An Assessment of Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters' Commitment to Reintegrate: A Case Study of Kwale County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study seeks to contribute to filling the prevailing research deficit in empirical data informed by Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and their experiences of, and challenges in, reintegration, through qualitative interviews with returning FTFs in Kwale County, Kenya; a county producing a relative majority of Kenyan recruits to Al Shabaab, who are offered amnesty upon return to their county of origin. The Life Psychology framework, which assumes an inherent human strive to obtain a good life, i.e. life embeddedness, is adopted for the analysis. The study finds that returnees commit to reintegration in the absence of other alternatives, due to economic incentives and longing for acceptance. It confirms that the process requires the societal motivation in facilitation, but will fail without the sustained commitment of the returning FTF. The study further establishes that returning FTFs are not able to obtain a flow in life embeddedness, which would indicate inability to reintegrate. Yet, many of the interviewed returning FTFs express the contrary, which challenges the concept of life embeddedness as an indicator for reintegration. The study further challenges the general assumption that deradicalization is a precondition for reintegration, as it finds that radicalized individuals are able to reintegrate into communities of origin without deserting held radical beliefs, if those communities share radical sentiments.

Introduction

Terrorism is recognized as one of today's biggest threats to international security, peace and development (Rapoport, 2011; UNSC, 2014) and as the "greatest test" of modern conflict resolution strategies (Miall et al., 2016, p. 333). While the world has seen a global increase in terrorism, its intensity and spread over the past decades; reaching its peak in 2014 in number of fatalities (IEP, 2017; 2019), the multitude of consequences generated by terror

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organizations are transnational and include death, fear and migration (Miall et al., 2016; UNGA, 2015). The migratory ways are recognized in two directions; one paved by civilians fleeing conflict affected territory to seek refuge and the other by those who are attracted to join the fight (UNGA, 2015), i.e. Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs). Parallel to persistent recruitment, reports of disengaging FTFs continue to proliferate (IEP, 2017; Koehler, 2016; Marsden, 2017; RAN, 2016; 2017). These disengaging recruits establish a third path in the migratory movement, as they return to their countries of origin. The return of FTFs constitute, beyond the numerous security threats unless addressed appropriately, significant potential in countering violent extremism (CVE) which urgently needs to be utilized.

Research Problem

The return of FTFs is not a new phenomenon, but its gained momentum in the global scholarly discourse can be attributed to advancement in detecting, disrupting and prosecuting terrorism activity as well as partial success of military offences resulting in battlefield loss or defeat of certain terrorist organizations (IEP, 2017; 2019; RAN, 2017). As ISIL, Boko Haram, Al Shabaab and others are pushed to retreat, the expectedly increased number of returning FTFs to societies of origin demands the development of comprehensive strategies for the rehabilitation and reintegration of FTFs as a prioritized item on the security agenda.

Reintegrating returning FTFs is argued to be the sole solution to the potential threats returnees pose to public safety (Clubb, 2016; Holmer and Shtuni, 2017; Marsden, 2017), which requires the societal motivation of receiving communities to facilitate the process as well as the commitment of the returning FTF (Bertelsen, 2015; IEP, 2017; Koehler, 2016; Marsden, 2017; Noor and Halabi, 2018). The returnee undergoes a continuous behavioral and cognitive process which risks, at high costs, being challenged and interrupted by internal and external factors (Khalil et al., 2019; Marsden, 2017). The risks can be averted if developed strategies are informed by returnees' experiences from practice (Horgan, 2009; Koehler, 2016; Marsden, 2017; Tapley and Clubb, 2019). Yet, the practice of reintegration of FTFs remains relatively undertheorized (Noricks, 2009; Koehler, 2016) as limited empirical

evidence is available concerning the reintegration process from a returning FTFs perspective. The deficit is argued to be a result of scholarly preoccupation with developing theories and preventive measures for radicalization (Altier et al., 2014; Horgan, 2009; Noricks, 2009). The reintegration imperative, simultaneous to theorization of radicalization, begs for further theoretical and empirical evidence which can only be provided through research capturing the experience of returnees and the essence of the reintegration process: the returnees sustained commitment to reintegration (Koehler, 2016; Marsden, 2017).

Kenya is substantially affected by terrorism and ranked at position 22 (IEP, 2017) and 21 (IEP, 2019) of 163 countries surveyed on impact of terrorism in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), arguably due to the geographic proximity to Somalia where the al-Qaida affiliated terror group Al Shabaab seeks to create an Islamic State (ICG, 2014; Rapoport, 2011). Numerous fatal attacks have been carried out on Kenyan soil, targeting civilians, security forces and foreign targets through sieges, hijackings, public beheadings, and massacres in educational, commercial and other public facilities (Al Jazeera, 2020; Guardian, 2017; ICG, 2014). The GTI uses four indicators to measure the impact of terrorism: number of casualties, injuries, incidents and damage due to terrorism (IEP, 2017; 2019), but does not account for the number of Kenyan FTFs participating in the Salafi-jihad in Somalia. The recruited Kenyan youth, driven by real as well as perceived socio-economic and religious-political grievances (RoK, 2017), account for 25 per cent of the estimated 7000 Al Shabaab members (Cannon and Pkalya, 2017).

Following the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) deployed with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2011 to fight back the Islamic Court regime (ICG, 2014; Miall et al., 2016), the third migratory flow caused by terrorism has emerged with new vigor. Intentions of the returning FTFs range from retaliation and continued recruitment to hiding and reintegration (Kenya Gazette, 2017; RoK, 2017). The Government of Kenya (GoK) criminalizes all acts of terrorism as well as affiliation with the same while, since 2014, offering an amnesty to FTFs with the objective to incite disengagement (Kenya Law, 2015; NCTC, 2016; Ombati, 2015). Following the announcement of amnesty, which scholarly

consensus generally note to advance only already considered disengagement (Altier et al., 2014), the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) recognized "hundreds of Kenyans leaving the ranks" of Al Shabaab (NCTC, 2016, p. 26); an increasing number of these returning to Kwale (RoK, 2017).

The Kwale County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism (KCPCVE), launched in February 2017 and aligned with the NSCVE, includes aspects of local rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives of returning FTFs. Formal and informal strategies are developed and implemented for enhancing reintegration, while engaged returnees face multiple challenges in sustaining commitment due to stigmatization, legal challenges, extrajudicial violence, harassment, retaliation from former comrades and interaction with the receiving communities where far from all are supportive (ICG, 2014; RoK, 2017). Hence, Kwale presents an opportunity for theorizing the experienced commitment of returnees, what challenges are faced in the process and how these are addressed.

Relevance

The reintegration of returnees has long been argued to present the most effective opportunity to practice counterterrorism (Horgan, 2008). If the rising number of FTFs is not appropriately addressed, it will pose a direct and latent security threat to receiving communities with the potential to cause severe consequences in aggravating violent extremism (Jawaid, 2017; RAN, 2016; 2017; RoK, 2017).

The practice of reintegration needs to be informed by returnees and it is argued that "former terrorists *are* willing to speak about their experiences if one asks the correct questions" (Horgan, 2009, p. 293, emphasis by author). As much as FTFs compose a heterogeneous group and returnees are not representative of those who remain with a terrorist organization, it is argued that answers to questions of "why" and "how" (Altier et al., 2014, p. 648) can inform processes of disengagement and reintegration. This study contributes to the deficient evidence-based literature on accounts of experiences in reintegration, which serves to inform future development of strategies in Kwale and elsewhere while strengthening

political will in implementing programmes. Furthermore, the findings will complement the chosen analytical framework, Life Psychology framework, and contribute to develop its theoretical accuracy.

Objective and Research Questions

The objective of the study is to increase understanding for what makes returning FTFs commit to a sustained reintegration process. Specifically, the study seeks to examine why returnees commit to reintegration, what challenges are experienced in sustaining commitment and how challenges experienced are addressed by returning FTFs. For the purpose of the objective, Kwale is used as a case study in order to answer the following research questions:

- Why are returnees in Kwale committed to the reintegration process?
- What are the challenges in the reintegration process in Kwale, and how are these addressed by returnees?

Literature Review

The 9/11 attacks fueled the global war on terrorism; the security oriented, hard approach to counter violent extremism and terrorism activity (Miall et al., 2016), but has brought the international community no closer to reaching a common definition of terrorism, let alone how to combat it (IEP, 2017; 2019). Within this discourse, uncompromising and punitive measures are advocated for and realism-oriented critics reject "talking to terrorists" as legitimizing violence (Miall et al., 2016, p. 333) and undermining "democracy and state legitimacy" (Clubb, 2016, p. 844). However, the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism notes that the preceding security-oriented strategy has "not been sufficient to prevent the spread of violent extremism" (UNGA, 2015, p. 2) and instead proved likely to provoke retaliatory violence (Miall et al., 2016). How programmes targeting FTFs should be carried out remains part of the highly politicized debate.

Parallel to calls for strict incarceration and institutional rehabilitation of returnees, counterarguments refer to how criminalization and stigmatization undermine disengagement

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(Marsden, 2017) and how prison environments often serve to proliferate radicalization (Gunaratna, 2011; Kruglanski et al., 2019) while emphasizing that if all currently engaged FTFs were to return to their countries of origin, state capacity would be severely challenged in performing judicial procedures (RAN, 2016; 2017). Furthermore, not all terror affiliates can be proved to, nor have, engaged in violence (Holmer and Shtuni, 2017; Kruglanski et al., 2019). The definition of an FTF includes all guilty of "perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts" (UNSC, 2014, p. 2), and does not differentiate between individuals who are radicalized and those who are not, who have or have not directly participated in combat, nor voluntary recruits or trafficked persons. While the UNSC Resolution 2178 (2014) recognized a need for a multi-stakeholder approach for developing rehabilitation and reintegration strategies, it fails to take into consideration the heterogeneity of the group this is urged for.

Researchers, scholars and institutions alike recognize that incentives for an FTF to disengage vary as much as the motives stimulating initial radicalization (Altier et al., 2014; Holmer and Shtuni, 2017; Khalil et al., 2019; Koehler, 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2019; RAN, 2016; 2017). As Horgan (see: 2008; 2009; 2011; 2012; 2016) predicted an increase in attention to deradicalization, he stressed the necessity to distinguish between concepts by illustrating that disengagement not automatically entails deradicalization (Horgan, 2009). The latter has further been argued to internalize the issue to regard solely the individual who has been radicalized, while overlooking structural causes and various combinations of factors inciting radicalization as well as the potential of externalities to reduce sympathy for, and involvement in, violence (Khalil et al., 2019; Marsden, 2017). Whether or not disengagement precedes deradicalization, the inconsistency in use of the terms (Altier et al., 2014) is rejected with reference to parallel cognitive and behavioral processes, and hence conceptual decoupling of attitude and behavior is necessary (Khalil et al., 2019). Further, Marsden (2017) emphasizes the difference between deradicalization and reintegration, stressing that the later can in fact occur in the absence of the former.

Koehler (2016) noted the deficit in deradicalization theories despite the prevalence in implementation of programmes for rehabilitation and reintegration of extremists in over 40 countries in previous decades. While scholars (Gunaratna, 2011; Holmer and Shtuni, 2017; Jawaid, 2017; Koehler, 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2019) have assessed programmes predominantly developed for a post-incarceration phase, it has been concluded that the assessed initiatives portrayed an incoherent range of similarities and differences arguably due to the lack of generalizable theories or strategies for reintegration (Koehler, 2016). Welcomed theory suggestions, including the Pro-integration Model (Barrelle, 2015), depluralization (Koehler, 2016) and Rusbult's investment model (Altier et al., 2014), highlight engagement with receiving societies as determinant for disengagement (Altier et al., 2014; Barrelle, 2015; Khalil et al, 2019; Koehler, 2016). Notably, it has been argued that a common reason for staying with an extremist group is the absence of something to return to (Altier et al., 2014; Noricks, 2009), which indicates the importance of the receiving society's willingness to incite and facilitate disengagement. Perspective-taking (Noor and Halabi, 2018) is suggested to decrease hostility while facilitating favorable consequences within the dynamic relationship between returnees and communities, including positive interpersonal attraction (Noor and Halabi, 2018) and pro-social bonds (Altier et al., 2014), which in turn encourage forgiveness of an out-group member (Noor and Halabi, 2018). However, due to origin, returnees diffuse the boundaries of external and internal upon return (Clubb, 2016).

Nonetheless, assessing the reintegration imperative, Holmer and Shtuni (2017) recognized that those who approach reintegration programmes "have already progressed a certain cognitive distance toward disengagement from the group and are actively seeking assistance" (Holmer and Shtuni, 2017, p. 7) which demonstrates the necessity of developing informed programmes to attract those who have not disengaged nor deradicalized. However, Marsden (2017) notes that the differing dynamics driving people in and out of extremism cannot be generalized and calls for more research regarding why returnees remain committed to reintegration in a continuously changing process, in a context where the returnee can be socially stigmatized, experiences limited opportunities, is socially excluded and, as in the case

of Kwale, have their lives restricted by insecurity and sense of surveillance by returnees with retaliatory intentions (RoK, 2017). While recognized as a valuable resource in CVE (Clubb, 2016; Noor and Halabi, 2018; Tapley and Clubb, 2019), beyond providing intelligence and understanding for radicalization (Clubb, 2016; Tapley and Clubb, 2019), returnees are increasingly engaged in de-glamorizing rather than morally de-legitimizing violence (Clubb, 2016). The credibility of the individual is contextual in relation to target audience (Clubb, 2016) and relies on the returnee's current ties with the former network, which can compromise a victim-centered approach in favor of vicarious forgiveness (Tapley and Clubb, 2019). While reintegration objectives suggest preventing recidivism and countering sympathy to violence (Khalil et al., 2019), the importance of individual resilience in remaining disengaged, despite challenges faced in practice, contributes to societal collective resilience to violent extremism and cannot be underemphasized (Marsden, 2017).

Indications of promising outcomes of family involvement in the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees are detectable (Koehler, 2016; Marsden, 2017; RAN, 2017). Nevertheless, it is important to note that family relations and roles are viewed and experienced differently in individualistic and collectivist societies. In the latter, one might assume that close community extending beyond the immediate family plays an equivalently important part in reintegrating returnees as the immediate family in the former. Mirahmadi's recognition of communities being an "underutilized resource" (Mirahmadi, 2016, p. 130) in building resilience against extremism is hence relevant. It is highlighted that programmes demonstrate higher success levels when they constitute a bottom-up approach; community-led and developed while legitimacy is facilitated by the top-down support from local and national government and judiciary (Mirahmadi, 2016).

Reports on CVE in Kwale elaborate on the implementation and development of programmes for rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees, while monitoring and process evaluation remain to be published. It is noted that the evaluative literature on reintegration processes is insufficient much due to security precautions, lack of transparency, the continuous nature of the process and that many programmes remain in relatively infant stages

(Koehler, 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2019). Qualitative field research predominantly engages practitioners and mentors of previously incarcerated radicalized individuals and more research in which beneficiaries of interventions inform research is encouraged. It is argued that while comprehensive evaluation is inhibited, monitoring of the implementation of strategies is essential and can only be informed by those in the process of reintegrating (Marsden, 2017). Subsequent to the plethora of practices in conduct of disengagement, deradicalization and reintegration programmes targeting FTFs, the conceptual understanding is no longer as "undertheorized" (Noricks, 2009, p. 299) as claimed a decade ago, but remains speculative and theoretical (Gill et al., 2015).

Life Psychology – Analytical Framework

The theoretical rationale of the Life Psychology framework relies on the assumption that all humans seek to attain a good life (Bertelsen, 2015). A good life is obtained when an individual is capable of managing challenges and tasks, which is possible if the level of challenges align with an individuals developed set of abilities and skills (Bertelsen, 2015). When level of skills and tasks are aligned in a state of *flow*, it creates a sense of internal satisfaction, security and harmony (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990, ed. 2008). This satisfaction is described as *life embeddedness* (Bertelsen, 2015).

Life Embeddedness

Life embeddedness forms resilience against risks, threats and challenges (Bertelsen, 2015, 2016). The definition of life embeddedness draws on a multitude of scholars' interdisciplinary ontological concepts regarding notions of trust, coherence, belonging, existentialism and security (see Bowlby, 1988; Erikson, 1995; Kruglanski, 2012; Laing, 1969; Polanyi, 1957, and others). The active aspiration for life embeddedness is enabled through abilities, i.e. the use of *skills*, which are developed in order to approach the range of opportunities for self-fulfillment and development as well as challenges and threats, i.e. *tasks*,

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life presents (Bertelsen, 2015, 2016). The tasks and skills are argued to be fundamental and universal, irrespective of culture, gender, origin etcetera, as the aim for all human beings is to maintain life embeddedness (Bertelsen, 2015).

Life Psychology categorizes life embeddedness into three main groups: 1) *participation*, 2) *attunement*, and 3) *perspective taking*; containing the aligned skills and tasks which create the state of *flow*. However, external events such as exclusion, stigmatization or marginalization can challenge these categories, creating a state of non-flow. If tasks are not challenging enough in relation to skills developed, an individual will experience a "frustrated surplus" (Bertelsen, 2016, p. 5), i.e. *frustrating non-flow,* where tasks presented do not require meaningful use of skills. Similarly, if tasks are too challenging an individual experiences "overwhelming deficit", i.e. *overwhelming non-flow*, as one's skills are not sufficient to handle tasks (Bertelsen, 2016, p. 5).
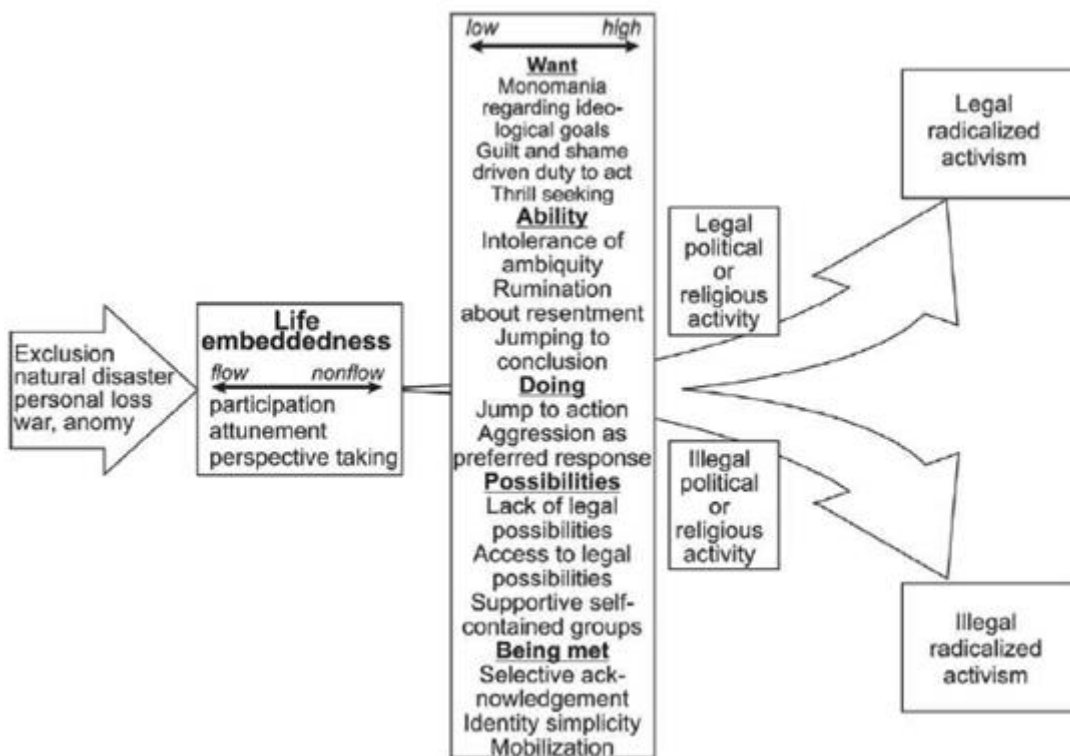

Figure 1. Source: Bertelsen, 2015, p. 249

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Participation

To obtain a satisfactory level of participation, an individual uses skills to actively participate in the construct of life. This entails being part of a community while: developing social relationships; shaping framework for preferences and interests; enrolling in meaningful activities, e.g. interest groups or recreational activities; and, being able to influence the social environment (Bertelsen, 2016). Frustrating non-flow can occur if participation is disabled by deficit in support or not acknowledged by the surroundings (Bertelsen, 2016). Overwhelming non-flow can occur when possibilities for participation are too complex for developed skillset (Bertelsen, 2016).

Attunement

Life embeddedness entails the aligning of morals, beliefs and way of living with the surrounding reality. This is enabled when an individual is realistic, pragmatically sets goals and makes plans for how to use skills to successfully and efficiently arrive at objectives (Bertelsen, 2016). Frustrating non-flow can occur if the surrounding environment is insecure or chaotic, which makes aligning impossible. Overwhelming non-flow can occur if future planning is unpragmatic due to lack of clear agenda, or when expectations are confusing or not clearly perceived by the individual (Bertelsen, 2016).

Perspective Taking

Perspective taking entails the ability to understand own and others' perspectives, wants and needs, and structural regulations, systems and rules (Bertelsen, 2016), which includes ability to develop empathy and to be able to sense and correspond to not verbally expressed signals from others. Frustrating non-flow can occur when not exposed to other perspectives, i.e. when the ability to understand others is neither challenged nor developed. Overwhelming non-flow can occur when understanding and perspective taking is impossible due to unclear or insufficient information available (Bertelsen, 2016).

Threatened Life Embeddedness

When life embeddedness is threatened, the individual will resort to activities aimed at restoring the state of *flow* (2015). The reaction is argued to be natural and universal, undertaken through efforts to either change the own life or the external surroundings through the use of skills (Bertelsen, 2015). A set of moderating factors are argued to determine how an individual will use skills to restore life embeddedness: if factors are in a low-state mode, skills will be expressed through legal activity; and, if in a high-state mode, one will turn to illegal activism or violent extremism (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016). The factors are *want*, *ability*, *doing*, *possibilities* and *being met*. Bertelsen (2016) describes *want* as the expression of motivation and level of energy to use a skill; *ability* as the internal, cognitive and practical capacity to use a skill; *doing* as the actualizing or realizing action in using a skill; *possibilities* as the external and structural factors such as norms and laws which guides ways to develop skills; and, *being met* as having support or being acknowledged by society (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016). Figure 1 portrays how these factors, in a high-state mode, can lead to radicalized activism.

Illegal Radicalized Activism

The Life Psychology framework recognizes different types of extremism, and Bertelsen (2016) highlights how important it is to distinguish between non-violent and violent extremism. Above elaborated factors will determine which path the individual seeking to reconstruct life embeddedness will embark on: resorting to legal political or religious activity or illegal activities which can escalate to illegal radicalized activism (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016).

Reintegrating by Restoring Life Embeddedness

The fundamental aspiration to actively direct competencies towards establishing life embeddedness is undertaken in non-radical and extremist environments alike when life embeddedness is perceived as threatened (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016), and hence the Life Psychology framework can be argued to work in reverse; according to which disengaging

individuals are to be empowered with opportunities to develop skills to handle challenges faced in reintegration.

Needless to say, individuals who have committed atrocities and violations of human rights should undergo applicable judicial procedures. However, in the events that evidence are insufficient for a conviction or FTFs have been pardoned with amnesty, it is essential that the individual is enabled to align skills and tasks to restore and reconstruct life embeddedness (Bertelsen, 2015). Bertelsen (2015) argues that building resilience through dialogue, education, counselling and other efforts will assist in transforming the moderating factors; initially in a high-state mode triggering the individual to resort to radical illegal extremism, amended to low-risk mode to enable the individual to develop *participation*, *attunement* and *perspective taking*. Bertelsen argues that the Life Psychology framework demonstrates that this is possible and necessary (2015).

Use and Choice of Framework

The study adopts the main assumption of the Life Psychology framework; the human aspiration to restore or construct life embeddedness. Hence, the analytical framework is allowed to partially guide identifying factors of relevance for the analysis of the reintegration process experienced by returning FTFs in Kwale, in order to assess if moderation of factors enable restoring life embeddedness. Since the skills used to reconstruct life embeddedness are determined in relation to external structures and conditions (Bertelsen, 2016), views of stakeholders and actors in CVE initiatives and reintegration programmes complement the experiences accounted by returnees.

The framework distinguishes itself as one of few existing disciplines addressing both the motivating factors for radicalization as well as components inducive of reintegration (Bertelsen, 2015; Ozer and Bertelsen, 2019); as push- and pull factors for radicalization do not directly reflect those of deradicalization, yet are assessed to be connected (Bertelsen, 2015; Koehler, 2016; Kruglanski et al., 2019). The framework currently offers the theoretical foundation for the Aarhus Model; an anti- and deradicalization initiative piloted in the

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individualistic context of Aarhus, Denmark, in 2014 (RAN, 2016; 2017). Due to security concerns regarding the reintegration of returning FTFs, the model has not been implemented without critique, as the approach has attracted attention as a "hug a terrorist"-model (SBS, 2017). Nevertheless, the theoretical foundation of the Aarhus Model presents a relevant framework for analysis of how reintegration is experienced by FTFs returning to origins elsewhere, due to it being presented as a generalizable theory (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016; Ozer and Bertelsen, 2019).

Methodological Framework

The methodological approach for the conduct of the study is a qualitative case study of Kwale, in order to enhance understanding for the reintegration process (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Thomas and Mohan, 2015). The study adopts an interpretivist epistemological position, as it seeks to understand the phenomena of reintegration by bringing forth the participants' perceptions, without attributing Kwale characteristics of generalized reintegration derived from a global imperative or discourse (Bryman, 2016). It takes on a constructionist ontological position as the characteristics of reintegration are assumed to be a result of human interaction. The chosen logic of abduction allows for the analytical framework to guide, yet not lead, the study while illuminating challenges experienced which will further be allowed to improve the theoretical framework (Bryman, 2016; Danermark et al., 2002).

Sampling and Primary Data Collection

Method for data collection include snowball sampling of interviewees, with which 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted: 10 with key informants, i.e. FTFs labelled as returnees (R), including 6 male and 4 female respondents in age range from 24 to 50 years. All interviewed returnees identify as Muslim and all but 2 belong to the Digo ethnic group. 9

are part of the amnesty programme announced by the GoK in 2015 (Kenya Gazette, 2017) and 1 (R10) is an unregistered beneficiary of other implemented initiative.

Key respondents' accounts are complemented and validated by 14 key stakeholders and actors prominent in reintegration initiatives, consisting of: 2 professors (P) with significant experience in research on CVE and reintegration in Kenya; 6 civil society actors (CSAs), ranging from volunteers in community based organizations (CBOs) to coordinators and executive directors of non-governmental organizations (NGOs); 1 distinguished religious leader (RL); 2 official actors (OAs), of which 1 on county level and 1 on national level; and 3 international actors (IAs).

Further, the study adopts data triangulation, i.e. review and analysis of primary and secondary data, including official documents and academic literature, not only to validate gathered data but to increase understanding for the phenomena of reintegration in Kwale (Yeasmin and Rahman, 2012).

Limitations and Delimitations

The sampling was limited to include, with 2 exceptions, individuals identifying with being Muslim and Digo, which is not to ignore that individuals identifying with other or no religion, and from different socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic communities, engage in violent extremism. Nevertheless, triangulating this occurrence notes marginalization of the Digo community in Kwale, while representative of ethnic majority of individuals from the area radicalized or recruited to Al Shabaab (CSA1; CSA4; IA3; OA1; OA2).

Delimited to the reintegration process facilitated locally in Kwale County while exclusively focusing on strategies developed for returning FTFs pardoned with amnesty, i.e. returnees not prosecuted or incarcerated following conviction of terrorism offence according to Kenyan Law (Kenya Law, 2015), the study excludes accounts of radicalized individuals who have joined the domestic secessionist group Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) or other local, regional or transnational extremist movements.

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Ethical Considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, conducted in a fragile and violent environment, ethical issues demand detailed consideration. Snowball sampling stresses close attention to integrity and contextual power relations in order for all respondents to participate voluntarily (Cronin-Fruman and Lake, 2018), fully aware of the objectives of the study (Bryman, 2016, referencing Diener and Crandall, 1978), and from whom informed consent is obtained. The interviewed returnees were sampled on premises of being able to assess their reintegration process, i.e. interviews were not conducted with vulnerable individuals who had recently returned or were in earlier stages of reintegration.

Objective, and throughout research continuous, risk assessments were carried out to ensure interviews would not pose security threats to respondents, researcher or surroundings, while ensuring cooperative organizations at no point compromised their ethics of conduct (Cronin-Fruman and Lake, 2018). The objective of learning from CVE practices in Kwale to inform strategy development elsewhere was disclosed while exercised with caution, so as to not violate sentiments, culture or values of participants (Bryman, 2016).

Contextualization

The coastal county of Kwale spearheaded the development of CVE strategies in Kenya (RoK, 2017); divided into preventive and curative efforts aimed to guide the multi-stakeholder approach. The reintegration component of the strategy addresses associated challenges and assigns responsibility to county and government officials, but avails room for cooperation with "strategic partners" (RoK, 2017, p. 53). The latter is not in law amendable, as association with FTFs is illegal unless the returning FTFs obtains amnesty. However, the amnesty, declared by the President in 2014, is not Gazetted and has hence not been formally adopted as a law-abiding policy.

Subsequent to the announced amnesty, an international organization (IO), together with government officials and civil society actors, introduced a livelihood program targeting

returnees. 48 identified beneficiaries received counselling and livelihood alternatives such as boda-bodas [motorcycles] or tuk-tuks [auto rickshaws] for operating transport businesses, and refrigerators and freezers for fish vending (CSA1; CSA5; CSA6; IA1; P2). The effort is described as a "disaster" (P1; P2) due to the identities of, with amnesty pardoned, returnees made public; provoking retaliatory attacks by returnees who were not availed the same opportunities, or whom perceived returning FTFs as traitors (BRICS, 2016; P1; P2). Actors explain that this triggered a wave of killings of returnees (Capital News, 2017; Guardian, 2017; Mwabege, 2016; CSA1; P1; P2), sporadic yet persistent during the time of research. The deteriorating security situation has been countered with firm measures by government officials and security forces, culminating in extrajudicial violence, killings and disappearances.

Parallel to ongoing recruitment (BRICS, 2016; CSAs; OAs; Rs), FTFs disengage from Al Shabaab: some due to experienced discrimination in the ranks or disillusionment due to inconsistency between held beliefs and reality, others for retaliatory reasons. Interviewed returnees account for intentions to reintegrate; some indicating missing family while all imply longing for security and acceptance (CSA2; CSA4; CSA5; OA1; P2; R1; R2; R7; S1). Regardless of reasons and ways to disengage, whether dynamic changes in attitude or behavior (Altier et al., 2014; Khalil et al., 2019), many of the responding returning FTFs express a strong fear for Al Shabaab left behind as well as a fear of what they face in their respective communities in Kwale.

Findings – Returning Home

Returning FTFs face multiple challenges upon return, including difficulties in rejoining community as well as possible acts of retaliation from radicals who return not intending to reintegrate. For many, returning to communities becomes a gradual process during which majority of respondents initially lived in hiding. While none of the respondents publicly disclosed their affiliation with Al Shabaab, most respondents recount being met with

suspicion and resentment due to circulating rumors (R1; R6; R7). R2 and R8 were welcomed back by family, yet experienced being avoided by community members. In contrast, when R10 returned home in 2015, her family rejected her. She retells staying indoors, afraid of being killed due to community speculation regarding her association with Al Shabaab, and was hence forced to relocate to a new area where her background remained unknown. Respondents R3, R4 and R5 were able to join their communities directly upon return, as their affiliation with Al Shabaab remained unknown.

Actors describe returning FTFs as rightfully "suspicious" (CSA3; OA1); perceived as security threats which community members are not hesitant to expose to security agents (CSA1; CSA3; CSA4; CSA5; CSA6; OA1; OA2). Societal resentment is acknowledged as a factor rendering returnees unsure of who they can turn to (CSA1), and it is known that many returnees first turn to families and their immediate social network, including religious communities (CSA5); CSA3 concurring "[t]hose are the houses that they run to first". CSA5, a local peace committee member, explains that civil society actors convene around this initial network to engage in dialogue, in order to support family members as they convince returnees to "embrace amnesty" (CSA5). A religious leader discloses that many returnees frequently visit mosques upon return to communities (RL1). However, an actor states that "community preparedness for reintegration of these people is still very low" (CSA4) and others note that communities often stigmatize those associated with recruits and returnees (OA2; P1). Families are stigmatized and accused of e.g. "eating from the profits" of terrorism (P2), hiding returnees (CSA3) and perceiving returnees as heroes (OA1). This is argued to compromise deradicalization and reintegration programmes, as it is important for security and community to know who enrolls in the reintegration process and with what motives (IA1; OA1; OA2).

The Amnesty

All interviewed returnees, with one exception (R10), have obtained amnesty. The conduct of practices under the amnesty and related programmes have presented opportunities and severe challenges to beneficiaries.

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Returnees have been enabled to engage with the GoK in ways not possible in absence of an amnesty (CSA3; OA1; R1). Prior to the announcement of the amnesty programme (Kenya Gazette, 2017), a limited number of returnees were approached and encouraged to partake in dialogue with government officials and civil society actors to inform practice (R1, R6). Actors confirm having engaged in identifying and profiling returnees on behalf of the government (CSA1; CSA4; CSA6) and CSA6, engaged with returnees whom on return to Kenya were hiding prior to surrendering, accounts "[i]t's very risky to meet someone with an AK47 in a forest" (CSA6).

One of the respondents confirms receiving a motorcycle through the programme (R2), others assess it has opened a platform for counselling and support (R9; R10) while some refer to a land cultivation project enabling a collective of returnees to engage in farming (R4; CSA1; CSA6). However, all respondents are critical to how the practice has been carried out and stress the severe limitations regarding the missing legal framework for amnesty. R7 explains; "Since 2015, we have that concept [of amnesty], but [it] is not a policy". The missing policies are stated as reason to why many returning FTFs disregard obtaining amnesty, which in turn has caused cleavages among returnees. Fear as well as envy related to livelihood alternatives provided to returnees enrolled in amnesty programmes, whose identities have not been anonymized in communities, induce retaliation by other returnees (CSA1; CSA2; R4). The latter group can be categorized in returnees who are either afraid to enroll, those awaiting appropriate time to enroll meanwhile fearing being identified by amnesty-protected returnees, and those who are simply unwilling to reintegrate and accuse others of betrayal (CSA3; CSA6; OA1; OA3).

All respondents accuse security agents for the use of excessive force and extrajudicial killings targeting returnees. The representative for the County Commission, under which the mandate of security officials is established, states that the County Commission "does not give [security officials] instructions on what to do in their day to day activities" and "only gives them instructions on policy" (OA1). The representative states that arrests of returning FTFs engaged in criminal activities or those not enrolled in amnesty might lead some to incorrectly

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believe returnees explicitly are harassed (OA1). Furthermore, local elders [respected informal community leaders] and peace committee members, with relations to security officials, have been killed by, allegedly, returnees (CSA1; CSA2; Mwabege, 2016).

All actors and stakeholders express concerns for how spoilers approach programmes, but rely on identification conducted by the government and civil society, and the County Commission representative states; "We have a way of finding out whether he is a genuine one or not" (OA1). A professor states the amnesty strategy "wasn't effective because the government was not prepared to have a long-term view of the amnesty" (P1). Several actors engaging in reintegration initiatives believe that returnees accept amnesty only in the absence of other alternatives (CSA2; CSA4; CSA5; OA2), CSA4 stating; "They know they will be killed if they don't [enroll]". The county official confirms that returnees who do not obtain amnesty are arrested and prosecuted (OA1).

Engaging with Communities

Many respondents participate as active community members, engaged in CVE initiatives to prevent radicalization. R1 describes himself as an activist who participated in forming a local organization for returnees. The organization is registered and supported by an established CSO in the area, and committed returnees are described as "change agents" (CSA6). Furthermore, returnees partake in integration programmes such as football tournaments enabling returnees and law enforcement officers to interact in order to mitigate cleavages, while others actively participate in preventive initiatives targeting youth vulnerable to recruitment (R1; R6; R7). R7 participates as an active community member by "going to peace forums, chief barazas [public meetings], weddings, burials, to sit in mosque and advice young brothers" (R7), and R9 and R10 have received support and counselling through targeted programmes. Some of the returnees interviewed participate in their communities in the roles of parents; R2 and R7 have since their return gotten married and had children, which has enhanced their community participation.

Actors interviewed express certain expectations regarding how returning FTFs should act when returning to communities. Many note how returnees "isolate" themselves from social settings (CSA1; CSA2; CSA4; CSA5). Hence, initiatives are designed with youth and madrasa leaders perceived as mentors and "the confidants of the people who return" (CSA3). Furthermore, returnees are assisted in obtaining "government services so that they can […] apply for grants to start income generating activities" (CSA3). While many returnees have not obtained or concluded secondary education (CSA1; CSA5; OA1), it is noted socioeconomic or sociopolitical status is not a determinant for recruitment or radicalization (Marsden, 2016; RAN, 2016). Nevertheless, a county official argues that returnees lack capacity, knowledge, education and tools to "restart their lives" and asserts that the government takes responsibility in capacity building and availing tools for development (OA1). In return, it is emphasized that it is fair to "expect [returnees] to take advantage of the skills to better their lives" (OA1). A religious leader emphasizes that some returnees are educated carpenters, masonries and electricians, while some holders of driver's licenses, arguing "it's a part of the puzzle for us to find ways in which we can help" (RL1) in encouraging developing and actualizing skills in practice. RL1 believes that if returnees are given financial incentives, they are more encouraged to commit to reintegration and not turn to criminal activities (RL1). A professor confirms that livelihood alternatives provided incite reintegration (P1).

Some actors have noted that CVE and reintegration initiatives are by many only seen as a sector for employment, resulting in "a lot of competition, a lot of duplication" (CSA6) among stakeholders. It is urged that the work "should be genuine" (CSA6) and "[w]hen you do something, you need to do it from your heart" (CSA1). Returnees are encouraged to work with CVE initiatives, as they are key actors in informing the design of programmes (OA2) and possess "battlefield intelligence […] that would never be shared with law enforcement and security" (IA1).

However, P1 discusses a notion of polarization between the "different segmentations of society"; i.e. beneficiaries and practitioners, retelling how national figures engaged in reintegration initiatives display prejudice using "a lot of stereotypes in defining the people

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that they [are] supposed to have interventions with" (P1), which discourages cooperation. Furthermore, some actors acknowledge societal failure "to offer [returnees] a sense of belonging" (CSA1; CSA2; CSA3) and "[f]eeling loved" (CSA3).

Conforming to Reintegration

Some of the respondents describe experiencing rehabilitation, cognitive and behavioral, through counselling or participation in various activities, which has enabled them to readjust morals, beliefs or values to align those of their respective communities. R9 states; "I didn't feel like talking, I didn't feel like telling anyone anything", until she was encouraged to participate in a forum for victims of violent extremism, where she received counselling. R10 retells how she used to "have so many nightmares, the flashbacks of what happened" and is grateful for the counselling and support from the women's network. R3 explains that despite difficulties faced since returning from Somalia, she would never return. She finds that it is better to "die at home rather than to die outside", referring to encountered challenges in Kenya in comparison with those in Somalia (R3).

Others express discontent or similar sentiments and perceptions of grievances as prior to joining Al Shabaab. Despite his activism in the community, R1 still indicates a strong sense of obedience to leader figures. He explains he would not hesitate to rejoin Al Shabaab if a prominent leader in his religious community was to encourage the engagement. R4 refers to the contingent nature of humans, and since "a human can change at any time" he cannot assure he would not opt out of the reintegration process. He struggles with what he describes as "wrong" ways of living among his country men, who do not "follow the rules of Allah" (R4). He also states that if extrajudicial killings continue and more individuals enrolled in, or affiliated with, amnesty are killed "by the Government", he will see no other option than to leave Kenya. R7 says that he has considered going back to Somalia, but refrains from rejoining as he is reluctant "to see fighting [and] to shed a lot of blood".

An INGO representative believes commitment to reintegrate can be categorized as "egocentric security reasons" by individuals who do not give up ideological believes, or as a

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"change of mind" subsequent to not ideologically motivated recruitment (IA1). Some civil society actors believe returnees commit to reintegration due to them being "young when recruited" (CSA1) and as they have grown, they "welcome new things in life, like family" (CSA3). According to actors, they engage returnees in actively deciding and planning their own futures; CSA6 explains that "[b]ecause they were in another world and now they came back" it is important to ask "[w]hat do they want to do for a living?".

Former ideologically motivated recruits imply they could, in certain circumstances, rejoin Al Shabaab. This implies importance in working with ideological sentiments, which is often carried out through counter-narratives. Actors express differing opinions regarding the approach, stating that "their entry point is actually to challenge the jihad" in religious spaces, which is argued to hold potential to do more harm than good among those ideologically radicalized (P1). P1 confirms having "never met a returnee who says that if a jihad is called by the competent Muslim leader, they would not participate in it because fighting is wrong", and assures; "if they find another place that interprets jihad properly, they will be prepared to participate in it again" (P1). In addition; CSA3 expresses fear that when recruited, returnees felt "they are loved, they are liked, they are listened to" which might motivate rejoining (CSA3).

Developing Understanding for Community Perception

Some interviewees portray understanding for how communities and officials perceive them (R1; R9), whereas others have not reflected on community-held perceptions (R3; R5; R8). While some think they should be met differently, i.e. receive more understanding and support (R3; R4), others contemplate how communities' perceptions affect reintegration efforts (R1; R6; R7; R9). In addition, some returnees express thoughts on their role and responsibility in reintegration (R1; R2; R6; R9).

R4 says he has not undergone a change following his return; "I left the fight, but I didn't change. I am a Muslim and I will remain so until my death" and elaborates on his held belief that "[a]ll non-Muslims are thinking that Muslims are terrorists". R1 acknowledges the

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fear of returnees among communities and the government, but encourages mutual trust by lowering levels of fear; "It's not good for a man or a woman to live in fear all the time. Or to live in the bush all the time, like an animal." He encourages unconditional support of returnees, even in the event of setbacks; "[e]ither they [the efforts] work or they don't work, but [the community] should embrace them [returnees]". He continues; "Even a mad person, if you embraced him, he will see you're a good person. So you can shave him, you can take of his clothes and be washed, and he can embrace you. But if you see a mad person and always you are chasing him away, when he sees you, he will run" (R1). R9 further addresses practitioners in CVE initiatives, urging; "[t]hey don't have to give up on us, even if we are too hard to understand. But they have to give us their benefit of that doubt, to listen to us, to hear us, even if we make trouble, they have to bear with us." She portrays a strong commitment to helping others who have been in her situation and stresses the need to assure returning FTFs and victims of terror they are not alone in their "suffering", which gives her a sense of fulfillment (R9).

R8 explains how he, despite difficulties, feels loved by his family. In return, his commitment to his family, including parents, 2 wives and 11 children, makes him commit to reintegration. R2 indicates feelings of owing community and family his contribution, social and financial, in order to be accepted back into the community. He explains it has been difficult to connect with community again, and that the resentment he perceives from the community members was not what he expected. He elaborates on his sense of exclusion; "When I go to the football like here, I can sit alone" and expresses a wish for the community to know he is a good person and that he regrets he joined Al Shabaab.

R7 says he received help from a local human rights organization to understand his rights, which equipped him with knowledge useful when confronted by law enforcement. CSA1, CSA4 and CSA6 confirm how volunteers and organizations have worked to raise returnees' knowledge of human rights. In the meantime, county officials acknowledge that stigmatization is an issue (OA1) and hence actors emphasize how reintegration "has to be done in two ways" (CSA4); by "preparing the community to understand that these people […]

need our support" and "the foreign fighters, returnees, defectors, to know that the community that they want to […] reintegrate with, would not view them as they did before" (CSA4). Managing expectations of returnees and communities alike is seen as essential (CSA1; CSA2; CSA4; CSA6).

Some actors advocate for compassion and understanding (CSA1) and highlight how returnees willing to reintegrate despite fear, as they "want to be safe" (CSA2), indicates commitment (CSA3). Some actors describe a sense of responsibility; "they are our youth" (CSA6), and a will to help the ones who are "a part of our communities, our families" (RL1). Others emphasize a "human rights perspective" per which a victim-centered focus and reconciliation need to be prioritized prior to offering returning FTFs "blanket amnesties" (CSA4). A representative for an international security think tank further stresses that amnesty should not be availed to criminals: returnees who either committed criminal acts prior to their affiliation with Al Shabaab, or those who resorted to criminal activity once back in Kenya. An INGO representative emphasizes the "fine line" between what is or is not appropriate in conduct of reintegration programmes and stresses the need to ask; "What is the bigger objective for security?" (IA1).

Trust

Trust between returning FTFs and community members as well as trust between different groups of returnees is fragile. The absence of legal structures for the reintegration process is highlighted to undermine the practice, which arguably amplifies the sense of lacking trust between all actors, practitioners and beneficiaries.

The level of trust indicated by returning FTFs varies from non-existent to high towards different actors and community members but, overall, returnees trust only a few close individuals such as sheikhs and religious leaders (R1), family (R1; R2; R3; R4) or close community members (R5; R9; R10). R7 says he does not trust anyone. R9 stresses the importance of a returnee to trust in order to heal; "When you remove what you have inside, the torture inside you […] [y]ou feel good, you can feel free" (R9).

Stakeholders and actors recognize that returnees trust "people who they believe can help them" (RL1) and the ones who "took time to win their hearts, and win their trust" (CSA1). County officials acknowledge that returnees do not trust government agents, i.e. the County Commission or security officials, and actors emphasizes how returnees fear judicial procedures even when pleading guilty for amnesty. The "biggest challenge for the returnee" remains to know "who is genuine or not" (CSA4) and for the actors to know if returnees remain a threat (P1) or if they "return for legitimate reasons" (IA1). Notably, some actors acknowledge that returnees trust the County Government (CSA4), as it is elected and "constituted by locals" (CSA4; P2). The same actors, however, find that the County Government of Kwale seems "uninterested politically" (CSA4; CSA5), portraying "no commitment" (CSA4; CSA6). It is argued that the County Government refers to the New Constitution of 2010 (Kenya Law, 2010) according to which security matters fall under the national governments jurisdiction (P1; BRICS, 2016), but actors are critical regarding how they "narrow their definition of security to regard solely crime" (P1), interpreting CVE and reintegration as outside of their mandate (IA3; P1).

Legal Framework and Structure for Coordination

All returnees have elaborated on implications of missing legal frameworks on security, trust and, ultimately, ability to reintegrate. Actors and stakeholders concur with insufficient frameworks posing the biggest challenge in engaging with returnees, and hence call for structure and coordination among actors (CSA1; CSA3; CSA5), will from national officials (CSA6; P2) and clear legal guidelines (CSA4; P1; P2; RL1). An actor refers to the Prevention of Terrorism Act criminalizing association with terror suspects (Kenya Law, 2015) restricting engagement with returnees as it is seen as "facilitating or sympathizing [with terrorists]" (CSA4). Yet, civil society actors defyingly conduct grass root initiatives as they await law amendments "so that they respond to the real situation on the ground" (CSA4; CSA6). Local actors and an international think-tank representative advocate for CVE objectives to be incorporated in the Kwale County Integrated Development Plan for it to be prioritized and

operationalized (CSA3; CSA4; IA3). CSA3 emphasizes that "[w]e'll use less time, less resources, but achieve more" if a coordinated approach is committed to by all actors and stakeholders. NCTC is referred to as "failing the society" (CSA6) in not allocating sufficient financial support to initiatives (P1; P2), not carrying out its mandate under the Prevention of Terrorism Act Article 40B (2) (Kenya Law, 2015) to co-ordinate national counter-terrorism efforts, nor developing coordinated strategies (CSA4, CSA6).

An international actor expresses a willingness to assist the GoK in reintegration initiatives, but as a legal framework is yet to be presented for assessment and evaluation, "material restrictions" (IA2) legally confine association with reintegration programmes. An INGO representative states that international actors can assists states and domestic stakeholders upon request, as government commitment is necessary to ensure understanding for local dynamics and implementation of process of change (IA1).

Analysis

Adopting the central assumption of the Life Psychology framework; that all individuals exercise agency in restoring life embeddedness when experiencing it to be threatened or in a state of non-flow (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016), a returning FTF is seen to restore the optimal state of *flow*, through reintegrating in the communities they return to.

Reintegration will be assumed to entail 1) *participation*; creating a sense of belonging through actively taking part in the community, 2) *attunement*; adjusting morals and beliefs to the community, and 3) *perspective taking*; developing understanding for others as well as the FTFs own part in the community (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016). The moderating factors for the outcome, of each category respectively, is demonstrated by the FTF's *want*, *ability*, *doing*, *possibility* and *being met. Want* is a sentiment of willingness expressed by the returning FTF, and *ability* is their individual capacity. *Doing* constitutes the actions undertaken. *Possibility* refers to how the FTF access opportunities offered through external factors such as laws,

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norms and societal structures and *being met* is used as a reference to other acknowledging the returning FTF.

Commitment to Reintegration

It is worth noting that the cost-benefit analysis made by an FTF deciding to leave Al Shabaab and return to Kwale, despite the life-threatening risks this poses, portrays high levels of will to return but says little about actual reasons to reintegrate. All respondents, including R10 who is not officially enrolled in the amnesty, have benefitted from amnesty programmes. It is the only legitimate way for returning FTFs to reintegrate, acknowledged by the returnees and actors alike. Being pardoned with amnesty is hence seen as the first, inevitable step in the process of reintegration and will not be analyzed per se, but the associated subsequent experiences and challenges will be elaborated on as part of *participation*, *attunement* and *perspective taking* as the returning FTF aspire to restore life embeddedness (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016).

Participation

Participation entails, according to the Life Psychology, being an active member of a community, in which one partakes in meaningful activities, develops skills and relationships as well as exercise positive social influence (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016).

All interviewed FTFs express a *want* to join their communities again, observable by seeing to how all indicate wanting to be accepted. The respondents assert a desire to join their families again and to obtain a sense of security. However, the authenticity of expressed desire for communal participation is challenged by the lack of other options than obtaining amnesty. Interviewed FTFs demonstrate an *ability* to actively participate by creating a sense of belonging in their communities. Returning FTFs engage in CVE initiatives, which enables them to socially influence their surrounding environment and therefore enhance their participation. It is acknowledged, by returnees and actors alike, that returnees are able to contribute to CVE due to their first-hand experience in radicalization and violent extremism.

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The actual participation, i.e. *doing*, is portrayed by participation in recreational activities with fellow community members. This bridges between different segments of the society but is challenged by publicly displayed resentment experienced by some of the returnees, making some FTFs withdraw from social settings.

The *possibility* to participate is initially offered through the amnesty. It is the primary enabler to societal participation, which is secondarily enabled by civil society actors offering assistance in gaining access to government services. Government actors are seen to assume responsibility in providing possibilities through vocational training, education and employment opportunities, but seem to trust that possibilities are already availed. This challenges participation, as the returning FTFs are expected to seize opportunities they do not perceive available to them, e.g. university enrollment and employment. Furthermore, returnees portray an inclination to supporting provision of economic incentives in encouraging participation and reintegration, and the sentiment is shared with local actors. External actors on the other hand believe this undermines the reintegration process, with reference to the implications of providing returnees livelihood alternatives in a society where many experience marginalization, discrimination and inequality (RoK, 2017); conditions which fuel illegal radicalized activism in the first place.

Being met entails being acknowledged and supported, which only few of the returning FTFs experience via family members or civil society actors who engage FTFs in dialogue with the government and stakeholders. However, the majority are met with resentment by family, who risk stigmatization if associating publicly with returning FTFs. This is illustrated by how e.g. R10 is rejected by family and forced to relocate fearing for her life.

In conclusion, the studied sample express want and ability to participate, which enables them to exercise agency in obtaining societal acceptance and reconciliation with their families. Furthermore, some returnees portray a strong inclination to help others who share their experiences as well as obtain livelihood alternatives provided. However, possibilities are structurally challenged by insecurity, not accessing opportunities, and how returning FTFs are

met with a deficit in support and acknowledgement as they attempt to participate. Many are rejected or isolated.

Attunement

Restoring life embeddedness requires the FTF to attune, i.e. pragmatically align beliefs, morals and way of living with the surrounding reality as well as plan realistic goals along with ways of arriving at those objectives (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016).

All interviewed FTFs have portrayed a willingness, i.e. *want*, to attune their behaviors to their respective surroundings, by leaving criminal environments or gradually returning to their communities. Furthermore, it is suggested that as young recruits grow older, their development, maturity and evolved life plans will make them want to attune to a life in their communities. However, the FTFs *ability* to attune beliefs can be questioned. Some make a cost-benefit analysis of rejoining Al Shabaab, evidently in the favor of staying in communities as costs to enlist are deemed too high. Furthermore, the applicability of the concept of attunement, including *doing*, can be challenged. FTFs who were ideologically motivated to join Al Shabaab express inclinations to rejoin the group if jihad is encouraged, which at first glance indicates inability to attune morals and beliefs if deradicalization is expected by their communities. However, attuning morals and beliefs regarding ideology might not be necessary if the community members share radical extremist sentiments.

The *possibility* to attune is dependent on external factors, such as counselling and support, which is availed to returnees by civil society actors. Receiving psychosocial support in reintegration has worked to rehabilitate some interviewees. The possibility is challenged by the state of insecurity in Kwale. Recent killings of returnees and civil society actors, committed by security officials and returnees with no intention to reintegrate, create an insecure environment undermining possibility to attune skills and believes with their surroundings.

Being met and acknowledged while attuning is observed through dedicated civil society actors supporting the returning FTFs. Some returnees are approached by fellow

returnees sharing the process of attuning, which can be assumed supportive. However, the ideologically radicalized individuals are often met by counter narratives. These are described to challenge an ideology which a returnee is not yet, and might never be, ready to discharge.

It can be concluded that the sampled FTFs attune their way of living with the communities they return to in order to obtain stability, security or because cost of rejoining Al Shabaab is deemed higher relative to staying. Possibilities and support to attune are partially accessed, through the support of fellow returnees and dedicated community members, but challenged by insecurity. FTFs interviewed seem willing to attune behavior, but unable or not required to attune beliefs; either they preserve ideologies in a non-radical setting, or the radical sentiments are shared in communities which does not require attuning. None of the ideologically motivated FTFs interviewed for this study, nor radicalized individuals whom responding actors have engaged with, indicate abandoning their radicalized ideology. Jihad remains justified, but returning FTFs believe its means of conduct in Somalia to be wrong.

Perspective Taking

Restoring life embeddedness requires the individual to both develop an understanding for their own wants and needs as well as those of others. The perspective taking entails developing empathy, ability to perceive not verbally expressed signals from the surroundings and understanding for societal structures (Bertelsen, 2015; 2016).

Returnees interviewed reflect on their *wants* and needs and those of their fellow returnees, but do not consider the wants and needs of the receiving communities. Returning FTFs long for acceptance while wanting to feel taken care of and cared for, and their advice for conduct of practices is directed towards the communities.

Much in the communities' reception of a returning FTF is not verbally expressed to the returnee. Fear is not articulated, yet understood by all returnees. This portrays an *ability* to sense not verbally expressed signals. However, few returnees reflect on their own individual association to what contributes to the fear sensed. Parallels are drawn between community perception and how FTFs are received, but fatalities and the caused suffering to victims of

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terror, through abuse, torture and murder, is not internalized despite having previously identified with Al Shabaab. An interviewee elaborates on how fear disables reintegration and believes there is a need for mutual kindness and care, acknowledges the difficulties experienced by the communities but believes the outcome would justify the lowering of their guard. Furthermore, ability to reflect on individual responsibility in the reintegration process is expressed by some who translate this into practicing perspective taking, i.e. *doing* (R1; R6; R7; R9).

Possibility to perspective taking is enabled by being exposed to other views. Segregation among majority of the FTFs and their communities prevents this, which makes evident that perceptions and beliefs are subjectively attributed by returnees to the communities and vice versa. The assumption that all non-Muslims perceive Muslims as terrorists is generalized by an interviewee, which indicates he has not been exposed to other perspectives in order to challenge the held belief. It is important to note that returnees mainly interact with other returnees and civil society actors who have arguably chosen to work with reintegration initiatives because they believe in reintegration and its importance. Hence, returning FTFs are initially *being met* by individuals with the resulting biased sentiment which is not shared by all actors. Some, more prejudice, actors alternatively believe in a security oriented hard approach in engaging with returning FTFs. Returnees might not be directly exposed to interaction with actors upholding the later beliefs, nor with victims of terror or articulated needs of receiving community members, which explains their assessment of their surrounding environment.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the FTF perspective taking is exercised to the extent that they want their immediate surrounding to understand them, in order to provide comfort and care. This is challenged by pre-formed expectations by retuning FTFs and community members alike; the former in how they expect to be received and the latter in how they expect the returnee to behave. Some community actors are willing to assist FTFs in reintegration if they meet a set of commonly understood and formulated criteria, which does not seem to be clearly communicated to the returnees. Further confusion is caused by the lack

of a coherent approach in reintegration initiatives, which inhibits ability to form a comprehensive image of the others' perspectives.

Beyond Life Embeddedness

Moving beyond the analytical framework of Life Psychology, additional challenges emerge to pose limitations to the theoretical framework and the abductive approach of this study allows suggestions for refining the framework regarding issues of trust, societal structures and the concept of attunement.

Developing Trust

All interviewees; returning FTFs, stakeholders and actors, highlight that developing a sense of trust is crucial for reintegration. Trust is seen as essential in order for returning FTFs to commit to the reintegration process and lack of trust is described as a reason for failing, leaving or abandoning the process. Majority of the returnees' trust only a few genuine actors, religious leaders and members of immediate family. This is verified and acknowledged by all stakeholders interviewed. Actors indicate that official leadership and elected leaders on county level are trusted by returning FTFs. This is not confirmed by the responding returning FTFs in this study, but elaborated on by actors who have engaged with other returnees. It is implied that exercising agency through electing local leaders works to enhance a feeling of trust. Nevertheless, developing trust is portrayed as an important component in reintegration, and a few interviewees elaborate on the importance of trust. R9 indicates it has given her a sense of fulfillment which is described valuable, and R1 encourages receiving communities to trust returnees; seen to be the only way to make reintegration possible.

Trust can be argued to be a moderating factor for how an individual will chose to use skills developed to address challenges and tasks presented by life. Low levels of trust undermine reintegration, whereas reliance, truth and confidence would be inducive for reintegration. Incorporating the component of trust as a moderating factor, among *want*, *ability*, *doing*, *possibilities* and *being met* in the Life Psychology framework, would arguably

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enhance understanding for participation, attunement and perspective taking. This, in turn, would enhance understanding for the concept of life embeddedness and what is inducive for its state of flow.

Developing Structures

The study makes evident that the absence of societal structures to legally facilitate reintegration of returning FTFs is a cause of major concern. Structures are not addressed in the Life Psychology framework, but highlighted as crucial by actors as well as returning FTFs. Actors call for legal guidelines for how to engage with returnees, and the inability to create legitimacy is attributed to the lack of legal framework, which some actors lobby for in Parliament and on local level. In the meantime, the consequences of this is that not all returning FTFs to Kwale enroll in the amnesty programmes, as their security is not guaranteed. Many fear being harassed or killed by security officials or other FTFs who do not intend to reintegrate. The latter group illustrates why efforts for successfully motivating reintegration is crucial, as some returnees' intentions are unknown which poses a severe security risk. This could be addressed through official structures. Furthermore, due to the missing framework, the returnees are unable to form realistic expectations. Hence, both returnees and actors reflect on how structure and frameworks are missing.

Without the confidence in structures, legitimacy is inhibited, which is not accounted for in the Life Psychology framework. The framework addresses the individual need to develop an understanding for existing structures and systems, but if a legal structure is non-existent, assessments evolve around illegitimate structures which do not address reality. Hence, it can be argued that flow in life embeddedness, as accounted for in the Life Psychology framework, demands legitimate structures, making the framework not applicable in environments with a weak social security structure where more pragmatic approaches are evidently necessary.

Developing Concept of Attunement

The concept of attunement emerges as a weakness in the Life Psychology framework, which demands further attention. 4 of the interviewed returning FTFs (R1; R4; R6; R7) indicate moderate to high flow in life embeddedness through community participation, attunement and perspective taking, which are assumed as preconditions for reintegration. Yet, they indicate radical sentiments and willingness to rejoin Al Shabaab if insecurity in Kwale persists, or if jihad is declared by a religious leader.

It is important to note that the baseline norm is constituted and created by the majority norm in any given society, and radicalized views justifying violent extremism represent a minority in many societies. Requiring attunement of minority norms and believes to fit those of the majority can arguably by returning FTFs be perceived as marginalizing, but nevertheless required for deradicalization in order to reintegrate. However, attunement as part of reintegration in parts of Kwale might not require deradicalization, in contrast to what is assumed in the Life Psychology framework. This could be argued to be the case for the radical FTFs interviewed, who reintegrate in a community which does not require attunement, as the radical sentiments held by the returning individual are shared by the majority of the community but where only some are triggered to violent radical activism. This indicates that one can be actively committed to the reintegration process without deradicalizing, which contradicts what is assumed in the Life Psychology framework. Hence, the Life Psychology framework does not seem to be applicable in a setting where FTFs return to an environment enclosing radical beliefs.

Conclusion

The objective of the study is to increase understanding for *why* a sustained reintegration process is experienced and committed to by reintegrating FTFs, and *how* associated challenges are addressed. The global increase in number of returning FTFs from violent extremist and terror organizations stresses the urgency of developing strategies to avert

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potential security threats and address the reintegration imperative. Arguably, the process is best informed by accounts from the returning FTFs themselves, which are accounts called for in the CVE discourse as many have returned to their county of origin and many more will follow.

The study finds that returning FTFs in Kwale are committed to the reintegration process primarily in the absence of other alternatives for rejoining their respective communities and to obtaining security. Secondarily, to receive care and compassion, majority of the FTFs turn to family and close community members, whose support and reconciliation encourages commitment to the reintegration process. The study finds that FTFs express a longing for societal acceptance and understanding, which they do little to address due to fear. Returning FTFs identify with other returnees, and display a commitment in supporting other returning FTFs in their reintegration process, while appreciate gaining the support in return. A strong incentive for commitment to the reintegration process, albeit debated among actors and practitioners, is the provision of economic incentives to encourage reintegration.

The challenges that emerge, from the studied experiences in the reintegration process, provide answers to the second research question. The challenges on structural, communal and individual level in the reintegration process in Kwale are addressed by returnees in differing ways. Structural challenges are produced by the missing legal framework for facilitation of the process of reintegration, which poses a security threat to returning FTFs and anyone they associate with. These include extrajudicial killings by security officials and extremist or radical FTFs. Insecurity excludes returning FTFs from society and prevents developing trust. Communal marginalization and stigmatization inhibit returnees from accessing educational and employment opportunities, which makes some turn to dedicated civil society actors or community members for support and assistance in navigating their way in the reintegration process. As some turn to family members, who either reject or hide the returnee, communal reintegration is inhibited. Others turn to religious leaders, whom on occasion are perceived to promote radicalization.

It can be confirmed that establishing a sense of belonging to restore life embeddedness is not solely the returning FTFs' responsibility since it requires the facilitation of communities. Due to this, the process of restoring life embeddedness is not to be seen as an isolated event solely undertaken by returnees. Both the returnees and members of the receiving societies are actively restoring a threatened life embeddedness; the former to reintegrate and the latter due to their participation, attunement and perspective taking challenged by the external security threat that has entered their communities.

Implications of the study suggest development of the Life Psychology framework. This includes the incorporation of the notion of trust as a moderating factor in order to establish life embeddedness, as well as the acknowledging the importance in legitimacy produced by societal structures in which pragmatic strategies are needed. It is important to note that actors forming the social security network in the Aarhus model, components of which the Life Psychology uses as a justification for its generalizability, are legitimate civil society actors or officials engaged in the individualized, mentoring strategies with which returning FTFs are approached. The security structure within the Danish context could be attributed more resilience and legitimacy due to the strength of social security networks, in comparison to status, strength and resources of social security in the Kenyan context. Furthermore, the development of social security networks is inhibited in an environment of corruption and inequality.

In relation to the Life Psychology framework, it can be concluded that the returning FTFs in Kwale portray experiencing possibilities to participate in their respective communities, even if so to varying degrees. However, inability to attune or take other perspectives into account, results in a state of non-flow in life embeddedness. Yet, many of the returning FTFs indicate that they are in fact reintegrating into their communities of origin, which challenges the concept of life embeddedness as an indicator for reintegration.

The returning FTFs' accounts presented have arguably highlighted the importance to more broadly and transnationally reach objectives encouraging this study; to advance understanding for experiences of returning FTFs reintegration process in order to strengthen

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individual, societal and political will to implement and sustain strategies enabling these individuals to commit to a process of reintegration. This incorporates redefining our understanding of, and demand for, deradicalization, as it might not always be necessary, possible or even societally expected.

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