more generally, does not play as prominent a role as during exile. Nonetheless, as long as humanitarian actors remain ignorant about the possibility that returnees may be or may become warriors, there is a risk that they will support the production of violence. Some of the mechanisms may be similar to those in exile: protection (defining returnees as worthy of special treatment) and strengthening leaders (serving as intermediaries for material support to returnees). Returnees who have lived with refugee support in exile may have learnt the rules of the game, and seek to manipulate the humanitarian regime upon return. In 1997-98, for example, the Taliban cleverly got various humanitarian agencies to support Pashtun IDPs who had escaped from fighting in Badghis and Faryab, while simultaneously drawing fighters from these populations.

In the refugee warrior literature, considerable weight is placed on geographical features. Closeness to a state border is considered important, not only because it facilitates incursions into the country of origin, but also because to residents it serves as a constant reminder of war and the need for protection by militants (Zolberg, Suhrke, Aguayo 1989: 277). As important, however, is the reception by the population in areas of settlement. For the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, the Islamic obligation, rooted in the *hijra*, to assist co-believers was reinforced by joint Pashtun ethnicity and hospitality norms, as well a history of frequent interaction across a porous border. In time, this gave

way to an integration that was so close that the Taliban regime, which ruled most of Afghanistan in the latter half of the 1990s, can only meaningfully be described as a transnational Afghan-Pakistani phenomenon, bred mainly in religious schools in Pakistan.

Geographical proximity, a history of porous borders, and identity commonalities between hosts and (departing) refugees are all factors that may strengthen both the capability and willingness—to use Lischer's terms—of former host states to engage. More generally, those are also factors, which give returnee warriors more room to maneuver. Returnees may settle in areas different from the ones they left, either because the political and economic situation at their original home has changed dramatically, or—as is often the case following prolonged exile—their preferences have changed. The ramifications may be massive, particularly if political fault lines coincide with ethnic or religious distinctions.

IDEOLOGY

Ideology, states Sidney Tarrow (1998; 21), serves both to “justify, dignify and animate collective action.” Ideology reinforces identities, thereby helping individuals respond to the question of whose side they are on, and permitting diverse groups to focus on common aims. Importantly, neither identities nor ideologies are fixed. Rather, movement members engage actively in what David Snow and Robert Benford (1988) have referred to as ‘framing work,’ or continuously working on their ideological justification. This framing, however, does not take place in a vacuum; states, the media and international organizations also contribute to framing, sometimes to the extent that movements’ attempts at framing are rendered useless.

Refugee warrior literature puts considerable emphasis on ideological frames. In the account of Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, for example, refugeehood serves an essential function in legitimizing violent struggle, mediated both by the refugee regime and ideals of democratic nationalism (1989: 277). Also Lischer (2005: 8-9) and Terry (2002: 42-47) emphasize the legitimizing function of the refugee regime. The emphasis, however, is on justifying armed resistance to the larger world in order to underpin continued support, rather than on legitimizing a just cause internally, for movement members.

After the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, refugee warrior leaders made violent threats to discourage return (see, for example, Rizvi 1990). This underlines the key role that the refugee population has for legitimizing continued resistance from exile, and, vice versa, timing return so that this legitimization effect is saved for a new regime, rather than the importance of boosting the image of the one in power. The cognitive distinction between refugees and warriors rooted in the refugee regime makes it possible for a new regime to gain international legitimacy through a return movement that may, at the same time, be a necessary import of fighters. The principle of a ‘right to return’, equally fundamental within refugee law and even more so with the increasing pressure on host country integration and third country resettlement, also takes attention away from

the potential that returning refugees may have a destabilizing effect and even contribute directly as active fighters.

The image of displaced people as victims of circumstances beyond their control can also be useful for internal purposes, contributing to a sense of common purpose and a justified cause. With a focus on internal legitimization in the Afghan resistance, Shahrani (1995) has argued that religious institutions—*jihad* and *hijra*—have played a key role. *Jihad* refers to religious struggle with resistance as one avenue of action, whereas *hijra* refers to religiously motivated flight modeled on the narrative of Mohammad's flight to Medina (see also Edwards 1986). In Shahrani's account, the two are mutually reinforcing, providing a religious justification for a violent response to being driven out by infidels. The refugees from Mecca severed all ties with those who did not join the flight, and established tight bonds with the host population and the emerging community that became the nucleus of the *Ummah*, the community of Muslims.

Eight years after the original departure, Mecca fell to the community of 'refugee warriors' returning from Medina. Similar to the first Muslims, argues Shahrani, the Afghan refugees have proven reluctant to distinguish between the decision to flee and the obligation to resist oppression (1995: 200). Like in the original narrative, return is an integral part of the religious obligation. The prophet and his followers returned as warriors, overthrew the sitting regime and established a legitimate government. In Shahrani's account, Muslim identity is linked to particular narratives, *jihad* and *hijra*, and together the two have a mobilizing effect. Both in the original narrative and in the Afghanistan of recent times, *jihadic* obligation is rooted in the maintenance, and even cultivation, of a collective during the time in exile. Ideologies, however, may be formed in settings that are fairly insulated from the situation in the state of origin, and may become particularly inflexible when not being molded in the everyday interaction with political opponents. At the extreme, therefore, they may prevent reconciliation and promote further violent conflict. Such incompatibility of worldviews may be particularly strong in the aftermath of protracted (or multigenerational, as in the Palestinian case) exiles.

Identity formation in exile is the main issue in Lisa Malkki's celebrated *Purity and Exile*, based on fieldwork among Hutu refugees in Tanzania, where she compares refugees settled in camps with those living dispersed in towns. In Malkki's account, focus is on the construction of national consciousness in exile. The camp refugees work to refine ethnic boundaries in a continuous process of constructing their history as a people unjustly exiled, which brings them to resist intermarriages or any form of local integration. The town refugees do their best to avoid classification, both as refugees and as Hutus, and they play on multiple identities in seeking local integration. For the camp refugees, the exile project is to become a nation, and international opinion is perceived as the ultimate arbitrator in the struggle for justice (1995: 251). This is reminiscent of the emphasis on the legitimizing function of democratic nationalism by Zolberg and associates.

For the camp refugees, argues Malkki, exile is seen as a period of purification and political empowerment, as the centre of political change in the home country (1995: 230). Return is the unquestionable objective, and violence is the legitimate means to resurrect past injustice and gain power in the country of origin. In Malkki's case, there are only two options. One is to refine one's identity in exile through cultivating difference from the host population in preparation for a politicized return. The second is to play down the differences from the host population in seeking enduring integration. There is, however, a third possible trajectory: refugees (or other migrants) may cultivate an identity — tribal, ethnic, religious or otherwise — which they share with all or parts of the host population. Over time, such an identity project may serve to reinforce existing, or even form new, types of transnational identities with political repercussions. The Taliban, originating mainly in the *madrasas* of Pakistan, became such a movement that was formed from an amalgamation of Deobandi-inspired Islamic ideology and Pashtun traditionalist values (increasingly also Al Qaeda militancy) that effectively spanned the boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan.³

ORGANIZATION

Social institutions—such as schools, religious congregation sites or community assemblies—can serve as platforms for political mobilization. In the study of refugee warriors, there is considerable agreement that camp-settled refugees, as opposed to self-settled ones, are the ones that are likely to be politically mobilized. Lischer (2004: 145), for example, suggests that integration in the host country prevents military engagement. My own work on Afghan refugees in Iran, in contrast, suggests that a significant degree of military engagement, including host state support, is also possible amongst self-settled refugees (Harpviken 2006: 181-185; forthcoming).⁴ The facilities for the displaced and for the military units are often separate, argues Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo (1989: 276). Sites for the military units, however, are even more important when the recruits are drawn from self-settled refugees. Furthermore, in the case of camp-settled refugees, the lines between the refugee camp and the military camp are blurred, and fighters are likely to circulate between the two. A second type of institution that proved particularly important in the Afghan case is the centre of Islamic training, the *madrasa*, already discussed above. A massive expansion of the *madrasa* system in Pakistan made it into primary centers for ideological training and for recruitment (Harpviken 1997). The *madrasas* were central recruitment grounds for the resistance parties in the 1980s, as they were for the Taliban in the 1990s.

Refugee camps have little role to play upon return, but there are cases where refugee camps are sustained for years after repatriation starts and serve as an integral part

³ A different example relates to those of Afghanistan's shia population who became enrolled in shia religious training institutions in Iran. Many of those came to identify themselves with a Khomeini-style Islamism. Throughout the past two and a half decades of war, the tensions between such a Islamist project and a nationalist Hazara project have run high, inspiring considerable fighting (the Hazara constitute at least 90% of Afghanistan's shia population, and vice versa) (Harpviken 1998).

⁴ One main difference – born out by the comparison between Afghans in Iran vs. in Pakistan – is that in camp-settlements it is likely that there is a significant international presence and reporting. When self-settlement is the main pattern, it is likely that such presence is either marginal or non-existing.

of transnational networks in which returnees are also a part. It may also be that returnees end up in camp-like settings (IDP camps included) upon return, where one can recognize some of the properties of the refugee camp. Other exile-based institutions may be brought back home as part of the return movement, such as schools, or they may remain an important point of reference in exile for those who have returned, perhaps even tied to a continued refugee administrative system existing in exile which continues to indirectly assist those who have returned.

Collective action thinking in the 1980s increasingly came to appreciate the importance of social networks for activism (e.g. McAdam 1986).⁵ Rather than individually held preferences guiding choices, people tend to act jointly with relevant others. Those who escape war often do so as part of larger collectives (Allen & Hiller 1986; Harpviken 2006). In many instances, those who flee together also settle together in exile, and refugee camps are often composed of numerous tightly knit groups. Flight collectives may be based on groups that were already politically mobilized and became subject to government countermeasures, what Zolberg *et al.* (1989: 25) typologizes as the 'activist' ideal type and Lischer (2004: 24-28) refers to as 'state-in-exile refugees'. The sequence, however, may also be different, as when collectives sharing a political project escape prior to taking up arms, in the realization that opposition can only be launched from a safe distance. Within communities of the displaced, old and new ties serve a key function in new recruitments into violent resistance (Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo 1989: 277).⁶

Similarly, there may be different patterns of mobilization in the context of return. The genuine 'returnee warrior' is somebody who is part of a military entity whilst in exile, and who returns as part of this group. This implies both an obligation to contribute to the assertion of the group's power and an expectation that the group will offer protection to the fighter and his dependents. Such groups, which may be rooted in commonality of origin and identity, tend to be quite robust. Peter Bearman, in a study of desertion during the American Civil War, has suggested that military units rooted in existing modes of solidarity were late, but that their members acted jointly once desertion was on the agenda. Entities based on individual recruitment started fragmenting earlier but took a much longer time to collapse (Bearman 1991). A second option is that refugees who are not politically or militarily active in exile are recruited upon return.⁷ This could be explained by socio-economic factors, such as the lack of alternative employment, or it may be explained by the need to gain protection in a situation where the state is not capable of doing so.

⁵ See also Hardin 1995: chapter 2; Tarrow 1998: 22-23

⁶ In relation to return of refugee warriors, Bearman's suggestion, based on desertion patterns in the American Civil War, that fighting units built on solidary ties are slower to demobilize, but are likely to do so more effectively once they start, may be a source of inspiration. (Bearman 1991)

⁷ One possibility may be that a small returning radicalized group sets itself up as the vanguard of a new opposition in the home country, recruiting primarily amongst people who have not been exiled at all. This would be similar to a sequence which seems fairly common in refugee mobilization, where a radicalized group escape and recruit amongst other refugees who were not necessarily politically active prior to flight.

Leadership is a different aspect of organization. For example, Alain Guillo, Jean-Jose Puig and Olivier Roy—close observers of the Afghan exodus in the early 1980s—claimed:

A hejrat protest exodus is always collective, organized and inspired by traditional notables ... it implies the movement of a structured group to another country, usually Pakistan, where it retains its cohesion for a certain length of time (Guillo, Puig & Roy 1983: 140).⁸

Once in exile, however, traditional leaders may find it difficult to retain their power. In camps, influence over aid distribution is key, and many observers found that in this environment, young, educated, English-speaking men fare much better than the traditional notables (e.g. Ahmed 1980; Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont 1988). Links to the host state play as important a role: in the Pakistani case the main resistance leaders were recruited from a small group of Afghan Muslim Brotherhood associates who had left home in the first half of the 1970s to launch armed struggle against their own regime, having gained the tacit support of the host government. Ultimately, the mobilization of refugee warriors may entail a degree of force by leaders within the population, as Stedman and Tanner maintain in their insistence that the manipulators of refugees are the warrior leadership (2003: 3).⁹ In the Afghan case, those who had left in the early 1970s became the vanguard of the resistance, appointed by Pakistan's intelligence services, to whom they were already well known. Unless there had been a Soviet invasion followed by a massive refugee flow, these pioneer activists would most likely have remained an irrelevant crowd of exile extremists.

Refugee warrior leaders are likely to be amongst the first to return in the context of regime change, and they are likely to possess many of the resources needed to gain powerful positions. Their long-term fate, however, may be more uncertain. In the case of post-1992 Afghanistan, it seems there was a partial reinvigoration of traditional modes of leadership. As the enabling resource environment of humanitarian aid that empowered the new elites in exile is not there anymore, old elites may be able to benefit from land and other resources at home and gradually rebuild their influence. This may imply that the 'new leaders' lose out in the longer term, in some cases to the extent that their status changes from well-respected resistance leaders to despised warlords, with the inherent risk that they become 'spoilers'.

⁸ Translation adapted from BIA (1985: 14). See also Centlivres & Centlivres-Demont (1988b), Edwards (1986).

⁹ Lischer (2004: 154-156) also suggests that aid agencies may revert to influencing leadership amongst refugees in order to prevent or reduce mobilization pressure.

CONCLUSIONS

The reintegration of refugee warriors is a central challenge in many post-conflict transitions. Placing this central, but not talked about, issue on the agenda is important in itself. As important, however, is that we now have an embryonic term and fragments of a research agenda. To make progress, we need to formulate a consistent research agenda with a parallel focus on theoretical and methodological approaches, while maintaining an awareness of the possible policy impact.

Theoretically, refugee warrior literature distinguishes between types of refugee populations, which are seen to have varying propensity for mobilization. Similarly, we may build a typology of returnees based on an understanding of the context for return. It may prove necessary to include the conditions at home, the conditions in exile, and the original causes for departure, which would lead to a number of trajectories that could—or could not—lead to mobilization of refugees.

To pursue such an agenda, the first step is an intensified engagement with the existing literature on refugee warriors, as well as literature on post-conflict transitions, particularly demobilizations. The next step is to identify a small number of cases with ample documentation of different distinct patterns of returnee engagement. In the final stage, a larger sample, including at least all conflict terminations in the post Cold War era, should be made subject to systematic comparative analysis.

A debate on refugee warriors in the post-conflict phase challenges existing policies and practice. At the intersection between two issues, the return and reintegration of refugees on the one hand and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of fighters on the other, research on returnee warriors has the potential to inform both.

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