

**Expert Perspectives on Reintegration of Former Child Soldiers Associated with  
Shining Path and the Militarized Communist Party of Peru**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines how subject-matter experts understand the factors shaping the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) and the Militarized Communist Party of Peru (MPCP), with particular attention to the Valley of the Apurímac, Ene, and Mantaro Rivers (VRAEM). Although child recruitment during Peru's internal armed conflict is well documented, the longer-term reintegration of those associated with Shining Path and the MPCP remains comparatively underexamined.

The study uses a qualitative interpretivist approach grounded in narrative inquiry. Its primary empirical material consists of semi-structured interviews with eleven subject-matter experts, complemented by documentary and biographical analysis and researcher reflexivity. The study did not interview former child soldiers directly; therefore, the findings represent expert-informed interpretations rather than first-person accounts or evidence of causal relationships. The analysis draws on Social Identity Theory, Basic Human Needs Theory, Social Cubism, Transitional and Transformative Justice, Healing-Centered Peacebuilding, and Hybrid Peacebuilding.

Through their testimonies, experts described reintegration as shaped by interacting psychological, relational, socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, and structural conditions. Recurring concerns included trauma and mistrust, stigma and silence, disrupted relationships, limited legitimate opportunities, uneven institutional continuity, cultural relevance, and territorial marginalization. Participants also identified family and community support, recognition, culturally grounded resources, hope, resilience, and meaningful opportunities as potential sources of recovery and inclusion, while they generally understood reintegration as an uneven, multidimensional process that does not culminate in a single definitive endpoint.

Overall, the thesis proposes an analytical relationship among hope, resilience, and reintegration and argues that hope becomes meaningful when credible social and institutional pathways toward civilian life exist. Its principal contribution to Peace and Conflict Studies is to reframe long-term reintegration as a relational, multilevel, intercultural, and structurally conditioned peacebuilding process. Building on this interpretation, the thesis develops an evidence-informed hybrid and intercultural policy framework linking individual recovery with family, community, institutional, and structural dimensions. This framework is proposed for future participatory refinement and evaluation, not as an empirically validated intervention model.

Keywords: *child soldiers; Shining Path; MPCP; reintegration; Peace and Conflict Studies; hope; resilience; Hybrid Peacebuilding; Peru; VRAEM.*

## Acknowledgments

There are looks that cannot be forgotten...

...a young woman on the border with Colombia, under the scorching sun that burned my skin, with her hands hardened by the jungle and her eyes that seemed to be screaming in silence while hiding under the shadow of a dirty cowboy hat.

...a lone soldier who had just angrily thrown his rusted bike on a dusty Sudanese road, aiming his weapon at me with a vacant stare. I could hear the cartridge slide slowly into the chamber as fear and memories flooded my mind, projecting my life like a fleeting film before my eyes. Suddenly, I only breathe peace.

...eighty Haitian children, smiling amidst hardship, dancing with danger and playing amidst need. Their house, crumbling in the dampness, as if waiting for the next storm to leave this world together with its little angels.

...children of the Peruvian jungle who, seen from afar, enjoy their childhood, but who, up close, hide behind a dark shadow of fear and distrust. They must grow up quickly to survive, because those who are called to protect them long ago have given up.

There are looks that scream so loudly that no one wants to hear them. Looks that cannot be forgotten because they have become a part of me, and although they have been with me for a long time, I never knew what they were trying to convey....

This thesis was, in essence, born from the attempt to decipher those looks.

More than an academic endeavor, this writing project and exercise in reflection is a moral one, since those enigmatic gazes have always been present in my mind,

accompanying me from the mountains to the classroom, from the jungle to my desk.

And on that journey, I have never walked alone.

**To my parents.**

You were my first home and my first school. You taught me that firmness does not need to be loud and that constant work transforms destinies. If, for decades, I was able to go through war scenarios and today sit down to reflect on them with serenity, it is because I first learned at home the value of discipline, humility, justice, empathy, and love. This thesis is not only dedicated to the children who suffer from the wars of adults; it is also the fruit of the love with which you shaped my soul and character.

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You lived through this thesis in silence. You lived through my mental absences, my moments of introspection, my days when the past seemed more present than the present itself. My empty and hurried phone calls. While I tried to sort through memories and theories, you held on to real life: distant contact, home, the transition to a new country, a new language, a new climate, the challenge of starting from scratch. Seeing my children growing up without having to face the ugly face of war is priceless. That is a luxury that many children don't have in today's world, something I am grateful for every single second of my life. Sofia, my beloved wife, thank you for your quiet strength and unconditional support. Thank you for keeping us together when my mind was constantly travelling between interviews, books, and difficult memories. I apologize for the times I was not fully present. Today, I return not only with the satisfaction of having completed this research but also with a deeper understanding of what truly matters.

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In the midst of studying violence, you represented continuity, growth, and hope.  
Reminding me of the future helped me avoid getting stuck in the past.

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Your presence is a bridge that sustains what is essential. This thesis also belongs to you.

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The principle of *Jita Kyoei*—mutual prosperity and well-being—permeates this research throughout. Peace is not individual victory; it is shared well-being. What I learned in the dojo found meaning in these pages.

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In different ways, both reminded me that memory is a responsibility. That telling difficult stories is a form of service and resistance. That humility and consistency can coexist with firmness. And that defending the underprivileged and helping those in need makes neglected voices more difficult to ignore.

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With you, I learned that wearing a uniform in foreign territory is a commitment to humanity. Protecting civilians, protecting children, and upholding fragile agreements amid chaos are not theories: they are daily practices. Your courage, commitment, and teachings are present here.

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I am one of you. My understanding of conflict was forged in training, patrols, and real operations with you all. I learned what it means to entrust my life to the comrade walking beside me.

To those who continue to serve, thank you for keeping the vocation to serve and protect alive.

To those I saw fall in action, this thesis is for you, too. Understanding the phenomenon of former child soldiers does not mean ignoring the pain experienced in

combat; it means trying to ensure that fewer children and young people are dragged into that spiral that marked us so deeply.

And finally,

**To the children and former child soldiers I have encountered at different times in my life.**

Your gazes were the starting point for this research. Gazes that were unspoken questions, silent cries, and desperate screams. This thesis is my attempt to answer them.

Through these lines, I do not seek to justify, simplify, or romanticize. I seek to understand. I seek to listen better. I seek to contribute, even if modestly, to ensuring that your stories are not reduced to statistics or worse, to eternal silence that falls into oblivion. This work began with a question, and it ends with a conviction: no child should have to bear the burden of adults' wars. If these pages manage to open a space for recognition, reflection, or action, then it will have been worth it.

## **Dedication**

To the children who suffer the consequences of the adults' wars.

May your voices never be silenced, nor your smiles erased.

## **List of Tables**

|                                         |           |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Table 1: Study Participants.....</b> | <b>37</b> |
| <b>Table 2: Coding Matrix.....</b>      | <b>48</b> |

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Abstract .....</b>                                                               | <b>i</b>   |
| <b>Acknowledgments .....</b>                                                        | <b>iii</b> |
| <b>Dedication .....</b>                                                             | <b>ix</b>  |
| <b>List of Tables .....</b>                                                         | <b>x</b>   |
| <b>Table of Contents .....</b>                                                      | <b>xi</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 1 – Background, Introduction, and Context .....</b>                      | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>1.1 Background and Research Motivation .....</b>                                 | <b>1</b>   |
| <b>1.2 Introduction .....</b>                                                       | <b>4</b>   |
| <b>1.3 Purpose statement .....</b>                                                  | <b>5</b>   |
| <b>1.4 Context.....</b>                                                             | <b>6</b>   |
| <b>1.4.1 Shining Path's origin and transformation.....</b>                          | <b>6</b>   |
| <b>1.4.2 Child soldiers: past, present, and future .....</b>                        | <b>8</b>   |
| <b>1.4.3 Children affected by war and the importance of their perspectives.....</b> | <b>9</b>   |
| <b>1.4.4 State response and implementation gaps.....</b>                            | <b>10</b>  |
| <b>1.5 Significance of the study .....</b>                                          | <b>11</b>  |
| <b>1.6 Conclusion .....</b>                                                         | <b>13</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 2 – Literature Review .....</b>                                          | <b>15</b>  |
| <b>2.1 Understanding the Child in the Literature .....</b>                          | <b>16</b>  |
| <b>2.2 Understanding the Concept of “Child Soldier” .....</b>                       | <b>18</b>  |
| <b>2.3 Theoretical Framework.....</b>                                               | <b>21</b>  |
| <b>2.3.1 Social Identity Theory .....</b>                                           | <b>21</b>  |
| <b>2.3.2 Basic Human Needs Theory.....</b>                                          | <b>24</b>  |
| <b>2.3.3 Social Cubism.....</b>                                                     | <b>25</b>  |
| <b>2.3.4 Transitional Justice, Peacebuilding, and Transformative Justice .....</b>  | <b>27</b>  |
| <b>2.3.5 Healing-Centered Peacebuilding .....</b>                                   | <b>28</b>  |
| <b>2.3.6 Hybrid Peacebuilding as the Integrative Framework.....</b>                 | <b>30</b>  |
| <b>2.4 Conclusion .....</b>                                                         | <b>32</b>  |
| <b>Chapter 3 – Methodology.....</b>                                                 | <b>34</b>  |
| <b>3.1 Introduction .....</b>                                                       | <b>34</b>  |
| <b>3.2 Research Question .....</b>                                                  | <b>34</b>  |

|                                                                             |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>3.3 Methodological Approach .....</b>                                    | <b>35</b> |
| <b>3.4 Study Participants .....</b>                                         | <b>37</b> |
| <b>3.5 Study Setting .....</b>                                              | <b>38</b> |
| <b>3.6 Data Collection.....</b>                                             | <b>38</b> |
| <b>3.7 Data Analysis.....</b>                                               | <b>40</b> |
| <b>3.8 Positionality and Reflexivity .....</b>                              | <b>41</b> |
| <b>3.9 Ethical and Epistemological Boundaries.....</b>                      | <b>45</b> |
| <b>3.10 Conclusion .....</b>                                                | <b>46</b> |
| <b>Chapter 4 – Analysis of Expert Interviews.....</b>                       | <b>47</b> |
| <b>4.1 Introduction .....</b>                                               | <b>47</b> |
| <b>4.2 Analytical Organization of the Interviews.....</b>                   | <b>48</b> |
| <b>4.2.1 Descriptive Overview of the Coding Matrix .....</b>                | <b>48</b> |
| <b>4.3 Mental and Physical Health Challenges .....</b>                      | <b>49</b> |
| <b>4.3.1 Mental Health, Trauma, and Trust .....</b>                         | <b>49</b> |
| <b>4.3.2 Gendered Dimensions of Harm .....</b>                              | <b>51</b> |
| <b>4.3.3 Individual and Collective Dimensions of Trauma .....</b>           | <b>51</b> |
| <b>4.3.4 Physical Health and the Embodied Consequences of Conflict.....</b> | <b>52</b> |
| <b>4.3.5 Public Health: Continuity, Access, and Interculturality .....</b>  | <b>53</b> |
| <b>4.4 Socioeconomic and Relational Challenges .....</b>                    | <b>54</b> |
| <b>4.4.1 Economic Precarity and Competing Opportunities .....</b>           | <b>54</b> |
| <b>4.4.2 Stigma, Discrimination, and Social Exclusion .....</b>             | <b>55</b> |
| <b>4.4.3 Family Relationships: Rupture and Support.....</b>                 | <b>56</b> |
| <b>4.4.4 Silence and Concealment of the Past .....</b>                      | <b>57</b> |
| <b>4.5 State and Institutional Responses .....</b>                          | <b>57</b> |
| <b>4.5.1 Perceptions of State Presence and Continuity .....</b>             | <b>57</b> |
| <b>4.5.2 Institutional Promises and Trust.....</b>                          | <b>58</b> |
| <b>4.5.3 Cultural Relevance and Local Knowledge .....</b>                   | <b>59</b> |
| <b>4.5.4 Armed Forces and National Police.....</b>                          | <b>60</b> |
| <b>4.5.5 Recognition and Reparation .....</b>                               | <b>60</b> |
| <b>4.6 Resilience, Support, and Reintegration Possibilities .....</b>       | <b>61</b> |
| <b>4.6.1 Social and Community Support.....</b>                              | <b>61</b> |
| <b>4.6.2 Family and Family-like Support .....</b>                           | <b>62</b> |

|                                                                                                                                                                              |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| 4.6.3 Reconciliation .....                                                                                                                                                   | 63        |
| 4.6.4 Opportunities .....                                                                                                                                                    | 63        |
| 4.6.5 Relative Reintegration Success .....                                                                                                                                   | 64        |
| 4.7 Integrated Findings from the Expert Interviews .....                                                                                                                     | 65        |
| 4.8 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                                                         | 67        |
| <b>Chapter 5 – Hope, Resilience, and the Possibilities for Sustainable Social Reintegration .....</b>                                                                        | <b>68</b> |
| 5.1 Introduction .....                                                                                                                                                       | 68        |
| 5.2 Hope as a Structurally Conditioned Possibility .....                                                                                                                     | 68        |
| 5.3 Resilience: Adaptation and Transformation .....                                                                                                                          | 70        |
| 5.4 Relational Conditions of Hope and Resilience .....                                                                                                                       | 72        |
| 5.5 Opportunities, Belonging, and Relative Reintegration Success .....                                                                                                       | 74        |
| 5.6 The Hope–Resilience–Reintegration Relationship .....                                                                                                                     | 75        |
| 5.7 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                                                         | 76        |
| <b>Chapter 6 – Micro-Level Findings: Individual, Family, and Community Dimensions .....</b>                                                                                  | <b>77</b> |
| 6.1 Introduction .....                                                                                                                                                       | 77        |
| 6.2 Individual-Level Findings .....                                                                                                                                          | 77        |
| 6.3 Family-Level Findings .....                                                                                                                                              | 79        |
| 6.4 Community-Level Findings .....                                                                                                                                           | 80        |
| 6.5 Interaction Across the Micro Levels .....                                                                                                                                | 82        |
| 6.6 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                                                         | 83        |
| <b>Chapter 7 – Macro-Level Findings: Structural, Institutional, and Societal Dimensions .....</b>                                                                            | <b>84</b> |
| 7.1 Introduction .....                                                                                                                                                       | 84        |
| 7.2 Historical, Structural, and Territorial Conditions .....                                                                                                                 | 84        |
| 7.3 Institutional and Governance Findings .....                                                                                                                              | 86        |
| 7.4 Societal Visibility, Recognition, and the Legacy of Conflict .....                                                                                                       | 88        |
| 7.5 Connecting Macro Conditions to Micro-Level Reintegration .....                                                                                                           | 91        |
| 7.6 Conclusion .....                                                                                                                                                         | 92        |
| <b>Chapter 8 – From Reintegration to Peacebuilding: A Peace and Conflict Studies Framework and Evidence-Informed Policy Approach for Former Child Soldiers in Peru .....</b> | <b>94</b> |

|                                                                                                 |            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>8.1 Introduction .....</b>                                                                   | <b>94</b>  |
| <b>8.2 Reframing Former Child-Soldier Reintegration through Peace and Conflict Studies.....</b> | <b>95</b>  |
| <b>8.3 Evidence-Informed Foundations of the Policy Framework .....</b>                          | <b>98</b>  |
| <b>8.4 Guiding Principles .....</b>                                                             | <b>99</b>  |
| <b>8.4.1 Reintegration as a Long-Term Healing-Centered Peacebuilding Process .....</b>          | <b>99</b>  |
| <b>8.4.2 Human Dignity, Agency, Relationships, and Social Inclusion .....</b>                   | <b>99</b>  |
| <b>8.4.3 Shared Responsibility with Clear State Accountability .....</b>                        | <b>100</b> |
| <b>8.4.4 Interculturality and Territorial Responsiveness .....</b>                              | <b>100</b> |
| <b>8.4.5 Prevention through Inclusive Development .....</b>                                     | <b>100</b> |
| <b>8.5 Four Pillars of the Policy Framework .....</b>                                           | <b>101</b> |
| <b>8.5.1 Pillar I: Individual Reintegration .....</b>                                           | <b>101</b> |
| <b>8.5.2 Pillar II: Family Reintegration.....</b>                                               | <b>102</b> |
| <b>8.5.3 Pillar III: Community Reintegration and Social Cohesion .....</b>                      | <b>102</b> |
| <b>8.5.4 Pillar IV: Structural and Institutional Transformation .....</b>                       | <b>103</b> |
| <b>8.6 Hybrid and Intercultural Governance .....</b>                                            | <b>104</b> |
| <b>8.7 Phased Implementation.....</b>                                                           | <b>106</b> |
| <b>8.8 Monitoring and Evaluation .....</b>                                                      | <b>107</b> |
| <b>8.9 Long-Term Sustainability .....</b>                                                       | <b>108</b> |
| <b>8.10 Conclusion .....</b>                                                                    | <b>109</b> |
| <b>Chapter 9 – Final Conclusions, Contributions, Limitations, and Future Directions .....</b>   | <b>110</b> |
| <b>9.1 Final Conclusions.....</b>                                                               | <b>110</b> |
| <b>9.2 Contributions of the Thesis.....</b>                                                     | <b>111</b> |
| <b>9.3 Limitations .....</b>                                                                    | <b>113</b> |
| <b>9.4 Future Directions .....</b>                                                              | <b>114</b> |
| <b>9.5 Final Reflection .....</b>                                                               | <b>116</b> |
| <b>References.....</b>                                                                          | <b>117</b> |
| <b>Annex A – Glossary .....</b>                                                                 | <b>126</b> |

## **Chapter 1 – Background, Introduction, and Context**

This study is grounded in a personal and professional trajectory shaped by encounters with conflict-affected populations, but its central concern is scholarly: how long-term social reintegration can be understood in the specific context of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the *Militarized Communist Party of Peru* (MPCP). This chapter develops the context necessary to frame that question. It begins by explaining the experiences that motivated the research and the positionality they produced, before locating child soldiering within the broader international literature and Peru's internal armed conflict. The discussion then traces the emergence and transformation of *Shining Path*, the MPCP's continuing presence in the *Valley of the Apurímac, Ene, and Mantaro Rivers* (VRAEM), and the institutional challenges surrounding former child soldiers' reintegration. From this foundation, the chapter defines the study's purpose and scope, identifies the empirical and analytical gaps it addresses, and explains why long-term reintegration is relevant not only as a social and institutional concern, but also as a peacebuilding challenge in contemporary Peru.

### **1.1 Background and Research Motivation**

“In the jungle, the machete is an extension of the arm. Of life, too” (Freyre, 2021, pos. 733).

My interest in children affected by armed conflict developed through encounters across several conflict-affected environments. These experiences did not provide empirical evidence for this study, nor did they substitute for the voices of former child soldiers. Rather, they form part of the positional and intellectual trajectory that led me to ask how societies understand and respond to individuals whose childhoods have been shaped by violence.

In 2003, while serving as a junior Peruvian Marine officer in El Estrecho, a small town on the Putumayo River bordering Colombia, I encountered a fifteen-year-old girl who had spent years working in coca fields across the border. At first, I believed she was considerably older. Her hands were damaged by years of physical labour, and she carried a *peinilla*, a machete commonly used in the region. She was not necessarily a child soldier in the strict sense of the term, but she was clearly a child whose life had been shaped by the intersection of poverty, illicit economies, insecurity, and armed conflict. Her stare remained with me long after the encounter.

Four years later, while serving as a *United Nations Military Observer* with the *United Nations Mission in Sudan* (UNMIS), I encountered another dimension of the relationship between childhood and armed violence. Our patrols included monitoring compliance with the peace agreement and observing humanitarian conditions, including concerns surrounding child recruitment. During one patrol near Rumbek, a young armed *Sudan People's Liberation Army* soldier reacted violently to our vehicle and pointed his rifle at me. As the situation unfolded, I found myself wondering what experiences could produce such an intense response and whether his own life might have been shaped by recruitment into armed conflict at an early age.

My experiences in Haiti further reinforced these concerns. In 2014, while commanding an infantry company with the *United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti* (MINUSTAH), I encountered children living in precarious conditions in an orphanage whose deteriorating structure placed them at considerable risk. With support from a non-governmental organization and a Paraguayan military engineering unit, we developed a plan that helped build a safer facility. Although these children were not child soldiers, the experience reinforced a broader lesson: protecting children affected

by violence and institutional fragility requires more than responding to immediate threats. It requires sustained social and institutional support.

This question became more directly connected to Peru when I returned in 2015 as Deputy Commander of the *Naval Component* operating in the VRAEM. There, state forces continued confronting the MPCP, the successor to *Shining Path*, and the illicit economies associated with its operations. Children remained among those affected by the conflict. My responsibilities also reinforced the importance of avoiding the stigmatization of local populations and recognizing that communities living amid armed violence cannot simply be divided into perpetrators, supporters, and victims without considering the coercive and structural conditions surrounding their lives.

These encounters—from the Putumayo border to Sudan, Haiti, and the VRAEM—gradually transformed a professional concern into an academic question. They also shaped my positionality. My military and peacekeeping experiences shape the questions I consider important and how I approach conflict, security, vulnerability, and reintegration. For this reason, these experiences are acknowledged reflexively rather than presented as evidence about former child soldiers themselves. Chapter 3 examines the methodological implications of this positionality in more detail.

The present research emerges from this trajectory but moves beyond personal experience. It seeks to examine systematically how subject-matter experts with professional experience related to conflict-affected populations understand the factors shaping the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the MPCP. In doing so, the study attempts to make a comparatively underexamined Peruvian phenomenon more visible while maintaining a clear distinction between the researcher's experiences, expert interpretations, documentary evidence, and the first-person experiences of former child soldiers.

## 1.2 Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of children have been estimated to participate in armed conflicts worldwide (Freyre, 2021; Muraszkiewicz et al., 2020; Villanueva O’Driscoll et al., 2013). Armed forces, militias, insurgent organizations, and other armed groups have used children in combat and non-combat roles, exposing them to indoctrination, coercion, exploitation, physical and psychological abuse, and sexual violence (Drumbl, 2012; Muraszkiewicz et al., 2020; Van Engeland, 2019).

International efforts have consequently sought both to prevent child recruitment and to support children leaving armed groups. Instruments and initiatives such as the *Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups* and the *Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers* illustrate the development of this international protection framework. The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict have also become increasingly recognized within international criminal law (McBride, 2014).

Although child soldiering is a global phenomenon, much of the scholarship has concentrated on cases in Africa and Asia, and in Latin America, particularly Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (Bainomugisha, 2019; Beah, 2008; Boothby et al., 2006; Bultmann, 2019; Cameron, 2001; Garbarino, 1992; Garbarino et al., 1991; Kahn, 2008; Özerdem & Podder, 2011; Walzer & Deng, 2009; M. Wessells, 2006; M. G. Wessells, 2019; M. Wessells & Kostelny, 2008; Whitman et al., 2012). Peru has received considerably less sustained attention despite decades of internal armed conflict and documented recruitment of children by *Shining Path* and its successor organizations (Boesten & Gavilán, 2023; Freyre, 2021; Gagnon et al., 1993; Gavilán Sánchez, 2017; León, 2020; Save the Children & Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2010; Villasante Cervello, 2016, 2019; Yaranga, 2022).

The *Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR)* concluded that *Shining Path's* recruitment and use of children during the internal armed conflict was not incidental but formed part of its broader strategy. Children performed support functions and, in some cases, were incorporated into armed activities from an early age (Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación, 2003). Yet the problem did not disappear with the *Shining Path's* military decline during the 1990s. On the contrary, recruitment has persisted in areas where the MPCP remains active, particularly in the VRAEM.

The Peruvian case presents a distinctive peacebuilding challenge. It connects the historical legacy of internal armed conflict with persistent territorial inequality, illicit economies, limited state presence, cultural diversity, social stigma, and continuing insecurity. Reintegration must be examined not simply as the moment an individual leaves an armed organization, but as a longer social process unfolding within families, communities, institutions, and territories affected by violence.

This study focuses specifically on how knowledgeable professionals understand that process. It does not claim to reconstruct the lived experiences of former child soldiers directly. Instead, it examines expert interpretations of the factors that may shape long-term social reintegration and analyzes those interpretations through the theoretical and analytical framework developed in the chapters that follow.

### **1.3 Purpose statement**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study is to examine how subject-matter experts with professional experience related to conflict-affected populations understand the factors that shape the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the MPCP in Peru.

Rather than attempting to establish the direct lived experiences or long-term impacts of child soldiering on former child soldiers themselves, the study examines the

professional observations, interpretations, and experiences of experts familiar with conflict-affected populations. Through semi-structured interviews complemented by documentary, biographical, and reflexive analysis, the research seeks to identify and interpret the individual, family, community, socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, political, and territorial factors that participants perceive as influencing reintegration.

The study further examines how these factors interact within Peru's particular historical and post-conflict context and considers their implications for peacebuilding and public policy. In doing so, the research contributes to an understudied area of scholarship (Villasante Cervello, 2019) while developing an evidence-informed framework for understanding and supporting long-term social reintegration.

## **1.4 Context**

### **1.4.1 Shining Path's origin and transformation**

Peru's political history has been shaped by profound geographic, cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional inequalities. Colonialism, natural-resource exploitation, discrimination, corruption, and uneven state development have contributed to enduring fractures within Peruvian society (Babb, 2019; Degregori, 2016; Felbab-Brown, 2010; Feldmann & Luna, 2023; Li, 2015; Quiroz, 2019).

These tensions have deep historical roots. Indigenous and regional resistance during the colonial period, including the eighteenth-century rebellions associated with Túpac Amaru II, Tomás Katari, and Túpac Katari, reflected longstanding conflicts over authority, exclusion, and inequality (Brosseder, 2019; Serulnikov, 2019; Sobrevilla Perea, 2019). During the twentieth century, these tensions increasingly intersected with socialist and revolutionary movements. José Carlos Mariátegui's work linked socialism to the conditions of Peru's rural and Indigenous populations, while subsequent revolutionary organizations developed their own interpretations of these ideas (Gorriti

Ellenbogen, 2017; Rau, 2019; Roncagliolo, 2017; Villasante Cervello, 2019). Following unsuccessful guerrilla movements in the 1960s, Ayacucho became a particularly important centre of political mobilization. Under Abimael Guzmán Reynoso, a radical faction of the Communist Party consolidated into the organization later known as *Sendero Luminoso*, or *Shining Path* (Cant, 2019; Degregori, 2016).

Between 1969 and 1980, *Shining Path* consolidated its ideological and organizational strategy. In May 1980, as Peru returned to democratic government, members of the organization burned electoral materials in Chuschi, Ayacucho, symbolically initiating what the organization called the *Inicio de la Lucha Armada* (*Beginning of the Armed Struggle*). The Peruvian state initially underestimated the insurgency but transferred responsibility for counterinsurgency operations to the armed forces in parts of the emergency zone in late 1982. Violence subsequently intensified (Chávez et al., 2023; Gorriti Ellenbogen, 2017; Starn & La Serna, 2021; Villasante Cervello, 2019).

Civilian populations bore much of the conflict's human cost. *Shining Path* committed massacres and other serious human-rights abuses, while state forces were also responsible for extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and other violations. Approximately 70,000 people were killed, hundreds of thousands were displaced, and numerous rural communities were devastated during the conflict (Friedman, 2018).

The capture of Abimael Guzmán in 1992 severely weakened *Shining Path* but did not eliminate armed remnants. Over subsequent decades, surviving factions underwent significant transformations. The organization now generally identified as the MPCP maintains elements of *Shining Path's* ideological discourse while operating within the VRAEM's political economy and interacting with narcotrafficking networks (Arrieta Matos & Tipe Sánchez, 2019; Matusitz, 2022). This transformation is important for understanding contemporary child recruitment. The persistence of illicit economies

means that recruitment cannot be interpreted exclusively through ideological explanations. Coca production, narcotrafficking, informal economic activity, territorial isolation, poverty, and weak state presence shape the environment in which armed recruitment continues (Durand, 2017; Felbab-Brown, 2010; Feldmann & Luna, 2023; Saavedra, 2023). As Tokatlian (2012, p. 61) asks:

“If the protection of children is extended to all children, should we not be worried about the children of coca and poppy crop peasants who, after forced eradication, end up becoming child soldiers?”

The contemporary phenomenon lies at the intersection of the unresolved legacy of Peru’s internal conflict and the political economy of the VRAEM.

#### **1.4.2 Child soldiers: past, present, and future**

After the *Shining Path's* military decline in the 1990s, its remaining armed elements consolidated their presence in the VRAEM, a geographically difficult region where the Andes meet the Amazon basin. The area's terrain, limited infrastructure, coca economy, narcotrafficking routes, and uneven state presence have created conditions in which armed actors have been able to maintain influence (Fumerton, 2023).

Within this environment, the MPCP has continued to use children (Arrieta Matos & Tipe Sánchez, 2019; Matusitz, 2022; Yaranga, 2022). Some children enter armed organizations from surrounding communities, while others are born and raised within environments controlled by armed groups (Theidon, 2023; M. G. Wessells, 2016). Their experiences may involve not only exposure to violence but also socialization within structures that shape family relationships, identities, authority, education, and perceptions of the outside world.

Leaving such environments does not automatically constitute successful reintegration. International research has associated former child soldiering with challenges involving psychological well-being, education, employment, stigma, family

relationships, identity, and community acceptance (Betancourt et al., 2010; Mapp, 2010; Robjant et al., 2020). These findings provide important comparative context, but they cannot simply be assumed to describe former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the MPCP. This research examines how relevant professionals understand these factors in the Peruvian context.

The continuing recruitment of children also gives reintegration a preventive dimension. Understanding what supports or constrains sustainable civilian participation is relevant not only to those who have already left armed organizations but also to broader efforts to reduce conditions that may facilitate future recruitment.

#### **1.4.3 Children affected by war and the importance of their perspectives**

The international literature increasingly recognizes children associated with armed forces and armed groups as individuals whose experiences cannot be reduced either to passive victimhood or to security threats. Their trajectories may be shaped simultaneously by coercion, agency, family relationships, community dynamics, identity formation, economic circumstances, and the social environments surrounding conflict and reintegration.

Wessells' (2006, 2007, 2016, 2019) work, for example, emphasizes children's perspectives in examining recruitment, militarized identities, recovery, and social reintegration. First-person narratives have likewise helped illuminate dimensions of violence, survival, identity transformation, and reintegration that externally generated accounts may not fully capture. International child-protection frameworks similarly recognize that children associated with armed organizations occupy diverse roles extending beyond direct combat.

This distinction is especially important methodologically. This thesis does not address the international absence of first-person child-soldier narratives. Nor does this

study claim to provide such narratives in Peru. Instead, it addresses the limited systematic knowledge concerning long-term social reintegration in the specific context of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the MPCP.

The study approaches that problem through subject-matter experts with relevant professional experience. Their narratives provide informed professional perspectives on reintegration, but they are not treated as substitutes for former child soldiers' own voices. Maintaining this distinction establishes the research's epistemological boundary and informs the interpretation of its findings throughout the thesis.

#### **1.4.4 State response and implementation gaps**

The Peruvian state's response to people rescued from *Shining Path* and its successor organizations provides an important institutional context for this research. *Shining Path* abducted and displaced populations during the internal conflict, particularly in rural highland and Amazonian areas, and remnants of the organization maintained similar practices in the VRAEM (Villasante Cervello, 2016).

State forces have conducted operations to rescue people held in captivity. A significant operation in 2015 resulted in the liberation of fifty-four Asháninka people, including thirty-four children under fourteen years of age (Arrieta Matos & Tipe Sánchez, 2019; Sarmiento Barletti, 2015).

In 2016, the Peruvian government adopted the *Protocol for the Attention of People and Families Rescued from Terrorist Groups*, intended to coordinate assistance to rescued individuals and families. Following recommendations contained in the 2018 *National Human Rights Plan*, the Protocol was amended in 2021 to strengthen culturally and linguistically appropriate services and improve coordination, monitoring, and reporting among responsible state institutions.

These measures demonstrate formal recognition that rescues alone do not complete recovery and reintegration. However, available documentation provides limited evidence concerning the implementation and long-term outcomes of these mechanisms. At the same time, reports indicate that the MPCP continues to use children in the VRAEM (Save the Children & Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2010; Yaranga, 2022).

This gap between formal institutional frameworks and the limited evidence on sustained implementation is particularly relevant to the present study. It raises broader questions about how reintegration is understood, what forms of support professionals consider necessary, and how institutional responses interact with the social and territorial environments into which individuals return.

Against this background, the study maintains a deliberately narrow scope. It does not attempt to provide a comprehensive history of children affected by Peru's conflict or directly reconstruct former child soldiers' experiences. Rather, it examines how subject-matter experts understand the factors shaping long-term social reintegration, with particular attention to the VRAEM because of the continued presence of the MPCP, persistent child recruitment, illicit economies, institutional limitations, and the region's distinctive historical and intercultural context.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

This study is significant for three related reasons.

First, it addresses an empirical and contextual gap. Although child recruitment by *Shining Path* has been documented and broader international scholarship has examined child-soldier reintegration, comparatively limited research has focused specifically on the long-term social reintegration of individuals formerly associated with *Shining Path*

and the MPCP. The Peruvian case remains underrepresented in the broader child-soldier literature.

Second, the study addresses an analytical gap. Reintegration is frequently examined through particular dimensions such as trauma, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), economic assistance, security, or social services. This research instead investigates how experts understand the interaction of psychological, relational, family, community, cultural, socioeconomic, institutional, political, and territorial factors. This multidimensional approach is especially relevant in a context where the effects of past political violence coexist with contemporary illicit economies, territorial inequality, and uneven institutional presence.

Third, the study has significance for *Peace and Conflict Studies* (PACS). The central concern is not simply what happened to children during conflict, but what conditions may enable individuals and communities to move forward after violence. Questions of trust, identity, recognition, belonging, hope, resilience, social relationships, institutional legitimacy, and opportunities for peaceful participation connect reintegration to broader peacebuilding processes. Recent healing-centered approaches to peacebuilding further suggest that societies emerging from chronic violence must address not only institutional reconstruction but also the damaged relationships and social fabric through which individuals and communities experience post-conflict life (Yoder-Maina, 2022). Yoder-Maina's healing-centered approach reinforces the relevance of examining reintegration through trust, belonging, relationships, resilience, institutional responsiveness, and possibilities for social healing.

The study does not assume that the experts interviewed can speak for former child soldiers. Its contribution lies instead in systematically examining their professional knowledge and interpretations, comparing areas of convergence and divergence, and

situating those perspectives within documentary evidence and a multidisciplinary PACS framework. This provides the empirical and conceptual foundation for the subsequent analysis and for the evidence-informed public-policy framework developed later in the thesis.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has established the personal, historical, political, and institutional context of the research. The researcher's encounters with children and communities affected by conflict in Peru and other international settings explain the study's motivation and establish a positionality that requires continued reflexive attention. These experiences motivate the research; they do not constitute evidence about the experiences of former child soldiers.

Within Peru, child recruitment must be understood against the historical evolution of *Shining Path*, the severe consequences of the internal armed conflict, and the subsequent transformation of armed remnants into the MPCP within the political economy of the VRAEM. Although Peru has developed mechanisms intended to support people rescued from armed groups, questions remain regarding implementation, continuity, and long-term reintegration.

Against this context, this thesis examines how subject-matter experts understand the factors shaping the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the MPCP. Its analytical concern extends beyond disengagement from an armed organization toward the longer process through which individuals may reconstruct relationships, identities, belonging, opportunities, and participation within civilian society.

The next chapter situates this problem within the scholarly literature. It develops the theoretical perspectives used to interpret the expert narratives—Social Identity Theory,

Basic Human Needs Theory, Social Cubism, Transitional and Transformative Justice, Healing-Centered Peacebuilding, and Hybrid Peacebuilding—and establishes the conceptual framework through which the empirical findings will subsequently be analyzed.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter establishes the conceptual and theoretical foundations for examining how subject-matter experts understand the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the MPCP. Chapter 1 situates the study within the historical, political, institutional, and territorial context of child recruitment and reintegration in Peru and identifies the need to examine reintegration as a longer social process that extends beyond disengagement from an armed organization. Building on that foundation, this chapter first clarifies the principal concepts used throughout the thesis and then develops the theoretical lenses through which it interprets expert narratives and documentary evidence.

The chapter begins by examining how the literature understands the concept of the *child*. Although the under-eighteen threshold provides the central international standard for protection, scholarship also draws attention to childhood as developmental, relational, socially situated, and culturally mediated. Section 2.1 therefore considers the relationship among protection, developing autonomy, vulnerability, agency, and culturally variable expectations of maturity. Section 2.2 builds directly from this discussion by examining the more complex category of the *child soldier*. It distinguishes association with an armed organization from direct combat, considers differences in coercion and agency, and explains why the term *former child soldier* is used in this thesis without treating armed-group involvement as a uniform or permanent identity. These conceptual distinctions are important for the rest of the study because they allow childhood protection and developing agency to be held together without reducing former child soldiers either to passive victims or to fully autonomous adult actors.

Section 2.3 then develops the theoretical architecture used to interpret long-term reintegration. No single theory captures the full range of individual, relational, cultural, institutional, and structural conditions involved. Social Identity Theory and Basic Human Needs Theory illuminate questions of identity, belonging, recognition, security, and participation. Social Cubism situates these processes within their historical, political, economic, demographic, and psychocultural environments. Transitional and Transformative Justice address the legacies of violence, recognition of harm, relational repair, and structural change, while Healing-Centered Peacebuilding connects recovery with agency, relationships, community resources, cultural knowledge, and social healing. Hybrid Peacebuilding provides an integrative framework for examining how formal institutions, communities, local knowledge, Indigenous authorities, and other actors may interact to support reintegration.

Together, the conceptual and theoretical literature establish the analytical architecture for the chapters that follow. The chapter does not assume these frameworks explain how former child soldiers experience reintegration. Rather, they provide complementary lenses for interpreting the expert perspectives collected in this study.

## **2.1 Understanding the Child in the Literature**

Although Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the most widely accepted legal threshold, defining a child as a person below eighteen unless majority is attained earlier under applicable law (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), the concept of the *child* should not be understood solely through chronological age. Lee-Koo (2015) observes that this age boundary exists alongside socially and culturally specific understandings of maturity, responsibility, and participation. Therefore, childhood develops through an interaction between biological development and social expectations, while transitions to adulthood may be shaped by cultural

norms, family responsibilities, gender, socioeconomic position, and other contextual factors (Lee-Koo, 2015). Similarly, Vissing (2024) argues that perceptions of childhood influence the opportunities and limitations children encounter, their relationships with others, and the degree of agency they are permitted to exercise. A legal age threshold is therefore indispensable for establishing protection, but it does not fully explain how childhood is understood or experienced in different social or cultural settings.

Schapiro (1999) offers a philosophical perspective that complements these social and cultural approaches. She differentiates between conventional definitions of childhood and the deeper moral question of what justifies considering someone a child, noting that legal age classifications often do not align with judgments about autonomy and decision-making. For Schapiro, a child is fundamentally a person who is “not yet developed” but in the process of development. This entails specific obligations for adults to protect, nurture, discipline, and educate children. Her point is not that children lack moral significance or agency altogether; she emphasizes that children's opinions are important and that they may bear some responsibility for their actions. However, she maintains that their choices and actions do not necessarily carry the same moral weight as those of adults (Schapiro, 1999). Childhood thus involves both emerging agency and ongoing protection.

This developmental understanding also helps avoid treating all children as a homogeneous category. Whitaker (2023) approaches childhood through the lenses of vulnerability, capability, readiness, and relationship, emphasizing the importance of recognizing each child's circumstances. Lee-Koo (2015) similarly shows that family obligations, work, gender, education, culture, and socioeconomic circumstances may affect when and how young people assume responsibilities typically associated with adulthood. This becomes particularly important in conflict settings, where children may

take on roles such as workers, caregivers, heads of household, or combatants (Lee-Koo, 2015). Schapiro's (1999) distinction between childhood and adulthood reinforces the need for caution: childhood is not simply a lesser degree of adult development, but a distinctive developmental and normative condition in which the capacity for autonomous self-direction is still being formed. This means that assuming adult-like responsibilities does not, by itself, transform a child into an autonomous adult.

For this thesis, these perspectives support an understanding of the *child* as both a rights-bearing person entitled to special protection and a socially situated individual with developing capacities and agency. The under-eighteen threshold remains the internationally recognized normative standard for identifying childhood and should not be displaced by culturally variable expectations of maturity, especially when this framework relates to protecting children affected by war. At the same time, children should not be represented simply as passive or incapable actors (Whitaker, 2023). Schapiro's (1999) account is especially useful for holding these positions together: children are developing agents, but their still-forming capacity for autonomous self-direction provides a moral basis for differentiated protection and responsibility. This distinction provides an important conceptual bridge to the more difficult category at the centre of this study: the *child soldier*.

## **2.2 Understanding the Concept of “Child Soldier”**

Building on this understanding of childhood, the concept of child soldier also requires greater precision than the term initially suggests. The Paris Principles define a child associated with an armed force or armed group as a person below eighteen who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity. The definition includes fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, and children used for sexual purposes and is not restricted to those who directly participate in hostilities (Paris

Principles Steering Group, 2022). This broader formulation is important because it separates association with an armed organization from the narrower category of direct combat. In this sense, Child soldier should consequently not be treated as synonymous with *child combatant*.

The terminology itself carries important analytical implications. Kiyala (2019) retains the term child soldier while grounding it in the broader Paris Principles definition, because children may perform a wide range of activities within armed organizations that do not easily fit into fixed combat and non-combat categories. At the same time, he identifies an important problem with the expression: calling a child a soldier can suggest the occupational choice associated with adult military service in many countries, even though children's involvement may stem from coercion or highly constrained circumstances (Kiyala, 2019). Schapiro's (1999) analysis helps explain why this distinction matters. If childhood is a developmental condition in which autonomous self-direction is still forming, a child's apparent decision to join or remain with an armed organization cannot automatically be interpreted using the same assumptions about autonomy and responsibility that apply to an adult. Her argument that children's choices and actions may carry different moral significance than adults' is particularly relevant here.

This distinction helps clarify the difficult relationship among victimization, agency, and responsibility. Hartjen and Priyadarsini (2012) argue that children may become soldiers through forced recruitment or because severely constrained alternatives lead them into armed organizations, while emphasizing their status as victims. Yet acknowledging victimization does not require portraying children as entirely passive (Whitaker, 2023). Schapiro (1999) explicitly recognizes that children may act, express preferences, and bear some responsibility, even though their choices and actions are not

necessarily treated the same way as adults'. Her account is particularly valuable for this thesis because it avoids a simplistic victim-perpetrator binary. A child may exercise agency within an armed organization while remaining developmentally situated, constrained by circumstances, and entitled to the protections associated with childhood. Agency, in this sense, should not automatically equate with full adult autonomy or responsibility.

Accordingly, this thesis uses *former child soldier* as a practical umbrella term for individuals who, while children, were recruited, used, or incorporated into an armed organization in combat or non-combat capacities. The term recognizes their protected status as children without assuming that they shared the same experiences, entered armed organizations under identical circumstances, exercised the same degree of agency, or participated directly in hostilities. It also allows attention to differences in coercion, socialization, roles, relationships, and the structural conditions surrounding their involvement (Hartjen & Priyadarsini, 2012). This interpretation brings together the preceding discussions of the *child* and the *child soldier*: children may exercise agency and make consequential decisions while still developing the capacity for autonomous self-direction associated with adulthood, and recognizing such agency does not remove their protected status as children. This distinction is particularly important for long-term reintegration because the concept of *former child soldier* identifies a significant experience in a person's childhood without treating that experience as a permanent or all-encompassing identity. Association with an armed organization may have lasting consequences and remain an important part of an individual's biography, but it should not be assumed to determine who that person is or can become. Reintegration therefore involves creating conditions in which individuals can develop or recover relationships, social roles, belonging, agency, and future opportunities beyond identities associated

with armed conflict. This does not require erasing or minimizing the past; rather, it recognizes its significance without allowing it to define the entirety of the person's present identity or future possibilities.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

The exploratory nature of this study requires a theoretical framework that can move across different levels of analysis. Reintegration involves individuals, but it also takes place within families, communities, institutions, political economies, cultural systems, and territories. No single theory fully captures these relationships.

The frameworks used in this study address different but interconnected dimensions of the reintegration problem. Social Identity Theory and Basic Human Needs Theory help explain questions of belonging, recognition, security, and participation. Social Cubism places these processes within their historical, political, economic, and social environments. Transitional and Transformative Justice draw attention to the legacies of violence, recognition of harm, relationships, and the conditions required for structural change. Healing-Centered Peacebuilding adds a recovery-oriented perspective that connects trauma and healing with agency, relationships, community resources, cultural knowledge, and social well-being. Hybrid Peacebuilding then provides the broader integrative framework for examining how formal institutions, local actors, community knowledge, and different forms of authority interact in conflict-affected settings.

### **2.3.1 Social Identity Theory**

“[Victor Raul Quispe Zaga, also known as Jorge,] ... at the age of twenty-four, perhaps twenty-six, was finally going to have an identity. He was going to become a citizen. At last, he would officially exist” (León, 2020, p. 180)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Author's translation from Spanish.

Social Identity Theory emerged from Henri Tajfel's and John Turner's work on categorization, group membership, prejudice, and intergroup relations. The theory proposes that individuals derive part of their identity from the groups they belong to. Group membership provides belonging, values, emotional attachment, and social meaning, but it may also contribute to processes of differentiation, prejudice, discrimination, and dehumanization when identities are constructed antagonistically (Hogg, 2016).

Social Identity Theory is particularly relevant to child soldiering because armed organizations are not only military structures; they may also become powerful environments of socialization. Some researchers identify the adoption of a military identity as an important consequence of youth soldiering, especially when armed groups systematically use training, rewards, propaganda, punishment, and violence to reshape young people's values and behaviour:

The adoption of military identity is among the most powerful psychological impacts of youth soldiering. These identity shifts change values, increase aggressive behaviour, and may position young people to continue cycles of violence. ... armed groups use training regimens, prolonged brutality, reward structures, and propaganda calculated to remake youth as soldiers. ... Experience in many countries indicates that youth who take on a military identity are at risk of increased aggressive behaviour. (M. Wessells & Kostelny, 2008, pp. 117-8)

Matusitz (2022) similarly associates recruitment vulnerability with social exclusion, alienation, identity crises, the search for belonging, and the desire for a positive social identity.

For children recruited at a young age—or born within an armed organization—the distinction between personal identity and group identity may be particularly difficult to separate. Armed groups can become sources of authority, belonging, protection, recognition, and meaning.

While older child soldiers are usually able to remember life before the conflict – and therefore retain a healthier sense of identity and stability – children born in armed groups are completely unfamiliar with the civilian context. For them, extraction from the armed group represents the loss of the only family they have ever known. (Whitman et al., 2012, p. 42)

Wessells' (2016) work also describes how prolonged group socialization may lead children to internalize military roles and values, while coercion, fear, and reward structures reinforce group conformity.

The Peruvian literature illustrates the relevance of these dynamics. Accounts concerning *Shining Path* describe indoctrination, coercion, family separation, punishment, and the construction of loyalty to the organization. Arrieta Matos and Tipe Sánchez (2019), for example, argue that children no longer belonged to their parents but to the party, showing how armed organizations sought to replace family attachments with organizational identity.

Social Identity Theory also helps illuminate the difficulties that may arise after disengagement. Leaving an armed organization does not automatically generate a socially accepted civilian identity. Former child soldiers may have to negotiate between identities developed within the armed group and identities imposed upon them by the outside society, including stigmatizing labels associated with terrorism, criminality, or violence. Wessells and Kostelny (2008) emphasize the importance of reconstructing civilian identity during reintegration.

For this thesis, Social Identity Theory performs the following analytical functions: It helps interpret how experts understand militarized socialization, stigma and recognition, and the reconstruction of belonging within civilian life. It is especially relevant to the analysis of trust, community acceptance, family relationships, and social participation developed in later chapters.

### 2.3.2 Basic Human Needs Theory

“How could anyone rather eat a baby so as not to die?” (Villasante Cervello, 2016, p. 136).<sup>2</sup>

“While extracting the oil, the starving “cooks” would swallow the human flesh. Hunger was stronger than any moral consideration for these desperate people” (Arrieta Matos & Tipe Sánchez, 2019, p. 107).<sup>3</sup>

Basic Human Needs (BHN) Theory, particularly as developed within conflict studies by John Burton, emphasizes the importance of needs such as security, identity, recognition, and participation. When these fundamental needs remain persistently unmet, conflict may intensify because individuals and groups seek alternative means of satisfying them (Sandole, 2013).

BHN Theory is useful for this study because child soldiering cannot be understood solely through military recruitment. Armed organizations frequently operate within environments where security, protection, recognition, participation, family stability, and material well-being are already severely constrained. Recruitment may intersect with unmet needs even when coercion remains the principal mechanism.

Avruch and Black's cultural critique adds an important qualification. Although basic needs may have broad human relevance, how people understand and satisfy those needs is culturally mediated (Avruch et al., 2013). Security, belonging, recognition, participation, and well-being cannot be operationalized identically across all populations or cultural contexts.

This qualification is especially important in Peru, where former child soldiers may come from Indigenous, rural, multilingual, and culturally diverse communities. A reintegration program based solely on standardized institutional definitions of well-

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<sup>2</sup> Author's translation from Spanish

<sup>3</sup> Author's translation from Spanish

being could overlook locally meaningful understandings of family, community, healing, recognition, and participation.

The relevance of BHN Theory extends beyond recruitment into reintegration. Conflict-related deprivation may threaten subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, and identity (Avruch et al., 2013). If legitimate avenues for satisfying these needs remain unavailable after disengagement, individuals may continue to face insecurity and exclusion. In areas where illicit economies and armed networks remain active, these structures may also offer alternative pathways for income, recognition, protection, or belonging.

BHN Theory provides a lens for interpreting how expert-identified factors such as security, identity, recognition, economic opportunity, family support, institutional trust, and social participation relate to reintegration. Its analytical value lies not in reducing reintegration to a list of needs, but in examining whether civilian social environments provide legitimate and culturally meaningful pathways through which fundamental needs can be addressed.

### **2.3.3 Social Cubism**

“What is at stake in post-war contexts is the reconstruction of social relations, cultural forms and economic networks, and the reinvention of ritual life that allows a community to make sense of the suffering experienced and caused” (Theidon, 2004, p. 89).

Social Cubism provides a multidimensional framework for examining conflict through six interacting dimensions: demographic, economic, historical, political, psychocultural, and religious (Byrne et al., 2002). This framework emphasizes the relationships among multiple forces and levels of conflict and how they change over time.

This approach is especially useful for the Peruvian case. The long-term reintegration of former child soldiers cannot be examined independently of the historical development of *Shining Path*, territorial inequality, racism and discrimination, illicit economies, state presence, political violence, Indigenous identities, community relationships, and memories of conflict. These dimensions are interconnected and change in relation to one another.

Social Cubism helps prevent two analytical problems. The first is over-individualization, in which reintegration is reduced to the psychological adaptation of the former child soldier. The second is over-structurization, in which individuals disappear from the analysis and reintegration becomes solely a question of institutions, poverty, or governance.

McKay (2002) emphasizes Social Cubism's potential to connect structural conflict analysis with individual-level interpretation. This characteristic makes the framework especially compatible with the architecture of the present thesis, which later distinguishes between micro-level and macro-level findings while examining the relationships between them.

Conflict theory ... addresses large social structures and issues such as latent and manifest interests. However, like structural functionalism, it does not view the individual but rather takes a more macroscopic view. Social cubism, this researcher hypothesizes, permits a cube to be used for an individual. (McKay, 2002, p. 886)

Social Cubism also complements narrative inquiry. Narrative analysis attends to the ways individuals interpret and communicate experience, while Social Cubism provides a framework for situating those narratives within broader historical, political, economic, cultural, and psychosocial contexts. In this study, however, the relevant narratives are principally those of the experts interviewed, supplemented by documentary and

biographical sources. Social Cubism helps interpret how those professional perspectives connect individual and relational concerns with wider structural conditions.

Its primary function in the thesis is consequently integrative: to explain how psychological, family, community, institutional, and structural factors identified at different levels interact.

#### **2.3.4 Transitional Justice, Peacebuilding, and Transformative Justice**

“...the conflict's main protagonists—the military and the Shining Path—generally did not take part in the CVR's public work...” (Friedman, 2018, p. 707).

Transitional Justice refers broadly to mechanisms and processes through which societies address serious abuses committed during periods of conflict or authoritarian rule. These may include truth commissions, criminal accountability, reparations, institutional reform, recognition, and other measures intended to address past harm while supporting democratic transition (Mihr, 2021; Werle & Vormbaum, 2022). Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission represents a central expression of transitional justice following the internal armed conflict. It documented extensive violence, established historical narratives concerning responsibility and victimization, and generated recommendations intended to contribute to reconciliation and institutional reform.

For former child soldiers, however, transitional justice presents particular challenges. Individuals recruited as children may occupy ambiguous positions between victimhood, participation, coercion, and responsibility. Conventional categories separating victims and perpetrators may therefore be insufficient for understanding their trajectories.

Peacebuilding broadens the analysis by shifting attention from past violations to reconstructing relationships and the social conditions necessary for sustainable peace. Jeong (2017) emphasizes the importance of addressing structural violence and

supporting social empowerment after violent conflict. Seen as a peacebuilding problem, reintegration matters not only because former child soldiers may require services, but also because unresolved exclusion, mistrust, damaged relationships, and institutional weakness may continue reproducing conditions associated with conflict.

Transformative Justice extends this approach further. Whereas Transitional Justice often emphasizes formal mechanisms for addressing past abuses, Transformative Justice focuses more directly on the social relationships, inequalities, power structures, and conditions that enabled violence and may continue reproducing harm (Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020; Friedman, 2018).

The distinction is particularly relevant to the Peruvian case. Friedman (2018) argues that Peru's reconciliation process has struggled to incorporate the perspectives of former conflict participants. Moving from transitional to transformative approaches requires more than acknowledging past harm. It also involves examining how exclusion, structural inequality, cultural marginalization, and damaged relationships may be transformed.

For this thesis, these perspectives perform complementary functions and move the analysis of reintegration beyond whether individuals have disengaged from an armed organization to the broader question of whether the relationships and structures necessary for sustainable civilian participation are being reconstructed.

### **2.3.5 Healing-Centered Peacebuilding**

Healing-Centered Peacebuilding complements the theoretical framework by connecting the effects of violence with recovery, agency, relationships, culture, and social transformation. It bridges the psychosocial and relational dimensions of conflict recovery with the broader concerns of Peace and Conflict Studies. Yoder-Maina (2022) understands healing not simply as an individual response to trauma, but as a process

embedded in the wider social environments affected by violence. The approach moves beyond a deficit-oriented view of trauma by recognizing relationships, community resources, cultural knowledge, and forms of agency that may support individual and collective well-being.

Two elements are particularly relevant to this study: inclusion and contextualization. Inclusion brings multidisciplinary participation, lived experience, and local forms of healing into the analysis. Contextualization cautions against transferring standardized interventions across settings and directs attention to local knowledge, storytelling, ritual, and community resources (Yoder-Maina, 2022). These principles are especially relevant in Peru, where culturally diverse Indigenous communities may understand harm, recovery, and well-being in ways that do not correspond neatly with externally developed models.

Healing-Centered Peacebuilding also connects personal recovery with the social conditions in which it occurs. Trust, participation, cultural continuity, supportive relationships, and responsive institutions may all shape possibilities for recovery and resilience. Its systems orientation therefore complements Social Cubism and Transformative Justice by linking individual and collective recovery with institutional and structural change.

The framework is also useful for considering the ambiguity between victimhood and responsibility. In the case of former child soldiers, childhood coercion and victimization may coexist with later participation in harmful acts. Healing-Centered Peacebuilding allows these complex trajectories to be considered without reducing individuals to fixed victim–perpetrator categories or removing questions of agency and responsibility.

In this thesis, Healing-Centered Peacebuilding serves as a complementary PACS lens, bringing healing, agency, relationships, cultural knowledge, and community

resources more explicitly into the analysis. Hybrid Peacebuilding, discussed next, provides the broader integrative framework for examining how these locally grounded processes interact with formal institutions, public policy, and different forms of authority.

### **2.3.6 Hybrid Peacebuilding as the Integrative Framework**

“[C]hild soldiering constitutes a significant impediment to peace [...] A high priority for peacebuilding, then, is to transform children's identities as warriors by aiding reintegration into civilian life that prizes peaceful values and behaviour.” (M. G. Wessells, 2016, p. 105)

The preceding theoretical approaches identify different dimensions of reintegration, but Hybrid Peacebuilding provides the broadest framework for understanding how those dimensions may interact in practice.

Jeong (2005) identifies security and demilitarization, political transition, development, reconciliation, and social rehabilitation as important elements of comprehensive peacebuilding. These dimensions are highly relevant to former child soldiers because sustainable reintegration requires more than physical disengagement from an armed organization.

Hybrid Peacebuilding adds an important insight: peace is rarely produced entirely through formal state institutions or exclusively through local communities. Mac Ginty (2010) conceptualizes post-conflict peace as emerging through interaction among external interventions, state institutions, local actors, norms, practices, and forms of authority. These relationships involve negotiation, adaptation, resistance, accommodation, and unequal power distributions.

This framework is especially appropriate for the Peruvian case. Conflict-affected populations may interact simultaneously with national government agencies, regional and local authorities, Indigenous institutions, families, churches, non-governmental

organizations, community organizations, schools, healthcare providers, and informal support networks. Reintegration occurs within an already hybrid governance environment.

Hybridity, however, should not be romanticized. Local communities are not necessarily homogeneous, automatically peaceful, or stable organizations. Scambary and Wassel (2018) show that communities themselves may contain internal divisions, competing interests, unequal authority, and historically hybrid practices. Local institutions may provide cultural legitimacy and social support, but they may also reproduce stigma, discrimination, exclusion, or other forms of inequality.

This caution is central to the present study. Hybrid Peacebuilding should not be interpreted as an argument that communities can substitute for the state. Nor does it imply that centralized state programs can simply be supplemented by symbolic local participation. Instead, the framework highlights how actors negotiate responsibility, legitimacy, knowledge, resources, and authority.

Applied to reintegration, Hybrid Peacebuilding raises several questions that guide the later analysis: How do formal institutions interact with locally legitimate actors? How are culturally meaningful approaches incorporated into public interventions? When communities compensate for weak institutional support, does this strengthen resilience or transfer excessive responsibility onto already vulnerable populations? How can state responsibility be maintained while incorporating Indigenous and local knowledge?

Hybrid Peacebuilding functions as the integrative framework of this thesis. It brings together insights from Social Identity Theory, Basic Human Needs Theory, Social Cubism, and Transitional and Transformative Justice, and Healing-Centered Peacebuilding without collapsing them into a single theory.

The resulting analytical structure can be summarized as follows:

- **Social Identity Theory:** How are belonging, stigma, militarized identity, civilian identity, group identity, and individual identity reconstructed?
- **Basic Human Needs Theory:** Are security, recognition, identity, participation, and other fundamental needs being addressed through legitimate and culturally meaningful means? What fundamental needs remain unmet?
- **Social Cubism:** How do individual and relational factors interact with historical, political, economic, demographic, psychocultural, and cultural conditions?
- **Transitional and Transformative Justice:** How are past harms recognized, relationships repaired, and structures associated with violence and exclusion transformed?
- **Healing-Centered Peacebuilding:** How do trauma, relational repair, agency, community resources, and social healing connect to peacebuilding?
- **Hybrid Peacebuilding:** How do state institutions, communities, local actors, and other organizations interact in supporting—or constraining—long-term reintegration?

This structure provides the theoretical basis for interpreting the expert narratives throughout the remainder of the thesis.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has established a complementary theoretical architecture for interpreting expert perspectives on long-term reintegration. Social Identity Theory and Basic Human Needs Theory illuminate identity, belonging, recognition, security, and participation; Social Cubism connects these concerns to their broader structural environment; Transitional and Transformative Justice address recognition, relational repair, and structural change; and Healing-Centered Peacebuilding strengthens the connection between trauma, relationships, agency, community resources, and social healing. Hybrid

Peacebuilding provides an integrative framework for interpreting interactions among formal institutions, communities, Indigenous authorities, civil society, and other actors.

These perspectives serve as analytical lenses rather than empirically demonstrated propositions among former child soldiers themselves. Together, they support the thesis's later PACS interpretation of reintegration as a relational, multilevel, intercultural, and structurally conditioned peacebuilding process. Chapter 3 now explains the methodology used to collect and interpret the expert perspectives examined in this study.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter explains the qualitative and interpretivist methodology used to examine how subject-matter experts understand the factors shaping the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and its remnants, the *Militarized Communist Party of Peru* (MPCP).

The study employs narrative inquiry through semi-structured interviews with eleven subject-matter experts, complemented by documentary and biographical analysis and researcher reflexivity. The chapter describes the research question, methodological approach, participant selection, study setting, data collection and analysis procedures, and researcher positionality.

Former child soldiers were not interviewed directly; consequently, the primary empirical material consists of professional observations and interpretations by subject-matter experts rather than first-person accounts. Section 3.9 defines the ethical and epistemological implications of this boundary in greater detail.

### **3.2 Research Question**

The study is guided by the following research question:

How do subject-matter experts with professional experience related to conflict-affected populations understand the factors that shape the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with Shining Path and the Militarized Communist Party of Peru (MPCP) in Peru?

The question is deliberately exploratory. It seeks to identify how knowledgeable professionals interpret the conditions, challenges, and possibilities surrounding reintegration rather than testing causal relationships or claiming direct access to the experiences of former child soldiers.

### **3.3 Methodological Approach**

The study adopts a qualitative interpretivist approach grounded in narrative inquiry (Hiller & Chaitin, 2014). Interpretivist research is appropriate where the objective is to understand how individuals make sense of complex social phenomena rather than to establish universal causal relationships. Narrative inquiry complements this orientation by examining how participants organize, interpret, and communicate professional experience through stories and reflection.

Narrative inquiry commonly draws on biographical, autobiographical, and oral narrative materials (Hiller & Chaitin, 2014). In this study, these sources performed different functions. Selected biographical and documentary publications provided historical and contextual information concerning child recruitment, conflict, and reintegration. The researcher's reflexive engagement with professional experience informed positionality and interpretation. However, the principal empirical data came from semi-structured interviews with subject-matter experts.

Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it combines thematic consistency with flexibility. Pre-established questions provide a common structure across participants while allowing follow-up questions to develop in response to professional experiences, observations, and issues raised during the conversation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Gert Larsen & Adu, 2022; Islam et al., 2022; Jeong-Hee, 2019a; Moore, 2014).

The interviews were designed to elicit participants' understandings of the Peruvian child-soldier phenomenon and the factors surrounding long-term reintegration. They were not intended to reconstruct the first-person lived experiences of former child soldiers. Instead, the narratives were treated as professional and experiential interpretations that could be compared across participants and considered alongside

documentary and biographical sources. Practice-oriented Peace and Conflict Studies research also illustrates the value of practitioner knowledge in developing conceptual understandings of conflict recovery. Yoder-Maina's (2022) Healing-Centered Peacebuilding framework, for example, was developed from interviews with thirty peacebuilding and trauma-informed practitioners and scholars across multiple regions. Such professional knowledge can provide valuable interpretive insight, while remaining analytically distinct from the first-person lived experiences of conflict-affected populations.

The principal interview questions were:

1. Can you please describe your experience working with Shining Path or MPCP child soldiers or former child soldiers?
2. Have you ever interviewed or worked directly with a child soldier or former child soldier?
3. What consequences and challenges do you think former Shining Path or MPCP child soldiers may experience?
4. What challenges do communities face when reintegrating former child soldiers associated with Shining Path or the MPCP?
5. Are you aware of government or other organizational support for former child soldiers and their social reintegration?

These questions functioned as a general framework rather than a rigid questionnaire, and additional questions were introduced when participants raised issues relevant to the research question.

The resulting methodological design combines three forms of evidence:

- **Expert narratives**, which provide the primary empirical material;
- **Documentary sources**, which provide historical and contextual triangulation;  
and
- **Researcher reflexivity**, which makes explicit how positionality may influence interpretation.

Together, these sources allow for a multidimensional interpretation of the phenomenon while maintaining clear distinctions among professional perspectives, documented evidence, and researcher interpretation.

### 3.4 Study Participants

The study employed purposive, non-probability expert sampling to recruit participants with professional knowledge relevant to child soldiering, conflict-affected populations, reintegration, or the Peruvian conflict. Expert sampling was appropriate because the objective was not statistical representation but collecting informed professional perspectives on an under-researched phenomenon (Douglas, 2022).

The study also used snowball, or referral, sampling to identify additional participants through relevant professional networks (Cooper & Rice, 2014; Hiller & Chaitin, 2014; Sarker & Abdulmalek Al-Muaalemi, 2022).

Eleven participants were recruited. Their backgrounds included anthropology, journalism, military, and psychology. This professional diversity was intended to generate multiple perspectives, not consensus.

**Table 1: Study Participants**

| No. | Name/Pseudonym      | Profession     | Organization/Affiliation                               | Country |
|-----|---------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1   | Mariella Villasante | Anthropologist | Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú               | Peru    |
| 2   | Bartholomew Dean    | Anthropologist | University of Kansas                                   | USA     |
| 3   | Mechthild           | Anthropologist | German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) | Germany |
| 4   | Ricardo León        | Journalist     | Independent                                            | Peru    |
| 5   | Iván Brehaut        | Journalist     | Independent                                            | Peru    |
| 6   | Carlos Freyre       | Military       | Peruvian Armed Forces                                  | Peru    |
| 7   | Coqui               | Military       | Peruvian Armed Forces                                  | Peru    |
| 8   | Sam                 | Military       | Peruvian Intelligence Services                         | Peru    |

| No. | Name/Pseudonym | Profession                              | Organization/Affiliation                    | Country |
|-----|----------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------|
| 9   | Roberto        | Military/<br>Peacekeeping<br>Consultant | Independent                                 | Uruguay |
| 10  | Abelina Ampiri | Psychologist                            | Independent                                 | Peru    |
| 11  | Elba           | Psychologist                            | Pontificia Universidad<br>Católica del Perú | Peru    |

The participants varied significantly in the nature and extent of their contact with conflict-affected populations. Some had direct professional experience with former child soldiers or rescued populations; others contributed broader expertise concerning Indigenous communities, conflict, security, psychology, journalism, or reintegration. These differences are analytically important. Participant accounts were examined for both convergence and divergence, with attention to differences in the location and nature of each participant's expertise.

### 3.5 Study Setting

The research was conducted virtually, with the principal investigator based in Winnipeg, Canada. Participants were located in Peru and several other countries at the time of the interviews.

Virtual interviewing was appropriate because participants were geographically dispersed and because the study focused on professional expertise rather than observation within a single field site. The research nevertheless remains geographically focused on Peru, with particular attention to the VRAEM and populations affected by *Shining Path* and the MPCP.

### 3.6 Data Collection

Data collection consisted of two complementary components: documentary research and semi-structured expert interviews.

Documentary research included academic publications, historical material, government documents, biographical sources, and other relevant material used to establish the historical and institutional context of child recruitment and reintegration (Hiller & Chaitin, 2014).

The interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams or WhatsApp and recorded digitally. All interviews were conducted in Spanish. Spanish was the researcher's native language and the primary language used by most participants. Two participants spoke Spanish as a second language.

The researcher transcribed the interview recordings with technological assistance. The researcher used Trint to support transcription and DeepL or Google Translate to assist translation and editing where required. Also, Google Scholar and Kindle eBook platforms supported data collection. The researcher reviewed automated outputs against the original material. English translations used in the thesis are treated as researcher-verified, meaning-preserving translations of the Spanish-language interviews rather than independent English-language testimony.

A Chain of Evidence spreadsheet was maintained throughout data collection in accordance with the organizational approach described by Douglas (2022). It recorded relevant procedural information such as interview dates, participant codes, transcription status, interruptions, and notable circumstances arising during data collection. The Chain of Evidence aimed to strengthen transparency and traceability rather than serve as an additional analytical dataset.

Audio recordings were transferred to the University of Manitoba's secure data-storage environment and managed in accordance with the study's approved research procedures.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative qualitative coding and thematic interpretation process.

Technology organized material but did not interpret it. For instance, Microsoft Word and Excel supported transcript organization, coding, comparison, and thematic development. Zotero also helped organize data and generate citations and references. As Bazeley and Jackson (2013) emphasize, qualitative software and digital tools assist data management but do not replace the researcher's analytical responsibility.

The analytical process drew on the general narrative-inquiry principle of moving from raw data to coded themes and subsequently to an interpreted research narrative (Jeong-Hee, 2019b). Douglas's (2022) staged approach also informed the analysis organization.

The process involved five interconnected stages:

1. **Familiarization and identification of key concepts.** Interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to identify significant ideas, observations, experiences, and recurring patterns relevant to the research question.
2. **Coding and thematic organization.** Related concepts were grouped into broader thematic categories. These categories included mental and physical health, socioeconomic challenges, family and community relationships, institutional responses, resilience, hope, trust, and opportunities for reintegration.
3. **Comparison and validation.** Emerging themes were checked against the original transcripts to ensure interpretations remained grounded in participant accounts. The analysis considered convergences and divergences across professional backgrounds rather than assuming uniformity among participants.

4. **Triangulation and theoretical interpretation.** Interview themes were considered alongside documentary evidence and interpreted using the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. This stage distinguished between what participants reported, what documentary evidence independently supported, and what the researcher inferred analytically.
5. **Synthesis and presentation.** Themes were organized into the empirical and analytical structure presented in Chapters 4 to 8.

The analytical process was interpretive rather than purely descriptive. However, the study's evidentiary structure bounded the interpretation. The analysis sought to interpret meaning within the participants' professional narratives, not to infer first-person experiences that were not directly collected.

For this reason, three types of claims are distinguished throughout the thesis:

1. **Interview-derived claims** are attributed explicitly to participants or described as expert perspectives.
2. **Documented substantive claims** rely on published, historical, or institutional sources.
3. **Researcher interpretations** are identified as analytical propositions developed through comparison of the interview evidence, documentary sources, and theoretical framework.

This distinction is central to the study's credibility and directly informs the presentation of findings in the chapters that follow.

### **3.8 Positionality and Reflexivity**

This research is closely connected to my personal history, professional trajectory, and intellectual commitments. In qualitative research, positionality refers to the standpoint from which the researcher approaches the study and can shape the questions asked, the

relationships formed, and how evidence is interpreted (Yip, 2024). Bukamal (2022) similarly emphasizes that researchers actively participate in knowledge production and that they should make their biographies, professional experiences, values, and social locations explicit. I therefore do not attempt to remove my background from the research. Instead, reflexivity is used to examine how it may contribute insight, introduce assumptions, and define the limits of what I can reasonably claim.

I was born in Lima in 1975 and grew up during a period of intense political violence associated with Shining Path. I later served for twenty-six years in the Peruvian Navy, including experience in counterinsurgency, counternarcotics, border security, and peacekeeping. My final operational assignment in Peru as a Marine officer involved the VRAEM in 2015. I also served as a United Nations peacekeeper and later developed academic and teaching experience in international security, political science, and Peace and Conflict Studies. Experiences in the Peru–Colombia border region, Sudan, Haiti, and the VRAEM gradually transformed a professional concern with conflict and security into an academic interest in child protection and long-term reintegration. These experiences form part of the intellectual trajectory that led to this study, but they are not treated as empirical evidence about former child soldiers.

My relationship to the research topic is best understood as a fluid insider–outsider position. Positionality scholarship cautions against treating these categories as fixed. Yip (2024) describes insider and outsider positions as context-dependent and existing along a continuum, while Ibrahim et al. (2024) show how nationality, profession, education, language, and institutional affiliation can intersect to produce hybrid forms of positionality. In this study, I have insider familiarity with Peru, the country's conflict history, military institutions, security issues, and the VRAEM. However, I am not an insider to the lived experience of former child soldiers, nor am I a member of any of the

Indigenous Andean or Amazonian communities discussed in the thesis. This distinction requires cultural humility and prevents me from treating professional familiarity as equivalent to local or first-person knowledge.

My military background is both a source of contextual understanding and a potential interpretive risk. Knowledge of defence and security institutions, military culture, and counterinsurgency can help situate the conflict, but it may also make security-oriented or state-centred explanations more familiar to me than perspectives rooted in the experiences of marginalized civilians. Insider knowledge can illuminate context while risking “blindness to the familiar,” whereas outsiders may identify different assumptions but lack local understanding. To reduce this risk, the participant sample included psychologists, anthropologists, journalists, and other professionals whose perspectives may differ from my military and security approaches. Even the selected military participants have positionalities that may not necessarily align with my experience or views. Reflexivity therefore involved testing interpretations against participant accounts, documentary evidence, and alternative professional perspectives rather than assuming that operational familiarity conferred analytical authority.

Emotional proximity also requires attention. Growing up amid political violence and losing colleagues during the conflict may shape how I understand Shining Path and the MPCP and could encourage binary distinctions between state actors and terrorists. This, in turn, requires attention to coercion, vulnerability, structural exclusion, and the complex position of children who may have been both victims of recruitment and participants in harmful acts. Reflexivity is particularly important here because it involves examining how personal history and assumptions shape interpretation rather than claiming that such influences can be eliminated (Bukamal, 2022; Yip, 2024).

My peacekeeping service in Sudan and Haiti, and later at the United Nations Department of Peace Operations in New York, together with teaching experience in Indigenous communities in Canada, also introduced comparative perspectives on child protection, conflict recovery, and community vulnerability. These experiences may broaden interpretation, but they also risk transferring external models uncritically to Peru. Ibrahim et al. (2024) argue that positionality should include attention to power, privilege, and the assumptions embedded in knowledge production. This supports the thesis's emphasis on local context, cultural relevance, Indigenous knowledge, and hybrid peacebuilding rather than automatically applying externally generated approaches.

My professional and normative commitments are also acknowledged. Rouse (2024) argues that professional identity and contextual knowledge can enrich sensitive qualitative research, but they require critical reflexivity and clear boundaries because personal and professional selves influence the research relationship and interpretation. Similarly, my commitment to service, dignity, reciprocity, and peacebuilding—including the influence of my life-long practice of Judo and its principle of *Jita Kyōei*, or mutual welfare and benefit—may orient me toward relational and community-centred interpretations. These commitments are part of my positionality, not empirical or theoretical evidence.

I therefore applied reflexivity throughout the study as a practice of transparency and methodological discipline. Zembylas (2025) cautions against treating positionality as a static list of identities or as a claim to automatic epistemic authority. Instead, positionality should remain dynamic, self-critical, and attentive to power and accountability. Consistent with this approach, the thesis distinguishes among participant testimony, documentary evidence, theoretical interpretation, and my own professional or

personal assumptions. My positionality is thus presented not as a credential for knowing the experiences of former child soldiers, but as an explicit account of the standpoint from which I ask the research question, interpret the evidence, and remain accountable for the study's limits.

### **3.9 Ethical and Epistemological Boundaries**

Because the study concerns an ethically sensitive population, the decision to interview experts rather than former child soldiers is methodologically significant.

Former child soldiers may face risks associated with trauma, stigma, legal ambiguity, security, confidentiality, and renewed exposure through research. The present study therefore does not seek to speak on their behalf or claim that expert interpretations are equivalent to first-person testimony.

This limitation affects the type of knowledge the study can produce. The interviews can establish that knowledgeable professionals identify or understand particular factors as important. They cannot independently establish that every former child soldier experienced those factors or that one factor directly caused a particular long-term outcome.

This evidentiary boundary is maintained throughout the findings and analytical chapters. Statements derived from interviews are attributed to participants; stronger substantive claims require independent documentary or scholarly support; and broader conclusions are presented as interpretations rather than empirically proven causal relationships.

The same principle applies to biographical material. First-person or biographical accounts can provide valuable contextual evidence, but they are not part of the interview sample and are therefore distinguished from the primary empirical dataset.

This explicit differentiation among evidence types strengthens the research by clarifying what the study can responsibly claim.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

This chapter established the qualitative interpretivist methodology guiding the study. Narrative inquiry and semi-structured interviews with eleven subject-matter experts generated the primary empirical material, while documentary and biographical evidence provided contextual support, and reflexivity made the researcher's positionality explicit.

The analysis moved from thematic coding and comparison to triangulation and theoretical interpretation, maintaining a distinction among expert perspectives, independently documented evidence, and researcher interpretation. Because former child soldiers were not interviewed directly, the findings establish how the participating experts understand the factors surrounding reintegration rather than the first-person experiences of former child soldiers themselves.

Chapter 4 now presents the empirical findings, which subsequently provide the basis for the analysis of hope and resilience (Chapter 5), the micro- and macro-level syntheses (Chapters 6 and 7), and the PACS-informed policy framework developed in Chapter 8.

## Chapter 4 – Analysis of Expert Interviews

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes how the subject-matter experts interviewed understand the factors shaping the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the *Militarized Communist Party of Peru* (MPCP). It constitutes the principal empirical chapter of the thesis and provides the evidentiary foundation for the analytical chapters that follow.

Because former child soldiers were not interviewed directly, the findings presented here should not be interpreted as first-person evidence of their lived experiences or as proof of causal relationships between child soldiering and particular adult outcomes. Rather, they represent recurring patterns of professional knowledge, observation, and interpretation identified across the expert interviews. Where relevant, these perspectives are considered alongside documentary evidence discussed elsewhere in the thesis.

Four broad themes emerged from the coding process: mental and physical health challenges; socioeconomic and relational challenges; state and institutional responses; and resilience, support, and possibilities for reintegration. Across these themes, several cross-cutting concerns recur, particularly trust, stigma, silence, family and community relationships, institutional continuity, cultural relevance, and access to meaningful opportunities.

The chapter does not seek to establish what every former child soldier experiences. Its purpose is to identify how knowledgeable professionals understand the principal challenges and possibilities surrounding reintegration and to make the evidentiary basis for those understandings visible.

## 4.2 Analytical Organization of the Interviews

The interviews were coded and organized thematically following the analytical process described in Chapter 3. Initial codes were consolidated into broader categories and compared across participants. The coding matrix identified recurring themes, areas of convergence, and issues that appeared less frequently but remained analytically significant.

The interview material was examined across three interconnected levels:

1. **Individual:** psychological, physical, identity-related, and economic concerns;
2. **Relational:** family, community, stigma, trust, and social support; and
3. **Institutional and structural:** state intervention, public services, socioeconomic conditions, cultural relevance, and territorial marginalization.

These levels should not be treated as independent. One of the strongest patterns across the interviews is precisely that participants understood individual reintegration as deeply affected by family relationships, community responses, institutional behaviour, and broader structural conditions.

### 4.2.1 Descriptive Overview of the Coding Matrix

The coding matrix provides a systematic overview of the interview material but is not intended as a statistical representation of prevalence. The frequency of coded excerpts indicates how often particular issues appeared in the analyzed material, not their objective frequency among former child soldiers.

**Table 2: Coding Matrix**

| Theme                      | Sub-theme       | Coded excerpts |
|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Mental and physical health | Mental health   | 110            |
|                            | Physical health | 23             |
|                            | Public health   | 45             |
|                            | Economic issues | 66             |

| Theme                                   | Sub-theme                    | Coded excerpts |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| Socioeconomic and relational challenges | Social issues                | 190            |
|                                         | Family issues                | 42             |
|                                         | Hiding the past              | 41             |
| Role of the state                       | State presence/intervention  | 123            |
|                                         | Armed Forces/National Police | 49             |
|                                         | Recognition and reparation   | 18             |
| Resilience                              | Social support               | 66             |
|                                         | Family support               | 11             |
|                                         | State support                | 26             |
|                                         | Reconciliation               | 2              |
|                                         | Opportunities                | 33             |
|                                         | Relative success stories     | 20             |

The matrix indicates particularly dense discussion around social challenges, state presence, and mental health. Lower frequency should not automatically be interpreted as lower importance. Reconciliation, for example, appeared comparatively rarely but became analytically important precisely because participants described it as difficult, exceptional, and contingent.

### 4.3 Mental and Physical Health Challenges

#### 4.3.1 Mental Health, Trauma, and Trust

Mental health emerged across the interviews as one of the most persistent concerns participants associated with long-term reintegration. Experts referred to nightmares, fear, hypervigilance, avoidance, depression, unresolved grief, suicidal behaviour, and distrust when discussing people and communities affected by political violence.

Mechthild Bock, reflecting on conflict-affected populations with whom she had worked, described the persistence of traumatic memories through dreams:

MECHTHILD BOCK: This trauma has often manifested itself through dreams. For example, in the case of the man who killed the two boatmen, it is said that he had dreamed the night before that a tree had fallen on his house. During the

conflict, when someone dreamed that a tree had fallen on the community, it meant that Shining Path was going to attack it.

The significance of this account lies not in establishing a universal clinical pattern but in illustrating how one expert perceived memories of conflict continuing to shape emotional responses after direct violence had diminished.

Across several interviews, however, trust appeared even more consistently than diagnostic categories. Elba linked willingness to speak about traumatic memories directly to the presence of a safe environment:

ELBA: That denial tells me that she doesn't trust anyone. Trust is directly related to a safe environment. To the extent that I feel confident and feel that this environment is one that will take care of me, and not one that will hurt me. To the extent I know this is safe, I will tell you about a memory I have.

Iván Brehaut similarly described mistrust operating in both directions:

IVÁN BREHAUT: They committed suicide, and many did not feel supported by the community. There was a lot of mistrust in the community because, having been part of the Shining Path forces, people feared them and mistrusted them.

These accounts suggest that reintegration, as understood by the participants, involves a reciprocal trust problem. Individuals affected by armed organizations may mistrust communities and institutions, while communities may simultaneously mistrust those associated with *Shining Path* or the MPCP.

A related issue concerns silence and avoidance. Elba rejected the notion that traumatic memories can simply be forgotten:

ELBA: There is a conscious and unconscious blocking of the past when I know what I experienced, but do not want to talk about it. But that does not mean the memory is blocked; it is there. This is directly related to trust or a safe environment. [...] The thing is, you don't detach yourself from trauma. You process it.

Her account distinguishes between silence as an apparent absence of memory and silence as a possible response to insecurity or emotional pain. This distinction becomes

important later in the chapter because participants described silence not only at the individual level but also within families, communities, and public institutions.

#### **4.3.2 Gendered Dimensions of Harm**

Several expert accounts also emphasized that conflict-related harm may be gendered. Elba described stigma and vulnerability to renewed sexual violence among women returning to communities:

ELBA: Just because some women return to their communities [...] and say they have been in the VRAEM, people wonder: what could she have been doing there? And rumours begin about where she comes from. In the case of the jungle, [...] many men believe that a woman who has been sexually assaulted can continue to be assaulted.

Her account suggests that reintegration may expose some women to overlapping forms of victimization: violence associated with armed conflict, social stigma, and gender-based violence within post-conflict family or community environments.

The interview evidence does not permit generalization about the experiences of all female former child soldiers. However, Elba's account identifies gender as a potentially important dimension of stigma, vulnerability, and reintegration that warrants further investigation.

#### **4.3.3 Individual and Collective Dimensions of Trauma**

Participants frequently moved between individual suffering and broader community-level consequences. Abelina Ampiri described the continuing presence of fear within Asháninka communities:

ABELINA AMPIRI: Today, when you go to a native community in the Ene River area, you always see people with weapons. And the residents say it is for security, as the terrorists may reappear. So, there is always this psychosis from the trauma left over from the era of terrorism.

This testimony should not be read as establishing a clinical diagnosis of entire communities. Rather, it demonstrates how one professional described persistent collective fear and insecurity in places affected by violence.

Mechthild Bock similarly observed that individuals frequently spoke about trauma in others rather than identifying it in themselves:

MECHTHILD BOCK: Normally, there is still no self-recognition of trauma at the individual level. People talk about others who are traumatized, but never about themselves. But this situation, in turn, creates mistrust and even fear.

The interviews suggest that participants understand psychological recovery as inseparable from trust, social relationships, community memory, and access to sustained support.

#### **4.3.4 Physical Health and the Embodied Consequences of Conflict**

Physical health appeared less frequently than mental health in the coding matrix, but the cases discussed by participants reveal how bodily harm may intersect with economic and family reintegration.

Ricardo León emphasized the enduring memory of hunger among people he had interviewed:

RICARDO LEÓN: [Many former child soldiers] tell you that the main memory that tortures them is hunger. In other words, it is a physical memory they have, rather than the fact that they lost their mother, for example. What marked them most was that they could not eat.

Carlos Freyre similarly described severe malnutrition among captives:

CARLOS FREYRE: If free communities had a nutrition problem, imagine what it was like for captives, who often only ate whatever leaves or roots they could find. Their food problem was so severe that their hair was yellowish, discoloured, and sometimes reddish.

Other accounts connected injury directly to employment and family responsibilities.

Ricardo León described “Aquiles,” whose physical disability limited his capacity to work:

RICARDO LEÓN: Today, Aquiles is disabled and practically begging for a disability pension. [...] He can't do anything. He can't even work as a municipal police officer or drive a motorcycle taxi in his town.

The importance of this case lies in the interaction of multiple factors. Physical injury may restrict labour-market participation; reduced income may affect family well-being; and bureaucratic difficulties may compound stress and mistrust. The interviews suggest that physical health should not be isolated from social and economic reintegration.

#### **4.3.5 Public Health: Continuity, Access, and Interculturality**

Participants identified three recurring concerns regarding public-health responses in conflict-affected territories: access, continuity, and cultural relevance.

Regarding access, Abelina Ampiri emphasized the scarcity of specialized professionals:

ABELINA AMPIRI: There is a need for more health professionals and specialists who can provide adequate, long-term support.

Regarding continuity, Elba criticized short-term models of psychosocial intervention:

ELBA: Because, in the state, evidence is often required. And that evidence has to be short-term. So, proposals are being made, such as giving six sessions, and after these six sessions, the person has to be well. That's a lie; it's not real!

Regarding interculturality, Abelina described the limited availability of Asháninka psychologists:

ABELINA AMPIRI: We are only two Asháninka psychologists. A male psychologist who works in a community mental health centre [...] but does not speak the Asháninka language fluently. And I, a female psychologist dedicated to fieldwork [...] There are no others.

These accounts might not establish the overall condition of Peru's public-health system. They do, however, reveal a consistent expert concern: long-term recovery may be constrained when care is geographically inaccessible, temporally short-lived, or culturally disconnected from the communities it intends to serve.

#### **4.4 Socioeconomic and Relational Challenges**

##### **4.4.1 Economic Precarity and Competing Opportunities**

Economic factors appeared across the interviews at both structural and individual levels. Participants described an environment in which legal and illegal economic opportunities coexist, particularly in the VRAEM.

Sam described the relationship between young people and the narco-trafficking economy:

SAM: The *pioneritos* are the human capital of the Militarized Communist Party of Peru. The *mochileros* are young people from the area whose job is to transport drugs, with a carrying capacity of approximately ten to fifteen kilos.

His account points to the relationship participants perceived between recruitment, illicit economies, and limited legitimate opportunities.

Economic insecurity was also discussed as a problem after disengagement. Ricardo León questioned whether the relatively small number and geographic isolation of former child soldiers contribute to their limited policy visibility:

RICARDO LEÓN: There is no rescue policy for these children. Perhaps because there are not many of them, perhaps because they are not important, perhaps because they are far away, perhaps because the state does not consider them worth investing in.

This statement reflects León's assessment rather than an independently established explanation for state policy. Nevertheless, it illustrates a recurring concern across the interviews: geographically remote and numerically small populations may struggle to generate sustained political attention.

The interviews further suggest that employment should not be understood simply as income generation. Education, vocational skills, citizenship, and opportunities for social mobility may provide alternative identities and legitimate pathways for participation. Conversely, where legal opportunities remain scarce and illicit markets remain accessible, former armed-group members may encounter competing economic pathways.

#### **4.4.2 Stigma, Discrimination, and Social Exclusion**

Stigma emerged as one of the most frequently discussed social obstacles. Several participants described former child soldiers and rescued populations being associated with terrorism even when recruitment or captivity had occurred through coercion.

Abelina Ampiri described this problem in a receiving community:

ABELINA AMPIRI: The receiving community constantly singled them out, along with their children, as if they were terrorists. The residents did not allow their children to associate with the rescued children because of the widespread stigma with which they were treated. And the resettled people felt bad. This put pressure on them, leading them to think about escaping again to another place.

This quotation demonstrates how one participant understood stigma as affecting not only individuals but also their children and broader family relationships.

At a wider societal level, Mariella Villasante connected invisibility with racism and classism:

MARIELLA VILLASANTE: Peruvian society does not want to know anything about it. Everyone covers their ears. [...] We prefer to live in indifference because this happened to the Indians in the mountains or the *Chunchos* in the jungle. [...] There is an issue of classism, discrimination, and racism here, which is very present.

Her account situates reintegration within broader patterns of racialized and territorial inequality. This testimony does not establish generalized societal indifference; it

illustrates how one expert interprets the limited visibility of conflict-affected Indigenous populations within national political life.

#### **4.4.3 Family Relationships: Rupture and Support**

The interviews present family relationships as deeply ambivalent. Conflict may separate families through abduction, disappearance, death, migration, or mistrust; at the same time, family connections may provide some of the strongest sources of belonging and support during reintegration.

Carlos Freyre described Aquiles's effort to reconnect with his father:

CARLOS FREYRE: Aquiles begins to search for his father. Little by little, he obtains information until he finds his whereabouts. His father lived near Satipo. Aquiles goes and meets him.

By contrast, Ricardo León described unresolved mistrust within another family:

RICARDO LEÓN: Jorge used to visit some paternal uncles who were members of Sendero [Luminoso] and then left. But they didn't talk about it because [...] they themselves had betrayed each other at some point.

These contrasting accounts illustrate why family reunification cannot be assumed to produce recovery automatically. Family may provide recognition and continuity, but it may also contain unresolved conflict, silence, guilt, or fear.

Participants also described substitute or non-biological family relationships. Iván Brehaut recalled community members adopting rescued children:

IVÁN BREHAUT: The community's president had six biological children and four adopted children, who had been freed and whom he was raising. [...] The school teacher had two or three adopted children.

Such cases suggest that the protective function of family may extend beyond biological kinship to durable caregiving and supportive relationships.

#### **4.4.4 Silence and Concealment of the Past**

Silence emerged as a recurring theme at several levels. Participants described individuals avoiding discussion of the past because of fear, shame, pain, stigma, or practical concerns about safety and social adaptation.

Mariella Villasante described concealment as potentially adaptive:

MARIELLA VILLASANTE: Why don't they speak up? Because it is the only way to get their lives back on track. It is the best way for them. And they are right to do so to adapt. What would they gain by telling everyone everything they did or what was done to them?

Villasante's account complicates the assumption that silence necessarily indicates a failure to process the past. In some contexts, concealment may be a rational strategy to avoid stigma or danger.

At the same time, participants also linked silence to political and social invisibility. When experiences remain unspoken, recognition and targeted institutional responses may become more difficult to develop. The interviews suggest that silence can perform two opposing functions: protection and invisibility.

Taken together, these accounts indicate that participants understood silence as context-dependent: it may protect individuals from stigma or danger while also contributing to social and institutional invisibility. The significance of disclosure depends partly on whether individuals perceive their social environment as sufficiently safe and trustworthy.

#### **4.5 State and Institutional Responses**

##### **4.5.1 Perceptions of State Presence and Continuity**

Participants frequently described state intervention as uneven, fragmented, short-term, or disconnected from local needs.

Iván Brehaut described intermittent official visits:

IVÁN BREHAUT: Only the police and the occasional official would visit them to take photos, but no one supported the social reintegration process to bridge the chasms of fear and mistrust between the Asháninkas and the recovered individuals.

Abelina Ampiri similarly described organizations appearing briefly and then disappearing:

ABELINA AMPIRI: Many institutions lend their support. But I don't know whether they do so out of a genuine desire to help or for other reasons, because they bring small things, take lots of photos, and then disappear, and we don't hear from them again.

These accounts should not be read as evidence of complete state absence. Chapter 1 documents the existence of formal protocols and institutional mechanisms. Rather, the interviews identify a perceived gap in implementation and continuity between formal commitments and sustained support at the territorial level.

Elba described one dimension of that gap through the emphasis placed on visible infrastructure:

ELBA: There is a reparations policy for affected communities. The problem is that this was focused on projects such as installing pipes [...] or providing electric lighting or building a sports field, but the psychosocial issue as a whole was always overlooked, namely, helping to repair and heal the breakdown of the social fabric.

Her account suggests that participants distinguish between material interventions and relational or psychosocial needs. They do not necessarily reject infrastructure; rather, they question whether infrastructure alone can address mistrust, trauma, stigma, and damaged social relationships.

#### **4.5.2 Institutional Promises and Trust**

The relationship between institutional continuity and trust emerged repeatedly.

Coqui argued that support often ended prematurely:

COQUI: These young people we have rescued are victims of this bloodthirsty group. The state should have created a dedicated entity to guide and support them

beyond the age of majority. [...] They have only been monitored until these children reached the age of majority, which I consider insufficient.

Abelina similarly described unmet commitments:

ABELINA AMPIRI: There has been no well-articulated state strategy for understanding how to accompany these people through this process and how to treat them, despite the involvement from some sectors. However, not everything that was promised was fulfilled.

Within the interviews, broken institutional commitments were frequently linked to mistrust. This becomes especially important for the later analysis of hope in Chapter 5: expectations of support may create possibilities for a different future, but unfulfilled expectations may deepen disappointment and distrust.

#### **4.5.3 Cultural Relevance and Local Knowledge**

Participants also criticized interventions perceived as externally designed or culturally inappropriate.

Abelina reflected on adapting her own professional training:

ABELINA AMPIRI: Little by little, I realized that I had to adapt to their customs and not try to impose what I had been taught all my life; otherwise, my work would be in vain.

Iván Brehaut described the loss of a culturally relevant educational approach:

IVÁN BREHAUT: There was an educational plan in the Asháninka language that used a culturally relevant approach to teaching. The teachers spoke Asháninka. They taught Amazonian history. Until the nuns arrived and said that the standardized national curriculum should be applied and that the Asháninka language should not be spoken.

These accounts suggest that cultural relevance is not simply an additional program feature but may affect legitimacy, participation, and trust. This issue becomes particularly important in the hybrid and intercultural peacebuilding framework developed in Chapter 8.

#### **4.5.4 Armed Forces and National Police**

Several participants described cases in which former child soldiers or rescued young people developed relationships with military, police, or intelligence institutions. These relationships could provide immediate protection, food, education, or practical support, but participants also identified significant limitations.

Carlos Freyre described a recurring pattern in which former armed-group members initially became valuable collaborators:

CARLOS FREYRE: Almost all rescued children have a similar fate. First, they collaborate extensively under certain conditions. The armed forces promise them some benefits. But at some point, their information becomes obsolete [...] and then they stop working with us and move to the towns and cities they choose to live in.

The testimony indicates a potential tension between short-term security objectives and long-term reintegration. Once an individual's operational usefulness declines, continued social support may fall outside security institutions' mandate or capacity.

Association with state security forces can also create danger. Freyre described retaliation against the family of a collaborator:

CARLOS FREYRE: Shining Path identified one of our collaborators and, in retaliation, kidnapped his father in his community. Unfortunately, we could not do much.

These accounts suggest that participants perceived security institutions as capable of providing important immediate support but with limited capacity or mandates to address the broader social, educational, health, and relational dimensions of long-term reintegration.

#### **4.5.5 Recognition and Reparation**

Participants generally recognized the importance of material reparations but questioned whether financial or infrastructure-based measures adequately address relational and psychosocial harm.

Abelina Ampiri explained:

ABELINA AMPIRI: While it is true that there is a program [...] on individual and collective reparations, it is clearly focused on the economic aspect. But this has not healed the wounds or scars that all those affected by the conflict carry deep in their hearts.

This account reflects a broader theme across the interviews: recognition matters alongside material assistance. Former child soldiers occupy particularly complex positions because recruitment as children may coexist with later involvement in violence. Participants raised questions concerning victimhood, responsibility, stigma, recognition, and reconciliation that cannot be resolved through economic compensation alone.

Chapters 7 and 8 develop the fuller implications of these issues for Transformative Justice and Peacebuilding.

## **4.6 Resilience, Support, and Reintegration Possibilities**

### **4.6.1 Social and Community Support**

Participants described community organizations, religious actors, non-governmental organizations (NGO), local leaders, and informal networks as important sources of support, particularly where formal institutional assistance was perceived as insufficient.

Elba referred to organizations providing care for rescued children:

ELBA: We have to work, for example, with organizations such as *Aldeas Infantiles*, an NGO that has taken in many of the rescued children.

Iván Brehaut described community-development projects as contributing to trust:

IVÁN BREHAUT: These were people who had overcome local prejudice by working in community activities. Before, to gain the community's trust, you needed to join the self-defense committees; now you earn that trust through development work. People no longer fight against Sendero [Luminoso], but participate in a social development project.

This account is particularly important because it suggests that productive participation may serve both economic and relational functions. Community work can

provide income or practical value while also creating opportunities for individuals to be recognized through new civilian roles.

Participants nevertheless described community support as uneven. Some communities accepted or cared for rescued individuals; others reproduced stigma, mistrust, and exclusion. Local leadership, existing relationships, resources, prior conflicts, and external support appear in the expert narratives as factors influencing these different responses.

#### **4.6.2 Family and Family-like Support**

Family support also emerged as a potential protective factor.

Sam contrasted adults who had relatives outside the organization with very young rescued children:

SAM: For adults, I think it is easier. Most who escaped had relatives outside the party who were not part of it and who provided family support. For young children, however, the opposite is true: some do not even know how to speak. For them, there is simply nothing.

His account suggests that durable relationships outside the armed organization may provide a reference point for identity, belonging, and practical support.

Elba articulated the broader relational dimension particularly clearly:

ELBA: The individual does not come out alone. The individual comes out in the community. [...] Just as the context can make me sick, my community can also help me heal. [...] The community fabric will help me sustain the individual, and the individual will help me sustain this community fabric.

Elba's account illustrates how one participant understood recovery as relational rather than exclusively individual. Elba's relational understanding places family and community relationships within the social environment through which civilian life may be reconstructed.

### **4.6.3 Reconciliation**

Reconciliation appeared less frequently than other themes but was discussed in several significant cases.

Bartholomew Dean reflected on the capacity of some communities to accept individuals associated with past violence:

BARTHOLOMEW DEAN: In some cases, people continue to be affected and live lives that are far from normal. However, in other cases, I am sometimes surprised by the resilience of some individuals and communities. For example, I wonder how it is possible for a community to accept and welcome back someone who, in the past, committed crimes against their own people. That is an example of social resilience, of true reconciliation.

This testimony should not be interpreted as evidence that forgiveness or reconciliation is common or that victims should be expected to forgive. Rather, it illustrates one expert's understanding that severely damaged relationships may, under some circumstances, be renegotiated.

The rarity of reconciliation-coded material itself is noteworthy. Within the interviews, reconciliation appears more as a difficult possibility than as an established outcome.

### **4.6.4 Opportunities**

Participants consistently connected reintegration with access to education, employment, vocational training, public services, and meaningful social roles.

Sam described “Juan,” a former child soldier who later demonstrated skills in civilian employment:

SAM: Juan also worked for an acquaintance of mine as a construction-site supervisor. My friend was impressed with his work. He told me that Juan is very disciplined and knows how to manage workers.

This example is valuable because it challenges representations of former child soldiers primarily through deficits. The participant identified skills developed within a previous environment that could be redirected toward legitimate civilian participation.

At the same time, Sam warned that illicit economies may remain competing sources of opportunity:

SAM: If the hard core of the Quispe Palomino gang [the MPCP] falls apart [...] the masses will have to look for work, and these illegal activities, and the groups that lead them are, unfortunately, an option.

These accounts suggest that reintegration involves not simply the availability of “opportunities” in the abstract but the relative credibility and accessibility of legal and illegal pathways.

Chapter 5 examines the relationship between opportunity, hope, and reintegration more fully.

#### **4.6.5 Relative Reintegration Success**

The interviews did not provide evidence of a single, clearly defined endpoint that could be classified as complete reintegration. Instead, participants described trajectories of relative success.

Carlos Freyre compared two former collaborators:

CARLOS FREYRE: You see Aquiles now, and you see that he has a very simple life. I also met another collaborator known as Jaguar, a former Shining Path leader in the Huallaga sector, who has become president of a neighbourhood council in [a district of] Lima. Some have been more successful than others in integrating into society.

These accounts suggest that reintegration should not be understood as a binary condition. Economic stability, family relationships, community participation, physical well-being, social acceptance, and psychological recovery may develop unevenly.

The cases described in the interviews support a more cautious formulation: participants identified examples of partial, uneven, and context-dependent reintegration; they do not provide definitive evidence of complete or sustainable success.

#### **4.7 Integrated Findings from the Expert Interviews**

The thematic analysis identifies several recurring patterns in how participants understand long-term reintegration.

First, trauma and fear were repeatedly identified as significant concerns, but participants rarely described them as exclusively individual psychological problems. Trust, community memory, family relationships, material insecurity, and institutional behaviour were frequently intertwined with psychological recovery.

Second, rebuilding trust emerged as one of the strongest cross-cutting themes. Experts described mistrust between individuals and communities, between communities and institutions, and within families. Trust also appeared as a prerequisite for accepting support, discussing the past, participating socially, and developing confidence in institutional commitments.

Third, stigma and social exclusion were repeatedly identified as barriers. Participants described former child soldiers and rescued populations being associated with terrorism or violence even where coercion had shaped their involvement. Indigenous populations were also described as affected by broader patterns of racial, class, and territorial marginalization.

Fourth, silence emerged as both protective and limiting. Participants interpreted concealment as a possible strategy for safety and adaptation, while also noting that silence may contribute to invisibility and limit social recognition.

Fifth, participants described family and community relationships as ambivalent. They may reproduce conflict-related fear, silence, stigma, or violence, but they may also

provide belonging, care, identity continuity, social support, and opportunities for reconciliation.

Sixth, economic and educational opportunities were understood as important but insufficient on their own. Participants described productive projects, education, and employment as potential pathways toward dignity and new civilian roles, while emphasizing that opportunities interact with psychological, relational, and institutional conditions.

Seventh, participants frequently described a gap between formal institutional commitments and sustained territorial implementation. The interviews do not demonstrate complete state absence; instead, they reveal perceptions of fragmentation, short-term intervention, unfulfilled commitments, limited psychosocial continuity, and insufficient cultural adaptation.

Eighth, locally grounded support was repeatedly identified as significant. Families, communities, NGOs, churches, local leaders, Indigenous professionals, and informal networks sometimes provided support where formal institutional mechanisms were perceived as weak or discontinuous.

Finally, reintegration was generally described as an ongoing and uneven process without a clearly defined endpoint. The cases presented by experts suggest trajectories of partial stability, adaptation, family formation, employment, community participation, and relative social acceptance, often alongside continuing limitations.

These integrated findings provide the empirical basis for the chapters that follow. They do not constitute a causal model. Rather, they identify the principal factors and relationships that emerged across the professional narratives.

## **4.8 Conclusion**

The expert interviews identify long-term reintegration as a multidimensional process in which psychological well-being, trust, stigma, family and community relationships, socioeconomic opportunities, cultural relevance, and institutional continuity interact and influence one another. These findings constitute professional interpretations rather than a causal model of former child soldiers' experiences.

Among the recurring factors, trust, belonging, opportunity, and the possibility of imagining a future beyond violence provide the analytical bridge to Chapter 5, which examines the relationship among hope, resilience, and reintegration.

## **Chapter 5 – Hope, Resilience, and the Possibilities for Sustainable Social Reintegration**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter 4 identified the principal factors that the subject-matter experts associated with the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers connected to *Shining Path* and the *Militarized Communist Party of Peru* (MPCP). Among those factors, trust, family and community support, social recognition, meaningful opportunities, institutional credibility, and the possibility of rebuilding a future emerged repeatedly across the interviews.

This chapter develops a focused interpretation of three interconnected concepts: hope, resilience, and reintegration, which are examined within the relationships, communities, institutions, and broader socioeconomic conditions in which they develop.

The chapter proposes that hope can be understood as a future-oriented capacity to imagine a viable life beyond violence, while resilience refers to the capacities through which individuals, families, and communities respond to adversity and attempt to move toward that future. Reintegration, in turn, is understood as the longer relational process through which meaningful participation, belonging, trust, identity, and civilian life may be reconstructed.

This interpretive proposition draws on recurring patterns in the expert interviews and is considered through the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. It is not presented as a causal model or as direct evidence of former child soldiers' subjective experiences.

### **5.2 Hope as a Structurally Conditioned Possibility**

Hope emerged in several interviews not as abstract optimism but as an expectation linked to freedom, support, recognition, and the possibility of a different future.

Abelina Ampiri provided one of the clearest examples when describing people rescued from armed organizations:

ABELINA AMPIRI: They were taken out and told that they would be free, and they left with the hope of becoming free and of being supported through that process. But where is that support and that freedom? For many, it felt like a deception, and they think they might have been better off remaining in the jungle.

Her account is significant because it links hope directly to credible expectations.

Freedom alone did not necessarily constitute reintegration. According to Ampiri's interpretation, those leaving captivity also expected accompaniment and support. When those expectations were perceived as unfulfilled, hope could become disappointment and reinforce mistrust.

This suggests that hope in post-conflict reintegration should not be conceptualized simply as an internal disposition. It is partly conditioned by whether individuals perceive that legitimate pathways toward security, belonging, participation, and dignity actually exist.

Ampiri's observations about communities affected by conflict reinforce this point:

ABELINA AMPIRI: There is resentment mixed with fear... it's something silent... the psychosis that terrorism will return.

In this account, memories of violence shape expectations about the future. When fear, insecurity, and unresolved mistrust remain dominant, imagining a stable future may become harder.

Basic Human Needs Theory helps interpret this relationship. If security, recognition, belonging, identity, and participation remain uncertain, hope may be reduced to short-term survival. Conversely, when social relationships and institutions provide credible evidence that a different future is possible, hope may become connected to longer-term aspirations such as education, employment, family life, social participation, or community acceptance.

Healing-Centered Peacebuilding also offers an additional way to understand the relationship between hope and agency. Yoder-Maina (2022) associates healing with restoring choice and the ability to act within one's environment. This complements the present study's interpretation of hope as structurally conditioned: imagining a different future becomes more meaningful when individuals perceive that they have both agency and credible social pathways through which they can exercise their choices.

The expert narratives do not support a causal claim that hope produces reintegration. Instead, they suggest that hope becomes more meaningful when credible social and institutional conditions support it.

### **5.3 Resilience: Adaptation and Transformation**

The interviews also challenged simplified conventional understandings of resilience. Participants described individuals, families, and communities surviving extraordinary adversity, but survival itself did not necessarily indicate successful reintegration.

Sam's account of “Juan,” a former child soldier with whom he had direct professional contact, illustrates the relational dimension:

SAM: What I have observed is that if you earn the trust of young people like Juan, they can come to trust you deeply and become extremely loyal... Having an older brother outside Shining Path helped him a great deal because it gave him support beyond the organization.

This testimony suggests that resilience may depend partly on relationships capable of providing trust, belonging, and an alternative reference point outside the armed organization. It challenges an exclusively individual understanding of resilience.

Across the interviews, different responses to adversity can be interpreted along a continuum between adaptive and transformative resilience (Béné & Doyen, 2018).

Adaptive resilience refers here to strategies that allow individuals or communities to endure adverse conditions without necessarily transforming them. Silence, concealment,

withdrawal, accommodation, or participation in precarious environments may sometimes protect an individual from immediate harm. These responses should not automatically be interpreted as pathology or failure; in particular circumstances, they may constitute rational forms of self-protection.

Transformative resilience, by contrast, refers to processes through which adversity becomes connected to the reconstruction of relationships, identities, life projects, participation, or community engagement. This does not imply that trauma disappears or that structural barriers cease to exist. Rather, it describes movement beyond immediate survival toward the possibility of altering one's relationship with the social environment.

Yoder-Maina's (2022) Healing-Centered Peacebuilding framework reinforces this relational interpretation of resilience. The approach locates resilience not only within individual capacities but also within relationships, community resources, agency, participation, and systems capable of adapting after violence. In her study, resilience is closely associated with community capacity, agency, and opportunities for constructive participation. Yoder-Maina's emphasis on community capacity, agency, and participation supports the distinction proposed here between adaptation that permits survival under adverse conditions and more transformative resilience through which individuals and communities may reconstruct relationships, participation, and meaningful life projects.

Abelina Ampiri's personal trajectory provides a particularly compelling example. Her continuing search for her missing sister became intertwined with sustained work supporting people and communities affected by the conflict:

ABELINA AMPIRI: Over the years, all these experiences have motivated me to work with groups of people who were rescued from these terrorist organizations, with the purpose of helping them, but also with the hope of finding my sister. I hoped I might find her in one of these communities.

Ampiri's testimony concerns her own experience of loss and community engagement, not the reintegration of a former child soldier. Its analytical relevance lies in how personal and family suffering became connected to sustained community-oriented action.

In this sense, Ampiri's account helps conceptualize transformative resilience as more than individual recovery. Hope, unresolved loss, service, solidarity, and community engagement may coexist. Transformative resilience involves not erasing the past but developing relationships and forms of agency through which suffering acquires new social meaning. Abelina's trajectory also resonates with Yoder-Maina's emphasis on agency as a component of breaking cycles of violence. Healing-Centered Peacebuilding conceptualizes recovery not simply as reduced suffering but as the restoration of agency and the capacity to participate in changing one's social environment. Abelina's transformation of unresolved family loss into sustained engagement with conflict-affected communities provides an illustrative parallel to this understanding of transformative resilience.

This distinction also introduces an important caution. Resilience should not be romanticized. Individuals and communities may become highly adaptive precisely because formal support is inadequate. The ability to survive institutional neglect should not be treated as evidence that institutions are functioning effectively.

#### **5.4 Relational Conditions of Hope and Resilience**

The expert narratives suggest that hope and resilience are shaped not only by individual capacities but also by the relationships within which reintegration takes place. Social acceptance, trust, recognition, and opportunities for participation may influence whether individuals can move beyond immediate adaptation toward a more stable sense of belonging and a credible civilian future.

Abelina Ampiri's account of the resettled population provides a particularly useful illustration of this relational process. She described an initially difficult relationship between the receiving community and the resettled population, marked by stigma and mistrust, but also observed gradual changes following sustained engagement:

ABELINA AMPIRI: After approximately five years, the receiving community had already accepted the resettled people as members of the community... This helped greatly in enabling the population to accept them. Today, I am very pleased that some members of the newly integrated population are part of the community leadership.

Ampiri's account addresses the broader resettled population and is not specific to former child soldiers; it is used here to illustrate her professional understanding of relational change in a conflict-affected reintegration setting. In this sense, her account is significant because it portrays relational change as gradual rather than immediate. Acceptance developed over several years and involved repeated interaction, mediation, persistence by the resettled population, and engagement with community leadership. Her testimony also suggests movement beyond simple tolerance: participation by formerly resettled individuals in community leadership indicates recognition and social inclusion within the receiving community.

Ampiri's account shows why hope and resilience cannot be separated from social recognition. Hope becomes more credible when individuals can perceive that exclusion is not necessarily permanent and that meaningful participation and recognition may become possible over time. Resilience, likewise, can involve more than enduring stigma; it may include persistence within difficult relational environments and gradual movement toward belonging, participation, and socially recognized roles.

At the same time, Ampiri noted that some stigma remained even after significant progress. Her account cautions against interpreting community inclusion as complete or irreversible. Relational environments may contain both acceptance and residual

mistrust, showing that reintegration can advance unevenly without necessarily culminating in a definitive endpoint.

The case illustrates how improving social relationships may make alternative futures more imaginable, while persistence, recognition, and participation may support more transformative forms of resilience. Chapter 6 extends this analysis by examining how individual, family, and community processes interact within reintegration.

### **5.5 Opportunities, Belonging, and Relative Reintegration Success**

Expert narratives also repeatedly connected reintegration with access to meaningful and legitimate opportunities. Education, work, productive projects, social participation, and public services appeared not only as material resources but as potential pathways toward recognition and belonging.

Iván Brehaut described individuals participating in a fish-farming project:

IVÁN BREHAUT: Those who had found it hardest to reintegrate were among the most committed and hardworking in the fish-farming project. It was, in a sense, part of paying their dues and showing the community that they genuinely wanted to belong, creating a sense of belonging and allowing the community to recognize that commitment.

This expert-described case does not establish that productive projects cause reintegration. Its significance lies instead in the relationship among economic participation, social recognition, and belonging. Work can provide income, but it can also enable individuals to occupy socially valued civilian roles.

The credibility of legitimate opportunities also depends on the wider economic environment. In settings where legal pathways coexist with accessible illicit alternatives, education and employment opportunities may take on particular significance. Chapter 7 examines the structural dimensions of this competition in more detail.

This is where hope and opportunity become closely connected. A viable future becomes easier to imagine when pathways toward it are visible. Conversely, when legitimate pathways remain weak while illicit opportunities are immediately available, hope may remain disconnected from achievable civilian life.

Participants generally did not describe complete or final reintegration. Instead, the interview material includes what this thesis calls relative reintegration success: individuals may build families, find employment, participate in communities, or develop greater stability while continuing to experience other difficulties.

This suggests that reintegration is better conceptualized as multidimensional and uneven. Progress in one dimension does not necessarily imply progress in all others.

## **5.6 The Hope–Resilience–Reintegration Relationship**

Based on recurring patterns across the expert narratives and their interpretation through the theoretical framework, this thesis proposes an analytical relationship among hope, resilience, and reintegration.

The relationship should not be understood as a linear sequence in which hope automatically generates resilience and resilience necessarily results in reintegration. Rather, the three processes interact within specific social and structural environments. Their interaction is conditioned by factors repeatedly identified in the interviews: trust, family and community relationships, social recognition, economic opportunities, cultural relevance, public services, institutional continuity, and security.

The process is neither automatic nor irreversible. When institutions are perceived as unreliable, opportunities are scarce, stigma remains intense, or insecurity persists, hope may weaken, and resilience may remain primarily adaptive. Individuals may survive without developing conditions for broader social participation.

Where credible opportunities, social recognition, trustworthy relationships, and sustained support are present, resilience may become more transformative, enabling individuals and communities to move beyond survival toward reconstructed life projects and social relationships.

This proposition represents an analytical contribution of the thesis, not a tested causal model. It offers a way of interpreting how the factors identified by the experts may relate to one another and provides a bridge between the empirical findings and the broader PACS framework developed later in the thesis.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has proposed an analytical relationship among hope, resilience, and reintegration. Hope concerns the credibility of alternative futures; resilience concerns capacities to respond to adversity and, potentially, reconstruct relationships and life projects; and reintegration concerns meaningful participation in civilian social life. Their interaction is neither linear nor automatic but conditioned by the relational, institutional, and structural environments examined in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 6 now reorganizes these relationships at the micro level, examining how the expert-identified factors interact across individual, family, and community dimensions. Chapter 7 subsequently addresses the broader historical, institutional, socioeconomic, and societal conditions that shape those processes. These two levels of analysis provide the foundation for the PACS-informed interpretation and evidence-informed policy framework developed in Chapter 8.

## **Chapter 6 – Micro-Level Findings: Individual, Family, and Community Dimensions**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter synthesizes the study's micro-level findings across three interconnected dimensions: the individual, the family, and the community. The purpose is not to reproduce the thematic findings presented in Chapter 4, but to examine how the factors identified by the experts interact within the immediate social environments in which reintegration occurs.

The analysis draws primarily on expert interviews and interprets them in relation to documentary evidence and the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2.

Across the interviews, reintegration emerged as more than an individual transition from armed-group membership to civilian life. Participants described psychological well-being, identity, trust, family relationships, social recognition, belonging, economic opportunities, stigma, and community responses as interdependent. A difficulty at one level may affect the others (e.g. psychological distress may strain family relationships; family support may strengthen belonging; community stigma may undermine identity reconstruction; and social acceptance may create opportunities for participation).

The guiding micro-level insight is that reintegration is relational: individuals rebuild civilian lives through relationships with families, caregivers, communities, and other social networks, not in isolation.

### **6.2 Individual-Level Findings**

At the individual level, the expert narratives suggest that reintegration should not be understood solely as psychological recovery. Participants also identified identity reconstruction, trust, physical well-being, social recognition, and access to viable civilian roles as interconnected dimensions of the process.

This concern is particularly important for individuals recruited very young or born within *Shining Path* or MPCP-controlled environments. One participant with operational experience involving former *pioneritos* explained:

COQUI: Many of these young people had either been born inside the camps or had been abducted when they were very young and did not know the outside world. They had been made afraid of everything that existed outside the party.

Coqui's account illustrates how one expert understood prolonged socialization within an armed organization as shaping perceptions of security, authority, trust, and belonging.

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, disengagement may involve more than abandoning a militarized role. It may require constructing a civilian identity capable of providing alternative sources of belonging and recognition. Basic Human Needs Theory adds that security, identity, participation, and recognition must become available through legitimate civilian relationships and institutions for such a transition to be sustainable.

At the individual level, participants described psychological well-being, trust, identity, silence, physical health, and socioeconomic capacity as interconnected. Fear and mistrust may affect participation and willingness to disclose the past; stigma may constrain civilian identity reconstruction; and injury or limited education may reduce access to socially meaningful economic roles. These relationships illustrate why individual reintegration cannot be reduced to a single psychosocial or material dimension.

These dimensions should not be understood independently. The central micro-level issue is their interaction (e.g., injury may lead to reduced employment capacity, economic insecurity, family stress, or diminished well-being. Or stigma may cause concealment, reduced social participation, weakened belonging, or continued mistrust).

The expert narratives suggest that individual reintegration depends partly on whether a credible civilian identity can be constructed within conditions that provide security, recognition, relationships, and meaningful opportunities.

### **6.3 Family-Level Findings**

At the family level, the interviews present kinship and caregiving relationships as both potential sites of conflict-related rupture and important resources for reintegration.

Child recruitment may involve separation, disappearance, death, coercion, displacement, or prolonged absence. These experiences can leave unresolved grief, silence, mistrust, and disrupted relationships. At the same time, surviving or reconstructed family ties may provide continuity, belonging, emotional support, practical assistance, and a social reference point outside the armed organization.

Sam's account of "Juan" illustrates this potential:

SAM: In this process, we learned that he had an older brother who had also escaped from the party before him. That helped him a great deal because he had support outside Shining Path.

For Sam, the older brother provided a source of belonging outside Shining Path.

The same case also illustrates the complexity of family ties. According to Sam's testimony, Juan's mother remained in captivity inside the armed group, and his continued concern for her connected his civilian transition to unresolved separation and responsibility. Family may simultaneously provide support and maintain emotional connections to unfinished conflict experiences.

The importance of family relationships is also visible through their absence. Sam contrasted adults who retained relatives outside *Shining Path* with very young rescued children:

SAM: The good thing is that most of those who escaped had relatives outside who were not part of the party... But for these very young children, some of whom

cannot even speak, there is nothing. They are adrift. And when they turn eighteen in the shelter, they simply have to leave. Where are they supposed to go?

This contrast broadens the meaning of family beyond biological reunification. Where biological families are unavailable, durable caregiving relationships, foster arrangements, mentorship, or other forms of long-term social support may perform comparable functions.

The expert accounts portray family relationships as dynamic rather than uniformly protective. Separation and unresolved loss may sustain conflict-related harm, while stable family or family-like relationships may provide belonging, identity continuity, and practical support. Family-level reintegration depends less on reunification itself than on the quality, safety, and sustainability of reconstructed relationships.

#### **6.4 Community-Level Findings**

At the community level, the expert narratives describe reintegration as a negotiated social process. Communities are not simply locations to which individuals return; they are environments in which identities, trust, recognition, stigma, belonging, and participation are socially constructed.

The interviews reveal a central ambivalence. Communities may reproduce fear, stigma, silence, and mistrust, particularly where memories of violence remain unresolved. At the same time, they may provide cultural continuity, caregiving, local leadership, social support, and opportunities for reconciliation.

As established in Chapter 4, participants also described local families and community networks assuming caregiving roles where formal support was perceived as limited.

Bartholomew Dean described a more exceptional case of reconciliation:

BARTHOLOMEW DEAN: Sometimes I am surprised by the resilience of some people and communities. I wonder how it is possible for a community to accept

and welcome back someone who, in the past, committed crimes against their own people. [...] The woman and her mother accepted his apology and allowed him into their home, giving reconciliation a chance. This is a very powerful and extreme case that I know. It is an example of social resilience, of genuine reconciliation.

The case does not imply that reconciliation is routine or that victims are expected to forgive. Its significance lies in showing that some participants perceived the possibility of renegotiating relationships even after severe violence.

Conversely, participants described stigmatizing labels that could preserve identities associated with armed violence after disengagement, illustrating how community recognition may either support or constrain civilian identity reconstruction.

The community findings revolve around four relational processes.

1. **Stigma and exclusion.** Fear and memories of violence may lead communities to interpret returnees primarily through association with *Shining Path* or the MPCP.
2. **Collective memory and mistrust.** Reintegration takes place within communities that may themselves carry unresolved histories of displacement, killing, forced recruitment, or collaboration.
3. **Local support and cultural continuity.** Families, religious organizations, Indigenous practices, community leaders, and local networks may provide resources for belonging and adaptation.
4. **Trust and reconciliation.** Where relationships can be renegotiated, individuals may develop new roles and forms of recognition within civilian society.

The social environment can both reproduce harm and support transformation. Community should neither be romanticized as inherently healing nor reduced to a source of stigma. It is a contested relational space in which the possibilities for reintegration are continuously negotiated.

## **6.5 Interaction Across the Micro Levels**

The individual, family, and community dimensions identified above are analytically distinguishable but empirically interdependent.

At the individual level, reintegration may involve psychological recovery, identity reconstruction, trust, and developing viable civilian roles.

At the family level, caregiving, belonging, unresolved loss, economic stress, and the quality of reconstructed relationships may support—or constrain—those processes.

At the community level, social recognition, stigma, cultural practices, collective memory, and opportunities for participation shape whether civilian identities become socially meaningful.

These relationships can be represented as a reciprocal process of individual well-being and identity, family relationships and belonging, and community recognition and participation.

No level operates independently. A supportive family may help an individual manage stigma; community acceptance may strengthen a reconstructed civilian identity; economic insecurity may strain both family and individual well-being; and institutional weakness may force families and communities to assume responsibilities beyond their capacity.

This interaction is important because it explains why reintegration cannot be reduced to the provision of a single service. Psychological assistance without social acceptance may have limited effect. Family reunification without safety or economic support may reproduce stress. Community development without attention to stigma and identity may leave social exclusion unchanged.

The micro-level analysis supports a relational understanding of sustainable reintegration where progress depends not only on changes within individuals, but also on changes in the relationships through which civilian life acquires meaning.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The micro-level synthesis shows that individual, family, and community processes are analytically distinguishable but relationally interdependent. Psychological well-being, identity, trust, family support, stigma, belonging, and community recognition can reinforce or constrain one another, making reintegration more than an individual process of adjustment.

Chapter 7 shifts outward from these immediate relational environments to examine the historical, socioeconomic, territorial, institutional, and societal conditions that shape their possibilities and limits.

## **Chapter 7 – Macro-Level Findings: Structural, Institutional, and Societal Dimensions**

### **7.1 Introduction**

While Chapter 6 examined the immediate relational environments in which reintegration takes place: the individual, family, and community, the present chapter shifts the analysis outward to the broader historical, socioeconomic, territorial, institutional, and societal conditions within which those micro-level processes unfold.

The purpose is not to repeat the expert-identified challenges presented in Chapter 4, but to examine how participants understand the wider environment that may enable or constrain long-term social reintegration. Particular attention is given to historical exclusion, territorial inequality, illicit economies, institutional implementation, political visibility, recognition, and broader societal narratives surrounding former child soldiers.

An important evidentiary distinction is maintained throughout the chapter. Historically documented conditions—such as Peru's internal armed conflict, *Shining Path's* recruitment of children, the transformation of armed remnants, and the existence of formal state protocols—are grounded in the documentary literature discussed in earlier chapters. Assessments of state responsiveness, local authority, implementation gaps, political priorities, or community–state relationships derived from the interviews are presented as expert interpretations rather than independently proven facts.

At the macro level, the study suggests that reintegration cannot be understood solely in terms of what happens after an individual leaves an armed organization. It also depends on the broader environment into which that person must establish civilian life.

### **7.2 Historical, Structural, and Territorial Conditions**

As established in Chapter 1, child soldiering in Peru developed within a historical context shaped by political violence, territorial inequality, uneven institutional presence, and socioeconomic and ethnic divisions, while the later MPCP became increasingly

embedded in the political economy of the VRAEM. The expert interviews add an interpretive dimension to this documented context by showing how socioeconomic opportunity, authority, status, security, and illicit economies may continue to shape contemporary recruitment and reintegration environments.

One participant with operational experience in the VRAEM explained:

SAM: I don't think it is so much ideological anymore. It has more to do with economic, cultural, and social factors. They see [the MPCP] as a group that provides security in the area, and this becomes a way of gaining power in that sector, because these groups have become, so to speak, the authority in those localities. For some residents, having a son belong to the party is a way of empowering him, of giving him a position, a role of some importance—considering that outside that sector or that reality, he would most likely have no opportunity to occupy an important position or have any influence over what happens in his locality.

Sam interpreted the case as illustrating how economic exclusion, recognition, authority, security, and social status may intersect with armed-group participation. His account is specific to the context he described and is not presented as a general explanation of recruitment across the VRAEM.

Sam's interpretation shows how economic marginalization, territorial insecurity, authority, recognition, and belonging interact. At the macro level, the significance lies in how these conditions may combine to make armed or illicit structures socially and economically relevant alongside legitimate civilian alternatives.

The macro-level implication extends beyond poverty alone. Reintegration takes place within a competitive social environment in which legitimate and illicit systems may simultaneously offer income, protection, authority, status, or belonging.

### **Transformation and Persistence of Conflict**

Participants also situated reintegration within a setting in which the direct political conflict associated with *Shining Path* has changed rather than disappeared completely. The capture of Abimael Guzmán in 1992 substantially weakened *Shining Path*, but the

later MPCP developed within a different political economy involving territorial control and illicit markets.

For this reason, the term *post-conflict* should be used cautiously in the Peruvian case. For individuals and communities in areas where the MPCP, narcotrafficking, illegal economies, and coercive actors remain present, the distinction between conflict and post-conflict may be blurred.

The expert narratives suggest that reintegration occurs not simply after violence but sometimes alongside transformed forms of insecurity. This affects the credibility of civilian alternatives. Education, employment, and state services may represent one pathway, while illicit economies and informal armed authority may provide another.

The analytical issue is not that structural inequality mechanically causes child recruitment. Rather, the evidence suggests that persistent inequality and limited legitimate opportunities may create environments in which armed and illicit actors remain socially and economically relevant.

### **7.3 Institutional and Governance Findings**

A central macro-level theme concerns the relationship between formal institutional commitments and their perceived implementation in conflict-affected territories.

The interview evidence does not establish that the Peruvian state is absent. As discussed in Chapter 1, formal policies, legal frameworks, reparations mechanisms, rescue operations, and protocols for affected populations exist. The question raised by participants is instead whether these mechanisms are experienced as sustained, coordinated, accessible, and culturally appropriate.

When talking about the implementation of the *International Labour Organization Convention 169* concerning the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples, one participant

with long-term experience working with Asháninka communities described state engagement as frequently reactive:

MECHTHILD BOCK: Beyond Peru's ratification of ILO Convention 169, the state has generally maintained a very passive position regarding its implementation. What has existed is pressure from the communities demanding that their rights be recognized and exercised... It was the communities' demands that motivated state participation.

Bock's account reflects her understanding of the relationship between formal recognition and territorial implementation in the communities with which she worked.

The testimony is analytically significant because it depicts Indigenous communities not as passive recipients of policy but as actors who mobilize rights, local authority, knowledge, and collective organization to influence institutional behaviour.

A similar perception of institutional discontinuity emerged regarding former child soldiers:

CARLOS FREYRE: Nothing sustainable. What exists is personal assistance or some gestures of goodwill, but nothing more.

Freyre was referring to his awareness of support available to individuals leaving armed organizations as adults. In the cases known to Freyre, sustained reintegration mechanisms were not visible.

These accounts point to a more precise problem than 'state absence': an implementation gap, which may involve several dimensions:

- **Continuity:** interventions may end before long-term reintegration needs have been addressed.
- **Coordination:** security, health, education, social protection, justice, and local institutions may operate without sufficient integration.
- **Territorial reach:** formal policies may exist nationally while remaining difficult to access in remote regions.

- **Cultural relevance:** programs may not adequately incorporate Indigenous languages, knowledge, authority, or social practices.
- **Visibility and political priority:** small, geographically dispersed, or socially stigmatized populations may struggle to sustain political attention.

These are primarily expert-identified concerns and should remain framed as such unless documentary evidence supports them independently.

### **Formal institutions and local agency**

The interviews also reveal that gaps in formal provision do not necessarily produce an institutional vacuum. Families, Indigenous organizations, churches, NGOs, community leaders, individual officials, and informal networks may provide forms of support.

This observation becomes important for the Hybrid Peacebuilding analysis developed in Chapter 8. At this stage, however, the empirical point is narrower: participants described governance and reintegration support as involving multiple actors, extending beyond formal state institutions.

The macro-level pattern is one of distributed but unequal capacity: local actors may provide cultural knowledge, legitimacy, trust, and relational support, while state institutions possess formal authority, resources, and longer-term mandates. Chapter 8 addresses how to coordinate these capacities.

## **7.4 Societal Visibility, Recognition, and the Legacy of Conflict**

The macro environment of reintegration also includes the ways former child soldiers and other conflict-affected populations are represented, recognized, or remain invisible within broader Peruvian society. The expert interviews suggest that this dimension extends beyond interpersonal stigma to national narratives of the conflict, institutional

recognition, and the historical inequalities that influence whose experiences receive sustained public attention.

Participants described particular ambiguity surrounding the status of former child soldiers. Individuals recruited as children may have experienced coercion, victimization, indoctrination, and violence while, in some cases, later participating in harmful acts. Their trajectories do not always fit neatly within conventional victim–perpetrator categories. At the macro level, this ambiguity may affect social legitimacy, access to reparative mechanisms, and institutions' willingness to develop specific responses.

Building on Villasante's earlier interview observations, her account interprets the limited visibility of conflict-affected populations through the intersecting lenses of racism, classism, geography, and historical inequality. In her account, the disproportionate impact of the conflict on Indigenous populations contributed to a social distance between those communities and sectors of Peruvian society less directly affected by the violence. She situated this indifference within deeply rooted colonial and postcolonial patterns of discrimination. Her interpretation raises a broader question about whose suffering becomes incorporated into national memory and whose remains socially peripheral. Her interview explicitly connects these dynamics to racism inherited from colonial structures.

Mechthild Bock's long-term work with Asháninka communities provides complementary support:

MECHTHILD BOCK: Discrimination and the fact that they have never been taken into account reinforce this situation of abandonment.

Bock's account connects discrimination with insufficient recognition and perceived institutional abandonment. Her broader testimony also describes concerns about inadequate psychological care and the limited incorporation of traditional approaches to healing, suggesting that marginalization concerns not only attitudes but also whether

Indigenous populations perceive their needs and knowledge as recognized within institutional responses.

Together, these perspectives suggest a pattern of unequal societal visibility. Villasante emphasizes race, class, geography, and historical inequality, while Bock highlights discrimination and the experience of not being sufficiently recognized by institutions. These expert interpretations do not establish that such views are shared across Peruvian society, but they identify structural discrimination and unequal recognition as relevant conditions surrounding reintegration.

This macro-social dimension differs from the community-level stigma examined in Chapter 6. Community stigma operates through everyday relationships of fear, trust, acceptance, and belonging, whereas societal invisibility concerns national recognition, political visibility, institutional categories, and broader conflict narratives. Local acceptance alone cannot resolve national invisibility, just as formal recognition does not automatically eliminate community stigma.

The expert accounts suggest the possibility of what may be described as double invisibility: limited recognition of former child soldiers as a distinct conflict-affected population combined with the historical marginalization of many Indigenous communities and territories affected by the conflict.

Reintegration should be understood not only as an individual or community process, but also as occurring within a broader social environment shaped by racism, discrimination, historical marginalization, and unequal recognition. The expert narratives suggest that these conditions influence whether former child soldiers and the communities most affected by the conflict become visible within Peru's institutional and post-conflict landscape.

### **Recognition and reparative justice**

The documentary record demonstrates that Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognized the systematic recruitment of children by *Shining Path*. Yet participants questioned whether this recognition has translated into adequate long-term responses for former child soldiers.

The difficulty is partly categorical. If former child soldiers are treated exclusively as perpetrators, their childhood coercion and victimization may disappear from view. If they are treated only as victims, questions of responsibility and harm caused to others may be overlooked.

At the macro-social level, this ambiguity may affect recognition, access to reparative mechanisms, institutional responses, and the public legitimacy of former child soldiers' claims. Participants' accounts identify victim–perpetrator categorization itself as part of the wider societal environment in which reintegration occurs.

The macro-level problem of recognition extends beyond compensation. Recognition can affect dignity, citizenship, institutional trust, and the possibility of developing socially legitimate identities outside the armed organization.

## **7.5 Connecting Macro Conditions to Micro-Level Reintegration**

The value of the macro analysis lies in explaining why the micro-level processes identified in Chapter 6 cannot be considered independently from their broader environment.

The relationship can be summarized as follows:

- **Historical and territorial inequality** shapes access to institutions, services, security, and legitimate opportunities
- **Institutional continuity and implementation** affect trust, support, recognition, and expectations for the future

- **Illicit economies and alternative authority** create competing pathways for income, status, protection, and belonging
- **National narratives and political visibility** influence stigma, recognition, reparations, and policy priority
- **Local agency and institutional interaction** shape how formal policies are translated into actual social support

These macro conditions interact directly with the individual, family, and community processes identified in Chapter 6.

For example, an individual may try to construct a civilian identity, but that process becomes harder where employment is scarce or stigma is institutionalized. A family may provide emotional support, but persistent poverty and weak access to healthcare can strain its capacity. A community may develop local mechanisms for reconciliation, but those efforts may remain fragile without institutional recognition, security, and public resources.

The relationship is reciprocal: communities and local actors also influence institutions, demand rights, create informal support mechanisms, and shape the way policies function in practice.

These reciprocal relationships provide the transition to Chapter 8, where their significance is interpreted explicitly through Peace and Conflict Studies and translated into an evidence-informed policy framework.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The macro-level synthesis indicates that reintegration occurs within broader historical, socioeconomic, territorial, institutional, and societal environments. Limited legitimate opportunities, illicit economies, territorial marginalization, uneven

institutional implementation, political visibility, and contested forms of recognition can condition the individual, family, and community processes examined in Chapter 6.

The most important implication is the reciprocal relationship between individual agency and structural conditions, local capacity and public responsibility, and community relationships and national institutions. Chapter 8 uses Peace and Conflict Studies to interpret these interactions and translate them into an evidence-informed framework for long-term reintegration.

## **Chapter 8 – From Reintegration to Peacebuilding: A Peace and Conflict Studies Framework and Evidence-Informed Policy Approach for Former Child Soldiers in Peru**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapters established three levels of analysis. Chapter 4 identified the principal factors that subject-matter experts associate with long-term social reintegration. Chapter 5 developed the relationship among hope, resilience, and reintegration. Chapters 6 and 7 then reorganized these findings across micro- and macro-level dimensions.

This chapter brings those analyses together through a Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) lens and translates them into an evidence-informed public-policy framework.

The central proposition is that long-term reintegration should not be understood only as a post-conflict social-assistance, security, psychosocial, or DDR problem. Rather, it can be conceptualized as a relational, multilevel, intercultural, and structurally conditioned peacebuilding process. Reintegration involves not only the individual's transition away from an armed organization but also reconstructing identity, trust, belonging, social relationships, institutional legitimacy, and credible opportunities for participation in civilian life.

The framework developed in this chapter draws on four sources: expert interviews, documentary evidence, the theoretical architecture developed in Chapter 2, and the synthesis presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. This framework is evidence-informed but has not been empirically validated. Its purpose is to translate recurring factors and relationships identified throughout the thesis into a coherent set of policy orientations for Peru.

The chapter first clarifies the thesis's PACS contribution, then sets out the principles guiding the framework, presents four interdependent policy pillars, and concludes with governance and implementation considerations.

## **8.2 Reframing Former Child-Soldier Reintegration through Peace and Conflict Studies**

Many of the individual consequences associated with child soldiering—trauma, disrupted education, stigma, family separation, socioeconomic exclusion, and difficulties rebuilding civilian identity—are already documented in the international literature. This thesis contributes less by identifying those consequences anew than by examining how experts understand their interaction in the Peruvian context and interpreting that interaction through PACS.

Viewed through a PACS lens, reintegration is not simply a question of whether an individual has left an armed organization or acquired employment. It also raises broader questions. A PACS perspective asks whether relationships damaged by violence can be rebuilt, whether civilian identities can gain social recognition, whether families and communities can recover sufficient trust for coexistence, whether institutions can provide credible and culturally appropriate pathways to participation, and whether structural conditions associated with vulnerability can be transformed.

These questions place reintegration squarely within Peace and Conflict Studies and must be considered in Peru's specific historical, cultural, institutional, and territorial context.

### **Reintegration as relational peacebuilding**

The findings in Chapters 4 to 7 suggest that many of the identified factors are fundamentally relational. Trust exists between people and institutions. Identity depends partly upon recognition by others. Belonging is created within families and

communities. Stigma is socially produced. Hope becomes credible when individuals can see pathways toward inclusion and opportunity.

The expert evidence developed in Chapters 4 to 6 repeatedly portrayed recovery as relational, most explicitly in Elba's observation that individuals emerge from violence within social environments capable of either sustaining harm or supporting recovery. The PACS significance of this finding lies in recognizing trust, identity, belonging, and social recognition as relationships that must be reconstructed across individual and social environments.

### **Reintegration as multilevel peacebuilding**

The micro- and macro-level analyses further indicate that reintegration operates simultaneously at several levels:

- **Individual:** psychological well-being, identity, agency, education, employment, and security;
- **Family:** belonging, caregiving, unresolved loss, economic stability, and relational continuity;
- **Community:** recognition, stigma, collective memory, cultural practices, trust, and participation;
- **Institutional:** access to services, coordination, legitimacy, protection, and continuity;
- **Structural:** territorial inequality, illicit economies, political visibility, and long-term development.

The importance of a PACS framework lies precisely in connecting these levels rather than treating them as separate policy sectors. Healing-Centered Peacebuilding provides an additional perspective on why these levels should be considered together. Yoder-Maina (2022) conceptualizes collective trauma as one possible mechanism through

which the effects of chronic violence may continue influencing social relationships and institutions. Her systems-oriented approach emphasizes that prolonged violence can affect not only individuals but also the relationships, communities, and institutional structures upon which recovery and peacebuilding depend. Collective trauma is used here as an interpretive concept; it is not intended as a clinical diagnosis of former child soldiers or conflict-affected communities.

### **Hope as a peacebuilding concept**

The hope–resilience–reintegration relationship developed in Chapter 5 also acquires broader significance here.

Chapter 5 interpreted hope as structurally conditioned by the credibility of opportunities, support, recognition, and institutional trust. Viewed through PACS, this becomes relevant to sustainable peace because the capacity to imagine legitimate futures beyond violence depends partly on whether social and institutional environments make those futures appear attainable.

### **Theoretical integration**

The theoretical frameworks developed in Chapter 2 converge here around different dimensions of the same peacebuilding problem. Basic Human Needs and Social Identity illuminate security, recognition, belonging, participation, and civilian identity; Social Cubism connects these processes to historical and structural conditions; Transitional and Transformative Justice address recognition of harm, responsibility, relational repair, and structural change; Healing-Centered Peacebuilding connects trauma and social healing with agency and institutional relationships; and Hybrid Peacebuilding explains how formal and locally legitimate actors may interact in responding to these dimensions. Their value lies not in producing a single unified theory, but in making the multilevel character of reintegration analytically visible.

Healing-Centered Peacebuilding adds a complementary perspective to this complexity. Yoder-Maina (2022) emphasizes that chronic violence can complicate binary categories of victim and aggressor and that breaking cycles of violence requires attention to the complex relationships among suffering, agency, responsibility, and participation in violence. For former child soldiers, Yoder-Maina's treatment of victim–aggressor ambiguity is particularly relevant because childhood coercion and victimization may coexist with later participation in harmful acts.

Together, these perspectives support the central conceptual contribution of this thesis: Long-term social reintegration can be understood as a relational, multilevel, intercultural, and structurally conditioned peacebuilding process through which individuals and societies attempt to reconstruct the relationships and conditions necessary for meaningful civilian life.

Healing-Centered Peacebuilding reinforces this interpretation by framing healing not as a separate clinical stage but as a cross-cutting process involving relationships, agency, community resources, institutional responsiveness, and broader social recovery (Yoder-Maina, 2022). This is not a linear process, and it is strengthened by restoring trusting relationships (Betancourt, 2025).

### **8.3 Evidence-Informed Foundations of the Policy Framework**

The framework developed here is an evidence-informed synthesis and has not yet been empirically validated as an intervention model. It draws on the expert interviews, documented historical and institutional conditions, existing scholarship on child soldiering and reintegration, and the PACS interpretation developed in this thesis.

Across these sources, reintegration emerges as long-term, relational, culturally and territorially situated, multisectoral, and linked to preventing future recruitment. These

characteristics provide the basis for the five guiding principles and four policy pillars that follow.

## **8.4 Guiding Principles**

The proposed framework is organized around five principles.

### **8.4.1 Reintegration as a Long-Term Healing-Centered Peacebuilding Process**

Reintegration is a long-term process that extends beyond disengagement from an armed organization or the attainment of legal adulthood.

Participants repeatedly described continuity as a problem, particularly in psychosocial care and transitions out of institutional support. Public policy should recognize that educational, psychological, family, social, and economic needs may change over time.

The objective is not indefinite dependency but sustained access to pathways through which individuals can gradually develop autonomy, participation, and social belonging.

### **8.4.2 Human Dignity, Agency, Relationships, and Social Inclusion**

Former child soldiers should not be defined exclusively through victimhood, vulnerability, or past association with armed groups.

The policy framework should promote agency, participation, autonomy, and access to socially recognized civilian roles. Education, employment, family life, community participation, and civic engagement can contribute not only to material well-being but also to dignity and identity reconstruction.

This principle also cautions against mandatory disclosure of personal histories. Access to services should not depend upon publicly identifying individuals as former child soldiers. Doing so could increase stigma or danger.

#### **8.4.3 Shared Responsibility with Clear State Accountability**

Reintegration requires cooperation among state institutions, communities, families, civil-society organizations, and locally legitimate actors. Their roles, however, are not interchangeable. The state retains responsibility for protecting rights, funding essential services, coordinating institutions, and ensuring long-term continuity.

#### **8.4.4 Interculturality and Territorial Responsiveness**

Conflict-affected territories differ substantially in language, history, social organization, geography, infrastructure, and institutional capacity.

Implementation should combine national standards with local adaptation and, where relevant, incorporate Indigenous knowledge, languages, leadership structures, healing practices, and forms of participation.

Several participants emphasized culturally relevant approaches, consistent with Healing-Centered Peacebuilding, which cautions against transferring standardized interventions across cultural settings and instead emphasizes adaptation to local knowledge, relationships, practices, and understandings of healing (Yoder-Maina, 2022). In practice, interculturality must extend beyond language translation. Programs should involve affected communities in defining needs, adapting interventions, identifying culturally meaningful forms of support, and evaluating whether services respond to local realities.

#### **8.4.5 Prevention through Inclusive Development**

Reintegration policy should also help prevent future recruitment.

This does not mean that poverty or exclusion automatically causes child soldiering. The findings instead suggest that armed and illicit actors may remain relevant where legitimate opportunities for participation, employment, security, and recognition are limited.

Investment in education, youth opportunities, community institutions, public services, and territorial development can support both reintegration and the prevention of future recruitment.

## **8.5 Four Pillars of the Policy Framework**

The framework organizes these findings around four connected areas of reintegration: the individual, family, community, and structural/institutional levels.

### **8.5.1 Pillar I: Individual Reintegration**

The first pillar focuses on restoring and strengthening individual capacities for civilian life. This pillar includes:

- **Psychosocial support.** Long-term, trauma-informed, culturally relevant mental health and psychosocial services should be accessible without assuming that all former child soldiers require the same clinical intervention.
- **Education and personal development.** Flexible literacy, formal education, vocational training, and lifelong-learning pathways should respond to highly varied educational histories.
- **Economic inclusion.** Employment support, vocational development, entrepreneurship, and local economic opportunities should be linked to broader territorial-development strategies.
- **Identity and social participation.** Opportunities for meaningful participation in community organizations, cultural activities, education, employment, sports, and civic life can support civilian identity reconstruction.
- **Rights and protection.** Individuals should have access to legal identity, healthcare, education, justice, social protection, and protection from discrimination, exploitation, or retaliation.

These components should be coordinated rather than delivered as independent services. The purpose is not simply to make individuals economically productive but to create credible pathways toward autonomy, dignity, and socially meaningful civilian roles.

### **8.5.2 Pillar II: Family Reintegration**

The family pillar focuses on rebuilding safe, sustainable relationships where possible and appropriate through:

- family tracing and reunification where safe and desired;
- psychosocial support for families affected by separation, loss, or conflict-related violence;
- parenting and caregiving support;
- economic and social assistance where household instability threatens reintegration; and
- recognition of extended, foster, adoptive, and community-based caregiving arrangements where biological reunification is unavailable or inappropriate.

Family reunification should not be treated as an automatic indicator of success. The quality, safety, and sustainability of relationships matter more than physical reunification alone.

### **8.5.3 Pillar III: Community Reintegration and Social Cohesion**

Community reintegration requires more than physical return. Policy should support social recognition, trust, participation, culturally grounded forms of healing, and opportunities to assume meaningful community roles through:

- trust-building and community preparation;
- anti-stigma strategies based on participation rather than labeling;

- community dialogue and culturally appropriate reconciliation mechanisms where communities consider them appropriate;
- support for local organizations and Indigenous authorities;
- inclusive educational, cultural, sport, and development initiatives; and
- protection of privacy and voluntary participation.

The expert findings in Chapter 4 identified trust as one of the most difficult relational dimensions to reconstruct and suggested that educational or productive participation alone may be insufficient where emotional and social relationships remain damaged. Community-level policy should address social recognition and trust alongside material participation.

Community participation should also be approached carefully. Communities are not homogeneous, and local institutions can reproduce stigma or inequality as well as provide support. Public policy should strengthen locally legitimate capacities without assuming that all local practices are automatically inclusive.

#### **8.5.4 Pillar IV: Structural and Institutional Transformation**

The fourth pillar addresses the enabling environment in which the first three pillars operate.

This pillar includes:

- territorial development;
- institutional coordination;
- service continuity;
- institutional legitimacy and responsiveness;
- intercultural public administration;
- recognition and reparative measures; and
- prevention of future recruitment through inclusive development.

Territorial development is particularly important because access to healthcare, education, transportation, communication, employment, and justice varies substantially across conflict-affected regions.

Institutional coordination should connect sectors rather than create another isolated bureaucracy. Reintegration requires coordination among health, education, employment, justice, social protection, child protection, security, and regional development.

Institutional legitimacy is linked to experts' observations that trust depends not simply on the state's physical presence but on whether institutions act consistently, fairly, and in ways local populations perceive as responsive.

This pillar seeks both to improve access to services and to strengthen trust between institutions and conflict-affected populations.

## **8.6 Hybrid and Intercultural Governance**

The four pillars require a governance structure that connects national responsibility with territorial adaptation.

A hybrid approach combines state responsibility with meaningful local participation. The state remains responsible for rights, resources, essential services, institutional coordination, and continuity, while communities and local actors contribute knowledge, legitimacy, cultural understanding, and locally appropriate forms of implementation. This balance reflects the interview findings discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, which describe local actors as important sources of support, cultural knowledge, advocacy, and social continuity, while participants also identified limitations in the continuity and territorial implementation of formal state responses.

Yoder-Maina's (2022) emphasis on community ownership should be read alongside the Hybrid Peacebuilding framework developed in this thesis. Community-driven approaches can strengthen cultural legitimacy, agency, local relevance, and

sustainability, but they should not become mechanisms for the state to withdraw from its responsibilities. Community participation should complement, not replace, state responsibility. Public institutions remain responsible for rights, resources, services, coordination, and long-term continuity.

### **National level**

The national government should establish:

- policy objectives and legal standards;
- stable funding mechanisms;
- cross-sector coordination requirements;
- minimum service guarantees;
- national monitoring standards; and
- mechanisms ensuring long-term continuity beyond changes in government.

### **Regional level**

Regional governments should adapt national objectives to territorial conditions by coordinating health, education, social protection, economic development, and culturally relevant services.

### **Local and community level**

Municipalities, Indigenous authorities, local service providers, schools, community organizations, families, and civil-society actors should participate in implementation and feedback.

Their role is particularly important in identifying local needs, culturally relevant approaches, implementation barriers, and opportunities for participation.

### **Former child soldiers and affected populations**

Where ethically and practically appropriate, individuals directly affected by child soldiering should be given opportunities to participate voluntarily in program design

and evaluation. Participation should never require public disclosure of identity or history.

## **8.7 Phased Implementation**

Because reintegration needs change over time, policy implementation should proceed in phases.

### **Phase I: Stabilization and Protection**

Initial priorities include:

- physical and mental healthcare;
- legal identity and documentation;
- immediate protection and safe accommodation where necessary;
- educational assessment;
- family tracing or caregiving arrangements;
- social assistance; and
- security planning where retaliation is a concern.

### **Phase II: Relational and Social Reconstruction**

The second phase focuses on:

- sustained psychosocial support;
- family relationships;
- educational re-entry;
- vocational development;
- community preparation;
- anti-stigma initiatives;
- identity reconstruction; and
- participation in civilian social life.

### **Phase III: Long-Term Inclusion and Peacebuilding**

Longer-term priorities include:

- employment and economic stability;
- civic and community participation;
- continued access to psychosocial services when needed;
- institutional coordination;
- territorial development;
- community resilience;
- reconciliation where appropriate; and
- prevention of future recruitment.

The phases should not be rigid. Individuals may move between them as needs and circumstances change.

## **8.8 Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation should assess both service delivery and changes in relationships, participation, trust, and well-being.

Quantitative indicators may include:

- educational participation and completion;
- employment or livelihood stability;
- healthcare access;
- access to social protection;
- documentation and legal status; and
- continuity of services.

Qualitative indicators should examine:

- perceived safety;
- trust in institutions;
- family functioning;

- community participation;
- experiences of stigma;
- social belonging;
- perceived opportunities for the future; and
- satisfaction with cultural relevance and institutional responsiveness.

Hope may be especially valuable as a qualitative dimension—not as a numerical proxy for success, but as an indication of whether individuals perceive credible pathways toward future participation and dignity.

Monitoring findings should inform program adaptation and institutional learning, not simply fulfil administrative reporting requirements.

## **8.9 Long-Term Sustainability**

One recurring concern in the expert narratives is discontinuity.

Long-term implementation requires:

- stable legal authority;
- protected or multi-year funding;
- trained personnel;
- institutional memory;
- cross-sector coordination;
- local implementation capacity;
- community participation; and
- regular evaluation and adaptation.

Long-term sustainability also requires resisting two opposite risks.

The first is short-term institutionalism, in which programs disappear when political priorities change.

The second is romanticized local resilience, in which families and communities are expected to compensate indefinitely for weak public systems.

Local capacity and state responsibility should reinforce one another. Individual recovery is shaped by family and community belonging; families and communities need accessible opportunities and public services; and institutions build legitimacy when they respond credibly to local knowledge and territorial needs. In this way, individual reintegration becomes connected to broader social transformation.

## **8.10 Conclusion**

This chapter has developed the thesis's principal conceptual and policy contribution. Through a PACS lens, long-term reintegration is reframed as a relational, multilevel, intercultural, and structurally conditioned peacebuilding process in which individual recovery, family and community relationships, institutional responsiveness, and structural opportunities interact.

The framework organizes these findings around four connected areas: individual, family, community, and structural/institutional reintegration. Hybrid and intercultural governance connects these levels by combining sustained state responsibility with meaningful local participation. This framework has not yet been empirically validated. It provides an evidence-informed and theoretically grounded basis for future policy development, participatory refinement, and evaluation.

## **Chapter 9 – Final Conclusions, Contributions, Limitations, and Future Directions**

### **9.1 Final Conclusions**

This thesis explored how subject-matter experts with professional experience related to conflict-affected populations understand the factors shaping the long-term social reintegration of former child soldiers associated with *Shining Path* and the *Militarized Communist Party of Peru* (MPCP).

Through semi-structured interviews with eleven subject-matter experts, complemented by documentary and biographical analysis, researcher reflexivity, and an interdisciplinary Peace and Conflict Studies framework, the study identified recurring professional perspectives concerning the psychological, relational, family, community, cultural, socioeconomic, institutional, political, and territorial dimensions of reintegration.

Across the expert narratives, long-term reintegration was understood as being shaped by interconnected psychological, relational, socioeconomic, cultural, institutional, and structural conditions. Participants identified both constraints and potential sources of support, but these factors matter most in how they interact across individual, family, community, and institutional levels.

These conclusions remain expert-informed: former child soldiers were not interviewed directly, and the study does not claim to establish their first-person experiences or causal relationships. Its contribution lies in interpreting how knowledgeable professionals understand the factors shaping reintegration in the Peruvian context.

The thesis's central conceptual conclusion is that long-term reintegration becomes more intelligible when viewed through Peace and Conflict Studies. Reintegration is not only a question of disengagement from an armed organization, psychosocial recovery,

economic assistance, or security. It also involves reconstructing trust, identity, dignity, belonging, relationships, institutional legitimacy, and credible opportunities for peaceful participation.

The thesis reframes reintegration as a relational, multilevel, intercultural, and structurally conditioned peacebuilding process. Individual recovery is connected to family and community relationships; those relationships are conditioned by institutions and structural opportunities; and institutional legitimacy is itself shaped by the quality of interaction between public authorities and conflict-affected populations.

The analysis of hope and resilience further develops this conclusion. Hope emerged not simply as optimism, but as a future-oriented expectation influenced by whether individuals can perceive credible pathways toward security, recognition, support, participation, and meaningful civilian life. Resilience, likewise, should not be equated automatically with successful reintegration. Adaptive resilience may enable survival under adverse conditions, while transformative resilience involves reconstructing relationships, identity, agency, and life projects.

These findings suggest that sustainable reintegration depends not only on changing individuals but also on improving the social and institutional environments in which reintegration occurs

## **9.2 Contributions of the Thesis**

This thesis makes six interrelated contributions.

This thesis's principal conceptual contribution to Peace and Conflict Studies is the reframing of reintegration as a relational, multilevel, intercultural, and structurally conditioned peacebuilding process. This research extends the analysis of reintegration beyond DDR, humanitarian, security, psychosocial, and social-assistance approaches by

linking individual recovery with trust, identity, community relationships, institutional legitimacy, and structural conditions for peaceful participation.

Empirically, the thesis contributes an in-depth qualitative account of how subject-matter experts understand long-term reintegration in the specific context of *Shining Path*, the MPCP, and Peru. This addresses an area that remains comparatively underexamined in the broader literature on child soldiering.

A further analytical contribution lies in proposing a relationship among hope, resilience, and reintegration. Hope is interpreted as structurally conditioned by credible opportunities, recognition, relationships, and institutional trust, while resilience is differentiated between adaptive survival and more transformative processes of rebuilding life projects and social participation.

The theoretical contribution lies in bringing Basic Human Needs Theory, Social Identity Theory, Social Cubism, Transitional and Transformative Justice, and Hybrid Peacebuilding into complementary dialogue, while Healing-Centered Peacebuilding strengthens the connection between trauma, relational repair, community agency, and broader processes of social transformation. Together, these perspectives allow analysis of reintegration across individual, relational, community, institutional, and structural dimensions.

At the policy level, the study translates expert-informed findings, documentary evidence, and PACS analysis into an evidence-informed, hybrid, intercultural framework. The framework connects individual recovery, family support, community participation, institutional coordination, territorial development, and long-term peacebuilding.

Methodologically, the research demonstrates both the value and limitations of expert narrative inquiry in an ethically sensitive and difficult-to-access research context. It

shows how professional knowledge can contribute to exploratory understanding while maintaining a clear distinction between expert interpretation and first-person lived experience.

Taken together, these contributions position long-term reintegration as a peacebuilding concern that connects individual agency with relationships, institutional responsiveness, structural transformation, and sustainable peace.

### **9.3 Limitations**

The principal limitation of this study is that former child soldiers were not interviewed directly. The empirical findings therefore represent the professional experiences, observations, interpretations, and perspectives of subject-matter experts rather than first-person accounts from former child soldiers themselves.

This methodological choice was influenced by ethical, security, access, and vulnerability considerations associated with researching this population. Consequently, the study does not claim to determine the actual psychological, social, family, economic, or relational effects experienced by former child soldiers, nor does it seek to speak on their behalf.

A second limitation concerns the heterogeneity of the expert sample. Participants came from different professional backgrounds and possessed varying degrees of direct contact with former child soldiers and conflict-affected populations. This diversity broadened the range of perspectives available to the study but also meant that participants' observations differed in proximity, disciplinary orientation, and type of evidence.

A third limitation concerns the research's geographic and contextual specificity. Although the study addresses Peru broadly, much of the discussion is particularly relevant to the VRAEM and to populations associated with Shining Path and the MPCP.

The findings should therefore not be generalized automatically to all former child soldiers or other conflict settings.

Finally, the public-policy framework proposed in Chapter 8 has not been empirically tested. It is an evidence-informed analytical and policy synthesis, not a validated intervention model. Its value lies in organizing recurring findings and theoretical insights into a coherent framework that can inform future research, policy development, and evaluation.

These limitations do not invalidate the study; rather, they define the boundaries within which its conclusions should be interpreted.

#### **9.4 Future Directions**

The most important next step is research centred on the first-person narratives of former child soldiers themselves, where ethically appropriate and practically feasible. Such work could examine whether the factors identified by experts correspond with, complicate, or challenge the priorities and understandings articulated by former child soldiers. This would allow future scholarship to compare professional interpretations with first-person perspectives rather than assuming their equivalence.

A second priority concerns gendered experiences of recruitment and reintegration. The present study identified important concerns surrounding sexual violence, stigma, silence, family relationships, and gendered vulnerability, but the evidence was insufficient to develop these themes fully. Future research should examine the different roles of women and girls within *Shining Path* and the MPCP and how those trajectories may shape later reintegration.

A third area concerns the relationship between former child soldiering, illicit economies, and organized crime. The interviews and macro-level analysis suggest that some conflict-affected territories contain legal and illegal pathways that compete for

labour, status, protection, and economic opportunity. Future research could investigate whether and under what circumstances former child soldiers become vulnerable to recruitment into criminal economies after leaving armed organizations.

A fourth priority is empirically assessing state reintegration mechanisms. Future research should examine the implementation, territorial reach, continuity, intercultural relevance, and outcomes of existing protocols and institutional responses. This would help distinguish more clearly between formal policy design and actual delivery.

A fifth area is the study of hope and transformative resilience. The analytical relationship proposed in this thesis should be examined empirically, particularly whether hope strengthens when individuals perceive credible opportunities, recognition, belonging, and trustworthy institutions. Future research could also examine how adaptive resilience develops into—or fails to develop into—more transformative forms of social participation.

Finally, the policy framework developed in Chapter 8 should undergo participatory validation. Former child soldiers, families, Indigenous authorities, local communities, public officials, service providers, and civil-society organizations could assess whether the proposed pillars reflect their priorities and whether the framework is feasible within Peru's institutional, cultural, and territorial realities. Particular importance should be given to the voluntary participation of former child soldiers themselves, where ethically appropriate and practically feasible, so the framework can be examined against first-person perspectives beyond the scope of the present study.

Future research should therefore move progressively from expert-informed exploratory understanding toward participatory, first-person, and policy-evaluation research. Such work would not simply extend the present study; it would provide an opportunity to assess, refine, challenge, or revise its expert-informed conclusions and

proposed policy framework through the perspectives of those directly affected by child soldiering.

## **9.5 Final Reflection**

The reintegration of former child soldiers raises a question that extends beyond the individuals directly affected: what does a society need to reconstruct after children have been incorporated into organized violence?

The expert-informed findings and PACS analysis suggest that leaving an armed organization should not be equated with the restoration of civilian life. Relationships may remain fractured, identities contested, opportunities restricted, communities mistrustful, and institutions insufficiently responsive. At the same time, expert narratives identify resources for moving forward in family relationships, community solidarity, cultural knowledge, legitimate opportunities, hope, resilience, and the reconstruction of trust.

From a Peace and Conflict Studies perspective, this is why reintegration matters beyond humanitarian assistance. It concerns the capacity of individuals and societies to transform relationships shaped by violence into relationships capable of sustaining dignity, belonging, participation, and peaceful coexistence.

The long-term reintegration of former child soldiers should therefore be understood not as the final administrative stage after conflict, but as part of the continuing work of building peace.

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## Annex A – Glossary

For the purpose of this study, the following terms and meanings should be considered:

| Term in Spanish       | Term in English                       | Acronym<br>(Spanish / English) | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abimael Guzmán        |                                       |                                | Leader and founder of Shining Path.                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Aldeas Infantiles SOS | SOS Children's Villages International |                                | An international non-profit organization that works primarily to promote and defend the right of children, adolescents, and young people to live in a family, as well as those who have lost family care or are at risk of losing it. |
| Alias                 | Alias                                 | a.k.a                          | Also known as...                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Ashaninkas            |                                       |                                | An Indigenous people of Amazonian origin, considered one of the largest and most dispersed in the central Peruvian jungle, who were brutally affected during the internal armed conflict, especially by the actions of the SP.        |
| Chunchos              |                                       |                                | Derogatory term used to refer to people of jungle origin, including the Asháninka Indigenous people.                                                                                                                                  |

|                                             |                                        |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Chuschi                                     |                                        |      | A small town located in the highlands of the Andes in Ayacucho, one of the poorest regions in Peru.                                                                                                                                                          |
| Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación   | Truth and Reconciliation Commission    | CVR  | It was established in 2001 to investigate human rights violations during the Peruvian internal armed conflict between 1980 and 2000.                                                                                                                         |
| El Estrecho                                 |                                        |      | A Peruvian town located on the banks of the Putumayo River, on the border with Colombia, where, due to its geographical location, illicit activities related to arms trafficking, timber and drugs, as well as illegal mining, have developed, among others. |
| Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia | Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia | FARC | Marxist terrorist group that fought the Colombian state for more than 60 years until the signing of a peace agreement in 2016.                                                                                                                               |
| Inicio de la Lucha Armada                   | Beginning of the Armed Struggle        | ILA  | Shining Path's first attack on May 17, 1980, in the town of Chuschi in Ayacucho, declaring war on the Peruvian State.                                                                                                                                        |
| Masato                                      |                                        |      | A traditional drink of the Amazonian communities, prepared from boiled cassava mixed with water, which is chewed in the mouth, spat out, and left to rest so that the resulting starch turns into sugar, and this, in turn, into alcohol.                    |

|                                         |                                     |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mazamari                                |                                     |          | One of the nine districts of the province of Satipo, with an approximate population of 45,000 inhabitants, where the main base of the Special Police Forces and the military airport that serves as the entry point for State forces to the VRAEM are located. |
| Militarizado Partido Comunista del Perú | Militarized Communist Party of Peru | MPCP     | SP's remnants, who are highly involved in drug trafficking and organized crime, whose stronghold is located in the Vizcatan heights within the VRAEM.                                                                                                          |
| Mochilero                               | Backpacker                          |          | A person, usually a young one, who crosses the jungle and the Andean mountains on foot, carrying cocaine packs on their backs to deliver it to organizations that then distribute it around the world.                                                         |
| Observador Militar                      | Military Observer                   | MILOB    | UN military experts on mission who usually perform their peacekeeping duties in uniform but unarmed.                                                                                                                                                           |
| Ollanta Humala                          |                                     |          | President of Peru from 2011 to 2016                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Organización de las Naciones Unidas     | United Nations                      | ONU / UN | A global intergovernmental organization whose mission is to maintain international peace and security.                                                                                                                                                         |
| Peinilla                                |                                     |          | A traditional Colombian machete that, in the vicinity of the Putumayo River, usually has a sheath with embroidered Indigenous designs.                                                                                                                         |

|                                             |                                  |        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pionerito                                   |                                  |        | A child born inside the SP or the MPCP who later becomes a child soldier.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Programa Nacional de Asistencia Alimentaria | National Food Assistance Program | PRONAA | State program whose main function for 20 years, until 2012, was to provide food assistance to school-age children, ages 3 to 12, in public schools.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Quispe Palomino                             |                                  |        | Family names related to MPCP leaders. In Perú, paternal (Quispe) and maternal (Palomino) family names are used together. However, the use of only paternal family names is accepted for non-official issues.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Reintegración                               | Reintegration                    |        | A comprehensive, elaborate, and sustainable process that aims to enable a person who has been isolated from society due to their participation in terrorist groups to return to it through the recovery of their family, community, and social ties and the attention to their economic, educational, health, and other relevant needs, allowing them to function adequately in their new life. |
| Río Putumayo                                | Putumayo River                   |        | One of the main tributary rivers of the Amazon River and a natural border between Peru and Colombia.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Rondas Campesinas / Comités de Autodefensa  | Civil militias                   |        | Social organizations composed of rural residents that look after their community's safety and security.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

|                                                 |                                                         |         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Senderista                                      |                                                         |         | A member of SP or the MPCP.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Sendero Luminoso                                | Shining Path                                            | SL / SP | Communist terrorist group, considered the most bloodthirsty in Latin America, responsible for tens of thousands of deaths and millions of dollars in material losses, which began its armed struggle against the Peruvian State in 1980 until the capture of its leader in 1992. |
| Terrorista                                      | Terrorist                                               |         | A person who belongs to a terrorist organization.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Valle de los Ríos<br>Apurímac, Ene y<br>Mantaro | Valley of the<br>Apurímac, Ene<br>and Mantaro<br>Rivers | VRAEM   | It is a mountainous region spanning the highlands and rainforests of five Peruvian departments: Apurímac, Ayacucho, Cusco, Huancavelica, and Junín. It is considered the poorest region and the largest producer of cocaine in the country.                                      |