Post-war moral communities in Somalia and Nepal: Gendered practices of exclusion and inclusion

By Tone Bleie
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Post-war moral communities in Somalia and Nepal: Gendered practices of exclusion and inclusion

Report by Tone Bleie¹

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Introduction: a gender perspective on DDR in post-war and peacebuilding situations

The report of the Secretary-General (SG) to the General Assembly and Security Council – “Women’s participation in peacebuilding” – is an astute recent response to a request to the SG by the Security Council to come forward with specified international and national measures that meet the needs of girls and women in post-war situations. More specifically, SG should identify the challenges facing women’s participation in preventing, resolving and recovering from violent conflict. This report highlights the importance of acknowledging the new roles women and men assume during conflict, as combatants, economic actors and activists. Indeed, it is a key challenge if peacebuilders are to address gender inequality and discrimination on the basis of sex.

Norway has a highly visible international profile in relation to women, peace, and security. Norway was one of the first member states to create a national action plan for implementing Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325. Norway also adopted a Strategic Plan 2011–13 on Women, Peace and Security, building on and responding to the more subsequent SCR 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960, which pay increased attention to greater accountability of member states. This strategic plan aims at strengthening the participatory aspect of women in all peace and security-related efforts. Post-conflict situations and peacebuilding are two of the plan’s priority areas. The plan mainly details action to promote political participation, widen access to services and enhance economic security in the recovery process, while also addressing a gender perspective on disarmament.

A gender perspective on armed actors, in particular those transitioning from armed female and male combatants to ex-combatants, is not explicitly addressed. Neither is the critical gendered relation between armed actors and civilians at different stages of what is often a drawn-out reintegration process. Apart from that, this report fills a gap by outlining a conceptual framework for a gender-relation perspective on DDR and a gender-aware analytical toolbox. Both are tested out on key empirical evidence as part of the research project “Improving reintegration in Somalia, Nepal and Afghanistan through evidence-based research.”

Key elements of a new gender-sensitive reintegration agenda

A gender-aware approach to reintegration can be based on context-sensitive disengagement efforts in order to manage the hobbled transition from combatant to ex-combatant. Disengagement and engagement is a useful pair-concept for documenting and analyzing the specific junctures of entry and exit out of armed movements. Over the last decade DDR practitioners have increasingly come to problematize understandings of this transition as a gender neutral technical affair of stripping

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3 Op.cit; para 10, 38 and 50
5 Norway’s Strategic Plan 2011-123 on Women, Peace and Security, 2011. Oslo: NMFA
6 This currently concluding 1- year pilot project was conducted in collaboration with the Inter-Agency Working group on DDR (IAWG-DDR) with the generous support of the Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs.
7 These operational terms can unravel the psychological, social, economic and political dimensions of a multi-scaled reintegration process. The concept is particularly useful in analyzing continued engagement after formal demobilization and discharge, Bleie T. and R Shrestha, 2012. DDR in Nepal: Stakeholder Politics and the Implications for Reintegration as a Process of Disengagement, p. 4. Tromsø: Centre for Peace Studies.

While emerging evidence does not dismiss the importance of economic reintegration, it does show that social, psycho-social and political integration is of greater importance than hitherto acknowledged. Interlockings between social, economic and political integration promote successful disengagement from armed violence. These interlockings are context specific and hence differ within armed movements and groups and indeed the plethora of armed groups which often operate in war-afflicted countries. In order to unravel these interlockings, the specific social organization and underlying values of social reintegration, a multi-faceted notion of “community” is a useful analytical notion for both reintegration researchers and practitioners. A moral community can be a local community, a community of believers or citizens. Armed conflicts often challenge, change, stymie or reproduce moral values in complex ways, ways which tend to be overlooked by planners, resulting in unfortunate oversights in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of reintegration programs. A central dimension of social, psycho-social and political reintegration is about adjusting to, negotiating and innovating (often if not always) gender-differentiated moral values of repute/ill repute, respect/disrespect, honor and shame. Gendered moral values are central to ex-combatants who face often painful social and psychological dilemmas of belongingness, based on gender identities. They also have to handle anything from subtle to blatant sanctions ranging from hurtful social stigma and exclusion to severe penalties. One key finding of our recent research is that ignoring these gendered aspects of political and social reintegration and retaining a simplistic, gender-blind view of ex-combatants as utility-maximizing actors has serious consequences on two counts. First, ignoring the underlying social structure, which constrains or enables ex-combatants’ paths out of armed groups, renders explanations of their exit hugely inadequate. Second, planners and implementers of reintegration programs risk generating less than optimal outputs and outcomes. The research-based evidence of the kind we hope to produce, may in other words be of critical importance in making DDR policies and programs more effective.

From an analytical viewpoint, DDR intersects with post-war gender orders along three dimensions or sub-systems. Firstly, the level of impact reintegration of ex-combatants has at large on women and men’s agency as individuals and collective actors (may pursue progressive, conservative or gender-blind agendas). Secondly, post-war states’ will to pursue gender policies (including DDR policies and programs) which legitimize and scale-up incipient positive changes from the war period and delegitimize sexual violence and gender discrimination. Thirdly, the level of exclusion or inclusion and acceptance of returning ex-combatants by key moral and social gatekeepers in the society. The main focus of this paper is on the third dimension, the other two shall also be commented on, since all three dimensions are interrelated in some respects.
The merits of Somalia and Nepal as contrasting cases

The armed conflicts in Somalia and Nepal both have tangled regional dimensions and take place in countries where the UN’s own preconditions for DDR interventions are at best only partially met. Beyond these similarities, we find certain notable differences. Comparing engagement in and exiting from a radical militant mass movement with a noble agenda of liberation from feudal tutelage, on the one hand, and ostracized criminal pirate gangs, on the other, might seem at first sight nearly untenable. In addition, the Alternative Livelihoods to Piracy (ALP) project in Somalia is not part of any official DDR process, unlike the two ongoing reintegration programs in Nepal.9

However different these two cases are on the face of it, both can be analyzed as instances where careful attention to the interdependencies or interlockings between social, political and economic reintegration places issues of identity, belonging, social organization – and its underpinning gendered and age-based structure – at the center of an applied analysis for research of relevance for programming purposes.

In Somalia, engagement and a sense of belonging to a criminal armed group, as well as disengagement, are enabled and disabled by gender-specific kinship and community relations. Most significantly, efforts to return to civilian life are influenced by a mix of positive and negative sanctions from male and female guardians and local imams, who in their own right are powerful moral opinion makers. Similarly, engagement and disengagement in post-war Nepal are found to be enabled and disabled by intricate constellations of gender, caste kinship, and peer and community relations. In order to grapple with these empirical realities, work is guided by a multi-faceted notion of community, of gender relations and intergenerational dynamics as outlined above.10

These analytical tools are what make it possible for reintegration researchers and practitioners to understand war-time and post-war changes in in recruitment, engagement and disengagement as a mix of planned and unplanned, radical and incipient, changes to deeply gendered societal orders that underpin armed violence and restoration of peaceful means and action.

Somalia: economic gain, lack of livelihood, and masculinities

Poverty, and the scarcity of other appropriate livelihood opportunities, are the main factors pushing young men into piracy in the Somali regions. But the importance of social factors arguably needs closer attention.

It is claimed that men engage in piracy because they benefit more from it than from other activities, or because there are few or no other alternatives, or alternatively because the rewards piracy can offer are so great, recruits are drawn away from other, relatively good, jobs. In other words, you are drawn into piracy because of the opportunities for increased income. Nevertheless, we have found that economic motives themselves are firmly welded to specific moral norms and social organization.

9 The UN’s Interagency Rehabilitation Program (UNIRP) was launched in early 2010 and ends in 2012. A second nationally run effort of army integration, rehabilitation and retirement was launched in early 2012.

10 For an elaboration of the concept of community see Bleie, T., 2012. Community-based reintegration in DDR: Messages, gaps and ways forward. Briefing paper, New York: IAWG-DDR. Draft (forthcoming on IAWG’s webpage in April 2012). Gender relations refer to social relations between women and men, between woman and between men. These relations are based on context, intersecting with other social hierarchies; generally age, caste, ethnicity and class.
There are underlying traditional gender norms of gender segregation and related values, which in the Somali context place men and women at different ends of the scale in terms of roles, responsibilities and opportunities. The high death toll among men who have fought in Somalia’s long-drawn-out civil war, has enabled elder women to assume household and community roles of greater authority and visibility in everyday life than before the civil war started in 1991. Many young men, whether they like it or not, have to assume roles as breadwinners, warriors, protectors, status seekers, and authority figures. Any young man taking on this combination of roles, gains recognition as a social adult. In Somalia, where protracted violence and droughts have destroyed livelihood assets such as houses, land and livestock, it is difficult for men to succeed as breadwinners.

Thus, to promote livelihoods and protect their self-dignity and masculine reputation, many men become vulnerable to the appeals of criminal and armed groups. Such groups clearly tap into young men’s gender identity in its current crisis, drafting them into criminality and violence. Without opportunities of employment or social position, young men in marginalized communities lack a legitimate path to make the transition from boyhood to manhood. In addition to income, protection and access to women, these groups offer young men an acute sense of belonging and purpose and means to achieve much sought-after respect and recognition among their peers or communities.

With few exceptions, the young interviewees appeared to come from economically deprived families. Despite knowing that piracy was haram, i.e. forbidden by Islam and unacceptable to local communities and religion, people still joined for want of alternative livelihoods. Seeing friends grow rich from piracy can push boys and men to explore similar opportunities offering easy access to money and increased attention from women. Another young man, who was recruited into al-Shabaab at the age of 17, said: “They just told us they will provide us with a job and money. First they promised to pay us $200 first month. They gave us $50 and they told us they will give us the salary they promised next month and took us to Kismayo City” (interview 1 with former al-Shabaab member, May 2011).

While a large majority of the youngsters join piracy in order to meet basic welfare needs, others see such groups as the quickest route to adding to their income. Having a job and regular income is nevertheless no guarantee against the appeal of piracy groups. Members of more ideologically based groups are also attracted by the promise of enormous economic rewards. A 21-year-old man and former member of al-Shabaab explained his decision: “I had a good job at that time. I was working in a company. I earned $200 per month and worked there for four years” (Interview 7 with earlier al-Shabaab member, June 2011). However, al-Shabaab had a more tempting offer: “They told me I would earn $1,000 per month. And get a Toyota Pickup. I also had free airtime; they got me a phone, free fuel and the vehicle. They paid me nicely and it was a good life”. He became a contract killer for al-Shabaab, specializing in the murder of government officials.

**Missing social factors: explaining recruitment into piracy**

Somalis have a strong gender and age-differentiated clan and family system which shapes women’s and men's actions and resource rights. Economic activities are usually family-run. Some are

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12 For similar lines of arguments, see UNDP 2010, pp. 12-13

monopolized by certain families and social networks and relationships play an influential role in young people’s livelihoods and life chances.\textsuperscript{14}

Piracy groups only recruit men and are mostly clan-based. Many groups consist of a leader, family members and a network of friends: “In general, groups seem to be recruited from younger and older men with previous family or village ties.”\textsuperscript{15} Peers and schoolmates of pirates are ripe for recruitment. Local restaurants and coffee shops, where unemployed young men can be found spending their time drinking tea and coffee, chewing \textit{khat}, and conversing, are also fertile grounds for recruitment.\textsuperscript{16} Members of armed groups can also recruit members of their own family. An interviewee who worked as a fisherman with his uncle noted:

\textit{I finished school and started working with my uncle. He was a fisherman, so I was helping him with fishing and whatever he needed help with. In the beginning, my uncle was working alone, but then they became a group. My uncle was driving the boat, and they were about 10 people in the group. One day they had problem with a ship cutting off their nets. From then on, the group started organizing themselves [as pirates].} (Interview 5 with ex-pirate in June 2011)

Despite his uncle being the group leader, it took some years for the young man to join, not least because his mother was set against it. He recited her objections: “Well you can die. There is a risk. She had heard stories of people in Mombasa. It is a difficult job. I could lose myself even.” Nevertheless, his uncle and friends eventually succeeded in persuading him to join their group in the face his mother’s warnings: “I heard stories about them, about what they received, money. I heard many stories. Most of my friends were in the groups. I saw my friends getting money.”

This is a good example of how elder female and male family members both encourage and discourage youth to join violent armed groups. In this particular case, the uncle’s influence and the prospect of sudden richness were factors pulling the young man into the armed group, while his mother served as a barrier against group membership. Our material is too limited to permit of a firm conclusion as to whether older men wield more influence with younger men and their decisions, compared to older women. What we can say, though, is that while men sometimes do decide to join a group on their own, peers, friends and elder male relatives are strong influential factors, with the young subjected to conflicting pressures.

While there are general risk (push) factors fuelling certain types of delinquent behavior or militant groups, some men still do not join,\textsuperscript{17} many of whom are also unemployed and vulnerable. As stated above, male relatives and friends are important means of recruitment into armed groups. However, the same networks of friends and family-based social organizations can be strong barriers to membership of armed groups. More than half of our informants had been warned against joining by

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\textsuperscript{14} Interview with UNICEF staff May 2011
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\textsuperscript{16} Quite many of these shops and stalls are owned and run by women who benefit directly from pirate costumers. Due to this fact, the Alternative Livelihood Project has targeted women making a living of piracy, in addition to women whose husbands were killed or in jail due to piracy, see Gjelsvik M. I. and T. Bjørø, op. cit. p 20.
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\textsuperscript{17} Horgan J., 2005. The social and psychological characteristics of terrorism and terrorists, p. 48. In T. Bjørø (ed.) \textit{Root causes of terrorism: Myths, reality and ways forward}. London: Routledge
\end{flushleft}
senior family and local community members. Parents were particularly vocal in trying to prevent their children from joining.

Nepal: Engagement motivated by grievances, insecurity and lack of livelihoods

In Somalia, poverty is a cumulative result of environmental crises: overfishing, drought, displacement, each compounded by recurrent civil wars. This is what motivates young men to become pirates. In Nepal, membership of a militant communist movement displays a different mix of motivating factors.

As our recent research found, grievances stemming from deep rooted caste, ethnic, age, and gender-based discrimination, together with gross violations by the security forces, provide a major motivating force. The following is quite illustrative: “In 2002 one co-villager was killed by the security forces. I joined PLA as revenge” (interview in April 2011 with a male ex-fighter classified as verified minor and late recruit).

Economic inequality, hardship and a deep sense of being deprived of a future was partly because of gender, caste, ethnic and age-based discrimination and of physical insecurity caused by a weak state unable to guarantee either rule of law or basic human rights. While Nepal’s gender systems\(^\text{18}\) privilege men as sons and husbands in many ways, there is no rigid system of gender segregation as in Somalia. Nevertheless, the large numbers of girls and women who joined mobile militia units and People’s Liberation Army took a radical decision. They broke with prevailing norms of female mobility and modesty by living together with non-related male comrades, assuming responsibilities as cultural workers, health assistants, couriers, spies, military strategists and fighters.\(^\text{19}\)

Children and young boys and girls became members of the militant Maoist movement for other reasons as well. School children were liable to be kidnapped, and some fell afoul of the age-old “one member per house” conscription order. In observing this rule, parents sometimes sent their daughters to the front as fighters, sparing their sons whom they considered as their life insurance. Before the decade of armed conflict between 1996 and 2006, a whole generation of young people of both sexes living in Nepal’s mostly stagnant countryside had already developed a basic awareness of a sense of their deprivation and lack of prospects thanks to development rhetoric of INGOs and NGOs. Those who could afford to escaped to India or overseas destinations to find work. In offering a persuasive political ideology and a much-wanted sense of belongingness for girls and boys in the vulnerable transition from childhood to adulthood, the Maoist could tap into simmering discontent and budding political awareness. Use of mass violence was a legitimate means for a worthy political cause. Again the contrast to Somalia’s discredited criminal piracy is stark. Many young Nepalese girls from ethic groups and lower castes joined first as political supporters and later as combatants,

\(^\text{18}\) Nepal’s intricate social structure is based on caste principles (since long formally abolished) and includes ethnic and indigenous groups (currently recognized as nationalities) at the lower rung of the hierarchy. Nepal’s gender systems vary in terms of norms for women’s mobility, sexuality, marriage and divorce rules (ethnic groups have for long been more tolerant towards inter-ethnic marriages and divorce). Most systems however (except in the far-western hill region) build on patrilineal principles that privilege men’s custody rights, rights to inherited property, rights as heads of households and guardians. Recent national gender equality legislation makes slow inroads in changing these deeply ingrained systems.

inspired by a mix of grievances (which became more politically articulate as they underwent ideological training), and mediated through social mechanisms.

Missing social factors: Explaining engagement as Maoist combatants

Recent research provides evidence of the main recruitment mechanisms and the motivations of female children and adults in particular. The recruitment mechanisms display a blend of gender-specific and gender-neutral traits. Regardless of gender, many were motivated and encouraged by close elder relatives, other villagers (often teachers) and friends who themselves were sympathizers, political activists, militia members or PLA combatants.

In-depth interviews with female combatants and ex-combatants show that a major reason for joining the militia was a quest for social, economic, and political emancipation (in addition to self-defense and revenge). One interviewee was particularly lucid about her reasons.

_"I was always dominated by men at all stages of life. I never got freedom to choose what to do. When I was a child I did whatever my father said. After being married, I obeyed my husband even though he used to beat me almost every day for petty issues. I never argued with them, since I had been thought that they know more than women so disobeying will be great sin._

On becoming a guerilla soldier in “the People’s War,” girls and women shared for the first time in their lives the same non-military and military duties and responsibilities as men. Their new life as foot soldiers, mid and senior officers in the line of command of the PLA and the United Front served as a gendered re-socialization process. The sexual division of labor (pregnancies and births apart) was minimal, and the women were aided by being given new revolutionary names which substituted for their old names derived from the Hindu pantheon. Female combatants developed a new sense of pride and dignity due to personal sacrifices, military courage, feats in the battlefield and prospects of promotion in the ranks. Women cut off their beautiful black long hair (such an important sign of femininity) and wore the same sort of worn-out t-shirts and combat dress as their male comrades. The political and military leadership also encouraged inter-caste marriages as a part of their social revolution, but also to ensure loyalty and minimize defections. The leadership also discouraged and even banned recent recruits from visiting their homes for several months, in order to encourage solidarity in the ranks and consolidate the social and ideological socialization process.

This militarized life, which for many female and male combatants lasted over several years, brought a profound collective sense of belongingness to a revolutionary political movement which (often) succeeded both in the battlefield and in setting up new local government and people’s courts in the so-called liberated base areas. This sense of belonging to an expanding political movement with a justified claim to the moral high-ground, which, in many instances, was rather massively endorsed by the combatants’ own native communities, stands in stark contrast to the Somali case. Engagement as pirate was meet with considerable moral disapproval and social sanctions, as discussed above.

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20 Most of the interviewees in Sharada Khadka’s study, op. cit, listed empowerment (in the sense of enhanced decision-making power as a woman) and gender justice as major driving forces. Nearly 70 percent of the interviewees were Tharus, Magars, Gurungs, Rajs, Tamangs and Dalits.

21 Pregnant birth-giving combatants got generally one week maternity leave by their commanding officers. During interviews, former Maoist combatants have spoken poignantly to us about their hardships during labor and having to leave their weak infants behind with relatives, and return to their military units. In hindsight, many have expressed pride in their sacrifices as mothers.
In the following sections we briefly debate from a gender perspective the social aspects of disengaging from piracy in Somalia and the Maoist army in Nepal.

**Somalia: Exiting by managing family relations and community pressure**

Many families and local communities are against piracy because it violates in their view Islamic teachings and values. Thus, for many informants, joining the pirates changed relations with their family. Some tried to keep it a secret in order not to offend the sensibilities of relatives. One informant explained this strategy: “My family did not have any idea about what I was doing. I hid the money because they would start asking me where I got it from. And at the same time, they would refuse to receive any money from me as they consider it haram” (interview 4 with an ex-pirate, June 2011). To make it easier to hide extra earnings, pirates moved into rented houses together. Involvement in piracy also changed community and social relationships. As another informant noted: “I joined my friends planning to become a pirate and hijack ships to get money. So we decided to rent a house. I left home and moved in with them” (Interview 13 of ex-pirate, June 2011). He told the family he was going to look for a job. Some pirates lose virtually all contact with their families who quite literally have no idea where to look for them.

Many of Puntland’s coastal communities are strongly against piracy. Pirates spend lavishly, which causes inflation and creates problems for already financially distressed people in local communities. They also engage in other unacceptable social behavior, such as drug abuse and bringing in prostitutes: “The communities consider the pirates themselves and their bodies as haram. So they avoid those they know are in that group” (Interview 20 with an ex-pirate, June 2011). Thus, in spite of the riches the successful pirates can show off, there is a considerable social stigma attached to their social positions as pirates in the local community. The key moral opinion makers are the respected elders of adult young men and under-aged boys. Moreover, local imams are typically very influential moral opinion makers with a considerable sanctioning power. The Alternative Livelihood to Piracy project has been found to successfully combine a livelihood and social reintegration approach, which involve these religious leaders. By giving religious leaders a key role to play in anti-piracy campaigns, - such as including anti-piracy messages in Friday prayers, local imams are effectively contributing to disengagement.\(^\text{22}\)

What makes the social and moral realities facing disengaging female ex-combatants in post-war Nepal different from those facing male pirates in Somalia? Involvement in a piracy gang is usually a rather short-lived affair. While the in-group feeling could be relatively strong, a corollary of the gangs’ rather isolated way of living, exiting and returning to one’s local community and moral community brought relief and a gradual restoration of repute and a cherished sense of social acceptance by one’s elders and respected religious leaders. Living the life of a Maoist combatant (female or male), on the other hand, has a long-lasting impact and is much more complicated because of what often comes to be seen as competing moral imperatives and social attachments to the different communities (push and pull factors).

**Nepal: Exiting – managing a conflicting sense of belongingness**

The end of Nepal’s armed conflict in 2006 was followed by a chaotic interim period. For those who were not ordered by the Party or had elected voluntarily to return to civilian life, a long period of

\(^{22}\) Gjelsvik M.I. and T. Bjørgo, op. cit. pp. 20-26
cantonment ensued. According to the final round of UN’s verification, in early 2007, about 20 per percent were female combatants and 80 percent male. Much has been said in a larger report on this project about the serious implications for teenagers (still children in legal terms), young women and men of having to cope with life in military camps scattered around Nepal’s countryside for years, and indeed their complex reasons for doing so. Suffice it here to say that these cantonments became community-like on several accounts. Not only were infrastructures and services upgraded, the quality of military life was greatly improved, with better living quarters, recreation facilities, obligatory daily military exercises and reinsertion activities. Moreover, the Maoist military command (still in charge of a reduced number of cantonments) had to allow their combatants – all of reproductive age and mostly still unmarried – to marry and establish families. Not only were intermarriages between cadres encouraged, “model” inter-caste marriages were too. And as during the armed conflict, the early encampment period was in several respects marked by a striking absence of a gendered division of labor. Not only both sexes do the same demanding daily exercises; they shared similar duties in the canteens and living quarters. Even football matches were played together.

With the onset of marital life, and especially with the advent of pregnancy and children, revolutionary ideas of women’s emancipation were tested and indeed compromised. Instead of prioritizing child-care services in all the cantonments, the Maoist leadership opted for a maternity scheme. Female combatants were allowed to three years of maternity leave, while retaining their right to the monthly allowance. The scheme, based on traditional ideas of motherhood, in which mothers are the prime caregivers and fathers peripheral figures, had significant differential implications for female and male combatants with children. Apart from senior officers living with their families in the camps, female foot soldiers and junior officers moved to communities surrounding the cantonments. Many of these female combatants were to some degree de facto demobilized and disengaged, in spite of their formal status. The long maternity leave had a deleterious effect on female combatants’ rank mobility compared to male combatants.

These various processes of social inclusion and cohesion in a radical political and moral community, with its contradictory polices which, on the one hand sought to loosen the hold of certain gender and caste taboos as part of a grand political project, but on the other reinforced them by pursuing a conservative maternity policy (creating vastly unequal prospects of promotion), set the terms for quite painful and conflict-ridden exiting processes.

During the years of living in these community-like cantonments, female and male combatants on leave were exposed to an array of contradictory social, moral and economic expectations: from their parents, children, other senior kin, in-laws (if married with civilians), village chiefs, party comrades and childhood friends. Combatants had to face, tackle and negotiate expectations reflective of Nepalese society undergoing the early stages of a root and branch transformation of deeply hierarchical and religiously sanctioned values of divine kingship, high caste dominance and men’s legal and social authority over women. Many who had broken caste taboos and married out of their

24 Each main cantonment got eventually a health post, staffed by a government MBBS doctor and nurse and equipped for uncomplicated deliveries. The services catered reasonably well to the health needs of female combatants who had no serious reproductive health issues or war injuries.
25 Bleie, T and R. Shrestha, op.cit p. 27
caste found their choices fully accepted. Others felt barely tolerated after returning home. Indeed, many were condemned, stigmatized and rejected. The moral gatekeepers tended to be mothers and other elderly female relatives, whose traditional role as forgers of marriage alliances was felt to be under threat. Male guardians and traditional villager leaders felt their authority and social control were at stake, and local Hindu priests were vehemently opposed to any violation of the ancient caste rules of marriage and worship. Since the verified minors and late recruits were discharged in early 2010, marriage has clearly been one of the most critical inclusion and exclusion mechanisms for female and male ex-combatants in the reintegration process. A large proportion of the roughly 17,000 re-verified ex-combatants that were recently (in early 2012) discharged, are currently planning not to return to their native community. The social stigma of inter-caste marriage is one exclusionary factor. Another for many female ex-combatants is allegations of moral corruption, a result of “sinful cohabitation” during the war and in the cantonments. Once out of the tight revolutionary community, former female and male Maoist combatants also face other challenges on the “home front”, including difficulties in their equitable conjugal relationships, tackling the religious belief of their elders, and caste-based notions of purity and pollution. The following two interview excerpts are particularly good at depicting these struggles at first hand:

I and my husband were discharged at the same time and returned together to his home. We had shared the same daily tasks in the cantonments, but when we came home my husband totally changed. I had to work at home and on the farm from 4 o’clock in the morning to 11 o’clock at night while my husband used to [spend the day] chatting about his war experiences with others… This I would not tolerate. As a result, we divorced and I came to this city to find a job for a living.

When I was discharged from the PLA, I came back home. I was really welcomed by my family. Next morning, my mother asked me to go to the temple to worship God. I thought my mother was really silly worshiping God. I had learnt during the war that religion was a means to oppress poor people… One day, when I went out to meet my childhood friend, she treated me like I was an untouchable, so I did not feel like going out any more.

Both of these lucid interviewees give us an idea of how conflict ridden disengagement from a radical political community can be, especially when it involves settling in local communities which remain faithful to the “old feudal and gender-biased order.” While the moral order and hierarchical discriminatory systems are shaken, change is painfully slow and piecemeal for these young women and men, who, having dedicated most of their lives to militant struggle, consider themselves the vanguard of “a New Nepal.” Neither the Maoist leadership nor the international agencies have launched suitable life skill programs, aimed at assisting radicalized militant youths to find a critical balance between confrontational revolutionary and reconciliatory attitudes. Such attitudinal changes

26 The substantial interview data presented in the Saferworld Report from 2010 (see: Common ground? Gendered Assessment of the needs and concerns of Maoist Army combatants for rehabilitation and integration. Kathmandu: Saferworld) and our own interview data from 2011 suggest that the majority plans to settle in new local communities, typically in residential areas near their former cantonments or in major urban areas.

27 According to Nepalese traditional gender customs, it is inappropriate for unrelated sexually mature women and men to meet in private without a chaperone. Sharing of a meal is likened to having intercourse.

28 Khadka, S. op.cit p. 55

29 Khadka, S. op.cit p. 55
and negotiation skills could play very constructively into the ongoing social, psycho-social and political reintegration processes.

Conclusion: The social dimension of a gender-sensitive agenda
This report has aimed at highlighting mostly the social dimension of a gender-sensitive reintegration agenda. It argues that the interlockings of social, psycho-social, economic and political reintegration processes promote successful disengagement from armed violence. In order to unravel these interlockings and their underlying values of social reintegration, a multi-faceted analytical notion of community was used.

Centered on the idea of the moral community, the notion was applied to two highly contrasting cases of disengagement from armed violence: gangs of pirates which recruit young men only, and a Maoist militant movement to which minors and adults of both sexes are recruited. In both situations, organized attempts are being made to ease a return to civilian life in countries with fragile states and societal orders marked by unquestionably different relations between women and men. But both are cases of profoundly intermeshing gender and age hierarchies, which structure households, kin-groups (and clans) and communities by means of particular customs and behaviors, giving certain categories of elders huge powers to ostracize or forgive young women and men who have transgressed against moral strictures on repute, respect, honor and shame.

In the Somali case, what at first sight looks like only economic motives for joining a dangerous and unlawful activity, turns out on closer examination to be a process of recruitment organized and mediated through clan, kin and peer-based social networks. Senior kin of both sexes do attempt (sometimes successfully) to dissuade these young men from joining. But the latter’s attraction to risky criminal path is also motivated by a quest for masculine recognition by both competing peers and women in a situation with few alternative routes to successfully negotiate the transition from boy to manhood.

Unlike the multiple drivers propelling young men into piracy, choosing to become a Maoist combatant was often a response to long-held grievances against the state and local elites, as well as youthful attraction to a persuasive political ideology and, not least, a mass movement which offered an inclusive family of moral warriors. As in the Somali case, senior kin, village elders and peers motivated and facilitated recruitment in Nepal. Girls joined for a variety reasons spanning from a quest for gender equality to an opportunity to avenge past injustices, or simply because they were ordered by family elders who wanted to save their more valuable sons and heirs from becoming war causalities. For girls and women, the decision to become guerillas was much more consequential than for boys. Female combatants deemphasized their traditional femininity and, like their male comrades in arms, were radically re-socialized as soldiers fighting side by side for a worthy political and moral cause. This sense of belongingness to a massively expanding movement and non-state actor (to which even the international community was largely sympathetic, apart of course from the Maoists’ human rights violations), is quite unlike the sense of belonging as a member of a gang of pirates, which is massively condemned by local communities and the intentional community alike.

For the Somali pirates, the booty brought needed income and masculine notoriety. But these benefits did not easily translate into a respectable marriage or approval by one’s female and male elders. Disengagement (especially for the not-so-successful pirates) through an alternative livelihood project, which could also redress their ill-repute as sinners and re-integrate them as members of a
moral community, has proved to be a quite successful programmatic reintegration strategy. There is a learning potential here for reintegration efforts in other post-war settings involving criminal or political violence, whether part of a formal DDR process or not.

Ex-Maoist combatants of both sexes have had to deal with a more complicated set of gender-specific and gender-neutral barriers in their long-postponed disengagement process. They became profoundly ideologically socialized during the war and cantonment. The markedly deemphasized sexual division of labor in the camps and on the battle field, coupled with heroic feats of armed insurrection were experienced as profoundly empowering experiences for most girls and women. During the drawn-out cantonment period most of these women married. Many were politically encouraged “model marriages” where the women married comrades from other castes and ethnic groups. In the ongoing rehabilitation/reintegration process, both female and male ex-combatants face challenges of social approval and inclusion, but the challenge is greater for female ex-combatants who are supposed establish a life as dutiful daughter-in-laws in their in-law households. Ingrained gender-differentiated ideas of sexual morality act as an additional barrier to community acknowledgement of their military past and the possibility of returning home with pride and dignity intact. Other notable “home front” challenges include how to transfer the more equitable conjugal relations established during the cantonment period to the old community, and how best to adapt to what have become in the meantime objectionable religious and caste customs. These social reintegration challenges are at least as influential as the lack of livelihood opportunities in discouraging many female and male ex-combatants from returning to their native rural communities which they find too wedded to the tradition-bound social order. The ongoing reintegration processes, if seen from a gender perspective, could speed up Nepal’s slow sexual and social transformation. It will continue as it has so far, a painfully conflict-ridden process, especially for the female ex-combatants and their dependents who in many cases may find themselves at odds with their communities both morally, socially and politically. If this is to be reversed, central and local governments (including the defunct local peace committees), the Maoist Party and other mainstream parties, working in collaboration with the ex-combatants and their communities, have to start acting systemically instead of ad hoc to realize the National Action Plan 1325 and other established, but too fragmented instruments of gender governance.

Returning to our initial principal argument about how DDR and reintegration intersect with three sub-systems of a post-war gendered societal order, the two vastly different cases offer some hard-earned, yet valuable insights into opportunities (lost and gained) of pursuing gender-aware disengagement strategies, which may hopefully hold more general relevance for reintegration polices and programming worldwide.
The International Research Group on Reintegration

Efforts to ensure social, political and economic reintegration of former combatants are persistently neglected in peacebuilding interventions. This is so, even as reintegration of former fighters is a central prerequisite for durable peace to take hold and for post-war economic reconstruction to be kick-started.

The Centre for Peace Studies’ (CPS) International Research Group on Reintegration (IRGR) is currently in cooperation with other applied academic institutions and international agencies, including the United Nations Interagency Working Group on DDR (IAWG-DDR), undertaking interdisciplinary and comparative studies of reintegration. Current initiatives build on a four years in-depth project with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) on the contexts of DDR. Ongoing applied research will enable the group to assess strengths and weaknesses in current DDR policy formulation and programming and contribute to a bolstering of reintegration efforts in key conflict zones.

The research initiative will solidify the standing of the Centre for Peace Studies at the University of Tromsø and associated partners as an international hub for expertise on reintegration. Complementary to the ongoing IAWG-CPS collaboration, which also has a focus on customization of DDR knowledge products, CPS is in collaboration with UNIDIR (Geneva) and Livework (a leading innovator of service design), developing prototypes which may enable CPS gradually to take on global service functions on reintegration.

Disarmament and demobilization, the shorter and technical sides of DDR, usually receive considerable focus and resources. Reintegration, however, is understudied and critically underfinanced. The work of the IRGR may help rectify this by maintaining a deliberate focus on reintegration and substantiate why long-term funding will enhance cost-effectiveness of peacebuilding. An underlying premise of current initiatives is that if reintegration, in all its facets, is systematically studied, we can generate new important evidence-based knowledge that will help future reintegration programming. Too little is known about the mechanisms that facilitate and play into reintegration processes. These need to be recorded, distilled and analyzed in order for researchers and practitioners to see common patterns and processes, which in turn can shed new light on why and how reintegration processes unfold in the way they do. Reintegration is an issue gaining importance in inter-agency efforts - helping to develop UN-wide tools and approaches will therefore provide important support to the Integrated Missions concept.

The IRGR comprises both faculty staff and affiliated leading scholars on DDR and global security. Furthermore, CPS currently supports young researchers to develop expert knowledge on DDR and Reintegration in particular. CPS’s own PhD and MA students in Peace and Conflict Transformation are affiliated with the expert group and receive guidance from a group who combine academic excellence with dedicated work as practitioners. Several of the groups’ members are current or former UN staff, including from agencies such as DPKO, UNDP, UNIFEM and UNESCAP. The DDR team will offer advice on design, implementation and evaluation of DDR, as well as on institutional capacity building and on mainstreaming gender-aware reintegration concerns into large-scale reconstruction and recovery efforts.