

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
School of Global Studies



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The nuances between war and peace

*An empirical study of the experiences of peace in Liberia*

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## Abstract

This study is concerned with the way we understand and assess ongoing peace processes in contexts of previous intense armed conflict and violence. In particular, this study aims to create an understanding for how peace, in an ongoing peacebuilding process, is experienced by the grassroots population, and how this experience contrasts with international measures of peace. Further, this study aims to develop an analytical framework, which, with a greater context sensitivity, can provide an empirical basis in order to better analyze ongoing peacebuilding processes, especially when there has been a long overarching peace process, such as in the case of Liberia. This study seeks to develop the framework by collecting data empirically from the local population in Liberia, by using semi-structured interviews with focus groups, as well as use extracted parts from previous theories in the field of peace research. The research question stated are: *How is peace experienced by the grassroots population and how does a context sensitive framework for analyzing peace processes contrast with international measures?* Further, this study includes three sub-questions guiding the development of the analytical framework, focusing on the analytical dimensions of: *expectations, communication and power*. The main findings of this study are the developed analytical framework, the current assessment of the state of peace in Liberia, as well as a deeper understanding for the contrasts between the local experiences of peace by the grassroots population and the global measures.

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## Introduction

*“...at this very moment, I do not know what the difference is between war and peace, and I tell you that, the only thing absent is the gun being fired. But in the absence of the gun being fired, almost all the same circumstances exist at this current point.”*

(Man; Kofi Annan Peace Institute, Monrovia)

This study is concerned with the way we understand and assess ongoing peace processes in contexts of previous intense armed conflict and violence. In specific, this study aims to create an understanding for how peace, in an ongoing peacebuilding process, is experienced by the grassroots population, and how this experience contrasts with international measures of peace. Further, this study aims to develop an analytical framework, which, with a greater context sensitivity, can provide an empirical basis in order to better analyze ongoing peacebuilding processes, especially when there has been a long overarching peace process, such as in the case of Liberia. This study seeks to develop the analytical framework both by collecting data empirically in Liberia, as well as use extracted components from previous theories.

This study is interested in how Liberia, a post-conflict country, establishing official peace in 2003, after 14 years of civil war, is ranked in the second highest category of peace, in the same peace category as Sweden (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018). At the same time Liberia is in the bottom ten of the least developed and poorest countries in the world (UNDP, 2018). How is this possible when the theories of peace research point to the interlinkage between peace and development? (Hettne, 1984). Liberia has, similarly to the majority of contemporary post-conflict countries, experienced an intrastate conflict (Lucey & Kumalo, 2018, p. 3; Allansson, Melander & Themnér, 2017, p. 576). Liberia is characterized by the same challenges that most post-conflict and/or developing countries today are facing: poverty, corruption, criminality and large scales of sexual violence. Simultaneously, democracy has developed as evidenced by successful election cycles (Lucey & Kumalo, 2018, p.3; Hillesund, 2017). The *Global Peace Index* (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018) and the *Human Development Index* (UNDP, 2018) are the world's leading measures in their field quantitatively ranking the world's countries using data which to a large extent help to guide and influence both government and nongovernmental organizations' decisions related to war, conflict and

peace (Davenport, Melander & Regan, 2018, p. 9). Are these global assessments corresponding with the reality for the people living in post-conflict countries?

If one observes the state of peace in the last ten years, it would seem that peace is deteriorating where tensions, crises and conflicts have emerged and remained unresolved, causing a gradual decline in the global levels of peacefulness (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018). One of the greatest risks of conflict today are actors who can mobilize perceptions of exclusion and injustice rooted in inequalities across groups within states (The United Nations & World bank, 2018). This study argues that the inequalities within countries categorized and recorded by the *Human Development Index* (UNDP, 2018) are also present in Liberia.

In line with Lederach's (1997) definition, the grassroots are the majority population; whose citizens form the basis of society. The grassroots refer to all people who are not leaders in the government nor in the opposition or are a part of the influential top in society in regard to politics, religion, military or economics. In Liberia the grassroots are in general a poor and disadvantaged part of the population as there is a huge gap between the top and the grassroots. The grassroots population is the part of the population that is directly and the most affected by peace or the lack of peace, and is disproportionately more affected by inequalities compared to the elite and government (Lederach, 1997). This study argues that it is fundamental to include the grassroots, in the peace assessment in order to get a comprehensive picture of the peacebuilding process and further be able to detect possible grievances and tensions which could lead to conflict or a relapse of violence. Therefore, this study is focusing on the mass population in Liberia, where the general inclusion of the locals rarely moves outside the capital or beyond centralized institutions (Öjendal, Leonardsson & Lundqvist, 2017, p. 81). This study emphasizes the need for operational measures, which lets the grassroots be a part of the peace assessment as well as capture the nuances of a complex theoretical concepts that is peace (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2016, p.71) (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 9). The assessment of peace processes has largely been done with quantitative data (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 9). The focus on quantitative data is arguably understandable from a methodological perspective, but to generalize across large data and combine nation states, as well as groups within the country which will include discrepancies of peace, creates a risk of categories which might not translate into the empirical reality (Diehl, 2016, p. 1). This can be argued to be the case, where the *Global Peace Index* (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018) have

placed Liberia and Sweden in the same peace category. Hence there is a need to understand the contrasts between the grassroots experiences of peace and the global measures of peace.

## Aim and Research questions

This study aims to create an understanding for how peace, in an ongoing peacebuilding process, is experienced by the grassroots population, and how this experience contrasts with international measures of peace. Further, this study aims to develop an analytical framework, which, with a greater context sensitivity, can provide an empirical basis in order to better analyze ongoing peacebuilding processes, especially when there has been a long overarching peace process, such as in the case of Liberia

This study aims to be an initial step in addressing the current lack of an analytical framework for assessing ongoing peace processes. A framework which derives from the grassroots populations' own experiences of peace and is both qualitative and operational. The study will develop the analytical framework both by using empirical data from the grassroots population in Liberia and by extracting components from previous research. In order to limit the aim of this study, the following research question have been chosen:

*How is peace experienced by the grassroots population and how does a context sensitive framework for analyzing peace processes contrast with international measures?*

The following sub-questions will be used to develop the analytical framework:

- *What are the grassroots' peace expectations?*

This study will aim to detect discrepancies between the peace the grassroots population expected after the civil war and the peace they are today experiencing.

- *How is the communication between the grassroots and the government?*

This study focuses on *who* has a voice in the peace process and which part of the population is asked to participate and give input in the peacebuilding process. Further, do the grassroots feel informed about decisions or changes from the government? Lastly, this study examines how the communication, or lack thereof, relates to



perceptions of inclusion in the Liberian society for the grassroots population.

- *In what way do the grassroots have power over the peace process?*

Power refers to the local ownership, or lack thereof, in the peace process, including questions of who has power over prioritization in the peacebuilding process. This ultimately decides whose peace is being discussed or developed.

## Delimitations

This study will not provide statistical results, but rather give a *qualitative indication* of how research regarding peace assessment should be further developed. Similar to many qualitative studies, a main concern regarding the methodology is the selection of interviewees. Even if the study made a conscious choice of the ten different focus groups to represent five different contexts, there is always a risk of getting a less representative result, a larger selection of focus groups will always increase representation. This study makes no claim to assess the peace for the entire grassroots population in Liberia. Rather, based on consciously selected groups which represent a broad spectrum of the grassroots in Liberia, this study will problematize and contextualize why the common people have such an important role in the assessment of the peace process in Liberia (Öjendal et al., 2017, p. 81).

Further, this study recognizes the need for continued research, which will be elaborated in the chapter of *Future research*. This study will argue that there needs to be future research done on other levels in the Liberian society. Because of the timeframe of 20 weeks, as well as the limited word space, the empirical research had to be restricted. Lastly, this study is only focusing on intrastate peace/conflict since this represents the majority of today's conflicts and ongoing peace processes (Allansson, Melander & Themnér, 2017, p. 576).

## Relevance to global studies

Many topics in the field of Global Studies which become apparent when studying globalization, such as “ethnicity, cultural diversity, migration, world views, political economy, security and sustainable development (University of Gothenburg, 2018), can be directly linked to contemporary conflicts and further contemporary peace processes. Some can be argued to be root causes of conflicts such as lack of development and ethical division,

while others can be consequences of conflicts like migration and security. The fact that the majority of the conflicts and wars today are intrastate (Allansson et al., 2017, p. 576) indicates a concentrated geographical spread of violence, but overall global impact and involvement in these conflicts does not mirror the limited geographical coverage. The empirical effects of globalization can be observed in events such as Syria's civil war which triggered a refugee crisis in Europe, and Brexit which contributed to an increase in the politics of fear and whose political and economic ramifications have affected the rest of the European Union (International Crisis Group, 2017). Today's global organizations and actors are extensively involved in restoring, mediating, building and keeping peace around the world. Therefore, this study argues that it is critical for all states and global actors to have ways of assessing the peace processes which accurately represent the people living in the conflict or post-conflict setting. We, as a global world, are collectively involved in creating, sustaining and intensifying conflicts, as well as solving, enabling and restoring peace.

## Previous research

*“Trying to push our understanding of what might be the most common yet understudied human condition: peace.”*

(Davenport et al., 2018, p. 185)

This study is primarily addressing formidable method questions about how we should assess peace in ongoing peacebuilding processes. Peacebuilding is internationally acknowledged as the following step when peace has officially been declared in a country (The United Nations & World Bank, 2018). Therefore, in order to assess a peace process following an official peace, it is critical to understand the field of peacebuilding. This chapter will therefore outline the main debates in the peacebuilding field including challenges and critique of the contemporary peacebuilding approaches. Further, the most recent debates in how to understand peace will be presented.

## The main debates in peacebuilding

The overall aim of peacebuilding is to prevent the resumption or escalation of conflict as well as establish a stable and self-sustaining peace, but peacebuilding has generated considerable debates and controversies. The main critique is that the record of peacebuilding has been

inadequate, and that international interventions have not been able to create a durable peace (Paris, 2010, p. 337). Questions about the motivations of powerful actors to support and implement the peacebuilding activities, and the effects of these activities in the societies in which they are implemented, raise questions for international politics. The main debate in peacebuilding has long been centered around the impact and nature of *liberal peacebuilding*. Liberal peacebuilding focuses on market-based economic reforms, promotion of liberal democracy, and is theoretically based upon the idea that liberal constituted societies will be more peaceful, both domestically and internationally, than illiberal societies (Newman, Paris & Richmond, 2009, p. 10-12). At the time of this study, liberal peacebuilding is the most prolific method of international democratization and post-conflict reconstruction. Critics of liberal peacebuilding find fault with it being a top-down approach among powerful actors focusing on building state institutions, and instead prefer a bottom-up approach employing a community-driven peacebuilding process (Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p.774). The tension between local actors and international interveners create a central split in the academic debate between scholars in favor of the liberal peace, which is perceived as the basis of the international interventions done today, and those criticizing the liberal peace to be the main reason for the poor record of peacebuilding.

The majority of today's wars and conflicts are intrastate (Lucey & Kumalo, 2018, p. 3), where the demand for self-autonomy over one's life and to be included are fundamental priorities for many groups in today's conflict-affected countries (Conciliation Resources, 2018). Even if there has been a solid focus on conflict prevention for years, violent conflicts continue to emerge. Compounding this issue is the fact that approximately 50% of conflicts relapse within the first five years after official peace has been established (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 268). The realization that conflicts keep erupting together with the fact that most violent conflict today are intrastate have strengthened the critique against liberal peace, specifically that it fails to address the root causes to conflict in the affected countries (Paris, 2010, p. 337). Critics argue that international peacebuilding interventions are failing to deal with the socio-economic consequences of conflict. In many cases, there is a lack of context sensitivity which at best results in a negative peace while the root causes of the conflict are still present (Ginty, 2008, p. 156). Mac Ginty argues that the reason behind the lack of context sensitivity is because the liberal peace is comprised of a standardization of actions decided on an international level. This standardization has taken precedence in comparison with other forms

of peacebuilding, such as local approaches, which has led directly to an exclusion of many actors in the peacebuilding process (Ginty, 2008, p. 144).

The so-called '*local turn*' in peacebuilding came as a critical approach in the study of peace and conflict. The local turn is the recognition of diffuseness of power, even the "normative power" of the EU, donors and the UN. The local turn is also the significance of culture, history and identity, as well as the importance of critical agency, and resistance of the unintended consequences of external engagement (Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p.769). In the focus of the local turn is the confrontation of universal ideas and practices and exposing the "natural" historical progressiveness that has placed the global North/West at the top of the current international hierarchy (Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 772). As Bhikhu Parekh states, "the liberal principle of individuation and other liberal ideas are culturally and historically specific. As such a political system based on them cannot claim universal validity" (Newman, Paris & Richmond, 2009, p. 17). The greater emphasis on the local contexts have resulted in a new conceptual focus from organizations like the UN and the World Bank, which stresses the need to include the masses in peacebuilding in order to create a sustainable peace (Conciliation Resources, 2018, p. 7). For example, the World Bank and United Nations 2018 report *Pathways for Peace*, argues that "inclusive decision making is fundamental to sustaining peace at all levels" (United Nations & The World Bank, 2018, p. 2).

Notwithstanding its recent developments and attention, the inclusion of the local population is confronted with considerable obstacles and the idea of including the locals is too often restricted to the margins of orthodox-dominated peacebuilding (Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 764). Even if there are increasingly more policies for supporting the civil society and the locals in conflict-affected countries, these are still rooted in a Western foreign policy strategy. This strategy is based on "international legitimacy" consisting of specific values such as inclusiveness and tolerance instead of a "local legitimacy" based on local support and indigenous roots (Verkoren & Leeuwen, 2013, p. 159). The universal ideas and rights lie in the heart of liberal peace and by awarding legitimacy to local approaches and norms, which might deviate from the liberal norms, the legitimacy of the universal project may be undermined (Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 774-775). This may be a reason for the prevalence of certain buzz phrases such as 'participation', 'local ownership' and 'partnership' as they imply local consent and legitimacy on top of a donor system directed by actors from the global North/West. In practice, however, the masses are to be included to some extent but

never given significant ownership or agency over the peacebuilding process (Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 775).

In the discussion about the local turn, critique against including the locals should be noted, since there are several scholars emphasizing that there is often a ‘romanticizing’ of the locals. Scholars in favor of liberal peace acknowledge that there is scarce knowledge about the local circumstances in the peace processes, leading to an acceptance of culture and practices, which sometimes goes against equality and human rights (Paris, 2010, p. 347). The critique against the inclusion of the locals raises questions about how the ‘international’ domain intends to engage the ‘local’ domain without accepting practices that do not correspond with international norms (Newman et al., 2009 p. 14).

#### Peacebuilding in the African context

This study is focusing on the case of Liberia, and in the context of peacebuilding in Africa, M. A. Mohamed Salih offers a critical assessment of the liberal peace (Newman et al., 2009, p. 17). Salih recognizes that liberal peace has generally brought stability as well as fostered the politics of democracy and respect for human rights. On the other hand, the liberal peace has failed tremendously to deliver real development or economic benefits to African post-conflict countries (Newman et al., 2009, p. 17).

He argues that there needs to be a stronger relationship between peace, democracy and development, because in many African cases there are superficial “democratic” institutions being established, which are a poor substitute for welfare gains. Salih states that welfare issues have to be seen as peacebuilding issues (Newman et al., 2009, p. 17). Salih also acknowledges the issue where democracy has been treated as a metaphor for development. The difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ democracies are not discussed, which results in liberal peace being viewed as a “ready-made package” exported from old to new democracies (Newman et al., 2009, p. 133). The contexts and idiosyncrasies of each specific country and their post-conflict conditions are not taken into consideration, resulting in what Salih describes as a “shock therapy”: *“Exhibiting their own brand of shock therapy, international peace builders attempt to transform nearly all features of the state and society, accomplishing in a matter of months what took decades in the West”* (Newman, Paris & Richmond, 2009, p. 135).

## Local ownership

John Paul Lederach is a part of the *Third generation* of conflict resolutions, and he is one of the most prominent scholars arguing for local inclusion and peacebuilding from below (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 58). He states that peacebuilding "... must face and adapt to the realities and dilemmas posed by the very nature of these conflicts" (Lederach, 1997, p. 147).

Lederach has been influential in the field of peacebuilding by bringing peacebuilding closer to the affected people. He focuses on rebuilding the societal structures in the post-conflict setting, based on the specific context in which the peacebuilding takes place. In addition, he developed the *Conflict Transformation* approach which emphasizes that peacebuilding is a comprehensive process, where the hostile relationships between actors need to be transformed into peaceful and understanding ones (Lederach, 1997, p. 84). The transformation of relationships is argued to move the peacebuilding beyond only addressing the instant problems presented at the surface, but creating constructive change by solving the underlying issues, which is often a part of the root cause to conflict and are likely to spark a relapse of conflict if left unresolved (Lederach, 1997). Lederach is critical towards the generalizable approaches which create a reductive ultimatum frame of reference, and instead argues for the need to acknowledge the complex web of interactions and embrace the paradoxes and complexities (Lederach in Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 62). Also, he recognizes the need for a shift in viewing and treating the "outsider" or those outside the international elite as equal partners with the international interveners in a relationship that encourages a sustainable peace from below (Lederach in Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 275).

## How do we understand peace?

Research on war and traditional security concerns has dominated the field of international studies (Diehl, 2016; Ramsbotham et al., 2016), but the relapses of violent conflict and war have led to many scholars to argue for a greater focus and emphasis on peace. Arguing that a larger focus on peace instead of war will enhance the possibility to create sustainable peace and hinder violent conflicts and war to relapse (Diehl, 2016; Wallensteen 2015; Höglund and Kovacs 2010; Davenport et al., 2018). One of the most common, most referenced and used peace scales are Johan Galtung's peace scale, ranging from *negative* to *positive peace* (Galtung, 1969, p.183). Galtung was the first scholar to extend the concept of peace not only to include the absence of physical violence and war, but also the absence of structural

violence, which he refers to as *positive peace* (Ramsbotham, 2016). With the distinction between personal and structural violence, it becomes two-sided and so did the concept of peace (Galtung, 1969, p.183). The concept of positive peace, absent of structural violence, started to tie peace and development together in the discussion of measuring and assessing peace (ibid).

In recent years, many scholars have tried to find ways of measuring peace and understanding peace in a way that shifts away from the simplistic dichotomies of war and peace, arguing that it is crucial if we ever want to understand why it is so difficult for many post-conflict countries to reach a sustainable peace (Höglund & Kovacs 2010, p. 369; Themnér & Ohlson, 2014, p. 62). There has been a tendency in contemporary research to assume a causal relationship between negative and positive peace, leading some to posit “if only the physical and immediate violence can be stopped, a positive peace will follow” (Höglund & Kovacs, 2010, p. 371). Many post-conflict scenarios show that this is not the case; the end of war provides no guarantees that peace, neither broadly and narrowly defined, will follow (Diehl 2016, p. 3). Even if the research has increased in various ways to measure peace, most of the work has been highly conceptual without measures to be used empirically, foremost having generalizing ambition (Davenport et al., 2018, p.1). The generalizing ambition has also resulted in most efforts and methods used today being quantitative measures (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 9; Diehl, 2016, p. 1).

It is important to bear in mind that quantitative and qualitative data are required to answer different types of questions. On one hand, the quantitative scholars are able to develop increasingly sophisticated statistical analysis, which the qualitative data cannot. On the other hand, the qualitative scholars argue that the quantitative statistical approaches “reduces the complexity of the social world to what can be measured, thus ignoring the wider body of factors driving human behavior, such as ideas, meanings, beliefs and reasons” (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 74). Qualitative and quantitative methods should be seen as mutually complementary methods, possibly integrated with each other (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 74).

The study by Regan, Melander and Davenport (2018) is the most recent contribution to the field of peace research, with their book “Peace as a continuum”. In it, they write that we are able to provide indicators of a country’s underlying risk of conflict but are less capable of providing a measure of how peaceful a country is (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 186). In their

book they are trying to provide measures of peacefulness, arguing that war and peace need to be measured in a continuum, rather than a scale, where there are different degrees of war and peace ebbing and flowing continuously (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 7).

### This study's contribution

This study's contribution to the field of peace research is the development of an analytical framework deriving from the grassroots population, which is both qualitative and operational, and is able to capture the nuances of the specific contexts.

As previously discussed, there are many theories supporting local inclusion in peacebuilding, and there is an emerging acknowledgment that peacebuilding needs to take place at several levels in society. However, there are few measures and strategies which operationalizes the theories into qualitative analytical framework which is used empirically. (Öjendal et al., 2017, p. 1; Davenport et al., 2018, p. 9). Further, even if there is an academic encouragement to let the empirical data steer the development of peace assessment, it is not reflected in the practical reality of how actors assess peace. The assessment mechanisms used today by international organizations, donors and governments are predetermined and standardized formats which are unable to capture the local nuances where the local dynamics are too diffuse to be distilled into a simple tick-box (Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 778; Davenport et al., 2018, p. 9). This study is inspired by, and is leaning on, theories which will be presented in the *theoretical framework* but choosing to take them one step further by developing a framework to be used empirically, which the theories has so far not done on a grassroots level. This study will in contrast to previous research not only take the local context into consideration, but it will let the empirical data steer the development of the analytical framework (Bryman, 2016, p. 574).

## Theoretical framework

The *previous research* is the foundation for the empirical study and is instrumental for formulating the *interview guide* (see appendix 1). The *theoretical framework* on the other hand, is used in the *analyze chapter*, as a part of the coding process leading to the creation of the analytical framework. The theories in the theoretical framework are chosen based on their relevance to the empirical material. Three different theories are used in the theoretical



framework, and parts of the theories have been extracted in order to construct the analytical framework.

The three analytical dimensions, *expectations, communication and power*, from the theory by Aggestam and Strömbom (2013) have been chosen because they complement the coded empirical data and create the base of the framework which will be discussed. The three analytical dimensions are then enhanced with extracted ideas from Lederach (1997) and Davenport (2018) theories. Lastly, it is important to note that the theoretical framework consisting of these three theories have been chosen because of their relevance to the empirical material, hence the empirical material steering the choice of the theoretical framework (Bryman, 2016, p. 582).

### Aggestam and Strömbom

A study by Karin Aggestam and Lisa Strömbom (2013) explored the peace gaps in Israel and Palestine and their analysis forms the core of the theoretical framework in this study where they focused on three concepts: *expectation, communication and power*. The three concepts are derived from research done in critical peacebuilding and will be used as analytical dimensions in this study as the empirical coded material complemented and reinforced the three concepts. *Expectations* refer to discrepancies between the kind of peace which is desired and the kind of peace which is experienced. *Communication* pertains to the processes of inclusion and exclusion regarding which groups are able to participate and have a voice in the peace process. Lastly, *power* refers to what extent asymmetrical relations and power dynamics of conflict are affecting the peace process and the peace practices carried out (Aggestam & Strömbom, 2013, p. 110). Aggestam and Strömbom also states that much of the previous research on peacebuilding has focused on policy and technical and institutional arrangement with very little emphasis on creating legitimacy for peace locally. The discussion of ‘whose peace’ and ‘which peace’ raises ethical discussions and questions about legitimacy regarding the peacebuilding carried out. ‘Whose peace’ is used as a critique against the international liberal actors where peacebuilding is portrayed as building peace from the view of the international actors instead of the local population in the host-country (Lederach & Appleby, 2010). The question of ‘which peace’ criticizes the political presuppositions of the contemporary peacebuilding which might not be anchored in the local reality (Lederach & Appleby, 2010).

## Lederach: an integrated framework for peacebuilding

John Paul Lederach is one of the main writers who challenged the top-down approach to peacebuilding and chose to focus on what he calls the middle level and the grassroots level. Lederach (1997) empathized genuine participation, responsibility and ownership across a wide spectrum of the population for the process of peacebuilding as one of the most important aspect in peacebuilding politics (ibid).

In Lederach's view, peacebuilding does not stop or end with the launch or termination of UN operations, with the establishment of a specific political party, or with elections being held. Instead, he views peacebuilding as a complete concept which includes, generates and sustains processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict towards a sustainable peaceful relationship (Lederach, 1997). The grassroots are the majority population, whose citizens form the basis of society. At the grassroots level, the people affected by conflict are numerous in contrast to the elite level where the people affected by conflict are few. The elite level consists of political, religious, military and economic leaders (Lederach, 1997, p. 42-43). Lederach (1997, p. 94) argues that the middle level leaders hold potential of being "kick-starters" for a transformation process, as they can connect the grassroots and the top-level in society in the peacebuilding process. The intermediate level includes local leaders in ethnic and religious groups as well as leaders of NGOs (Lederach, 1997, p.41). Lederach has received critique for his focus on the intermediate level as kick-starters (Paffenholz, 2014). This study chooses to focus on the grassroots level and their important roles in peacebuilding, as the majority population.

Lederach (1997, p.73) argued that there is lack of foresight into post-conflict situations and a failure to appreciate the interdependence and the multiplicity of the peacebuilding roles and activities. Therefore, contemporary conflicts often follow a pattern of confrontation and negotiations which fail to stop the relapses into violence as well as the humanitarian crises that follow. Lederach presents two main concepts for setting a departure point to view conflict as a progression. The first is the concept of *transformation*, which follows the progression of a conflict and involves a movement from a latent stage of confrontation to negotiation and finally to dynamic, peaceful relationships. Second is the concept of *sustainability*, where the aim is to not only initiate a progression of transformation, but also to create a proactive process which can regenerate itself over time (Lederach, 1997, p. 75).

Lederach further introduces what he calls “*An integrated framework for peacebuilding*”, a framework which consists of four different time dimensions. The first stage moves from the stages of *Crisis Intervention*, in the first weeks after official peace being established, up to six months, next to the *Preparation and training* during the first two years, the to *Design of social change* taking place five to ten years and lastly the *Desired future* from 20 years and further (Lederach, 1997, p. 77). The final step, *desired future*, is emphasized by this study, focusing on the need to have a long-term plan in place when constructing a framework that will encapsulate the peacebuilding process. (Lederach, 1997, p. 77). Lederach states that we need to create, within the conflict or post-conflict setting, a space to envision a commonly shared future and vision to commonly work towards (ibid.). Lastly, what Lederach refers to as a “peace constituency”, focuses on the contextuality of each specific setting as well as the need for the international community to adopt a new perspective which focuses on discovering and empowering recourses, mechanisms and modalities for building peace that exists within the post-conflict country of interest. (Lederach, 1997, p. 95). Lederach (1997, p.18) emphasizes that we need to see what he calls, “war-protracted-armed conflicts” in a system, a system which can be transformed by using a comprehensive approach and including the people who operate in it and the context in which it is rooted. Conflict is never a static phenomenon, but is dynamic, communicative and constantly changed by ongoing human interaction (ibid, p. 63).

### Davenport: a relational approach to peace

Davenport develops *A relational Approach to Quality Peace* in the book *A peace Continuum* (Davenport et al., 2018), where he defines peace as a situation where distinct actors exists in a situation of *mutuality*, where mutuality takes form in some degree of shared identity. The shared identity is reflected in the behavior, organization, language and values towards each other. This stands in contrast to conflict, where the actors act in *opposition* with competing identities which will reflect on their behavior, language, values and organization (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 145). Relational indicators of peace involve two components, where the first views quality peace as a two-way relationship between distinct groups. One of the parties typically is the state whose relationship can range between genocidal and warlike to full, respectful and voluntary integration. Davenport emphasizes the need to create a “we-feeling”, where the sense of community is important for indicating a behavior that suggest a necessary “we-ness, rather than a more restricted “other-ness” (ibid, p. 150).

The second component views peace as multilevel in nature. Davenport suggests that researchers should consider peace at international, regional, national and community levels simultaneously, because he argues that it is often that a country is peaceful at one level such as internationally, but then conflictual or violent at one level of analysis such as a community level (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 78). The highest level of peace according to Davenport is when the different levels such as local, community, national and international are mutually moving towards the same direction (Davenport et al. p. 158).

Davenport, Melander and Regan argue that war and peace need to be measured in a continuum, rather than a scale, where there are different degrees of war and peace moving back and forth. They agree that many opportunities are being missed because of the gross dichotomies between war and peace since most societies are neither at war nor peace. Instead, they exist somewhere along a continuum, and there exists a great diversity between peace and war that must be recognized to build a more holistic, inclusive peace (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 7). This study will use the idea of a peace continuum (Davenport et al., 2018) and the argument for developing a new kind of peace scale when assessing the current state of peace in Liberia. The peace continuum for Liberia will be discussed and presented in the analyze chapter.

The theories in the theoretical framework are chosen based on the relevance regarding the empirical material (Bryman, 2016, p. 582). The theoretical framework will be used by extracting different parts from the three theories in order to develop the theoretical aspect of the analytical framework which is to be created thought this study. This process and the use of the theoretical framework will be further explained in the method section below.

## Method

Liberia was chosen as a case study of this research since Liberia is argued to be a so-called *exemplifying case* (Byrman, 2016, p. 62). Liberia is an appropriate *exemplifying case*, because similarly to the majority of contemporary post-conflict countries, the country has experienced an intrastate conflict (Lucey & Kumalo, 2018, p. 3; Allansson, Melander & Themnér 2017, p. 576) and is currently undergoing a heavily protracted peace process. Further, Liberia is characterized by the same challenges that most post-conflict and/or developing countries today are facing: poverty, corruption, criminality and large scales of sexual violence, while

democracy continues to develop as evidenced by the country's election cycles (Lucey & Kumalo, 2018, p. 3; Hillesund, 2017). These main aspects make Liberia an *exemplifying case* (Bryman, 2016, p. 62), showing that qualitatively in-depth peacebuilding assessment must be done in countries with similar characteristics and historical experiences enabling future generalization to a certain degree. Further, single case studies enable deep empirical analysis of a specific case going deeper into relevant parts of society, which has been an important aspect for this study where the local context has a central role (Aggestam & Strömbom, 2013, p. 111).

The data collection is based on semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2016, p. 468) carried out with respondents from the grassroots levels in Liberia in the form of focus groups. A *research design* was created in the beginning of this study, which included preliminary research questions, previous research and methods. The literature review was done prior to the data collection, which has, in accordance with Creswell, helped position the study and further enhanced its relevance to the field of Peace research. The *research design* was the basis of the *interview guide* which was used during the interviews (see appendix 1).

The interview guide was developed with the aim to get a comprehensive understanding of the 15 years of the ongoing peacebuilding process and what it could tell us about the current state of peace in Liberia. The interview guide was based upon five themes: *Changes in everyday life during the peace process, Peace expectations, Challenges to peace in Liberia, Perception of community and reconciliation, and International actors and the peacebuilding process*. The interview themes were developed based upon previous research in the field of peace research, critical peace research and conflict resolutions. A broad base of theories has influenced the *interview guide*, but primarily, Lederach (1997) gave this study 'directions' of possible issues which could be important to include in the interview guide. At the same time, the semi-structured approach created space for the respondents to steer the interviews as well as letting new inputs arrive organically at each topic thus changing the content of the interviews. The interview guide had a focus on the epistemological standpoint of interpretivism (Bryman, 2016, p. 27), where the main goal is to create an understanding for the social reality of the respondents.

It is important to note that theory and previous literature served as tools to create the research design, position the study and create the interview guide, but once the process of conducting

the interviews, transcribing and analyzing the material, no literature and theory were used. At the stages of transcribing and analyzing the material the empirical data guided the process in isolation from previous research and theories. In the last step of the analysis, the literature and theory were linked to the coded empirical material in line with the analyzing method presented later in the section. The literature helped to link the empirical results and analysis to the already existing literature and current debates in the academic field which helps justify the credibility of the research (Creswell, 2014, p. 28).

## Qualitative Interviews

The thesis is based upon qualitative, semi-structured interviews, carried out in focus groups with the Liberian people on the grassroots level. Motivation for choosing this method explained next. First, the overall emphasis when assessing peace globally has primarily been on quantitative data (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 9) which this study argues to be problematic due to the risk of extrapolating large data across very different countries and contexts (Diehl, 2016, p. 1). Secondly, the grassroots population is often missing in the main debate about peace assessment, which is the case in Liberia as well (Öjendal et al., 2017, p. 81). Lastly, this study argues that the social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people (Bryman, 2016, p. 393) who have experienced and are experienced the peace which is to be assessed and studied. The epistemological standpoint of *interpretivism* is a main motivation for the choice of method, where the aim of this study is to interpret the grassroots' social world from their point of view to holistically understand the meanings respondents give to their surroundings, experiences and expectations (Bryman, 2016, p. 27). The personal experiences and reality of people from all levels of society matters in peace research as people act based on the meaning they attribute to their social world from their unique point of view (Bryman, 2016, p. 27). In order for this study to gain specific insight about the grassroots populations' social reality and this study's emphasis on context specificity (Diehl, 2016, p. 1), the qualitative semi-structured interviews are a suitable method (Bryman, 2016, p. 393).

The semi-structured approach gave the interviewee flexibility when conducting the interviews rather than responding to a fixed structure. Further the researcher gained opportunities to follow up on some of the questions in order to gain more information as well as letting the interviewer define what is important in relation the topics, which often generates unexpected ideas and thoughts. In line with the epistemological standpoint of *interpretivism*, the aim of

the semi-structured interviews in this study were to let the respondents define and give meanings to the subjects in question (Bryman, 2016, p. 27).

The interviews were carried out with people who had very different levels of education; some had never gone to school and were illiterate while some had a university education. This meant that the researcher had to be able to explain the questions in ways that were understandable, as well as trying to have a similar “level of discussion” in all focus groups, in relation to abstraction, seeing long term processes and being critical. All interviews were carried out in English; hence an interpreter was not used, and the material was not translated. The interviews were conducted with a sound-recorder, which was approved before starting the interviews, and then transcribed in to written text.

The thesis is interested in *the meanings* of the interviews rather than the linguistic expression (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 203), therefore, as highlighted by Kvale and Brinkman, the process of transcribing the interviews focused on the overall meaning of each interview rather than the linguistic expressions themselves. In line with Kvale and Brinkmann’s approach, (2009) the transcription of the material has been a part of reflecting over the material (ibid, p. 196), which has helped to develop a deeper understanding of the interview material (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 180). It is important to note that during the stage of transcribing, no theory or previous research was used. This was intentional in order to let the empirical material speak for itself and not allow previous research to affect the researcher’s development of the material (Creswell, 2014, p. 29). The analysis method has been carried out in line with the generalized coding method in Bryman (2017, p. 581-583).

### The Interviewees for this study

The focus groups have been selected through a *Generic purposive sampling* (Bryman, 2016, p. 412). The process of sampling the focus groups was used to get a representation of the Liberian grassroots population. The aim of having a representation of the Liberian grassroots population feeds into the motivation of why *focus groups* were chosen over individual interviews. This study is interested in how different groups at the grassroots level, for example people from rural areas versus urban areas, would answer, discuss and create meanings to the different questions. Hence, people with specific experiences from their ‘position’ in the grassroots population were chosen (Bryman, 2016, p. 501). Additional

motivation for choosing focus group interviews is the fact that it is more likely that the answers and views will be challenged in a group setting. As people will challenge each other's views, it will give the researcher a more realistic spread of what people think because they are forced to reflect and possibly revise their answers (ibid. p. 502), which turned out to be the case in some of the interviews.

The *Generic purposive sampling* (Bryman, 2016, p. 412) of the focus groups led to five different “group contexts”, where the five “group contexts” together represents the different economic standards, the different levels of education, employment as well as urban and rural areas in Liberia.

The different “group context” represented all three levels of economic standard in the country based on Liberia Institute of Statistics & Geo-Information Service (LISGIS, 2017), Monrovia: *high economic and access country*, Grand Bassa: *middle economic and access county* and River Gee: *low and extreme low economic and access country* (LISGIS, 2017, p. 14). Monrovia being the capital of Liberia represented the urban part of the country and is where three different contexts were sampled; the first; West Point, is the slum area of Monrovia, having the lowest socio-economic standard in the capital. The second sampled context were post graduate students at the Kofi Annan Peace institute and represented a higher educational background. The third sampled context in Monrovia were local employees at NGO's or in the humanitarian sector and represented specific insight regarding international actors' engagement in Liberia, but primarily representing a higher economic background in the grassroots population, since they were employed. The fourth context were from county Grand Bassa, which is representing the rural population, in a middle income and access county. The fifth context were in River Gee county, represented the rural population in the lowest income and access county, being the most isolated and poor part of Liberia.

All respondents in all the five different “group contexts” were from Liberia and representing the grassroots, hence, not being leaders in the government nor in the opposition or are a part of the influential top in society in regard to politics, religion, military or economics (Lederach, 1997).

In each of the five contexts, two focus groups interviews were carried out, one group of men, and one group of women, and each focus group consisted of 6-7 respondents. This resulted in



the interviews having an almost gender balanced selection. In all groups there was a consciously arranged age variety from young adults around 18-20 years old up to seniors around 60 years old. In total 63 people have been interviewed in this study. Each of the focus groups interviews took between one and two hours.

The focus group interviewees were conducted at different locations in Liberia. Because of the limited possibility to move around in the country, the data collection was dependent on different organizations for moving around and mobilizing people, the organizations involved were Kvinna to Kvinna together with their local partner organizations, Action Aid Liberia and The Red Cross. The locations could not be visited before the interviews took place, therefore the locations were often not ideal, frequent issues, such as a lot of outside noise, disturbance, heat and lack of light, were common. Additional concern was that the respondents had not always been informed prior to the interview occasion what the meeting was about, and so it had to be explained upon arrival. This, sometimes, created confusion, but full consent was always verbally agreed on after having explained the study, before starting the interviews, and the respondents always had time to ask questions before starting the interviews. The respondents were informed about anonymity, as well as the voluntary and unpaid nature of the interviews. All of the respondents which were mobilized expressed that they wanted to take part of the interviewee to make their voice heard. This resulted in a willingness to answer all questions and sometimes an open discussion between the respondents in the focus groups, hence, to build trust in the interviews were not experienced as an issue.

### Analyze method

The empirical data from the focus group interviews has been analyzed through the *generalize coding method* by Bryman (2016, p. 581-583). The empirical data have been coded in three main steps, where the first, *initial coding*, gave the initial impressions, an overview of what the data was saying. The material has here been read several times, first without taking notes and then with notes and lastly coded (ibid, p. 581). At this stage the process of identifying reoccurring themes within each interview starts, the similarities in the answers leads into the next stage a *focused coding*. In the focused coding the most significant and frequent codes in all ten focus group interviews were categorized into themes.

In the third and last step of coding the material, ideas and theories from previous literature were incorporated with the empirical codes. In the *Result and Analyze* chapter, the empirical detected themes are presented and analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework, presented earlier. The three analytical dimensions: *expectations, communication and power*, from the theory from Aggestam and Strömbom (2013) have been extracted, because they are in line with the empirical coded themes (Bryman, 2016, p. 582), detected during the *focused coding* step in the analysis's method. These three analytical dimensions: *expectations, communication and power* create the base of the framework. The three analytical dimensions are then complemented with extracted parts from the theories of Lederach (1997) and Davenport (2018) which have been presented in the theoretical framework.

The extracted parts from the three theories from Aggestam and Strömbom as well as from Davenport and Lederach form the theoretical aspect of the framework. The empirical data have been steering the choice of the theoretical framework (Bryman, 2016, p. 574). This process leads to a *bridging* between empirical data and theory. The empirical data has also been reforming the overall analytical dimensions of: *expectations, communication and power*, during the analytical process, in order to both tailor the analytical dimensions to fit the empirical data, as well as in order to develop sub-analytical dimensions to be used as part of the constructed analytical framework.

Important to note is that the empirical data consists of vast amounts of details but during the coding process the most significant parts of the empirical data, in relation to creating the analytical framework, has been extracted. This because the aim of the study is to develop the analytical framework and create an understanding for how the grassroots population experiences peace, since it is not a study about the life experiences but rather having the grassroots' life experiences and their realities as the basis for forming the framework.

Together, the main analytical dimensions and the sub-analytical dimensions, which will be presented in the conclusions, creates the analytical framework. This study argues that, the fact that there are two methods being joined together, both the solid empirical focus, where the development of the framework is steered by the grassroots population, together with the extracting of previous theory, makes the framework strong. It closes the gap between theory and reality and creates measures which can be used empirically, which is able to capture the nuances of the specific context.

In the last part of the *Result and Analyze* chapter, the framework created by the empirical codes together with the extracted theories, leads to the assessment of Liberia's current state of peace based on the grassroots, which is illustrated in a peace continuum.

When using methods of coding qualitative material there is always a need to be aware of the risks of mistakes when coding. A main critique of coding is the risk of losing context of the social setting (Bryman, 2016, p. 583). By both transcribing and coding the material close in time to when the interviews were conducted, this study will limit the risk for losing context. The process of going through the transcribed material several times to see the overall picture of the interviews (ibid, p. 581) will also help to reduce the risk of losing the social setting as well as creating an awareness of the fact that any slice of data can be coded in more than one way (ibid, p. 582). Further, the role of theory has an important purpose to later help validate the coded materials (ibid, p. 584; Creswell, 2014, p. 28).

### Ethical considerations

Several ethical considerations were taken before conducting the interviews. First, the asymmetrical power distribution between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale, 2006, p. 484). In general, the interviewee has the power over the interview where she defines the questions, the time and the overall structure. The interviewee also has interpretative prerogative of the collected data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 49). In this specific study, there was also the issue of power in relation to the researchers' position as a non-Liberian. The interviews were carried out with the common population, where the overall majority were living under harsh conditions including poverty, lack of food etc., which resulted in the asymmetrical power distributions between the interviewer and the interviewee becoming very apparent. In order to inform the respondents about the non-paid and voluntary nature of the interviews, the respondents were mobilized voluntarily by different local organizations, and not by the researcher.

Secondly, the issue of sensitive subjects which the interviews brought up, resulted in the need to consider how these questions would affect the respondents (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 79). Therefore, the overall topics were presented to the respondents before the interviews by local organizations, and the respondents were informed that they could leave the interview at

any time. This study closely made sure that the principle of ‘do no harm’ was followed and that all respondents felt respected and listened to (Centre for research ethics & Bioethics, 2019).

Lastly, the issues of subjectivity and influence of the researcher were considered. A researcher never conducts the interviews in a vacuum, but she is influenced by different presuppositions which will affect the human meeting between the interviewer and the interviewee. Therefore, it is highly critical to be reflective. To be reflective in this study meant to be aware and reflect over the researchers’ own position, assumptions and privileges as a Swedish student in the Liberian grassroots context. Further, how this might affect the interviews and the knowledge which later in the process is produced and presented (Pillow, 2003, p. 178).

## Background

### Liberia and the civil war

Between 1980 and 2003 was the darkest time in Liberia’s history due to two civil wars and total devastation of the economy (Peacebuilding data, 2010). The first civil war started on Christmas Eve 1989, by a rebellion, led by Charles Taylor, against the sitting president Doe, which led to Doe’s execution. Taylor waged a brutal campaign for power over seven years, where the country became divided along ethnic lines in form of rebel groups and military fractions. After seven year, Taylor won the 1997 election, but after only two years the tension grew. Taylor started to run the country according to the old ways, characterized by corruption, repression of dissent, miserable poverty for the majority of the population, as well as exploitation of ethnic division. A new civil war started, or rather the second phase of the earlier civil war continued. Two rebel groups, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia, challenged Taylor’s rule. A brutal war was carried out with extremely violent tactics (Peacebuilding data, 2010).

In the middle of 2003 peace talks were ongoing but still the war continued. Monrovia was under blockade from both groups and the capital became a humanitarian catastrophe. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 2003, Taylor finally resigned after increasing pressure from international actors. Taylor voluntary went into exile in Nigeria, and Vice President Moses Blah was left to

negotiate on the behalf of the government. At this time ECOWAS had sent peace troops while the U.S. Marine Corps had arrived. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Accra, Ghana, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 2003, which formally ended the civil war (Peacebuilding data, 2010). Local actors were involved in the peace agreement, however, there has been critique towards the process of the peace agreement, arguing that the inclusion was only directed towards a small group of chosen organizations and not in terms of building the actual peace agreement on local knowledge (Öjendal et al., 2017, p. 85).

A temporary government was put in place and ECOWAS managed to restore peace and order in the larger cities, but in the rural areas the widespread violence towards the civilian population continued. In September 2003, the UN decided to send 15 000 peace keepers to restore safety and to disarm the military factions, named UNMIL. In October 2005 the first election after the civil war was held and it led to the victory of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Madame Sirleaf became the first elected female president in Africa (Landguiden, 2016).

### The peace processes

The impact of the 14 years long civil war has been devastating for Liberia. All sides of the conflict committed grave acts of violence against civilians, including rape, torture, killing and abduction (Peacebuilding data, 2010). According to the estimation done by the *Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)*, 25,000 people were killed, mostly civilians, half of the country's population was forcibly displaced, 2/3 of women were subjects to sexual violence during the displacement (United Nation Mission in Liberia, 2018). During the civil war a very high number of child soldiers were used by all parties in the conflict. When the peace agreement was signed in 2003, it was estimated that 21,000 child soldiers needed to be reintegrated into society (United Nation Mission in Liberia, 2018).

In addition to the extreme human cost, the economy was devastated because of the war. Homes, buildings and the infrastructure were destroyed, and the conflict also left the country swarming with weapons. The massive displacement led to the shutdown of public services and the GDP per capita dropped by more than 70% due to the civil war (United Nation Mission in Liberia, 2018).

Efforts to restore the economy have been underway since the democratic government under the former president Madame Sirleaf was appointed in 2005. Then in 2014, the Ebola

epidemic hit the country hard, forcing international investors to pull their economic ambitions from the country and the majority of the ongoing reconstruction was put on hold or just abandoned (Landguiden, 2016). The two civil wars resulted in the country's agricultural industry being abandoned, the infrastructure completely failing as well as the industrial sector being destroyed. The civil wars threw Liberia back in time and without large amounts of aid and support from the international community the country would not have been able to survive (Landguiden, 2016).

In June 2009 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its final report which included for example the recommendations, that the former warlord Prince Johnson and former president Taylor, should be held responsible at the special tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes and economic crimes (Reliefweb, 2009; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2009). Fifteen years after the peace agreement, Liberia has not prosecuted a single person for the gross crimes committed during the civil wars (Human Right Watch, 2019). There is a lot of critique because of the lack of implementing the TRC reports recommendations, for example the UNMIL states that true reconciliation is hindered in the country because of inadequate accountability for human right violations committed during the war (UNMIL, 2014). In July 2018, the UN Human Right Committee expressed "concern that none of the alleged perpetrators of gross human rights violations and war crimes mentioned in the TRC report have been brought to justice" (Human Right Watch, 2019).

### Liberia today

President Weah won the last presidential election in 2017 (BBC, 2019). In March 2018, the UN operation, UNMIL, ended its 15 yearlong presence in Liberia. UNMIL is described as one of the most successful operations in the UN history. President Weah swore, at the ceremony of UNMIL leavening Libera, to keep the peace in the country (Landguiden, 2016).

In the latest *Human Development Index*, Liberia is ranked at 181 out of 189, where 189 is the country with the lowest Human Development Index (UNDP, 2018). Liberia is still, almost 15 years after the peace agreement was signed, one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. Liberia is to this day facing many challenges such as poverty, sexual violence, corruption and unemployment, lack of justice and lack of access to health care, which are affecting the majority of the population. Over half of the Liberian population are under 20

years old. Unemployment, lack of education, illiteracy and poverty are having an especially grave effect on the young population and many children are forced to become breadwinners for the family instead of going to school (Independent National Commission on Human Rights of Liberia, 2018). Liberia also has one of the world's highest amount of people with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Landguiden, 2016).

The Global Peace Index is today the world's leading index used for measuring global peace (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018). According to the *Global Peace Index* report for 2018, ranking the "State of Peace" in each country, Liberia is in the category: *High Peace*, which is the second highest category of state of peace. Liberia is ranked number 63 out of 163 (number 1 is the country with the highest state of peace), where Liberia has increased its state of peace by 27 points since 2017. Liberia is in the same category as Sweden, with Sweden ranking at 14 out of 163 (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018). Liberia had in the 2018 report the second largest overall improvements in state of peace in the world. The main improvements in Liberia's ranking was because of the improvements in the area of "safety and militarization" (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018).

## Results and Analysis

In this chapter the results from the empirical data collection will be presented as well as analyzed together with theory. The first part of the analysis is organized after the three research sub-questions, focusing on the analytical dimensions: *expectations, communication and power*. Secondly, the empirical implications of the result will be discussed and the current assessment of Liberia's state of peace will also be illustrated in a peace continuum.

The empirical result has through the coding process been coded into seven empirical themes: *No bullets no peace, Local measures of peace, Local inclusion, Drug use, Root causes to war, No expectations on peace and Lack of trust*. The empirical themes will be analyzed through the three analytical dimensions: *expectations, communication and power*, from Aggestam and Strömbom's theory (2013) as the analytical dimensions have been extracted from theory because they are in line with the empirical coded themes (Bryman, 2016, p. 582). The three analytical dimensions form the base of the framework and are in the analysis complemented with extracted parts from the theory of Lederach (1997) and Davenport (2018) in order to create the key aspect to consider when assessing peacebuilding processes.

The analytical dimensions: *expectations, communication and power*, have been reformed along the analysis process as the empirical data have steered the content of each of the three dimensions. The empirical data together with the three analytical dimensions will during the analyze process also lead to the creation sub-dimensions, which will be presented in the final framework, in the conclusion chapter.

### What are the grassroots' peace expectations?

This section focuses on the perceptions and expectations on the development in the peacebuilding process in the everyday life of the respondents. In accordance with Aggestam and Strömbom's approach (2013), *expectations* aim to detect discrepancies between the kind of peace, which was expected in 2003 when the war ended, and the kind of peace experienced today. In sum, this presents the question: 'which peace'? The analytical dimension of *expectations* deals with the empirical coded themes: '*root causes to war*' and '*no expectations on peace*'.

The empirical data shows that all respondents, in all ten focus groups, felt that their peace expectations have not been met. This is an overwhelming result which clearly points to a large discrepancy between the peace they were expecting and the peace they are now, and has since 2003, experienced.

*"During Madame Sirleaf times it was ok, we could eat three times a day, today we can only afford to eat one time a day, me and my four children. The last year has been the hardest. So, no the expectations after the war is not met".*

(Women; West Point)

To assess the peace expectations gives us an idea of the incentives the grassroots has for changing the status quo (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 87). This study argues that by comparing the peace expectations the grassroots had in 2003, when the peace agreement was signed, compared to today, we can create an understanding for how the grassroots feel for the current state of peace, for their future and how these feeling towards the future peace have changed and been affected by met or unmet peace expectations.



The respondent's peace expectations were very similar across all groups, the groups ranging between highly educated to uneducated, urban areas to rural areas, across gender and age variety as well as employed and unemployed. The reason as to why the peace expectations were similar across all groups, is most likely because the respondent's peace expectations were focused on very basic expectations. Expectations on peace which is needed for all human beings and all societies, such as health care, right to justice, to have job opportunities, to have food to eat, to get education and to have a safe and reliable security sector. Because the peace expectations from the grassroots are at the most basic level for a human being, it also creates a large impact on the respondents lives when these basic expectations are not met.

*“In 2003 there were NGOs running the hospitals, they had medicine and gave us free care.*

*Today there is no help here, people are dying in the hospital.”*

*(Men; West Point)*

It results in, according to the data, a large part of the people living on the grassroots level experiencing hard conditions, for example not having enough food to eat or feed their children, having to bribe the police in order to get safety, not having enough money to send the children to school and not being able to get health care.

*“The business is very bad now; you will carry the bucket on your head the whole day and sell nothing. So, people are dying because they cannot pay. We are dying and we do not have places to live, so what is peace then?”*

*(Women; West Point)*

These everyday, crucial, issues were also present in the two focus groups in which all the respondents (the NGO focus group) were employed and having a salary, which in this study is the group with the best living conditions:

*“During the war it was hard, and we only eat one time a day, today I have a job and a salary but there are so many people depending on my salary, so still sometimes we only eat one time a day.”*

*(Woman; NGO)*

Fifteen years have passed since the peace agreement was signed and the empirical data shows that today, in the majority of the focus groups, there is a strong feeling of hopelessness, where many have given up on the idea that their lives will improve. Several respondents in all focus group brought up that many aspects of their lives were better before the war, and therefore they at least expected to have the same living conditions as before the war, once the peace agreement was signed.

According to Regan, peace in a society exists when no group has an incentive to change the status quo by resorting to violent methods (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 86). On the one hand the grassroots in Liberia live under very harsh conditions where the majority do not have the ability to change the status quo. On the other hand, it can definitely be argued that there are incentives to change the status quo, since the very basic peace expectations are not met and have very direct and extensive effects on the respondent's lives. In line with Regan's theory (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 86) even if the masses might lack the capability to change status quo, they still have the incentives to change the perceived injustices in the country. Therefore, it is not a peaceful country, but it is rather absent of armed conflict or war (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 80), which could, based on the grassroots, be argued to be the case for Liberia today.

*“The reason why we do not see the difference between war and peace ... When you do not have relative satisfaction among everybody, and you have one group which are ready to take risks and resort to violence you have war. In times of peace, you also still have large aggravated groups, people with legitimate grievances, who were affected by the civil conflict, almost all of us were, but some of us more than others. If there is no redress for them, what if they say okay, we need to take it upon ourselves, where is the line (between war and peace)”.*

(Man; Kofi Annan Peace inst.)

The fact that many of these unmet peace expectations were the root causes of the civil war in Liberia in the first place, has created a fear among many respondents. The respondents have agreed, across all ten focus groups, that the root causes of the civil war were foremost poverty, lack of food and corruption amongst politicians and the elite, the grievances which mobilized along ethnic lines, creating division in the country. Respondents expressed that they see the connection between the grievances today and those which led to the civil war. The overall questions from the respondents when asking them about peace, were often turned

back to the interviewer; asking what peace really is, if all other circumstances that the local population, experienced during the war still are present and affecting their everyday life.

Some of the focus groups said that, in addition to the root causes to the previous war, there are also “new issues” where land is becoming a potential issue which could spark tension between tribes. These land issues were explained as being a consequence of the displaced people from the war. Also, many are suffering from PTSD and have not been rehabilitated from the war, as well as increased their drug abuse.

*“Liberia went to 15 years of war, it was senseless, we went to war because we wanted something else, we wanted change, but after the war nothing has changed; it has gone from bad to worse. There is no open bullet shoot. But even now when we go to sleep, we are terrified, it is not better. Even if you will call the police, you can call until you get tired, nobody will come”.*

(Women; NGO)

This study argues that it is important when assessing peace to create an understanding for the differences between a latent conflict, with the absence of armed conflict but with strong incentives to change status quo. And a peaceful country where there might be preferences to change things in society but where undemocratic or violent means are not an option for creating that change (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 86). This study argues that the unmet peace expectations can give the population or some groups of the population, the incentive to change status quo with violent means, especially when the unmet peace expectations are having large effects on the everyday life of the common population. According to Lederach there is too little attention paid to the latent conflict phases (Lederach, 1997, p.73) and further peace expectations is a field which is unresearched and it is not taken into consideration in the larger assessment of peace today (Aggestam & Strömbom, 2013).

So, to answer the question “*what peace?*”, the answer from the grassroots in Liberia, is that there is peace in the sense that there is the absence of the gun, but most other circumstances in their everyday life are the same as during the war. Therefore, the grassroots do not really see a clear difference between war and peace. The peace is perceived as very weak and fragile with a fear of the future because the root causes of the conflict are still present in the everyday life of most people in Liberia today.

## How is the communication between the grassroots and the government?

In accordance with Aggestam and Strömbom, communication aims at the processes of inclusion and exclusions in regard to what groups are able to participate and have a voice in the peace process (Aggestam & Strömbom, 2013, p. 110). This study further argues that communication is the “power of knowing”, looking at *what* and *how* things are communicated to the grassroots from the government and decision makers.

The study argues that communication is fundamental in order to create trust between the locals and the decision makers in power. Communication and inclusion in the process of the country, is the foundation for being able to create a common identity and further a shared vision for the future, which according to both Davenport (2018) and Lederach (1997) is important for having a sustainable long-term peace. *Communication* deals with the empirical coded themes: ‘*local inclusion*’ and ‘*lack of trust*’.

The aspect of *what* and *how* is communicated to the locals from the government is brought up because the respondents in several of the focus groups stated that they feel that there is a lack of information from the government to the locals, and that the lack of communication has increase during the past year with the new president. The respondents expressed feelings of “not knowing what is going on in the country”, “having no power over what is happening because they lack information” and “just dangling along and hoping for the best”. The respondents stated that the president is not informing the population about changes or decisions which makes the people feel insecure and excluded from the country’s decisions.

The majority of the focus groups also felt that, it is not only that they are uninformed about the decisions taken, but also that there often seems to be lacking a plan behind many of the decisions being taken by the president and the decision makers in power. For example, one of the respondents at the focus group at *Kofi Annan Peace Institute*, brought up the example of how the government made an announcement some time ago that the university in Liberia should be free. The respondent was visiting the University of Liberia just a few days before the interview took place, and she said that there was not even water to flush the toilets, in some classes there are no professors and no electricity. The respondents explain that before, when there was a university fee, there was a better standard.

*“At least there was basic thing like water and electricity, the students are now crying out and begging the government to let them pay a small fee to at least have an okay environment”*

(Women; Kofi Annan Inst.)

The government took a decision which seems to be rootless since there is not a plan for how the university should be paid for, another respondent continues. This is not uncommon according to many of the respondents, where there are announcements made but it is not followed through which leads to the respondent feeling less and less trust for the government. It also leads to a feeling of insecurity, where respondents feel that decisions are taken without thinking about the consequences on the ground for the grassroots who have to live in the reality of the decisions taken by the people at the top.

*”We do not really know what is going on in the country.”*

(Men; Grand Bassa)

Including the masses for a common future

The issues of not being informed and lack of communication relates to the issue of not being included. *Inclusion* is not only highlighted by Aggestam and Strömbom’s approach (2013), but also supported as an important aspect when studying peace, since many of the contemporary conflicts feature exclusion as a root cause. Exclusion from the decision-making, which leads to feelings alienation and division, creates a high risk of developing into conflict especially when mobilized together with other grievances (The United Nations and World bank, 2018).

The respondents in general, but especially in the slum areas in Monrovia and in the rural areas, felt that they have not been included by either the Liberian government or the international actors in the peacebuilding process. Over half of the focus group brought up that they feel disconnected from the government. It was expressed as locals being on one track and the government on another track where the locals are not included, thus lacking a feeling of unity between the two tracks. Local ownership and the need for including the locals in peacebuilding has been a reoccurring debate during previous years and has increasingly been seen as the way forward in the peacebuilding debate (Randazzo, 2017). What is not emphasized as much, is the notion, which both Lederach (1997) and Davenport (2018)

suggest, that it is not only about *actually* being included in processes and decisions but also about the *feeling*, and *perception*, of inclusion that is important. The attitudes and perceptions are central in order to study peace (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 190). The specific feeling of inclusion is especially important in order to create a shared identity in a country, as well as a common vision for the future to strive towards (Lederach, 1997). To have a shared identity creates the feeling of inclusion, which will limit the risk of feeling excluded and the risk of resorting to violence. To have a common vision for the future will enhance the long-term peacebuilding process according to Lederach and make the peace more stable and rooted in the country at all levels (ibid). It was brought up in several of the focus groups that during the former president Madame Sirleaf's administration, there was a plan for the country, but this plan is now lacking.

*“Now we do not know what the vision is, if we do not know what the vision is then we cannot subscribe, therefore we do not have any unity.”*

(Men; Kofi Annan Peace Inst.)

This goes in line with Lederach's (1997) argument that if people do not know where they are going it is hard to get there. There needs to be a feeling of social cohesion, which is moving in the same direction. Social cohesion is especially important in countries, such as in case of Liberia, where there have been civil wars dividing and destroying trust between groups and between the people and the government (Search for Common Ground and UNDP, 2016).

Davenport's (2018), *A relational Approach* to peace defines peace as a mutuality, where peace exists when distinct actors exist in a state of *mutuality*, this approach is similar to Lederach's idea of the need for a common vision, as well as to the perception by the respondents of the issues of lacking unity in the country. To problematize Davenport's idea about *mutuality* in the Liberia context, would be to see the hindrances of such *mutuality* existing in the Liberian society today.

*“We cannot help the government for example do a community road or anything, because they do not want to help us.”*

(Men; Grand Bassa)

The fact that many respondents felt disconnected from the government and the decision makers, together with the lack of trust because of not being informed about decisions, points to the direction of not having a state of *mutuality* in Liberia today. In the group of women in West Point, a similar analysis was made;

*“All are on their own. All people are for themselves.”*

*(Women; West Point)*

According to these women, everyone is for themselves, because there is no trust in the government and there is no feeling of ‘we will make it together’. According to the respondents, it is foremost an issue with the youth, because the government is not restoring any trust with the youth. Liberia has a very young population, and this results in, according to the respondents, a majority of the population are taking the law in their own hands and not respecting intuitions, policies, or laws because they do not feel included in them. Many of the youth are today living in harsh situations, where for example a large part of the youth populations has been former child soldiers, or born during the war, resulting in a loss of education as well as untreated trauma (Independent National Commission on Human Rights of Liberia, 2018). In Liberia today there is a high unemployment rate in the youth population, which have resulted in many not having money to go to school as well as an increase in drug use, and criminality in the country (Independent National Commission on Human Rights of Liberia, 2018).

*“During the war the youth had their arms to support themselves and this time the arms was taken away and nothing was given to replace the arms.”*

*(Women; Kofi Annan Peace inst.)*

The feeling of having been abandoned since the war, where the rehabilitation and the reintegration into society has not been a complete process, is not creating a trustful relationship with the people in power. The shared identity between the youth and the government is non-existent today, according to the respondents. There were a lot of expectations surrounding the election of president Weah, where the younger population felt that they could relate to him, as he came from a simple background and then became an elite football player. The high expectation on president Weah has not been met and many witnessed the deteriorating process throughout last year, where the expected positive

development resulted in a more negative development for the grassroots. Older respondents shared experiences with their own children, or youths in their surroundings, where the youths feel ignored and are losing hope. Again, the issue of unmet expectations, as discussed in the first part of the analysis, affects how people perceive the future, the failure to deliver basic services and needs leads to lack of trust and increases the feeling of division between the people in power and the grassroots.

The second hindrance toward existing in a state of *mutuality* for the government and the grassroots is, according to the data, the lack of justice from the civil war. A reoccurring discussion in all focus groups was the lack of implementation of the TRC report. There were different opinions regarding the need to establish the War Crime Court, or not, but all respondents agreed that it is a big issue that many of the people in decision making positions in Liberia today, were directly involved in the war. The overall majority of the respondents felt that the fact that people who have committed war crimes have not been held responsible is a major hindrance towards, not only justice, but also the overall development in the country. Indeed, it has become a barrier for the grassroots to feeling connected the people in the decision-making positions. In accordance with Davenport (2018), peace is a two-way relationship, in the case of Liberia the relationship between the state and the grassroots is damaged because of the lack of trust, both because of the unmet peace expectations and the lack of inclusion, but also for the lack of justice from the civil war.

*“We who suffered in the bush, we are now suffering again. All those who brought the war, the once who spoiled the country, they are the only once enjoining the country, they are the once working and enjoying. We want the court to come and arrest all those people.”*

(Women; Grand Bassa)

### In what ways do the grassroots have power over the peace process?

*Power* in this study, refers primarily to who has the power in the peace process (Aggestam & Srömbom, 2013, p. 110). More specifically, the respondents focused on power in relation to, who sets the agenda and the prioritizations for peacebuilding processes. In sum, this regards the question “whose peace”?



This study focuses on power in relation to the need to include, hence give power to, the local population and create a local ownership over the peace process. Further, the need for the international community to be context sensitive and be able to question the normative international approaches to peacebuilding, which further leads the discussion into a critique against the generalizable approaches to post- conflict development and assessment. The analytical dimension of *power* deals with the empirical coded themes: “*local measures of peace*”, “*local inclusion*” and “*drug use*”.

#### The absence of local ownership and the wrong prioritizations

Local ownership over the process of peace and development was mainly discussed in relation to the government and the international actors. When questions about peace expectations, as earlier discussed, were brought up, the respondents described a discrepancy between what the respondents expected the government and the international actor to prioritize, and what the respondents perceived that the government and international actors were focusing on in relation to peace and development in the country.

Like earlier stated the peace expectations of the respondents in all focus groups had in general not been met. But some of the respondents brought up the fact that some expectations on peace could be seen as met, these were expectations on *women’s empowerment*, *freedom of movement*, *climate engagement* and to have *elections*. The issue is that these expectations are, according to the respondents, secondary. They are secondary since the most basic peace expectations; having food, a job, safety, a functioning justice system, health care and education, are not met. The respondents described it as the progress of *freedom of movement*, for example, might be very hard to enjoy for most people if they have no food to eat. The respondents did value the progress of the *women’s empowerment*, *freedom of movement*, *climate engagement* and *elections*, and understood the importance of these progressions for the country. Even so, they could not understand why the government and, as they perceived it, the international community, focused on these issues when so many of them could only eat one time a day and could not send their children to school. For the respondents it was a backwards prioritization. This perceived prioritization by the government and international actors, led the respondents to question the interviewer, why they had not been asked, why they were not a part of developing the prioritization as they are the ones living in the reality of the country. Many respondents expressed a feeling of not being seen or heard.

The theories supporting the interlinkages between development and peace, stressed the importance of the most basic needs to be met before anything else (Hettne,1984). Lederach states that food-poverty is what dominates everything, but ironically decision makers often think of food-security as less of a political issue in comparison with issues of governance for example. When food-poverty is joined together with large social and economic inequities, the struggle for food, can be a main contributor to violence and conflicts, which should not be underestimated (Lederach, 1997). The respondents described the extent of the food poverty as, if the people are not able to eat then nothing else will work. In line with Lederach, the respondent felt that the lack of food could be a contributor to new violence and conflict because people will become desperate if the food-poverty does not stop.

*“Now what we do, is that the breakfast, which should be eaten in the morning, we push all to the lunch, we push it to lunch because the food is not enough to split, so we have to eat the food in one meal. We cannot eat three time; we can only eat one time a day now.”*

( Women; Grad Bassa county)

Again, it becomes clear that the root causes of the civil war are still present in the country, where the main cause to the civil war according to the respondents were food- poverty, poverty and corruption. The respondents experienced it as they are living with severe issues which are not addressed or brought up, which increases the gap between the government and the locals. It became very clear when the frustration and feelings of hopelessness were overwhelming in the interviews when asking about the main challenge for the respondents in their everyday life. The majority of the respondents agreed that it is poverty and then the drugs.

The prevalence of drugs is increasing all over the country and is what the respondents refers to as a “a new issue”, and not related to the root causes of the civil war. The respondents were upset over the fact that the increasing drug use is resulting in more crimes, more robbery on the streets, more violence, more sexual and gender-based violence, rape, murders and more insecurity. The drug use also leads to an increased poverty for the once already stuck in the drug addiction, as well consequences for the children to drug addicts. All respondents had personal experiences of the consequences which followed the increased drug use in their community. Some respondents had been forced to move because of continual breaking and entering of their homes, some have been robbed and threatened to life with weapons and

knives on the way to work, some had daughters or friends who been raped, and some had their children getting stuck in drug addiction.

*“For my own experience I just recently had to move out of my house because they continue to break in and they almost killed my little boy at one point and I had to move.”*

(Women; NGO:s)

The rural respondents, in all four focus groups, emphasized that the drugs are not only in the slums of the capital, it is all over the country, also in the smaller communities.

*“The drugs and criminality, it is not only in Monrovia it is here in River Gee as well, it is in whole Liberia.”*

(Men; River Gee County)

Just days before the majority of the interviews were conducted, President Weah held the *Annual presidential speech to the national legislature of Liberia* (Front Page Africa, 2019). Various respondents wanted to talk about this speech by the president during the interviews, as the speech is supposed to, every year, address the current state of affairs in the country, good and bad. Many respondents felt very disappointed, angry and frustrated because the president did not say one single word about the drug issue and all the other issues which the drugs bring to the communities. The fact that the president did not talk about the second largest challenge in the grassroots' everyday life led to feelings of not being prioritized. In effect, the gap between the local and the government continues to grow. The issue of the drugs has, according to all focus groups, increased during the last years and are continuing to increase and so are the issues which the drugs bring.

The drugs issue might from an outside perspective be perceived as 'a smaller issue' but this study argues for the need to see the immediate issues which have the largest effect on the grassroots, in relation to the structural concerns (Lederach, 1997). Where the drug issues are symptoms of several root causes to conflict, such as poverty, lack of education and job, as well as lack of rehabilitation after the war for many child soldiers.

The need to be context sensitive

The critique against the Liberian government as well as the international actors, having the wrong prioritizations and lack of inclusion, according to the respondents, steered the discussions towards democracy and elections, and further towards the need to see the specific context of Liberia.

In the focus groups carried out with *local employees at NGOs* and with the *student at the Kofi Annan Peace Institute*, it was brought up that, the fact that Liberia has had democratic elections is very important. The issue is that democratic elections needs to have a democratic system, in order to fulfill its purpose; establishing the rule of the people by the people (Lindberg, 2006, p. 1). The respondents in these four focus groups argued that the democratic system needs to include education and information, which according to them, is lacking in Liberia. The respondent's knowledge of the high level of illiteracy together with the fact that many cannot afford any kind of education, is a vast issue in relation to getting election information. As well as the issue of people being "desperate and poor", according to the respondents, which leads to that the people votes are easily "bought".

*"Democracy have failed us ... I say that because in order to exercise a free vote , or a free representation of yourself for a choice, you have to first understand that choice you are making and in that way you are not easily gullible or presided, and you place more value on that vote that you are making. But because, in my mind, the education was not prioritized for many years for a large part of the population, it came to show in the elections ... and that is a continues issue for democracy."*

(Men; Kofi Annan inst.)

One respondent at the *Kofi Annan Institute* brought up the possibility that it might more dangerous if the population feels that "democracy has failed us" then it would be as if Liberia should not have free elections until people are ready to make free voting. The respondent continued to explain that he does not see voting as free if there is not enough information for the people who should vote. As a result, there is no way for illiterate people to gain information or if there is better education so people understand what they are voting for. It may be easy for the Liberian government to say that they have democratic elections, where everyone can vote and where they follow the election results, but if people are not given the chance to secure education and information then the elections are not really democratic.

Rather, they are an “easy way” to get international support and legitimacy for the government (Ndulo & Mamoudou, 2016, p. 210).

Again, the issue of unmet expectations was coming into the discussion where peoples’ expectations of the democratic election have been high, but stayed unmet, since the root causes of war still persist even after getting the democratically elected president into power. This is especially supported by the respondents in the rural areas where they stated that they feel misled, because they used their democratic vote and got the president they voted for, but still their lives are not better. They feel like democracy did not give them what they expected. The data brings up interesting issues, where researchers on democracy such as Stefan Lindberg, argues that even if democratic elections are not free and fair, it will in the long run lead to a more democratic country (Lindberg, 2006, p. 146). Even if that might be correct the issue in the case of Liberia seems to be that people might not be ready to wait. The unmet expectations, together with the grievances of the persistent root causes of war, might together lead to incentives to change the status quo with undemocratic means, rather than wait for the process to become more democratic at least for the groups in society which are not seeing a positive change over this longer period of time (Davenport et al., 2018)

Further, the data can also point to the need to actually have a democratic system substantiate the elections, giving people the chance to have ‘realistic expectations’ built on information and education about democratic elections. This would possibly lessen the issues of unmet expectations leading, together with other grievances, to incentives to change status quo with violence. Several of the respondents brought up the need to put the elections in a Liberian context, where the history and experiences of the Liberian population will affect the voting as well as the expectations on the elections. The lack of education and information, together with the harsh living conditions, will result in, according to the respondents, that the grassroots voting are determined by aspects in their lives which they do not have power over.

When assessing ongoing peacebuilding processes, democracy and holding elections are common indicators, together with the time which has passed without relapse into violence (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 184). However, in line with Davenport, Regan and Melander, this study shows that time as an aspect of peace, might not be informative about the peacebuilding process in post-conflict counties which have suffered from intrastate conflicts (Davenport et al. 2018, p. 184). International actors often focus on single events such as peace agreements

and elections, therefore it becomes a focus on a single action which have dichotomous outcome (Davenport et al., 2018, p. 188-189) of succeeding or not. This study argues that peace is not a dichotomous outcome, rather it is an infinitely process, which reflect a broad outset of outcomes and practices (ibid). Where peace does not start or end with an election being held or a UN battalion being removed (Lederach, 1997, p. 94).

The question ‘whose peace’ is an important question in today’s peacebuilding and peace assessment field. Where the peace might often be designed in a certain way which is appreciated from the outside actors, hence the international actors and the elite where democratic elections, free markets, and environmental aspects might be at the top of the agenda. The external goals might be more prioritized than what peace actually is expected to look like from the inside and how peace should be designed based on the majority of the people affected by the peace (Lederach & Appleby, 2010). For example, some focus groups discussed that the international perspective of Madame Sirleaf was often very positive, she was the first female African president, the outside perspective of a female president in a country surviving a brutal civil war did not have any space for hearing the local views.

*“We made transition, a transition that was heard through most of the world but coming into the transition there were two perspectives. One was the international perspective of what Madame Sirleaf had done, as far as the international community thought that Madame Sirleaf did an excellent job, but the second perspective, which was not heard, was domestically, where we witnessed a lot of issues, such corruption”.*

(Men; Kofi Annan Peace Inst.)

In line with Lederach’s “peace constituency” the study argues that the context matters, where each specific setting, in this case Liberia, needs to be taken into consideration. The international community needs to adopt a mind-set which focuses on empowering the resources and mechanisms which exists within the local context in order to build sustainable peace (Lederach, 1997, p. 95).

*“If you give me a book, you should have done an assessment to make sure I can read it.”*

(Women; Kofi Annan Peace int.)

*“Like today you are here and asking us what we think, and they should have done the same, we could have sat down and talked. They only went to the high up, to the government and talked with them, but not with us. Our government do not respect us the citizens. They continue saying that Liberia has so much resources so if we could have trusted our government, we would never continue to ask the international community for money and food.”*

(Men; Grand Bassa County)

## Empirical implications of the findings

In this last part of the *result and analyze chapter* the analytical dimensions: *expectations*, *communication* and *power*, which have been presented and analyzed throughout this chapter will be briefly summarized which is the answer to the three sub-research questions.

Thereafter, a discussion about the main empirical implications of the findings will follow. Lastly, the analysis will lead to the assessment of Liberia’s current stage of peace and will be illustrated in a peace continuum.

### Expectations, Communication and Power

***Expectations:*** This term aims to detect the discrepancies between what kind of peace is expected and the kind of peace which is experienced. The empirical data clearly shows that there is a large discrepancy between the expected and the experienced peace for the common population in Liberia today. Further, the study argues that since the peace expectations from the respondents primarily consists of basic human needs such as food, safety and health care, it results in a more extensive effect on the respondents’ life when these expectations are not met. Therefore, when the peace expectations go unaddressed on the most basic level, it will create stronger grievances with stronger incentives for change. Hence, affected people are easily mobilized in order to change status quo, possibly resorting to undemocratic or violent means.

***Communication:*** This term aims to detect which groups have a voice in the peace process, further, what and how the government and decision makers are communicating to the grassroots. The empirical data shows that there is both a lack of communication between the grassroots and the government, but also a lack of follow-up on the communication, for example on decisions being taken by the government. Communication is the ‘power of

knowing', and if there is a lack of communication, it results in a feeling of exclusion. Exclusion and feelings of being uninformed decreases the trust towards the state and decision makers, which the empirical data clearly states are what has happened in Liberia. Exclusion and lack of trust go hand in hand and are common root causes to conflict. Further the feeling and perception of inclusion, is fundamental for creating a we-ness on a national level, a feeling of unity in order to have a shared vision for the future of the country. According to the common population, this is missing in Liberia today. The common identity and the shared vision for the future is the basis for creating a long-term peace as well as democratizing a country and this is, based on the responses from the grassroots, a large issue for Liberia today.

**Power:** This term aims to detect whose peace is present in the country; is the peace designed to fit into the international standard or is the peace created and adopted for the local population living in the country? Power is, in this study, argued to be the right of a local ownership over the peace process, where the locals needs to feel that they are part of the process, especially in relation to prioritizations in the field of development and peacebuilding. The data shows that the prioritization in the peacebuilding processes in Liberia are having the 'wrong' prioritization in relation to the reality of the grassroots. Further, the discussion about power demonstrated the need to be context sensitive and for the international community to be able to question their normative approaches for assessing and building peace.

#### Peace as a continuum

This study also relates to a larger discussion about how to assess peace. First, the study shows that the peace scale which today is most often used, Johan Galtung's definition (1969); ranging from *negative* to *positive peace*, needs to be developed. Based on the empirical findings in this study, there should be a range from *genocide/war* to *positive peace*, because in the case of Liberia, the country has not fully reached a *negative peace*. Instead, Liberia is somewhere in between *active conflict* and *negative peace*. This is based on the experiences of continued violence, sexual and gender-based violence, lack of security as well as the root causes of war still directly affecting the everyday life of the respondents. As well as the fact that most of the respondents' state that the difference between the period of the war and the current peace are minimal or insignificant.

Secondly, the study has demonstrated the need for a more *fine-grained scale of peace*, as the data shows that the nuances between war and peace are often difficult to detect. Therefore,



war and peace should not be considered as widely separate dichotomous concepts, rather interlinked concept moving along a continuum. Today the most common form of war is civil war and internal conflicts, and it is here that the lines between war and peace are blurred (Allansson, Melander & Themnér, 2017, p. 576). This is especially true for the grassroots living in the post-conflict context, where the root causes to Liberia's civil war, are still present after the official end of the conflict. All the respondents, in all focus groups, agreed that the root causes to the civil war are still present in Liberia today including lack of food, poverty, corruption in politics and the elite, as well as 'new issues' which have arisen after the peace agreement was signed such as an increased drug use, high criminality, PTSD and land disputes. The presence of the root causes and the similarities between war and peace for the grassroots emphasizes the need to not view war and peace as separate concepts. This result strengthens the theory of seeing peace as more fluid along a continuum (Davenport, Regan & Melander, p. 84). This needs to be taken into consideration also when studying peace on a theoretical level.

Thirdly, the empirical data reveals how the lack of context sensitivity and a local ownership over the peace process results in prioritizations done by the international actors and government which might not be rooted in the local reality. When the local inclusion in peacebuilding does not move beyond the government or formalized institutions, the peace which is established can be argued to be irrelevant to the majority population (Öjendal et al., 2017, p. 82). When the everyday local issues are not being prioritized and the majority population are not included in the peacebuilding process, it can be argued that many of the root causes of the civil war are largely undressed. (Öjendal et al., 2017, p. 82). This is what the respondents have expressed as their main fear for the future and the main reason their peace expectations have not been met.

#### The assessment of Liberia's peace

The peace scale below ranges *from genocide/war to positive peace*, and the distance between *genocide/war* and *negative peace* are not that long, to illustrate how near the stages of *genocide/war* and *negative peace* can be if the root causes to war are not solved. Liberia ended the war in 2003 and then started to move towards a *negative peace*. A *negative peace* was reached during Madame Sirleaf, the former president's first term according to the empirical data, but since then, starting during Madame Sirleaf's second term, there has been a negative development for the citizens. The overwhelming majority of the respondent's states

that the last year, 2018-2019, with the new President Weah, has been the worst year since the war ended, and many even say that it was better before the war than it is today. Many describe rapid negative changes, which have affected the grassroots population in the whole country. Hence, there has been a fast deterioration, within the grassroots community and a reversal in the overall peace process based on the grassroots own assessment and experiences.

*“We have had a new government for one year and what I have seen during these last 12 months is worse than I have ever seen. People know and see openly wrong things going on, glaringly, but people do not do anything. Some people even go and advocate for these things even if they know it is wrong. Because they are benefiting from it. We are now hitting rock bottom! It is getting worse than ever.”*

(Women; NGO:s)

*“Because during Madame Sirleaf’s period we used to say that we have fragile peace but coming into this year I do not even now what we call it. If it was fragile then, it is even more fragile now. We are seeing everyday sights of a police state emerging, we are seeing how the press is being attacked, where funds are walking out of the bank, where the poverty, the greatest form of violence, is at an all-time high.”*

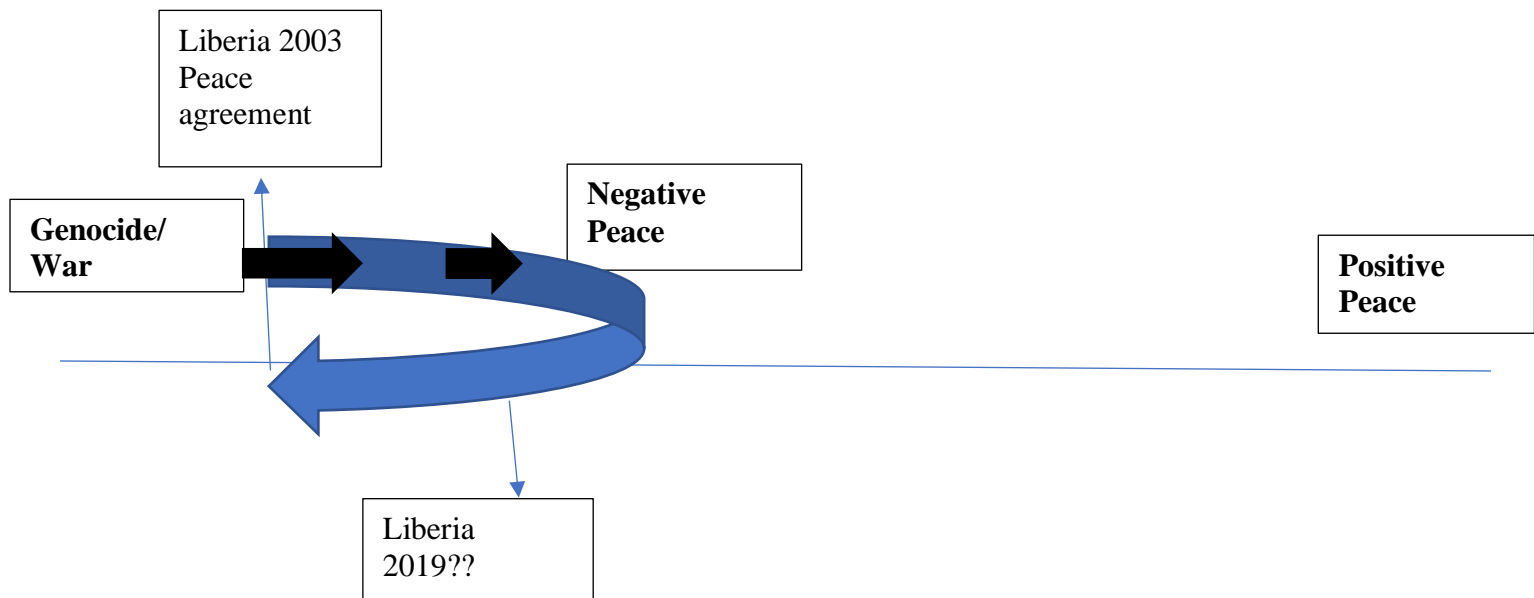
(Men; Kofi Annan Inst.)

*“If this continues, it will be hard to just survive in Liberia. “*

(Women; Grad Bassa County)

This peace assessment based on the grassroots population in this study, illustrating the above explained development since the end of the civil war in 2003. The study recognizes the importance to further complement this part of a continuum with the same studies done on other levels in Liberian society in order to get a comprehensive picture of the current peace. This assessment from the grassroots will stand in contradiction to the global assessment from the Global Peace Index, which places Liberia on a high level of peace (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018). The respondents themselves expressed the development, which is illustrated in the continuum, where they could clearly see a negative progress and a recess in peace process since 2003. By using the empirical data and the idea of seeing peace as a continuum, we can place Liberia’s current state of peace on a continuum and recognize that

there will be a large discrepancy of peace existing between the opposing concepts of war and peace.



## Conclusion

The overarching research question for this study has been: *How is peace experienced by the grassroots population and how does a context sensitive framework for analyzing peace processes contrast with international measures?*

The experiences of peace from the grassroots population has been discussed through the analytical chapter, the main findings have been presented in the empirical implications where the assessment of Liberia's current peace is presented based upon the grassroots experiences of peace. To summarize, this study argues that in order to create an understanding for how peace is experienced by the grassroots population we need to look at the dimensions of *expectations*, *power* and *communication*, since this is what the grassroots population themselves have centered around in the discussions of peace.

This study has by letting the collected data steer, and further, combined with extracted parts from previous research, reached a conclusion that contemporary assessments of peacebuilding processes need a *relationship-focused* way of assessing peace. A relationship-focused assessment includes questions about shared identity and a common vision for the future, and where the local context of relations and inclusiveness are taken into consideration. Further, where issues which might be perceived as “secondary issues” in the eyes of the international community, such as drug use in the case of Liberia, has to be seen from the perspective of the people living with the issues. Issues which might otherwise be missed in the large and standardized assessment done by international interveners, and further, if ignored, could lead to the strengthening of exclusion and larger grievances. In the long run they could be mobilized and lead to relapses of conflict or hinder the overall peacebuilding process.

This study shows that a social cohesion is significantly important for the grassroots population who are most affected by peace or lack thereof. If there are no operational qualitative measures for assessing peace, there is great risk that the complexity of the social world is reduced to what can only be quantitatively measured, thus ignoring what this study argues is an important aspect of long-lasting peace, such as social cohesion (Ramsbotham et al., 2016, p. 74). The empirical data shows that we should not dismiss this form of ‘softer’ indicators of social cohesion, a feeling of we-ness, identity etc. These are factors which drive human behavior and in the reality of today’s conflicts, it is aspects of exclusion, lack of unity and trust which are the basis on which grievances are exploited, leading to a recess in the peacebuilding process and further possibly to civil war.

After having created an understanding for how peace is experienced by the grassroots, it is possible to see how the grassroots’ experiences contrasts to international measures. The result from the qualitative assessment of peace in this study is exceptionally different from the international quantitative assessment. *The Global Peace Index’s* ranking of Liberia in the same peace category as Sweden (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018) is clearly not represented in the experiences and perception of peace from the grassroots in Liberia. The global measures point towards an overwhelming positive development for Liberia, whereby the experiences of peace from the grassroots population shows a deterring process during the last year in the lives of the respondents. This result strengthens the argument by this study, that the today leading quantitative approach when assessing peace globally, is problematic due to the risk of extrapolating large data across very different countries and contexts (Diehl,

2016, p. 1), which results in categories of peace which are not corresponding with reality. Further the result shows that it is problematic when the majority of the population, hence the grassroots, in the case of Liberia (Öjendal et al., 2017, p. 81), are excluded from being a part of assessing peace and creating the measures to be used for studying and determining their reality.

The assessment of the peacebuilding process from the grassroots are more in line with the development assessment from *Human Development Index* (UNDP, 2018). The relationship between development and peace is very clear in the experiences from the grassroots. The fact that the assessment of peace and the assessment of development stands in direct contradiction of each other in the global measures creates worrisome questions about the possible lack of understanding from outside actors of the local reality. If this is not changed it will continue to be a large discrepancy between both the different globally accepted ways of assessing peace, like the *Global Peace Index* and *Human development Index*, but also between the global assessment and the reality of the people.

#### The contrasts between a context sensitive framework and international measures

When having a deeper understanding of the grassroots' experiences of peace and how the experiences of peace contrast to the global measures, this study shows that it is important to, at least partly, have an approach to assess peace where the empirical reality steers the development of the framework and measures to use in the specific context, instead of using predetermined tick boxes. Otherwise the local nuances might be missed and in the case of contemporary conflicts, the nuances, which for an outside actor may be seen as insignificant, might be growing grievances as a consequence of structural or deep-rooted injustices.

In the case of Liberia, the globally defined indicators of peace do not correspond with what the grassroots population would use as indicators of their reality. The lack of local ownership over the peacebuilding process results in prioritizations done by international actors and government, which are not rooted in the local Liberian reality of the grassroots. The peace which is established and further quantitatively generalized in global measures, can therefore be argued to be irrelevant for the majority of the population. When the everyday local issues are not being prioritized and the majority population is not included in the peacebuilding process this study shows that it leaves many of the root causes of the civil war largely unaddressed.

The local nuances are important in order to get a peacebuilding process which actually represents the reality of the majority population, but also in order to capture tensions and risks of relapses into violence. War and peace for the people living in the post-conflict reality, are not dichotomies in a process. Instead, the differences between war and peace are rather small nuances moving back and forth in the everyday life of the grassroots.

By acknowledging that a great diversity and complexity of peace between the dichotomies of war and peace exists, it is possible for us to differentiate between different levels of peace. Hence, we see the difference between the peace in Liberia and the peace in Sweden, but also between the peace experienced at the grassroots level in Liberia and at the intermediate or elite level in Liberia. This will make it easier to create a better understanding of why specific countries can or cannot reach a more comprehensive long-term peace and develop how we can best approach these peacebuilding processes

#### The context sensitive analytical framework for assessing ongoing peace processes

The aim of this study was to be an initial step in addressing the current lack of an analytical framework for assessing peace processes, arguing that there is a need for a framework which derive from the grassroots populations' experiences of peace and is both qualitative and operational. After having created a deeper understanding for the grassroots' experiences of peace in today's ongoing peace process, this study has managed to develop an analytical framework which, with a greater context sensitivity, can operationally assess the ongoing peace process in Liberia. The framework which is presented below has with a qualitative approach derived from the grassroots population's own experiences of peace. Further the empirical data has steered the choice and use of the theoretical framework which has enhanced the empirical data, including extracted parts of theories from Aggestam and Strömbom (2013), Davenport (2018) and Lederach (1997).

The analytical framework consists of three main analytical dimensions, *expectations*, *power* and *communication*, which has been presented in the analytical chapter. Further, the framework includes several sub-dimensions, which have derived through the coding process together with the theoretical framework, where some dimensions have a theoretical foundation, and some are solely empirical. This framework is, argued by this study, to contain

key operational measures to include and consider in order to get an empirical basis which better can analyze ongoing peacebuilding processes.

### **The analytical framework:**

**Expectations:** What are the grassroots' peace expectations?

- What discrepancies exist between the expected peace and experienced peace?
- What are the everyday consequences of the unmet peace expectations for the people?
- Do the grassroots have incentives to change the status quo? If so, based on what?
- *Which* peace is present?

**Communication:** How is the communication between the grassroots and the government?

- *Who* has a voice in the peace process?
- *What* and *how* is communicated to the grassroots?
- Is there a perception of inclusion, working as a country with a common future?
- Can the grassroots relate to a shared identity with the decision-makers and the overall population?

**Power:** Do the grassroots have power over the peace process?

- *Whose* peace is established in the country?
- Is there local ownership over the peace process?
- Who sets the agenda and prioritization for the peace process?
- Is there a context sensitivity in relation to international interveners in the peace process?

## **Further research**

This study gives a qualitative indication of where future research needs to continue, and where there is a lack of operational measures for assessing peacebuilding processes qualitatively, as well as a lack of process which lets the empirical data steer the creating of the measures to be used. This study still recognizes that there needs to be further studies done in order to continue this study, where other post-conflict cases should be assessed in a similar way in order to strengthen the support for this kind of findings. This study has been limited to the grassroots level which was a consciously taken choice. Nevertheless, this study recognizes

the need to carry out similarly conducted research on the other levels in society, such as intermediate and elite levels. This study acknowledges that it is most likely that the conclusions and the assessment of peace would have been different if the study were carried out on the intermediate and elite levels. The argument that the conclusions are different, because of the focus on the grassroots, have been a main argument and motivation to actually focus on the grassroots.

This study would like future research to create an operational qualitative framework for assessing ongoing peacebuilding process which have all levels of society included. Where, similar to this study the other social levels' empirical data would steer the development of the framework. Lastly, future research should combine the qualitative analytical framework with quantitative systematic evaluation.



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## Appendix 1

### **Interview Guide**

#### **Introduction**

I will present myself and the research very briefly and ask for verbal consent (including consent for voice recorder and inform about anonymity)

Identification of the respondents in the focus group

( age, gender, education level, occupation, place of residence)

- Can you first tell me a bit about yourself?
- What do you work with?
- From what part of the country are you?

#### **Ways in which the life of the respondents has changed during the peace process**

- What has changed in your life since the peace agreement in 2003 was signed?
  - Your working/education situation?
  - Your living situation?
  - Your standard in life (friends, travels, food, access to healthcare etc.)
- What has not changed in your life since the peace agreement was signed which you think has to change?

#### **Peace expectations**

- What were your expectations on peace, in 2003 when the peace agreement was signed? (What did you hope would happen?)
  - Did you have expectations on your living situation, on your working/ education situation?
  - Expectations on the political environment?
  - Healthcare/ access to governmental facilities?
- What are your peace expectations today? / Have your expectations on peace changed during these 15 years?
- What is peace for you?
  - Is Liberia at peace today? How would you describe Liberia's peace today?

#### **Perceived challenges to peace and the peace process**

- What do you think is the biggest challenges to peace in Liberia today? (is it the living situation, the work, the education, the media, the political situation, violence, criminality)
- What do you think will happen in the future for Liberia? (Do you think the challenges discussed above will change?)

- How do you imagine a new Liberia to look like? (are you curious about the future?)
- Do you think people have incentives for change their current state of living? Even if they cannot, because of maybe money or power, do you think people want to create change in the country?
- If you think there are challenges to Liberians peace today, are they related to the root causes of the civil war or are they new challenges or rather “new” challenges?

### **Perceptions of community and reconciliation**

- Do you feel that the community you live in and the population of Liberia is working towards a united goal?
- Conflicting parties ‘relationships before and after the civil war: do they still live on and affect everyday life or the society as a whole?
- Has there been reconciliation between groups? (*the discussion regarding the criminal war court and lack of reconciliation has been highlighted last month’s internationally*)
- Do you think all people in Liberia have the same rights and possibilities? /if not should they?
- What do you work for/ what is your motivation in your work and in your life?
- What do you think makes people work for a common future and not only for today (the day to day mentality)?

### **Perceptions of international actors and the peacebuilding process**

- Have you been asked to give inputs or participate in formulating how the peace should be built in Liberia?  
If, yes, how?  
If no, how do you feel about that?
- Are you actively doing something which you think leads to more peace?
- What, according to you, creates peace?
- Have there been any risk for relapsing into violence after the peace agreement was signed 2003?
- What role do you think the international community should have in Liberia?

- What do you think is the main misperceptions that the international community have when they asses the peace process in Liberia?
- Do you think that the international actors in Liberia are/ have been successful in terms of peace? Why/ why not?
- Do you think that the international actors themselves see their activities and involvement in Liberia s as successful?
- Do you trust the institutions in Liberia today? Do you feel they have your best interest in mind?
- How is trust restored in public institutions and in leaders who are supposed to serve after a civil war?
- What do you think makes people willing to the risk of trusting when they before have been misguided/ cheated?

**Ending the interview:**

Is there anything else you would like to clarify or share with me before the interview finishes?

Thank you!