Introduction: Contemporary Modalities of Violence  
Florian P. Kühn – Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Scapegoat Violence in South Africa: The Construction of Evil Aliens  
Etienne Magbunduku – Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Universität Potsdam

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Combatants, Civilians, and the Dilemmas of a Post-conflict Environment: Critical Reflections on the Reintegration of Fighters  
Bianca Süßenbach – Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
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Constantin Wacker

This is a special issue of IReflect – Student Journal of International Relations guest-edited by Florian P. Kühn. Articles for this issue emanated from the seminar ‘Konflikt und Gewalt in den Internationalen Beziehungen’ – Conflict and Violence in International Relations, at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in the summer term of 2014 and winter term of 2014/15. All student contributions have been regularly peer-reviewed by the IReflect peer review pool and published in accordance with IReflect standards.
Introduction: Contemporary Modalities of Violence

Florian P. Kühn

Whether it is separatist violence in Eastern Ukraine, the so-called Islamic State (Da’esh) in Iraq and Syria, or other, lower intensity cases of prolonged, systematic violence: violence seems to be ubiquitous in our days. Despite the pressing urge to understand contemporary violent occurrences, thinking about violence has a long legacy of nuanced inquiry. Large-scale violence has been associated with the ascent of states and the international system of states. States, of course, with their claim to monopolise the use of legitimate violence, seem to be eternally challenged to put the monopoly into practice, finance the apparatus to organise violence (military units as well as police) and shape the legal space within violence can be regulated (von Trotha 1999; Weber 2002; Tilly 1992). However, violence – even when it is global and transnational – is a social activity, which requires taking into account the determinants which foster, support, restrict or put taboos on violent behaviour (Elias 1997). The causes of violence, in research approaches, should be distinguished from an actual sociology of violence – focusing on violence itself rather than its surrounding conditions (von Trotha 1997).

Different times appear to be conducive to different forms of violence. The modern state, often falsely associated with democratic rule and pacified social norms, has undergone two entangled developments: it struggled to replace feudal orders and monopolise violence in a unitary (historically that was an absolutist) state, and support it by newly developed institutions of organised violence such as the police. In the process, the state gradually pushed aside alternative orders of violence and replaced their functional value to society with increasingly formal institutions. As empowered bourgeoisie, or ‘civil society’, populations appropriated the means to regulate violence from the ‘Leviathan’ in a further step. The state’s use of violence, to be accepted as ‘legitimate’, in a long social process became to be monitored and henceforth regulated by law (Siegelberg 2000). Ideally, democratic control of armed forces, of governments, and executive branches is understood to best prevent violent abuses of power.

In practice, different findings ask for qualification of such an assumption. The modern and post-modern state is inclined to discern between certain forms of violence which are accepted in society while others are not – trust is a vital function for citizens that state and society find the ‘right’ and
legitimate way of defining and dealing with violence (Reemtsma 2008: 162ff.). It is clear, however, that violence is not a pre-modern phenomenon, to be magically wiped away with the attainment of modernity (Malešević 2010: 17). Democratic Peace Theory, with an international vision, has been found to have irresolvable antinomies, as democracies, assumed to be more peaceful than non-democracies, turn out to be exclusionary, competitive, or following utilitarian (instead of pacifist) aims (Müller 2002, Geis et al. 2006, 2007). The puzzle that Western states, while claiming to act in pursuit of peace, are aggressively trying to establish their social model globally, thus unhinging social structures in many places outside their own societies, has yet to be resolved (Pugh 2012, Turner and Kühn 2016, Kühn 2016). Seemingly, irrational violence has been found to be more rational than was apparent (Elwert 1999); a discussion has evolved regarding the new-ness of what was called the ‘new wars’ (Kaldor 2000, 2013, Münkler 2002, Gantzel 2002, Kahl and Teusch 2004).

The role of the state as an ordering principle has been discussed ideationally, tracing what mythically is expected from the state (Schlichte 2005). The discussion about fragile, failed and failing states (Schneckener 2006, Patrick 2007, Hehir 2007, Bôäss and Jennings 2007, Krasner 2004), as well as of different approaches – some less, some more effective – to (re-) establish state order (Chandler 2006, Duffield 2001, Bliesemann de Guevara 2009, Kühn 2010, Bliesemann de Guevara and Kühn 2010) pointed to the conditions of balanced state-society relations. Finally, the dynamics of civil wars have been highlighted (Cramer 2006, Kalyvas 2006) as well as the processes of the production and re-production of violence in societies – with and against the state (Wieviorka 2009, Žižek 2011). The broad landscape of approaches trying to make sense of violence, its sources and logic is, briefly put, impressive.

These discussions go back a long way, though. Making sense of organised violence in wars between states led Carl von Clausewitz to write ‘On war’ (1991 [1832-34]), trying to clarify the relation of war and politics, and especially politics in times of war. He cautions against the dynamics of war, the voraciousness of war’s dynamics to subdue social resources along with political considerations. In distinguishing between tactics and strategy, Clausewitz aims to crystalise a theory of war, and in highlighting the particularities of each war, he provides no practical handbook for generals. However, Clausewitz’ approach is focused on organised violence, conducted by experts in formalised institutions. Without the state, in such a view, war seems impossible. Violence beyond state orders, it becomes obvious, is not always so straightforward and neatly bounded, and Clausewitz merely covers a fraction of violent phenomena found empirically.

Violence can be distinguished according to two social functions it may fulfil, as Walter Benjamin wrote in 1921 (1965). He reminds us that violence, in the form of war and military violence, may lead to the establishment of a legal order, beginning with a constitutive legal act of making peace. This
lawmaking function of violence, according to Benjamin, needs to be analytically separated from law-preserving violence, which stabilises a social order once established (Benjamin 1965: 39-42). Stabilising an existing order by threatening to use violence (or other sanctions) becomes ingrained in the state. Reminding us how violence (Gewalt) and power (as in German in Gewaltenteilung or in the verb walten) are tied together, Benjamin points to inevitable linkages of power – as ubiquitous resource to subordinate a subject – and violence. Power, when institutionalised in systems of domination (Herrschaft), may originate in lawmaking violence; thus paradoxically, following Benjamin, order seems to be created from violence – however benign an ensuing regime might be. That societies and states become oblivious of this violent foundation does not change the fact. This is, of course, a significant deviation from previous contractual ideas (see Hanssen 2000: 8-10, 17) about how states are founded and come to define their specific order.

On the contrary, in her famous essay On violence, Hannah Arendt (1970) denies that relations between power and violence can at all be established intellectually. Violence, she contends, can destroy power but is unable to create power (Arendt 1970: 57). According to her ideas, both stand towards each other in non-related, unmingled ways. Neither peace nor power is a means to achieve an end – but rather an end in itself, as there is no convincing answer to the question what peace, or power, might itself be means to. Power, thus, has no end, nothing to achieve, and hence cannot be connected to violence which, in this notion, ought to be ‘useful’ to achieve something. Violence, in Arendt’s view, is always instrumental. Coercive mechanisms embedded in political or social structures are thus impossible to detect for Arendt – the apparent tightening of the term to enhance its analytical value cuts out phenomena which might well be understood as violence in more general terms. Arendt digresses the furthest from an idea of analysing violence in its social environment – and seemingly refuses carving out the inter-connections between violence and its political meaning.

Violence, understood as organised group activity, on the other hand, can be discerned by the organisational capacity of groups to overcome individuals’ feeble inclination to behave violently. Because most people do not habitually resort to or experience open violence (mind however, domestic, gendered violence enshrined in the masculinities of war, but also of many forms of ‘peace’), violence fascinates the public, selling well in film, video games, and literature. The depiction of violent events is one column of the business model of the yellow press, TV reporting, or lobbyists. A strong taboo put on violent action in pacified societies forces states as well as sub-state groups to convince their violent agents to practically employ violence; they can do this by maintaining specialised violent agencies, motivate laymen or buy private services. It is clear that ideology and material constraints determine the success of groups to be able to mount a violent campaign. For the states, this means that actively encouraging, financing and organising
violence stands in drastic opposition to the necessity to control or even eliminate violence from society. These conflicting aims, of sub-state as well as state organised violent campaigns, and how ideology and material potential feed into the dynamics of war, need to be analysed. Radicalising ideology as well as opening up of new sources of funding are necessary conditions to organise a violent campaign but also can get out of hand: “once unleashed, collective violence becomes its own master, operating on its own tracks and creating new realities” (Malešević 2010: 84).

Stathis Kalyvas, in his seminal book on civil wars\(^1\), asks why this form of violence seems so much more cruel and boundless. He comes close to addressing von Trotha’s (1997) demand to closely focus on the violence itself, not merely its conditions. While civil wars and, for that matter, the amount of violence employed are contingent upon the societies which they are embedded in, it is precisely the cleavages within warring parties which go a long way explaining actual levels of cruelty, dynamics of fighting and, often, atrocities. Seemingly, inexplicable acts of violence between former friends and neighbours can be attributed sense if we assume that war (or a state of general impunity and high levels of violence) creates opportunities to settle disputes or clarify competitive relations between individuals or families, tribes or other kinship groups. Such violence may not be directly linked to political grievances that triggered hostilities in the first place (but may be supported by them); private feuds may become politicised as they are incorporated in a narrative fitting the frame of the war. Also, violence transforms not only subjects, but also forms institutions and groups of perpetrators. Kalyvas impressively reminds us to look at the ‘endogenous’ quality of wars, that is to search for the dynamics within, not only between, warring groups (2006: 388-392).

The different facets of violence challenge academic research. There is a huge variety of approaches, each establishing knowledge about violence in its own right, its dynamics, causes, practices of violence and attempts to ‘re-capture’ the genie once released from the bottle. Sociological as well as

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\(^1\) The term *civil war*, often denoting violence organised to different degrees – thus setting it apart from criminality – but not conducted by formal, state actors or militaries in what can be epitomised as ‘war between states’, is itself highly problematic. As it assumes that a ‘normal’ state of war is one between states, it underlines the misleading assumption that society is necessarily contained within state structures. This is, of course, not the case, as the state system – while compelling – has developed over time, establishing ever similarising and homogenising formal institutions generally attributed to statehood. International law, as a law between states, is just one manifestation, but also diplomatic relations (between states), delineated legal spheres and territorial boundaries of laws’ validity. Unless civil rights are enshrined and established – which in many regions of the world is not the case despite formal statehood –, by definition there cannot be ‘civil war’. Sub-state war, focusing on the non-formal and extra-legal parties to the conflict (at least one group would have to be non-state in such a war), appears to be a better description for the phenomenon.
theories in international relations contribute their parts to analyse and make sense of phenomena most people rightly abhor (Heitmeyer and Soeffner 2004). Not all approaches, be they individualist or oriented towards group violence, find proper recognition in the articles of this Special Issue. However, we take inspiration from these approaches and attempt to provide theoretically grounded descriptions and explanations of phenomena of violent behaviour. While all articles differ in outlook, subject of inquiry and theoretical grounding, all articles understand political violence as a menace that – to be countered, shirked, or resiliently worked around – needs to be analysed and its inner workings understood.

As such, violence, as focused in this Special Issue, is understood as a collective activity. The articles share the assumption that a basic condition for violence is conflict. Social conflict, as communicated differences in interests between different groups, need not necessarily turn violent – however, violence, we assume, necessarily relates to a conflict. Thus, with our view on political violence, we exclude self-sufficient, bloodthirsty destructiveness from our analyses. While not every conflict leads to violence, certain types of conflicts may be prone to support or evoke certain forms of violence more likely than others (see Waldmann 2012). Therefore, we find that the relations between concrete practices of violence and the political circumstances we found need to be analysed in order to make sense of the observed phenomena. It is important to complete this picture by including how actors frame violent tactics and behave accordingly to use or avoid it. This approach keeps in mind the evolving nature of conflicts and the dynamics of violence, which more often than not create their own habitat: conditions conducive to continuing violence rather than for it to simply end. Thus, diagnosing the causes of violence may not suffice to suggest peaceful ‘solutions’ to a conflict; yet, critically engaging with the narratives of violence includes holding official and popular justifications against the deep structure of politics underscoring it. Hence, looking at who gains from the use of violence, distinguishing economic, political, cultural winners and losers of violence, we aim at getting a clearer picture of the modalities which shape violence today.

Such an approach includes but is not limited to asking how violence is embedded in a certain form of political conflict, or how the figuration of actors or actor groups plays into the violence regarding their respective formal or informal legitimacy. Also, we look at how actors’ ability to make use of resources – be they economic, symbolic, cultural or procedural – shapes the forms of violence, and in which way violence may be part of an overarching geo-political competition. In this way, the contributions combine sociologically inspired research with a focus on international relations.

This Special Issue collects research, which starts from the modalities of empirical violence, to reconstruct the functions and possible ascription of rationality to violent action. The articles contribute to an ongoing debate and effort to map and describe the vast variety of violence in international relations beyond the epitomic, but hardly occurring, war between states.
Changes in actual or presumed power constellations as well as attempts to project power beyond spheres of influence, conflicts over resources, and questions of legitimacy on local to global levels are in the centre of these analyses. At the same time, this research aims to analyse practices of interaction between national, regional and international actors as well as strategies against violence from repression to accommodation. Finally, economic, cultural, religious or structural factors are taken into account for their potential to work conducive to violence, to be pre-requisites for violence or to hamper or stop violent conduct. As ready-made solutions remain largely elusive, policy recommendations in support of pacification will only be identified as far as our analyses reveal unambiguous measures to resolve a conflict – fully aware that new political developments may unearth new political conflicts.

Etienne Magbunduku, in the first article, looks at violence directed at foreigners in certain townships in South Africa. This particular type of violence erupts occasionally and, on the surface, might be confused with spontaneous protests against minorities turned violent. However, Magbunduku shows that they are usually a culmination of violence escalating over longer periods. Using Girard’s concept of scapegoating (1989), he analyses that these groups are competitors for desirable goods or achievements: jobs and businesses, houses and wives. A majority tries to get rid of these ‘foreign overachievers’ through bullying at first, killing and displacing them at more escalated stages of the process. Those portrayed as scapegoats are usually blamed for the shortcomings in the lives of the violent majority. Turning against them is a way to get rid of competitors but also serves a function of ritual self-purification of the majority groups. Magbunduku shows how attempts to explain violence from a perspective of instrumental rationality – greed and self-enrichment – go a long way in explaining these escalations, but fail to explain the ritual component of such collective self-purification and its near transcendent redemption from ‘sin’ through violence against foreigners. This paradoxical mechanism is accentuated by the observation that during escalations not only foreigners but also members of South African linguistic and ethnic minorities fall victim to scapegoating and the resultant violence. These escalations, often tacitly accepted by police, are thus not just an excess against foreigners but identified with the purification efforts of a majority against members of minorities, regardless of their origin or social affiliation.

Tobias Pietsch looks at violence directed at Palestinian targets – cars, mosques, or uprooted olive trees – damaged by Israeli settlers. While different – and competing – forms of violence are present in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this particular form is fairly new. Only after 2008, the split of the politically organised settlers’ movement following the Gaza withdrawal of 2005, did the more radical settlers turn to this violent version of protest. Having lost political representation in the Israeli political system and their former ally, the Likud, which cancelled its former unconditional
support for the settlers, a minority turned to expressing discontent by hitting such ‘soft targets’. These attacks are called ‘price tags’, and in many cases slogans appear near the sites of attacks which make a direct connection to political decisions against settlers’ interests. Such ‘proxy vandalism’, of course, poses a problem for the Israeli state and its claim and obligation under international law to protect people and property under occupation. Hence, this violence is a means for the protesting radical settlers to demonstrate their ability to undermine the state and raise the price of politically unfavoured decisions – in economic as well as in political terms. Pietsch argues that analysing these as ‘vigilante’ violence, classically unprevented violence, which sometimes aims at supporting state order (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003, Waldmann 1998), falls short of accounting for this phenomenon’s intricacies. He makes the case for amending the concept so as to cover the indirect vector of this violence, where the target is not the addressee of a political message. The soft targets – Palestinians and their property – suffer the consequences of political conflicts between Israeli political groups. Including such a component of communication through political violence, Pietsch also contributes to and widens the narrow discussion on terrorism with its limiting focus on Islamist attackers.

Staying in the region, Patrick Stegemann focuses on the recently increasing importance of social media, in this case the role Twitter played for the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) during the Gaza war of 2014. Analysing their media strategy and (interactive) information activity on Twitter three months before, during, and three months after the war, he reveals that the IDF’s social media strategy did not achieve a persistent channel of interaction. While it is often claimed that wars are not only represented in the media but rather that media have become an integrated component of warfare, Stegemann shows that the IDF cannot uncritically be viewed as a ‘role model’. Outside of war, their stated aim was to provide channels of interactive communication which was meant to be durable during war; as it turned out, when war was fought, Twitter turned into merely a platform to inform a general public but hardly taking in feedback on how the actions in war were perceived. Beyond the practical use(s) of Twitter, Stegemann’s article illustrates how violence – to even stand a chance of gaining legitimacy – needs to be justified and framed in ways acceptable to a public beyond a state’s own constituency. It appears that states cannot anymore simply refer to their sovereign right of waging war or even to self-defence, but have to constantly reinvent an idea of order they aim to establish. That an existing order, within which violent practice takes place, needs to justify itself puts into doubt that this violence can be law-making in the Benjaminian sense; rather, the violence takes on a double character, as law-making and law-preserving at the same time.

The question of the power of a regime to suppress violence is at the centre of Simon Hufschmid’s article. He wonders why a state like China, usually rather adept in controlling, steering and suppressing its population’s...
political utterances, let alone demonstrations, seemed unable to prevent violent demonstrations against Japanese property and people in the wake of bilateral conflicts between both states. The disputed status of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which are administered by Japan but not officially recognised, as well as the introduction of revisionist text books regarding Japan’s imperial history triggered a wave of protests which, as Hufschmid scrupulously reconstructs, were conspicuously sequenced. Over several weeks, students and other supporters of nationalist sentiments were carried in buses to protests – which taken in isolation would be surprising in China, where mass protests are viewed to pose a risk of illustrating lack of state control. Additionally, however, vandalism against Japanese businesses and diplomatic institutions was tacitly accepted if not supported by Chinese police and security institutions. Surprisingly, as this analysis reveals, the Chinese government seemed to be hoping to derive international pressure from these protests. It is not without irony that the Communist Party used domestic reasons – public outcries – to justify its more assertive foreign policy in the Chinese Sea and for complaints about Japanese historical faults. Similarly, if the Chinese government hoped the Japanese government would move against publishers – rather uncommon in liberal, capitalist societies – they demonstrated an evolving but not well developed understanding of liberal politics. It remains unclear whether providing a valve function for Chinese society through protests or increasing the Chinese standing in international politics was the bigger failure.

Despite consistent lack of success, international interventions lead by the UN or ‘coalitions of the willing’ resort to Security Sector Reforms after the end of open conflict. While this may be a puzzle, Bianca Süßenbach in the final article goes even further, starting by questioning the distinction between in-war and post-war cases. Also, she argues, the neat distinction between civilians and soldiers – the latter to be reintegrated into society understood as homogenous and generally interested in peaceful, de facto liberal, politics – does not hold. Often, she shows, levels of violence remain high after (or because) peace agreements have been signed and international missions mandated. Likewise, militias may or may not have the epitomic village to return to, to be welcomed back in an idealised community of peers. As former parties to the conflict often have to rely on themselves to guarantee security and survival, demobilising in these situations can be an existential risk for them. Different armed groups, consequently, find a myriad ways to subvert, circumvent or appropriate Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs. Internal security dilemmas, prestige, survival motives can amend the usual greed and grievance (Collier and Hoeffler 2001) explanations. Süßenbach convincingly makes the case that the guiding mono-causal ideas about conflicts – which DDR programs rest upon – lack the analytical depth to understand social processes at play in prolonged violence, whether it is officially ‘post-conflict’ or not. DDR programs, consequently, not only fail to live up to the high expectations they are developed with, but may
also procure violence in that they create incentives for some groups to gain leverage over others.

Violence, all articles show from different perspectives, is a function of asymmetric social relations. Violence, for political analyses, needs to be approached as directed social action. To make sense of its dynamics, the interdependence of perpetrators and victims must be understood. Violent practices are by no means unidirectional, and violence points back at the perpetrators, changing them and their social environment as much as their victims. Over time, as the articles show, modalities of violence change with actors and political environment. We hope that this Special Issue may find readers’ interest in exploring the social function of violence and the dynamics of the social roles perpetrators as well as victims to violence play. By exploring this interplay, this Special Issue provides a good starting point to a closer inquiry into phenomena of violence, seemingly so prevalent today.

The articles combined in this Special Issue are part of a project seminar („Konflikt und Gewalt in den Internationalen Beziehungen“, Nr. 53116, SS2014 and WS 2014/15) at Humboldt University, Berlin, which took place over the course of two semesters. In summer term 2014, in conjunction with a reading seminar, we worked on conceptualising and developing the analytical tools for dealing with violent phenomena of different origin and progression. The author would like to extend his sincere gratitude to the contributors of this Special Issue, but also the participants of the reading seminar, who, with smart and challenging thoughts, helped lay the ground for the Special Issue. Also, the project seminar group would like to thank the publishers of IReflect for giving us the opportunity to publish our work in this context. Last but not least, thanks to the chair group International Politics’ team, most notably Jesper Nielsen for his support along all stages of this project.

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Kühn: Introduction – Modalities of Violence


Scapegoat Violence in South Africa: The Construction of Evil Aliens

Etienne Magbunduku

Abstract

Violence against African foreign nationals in South Africa is a rather common phenomenon whose frequency has increased since the end of apartheid. In May 2008, attacks against foreigners have culminated in an unprecedented nationwide violent campaign that resulted in at least 62 deaths and left several hundred people injured. In an effort to understand these acts this article analyses the causes and function of violence as well as the specific targeting of foreigners. Based on the conceptual framework of René Girard’s scapegoat effect, it aims at examining whether acts of violence against foreigners between 1994 and the May 2008 riots can be analysed as acts of scapegoat violence. The article shows how community conflicts, over property and business ownership as well as employment, cause tensions among its members that are projected onto foreigners. This framing of foreigners as scapegoats is facilitated by the community’s believe in threatening properties of foreigners. At the same time, foreigners are vulnerable due to their marginalised position in the communities they live in. Ultimately, the violence against minorities serves as a relief mechanism as it allows the majority community to consolidate at the expense of the scapegoat.

Keywords: South Africa, Victimization, Escalation Dynamics, Mob Violence, Community Conflict

Introduction

In May 2008, South Africa experienced an unprecedented outbreak of violent riots during which South African citizens attacked foreign nationals in townships across the country. Within sixteen days, 62 people were killed, the vast majority of them African foreign nationals, and about 100,000 were displaced because of the attacks (Kagee et al. 2011: 90). At the time, several
high-ranking political figures expressed their astonishment about the violent attacks (Dep. FA, 2008; Presidency 2008), such as Minister for Home Affairs Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula who remarked that it was "strange that people who have lived together for many years were suddenly at each other’s throats" (Faber 2008). However, in light of the frequency of violent attacks against foreigners that occurred since the end of apartheid this appears to be an understatement.

In an effort to account for the events of May 2008, South African media and political commentators put forward explanations relating to issues concerning poverty, inequality and the government’s failure to provide for better service delivery and border control (Crush 2008: 12-14). These arguments are in line with the popular explanations of violence in South Africa (Kynoch 2005: 493). Yet the question remains that if poverty or inequality led to the violent attacks, why then was the violence directed at foreigners but not against the political class or the rich?

The existing literature suggests a variety of factors that offer different degrees of explanatory power to analyse the violence between South Africans and foreign nationals. The most common approach to examine violence against foreigners relates to the concept of xenophobia (Neocosmos 2006, 2008; Crush 2008, Hadland 2008). While xenophobia is useful to identify attitudes and divisions between groups, the concept is unsuitable to account for the particularities of the outbreaks of violence due to its strong focus on racism as the motivation behind the attacks. Other authors, such as Harris (2001), argue that South Africa has a culture of violence, that is to say that even minor conflicts are frequently resolved through violence. Even though the culture of violence provides valuable insights into the readiness of especially township residents to use violence, it is too broad a concept to define the specific targeting of foreigners. A similar problem arises with regard to explanations that assume that what leads to outbreaks of violence is South African’s perceived discrepancy between their present situation and what they feel entitled to, that is relative deprivation theory (Pillay 2008; Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti 2011).

In an attempt to provide a combined explanation of both the outbreaks and function of violence as well as the specific targeting of foreign nationals this article applies the concept of the scapegoat mechanism. The scapegoat mechanism, according to René Girard, is defined as “the age-old way of gaining release from the violence or potential violence that mimesis produces is through nonconscious [sic!] convergence upon a victim" (Williams 1996: viii). Girard’s starting point relates to the existence of mimetic rivalries over objects of mutual desire between human beings that create a situation of conflict. The scapegoat mechanism sets in once the conflict-laden community projects its frustration on a specific individual or group of people. Hence, in the South African context, foreigners are not arbitrarily chosen victims but they serve as scapegoats due to existing rivalries in the communities they live in.
Instead of giving a detailed account of violent attacks against foreigners in South Africa or to isolate specific triggers, this article examines whether the acts of violence since 1994 qualify as acts of scapegoat violence. In this respect, the May 2008 attacks are considered to represent a climax of violent clashes between South Africans and foreign nationals that have been common over the years. Ultimately, it is argued that violence against foreigners serves the function of relief from tensions caused by personal rivalries, which allow the rest of the community to consolidate at the expense of the scapegoat.

Following the introduction, the first section introduces the conceptual framework of René Girard’s scapegoat mechanism. The second section examines circumstances that generate the conflict between South Africans and foreign nationals. It is divided into two parts that look at specific areas of rivalry and the construction of foreigners as scapegoats respectively. The third section analyses instances of violence against foreigners from 1994 up until the May 2008 riots to determine the applicability of the scapegoat mechanism in accounting for acts of violence against foreigners in South Africa. The fourth section concludes on the findings and provides suggestions for further research.

The Scapegoat Mechanism

Nowadays, the term scapegoat is commonly used to describe the blaming of a person for the mistakes or wrongdoings of others. However, the origin of the word is biblical and refers to the writing in Leviticus 16, wherein the Jewish chief priest symbolically lays the sins of the people of Israel on a goat that is then sent into the desert, thereby absolving them. Correspondingly, René Girard’s concept of the scapegoat mechanism is rooted in his theories of human culture and religion, based on interpretations of religious and historical texts (Girard 1989: 40, 120). Girard distinguishes between scapegoat as ritual (see Leviticus 16) and scapegoat as effect. While the former builds the theoretical basis of the latter, it is the scapegoat as effect that relates to Girard’s conception of human violence. The scapegoat effect is defined as follows:

[the] process through which two or more people are reconciled at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs, or frightens the scapegoaters. [The scapegoaters] have a single purpose, which is to prevent the scapegoat from harming them, by expelling and destroying him. (Williams 1996: 12)

Therefore, scapegoating is an unconscious process that relies on the scapegoater’s un-awareness of his projection. Hence, the scapegoat mechanism cannot function unless the scapegoaters truly believe in the evil capacity of the scapegoat, that is the scapegoat is perceived as a real threat to the well-being of the community irrespective of this actually being the case
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(Girard 1989: 14-17). However, when applying the scapegoat mechanism to a case study it proves difficult to determine whether scapegoating is solely an unconscious process.

The scapegoat effect is a collective phenomenon whose effectiveness increases with the number of participating scapegoaters (Williams 1996: 12). Likewise, the number of antagonists also determines the likelihood of an outbreak of violence. The more people unify against a common enemy the more likely they are to mutually reinforce their frustration and anger, which in turn escalates into violence. In order to understand the causes of violence it is necessary to look beyond Girard’s concept of scapegoat violence and consider the conflict within which it is embedded. In line with the notion that violence arises from a specific conflict setting, Girard describes the human proneness to mimetic rivalries, which cause conflict, as a preliminary stage to the violence that emerges with the scapegoat effect (Girard 1989: 126-127).

The concept of mimetic rivalries further delineates how and why a specific scapegoat is determined. The idea behind mimetic rivalries or mimesis is that human beings are imitational creatures whose “objects of desire and [...] ideas are based on the desires and ideas of others who are our models” (Williams 1996: viii). However, those who are regarded as models are not seen as role models in the positive meaning of the word, but they represent rivals whose possession of specific material objects as well as personal qualities cause resentment. Accordingly, the process of mimesis is highly conflictual as people’s appropriative urge over the same desires leads to interpersonal rivalries, envies and competition. Hence, the process of mimesis and the associated tensions produce conflict, while violence is exerted as part of the scapegoat mechanism to gain relief from this conflict by projecting all frustration on an allegedly responsible victim. Essentially, Girard demonstrates a continuous understanding of violence based on reciprocity and escalation, where “mimetic desires, [are] followed by mimetic rivalries, that result in the final scapegoat effect” (Girard 1989: 127).

In this context, it is important not to confuse Girard’s concept with that of resource scarcity as a trigger of violence. To Girard, resource scarcity in itself is insufficient to give rise to conflict and violence (Williams 1996: 10). Instead, it is the immediate competition and rivalry between human beings over the same objects of desire, which can also occur in a situation of resource abundance. In the end, Girard views both mimesis and the scapegoat mechanism as permanent features in human culture and relations as they are innate human behaviours (Williams 1996: 3).

From local Rivalries to the Construction of the Scapegoat

To understand the occurrence of acts of violence against foreign nationals in South Africa it is necessary to determine the specific conflict setting within which the violence emerges. Therefore, one needs to identify the objects of
mutual desire that create rivalries between South African and foreign national township residents. Subsequently, the existing rivalries are used as an explanatory basis for the construction of foreign nationals as scapegoats. As Loren Landau (2011: 3) points out “outsiders have come to be understood as a threatening obstacle to achieving justice and retribution for decades of discrimination and indignity”. While this represents an overarching notion of viewing foreigners as enemies, in the following I present some of the most prominent areas of friction that divide the two groups.

Employment

South Africa suffers from high unemployment, which is considered a major impediment to improving people’s living standards. In 2012, the unemployment rate amounted to 25 per cent, with youth unemployment being almost twice as high (CIA 2014). Against this backdrop, foreign nationals were continuously depicted as an impediment to local residents’ desire to find employment because they allegedly stole jobs (IOM 2009: 20; HSRC 2008: 39). The conflict element rests on the idea that foreign nationals drive down wages to a level that is unacceptable to South Africans. Moreover, South Africans consider themselves disadvantaged with regard to jobs that require skills because the era of apartheid had deprived them of gaining any relevant training (HSCR 2008: 40). Interestingly, a national survey revealed that only one quarter of the respondents has personally experienced losing their job to a foreigner and only one third knows or has heard of someone in their community that lost their job to a foreign national (Crush 2008: 33). Nonetheless, to perceive of foreign nationals as rivals, if not as a threat, on the labour market remains a common belief (HSCR 2008: 43).

Business Ownership

A related issue area that creates rivalries between local residents and foreign nationals concerns local business ownership. South African business owners frequently refer to foreign-owned shops as threats because they sell their goods more cheaply (HSCR 2008: 40). As a consequence, some South African shop owners are forced to shut down their businesses, while foreign shops grow in numbers (IOM 2009: 21). Next to the factor of competition that causes the emergence of rivalries, there is the element of envy, which a local resident describes as follows: “I think it was jealousy. Look, they said they are taking their jobs. When the foreigners were not here, no one was selling tomatoes and vegetables. Even now, the foreign boy who was a shoemaker is still not back, but there is still no shoemaker here” (IOM 2009: 22). Thus, foreign owned shops do not only compete in terms of price levels, but they
also offer better opening hours, products and shop locations, which South African shop owners are unable or unwilling to provide.

**Property Ownership**

In spite of government effort to improve the housing situation there are still numerous township residents who lack access to adequate accommodation. Ongoing urbanisation only aggravates this situation. As part of its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the government provides low cost housing solutions that are distributed on the basis of a waiting list. Therefore, property ownership in terms of houses becomes an object of rivalry, which is linked to people’s desire for a decent livelihood.

Foreigners who own RDP houses are viewed as problematic especially by those South African residents who have been on waiting lists for years and who are still waiting to acquire homes (HSRC 2008: 38). In this case, the mimetic rivalries reveal their greatest conflict potential because “there is a [common] belief that foreigners simply should not reside in [RDP] houses while South Africans remain homeless” (IOM 2009: 19). Foreigners who own RDP housing often purchased the property from South Africans (2009: 42). However, most local residents are not actually interested into how a foreigner acquired property but they simply assume they did so illegally (2009: 19).

**Gender relations**

A final aspect that accounts for the rivalries between South Africans and foreign nationals concerns gender relations. Over the past years, the vast majority of African immigrants who settled in South Africa have been men (HSCR 2008: 31). As a result, many South Africans claim that foreigners steal their women (IOM 2009: 22). Although this issue can certainly be framed in the context of mere competition over finding a partner, the aspect of envy needs to be highlighted as well. Hence, in their search for a partner South African women tend to prefer foreign over local men because the former provide better “opportunities for themselves and [are] prepared to do whatever work is available in order to make a living. South African men, on the other hand, are seen as materialist and acquisitive” (HSCR 2008: 33). Therefore, the rivalries are strongly informed by an element of envy because the mentality of foreign nationals towards the provision of a livelihood for themselves and their families puts local men in a less favourable position as potential partners.

In the end, the four conflict areas entail elements of both envy and competition, which constitute the basis of the mimetic rivalries between South Africans and foreign nationals. The conflict is enhanced with regard to
those foreign individuals who already acquired an object of mutual desire (for example employment or housing) as they serve as models whose success creates a strong imitative desire based on antagonism. Consequently, the potential for violence emerges as one party intends to prevent the other from attaining the mutually desired object. In this context, it is important to note that the rivalries principally also exist among South Africans because the conflict inherently concerns the community as a whole. However, the reason why the rivalries are so strongly focused on foreigners is an outcome of their construction as scapegoats, which allows the rest of the community to avoid confrontation among themselves through channelling their frustration on a victim.

Construction of the Scapegoat

In light of the existing rivalries between South Africans and foreign nationals, it becomes plausible why the former group frames the latter as a scapegoat. Thus, the way in which mimetic rivalries translate into scapegoating becomes apparent with regard to the untenable generalizations expressed by local residents towards foreign nationals. However, the scope of the unconscious projection of societal ails on foreigners is not merely a local phenomenon, but it is embedded in a national sentiment. This is revealed in a 2006 nation-wide survey on South African attitudes towards foreigners, which reveals that particularly African foreigners are framed as targets of prejudice, discrimination and ultimately scapegoating (Crush 2008: 4).

One of the main findings of the survey indicates that “[c]ompared to citizens of other countries worldwide, South Africans are the least open to outsiders and want the greatest restrictions on immigration” (Crush 2008: 1). This basic orientation among the South African population facilitates the scapegoating of foreigners as it lays the foundation of the perceived antagonisms that divides the two groups. Moreover, almost half of the population supports the deportation of foreigners and many South Africans even “believe that basic rights should be denied to many if not most foreign nationals” (2008: 3). While these views are shared among large parts of the South African society, they are especially applicable to those members of society with the lowest income, little education and high unemployment, namely township residents (2008: 5). Township residents find reconciliation at the expense of foreign nationals by declaring that “foreigners are the source of HIV/AIDS, the primary cause of crime, and a threat to South African jobs and cultural values” (Landau 2011: 6). In accordance with the concept of the scapegoat mechanism, local residents thus construct foreigners as vicious creatures who spread diseases that kill their children (IOM 2008: 22). In relation to crime, South Africans believe that foreigners are responsible for most of the criminal activities in the townships, but as they are undocumented they are rarely ever convicted for their wrongdoings (2008: 22).
As a result, many township residents view foreigners as a threat to their material possessions and physical integrity, while others “even argue that foreign nationals are able to access ‘supernatural’ powers to bolster their capabilities” (HSRC 2008: 35). These convictions underline how the scapegoaters truly believe in the evil capacity of the scapegoat.

Evidently, there are also a number of township residents who refrain from constructing foreign nationals as scapegoats but they only constitute a minority (IOM 2009: 18-22). Instead of projecting all local ills on foreigners, they link the existing issue areas to police corruption or flawed policies. Clearly, these individuals are excluded from the workings of the scapegoat mechanism. The scapegoaters, on the other hand, are those individuals who are caught up in the group dynamics and pressure of the majority who desire to use violence against the scapegoat to gain relief from the tensions they feel. Correspondingly, a township residents remarks: “we have become victims in our own country so it’s them [foreigners] we must fight against” (HSRC 2008: 35). However, the numbers of South Africans willing to take action against foreigners should not be overestimated. The 2006 survey on national attitudes towards foreigners shows that 16 per cent of the respondents were willing to gather together and force foreigners out of their neighbourhood and 9 per cent admitted to use violence in the process (Crush 2008: 37-38).

It remains unclear just why some individuals refrain from constructing foreigners as scapegoats while others are willing to use violence against them. However, in the South African case one can at least be sure that not many people would intervene in an escalation of scapegoat violence due to the widespread anti-foreigner attitudes (IOM 2009: 33). In this context, it is ultimately important to note that the construction of foreigners as scapegoats is not arbitrary but their selection is rooted in existing mimetic rivalries within their communities, which identify foreigners as sources of evil (Girard 1989: 17).

Instances of Violence against Foreigners: From 1994 to the May 2008 Riots

Ever since the end of apartheid, the perception of foreign nationals as scapegoats has intensified, which equally applies to the number of acts of violence against foreigners. In fact, the common construction of foreigners as scapegoats as well as the increase of local incidents of violence constitutes a necessary precondition for the nationwide spreading of violent attacks against foreigners in May 2008. In the following, I therefore try to identify patterns of violence based on a timeline of violent attacks against foreigners since 1994 (Crush 2008: 44-54). Starting from the concept of the scapegoat mechanism, the focus is on the two core elements that signify violence against foreigners as scapegoating. The first step is to look for aspects of
reciprocity and escalation, which are inherent to the occurrence of the scapegoat effect. In a second step, the incidents of violence are analysed in terms of their function as a relief from tensions. Finally, the establishment of patterns of violence as a result of the scapegoat effect then allows for a comparison with the dynamics of the May 2008 riots.

The vast majority of violent acts against foreign nationals that took place between 1994 and the May 2008 riots relate to rivalries concerning home ownership, business ownership and employment. In August 2006 alone, twenty to thirty Somali shopkeepers were killed in a series of attacks caused by tensions over business ownership (IOM 2009: 21). In general, the perpetrators of violence justify their attacks against foreigners largely based on the perceived rivalries and scapegoat attributions that were identified in the previous chapter. Moreover, the interplay between violence, mimetic rivalries and the scapegoat effect strongly relies on reciprocity (that is mimesis itself) and escalation. Examples of both elements are also very prominent among incidents of violence against foreigners.

In many instances, various forms of encroachments, such as property damage, precede an outbreak of violence. In 1994, for example, a group of South African fishermen attacked Namibian migrants whom they accused of stealing their jobs because they accepted lower wages (MG 1994). The reciprocity in this conflict derives from the existing rivalries concerning employment. The escalation ties in a month prior to the outbreak of violence when the South African fishermen continuously harassed the Namibians. Accordingly, the Namibian migrants complained about stolen and destroyed property as well as individual cases of assault. The conflict intensified up to the point at which the Namibians only moved around in small groups to prevent assaults. Consequently, the South African fishermen organised in a group of one hundred people to launch an attack against the Namibians, which left several people injured on both sides. This case of violence against foreign nationals represents a rather steady process of escalation due to the local setting and the proximity of the antagonists who most likely knew each other personally. Hence, in this example the factor of mimesis is more strongly pronounced than the scapegoat mechanism. However, in many cases this proximity is absent, which highlights the relevance of the scapegoat mechanism in causing an act of violence.

In September 1998, three foreign nationals were killed on a train by an angry mob of South Africans who had returned from a protest march during which foreigners were blamed for the high levels of crime, unemployment as well as spreading AIDS (IOM 2009: 23). “One man was apparently thrown from the train and was run over by an oncoming train. The other two were electrocuted by overhead wires when they climbed on the roof, trying to escape” (SAMP 1998). While this was the first instance that received major media attention, several foreigners have been thrown off trains since then (Crush 2008: 47). As compared to the case of the Namibian fishermen, this act of violence demonstrates a clearer connection to the scapegoat effect.
because the mimetic rivalries that exist between the antagonists are rather abstract. Hence, the choice of a victim may be perceived as arbitrary on a personal level, but it is consequential in terms of the workings of the scapegoat mechanism.

A further aspect of reciprocity and escalation are the effects of group dynamics. As previous examples have shown, the emergence of a mob can arise through self-organisation, as was the case with the fishermen, or incidental, as was the case with the protesters returning from a rally. A third option is the planned organisation of a third party, that is the call to take actions against foreigners at a community meeting. This took place in the informal settlement Itireleng near Pretoria in February 2008 (IOM 2009: 23). In this context, Girard points out that “[a]s an object becomes the focus of mimetic rivalry between two or more antagonists, other members of the group tend to join in, mimetically attracted by the presence of mimetic desire” (Williams 1996: 12). Correspondingly, of all the violent instances for which the number of participating scapegoaters is stated, it shows that on most occasions the perpetrators of violence emerge in large groups of more than a handful of people. For instance, in 1996 a crowd of 1000 South Africans turned against foreign nationals living in their settlement (Crush 2008: 44-45).

Principally, the asymmetry between scapegoaters and scapegoats in a moment of violent escalation appears to contradict the element of reciprocity. Yet, one has to keep in mind that this reciprocity is essentially undifferentiated in its nature in that “the persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole of society” (Girard 1989: 15). Correspondingly, Collins (2008: 120) points out that mob violence of this kind typically relies on the notion of a strong and threatening enemy, which is precisely what necessitates the attackers to create a safe environment for their attack, that is through sheer outnumbering.

In a mob situation, the likelihood of a violent escalation of the conflict increases gradually with the number of participants as they mutually incite and reinforce their desire for victimisation. Once the escalation is well underway and the desire for victimisation becomes overpowering, it turns into the mob’s sole objective, which then is in a state of rage and unable to differentiate. An example of this process would be an instance of violent attacks against foreigners in 2008 when a mob of South African scapegoaters accidentally killed a fellow South African who was mistaken for a foreign national (IOM 2009: 24). A similar process was at play in the course of the 1994 Buyelekhaya (Go back home) campaign during which South Africans intended to forcefully evict illegal immigrants from their township (HRW 1998). Despite the alleged targeting of illegal aliens, the mob turned against every foreigner living in the neighbourhood. Among them were many long-term legal residents who have been living in South Africa for as long as thirty years.
Not only does the scapegoaters’ desire for victimisation lead to a loss of differentiation, but it also constitutes the core function of violence that is triggered by the scapegoat mechanism. According to Girard, the scapegoaters are left with two courses of action once the scapegoat mechanism escalates: the expulsion or destruction of the scapegoat. Accordingly, the scapegoaters are driven by the idea that they need to harm the scapegoat in order “to prevent the scapegoat from harming them” (Williams 1996: 12). Hence, violence is intrinsic to the working of the scapegoat mechanism since the scapegoaters see no alternative way in dealing with their perceived threat.

In South Africa, Girard’s notion of relief through expulsion or destruction of the scapegoat is a very salient feature of the violent attacks against foreigners. Most acts of violence primarily aim at or entail the eviction of foreigners from the township. Hence, violence is either used in the actual act of evicting foreigners from the local neighbourhood or to at least to send a message to foreigners, that is for them to go back home. An example of the former case is an incident in Mizamoyethu, Cape Town in 1996, when a large mob of South Africans attempted to violently remove foreigners from their settlement (Crush 2008: 44-45). Moreover, in February 2008 a group of South African township residents “forcefully evict at least five Somali shop owners from the area, injuring three people after having apparently ‘warned’ the shop owners to leave three months before” (IOM 2009: 23).

Most instances of violence against foreign nationals are accompanied by looting and property destruction. This combination of violence and property destruction aims to rob foreign nationals of their subsistence and consequently make life in the township unbearable for them. For instance, in 1997 a group of South African hawkers beat local foreign traders and looted their shop. The motivation for this act of violence is explained as follows: “We want to clean the foreigners from our pavement [and] are prepared to push them out of the city, come what may. My group is not prepared to let our government inherit a garbage city because of these leeches” (Crush 2008: 45). Later, at least twelve foreigners were killed and several foreign-owned homes and shops were destroyed in a series of attacks in March 2008 (2008: 51). As a result, several hundreds of foreigners were left homeless and forced to seek refuge elsewhere. In these cases, the scapegoaters successfully relieve themselves of their tensions by expelling the scapegoat from their community. The intention to expel or evict foreigners is facilitated by the idea that they have somewhere else to go, as they are outsiders by definition.

As the attacks in March 2008 have shown, many acts of violence against foreigners involve deaths on the part of the scapegoats, which hints at the second option of relieving tensions for the scapegoaters, namely relief through destruction. In this context, it is important to highlight that cases of death because of the scapegoat mechanism are “primarily a collective action of the entire community, which purifies itself of its own disorder through the unanimous immolation of a victim” (Williams 1996: 12). Hence, a death that occurs in the context of a conflict between two individuals does not
necessarily qualify as serving the function of relief as part of the scapegoat mechanism, even if objectively one individual can be assigned to the group of scapegoaters and the other to the group of scapegoats. However, the scapegoat effect may emanate from a small starting point that then escalates into collective violence followed by death. An example for this is a violent clash in 2007, in the course of which two persons were killed (IOM 2009: 23). The conflict started out as a quarrel between a Zimbabwean and a South African family but as the conflict escalated the local population got involved and started to attack foreign residents.

Another strong motive for acts of collective murder relates to revenge, which Girard describes as “a theatrical re-enactment” (Williams 1996: 11) of the crisis that initially caused tensions in the community. In connection with the scapegoat mechanism, a revenge act can be based on either a rumour or an actual fact. There are several cases to which this proceeding applies, such as an incident in 2004 when a Mozambican man was killed by a mob of South Africans who accused him of killing a local resident in absence of any conclusive proof (Ncaca 2004).

The idea of sacrifice of a victim is an essential feature of the scapegoat mechanism as it offers a resolution to a conflict. On several occasions this immolation even assumes a quasi-ceremonial dimension since foreigners are regularly burned alive (Crush 2008: 11). Nonetheless, the relief and the return to tranquility that is supposed to be brought about by the destruction or expulsion of the scapegoat is evidently not permanent. By implication, the scapegoaters continue to be subject to the scapegoat mechanism for as long as the scapegoat is present. Against this background, the 2008 nationwide violent riots against foreigners were certainly distinctive in terms of scope, but not with regard to the mechanisms at play.

The May 2008 riots “constitute the first sustained, nationwide eruption of social unrest since the beginning of South Africa’s democratic era in 1994” (Steinberg 2008: 1). The violent attacks, which took place between 11 and 26 May, started in townships surrounding Johannesburg and subsequently spread to Cape Town, Durban and other settlements throughout South Africa. In view of the fact that many South African com-munities have been exposed to outbreaks of mimetic violence as a result of the scapegoat mechanism in the past, it is comprehensible why the violence was able to spread out on such a large scale. In fact, most of the sites that experienced violent clashes in May 2008 had seen violent confrontation in the past (IOM 2009: 23-28). Therefore, the 2008 riots can be explained in terms of a climax, which Girard describes as follows:

Once the contagion of mimetic violence is reintroduced into the community, it cannot be contained. The community, then, changes its tactic entirely. Instead of trying to roll back mimetic violence it tries to get rid of it by encouraging it and by bringing it to a climax that triggers the happy solution of ritual sacrifice with the help of a substitute victim. (Williams 1996: 13)
Altogether, the patterns of violence during the 2008 riots strongly resemble those of the attacks in previous years. Hence, elements of reciprocity, the escalation of mob violence as well as the function of violence as relief through expulsion or destruction of the scapegoat are all present. In the course of the violent clashes between South Africans and foreign nationals several hundreds of people were injured (IOM 2009: 24-28). On several occasions “mobs stormed from shack to shack, assaulted migrants, locked them in their homes, and set the homes on fire” (Kagee et al. 2011: 90). At the same time, many residents used the opportunity to appropriate the property of foreign-nationals after forcefully evicting them (IOM 2009: 24), which strongly reflects the preceding mimetic rivalries that existed between scapegoaters and scapegoats.

Overall, the motive of eviction of foreign nationals from local neighbourhoods can be regarded as a major driving force behind the attacks. In the aftermath of the attacks, 100,000 people were displaced of whom many did not return to their home (Kagee et al. 2011: 90). Thus, one might conclude that the scapegoaters were rather successful in expelling the scapegoats and thereby relieving themselves of tensions. Moreover, the killing of foreigners as well as the destruction of their homes and shops is related to the notion of the destruction of the scapegoat, which already was a common feature of attacks against foreigners prior to the May 2008 riots.

In total, 62 people lost their life during the riots, two thirds of which were foreign nationals, while “a third of those killed were South African citizens from ethnic minorities” (Polzer 2010: 3). At first sight, the large proportion of South African casualties from ethnic minorities may appear to contradict the applicability of scapegoat violence against foreigners. In this context, it is important to note that ethnic majority groups such as the Zulu and Xhosa are unique to South Africa, whereas ethnic minority groups constitute majorities in South Africa’s neighbouring countries. Hence, due to differences in culture and use of other languages they are often perceived as outsiders and as such they qualify as foreign and by implication as scapegoats too. Moreover, this also illustrates that the violent conflict is not defined along lines of nationality but rather one’s affiliation with the core community. Thus, it is the polarisation between minority and majority groups, which allows for the victimisation of the former by the latter (Girard 1989: 17-18).

Aside from the differences in terminology, the findings of Tara Polzer (2010: 2) on the key triggers of the violent attacks against foreigners in May 2008 seem to confirm the pertinence of the scapegoat mechanism. Polzer shows that the violence was not triggered by “poor economic conditions, competition for resources or poor service delivery, as these factors were also present in many communities where violence was not perpetrated or where it was prevented” (2010: 5). Instead, the outbreaks of violence and the eviction of foreigners are linked to conflicts based on localized rivalries, especially among business owners.
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The analysis of violence against foreigners in South Africa highlights the importance of local conflict dynamics rather than merely assessing singular trigger factors. Hence, it is the occurrence of mimetic rivalries that precede and presuppose the emergence of the scapegoat mechanism. In the absence of forms of conflict containment an outbreak of violence thus is contingent upon processes of escalation, which can take on an unprecedented scale, as was the case with the May 2008 riots.

Conclusion

The analysis of the causes and function of violence as well as the specific targeting of foreigners identifies links to specific conflict areas in the affected communities. Hence, rivalries concerning home and business ownership, employment and gender relations create competition and envy among all community members. This circumstance entails the potential for violent conflict. While the first three areas of rivalry represent prominent features in the escalation processes that led to violence, competition concerning gender relations is assumed to have played at least a contributing role. In an effort to resolve the conflict, the community projects its frustration onto foreign nationals who, as marginalized members of society, are thereby turned into scapegoats. Hence, foreigners become scapegoats not because of their nationality per se, but because they do not belong to the core group of their community. The scapegoaters truly belief in the threatening danger of foreigners to harm their lives and it is precisely this process of converging upon a victim that allows the scapegoat effect to unfold.

The examination of incidents of violence against foreign nationals since 1994 demonstrates that acts of violence are based on reciprocity and escalation. Since acts of scapegoat violence are primarily collective phenomena, they are typically executed by mobs that prey on victims who are comparatively weak but perceived to be harmful and strong. Once the conflict escalates, the reciprocity between scapegoaters and scapegoats leads to a loss of differentiation on the part of the former, who then are driven by the desire to either expel or destroy the scapegoat in order to restore tranquillity for the rest of the community. Hence, it is the scapegoaters’ desire for victimization that frequently leads to violent attacks against foreigners in South Africa. These patterns of reciprocity and escalation can also be detected with regard to the May 2008 riots when a nationwide spreading of attacks against foreigners led to a climax of scapegoat violence among previously affected communities. Therefore, violence as a result of the scapegoat effect serves the function of relief, that is, to break down tensions within a community at the expense of the scapegoat.

In terms of limitations, it has to be acknowledged that the overall scope of the research only allowed for a selective analysis of incidents of violence against foreigners in South Africa. Therefore, the results of the analysis
cannot be regarded as exhaustive or generalising but rather substantiate the presence of the scapegoat effect in acts of violence against foreigners in South Africa. While the riots of May 2008 represent a climax of violent attacks against foreigners, they did not lead to the end of it. Despite the government’s promises to demonstrate more initiative to tackle the issue, foreigners continue to be targets of violent attacks. Appropriately, further research should be conducted in order to examine the role of institutions with respect to the violent conflict. Thus, investigating the role of local police in the conflict could lead to further insights, for example concerning the issue of impunity of criminal acts against foreigners. Moreover, it could be helpful to consider local leadership structures and the associated problems regarding appropriate conflict resolution mechanisms as well as struggles to exercise authority. These considerations are similarly applicable to the provincial and national government and their (in)ability and (un)willingness to prevent further outbreaks of violence. Additionally, it might be fruitful to investigate the sacrificial cult that is entailed in the scapegoat ritual. Such an analysis could provide further insight into the rationale of the scapegoaters’ strong belief that their use of violence is rightful. In the end, a better understanding of the functionality of violence as part of the scapegoat mechanism helps to unravel why foreigners in South Africa are exposed to such hostilities. Yet, it ultimately raises more general questions about minority-majority relations in a society, which has its relevance beyond the South African context.
– I reflect –

A couple of weeks after handing in my final draft to be reviewed another nationwide wave of violent attacks against African foreigners took place in South Africa. Around that time, I attended a conference where I had the chance to speak to a South African scholar and ask for his opinion on these recent events. Interestingly, he considered the element of envy and the related unawareness of the differences in life philosophy between South Africans and African foreign nationals as major causes that create the conditions necessary for the outbreak for violent conflict. Amongst other things, he also criticized the ambiguous role of the South African state which can be seen as both preventer and perpetrator of violence against African foreigners. In the end, this conversation confirmed to me that my choice of the scapegoat mechanism as a theoretical framework and the associated research findings are indeed relevant to understand the conflict. However, it also made me aware of the many other aspects that I was not able to cover in my research but that are equally important to attempt to find a lasting resolution of the conflict.

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References


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Settlers’ Price Tags: Hitting Palestinians, Addressing the Israeli Government

Tobias Pietsch

Abstract

The number of violent attacks by Jewish settlers in the West Bank against Palestinians has almost quadrupled between 2006 and 2014. A new form of settler violence, so-called price tag attacks, developed since 2008, is dramatically increasing. Radical religious settlers attack uninvolved Palestinians in order to demonstrate to the Israeli Government that settlement evacuations have a ‘price’. With the aim to protect the political value of the settlement project, settlers choose soft targets for violent acts to compensate their political and organisational weakness. After splitting from the settler mainstream parties and after the Gaza withdrawal in 2005, they lack political representation. This article shows that approaches explaining vigilante political violence fall short of explaining this new form of settler violence. While classical forms of social and group control vigilantism still exist, new radical actors such as the hilltop youth have established a new phenomenon of violence: price tag attacks.

Keywords: Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Proxy Violence, Vigilantism, West Bank, Settlement Movement

Introduction

The Six-Day War of 1967 was as turning point in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Segev 2006). Within six days, Israel conquered the West Bank including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula and occupied those territories. Religious Zionists\(^1\) started to settle...
in what is called ‘Eretz Israel’\(^2\), the biblical land of Israel, especially the area of Judea and Samaria, known as the West Bank. The peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1979 included regulations to dismantle settlements from the Sinai Peninsula. The evacuation in early 1982 led to a first wave of violence by Jewish settlers\(^3\) (Pedhazur and Perliger 2003: 17). Following violent eruptions during the first Intifada and the Oslo process raised the number of predominantly Palestinian casualties. Most prominently on 27 February 1994, Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Palestinian worshippers in a mosque (Pedhazur and Perliger 2003: 9).

Many scholars and human rights organizations monitored, reported and tried to explain the causes of settler violence. Pedhazur and Perliger, like others, frame it as vigilante political violence, rooted in the ‘Jewish Underground\(^4\) as well as in historical and political conditions (2003: 14ff). Recent developments and increasing numbers of violent attacks by settlers, however, require a new approach to answer on the phenomena of changing modes of violence. According to the United Nations’ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), violent attacks conducted by settlers almost quadrupled between 2006 and 2014. The violence ranges from physical attacks, which caused 133 Palestinian casualties in 2011 as compared to 69 in 2010, to damage of property, mainly uprooting olive trees or burning cars or mosques (OCHA 2013: 2). Additionally, new so called price tag attacks need to be explained.

Though there are many reports and approaches to analyse and explain settler violence, important questions remain unanswered. The main question is: why do Jewish settlers use price-tag attacks? In addition one have to ask how this new phenomena can be explained? This leads to another question why settler violence towards Palestinians should be analysed as proxy violence. It is an expression of a political dispute between settlers and government at the expense of Palestinians. Settlers, I argue, chose soft targets to demonstrate the state’s weakness and limited will to protect Palestinians from violence.

Price tag attacks usually combine physical damage or harm to Palestinians or their property, but inevitably come with a message connecting this damage to a political decision taken by the government. Triggering decisions in question are usually perceived by the religious Zionists as threats to their

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\(^2\) Literally: ‘The Land of Israel’, refers to the biblical area in the Levant, also known as the Promised Land. There is no clear definition of borders; the area varies from the former British Mandate of Palestine to all between Nile and Euphrates Rivers. Nowadays, it usually means Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

\(^3\) Not all settlers are Israeli citizens. Many of them hold foreign passports, most notably from the United States or are temporary residents from abroad like Yeshiva students or supportive tourists. Therefore, the term Jewish settlers is more accurate then Israeli settlers.

\(^4\) Former terrorist organisation formed by members from Gush Emunim that existed from 1979 to 1984.
settlement activities such as settlement evacuations, freeze of constructions or decisions on land property in favour of Palestinians. This form of settler violence developed since 2008 (OCHA 2013: 2). By causing damage, the radical settler community wants to demonstrate to the Israeli government that there is a price attached to the political decisions. Ironically, most attacks are conducted against Palestinians and their property and only seldom the Israeli security personnel or institutions are targeted. On the surface this form of violence appears as a continuation of vigilante violence in the conflict between Jewish settlers and Palestinians. In fact, the article argues, that this new form of settler violence expresses a political dispute between settlers and the Israeli government played out at the expense of Palestinians.

Price tag attacks as a new form of settler violence erupted because a historical alliance between the Israeli government(s) and the settler movement broke up after the Gaza withdrawal in 2005. Newly formed actors like the ‘Hilltop Youth’\(^5\) split up from the settler mainstream, radicalised and identified the Israeli government as a main opponent. This division within the settler movement caused a loss of political cohesion, relevant political representation and led to a radicalization of small, violence-prone splinter groups. This form of violence contains elements of vigilante violence, based on the normative ideas of the settlement project, which, however, the Israeli government is not following in its policy. Thus, the concept of vigilantism needs to be developed further to account for the problem that the state is no longer the referent point for violent actors, but norms which differ from those of the state. In other words, while the settlers’ aims have remained (roughly) the same, the state has changed its policy, undermining in their eyes the settlers’ prospects and thus turned the state into an enemy of the settlers’ project.

**Context and Methods**

To answer the questions, numbers of attacks registered in databases from international, Israeli and Palestinian NGOs will first be analysed to establish an overview on casualties, attacks, damage, price tags over time. Thus we can identify periods of increasing or decreasing developments as well as peaks of violent acts. Secondly, messages left behind at the place of violence, mainly graffiti, but also testimonies and interviews in the media will be qualitatively analysed to identify triggers, motivations and background of price tag violence. Finally, juxtaposing triggers like events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, political decisions or settlement evacuation and acts of violence to identify correlations sheds new light on the drivers motivating this kind of violence. Settler violence triggered by the Israeli government but aimed at Palesti- 

\(^5\) Hilltop Youth: (Hebrew: HaNoar HaGva’ot) hardline national-religious youth who live in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and establish illegal outposts outside settlements on hilltops.
tinian targets could support the hypothesis that settlers choose soft targets to raise the political costs for the Israeli Government and destabilize the situation.

Besides academic research, many human rights organizations, NGOs and United Nations organizations offer case studies, testimonies, reports and databases covering settler violence all over the West Bank and Israel. Israeli NGOs ‘B’tselem’, ‘Peace Now’ and ‘Yesh Din’ (‘There is a law’) offer databases of attacks and casualties. A ‘Price Tag’ escalation timeline from 1 January 2011 until 13 October 2014 (Friedman, Peace Now) offers a detailed overview of attacks. Yesh Din offers an annual monitor focusing on law enforcement in the West Bank (Yesh Din 2013 and 2014) as well as a database containing 132 attacks from May 2013 until April 2014 including descriptions of the incidents. These include information on location, if there is a related graffiti or how an investigation was concluded and, if so, why a file was closed (Gurvitz 2014). The Anti-Defamation League offers a list of recent select price tag attacks from 2011 until November 2014 (Anti-Defamation League 2014).

From these reports and databases, valid data on violent attacks by settlers will be gathered. Thus, an overall picture can be reconstructed while gaps and missing information become apparent. Different, often diverging numbers of incidents and casualties appear while for many incidents no details are known. This problem would exist even if databases were complete (and completely reliable), as not every attack leads to a criminal file or a police investigation. Rather, because many Palestinians do not report acts of violence to the Israeli police due to lack of trust in law enforcement or police neutrality (Yesh Din 2014), the number of missing cases in the databases can be assumed to be vast. Nevertheless, the existing data allows to reconstruct general patterns as many, especially major events with serious damage, are documented. For the purposes of this article, reports on graffiti and spray painted messages allow to relate violence to political decisions and to disconnect victims and targets from the addressees of the violence’s message.

The History of the Messianic Settler Movement

The Six-Day War of 1967 opened up areas of great religious, traditional and historical importance such as the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem or the Tombs of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Messianic religious Zionists have seen this fact and the success of the war as a sign from God and a duty to settle in the biblical lands. Motivated by messianic sentiment and the euphoria of victory, they started settling in the conquered territories. But the beginning of the settlement movement put them at odds with the Palestinians living in those areas as well as with neighbouring Arab countries and the international community (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 17).
It has to be mentioned that not all settlers are ideologically motivated, religious Zionist-settlers. The vast majority of the 500,000 settlers live in the big settlement blocs close to the Green Line for economic reasons. Those settlements serve as satellite-towns to Jerusalem (for example Ma’ale Adumin) or Tel Aviv (for example Ariel) and offer cheaper and often more comfortable living conditions than cities in Israel.

It is also important to mention that only a minority of the settler community is involved in violent acts discussed in this article. The majority is not involved and does not support violence against Palestinians or price tag attacks (Yaar and Hermanann 2011a, 2011b, 2014). Jewish settlers’ attacks on Palestinians are mirrored by significant violence and Palestinian terrorism against Israeli civilians causing casualties every year.

The settlement movement erected settlements in the occupied territories to fulfil their religious duty and to safeguard the country against Arab invasions. After four wars with Egypt, Israel’s prime minister Menachem Begin and Egypt’s president Anwar El Sadat signed a peace treaty following the Camp David Accords in 1979. The peace agreement included an agreement to dismantle all sixteen settlements in the Sinai Peninsula. The evacuation in early 1982 led to the first wave of violence by Jewish settlers: “It was then first demonstrated that religious settlers were not afraid to use violence when their religious ideological beliefs were put at risk by democratic principles” (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 19). Nevertheless, Gush Emunim’s leaders called not for violent actions but to protest peacefully against the evacuation. The movement respected the primary of the state though they opposed any policy hindering the settlement project. The connection between the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and the settler leaders remained close (Byman and Sachs 2012).

**Breakup of a Historic Alliance**

The relationship between the national-religious settler movement and the Israeli governments is indicative for the ensuing violence. The alliance and cooperation kept going on despite the evacuation of the Sinai settlements and the Oslo Accords and despite the dilemma between democratic principles of the state and the messianic ideology of settling ‘Eretz Israel’. But the evacuation of the Gaza settlements was a turning point for the radical settler movement. As Ariel Sharon, the patron of the settlement movement who once wanted to settle every hilltop in Judea and Samaria, announced the withdrawal from the Gaza strip in 2005, radical settlers strongly opposed the government’s decision and evacuation. The evacuation of 2,500 settlers was perceived as the end of the support by the government for the settlement movement and therefore as a threat to the whole ideology. The trauma of 2005 created a new generation of extremists (Byman and Sachs 2012: 80). Most of them are young second or third generation settlers who were born...
and raised in the settlements. Most of them live deep in the West Bank, especially in the Yitzhar-Elon Moreh-Har Bracha triangle around Nablus (Abraham 2014: 3). These areas are known for their radical ideology but are also assumed of being evacuated first in case of a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

In contrast to big settlement blocs close to the Green Line, which will be harder to evacuate due to their size and strategic location, settlements deep in the West Bank constantly face evacuation. Especially outposts that have been erected illegally under international law as well as under Israeli law are likely to be affected by evacuation orders. These national-religious settlers became a marginalised minority as the Israeli majority opposes their settlement expansions and sees them as a threat to Israeli security and peace prospects, the international image of Israel and also are critical of budgetary constraints in the face of vast spending for settlements. As a result of this marginalisation, the young generation of settlers radicalised. A case in point is the ‘Hilltop Youth’.

They feel no obligation to observe secular laws and often play cat-and-mouse games with Israeli security forces. They erect hilltop outposts, mostly simple wood constructions, to claim control over areas, extend settlement boundaries or simply to jeopardise any progress towards an agreement with the Palestinians. They aim at expanding settler presence in the West Bank and to extend control over the biblical lands. Thus, every demolition or evacuation is perceived as an obstacle to their settlement plans.

The state, from this perspective, becomes an obstacle to the duty of settling the West Bank. The political marginalisation of radical settlers led to their perception that the status-quo and their social order are in danger. The radicalisation led also to a diversification of the settler movement. Umbrella organisations like ‘Gush Emunim’ and the ‘Yesha Council’ are no longer able to control and represent all settlers. A split in the movement, with the radicals viewing the leadership of ‘Gush Emunim’ and other mainstream settler leaders as too accommodating and thus a threat to their project.

Settler Violence

As the phenomenon of violent settlers is generally not new, many scholars explained the causes of settler violence and tried to find the root causes in historical, ideological and political conditions. Sprinzak (1986) analysed the radicalisation of ‘Gush Emunim’7, the main ideological settler movement, and the ‘Jewish Underground’. He describes a development “from settler extrale-
galism to vigilante terrorism” (1986: 210). Byman and Sachs (2012) describe settler violence, similarly to the US country report in 2013, as a form of terrorism (U.S. Department of State 2013). Yet, they fail to sufficiently explain why Jewish settlers aim their violence against Palestinians while their message is directed at the Israeli government.

Mendelsohn (2014: 508ff) analysed the relationship between the Israeli state and what he calls “the messianic settler movement”. He focuses what he terms “riding the back of the tiger”: “Because the outsourcing of a state’s central responsibilities and prerogatives is a highly risky strategy, I term it ‘riding the back of the tiger’ (RBT). States find that the consequences of going down this path can be grave, as the actors thought to be serving the state’s interests often end up undermining its international interests” (Mendelsohn 2014: 500). Gazit (2014) calls this form of violence state-sponsored vigilantism. He describes “settler violence as an informal political mechanism that structures and reproduces political control in the service of the state” (2014: 1). He states that “informal cooperation between the settlers and the Israeli soldiers represents a unique instance of state collusion and vigilantism, wherein the very same structural forces that undermine state authority also generate casual mechanisms that compensate it” (2014: 1).

Pedahzur and Perliger (2003) analysed settler violence in the theoretical framework of vigilantism prior to the unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza strip in 2005 and the increasing number of attacks and therefore prior the ‘price tag’ phenomena. They state that religiously based violence erupts due to different variables: cultural and ideological (Zvi Raanan 1980, in Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 10), sociological elements (Nahama Gal-Or 1986 in Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 10) and rational-organizational theories (Yohav Peled 1992 in Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 10). Their classification of vigilante violence explains well the settler violence in general but fails to explain the growing numbers of attacks and damage after 2008 or price tag attacks.

More recently, Karin Abraham published research focusing on price tag attacks. She classifies those attacks as a modus operandi in order to “undermine Israel’s ability to carry through territorial concessions in the West Bank” (2014: 7). She states that the “price tag also aims to destabilize the situation on the ground, thus raising the cost of political/diplomatic efforts that may yield territorial concessions” (2014: 3). Following this claim one needs to ask why the Israeli government does not fight settler violence more vigorously.

Most explanations are unconvincing regarding motivation and the role of the violence itself. As analyses focus mainly on the physical damage, the political and social effects of the violence have been neglected. Most of them only offer reasons for the rise of the attacks over the last years in terms of growing numbers of settlers, diversification of religious and ideological strands or the Gaza withdrawal in 2005 while not addressing the proxy attacks directed at Palestinians while politically addressing the government. It is still an open question, hence, if the concept of vigilante political violence explains that
particular form of settler violence. This article attempts to explain the dramatically increasing numbers of attacks and in particular the new phenomenon of price tag attacks by adding a conceptual extension to the vigilante terrorism paradigm.

Vigilante Violence and its Conceptual Weaknesses

The main approach to analyse religion-based violence is the theory of vigilante violence, rooted in the North American frontier culture. Scholars like Pedahzur and Perliger (2003), Sprinzak (1986) or Gazit (2014) adapted the concept to the case of Jewish settlers. Vigilantism on the one hand contains aspects like organised actions of citizens aiming to maintain public order. On the other hand, it implies “illegal measures often employed in the effort to keep order and avenge the initial crime, thus taking over the state’s role in protecting its citizens” (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 10).

Waldmann classifies vigilantism as form of terrorism, which aims to keep and protect a current order. He calls it a hybrid type of terror and terrorism acting outside the law to protect the status quo which the state is unable or unwilling to do in the eyes of vigilante groups (Waldmann 2000: 18). Gurr defines vigilante terrorism as violent “activity intended to protect the status quo or to return to the status quo of an earlier period” (Gurr 1987 in Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 10). Rosenbaum and Senderberg similarly argue that “the ultimate aim of vigilante violent groups is to maintain the existing socio-political order and thus provide support for the current ruling system” (Rosenbaum and Senderberg 1974: 10).

Table 1: Typology of Vigilantism after Pedahzur and Perlinger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(I) crime control vigilantism</th>
<th>(II) social group control vigilantism</th>
<th>(III) regime control vigilantism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.1 respond to a direct provocation.</td>
<td>II.1 systematic and planned attacks against the group who endangers the status quo.</td>
<td>Violent aggressions against representatives of the current regime in situations where vigilantes feel the regime is responsible for change in the political status quo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.2 initiating organized independent acts of revenge.</td>
<td>II.2 individual acts by settlers with no previously known record of engaging in such demonstrations of violence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

Both definitions help to analyse Jewish settler violence. There is no doubt that the national-religious settlement movement wants to keep the status-quo.

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8 Terror is violence of the state against oppositional groups, while terrorism is a strategy of the weak against the state.
quo as continuation of the settlement project. Every political decision calling for a settlement freeze or an evacuation is a threat to their plans and ideology. But it needs to be questioned if the second part of Rosenbaum’s and Senderberg’s definition claiming support for the current ruling system can be applied here. Undoubtedly, it was for many decades. But attacks during the Oslo peace talks and in previous years against the leadership of the ruling system raise reasonable doubts if this might not have changed. While Pedahzur and Perliger claim that perpetrators of settler violence are committed to the State of Israel and its laws and values (2003: 11), the Gaza withdrawal of 2005 may have undermined that loyalty. The concept of Pedahzur and Perliger differentiates between three types of vigilantism: (I) crime control vigilantism, (II) social group control vigilantism and (III) regime control vigilantism. Type I includes two subtypes: I.1 is applicable to situations were settlers respond to a direct provocation in a way that is more aggressive than necessary and also illegal. This type could typically be found during the Second Intifada when armed patrols reacted on stone throwing Palestinians by shooting them or driving over them. In many cases, they hit uninvolved and innocent people. Subtype I.2 would include organised acts of revenge against the Palestinian population. Both types erupted in three periods with a high level of violent attacks as shown in Figure 1. It shows the number of killed Palestinians by Israeli civilians in the occupied territories including East Jerusalem during the First Intifada from 1987 until 1991, the left wing government and the Oslo talks from 1992 until 1995 and the Second Intifada from 2000 to 2006. The main motivation for this type of vigilante violence was triggered by acts of violence committed by Palestinians (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 20ff).
The second type of social group control vigilantism generally aims at restraining groups who are vying for a new social and political order. Countercactions are triggered by a rival group, which initiates violent acts against the ruling regime in order to keep the status quo. There are also two subtypes: II.1 could be found mainly during the First intifada when violent acts by Palestinians against the occupation were perceived by settlers as an attempt that could jeopardise Israeli control over the West Bank. In order to prevent this, settlers systematically attacked Palestinians and their property. Those acts, especially if committed in groups, are usually well planned. The violent actor feels threatened by a proposed or looming change of the status quo while victims belong to groups that want to initiate change (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 26). Settlers attacked uninvolved Palestinians randomly in cities, set their cars on fire, uprooted trees or destroyed houses and fields with bulldozers (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 24ff). Subtype II.2 is characterised by “individual acts by settlers with no previously known record of engaging in such demonstrations of violence” (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 25) motivated by the social and political situation. The best known attack was the killing of 29 Palestinian worshippers by the Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein on 27 February 1994 in the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron. This incident accounts for the peak in 1994 in Figure 1. This attack like others of this subtype can be found during the time of the Oslo accords when national-religious
settlers saw the future of ‘Eretz Israel’ threatened by the left wing government of Yitzhak Rabin.

The third type of regime control vigilantism describes violent acts against representatives of the current regime, in this case mainly the Israeli government or the IDF as its representatives on the ground. Violence erupts if vigilantes perceive political decisions by the regime as a threat to the status quo like the evacuations of the settlements in the Sinai Peninsula. The best known case of this type was the assassination of Israel’s prime minister Yitzhak Rabin 1995 by the radical religious-nationalist Yigal Amir (Pedahzur and Perliger 2003: 26-27).

The concept of vigilante violence applied to Israel gets its explanatory value by connecting the national-religious ideology to the different types of settler violence since the evacuation of the Sinai. The role of violence can be clearly distinguished and there is a connection between violent actor and the target of vigilant action, although it might be indirect or selected by chance as in type I.2. However, since numbers of violent attacks have increased since 2008 and price tag attacks evolved the questions looms if those attacks still fit into the vigilante concept. Vigilante violence is a convincing explanation for earlier periods while other explanations might be better fit to explain price tag attacks. Price tag attacks against Palestinians and their property do not really fulfil the criteria of the model. Type III is ruled out as Palestinians are not representatives of the ruling regime nor are they decision makers with power to change the status quo. Type I is triggered by the target of the violence through prior provocations or crime. While this continues to happen of course, two aspects are important: first, the number of Palestinian violence and terrorism against Israeli civilians decreases since 2005. Against this decrease in Palestinian violence against Israelis, settler violence against Palestinians is increasing dramatically. Second, this type of vigilantism is further characterised by the victims of later violence provoking violent retaliation. But as it will be shown later, price tag victims are not connected to the provocation that causes vigilante activities. This leads to the conclusion, that price tag attacks against Palestinians do not fit in type I of the model. Social control vigilantism, type II, aims to maintain the status quo and is targeted at the group that propagates change. To show the differences to the existing categories and how to possibly extend the concept price tag attacks will be described and analysed as a new form of settler violence.

Price Tag Attacks

While deadly Palestinian violence against settlers significantly decreased (Figure 1, B’tselem 2014), attacks by settlers against Palestinians have almost quadrupled between 2006 and 2011 (Figure 2). The considerable difference and trend of the numbers of casualties is a strong indication for a differentiation between settler violence and Palestinian violence. The lack of
a strong correlation of the numbers hypothesises that price tag attacks are generally not a reaction on Palestinian violence. The fact that only the numbers of violent acts involving property or land damage leads to the assumption that those attacks do not necessarily target Palestinians themselves. In the UNOCHA data set, the authors claim that “[t]he root cause of the settler violence phenomenon is Israel’s decades-long policy of illegally facilitating the settling of its citizens inside occupied Palestinian territory” (UNOCHA 2011). This is of course a necessary condition because without Jewish settlers inside the West Bank violent acts against Palestinians would not occur. But their presence itself is not sufficient to either explain the violence or its increase. Also, the growth of the settler population does not sufficiently explain the rising number of attacks, as Byman and Sachs claim (2012: 74).

Figure 2: Recorded Settler Violence from 2006 to End of August 2013.

![Bar chart showing recorded settler violence from 2006 to 2013.

Source: UNOCHA, Update on Settler Violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, October 2013.

The first documented price tag attack occurred on 19 June 2008 when settlers from Yitzhat and Tappuah near Nablus “attacked the villages of Burin, Asira al Qabliya, Yasuf, Huwara, Jit and Urif by stoning cars and homes, setting fire to agricultural land, and shutting down local roads” (An Najah 2012: 68) following the demolition of a caravan near Yitzhar settlement. On 23 July 2008 a settler attacked an Israeli soldier at the outpost of Havat Gilad. Later that day, settlers from the same settlement set fire on Palestinian olive trees and fields. Nearby in the Palestinian village of Burin, settlers smashed cars, windows and cut electricity wires. The incidents happened after IDF troops evacuated a group of settlers from a bus parked illegally as a residential structure at the Adei Ad outpost (Azoulay 2008). Those two prototypal
events show typical characteristics of price tag attacks. The Israeli human rights organisation wrote about this form of settler violence:

"In recent years, settlers have carried out violent acts under the slogan ‘price tag’. These are acts of random violence aimed at the Palestinian population and Israeli security forces. They generally follow actions by Israeli authorities that are perceived as harming the settlement enterprise" (B’tselem 2011a).

For some reason, B’tselem deleted the word “random” in later versions (B’tselem 2011b) despite its relevance in understanding those attacks. Byman and Sachs characterise price tag violence as violence against innocent Palestinians, Israeli security personal and mainstream settler leader. All of them are perceived as enemies of the settlement project (2012: 73). The attacks are performed to counter the Israeli government’s ability to change the status quo in the West Bank by raising the costs for political decisions not favoured by the settlement movement. They aim at consuming political and economic resources by destabilizing and escalating the situation and causing tensions (Abraham 2014: 3).

Summing up, price tag attacks are a new form of settler violence growing beyond vigilante violence. Systematic acts of violence with a common typology of targets and destruction in connection with recurrent avowals from the perpetrators shown through graffiti are its central elements. This means that the phenomenon is not only new because of raising quantity but displays a new quality of violence.

Figure 3: Number of Price Tag Attacks between 2008 and 2014.

Sources: An Najah (2012), Tag Meir after Abraham (2014), Peace Now: Friedman
Figure 3 illustrates the growing numbers of price tag attacks mainly against Palestinians and concentrated in the West Bank between 2008 and 2014. The fact that the data of the figure is based on three different databases with varying numbers shows the difficulty of collecting valid information on price tag attacks. The different databases use unequal methods of defining and counting the attacks. This results of the fact that now all attacks get reported to the police due to mistrust and a lack of law enforcement and investigations (Yesh Din 2013). The data of Peace now is mainly based on media reports. But Abraham (2014) criticises that the data on price tag attacks “are however loosely counted. Not all appear to actually be ‘Price tag’ attacks” (2014: 10).

From 2012 to mid-2013, Israeli police counted 788 cases in Israel and the West Bank, arrested 267 suspects and indicted 154 (Ynet 2013). Those escalating numbers result from a widening of targets for price tag attacks to also include Israeli left-wing activists, Muslim and Christian institutions in Israel as well as Palestinians inside Israel. The first attack in Israel happened on 3 October 2011 when a mosque in Galilee was set in fire (Asbeck 2011: 3). Despite this worrying escalation, this article focuses on settler violence in the West Bank and leaves aside analysing incidents in Israel.

**Showing the Price for Evacuations**

In order to answer the article’s main question, why do Jewish settlers use price tag attacks, it is helpful to have a closer look to messages left at the scene of price tag attacks and triggers. After describing figures and examples this allows us to draw conclusions from what is known about those acts of violence.

Messages and motives displayed in graffiti are often left near burned cars, homes, and mosques, on walls or other surfaces close to price tag attacks. This strengthens the argument of proxy violence, because the price tag violence against Palestinians does neither hit the decision makers, the Israeli government, or their representatives, the Israeli security forces.

These messages, usually spray-painted in Hebrew, often contain the word ‘price tag’ (‘tag machir’ in Hebrew), names of evacuated settlements or racist paroles. Especially through evoking names of settlements or other information concerning political decisions, a connection between the price tag attack and a decision by the Israeli government can be identified.

Both of the following examples illustrate the connection between decisions by the Israeli government or Supreme Court concerning settlement evacuations and subsequent violent attacks on uninvolved Palestinians. The temporal sequence and references in graffiti to affected places or names of decision makers indicates the correlation: Firstly, when the Israeli Supreme Court called to evacuate the settlement of Migron some 14 kilometres north of Jerusalem, settler violence in this area rose. Eight Palestinians got injured when settler threw stones on a bus. After a deadline for the evacuation was
set to 12 September 2012, price tag attacks intensified. Six people got injured when an incendiary composition was thrown on a Palestinian taxi. On 29 August 2012 a Palestinian car was set on fire nearby with a graffiti left at the spot saying “Migron” (Asbeck and Börmann 2012: 2).

On June 2, 2011 four structures in the illegal outpost of Ali Ayn were evacuated and demolished. Four days later, a mosque in Al Mughayyir, close to Ramallah, was set on fire and graffiti were left reading ‘Ali Ayn’, ‘Price Tag’ and ‘This is only the beginning’ (Friedman 2015).

These, like many other examples, show the correlation between political decisions concerning settlements by the Israeli government and settler violence in particular price tag attacks. They were chosen to illustrate the systematically connection between decisions to change the status quo and the following violence.

This argument is strengthened if we have a look at databases, which include information on graffiti, targets and triggers. The Peace Now database on price tag attacks contains 172 reports from 1 January, 2011 to 13 October, 2014. At 113 scenes of attacks (65.7 per cent of the cases), graffiti were found (Friedman 2015). The Palestinian NGO Al Haq reports 36 cases of price tag attacks between 12 September 2011 and 5 January 2013. The smaller number is due to the fact that Al Haq focuses on legal monitoring of single cases. Nevertheless their database counts 10 graffiti (27.8 per cent) showing the words ‘price tag’ and other hateful slogans (Azarov 2013: 41ff). The most significant data can be found in the database of the An Najah University. They monitored 62 price tag attacks between June 2008 and July 2012. In 41 cases (66 per cent) they found graffiti messages linked to triggers and/or threatened settlement outpost. The database differentiates between four types of triggers: outpost removal, outpost threat, policy change and revenge attacks. They counted 34 outpost removals (54.8 per cent), 12 outpost threats (19.3 per cent) and 9 policy changes (12.9 per cent) as triggers for the monitored price tag attacks. In 10 cases (16.1 per cent) the triggers are unknown or others and in not a single case revenge has been a trigger (An Najah 2012: 66-67).

This shows clearly that in contrast to former forms of violence like those described as social group control vigilantism and regime control vigilantism above, price tag attacks do not target the decision makers itself neither are they acts of revenge triggered by the victims of the attacks. Settlers choose this form of violence to raise the cost of policy changes and settlement evacuations decided by the Israeli Government but on the expense of mostly Palestinian targets.

This answers also the question, why settler violence towards Palestinians should be analysed as proxy violence. Radical settlers choose Palestinians as soft targets because they know that Israeli law enforcement is on a very low level so they do not have to fear any sanctions. The starting hypothesis was that the violence is addressed to the Israeli government but randomly hits
Palestinians can be supported by messages left at the scene of crime by the settlers.

Conclusion

The concept of vigilante violence in general still goes a long way to explain certain types of settler violence. As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is on-going, there is still ‘classical’ settler violence against Palestinians, like acts of revenge, triggered by Palestinian acts of violence or other provocations. These acts of violence can be categorised as crime control or social group control vigilantism. From these different types of settler violence it makes sense to further distinguish the specific types of price tag attacks. Those price tag attacks can be classified as social group control vigilantism (against left-wing activists or politicians) or as regime control vigilantism if the violence is aimed at representatives of the state.

When talking about price tag attacks, it is necessary to differentiate between attacks in Israel and in the Palestinian territories because of differences in target selection and different legal systems and law enforcement. This article focused on violence and price tag attacks against Palestinians in the West Bank. Recent developments showed raising numbers of price tag attacks inside Israel against left-wing activists, politicians, Christians and Muslims, as well as against representatives of the state going beyond the scope of this investigation.

Attacks against uninvolved and innocent Palestinian civilians, as under scrutiny here, whether in the West Bank or inside Israel, mismatch the concept as introduced earlier. As Palestinian victims of price tag attacks do not provoke these, do not represent the regime or can hardly be understood as actors powerful enough to change the status quo, the concept needs to be amended and adapted to explain this new phenomenon.

The core of price tag attacks against Palestinians is their choice of soft targets to provoke and weaken the Israeli government. The break-up of the alliance between the Israeli state and parts of the settler movement after the Gaza withdrawal led to a fragmentation and radicalised splinter groups of national-religious settlers. Those small and extremist groups, like the 'Hilltop Youth', split up from the settler mainstream and its umbrella organisations, because they lost political representation and perceive current political decisions as a threat to their objectives. Aiming to protect the status quo or even expanding the settlement project, every evacuation of a settlement endangers their ideological goal of settling in the West Bank.

Because they are no longer integrated into the settler mainstream and represented by settlers organisations, which used to have notable influence on Israeli decision makers, they try to compensate their fading relevance through violence. Groups splitting up into smaller and consequently more radical groups, and getting more violent in order to counterbalance political
and organisational weaknesses is generally not new. But what is new in the case of Jewish settler violence is that those groups only formed recently after 2005 leading to the increasing numbers of attacks.

As shown, price tag attacks are a new form of settler violence harming mainly uninvolved Palestinians, to show the Israeli government the price of changing the status quo. This indirect way is chosen for two main reasons. The first is the political and organisational weakness as described above, of not being able any more to influence political decisions through classical lobbying. Secondly, Palestinians are soft targets for Jewish settlers because they do not fear investigations or sanctions as law enforcement is often missing for settlers in the West Bank.

This is a new form of violence which was not necessary before the breakup of the close relation between the settler movement and Israeli governments, as settlers saw the status-quo and even the continuation of the settlement project protected. As this relation broke up in 2005, a process of radicalisation started, leading to the phenomena of price tag attacks.

The concept of vigilante political violence is not sufficient any more to explain price tag violence against uninvolved Palestinians. Because it is proxy violence, against soft targets – the Palestinians – and not the one who are perceived by the violent actors as endangering the status quo – the Israeli government – it does not fit in Pedahzur and Perlinger’s typology of vigilante violence.
– I reflect –

The violent conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is pervasive in our daily media and many academic analyses. But most of the time violence is seen as an output of the long-lasting conflict, not as a tool or even aim itself. It was worth to deal with theories of violence and vigilantism in order to better understand the price tag phenomena. The finding of radicalized settler groups split up from the mainstream of the settler movement showed once more the heterogeneity of the Israeli society. I think this heterogeneity and complexity is often not noticed enough analyzing the conflict to develop proposals for solutions.

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War in the Digital Sphere: The Operation Protective Edge on Twitter

Patrick Stegemann

Abstract

As a case study, this article focuses on the social media strategy used by the IDF in the last Gaza operation, Protective Edge. A quantitative content analysis covering the period of war, as well as the three months before and after the war reveals that the IDF, an army of a democratic state, acts not only as a hard power but also as a soft power using tools of public diplomacy. Furthermore, the differences in communication during times of war, and in times before and after, show that the IDF try to portray themselves as a peaceful, women-friendly army whose activities are aimed at integrating minorities. Especially in times of war, the IDF tries to build enduring relationships with their followers by creating the image of a modern, inclusive, peace-loving army; in times of peace the IDF tweets a lot about soft topics and topics of human interest. In doing so, the IDF try to build up enduring relationships with their followers and aim to produce credibility that can be relied on in times of war. In the Israeli case, the extended use of social media communications by state institutions and especially the army is somehow remarkable and shows the political flexibility of digital tools and platforms. The article concludes that in times of war, the IDF succeeded in tweeting relevant information, almost in real time. Via their Twitter account, they provided narratives and information with an intense frequency to promote their version of the war. However, they missed out on the opportunity to use Twitter's potential for political communication, namely the opportunity to interact with their community during wartime.

Keywords: Twitter diplomacy, Palestinian-Israeli-conflict, social media, soft power, public diplomacy
Introduction

Computers and keyboards are the weapons – Facebook and Twitter are the battlefields. It is there that we fight, each and every day. –Israel Defense Forces spokesman, New Media Division

War has come to the social web. At least, in the recent Gaza war, many newspapers found social web platforms such as Twitter useful not only as sources of information, but also as phenomena to report on. The New York Times wrote: “The current conflict in Gaza is playing out on two fronts: one on the ground, spilling more and more blood with each passing day; the other glowing on television screens and flitting across Twitter feeds around the world” (Flanagan 2014). As well the English versions of Israeli newspapers such as Haaretz or the Qatar-based news channel Al Jazeera reported on the “Twitter war” going on in Gaza (Schechter 2014). But this is not such a new development. In the earlier 2012 Gaza war, the IDF announced the elimination of Hamas’ military wing leader Al-Jabari on Twitter, and kept updating the global public about their ongoing operation Pillar of Defence via social networks. The CNN labelled this “[o]ne of the most noticeable technological events in 2012” (Kelly 2013). The quote underlines the importance of this war and the worldwide attention it has attracted due to the IDF’s social media activity.

At the same time, CNN missed one thing: The Gaza war on Twitter was not only one of the most notable events technically, but also politically. As the website buzzfeed puts it: “Consider this: A country can declare – via Twitter – that it is at war. If that doesn’t make the Internet real, I don’t know what does” (Buchanan 2012). The story about the war, which the IDF tried to create on Twitter, is a political one, with political means and a political motivation. This article argues that an army of a democratic state like the IDF engages with the public on social media platforms and in the way it uses these reveals a lot about the changing relationship between the public sphere and a military actor such as the IDF. Since social media has become so important in recent conflicts, we have to integrate this new form of state communication in a theoretical framework. The IDF produces hybrid forms of communication: a mix of popular new media practices and more traditional modes of statecraft. This modification of state communication has to be understood within the theoretical framework of public diplomacy as the way to communicate effectively with the global public. The circumstances of communication have been changing regarding the growing importance of such new communication channels as social media. The IDF’s social media activity in the international field of political and military communication is striking. To understand the interplay between violent actors, politics, and public, it is important to gain deeper insight into how the IDF acts on Twitter and what kind of image they try to create. This article makes the case that social media
is not just another channel: since social media work according to somehow specific rules and characteristics, the communication of a player such as the IDF changes; social media change the way state institutions and in this case especially the IDF (inter)act. This article focuses on research into the outcome of social media communication by the IDF.

Moreover, the example of the IDF’s usage of such technologies challenges the media and also a dominant scientific narrative of technological determinism that was especially used to explain the success of the populist uprising in Egypt and Tunisia. The “Arab Spring” and also the Iranian opposition movement of 2009 have often been seen as “Twitter or Facebook revolutions” (see Khamis and Vaughn 2013). This narrative is a variation of the argument of the digital democracy theorem (Dijk 2013). In addition to this narrative, there exists a complementary narrative especially about Middle Eastern states: they are considered strictly repressive actors in the digital sphere (see Aouragh 2012). This narrative concentrates on the investment of these states in infiltrating, monitoring and repressing social media as capabilities of maintaining authoritarian control (Egypt’s 2012 Internet blockade to suppress the uprising might be the most popular example of this). The case presented in this article - the IDF’s use of Twitter - complicates both poles of this popular narrative about digital media: not only does it challenge the idea that new technologies per se liberate from below, but it also challenges the notion that states mainly invest in repression from above. In fact, the Israeli state case shows the political flexibility of digital tools and platforms. It stresses the highly variable objectives and political functions social media can serve. And it highlights the relevance of social media for public diplomacy.

As mentioned before, some scholars have argued that social media, and especially Twitter, are just another platform to distribute information besides newspapers, television, and other traditional media outlets (Lipinski and Neddenriep 2004; Golbeck et al. 2010). Without any doubt, even centuries ago, the physical war was always connected with a war for mind and thought; already Clausewitz’ theory of war offered surprisingly predictive insights into the interplay of informational and kinetic aspects of war (cf. Clausewitz 1980). The core of Clausewitz’ theory is to describe war within the context of political conflict, which is dominated by the two factors of violence and morality. Clausewitz describes precisely the relationship between these two factors: “The relationship these two factors share appears to be the same one that modern doctrine writers and military operators are struggling less successfully to describe with the terms kinetic operations and information operations” (Darley 2006: 74). Israel also has a long record of not only taking on military tasks, but also of mastering the challenge to earn the world’s political support for their actions and for the legitimation of their actions (cf. Schleifer 2003). Therefore Israel, like every other state, uses public diplomacy via all relevant channels.

The special character of the IDF’s social media activity in the context of public diplomacy can be regarded as unique in terms of international politics.
(cf. Caldwell et al 2009). Therefore, this article will focus on the IDF’s efforts on Twitter within the field of public diplomacy, concentrating on the most recent Gaza conflict and the IDF’s operation Protective Edge.

To do so, I will analyse the IDF’s Twitter activities during the operation as well as three months before and after the operation. This article proceeds in four parts. The first part reflects upon the concepts of soft power and public diplomacy within the framework of social media. The second presents the hypotheses that will be tested. The Data and Method section outlines my method of data collection and empirical framework. The Results and Interpretations section reports the result of content analysis and connects this result to the theoretical framework presented before. In the last section, I offer an explanatory conclusion and suggest themes for future research.

Theoretical Framework

The term soft power stands for a frequently used concept, introduced by Nye in the 1990s. Nye’s idea, based on a Weberian understanding of power, can be defined in his words: “Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye 2008: 94). This ability is based on resources of culture, values, and policies. The combination of hard power (economical or military power) and soft power has been characterised as “smart power”, a concept quite influential, especially in American foreign policy. The concept of smart and soft power has not only become a very famous concept, but also a highly contested one, having been “hijacked” over the last two decades as a cliché for policymakers (Roselle et al. 2014: 70). Nonetheless, Nye stresses the connection between soft power and public diplomacy. That is why this article takes Nye’s power concept as a starting point.

One of the core questions of international relations (IR) is to explore which methods, means of persuasion, and influence work under which modes of communication. These conditions of interaction have, of course, changed immensely since Nye published his concept in the 1990s. Without doubt, his concept has clear restrictions (Melissen 2007): critics note that soft power is vague and ineffective at its core and lacks a clear conceptual framework. These limitations become problematic when a nation or institution seeks to implement soft power in policy making. Nye himself admits the restrictions of his concept (2004), but he also further developed his approach. One of the most important later amendments is that, in modern times, politics has become a contest of competitive credibility: “The world of traditional power politics is typically about whose military or economy wins. Politics in an information age may ultimately be about whose story wins” (Nye 2004: 106). Therefore, the fight for the public centers on maintaining, expanding, and protecting one’s own credibility and weakening the one of the enemy. Nye describes an additional development of power in the information age: be-
cause of the sheer amount of information that can be produced cheaply and easily today, the question of power is not foremost a question of producing information, but of gaining attention. Regarding public diplomacy on Twitter, assessing the IDF reveals that they – just as every other Twitter user – have to accept and work with the entelechy of the network: the IDF is bounded by the special rationalities of social media in the field of public diplomacy. Moreover, the IDF, just as any other state institution, is required to demonstrate a certain degree of activity within social networks, due to the fact that Israel’s opponents are active as well. As social networks have become part of a broader public in recent years, being active in them is imperative.

Public diplomacy has a central role in promoting soft power (Nye 2008: 94), and consists of the three-dimensional paradigm of daily communication, strategic communication, and the development of lasting relationships. For Nye, this paradigm along with the need for two-way communication is at the core of public diplomacy (Nye 2008: 97). However, public diplomacy is not to be understood in adversarial terms: “Sometimes there is a competition of my information versus your information, but often there can be gains for both sides” (Nye 2004: 116). This understanding of public diplomacy is quite important in evaluating the steps the IDF takes in this field. It is also mandatory to mention the special role the army in Israel plays in public diplomacy. Contrary to most militaries worldwide, the IDF is not only in charge of the fighting on the ground, but also of the fight for narratives, information, and legitimacy in online media, essentially making it somewhat autonomous in certain areas in its employment of both hard and soft power.

There is a special term describing public diplomacy in Israel: Hasbara. The term was first translated into English in 1979 by the Washington Post as “overseas image-building” for Israel (cf. Schleifer 2003). Although there is a big discussion about the real meaning of the word (some scholars translate it with ‘explanation’ or ‘information’, others just as ‘propaganda’), there is broad consensus that it means something described as public diplomacy in other countries. It spreads out through various channels, initiated by the government, including the army. The strategy of public diplomacy or ‘Hasbara’ has changed over time. In particular, the ascent of social media changed the way public diplomacy is conceived of and conducted. Until the social media revolution reached the Israeli government, Hasbara was mostly formulated by and sent out directly from the Israeli government offices, and mainly by the foreign ministry. The development of a social media strategy, especially one involving the army, was an evolutionary process, driven by a hard awakening after realising the failures in the communication strategy in the 2006 war in Lebanon. In this war, Hezbollah succeeded in framing several Israeli military actions in their favour, and so “creat[ed] perception of failure with consequences more important than kinetic outcome” (Kalb and Saivetz 2007: 4). Furthermore, Hezbollah managed to gain the sympathy and support of many, long before the IDF had time to react and send out its own message regarding the incident. Neither the Israeli government nor the IDF had the
power to react appropriately in that context. After the war, the Israeli government was under pressure and initiated the Winograd commission, which aimed at investigating the failures of the military, politics, and media strategy. One of the commission’s central recommendations was to coordinate public relations across a wide spectrum of activities, including traditional media, new media, and diplomacy. To do so, the government was advised to organise an information and propaganda unit. Subsequently, the National Information Directorate (NID) was founded as the central institution coordinating all communication and public diplomacy activities. The creation of the new directorate marks the beginning of a coordinated effort by the IDF to include social media in its overall communication strategy. The IDF spokesperson’s unit initiated the social media unit in summer of 2009. However, the first sign of social media activity came during the 2008/2009 Gaza-operation Cast Lead, when a media strategy was planned simultaneously with the military aspects of the conflict. Unsurprisingly, the YouTube channel was opened only two days after starting the operation and became a sensation around the world. Their Twitter account was opened on 3rd January, the day the ground offensive in Lebanon started. An IDF spokesperson, Avital Leibovich, said to the Guardian on 2nd January 2009: “New media is a new war zone within the media - we are planning to be relevant there” (Shabi 2009).

Social Media

That the IDF’s activities on Twitter are supposed to be the “most noticeable event” of 2012 shows how relatively new social media still are. The term “social media” was introduced in 2004 when Facebook was founded. Nowadays, the IDF and many other Israeli government institutions are active on all main social media platforms: they have accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Flickr as well as their own blogs. This article focuses on Twitter as one phenomenon within the social web, whereby social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 61). This rightly emphasises user-generated content, which is constitutive for social web and can be described by the word produsage, coined by Bruns (2008). The term underlines the blurring of the distinctive line between production and use. Users are producers and users at the same time. That turns the social web into something functionally collaborative and is part of the reason why some scholars believe that “[s]ocial media introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organisations, communities, and individuals” (Kietzman et al. 2011: 250). Regarding the definition of public diplomacy outlined above, it seems clear that a change of communication influences how public diplomacy is conducted.

Stegemann: War in the Digital Sphere
Within the social web, microblogging services such as Twitter have become widespread over the last few years. Microblogging is the most recent form of blogging and describes a service where messages (tweets), usually no longer than 140 characters, are posted instantly. This kind of blogging expresses a novel form of communication as it quickly allows posting of updates, ideas, or simply notifications, thus providing a flexible platform for communication. Twitter has 285 million active users (as of October 2014, according to Twitter) and is ranked one of the ten-most-visited websites worldwide (Alexa 2014). Demography studies have shown that, on average, Twitter users are older than users of other networks (Cheng 2011) and that most users have an interest in politics and are technologically adept. A German study shows that 50 percent of Twitter users work in journalism or marketing (Pfeiffer 2009). Although this data ought to be used with care, as there is little reliable evidence and the majority of studies are carried out by marketing companies, they nonetheless illustrate the tendency of Twitter being a place for multipliers who are engaged in the social web.

Despite Twitter being viewed as social network in this context, it can also be seen as a news medium (Kwak et al. 2010). It is an open platform, and non-registered users can visit and view all tweets, which is part of the reason why Twitter has about 400 million visitors per month. Each registered user has a Twitter page on which all their updates are aggregated in a list. In addition, everybody following a Twitter user will receive tweets in their newsfeed posted by that person. Even though there is a lot of discussion on news algorithms, Twitter so far has none, which marks a significant difference from, for example, Facebook. That means that tweets from a person or institution that a user follows will chronologically appear in their Twitter-timeline. The entire Twitter-ecosystem is structured by the symbols “#” and “@”; although all tweets are directed towards a general audience, adding the @ with the username (i.e. @IDFspokesperson) means the user wants to direct a tweet at another user or send it as a response to an earlier tweet. The hash symbol # (‘hashtag’) means the tweet is related to a certain topic. This allows a bottom-up, collaborative agenda building. Including a hashtag in one’s tweet just ascribes a sort of title to a discussion in which every user can participate. The hashtag opens the opportunity that information spreads beyond the narrow group of followers. The higher the usage of hashtags is, the more likely the user’s tweets are to be found in a search. In a situation where news access is restricted (which happens during nearly every crisis and/or war, for example, in the situation during summer 2014 in Israel and Gaza), the role of alternative news sources and especially micro-blogging-platforms grows in importance (Kwak et al. 2010; Papacharissi and Oliveira 2012).

Twitter is becoming an integral part of a broader network’s public sphere (Bruns et al. 2010). Regarding the effect of social web agenda building, its foremost impact allows a political player such as the IDF to build their own agenda, without dealing with gatekeepers, as part of their public diplomacy strategy. Naturally, the IDF intends to reach journalists on Twitter, but with
more than 400,000 followers on Twitter they have direct access to people. There is a discussion about the multiplier effect in social media in a situation of war (Schejter 2009). Both military victories as well as defeats on the battlefield, can be displayed and multiplied several times, creating the potential to reach millions of people just minutes after a significant event, thus shaping the agenda and creating a special frame through which the international public should interpret this event. This potentially has a direct impact on people’s attitudes and sympathies in relation to the war and its warring parties. For example, the Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon war successfully employed such tactics by setting up rocket launch sites next to civilian buildings. By bombing these buildings, the Israeli Air Force inevitably hit and killed civilians, news of which Hezbollah would then shortly after convey to the international community via modern communication tools such as YouTube and Twitter. Doing so they managed to shape the international agenda to gain sympathy and support way before the IDF, who were not in charge of these modern communication channels back in 2006, had time to react and send out their own message (cf. Kreps 2007: 80). This example illustrates the impact social media (with its increasing pace and higher frequency of information) has on military communication and the consequences of the multiplier effect.

For this reason, this article investigates in the framework of an Israeli case study the role Twitter plays in a changing public sphere, especially in a situation of crisis and violence. As of now, little academic evidence has been produced about the use of social media in situations of war. In communication studies some approaches towards social media in a political framework have been developed. Niekerk and Maharaj (2009), for instance, try to analyse the role social media can play in civil disturbances, strategic security, and military operations. Within their approach, they concentrate on the aftermath of the Iranian elections in 2009 and the political uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East after 2010. By giving an overview about information warfare and discussing the adequacy of the information warfare approach to social media, they do not analyse the factual effect a platform such as Twitter has. Aside from that, there is a lively discussion about the role social media played in the “Arab Spring”. As the introduction mentions, the western media characterised this political uprising sometimes as a “Twitter or Facebook revolution” thus exaggerating the real influence social media had during the uprisings (cf. Khamis and Vaughn 2013; Aouragh 2012). Also, some discuss the use of Twitter in emergency situations (Adini et al. 2014) as a special source for information and a dialogue both for the population and security forces.

In contrast, there is less academic research on the role of social media in war situations (cf. Collings and Rohozinski 2009). One reason might be that Twitter is still seen more as a communicative playground than as a serious medium. Moreover, it is still a methodological challenge to research such a volatile and dynamic object of investigation. In addition, one could argue that communication via Twitter has not been used intensively in many conflicts so
far. This underlines the relevance of the research, since the IDF is now a role model for social media activity. Twitter has a growing importance in daily life—and in times of war. The audience can receive information in real time, potentially from the battlefield, changing the necessary skills required to verify, understand and maintain an overview in this constant flow of information. The social web obviously changes the current news ecosystems. We do not have to wait for the anchor to arrive; there is no need for a traditional reporter selecting news. Instead, the news is produced in real time and the media opens the possibility for the audience—or, as the famous sentence by Jay Rosen (2006) puts it, the people formerly known as the audience—to interact with the producers and sources of information. Thus, the military does not need to deal with traditional gatekeepers to get information across to a broader audience. Instead, they have direct access to readers, which also brings about new challenges in terms of interaction. One central question this article tries to answer is therefore how this contact was used by the IDF in the recent conflict. Even more remarkably, the Israeli activities within the social web serve as a role model for other military strategists. The US Army published an article about the Israeli advantages in social media activity during the 2008/2009 Gaza war, which could be “best practices that the U.S. military could adopt when dealing with new media and its role on the battlefield” (Caldwell et al. 2009: 1). Trying to understand the strategy the IDF implements by using social media in war situations might inspire further research in this field concerning other conflict situations as well.

**Hypotheses**

Based on an analysis of Twitter activities in the recent Gaza war, the article addresses the question how the war was covered on Twitter by one of the conflict parties, the IDF. This analysis is connected to the question of what role Twitter may play during violent conflicts in more generally. The research question focuses on the ways in which the IDF covered the operation Protective Edge during the period of war and how Twitter activity represented the development of violence in the war, represented by deaths and rockets launched. Furthermore, the question is how communication during war and in times of the ceasefire differs in terms of topics and frequency. Based on the outlined theoretical background, as well as the research question, the following hypotheses are to be tested:

I. In times of war, the IDF is more active on Twitter regarding frequency of their tweets and interaction with users.

II. Regarding topics and the style of presentation, the IDF acts as soft power on Twitter in times of peace.

III. Violence is portrayed as one-sidedly emanating from Hamas.
Data and Methodical Framework

The amount of information and its dynamic character render Twitter a hard-to-analyse methodological challenge. At the same time, Twitter’s open application programming interface (API) and the limited length of its content are helpful during data procession and analysis. The methodological approaches discussed so far can be divided into two main groups: on the one hand, there is quantitative-oriented research seeking to map the universe of social media (Bruns and Burgess 2010; Etling et al. 2010). This kind of research usually involves a mapping tool that collects and visualises a corpus of data. Such big-data analysis has also traced the rhythms of posting information on Twitter (e.g. Papacharissi and Oliveira 2012 traced the rhythms of news storytelling on Twitter via the #egypt hashtag in their study). On the other hand, some research focuses on a small part of the social media sphere (Bruns 2011). Such analyses can use visualisation tools, but typically involve a closer, qualitative approach.

The following analysis focuses on the tweets published by the IDF’s Twitter account using quantitative content analysis as a method. This article investigates the question of how the most recent Gaza war was reported on Twitter by the IDF’s English-language account (@IDFspokesperson). The IDF also tweets in Spanish (@FDionline), French (@Tshaal_IDF), Russian (@Tshaal_Rus), Arabic (@AvichayAdraee) and Ivrit (@idfonline). Since the English-language account is by far the most followed one, analysing only this account can be justified. Nonetheless, this account might be specific and employ a special type of language or information.

This study aims to describe and classify the tweets from the IDF in the period of the war (8.7.2014 - 26.8.2014). Before and after the nominal war, tweets posted between 8th April 2014 and 8th November 2014 were selected. It seems necessary to also evaluate some weeks of IDF’s Twitter activity outside the war period to evaluate the changes in communication compared to during the war. The number of tweets collected and analysed suffices to indicate changes during war while still being small enough to be handled and at the same time yield sufficient data for analysis of the communication during this period evaluated in depth here.

Tweets were collected retrospectively using the open API that Twitter offers. The program twitonomy was used to transfer tweets to Excel, making data processing easier. Overall, 2285 tweets were collected and analysed using quantitative content analysis. As a method, content analysis was initially used for examining newspapers or other written documents to gain an understanding of their content and to make inferences from the data about their context (Krippendorff 1980). To measure the interactivity of the IDF’s Twitter activities all @ and # were noted, as well as retweets categorised. Retweets and number of favourites were analysed allowing evaluation of the range of every tweet and identification of the most popular one. To describe IDF’s content, I analysed tweets to determine whether they contained a pic-
ture/graphic, a video, a link to a source (e.g. IDF-blog) or any other source. Thus, it was possible to evaluate to what extent the IDF use different media to stress their arguments. The most important categories describing the content can be summed up in the following dimensions: the location a tweet is reporting about, the topic, and the violent actor (if there is one). Information was collected regarding the location the tweet concerned, whether it referred to Gaza, the West Bank (the IDF use the Jewish terms Judea and Samaria, which were coded as the West Bank as well) or Israel (following the pre-1967 borders of the state). In total, ten different topics were identified: life in Israel/Gaza, military attack in Israel/the West Bank/Gaza, Iron Dome operation, domestic political actions, international negotiation, human interest, information about IDF (divided in human stories and other IDF information) and the category “other”.

Results and Interpretations

I. In times of war the IDF is more active on Twitter regarding frequency of their tweets and interaction with users.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigation Period</th>
<th>Non-War-Times</th>
<th>War times 08/07/2014 – 26/08/2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tweets per day</td>
<td>6,2</td>
<td>23.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of tweets being retweets</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of tweets being replies</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hashtag per tweet</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

With the beginning of war, the IDF started a Twitter offensive: on the first day of the 50-day operation they started to tweet much more often than before. During the entire period, they sent 1186 tweets, 23 tweets a day on average. They used smart infographics, developing their own, very distinctive pictorial language.
Figure 1: Numbers of Tweets per Day in the Investigation Period

Source: Own research based on @IDFSpokesperson.
In doing so, they were providing material that fit the target group. The content could easily be shared and understood in the fast environment of Twitter. The IDF managed to tweet relevant information in times of war almost in real time. On their Twitter account, they provided narratives and information with an amazing frequency to promote their version of the war.

Regarding the frequency of tweets per day, graphic 1 shows the growing intensity of Twitter activity during the war. With up to 50 tweets per day, the IDF was much more active during that time than before or after the war. Only in April more tweets were published, which relates to a campaign start for the remembrance of the Shoah. Under the hashtag #wearehere they intended to mobilise followers to post photos and information about holocaust survivors all over the world. This time was the only one in the investigated period when the IDF actually really interacted with its followers by using hashtags and responding to their followers’ tweets. Unsurprisingly, throughout the entire period, the IDF was much more interactive than during war times. On average, 11.6 percent of their posts comprised replies to other tweets, and in nearly every tweet they used hashtags referring to broader debates.

In contrast, the IDF did not use Twitter as a tool for interaction during the war. However, using these tools of interaction is a way to become visible to Twitter users not following the IDF. The IDF’s English account rarely used hashtags and only mentioned ten other users in tweets in the whole war.
period; it replied to a total of seven tweets that were mainly its own Twitter accounts in Hebrew, Arabic, Russian, and French or the personal Twitter account of IDF Spokesman @LTCPeterLerner. Despite social media allowing for bi-directional communication, the IDF clearly did not manage to maintain multi-directional communication. They did not get in touch with users and failed to create or uphold a conversation.

Unsurprisingly therefore, Israel lost the hashtag war: During the war, the pro-Israel-hashtag #israelunderfire was used only 28,3050 times (by all Twitter users in the period of war). In contrast, the pro-Palestinian hashtag #gazaunderattack was tweeted some 2.6 million times during the same time. This means the pro-Palestinian narrative was much more present in the Twitter hemisphere. Considering the idea of social media and its theoretical underpinning, namely that interaction is one of the most important characteristics intrinsic to social media as well as part of public diplomacy, which can be used to promote one’s own story and maintain credibility, the strategy of not using these tools of interaction can be considered flawed at best. Following the public diplomacy approach of Nye, public diplomacy is not all just about presenting information, but also about interaction, involvement and credibility. To support communicative credibility it can be useful to link to other news media, which support a position. About 40 percent of all tweets (in war time) contain graphics, footage or links to their own blog, whereas only two percent link to other news sources. The analysis shows that the IDF, in not connecting at all and not making use of outside sources, missed the chance to fill its credibility gap.

However, there is another explanation for the IDF’s failure to use the social aspect of Twitter. The IDF creates credibility and tries to build their Twitter follower community in times of peace. During peace, they use the tools of interaction more often and more intensely. An IDF spokesman framed it in this way in 2012: “We gather Twitter followers in times of peace, so that they are ready to disseminate our message when we are at war” (Stein 2012). Regarding Twitter’s own rationality regarding communication, this strategy appears to be a failure.

Therefore, hypothesis 1 is partly falsified: The IDF was more active in times of war but significantly less interactive.

II. Regarding topics and the style of presentation the IDF’s acts as soft power on Twitter in times of peace.

The IDF tries to create an image focusing on non-military topics in times of peace. Twenty-six percent of all tweets in peace times deal with “human interest”. This category includes all topics not connected with the army directly, for example, pictures from Tel Aviv wishing a blessed shabbat or the campaign #wearehere trying to activate the Twitter community to send in pictures of holocaust survivors. In addition, 11 percent of all tweets are about
human interest stories within the army, covering personal stories about minorities in the IDF or speaking about the role of women in the army (e.g. Example to the world: #IDF is leading the way in gender integration & representation of #women; 19/05/2014). Pictures of women serving in the IDF create a picture of a progressive, emancipated army. Furthermore, it creates a less aggressive image. Nonetheless, it is quite obvious that the presentation of women and men in the army conforms to certain gender stereotypes. While women are often portrayed in sexualised, flirty and smiling postures, men tend to be shown in serious, concentrated poses fulfilling military duties (a phenomenon highlighted for traditional media coverage about the Israeli army before, cf. Berger and Naaman 2011). Furthermore, stories about minorities like Muslims, Druze or African-Israeli-Jews serving in the army (The story a Bedouin Muslim officer’s visit to Auschwitz #HolocaustRemembranceDay; 28/04/2014) are also attempts to create a positive, friendly image of the army, referring to tolerance and inclusion instead of enclosure and exclusion. This might be even more important regarding the international discourse in which Israel is often accused of acting in racist ways.

**Topics Covered in Peace Time**

*Figure 3:* Topics covered in peacetime (n=1105; 08/04/2014 - 07/07/2014, 27/08/2014 - 08/11/2014).

![Bar chart showing topics covered in peacetime](chart)

*Source: Own research.*
Thirteen percent of tweets include information on new military supplies, the IDF in general, or its history. This content often focuses on the advanced character of the army and the service the army provides for the state of Israel. Thirty-six percent of all tweets in the non-war-period deal with violent acts (attack in Israel, attack in the West Bank, attack in Gaza, Iron Dome). As a note of caution, this number is inflated by the high number of posts about rockets launched from Gaza and military actions in the West Bank and Gaza immediately before the actual begin of the operation. Attack in the West Bank contains more than any other topic the kidnapping of the three teenagers on 12th June 2014.

To summarise, the content in the pre-and post-war period shows very clearly that the IDF do act as a soft power on Twitter, using traditional tools of public diplomacy. They try to create an image of themselves that supports Western values (tolerance, gender, and racial equality), creating a non-violent, likeable picture of the army and the state of Israel. The IDF use its Twitter account the way most people do: as a medium for daily chatter and personal stories. It is less about information than about stories, feelings, and sympathy. In other words, the IDF try to be an army without war, a violent actor without violence.

This strategy fits neatly into the presented theory of soft power: the IDF create an image of themselves and of the state of Israel that is supposed to be attractive and tries to create a relationship with their community. They are more interactive and publishing “soft stories” and information about an army in which gender stereotypes are absent and the integration of minorities works out almost perfectly. That way they try to create credibility within their community that can be used in times of war. Regarding these findings – the range of topics the IDF tweet about and the high interactivity in times of peace – the hypotheses is verified. This agenda presented in the non-war period apparently changes during the war period.

III Violence is one-sidedly portrayed as emanating from Hamas in wartime.

As this article has shown, the IDF social media strategy was challenged in times of war. Not surprisingly, the topics the IDF tweets about change during wartime. First of all, the human-interest topics disappeared with only three posts covering human stories within the IDF and not a single tweet covering “human stories” in general. During the same period, posts dealing with attacks in Israel became the dominant topic. The IDF published information almost in real time about rockets from Gaza in Israel, the use of the Iron Dome intercepting rockets and rocket tolls. Fifty-eight percent of all tweets dealt with these topics. So the IDF clearly tried to promote their narrative of the war as a reacting army. Correspondingly, only 11 percent of the tweets featured IDF attacks in Gaza, while a vast number of tweets cover life in Gaza: 18 percent of all tweets in times of war. In such tweets, the IDF blamed Ha-
mas for suppressing and endangering the people in Gaza by hiding weapons in mosques, hospitals, and private houses (e.g. Unlike Hamas terrorists, the #IDF does all in its power to limit civilian casualties; 11/07/2014; Evidence: Hamas uses civilians as a human shield; stores long-range rockets in civilian neighbourhoods; 14/07/2014).

Figure 4: Topics Covered in Wartime (n=1179; 08/07/2014 - 26/08/2014).

Source: Own research.

This shows that in times of war the IDF acts more as a hard power. They report on violent acts of Hamas to explain and justify their own military actions. Nonetheless, the tone of the tweets oscillates between deterrence towards Hamas (i.e. 15/07/2014: If Hamas fires at Israel, we will respond with force) and posts clearly targeting the western audience: “72 rockets hit Israel today. What would you do if it was your country?” (09/7/2014) or “Beit Lahiya is the greatest source of rocket fire on Israel. That’s why we’re striking Hamas targets in the area” (18/07/2014). In the first example, the IDF presents itself clearly as a source of hard power; in the second, the IDF obviously try to present arguments and create empathy for Israel’s situation and reaction. Strictly speaking, the IDF acts in this case in terms of public diplomacy, trying to win the “hearts and minds” of different audiences.
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Figure 5: Tweets per Day in Wartime Compared to Casualties in Gaza and Rockets Launched from Gaza (n=1179; 08/07/2014 - 26/08/2014).

Source: Own research.
As already mentioned, the IDF focused on Israel as the victim in the war. Fifty-eight percent of all tweets dealt with attacks in Israel, whereas only 11 percent covered military attacks of the IDF in Gaza. This becomes even plainer when looking at the category “violent agent”: in the entire war the IDF only occurs as violent agent in 11 percent of all tweets (which is not surprising considering that only 11 percent of all tweets covered Israeli military actions, see above). On the other hand, Hamas occurs directly in 37 percent of all tweets as violent agent, in 40 percent “Palestinian terrorist from Gaza”. Since the IDF framed the war as a war Israel against Hamas both numbers can be aggregated. As a result, 77 percent of all mentioned agents in all tweets are violently acting combatants from Gaza.

The violence portrayed as one-sided is also represented in the way the IDF speaks about violent acts. While own actions are mostly “reactions”, Hamas’ are not (“IDF targets terror activity in Gaza following renewal of rocket fire.” 09/08/2014). Moreover, the IDF use a more violent language describing Hamas attacks (“killing”, “murdering”, “slaughtering”), while using much less violent language and euphemisms describing their own actions (“neutralizing the terrorist”, “caught them”).

As a result, the IDF creates a one-sided image of the war, overemphasising their own victimhood, while disregarding the death toll in Gaza. This is not surprising and – to be very clear – is part of the IDF’s mission as any military’s. Consequently, the IDF frames Hamas in such a way as to delegitimise them by communicative acts that destroy the credibility of the other’s narrative. As mentioned, 18 percent of all tweets deal with “life in Gaza”. In these cases, the IDF tries to frame Hamas as a domestic violent agent in Gaza, using the people of Gaza as human shields or breaking humanitarian law. Considering the theoretical groundwork, this can be seen as a classical way of public diplomacy: creating the image of an irrational, extremely violent counterpart. Without any doubt, this strategy is aimed at the international public to legitimise IDF action and to support their own “story” of the war. The frequency of tweets per day during the war compared with the rockets fired from Gaza to Israel1 also reveals that the number of tweets corresponds to the number of rockets launched from Gaza. This supports the hypothesis that the IDF try to create a one-sided image of the war to legitimise their own military actions and delegitimise the enemy.

**Conclusion**

The IDF’s Twitter channel is still a special phenomenon in social media. As a case study, this article investigated the IDF’s Twitter activity during the last Gaza operation comparing it to Twitter activities before and after the war. It

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1 The rocket count is based on the data by The New York Times (Yourish and Keller 2015).
argued that the IDF acts not only as a hard power but also as a soft power using tools of public diplomacy. On Twitter, the IDF tries to create an image that has the potential to attract the target group: the English-language Twitter account focuses on human interest stories and tries to underline the IDF’s progressive character regarding gender equality, the integration of minorities and moral standards. In this way, the IDF tries to build lasting relationships with their community, hoping to rely upon them in times of war. Also, the IDF managed to report about the war in near real time, using infographics and providing information and narratives supporting their points of view.

Through this strategy of trying to monopolise the information access and gaining the power of interpretation, the IDF can frame actions in their favour and can offer information the world public cannot get through other journalists in the area. Therefore, the Twitter activity can actually have an effect regarding agenda setting and framing for the broader international public. This case study is an important step towards a deeper understanding on the role social media can and will play in international public diplomacy and military communication in the future. Nonetheless, it has clear restrictions: Further research should also compare the Twitter activities of the IDF’s counterpart, the Hamas. Since Twitter deleted several Hamas accounts during the war, this was unfortunately not possible for this research. In addition, future research could show how this kind of political communication changes the relationship of strategic communication and the strategy of war or how a hierarchical organisation such as an army manages to organise a non-hierarchical communication by blurring the distinction between producers and users.

As the article has demonstrated, the IDF failed to be interactive with their community in times of war and failed to use Twitter as a channel for two-way communication. Further research could also investigate the agenda-setting effect Twitter activity can have, analysing the extent to which newspapers use the Twitter channel as a source or use frames deployed by the IDF in their Twitter activity. This would be an important next step for a better understanding of international communication and effects produced through social media.
When I decided to write on the topic in early summer 2014 I did not expect that the conflict would escalate the way it did. Ironically, the topic will become even more relevant in the future. The operation „Protective Edge“ lasted 49 days and more than 2000 people died. Today it appears that social media’s relevance is even increasing as regards international conflicts: the social media power of the so called Islamic State is well known – it has indeed become another battlefield.

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“Spontaneous” Anti-Japanese Protests: China’s Diplomatic Weapon

Simon Hufschmid

Abstract

Many foreign media outlets have failed to question the Chinese government’s assertion that anti-Japanese protests in China are spontaneous acts of patriotic citizens angered by Japan’s provocative political actions. Although the Chinese government seems to approve the protests, it is at the same time described as a passive actor shocked by the scope and vigour of the demonstrations and worried that the demonstrators could turn against the Communist Party. By reassessing the role of the Chinese leadership during the protests of 2005 and 2012, this article takes up a more critical stance. It asks: Considering its capacity to prevent and suppress large-scale protests, why does the Chinese government frequently allow anti-Japanese protests to occur? The analysis shows that although the demonstrations serve various foreign-policy purposes, including pressuring Japan into making political concessions and signalling China’s limited diplomatic leeway, they have proved largely ineffective.

Keywords: Chinese Communist Party, Chinese-Japanese Relations, Historical Resentments, Nationalism, Riots, Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, Territorial Dispute

Introduction

Despite close economic ties, Sino-Japanese political relations continue to deteriorate amid unresolved territorial disputes, as well as conflicting historical interpretations and geopolitical interests (Bremmer 2014; Calder 2006; Tiezzi 2014). With the rise of China as the world’s second-largest economy, the country has practiced an increasingly assertive foreign policy, partly fuelled by home-grown nationalist sentiments (Mearsheimer 2014; Swaine 2011). In this light, the recent surge of nationwide anti-Japanese demonstra-
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tions can be regarded as an expression of China’s growing self-confidence and dissatisfaction with the status quo.

This article analyses the various manifestations of violence during the anti-Japanese street protests in China in the wake of Japan’s revision of history textbooks and its candidacy for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 2005, and the escalation of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute in 2012. It asks how violent protests could occur despite the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) general disapproval of mass demonstrations due to their threat to domestic social stability - and thus to the government. The article contributes to the existing research on China’s foreign policy by linking anti-Japanese protests, as a matter of domestic policy, to specific foreign-policy objectives.

Thus far, anti-Japanese demonstrations in China have predominantly been interpreted as a mere expression of popular anger rather than a purposefully employed foreign-policy tool of the government. Foreign observers have described China’s ruling elite as passively approving, yet, surprised by the scope and vigour of the demonstrations, trying to curb the protests before they could turn against the CCP (Kim 2010: 16; Reilly 2008: 209). From this point of view, violence against Japanese citizens or property is seen as an excessive expression of patriotic feelings disapproved by China’s leadership. This article tries to fill the void by viewing anti-Japanese protests and the accompanying violence as a means to a specific foreign-policy end. The article thus offers new insights into the role of the Chinese government in encouraging, stage-managing, and controlling the demonstrations.

It will be argued that as the Chinese government recognizes that the success and credibility of its foreign policy hinges, among other things, on having a strong domestic backing, it is increasingly tolerant of violent nationalist demonstrations to justify a more assertive foreign-policy approach toward Japan. Thus, the protests are meant to signal the government’s limited leeway in diplomatic negotiations. This strategy aims at receiving political concessions from Japan, drawing international attention to its foreign-policy concerns, as well as fostering national cohesion and party legitimacy. At the same time, Beijing hopes to avoid international criticism by shifting the responsibility for its hard stance partly onto its citizens. Since Japan has so far refused to acknowledge a territorial dispute and rejected China’s offers for diplomatic negotiations, regular protests are seen as a cost-effective and visually strong tool that elicits international media attention and strengthens China’s bar-

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1 The term “violence” will be understood as “the use of physical force to harm someone, to damage property, etc.” (Merriam-Webster 2015).
2 The terms “protests” and “demonstrations” will be used interchangeably and will be understood as “events at which people gather to show strong disapproval about something” (Merriam-Webster 2015).
3 Uninhabited islands in the East China Sea, administered by Japan and claimed also by China and Taiwan; called Senkaku Islands in Japan, Diaoyu Islands in China, and Diaoyutai Islands in Taiwan (BBC 2014).
gaining position. Although the Chinese government has so far been capable of managing the protests, they pose a considerable risk of eventually turning against the CCP, especially as domestic grievances grow.

The research is based primarily on a qualitative analysis of newspaper articles, academic journals, blogs, and books. Although most sources are web-based and were published in English, well-respected sources from Japan, China, Great Britain, and the United States are used to offer a balanced and accurate account of the events and allow for differences in interpretation. Because most Chinese media outlets remain state-run, they offer valuable insight into the CCP’s position (and into what it wants readers to believe), yet are less suitable to critically evaluate the state’s involvement in the protests. The article therefore also relies on statements by Chinese protesters and political observers published in foreign newspapers, books, blogs, and the social media.

The article is divided into four sections. In the first two, the political background and the course of action of the demonstrations of 2005 and 2012 will be described, focusing on Chinese leaders and the police. The third section offers a review of existing analyses of the demonstrations, while the fourth provides an in-depth analysis of the government’s role and foreign-policy motives for encouraging the protests.

The Anti-Japanese Protests of 2005

The largest anti-Japanese demonstrations in China since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1972 were preceded by Japan’s approval of a revisionist history textbook and its efforts to receive a permanent UNSC seat. Although Japan had lobbied for a permanent seat on the UNSC since the 1990s, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi for the first time made it an official foreign-policy objective. In September 2004, together with Brazil, Germany, and India, Japan called for a reform of the UNSC (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2004). As the world’s second-largest economy and the second-largest financial contributor to the UN, Japan felt entitled to assume a greater responsibility in global affairs. Even as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appeared to back Japan’s bid, calling for an increase in “the involvement in decision-making of those who contribute most to the United Nations financially, militarily and diplomatically,” Chinese officials kept quiet (UN 2004: 90). Thus, it was a Chinese grassroots campaign of the US-based Global Alliance for Preserving the History of WWII in Asia which first opposed Japan’s candidacy through an online petition in March 2005.

Although the petition aimed at overseas Asian communities, the group hoped to collect one million signatures and present it to the UN General Assembly (China Daily 2005b). The petition was posted on China’s most popular web portals and public sign-on events were soon held in cities across the country. The government approved the campaign, allowing news media to
cover it extensively (Weiss 2014: 133; Tai 2006: 275-277). The Chinese Foreign Ministry called the petition campaign a “responsible act to make Japan realize its historical wrongs” rather than an expression of anti-Japanese sentiments (Wan 2006: 390). Thus, accompanied by daily media reports, 22 million signatures were collected within a few weeks. Yet, citizens also criticized their leadership for not taking a tough stance against Japan. A petition organizer told the New York Times that “China must vote no, and not just abstain. The government may not want to take the lead, but the Chinese people have taken the lead. [...] There has never before been a petition campaign of this magnitude in China. It will be much harder for the government to suppress in the future” (Kahn 2005b).

The anti-Japanese mood surrounding the petition led to the largest protests in China since the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999. On the weekend of April 2nd-3rd, 2005, a street petition against Japan’s UNSC bid turned violent as some of the 10,000 protesters smashed windows of a Japanese shopping mall in Chengdu (French 2005b). In Shenzhen, hundreds of police were sent to prevent protesters from storming Japanese department stores (French 2005b).

On April 5, Japan’s Ministry of Education fomented the crisis by approving a revisionist history textbook for junior high school students that counters “a historical conception of maltreatment” which portrays Japan as “a sole evil” (People’s Daily Online 2005). The revised textbook instead plays down Japan’s wartime atrocities, including sexual slavery, forced labour, and the Nanjing Massacre, during which 100,000 to 300,000 Chinese were killed and 20,000 women raped by Japanese soldiers. Moreover, it refers to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as “sovereign territory claimed by China”. The Chinese Foreign Ministry called the new textbooks “poison for Japan’s younger generations” (AP 2005). The textbook came at a time when Japan’s relations with its East Asian neighbours had already been at a low, partly due to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates Japan’s war dead, including 14 convicted Class A war criminals.

Following the textbook approval, anti-Japanese protests erupted in Beijing on April 9 as more than 10,000 people, mostly students, went out to call for a boycott of Japanese products. Although the demonstrations were held mostly peaceful, some Japanese cars were demolished and overturned, Japanese restaurants were vandalized, a Japanese bank branch was pelted with rocks, and billboards advertising Japanese products were damaged. Some protesters threw rocks at the Japanese embassy and the ambassador’s residence while others waved Chinese flags, shouted anti-Japanese slogans, and chanted the national anthem (Shirk 2007: 140-142; Tam 2007:286-287).

Similar protests took place all across the country. In Shenzhen, a Japanese-run supermarket was surrounded by 10,000 protesters shouting “Boycott Japanese goods!” while throwing plastic bottles (Watts 2005b). Two Japanese college students were struck on the head at a restaurant in Shang-
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hai (Voice of America 2005). The Japanese consulate general in Shanghai later issued a warning to Japanese citizens, urging them to “be careful in remarks and behaviour” and “avoid making provocative acts” (Watts 2005a). China’s state-owned newspapers, television stations, and news websites did not cover the protests, and Internet forums at various universities were either temporarily closed or monitored (Bezlova 2005; CECC 2005).

The China Chain Store & Franchise Association, China’s largest retail group, issued an appeal to boycott products made by Asahi Breweries and Ajinomoto in response to their alleged support of the new textbook. “Any Chinese customers with patriotic spirit and morality will understand and support us,” the association wrote on its website (China Daily 2005d). The Chinese government allowed the protesters, at least in the beginning, to freely use the Internet and cell phones to promote the boycott (Watts 2005c).

The Chinese government described the protests as “spontaneous” rallies by “people upset about Japan’s wrong attitude and actions on the history of the invasion” (Kahn 2005a). Yet, the “spontaneous” nature of the demonstrations can be questioned as much appeared organized: different areas were taped off for press, protesters, and riot police; routes were predetermined; and buses brought students to protest sites and back to college (Marquand 2005). In Beijing, police not only allowed protesters to hurl various objects at the Japanese embassy, but was also seen creating extra space for them to do so. According to one report, “the police herded protesters into tight groups, let them take turns throwing rocks, then told them they had ‘vented their anger’ long enough and bused them back to campus” (Kahn 2005a). To maintain control over the “spontaneous” event, police ordered four leading organizers of anti-Japanese activities to stay home. A participating college student told the New York Times that “[i]t was partly a real protest and partly a political show. I felt a little like a puppet” while pro-democracy activist Yu Jie noted that “the movement has been heavily manipulated. The sentiment against Japan is real, but the government has co-opted it for its own purposes” (Kahn 2005a).

Following the second week of demonstrations, Japan lodged a formal protest against China. Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura summoned Chinese Ambassador Wang Yiin Tokyo, demanding a formal apology, compensation for damages, and improved protection for Japanese nationals. Wang condemned the violent demonstrations, but did not apologize (Onishi 2005). The Chinese Foreign Ministry remarked that “the responsibility for the current state of affairs between Japan and China does not rest with China” (Takahara 2005).

Ahead of Japan’s Foreign Minister Machimura’s visit to Beijing on April 17-18, police admonished citizens to express their patriotic passion in an “orderly manner” (BBC 2005). While students were confined to their dormitories, the Japanese Embassy and Tiananmen Square were surrounded by riot police (Watts 2005c). Planned rallies in other cities were stopped and several organizers got arrested (Watts 2005c).
In Shanghai, however, some 20,000 demonstrators took to the streets on April 16th, in not only one of the largest protests since Tiananmen in 1989, but also one of the most violent. Many citizens received text messages from the Shanghai municipal security office encouraging them to “show [their] love for [their] country in a law-abiding way” (Watts 2005c). Even though riot police closely monitored the demonstrations and sealed off the Japanese consulate, it did not stop protesters from throwing eggs, bottles, paint, and rocks at the building. After two Japanese citizens were kicked and beaten by the mob, Japan’s Foreign Ministry criticized the Chinese government because “[e]ven though information was available beforehand to infer that there would be a demonstration, nothing was done to prevent it” (French 2005a).

Following the third successive weekend of protests, the Chinese government started to crack down on rising nationalist anger. It made clear that further protests would not be tolerated and boycotting Japanese goods was against China’s economic interests (Yardley 2005b). Minister of Commerce Bo Xilai, for instance, said that the government “[does not] expect the economic and trade relations between the two countries to be infringed upon” (Xinhua 2005a). A group of former Chinese diplomats was sent to colleges in six cities in order to help students “correctly understand the importance of friendly coexistence between the countries” (Yardley 2005b). According to the Ministry of Public Security, “unauthorized marches” were illegal and the police “would mete out tough blows” to protesters caught vandalizing property (Yardley 2005b).

After his bilateral meeting, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing called for an end to anti-Japanese demonstrations, saying that “the masses must believe in the party and the government’s ability to properly handle all issues linked to Sino-Japanese relations” (Reilly 2012: 152). Jiefang Daily published an editorial calling the protests part of an “evil plot” with “ulterior motives” (Reilly 2012: 152). Chinese television reported 26 people were detained and 16 arrested for “disturbing social order”. One of the suspects, a university teacher, was quoted as saying, “I let down my university, my teachers as well as my students. I hope others can learn a lesson from me” (Cody 2005). Ahead of Labour Day and the anniversary of the anti-imperialist movement in 1919 on May 4th, the “[p]olice urged the public not to take part in illegal marches or demonstrations and not to publicize such activities through the Internet or cell phone short messages” (Cody 2005). Owing to a series of detentions, cell phone warnings and a heavy police presence in Beijing and Shanghai, the Chinese leadership successfully prevented further protests. On May 4th, Premier Wen Jiabao made an unannounced visit to the campus of Peking University, where he highlighted to students the importance of friendly relations with China’s neighbours and domestic stability (Yardley 2005c).
The Anti-Japanese Protests of 2012

Over the following years, both governments sought to repair bilateral ties. Relations deteriorated again when a Chinese trawler captain was arrested after colliding with the Japanese coast guard near the disputed islands in September 2010. China responded by halting exports of rare earth minerals for two months and temporarily detaining four Japanese Fujita employees for entering a restricted military zone (Bradsher 2010; Harlan & Wan 2010). Within three weeks, Japan released the captain and his crew without charges. Small-scale anti-Japanese demonstrations took place in two dozen smaller Chinese cities during September and October but were suppressed by police (Weiss 2014: 179). Nationalist web forums and chat groups were shut down, leading activists detained, and students required to take extra classes over the weekend (Weiss 2014:182). Both countries tried to defuse tensions, speaking of the importance of “joint efforts to maintain and advance the strategic bilateral relationship of mutual benefit” (Xinhua 2010). The Chinese Foreign Ministry stated that “[i]t is understandable that some people expressed their outrage […] but we maintain that patriotism should be expressed rationally and in line with law” (Xinhua 2010).

Two events preceded the outbreak of renewed tensions in 2012. On August 15th, the anniversary of Japan’s World War II surrender, 14 Chinese activists sailed from Hong Kong to the disputed islands. Before being able to tear down Japanese structures and plant a Chinese flag, they were arrested by the Japanese police and later deported. Live coverage of their landing was provided by Chinese television. Leung Kwok-hung, a Hong Kong Legislative Council member, suggested that the Chinese government “wanted to escalate the situation with Japan to show its toughness on sovereignty issues, accommodate public opinion, and counter U.S. moves to increase its security presence in Asia”. Previously, Chinese authorities had blocked nationalists’ plans to sail out from Hong Kong (Weiss 2014: 200-201).

Four days later, ten Japanese activists, mostly conservative lawmakers and local politicians, responded by making an unauthorized landing on the islands. The Chinese activists’ arrest and the subsequent landing of Japanese activists led to a first wave of violent protests, with attacks on Japanese cars, businesses, and restaurants. Although Chinese media portrayed the demonstrations as involving no more than 200 people, photographs posted on microblogging websites showed much larger crowds (Bradsher et al. 2012). In Guangzhou, up to 800 protesters demanded the return of the disputed islands and called for a boycott of Japanese products. In Shenzhen, police arrested protesters after they had overturned Japanese-made cars, including police vehicles. China’s Foreign Ministry justified the protests, noting that “the illegal behavior of Japanese right-wingers has violated China’s territorial sovereignty” (Branigan 2012).

On September 11th, despite China’s prior warnings that a “provocative unilateral move” would “throw bilateral relations into a scalding pot”, the
Japanese government reached a purchase agreement with the Kurihara family, who owned three of the five main islands, for 2.05 billion Yen (Dickie & Hille 2012). The Japanese government, which had previously leased the islands on an annual basis, acted swiftly after the right-wing governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, had signalled interest in buying them. Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda reaffirmed that the purchase would allow the executive branch to maintain control of the islands in a “peaceful and stable” manner (Mochizuki 2012). The Chinese government nonetheless called the decision “illegal” and “invalid,” stating that it “cannot alter the fact that the Japanese side stole the islands from China” (Perlez 2012). It responded by sending six surveillance ships in waters near the disputed islands (Wee & Sieg 2012).

The second and largest wave of protests began on September 15th when thousands of demonstrators besieged the Japanese embassy in Beijing. Police forces barricaded the embassy to prevent protesters from storming it and urged protesters to respect the law and “remain rational”. Protesters waved Chinese flags chanting “Return our islands! Japanese devils get out!” One protester told Reuters that “the government is encouraging this. […] The government has taught us to be anti-Japanese in school, so if they want to stop us it would be like slapping their own mouths” (Wee & Duncan 2012). Over the weekend, demonstrations erupted in as many as 85 Chinese cities. Japanese-made cars as well as Japanese businesses were damaged, set on fire, or looted. In Xian, a Chinese man was left partially paralyzed after being repeatedly hit in the head by an anti-Japanese mob for driving a Japanese car (Murphy 2012). Many Japanese restaurants had to place Chinese flags on their windows to protect their property. Japanese Prime Minister Noda asked China to protect Japanese citizens and businesses (Johnson & Shanker 2012). Similarly, United States Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta said that he was “concerned that when these countries engage in provocations […] over these various islands that it raises the possibility that a misjudgement […] could result in violence and […] in conflict” (Whitlock 2012).

After Internet activists identified a leading protester as the Xian police chief, rumours started that Chinese government officials and police officers were in fact orchestrating the protests. Pictures of the suspected police chief were quickly deleted and search terms such as “police leading anti-Japanese marches” were blocked (NTDTV 2012). According to various reports, many protesters were given a day off to participate in the demonstrations. 600 farmers from the provinces were reportedly brought to Beijing by organized buses to demonstrate (Demick & Makinen 2012). Dissident artist Ai Weiwei therefore said that “it is obvious that this was planned […] [Tiananmen was] the last time that people themselves organized a real protest and then the government sent in tanks to crush them” (Demick & Makinen 2012).

Due to lower demand, Japanese automakers and electronics firms temporarily suspended their production in China after their factories had been damaged by protesters. Many Japanese schools in China cancelled classes due to safety concerns (Takada & Buckley 2012). Demonstrations continued
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through September 18th, the anniversary of the 1931 seizure of the Manchurian city of Mukden by Japanese troops. Police presence was considerably higher than in the days before. A large number of riot police guarded the Japanese embassy in Beijing and the nearest subway station was closed (Wee 2012). Nonetheless, about 50 protesters were able to surround and damage a car carrying the U.S. ambassador to China, before being dispersed by police (Jiang & Mullen 2012).

Soon afterwards, the demonstrations started to fade. The state-run Global Times wrote that “violence protests should never be condoned. [...] Violence can only weaken the current campaign against Japan” (Global Times 2012). Similarly, in an editorial, Xinhua News Agency stated that “wisdom is needed in the expression of patriotism. No law should be broken as Chinese people strongly condemn the Japanese government’s ‘purchase’ of the Diaoyu Islands, as the expression of patriotic feelings should not come at the cost of disrupting domestic social order” (Xinhua 2012b).

**Spontaneous Protests?**

Many foreign observers failed to question the CCP’s assertion of “spontaneous” outbursts of angered citizen, with the Chinese government as merely reacting. One analyst noted that the demonstrations were “spontaneous and voluntary, not necessarily state-sponsored” (Kim 2010: 16). Another referred to the protests as “admirably voluntary, stimulating, and intrepid actions of the young people in defence of truth and justice in history” (Tam 2007: 296). Some experts, however, acknowledged the Chinese government’s involvement but claimed that it was surprised by the vigour and scope of the protests, which were mainly organized through the Internet and cell phone messages (Reilly 2008: 209; Yardley 2005a). From this point of view, the Chinese public, driven by deeply rooted anti-Japanese sentiments, responded contrary to what their government perceived as in China’s best economic and political interest. Aware of the importance of Japanese investments and technological know-how, the Chinese ruling elite rejected the violent attacks on Japanese businesses as well as calls for a boycott, for a suspension of production, a mass layoff of Chinese workers in joint ventures, and a possible economic retaliation would have hurt China’s economy.

At the same time, the CCP intended to present the country as a peacefully-developing civilized state with a growing sustainable economy and a responsible international mind-set (Dai 2010; Zheng 2005). Hence, during the anti-Japanese demonstrations in 2012, People’s Daily remarked, “being civilized, law-abiding is a basic quality of citizens. Damaging fellow citizens’ legal property and taking out anger on Japanese nationals in China is extremely inappropriate. [...] In the age of globalization, we should let the world see a China that is peacefully developing, whose government is making progress and whose people are improving their qualities” (Lai 2012). China’s fast-
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growing economy has raised expectations for better standards of living, especially among the new middle class (Fukuyama 2013; Hewitt 2007). Yet, due to serious consequences for criticizing the ruling party for common grievances, Chinese citizens, with the consent of their government, have redirected their frustrations onto Japan (Beardson 2013; Pew Research Center 2012). In 2005, Shinzo Abe, acting secretary general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, presumed that the anger in the weekend marches was in fact an outgrowth of social problems in China, and “Japan is an outlet to vent that anger” (Onishi 2005). Other scholars viewed the protests as a purposeful diversionary tactic by the government which “may also wish to inculcate and galvanize nationalistic feelings or exploit xenophobic tensions as a diversion from wealth inequalities, economic dislocations, ethnic conflicts, or other problems” (Chung 2004).

Although the demonstrations were primarily directed at Japan, Chinese protesters managed to express their dissatisfaction with the CCP’s handling of the bilateral dispute. China’s leadership was particularly criticized for not taking a tough stance against Japan’s “history-denying” behaviour. Young demonstrators holding up portraits of Mao Zedong loudly expressed their dissatisfaction with the Chinese government’s “weak-kneed” stance toward what they called “Japan’s imperialism” (Okudera & Hayashi 2012).

There is considerable academic debate as to whether public opinion (e.g. nationalism) is the driving force in China’s foreign policy-making or whether public opinion is manipulated as a tool of national policy (Reilly 2012: 23-54; Repnikova 2014). Regardless of state censorship, Chinese scholars stress the significance of understanding domestic influences on China’s international behaviour (Zhang 2013). In fact, public opinion is listed as an increasingly important factor in shaping Sino-Japanese relations (Wang 2012). The Chinese public, long concerned exclusively with domestic issues such as economic reform, has lately become more focused on foreign affairs. The rise of popular nationalism is attributed to “a changing media environment, China’s stronger involvement in the international arena, and the prevailing sensitive memories of national humiliation by foreign powers” (Repnikova 2014). Domestic nationalist sentiments are described as a “double-edged sword” that can help reinforce China’s international objectives, but also constrain its diplomatic leeway (Repnikova 2014). Hence, public opinion backing allows policymakers to take a stronger stance in territorial disputes and increase their domestic legitimacy by responding to it. At the same time, domestic nationalism undermines China’s diplomatic flexibility and tarnishes its image of a peaceful rise (Hong 2007).

Therefore, the government is faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, it needs to accommodate the citizens’ demand for a tougher stance against

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4 The protests could thus be interpreted as a case of Freudian displacement, i.e. the diverting of emotional feelings (usually anger) from their unacceptable original source to a more acceptable or less threatening substitute target (Weiten 2014: 367).
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Japan to avoid a possible spill over of anti-Japanese sentiments to domestic criticism of the CCP. On the other hand, it has to contain the demonstrations to protect China’s economic interests and global reputation. A potential disruption of social order was particularly worrisome in 2012, just months before a crucial leadership change in China (Weiss 2014: 21-22; Reilly 2012: 38-39).

China’s Foreign-Policy Motives and the Geopolitical Outcome

The existing literature, however, neglects the active role of the Chinese government in initiating and encouraging the protests. The CCP’s ability to manipulate and control public opinion through censorship, skilful propaganda and mass surveillance is, although widely known, still underestimated. The Chinese government has improved its capability to anticipate and prevent nation-wide demonstrations since Tiananmen in 1989. The party maintains order and retains power by offering material incentives, while expanding censorship, surveillance, and the imprisonment of political dissidents. Small rural protests over land seizures, local corruption, and pollution have nevertheless increased, leading to increased street presence of security forces and specialized anti-riot units in all provinces (Eckholm 2001). The anti-Japanese demonstrations therefore cannot be explained by the government’s lack of information or preparedness. The prevention of large-scale protests in 2010 as well as the quick and resolute suppression of the protests in 2005 and 2012 illustrate the CCP’s capabilities and raise doubts about the spontaneous nature of the demonstrations. In fact, an in-depth analysis of the events shows that the government not only approved the protests in 2005 and 2012 but actually encouraged citizens to express their anger.

It is well-known that the CCP promotes a patriotic school curriculum to foster social cohesion and present itself as the legitimate ruling party, which since the independence struggle against Imperial Japan has safeguarded the country against outside threats. Despite the Chinese Foreign Ministry’s assertion that “patriotic education is not anti-Japan education”, Chinese pupils are still subjected to films, textbooks, and school trips to museums that vilify Japan (China Daily 2005a). Hence, many young people, who are particularly susceptible to government propaganda, joined the protests.

To understand the Chinese government’s motives for encouraging anti-Japanese protests in 2005 and 2012, despite their internal risks, we must analyse its behaviour toward Japan during the crisis. Prior to the demonstrations of 2005, Beijing had remained silent on Japan’s bid for a permanent seat in the UNSC. It had stressed the importance of bilateral economic cooperation and regional political stability and acknowledged Japan’s contributions to international development (Kahn 2005b). Although it seemed that government policy and public opinion were moving in opposite directions, it was generally assumed that China would eventually veto Japan’s UNSC bid due to
differing historical interpretations, opposing geopolitical interests, unresolved territorial questions, and different political views on human rights and state sovereignty (Malik 2005; Weiss 2014: 127-128). But only after a state-supported popular Internet petition against Japan’s UNSC bid could the government clarify its position. On April 12th, 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao for the first time explicitly opposed Japan’s bid, stating that “only a country that respects history, takes responsibility for history and wins over the trust of peoples in Asia and the world at large can take greater responsibilities in the international community” (Pan 2005). State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan explained that although violence should not be condoned under any circumstances, “the Chinese people really can’t understand how a nation which cannot honestly look at its aggressive history and which cannot correctly understand the feelings of the people of the countries it victimized could be qualified to bid for a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council” (Xinhua 2005b). The Internet petition, ultimately signed by more than 40 million people, allowed the government to internationally justify its already decided veto by referring to Chinese citizens’ opinions (Weiss 2010: 32-33). Thus, China could avoid international criticism for unilaterally blocking a reform of the UNSC. Ultimately, due to disagreements over membership and veto rights, no vote on a UNSC reform took place in 2005.

Statements by government officials suggest that the demonstrations should reinforce China’s discontent with Japan’s whitewashing of war crimes, such as the approval of revisionist textbooks. The protests should put additional pressure on Japan to “correct” its understanding of history, refrain from offending its neighbours, and offer a sincere apology. Indeed, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi soon offered a public apology over Japan’s wartime colonization and invasions. On April 22nd, 2005, speaking at the Asia-Africa summit meeting in Indonesia, he said that “Japan, through its colonial rule and aggression caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people […] of Asian nations. And with feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology always engraved in mind, Japan has resolutely maintained […] never turning into a military power but an economic power” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2005). The Chinese Foreign Ministry welcomed the apology but insisted that Koizumi’s words should be “translated into action,” such as refraining from further visits to Yasukuni Shrine (China Daily 2005c). Japan’s unprecedented apology can be regarded as a conciliatory gesture to improve bilateral relations and calm the crisis. Although the speech was solely of symbolic value, as Japan neither paid war reparations nor made political concessions, the apology gave China’s leadership an opportunity to present it as a diplomatic breakthrough and stop the protests (Weiss 2014: 150). The government understood that prolonging the demonstrations would not produce additional Japanese concessions, but would merely hurt economic ties and carry the risk of turning against the CCP.

In 2010, the Chinese government initially hoped to resolve the issue of the arrested Chinese trawler captain quietly. Anticipating a prompt release of
the captain, it was able and willing to prevent anti-Japanese protests. However, when Japan extended the captain’s detention and continued denying the territorial dispute, China took countermeasures by approving anti-Japanese protests in smaller cities. Ultimately, the export embargo on rare earth minerals, the arrest of four Japanese workers, and increased patrols in the East China Sea signalled China’s resolve and forced Japan to release the captain – just as the “sporadic” protests started to become intermingled with unrelated domestic grievances and look insincere (Weiss 2014: 187-188).

The anti-Japanese demonstrations of 2012, on the other hand, served one clear foreign-policy purpose: signalling the Chinese government’s resolve to protect what it perceived as China’s territorial sovereignty. China’s message to Japan was that it would not surrender its claim to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and thereby set a geopolitically dangerous precedent for other territorial disputes surrounding Taiwan, Tibet, the Spratly Islands, and the Paracel Islands. Although the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands had been administered by Japan since 1895 (aside from a 1945 to 1972 period of administration by the United States), a formal purchase of the islands by the Japanese government was considered a deliberate provocation to strengthen Japan’s “actual control”. Before the second wave of demonstrations began in mid-September, the Foreign Ministry of China issued a statement that “the era of the Chinese people’s humiliation has passed, not to return again. The Chinese government will not sit back as its territorial sovereignty is violated” (Xinhua 2012a). It urged Japan to come to the negotiating table and refrain from unilateral actions that harm China’s territorial sovereignty, or otherwise face “serious consequences” (Xinhua 2012a). The so-called “nationalization” of the islands was particularly worrisome because it was “no isolated development” according to China’s ambassador to the United Kingdom, Liu Xiaoming, who listed “naming, landing, surveying, amending Japanese domestic law and patrolling the islands” as examples (Liu 2012). China was further concerned about the growing political influence of conservative groups as the Japanese government had “placated and indulged right wing forces as they set off the storm of ‘island purchase’ in order to pave the way for such a purchase of its own” (Xinhua 2012a).

Therefore, following the formal purchase of the islands by Japan, the Chinese government not only approved anti-Japanese protests, but also ordered Chinese patrol boats to repeatedly intrude into Japan’s territorial waters near the uninhabited islands to test the Japanese Coast Guard’s preparedness and determination (Yoshihara 2014). Despite the risk associated with such behaviour, China aimed at wearing down Japanese resolve and gradually eroding Japanese control with low-level, non-military manoeuvres (AP 2012). In the short run, the Chinese government hoped to force Japan to acknowledge the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands as disputed, which Japan always had refused to do (AP 2012). Japan, however, responded resolutely by holding a 12-day military exercise with the United States in which 37,000 Japanese military personnel took part. The drills aimed to “heighten interoperability needed to
effectively defend Japan or respond to a crisis in the Asia-Pacific region” (Guzman 2012).

Bearing the close U.S.-Japan ties in mind, the anti-Japanese protests were also directed at the United States. They should force the U.S. to acknowledge China’s territorial claims and reconsider its political relationship with Japan. During a visit to Japan, U.S. President Barack Obama confirmed his country’s stance on the island dispute: “We don’t take a position on final sovereignty on the Senkakus but historically they’ve been administered by Japan and should not be subject to change unilaterally (McCurry & Branigan 2014). Concerned about regional stability and trade relations, the United States called on the two parties to refrain from provocations and resolve the differences peacefully through dialogue. Nevertheless, in late November 2012, the U.S. senate passed an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act which unequivocally stated that the United States “acknowledges the administration of Japan over the Senkaku Islands, and that this position will not be changed through threats, coercion, or military action” (AFP 2012). Hence, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to defending Japanese territory in case of an armed attack by China in accordance with Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. The Chinese Foreign Ministry criticized the involvement of the United States, calling the U.S.-Japan alliance “a bilateral arrangement formulated during the Cold War era, which should not infringe on China’s territorial sovereignty and lawful rights and interests” (Zhang 2014). In fact, China holds the United States partly responsible for the dispute, as the U.S. “illegally” returned the islands to Japan (rather than to China) in 1972, after a 27-year-long period of U.S. administration.

Anti-Japanese demonstrations and cases of territorial intrusion, however, only strengthened the U.S.-Japan alliance. In this light, the U.S. security guarantee for Japan can be viewed as a move to counterbalance China’s recent military build-up and increased territorial assertiveness. As part of its “pivot to Asia”, the Obama administration has sought to reassure regional allies, including Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, of its security commitment. Joint military exercises, preferential arms deals, defence agreements and a stronger U.S. military presence should primarily contain China’s territorial aspirations in the East and South China Sea. Although the United States does not, at least officially, deny China’s territorial claims, it advocates diplomatic solutions in line with international law (Khalid 2015). The protests even affected domestic politics in Japan. In December 2012, shortly after the bilateral crisis, Shinzo Abe was elected Prime Minister for the second time, as the Liberal Democratic Party returned to power. The conservative Prime Minister gained national popularity, among other things, for his hawkish foreign policy and his tough stance on China (BBC 2012). He promised to expand the role of the Self-Defence Forces (“collective self-defence”), increase defence spending, and strengthen military cooperation with regional allies (Hayashi 2013). Despite concerns from China and South Korea over a remilitarization
of Japan, the United States has welcomed a proactive role of the Self-Defence Forces that would allow Japan to assist allies under attack (Barnes 2015).

The Chinese government allowed the anti-Japanese protests in 2005 and 2012 to occur in order to convey Chinese citizens’ anger and insult caused by Japan’s recent political statements and actions, as well as to justify its UNSC veto and more assertive foreign policy toward the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. While economic sanctions carried the risk of backfiring due to close economic ties, demonstrations were seen as a cost-effective way to signal China’s dissatisfaction with Japan’s policies. Acts of violence against Japanese institutions were inevitable by-products of the protests, but were tacitly approved and in some cases even encouraged. Large-scale protests of furious citizens allowed the Chinese government to justify its uncompromising foreign policy regarding territorial issues. While local media were not permitted to cover the protests extensively to avoid mass riots, foreign media reports were approved in order to draw international attention to the dispute and, if possible, gather support. By calling the demonstrations “self-organized” and “spontaneous” acts of angered citizens, it not only masked its capacity to prevent the demonstrations, but also its complicity in supporting them. Hence, People’s Daily, mirroring the view of the CCP, wrote in an editorial during the protests of 2012, “No one would fail to understand the compatriots’ hatred and fights when the country is provoked; because a people that has no guts and courage is doomed to be bullied, and a country that always hides low and bides its time will always come under attack” (Johnson & Shanker 2012).

Conclusion

While China has become increasingly hawkish on bilateral security issues, its economic approach toward Japanese investments and imports has become more dovish (Katz 2013). In other words, China has decided to “delink” economics from politics. The political circumstances surrounding the protests of 2005 and 2012 illustrate this development. While the earlier protests targeted Japan’s bid for a permanent UNSC seat and its approval of nationalist history textbooks, the latter were directed at Japan’s purchase of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Over the course of several weekends, tens of thousands of people took to the streets all across China, thereby vandalizing Japanese cars, restaurants and shopping malls. Occasional expressions of dissatisfaction with their own government, which was perceived as too soft, indicate the CCP’s inability to completely manipulate the masses at will. Hence, before the demonstrations could expand, become intertwined with domestic grievances, and turn against the ruling elite, the government decided to suppress further protests.

A closer look at the demonstrations reveals that the Chinese government, which had shown on previous occasions the capacity to suppress mass gath-
erings, not only tacitly approved the protests but, up to a certain point, encouraged them. Shi Yinhong, professor of International Relations at Beijing's Renmin University, points out, “If the government very consciously opposed or didn't want these demonstrations, if they resolutely didn’t want them, then there would be nothing” (Weiss 2014: 180). The protests served to signal discontent with Japan’s political actions, to safeguard and advance own foreign-policy interests (e.g. Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands), and to shift responsibility for political actions onto its citizens in order to increase its international legitimacy. Yet, as Japan refused to back down, the protests only further deteriorated political relations. To what extent the demonstrations effectively fulfilled a domestic purpose, such as diverting from social grievances, increasing national cohesion, and strengthening the legitimacy of the CCP, should be the focus of future research.

From a foreign-policy perspective, the anti-Japanese demonstrations were largely ineffective. If anything, they reinforced historical resentments and nationalist views in both countries, and further escalated the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. An annual survey by the Japanese non-profit organization Genron NPO in cooperation with China Daily revealed that unfavourable views of China had steadily grown in Japan from around 40 percent in 2005 to 93 percent in 2014. Unfavourable views of Japan currently stand at 90 percent in China (Fujikawa 2014). If asked about which country poses the greatest threat, 68 percent of Japanese respondents mention China. Moreover, 85 percent are concerned that the territorial dispute with China could lead to a military conflict. These concerns are shared by the Philippines and Vietnam (Pew Research Center 2014). 53 percent of Chinese and 29 percent of Japanese respondents even expect war over the islands to break out by the year 2020 (Iaccino 2014).

While Japan’s current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe continued the tradition of wooing his conservative base by visiting Yasukuni Shrine, calling for a permanent UNSC seat and publishing nationalist textbooks, China’s President Xi Jinping has established an Air Defence Identification Zone over the East China Sea in 2013, incorporating the disputed islands. Wary of China’s military build-up and its provocative behaviour in the East China Sea, the Japanese government, far from entering into negotiations over the islands, has sought to strengthen its own military capabilities and its alliance with the United States. Similar balancing efforts were made by Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Philippines which have been closely watching China's conduct in the dispute to prepare for a possible territorial confrontation of their own.

Moreover, bilateral trade relations between China and Japan were impaired, as companies from both countries suffered short-term financial losses due to lower demand, political uncertainty, and a suspension of production. Exports to China were significantly reduced following the protests, but soon rebounded to pre-crisis levels (Katz 2013). Due to the political tensions and rising manufacturing labour costs, Japanese firms have diverted their recent direct investments away from China to Southeast Asia (Dominguez 2014).
Nevertheless, China remains Japan’s most important trading partner while it relies on Japanese technology for its own exports. A record 13 million Chinese tourists travelled to Japan in 2014, buying more than $1,000 worth of goods on average (Pfanner 2015). In addition to neorealist balancing, economic interdependence can thus be seen as a factor that so far has prevented an escalation of the dispute.

Given the risk of nationalist demonstrations spiralling out of control, the Chinese government should reconsider its foreign-policy approach toward Japan. Since coercion and threats have not led to the desired outcome, China’s leadership might want to explore alternative diplomatic means such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation, or arbitration—even if Japan continues to deny the existence of a territorial dispute. In the long run, closer economic relations may create an atmosphere of trust and understanding conducive to political rapprochement. Furthermore, the Chinese government must respect the constitutional obligation of the Japanese government as a democratically elected body to guarantee domestic right-wing forces’ freedom of expression and therefore refrain from politically exploiting the dispute by equating the (provocative) actions of a small group with Japan’s official position. However, wary of a public backlash, Beijing is unlikely to choose this path of diplomatic engagement for the foreseeable future. Although China will increasingly attempt to challenge Japan, an escalation of the dispute appears improbable since neither government is ultimately willing to fight a war over five uninhabited islets and three barren rocks, despite the potential existence of oil and gas reserves nearby. Domestic nationalist pressure and diversionary tactics nonetheless carry the risk of political misjudgement with unintended consequences. Although the status quo (including occasional protests) will likely be maintained for now, both governments would be well-advised to start taking conciliatory steps.
I chose the topic of anti-Japanese demonstrations because it symbolizes a bilateral relationship based on mutual distrust that will likely shape the 21st century beyond the East Asian region. One of the many difficulties I encountered while analyzing anti-Japanese demonstrations was China’s lack of free speech and media independence, as credible information regarding the role of China’s government in the protests can hardly be found in Chinese sources. With only limited access to reliable sources inside the Chinese government, I was forced to rely heavily on reports in less-censored foreign media and draw conclusions about Beijing’s motives based on its behavior toward Japan and the protesters. Another challenge was to differentiate between domestic and foreign-policy objectives. I learned that although events like the anti-Japanese demonstrations seem to have a clear target audience, they often have various root causes and serve multiple objectives. Even though foreign-policy analysts have tended to disregard domestic politics, I found that a one-sided analysis of China’s striving for material resources and historical justice is insufficient to explain the island dispute. Any analysis of the Sino-Japanese dispute must therefore include the role of emotions (e.g. nationalism) at the domestic level.

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Abstract

Post-conflict environments are not necessarily ‘post-violence’. Post-conflict peacebuilding and in particular the demobilisation and reintegration of former fighters are seen as vital for the reduction of violence in the long run. This article examines the functionality of wartime violence and identifies possible drivers for mobilisation. It argues that the post-conflict conditions and the will to refrain from violence depend on the nature and causes of the former conflict. Internationally led Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs face inherent incompatibilities and challenges, especially when it comes to reintegrating former fighters. In this context, the notion of civilian ‘recipient communities’ seems not as straightforward as often presumed. After critically analysing some of the underlying assumptions of DDR programs, the article concludes that DDR may not be appropriate instruments to successfully reduce violence in the long term. DDR’s utility and efficacy might to some extent be overstated while the actual dynamics of protracted conflict, the interrelation of conflict, violence, and social structure are underestimated.

Keywords: post-conflict violence, pacification, mobilisation of combatants, recipient communities, Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR)

Introduction

At a civil war’s ‘official’ end, whether achieved in form of peace agreements or ceasefires, the situation often does not correspond with the reality of the
conflict-affected societies: soldiers and paramilitaries tend to not ‘simply break up and go home’ (De Vries and Wiegink 2011: 1). Instead, a civil war’s end cannot be seen as a clean break and combatants do not simply turn into civilians even after disarmament or return back to their communities of origin as if the conflict had not happened.

In fact, the line between war and peace is difficult to draw and an unstable post-conflict situation\(^1\), whether “defined as a significant reduction in direct mortality, the signing of a peace agreement, the deployment of a peacekeeping force, [...] or the holding of elections” (Muggah 2007: 190) is not necessarily post-violence (for example Muggah 2005; 2007). Even peace agreements do not automatically trickle down to local or regional spheres (Autesserre 2014: 493), protracted conflict dynamics cannot simply be erased, and violence often continues on several levels outside formal agreements.\(^2\)

Especially levels of violent crime\(^3\) frequently increase in the wake of civil war: Mac Ginty (2006) indicates that crimes in deeply divided societies are predominantly intergroup and represent the continuation of conflict between ethnic groups even after official settlements (2006: 109).\(^4\) Civil wars often recreate patterns of sectarian violence in post-conflict societies, which reproduce the construction of members of other groups as legitimate targets for violence (Steenkamp 2005: 262), a process that is not easily or quickly transformed in transitions to peace. Peace processes that do not address or potentially exacerbate structural inequalities (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2007) have as much of a role in shaping the emerging levels of violent crime as the experience of the civil war itself. The demobilisation of former combatants who have survived through threat and violence places them in an environment “where those skills are neither rewarded nor replaced” (Gamba 2003: 180).

Increasing levels of violence at conflict’s official end are thus very common and result out of a complex conflict environment, a variety of divided groups fighting for diverse reasons (Findley and Rudloff 2012) and possibly the exclusion of various actors and their interests, desires and

\(^1\) The rhetorical distinction into ‘conflict’- and ‘post-conflict’ is mainly due to policy implications, that is international humanitarian law applies to conflicts but not to conflict-affected countries emerging from civil war, also the relief-development gap for aid agencies’ instruments and their funding depends on this rhetoric.

\(^2\) As occurred after a peace pact in Nigeria before upcoming elections in 2011, in Cote d’Ivoire after Ouattara was declared president from 2011 on, during the Northern Ireland Peace Process, in South Sudan, DRC and so on.

\(^3\) Such as gratuitous violence, violent acts of sectarian hate, gang warfare, emergence of shadow markets and networks, sexual violence.

\(^4\) Monaghan (2005) maintains, for example, violence in Northern Ireland a product of the deep cultural and social divisions created by the armed conflict, while Simpson (1993) argues that the legacy of Apartheid in South Africa has continued to shape racially-motivated crimes and tensions.
needs, that may not match the aims of an overall peace accord. Keeping a war going and prolonging violence might for some be a higher priority than winning it, and armed conflict may offer prospects which peace would not in the same way. As David Keen (2007: 2) stated, war may "offer[s] a more promising environment for the pursuit of aims that are also prominent in peacetime", namely limiting exposure to violence, the accumulation of resources, and suppressing political opposition.

The challenge for external interveners, who enter the situation aiming to build stability and security, would be that they somehow "need to try to make peace appear a more attractive option than war" (Keen 2007: 11). While ending violence usually is the main objective of an external intervention, a ceasefire or peace agreement guarantees by no means an overall peace process for all the war-affected society.5

The dichotomous perceptions of post-war societies that external interveners often employ are at the centre of this article. Especially the common indiscrimination of combatants and civilians haunts the transition from war to peace. In order to illustrate how the post-conflict situation depends on various drivers for violent action in the first place, the article challenges the assumption that former fighters aim for peaceful transition after violent conflict, as well as the notion of some not conflict-affected civilian society for them to easily go back to peace. In a first step, the article exemplifies the functionality of wartime violence by linking it to mobilisation processes and distinguishing different types of combatants. It thereby challenges the main emphasis on material components like resource scarcity or abundance to explain the causes of conflict. In a further step, the underlying assumptions of international Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs will be contested, particularly regarding successful and sustainable reduction of violence. While such external programs are meant to ensure the presence of a 'neutral third party' to oversee disarmament between contestants, the preconditions and technical measures of DDR programs often tend to oversimplify post-war realities, also referring to the difficulties in distinguishing combatants and civilians. It is suggested that the utility and efficacy of DDR is to some extent overstated whereas the actual dynamics of protracted conflict, as well as the interrelation of conflict, violence, and social structure are downplayed (Mutangesa in Berdal and Ucko 2013: 316). This is not to say that the focus on former fighters and weapons reduction is not a crucial step to facilitate transition to peace and processes of reconciliation and post-war reconstruction. Rather it is meant to show, how the often dichotomous categories of external interveners (and programmes conducted under the

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5 The notion of peace is not as straightforward: “Whose peace are we talking about? Peace on what terms? Peace in whose interests? And peace negotiated by which individuals or groups?” (Keen 2007:18); also there is “great diversity of peace beyond the absence of war in a number of post-settlement societies” (Höglund et al. 2010: 367).
Süßenbach: Reintegration of Fighters

...aegis of multilateral institutions, NGOs, think tanks, and international donor agencies) are frequently not applicable to the realities on the ground. The assumed lines between fighters and civilians, war and peace, and between 'legitimate partners' vs. 'spoilers' to the peace process (Stedmann 1997: 5, critical for example Pouligny 2006: 217) are far more blurry and not that easy to draw.6

International Involvement, the ‘Spoiler Problem’, and the Idea of Pacification through DDR

In post-conflict situations, where political representation is contested, good governance, rule of law, and public sector capacities are often absent, and violence is not politically institutionalised but privatised and criminalised, a transition to politics and peaceful order often seems possible only with international involvement. At this point, an internationally led peacekeeping intervention can up to some extent enforce and even impose stabilising measures.7 The threat of potential military power, their representation of a presumed common international will and neutral third party, as well as their ability to offer benefits can be strong incentives to participate and agree on the terms of a peace process. However, national elites and domestic authorities likely to have a say in and be the beneficiaries of a peace accord are expected to be more willing to cooperate than parties not included and thus not profiting from a settlement pact or peace agreement, such as low-rank rebels and other ‘spoilers’.8 But also civil society organisations are consulted at best but often not included in decision-making, planning and

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6 Those categories most likely result out of a need to simplify and structure complexity in order to develop instruments and implement programs. But the depiction of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’, ‘the government’ versus ‘the insurgents’, though understandable and maybe even necessary in order to deal with messy contexts, leads to sometimes dangerous simplifications. The ‘referring to previous experiences, the prioritisation of immediate and visible results, the standardisation of instruments and measures, and cost evasion’ lead to friction (Tsing 2005) and biased decision-making and thus to sub-optimal interventions (Jair van der Lijn 2013) where ‘screws are hammered down’ (2013: 182).

7 Third Generation Peacekeeping missions since the 1990 were equipped with ‘robust mandates’ under Art. VII of the UN Charta and could enforce and defend their mandates, as in UNMIK (Kosovo, 1999), MONUC (DRC, 1999), UNMIL (Liberia, 2003), UNOCI (Ivory Coast, 2004), MINUSTAH (Haiti, 2004), MINURCAT (Central African Republic, Chad, 2007), and UNAMID (Sudan/Darfur, 2008).

8 “[...] leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it” (Stedmann 1997: 5).
implementation processes even though viewed as ‘genuine local partners’ and legitimate ‘owners of the peace process’ (for example Donais 2009, Richmond 2010).

However, in this context, outsiders often see violence and intra-state conflict as products of pathology of underdevelopment and poverty (see, for example, Cramer 2006: 87). This stems from the (neo-) liberal claim that violence is abnormal and dysfunctional, distinctive from and overcome by civilised societies, who do not need to resort to violence because of their high degree of civilisation, democracy and the idea of liberal peace. These notions determine the way violent conflicts are perceived and portrayed from the outside and consequently influence how external interventions and peacekeeping strategies are designed and implemented. For external actors seeking to stabilise an insecure situation and foresee the reconstruction and transformation after civil war, usually the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of combatants are typical first requirements for pacification. This follows the common assumption that former fighters would be a threat and spoilers to an overall peace accord (Knight 2008: 28, Malan et al. 2003: 2, Conflict Security and Development Group Review 2003). Hence, they need to be demobilised and reintegrated into civil society or the national military.

The internationally designed and funded DDR programs address former fighters to give up weapons, offer security guarantees and incentives to demobilise, and help fighters reintegrating into their communities. Focusing on ex-combatants and their reintegration are thus perceived an important step to reduce violence. However, as McMullin (2013b) argues Notwithstanding the increasing wariness of practitioners and academics to reduce the causes of war or war recurrence to single, monolithic variables (for example, the presence of natural resources), ex-combatants tend to be monitored and discussed in terms of how their dissatisfaction could lead to war recurrence independent of other variables that contribute to war, and independent of the extent to which ex-combatant dissatisfaction might be linked to these other variables. These assumptions about ex-combatants combine to produce a threat narrative in which the rationale for reintegration is not the integration or reconciliation of particular post-war communities and ex-combatants but the management and mitigation of ex-combatant threats (2013b: 393).


There is an extensive body of literature on the liberal peace idea and peacebuilding interventions under those premises (most notably Paris 2002, 2004 or Paris and Sisk 2009) and maybe even more critical contributions on the Neo Barbarism dogma as well as on the consequences of attempts to export the liberal peace and western state to post-war contexts (see for example Bliesemann/Kühn 2010).
The underlying presumptions of DDR programs have diverse implications and provoke essential questions about their applicability in messy post-war environments. The UN treat DDR as central tool for reconstruction and the instrument of choice in post-conflict settings; in practise, it remains unclear how those programmes can account for heterogeneous actor constellations, or combatants’ diverse reasons to fight. Generally, former fighters are consistently framed as spoilers on the one hand, while on the other they are being offered incentives and sometimes even ‘bribed into peace’ (as happened to a significant extent in Mozambique and later in Sierra Leone and Liberia, see Keen 2007: 15). Furthermore, DDR programmes circumvent the question why fighters would sometimes be reluctant to go back home after the end of war. How can their reasons not to demobilise or at least to stick with their comrades after conflict be explained? Conversely, and obviously the least reflected aspect of external programming, how can a programme successfully address civilian communities if they are not distinguishable from combatants in terms of involvement in conflict dynamics?

While this article aims at critically investigating these mismatches of external designs, international policy standards and the realities of implementation, this is not to imply that interventions are oblivious to the complexities of messy post-war contexts or that external actors necessarily and always get it wrong. Rather it argues that the assumptions underpinning donor-driven programmes such as DDR with their standardised templates turn out to be problematic when applied to individual cases.11 When ex-combatants are indiscriminately seen as potential spoilers and “poorly understood as a mob of angry and violence-prone youth”12 this clearly displays the tendency to separate the “evil perpetrators of violence from the innocent victims of violence” (Keen 2007: 15) and neglects the reasons for mobilisation process by which diverse groups took up arms or persuaded others to do so.

Mobilisation Patterns, Combatant Types and the Function of Violence: Why Combatants are not simply turned into Civilians after Conflict

In many respects, understanding peace requires an understanding of an earlier conflict. War and conflict cannot be seen just as a time of terror, but may offer opportunities for domestic and local actors to improve their own position against rivals. Conflict and wartime violence can result from socio-economic or political imbalances, but also out of individual reasons for mobilisation. Often the preceding grievances remain present in a post-

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11 In some cases like Sierra Leone or South Sudan, DDR had little effect on reducing the stigmatisation of returning combatants, promoting non-violence or the dismantling of factions (Muggah 2005: 241).
12 Quoting Mitton (2013: 325-326) about external attributions regarding young RUF fighters in Sierra Leone.
conflict society even after a formal peace agreement (Mitton 2013: 321). To understand how fighters could be demobilised and reintegrated into a civilian life, it is necessary to understand the drivers for fighters to participate in violent conflict, as well as to analyse the structures wherein reintegration could take place more carefully. Some might take up arms for a political cause and agree with the group’s overall means to achieve political aims even by the use of force. For some, violent action might be necessary to protect communities and family; sometimes, communities even expect young men to join the fighters. Violence can be essential to access food, shelter, property, or gain positions of authority. Some may exploit a conflict for criminal activities that thrive in such an enabling environment. Others seek social status or may just follow charismatic leaders. Some might participate in armed conflict, because they believe to be safer within a fighting faction than outside of one. Also, abduction and imposition are frequently part of recruitment strategies of violent groups, so the individual may not face a choice.

Despite these mixed motives, selective incentives and diverse pull-and-push factors for fighters to participate (for example Humphreys and Weinstein 2008: 441-442), international actors emphasise the material component and consequently foster economic development and reintegration rather than social reintegration (Bowd and Özerdem 2013: 453ff).

Indeed, the economic dimension matters for rebel group formation, as the access to resources matters. Insurgents are usually ‘weak relative to the governments they challenge’ (Fearon and Laitin 2003 cited in Weinstein 2005: 599). To survive they need arms and ammunition, resources to feed, equip and finance the organisation as well as a supply and training of recruits to maintain the insurgency (Weinstein 2005: 599). Whether a group can draw upon economic assets, as natural resources, diaspora remittances or the support of an external patron is seen as critical to successful organisation and rebel recruitment (Collier et al. 2003, 2000). Yet, in other cases, economic endowments are not as central. Although diamonds and other lootable resources play an important role in many conflicts (for example in

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13 In general there is to notice the idea of reintegration, as is not always clear where to be reintegrated into (Jennings 2007: 213), as many combatants, especially child soldiers, never experienced ‘civilian life’ and have not possessed any skills apart those required as soldiers (McMullin 2013a: 17).

14 In a study about the determinants of participation in violent conflict in Sierra Leone, Humphreys and Weinstein (2008: 438ff) found that 87.8 per cent of the RUF fighters claimed to have been abducted, most of them child soldiers. In contrast, over 70 per cent of CDF (Civil Defense Forces, a paramilitary organization supporting the elected government of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah against the rebel groups RUF) fighters stated to have joined in support of the groups’ political goals. This illustrates differences between the systematic, but indiscriminate recruitment by the RUF and the voluntary, more selective process employed by the CDF.
Angola, Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone), rebel groups have also emerged in environments lacking an economic base around which to organise (for example in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Rwanda). In these contexts, rebel leaders have met the logistical demands of insurgency through means other than the mobilisation of material wealth and have employed appeals to ethnic or class solidarity, nationalist sentiments, and local community ties to identify the recruits and resources necessary to effectively challenge the government (Weinstein 2005: 599).

Economic reasons and the accumulation of resources may indeed be supporting drivers for mobilisation, facilitating rebel recruitment and offering incentives for people to join armed groups, but by no means are they the most important ones. Since the “aims in a war are complex” (Keen 2008: 1), a civil conflict will likely not be the result of one single cause.

In the Sierra Leonean conflict, for example, illegal diamond mining, corruption, and the competing for natural resources were often stated as the main cause. Although the presence of easily extractable diamonds, opportunities for looting and smuggling certainly provided an incentive for violence and contributed to the conflict’s prolongation, this has sometimes been described as proxy for other not so obvious reasons and motivations. As for example Kandeh stated “the country’s armed rebellion was not caused by diamonds but by a mode of governance that is antithetical to both the developmental aspirations of society and the global neo-liberal agenda” (cited in Zack-Williams 2012: 5). Violence in Sierra Leone has to a large extent been a response to exclusion, especially affecting a generation of rural-based and politically as well as economically marginalised youth. Those were later deemed critically to post-conflict peace and stability as ‘potential threat’ of unemployment and ‘drifting into criminality or even renewed conflict’ (Institute for Security Studies, cited in Mitton 2013: 323) which once again “underlines the dangers in peace agreements that include some but exclude large numbers of others” (Keen 2007: 14).

Diverse motives and different types of combatants must be more broadly considered as factors influencing mobilisation, adding to ideology or economic explanations. Barrett has identified different types of combatants and their motives to join armed groups in conflict, stemming from interviews with former fighters in Toto/Nigeria (Barrett 2011: 755ff). Although the interviewees were reluctant to admit to reasons of personal gain and rather tried to advertise some noble cause to join, one can with Barrett distinguish ideologues and basic needs, followers and pragmatist combatants. Different motivations, however, imply easier access to or more difficult strategies to engage with fighters in order to facilitate demobilisation. Barrett finds that if a person joins armed groups for ideological reasons they are less likely to give up fighting for material incentives or due to threat of force; these fighters perceive a greater cause legitimising their action and use of violence. Conversely, someone who joined for self-preservation and the hope to gain access to personal protection, food and shelter, would be easier to convince...
through certain guarantees of safety and provision of well-being. The
*pragmatist* type, likely to be a group leader and older than average, is
identified to be the easiest to approach with rational incentives because of his
willingness to achieve measurable and divisible ends and his evaluation of
long-term goals that might be better realised through negotiation than
through continued fighting. Lastly, social perception and communal
acceptance during and after conflict are identified as the primary motivation
of the *follower* combatant. This type thereby best exemplifies the intertwined
relation between combatants and the civilian community.

Such typologies certainly do not fully account for an adequate explanation
of mobilisation patterns since they simplify human behaviour. Moreover,
what fighters say in interviews might not mirror their hidden motivations
(Barrett 2011: 759) and motivations may be very typical for one specific
conflict environment but not for others. Yet, typologies can be useful to
analytically identify diverse functions that violence can take for different
actor types while underlining that a single, universally applicable answer to
the question what motivates fighters cannot be given.

The fact that they often cannot clearly be distinguished from *uninvolved
civilians* adds to real type blurring of ideal type characteristics. Neither
combatants nor civilians are homogenous typical groups and circumstances
as well as attributions change significantly during wartime and afterwards.
Some kinds of combatants were recruited from civilians, and their
disillusionment with peace may be one of the critical reasons why large-scale
mobilisation and violence were possible in the first place.

With those thoughts about combatants’ diversity in mind, the following
part briefly establishes the conceptual framework of DDR, its purpose and its
difficult assessment and limitations in terms of violence reduction. It then
contests, drawing on de Vries and Wiegink (2011), some of the underlying
assumptions referring to the settlement decisions of former fighters. The
efficacy of DDR will be critically evaluated by suggesting that the agencies
involved in conducting and implementing those programmes routinely fail to
distinguish between different types of combatants. Also the architects of
those programmes frequently do not account for mobilisation patterns, seem
to think of civilian communities as not conflict-affected, and occasionally try
to *bribe* commanders (Keen 2007: 15) and *programme* other combatants into
peace (de Vries and Wiegink 2011: 47) without addressing the underlying
grievances and their experiences during war-time. Tailor-made solutions are
often less dominant and there is a tendency to “hammer down screws: the
wrong tools are used to deal with the problem” (van der Lijn 2013: 182,
original emphasis). The complexities of DDR environments – the attitudes
and expectations that influence dynamics between ex-combatants and their
communities – and international expectations on DDR are not in harmony (de
Vries and Wiegink 2011: 47).
International Standards meet Local Requirements: DDR Programmes in Post-conflict Environments

Over the last decades, the international donor community has spent millions of dollars on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes that “aim to support the peace process, create political space, and contribute to a secure environment” (United Nations 2010: 2). A general assumption in the literature as well as in the design of these programmes states that not properly demobilised combatants remain a threat to evolving stability and fragile peace\(^\text{15}\) as a “ticking time bomb” (Mashike 2004, cited in de Vries and Wiegink 2011: 38); fighters could easily resort to violence thereby jeopardising the overall peace process (Mitton 2013: 324-325). Accordingly, DDR has become a key component of peace operations, be they conducted by the United Nations or by regional organisations such as the African Union or European Union, as well as a central activity for development agencies and armed forces in donor countries (Berdal and Ucko 2013: 317). The expectations and funding of donor agencies and countries on DDR and weapons reduction initiatives seem higher than for any other post-conflict reconstruction instrument, although their contribution to broader security in post-conflict contexts remains rather unclear (Stankovic and Torjesen 2010: 4, Muggah 2005: 249). Despite the fact that their track record shows mixed results,\(^\text{16}\) DDR programmes remain relatively “uncontested as a central tool in the liberal peacebuilding project” (Munive 2013: 586).

As part of an overarching political strategy to facilitate the transition from war to peace and expanding the political space, DDR is aiming to provide an important step to comprehensively transform the ways that states control the use of force by channelling irregular armed groups into the state’s armed forces or the national police. Combatants ought to be “enabled to shift from participation in fights to participation through political parties or other formal, in any case non-violent institutions” (Sisk 2013: 89). However, although DDR has served as a cornerstone in peacebuilding for more than 20 years now, no overall consensus has emerged about what DDR is meant to achieve, how it is best implemented, and particularly about how

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\(^{15}\) The World Bank (2003: 159), for example, claims that “a structured DDR process, which demobilizes combatants in stages and emphasizes their ability to reintegrate into society, may reduce the risk of ex-combatants turning to violent crime or rejoining rebel groups in order to survive”.

\(^{16}\) The much-debated study of Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) even finds that DDR might not help demobilising former fighters at all, and also states that they would demobilise themselves if there is not enough offered by the programme (see also de Vries and Wiegink 2011); Munive (2013) shows how the conventional DDR template is challenged by specific context factors in South Sudan; Knight (2008) provides an overview on the achievements and challenges of DDR experiences in seven case studies in Africa.
reintegration can be assessed\(^\text{17}\) (Bowd and Özerdem 2013: 453, Stankovic and Torjesen 2010).

Since DDR activities are usually carried out as part of a broader political process of state transformation and alongside other peacebuilding and state building measures, thereby often closely linked to Security Sector Reform (SSR), it is difficult to determine the relationship between the activities and thus hard to isolate and measure the effects of DDR separately. Additionally, there is no consensus on the criteria of success and whether they can be equally applied from case to case, as each case is unique but also influenced by the cases and ‘lessons learnt’ that preceded it (McMullin 2013a: 9). Practitioners usually assess short-term effects of DDR by focussing on visible outputs and outcomes, like reductions in the stock of arms, the number of ex-combatants formally demobilised, and the number of former fighters who have undergone reintegration and vocational training (yet sometimes for jobs that were not there as in Sierra Leone, see McMullin 2013a: 157). However, no straightforward relation exists between the number of weapons collected during disarmament\(^\text{18}\) and the likelihood of achieving sustainable peace. This renders the number of collected weapons and demobilised armed groups an insufficient indicator of success or failure and draws attention to less tangible factors and longer-term effects such as positive or negative changes in the dynamics of post-conflict violence, the structure and character of armed groups, the wider political and economic context of reintegration, and the implications of DDR for legitimate peacebuilding and state building efforts (Stankovic and Torjesen 2010: 3, McMullin 2013a, Bowd and Özerdem 2013: 467–468).

Despite this lack of criteria for evaluation, DDR programmes have become increasingly refined establishing a set of standard templates well in place. The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS\(^\text{19}\)) have been continuously reviewed from their inception in 2006 onwards, most recently in May 2014, and overseen by a UN interagency working group on DDR (IAWG-DDR), which is represented by over 15 UN agencies, funds, departments, and programmes.\(^\text{20}\) The standards emphasise national ownership and inclusion and aim to address broader community structures. International standards lead to standardised practices, however in doing so, DDR programmes often fail to account for the realities of the post-conflict situation. The in policy reports often-stated efficacy of DDR\(^\text{21}\)

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\(^{17}\) Economic reintegration is measurable with quantitative indicators, whereas social reintegration is much less tangible (overview of DDR conventional measures and social capital indicators, see Bowd and Özerdem 2013).

\(^{18}\) This is because frequently the weapons surrendered are old and not in use anymore but useful to participate and profit from the incentives of the programme.

\(^{19}\) Available online: www.unddr.org/iddrs.aspx.


\(^{21}\) For an overview see for example Knight (2008: 33ff).
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seems mainly due to technocratic and quantitative approaches to evaluation that are also reflected by a large body of literature on planning processes, organisation and coordination structures (Berdal 1996; Colletta et al. 1996; DPKO 1999; UN Security Council 2000; Kingma 2002; World Bank 2002). However, context and politics of reintegrating ex-combatants often lack an appreciation of the country’s social, historical, and economic environment (Muggah 2005: 246). Participatory approaches to implementation, and deeper engagement with the political dimension of violence are rarely the case (Berdal and Ucko 2013: 317) and community centred approaches likewise often lack appropriate ways to be put into practice (Özerdem 2012: 52).

In many cases, practical implementation in post-conflict settings face difficult challenges where the goals and capacities of DDR as well as the international standards and policies meet their limits. For instance, in Somalia or Afghanistan, where over decades the entire “country has been flooded with small arms and light weapons from a variety of sources” (Small Arms Survey 2003: 288), it is quite difficult to distinguish between war weaponry and guns that are used for traditional purposes, such as hunting or self-defence. Gun ownership, not only in non-Western societies, may be perceived as cultural or legal entitlement. In highly insecure environments, where the line between fighters and civilians becomes blurred, owning a weapon for self-defence is broadly accepted while disarmament is not; hence, identifying who is to be targeted by a DDR programme rests on highly politicised decisions.

Policy rhetoric, expectations, and the realities of implementation mismatching in this way, it is tempting to ask why the international community and donor agencies still support the immense funding of DDR. Persistent doubts remain regarding a significant reduction of violence – in many cases the standards are not even applicable to the setting and might have numerous unintended consequences. Especially buy-back programmes and cash for weapons without adequate security guarantees sometimes proved to do more harm than good, as happened in Haiti and Columbia, where ex-combatants exploited buy-back cash programmes by trading in old or broken weapons and buy better ones to trade on the black market (Muggah 2007: 199).

Given clear inconsistencies inherent to the programming but also due to the specifics of local context, the following part takes issue with two common truisms of DDR referring to the settlement decisions of former fighters. It explores why reintegration efforts through DDR consistently fail due to oversimplifying assumptions about homogenous groups of fighters on the one hand and recipient communities on the other.

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22 Although this is frequently stated in handbooks as well as manuals and explicitly focused on by the IDDRS standards.
DDR Programmes and their Reintegration Efforts: Ex-combatants and Recipient Communities

In spite of the development of the IDDRS and of the general theory and practice of DDR, such externally planned templates inevitably lack local knowledge and context specificity (Munive 2013: 587). The Reintegration-Phase of DDR is described rather vaguely as “the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income” and are further seen as “an essentially local process with an open time frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level” (UNSG note 2005).

Practise strongly challenges the notion of homogenous groups of fighters and calls for more attention to different statuses and drivers of ex-combatants. In attempts to acknowledge the important role that commanders can play in the implementation of DDR, lucrative benefits such as political power, military positions or special training programmes have frequently been offered to high-rank commanders to create short-term stability. Clearly this enabling cooperation and rewarding the ones who are also considered to endanger the peace process, runs contrary to the DDR goal of transforming those structures and thus endangers long-term stability and transition. Moreover, this has often been done literally by bribing commanders into peace (Keen 2007: 15) or by relying on commanders to provide lists of their fighters without any independent verification, thus empowering them to include or exclude individuals to their discretion (McMullin 2013a: 165). Furthermore, as in case of the RUF in Sierra Leone, by transforming not per se political rebel movements into political parties (Mitton 2008).

Additionally, many in the mid-level groups, disappointed by “being lumped in with soldiers they felt superior to” (Jennings 2008, cited in Stankovic and Torjesen 2010: 10) sometimes resulted in less incentive to participate in the programme due to disaffection and indiscrimination.

The settlement decisions of former combatants are not as straightforward as often expected by external actors, who seem to assume a general will of combatants to resort from violence and return to their civilian life (de Vries and Wiegink 2011). Firstly, it is commonly presumed, that the interruption of command and control (C&C) structures is a key component for successful demobilisation and reintegration so that ex-combatants can ‘break up’ and go back to their communities and civilian life, free from the influence of their former commanders and comrades. The idea behind this is

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24 The issue of political grievances can challenge reintegration efforts in particular contexts. In post-2002 Sierra Leone, for instance, many RUF members (for example Corporal Foday Sankoh) were reluctant to be reintegrated into the political system, since they had rejected 'traditional hierarchies' (that is the government) which they perceived as exclusivist and disinterested in accommodating their grievances (see Mitton 2008).
that if a group is being disarmed but without disrupting the C&C element, it
can maintain its original composition and hierarchy and thus retain the
potential for remobilisation and violent action. Contrary to this idea, de Vries
and Wiegink argue that the interruption of C&C structures is not always
practicable, and might not be desirable either. By referring to the
mobilisation process as well as to the collective experience of fighters, they
explain that ex-combatants might, even after demobilisation, rather choose to
stay together due to their common experiences and the bonds they formed
during war (De Vries and Wiegink 2011: 41). Especially when mobilisation
followed attempts to escape the circumstances of their former life and rural
settings, former fighters might indeed see little benefit in returning to their
communities of origin (2011: 39). Economic opportunities may be unevenly
available while state agents may not be able to supply sufficient guarantees
for survival. Also, security concerns, such as the desire for protection or the
danger for a lone ex-soldier to be associated with a former armed group can
be part of the decision to stick together (2011: 42). The chances to survive
and build a new life may seem more likely in a group than by returning home
individually “only to starve” (2011: 43) or facing the prospect of being
rejected and stigmatised (see McMullin 2013b). Thus, group belonging and
the fear of not participating in violent conflict, as initial reasons for
mobilisation clearly remain influential for settlement decisions even after
conflict’s end and with international involvement.

De Vries and Wiegink (2011) also argue that the structure of a DDR
programme itself can, contrary to its intention, contribute to ex-combatants
choosing to stay together. If a programme provides certain benefits, staying
in close contact with former comrades could be useful to receive the
(financial) profits, as the selection and distribution mechanisms often work
through combatant networks and associations. The often-neglected politics
of local networking, neopatrimonial distribution structures and clientelist
patronage systems prove indeed to be central for qualifying for the
programme (Munive 2013: 597). In the contrary case, if a programme does
not offer adequate incentives to participate, it may seem even more
reasonable not to leave a network (de Vries and Wiegink 2011: 43).

As has been illustrated, the decision to stay together is closely linked to
the feeling of being more safe and accepted in a group of people with similar
experiences (Mitton 2013: 327). Trust (Bowd and Özerdem 2013: 467), as
well as the perception of being understood and not rejected and to benefit
more from maintained structures than from the return to insecure
circumstances are thus key factors. This shows that mobilisation patterns
and the motivation to participate in DDR programmes are closely connected.

Similarly, experiences during war are not to be underestimated factors in
DDR programmes, for instance disillusioned and disappointed combatants
may be reluctant to trust incentives offered by external actors. Or quite on
the contrary, they may expect more from external actors than from their own
national authorities. In the case of Angola for instance, ex-combatants had
overly idealistic expectations of the programme and expressed civilian employment aspirations in areas that were highly valued but not widely available (such as medicine, engineering) and which exceeded their qualifications; thus, they were disillusioned by the programme when offered a job in farming (Hansen and Tavares 1999).

In addition, if fighters were able to maintain close relations with the civilian population (especially support of their families) during the time of war they might be more willing to return to their communities than if there exist strong tensions, for example because of atrocities against civilians during war. Whether militants fought for or against the population is vital to reflect the heterogeneous and imbalanced situation between demobilised fighters and communities in a post-war society. In the Sierra Leonean case large-scale violence against the civilian population made reintegration attempts very difficult, which underlines that the common notion of recipient communities as the home to go back to fails to take into account changes that society underwent. Re-integration is thus a misleading term, suggesting a return to civilian life, that many never experienced, thereby ignoring the dynamic nature of communities (McMullin 2013a: 17).

‘Community reintegration’ is mainly described in vague terms and seen as a relatively easy enterprise. Based on the assumption of a general willingness of communities to reintegrate returning fighters, reintegration studies and standardised DDR programmes predominantly target former fighters by offering them, depending on their position and influence during the conflict, governmental positions, economic assets and amnesties. In so doing, this approach creates the perception that the perpetrators of human rights violations are being rewarded while local communities are not receiving support. International actors often seem to imply existing civilian capacities of resilience and social inclusion. However, many pre-conflict societies were characterised by ‘non-integration’ due to political marginalisation, poverty and repressive social systems, excluding the most vulnerable parts of the population. Given the devastating nature of war those conditions are likely to persist after the end of the conflict. Accordingly, if those dynamics and social complexities are not sufficiently taken into account, successful reintegration “tends to be framed, albeit inadvertently, as a reintegration into the poverty and socio-political marginalization that preceded and perhaps even provoked conflict” (McMullin 2013a: 5). The complexities of those reintegration dynamics can often not be understood or addressed by externally planned DDR programmes.

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25 As has happened for example in Sierra Leone, where the leader of the RUF fighters, Foday Sakoh, was rewarded with the right to manage Sierra Leone’s diamonds in the aftermath of the conflict, see Keen (2000:14).
Conclusion

The article aims at illustrating how post-conflict environments are not necessarily the end of violent action and former fighters do not simply become civilians at a conflict's official end. Instead, following violent conflict, the social order can be highly fragmented and characterised by power imbalances. Competing interests of diverse groups add to a potentially weak security situation, and violence can continue on various levels. In such a messy post-conflict environment, international involvement aiming to pacify through mainly standardised instruments regularly comes to its limits as assumptions often do not match local context and requirements. The article meant to show how the often dichotomous categories of external interveners are frequently not applicable to the realities on the ground; the assumed lines between fighters and civilians, war and peace, and between 'legitimate partners' or 'spoilers' to the peace process are blurry and not that easy to draw.

Despite their popularity among donors, policy-makers and multilateral agencies, internationally led interventions employing DDR often ignore the specific post-conflict setting and thereby neglect the underlying grievances that led to mobilisation and violence in the first place. Primarily they build on assumptions of rational self-interest and treat former fighters as homogenous groups of perpetrators (McMullin 2013b: 405) acting out of greed or grievance. Moreover, they do not account for the diverse functions of violence, simply understanding violence as abnormal and dysfunctional. The consideration of mobilisation patterns and their variation for different types of combatants aimed to display the dependence of a post-conflict context on the drivers of the former conflict. Furthermore, ex-combatants and communities seem not to engage with each other the way that international agencies anticipate, since combatant-society relations are more deeply intertwined and community reintegration faces an abundance of obstacles.

The article concludes that DDR programmes are necessarily not local and context-specific and frequently target the wrong people. This is illustrated by disarmament taking place in societies where owning a weapon is a status symbol, as in Afghanistan or Somalia. Also the focus on combatants was sometimes perceived as irritating by those society members who were affected by violence but not benefitting from these programmes. Particularly the tendency to give incentives to ex-combatants ‘to go back’ and view the civilian communities mainly as home for them is rather problematic as it supports the perception of DDR as “entitlement for former soldiers” instead of a “mechanism to improve overall security” (Muggah 2007: 201) of traumatised communities in countries emerging from civil war. Indeed, from different perspectives what might "look[s] to some people like realism and pragmatism [that is policy implementers] may look to others [that is war-affected societies struggling to process the experience of violence] like..."
appeasement and a prolongation of impunity” (Keen 2007: 14). Tailor-made solutions are often less dominant and there is a tendency to “hammer down screws: the wrong tools are used to deal with the problem” (van der Lijn 2013: 182).

In conclusion, DDR programmes clearly do not have the far-reaching impact that the massive international investment and expectations seem to imply. In some cases, DDR may even be counterproductive and politically destabilising due to the implementation of an external design that might not be compatible with local needs and time frames. Donors requesting immediate disarmament while uncertainty prevails may contribute to increasing insecurity instead of creating stability. This also illustrates the close intertwining of DDR and SSR processes that may partly contradict each other in practise: the requirement of DDR to remove or breakdown non-state armed groups that could contest the state’s power and authority, is confronted by the invariable resistance of those groups to demilitarise, unless they feel the state is capable of providing a base level of security and justice (Sedra 2011: 249).

DDR’s effects are not clearly positive, they are often only applicable under false premises and they might even be counterproductive to reduce violence. This raises the question if only the expectations on DDR are too high given the environments in which DDR is usually employed. Ultimately, DDR’s efficiency to reduce violence, improve security, contribute to community and economic development, and to lower the risk of renewed conflict remains largely unknown (Muggah 2007: 201). As seen in the Sierra Leonean and other cases, one cannot simply “programme people into accepting one another after years of violent conflict” (De Vries and Wiegink 2011: 40).
The article was written during a one-year project course on ‘conflict and violence in international relations’. With the aim to develop articles that could eventually be published in this special issue, the seminar included textual work as well as discussions on review processes and publication requirements. For this matter, the seminar setting provided the comfortable situation of a rather small group size of only six people where each of the articles would be discussed in some length and detail and feedback was given frequently. Also with its length of one year it allowed for the gradual development of structure and argument, constantly integrated into the seminar setting and accompanied by critical debate each step of the way. In this sense it was an interesting, fruitful and rather uncommon seminar situation and for me the process of writing the article was a learning process in form as well as in content. As the project seminar was also my last MA course it was accompanied by constant reflection on the issues that I’ve learned and addressed in the past years of studying as well as by thoughts on linkages to my MA thesis, that I started writing during that time.

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Süßenbach: Reintegration of Fighters


Süßenbach: Reintegration of Fighters


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