Links between migration and the presence of foreign combatants in armed conflict

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Abstract

This article explores the connections between migration and foreign combat, offering an improved definition of „foreign fighters," and a general concept of foreign combatants' behaviour as an anomalous form of migration. In contrast with the popular discourse and terrorism-related concerns about present-day Western European foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria (and their return to Europe) and Middle Eastern migrant refugees (and their arrival in Europe), the intention of this article is to offer a conceptually thorough consideration of the causal connections between movements of migration and the presence of foreign combatants in armed conflict, informed by a wide sample of cases. Such an assessment has to take place with a view to all forms of migration (including forced migration), all forms of foreign combat (not only foreign combat on the side of non-state actors as David Malet's oft-cited but overly restrictive definition would imply), and regions of the world beyond the Middle East and Islamic countries. Along these guiding lines, the article points out many comparatively rarely considered cases of foreign combat as well as the underestimated obstacles in the way of fighting abroad. Taking account of the latter allows refutation of a key implication of „new war theory" (its focus on „greed" as a motive of combatants), in light of the continued importance of cultural factors and ideological motives for participation in foreign combat.

Keywords: foreign fighters, migration, transnationalisation, armed conflict, new wars

Basic considerations related to migration

Even though only a fraction of humanity participates in protracted voluntary migration (as opposed to brief visits to other countries), mobility is fundamental to human nature

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and has been a key driver of history. This is how human beings came to inhabit all continents in the first place. The more recent history of colonisation, economic development, and even that of wars cannot be told without reference to movements of migration.

Here only a few basic considerations are pointed out that shall inform the discussion that follows (based on Koser, 2007). These are (1) that migrants tend to move to places with pre-existing migrant presence of the same or a similar population (Koser, 2007: 36); (2) that as a result of their movements networks of migration spring up providing an infrastructure (the provision of information, financial resources and logistical facilitation) for continued migratory flows along the same channel (Koser, 2007: 37); (3) that a part of movements of migration is „circular" in nature, i.e. migrants may continue to move between the original source and receiving countries (Koser, 2007: 9, 51); (4) that migrants' motives for migration are typically complex, and they may fit various different conceptual and legal categories of migrants as well as change from a profile fitting one of these to one conforming to another (Koser, 2007: 18); (5) that the distinction between source, receiving and transit countries is becoming blurred as the super-network of migration becomes more and more an all-channel network;[2] and (6) that even so there are a few countries with a pure „source" character where collapsing governance and armed conflict renders flight vital and immigration implausible (and, in that sense, anomalous when it does happen).

Foreign fighters: a definition

Most foreign fighters are migrants in the sense that they live „outside their own country for a year or more" (Koser, 2007: 16), or at the least for a considerable amount of time. They are a very special subset of migrants, however, and the implications of their status as such need to be considered in detail.

Foreign fighters have been around, and involved in armed conflicts, for much longer than is generally considered. Misconceptions of their presence as a recent phenomenon derive from definitions that primarily reflect the few salient cases of contemporary conflict where foreign fighters have played a prominent role (mostly Middle Eastern conflicts with Muslim foreign fighters).

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[2] An all-channel network is one in which every node connects to all other nodes, unlike, for example, in a scale-free network where most nodes connect to a select few „popular" nodes (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001: 1; Barabási, 2013).

A common definition thus tells us that foreign fighters are „noncitizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts" (Malet, 2013: 9). This takes a number of things for granted that ought to be critically assessed.

Do the combatants of interest need to join specifically an insurgency to qualify as „foreign fighters?" Is that circumstance relevant to their being „fighters," and to their being „foreign?" Malet's definition is just as puzzling from a truly neutral analytical perspective as the tendency in terrorism research to define terrorism as „non-state actor violence." Just as states can in fact engage in the use and the support of „terrorism" (violence deliberately targeted against civilians, designed to impact on a secondary audience of observers) to further their ends, states can also welcome foreign fighters on their side, and may even incorporate them into their armed forces. The French Foreign Legion, the British Gurkhas, the International Brigades on the republican side in the Spanish civil war, the Polish soldiers who fought in the course of the Italian campaign or in Operation Market Garden during World War II, and even immigrants participating in naturalisation-through-military-service schemes[3] may all serve as examples featuring foreign fighters involved in warfare (Porch, 2010; Farwell, 1990; Chudzio and Hejczyk, 2015; Koskodan, 2011).

A definition focusing only on non-state combat may also lose sight of the frequent involvement of state parties behind non-state belligerents who serve as their proxy forces. Foreign fighters who join an insurgency or a given combatant party may be delegated to do so by a state party, at times from among members of its own regular armed forces as seems to have been the case on a number of occasions with Pakistani soldiers fighting on the side of the Afghan mujahedeen (see the example of „Colonel Imam" in e.g. Gall, 2010) and later the Taliban (see available evidence about direct Pakistani support to the latter before the 2001 intervention in Human Rights Watch, 2001).

Furthermore, the „noncitizen" criterion takes the existence of citizenship, and by implication modern nation-states, for granted. This arbitrarily narrows the time-frame of interest whereas in reality „foreignness" is a quality that predates the nation-state. One may be foreign to a given locale without having a different citizenship, and historically one may have been foreign to a given locale without having any kind of citizenship to

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[3] For instance in the United States where the Immigration and Nationality Act offers this possibility to people „who (1) have good moral character, (2) knowledge of the English language, (3) knowledge of U.S. government and history (civics), and (4) attachment to the United States by taking an Oath of Allegiance to the U.S. Constitution." See further information at https://www.uscis.gov/news/fact-sheets/naturalization-through-military-service-fact-sheet (accessed: 12 January 2016).

differentiate one from the locals resident in the area. Crusaders covered a great distance to join the struggle in what they regarded as the „Holy Land" (Hindley, 2004) just as the jihadis of today travel a great distance in many cases to help out those whom they see as their „brothers."

At the same time, „local" is in empirical reality a problematic category. Does being resident, and thus local, in one village qualify one as foreign in the case of fighting in or around the neighbouring village? The application of the term „local" in the context of most conflicts is implicit reasoning concerning the legitimacy of involvement in a given struggle in a given locale. It alludes to who belongs in that locale in the first place.[4] The Kamajor militia that played a role in Sierra Leone's stabilisation post-1995 may have been a „local force" in the eyes of the international community but, as its Mende name makes it clear, it was a force arising from the Mende-speaking southeast and was thus behaving and seen differently in other parts of the country (Ferme and Hoffman, 2004).

Combat on the side of others may be understood by the supposedly non-local combatants as „their struggle" and „their community's struggle" regardless, their notion of communal identity and territorial possession extending to the people and the area concerned. In some cases this may be an artificially or intersubjectively constructed „right" to impose an agenda unto others, irrespective of whether the others concerned are willing or not to accept said agenda. Calling a fighter a foreign fighter may itself be a tool to counter this: for the purpose of separating these combatants from the people among whom they are involved in fighting (to de-legitimise such combatants).

To use a contemporary example of the controversial (and inherently political) nature of the „foreign" label, those sharing the Islamic State's perspective in Iraq and Syria may not regard members of the broad Islamic *umma* (community) as „foreign" at all. Such a distinction may be illegitimate in their eyes in light of the „unity of the community of the believers" which they seek to emphasise. At the same time, showing the complexity of the matter at hand, even Islamic State combatants indicate attachment to different locales in their „kunyas," i.e. their *noms de guerre*: there are the „al-Libis" (Libyans), the „al-Masris" (Egyptians), the „al-Suris" (Syrians), the „al-Filastinis" (Palestinians), the „al-Shishanis" (Chechnyans); by today there are also the „al-Britani"

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[4] This may be one of the reasons for the tendency in the literature to accept the understanding that foreign fighting is connected to joining an insurgency. Joining the state may be seen by some to be somehow more normal and legitimate, In other words this is a manifestation of statism: the tendency to naturalise the state as a gatekeeper to both territory and society.

(British), the „al-Alemani" (Germans), the „al-Beljiki" (Belgians), the „al-Faransi" (Frenchmen), etc.

With a view to the above complications, a foreign fighter may be regarded as a combatant who takes part in combat within the territory of a political entity or sub-entity other than the one to which he or she has substantial attachment through birth, personal relationships, basic socialisation, and the amount of (life)time spent there, with the additional requirement that the combatant in question be <u>not</u> involved in *combat* as a member of the armed forces of his or her *home entity*.

The three definitional elements highlighted above (underlined and in italics, respectively) are reviewed below, along with other issues, to clarify and consider further details that may be relevant to careful conceptualisation.

1. The requirement of not being part of one's „own entity's" armed forces may be necessary as members of such forces typically have the nationality of the country they are fighting for. The definition thus excludes regular and other military troops involved in overtly fighting an adversary in depth, within the other party's own territory (e.g. Soviet troops advancing on Berlin in 1945, or Russian troops capturing the town of Gori during the war with Georgia in 2008), or fighting far away from their home country (e.g. Napoléon's *Grande Armée* and its fellow travellers occupying Moscow in 1812, or the Russian air force bombing targets in Syria from September 2015).

   Technological developments in warfare introduced ever larger mobility and firepower to the battlespace, and this played an important role in compelling leading powers' armed forces to become globally deployable and dispersed even in peacetime.[5] Economic and political interconnectedness worked to the same effect, along with the pull of economic interests.

   In the globalised political context and highly transnational social world of today military forces may have numerous reasons to remain engaged in different tasks around the world, be it as peacekeepers (in Peace-Keeping Forces or PKFs from the Sinai Peninsula to Kosovo), as observers (from the

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[5] With reference to the need for power projection and rapid response capability related to developments even in peripheric areas, 2nd strike capability in prospective nuclear warfare (by submarines and Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles), security reassurance to allies fearing attack, and the evolving capability of intercontinental warfare (to name a few of the specific reasons that explain this).

Golan Heights to Jammu and Kashmir) or as forces forward-deployed with a view to contingencies (such as the U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet which has its „Garrison/HQ" in Bahrein). This is relevant because it would be wrong to deny that members of military forces serving abroad actually constitute a special subset of legal migrant labourers.[6]

2. The word „home" in „home entity" in the above definition acknowledges the elusive or intersubjective nature of what makes a foreign fighter „foreign:" through the question of whether a combatant has a larger political entity or sub-entity to call „home" other than the one where he or she is fighting. In some cases this is not a simple question. Most of Israel's overseas recruits in the First Arab-Israeli War emerged from among the „overseas enlistees" (Ga'hal) who joined its armed forces in Palestine from among the ranks of the Jewish population in Displaced Persons camps around Europe, in the wake of World War II. The Allied Powers originally intended to re-settle these people „in their respective countries" – countries that in many cases proved less than accomodating towards them and to which they did not necessarily wish to return. Instead, many of them were looking to Palestine as their future home, and many were persuaded to accept that prospect in the years that ensued [even as others re-settled elsewhere] (Cohen, 2011; Yablonka, 1992; Zertal, 1998).

Another peculiar example in this respect is the case of Poles who were forcibly removed from Polish areas by Soviet forces after the Soviet aggression against Poland in 1939, and eventually set up the Polish Army in the USSR (upon Nazi Germany's attack against the Soviet Union). This exile army, created to serve at the side of Soviet forces, evacuated eventually to Iran, and merged in the Middle East with other elements into the 2nd Polish Corps (Chudzio and Hejczyk, 2015: 17-20).

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[6] The term „entity" is used instead of „state," and this is relevant with a view to the times before the rise of the modern state. To operationalise how the distinction may apply (rather problematically) in a given case, French crusaders, for example, would have qualified as foreign combatants on the basis of fighting not for the French Kingdom *per se*, in lands distant from home, doing so in a force of diverse composition – a force that was often quite disorganised as well. They were, at the same time, acting under the Pope's guidance (albeit behaving not always in accordance with it, in practice), and may have joined a crusade and fought in it in direct service of their feudal lord – all of which makes categorisation in their case problematic. (On the organisation, including recruitment, of the first crusades, see Lloyd, 1999b: 47-53.) Swiss pikemen or German *Landsknechte* from Swabia (*Schwaben*) in foreign service would be purer examples from medieval times.

3. The reference to „combatant" is interesting in and of itself. The conduct of war is per definition a life and death matter. How a combatant who may have other, „nearer" enemies, ends up in potentially lethal engagement with a fighting force in a different locale, and why he or she does so, is always an intriguing issue to investigate.

It is a common idea to think of the people concerned as either *mercenaries* (people who are financially motivated), or *fanatics* (people who are, at the very least, strongly committed to an idea), or somehow the *ethnic kin* of the local combatants (and thus motivated by solidarity, in which case they are not as clearly „foreign" as in other cases). In reality, however, these three categories may be found to be in overlap in some cases, while in others neither of them may constitute a valid interpretation (Morillo, 2008: 260). For instance, adventure-seeking, or the „Hemingway factor,"[7] which is usually found to play *some* role for a part of recruits in any case, seems to play an important role in the case of Western volunteers joining Kurdish forces and Christian militias in Iraq and Syria (Patin - bell¿ngcat, 2015: 26-29). Additionally, a motive is usually not enough of its own, and opportunities as well as constraints play a role in how and why people become foreign fighters.

Opportunity, for example, would often arise from the presence of an actor or actors interested in mobilising for participation and hence the process of mobilisation itself is also interesting when seeking to understand what drives involvement in foreign combat. Consider here the peculiar example of Afghans fighting in Syria on the side of Bashar al-Assad's Syrian government forces, recruited by Iranian agents from among Afghan migrants and refugees in Iran (Dehghan, 2015).

4. The type of *combat role* also pertains to understanding the process of taking part in foreign combat. A person volunteering to be a suicide bomber may be interested in a one-nanosecond participation in conflict, with the limited requirements thereof (as were e.g. British Muslims Asif Muhammad Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif when they blew themselves up at a Tel-Aviv bar in

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[7] American writer Ernest Hemingway covered various conflicts as a journalist, including the Spanish Civil War from where he reported clearly favouring the Republican side. He took his part in the making of propaganda films in support of Republican forces and he spoke out on various fora against Franco's faction and Fascism in general. Yet, he was not a foreign fighter (a combatant) himself. On Hemingway's time in Spain during the civil war see Herlihy-Mera (2012).

April 2003). Very different skills may be required for someone to make a valuable contribution in manufacturing suicide vests for bombers, and the recruitment process cannot quite work the same way. Herein lies a definitional issue: in order to decide what constitutes a „combat role," one has to have a solid concept of how to distinguish foreign fighters from foreigners who may be closely in touch with them, in the same area together with them, and yet not actively taking part in the fighting alongside them. What constitutes „taking part" is problematic.

The manufacturing of suicide vests clearly does, even though the person involved in this does not normally see direct engagement with the forces targeted; such persons' role will be analogous in this respect to that of a worker in a factory producing weapons of any kind. It may be tempting to say that a person's or his or her environment's understanding of one's role should determine the answer to the question above, yet even so one encounters many problematic issues. In Israel, people who, at the time of the birth of the country, smuggled Jewish migrants to Palestine on board ships, or flew military aircraft to the country without staying there to fight themselves, are acknowledged in historical memory as „overseas volunteers" (Ma'hal) of the 1948 war nonetheless.

To consider a very different example: If a teenage Muslim girl living in a Western country decides to join the Islamic State and marry one of its warriors to thus, in her own understanding, contribute to the cause of jihad, should that be seen as being part of the jihad? [Consider the example of „Syona, 21," born to Dutch parents, in: San, 2015: 50.] How about the cook who prepares food for jihadi combatants? [Consider the example of Osama bin Laden's cook e.g. on the basis of AP, 2012.]

With reference to humanitarian law, combatants are those who directly take part in hostilities. Yet from case to case such a restrictive understanding of the notion of the combatant may have to be reconsidered.

Links between conflict-induced migration and foreign combat

Conflict may induce both displacement and ex-migration (crossing borders). With regards to the presence of foreign combatants, it may induce immigration as well. The latter is clearly the more counter-intuitive implication of conflict, from the perspective of a

Rational Actor Model interpretation of human behaviour that regards survival as the fundamental preference of human beings in a consistent and transitive order of preferences. Yet, for various reasons, people do sometimes seek the chance to join conflicts of choice nonetheless.

That conflict induces displacement is a fairly uncontroversial statement. Still, it is worth taking account of the type of conflict, as suggested by Sarah Kenyon Lischer (2007: 146) who cites Kalyvas' categorisation of the latter (in Kalyvas, 2006) whilst arguing that in terms of displacement effects different kinds of conflict produce different outcomes.

Genocidal intent thus makes a difference in cases of both unilateral and bi- or multilateral use of violence. When state terror or civil war violence is selective (directed at select members of the opposition in the case of the former, and only combatants in the case of the latter), less displacement may be expected. Naturally, as noted by Lischer as well, recognising this is only the beginning to arriving at better-functioning models of conflict-induced displacement. In the case of a civil war, the weapons and tactics employed, the strategies of the combatants, and the spatio-territorial dynamics of the fighting may all contribute to different results.[8] Moreover, a protracted civil war may create a host of economic incentives for leaving as well as the fear of being enlisted by the combatant parties, thus leading to flight for reasons other than the fear of imminent death and destruction.

Much available anecdotal evidence supports the notion that conflict zones are fled not because all of their territory becomes a sure place to die but because much of their territory becomes a bad place to live. Consider but two examples here. Faisal Uday Faisal, an Iraqi man from Baghdad speaks openly of having migrated to Germany for economic reasons (having had a low-paying job as a steward in the Iraqi Ministry of Education) and „arranging" a story of being threatened by Iraqi militias to be able to claim refugee status, having by now returned to Iraq (cited in Morris, 2016). Meanwhile, a Syrian mother speaking in a *PBS* documentary at a bazaar in Damascus (2015: 7'29'' to 8'05'') tells about her sons, one of whom was „martryred" in her words, fighting in the ranks of the Syrian Army, while the others have left for abroad. As to the latter, she states that they should also have been „martyred" if necessary. In both cases the motives for leaving

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[8] Consider the case of Syria where tactics that may qualify as terrorism, or at the least as the indiscriminate use of military force, are regularly employed by various factions against civilian populations. It would be hard to disregard the effects of such incidents when at the same time a single, stand-alone terrorist attack in a Western European country typically evokes significant reactions as well.

country and relatives behind were complex in the case of those who did so, and the word „flight" does not do justice to such complexity.

Once developments exceed internal displacement, and the people affected cross international borders, the countries primarily implicated by this are the directly neighbouring ones that become the countries of first asylum. The refugee population is mostly contained in their territory in the short run. Later on, however, ex-migration continues as temporary housing in refugee camps and other similar contingency facilities does not provide adequate prospects to the people concerned. Diaspora groups thus usually emerge out of protracted conflict situations.

The permanently transient nature of life in conflict-induced dispersion in diaspora on the one hand, and in refugee communities in countries of first asylum on the other, may be such that joining combat remains an option for young people, especially men. The emergence of „quasi-foreign" fighters is thus often observable. Diaspora Somalis' fighting in Somalia (see e.g. ADL, 2013) or the example of diaspora Chechens in Ukraine may illustrate this (in the latter case on a substitution battlefield instead of Chechnya proper; see Kramer, 2015). In the meantime, refugees in countries neighbouring on conflict zones are often forcibly or semi-forcibly recruited to be combatants (Stedman and Tanner, 2003). If they then fight in their source countries (from where they left as refugees) they may also be denoted as „quasi-foreign fighters" themselves.

As to those who migrate to conflict not from the diaspora and not as a result of coercion but feeling that there is a likeness of cause between them and the local combatants in their conflict of choice, the following list of considerations may apply based on a review of the available literature on foreign fighters (and related subjects):

(1) that push as well as pull factors play a role in driving the movement of aspiring combatants, just as in the case of other movements of migration;

(2) that there may be among them some who join fellow combatants, i.e. those significant others who may fit the previously mentioned profile more clearly, out of peer or social pressure – their micro-environment may be key to driving their actions. Cluster migration is often visible in foreign fighting as well as in the case of regular migration (on the importance of collective choices see della Porta, 1995; Petersen, 2001);

(3) that language skills play an important role in structuring the dynamics of the migration of prospective and actual combatants. Without commonality of

language or the availability of a convenient *lingua franca*, foreign fighting may be far less appealing (Ciluffo et al., 2010: 21-22);

(4) that the movement may have certain key „bridge" and „rockstar" figures who play a critical role in its organisation (Ciluffo et al., 2010: 21-22);

(5) that foreign combatants may be looking for a substitute fight in the conflict they join and see it as a prequel to eventually continuing essentially the same fight at home (Keck and Sikkink, 1999: 93-93);

(6) that given the transnational nature of the mobilisation as well as the migration for combat, pre-existing transnational human networks and resource bases may play a role in breathing life into the movement of combatants (Adamson, 2005: 31-35);

(7) that there may develop conflict between foreign and local combatants for a number of reasons.

Strategic explanations of the foreign fighter phenomenon concentrate on understanding combatants' behaviour in terms of a rational actor model, and thus focus on the role of constraints and opportunities. Push and pull factors in this sense are diverse. For example: in the People's Crusade of 1096 an important driving factor seems to have been economic distress and famine resulting in general scarcities, and even in mass outbreaks of ergotism (upon the consumption of stored rye poisoned by the toxin of a fungus). As to the latter, the sudden spike in cases of ergot poisoning had some relevance as well, as the fear that it inspired added to the wave of millenarianism sweeping across Christian Europe at the time (Riley-Smith, 2005: 18; Hindley, 2004: 21).

Important questions from the perspective of the would-be combatants include whether in his or her home area a foreign fighter has left behind a combat-prohibitive environment, or if the hope on their part is that constraints in the home environment may be eventually overcome by first training, practicing and consequently becoming a better warrior elsewhere (Hegghammer, 2013: 6-7).

While some of the considerations cited from the literature with respect to this are highly specific to the transnational jihadi movement (focused as the literature is on them), it seems reasonable to assume that in the past other foreign fighters may have found their respective environment combat-prohibitve in one sense or another as well, just as it may be reasonable to assume that many acquired military skills during their time as foreign fighters. For some this indeed may have been a key goal in and of itself, with a view to

further, more distant ends. Based on the scarce evidence available, Rękawek notes the possibility of this even in the case of the few Western European volunteers who have joined the Moscow-backed rebel side in the conflict in Ukraine (Rękawek, 2015a: 8-11, and 2015b).

Given commonsensical considerations about how both the practicing of one's existing skills in a new environment and the highly likely learning of new skills in a new environment may make one a more capable person in any walk of life, we may expect that this experience can be generalised to foreign fighters of any kind. What this does not mean is that foreign fighters would be necessarily more capable than local fighters. The experience of fighting in a foreign land is expected to enhance the skills they have and learn but the comparison in their being „comparatively more capable" is with their prior self. The exception may be that of mercenaries. In an historical overview of privatised warfare, Singer finds that „When quality mattered more than quantity, the activity and significance of mercenaries was typically higher, primarily because skilled professionals were superior to ill-trained or citizen soldiers" (2003: 18). The role of the former South African firm Executive Outcomes in Sierra Leone may be an instructive example in this regard (Howe, 1998).

Once foreign combatants are present in the area of conflict, their relationship to the local combatants to whom they are allied may become strained. Tension may be the result of the inevitably awkward relationship between partly or fully autonomous (and armed) actors who have potentially incompatible interests – and foreign combatants often fight in units of their own, even when hierarchically incorporated into a larger local force, owing to the practicality of this arising from their difference of language. Beyond this, foreign fighters may distort the agenda of local combatants' struggle, or even hijack it outright. They may act in less than perfect agreement with local combatants, e.g. by giving up early or continuing fighting when a compromise may be reached. In other words, they may be fighting with a different understanding of the public good (and with reference to a different „public" at that). In fact, it is hard to imagine how foreign and local combatants may have the exact same public good in mind related to what they are involved in (Hegghammer makes a similar point in 2010: 63). When foreign fighters enjoy a degree of autonomy and are, at the same time, more extreme in their approach to the conflict and towards the opposing parties, this may result in excessive violence and, consequently, more in the way of conflict-induced displacement and ex-migration.

As to the post-conflict experience of foreign fighters, van Zuijdewijn convincingly argues that instead of, or besides, the motive to become a foreign fighter, one's motive upon returning, in some cases decided in advance, in some cases developed at a later stage, may be an equally relevant dimension of categorisation. Thus, writing of jihadi foreign warriors, she differentiates „terrorists," „martyrs," „veterans," „reintegrated fighters," and „recruiters" (Zuijdewijn, 2014: 81-84).

Martyrs are those who are killed in the course of their tour as foreign fighters and may have been interested in sacrificing themselves in this way (and in never coming back) in the first place. Veterans are those who may continue to wander from one theatre of fighting to the other, adopting this as a form of life. Reintegrated fighters are those who eventually move beyond the fighting experience and choose to return to a more normal life. Recruiters, finally, may be back in their old country but with the interest of organising the continued supply of foreign combatants to a given conflict – they may do so especially effectively as veterans of the fight themselves.

One should add that the path that a foreign fighter eventually takes is determined partly by constraints, in any case, and hence one's motive (or intentions) upon returning may be different from one's eventual record upon returning. More importantly, a category that is missing from van Zuijdewijn's list, very relevantly for the subject consideered in this article, is the „émigré" who never returns, finding a new home connected to foreign fighting either in or near the conflict zone proper or elsewhere. The émigré may be either an exile who is practically unable to return, or a voluntary migrant whose wish may have been to emigrate in the first place.

Precisely this is the basis of one of the most interesting connections between migration and foreign fighting: that it has played a role in the process of state formation, with prominent examples across history including the Crusader states of the 12th and 13th centuries, the Monastic State of the Teutonic Knights (1230-1525), as well as, in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, the history of the United States[9] where foreign

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[9] Many newcomers to the Americas as well as actual foreign combatants (who would eventually return to their home countries) served in the U.S. War of Independence, on both sides. On the side of the colonies fought people such as Gilbert du Motier (the Marquis of Lafayette) who returned to France after the conflict, or, for another example, Michael Kovats (Kováts Mihály), formerly a Hussar officer of Maria Theresa, born in Karcag, Hungary, who joined the cavalry of the Continental Army and died in the 1779 Siege of Charleston. His comrade Casimir Pulaski (Kazimierz Pułaski) shared in his fate several months later, during the siege of Savannah. Together they are remembered to this day as the founders of U.S. cavalry. In the meantime, on the other side served a great number of „Hessians" from Hessen-Kassel whose rulers for centuries specialised in „hiring out" some of their soldiers as mercenary troops – a source of significant revenues for the Landgraviate (Reese, 1992: 16).

volunteers were as crucial in acquiring lands that today are a part of Texas [and were for a brief while a part of the Republic of Texas] (Malet, 2013: 58-92) as the continued influx of migrants was in pushing the Frontier westward along with the native population. These are but some of the more visible cases.[10]

The transnationality of foreign fighting and its limits

The theory of transnational mobilisation originates from starting assumptions that include the ambiguous nature of who may be regarded as socially embedded when it is an increasingly global world of transnational human networks in which individuals are connected. There is, in latter decades, growing migration as well as intensifying capital mobility. In such a context, „social entrepreneurs" interested in mobilising for different causes may draw on „transnational constituencies" and „transnational resource bases," that may emerge out of financial flows of remittances for example, and from „transnational informal economic networks" of labour, be it labour employed in licit or illicit economic activity [such as organised crime] (Adamson, 2005: 31-35).

In migrant communities, densely networked cooperation is especially common as they struggle to collectively overcome the problems of adaptation in a new environment where a steady stream of newcomers may be joining those already there. This gives rise to the solidarity networks of imagined communities, actually bringing the community closer together at the same time as it maintains an intense connection to those left behind at home as well (Lloyd, 1999a: 371-373). Along with the migration of people and capital, ideas spread more easily in a context like this, and this further facilitates transnational mobilisation (Adamson, 2005: 33-37).

Historically, the level of transnationalisation in the three dimensions alluded to above (of people, capital, and ideas) is variable and there have been earlier eras characterised by population movements as significant as the ones witnessed today. The simultaneously increasing flow of persons, goods, services, capital and ideas may represent something qualitatively new but the above insights into transnational mobilisation may still be of use in studying earlier historical contexts as well.[11]

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[10] For a case considered less often, take the brief history of the State of Katanga, a short-lived breakaway entity (1960-1963) in the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, under President Moise Tshombe's leadership, whose armed strength derived largely from the presence of foreign mercenary forces (organised in the framework of the infamous Katanga *Gendarmerie*).

[11] Taking part in the crusades, for instance, used to be referred to in their time as „peregrinatio" (pilgrimage) as well as „iter" (journey) and „passagium generale" (general passage), containing reference to how the experience was connected to the long-established practice of pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It had its

Regarding the issue of how much overall continuity there is, reflecting on the seeming prominence of foreign fighters in the contemporary era, we should question to what extent the scale of their presence is really unprecedented. Moreover, since the 1990s there has been much discussion in the literature of armed conflict on the perceived rise of „new wars" that are seen as distinct from the wars of old in certain respects (see e.g. Kaldor, 1999; Collier, 2000). The general assumptions operating behind this include the view that today's wars are motivated „by greed rather than grievance," that combatants lack ideology and mass legitimacy, and that they are inclined to use uninhibited violence even gratuitously (as this is summed up by a source critical of the discourse of new wars: Kalyvas, 2001).

The new war thesis, were we to believe it, would present a puzzle: If wars are really unlimited by considerations of morality or legitimacy, and are free of ideology, then in today's globalised world, characterised by a larger and more intense flow of persons than before, we should expect mass foreign combatant involvement in purely financially motivated, resource-exploitative fighting. Perhaps especially so in conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa that are often seen or presented as archetypes of new war.

In fact, sellswords and freelancers (along with other military professionals for hire, such as mercenary archers, crossbowmen, siege engineers, etc.) were *more* common in medieval Europe than in the conflicts in question in the present day, as the example of the *condottieri*,[12] free companies, *routiers,*[13] and others may show. In contrast, at the present the involvement of ideologically motivated foreign combatants is on the rise with the ascendance, among others, of the transnational jihadi movement since the 1970s.

The explanation for this on a superficial level may be two-fold, and lie partly in less than complete transnationalisation on the one hand, and the (in fact) less than complete transformation of the character of war on the other. To elaborate further: (1) it may matter to a combatant if one's home state and/or society (or at least a relevant

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infrastructure as well – according to Hindley „by AD 350 there was a regular pilgrim route from Bordeaux to Jerusalem with hospices on the way" (2004: 3).

[12] Machiavelli thus writes of the *condottieri*: „Mercenaries are disorganised, ambitious, undisciplined, and disloyal; bold among friends, among enemies cowardly (…) In peacetime they plunder you, in wartime your enemies do [because your mercenaries will flee instead of beating them back]" (Machiavelli, 2008: 221). Elsewhere he writes of the demoralising effect that the employment of (and dependence on) foreign troops may have on one's regular forces (p. 241).

[13] *Routiers* or roaming (and killing and plundering) unpaid sellswords played a role both in causing and, eventually, in putting down the peasant rebellion of 1358 in northern France (known as the *La Grande Jacquerie* in French) [Erdődy, 1969: 7-23]. Four years later some of the same free companies involved have banded together to defeat the French army at the battle of Brignais – one of their commanders was the English mercenary John Hawkwood (Caferro, 2006).

segment thereof) approves of involvement in combat in a foreign location in terms of dominant values, beliefs and views; (2) it may also matter from the perspective of hosts, in terms of efficiency in combat as well as considerations of legitimacy, if they are fighting together with comrades with whom they share (at the least) culture and language (or a political vision).

Methodically verifying these propositions in empirical research may be warranted. Beyond addressing their validity, understanding the deeper reasons behind the contemporary character of civil war is prospectively even more interesting. Resource-exploitative many a contemporary conflict may be, yet even as the resources in question are sucked out of the regions concerned and are utilised by a globally interconnected and interdependent economy, most of those involved in the fighting on the ground remain local to the broader conflict zone, helped in some cases by ideologically motivated and/or culturally related comrades-in-arms.

Conclusion

Foreign fighting and migration connect in ways that may be obvious – such as that foreign fighters are themselves a special subset of migrants. Yet, as this article has shown, other connections exist that may be interesting to uncover, as is for instance the link with state formation and the role played in it by combatants who chose to emigrate upon their involvement in foreign fighting.

At the same time, it has also become visible in the process of exploring this connection that foreign combat and conflict interrelate in complex ways via population displacement. Viewed from this vantage point, the paradoxical nature of foreign fighting needs to be realised. Interpreting foreign combat as an anomalous form of migration, this article examined foreign combatants' motives based on the available literature on migration and foreign fighters, as well as based on a broad set of empirical examples.

Highlighting related considerations along with some of the practicalities (and difficulties) of foreign combat also points to a flawed aspect of new war theory that may guide further critical examination of its propositions: namely, that new war theory's assumption of „greed" being the most important motive of contemporary combatants may be called into question in light of the continued importance of cultural factors and ideological motives for participation in foreign combat.

This underlines the need to take continuities in the nature of armed conflict seriously at a time when new (and seemingly new) aspects of conflict are often over-emphasised.

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