Demos Conceptions – The Limits of Citizenship among Ex-Combatants in Liberia

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Abstract

In the state of Liberia, the issue of democratization has received a lot of attention and the image of the first female elected President in Africa, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, has given boost to positive appraisals. But how deep does this new political makeover run? During the war, and before, the issue of Liberian identity has been a focal point and problematic issue.

My purpose in this text is to investigate how the critical group of ex-combatants conceptualizes the limits of *demos*, who is seen as a citizen and why? Ethnic polarization played a huge role in the civil war in Liberia, where particularly Mandingos were targeted. To what extent is this group seen as part of the *demos* in Liberia today? This question is particularly interesting to examine among ex-combatants, as they should have felt the full blow of the ethnification of the Liberian citizenship. In that sense, as a group they could be seen as a least likely case for embracing an open *demos* conception. The paper also discusses what meaning is attached to the concept of a Liberian identity.

I here present the findings of focus groups completed during the spring of 2008 with ex-combatants in three counties of Liberia. A total of 88 participants, from various factions and backgrounds, are included in the paper. The findings suggest a fairly inclusive conception of *demos*.

A note to the reader:

This text is part of my dissertation on the political reintegration of ex-combatants in Liberia. The general purpose of my dissertation is to examine whether certain reintegration programs also help, or problematize, the political reintegration of the ex-combatants. In this chapter, I deal with one aspect of that political reintegration, namely the concept of the demos in Liberia. This is a draft of this text, and the connections to the reintegration programs are only preliminary at this stage. Comments are more than welcome!

“We the Liberians” – Defining Demos

The issue of citizenship is at the centre of political science, it defines the relationship between state and individual, between polity and its members. The notion of citizenship is also closely related to the notion of a demos, a core feature of a democracy. After civil war, these issues are often precarious and politicized, thereby also questioning who is seen as a rightful and equal member of the polity. Indeed, often these issues have been at the centre of the conflict to begin with. There is a considerable amount of research trying to deal with the challenges of post-conflict societal divisions, specifically ethnically divided societies, in order to increase the possibilities of successful peacebuilding. This issue is also clearly related to the *stateness problem* referred to by Linz and Stepan (Linz and Stepan 1996a; Linz and Stepan 1996b, p. 24): without a clear demos the creation and the stability of the state is also in question. The bulk of this research, however, focuses on institutions, through different power sharing and decision sharing solutions (see e.g. Roeder and Rothchild 2005; Hartzell and Hoddie 2007, p. 149; Jarstad 2008; Paris 2004; Lijphart 2004; Horowitz 1993). However, as has been recognized by Roeder and Rothchild, these very institutions threaten to make these divisions and polarizations permanent. Before a panacea is prescribed, I propose that we need a better understanding of what happens with identities after war, and this is where this paper makes a contribution.

The war in Liberia has been described as a war “over the questions of what it meant to be a Liberian, and how the polity of the country should be constituted and resources distributed” (Bøås and Hatløy 2008, p. 37). While no one joined each faction because of ethnicity, the different factions tended to cater to specific ethnic groups (Bøås and Hatløy 2008, p. 41; Toure 2002, p. 25). In addition, the group of Mandingos have generally been seen as less Liberian and “as strangers and foreigners” (Bøås and Hatløy 2008, p. 47; Ellis 1995, p. 179; Levitt 2005, p. 19). Some argue that identities that have been at the focal point of a war are unlikely to change fast, and will only do so when institutions have demonstrated that such identities are safe (Hartzell and Hoddie 2007, p. 150). In view of the war and past experiences of politicized and divisive ethnicities, Liberia must be seen as a least likely case for the existence of a unified and inclusive demos. If that is the case, it would pose grave challenges to the democratization, peacebuilding and state-building processes in Liberia.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how ex-combatants envision the Liberian demos and Liberian citizenship. As ex-combatants they were heavily involved in the war, and should have felt the weight of politicized ethnicities and societal divisions. Where do they draw the boundaries of this demos? Who is included and who is not, and on the basis of what? What ethnic labels still carry political weight? In essence, what is the *imagined community* of the ex-combatants? (see Anderson 2006). While some would claim that notions of citizenship and identities are not static but continually under negotiation (Jackson and Warren 2005, p. 565), some research would suggest that beliefs and values concerning ethnicity, nationality and citizenship are fairly robust (Almond 1990, p. 150; Bennich-Björkman 2007, passim), at least in comparison with other aspects of political culture such as tolerance, trust and efficacy. While this chapter only discusses appreciations of demos and citizenship at one point in time, the background of the war gives us a reference point for considering the issue of change *vis-à-vis* identities.

Using focus group interviews with 88 participants, this chapter will explore the ex-combatants' conceptualization of the demos. The chapter begins with a section that offers a contextualization of the demos problem in Liberia, in relation to the Liberian constitution, the war and specific groups which have been seen as problematic in the past. This is followed by a theoretical discussion concerning the demos and citizenship principles. Thereafter a methodology section follows that describes how the data was collected through focus groups. The next section presents the results of the interviews, particularly focusing on principles of access to Liberian citizenship, delineations of who is not seen as Liberian or less Liberian, power implications and properties of those seen as Liberian. Surprisingly, the ex-combatants envision a rather inclusive demos, although this is not universal and without pitfalls. The ex-combatants clearly see themselves as part of the Liberian demos, a demos defined by qualities such as patriotism, religiousness and societal responsibility. In terms of the link between membership in the polity and power in the polity, many separate between the power to elect (given to the people) and the ultimate power to decide (delegated to bodies of government). Again, the theme of the ex-combatants as carriers of the Liberian nation, and of shouldering responsibility for the development of, and politics in Liberia emerges.[1]

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[1] See other chapters in my forthcoming dissertation: *Participation in the Midst of Cynicism & Faith, Dissent & Opposition* (a version of this chapter will also by published in *Democratization* in 2011) and *Electoral Meaning – the Gateway to Democracy in Liberia?* (a version of this chapter will also be published in *Anthropology Matters* in 2010).

Historical Background

The creation of the Liberian state was at first driven by the American Colonization Society (ASC), who from 1821 removed free slaves from the US to present day Liberia. The ASC was founded in 1816 by America's southern aristocracy, and the project to return Africans to Liberia was heavily cloaked in religious terms, but the real goal of the ASC was "to rid the United States of free Blacks because of the perceived threat they posed to America's slavocracy" (Levitt 2005, p. 32). The Liberian Dominion was established in 1822, and the Liberian Republic in 1847. The original constitution stated that "none but persons of color shall be admitted to citizenship in this republic" (Government of Liberia 1847, section 13). This formulation was quite radical at the time of its inception and was a reaction against racial hierarchies in the U.S. (Burrowes 2004, p. 68). In addition, the right to citizenship was seen as:

> a privilege earned through 'responsible' conduct as verified by three disinterested citizens. A responsible citizen, defined by a law brought over from the colonial period, was a homeowner who, over at least three years, had consistently attended church services, dressed in Western clothes, and cultivated two acres (Burrowes 2004, p. 69).

The original constitution was amended a few times during the early 20th century, for instance to extend suffrage to women in 1945. The current constitution which augured the Second Republic in 1986 similarly states that "only persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent shall qualify by birth or by naturalization to be citizens of Liberia." (Government of Liberia 1986, article 27; see also Government of Liberia 1955, section 13). The settlers were called Americo-Liberians, either freed slaves from the US or captured slaves that were brought back to Africa and Liberia by the ACS. In Liberia they are often referred to as *Congo*, or *Congo-Congo* people, a term seen as derisive by some. The Americo-Liberians have been the political elite in Liberia since the creation of the state, and up until the *coup d'état* in 1980 by Samuel Doe they were also in control of the state.

The indigenous groups make up the majority of Liberia's estimated population of 3.5 million.[2] In total there are 16 ethnic groups in Liberia, which can be grouped into three linguistic groups: Mel (Gola and Kissi), Kru (Belle, Bassa, Kru, Grebo, Dei and Krahn) and Mande (Vai, Kpelle, Mandingo, Mende, Gbandi, Loma, Mano and Gio). The largest group is the Kpelle, constituting approximately 15 % of the population. The Americo-Liberians make up about 5 % and the Mandingos slightly more than 1 %. Several of these ethnic groups are also present in the surrounding countries.

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[2] While a national census was carried out in 2008, these figures are fairly unreliable as the census data is yet to be become publically available.

The ethnic group of Mandingos settled later than most groups in Liberia, but they were present when the ACS landed in Liberia and created the Liberian state. They do not have a majority in any of the counties in Liberia, and are often seen as different partly because of religious issues (they are more often Muslim than Christian), but also because of business acumen (d'Azevedo 1994). The Mandingos are, however, not the only group that is Muslim, as around 20 % are considered to be Muslims in Liberia, although these estimates are also unreliable.

Issues of ethnicity and citizenship have been politicized and problematic for a long time in Liberia. During the True Whig Party regime (1883-1980) Mandingos were positively differentiated from other indigenous ethnic groups through the actions of the state, and Mandingos as well as Krahns continued to be so during Samuel Doe's regime in the 80s. President Doe also declared that the Mandingos were citizens, which was perceived by many as a *naturalization* of the Mandingos. Historically, the Mandingo and the Lebanese community have been seen as strangers and foreigners, hence making their inclusion in the Liberian demos dubious and worth investigating.

During the *Great War* (1989-2003) things became even more polarized, especially in relation to the Mandingos. The Charles Taylor regime beleaguered the Mandingos in particular, and the composition of the different factions during the years of war also reflected this polarization, notably the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) catered towards the Mandingos, as did the United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO-K), a precursor to LURD. Although questions of ethnicity cannot entirely explain the war or faction composition, the issue of Liberian identity was at the heart of the war (Bøås and Hatløy 2008, pp. 37, 41, 47; Toure 2002, p. 25). During the elections in 2005 there were accusations of Mandingos either not being allowed to register and vote, or fraudulently coming in from neighboring countries to vote. Although such claims have been exaggerated, Mandingos did make up a large part of Liberian refugees and as such were disproportionately disenfranchised (ICG 2005, p. 3; Harris 2006, p. 380). During the elections the issue of Mandingo citizenship was also a contentious one (Akokpari and Azevedo 2007, p. 86; ICG 2005, p. 19; Sawyer 2008, p. 194).

Inclusion & Exclusion in *Demos*

The word *demos* is constitutive of the word democracy, or the Greek word *dēmokratia*. The Greek word *dēmos* means *people*, and *kratos* means *power/rule*, creating the commonly known definition of democracy: "the rule of the people" (Hansen 1989, p. 3). Thus, the word *demos* refers to the group of people constituting the polity that constitutes a democracy. Hence, it is obvious that the existence of a demos is a prerequisite for democracy:

> Democracy involves the sovereign self-determination of a people […] It requires a demos, a ‘we’ to which individual citizens feel they belong, in whose deliberations they have a voice, and toward which they can accordingly feel a sense of shared fate and solidarity (Cohen 1999, p. 246f).

However, it can also be seen as a prerequisite for democratization. Rustow clearly sees a set demos, or national unity, as a prerequisite for democratization (Rustow 1970, p. 350). While Rustow stipulates this in his seminal article, he also recognizes that this is a difficult criterion to meet and the extent to which it is met will have long term consequences for the development of that particular polity (1970, pp. 360-1). A more reasonable approach, seems to be to recognize that the delineation of demos is done in parallel with the democratization process (Marx 2002, p. 104). However, the delineation of the demos poses problems for any state-building enterprise (Linz and Stepan 1996a, pp. 16-37).

Through defining the demos, we inevitably also define who does not belong. If there is to be a *we*, then there will ultimately also be a *they*. Exclusion is part and parcel of any principle of inclusion, and therefore also of the concept of demos (Bader 1995, pp. 212, 221; Van Gunsteren 1988, p. 731; Marx 2002, pp. 103, 125; Cohen 1999, pp. 249-50; Horowitz 1993, p. 18).

If exclusion is inevitable, where do you draw that line? In the extreme form, the demos should, according to Dahl, contain all those subject to the laws of the polity. However, such a principle is challenging as it would include e.g. children and transients (Dahl 1989, p. 115). In his final version of who should be included in the demos, this includes all adults subject to the laws of the polity, except transients and persons proved to be mentally defective. While he recognizes that drawing the line between children and adults, and transients and permanent residents is problematic, he does not seem to do so in reference to mental capacities (Dahl 1989, p. 129). Even then within democratic theory there are problems of delineation. And while it may be preferable that such limits are determined democratically (Dahl 1989, p. 123), they rarely are (Cohen 1999, p. 254; Bader 1995, p. 218; Horowitz 1993, p. 23) and were certainly not in the case of Liberia. The *modus operandi* for this delineation is, at least formally, citizenship. This is the basis for which membership in demos is portioned out. Having citizenship means you are in, not having it means you are out (Bader 1995, p. 213f), calling for a closer look at citizenship principles.

What possible principles of exclusion are there then? Three basic principles for access to citizenship are *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*, which come into force at birth, and thirdly *naturalization*, which comes into force later in life. *Jus soli* implies that if you were born in the country you should be granted citizenship, whereas *jus sanguinis* suggests that citizenship is something that can be inherited, passed on from your parents. Thus, even if you are not born inside the country, if your parents (or one of your parents) had citizenship in that country, so should you. *Naturalization*, however, implies that you are granted citizenship later in life, after, for instance, a period of residence in said country or marriage with a citizen of said country (Bader 1995, p. 214; Safran 1997, p. 314). While most countries use different combinations of these three principles, there are additional ones such as in Israel, where *jus sanguinis* is used in combination with a religious criterion, i.e. conversion to Judaism would enable access to citizenship (Safran 1997, p. 326).

What makes inclusion so valuable? Being a part of demos, a citizen in a polity, also implies the right to participation in the decision process. Thus, being a citizen implies access to power, for instance through elections. This will also be discussed in the analysis, in order to capture the extension of demos in relation to power. This highlights the political nature of these concepts, where both citizenship and being a member of demos imply access to such political rights as voting. The term *demos* refers to the group of individuals that have citizenship in a democratic state, whereas *citizenship* can be granted within any type of state, democratic or otherwise. Nationality and ethnicity are in this text seen as social constructs, and their potential overlap is not assumed one way or the other. Clearly, all of these concepts are loaded terms, and their internal relations are often complex. The object in this text is to determine how ex-combatants relate to these concepts, and relate these concepts with each other.

Ideally, citizenship should be disconnected from various ascriptive criteria and identities, although some of these are used as indicators of other criteria needed to ensure that the individual can function properly as a citizen in a particular polity (Bader 1995, p. 222ff; Van Gunsteren 1988, p. 736ff). In addition, ideally the demos should be a separate entity from the *ethnos*, meaning race, nation, or peoples (Bader 1995, p. 223). A complete overlap of an ethnic group with a certain citizenship would then be problematic if we want the citizenship to express our political membership rather than our descent, at least it will be difficult analytically to separate the two.

In order to study these issues, the following questions were posed in the focus groups: Who should get to decide what happens in Liberia? Who is a Liberian? Who isn’t? And how do you determine who is? After that, the groups were probed about their opinions concerning other groups (other ethnic groups, Americo-Liberians, Mandingo, diaspora, groups living in surrounding countries etc), if they had not already been mentioned. Some groups also discussed what being a citizen entails.

Data Collection

This chapter relies on focus group interviews carried out with 16 groups, totaling 88 participants, among which 27 were female and 61 were male. The data collection was carried out between April 15th 2008 and June 15th 2008, in four areas of Liberia: Monrovia, Kahtoe Town, Foya and Zwedru, thereby covering both the rural and the urban parts, as well as inland (North and East) and coastal regions.[3] The leading principle for group composition was to create as homogenous groups as possible (related to reintegration programs, faction, gender and ethnicity) in order to facilitate useful comparisons and functional groups. See appendix 1 for more details concerning group composition. The interviews were transcribed in full and then coded using the computer software AtlasTi.

It may be worth noting however, that in the focus groups, only four participants had at least one parent that was Mandingo: one in group 8, one in group 18 and two in group 12 (both of their parents were Mandingo). In addition, no one claimed to have a parent that was Americo-Liberian in any of the groups. The absence of these two groups should at least make it easier for the participants to express negative opinions about these groups. Also, one fourth of the participants claimed a mixed ethnic background.

The groups were recruited in different ways. In some cases I approached the ex-combatants through the elders of the village, those in charge of the program or trainers known to have participated in the program and in other cases participants were contacted through the network of a veterans' organization in Monrovia. 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) in keeping with focus group praxis (Morgan 1997, p. 38f).[4] Overall, it was never difficult to recruit participants.

A problem particular to the use of focus groups is the balance between the individual and the group. To whom do we ascribe the opinions? As each individual is situated within a group, a group which may either silence or trigger his expression, the group remains the main unit of analysis although a certain amount of individual information can be gleamed as well. Thus, when reporting on the opinions expressed, I have opted to restrict this to the group number, and only indicate a specific person when quoting or when it was clearly just the opinion of one person. While attributing an opinion to a specific group, it is usually impossible to determine whether this entails consensus, a majority or simply the voice of the vocal, as the participants were not asked to indicate agreement with a show of hands. However, the groups were continually encouraged to express dissent or differing experiences, and when such disagreement was manifested this is discussed in the text. This particular theme seemed to generate more disagreements than others did in the focus groups.

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

[4] There is also a large debate concerning the appropriateness of paying research participants, but the arguments in favor of reimbursing participants for their time and costs outweigh the negative in this research project. For a more detailed discussion on this see e.g. McKeganey 2001; Russell et al. 2000; Grady 2005.

Related to this is also the question of social desirability bias, as the group dynamic and having a western female moderator may have impacted comments made in the group, particularly regarding the inclusion of Mandingos. They may have felt that this was the appropriate answer, but even if it was, this still hints at them being aware of what a legitimate answer to such a question is: Mandingos should be recognized as citizens. That in itself is important, even if the data was biased in this direction. However, in order to enable exclusivist comments in the groups, I would press the groups for comments about who they did not see as Liberian, also hinting at such exclusivist comments having been made in other groups. Also, since some groups and individuals did express comments of this nature there does seem to have been space for others to join in such comments had they wanted to.

Finally, another issue of concern when reporting on focus groups, is the aspect of missing values. Not all issues were discussed in every group, thus it is quite possible that had one group been confronted with other opinions expressed by another group, they may have voiced either agreement or disagreement, we simply cannot know which. All of these issues highlight the non-quantitative character of focus groups; focus groups deal well with mapping different typologies of meaning and experience and less well with exhaustive lists of who felt or thought what.

Clearly, using focus groups within political science in general (particularly as the main form of data collection) is unorthodox. However, I would argue that this form is particularly suitable for understanding identity issues and the particular group of participants at hand. The question of identity and demos is something that requires room for nuances, and the notion of citizenship is fairly abstract. Using focus groups allows for the development of such nuances and helps the participants to formulate their opinions through the interaction in the group. Ex-combatants have often been described as a problematic group to do research on, as it can be hard to gain their trust and often they provide stories that fit with their preconceptions of why you are there as a researcher (see e.g. Nilsson: 55; Utas 2003; Utas and Christensen 2008). This seems to suggest that only lengthy participant observation would yield the data necessary. Clearly, participant observation could be useful, but this form of data collection is much more costly in terms of time and the topics of interest for this text may be rarely discussed naturally. Focus groups are, in addition, known to be appropriate when working with marginalized groups and when you need a permissive method of data collection

(Morgan and Krueger: pp. 15, 18), as they create a trusting and safe environment for the interview.

“We the Liberians”

In this section, the material collected through the focus group interviews will be analyzed. The first aspect is how access to a Liberian citizenship is granted. This is followed by a discussion of the limits *vis-à-vis* particular ethnic groups and foreigners, and then by a discussion of the qualities and descriptive characters of Liberians in the eyes of the ex-combatants. Finally, this section will discuss the linkage between being Liberian and gaining access to the political system.

Principles of Access

The ex-combatants tended to present a rather unified and hierarchical system of access to citizenship. The hierarchy of these principles is based on the groups that expressed support for several principles, although more groups expressed support for the principle of naturalization and *jus soli*. The most important that trumped the others, for most groups, was the *jus sanguinis*, particularly patrilineal, principle (3, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17).[5] In second place, came *jus soli*, the locality of your birth (3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18), and finally, in last place was naturalization based on other criteria (3, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18). The transferal of citizenship through your parents was mainly perceived on the father’s side; the fact that I claimed to be Swedish although my father is American seemed very odd to them. If only the mother was Liberian, the groups either concluded that the child was not Liberian or there was disagreement in the groups. While the issue of descent was important, the issue of color was not. Thus, the principle expressed in the constitution *vis-à-vis* ‘negro descent’ was not embraced by the ex-combatants, except by a few groups (7, 8, 14 and one person in 16) who clearly stated that white people could not become citizens, and that *negro descent* as described in the constitution was important. While most groups simply did not speak specifically to this, in group 15 Archie[6] clearly stated that “I always talk in the spiritual […] not the physical. […] I think we need to get away from where you come from, your color. That is not important.”

In relation to naturalization, several also expressed the idea that becoming a citizen was a matter of a personal choice, particularly if you were born in

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[5] The numbers within parentheses refer to the focus group number, which are also listed in appendix 1.

[6] The names used are not the real names of the participants. Participants within the same group have names starting with the same letter, usually based on the location of the interview or program participation.

Liberia by foreign parents then you had to decide at 18 what citizenship you wanted (2, 15, 17 and 18). For group 18, citizenship was clearly something transient, something that can change fairly easily, and Alex (15) said that “your fate can be determined by you”. Naturalization was also deemed as possible, if you built your house in Liberia or had children there (7, 10). For some groups, however, those that become Liberian by paper, by naturalization, were not seen as equally Liberian as those that are Liberian by birth, although they recognized them as citizens (15 and 17). For them the issue of birth was more important.

While several groups recognized the possibility of declaring your belonging at the age of 18, some did not see it as possible to abandon your Liberian citizenship later in life and become a full citizen of other countries (3 and 11). Thus, Liberians in other countries should have the right “to decide for Liberia, but not for the other country” (Brandon, 3), and similarly: “So we consider them as Liberians by birth rights. Except they tell us … say they are not Liberians now, we in America, we have naturalized ourselves with America. But if we see them, and we all grow up together, we say they are Liberians.” (Kevin, 11).

Ethnicity is not Nationality

Most participants were very clear about the difference between ethnicity and nationality. The two were seen as separate entities. In some of the groups we spoke about ethnic groups that live both inside Liberia but also across the border, in Sierra Leone, Guinea or the Ivory Coast. Most of them were very adamant about e.g. the Krahn in the Ivory Coast not being the same as the Krahn in Liberia, so even though they recognized them as belonging to the same ethnic group, they held on to the fact that they are different, they are Ivorian (2, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18). Speaking about the Ivorian Krahn, Gina in group 2 said that: “We have a boundary with them. They are not part of us.” Clearly, the integrity of the borders of Liberia is physically not intact, but conceptually ex-combatants recognized and valued that border.

As to the extension of citizenship in Liberia to Mandingos, several groups were inclusive in their conceptualization (1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15 and 18).[7] The question of inclusion was, however, not a clear cut issue for several of the groups, as they would add comments that moderated their inclusion somewhat. For example, group 15 felt that they were not true patriotic citizens (as they would not support the Liberian national football team but rather the Guinean one). For this group, this implied dual loyalties, similar to having dual citizenship, something they considered as unconstitutional.

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[7] It is interesting to note that only three of the groups had Mandingos present in the group (8, 12 and 18).

Group 7 and 10 saw the Mandingos as citizens, but not as Liberians. Several of the groups also made a distinction between different Mandingos, those that had lived in Liberia for a long time and made a life there in contrast with Mandingos originating from the surrounding countries that were only in Liberia to make business (7, 9, 10, 15 and 16).

Often there were disagreements concerning the inclusion of Mandingos in the demos among the focus groups (e.g. in groups 13, 14 and 18). Common arguments in favor of their inclusion included that they are the 16th group of the 16 different ethnic groups that make up Liberia, and if you do not include them you will be one group short (2 and 13). Others mentioned that when the state of Liberia was created, the Mandingos were already here, and that they helped create the state, hence they are Liberian (9, 13 and 17), and group 18 saw Doe's act of naturalization as proof of their Liberianess. In contrast with the inclusion argument that the Mandingos were there in 1847, group 7 saw the Mandingos as originating from somewhere else and hence that they should live there instead and not in Liberia. However, if they established a relationship with one of the other ethnic groups in Liberia and built their house there, this would enhance their claim to membership in the Liberian demos. While they were hesitant about including them, they had no problem allowing their children to marry a Mandingo or live next door to them (7). Some also mentioned the act of Doe in the 1980s, when he declared that Mandingos are citizens of Liberia, as an act to naturalize them, i.e. that they were not truly Liberian to begin with (15). Group 15 still professed to respect their views, and their right to vote, but also said that a lot of people do not feel as if Mandingos want to be citizens, and that they just come as traders and for business. While the group said this, in the end they concluded that they were citizens after all, agreeing with Archie who said: "We are all Liberian". Comments made in group 16 are indicative of the hesitation and unwillingness felt by several:

> We have problems with Mandingos. […] They don't want to be refugees, they want to be real citizens. […] We are forced to allow them to be citizens. If we don't allow them, there will be war again. (Vito, 16).

They also suspected that some Mandingos had fraudulently participated in the election, again highlighting the difference they made between Liberian Mandingos and the "troublemakers" who are Mandingos from other countries (16).

Another group that was also discussed was the Americo-Liberians. Most of the groups readily agreed to them being Liberian (2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17 and 18). While group 9 ended in including them, it was not a clear-cut issue for them. Several groups also lacked a consensus on the issue: only Yona in group 13 included them, Barbra and Buffy in group 4 did not. In other groups, the participants differentiated between different Americo-

Liberians, for instance in group 16 they felt that if they had a father from America they were not Liberian, and similarly group 18 felt that if they had been born in America, they were American and not Liberian. Thus, the principles of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* come into play here as well.

Those that included the Americo-Liberians in the Liberian demos supported this argument by the fact that they had helped build Monrovia after the ASC had brought them there (7), similarly others felt that they had made the country independent (9 and 14). Interestingly, several groups were also convinced that only slaves that originated from Liberia were sent back to Liberia, and those that originated from other areas, were sent back there, thus all the Americo-Liberians had always been Liberian in their eyes (Shiloh, 14, 16 and 17). However, they did recognize some of the ulterior motives for sending the freed slaves back to Africa; namely prevention of interracial marriages and the like, rather than the more humanitarian purpose that the ACS proclaimed in more public forums to be their motive (17). While seeing them as Liberian, some would add that having a relationship, such as being married, with one of the ethnic groups in Liberia would solidify your Liberianess: “If I am a Congo man, I should have certain relationship with some kind of ethnic group in Liberia to make me a Liberian.” (Curtis, 12), but also owning property could be a way to manifest your membership.

While membership in specific ethnic groups was not a guarantee or a hinder for being Liberian, some did see being part of at least one of the many ethnic groups as a precondition for accessing the Liberian demos (12). Thus, in many ways *ethnos* is not *demos*, ethnicity is not nationality. The ex-combatants differentiate between groups on different sides of the border, and specific ethnic groups (Mandingos and Americo-Liberians) in Liberia are generally included in the demos.

Finally, when asked if there are people in Liberia who are not Liberian, most mentioned foreigners residing in Liberia, particularly the Lebanese community, and nationals from the surrounding countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone (12, 14, 15, 16 and 17). Some saw the African nationals as bringing violence and criminality to Liberia, and the immigration policies of Liberia were seen as in need of improvement and austerity (10 and 12). When asked if white people were causing the same problems, Curtis in group 12 answered that: “no. They are our international counterparts - they are our brothers, they are our sisters”.

Describing the Liberian citizen: the patriotic believer

While the above discussion has clarified certain aspects that grant access to a Liberian citizenship, in this section, some additional qualities that were linked to being Liberian will be discussed. One important aspect here is the issue of religion. Being religious and believing in a God, no matter if you are Muslim or Christian, is typical Liberian and often described in contrast to neighboring nationalities (10, 11, 12 and 15): “We the Liberians, we believe in God. […] You see, but we know that Liberians, we get mind, free open mind, through God.” (Kirby, 11); “If you’re not religious you can’t … you are not a true Liberian” (Curtis, 12). Being religious was also seen as a way of contributing to the progress of the nation (12).

Contributing to the progress of the nation was also seen as an important quality of being Liberian, or in their words being patriotic. The issue of being a good citizen and what that entailed was discussed in some of the groups (12, 13, 14 and 15), and for the most part this was related to claims on the individual and not claims on government, only two groups mentioned access to specific rights in relation to this (13 and 14).[8] Being patriotic entailed proving your love for your country (15), and one way you could prove your love was to serve the government, preferably through the armed forces or the police (12 and 14). But being patriotic could also entail leaving politics behind and avoiding conflict. Their understanding of politics, however, is very much connected with the experience of war: “I don’t want to see bloodshed or any other problem, so it will [be] necessary that I leave politics and be fair to my brother. If the two of us have a can of soft drink, we share that equally, so that he will be satisfied and I will be satisfied, so to that point, I take it as being patriotic citizen.” (Curtis, 12), similarly: “Politics? you know we as ex-combatants, some of our fellow Liberians try to give us bad record because what they felt in the past; so we decided as ex-combatants to leave politics, to live as a patriotic citizens” (Curtis, 12). Group 13 also defined being a good citizen as someone who avoided conflict and had the “country at heart” and does not destroy it. Interestingly, there seems to be a potential conflict between the idea that as a patriot you fight for your country, but that being a patriotic citizen also entails leaving politics aside and not fighting. This paradox was not recognized by the participants, but can be seen as an expression of the difficulties for the ex-combatants to define their new role in the post-conflict polity.

Being a patriot was clearly connected to caring about the welfare of Liberia. Doing this could also entail standing for the truth and acting for the benefit of everybody: “You cannot be a patriotic citizen and go against your people” (Archie, 15). The following conversation in group 12 is also instructive:

Johanna	Ok. Alright. What does it mean to be a citizen of Liberia? In what way do you need to behave in order to be a citizen of Liberia?
Curtis	You need to behave the right way or… to see the progress of the country, that alone makes you a Liberian.
Johanna	Do you work for the progress of the country?

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[8] The rights included e.g. the right to participate, the right to life, the right to education and freedom of speech and of movement.

Curtis	Yes of course! By joining the police, by joining the army, by joining some religion, by going to church, playing part within the church.
Johanna	Ok
Curtis	That alone makes you a patriotic Liberian.
Johanna	Ok, what do you say Chad? What does it mean to be a citizen?
Chad	To be a citizen like just what my brother was saying, you have to take part; you got whole lot of activities […] If you a Liberian, you have to be part of these ethnics groups, you go to church..
Johanna	You have to participate in your community..?
Chad	You got to take part and participate in those activities [inaudible]
Johanna	Ok. Are there any .... do you have any rights as a citizen?
Curtis	Yes of course! As a citizen, you have the right, that anywhere you see your missing property, under the law, you should have it arrested as a citizen of Liberia. And then under the law as a citizen of Liberia, you are not to harm no one…but to take it to the law. So if you a patriotic citizen of Liberia, if my brother does me wrong, there is a need for me to go the law and invite him there, instead of fighting him or harmo [embarrass] him. Anyone who fights his or her brother, they are not a citizen of this nation, that's my understanding.
Johanna	Ok. So to be a citizen means to respect the rule of law?
Curtis	Thank you!

Similarly, group 14 and 16 felt that as a good citizen you should abide by the constitution and the laws of the land, pay taxes, and have a generally good conduct. One person in group 16 noted that they needed "more education, if not we will be bad citizens, because we are suffering. Bad citizens always causing problems, those problems will be war and group fighting." If you had managed to live in the country at least 10-15 years without any problems, then you would be a good citizen, no matter if born or naturalized (16).

In addition to patriotism and religion, some other aspects were also linked to being Liberian. Language (particularly local languages) and the way you speak were also seen as important markers of your citizenship (11, 12, 13 and 15). Sharing a local language implied a Liberian identity, even if the person themselves did not consider themselves as Liberian (11). Also, because a lot of people lack passports or other certificates that prove their identity, language and dialects are seen as instrumental in for instance determining the difference between a Mandingo from Liberia and one from Sierra Leone (12). In relation to this, Earl in group 17 noted that the Americo-Liberians set themselves apart by the way they speak: "They created a line of demarcation with our people on the ground. So, our people consider them to be Congo because of the English that was coming from their mouth." Whether this refers to the style of English or English on its own is rather difficult to say based on the interview. Interestingly, only one group mentioned the importance of living in accordance with the national culture (including wearing African clothes), and doing as your forefathers had done before you (16).

The issue of owning land and sharing in the wealth produced by the land were also issues that defined who was seen as Liberian (3, 11, 15 and 17): “Everybody should get part of the resources. Then we know we are Liberians.” (Kirby, 11). This was also linked to the idea that land was stolen from them by the colonizers, by the *Congo* men. In group 15 it was also important that individuals expressed their loyalty and solidarity with the nation through building their house in Liberia: “how can you be a patriotic citizen if you do not have a structure built in Liberia?” (Alex). This lead to the questioning of top politicians in the country who have houses in America, such as Amos Sawyer: “is he a patriotic citizen?” (15) - “He came to steal again!” (Archie, 15).

The Right to Decide

Finally, another aspect of belonging to the demos is the access to power which such membership accords. While the right to vote is clearly accorded to Liberian citizens, often this was not the only or first association when they were asked who should decide what happens in Liberia. References were instead made to God (10 and 12), the legislative branch of government (4, 15 and 16), the President (4, 7, 8, 10 and 16) or the international community (1, 7, 12 and 18). In one group they noted that they felt that it was better if the international community would decide, as Liberians do not respect decisions made by other Liberians (12). In group 15, most agreed that parts of the government should have the last say, but that the people should have the first say. However, different people in that group argued in favor of different bodies of government. Austen wanted the legislature (the House of Representatives) to have the last say, and Alex after some thought came to think that it was the judiciary that should have the last say, as according to the constitution, the law and constitution are the ones that have the last say. Thus, after some discussion this group decided that it was not the executive as first suggested that should have this role. Similarly, group 16 first picked the President, but after some discussion they all agreed, except Vito, that the legislative should decide.

Clearly, for several groups having one person in charge was important, for some this was the President, but they also identified others, such as Charles Taylor (11) or the local commissioner (8). Both group 7 and 8, felt that power should be delegated to one person: “we have the head, we elect them to decide for ourselves” (7). But in group 8 they more clearly expressed the idea that one person should be the leader, as if too many had power they felt that no one would take responsibility and it would only result in confusion. To them power was seen as indivisible. While several groups expressed that the ultimate decision should lie elsewhere, than with the people of Liberia, none of them wanted to remove the right to vote and participate in elections.

Many would also say that “We ourselves,” “We the Liberian people,” “everybody should decide” or Liberians should decide what happens in Liberia (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17). In group 18, only Hester felt that the Liberians themselves should decide, and then channel it to the President. All participants clearly identified with this *we*, and some groups were very clear about the fact that participation in the war as a combatant did not diminish their membership in this category “we the Liberians” (17). Partly, this was seen as a better solution than the above alternatives, as Liberians were more likely to make good and sound decisions for Liberia. Liberians know Liberia better, and are able to be held accountable for their decisions in a way that outsiders are not (2, 9, 10, 14 and 17). Examples of comments include: “We ourselves have to settle our problems before different people come in. If we do not have understanding among ourselves before different people having to come, there will be no understanding among us.” (Gabby, 2); “What makes it good is that it allows the will of the people to prevail, and when the will of the people prevails, it means that whoever go to the area must take into consideration that the very people that put me there has the same power to remove it.” (Earl, 17); and “Exactly, if you make decision outside of Liberia and the Liberia civil society, their members, all of the various groups in Liberia do not form part of that decision making process, that decision you made outside Liberia it becomes […] [a] fiasco, because once the Liberians are not part of the decision making process then where are we heading to? It reminds me of the […] colonization of Liberia” (Earl, 17). In group 9, Jeff expressed that it was difficult to change things alone, and that it required several to enable such change: “one tree cannot make a forest”.

While most expressed this faith in the ability of the Liberian people to make sound decisions, one person clearly disagreed with them. Archie (15) wanted the religious leaders to be the ones to decide, as they channel God and would do what God wants to have done. To him, this strategy would bring peace and harmony to Liberia, as Liberians in general behave like the Devil. He felt that the citizens are confused, and that often this confusion was created by the poverty they live in, i.e. that their economic interests interfere with their better judgment. Instead, he felt that the religious leaders are more likely to work in the interest of the people than the government. While Archie expressed such ideas, he was also the only one who wanted individuals younger than 18 to be able to vote, somewhat inconsistently. Everyone else set the bar at 18 years old (8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18).[9]

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[9] Group 9, however, claimed that 16 was the legal age, group 7 that it was 15.

Summary & Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the ex-combatants conceptualize the Liberian demos. Given the background of the war and past politics in Liberia, the likelihood of finding evidence of an inclusive view of the demos was low, particularly among the ex-combatant community. Agreement on who is included in the body politic is essential in a democratization process, as well as in the peacebuilding process. Given such expectations, and the importance of such attitudes, the results of this investigation are certainly very positive. However, what do such conclusions imply? Were our expectations faulty to begin with? Or has an actual change in the mentality concerning this occurred? One caveat of course is the social desirability bias that may have affected the groups. While this may have been the case, as mentioned earlier, at least the data then indicates that they perceive an inclusive demos as the norm. Such a result is also positive. However, as several individuals and at times entire groups did express more exclusionary opinions the focus group setting did not exclude such sentiments. Given this it seems more reasonable to accept that the sentiments expressed in the groups are those actually felt by the participants and not the result of social pressure. Also, prior research is convincing in their depiction of politicized ethnicities and demos during the war (Bøås and Hatløy 2008; Toure 2002; Ellis 1995; Levitt 2005). While caution is required, there does seem to have been a shift in the mentality. This is noteworthy, especially in the face of research that indicates that it is unlikely (see e.g. Hartzell and Hoddie 2007; Bennich-Björkman 2007; Almond 1990).

In relation to two particular groups, the Mandingos and the Americo-Liberians, the groups were in general open to their inclusion in the Liberian demos. However, this was certainly not a universal opinion and several groups exhibited internal disagreements concerning this. Also, several of the groups tended to differentiate between Mandingos. Whether we should understand this as an ability to differentiate ethnicity from nationality, or as a way to smooth over their xenophobic opinions concerning Mandingos is difficult to determine. It is hard to think that there are that many non-Liberian Mandingos in Liberia as such statements would imply, lending more credibility to the latter interpretation. Thus while the overall results would have to be seen as positive, given the past history, there is still certainly room for improvement.

If we are to summarize the general findings, the groups tended to espouse all three principles of citizenship (*jus sanguinis*, *jus soli* and naturalization). However, some of these principles were seen as more fundamental, such as *jus sanguinis*. For many of the groups, *ethnos* is not the same as *demos*. One possible reason for why this might be the case is that the Liberian society is *overly* divided; there is not one minority but several. This means that every group is aware of them not constituting a majority on their own.

When it comes to describing the Liberian citizen and how such a person should be, some traits were often mentioned, for instance being religious or exhibiting patriotism, which included serving the government, abiding by the law and avoiding conflict and politics. In relation to the description of the patriotic citizen, a contradiction within the ex-combatants view of themselves has become apparent. On the one hand patriots should serve the government, particularly through participation in the army, and on the other hand patriots should avoid conflict and adverse behavior towards each other. This clash of ideals could reflect the ex-combatants trying to justify their past and also staking out a new place and role for themselves in post-conflict Liberia.

In terms of the link between membership and influence in the polity, the groups clearly identified the Liberian people as the origin of power in Liberia, but most envisioned a delegation of power to various government bodies (differentiation between voting and deciding), although some also indicated the international community and God. The ex-combatants clearly saw themselves as part of the Liberian demos.

In the discussions concerning who is and is not Liberian, several participants expressed the notion that you needed to be emotionally invested in Liberia in order for your membership to have some credibility. This was noticeable in relation to the Mandingos, the Americo-Liberians and top politicians in general. The idea that many are only here for business and have their main assets outside of Liberia was common. Ideas such as these, should, at least in theory, be easily worked on through personal contacts with ‘the other,’ particularly with Mandingos. When you get to know someone, on a personal level, it is easier to appreciate their level of involvement in the society that they live and not resort to stereotypes.

As indicated, not all groups were equally open to an inclusive and democratic demos. The following groups tended to be less inclusive and democratic in their conceptualization of the demos: 10, 11 and 12, and the following groups were the most inclusive and democratic in their conceptualization: 2, 4, 7, 9, 15, 17 and 18. Locality does not seem to play into these attitudes, although the urban groups included the more extreme opinions on both ends, both the most inclusive and the least inclusive. Trying to discern whether the ethnic composition of the groups played into this is more difficult, but it does not seem as if the homogenous groups differed substantially from the groups that contained a mix of ethnic groups. In terms of the groups that contained Mandingos (8, 12 and 18), we also find all types of attitudes concerning inclusion, i.e. having a Mandingo present in the group does not seem to have stopped other participants from voicing exclusionary attitudes, indeed one of the least inclusive groups (12) had two participants whose parents were both Mandingos. More importantly, however, the other groups were not constrained in the same fashion, lending more reliability to the positive results in those groups. In terms of gender, it would seem, as if the female ex-combatants tended to be a little more inclusive than their male counterparts.

The programs hypothesized to have a positive impact on demos conceptualizations are those that involved and encouraged social interaction across groups (between ethnic groups, factions, but also between ex-combatants and non-ex-combatants). The GAA and YMCA programs fit with this description overall, but when the groups described the level and type of social interaction in the groups, the following groups crystallized in the more positive end of the spectrum: (note to reader: not done yet). Also, the programs involving formal education did bring the participants into contact with other groups, but often carried with it some stigmatization as well, as they were often pinpointed as ex-combatants during registration for instance. The GAA participants and those in the formal education programs did belong to the more inclusive groups, but the experience within MVTC and YMCA were more mixed. Those that did not participate in any program were classified in the mid-range and the least inclusive groups. Possibly not participating has lead to less exposure to different groups in society. However, individual experiences within these programs do XXX. [This paragraph is yet to be completed.]

The issue of the demos and citizenship was an issue that clearly engaged the participants, also because there were a lot of different opinions concerning this. The focus groups allowed the participants to confront and refine their different arguments. In addition, the focus groups also enabled the participants to redefine their opinions; simply put, to change their mind. They could try out an answer and through joint discussions come to realize that their initial thought was not quite what they wanted to say. This would not have been possible with survey work and speaks to one of the advantages of focus groups.

Appendix 1: Group Composition

No	Program	Area	Gender	Faction	Ethnicity	Size	Age ($\bar{x}$)	Comment
1	GAA	Rural	Male	MODEL	Krahn	7	25-30*	(G)
2	GAA	Rural	Female	MODEL	Krahn	5	over 35*	(G)
3	GAA	Rural	Male	MODEL	Krahn	4	25-30 (27)*	(B)
4	GAA	Rural	Female	MODEL	Krahn	6	20-25*	(B)
5**	MVTC	Urban	Male	-	mixed	5	30-35*	(M) Not combatants.
6**	Various	Urban	Male and female	mixed	mixed	6	over 35*	(N) Staff at NEPI (veterans' organization)
7	UMCOR	Rural	Male	Mixed	Kissi	4	19.5	(F) Two non-combatants
8	UMCOR	Rural	Female	GOL	Kissi	4	17.5	(F)
9	MVTC	Urban	Male	GOL	Bassa/Kpelle	6	33	(J)
10	MVTC	Urban	Male	LURD***	Bassa***	6	29.7	(L)
11	None	Rural	Male	GOL/LURD	Kpelle	5	35.4	(K)
12	YMCA	Urban	Male	LURD/GOL	Mixed	6	20	(C)
13	YMCA	Urban	Female	GOL	mixed	6	31.5	(Y)
14	None	Urban	Male	GOL	Loma	6	23.2	(S)
15	YMCA	Urban	Male	MODEL	Kpelle***	6	27.8	(A)
16	MVTC	Urban	Male	MODEL***	Mixed	6	30.6	(V)
17	University	Urban	Male	GOL	Mixed	5	29.5	(E)
18	High School	Urban	Female	GOL	Gio***	6	30.5	(H)

* Exact age not given for participants, based on age category (median). If several also gave an exact age, mean in parentheses.

** Indicates that the group was not included in this analysis. Both groups are points of reference, rather than main objects of study.

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

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