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# Guatemalan Ex-Combatant Perspectives on Reintegration: A Grounded Theory

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## Guatemalan Ex-Combatant Perspectives on Reintegration: A Grounded Theory

### Abstract

While reintegration programs for ex-combatants have become a major focus of cease fire agreements, their success remains elusive. In this study, I interview members of Nuevo Horizonte, an intentional community comprised of Guatemalan ex-guerrillas. These men and women reflect on two questions: what was reintegration like, and what advice do you have for other reintegrating ex-combatants. Using a grounded theory approach, common themes (such as being united) were developed and lead to a substantive theory of their transformative reintegration process. The collective voice of these ex-combatants challenges conventional reintegration programs by (a) challenging the demobilization prerogative showcasing how their unity was integral to their reintegration experience and (b) challenging the development model in which ex-combatants are viewed as lacking capacity and in need of outside experts to deliver solutions. By highlighting how reliance on their own capacity resulted in their successful reintegration, these ex-combatants believe their experience can assist other ex-combatants around the world.

### Keywords

Ex-Combatants, Grounded Theory, Guatemala, Peace, Demobilization Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR), Social Constructionism

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## Guatemalan Ex-Combatant Perspectives on Reintegration: A Grounded Theory

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### Introduction

The demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants have been critical components of peace accords over the last 20 years. Formal DDR operations of the United Nations began in 1989, and have since figured prominently in post-conflict rebuilding in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Balkans (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007, p. 532). While the United Nations proclaims that DDR programs have had demonstrated success, as measured by the associated political stability, prevention of a recurrence of armed conflict (United Nations, 2000; United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala, 2004), and improved economic outcomes (Pugel, 2007), others challenge these assertions by arguing that there is little empirical evidence to support the premise that internationally-funded programs facilitate reintegration (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Garibay, 2006; Hamber, 2007; Humphries & Weinstein, 2007; Theidon, 2009). Regardless of the diversity of opinion surrounding the efficacy of DDR programs, they have grown in both popularity and magnitude. In this paper, I focus on the DDR experience of a small group of Guatemalan ex-combatants who, following the end of the Guatemalan Civil War in 1996, made the unusual decision to reintegrate as a collective and unified group. This was based partly on their common challenge: their villages had been destroyed and their families had been killed or displaced. Additionally, their decision was influenced by the intensive and life-changing experience of being a guerrilla—relying upon one another in order to survive, fighting collectively for a cause worthy of dying for (T. Figueroa, personal communication, December 5, 2007), and from their pre-war experience with the cooperative movement in rural Guatemala (Falla, 1992). This group (now numbering 400 including men, women, and children) formalized their vision by establishing a cooperative, which they named Nuevo Horizonte (New Horizon). Thirteen years later, they reflected on their journey of

reintegrating back into Guatemalan civil society. In this paper, I attempt to represent their thoughts and sentiments on their own reintegration journey, and in part, attempt to assist them in their hope to offer advice to other ex-combatants who are (or will be) participating in similar DDR programs throughout the world. By using a grounded theory approach, I have generated a substantive theory that describes how their unity was a foundation for the successes they achieved during their reintegration process.

## **The Guatemalan Context**

Guatemala is a nation of contrasts. Its natural beauty and wealth, which includes rich agricultural land and natural mineral resources, are immediately visible. However, Guatemala's riches are contrasted with its poverty rates that are among the highest in the western hemisphere (Jonas, 2000). Guatemala's poor, which includes a disproportionate number of the country's majority indigenous population (Jonas, 2000), is juxtaposed against a minority wealthy class that has remained essentially intact and entrenched throughout Guatemala's past 5 centuries of colonial history (Arzu, 1992).

Guatemala's civil war lasted from 1960 to 1996 and was the longest and bloodiest war in the history of the western hemisphere (Jonas, 2000). At the height of the military repression in the early 1980s, more than 600 massacres were carried out (many of which consisted of destroying entire villages, including torturing and killing all the men, women, and children) in the military's official "Scorched Earth" policy (Falla, 1992, p. vii). According to the United Nations-sponsored Truth Commission (known by its Spanish Acronym of CEH for Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico), the Guatemalan military and its allied forces were deemed responsible for 93% of the war crimes and human rights abuses during the 36-year civil war (officially labelled a genocide), while the insurgent forces of the URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) were held accountable for only 3% (Comision para el Esclaramiento Historico, 1999).

By the early 1990s, however, global forces, such as the end of the Cold War and a widening global search for additional stable economic markets, brought external pressure to end the Civil War (Paris, 2004). Negotiations culminated on December 28, 1996, when the Guatemalan government and the URNG signed the final of 12 Peace Accords, which ushered in a much-anticipated official cease-fire (Secretaria de la Paz, 2012).

In addition to committing to addressing many of the longstanding social and economic issues of Guatemala, the Peace Accords also set the terms for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of the insurgent ex-combatants and included, among other things, training in a trade such as agriculture, construction, or small business (Hauge & Thoresen, 2007, p. 23). The URNG members were divided into two groups: those who had families, land, or some form of livelihood to which to return and those who had neither family nor assets within civilian society. The latter group amounted to a significant minority and represented people whose family members had been massacred and in many cases, whose entire villages had been completely destroyed (T. Figueroa-Acietuna, personal communication, December 5, 2007). It was from this latter group that the cooperative community of Nuevo Horizonte was established. Borrowing from their experience of forming Catholic-based cooperatives in rural Guatemala in the 1970s and 1980s, they envisioned and subsequently actively negotiated the terms of their reintegration to include the purchase of collectively-held land and the establishment of a legally recognized cooperative where they would have the opportunity to create a social, political and economic model of life based on the principles of equality (T. Figueroa-Acietuna, personal communication, December 5, 2007).

The cooperative of Nuevo Horizonte began in February 1997 as an abandoned estate of 900 hectares with no permanent housing or infrastructure (T. Figueroa-Acietuna, personal communication, December 5, 2007). According to founding members the first few years were extremely difficult, as people had no money or other resources to transform the tropical pastureland and forest into a viable agricultural operation. Long days of hard labour produced very little in terms of short term rewards and promises of government support went largely unfulfilled. However, my personal experience of living in this community over a decade later afforded me that opportunity to actually see the results of their long term vision and hard labour, coupled with financial backing from international governmental and non-governmental organizations. Just a few examples of the cooperative's successes include a local potable water system, an eco-tourism project that attracts international visitors, a restaurant and hostel, a fish farm, livestock, fruit and vegetable production, a chicken and egg project, a reforestation project, a community health centre, library, woodworking shop, daycare, and their own independent high school. While individual wealth, in the form of personal material possessions, is not readily visible, their collective wealth is.

### **Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration: Why another Study?**

The growing popularity of implementing DDR programs throughout the world has been accompanied by a burgeoning field of research to determine whether or not these programs are successful in accomplishing their goals. We know from the research that the challenges are many, but we still lack understanding of the first-hand experience of the ex-combatants—their personal perspectives on their challenges and what they do to address or overcome them (Crandall, 2004; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Specker, 2008).

I personally became interested in DDR when I had the opportunity to live in Nuevo Horizonte for 4 months with my family. My relationship with this group of ex-combatants was one of friend and colleague. I had no formal background in DDR and had not been part of any DDR programming. Rather, I was a student enrolled in graduate course work in Peace and Conflict Studies—thus my lens was one seeking understanding of how a group of men and women who experienced first-hand the taking up of arms for a political cause, came to reintegrate peacefully after negotiating a cease-fire with their military opponent.

This lived experience led to my academic engagement with DDR. Based on the stories I heard in Nuevo Horizonte, my review of the extant literature left me unsatisfied that the voice of the ex-combatant was adequately captured. For example, many researchers constructed identities that included an explicit degree of mistrust and negativity. Labels such as “spoilers” (Stedman, 1997), “belligerents” (Krampe, 2009), “obstacles” (Hauge & Thoresen, 2007), and “drug addicts” (Collier, 2007) were used by the researchers and DDR evaluators. In Liberia, ex-combatants were generally viewed as “uprooted urban youth with a history of unemployment, underemployment, and idleness (Boas & Hatloy, 2008, p. 33), prone to criminal behaviour (Abdullah, 1998), in spite of contrary evidence gathered from the ex-combatants themselves (Boas & Hatloy, 2008, p. 33). Stovel (2008), too, expressed concern that rebel groups are portrayed as terrorists (p. 310). Metsola (2006) suggests the reasons why ex-combatants are viewed with a great deal of suspicion, rather than with potential, is that of fear that their organizational capacity, strategic knowledge, and military skills might be used against the ruling class, and extends to the international community and donor countries. I believe that ex-combatants, due to these pervasive negative images, may potentially, as Gergen (2009) states, become “morally condemned by the research” (p. 59). Outside observers, in their guise of objectivity, appear to have depicted the ex-combatant as a potential threat to their nation's future security and peace. Although this may not be totally unfounded in certain historical contexts, my lived experience in the community of Nuevo

Horizonte suggested to me that this perspective is quite different from the way in which ex-combatants view themselves. Stovel (2008), for example, questioned the international peace brokers' claim of the reconciliation process in Sierra Leone as successful, while her in-depth interviews with the ex-combatants themselves revealed a contradictory view (p. 307). The issue, therefore, that warrants further study is to understand more fully the DDR process from the perspective of the ex-combatant. Therefore, an understanding of the reintegration of the people of Nuevo Horizonte warranted further study due to

1. the discrepant portrayals of ex-combatants between outside observant study reports and ex-combatant self-report interview studies (as evidenced by Stovel [2008] and my own perception from Nuevo Horizonte), and
2. the reintegration of the ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte calls into questions the claim of demobilizing as a criterion for successful post-war community.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to identify a central theory that explained the reintegration process of the ex-combatants. The research question was, "What central theory explains the reintegration process of the ex-combatants over time, as perceived by Guatemalan ex-combatants who had established and maintained the community of Nuevo Horizonte?"

During the 4 months that I lived in Nuevo Horizonte, I became aware that the community was very interested in sharing their collective history. They had already engaged in a number of activities of sharing their experience as ex-combatants, including formal presentations to visiting tourists, university groups, and foreign volunteers; painting murals on community buildings telling their history pictorially; and collaborating with foreign academics (e.g., Hauge & Thoresen, 2007). It seemed appropriate, therefore, to offer the community another opportunity to share their story with an academic audience that was interested in DDR.

The method by which I hoped to engage with the people of Nuevo Horizonte was influenced by a number of philosophical and ethical considerations. Firstly, as mentioned previously, my connection with the community began as a friend, co-activist, and colleague, not as a researcher or a DDR expert. I believe this relationship supported the normative nature of my discipline (Peace Studies), facilitating a less hierarchical relationship and anti-oppressive research approach, characterized by awareness of and attention to power differences, a sensitivity to voice, and a pursuit of social justice as an outcome of research (Potts & Brown, 2005).

Additionally, my journey of learning and subsequently writing about the reintegration experience of the ex-combatants from Nuevo Horizonte is underscored by the foundation of social constructionism (Charmaz, 2006; Gergen, 2009). Juxtaposed against a modernist (or realist) paradigm which views reality as separate and distinct from humans (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), social constructionism acknowledges that reality and knowledge are constructed (researchers and participants are therefore co-creators of knowledge and understanding) and therefore, any theoretical conclusions from the research offer only an interpretation of the studied world, not an exact picture of it (Charmaz, 2006).

## **Methodology**

Prior to engaging in the interview process, I discussed the ethical issues of this study with both the community representatives and with the participants themselves. The study was endorsed by the community leaders with the proviso that the community receive a written summary so that the knowledge and understanding could be shared with the community, and

also remain as co-property of the community. Additionally, they acknowledged the importance of some form of community compensation, in return for the appropriation of the community's time and knowledge. To this end, a library project had already been proposed and initiated at this point by myself and activist colleagues, with the purpose of hiring young people who were attending either high school or university. The wages were to be a source of well-needed income to support secondary and post-secondary education which often was cost-prohibitive in the community.

The two research questions which guided my interviews of the ex-combatants were the following:

1. How do the ex-combatants of Guatemala transition from war to civilian life?
2. What advice do the ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte have to ex-combatants of other countries, who are in the process of reintegration?

I chose a grounded theory methodology in order to best address the gaps and challenges of the current DDR literature, as discussed in the previous section. Because grounded theory is an inductive form of inquiry, the grounded theorist does not start from a place of logically-deduced pre-conceived hypotheses (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5), but rather is open to an authentic unfolding of understanding. Grounded theory helps researchers to build theory to explain a process or phenomenon by utilizing strategies that are neither rigid nor prescriptive, by focusing on meaning to further (rather than limit) interpretive understanding, and by embracing the relativistic paradigm of social constructionism (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510), and as such is based on the ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed, and therefore cannot be viewed as independent from those who have constructed it (Creswell, 2007, p. 248).

Grounded theory utilizes a series of coding, where interview data are defined and organized. I utilized coding processes outlined by Charmaz (2006), which consisted of three progressively more complex analyses: focussed coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding. Focussed coding consisted of reviewing the transcripts and summarizing chunks of data into single concepts or phrases. Axial coding consisted of organizing the focussed codes into relationships and determining relational categories in order to bring the data into an organized relationship. Finally, theoretical coding consisted of integrating and conceptualizing the categorized data to determine how the codes may be related to each other as a hypothesis to be integrated into a theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63)

## **Data Collection Procedures**

The formal data collection process took place from December 13 to December 30, 2009, 2 years after I had lived in their community with my family. However, prior to the formal data collection, I conducted some informal preliminary interviews in the Fall of 2007 when I lived in Nuevo Horizonte. This exercise allowed me to evaluate issues such as trust, community interest in the topic, willingness of people to participate, appropriateness of the interview format and style (including the nature of questions), and my ability to conduct this process in Spanish. On all accounts, I felt sufficiently satisfied that this project had community endorsement and that there was the potential to collaborate successfully.

In the month prior to arriving in Guatemala to conduct the formal interviews, I had received approval in principle from the Junta Directiva (community leaders). Upon arrival in Nuevo Horizonte, I met with the Junta Directiva in person and received their formal approval after agreeing to several conditions: criteria for participant selection (discussed below),

providing the community with a summary of the research in Spanish, and remaining connected with the community after the research was completed (achieved by the creation of a library project that is still operating in 2013).

The two criteria proposed by the Junta Directiva for selecting participants were

1. current membership of Nuevo Horizonte cooperative and
2. participation as combatants in the guerrilla forces (URNG) during the Guatemalan Civil War.

I selected a cross-section of 5 men and 3 women whose ages ranged from 40s to 70s. Potential participants were approached by me and a member of the community, Arnulfo, who worked with me on this project assisting with translation. Arnulfo was currently studying business administration in the hopes to someday assume a leadership role in the community. Both his parents were ex-combatants and Arnulfo was very familiar with the history of the community and was connected with the generation of people who were ex-combatants. Four who were asked did not take part due lack of time. All participants were given a written summary of the study to read before they signed a voluntary consent form.

I planned for a sample size of 8-10 participants for two reasons: firstly, using a grounded theory qualitative approach, I was not seeking generalizability from the interviews (Kvale, 1996) and secondly, I acknowledge that the nature of grounded theory methodology is dynamic, and therefore, I had a contingency plan to expand the number of interviews, if quality and saturation of information were not initially attained. Criteria for determining quality and saturation included genuine understanding of the context of the participants' stories, collection of a range of views, data that moved beyond the superficial allowing for the development of categories and the generation of ideas and comparisons (Charmaz, 2006).

During my preparation of the interviews, I anticipated organizing an orientation meeting for all participants for the purposes of

1. creating an opportunity to seek mutual clarification of the goals of the study,
2. presenting them with the global scope of reintegration of ex-combatants, and
3. eliciting from them ideas on what successful reintegration looks like.

However, this orientation session did not occur. This was mainly due to the fact that my contact, Arnulfo, did not think it was necessary and that attendance would probably have been poor. However, I believe these three goals were accomplished by raising them individually with each participant at the beginning of each interview.

The actual interviews were structured as follows: the location varied (public location such as the community restaurant or a person's home) but all were conducted in the community. Interviews began with a review of the study's purpose and the signing of the consent form by the participant. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and were video recorded with participants' consent. The interviews were semi-structured, but consistently began with the primary research question: What was your experience of reintegration like? Towards the end of the interview, I asked each participant the same question: What advice do you have for other ex-combatants who are re-integrating back into society? Throughout the interviews, I utilized a variety of open ended-questions and a range of appropriate listening responses (Adler, Rosenfeld, Proctor, & Winder, 2009).



## Data Analysis

During the initial focussed coding process, I transformed the transcribed interviews into 438 single-word or short phrase codes that summarized and conceptualized the information. I employed thought-by-thought coding which works well with issues and with information collected from interviews by giving the reader a clear picture of the ideas (assumptions, meanings, significance of what was said) and is sufficiently detailed to safeguard against the superimposition of preconceived notions (Charmaz, 2006). In using thought-by-thought coding, I also identified categories and process in a way to allow comparison of the data among the various interviews (Charmaz, 2006). Table 1 provides several examples of how interview data were coded, utilizing the following guidelines from Charmaz (2006): clear evident connections between the data and the codes, guarding against re-writing the data that does not reflect the participant's experience, and careful examination and reflection on how the codes reflect the described experience.

Table 1: Examples of Interview Data and Coding

Segment of data	Focussed code	Axial code	Category
...we were hoping that they would not throw us out. Because they were the ones with the power. They are the owners of the money...	Feeling powerless	Feeling vulnerable	Conditions
What is important is how much we know. We share and add to the knowledge of our brothers and sisters and then we can accomplish great things among all of us.	Collaborate with others	Collaborate with others	Strategies

During the second phase of axial coding, I reviewed all of the 438 focussed codes and sought emerging relationships among the codes and a looked for a possible structure of categories into which the relationships fit. I grouped the focussed codes together as many were closely related and formed into themes, from which a set of categories began to emerge. I kept the core phenomenon (the reintegration process) as the axis of my analysis, and developed the following set of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998):

- Conditions (what factors preceded reintegration)
- Strategies (what actions were taken in response to reintegration?)
- Consequences (what were the outcomes of reintegration?)
- Lessons Learned (what advice can we discern from the experience of reintegration?)

I utilized these categories for my initial analysis for the following reasons: to understand a process that was, in essence, a chronological process with a beginning and ending; and to capture the concrete stories and occurrences from the interviews as well as the conceptual reflections and analyses. My preliminary notes and memos supported the idea that participants reflected on their experience as a dynamic and chronological process.

During the axial coding phase, I printed the 438 focussed codes onto colored paper (based on each interview) and arranged them according to above four categories. Axial coding brought the large amount of codes developed in focussed coding back together in a coherent whole (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60) in the form of related categories around the core phenomenon of reintegration. Of the 438 codes, 63 synthesized conversation that did not relate directly to the research question and were therefore eliminated.

Table 2 displays how I sorted the 438 focussed codes into 50 broader axial codes, which I in turn determined to form a relationship based on four categories. For example,

under the category of Conditions, the 76 focussed codes were analyzed during the axial coding phase, and grouped and collapsed into 12 axial codes.

Table 2: Focussed and Axial Codes and the Four Categories into which They Were Placed

Number of Focussed Codes	Number of Axial Codes	Axial Codes*	Category
76	12	Hope (2) We were organized (1) No skills for civil life (16) Fear/uncertainty/mistrust (13) Had nothing (10) Inadequate formal process (10) Poor leadership/representation (9) Feeling vulnerable (6) Feeling forgotten/abandoned (2) Feeling judged (2) Difficult conditions (4) In touch with our history (1)	Conditions
70	11	Working with people from other countries (5) Being organized/working together (16) Building community infrastructure (5) Positive attitude (1) Took charge (3) Hard work (9) Non-violence (2) Learning a skill (3) Reached out to neighbours (16) Used our knowledge from the war (1) Ideological framework (9)	Strategies
153	16	Life is good (7) Received a lot of outside help and recognition (2) Re-integrated with our neighbours (7) Employment still a problem (5) The repression has stopped (12) We're in charge of our future (5) Still engaged in political struggle (15) Building community infrastructure (10) Feel betrayed, let down (26) Violence continues, just a different type (5) We remain united (18) Don't rely on the state for anything (13) A cynical analysis of the world (11) Recent positive government changes (3) There was some success (4) Debt (10)	Consequences
76	11	We didn't negotiate well (8) Stay united (14) Need to be in charge of the process (9) Work with other ex-combatants (3) Need to know what you're getting into (12) Integrate with the locals (4) Need strong mechanisms to implement peace accords (8) Struggle through nonviolence (6) Hard work is necessary (2) Apathy, cynicism (3) Need to have a good analysis of the causes of war and conflict (7)	Lessons Learned
63			Codes that did not relate to 4 categories

\*The number after each of the secondary codes represents the number of primary codes that were grouped or collapsed into the secondary code

During the process of axial coding, I conducted a category analysis in which I created four categories which brought the data together in a meaningful relationship. Below is a discussion of this process and how these connections and relationships came together.

### **Conditions category: What were the conditions that influenced reintegration?**

The 12 secondary codes in this category attest to the feeling of vulnerability of the ex-combatants as they entered the reintegration process. While the axial codes represent an array of sentiments, including ideas such as hope, being organized and being in touch with our history, the majority attest to the difficult condition in which they were placed. The ex-combatants had nothing, they did not have the experience to engage in negotiating their process, and they felt judged, forgotten and abandoned. In addition, they had no jobs, financial resources or practical skills. I believe the most appropriate way to summarize their conditions was to say that they were vulnerable. The following participant comments attest to feelings of vulnerability:

Really tough. Really tough in the sense that when we integrated ourselves back into civilian life it was like beginning all over again, like beginning from zero.

### **Strategies category: What strategies were used to reintegrate?**

The 11 secondary codes in this category attested to the participants' perception of working hard, building a community, connecting with neighbours seeking relationships with international organizations and partners, working collectively, taking charge and continuing with the ideological struggle. The following explanation attests to this composite of strategies:

Reintegration was pretty difficult because everyone looked upon us as bad...but we decided to be willing to be able to make many changes within our society...because we, through our exemplary behaviour, through our ability to organize ourselves, we were demonstrating so much to them...more than anything, that we were human beings.

### **Consequences category: What were the consequences of reintegration?**

The 153 focussed codes in this category were collapsed into 16 axial codes (see Table 2). The data reflected a complex understanding of success with a clear sense that the reintegration process afforded the participants a chance at a new life without fear and violence. The following two comments exemplify participant sentiments on why they thought some degree of success had been achieved:

But here we have had successes, we had had victories, little by little we move forward, surpassing in terms of socio-economic life, even though it has been very difficult.

Now another one of the benefits would be that we have remained here together, in a substantial group, and that we have always worked hard, in the sense that we are still human beings and make mistakes. We have tried to maintain our collective lifestyle, to resolve our community problems

collectively, and we work individually but within a common collective and in little groups, etc. And thankfully we have worked in this style up until today.

However, there was another side to the consequences, as exemplified in the following comment. A pervasive negative consequence was the debt on their land, which probably has been the largest obstacle facing the community since its establishment. Also, many comments reflected the disappointment with the lack of change, economically and socially, within the larger Guatemalan society:

In the case of combating poverty, that's another subject. The main reason for the armed struggle in the first place was the inequality between the rich and the poor in Guatemala...The peace accords were signed—the state assumed commitments to invest in the public goods with the intent of creating opportunities and reducing poverty. But on the contrary, sure there was poverty before, but now there is extreme poverty. The number of people living in poverty has increased...This is not accomplishing what was set out in the peace accords.

### **Lessons learned category: What were the lessons learned?**

Overall, the participants' advice offered reflections from people who knew so much more now than they did before they reintegrated, and that the knowledge they gained in the process would have been invaluable at the beginning.

Here in the community also, we have acquired a lot of experience. Even though in reality we could have arrived at this place in better conditions, perhaps more organized, because we lacked a lot of organization. But nonetheless, with the little experience we had on reintegrating into civil society, we have succeeded in furthering ourselves little by little.

Some of their comments are not surprising and correspond with information found in other categories, namely the importance of making relations with your neighbours, being organized, and staying united. Their advice apparently grew out of their disappointment and frustration with the peace accords process. Specifically, there was distrust articulated about the promises that were not delivered:

Well, I don't know a lot about politics, but on a political level, I believe that each successive government in Guatemala, none of them has carried through on those things that were promised to the people by the signing of the peace accords. Neither to the people, nor to the ex-combatants.

Based on this disappointment, the advice focused on making sure parties are held accountable, making sure people are bargaining in good faith, and making sure the process is transparent.

This is what I would say to other compañeros (comrades) who are part of the struggle, or who will be negotiating peace accords: think long and hard when you sign peace accords with a government . . . Because this did not happen in Guatemala. In Guatemala, all that was agreed upon remained only on paper. In practice, there is nothing.

Their advice reflects their experience that the content and goals of the peace accords were not problematic for them; the issue was that they believed the accords were not being operationalized.

### **Developing a Theoretical Model**

#### **Five Thematic Strategies of Reintegration**

The 50 axial codes were developed based on the above four categories:

- conditions
- strategies
- consequences
- lessons learned

However, there were themes that transcended these headings. For example, being united was coded as a condition of reintegration, as a strategy to reintegrate, as a consequence of reintegration, and, finally, a lesson learned. Therefore, I engaged in another more sophisticated level of analysis of the 50 secondary codes. This process, which Charmaz (2006) refers to as theoretical coding allowed me to move the analysis beyond a descriptive representation of the core phenomenon. At this point in the analytical process, I believed the utilization of the four categories did not push the understanding far enough. For example, the theme of unity was prevalent throughout the four categories and all of the eight interviews, but was not reflected strongly enough in this framework during axial coding. I believed this strong and pervasive presence of the theme of being united warranted a central place in any theoretical framework. My acknowledgement of the importance of being united led to a third round of coding and a reconfiguring of the categories. This opened up a wider set of relationships between categories to something bigger than the limited framework offered by the initial four categories.

Through the process of theoretical coding, I moved the understanding from a descriptive concrete process (conditions to lessons learned) to a conceptual framework by removing the axial codes from the four categories and by re-grouping them into five interrelated thematic strategies. These strategies, more conceptual in nature than the four categories (conditions, strategies, consequences, and lessons learned), were derived directly from the data. As Glaser attests (as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 64), they “earned their way” into the conceptual framework by authentically (and conceptually) representing the actions and strategies utilized by the ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte during their reintegration. Therefore, I organized the 50 axial codes into 5 themes:

- Being united
- Being autonomous (taking charge of the reintegration process)
- Being in relation (establishing connections with their neighbours and international partners)
- Maintaining a vision for social justice (working towards social and economic justice for Guatemala)
- Being a role model (working hard to build a community, exemplifying good citizenship)

The first thematic strategy, being united, is foundational, as it enabled and strengthened the other four themes. This is what Chenitz and Swanson (1986) refer to as a

core category in grounded theory, one that solves or processes the issue or phenomenon (reintegration). Glaser (1978) refers to this as a core variable, as it is a category that recurs frequently in the data and one that is central to the theory. According to Glaser, a core category can be a cause, condition, or consequence, or in this case, a strategy. Being united is the core category, core variable, also called a core theme and a core strategy.

The four points below demonstrate this hierarchical arrangement, that is, how the subsequent four thematic strategies, being in charge of their reintegration process (being autonomous), establishing connections with their neighbours (being connected), continuing their struggle for social justice (being visionary) and building an entire community from nothing (being a role model), were made possible through the core theme of being united.

- Being united, as a thematic strategy, was mentioned in each of the four categories: conditions, strategies, consequences and lessons learned.
- Being united was mentioned by all 8 interviewees.
- Being united was described as having its roots in the war and even before the war.

The following excerpts demonstrate how their being united was the foundation for the other four thematic strategies.

Being united helped them to be in charge of the reintegration process, and to be in control of their lives:

What we have here, we have done ourselves. In one form or another, the Cooperative of Nuevo Horizonte has many privileges...The first children here studied under the trees. Now we have a daycare, kindergarten, primary and junior high, a typing academy, a computer academy, and for special uses, we have internet. These are privileges.

It is always necessary to be united. It is always necessary to be together in order to make organizational plans and in order to further the struggle. Therefore, to further the struggle above all is so the individual does not get lost.

Being united helped them to be connected and to forge relationships with neighbours and international partners:

There is a community one kilometre away from here that has been around for more than 60 years. This community has never had running water. Until we decided to help them with a water system.

Being united helped them to maintain their vision for working towards social and economic justice:

Well, as another piece of advice, I would also say that to live collectively helps find solutions to many necessities. Ever since we were together during the revolution, we moved together.

Being united helped them to build their community, which acts as a role model for all Guatemalans:

And the act of living collectively has helped us resolve, like I was telling you, the education piece. Because, if we hadn't have been organized collectively, it would have been hard—we would not have built the school, that the government built. We have a daycare, which is a benefit.

Therefore, all of this we accomplished through organization, by always being together.

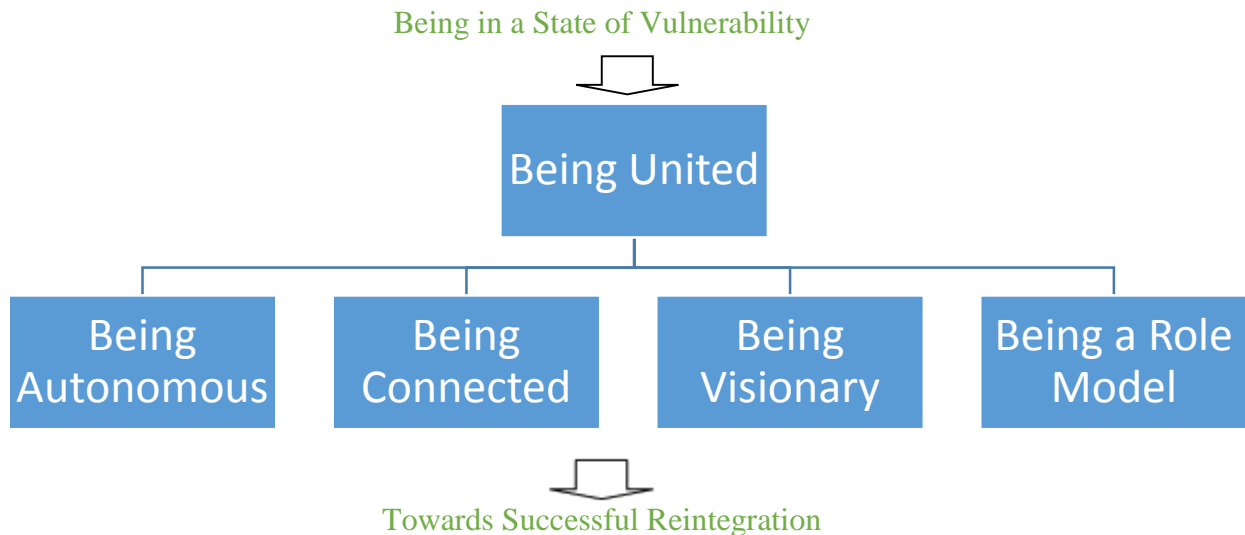


Figure 1: Reintegration: The Five Themes/Strategies. The five boxes represent the five thematic strategies and their relationship to each other, and how they enabled the ex-combatants to transition from a state of vulnerability, towards successful reintegration.

### Theoretical Model of Successful Ex-Combatant Reintegration

The purpose of developing a theoretical model is to conceptualize the phenomenon of the study (reintegration) in order to understand it in abstract terms (Charmaz, 2006, p. 127), and offer an interpretation. The following paragraph describes a theoretical model of successful ex-combatant reintegration.

At the beginning of the reintegration process, the Guatemalan ex-combatants were particularly vulnerable. Reintegration was foundationally a collective process united around a vision of staying together, connected with other communities and maintaining their struggle for social justice. The strategies they used to reintegrate were tied to their unique vision of reintegrating collectively rather than individually. Their process of reintegration was being united, being autonomous, being connected with the world around them, being visionary, and being a role model. Being united was their foundational theme, which facilitated their ability to take charge of their reintegration process (being autonomous), reintegrate with their neighbours (being connected), continue to struggle for social justice (being visionary) and build a community from nothing (being a role model). These thematic strategies have guided their lives and community building for the past 13 years, and have led to significant, though limited success for gaining social justice. These five thematic strategies enabled them to be much more successful than they would have been as individuals, but were not able to transform those concerns (such as macro social and economic justice) which were beyond their sphere of collective influence.

## **Verification of Findings**

I developed a three-page summary, in Spanish, of the theoretical model to present to all the participants. Arnulfo, who assisted with this process (as I did not return to Nuevo Horizonte for the verification process) reviewed the document to ensure the Spanish wording would be easily understood by the participants. When Arnulfo met with each participant, he was able to answer any questions they had about the text. Arnulfo asked each participant to comment on the document's authenticity in terms of reflecting their sentiments on their personal journey through reintegration. All participants endorsed the model and none offered any specific changes.

## **Discussion**

In the previous section, I presented my analysis of the participant interviews, culminating in a theoretical framework, in order to better understand the phenomenon of reintegration of Guatemalan ex-combatants. In the framework, I explained how the ex-combatants strove to succeed in their reintegration process by consciously utilizing a set of strategies. They recognized their initial vulnerability due to their lack of experience in the reintegration process and also their lack of power.

In this section, I discuss the importance and relevance of this theoretical model of successful ex-combatant reintegration and I offer a response to the questions:

- So what?
- Why is this relevant?
- What does it add to the existing understanding on the issue?
- How does it extend the literature?

## **The Vulnerable Ex-Combatant**

My analysis of the existing literature has documented, in my opinion, a well-intentioned, but somewhat incomplete portrayal of ex-combatants. Much of the focus of the DDR literature is from a macro-insecurity framework (Knight & Ozerdem 2004), where the aims of DDR are to protect not only the fragile peace of a country (by somehow discouraging the ex-combatants from returning to violence through rehabilitation and rewards), but also to protect the general public from people (mainly men) who know of little else besides violence, and know few forms of economic livelihood that do not translate into petty thievery (Abdullah, 1998; Boas & Hatloy, 2008; Darby & MacGinty, 2000; Hauge & Thoresen, 2007; Krampe, 2009; Stedman, 1997). Through this inquiry into the reintegration experience in Guatemala, I have challenged this perspective in several ways.

First of all, I believe that the ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte, not surprisingly, viewed themselves in the preliminary stages of reintegration, as being vulnerable. In a previous section, I gave examples of how other ex-combatant groups are described by their vulnerability, though in a context of either economic vulnerability (also corroborated by the participants in this inquiry) or vulnerability as instability with regard to the urge to return to violence if their needs are not addressed.

The participants of Nuevo Horizonte talked about a different vulnerability consisting of being subjected to a process over which they had little control and in which they had no experience, and a consequential sense of fear and lack of trust in the government and those in charge of the DDR program. Their vulnerability reflected their limited literacy skills and economic capacity. Therefore, I suggest that a systematic understanding of how to work with



people who are vulnerable can improve how DDR programs are conducted. This adds to the literature by offering a deeper understanding of the psychological and social needs of the ex-combatants in the preliminary stages of DDR. It also adds to the literature by conveying an alternative portrait of the ex-combatant—moving from one of a potential force to be bridled to one with self-identified positive attributes and skilful reintegration strategies.

### **Being United**

I contend that DDR programming is constructed in an individualist paradigm, which in light of Paris' (2004) analysis, falls into the larger neo-liberal individualist paradigm that characterizes First World development work. DDR programs emphasize demobilization (relying on one's self) and employment (personal responsibility and independence). These are not negative attributes or goals, and some may argue that these aspirations are shared by many ex-combatants around the world. Nonetheless, these attributes differ from the collectivist background of those Guatemalan ex-combatants who live in Nuevo Horizonte. As already demonstrated, their collectivist culture had its beginnings in agricultural cooperatives long before they joined the armed resistance movement, and was solidified during their combat time, during which collectivism was seen as necessary to survive. Therefore, their core strategy (being united) was intentional. Perhaps there are other ex-combatants elsewhere who would benefit from the unity and the collective ability of their former combat groups. This idea challenges one of the major tenets of DDR, which is to disband groups of combatants as a means to reduce the threat of resurgence of the violence.

The constructed identity of the ex-combatants may also be viewed by DDR program leaders as a psychological barrier to integration. "Whenever there are tendencies toward unity, cohesion, brotherhood, commitment, solidarity, or community, so is alienation under production" (Gergen, 2009, p. 114). In other words, the unity or solidarity of the ex-combatants may inhibit their acceptance by the civilians among whom they will have to live, just as those civilians may feel alienated from a group with a strong and unified (and different from their own) identity. We define who we are by how we are different. However, the experience of the participants from Nuevo Horizonte does not seem to support this. For the participants, it seemed that their unity gave them the power, or the collective wisdom instead to break down barriers, rather than reinforce them.

### **Being Autonomous**

In spite of this sense of vulnerability, (or perhaps because of it) the ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte mobilized themselves and took matters into their own hands. Their vulnerability, as articulated in the following participant quotation, therefore, did not seem to invoke a plea for charity or takeover, but rather invoked a request for assistance, so that they could enhance their own capacity for determining their future, to foster their own independence and autonomy.

One does not have to impose on someone what they ought to do...It is not necessary to impose. It is necessary to facilitate the process, not impose it...because the perspective of the West is different than the perspective of Latin America or the Third World countries.

This theme or strategy of being autonomous exposes another disparity in the self and other-constructed identity of the ex-combatant. To begin with, in the following quotation, one

of the participants highlights how his collectivist sense of seeking autonomy clashed with outsiders. These opposing constructions revealed themselves most when the community forged economic ties with organizations offering development aid.

I believe the topic of cooperation is a touchy subject. Because cooperation, depending on who is in the driver's seat, and who is on the receiving end, it can bring capacity or take away capacity...For me, cooperation has brought about unpleasing results in Guatemala. And it's not because cooperation is bad, on the contrary, it's because the proper conditions haven't been created...Instead of creating organization, instead of creating proper conditions, they (outside organizations) have come to create dependence and have created a lot of paternalism.

I believe this disparity of understanding is explained succinctly through Farmer's (2005) framework for development aid: through his experience as a physician engaged in international development work, he has observed how conventional development programs (where superior knowledge and decision-making power reside with the development experts) can create dependence. However, when development projects adopt what Farmer refers to as the social justice model, when the cooperative relationship between giver and receiver necessitates the blurring of distinguishing lines and identities, empowerment, capacity and autonomy are allowed to flourish. Autonomy is a key of the social justice construct, and the relationships are based on "the struggle to construct a just and fraternal society, where persons can live with dignity and be the agents of their own destiny" (Gutierrez, 1973, p. xiv). I believe the following quotation supports the idea that the people of Nuevo Horizonte sought a social justice framework for their relationships with their neighbours and with the organizations that assisted them with their reintegration.

From here what we have learned is that we have to change. We have to undo this type of cooperation. Because instead of giving you advantages, it gives you disadvantages. Therefore, for me I believe that Nuevo Horizonte has worked a lot and the truth is that the cooperation can contribute, but only if it respects the existing structure. And, true, also the people need to be organized. If they are not organized, it is not possible. Even though cooperation (aid) may come with a lot of money, it doesn't resolve the problem.

## **Being Connected**

A number of the participants refer to the way that the civilians viewed them during the initial phase of reintegration—with fear (may be violent) and disdain (murderers, thieves, prostitutes). They attributed this in part to an intentional campaign during the war, when government forces, as the dominant social group, utilized popular media to construct a negative image of the guerrillas as the other. The ex-combatants, at the beginning of reintegration responded by breaking down this barrier, by intentionally re-constructing how others thought of them, potentially avoiding what Waller (2007) refers to formal social exclusion.

But also, one has to do their part, we have to do our part as well so that the people get to know us.

## **Being Visionary**

The theoretical framework provides a description for how the ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte viewed themselves in terms of being visionary. They believed they had a purpose that transcended the transition from guerrilla to member of civil society. Their ideological goal of social justice for all Guatemalans transitioned into a non-violent struggle, which was made possible by the newly opened political space, and manifested through legal political parties and social organizations. This transformation occurred on a national scale, and was frequently mentioned by the participants as one of the successes of the reintegration process. The following quotation attests to their commitment to continue with their ongoing struggle for social justice:

I believe it is important to realize that signing the peace accords was not the end of our revolutionary movement. And when I say revolutionary I don't mean violence, I mean development of a society where the people are liberated and have adequate means to survive and live with dignity.

This vision by ex-combatants has not been captured anywhere in the DDR literature that I have reviewed.

## **Being a Role Model**

As discussed previously, the literature has many examples of the perspectives of outsiders, who perceive ex-combatants as threats. It is therefore significant that the ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte did not perceive themselves as the threat to lasting peace. On the contrary, as demonstrated in the previous section, they saw themselves as catalysts for lasting peace. This peace is one that will bring economic and social justice to all of Guatemala. Unlike any literature reviewed thus far, these ex-combatants would say that the real threat to lasting peace is, in fact, the Guatemalan government and the global political and economic forces that restrain any meaningful attempts to create change.

It is also noteworthy to highlight another distinction between the DDR literature and the thoughts of this inquiry's participants. The focus of DDR programming has grown to include a wide range of services for ex-combatants and is larger than simply keeping a cease-fire. Nonetheless, measurements of DDR in themselves focus on outcomes for only the ex-combatants. What resonated among the participants' interviews was a hope for the amelioration of the social and economic conditions for all of Guatemala. Their criteria for success went far beyond their own needs, or perhaps more accurately, reflected a realization that their own needs are inextricably interdependent with all of their Guatemalan compatriots. To me, this sense of success is far more visionary than has been reported in any of the literature.

But we also try to keep this (our unity). And many parents try to pass this on to the youth because one day we are going to be gone, no? Therefore, God willing, the youth that are around today, plus those who are not yet even born, will always follow in this path—being united. Because one day in Guatemala, or perhaps in other countries, if everyone just struggles for justice individually, you can't. No one will hear you. We need to be united. Therefore, this, and I feel that it has been a benefit that has helped us to bring many benefits.

## **The Social Construction of Reintegration**

Evaluation and monitoring of DDR has become a serious and well-researched endeavour. There are significant interests, efforts, and resources dedicated to learning from past challenges, and to making the DDR process as effective as possible.

However, I would like to raise several issues regarding the underlying epistemology, ontology, and axiology of current DDR programming, including the monitoring and evaluation components. The first point I raise is that knowledge (epistemology) and authoritative understanding of DDR is constructed based on a Development Model, which inadequately addresses the perspective of ex-combatants. The second point I raise is that the dissemination of that knowledge may not fully engage those (ex-combatants) who want to be part of the dialogue and contribute to solutions (axiology).

The following participant quotation offers an excellent perspective on knowledge and reality.

Realities. You may believe that what you think is absolutely the only way, the ideal, but your method of appraising things compared to mine is different. Very different. Therefore, what is important is to have the capacity, the knack or the humility perhaps, to allow for the other person to express their way of seeing things, and perhaps through this, to construct collectively the processes.

This quote exemplifies the social constructionist premise that realities are not necessarily shared by groups. It also speaks to the tendency for power to dictate whose knowledge is accepted as legitimate. Social constructionists contend that there are many realities, and what may sometimes seem as the only reality may simply, in fact, be the reality of the majority, or in the case of DDR, the reality of those who write about it, measure it, and control it. I contend that these dominant epistemological constructs to include ex-combatants are potential threats, the goal of DDR is security, and the DDR process is tied to a neo-liberal ideology and a Development Model. By now it is clear that the participants' perspectives differ from these tenets of the international community, thus exemplifying the multiple perspectives of a reality or interpretation of a phenomenon such as reintegration. To be clear, the purpose of this discourse is not to say that the perspective of the Guatemalan ex-combatants supersedes or is superior to the incomplete perspectives of the dominant viewpoints. As Gergen (2009) states, "To recognize that a favoured reality is constructed is no reason for its abandonment" (p. 165).

The second point I wish to raise is the sharing of knowledge. Conventional methods of knowledge dissemination is dominated and controlled by academics and technocrats who live and work in wealthy western nations. This study is no exception. Therefore, those of us who are charged with the privilege to study and evaluate DDR programs are commissioned with the responsibility to showcase the voices of those who do not access conventional avenues of knowledge dissemination. We need to share those views of the ex-combatants themselves.

We know so little. But what is important is that the little we do know, we share and therefore we add to that which others know, and we can accomplish something very big among all of us. . . .

Therefore, the participants' call for autonomy has a lot to do with a call for an acknowledgement of their reality, their lived experience. Their perceived lack of experience,

their perceived threat to peace, may be also about their wish to simply share their reality, or their perspective. If the research of DDR and the language and construction of its goals, its outcomes or evaluative criteria speaks only to United Nations officials, then those outside this sphere cannot enter into the dialogue.

### **Relevance to the Existing Literature**

How does this study corroborate or support the existing literature? I would like to highlight three issues. Firstly, the participants' stories support some of the concerns uncovered by authors such as Jennings (2007) whose critical analysis of DDR in Liberia raises the concern that we need to not only question whether ex-combatants are reintegrating, but more appropriately, what are they reintegrating into? Guatemala's post-conflict journey is not unique in its challenges of widening poverty, growing violence, and unchecked impunity. Therefore, the question of successful reintegration raises significant questions about how DDR can successfully address longstanding and wide-reaching societal problems. Similarly, the participants of this study determined that their success in reintegrating was hampered by powerful external forces over which they had no control, and which actually exacerbated conditions (e.g., poverty, violence, and impunity) which they fought to eradicate. Jennings (2007) states, "Asking 'reintegration into what' seems a first step rarely taken, with the exception of market analyses commissioned to determine how many mechanics and seamstresses a post-conflict society can absorb. The remedy is prescribed before diagnosis" (pp. 213-214).

Secondly, the participants' stories support Stovel's (2008) concept of sentient reconciliation. The ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte stressed that while economic viability is necessary for successful reintegration, it is not sufficient. Attaining a sense of belonging and acceptance was crucial, and accounted for the strategies they implemented during their reintegration phase. Sentient reconciliation also includes less tangible qualities such as forgiveness and healing (Lambourne, 2001), which are more difficult to measure than economic indicators. Because DDR evaluations tend to be focussed on concrete outcomes and deliverables, it is not surprising evaluators and researchers have often avoided tackling these more elusive outcomes.

Thirdly, the participants of this study confirm what has been reported in many other countries, that promises of job training and economic incentives have in reality fallen significantly short of promises and expectations. In spite of significant resources utilized by DDR programs, there are no literature examples of ex-combatants who stated they were satisfied with their economic prospects post-reintegration. The reasons for this are no doubt complex, and cannot be separated from the previously discussed challenge of widespread poverty in the affected countries, but I believe this dissatisfaction is exacerbated by the perceived lack of participation and input by the ex-combatants, which may manifest itself in various forms of disillusionment. In addition, these participants blame this shortfall on systemic corruption, as do others (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Jennings, 2007).

There are several ways in which this study challenged the existing literature. First, I believe the theoretical framework clearly describes the ex-combatants in terms of their capacity instead of their deficits. The framework is based closely on the reflections of the men and women of Nuevo Horizonte who experienced the reintegration process and who remember it vividly in terms of their own strengths and resources. This orientation is not represented in the literature, which generally reflects a perspective that ex-combatants are in a position of needing help, and the solutions to their problems are found externally. This issue warrants some attention. Reframing ex-combatants in a more positive and capable frame of reference may seem straightforward on an intellectual level, but in practice, it is more

difficult. DDR brokers and managers tend to be well-educated and have an array of education and practical skills, while the ex-combatants often have no formal education or skills that are overtly applicable to re-enter civilian life. It may seem unavoidable in practice for these two groups to adopt roles of expert and incapacitated. Nonetheless, according to the reflections of the participants of this study, a big part of their success relied upon being able to use their capacities and skills they already had.

Second, the positive collective identity that the ex-combatants of Nuevo Horizonte have constructed directly challenges the negative stereotypes that are found in the literature. Ex-combatants were seldom if ever portrayed as problem-solvers, visionaries, or as other positive contributors. At best, they were portrayed in neutral terms, or more likely, as victims. I believe this challenge of the identity of the ex-combatant is one of the most significant contributions that this study has to offer.

Further, I believe this study extends the literature on the reintegration of ex-combatants. Ultimately, the purpose of this inquiry has been to seek advice from experienced ex-combatants for those who are currently in the DDR process, either as experts or as participants. I believe this aspect is important to emphasize. The current literature is filled with many evaluative surveys asking ex-combatants about how the process went, but I am not aware of one example in which these participants were asked the question, how would you improve it? I believe this shortfall is reflected in McKnight's (1995) belief that frequently, expertise and wisdom is held by those with power, and the expertise and wisdom of participants is overlooked.

If we look back to the secondary codes under the category of Lessons Learned, the following seven themes can be extrapolated from the advice of the ex-combatants:

1. Be united
2. Have a transparent process
3. Take charge of the process
4. Ensure that there are mechanisms to ensure the completion of the terms of the peace accords
5. Build relationships with other ex-combatants
6. Integrate with the population
7. Do not wait for the government (or other groups) to fix things—take charge of your future

Another way in which this study extends the literature is its time frame. This study captures the reflections of a group of ex-combatants 13 years after the peace accords were signed. To my knowledge, this is unique as most evaluations have occurred during or immediately after the DDR process has been implemented.

## **Limitations**

As highlighted in the previous section, the ultimate purpose of this inquiry was to elicit the thoughts of experienced ex-combatants to formulate advice for others in the same situation. In spite of best efforts to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness, and to conduct this inquiry with an anti-oppressive orientation, the fact remains that the participants' voices and their story is still being transmitted and interpreted by an outsider from a foreign and globally dominant society. The challenge that DDR programs are organized and controlled by outsiders from the globally dominant society can be used as a critique to this inquiry as well.

As a qualitative grounded theory study, the results can be seen as understanding a unique story and the results are not necessarily readily transferrable to other DDR contexts.

Additionally, while I believe that the views and perspectives of the participants generally represent those of the entire community of Nuevo Horizonte, ultimately, they were elicited from 8 ex-combatants. Nonetheless, there are important things to learn. Additionally, in spite of the title of this dissertation, this inquiry is based on the people who chose to live in Nuevo Horizonte, and does not represent the story of all the ex-combatants of Guatemala.

I must add as well, that while the aim is to offer advice to others in similar situations, it is easy to realize that each society, culture, country, group of ex-combatants, and conflict is unique. As Jennings (2007) states, DDR programming must be more sensitive to local contexts and capacities, therefore, conclusions drawn from this study cannot be used as generalized recommendations for other countries and conflicts.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

As a qualitative inquirer embedded in the paradigm of social constructionism, I believe in the value of expanding the quest for deeper understanding. Therefore, my suggestions for future research do not focus so much on specific topics, geopolitical priorities, or specific post-conflict challenges, but rather focus on processes that further elicit the voices of those who do not currently participate in our dominant discourse of reintegration. I believe one innovative focus for further inquiry is on how ex-combatants can be better heard and how their voices can be further disseminated. Listening that is intentional and drawn from a perspective of social justice can reduce the disparity between the program goals of international development organizations and those of the people whose lives and predicaments they are trying to ameliorate (Rural Southern Voices for Peace, 2011).

Additionally, I suggest that inquiries be extended to long-term retrospective studies in different parts of the globe. For example, how are the ex-combatants on the African continent managing 10 years after their reintegration programs have been dismantled? And lastly, I believe that further research (and perhaps even DDR implementation) needs to view ex-combatants through a lens of capacity, and needs to be open to recognizing the strength of unity during reintegration.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to identify a central theory that explained the reintegration process of the ex-combatants. In this study, I offered a theoretical model of successful ex-combatant reintegration to better understand how a group of Guatemalan ex-combatants reintegrated back into Guatemalan civilian society after the end of the longest civil war in the Western Hemisphere. I utilized a qualitative methodology, grounded theory, to guide the process; I proclaimed social constructionism as the paradigm to guide the ontological and epistemological assumptions. I aligned myself with the values and goals of Peace Studies, that is, to seek ways to struggle nonviolently, and to strive to create communities, global and local, that exist not only in a state of absence of war, but also in a state of social justice for all.

In the end, after corroborating my results with the participants, I am excited that the story of these ex-combatants is relevant and timely, to the participants themselves and more importantly, to those involved in implementing DDR programs and to those involved as participants around the world. The theoretical model of successful ex-combatant reintegration rests upon the foundational theme of being united. Challenging conventional views of how DDR programs are implemented, this framework helps explain how the solidarity among the former guerrillas assisted them in significant ways. Being united assisted the ex-combatants

in autonomously taking control of their reintegration process and of their lives. Being united helped them forge relationships and stay connected with neighbours and international partners. Being united helped the former combatants to maintain their vision for working towards social and economic justice. Being united helped them to build their community, serving as a role model for all Guatemalans.

Lastly, through this study, I offer the opportunity for those who have experienced the reintegration process a chance to offer advice to others. The DDR literature is often about what the experts bring to the table. Through this inquiry, I give voice to a group of ex-combatants can bring to the table: through capacity and skills that they learned as guerrillas, these former combatants, now community members, offer a vision for social justice, strength in remaining united, and advice for other ex-combatants who are transitioning. Their message is simple and profound: stay united and organized, have a clear vision of social justice, ensure that the process is transparent, and work hard to re-integrate among your neighbours.

These ex-combatants have a message important for us to hear. It is important that their voices are heard by those who seek to do as good a job as possible in other contexts of DDR. It is also important that other ex-combatants benefit from the experience and understanding acquired by those who have gone before them. This experience offers a wisdom perhaps obtainable in no other way.

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