

The Lost Honor. Ex-soldiers Fighting for their Rights in Post-conflict Liberia

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This contribution aims at highlighting the negotiation process between the deactivated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and government actors in post-conflict Liberia from a social anthropological perspective.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed in Accra in 2003, foresaw the restructuring of the army. Thereafter, however, the entire army of 16'000 servicemen was disbanded. For reasons not plausible to the ex-soldiers, they were not fully integrated in the DDDR procedure, and were excluded from the recruitment process for the new army, trained by the international community. The ex-soldiers received a scanty benefit and a meager monthly rent.

Though much of their grievance concerns the bad living condition and the low pension, their main concern are the lost honor and recognition after having fought a brutal war. Having dedicated their lives to serve their nation loyally, they feel not being treated fairly. For this reason, a group of ex-AFL soldiers formed an organization and elected a leadership consisting of former senior officers. Aim of the group is to advocate for the rights and interests of the ex-soldiers. In various forms of activities, they make their claim by demonstrating and by seeking meetings with government actors as well as the international community including international veteran associations. They had submitted a petition to dismiss the president for the unconstitutional deactivation of the army. The deactivated AFL are a listed pressure group (CIA World Fact Book), and as frustrated and marginalized former soldiers familiar to the use weapons, they are considered a potential threat to national security (Jaye 2006).

The government is split on this matter: some emphasize the atrocities committed by the AFL; others see these atrocities as symptoms of a malfunctioning institution and failures of individuals. Job trainings and scholarships suggested by the government were not considered a valuable option, for the majority is above 50 years of age. The bargaining process is ongoing between the ex-servicemen who enjoy sympathy of a large part of the population, and the part of government that depends on international support for peace-building.

This empirical contribution aims at providing insights into the debate on the ex-soldiers in the political landscape and its significance for security issues and peace-building efforts in Liberia.