

Dissent and Opposition among Ex-Combatants – Implications for the Consolidation of Democracy

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Abstract

This paper uses focus groups to evaluate the extent to which ex-combatants in Liberia adhere to ideals of pluralism. Specifically, this involves their views on dissent or freedom of speech, as well as the role of the opposition in Liberia. How do they deal with critique at an individual level as well as the level of the state? This study is part of a larger evaluation of ex-combatants adherence to democratic norms. The results of this investigation are disheartening in terms of democracy, but point to a clear adherence to the peace process. While they recognized the ideal of freedom of speech, and indeed link that to their definition of democracy, they shun open critique, largely because a fear of conflict and violence. The political context of Liberia, does not, to them, appear stable enough to handle an open conflict of opinion. This paper also tries to gauge the advantages and disadvantages of using focus groups as a data collection method. What is particularly worth mentioning here, is the creation of trust in a well designed focus group, which given the field of research – post-conflict context – may be especially important. In addition, in terms of assessing the adherence to the ideals of pluralism, the interaction itself, within the groups, also tell us a great deal.

The conclusions offered here, are preliminary as not all groups have been analyzed at this point. As this is the first draft of this paper, all types of input are welcome. The data collection for this paper was funded through grants from NAI, SAREC and *Rektors resebidrag från Wallenbergs Stiftelse*.

Introduction

This paper investigates the adherence to ideals of pluralism and tolerance among ex-combatants in Liberia. The interest in this particular group is sparked by the fact that these individuals participated in civil war, where issues of pluralism and tolerance are dealt with in a completely different manner than in a democracy. Given this experience, and the current development towards democracy in Liberia, how do ex-combatants deal with these issues today? This volatile group could cause serious havoc if they had the inclination to do so.¹ While addressing the values of pluralism, this paper will also address the advantages and disadvantages of using focus groups in this field.

This investigation is part of a larger study, where the democratization process is studied through taking stock of the political culture among the ex-combatants. If this group has made reasonable progress in terms of their commitment to democracy there is reason to cheer for the entire citizenry. The consolidation of democracy could be summarized as making democracy *the only game in town*, thus is relates to the creation of democrats (diffusion of democratic values) and popular support of the political system (popular legitimation).² In this particular paper, this involves examining the values of pluralism and tolerance among the ex-combatants and their take on the role of the opposition in their political system. The results of this examination are disheartening, highlighting the longevity of the democratization process and the difficulties in leaving a violent past behind.

This paper is methodologically heavy for a reason. This paper uses the evaluation of pluralism and tolerance as a way to gauge the appropriateness of applying focus groups to this field. Focus groups are still a rare tool in political science, and when applied, it is usually as a preamble for designing a survey. One of the reasons why focus groups are potentially a powerful research method is their ability to reveal two types of information: the interaction within the groups as well as the content of what was said.

¹ Sawyer 2008, p 188.

² Cf Schedler 1998, p 91. See also Linz and Stepan 1996, pp 15f.

Since the informants represent a wide range in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, military faction and program experience, a lot can be said on the basis of this material.³ Although they are representative of the ex-combatant community, caution is required, as the sampling process reminds us of a snowball sample, and specific groups were targeted rather than a catch-all strategy. In particular, the goal of this paper is to present the similarities, the general traits they have in common, and only when called for, present opposing or different opinions when they were voiced by the participants.

³ Out of the 99 informants, 9 were non-combatants that participated in programs geared towards ex-combatants.

Pluralism and Dissent

This theoretical section is meant as a backdrop to the analysis, to help contextualize the attitudes of the ex-combatants. The topic as such was relevant as one of the building blocks of the question guide designed for this data collection, but when analyzing the material certain nuances within the question of respecting both ideas and people are needed.

As expressed by Sartori: “*liberal* democracy [...] is based on dissent and diversity. It is we, not the Greeks, who have discovered how to build a political system on a *concordia discors*, a dissenting consensus.”⁴ When discussing democratic norms, tolerance of opposition groups is often seen as a cornerstone.⁵ Indeed, democracy requires us to respect both people and ideas equally; tolerating others as equal members of the polity also entails tolerating their opinions and right to expression.⁶ A true democrat tolerates a diversity of opinion, and accords the same political rights to his friends and foes. This ideal is rarely fulfilled, or is at least very difficult to apply both in principle and in practice.

How are we to understand the concept of a dissenting consensus? Consensus in this sense does not entail absolute agreement, one vision of the world. Rather than being static, this concept is dynamic as it entails an “endless process of adjusting many dissenting minds (and interests) into changing ‘coalitions’ of mutual persuasion and reciprocal concessions.”⁷ Neither does it entail conflict, in the sense of Hobbes, but rather dissent and respecting other viewpoints enough to engage in a debate with them. Thus, dissent is somewhere in between consensus and conflict, underlining the peaceful nature of democracy while recognizing the diversity so crucial to democracy.⁸

If we relate this to nature of the political system, this is played out in the need for different parties, forwarding different perspectives on societal issues and public

⁴ Sartori 1997, p 59.

⁵ Finkel, Sigelman, and Humphries 1999, pp 205f.; Bratton 2006, pp 11-13.

⁶ Bohman 2003, p 95.

⁷ Sartori 1997, p 63.

⁸ Sartori 1997, pp 63f. Bohman 2003, pp 94f.

policy, pluralism requires a plurality of parties. Compared to factions, parties are interested in more than just personal endowment, they are meant to serve the greater good, whether in government or in opposition.⁹ Depending on their position, however, their roles are also different – make policy or critique policy.

Evaluating the ex-combatants' adherence to these ideals, will first require an examination of what ideals they profess to have within this area, and then study three areas where these ideals may be played out: 1) how were issues of dissent within the group itself dealt with, 2) how did they describe their own behavior, and 3) what did they see as appropriate behavior at the national level, i.e. the role of the opposition.

⁹ Sartori 1997, p 60.

Methodology

The data collected for this paper used 18 focus groups from four areas in Liberia, three counties: Lofa, Grand Gedeh and Montserrado, and within Montserrado both the rural and urban parts.¹⁰ The groups included 99 participants, of which 28 were female and 71 were male, and only 90 of those were ex-combatants. The data collection was carried out between April 15th 2008 and June 15th 2008. In this paper 7 of the focus groups are studied, with a total of 37 participants. Among these 11 were female and 26 were male.¹¹

Why focus groups?

The answer given here should offer a rough guide as to why this form of data collection is useful and preferable. The reasons are several; some are pragmatic and others are related to ontological issues.

Starting with the more pragmatic reasons, using focus groups gives rise to two forms of knowledge, one is related to the content of the conversation and the second one is related to the interaction between participants.¹² As noted in the theoretical section, both of these forms of knowledge are desired. The alternative would be to conduct both individual interviews and observational work, which seems inefficient in comparison. It may also be easier for most participants to express their opinions in these groups, than it would be in individual interviews. Holmberg and Petersson claim that in countries where politics is conflictual and the democratic institutions are less established than in the west, people may be more weary to expose their political views to strangers.¹³ Using focus groups should at least partially help alleviate this problem, although it cannot eradicate it. The presence of a white female westerner should also become less intimidating in the group setting than in

¹⁰ Two of the groups are only included as points of comparison. One group (5) consists of non-combatants that participated in the same program as ex-combatants. The second group (6), consisted of participants from the veterans' organization.

¹¹ The field work was financed through grants from NAI, SAREC and *Rektors resebidrag från Wallenbergs Stiftelse*.

¹² Eriksson 2006, p 44. See also Morgan 1997.

¹³ Holmberg and Petersson 1980, p 68.

the individual interview; in focus groups there certainly is both safety and power in numbers.

The ontological reasons can be divided into two: the depth of human opinion and the nature of human opinion. Survey work and even individual interviews presupposes that all individuals have an opinion regarding all questions. Particularly with regards to surveys, people may often feel forced into offering an opinion, which infringes upon the reliability of the study. We simply do not know if the opinions were offered because it was theirs, or because they felt like they ought to have a response.¹⁴ Clearly, the answers we care about are those the interviewee feel convinced about. The focus group setting allows you to take this into consideration; no one is forced to answer anything and the social pressure to give *any* answer is reduced as others are likely to speak instead.

The other aspect relates to whether opinions are independent of context, the nature of human opinion. Is the self independent of her context? If she was, than one “merely [has] to ask the right questions and the other’s ‘reality’ will be revealed,”¹⁵ but to think that we are able in individual interviews to isolate the individual from the group is illusory, for one, we cannot completely eradicate the interviewer. The production of knowledge cannot be atomized in this fashion, even if we try.¹⁶ Pool asserts that:

the social milieu in which communication takes place modifies not only what a person dares to say but even what he thinks he chooses to say. And these variations in expression cannot be viewed as mere deviations from some underlying ‘true’ opinion, for there is no neutral, non-social, uninfluenced situation to provide the baseline.¹⁷

Taking the idea seriously, that “opinions are created in the act of communication in which they are expressed,”¹⁸ should not only entail that we are sensitive to the impression the interviewer herself may make, but that creating the social milieu that reflects our target group the best should also be attempted in order to capture something that, although not conceived of as the *true* opinion – because there are

¹⁴ Holmberg and Petersson 1980, pp 73f.

¹⁵ Gubrium and Holstein 2002, p 12.

¹⁶ See also Drury and Stott 2001, pp 62f; Gubrium and Holstein 2002, pp 5-13.

¹⁷ Pool 1957, p 192.

¹⁸ Pool 1957, p 194.

doubts as to whether such a thing exists - can be considered as a more fruitful form of individuals' opinions. The use of focus groups is in part an answer to this call; they frame the individual in a group context, and in a group context relevant to the research subject at hand. To disregard this element of human opinion completely when collecting data seems defective. Focus groups, on the other hand, allow for a nuanced and problematizing form of research, which allows the participants to reflect and reconsider their statements, in the relevant group context.¹⁹

One problem often raised by researchers not familiar with focus groups, is: What is your unit of analysis? This is a valid question, but perhaps not as problematic as one might think, and especially not if you accept the idea that opinions are never independent of context. The question is also relevant when we discuss the issue of political culture. Can political culture be measured in one individual, or do we need to rely on aggregate data? As has been expressed by Patrick, political culture is a question of something shared among individuals, thus the unit of analysis can be thought of within this tradition as "individuals in their plurality".²⁰ The focus group offers a way to capture this: the individual in the group context. Thus, the unit of analysis is not one nor the other, but rather a combination of the two, or a vacillation between the two. Clearly, this can create problems if the researcher is out to establish variation solely at the individual level, or solely at the group level, but in this research and in many other cases that is not the goal.

Focus groups allow room for social pressure to conformity,²¹ and this is partly its purpose but it can also be troublesome if it gets out of hand. This is why it is important to pay attention to the group interaction displayed in each group, in order to determine the level of group conformity. I would argue that different personas are visible through this type of data collection; the groups do not homogenize to such an extent as to render invisible differences in opinion or language use. However, in this particular paper the main unit of analysis will remain the group because the issue

¹⁹ Eriksson 2006, p 43.

²⁰ Patrick 1984, pp 285f.

²¹ Eriksson 2006, pp 284-5.

area covered here is quite limited, hence there is not enough data to evaluate and assess each individual adequately.

Selection and selection bias

The selection of focus group participants was done strategically, as delimiting the entire population is problematic. The groups were recruited in different ways, in some cases I arrived at a local community and asked to be introduced to some of the ex-combatants in the area (usually through the elders or those in charge of the program). In other cases, I would locate some of the villagers involved in the particular trade at hand, and asked for the names of some of the trainers I knew to have been involved in a particular reintegration program. Through their help, I would contact some of the participants and ask them to meet me the next day. In one case I also visited a training facility to speak directly to some of those currently enrolled. Finally, in some of the cases I worked with a veterans' organization in Monrovia, and through their network contacted potential participants and invited them to come to a discussion, similar to a snowball sample.

Although the programs were chosen in a strategic manner, this does not hamper the potential for generalization. The programs studied represent a large part of the programs under the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) trust fund, all in all the four training programs²² (the other groups were either involved in formal education or no program at all) carried in excess of 27.9 % of the caseload.²³ In addition, 12 of the 18 groups were carried out in Montserrado County, the county of preferred settlement (48 %).²⁴

Examining the individual characteristics of the ex-combatants involved, the potential for generalization is not stifled there either, although the composition differs from the population composition. In part, this has been intentional, so as to

²² These include Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), Monrovia Vocational Training Center (MVTC), the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and German Agro Action (GAA).

²³ JIU 2008.

²⁴ UNDP 2004, p 38. These numbers are based on information given at cantonment site; there are no figures available for actual settlement. The figures for the other counties varied between 14 % and 0.05 %, with Lofa at 6 % and Grand Gedeh at 4 %.

allow for important comparisons, e.g. the female component was larger than in the population (30 % vs. 22 %).²⁵ The groups represent the breadth of ex-combatants' background, e.g. covering 14 of the 16 ethnic groups of Liberia, and an age range of 13 to 44 years (mean 28). With a small and strategic sample it is hard to match the distribution of demographic characteristics of the population, but the important issue is rather if these individuals are different from individuals with the same characteristics in the population. There are no apparent reasons to suspect that this is the case, except for some self-selection issues, see below. For more details on group composition, see Appendix 1.

Self-selection is to some extent a problem, as the participants can choose not to take part; in this case it is likely that those who do participate will hold more positive democratic values. All participants were given monetary compensation for their time and to cover transportation costs, to the amount of five USD (varying slightly depending on transportation needs). This economical provision should have decreased the number of those who particularly enjoy talking and debating in the sample, and encouraged others not so interested in participating.

Doing the interviews

Each discussion begun with a discussion over the research aims and issues of confidentiality over some light snacks and drinks. They were informed about how the data collected would be used and of the independence of the research, i.e. lack of links to local NGOs and programs. Before starting the recorder all were asked whether they consented to recordings being made of the talk. The average length of the discussions was an hour and 45 minutes, although some ran longer and some a little bit shorter (one hour to about three hours). The size of each group varied from four (three groups) to seven (one group), but most groups included six participants (ten groups). I found that a group of six worked the best, as it was large enough to create a feeling of a group and small enough to ensure that the length of the discussions remained reasonable. At the end of each discussion, they were asked to

²⁵ Bugnion et al. 2006, p 30.

fill in a short survey that mainly covered demographic issues. Often I would read the survey out loud and they would check the appropriate box, or I would assist them in that as well depending on the reading and writing skills of the particular participants.

All groups were exposed to the same opening questions, but follow-up questions varied depending on the discussion itself; in some cases the groups entered into the topic on their own, other times they were prompted by me. The participants were often prompted by questions such as: *Could you give an example of what you mean? Why do you think that is? Does everyone agree? Are there any alternatives? Why do you say that?* Sometimes the discussion had to be cut off, in order to have time to cover all of the questions included. Only very rarely was there a need to stop a discussion that was of substantial interest to the researcher.

The focus groups were used to witness the interaction between the participants, in order to evaluate the extent to which they have an open mind to other people's arguments and ideas, or if they are set on there being just one correct answer to each problem/question. Partly, this was one way around asking them to comment of fairly abstract ideas such as dissent. Depending on the views of the participants they may have explored this on their own, but if not, I simulated an alternative opinion to their ideas (verbal stimuli/manipulation),²⁶ and by observing their reactions to this determine their open-mindedness.

Another technique employed in the focus groups, was the use of pictures. This was only applied in relation to election experience, but which on occasion bordered the issue of opposition. The pictures served as a memory device, and as the pictures were neutral they also allowed participants to voice spontaneous thoughts and ideas in relation to the pictures. All of the groups really liked looking at the pictures. This method of broaching a topic made it easier for the participants to gear the conversation towards issues that mattered to them, thus allowing them to set the agenda within an area predefined by me as the researcher.

²⁶ Bositis 1988, p 336.

In the groups carried out in the rural setting, language was more of a problem. All interviews were carried out in English, but in the four groups in Grand Gedeh, a translator was present. I would start the conversation in English, and when required, this would be translated into Krahn, and if a participant so wished they could express themselves in Krahn and the translator would then translate it back to English for me. The majority of the conversation was always carried out in English and the translation was simply a backup. During the transcribing process, I also had another Krahn speaker translate the Krahn sections, in order to verify what had been translated. In the two groups in Lofa County, no such separate translator was present, but individuals in the group would help to explain words or questions in Kissi to those not as fluent in English as themselves.

One problematic issue that proved hard to mediate was the issue of my allegiance. The participants had no problem seeing me as disconnected from the government of Liberia, but were harder to convince of my non-allegiance to the NGO community. This prompted explanations of my work not only before the interviews, but also at the end of the discussions to further press my academic independence.

Failing the pluralist ideal

Professed Ideal

Most of the groups expressed a clear preference for freedom of speech, and identified this as *the* defining aspect of democracy. Though there were different conclusions as to whether Liberia could be judged as a democracy based on this criterion (group 2 claimed no), the possibility of expressing one's opinions, being respected in the process and engaging with others was valued by most participants (1, 2, 3, 4 and 12).

Some were, however, consensus orientated as well. The idea of reaching a consensus, or eliminating differences of opinion was also valued, notably this was described as *homogenizing* the group or *having one mind* as a group (Gomer and George, 1; and Gabby, 2). One participant expressed himself in the following manner: "we all share ideas, various ideas, to make one. That's one of the good things I see about democracy" (Curtis, 12), highlighting the procedural nature of democracy. However, both of these manners of expression seem to imply the preference of consensus over dissent among the ex-combatants, although it is difficult to evaluate whether it truly differs from the ideal of a dissenting consensus.

Observed Interaction

In terms of the behavior within each group, and how they actually dealt with differences of opinion, most of them exhibited very uniform ideas and opinions. Thus, dissent or alternative viewpoints had to be offered by me. Sometimes they could recognize the logic in my argument, but would usually retain their own position. They had no problem disagreeing with me or voicing critique against the government/authorities, nor did it provoke an uncomfortable atmosphere. Those that did offer somewhat differing points of views, were usually those that in general were active in the conversation to begin with, e.g. Kevin and Curtis (11 and 12).

In those few instances when dissent was expressed in the groups, the rest seemed to take it well, and one participant even noted, when I asked if he agreed, that he “can respect his brother’s opinion even if he disagrees with him” (15).

Several of the participants expressed an enjoyment in participating, in this round-table discussion, or workshop as they sometimes referred to it as. It is possible that the culture of discussion expressed in these groups, was much freer and relaxed than they were used to, whereas for me it was still somewhat authoritarian as they tended to direct their responses/statements solely to me rather than engaging in a conversation with each other (notably group 4). The failure to do so did not however, hamper their ability to react to previous statements.

When asked whether they felt listened to during the conversation, 89.9 % answered in the affirmative, and 96.0 % felt that they enjoyed the conversation. In total seven persons did not experience the conversation as positively as the rest, notably six of them did not feel listened to, while three reported that they did not enjoy the discussion. The only way these people stand out compared to the rest, is in their general social life, where they seem to be more isolated (57.1 % are single, 71.4 % do not live close to their families, and 57.2 % reported that they had some problems gaining social acceptance, compared to the same values for the entire sample: 25.3 %, 38.4 % and 29.3 % respectively).

Private Dissent

Relating to how the participants deal with dissent and the expression of dissent in their own lives, one aspect becomes very clear. Most of them opt to not express dissent, especially in the form of protests or marches, because of the problems they believe will follow. Expressing dissent is intimately tied up with the risk of violence, and open conflict (7), which would make it more difficult for them to integrate into society. They fear being stigmatized as troublemakers, and therefore bow out of this form of political participation (11 and 12), e.g.: “You know we as ex-combatants [having a bad record due to the war], so we decided to leave politics, to live as patriotic citizens” (Curtis, 12).

When faced with dissent in ordinary life, several express the need to make that person fall back in line, and one way to achieve this is through persuasion and settling the issue through the influence of elders in the community (1, 4 and 11). For example Kasper described it in the following manner: “the elders usually come in and settle dispute among the entire youth here [...] then any other misunderstanding the elders come together, they decide it and bring peace. Usually, that’s what we been doing here.” (11).

Some also expressed self-restraint in terms of criticizing publicly the government or other authorities, as this was seen as causing trouble and decreasing the effectiveness of the government (1 and 12). George expressed it thus: “We can’t say anything against the government now, because it is OUR government. [...] Whether it is good, whether it is bad, we accept it.” (1).²⁷ And if you had to express your dissent, they were adamant about doing it in a diplomatic way, thus opting to talk on the radio was possible (Chad, 12), rather than taking it to the streets.

Role of the opposition

Although some recognized the usefulness of having opposition parties, the groups considered up until now were critical of the idea (1). The issue raised a lot of strong opinions, and some claimed that the multiparty system was one of the major problem in Liberia today (Kevin, 11). It was clear that the role they envisioned for any opposition party was not one of critiquing the ruling party. The reasons for this are several, but mainly it was related to the confusion it could create (4, 11) and the danger it posed to society (3, 11, 12). If anything, the opposition should help the ruling party in a constructive and less public fashion (12).

Decreasing the number of political parties was envisioned by several, although not everyone was clear about why they thought that was better (4). However, some did recognize that it was useful to have at least more than one party, that way you could have a shift of power at election time (3). For others, having fewer parties would allow more qualified people to obtain important positions within the party

²⁷ Cecil (group 12) did not want to criticize the government because of his lack of knowledge.

and government, something which according to Kevin would increase democracy (11). Kirby in group 11 had difficulties understanding the need for more than twenty parties in Liberia, when a country like the USA (which is so much bigger) only needs two.

The issue of opposition and critique at the national level was clearly linked to fears of conflict. Several participants made the link between critique/opposition and war: “For example, like George Weah, the way he was fighting for president, but then he don’t carry the election. Maybe, when, he is somebody that like war, he make all that tension to make war, because he not win” (Brandon, 3). Curtis retains his aversion for opposition and critique even after hearing my arguments in favor of it: “Those criticisms brought a whole lot of noise, it brought whole lot of demonstration, it led people to death, it led some people to jail. So at this time, for our past experience, I don’t think there is a need for us to still mind opposition party criticism” (12). Their reasoning is understandable given their recent experiences of war. Fear of conflict causes them to evaluate political processes in a different light than an individual in a developed democracy would; the conflict mode is still pervasive and causes them to reject this form of pluralism and dissent.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to take stock of the emerging democratic culture among ex-combatants in Liberia, through an analysis of the adherence to the ideals of dissent. The data used for this paper was collected in three areas of Liberia between the 15th of April and the 15th of June of this year, through focus groups. In this paper, 7 out of 18 groups were scrutinized. The analysis was focused on the group level, as this particular issue was too narrow to allow for a detailed analysis on the individual level. In the larger research project dealing with democratic citizenship in its broader sense, such individual analysis will be possible however. The conclusions offered in this paper can only be preliminary as not all groups are included in the analysis; however the general trend is believed to be similar.

Before discussing the more content related conclusions, certain observations are pertinent concerning the chosen methodology. There seem to be certain advantages of this form of data collection in a post-conflict setting. Firstly, ex-combatants have often been described as a problematic group to do research on, particularly regarding honesty.²⁸ The participants openly voiced their experience and feelings concerning issues that are usually seen as sensitive or precarious, which should indicate that this problem was not that grave. Compared to the individual interview setting, trust was established at a much faster rate, which in a post-conflict context is vital.

Their opinions are clearly exposed to social desirability bias, both internally among themselves but also in relation to me, the interviewer. However, if they filtered their opinions accordingly, such data is not useless, but rather the opposite. Such opinions are perceived by the ex-combatants as the *norm*, or the 'correct' answer, and thus reflect their social reality in a more accurate way.

Clearly, some of the groups did exhibit very uniform opinions; but some did not – hence I believe this variation has more to do with the participants themselves than the instrument used for data collection. In these cases I am led to conclude that it relates more to their culture of discussion and debate; i.e. these participants value

²⁸ See Utas 2003 for more details.

uniformity and consensus to a much higher degree than other participants, hence the tolerance of different ideas was lower in certain instances.

Some of the notable disadvantages of using focus groups in this field relate to the problem of representativeness and the range of questions that can be covered in such a data collection method. In a survey you are able to cover a wider spectrum of questions, but the answers will not be as nuanced as those obtained from focus groups, nor will you be able to evaluate the strength of such opinions. In terms of the representativeness of the results obtained, this is clearly hampered by the use of a strategic sample, the presence of an attitude cannot be easily quantified and generalized. Focus groups map out the territory of opinions, and if significant group differences exist one can deduce that such differences of opinions are likely to exist among those segments of the population.

In terms of the consolidation of democracy, the results of this analysis point to a lack of diffusion of democratic values in terms of adherence to pluralism. Despite ex-combatants' expression of pluralist ideals, they have large difficulties applying them in practice on all three levels, a result which was prevalent in all groups. This mismatch between the abstract and the concrete application of democratic values has been a difficulty in developed democracies too,²⁹ but the extent of this dissonance in the Liberian case is worrisome. It seems as if the participants are still caught in what can be described as a *conflict mode*, the political context in which they find themselves in, five years after the end of the war, is still interpreted through their war experience. Heightened threat perceptions are known to increase intolerance,³⁰ thus given this background experience it is not strange that fear of violence and trouble is one of the reasons for their abhorrence of dissent and public critique. It is clear that these ex-combatants have not completely transitioned from the war; there is not faith in the process of democracy in terms of dealing with the resolution of conflict in a peaceful way. If the past (war) can be summarized as conflictual and intolerant, the present could be characterized as that of conflict avoidance yet intolerant. The ideal of dissent without fear is yet to be fulfilled.

²⁹ Sullivan and Transue 1999, p 633, 635.

³⁰ Gibson 1998, p 42.

However, what is more encouraging is that the group that could be a threat to stability, chooses to actively refrain from behavior that could endanger the peace; violence is no longer an option for dealing with politics. Though not entrenched democrats, at least they are entrenched proponents of peace. Perhaps, at this stage the inherent conflict between the nature of peace and democracy³¹ are still played out, and peace gets the upper hand.

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³¹ Baker 2001, pp 756-760; Boutros-Ghali 1995; Jarstad 2005; 2006, p 11; Mansfield and Snyder 1996, 2001; Ottaway 2005-04-07; Paris 2004; Plattner 2005; Sisk 2004-12-09.

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Appendix 1: Group Composition

No	Program	Area	Gender	Faction	Ethnicity	Size	Comment
1	GAA	Rural	Male	MODEL	Krahn	7	
2	GAA	Rural	Female	MODEL	Krahn	5	
3	GAA	Rural	Male	MODEL	Krahn	4	
4	GAA	Rural	Female	MODEL	Krahn	6	
5	MVTC	Urban	Male	-	mixed	5	Not combatants
6	Various	Urban	Male and female	mixed	mixed	6	Staff at veterans' organization
7	UMCOR	Rural	Male	Mixed	Kissi	4	two were not ex-combatants
8	UMCOR	Rural	Female	GOL	Kissi	4	
9	MVTC	Urban	Male	GOL	Bassa/Kpelle	6	
10	MVTC	Urban	Male	LURD*	Bassa*	6	
11	None	Rural	Male	GOL/LURD	Kpelle	5	
12	YMCA	Urban	Male	LURD/GOL	Mixed	6	
13	YMCA	Urban	Female	GOL	mixed	6	
14	None	Urban	Male	GOL	Loma	6	
15	YMCA	Urban	Male	MODEL	Kpelle*	6	
16	MVTC	Urban	Male	MODEL*	Mixed	6	
17	University	Urban	Male	GOL	Mixed	5	
18	High School	Urban	Female	GOL	Gio*	6	

* indicates that the group consisted mainly of such individuals, but not exclusively

Groups in bold are included in paper