



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN COMPROMISE AFTER CONFLICT

Ex-Combatants' Voices

Transitioning from War to Peace in
Northern Ireland, South Africa and
Sri Lanka

Edited by John D. Brewer · Azrini Wahidin



palgrave
macmillan

Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict

Series Editor

John D. Brewer
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast, UK

This series aims to bring together in one series scholars from around the world who are researching the dynamics of post-conflict transformation in societies emerging from communal conflict and collective violence. The series welcomes studies of particular transitional societies emerging from conflict, comparative work that is cross-national, and theoretical and conceptual contributions that focus on some of the key processes in post-conflict transformation. The series is purposely interdisciplinary and addresses the range of issues involved in compromise, reconciliation and societal healing. It focuses on interpersonal and institutional questions, and the connections between them.

More information about this series at
<http://www.palgrave.com/gp/series/14641>

John D. Brewer • Azrini Wahidin
Editors

Ex-Combatants' Voices

Transitioning from War to Peace
in Northern Ireland, South Africa
and Sri Lanka

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

John D. Brewer
Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for
Global Peace, Security and Justice
Queen's University Belfast
Belfast, UK

Azrini Wahidin
Department of Sociology
University of Warwick
Coventry, UK

Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict

ISBN 978-3-030-61565-9

ISBN 978-3-030-61566-6 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-61566-6>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2021

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG. The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*For John's grandchildren Matilda, Tobias, Merryn, Juliet and Theo
In the hope they never have to live through what their parents and
grandparents did*

and

*For Azrini's mother Che Mah Wahidin and her sister Wan-Nita, for their
love and friendship.*

Series Editor's Preface: Palgrave Studies in Compromise After Conflict

Compromise is a much used but little understood term. There is a sense in which it describes a set of feelings (the so-called spirit of compromise) that involve reciprocity, representing the agreement to make mutual concessions towards each other from now on: no matter what we did to each other in the past, we will act towards each other in the future differently as set out in the agreement between us. The compromise settlement can be a spit and a handshake, much beloved in folklore, or a legally binding statute with hundreds of clauses.

As such, it is clear that compromise enters into conflict transformation at two distinct phases. The first is during the conflict resolution process itself, where compromise represents a willingness amongst parties to negotiate a peace agreement that represents a second-best preference in which they give up their first preference (victory) in order to cut a deal. A great deal of literature has been produced in Peace Studies and International Relations on the dynamics of the negotiation process and the institutional and governance structures necessary to consolidate the agreement afterwards. Just as important, however, is compromise in the second phase, when compromise is part of post-conflict reconstruction, in which protagonists come to learn to live together despite their former enmity and in face of the atrocities perpetrated during the conflict itself.

In the first phase, compromise describes reciprocal agreements between parties to the negotiations in order to make political concessions

sufficient to end conflict; in the second phase, compromise involves victims and perpetrators developing ways of living together in which concessions are made as part of shared social life. The first is about compromises between political groups and the state in the process of state-building (or re-building) after the political upheavals of communal conflict, and the second is about compromises between individuals and communities in the process of social healing after the cultural trauma provoked by the conflict.

This book series primarily concerns itself with the second process, the often messy and difficult job of reconciliation, restoration and repair in social and cultural relations following communal conflict. Communal conflicts and civil wars tend to suffer from the narcissism of minor differences, to coin Freud's phrase, leaving little to be split halfway and compromise on, and thus are usually especially bitter. The series therefore addresses itself to the meaning, manufacture and management of compromise in one of its most difficult settings. This book series is cross-national and cross-disciplinary, with attention paid to inter-personal reconciliation at the level of everyday life, as well as culturally between social groups, and the many sorts of institutional, inter-personal, psychological, sociological, anthropological and cultural factors that assist and inhibit societal healing in all post-conflict societies, historically and in the present. It focuses on what compromise means when people have to come to terms with past enmity and the memories of the conflict itself and relate to former protagonists in ways that consolidate the wider political agreement.

This sort of focus has special resonance and significance for peace agreements is usually very fragile. Societies emerging out of conflict are subject to ongoing violence from spoiler groups who are reluctant to give up on first preferences, constant threats from the outbreak of renewed violence, institutional instability, weakened economies and a wealth of problems around transitional justice, memory, truth recovery and victimhood, amongst others. Not surprisingly therefore, reconciliation and healing in social and cultural relations are difficult to achieve, not least because inter-personal compromise between erstwhile enemies is difficult.

Lay discourse picks up on the ambivalent nature of compromise after conflict. It is talked about in common sense in one of two ways, in which

compromise is either a virtue or a vice, taking its place among the angels or in Hades. One form of lay discourse likens concessions to former protagonists with the idea of restoration of broken relationships and societal and cultural reconciliation, in which there is a sense of becoming (or returning) to wholeness and completeness. The other form of lay discourse invokes ideas of appeasement, of being *compromised* by the concessions, which constitute a form of surrender and reproduce (or disguise) continued brokenness and division. People feel they continue to be beaten by the sticks which the concessions have allowed others to keep; with restoration, however, weapons are turned truly in ploughshares. Lay discourse suggests, therefore, that these are issues that the Palgrave Studies in Compromise after Conflict series must begin to problematise, so that the process of societal healing is better understood and can be assisted and facilitated by public policy and intervention.

The contribution of one significant stakeholder to this process of compromise—that of ex-combatants—goes mostly unheralded. To their supporters they are martyrs and heroes; to their detractors they are demons. What this volume calls the ‘martyr-hero-demon syndrome’ is, the editors’ point out, an unfruitful lens through which to understand ex-combatants, and the volume advocates a more nuanced moral framework to locate the transition they have made from war to peace. It is a compelling book because it deals with the messy and complex issue of the morality of political violence and the social and emotional reintegration of those responsible for it. This gives the volume a high level of originality.

The ‘martyr-hero-demon syndrome’ also fails to capture that most people do not emotionally engage them as martyrs, heroes or demons, but are simply indifferent to ex-combatants. There is an understandable sense in which ordinary people’s indifference makes them reluctant to applaud those who give up on the military struggle, since, they argue, they should never have taken up arms in the first place. This view is naïve and misplaced. Violence can be virtuous and necessary, especially in the context of decolonisation, human rights abuses, extreme structural inequality and repression. This naivety does mean, however, that militant groups never get the credit they deserve for shifting to a political strategy. In cases where they win, the new regime can quickly move on from war economies and war politics, finding ex-combatants an inconvenience, in

much the same way they find victims problematic. Post-apartheid South Africa comes closest to this case. When they lose, ex-combatants face a double bind, since criminalisation, social ostracism, rejection and neglect are added to the loss, as in Sri Lanka. In cases where there is a negotiated second-preference political settlement, ex-combatants have an ambiguous status as a painful reminder of the legacy of war. This ambiguity is especially problematic where the mutually agreed settlement is fragile and contested. Ex-combatants in these circumstances become the focus of the contestation over the morality of the war and whether the violence was worth it. Northern Ireland represents such a case. The latest volume in this series, which addresses ex-combatants in Northern Ireland, South Africa and Sri Lanka, therefore has unusual pertinence since the position and status of ex-combatants in each country are quite different.

Another significant contribution made by this book is the way it complements two earlier volumes in the series that captured the voices of victims in the same three case countries. Cross-national comparisons are useful in peace research but rarely attempted, often because peace processes are quite different, and the comparisons made here with respect to the status and position of ex-combatants in these three countries allow contrasts to be drawn between the perspectives of victims and combatants in the three places, and their differences.

Another theme of the volume makes for an even stronger justification for addressing ex-combatants, which is its focus on the transition many ex-combatants make toward engagement with peace. They can become, in the words of some authors, 'peace warriors', struggling as hard to consolidate conflict transformation as they once did in combat. Ex-combatants are often a significant constituency in support of political solutions and many become active in the search for compromise. Their involvement in 'bottom up' restorative justice programmes is well documented. It often takes someone who fights a war to see its emotional costs; bystanders can be the most belligerent and uncompromising. For this reason, many of the chapters in this volume address the emotional landscape of ex-combatants and give voice to the costs ex-combatants' military engagements caused them and to their desire for peace.

Ex-combatants are very heterogeneous as a category, and a further strength of this volume is the distinction it makes between types of former

combatants, including, for perhaps the first time, a comparison between the lived experiences of state veterans and non-state combatants. Significant differences are shown to exist in the re-integration process back into society of former girl child soldiers, men, women and state veterans, as well as between the three case countries themselves. The parallels and the differences the authors identify on all these points of comparison make this a very useful volume and readers will find very much of interest in it.

A purple thread running throughout is the importance of considering gender when capturing the voices of ex-combatants; the editors make no apology for this. As the chapters richly show, militarised hyper-masculinities are a feature of most male combatants, and women ex-combatants tend to be silenced as a result. It is thus important to hear the voices of both men and women.

Readers should be warned that this book deals with issues that are controversial. Arguing that political violence can be both virtuous and necessary will be troublesome to pacifists and to political opponents, but this volume does not focus only on the revolutionary 'voice' but on all those who have taken up arms, including state veterans. It is original to consider non-state veterans and state veterans together. This book is also pioneering in bringing together experiences from the Global North and the Global South, without giving preference to either one. This volume therefore collects together researchers from across the generations and the Global North-South divide, in a way that promotes excellent scholarship from young researchers in the Global South.

The editors are aware that one of the weaknesses of edited collections is that they can be disjointed inasmuch as the individual chapters are written independently. To facilitate cross-referencing, the editors have provided a conclusion that draws the arguments together and added an introductory note to each chapter that 'frames' the issues it raises in the light of other contributions.

As Series Editor I very warmly welcome this latest addition to the Series.

Belfast, UK
September 2020

John D. Brewer

Contents

1	Introduction	1
	<i>John D. Brewer and Azrini Wahidin</i>	
2	Listening to Ex-combatants' Voices	11
	<i>John D. Brewer</i>	
Part I Voices from Northern Ireland and Britain		35
3	Female Ex-combatants in the Irish Republican Army and the Rocky Road to Peace	37
	<i>Azrini Wahidin</i>	
4	The Experiences of Loyalist Ex-combatants on Their Journey from Conflict to Peace	63
	<i>David Magee</i>	
5	'Sin by Silence': The Claims to Moral Legitimacy Amongst Northern Irish Paramilitaries	93
	<i>John D. Brewer</i>	

6	British Counter-Insurgency Veterans in Afghanistan	123
	<i>John D. Brewer and Stephen Herron</i>	
Part II Voices from South Africa		149
7	Contested Voices of Former Combatants in Post-Apartheid South Africa	151
	<i>Malose Langa, Godfrey Maringira, and Modiefe Merafe</i>	
8	The Lives of Women Ex-combatants in Post-Apartheid South Africa	179
	<i>Siphokazi Magadla</i>	
9	‘Why Did I Die?’: South African Defence Force Conscripts Pre- and Post-1994	207
	<i>Wilhelm Verwoerd and Theresa Edlmann</i>	
10	An African Comparison: Girl Soldiers Returning from a Rebel Group in Northern Uganda	237
	<i>Allen Kiconco</i>	
Part III Voices from Sri Lanka		263
11	Reflections on the Role of Female Cadres in the LTTE	265
	<i>Bhavani Fonseka</i>	
12	Media Representations of Women Ex-combatants in Sri Lanka	287
	<i>Ashleigh McFeeters</i>	
13	Concluding Reflections	315
	<i>Azrini Wahidin</i>	
	Index	341

Notes on Contributors

John D. Brewer is Professor of Post-Conflict Studies in the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast and Honorary Professor Extraordinary at Stellenbosch University. He is a member of the Royal Irish Academy, a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Academy of Social Sciences and the Royal Society of Arts. He is also a member of the UN Roster of Global Experts and former President of the British Sociological Association. He has been awarded an honorary doctorate by Brunel University for services to social science. He is author or co-author of 16 books and editor or co-editor of a further six. He is writing a commissioned introduction to the sociology of peace processes for Edward Elgar Publishers, and with Stephen Herron a volume on the emotional labour of counter-insurgency soldiering.

Theresa Edlmann is National Programmes Manager at the Black Sash Trust in Cape Town and a research associate in the History Department at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Her most recent publication is *Zonnebloem College and the Genesis of an African Intelligentsia (1857–1933)*, which she co-authored with Janet Hodgson. Theresa's PhD, *Negotiating Historical Continuities in Contested Terrain: A Narrative-Based Reflection on the Post-Apartheid Psychosocial Legacies of Conscription into the South African Defence Force*, was based at Rhodes University. While busy with

her PhD, she established the interdisciplinary Legacies of Apartheid Wars Project, with the aim of facilitating dialogues between people caught up in apartheid era violence in Southern Africa. Prior to that she was involved in teaching, supervising and facilitating a range of programmes and courses at Rhodes, incorporating Drama, Education, History and Psychology, as well as founding and directing an NGO called The Spirals Trust. Using creative narrative-based approaches as the core focus of her professional career, she has also worked in the fields of human rights, transformation and inclusivity, community development, transitional justice, teacher training, alternatives to violence, mentoring emerging leaders and organisational development.

Bhavani Fonseka is a senior researcher and attorney at Law with the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a think tank in Sri Lanka, with a focus on research, national and international advocacy and public interest litigation. Her work has revolved around assisting victims and affected populations across Sri Lanka, legal and policy reforms and public interest litigation (PIL) cases. She is the editor of the book *Transitional Justice in Sri Lanka: Moving Beyond Promises*. She was an adviser to the Consultation Taskforce appointed by the Government of Sri Lanka in 2016 and a member of the drafting committee to formulate the National Human Rights Action Plan for Sri Lanka for the period 2017–2021.

Stephen Herron is an anthropologist specialising in the study of conflict, military and veterans' issues. He is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast. Dr Herron is co-investigator on a project led by John Brewer, which is researching the reintegration experiences of UK ex-armed forces personnel who have experienced 'negative transitioning', namely, those who have suffered mental health issues, been in prison and/or been homeless. This research, the first major UK wide qualitative study of its kind on negative transitioning veterans, follows on from a previous project involving Herron as co-investigator which examined how counter-insurgency warfare impacts on the post-deployment reintegration experiences of British land-based military personnel, also led by John Brewer.

Allen Kiconco is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Witwatersrand. She holds a PhD in African Studies (2015) from the University of Birmingham. Allen works on the lived experiences of women and girls in both conflict and post-conflict settings of Africa, including abduction, sexual violence and forced marriage. Her work includes extensive fieldwork with ex-combatants and sexual violence survivors in Uganda and Sierra Leone. Her monograph *Conflict, Reintegration and Gender in Uganda: Returning Home?* is under contract with Routledge.

Malose Langa is an associate professor and a senior lecturer in Department of Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand. He is also a senior researcher at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), as well as an associate researcher at the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP) at the University of Witwatersrand. His research interests include collective trauma, violence, masculinity and youth at risk. He is the author of the book, *Becoming Men: Black Masculinities in a New South African Township*.

Siphokazi Magadla is Senior Lecturer in the Political and International Studies department at Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa. She worked previously as a research consultant for the Security Sector Governance programme of the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria, focusing on the role of women in peace and security. She holds a BA (Hons) in Political and International Studies from Rhodes University. She was awarded the Fulbright Scholarship to pursue a Master's Degree in International Affairs at Ohio University, USA. Her PhD examined the state-assisted integration of women ex-combatants into civilian life in post-apartheid South Africa. She was a fellow of the Social Science Research Council's Next Generation Social Sciences in Africa Fellowship Program in 2013–2014. She is a Board Member and Book Review Editor of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* (JCAS). She is the 2018 recipient of the Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award.

David Magee works for the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, where he has responsibilities for the Peace and Security and Northern Ireland

grant programme, although he writes here in a private capacity. Before taking this role, he worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross, after being awarded a PhD from the University of Aberdeen in 2013, which explored the deconstruction of Loyalist military masculinities. David's earlier career includes over a decade working in the community and voluntary sectors in Northern Ireland. He has worked with young people, women's groups, migrant workers, restorative justice groups and in cross-community education. His experience includes working formally and informally with both Loyalist and Republican armed groups for humanitarian and peacebuilding purposes. David studied Theology and Psychology at the University of Southampton, and completed an MPhil from Queen's University Belfast on Martin Luther King's Philosophy of Nonviolence. This interest in Kingian nonviolence continues to inform his work. David's other interests include Northern Ireland, masculinities, social transformation and peace processes.

Godfrey Maringira is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Sol Plaatje University, Kimberley, Northern Cape, South Africa. He is a research associate at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, Anthropology and Development Department. He is a senior research fellow at Volkswagen Stiftung Foundation and is also a principal investigator of the International Development Research Center (IDRC) research on gang violence in South Africa. His areas of research include armed violence in Africa with a specific focus on the military in post-colonial Africa. His 2017 *African Affairs Journal* article 'Politicisation and resistance in the Zimbabwe national Army' was awarded the best author price in 2018. In 2020, he was awarded the Benedict Vilakazi best author price, *African Studies Journal* (Routledge), for his article titled: 'When combatants became peaceful: Azania People Liberation Army ex-combatants in post-apartheid South Africa'. He is the author of *Soldiers and the State in Zimbabwe* (2019).

Ashleigh McFeeters is postdoctoral fellow on the ESRC project *Apologies, Abuses and Dealing with the Past* at The Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice and School of Law at Queen's University Belfast. This project examines the role of apologies for victims of institutional child sex abuse, the Troubles and the

banking crisis on the island of Ireland. Ashleigh received her PhD from Queen's in Sociology under the supervision of Prof John Brewer and Dr Julia Paul. Her thesis investigated the role of the news in peace-building by examining representations of female ex-combatants in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka and is being published as *Gender and Conflict Transformation in the News—A Study of Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka* by Palgrave Macmillan. She holds an MA in Comparative Ethnic Conflict from Queen's and a BA (Hons) in English Studies from Trinity College Dublin.

Modiefe Merafe is a senior community facilitator at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR). He has worked with communities in preventing violence and addressing its consequences. Modiefe has worked mainly with, among others, the South African ex-combatants, ordinary men, women and unemployed youth. The focus of his work has been around gender-based violence (GBV), state-sponsored violence, youth violence, collective violence and peacebuilding. Modiefe studied Community Development at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

Wilhelm Verwoerd is a senior research associate and a facilitator at Studies in Historical Trauma and Transformation, Stellenbosch University, and a teaching associate at Trinity College, Dublin. As a white, Afrikaans, speaking South African, a former researcher within the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995–1998) and a peace practitioner in (Northern) Ireland (2001–2012), Wilhelm is devoted to (re)humanisation/reconciliation in contexts of deep political division. He is working on a book based on an international 'Beyond Dehumanisation' reflective learning project with ex-combatants and survivors from the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, Israel-Palestine, South Africa and the USA. His main research interests include the (incomplete legacy of the) South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission; shared historical responsibility of white South Africans for apartheid and colonialism; relational processes to transform (white) resistance to social justice in post-1994 South Africa; embodied spirituality of authentic reconciliation. Many of these interests feature in a recent memoir, *Verwoerd: My Journey through Family Betrayals* (2019).

Azrini Wahidin is Professor of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Warwick and a visiting professor in the Faculty of Law, University of Malaya. She is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and the Royal Society of Arts. She is author, co-author and editor of 15 books. She is the Programme Director for the Sociology and Criminology Programme at the University of Warwick and the Director for Internationalisation, Chair of the Ethics Committee for the British Society of Criminology and REF panel member for UOA 20: Social Policy. Her latest single-authored book, *Ex-Combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland—Women, Political Protest and the Prison Experience*, focused on female former politically motivated prisoners and the role of transitional justice. It was the largest study to be conducted on the experiences of former members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA).



1

Introduction

John D. Brewer and Azrini Wahidin

Introduction

This edited collection is a compendium volume to two books published by Palgrave in 2018 from the Leverhulme Trust-funded research programme called *Compromise after Conflict*, which covered Northern Ireland, South Africa and Sri Lanka. The books in different ways addressed the voices of victims. *The Sociology of Everyday Life Peacebuilding* (Brewer 2018b) and *The Sociology of Compromise after Conflict* (Brewer et al. 2018a) used victims' voices to claim that victims had an 'absent presence' in peace processes; talked about aplenty but rarely heard from directly.

J. D. Brewer (✉)

Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice,
Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK

e-mail: j.brewer@qub.ac.uk

A. Wahidin

Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

e-mail: Azrini.wahidin@warwick.ac.uk

These volumes argued that victims needed to be mainstreamed in peace processes because they have a remarkable—and largely unexpected—capacity to be moral beacons, able to engage in modes of reasoning and everyday practices that supported peacebuilding in the three case countries covered by the research programme. The two volumes made a strong case that victims' voices should be heard above those who deign to speak on their behalf, for when we listen to ordinary victims, the majority have an emotional empathy with the erstwhile enemy that makes them an example of everyday peacebuilding and compromise that others might follow. We might call this the dignity of ordinary victims.

The current volume is complementary because it seeks to give voice to ex-combatants from the same three case countries, with one comparative case from elsewhere in the Global South. It has not emerged from the Leverhulme-funded research team, which was led by John Brewer as Principal Investigator, but from an idea suggested to him by Azrini Wahidin, whose pioneering work on women in the IRA was published as part of the *Palgrave Studies in Compromise After Conflict* Book Series (Wahidin 2016), which grew from the Leverhulme Trust research programme. The two editors have a long-time friendship and collaboration.

This volume on the voices of ex-combatants therefore owes its impulse to the two compendium volumes on victims' voices, for the two editors of this volume aspire to give the same voice to ex-combatants as the earlier volumes did to victims. This volume has the same intellectual interest and motivation of its predecessors, therefore, in centring ex-combatants' voices, their lived experiences, emotional landscape and their contributions to the respective peace processes in the three cases and elsewhere.

However, this volume is much more than a compendium. The focus on ex-combatants in South Africa, Northern Ireland and South Africa has value in its own right. There is intellectual coherence in the comparison. Ex-combatant issues in these three societies operate within a common legacy: the shadow of empire, a long political struggle of decolonisation, the material struggle against social injustice and inequality that marks the colonial experience, and the long and violent nature of their respective wars of independence and decolonisation. Each experienced conflict over what are alleged to be absolutist social cleavages, such as ethnicity (Sri Lanka), 'race' (South Africa) and religion (Northern

Ireland), although in all cases the real division was political and revolved around the legitimacy of the state (for the debate about the political role that religion played in Northern Ireland, see Brewer and Higgins 1998; McGarry and O’Leary 1995; Mitchell 2006). The differences in their respective peace processes—the colonial model of regime change at the top with little change at the bottom (South Africa), a victor’s peace (Sri Lanka) and a negotiated second preference settlement (Northern Ireland)—afford the opportunity also to see whether this has an impact on the lived experiences of former combatants.

A comparison of ex-combatant issues in these three societies therefore throws into high relief some key questions about the motivations for engagement in military struggle, what the lived experiences are of the various categories of people who fought in these different kinds of war, and what legacy has been left for former combatants as each country moves forward on different paths. A number of common themes emerge from their comparison which focus the current volume: the nature of their respective demobilisation, demilitarisation and reintegration programmes, and their effectiveness; the effect of ongoing material inequalities faced by ex-combatants as a legacy of colonialism; the impact of masculinity and gender differences on the lived experiences of ex-combatants; the contested victim status of state veterans and ex-combatants’ ambivalent engagements with peace.

However, our readers will inevitably ask one question, which was not raised against the earlier two volumes on victims. Why a book on ex-combatants, considered by some as the least morally deserving stakeholder in a peace process? In this Introduction, we want to explain why we need a book on ex-combatants and to outline what is distinctive about this volume.

The late Christopher Hill, famous historian of the English civil war and a former Master of Baliol College, Oxford, put it better than we can when he remarked that history has to be rewritten for every generation, for while the past does not change, the present does, and each generation asks new questions and finds new areas of sympathy as it relives different aspects of the experiences of its predecessors. More than a quarter of a century has passed since the ending of apartheid in South Africa; it is nearly as long since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in Belfast,

and it is 11 years since the massacre that annihilated the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, bringing an end to its civil war. It is time, thus, for new generations to seek to understand its predecessors who went to war. As Christopher Hill might have put it, are there grounds for new understandings, if not sympathy, for the men, women and children who were combatants in each country's war? To learn more about these combatants, all this time later, is the purpose of this book.

The Rationale for the Book

A book on ex-combatants is important for two reasons: because it is challenging, and the challenge motivates us; but primarily because theirs is a voice relatively neglected, and they need to be heard as much as other stakeholders. Let us deal first with the challenge.

Ex-combatants pose a special problem for academic researchers. They invoke moral questions from which academics usually shy away. Whether we like it or not, the very language used to describe ex-combatants is morally loaded—terrorists, perpetrators, victimisers, wrongdoers—and is laden with moral judgement. As perpetrators, they have blood on their hands, forcing upon academics a moral dilemma about whether to engage with them or not. They are not normally, of course, the only ones to have killed; and thus they pose a moral dilemma of a different kind in forcing academics to distinguish between different kinds of perpetrators, choosing which to address and which to ignore. The fact that most perpetrators make moral claims about their motivation for involvement in armed struggle, which form part of the additional claims they make to be considered as victims, also obscures the moral debate surrounding perpetrators.

Moreover, the label 'ex-combatant' is not solely an abstract one; it refers to living, breathing people, with motivations, hopes, aspirations, fears and problems that are no less real because of the moral judgements made about them. For academics to treat these issues at face value, suspending moral considerations, and to consider ex-combatants as people with voices that need to be heard, is likely to open up researchers to all the moral contempt that some people reserve for certain perpetrators.

Research on ex-combatants requires otherwise tender academics to have thicker skins than they normally possess, since it is important to move beyond simple moral judgements and assumptions and to hear the voices of those coping on the ground with these problems. The hostility researchers face from a public opinion that resists hearing ex-combatants' voices only reinforces the need for such an approach.

Research work on ex-combatants therefore pales in comparison to that on victims; their voice tends to be even more silent and ignored than victims. In one sense, of course, the field is already saturated with ex-combatants' voices. A Google search will throw up many tens of thousands of references, but these will be disparate, hard to access, be of widely variable quality and be of multiple different kinds, only a proportion of which will be serious academic treatment. There are biographies aplenty by ex-combatants that glorify, aggrandise and romanticise their lives. YouTube has put these voices also to video and screen. The value of this edited collection is that it draws this focus together between the covers of one volume in a dispassionate manner. Much of the literature on the internet also reflects what in Chap. 2 Brewer calls the 'martyr-hero-demon syndrome', making either saints or devils out of combatants. Much of what is written by ex-combatants themselves is so self-aggrandising as to be meaningless to new generations who want to learn something of the life experiences of their predecessors. This syndrome is an inadequate moral framework to capture ex-combatants' voices. The syndrome is offered as a formula for critiquing public representations of ex-combatants and the whole volume is designed to show the syndrome's inadequacies as a way of understanding ex-combatants.

The politics of victimhood often contests, on moral and political grounds, that perpetrators be considered as moral agents. Their claims to victim status are particularly disputed. It is for this reason that ex-combatants rarely get the credit they deserve for giving up on violence, or for the moral courage they show in face of the threats they face from erstwhile colleagues who continue the military struggle. McEvoy and Shirlow (2009) described ex-combatants as 'moral agents' for their engagement with conflict transformation, whereas some victims complain about them receiving credit for something that was wrong in the first

place. Three points are worth making about this disjuncture. The first concerns perspective. Ex-combatants should be perceived as much in terms of what they do to assist a peaceful future as what they did in the violent past. Secondly, as we shall emphasise shortly, ex-combatants make moral claims that in part deal with culpability, arguing there was little choice but to take up arms. Thirdly, the distinction between victims and perpetrators is rarely simple, for multiple victimhood (Brewer 2010, p. 123ff) can result in groups being victims and perpetrators at the same time (also see Borer 2003). As Jankowitz (2018, p. 97ff) argues with respect to Northern Ireland, the ‘victim-perpetrator paradigm’, as she calls it, constructs them as binary and mutually exclusive categories, when in practice the categories are much more complex and interlinked. While the politics of victimhood leads some stakeholders to deny this penetration and complexity, viewing the categories in morally unambiguous terms between their ‘preferred victims’ and ‘dispreferred perpetrators’ (see Brewer et al. 2018b, p. 38ff for this distinction), this is not how perpetrators—or many victims—view themselves.

The aim of this book therefore is to contribute to the developing discourse on the experiences of ex-combatants by bringing together in one volume empirical research on the experiences of different types of former combatants from Northern Ireland, South Africa and Sri Lanka (with one comparative case from Uganda). The categories of ex-combatant we address here are men, women, child soldiers and state veterans, in the belief that they each have different lived experiences in the transition to peace. This approach helps us isolate the impact on masculinity and gender on ex-combatants’ lives, to explore the stigma faced by child soldiers, and to discuss the problematic status of state veterans. State veterans are not normally considered as ex-combatants in this sense, with the focus usually on combatants from non-state armed groups. Our three case countries throw up interesting questions about state veterans however, about how new regimes treat the state forces of now collapsed governments, and how democratic governments treat soldiers in peacetime. In many ways the lived experiences of state veterans after conflict can be as difficult as are those of non-state actors. Setting their experiences alongside categories more readily recognised as ex-combatants

allows us to broaden the understanding that new generations can have of their predecessors who were at war.

This volume aims to make the reader aware of the experiences of former ex-combatants transitioning from war to peace and to highlight a series of issues this transition throws up for each category. These issues include: their motivations for participation in the military struggle; their lived experiences in transitioning from war to peace; the emotional legacies, if any, of their former involvement in conflict; other social reintegration issues back into civilian status (material, economic, social, cultural, etc.); their ‘techniques of neutralisation’ in their accounts of their involvement as they look back, and the moral claims they make to victimhood status now; their engagement or not with reconciliation and peace today; and their feelings towards the peace process in their case country, such as the enduring legacy of colonialism, trauma and ambivalence towards the settlement.

This gives the volume a distinctive focus. It is designed to:

- Capture directly the voices of different kinds of ex-combatant in their own words.
- Provide the voice of those from below, the rank and file rather than political leaders.
- Provide insight into the transition issues facing former ex-combatants across their life course.
- Highlight the cultural, societal and emotional issues in the transition from war to peace as they affect ex-combatants.
- Explore the various contributions former combatants have made to post-conflict compromise, reconciliation and peacebuilding.
- Locate in a single framework the contrasting transition experiences of state veterans and other forms of ex-combatant.
- Isolate the gendered and post-colonial legacies of warfare as they continue to impinge on some forms of ex-combatant.

In what follows, we iterate the importance of these themes and validate them for different categories of ex-combatants in different national conflicts. While there are numerous cases that could have been chosen to highlight ex-combatants’ voices, we deliberately sought continuity with

the publications on victims' voices in Northern Ireland, South Africa and Sri Lanka so as to be able to place the respective voices alongside each other. The chapters therefore take a case study format focusing on our case countries, since this reflects the regional areas of expertise of contributors. We therefore have explicitly not organised this book according to themes, as authors are mostly familiar with their own region of expertise. It is our job as editors in the Conclusion to draw together the themes as they emerge from the individual contributions. Chapters have been specially commissioned from recognised authorities with expertise in the case country. We deliberately neglected to invite some internationally well-known authors however, in order to ensure demographic diversity amongst our contributors, in terms of gender, ethnicity, stage of career and location. We were particularly concerned to invite authors in the Global South from amongst the formerly dispossessed and disadvantaged groups, as well as women. Nonetheless, there are some international scholars of renown amongst the contributors, allowing early career researchers to be published alongside them. Some chapters are written by practitioners in human rights groups, NGOs and in civil society groups, giving the volume the special perspective of that sector.

Bibliography

- Borer, T. (2003). A Taxonomy of Victims and Perpetrators. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 25, 1088–1116.
- Brewer, J. D. (2010). *Peace Processes: A Sociological Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Brewer, J. D., Hayes, B., & Teeney, F. (2018a). *The Sociology of Compromise after Conflict*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brewer, J. D., Hayes, B., Teeney, F., Dudgeon, K., Mueller-Hirth, N., & Wijesinghe, S. (2018b). *The Sociology of Everyday Life Peacebuilding*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brewer, J. D., & Higgins, G. (1998). *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland 1600–1998*. London: Macmillan.
- Jankowitz, S. (2018). *The Order of Victimhood*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McEvoy, K., & Shirlow, P. (2009). Re-imagining DDR: Ex-combatants, Leadership and Moral Agency in Conflict Transformation. *Theoretical Criminology*, 13(1), 31–59.

- McGarry, J., & O'Leary, B. (1995). *Explaining Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mitchell, C. (2006). *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Wahidin, A. (2016). *Ex-combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.



2

Listening to Ex-combatants' Voices

John D. Brewer

Introduction

The focus of this volume is on ex-combatants who have transitioned from war to peace; it does not address combatants who still seek military solutions to political conflicts. This book's originality lies in the focus on representing ex-combatants' voices from the wide range of types of former combatant it addresses within the one cover. This chapter elaborates, however, on the challenges that come with writing such a book. The moral contestation around the category means ex-combatants are rarely approached dispassionately. This chapter identifies what it calls the 'martyr-hero-demon syndrome' and suggests that this syndrome is a distorting moral framework with which to capture the lived experiences of ex-combatants transitioning to peace. Just as we now recognise the

J. D. Brewer (✉)

Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice,
Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK

e-mail: j.brewer@qub.ac.uk

complexity of victims' voices and the positive contribution ordinary victims make as moral beacons to everyday life peacebuilding and compromise, there is need to explore the complexity of ex-combatants' voices and to establish their contribution or not to peacebuilding. This chapter therefore interrogates the complexity of ex-combatants' voices by isolating different categories of ex-combatant in Northern Ireland, South Africa and Sri Lanka—men, women, child soldiers and state veterans. The inclusion of state veterans is important, for their lived experiences, reintegration problems, emotional landscape and moral ambiguities are normally overlooked in the ex-combatant literature. State veterans have some parallels with the conventional category of ex-combatants that dominates the research agenda. It is no doubt true that the Andy McNab style of memoir exists aplenty for state veterans, full of self-aggrandisement and sensationalism, but it is original for us here to include academic research on state veterans alongside the narratives of other categories of militarist.

Research on Ex-combatants

There is now a growing academic literature on ex-combatants' motivations to armed struggle (e.g., Brewer et al. 2013; Elster 2004) and to commit genocide (Waller 2002), as well as the emotional and material costs of social reintegration back into civilian life after the war is over (e.g., McMullin 2013). Ex-combatants share with victims a personal legacy from the war. Most people in peace processes wish to move on, to 'get on with their lives', but ex-combatants and victims alike are often unable to consign their experiences to the past; their lived experiences of transition reflect an ongoing legacy that remains with them.

Reintegration is a dominant concern in the ex-combatant literature. Demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) policies are widely proffered as ways to deal with ex-combatants' reintegration needs (see Schnabel and Ehrhart 2005). In some cases of regime change after war, a select number of ex-combatants can be absorbed into the defence forces or police, as benefitted some ANC militants in South Africa and ZANUPF in Zimbabwe. This rarely affects them all, leaving some