

Seeking Recognition, Becoming Citizens

Achievements and Grievances among Former Combatants from Three Wars

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■ **ABSTRACT:** How do former combatants understand and make themselves into a citizen category? Through exploring the life narratives of former combatants from three different wars (Namibia, Colombia, and United States–Vietnam), this article locates similarities in the claims for recognition. The achievements or the grievances associated with the war and their homecoming made them deserving of special recognition from the state, the country, or other veterans. These claims situate these veterans in a political landscape, where they are called upon to mend and affirm the relation with the state, achieve recognition from society, and defend their fellows, which inform their citizenship practices, as it shaped their political mobilization and perceived political status. Through seeking recognition, they affirm their role as citizens.

■ **KEYWORDS:** former combatants, citizenship, M-19, political mobilization, recognition struggles, SWAPO, Vietnam veterans

Combatants have a fundamental relation with the state through military service and conscription, and form part of state-building processes. Military service has been closely tied to ideas about citizenship. However, non-state armed groups and non-regular combatants also shape state-building processes (Davis and Pereira 2003; Kestnbaum 2009: 241). Charles Tilly's (1985) suggestion that wars make states and states make war (see also Barnett 2006: 99–100), translates to the individual level, as individuals are irrefutably involved in these macro-level processes; combatants and citizens are made by these processes, but they also in turn make the state and the war. Participating in making war allowed participants to make claims in the making of the state. At one point, the combatant could claim a special relation with the state, even as a representative of the state,¹ but this has long been questioned (Leed 1979: 207). New ways of organizing the military, as well as the increasing use of privatized security, is continuing to shift this relationship between combatants and the state, where rights and obligations become less relevant in the relationship between the two entities (Eichler 2014; Weber 2014). The relationship between the combatant and the state is not stable, but the two are intrinsically linked. In this article, I show how the link with the state during the war is not enough, but also how we need to consider how the homecoming experience at large plays in to this, as well as how the relationship with the polity and society as a whole and their veteran peers form part of how these veterans are made as citizens.



This article shows how people's experiences as former combatants are turned into a veteran identity, and ultimately a citizenship identity, as a political impetus is embedded in the way it is formulated. Political identities matter for "how people perceive the social world and act on and in it" (Simon and Klandermans 2001: 327; see also Huddy 2003: 514, 520–521; Tajfel 1974). A central aspect of constructing an identity is about seeking recognition from others, which in turn is intrinsically linked to seeking space and voice in a polity (see, e.g., Hobson et al. 2007: 444). Yet current literature has not paid enough "attention to the processes of political identity formation and the framing of claims" (Hobson 2003: 3–4). This article speaks to such processes, particularly as it relies on data that provide an insiders' perspective to these processes. Particularly, through paying attention to these claims, we also learn about how they formulate their position in the polity, and thus their citizenship and ensuing practices.

This article builds on the life histories of former combatants from three very different wars: namely, independence fighters from Namibia (SWAPO), guerillas from Colombia (M-19), and Vietnam veterans in the United States. Through studying the various recognition claims made by the former combatants themselves in these diverse cases, we can understand how their veteran identity is situated politically and how veteran identity operates more generally as a political identity. The article demonstrates how they link their veteran identity to the state, but also the broader political community, and what this implies for the life path and choices of the returning combatant. What is clear is that this relationship is full of tensions—tensions that often contain a political impetus. Using such life histories, this article can see not only how such claims are formulated over longer periods of time but also how such claims are situated in the stories these former combatants tell about their political lives.

This article uses cases where the combatants demobilized several decades before they were interviewed. The three cases are independence fighters from Namibia (SWAPO), guerillas from Colombia (M-19), and Vietnam veterans in the United States. These wars and armed groups are different in several ways. The wars involved different actors and had different goals (civil war, independence war, intrastate war), and the process of recruitment and the reasons for joining for each combatant also differ as a result. All three wars were politically driven, albeit in very different ways, and the outcome of the wars and the resulting position of the former combatants varied. In addition, the groups of combatants in each case are also different in the demographics,² even if most tended to be young men. Finally, the way each society received each group after the war is also very different in the three cases, as well as the formal support offered through reintegration programs or veterans' programs; the institutional context in each case is radically different. Given these large differences, any similarities between these three cases are particularly noteworthy and should point to more general mechanisms.

In the following sections, I explore the literature on recognition struggles further, as well as the previous literature on veterans in this field. This is then followed by a description of the data collection, before turning to how veterans position themselves as worthy, and deserving of recognition. This section is divided into such claims in relation to society, the state, and their peers, respectively. Many former combatants position themselves as neglected and forgotten, while feeling their war experience and achievement (or treatment after the war) make them deserving of preferential treatment. This claim for recognition is also connected with political capital or political influence in their respective societies. In many ways, these claims for recognition are connected to the legacy of the war: how the war as a whole is understood, and what it was seen as achieving or delivering. In this respect, we are reminded of large differences between the three cases. In Namibia the war led to independence, and in Colombia it led to constitutional reform (among other things), whereas in the United States, the Vietnam War was generally seen as achieving nothing, instead perceived as a defeat, and a politically controversial and morally

unjust one at that. In all three cases their veteran identity builds on the war experience itself, but also on the experience of coming home after war (and how they perceive they were treated) as a veteran. Thus, both of these experiences (war and coming home) are key processes for the constitution of this identity. In various ways, the veterans are able to create a narrative where they are the inheritors of the state (as creators, as reformers, as the most dutiful citizens), and a narrative with a debt particularly on the part of the state; these narratives in turn mobilize and amplify their political engagement (their citizenship practices). What is particularly interesting is how these claims not only involve the state but also other targets (such as society and their peers) and how these claims toward all these categories *together* shape how these veterans see themselves as political beings.

Recognition Struggles and Veterans

Identity formulations are dialogical: they are not done in a vacuum but rather in relation *to others*, and the *recognition from the other* of the proposed identity is therefore central in these processes. Recognition claims are thus essential in the process of making oneself (Fraser 2003: 23; see also Fraser and Honneth 2003; Honneth 1995). The act of asking for recognition is of course not the end of this process, but it is a component that can be studied in its own right. Seeking recognition often involves disputes about resources, services (and how they should be distributed), and ultimately disputes over policies. Recognition struggles can theoretically be differentiated from redistribution struggles, but in practice the two often go together (Hobson 2003; Phillips 2003: 264). Part of this process is about overcoming a sense of exclusion and negative imagery surrounding the identity in question, and understanding that the individual's sense of being devalued in something shared with others (Hobson 2003: 4–5). Who the other is also tells us something important about this process.

Struggles for recognition are inherently political. As noted by Anne Phillips, recognition struggles are “more often a claim about political voice than the moral worth of the groups in question” (2003: 265). Being recognized should give you a seat at the table, and influence over policy, but it also enters politics through election strategies, as playing on identity markers of groups seeking recognition can mobilize, as well as provide shortcuts to formulating preferences about political candidates (266). Employing narratives about the construction of the polity itself is yet another way recognition struggles are drenched in political impetus (Hobson 2003: 12). Through studying recognition claims in relation to a specific identity, we thus also get clues that feed into their citizenship practices.

Veterans have long tried to claim the state in various ways, even if they sometimes meet resistance in this process, either from society or from the state itself (see, e.g., Diehl 1993: 31; Edele 2008: 6, 11; Mann 2006: 212). The relationship between the state and combatants is particularly developed when (and if) the state offers benefits, compensation, or pensions, for what happened during war. This creates interest groups who act to shape the disbursement and type of benefits. As a result, how the state receives and treats the veteran often becomes the object of mobilization: Who should be rewarded after the war, who should be punished, who made contributions above and beyond for the good of the state and society? Who is responsible for the suffering endured during the war? These questions play into how benefits and programs targeting former combatants are designed after war, and these are not short-term issues. In many cases, we see how these questions are ongoing political questions many decades after the end of the war (see, e.g., Edele 2008; Kriger 1991; Mann 2006; Metsola 2015; Mettler 2002; Mettler and Welch 2004; Preston 1997; Resch 1999; Schafer 2007; Sprenkels 2018; Wiegink 2015).

The demand for recognition from the state has historically been caught up in issues surrounding sacrifice: “The citizen-soldier . . . is the holder of a blood-debt upon the society he has defended and can demand restitution for his ‘sacrifice of himself’ as well as for that of his comrades who have died” (Leed 1979: 204). And thus veteran pensions and benefits are paid out as compensation for what was achieved through the war and/or what happened to the individual during the war. Veteran programs in the Global North are often concerned with recognition and the state mending what was broken by the state’s decision to wage war. The idea of debt is either connected to a society or community that was defended, or the state that sent the combatants to war. Thus, this logic is only partially applicable after civil wars, as only some combatants are recognized in this manner, whereas others are seen as the perpetrators of the war, thus potentially inverting the debt.

Veteran pensions and reintegration programs can be seen as a way to both honor and compensate lives destroyed by the war, and ultimately this politicizes eligibility (see, e.g., Diehl 1993: 12; Mann 2006: 98, 122; Moradi 2017; Resch 1999: 5; Skocpol 1992). But the question of material recognition, through care, compensations, pensions and medals, and the associated political and symbolic recognition, is actualized (if not achieved) in modern contexts as well, involving private security and contract workers (Christensen 2017: 25; Eichler 2014: 605; Taussig-Rubbo 2009), but also after civil wars and in the cases of Namibia and Colombia (for more on this, see also Söderström, forthcoming). Obtaining material recognition translates into symbolic recognition, and in turn, if symbolic recognition is claimed or achieved, it can be used for leverage over material resource allocations.

The former combatants interviewed for this article were not sought out because they were involved in specific recognition struggles or in specific social movements, but rather because the recognition claims formulated by them were done in the context of telling their life histories. This means we gain a deeper insight into how claims of recognition shift and how they are embedded in how these former combatants narrate their lives and who they are. In these life narratives, recognition is not only sought from the state but also other significant counterparts that together build their political landscape. Needless to say, any polity consists of more than just the state. This article also places these narratives front and center, in that it is their meaning-making around their political life that is scrutinized rather than the response from the state or society.

Comparative Research Design and Life History Interviews

This article is based on life history interviews with former combatants from three very different armed groups and wars. What similarities in how recognition claims are brought forward resonate across all three cases despite their inherent differences? The guerilla group M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril) originated around 1974 in Colombia among “urban middle-class progressive activists, intellectuals, communist youths, disgruntled members from Alianza Nacional Popular,” with a clear nationalist and socialist agenda (García Durán et al. 2008; Guáqueta 2007: 421, 425). The guerrilla combatants demobilized after the peace negotiations in 1989–1990, and some participated in a formal and national reintegration program targeting M-19 and other former guerillas who demobilized at the same time. The group was rather small (estimates range between 791 and 2,000 individuals in a population of 34 million), but the associated network of supporters and helpers was larger (as in Namibia). M-19 transformed into the political party M-19 Democratic Alliance, which achieved rather large electoral success initially, resulting in an important role during the rewriting of the constitution, but their presence started to fade by 1994 (Guáqueta 2007).

The South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) was an independence movement in Namibia formed in 1960. The People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) was the military wing of SWAPO. SWAPO has been the dominant political party since independence. Following the first free elections in 1989, the party has received about 76 percent of the votes in each presidential election (increasing their vote share substantially in 2014 to 87 percent). SWAPO consisted of about 30,000 combatants at independence, in a population of 1.4 million. The government has continually extended the compensations to former SWAPO veterans and provided employment with government agencies, especially following organized protests by these veterans. The narrative and legitimacy of SWAPO has been built up around the centrality of their veterans (often in contrast with other former combatants in Namibia) (see, e.g., Metsola 2006, 2010).

Vietnam veterans in the United States form the third case, a completely different veteran experience. The Vietnam War (1955–1975) represents a different type of war from the civil war in Colombia and the independence war of Namibia, as it began as an internal war before transforming into an interstate war between 1965 and 1975 (Gleditsch et al. 2002; see also Gleditsch 2004: 245–246). The current US veteran population is almost 21 million (in a population of 325 million), of whom 6,459,836 are Vietnam veterans (VA 2017).³ There were already programs in place in the United States to support returning combatants, even if these programs have developed over the years. In Colombia and Namibia, the armed conflict and participation signified a deep political commitment, whereas the United States relied on volunteers and draftees during the Vietnam War. The Vietnam veteran in the United States faced a society that politicized their engagement independent of any individual's own understanding of their original participation. Often the public discourse surrounding these veterans has been described as one of neglect and scorn, portraying the Vietnam veteran as troubled (cf. Dean 1992).

The data collection centered around how these veterans interpret and understand the process of coming home and what role politics play in their lives after coming home, and their life choices after returning home (for more on these life history interviews, see Söderström 2016, 2019, forthcoming). Thus, these interviews offered an opportunity to study how claims of recognition are embedded in their lives of politics. I located former combatants to interview through a combination of formal and informal entry points into each group. Formal veterans' organizations were most important in the case of the United States (11 entry points), whereas in both Namibia (7 entry points) and Colombia (7 entry points), I was able to find more diverse entry points into the groups, some more formal, others more informal. I attempted to diversify the sample by asking participants to recommend additional individuals more removed from the group and distanced from their veteran identity. Yet, as the networks were used for interview recruitment, those who were reachable via the network are likely to have a more salient veteran identity compared to those who cannot be reached via network contacts (this is a typical problem for most social movement studies; see McAdam and Paulsen 1993: 641), and those interviewed are still likely to be more homogeneous than these groups at large. Data collection in Colombia was carried out in 2012 and 2014, in the United States in 2016, and Namibia in 2017. A complete list of the interviews is provided in the appendix, and Table 1 shows the distribution of the interviews across the three cases. In the text, the interview number is prefixed with a letter indicating the particular case (C, N, and U, respectively). In Namibia and Colombia, I worked with research assistants who could also help to translate when necessary. All names used are pseudonyms, and names of other individuals or locations have been removed if they endanger the anonymity of the participant.

Table 1: Distribution of Interviews

Case	Colombia	United States	Namibia	All cases
Number of interviews	23	14	13	50

Recognition of Achievement and Grievance

The veterans interviewed make claims for recognition in relation to society, the state, and their peers, and I will discuss these claims in turn. In all three cases, the research participants express justifications for why they had participated in the war, but this was particularly present among Vietnam and M-19 veterans. Among the SWAPO veterans, the achievement was a given, and less porous, as they had created a new and independent state, so there was less pressure to justify their participation. In contrast, the M-19 and Vietnam veterans feel they must position their achievement (or grievance) in order to become deserving of further recognition. The M-19 struggle with being one of several guerrilla groups, and having waged war *against* the state, so they tend to frame the basis for why they should be recognized in terms of their contribution to the democratization and reform of Colombia, arguing the war they participated in made the country better for the poor people. The Vietnam veterans in turn stress their duty and sacrifice as the basis for their recognition, focusing on specific and personal achievements during the war, as they overall accept the war itself and its outcome cannot be claimed as merits in themselves.

Before turning to how recognition is sought from others, it is important to note the former combatants also expressed how they were proud of their past and thus how they accorded recognition to themselves. This is a typical component in recognition struggles, where the identity in question is also made into something that the group (and individual) itself can be proud of (Hobson 2003: 4). In all the groups, the veterans also show great sensitivity to what is claimed, specifically what exactly was done and not during the war. Veterans see it as necessary to guard these limits, continually upholding and demarcating who is seen as “deserving,” who is a real veteran, a real *hero*, and why.

Asking for recognition also comes with a dilemma across all three cases. If veterans are to be recognized for their achievements, they must be open about their identity, but this entails risks: stigma, social exclusion, lack of job opportunities, and even security risks. This caused many (but not all) participants to be cautious about whom they share their veteran identity with. This dilemma was experienced by former combatants in all three cases. However, it was clear the costs varied between the cases (and within), and they were most problematic in Colombia, where former guerillas were often targets of violence, particularly during the 1990s, whereas it was the least problematic in Namibia. In the United States, many veterans hid their identity in the early years after coming back (in contrast with veterans of other generations). This eventually shifted, and as the social stigma lessened, they became increasingly open about their participation in the Vietnam War (particularly after the construction of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial). When they first came home, however, their veteran identity was associated with a lot of guilt. Thus, some kept quiet because they were ashamed of having participated in the war and the things they did during the war. This dilemma was not pronounced for everyone or at all times. The identity certainly also helped open various different doors for some of the former combatants (careers as well as political opportunities). But it seemed as if this experience had to actively be made into an asset; otherwise it became a liability. Hence, in the following sections, I turn to how the former combatants try to transform their identity into an asset, thereby creating something which affords them recognition. The rest of this section is organized according to the target of their recognition claims: society, state, and their peers.

Societal Recognition

For all three groups, the importance of the recognition of the country at large, of society in general, was clear, even if the degree to which this was achieved, and deemed reasonable, varied. Such claims were directed toward society overall, and to more specific segments (such as their

children or history), and often focused on their achievements and wanting to have their legacy and experience known. Their recognition from society needs to be actively claimed, as it is generally not just accorded them automatically. The M-19 veterans' hope for recognition from ordinary people and society took many forms: love, attention, medals (admiration), trust, or votes, or politically or professionally being given a position where they are expected to lead people. Some of these things were achieved, and other things were more longed for. For instance: "this country loved us"; "we were the more recognized and so the people followed us"; "to the combatants of M-19, you already accomplished your mission, stay sitting, . . . waiting for the attention and the medal" (C16).

The SWAPO veterans also sought recognition from society, yet here it was clear this was politicized and a point of contention in Namibia today. The question arises of exactly *how much* recognition and additional respect should be accorded to the veterans. One participant, Sackaria, feels mistreated by people in society and clearly sees the liberation as his personal achievement: "I liberated this country and now people are treating me like this, why?" (N12). Similarly, the SWAPO veteran Memory recognizes that some people in society feel veterans are getting too much recognition from the state: "There are some that are saying that the government is just looking at us, but that is not true; no one is looking at us" (N3). Another participant, Gomen was also displeased with the lack of respect and recognition he was receiving from younger generations, adding, "Why you are not seen? . . . It is one of the problems. I don't have any identity" (N1).

Overall, these participants feel as if their war effort is not recognized enough, and only some of the veterans have received the material benefits associated with recognition. In Namibia, this differential recognition among veterans is seen as being based on which side you fought, and what you did during the war, or because you are friends with the right people. And as the war records are not trustworthy, there is room for this kind of differential recognition and negotiation. The Vietnam veterans also experienced differential recognition, but for them it was other generations of veterans who were exalted. This is suggestive of the diversity and heterogeneity within the veteran communities.

Overall, the Vietnam veterans were the most displeased with the recognition they have been accorded from the country and people. In fact, they saw this as a mistreatment in itself, which made them more deserving of recognition today. The outcome of the war and the way the war was waged reflected on them as individuals, and caused a general loss of respect for the military in American society. They were the first generation that had lost a war, and as such, the Vietnam veterans reflect the experience of other veterans who participated in wars that were lost (see, e.g., Diehl 1993: 13). Dennis describes this sense of being blamed for the outcome of the war and denied the same hero status as other veterans in the country's history have received:

They [World War II veterans] won the war, it was the Great War, they came home, they saved the war, everybody loved them, you know. When we went, we didn't win; it was a dirty war and it was political. [. . .] Like we were you know, we were the killers and the baby killers and the . . . you know, and we weren't. I mean we did but . . . we were trying to serve our country, but we were easy targets and I guess we were easy targets from the World War II vets because we weren't heroes. (U8)

For Dennis, his dissatisfaction has been channeled into his commitment to veteran organizations. Several veterans struggle with this lack of achievement (due to losing the war), and thus some stressed they as individuals have become dutiful and productive citizens to repay their debt of losing or as a way to demonstrate they do what is asked of them. Robert still feels neglected by his society and that his voice should have been more important, and listened to

both back then and today, saying, “Scorn and derision, nobody gave a damn about our opinions, about anything,” and “Nobody gives a shit about us, to be honest” (U12). They have been unable to simply take on the role of heroes and its associated traits. But their objection is not solely about not being seen but also about what was perceived as explicit negative treatment when they came home, often epitomized through the idea of being spit on, the anti-war movement, and how Vietnam veterans are depicted in films.

In contrast, however, a few Vietnam veterans focused on how they do feel as if they have now been properly recognized by society in general. Dick, for instance, described how recognition has been accorded to him and fellow veterans, in particular from other veterans and the public. He is clearly aware of the political capital inherent in his identity:

Well, it gave me credibility. I mean not just with other veterans, but with the general public. Veterans are one of the highest regarded groups. If you’ve got a phone bank calling on behalf of Kerry and you say I’m calling on behalf of John Kerry, you may or may not get anyone to listen, but if you call someone saying I’m a Vietnam veteran and I’m calling on behalf of John Kerry, people tend to listen to you. (U14)

Thus, Dick’s Vietnam veteran identity has given him access and recognition from the public. In fact, across all groups, some of them saw how the status as a former combatant gave them political capital and a position in society, which gave their political voice more gravitas. Their claims for recognition from society largely focused on their achievements during the war and ensuring their legacy and experience (during and after the war) is known. Through narrating this high status position, they actively claim recognition from society overall, but it is also informed by creating a debt on the side of society in terms of the failures of society to care for them in the past.

State Recognition

This section demonstrates how veterans narrate how the state has made them and how they in turn have made the state. Here we will see some of the strongest examples of how being a veteran connects people to politics. What is more striking, however, is when they perceive the state as absent as this undermines their position and identity as veterans. For many veterans in all three groups, the state has not fully recognized them and is in fact seen as indebted to the veterans. Their idea of a pact between the state and the combatants was broken either already during the war (particularly for the Vietnam veterans) or when they came home. This broken pact at the very least created a distrust of the government and the state in general, but it also propels their political involvement.

Although a few of the Vietnam veterans felt the state had done its part, the dominant discourse among them was, however, one of failure, and therefore those who stressed their satisfaction also positioned it against this more negative discourse. The idea of a pact with the state was entertained by individuals on both sides of this argument; some saw the pact as upheld, others as broken. Bob noted: “Every serviceman or woman when they sign on the dotted line, they are issuing a blank check to Uncle Sam, do what you will with my life” (U3).

For most Vietnam veterans, the events of the war, or the war itself, become filters through which they perceive the pact with the state is broken. They describe how they failed to see the justifications for the war and how the lies concerning the war and its mismanagement led to disillusionment with the government and a sense of being betrayed by politicians. Discussing events in Vietnam, Lee describes how his war experience affected his relationship with the state. For him, it was the way the war was waged and handled by the state that caused concern: “That

was a big concern of mine, and so then I lost confidence in my own government and I felt really betrayed because . . . you know, I thought we had a duty, we had an obligation, we had a commitment” (U5). Similarly, Ralph also felt betrayed by the government because of how it had handled the war and hidden things from the public: “When more details came out in the aftermath of the war about what was going on behind the scenes, I did feel exploited by the national government” (U9). This feeling of betrayal was not unique. On 23 April 1971, about seven hundred veterans discarded their medals in an anti-war protest, where they threw their medals at the Capitol. Ben (U11) felt so betrayed by the government that he was one of the veterans who participated in this event. Rejecting these medals was a clear rejection of the recognition afforded by the US government.

Another reason for experiencing a broken pact with the state due to the war itself was the perception that fellow soldiers who had died were disrespected by various officials of the state. For Charles, this also meant his allegiance to other fellow veterans increased: “That is why that whole tribal identity just blossomed within me, and I think in all the other guys just as a natural occurrence, we’re here to take care of each other and one of us gets killed, well it’s bad, but at least we’ll remember, the big guys don’t really care” (U7). For most Vietnam veterans, the homecoming treatment is the main filter for how they see the state and in turn themselves. The problem was how they had been treated after the war, not simply the war itself. Thus, their assessment of recognition from the state is centered on the benefits awarded to veterans on the basis of their personal sacrifice (mental and physical damages) during the war. While Thomas is more pleased with the care offered by the state today, he believes the state largely broke the pact it made with him when he joined the military. He did his part, his service, while he believes the state has not delivered on their part of that promise: “I regret my country let me down . . . When I came home because they didn’t hold up their part of the deal? I mean, I swore” (U10). The deal or the promise by the state was never very detailed at the beginning of their war participation, but there was always a sense of an abstract promise.

These veterans often have a sense they are getting less benefits and care from the state than other generations of veterans (and sometimes compared to veterans in other countries, including Vietnam), and that the government is actively trying to limit their access. Comments concerning such material redistribution included: “those kinds of benefits were never really made available to Vietnam veterans; there were some benefits but not like that” (U11); “the new legislation they are coming up with on veteran issues and so forth, they’re very cleverly excluding us” (U13); “they took it out on the warrior, not on the politicians or the people who sent us. We just did what you told us to do” (U10). The reason for this sense of betrayal is linked to an idea of punishment for the outcome of the war. They feel society in general was unsettled by them, and because the Vietnam veterans disturbed people’s image of their country and its success, the veterans feel they have been subsequently ignored by the state and society. This has resulted in anger, resentment, and some distrust, but it has also engendered political mobilization for some of them.

In contrast with the Vietnam veterans’ duty, the basis for the SWAPO veterans’ recognition is the outcome of the war. For them, achievement is what makes you worthy of recognition, and the achievement is the liberation of the country. It is clear they see the state itself as something that they have built; as parents of the independence, the genesis of the entire state is their achievement. Either you contributed to that, or you did not. Those who were in exile are clearly seen as contributors, whereas only some of those who stayed in the country contributed, and not everyone fought on the right side, again highlighting differences within the veteran community. Just as in Zimbabwe (see, e.g., Kriger 2003: 15), the war and the liberation of the country has become central to SWAPO’s own legitimacy, and thereby these have also empowered the

SWAPO veteran. It is therefore not surprising the state has treated other veterans differently (for more on this, see Bolliger 2018; Kössler 2007; McMullin 2013: 102–6; Metsola 2015: 189–248). Thus, not all former combatants are equal in Namibia, yet being a veteran is a position of political power. For most of the Namibian veterans, recognizing this achievement is intrinsically linked with material benefits, as that is how recognition is communicated. The responsibility of providing these benefits falls to the state, which would not exist if not for these fighters. Recognizing the voice of veterans' organizations and material support (reintegration projects) are seen as ways for the state to say to its veterans that they have done something important for the country. This is seen as an ongoing question that has yet to be resolved, and most participants were disappointed with the amount of material recognition to date.

Sackaria's experience speaks to how many SWAPO veterans felt. Sackaria feels forgotten by the state as the state is seen as unable to provide for veterans. His desire for recognition is both linked to limited actions such as providing identity cards, as well as more substantial forms of recognition involving financial help and support, and access to work. He expresses a desire to be recognized more, and compares his situation to that of veterans in other countries, who he believes receive much greater material support. As Sackaria does not think the government can help them anymore, he has turned toward making claims directed at the UN instead. Over the years, the state in Namibia has repeatedly responded to claims by the SWAPO veterans, which in turn only seems to have emboldened the veterans to ask for more, and again. The veterans can claim to have built the state, and undoubtedly, this argument has been a very forceful argument in Namibian politics over the years (see also Metsola 2006). A less typical experience is that of Ndahafa's disappointment. Her sense of a broken pact stem from events during the war. Her own and others' experience of torture and false accusations during the war has led her to wait for admission, apologies, and compensation for this experience from the state and from SWAPO.

A few of the M-19 veterans also make claims on the state, even if this is rarer. As a group, they fought against the state, so it makes sense they do not see the state as directly indebted to them. However, José believes the state has a responsibility toward the demobilized combatants, particularly in terms of ensuring they have a worthy way of supporting themselves: "You go to a company and they are like, 'Let me see your CV' and then, 'No, it's useless,' so then you are obliged to die politically and as a citizen, in other words, a natural death, as a citizen and within the civilian life you die because there are no alternatives if you don't have that possibility [of a job]" (C10). José continues and hints at a mutual relation, even dependency, between former guerillas and state, suggesting that if these former combatants die as citizens, it will ultimately also be a problem for the state. Thus, it seems the state is called upon not because of an idea of a pact or because of the armed group being credited for creating the state but rather because it is in the self-interest of the state. Amadeo, however, sees the peace agreement as the pact, whereby the state is believed to have made promises, and those promises were broken, as the state failed to protect and keep the guerillas safe after they demobilized: "It was a pact between the state and M-19. And the state broke the pact . . . During the first phase of the amnesty process, some people from M-19 disappeared . . . that it is not a way to win over a former combatant" (C22).

In all three cases, the state was an important counterpart for the former combatants, and for how they position themselves as veterans. The idea of the state making combatants and combatants making the state comes through in these interviews, but particularly among the SWAPO and Vietnam veterans, the state is more present and an important counterpart than for the M-19 combatants, who tend to emphasize other sources of recognition instead (such as society and other members of their armed group). In contrast, some of the interviewed Vietnam and SWAPO veterans felt as if the state afforded them a great deal of recognition for the war and the armed combat during the war. In the case of the SWAPO veterans, making claims on the

state or the government is the same as directing claims to the leaders of the armed group they once belonged to. Indeed, the SWAPO leadership run the state. As the leaders of M-19 cannot provide the same access to the state, it makes sense the state is less present for the M-19 veterans as they call for recognition. However, both groups express a sense that their leaders have forgotten them. The Vietnam veterans are clearly also disappointed with the lack of recognition, and this builds both on how they felt deceived during the war and how they were treated after the war by the state. Issues of benefits, payback, and support are clearly politicized, and there are various layers of interpretation of these state actions, as well as a questioning of what really is being done—and has been done—for them. Recognition and redistribution go hand in hand and contain a political impetus, as they represent ongoing conversations with the state but also issues that need to be addressed politically.

Peer Recognition

Across all groups, a central *target for recognition claims* is the armed group itself, or from other veterans. This is directed either at the leadership within the group or at the veteran community at large. The M-19 veterans had a clear sense of being recognized by their fellow combatants, particularly during the war itself. The close-knit network of former combatants after the war was a source of recognition for many. Some, like Mario, however, expected more material benefits as a result of their work for M-19 and directed these claims to the leadership within M-19. And many of the female combatants felt, as women, they were not accorded the same degree of support and recognition as their male counterparts within this network. For instance, Alba wants to be recognized as someone who knows about and can represent M-19, and to be allowed space to talk, to be given a public voice. She wants the women to be recognized for their political work after the war, and she is frustrated with current practices: “It is the recognition of the men toward us as women in the political arena . . . So in general, they quote each other, ‘Navarro said, Petro said . . .’ Right? But us, that is a different story . . . The recognition that we [female M-19] are political actors as well” (C9). For Alba, being recognized by male leaders in the group was so extraordinarily important that simply the act of an elite male member of M-19 suggesting she was relevant to be interviewed was intensely gratifying for her.

Among the SWAPO veterans, there was also a sense of being forgotten by their leaders. The lack of recognition within one’s own ranks was understood as being due to the leaders’ tendency to only see some combatants as relevant, connected, or revolutionary enough to be given this attention. For instance, Fanuel noted: “Only that sometimes you cannot claim any heroism yourself, but I hope one day among the leaders one would pick it up and say, ‘*Man*, let this guy, he is a veteran . . . let his name be among the heroes” (N8). Among the Vietnam veterans, the main object of reproach is other generations of veterans in the United States. Many of them felt ignored and not accepted by older generations of veterans when they came home, particularly those from World War II and Korea. On the other hand, they themselves feel a great sense of community with other veterans, from their own and other generations, as well as from other countries (like Russian veterans who served in Afghanistan, for instance). This sense of community is based on a similar experience, and something they do not share with the rest of the population in their country. Thus, they tend to stress the universality of war. However, the feeling of not being recognized by other generations of veterans, particularly those of World War II (their fathers’ generation), was so strong that it was even incorporated into their veterans’ organizations’ motto, as noted by Dennis: “The World War II vets didn’t want anything to do with us . . . Vietnam veterans of America. They started back around then too, so there were a lot of other veterans that felt like I did that we got screwed and our motto is ‘never again will

one generation of veterans abandon another” (U8). Against this backdrop, Vietnam veterans have made additional efforts to reach out to veterans of their own generation, as well as more recent ones. As noted by Bob: “If veterans don’t watch out for one another, who will?” (U3). The importance and role of the network of other veterans, and the affective ties associated with this network, cannot be overstated in all three cases. This is particularly strengthened as a result of losing friends during the war, and this bond with the dead acts as a reminder of how vulnerable they themselves were during the war, and how much they were at risk of sacrificing (see also Leed 1979: 211–212). The sacrifice of others becomes a symbol of the potential sacrifice those still alive were willing to risk, and those who died stood in their place, creating strong bonds within the network, affective bonds that call for mutual recognition. Upholding these bonds in all three cases pulls them toward political engagement for each other and those they have lost; again, political impetus becomes embedded in how recognition is sought.

A Broken Pact?

Given the large differences between these cases, the similarities in how they engage in recognition claims speak beyond these cases. This is not to say their experiences were homogenous—far from it. But their narratives concerning recognition shared several constructions despite the inherent differences between these three cases. Recognition is central to how these former combatants talk about their political lives after demobilization. Demands and expectations of recognition, and associated disappointments when this does not come, form an important part of how they politically conceive of themselves and their position in society. The question of who recognizes you, and why, was important for many former combatants. The state was a central part of this equation, but it was not the only reference point from which recognition was sought or received. Here also we see how the war and its associated achievements and hardships (as has been shown in other cases; see, e.g., Brooks 2004: 5; Kriger 2003: 187), as well as the reception when coming home (and associated hardships), form part of what former combatants feel should be recognized by the state, by society overall, but also by their children, history, other veterans, and themselves. It is clear that while many respondents experience some degree of recognition from these sources, it is mainly expressed as a *longing for* recognition, as a sense of abandonment and lack of recognition underpins this narrative, ultimately creating a sense of indebtedness. Addressing this debt, reminding of it, and mending the pacts implied in these relationships define these former combatants’ political position and how they act on it and thereby shape their political mobilization (i.e., their citizenship practices).

Overall, the veterans claim recognition either for the deed of the war itself or because the war broke them in some way. By showing their willingness to sacrifice themselves, they claim to have earned respect. But the homecoming in itself was also seen as something that should be compensated if they had been received poorly. The achievement is more central to SWAPO and M-19, whereas grievance and duty are more at the center of the Vietnam veterans’ claims to recognition. But the narrative of all three contains elements of both positive (achievement) and negative (grievance) elements. The M-19 also turns to the population for recognition, and as the body politic, they have a duty toward. Thus, it is rather the demos than the abstract idea of the state that becomes their main counterpart. They position themselves as the parents and guardians of democracy in Colombia and thus point to a contribution toward the polity. For the M-19 veterans, the war itself is the most important filter, as they can stress the achievements associated with the war. In contrast, the Vietnam veterans can point to the state and even hold the state accountable for a “bad” war and for its failure to care for them when they came home;

thus, the state's failure to recognize their sacrifice has a great impact on how the Vietnam veterans position themselves politically. The SWAPO veterans in some way form a midpoint, stressing both the achievement of the war, as well as the grievances associated with their homecoming when constructing their veteran identity.

Thus, in each of the three cases, a position of special status (as creators, as reformers of the polity and state, and as the most dutiful citizens) is narrated by the former combatants, and upheld over time. The experience is not limited in time but makes itself known at multiple instances throughout their life, as both their own lives and network, but more importantly, societal developments form reminders of their war experience over the years. This experience is politicized and positions them vis-à-vis society and the nature of the state. The narrative of all three contains elements of achievement, grievance, or duty. Their continued sacrifice and service create claims on the state. While the degree to which veterans can claim a pact with the state varies greatly across the three cases, it is clear they all have a sense of making the state through their making of war, and homecoming. As such, they claim a right to the state also *making* or *acknowledging* them. This article has shown it is not only the experience of the war itself that is part of this process, but also the homecoming experience itself.

Through positioning the state as something they feel they have either created or upheld and by stressing their duty and service, a vision of engaged citizenship and a strong sense of empowerment is formulated among the veterans. Indeed, many of the former combatants feel as if they were part of a powerful societal development, where their actions made a difference in the world. They invested themselves in the war they formed part of, and staked their positions as citizens on the outcome of the war. Coming home, some of this is lost, and the outcome of the war became unclear and morally problematic for them. The disconnection and perception of a broken pact that comes with the coming home, create tension and friction, something in need of mending, which pulls many of them toward active citizenship engagement. These demands for recognition enter the public arena, both as veterans' specific material demands in relation to policy, but also as such demands shape how the history of the war will be understood. Moreover, the ways these demands become part of the public dialogue also shape who is deemed to belong and form part of society. They also form the bedrock for how former combatants then move on to understand their place in society and their reasoning behind their choices to mobilize or not, and for what causes. While they all are able to position themselves as inheritors of the state (and thus pulled into politics), they are of different types, as creators, as reformers, and as dutiful subjects; through engaging in war, they are made as citizens.

A few fault lines within and across the groups are worth noting as well. In all three cases, many of the combatants note their position as a veteran within the group, as someone worthy of recognition, is negotiated and struggled over. As a result, there is a sense of fluidity around who belongs and has the right to be recognized. Just as within other recognition struggles, veterans also engage in boundary-making activities, to settle who is a true member of the group and who is not (Hobson 2003: 6). Throughout the article, I have tried to highlight where there is diversity within the groups I have interviewed, but as recruitment was dependent on their networks, these interviews may reflect more homogeneity than is present in these groups at large. Among those interviewed, the female combatants seem to struggle more with competing identities, as well as the lack of recognition among their own ranks. This is no surprise, as the veteran identity typically is entrenched in masculinity, and while gender roles can be transgressed during war, afterward they often reassert themselves (see, e.g., Åse and Wendt 2018; Eichler 2014: 603; Eriksson Baaz and Utas 2012; Karner 1996; Kestnbaum 2009: 248; Moran 2010). This is to say not that the gendered social practices across all three groups were identical but rather that this fault line was clearly accentuated in all three.

Leonie Huddy notes a group identity is more likely to form if the identity can be linked with high status and if it associated with positive valence (2003: 519, 536). This is indeed something the veterans who emphasize their achievements and deserving nature would like to stress, but some of the veterans' encounters with society after war tell a different story, so this conflict of status is something that has to be dealt with. Yet, acting out their membership in the group of other veterans helps the former combatants reinforce their high status position. Here, the issue of being able to be proud of *something* also becomes important. If they cannot claim the outcome of the war as this something, then they resort to other layers of meaning, such as doing your duty to other fellow combatants for instance. In part, this makes up veterans' political home coming; if they are only categorized as bad, as the losers, as having made no contribution to society, then they face larger personal obstacles as they come home. The network of other veterans becomes *home and family*. Breaking the pact with other veterans is therefore very difficult (and unlikely), and keeping this pact ultimately often entails speaking out for your peers (using your political voice). Together, societal, state and peer recognition claims situate these veterans in a political landscape, where they are called upon to mend and affirm the relation with the state, achieve recognition from society, and defend their fellows, which inform their citizenship practices as it shaped their political mobilization and perceived political status.

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NOTES

1. For instance, the idea of the state, and who the nation is, has often been colored by the myths surrounding those that fought for the state to begin with (on the American War of Independence, see, e.g., Resch 1999).
2. The M-19 combatant was often urban and educated, the SWAPO combatant came from broader sections of society, and both groups had a fair amount of female combatants, whereas the combatants who went to Vietnam were largely young men.
3. A commonly used definition for a veteran in the United States is a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

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■ APPENDIX: LIST OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Gerardo, born 1960, male M-19, 16 October 2012, Bogotá, Colombia
 Federico, born 1957, male M-19, 19 October 2012, Bogotá, Colombia
 Juan, born 1967, male M-19, 24 October 2012, Bogotá, Colombia
 Camila, born 1945, female M-19, 25 October 2012, Bogotá, Colombia
 Mario, born 1941, male M-19, 25 October 2012, Bogotá, Colombia
 Joaquin, born 1965, male M-19, 26 October 2012, Bogotá, Colombia
 Julio, born 1958, male M-19, 27 October 2012, Bogotá, Colombia
 Estella, born 1961, female M-19, 17 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia

Alba, born 1950, female M-19, 18 & 21 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
José, born 1949, male M-19, 18 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Jaime, born 1956, male M-19, 19 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Camilo, born 1964, male M-19, 20 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Gregorio, born 1958, male M-19, 21 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Emilio, male M-19, 23 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Eduardo, born 1954, male M-19, 24 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Felipe, born 1963, male M-19, 24 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Dante, born 1953, male M-19, 24 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Catalina, born 1964, female M-19, 26 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Alfonso, born 1961, male M-19, 26 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Celestina, born 1960, female M-19, 27 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Maria, born 1952, 27 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Amadeo, born 1955, male M-19, 28 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
Angela, born 1966, male M-19, 28 November 2014, Bogotá, Colombia
John, born 1946, male Vietnam veteran, 21 March 2016, [small town], Oregon, US
Francis, born 1947, male Vietnam veteran, 23 March 2016, Newcastle, California, US
Bob, born 1946, male Vietnam veteran, 29 March 2016, Oakland, California, US
Jacob, born 1954, male Vietnam veteran, 30 August 2016, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, US
Lee, born 1940, male Vietnam veteran, 30 August 2016, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, US
Gary, born 1945, male Vietnam veteran, 31 August 2016, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, US
Charles, born 1945, male Vietnam veteran, 31 August 2016, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, US
Dennis, born 1947, male Vietnam veteran, 2 December 2016, Fairfax, Virginia, US
Ralph, born 1945, male Vietnam veteran, 2 December 2016, Fairfax, Virginia, US
Thomas, born 1947, male Vietnam veteran, 6 December 2016, Washington, DC, US
Ben, born 1942, male Vietnam veteran, 9 December 2016, Fairfax Virginia, US
Robert, born 1942, male Vietnam veteran, 27 January 2017, Greenbelt, Maryland, US
Ford, born 1949, male Vietnam veteran, 30 January 2017, Europe
Dick, born 1940, male Vietnam veteran, 3 February 2017, Arlington, Virginia, US
Gomen, born 1950, male PLAN, 10 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Ngenokesho, born 1972, male PLAN, 10 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Memory, born 1959, female PLAN, 11 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Amon, born 1962, male PLAN, 11 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Gerson, born 1955, male PLAN, 12 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Jairus, born 1958, male PLAN, 13 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Mukwanambwa, born 1963 female PLAN, 14 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Fanuel, born 1953, male PLAN, 14 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Hilma, born 1956, female PLAN, 15 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Peter, born 1954, male PLAN, 15 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Bwilu, born 1939, male PLAN, 16 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Sackaria, born 1976, male PLAN, 17 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia
Ndahafa, born 1958, female PLAN 17 March 2017, Windhoek, Namibia