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Creating an International Network of Democracy Builders Volume 2

Liberia: Assessing the Conditions for Liberal Democracy in a Postconflict State

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Executive Summary

Liberia (from the Latin for *free*) is Africa's oldest republic, founded in 1847. But the path to liberty for Liberians has been onerous, with some waxing and much waning of political freedoms, periodic flirtations with democracy and considerable horrors under Liberian warlord rule and civil war. A UN-sanctioned intervention in 2003 saw the end of Liberia's civil war, and the international community continues, since 2003, with efforts in rebuilding the infrastructure and socio-political support.

Post-conflict reconstruction efforts unites international, governmental and non-governmental agencies in conflict-prevention, peace-building, economic development, human security and development, good governance promotion and democratic development programs, all of which overlap. Success or failure in one field will often impact others, but equally possible is the misinterpretation of where successes have actually occurred; in Liberia, significant success in conflict-prevention and disarmament is coterminous with the presence of the UN peacekeeping force deployed at the end of the horrific civil war in 2003, there is promise in the country's single, albeit very hopeful, election and a dramatic reduction in open violence, but can we assume that the country is ripe for democracy? If so, upon what criteria?

The Perlin Model, established by George Perlin of Queen's University, is composed, in part, of a detailed set of conditions that are essential and integral to the establishment of a liberal-democracy and that facilitate the development of a liberal-democracy. The model provides a comprehensive framework enabling the assessment of complex post-war environments in

order to determine the presence or lack of liberal-democratic conditions.¹ The model is a tool by which the field worker, political analyst or aid donor is assisted in the determination of where to best focus resources. In applying the Perlin framework to an analysis of post-2003 Liberia, this paper demonstrates the model's utility; the framework is of particular value in cases of competing prognoses, which can muddy prospects for international consensus on the merits of various aid alternatives. An assessment of essential conditions in Liberia, including levels of political engagement, democratic political culture and civil society, as well as such facilitating conditions as social stratification, market economy functionality, and political community cohesion, indicates that Liberia has not met all or most of the conditions to achieve and sustain a liberal democracy. Liberia held a free and fair election in 2005 that was met with great enthusiasm by the electorate,² and this event signifies a level of political engagement amongst Liberians, which is promising for democracy in Liberia, but several requirements (an engaged and informed citizenry, state elites mindful of the limits of their authority, an active civil society) are starting to be realized but may not be sustainable without (currently significant) international troop presence and financial aid. Ultimately, such facilitating conditions as a large middle class and a functioning market economy have yet to develop. The following assessment provides both a set of Liberia-specific targets for improvement and a transferable method for assessing other post-conflict scenarios.

¹ See Appendix I.

² See Appendix III for details of public opinion on the election and prospects for future voter participation.

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The Centre owes a debt of thanks to its research partners in Liberia, including the Sua Foundation, Inc., the Department of Political Science at the University of Liberia and the Office of the Superintendent for Nimba County. Thanks particularly to the research team: Reverend Darigbe LeRoy Sua, Dr. Dangbe W. Sua, Mr. Thomas Weber and Mr. Sherman Tarnue. As this study makes painfully clear, Liberia has endured decades of violence and destruction, and the ability of our partners in Liberia to carry out a social science survey is a hopeful indication that Liberia has indeed turned a corner.

The approach of the Centre for the Study of Democracy is to recruit local experts in our partner countries and then pair them with scholars, fellows, or research assistants of the Centre. Timothy Andrews Sayle, a historian, has made a great contribution to the project as a whole, not least being his succinct and useful history of the recent Liberian conflict.

Valerie Ashford, Research Coordinator at CSD, has contributed an interesting paper that examines the victory of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf through the lens of Diaspora politics. Diasporas and expatriates can have a large affect their former home nations; often diasporas are a problem in that they are more hardline on issues than those in their homelands who deal with them daily. But Diasporas can equally play a positive role when they take the experience of democracy and the rule of law from their new homes and promote these values in their old. Ms. Ashford has written about one such positive experience when Liberia's two leading candidates for president were both members of the Diaspora. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf made history by becoming the first woman president elected in Africa - her victory is of tremendous of interest not only because of her gender but because it is a vivid example of the potential affect of Diaspora on world affairs.

We are indebted to Ms. Ashford for articulating this dimension of the Liberia case so well.

Special thanks to Ging Wong for his management of this project, to Julie Burch for successfully coordinating this truly international project.

Thomas S. Axworthy

Chair, Centre for the Study of Democracy

Acronyms

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
ACS	American Colonization Society
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
EC	European Community
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitory Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FDD	Forces for the Defense of Democracy
GEMAP	Governance and Economic Management Program
IECOM	Independent Elections Commission
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SMC	Standing Mediation Committee
UN	United Nations
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
U.S.	United States

Introduction

The Republic of Liberia, an independent state since 1847, was founded on great promise. Established in 1822 by the American Colonization Society as a settlement for freed black Americans, the country has paradoxically evoked great hope and deep suffering in its citizens. Liberia's natural endowment of iron ore, timber, gold, diamond and rubber offers the hope of broad prosperity, but has also 'cursed' Liberia by serving as a tool for elites' aggrandizement and by generating violent conflict.³ Liberia's political model, based upon the presidential republican system of the US, promised opportunity for black Americans denied political opportunity elsewhere. Somewhat ironically, Americo-Liberian settlers did not extend political opportunity to the indigenous Africans of Liberia's territory; in fact, Liberian presidents have systematically centralized power in their own offices, effectively eviscerating alternative political and bureaucratic branches. The structural faults apparent in a political system that is "not designed to accommodate the will of the majority of its population"⁴ and is prone to the accumulation of power in one office were exacerbated by greed for easily monopolized natural resource wealth. Disproportionate aggregations of power and wealth have occurred, which bar a key condition of the Perlin model of democratic development. The combination of an all-powerful Presidency with vast material resources drove Liberia to violent conflict from 1989 through 2003. This fifteen- year period saw forms and degrees of violence surpassing even earlier horrors of modern conflict, including child soldiers,⁵ deliberate atrocities against civilians, unrestrained brutality that blurred any distinction

³ Doyle, Mark. (22 August 2007). "'Curse' of Liberia's Resources." *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6958883.stm>. Retrieved August 2008.

⁴ Levitt, Jeremy I. (2005). *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia*. North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press. p 257.

⁵ Achvarina, Vera and Reich, Simon F. (Summer 2006). "No Place to Hide: Refugees, Displaced Persons, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers." *International Security*. Vol. 31. No. 1.

between gangs and armies,⁶ violence that destabilized Liberia's neighbor states,⁷ and the displacement of almost one third of Liberia's entire population.⁸

Incredibly, despite the horrors faced by Liberians and the complete collapse of their state, the "Election Watch" of the *Journal of Democracy* reported in its January 2006 issue that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had won a presidential runoff in November, 2005,⁹ which, according to international observers was a free and fair election, with one analyst proclaiming that it was "without doubt ...by far the freest and fairest election that Liberia has ever seen."¹⁰ Liberia's civil wars are partly a function of the country's origins,¹¹ and so Liberia's democratic development has been motivated in part as well by reaction to the vicious wars that have plagued its citizens. Liberia's history, particularly since the end of the Second World War, is rife with impediments to political freedom, but does nonetheless exhibit a number of the essential elements necessary for any successful transition to democracy.

⁶ Sawyer, Amos. (2005). *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia*. London: Lynne Reinner Publishing. p 129.

⁷ International Crisis Group [Hereafter ICG]. (30 April 2003). "Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm." *ICG Africa Report No. 62*. pp 1-55.

⁸ Stears, Brooke K. and Gompert, David C. (June 2007). "Making Liberia Safe Through Comprehensive Security-Sector Reform." *Policy Insight* (Pardee RAND Graduate School. Vol. 1. No. 3. p 1.

⁹ "Election Watch: Election Results – September-December 2005 (2006)." *Journal of Democracy*. Volume 17. No. 1. pp 178-179.

¹⁰ Harris, David. (2006). "Liberia 2005: an unusual African post-conflict election." *Journal of Modern African Studies*. Volume 44. No. 3. p 378.

¹¹ Morgan, E. Philip. (January 2006). "Liberia and the Fate of Interim Government in the Regional Vortex of West Africa." *Strategic Insights*. Volume V. Issue 1 p 2.

Liberia's Beginnings

Although founded not as an independent nation, but as quasi-colony of the American Colonization Society (ACS,) Americo-Liberians fairly immediately chose to declare sovereignty to protect themselves from British or French intrusion,¹² although with no guarantee of protection or any colonial relationship with the US. The new nation was now composed of Americo-Liberian settlers and seventeen ethnic groups.¹³ For most of its history since, Liberia has been dominated politically and exploited economically by an Americo-Liberian elite.¹⁴ This oligarchic rule created resentment in and division among indigenous Liberians; stratification separated ethnic groups and economic classes. According to Jeremy Levitt, the autocratic and oligarchic political system established by the ACS in 1822 “permanently shaped the sociopolitical order responsible for the institutionalization of ethno-political conflict” between Americo-Liberian settlers and indigenous Liberian groups from 1822 through 1980.¹⁵

In 1980, a military coup ended the reign of the Americo-Liberian oligarchy, and led to vicious civil wars from which democracy has only begun to emerge since 2005. The fall of Americo-Liberian dominance is defined in large measure by the two final Americo-Liberian presidents, William Vacanarat Shadrach Tubman, who ruled from 1944 until his death in 1971, and William Richard Tolbert, Jr., who ruled until he was overthrown and later executed by non-commissioned officers in 1980.

¹² Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 13.

¹³ Howe, Herbert M. (2001). *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States*. London: Lynne Reinner Publishers. p 131.

¹⁴ Ibid p 132.

¹⁵ Levitt. *The Evolution of Deadly Conflict in Liberia*. p 257.

From World War Two until Military Coup: Presidents Tubman & Tolbert

For all its horrors, the Second World War had a positive economic impact on Liberia. Liberian natural resources essential to the Allied war effort, and the use of Liberia's facilities for the transport of war material brought Liberia into the international market. Through concessions, partnerships and a variety of agreements, Liberian President William Tubman brought the revenue from Liberia's natural resources under the control of his office, effectively centralizing economic power and expanding the potential for a patronage network.¹⁶ Tubman, with support from the US government, developed the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL,) with officer ranks staffed almost entirely by Americo-Liberians.¹⁷ The AFL and related security branches established an infamous security network which, in addition to patronage and bribery of indigenous chiefs, established a cult of personality around the president.¹⁸

West Africa faced significant change during Tubman's 1944-1971 reign, forcing him to gradually expand Liberia's political structures in accordance with the freedoms and independence gained by Liberia's neighbours.¹⁹ Tubman undertook various constitutional reforms throughout the mid 1960's. Although Liberia remained an autocratic one-party state, new county jurisdictions were established, and the access to education was greatly increased. Intergration of country jurisdictions, and patronage based on his access to the nation's wealth enabled Tubman to begin eroding the dominance of the Americo-Liberian elite.²⁰ By the time of Tubman's death in 1971, post-WWII economic gains and increased political opportunities

¹⁶ Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 15.

¹⁷ Gompert, David C., Olga Olikier, Brooke Stearns, Keith Crane, and Jack K. Riley. (2007). *Making Liberia Safer: Transformation of the National Security Sector*. California: RAND Corporation. p 5.

¹⁸ Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. pp 15-16.

¹⁹ Morgan. "Liberia and the Fate of Interim Government in the Regional Vortex of West Africa." p 2.

²⁰ Harris, David. (1999). "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president: how Charles Taylor won the 1997 Liberian elections." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 37. no. 3. p 432.

for indigenous Liberians fostered high expectations among Liberians for their future; Amos Sawyer claims the Tubman changes “energized the quest by ordinary people for greater democratization and more meaningful participation in the political decision-making process.”²¹ These expectations subsequently fell on the shoulders of Vice-President turned President William Tolbert.

Tolbert further increased access to education, disabled some of the Americo-Liberian patronage system, and promoted indigenous Africans, including future president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf,²² but, threatened by challenges to their status, Americo-Liberians withdrew their support, and Tolbert was unable to build a political base as stable as Tubman’s had been.²³ The decline in commodity prices in the late 1970’s,²⁴ missed opportunities to increase democratic political participation,²⁵ and a poor relationship with the AFL conspired to bring Tolbert’s presidency – and life – to a violent end.

What occurred in Liberia under Tolbert’s reign illustrates the theory of relative deprivation. Ted Robert Gurr notes that relative deprivation occurs as the result of a perceived discrepancy between a population’s value expectations and their value capabilities.²⁶ Value expectations are the desired conditions of a population, and value capabilities are the positions believed by the population to be attainable.²⁷ Liberia suffered “progressive deprivation” – the state of a population’s value expectations rising without correlative

²¹ Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 16.

²² Adebajo, Adekeye. (2002). *Liberia’s Civil War: Nigeria, ECOMOG, and Regional Security in West Africa*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers. p 24, Harris. “From ‘warlord’ to ‘democratic’ president.” p 432, and Gompert et al. *Making Liberia Safer: Transformation of the National Security Sector*. p 5.

²³ Sawyer, Amos. (2004). “Violent conflicts and governance challenges in West Africa: the case of the Mano river basin area.” *Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 32. No. 3. pp 434-444.

²⁴ Harris. “From ‘warlord’ to ‘democratic’ president.” p 432.

²⁵ Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 17.

²⁶ Gurr, Ted Robert. (1970). *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p 24.

²⁷ Ibid pp 25-7.

increase in their value capability.²⁸ Tubman and Tolbert's reigns saw Liberia gain economically and in socioeconomic infrastructure (health care, education, political opportunity) and consequently, fuelled by the experience of expansion, Liberians continued to expect yet more improvement in their economic and political lives.²⁹ With the 1970's oil crisis, the plummet in commodity prices,³⁰ demands for a multiparty democracy refused,³¹ and a proposed increase of 50% in the price of rice,³² violence and rioting broke out in the country. The Liberian population was denied the value capabilities to meet its limited and reasonable value expectations.

Tolbert's attempts to contain the violence brought about his demise. His efforts to dismantle Americo-Liberian dominance in the AFL officer corps severely hampered the capability of the army, and served to diminish his image of professionalism.³³ He both alienated and over-politicized the AFL by relieving certain officers on charges of disloyalty,³⁴ and by using AFL units to crush student and labour demonstrations.³⁵ The last straw for many AFL soldiers (and the people of Liberia) was Tolbert's decision to use Guinean soldiers against his own rioting citizens, after having declared emergency powers and suspending *habeus corpus*. Sensing the mood of the people and the moribund future of the country, non-commissioned officers from the ranks of the AFL staged a successful *coup d'etat* that resulted in Tolbert's death, and the death many of his associates. Heading the coup was Master-Sergeant Samuel

²⁸ Ibid pp 52-3.

²⁹ Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 16.

³⁰ Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." p 432.

³¹ Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 17.

³² Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 23.

³³ Sawyer. "Violent conflicts and governance challenges in West Africa: the case of the Mano river basin area." pp 443-444.

³⁴ Gompert et al. *Making Liberia Safer: Transformation of the National Security Sector*. p 5.

³⁵ Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 24.

Doe, an indigenous Liberian, who would suspend the constitution and declare himself Head of State.

The Military Regime of Samuel Doe

Samuel Doe's self-appointment as Head of State brought jubilation to Liberia's indigenous population.³⁶ Although the constitution had been suspended, Doe promised elections in 1985, and indigenous Liberians were under the rule of one of their own for the first time. Doe's coup ended a century of Americo-Liberian oligarchy, but, according to Amos Sawyer, instead of exorcising over-centralized and predatory rule, Doe merely changed its character,³⁷ resulting in the ghastly civil war that raged with only brief respites from 1989 to 2003.

As a non-commissioned officer (though quickly self-appointed a general officer,) Doe had few political connections. To remedy this, he quickly consolidated power by politicizing ethnic affiliations.³⁸ Doe was an ethnic *Krahn*, one of Liberia's 17 ethnic minorities. Although constituting only five percent of the population, *Krahns* dominated the military under Doe.³⁹ Doe also reached out to the *Mandingo* population, expanding opportunities for exploitation of economic opportunities until *Mandingos* dominated commerce.⁴⁰ This new patronage system, favouring particular indigenous Liberian groups at the expense of others, including Americo-Liberians and foreigners, was disastrous for the Liberian economy. The potential for inflows of considerable Western capital was lost by presidential favouritism of small local firms, and caused withdrawal of hoped-for major foreign investors.⁴¹ Liberia

³⁶ Ibid p 20.

³⁷ Sawyer. "Violent conflicts and governance challenges in West Africa: the case of the Mano river basin area." p 443.

³⁸ Hoffman, Daniel. (2006). "Despot deposed: Charles Taylor and the challenge of state reconstruction Liberia." In *Legacies of Power: Leadership Change and Former Presidents in African Politics*, edited by Roger Southall and Herring Melber. Chicago: Independent Publishers Group. p 310.

³⁹ Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." p 433.

⁴⁰ Ibid p 433.

⁴¹ Morgan. "Liberia and the Fate of Interim Government in the Regional Vortex of West Africa." p 3.

became newly re-stratified, not through an Americo-Liberia oligarchy but nonetheless at the hands of a minority.

Doe's political roots were in the rural communities of Liberia, and he had no affinity for the institutions or norms of traditional governance in Liberia.⁴² As a result, he could not rely on the established bases of autocratic political power in the country, so his blatant corruption and patronage systems caused estrangement between himself and much of his original base of indigenous support. Civil society, students and journalists peacefully dissented against Doe's policies, but were brutally repressed, in turn driving several aborted coup attempts early in his reign.

The US was originally pleased to have Liberia as an ally against the Soviet Union as the Cold War festered. Throughout Doe's 1980-1989 reign, the US provided over 500 million dollars in aid to a nation numbering only 2.5 million people.⁴³ Very little of this money, if any, made its way to the Liberian public, and much of it was funneled to Doe's private accounts. With the Liberian economy falling anaemic under Doe's corrupt mismanagement, and increasing evidence of crude violations of human rights, the US began to apply pressure on Doe to hold the promised 1985 elections.⁴⁴ Ceding to this pressure, Doe staged a farce of an election in October of that year. Prior to the election, Doe had eliminated his major opponents, disqualifying some and killing others. On the day of the election, Doe gave orders to his soldiers to arrest or flog any citizen insulting him or his chances of victory. At the same time, a judge loyal to Doe threatened the prosecution of any who dared to criticize the election process.⁴⁵ After eliminating most of his major opponents and rigging the vote with loyal

⁴² Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 24.

⁴³ Howe. *Ambiguous Order*. p 130.

⁴⁴ Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." p 433.

⁴⁵ Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 29.

ballot counters, Doe won with a 50.9% share of the vote. David Harris, an expert on Liberian elections, expects that Doe's total was closer to only one quarter of all votes.⁴⁶

Yet another coup attempt followed close on the heels of the clearly fraudulent election; the attempt failed, and Doe ordered a counter-action against the Liberian country home to members of the coup-plotter's ethnicity. In November, 1985, approximately three thousand members of the *Gio* and *Mano* groups were massacred.⁴⁷ These murders were not forgotten by the people of Nimba County, and their anger at Doe would help swell the ranks of another – and final – coup against Doe in 1989.

Liberia's First Civil War

In the last days of 1989, a guerrilla force of 168 men entered Liberia, meaning to end Doe's rule and to seize his power for their leader, Charles Taylor. In earlier days, Doe had hired Taylor as one of many young technocrats brought in to manage the country.⁴⁸ On official Liberian business in America, Taylor had been arrested on charges of embezzlement; he subsequently managed to escape from a US prison. After his escape, Taylor was tutored in the arts of insurrection (in a Libyan training camp used by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi) to prepare operatives to unseat American allies such as Samuel Doe.⁴⁹ Taylor's training was highly successful; by manipulating ethnic rivalries already aggravated by Doe,⁵⁰ by seeking out anti-*Krahn* groups,⁵¹ and by drawing support from Nimba County inhabitants still seething from Doe's 1985 massacre, Taylor's forces swelled from a meager 168-man team to 10,000 fighters by May of 1990.⁵² The US was preoccupied by developments in Eastern

⁴⁶ Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." p 433.

⁴⁷ Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 42.

⁴⁸ Gompert et al. *Making Liberia Safer: Transformation of the National Security Sector*. p 6.

⁴⁹ ICG. (24 April 2002). "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." *ICG Africa Report No. 43*. p 1.

⁵⁰ Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 41.

⁵¹ Howe. *Ambiguous Order*. p 87.

⁵² Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 58.

Europe and in the Middle East, and largely ignored the brewing conflict in Liberia; lack of American assistance to Doe emboldened Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).⁵³ While AFL troops began to crack down against the invaders, lashing out with indiscriminate force, NPFL ranks mushroomed to include Liberian militiamen, farmers, and foreign mercenaries.⁵⁴

Although not yet in control of Liberia's capitol, Monrovia, Taylor declared himself president on 28 July 1990, two months before rebels would kill Doe. Arguing that he had fought in the name of democracy, Taylor declared that he would hold elections within six months.⁵⁵ Despite this bluster, Taylor's desire for democracy was designed to appeal to Liberian and international supporters was not genuine. The destruction he had unleashed in Liberia continued to rage beyond his control.

Taylor's forces were more categorically comparable to gangs than armies, the only real ideology imbued among them being that of the potential for personal wealth: one scholar argues that only the search for booty served as a cohesive element for the core force.⁵⁶ Daniel Hoffman describes Taylor's NPFL as

...a violent military organization whose supporters did not necessarily share or endorse a political agenda, and whose interest in seizing control of the sovereign state was only one facet of a broad strategy to exploit international opportunities for wealth accumulation.⁵⁷

This economic motivation for war both shaped and prolonged the conflict. In his study of civil wars, Paul Collier has found that ethnic "fractionalization significantly *reduces* the risk of conflict," as it creates conditions for collective action, reducing enticement within

⁵³ Howe. *Ambiguous Order*. p 130.

⁵⁴ Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 57.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* p 59.

⁵⁶ Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 25.

⁵⁷ Hoffman. "Despot deposed: Charles Taylor and the challenge of state reconstruction Liberia." p 311.

individual minority group to take up arms against collectivities of other groups.⁵⁸ By this logic, Liberia and its 17 ethnic groups should have been relatively safe from widespread civil war, as no particular group should find it in their interest to fight against the combined strength of the other groups. The enormous economic opportunities available to militias in resource-rich Liberia, however, outweighed the preventative feature of its multiple ethnic groups. Collier notes that the “presence of primary commodity exports massively increases the risks of civil conflict.”⁵⁹ Since Taylor had developed no ideological or ethnic loyalty among his large forces beyond the prospect of individual material gain, groups began to splinter off in search of their own natural resource wealth. An AFL weakened by internal divisions, and a population suffering from both rebel and government atrocities provided manpower for various militia groups. As Collier’s research suggests, many found “inviting economic prospects” to fight for control of the resources that could be profitably sold even in the midst of civil war.⁶⁰ In fact, what had once started as a small rebel invasion against Liberia’s standing army and government quickly deteriorated into a war with eight violent factions all competing for access to and control of resource-rich areas.⁶¹

In addition to large numbers of armed groups, Liberia was awash with small arms made available by neighbouring countries. Such an influx of weaponry combined with utter disregard for anything beyond wealth led to the arming of ill-trained forces,⁶² and the explosive, tragic growth in number of child soldiers.⁶³ The violence wracking Liberia

⁵⁸ Collier, Paul. (2002). “Doing Well out of War: An Economic Perspective.” In *Scarcity and Surfeit: The Ecology of Africa’s Conflict* edited by M. Berdal and D.M. Malone. Praetoria, South Africa: The Institute of Security Studies. p 98.

⁵⁹ Ibid p 97.

⁶⁰ Ibid p 97

⁶¹ Adebajo, Adekeye. (2002). *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia. Sierra Leone. and Guinea-Bissau*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers. pp 46-47.

⁶² Howe. *Ambiguous Order*. p 83.

⁶³ Achvarina, Vera and Reich, Simon F. (2006). “No Place to Hide: Refugees. Displaced Persons. and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers.” *International Security*. Vol. 31. No. 1. p 129.

decimated what was left of Liberia's economy. A hideous degree of death, refugee flows and internal displacement has resulted in unspeakable suffering for the Liberian people.

Intervention & the Second Abuja Accords

Only months into the conflict, in May 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) established a Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) bringing all Liberian factions together to negotiate. Although these negotiations were largely unsuccessful, the SMC established the ECOWAS Monitory Group (ECOMOG), a large conventional military force designed to ensure peace in Liberia while the rebel groups settled differences and prepared Liberia for elections.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the ultimate goal of neither the ECOMOG leaders or the Liberian rebels were elections.

ECOMOG was largely a Nigerian creation, an opportunity for Abuja to play out its leadership aspirations in Western Africa. The Nigerian leadership had a positive relationship with Doe, and was angered both by opposition to Doe and the NPFL hostage-taking of Nigerians.⁶⁵ ECOMOG had had minor successes during the war, including a major offensive action that forced Taylor to sign a ceasefire in 1992. It is reported, however, that the ceasefire forced by ECOMOG allowed all sides to re-equip their forces, and the ceasefire was broken by the NPFL artillery bombardment of Monrovia in October, 1992.⁶⁶ ECOMOG's employment of some factions for both intelligence and battle led to criticisms that its deployment served to unnecessarily prolong the war.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Howe. *Ambiguous Order*. p 136-9.

⁶⁵ Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 48.

⁶⁶ Howe. *Ambiguous Order*. p 139-143.

⁶⁷ *Ibid* pp 142, 86.

West Africa scholar Adeyeye Adebajo argues that the peacekeeping and peace-enforcement mission of ECOMOG fared miserably for three reasons: First, the security environment was such that there was no peace to keep, with the state entirely collapsed, over 200,000 dead, and the largest rebel leader, Taylor, fervently against intervention. Second, ECOWAS was fundamentally divided about how to proceed, with different nations backing and supplying different armed groups. Third, there was no assistance from the international community in terms of monetary or logistical support for the major undertaking required for peace.⁶⁸ The first 13 peace agreements from 1990-1995 all failed to win peace in Liberia,⁶⁹ largely due to Nigerian insistence that a new Liberian government could not include conflicting parties.⁷⁰ Seeing little benefit in peace, let alone a democracy from which they may be excluded, the warlords and rebels continued to fight to gain or maintain control of the natural wealth of Liberia.

A number of factors led to the August 1996 signing and implementation of the Abuja II Accords. Leadership change in Nigeria brought a desire to end the frustrating ECOMOG commitment which was unsupported by member states, and which had borne 500 casualties.⁷¹ The new Nigerian leader, Sani Abacha, achieved rapprochement with Taylor,⁷² and this demonstration of Nigeria's commitment to Liberian peace encouraged the EU and the US to support efforts to end the war. Taylor's enemies had been gaining strength in Liberia, and this provided him an incentive to end the war while still in a position of relative superiority.⁷³ When in August, 1995, Nigeria accepted Ghana's position that Liberian warlords and rebel leaders should be eligible for positions in a new Liberian government, the

⁶⁸ Adebajo. *Building Peace in West Africa*. p 43.

⁶⁹ *Ibid* p 49.

⁷⁰ Morgan. "Liberia and the Fate of Interim Government in the Regional Vortex of West Africa." p 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid* p 6.

⁷² Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." p 436.

⁷³ Adebajo. *Building Peace in West Africa*. p 44.

road was cleared for the Abuja II peace agreement which ended open conflict and set an election date of 30 May 1997.⁷⁴

The Abuja II Accords established a temporary Council of State consisting of Liberian warlords but, unlike the failed Abuja I Accords, which had sought government positions for warlords, ECOWAS had the teeth to ensure a more successful transition;⁷⁵ preceding the elections, ECOWAS could sanction and even exclude factions who resumed violence. As Adebajo notes, ECOWAS was “ready to take punitive measures against spoilers,” believing that the time for peace had come in Liberia.⁷⁶

Making good their promise, the US provided financial and logistical aid to the Nigerian forces responsible for disarmament in Liberia.⁷⁷ Figures defining the success of the disarmament and demobilization efforts that followed Abuja II are disputed, and there occurred a significant discrepancy between the number of fighters disarmed and the number of soldiers fully demobilized. It is estimated that between 25% and 45% of Liberian fighters were not demobilized.⁷⁸ Certainly, some success was made by this international effort, but the significant number of arms in Liberia, and the difficulty of re-integrating child soldiers and adults into a society without an economy, has left a sizeable number of fighters scattered throughout Liberia.

⁷⁴Adebajo. *Building Peace in West Africa*. p 60.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Adebajo. *Building Peace in West Africa*. p 62.

⁷⁷ Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 20, and ICG. (3 November 2003). “Liberia: Security Challenges.” *ICG Africa Report No. 71*. p 13.

⁷⁸ Sawyer. *Beyond Plunder*. p 40, and Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. pp 63-4.

The 1997 Election

Despite sporadic fighting and consequent postponements, Liberia held a country-wide election in July 1997, using proportional representation to elect a president and legislators.⁷⁹ The Abuja II Accords had mandated both the election and the creation of an Independent Elections Commission (IECOM) designed to include a broad range of political interests in the management of the elections.⁸⁰ Charles Taylor, running as a member of the National Patriotic Party (the political incarnation of the NPFL) won the elections handily, securing 75% of the vote. Following the election, observer and former President Jimmy Carter described the event as “a uniformly excellent election process,” and the UN also reported no violence, intimidation or major irregularities during the election.⁸¹ Despite Carter’s glowing accolades and the UN’s myopic review of the situation, both David Harris and Terrence Lyons have written authoritatively on astounding irregularities manifest in the election process: both note that voters were not faced with a choice between candidates for office, but between more war or a desperately needed reprieve from violence.⁸² The 500 international observers of the minutiae of the election process⁸³ condoned the election because they did not recognize systemic pressures on Liberians, or that human security is an essential precondition of genuinely democratic choice.

Taylor entered the election cycle as the *de facto* incumbent, with immense resources and a history of control of much of the country since his 1989 invasion. He had sole control of radio broadcasting, resources enough to print t-shirts and distribute rice, which were unfair

⁷⁹ Harris. “From ‘warlord’ to ‘democratic’ president.” p 436.

⁸⁰ Lyons, Terrence. (2004). “Post-Conflict Elections and the Process of Demilitarizing Politics: The Role of Electoral Administration.” *Democratization*. Volume 11. No. 3, p 50.

⁸¹ Harris. “From ‘warlord’ to ‘democratic’ president.” p 438.

⁸² See Lyons. “Post-Conflict Elections and the Process of Demilitarizing Politics,” and Harris. “From ‘warlord’ to ‘democratic’ president.”

⁸³ Harris. “From ‘warlord’ to ‘democratic’ president.” p 437.

advantages over his opponents⁸⁴ and exhibited his desperation for the presidency.⁸⁵ Such desperation was understood by Liberians to warn of a desire for power so deep that Taylor's loss could only be avenged by returning the country to civil war.⁸⁶ As Lyons writes, Liberian voters "were intimidated not by thugs at the polling stations but by the trauma of the last seven years of war."⁸⁷

Taylor's threats of a return to war pressed Liberians to a high turn out on election day.⁸⁸ His implicit ultimatum resulted in support from self-interested voters; multi-ethnic, pan-Liberian support also brought votes for him in every county.⁸⁹ At the time of the election, political parties were little more than militias, with Taylor's the strongest. Lyons writes that the since politics were "highly militarized at the time of the vote," the ballot was only an "electoral ratification of the militarized institutions of civil war." Liberians "made a calculated choice" when voting, not for the figure who would serve their political interest, but to "appease the powerful ex-milita leader."⁹⁰ "The voting," writes Harris, "was a reasoned ploy by the electorate to maximize the possibility of improved living conditions."⁹¹

Denied resources and independence from ECOWAS, IECOM was largely ineffective. Important registration details and deadlines were not publicly released, and legal issues inflected many campaigns.⁹² Opposition parties were unable to unite against Taylor, a requisite for victory since all but one opposition group was ethnically based. With each ethnic

⁸⁴ Ibid p 438.

⁸⁵ Ibid p 446.

⁸⁶ Lyons. "Post-Conflict Elections and the Process of Demilitarizing Politics." p 39.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." p 450.

⁸⁹ Ibid p 432.

⁹⁰ Lyons. "Post-Conflict Elections and the Process of Demilitarizing Politics." p 36.

⁹¹ Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." p 431.

⁹² Lyons. "Post-Conflict Elections and the Process of Demilitarizing Politics." pp 50-1.

group responsible for such a low percentage of the Liberian population, parties had to appeal across ethnic boundaries. The only two candidates to attract multi-ethnic support were Taylor and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, whose Unity Party placed second.⁹³ Taylor's massive majority deterred opposition candidates from launching appeals against the results, and his easy victory was presented essentially as a *fait accompli*.⁹⁴ The elections, mandated as a tool to end the war, provided only a "thin veneer" of democracy and produced an essentially undemocratic result.⁹⁵

Charles Taylor's Exploitative Rule

Charles Taylor's reign from his election in 1997 to his exile in 2003 provided no relief from the brutality experienced by the Liberian population since the NPFL invasion of 1989. Liberians suffered widespread starvation after the war. Unemployment reached an astronomic 85%. The country lacked running water and electricity for over a decade, and no attempts were made to reconstruct the shattered state.⁹⁶ Liberia, a state with 400 doctors in the 1980's, was left with 30 by 2002.⁹⁷ Claiming to have the mandate of the Liberian population after the 1997 election, Taylor announced he was no longer bound by the Abuja II Accords and so had no responsibility to restructure the dangerously unstable militias or to work towards national reconciliation. Instead, Taylor forced retirements of professional military officers until all that remained were armed gangs loyal to Taylor. Large sums of money were spent on arming redundant elite units that Taylor separated to prevent a coup, while the regular units were not paid but instead forced to compete for looting rights.⁹⁸

⁹³ Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." pp 448-449.

⁹⁴ Harris. "From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president." p 442.

⁹⁵ ICG. "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." p i.

⁹⁶ Adebajo. *Liberia's Civil War*. p 207, and International Crisis Group. "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." p 16.

⁹⁷ ICG. "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." p 16.

⁹⁸ ICG. "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." pp 13-14, and ICG. (19 August 2004). "Liberia: Unravelling." *Africa Briefing*. p 4.

Taylor ruled Liberia as a personal fiefdom, using “intimidation, patronage and corruption” to entrench his position as national leader.⁹⁹ Daniel Hoffman characterizes Taylor’s rule as having a heavy “reliance on transregional and transnational commercial interests, the abandonment of bureaucratized authority, and the collapse of distinction between the private interest of the ruler and the collective interest of the state.”¹⁰⁰ Taylor’s networks of commercial and economic interests brought him huge personal profits from natural resources, a sizeable fraction of which he used to establish an informal patronage network across Liberia which bought the support of Americo-Liberians and indigenous Liberians alike.¹⁰¹ The network appealed to the self-interest of many potential opponents, and the spoils paid out by Taylor ensured that no broad or effective base of peaceful opposition could develop.¹⁰²

Taylor’s greed for riches brought greater misery upon his own citizens as well as upon Liberia’s neighbor states. His rule caused the International Crisis Group to identify Liberia as the “eye of the regional storm” that would sweep through West Africa during his reign.¹⁰³ Throughout his presidency, and even during the initial fighting in the 1990’s, Taylor exported violence to Sierra Leone and Guinea. The vicious Revolutionary United Front (RUF), notorious for atrocities committed in Sierra Leone, was largely bankrolled and trained by Taylor in his bid for control of diamond mines.¹⁰⁴ The destabilization of Sierra Leone was also vengeance for Taylor, who angrily vowed that Sierra Leone would “taste the bitterness of war” in return for allowing ECOMOG forces to establish a rear base there in the 1990s.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ ICG. “Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability.” p 13.

¹⁰⁰ Hoffman. “Despot deposed: Charles Taylor and the challenge of state reconstruction Liberia.” p 311.

¹⁰¹ ICG. “Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability.” p 21.

¹⁰² Hoffman. “Despot deposed: Charles Taylor and the challenge of state reconstruction Liberia.” p 311.

¹⁰³ ICG. (30 April 2003). “Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm.” *ICG Africa Report No. 62*. pp 1-55.

¹⁰⁴ Ndumbe, J. Anyu and Babalola Cole. (2005). “The Illicit Diamond Trade. Civil Conflicts, and Terrorism in Africa.” *Mediterranean Quarterly*. Vol. 60., No. 2. p 60.

¹⁰⁵ ICG. “Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability.” pp 1-2.

When, in 2000, British intervention in Sierra Leone turned the tide against the RUF, thousands of armed and battle-hardened rebels spilled back into Liberia.¹⁰⁶ Taylor's use of proxy militias and his willingness to destabilize other states was so rampant that his continued leadership soon became a liability to the international community.

In 2000, Charles Taylor backed an invasion against Guinea by rebel forces, and incurred the wrath of both the US and the UK. Taylor's penchant for destabilization threatened to roll back the gains made by the British in Sierra Leone, and the US perceived Liberian attempts on Guinea's government as a direct challenge to their regional ally.¹⁰⁷ Fuelled further by Taylor's alleged business connections with al-Qaeda, the US began aiding Guinea militarily while British military officers made high-profile visits to sensitive areas.¹⁰⁸ According to International Crisis Group reports, a counter-invasion by Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) from Guinea into Liberia in 2000 was supported by contact with the US and UK military, which supplied US and UK arms funneled through Guinea.¹⁰⁹

LURD was an incoherent mixture of remnants of militias from the 1989-1996 war, cobbled together from exiles who had fled Taylor's rise to power in 1997.¹¹⁰ Mistreatment and the absence of economic opportunity outside Liberia motivated a number of former fighters to seek Taylor's demise.¹¹¹ Although Liberian government forces numbered 60,000 troops on paper, desertions, low morale driven by conscription, and lack of pay for most soldiers reduced the body of those willing to fight for Taylor to his elite units.¹¹² The rebels, however, faced no such manpower shortage. The LURD invasion was initially only 3,000 strong, but

¹⁰⁶ Ibid p 6.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid p 22.

¹⁰⁸ ICG. "Liberia: Security Challenges." p 14, and ICG. "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." p 5.

¹⁰⁹ ICG. "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." p 3, and ICG. *Africa Briefing*. p 4.

¹¹⁰ ICG. "Liberia: Security Challenges." p 15.

¹¹¹ ICG. "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." p 15.

¹¹² ICG. "Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm." pp 6-7.

soon grew to include disenfranchised Liberians, many of whom sought economic benefit from the rampant looting undertaken by all combatants.¹¹³ The fighting groups splintered as per the earlier Liberian war, with another major rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) supported by the Cote d'Ivoire government.¹¹⁴ No group abstained from looting, targeting civilians, or conscripting child soldiers, and the impoverished country fell further into chaos and destruction, until 2003.

In early 2003, LURD forces laid siege to Monrovia in the endgame of Taylor's regime. While surrounded by LURD forces, Taylor was indicted by the Special Court of Sierra Leone for his hand in the violence there. In August, 2003, Nigeria accepted Charles Taylor as an exile, opening the door for peace.¹¹⁵ Sensing that their free ride funded by Taylor's economic exploitation had come to an end, forces loyal to Taylor gradually stood down. LURD and MODEL fighters, motivated by a hatred for Charles Taylor, lost steam with Taylor's departure, and also lost funding from their patron states.¹¹⁶ Concern remained that fighting would continue for Liberia's resources, and Nigerian peacekeepers, supported by U.S. Marines waiting just off the coast, moved in to guarantee the shaky peace.

An End to War

On 18 August, 2003, a comprehensive peace was signed between the Liberian government, LURD, and MODEL.¹¹⁷ The Accra Accord divided the offices of the state among the parties to the conflict, establishing a National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) until elections in 2005. The International Crisis Group criticized the peace as "99 per cent realpolitik and 1 per cent principle," allowing the "three warring faction to carve up the

¹¹³ ICG. "Liberia: Security Challenges." p 5.

¹¹⁴ Ibid pp 9-10.

¹¹⁵ Hoffman. "Despot deposed: Charles Taylor and the challenge of state reconstruction Liberia." p 308.

¹¹⁶ ICG. "Liberia: Security Challenges." p 7.

¹¹⁷ "Comprehensive Peace Agreement Between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties." Available from the United States Institute for Peace. <http://www.usip.org/>. Retrieved August 2007.

national cake” and providing for “two more years of looting rights.”¹¹⁸ Despite these criticisms, the Accra Accord provided for a two-year period in which to improve security, to re-establish a semblance of state order and to convince the Liberian population that a national election would not precipitate war. The 1997 demonstration had shown how even a reasonably well-administered election becomes meaningless without the proper systemic conditions, and so Liberians and the international community set about to the task of re-creating the state of Liberia.

Soon after the agreement was signed, the UN Security Council established the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. UN peacekeepers, deployed to ensure peace, found one of their major tasks to be protecting citizens against looters.¹¹⁹ The resolution that authorized UNMIL was more robust than previous “nation-building” attempts, and the UNMIL was placed in control of vital infrastructure, disarmament and judicial reform.¹²⁰ Initial disarmament programs were so popular that they quickly overwhelmed the UN operation. 30,000 combatants were expected to take part in the program, but over 100,000 were eventually disarmed. This enormous influx strained the resources of the rehabilitation effort, and was an initial setback for UNMIL.¹²¹ As the UN forces gradually reached the authorized troop strength of 15,000, UNMIL was able to recover from the disarmament debacle and to develop effective rebuilding and stability.¹²² The disarmament and rehabilitation was an obvious boon to democratic development, stripping those who would challenge any new government from an easy source of disaffected – and armed – citizens.

¹¹⁸ ICG. (2005). “Liberia’s Elections: Necessary But Not Sufficient.” *ICG Africa Report No. 98*. p 1.

¹¹⁹ ICG. “Liberia: Security Challenges.” p 1.

¹²⁰ ICG. “Liberia: Security Challenges.” p 14, and ICG (6 April 2006). “Liberia: Resurrecting the Justice System.” *Africa Report No. 107*. p 1.

¹²¹ Gompert et al. Making Liberia Safer: Transformation of the National Security Sector. p 14.

¹²² Bellamy, Alex J. and Williams, Paul D. (2005). “Who’s Keeping the Peace? Regionalization and Contemporary Peace Operations.” *International Security*. Volume 29. No. 4. p 165.

Corruption, long a problem throughout Liberian political history, was initially rampant in the NTGL. In the first year of NTGL oversight, ECOWAS and EC investigations found theft and fraud on such a scale that any possibility of building a durable peace was threatened.¹²³ In 2004, a major anti-corruption sweep took place, spurred on by pressure from Liberian civil society groups, ECOWAS, and the European Community.¹²⁴ In September, 2005, the NTGL agreed to participate in a Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP) designed to “build a system of economic governance that promotes accountability, responsibility and transparency in fiscal management so that Liberia's resources will be used in the interests of the people of Liberia.”¹²⁵ Although criticized by some as neo-colonization, GEMAP provides international expertise, new procurement laws including open bidding, an external auditor and revised civil service mandates and salary structures.¹²⁶ Perhaps of greatest importance, the GEMAP insulates the democratically elected President of Liberia from political pressure for firing or prosecuting those who practice corruption.¹²⁷ In one fell swoop, the GEMAP has set liberal-constitutional rules for a limited government that would also be effective, responsive and accountable to popular sovereignty.

¹²³ ICG. “Liberia’s Elections: Necessary But Not Sufficient.” p 10.

¹²⁴ ICG. “Liberia’s Elections: Necessary But Not Sufficient.” p 2.

¹²⁵ Government of Liberia in Partnership with the International Community. “Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP).” <http://www.gemapliberia.org/>. Retrieved August 2007.

¹²⁶ ICG. “Liberia’s Elections: Necessary But Not Sufficient.” p 10.

¹²⁷ ICG. (13 January 2006). “Update Briefing – Liberia: Staying Focused.” *Africa Briefing No. 36*. p 5.

The 2005 Election

After two years of relative peace, 74.8% of Liberians took to the polls in 2005 to elect 30 Senators, 64 Representatives, and a President.¹²⁸ David Harris has written authoritatively on the election, comparing it to Liberia's 1997 race as well as other African post-conflict elections. Unlike RENAMO in Mozambique, UNITA in Angola, the FDD in Burundi, the RUF in Sierra Leone and even the NPFL in 1998 Liberia, no rebel forces, including LURD or MODEL, attempted to form a political party for electoral competition. With no rebels, no incumbent, and no partisan government machinery backing any candidate, the election was open for a true contest.¹²⁹ The National Elections Commission, reconstituted as independent by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, engaged in a broad civic education program prior to the vote, and effectively registered voters and candidates alike.¹³⁰ The presence of 15,000 UN troops guaranteed a peaceful election, and the two years of disarmament and demobilization paid off with no violence preceding the election. It appears from the results that ethnic affiliations played little role in the voting, and the fact that House and Senate seats only rarely matched the Presidential vote in each county suggests local factors were on the mind of the electorate.¹³¹ Stratification had not reared its ugly head in voting, and Liberia looked to be well on its way to a society capable of forming interest groups across ethnicities.

In the Presidential race, three former exiles were expected to fare well: former Taylor crony-turned-enemy Charles Brumskine of the Liberal Party, Harvard Graduate and World Bank economist Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of the Unity Party, and football hero George Weah of the

¹²⁸ Harris. "Liberia 2005: an unusual African post-conflict election." p 385.

¹²⁹ Ibid p 375-77.

¹³⁰ ICG. (2007). "Update Briefing – Liberia: Staying Focused." p 1, and Republic of Liberia. "National Elections Commission." <http://www.necliberia.org/>. Retrieved August 2007.

¹³¹ Harris. "Liberia 2005: an unusual African post-conflict election." p 385.

Congress for Democratic Change.¹³² At the end of the first round, the popular Weah led the vote, but the small difference between his total and Johnson-Sirleaf's required a run-off election. Although the top six vote-getters after Weah and Johnson-Sirleaf turned their support to Weah, the electorate weighed the decision themselves and chose Johnson-Sirleaf. Despite some minor stone-throwing at the US embassy and claims by Weah of irregularities, he eventually ceded victory to Sirleaf-Johnson. In an essential comparison to the 1997 elections, Harris notes that, unlike Taylor, the "fear of what might happen after a Weah defeat did not induce enough to vote him in."¹³³ Liberians, protected by an international peacekeeping force and an international commitment to reconstruction, voted for the leader they felt best able to lead their state in peace.

Conflict-Prevention in Liberia

Upon her victory, Johnson-Sirleaf acknowledged the importance of an effective opposition and promised to respect a strong opposition in her stated commitment to true democracy in Liberia.¹³⁴ Johnson-Sirleaf herself had not experienced much honourable treatment in opposition, having served two periods of detention for intending to stand as an opposition senatorial candidate against Samuel Doe. As a strong proponent of an interim government after Taylor's demise, Johnson-Sirleaf recognizes that careful, reasoned change must be brought to Liberia.¹³⁵ One scholar of democracy observes that with "much of Africa suffering setbacks after some impressive democratic gains, ... Liberia enjoyed a notably peaceful environment during Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's first year as president and showed progress in fighting corruption and expanding government transparency."¹³⁶

¹³² ICG. "Liberia's Elections: Necessary But Not Sufficient." p 4.

¹³³ Harris. "Liberia 2005: an unusual African post-conflict election." p 390-1.

¹³⁴ Inaugral Address of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, in "Liberia: Documents on Democracy." (2006). *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 17. No. 2. pp 181-182

¹³⁵ ICG. "Liberia: The Key to Ending Regional Instability." p 19.

¹³⁶ Puddington, Arch. (2007). "The Pushback Against Democracy." *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 18. No. 2. p 132.

Since 2003, UN forces have continued to fulfill their mandate of ensuring peace in Liberia, although the international community's primary concern is with Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programs.¹³⁷ In addition to the DDRR programs for militia members, millions of aid dollars were spent on demobilization of the Armed Forces of Liberia. These programs have seen major success by destroying tonnes of weapons and by ensuring income as well as the potential for productive futures for demobilized soldiers.¹³⁸ In a literal adoption of the ancient proverb, weapons have been bent and shaped into hoes, hammers, nail removers, rakes, spade shovels and cocoa harvesting hooks.¹³⁹

Security sector reform has been the object of close attention in Liberia, with careful planning and selection processes ensuring a small but effective military, police force and port authority. After contracting firms to establish a military recruitment process based on the professional American military, Liberia hopes to field a lean and efficient fighting force that may serve as a model for the continent. A small force with limited responsibility will be easily managed by civilian control. With continued success in its development, there is hope that Liberia, once the instigator of region-wide conflicts, will be an anchor of prosperity and political stability in West Africa.¹⁴⁰ Wisely, the UN is expecting to remove troops only as Liberian personnel are ready to secure their own country. The pace of troop removal highlights the necessity of a coherent, robust and full commitment by the international community to Liberia's successful promotion of democracy.

Equally close attention has been paid to economic and human development in Liberia, where needs are obvious. Two years after the war, 80% of Liberia's population was illiterate and living below the poverty line. Unemployment rate exceeded 70%. 35% of Liberians were

¹³⁷ Elavalthoduka, Matthew. (2005). "From the Editor." *UNMIL Focus*. Volume 2. p 3.

¹³⁸ Washington, J. Wesley. (2005). "Demobilization of AFL Begins." *UNMIL Focus*. Volume 4. p 25.

¹³⁹ A.C. (2005). "Former Weapons Become Construction Tools." *UNMIL Focus*. Volume 4. p 26.

¹⁴⁰ ICG. "Update Briefing – Liberia: Staying Focused." pp 1-5.

malnourished, 62% not fully vaccinated, only 25% could access safe drinking water and only 36% had access to sanitation facilities.¹⁴¹ Immediate work was undertaken by international donors to support the building of roads. The EU has designated Liberia a priority country, and continues to allocate funds for basic infrastructure and social services.¹⁴² USAID, too, is focused on organizing and training labourers to re-build Liberia's war-shattered infrastructure. Ultimately, major donors to Liberia are motivated by what the European Union identifies as "conflict prevention rationale."

Certainly, a political system riddled with corruption and a history of presidents ready to use violence for political gains led to Liberia's state failure and its horrendous war. Still, there is no guarantee that a peaceful Liberia will develop successful democracy without careful nurturing. Although Johnson-Sirleaf appealed to Nigeria to release Taylor, he now awaits trial imprisoned at The Hague. "Taylor's legacy", one observer writes, "is a country still perilously close to the abyss of lawlessness – lawlessness that domestic enemies of democratic Liberia could be quick to exploit."¹⁴³ The major focus of international donors is on prevention of any return to conflict through disarmament and security force training to thwart lawlessness. Such prevention is a necessary and yet far from sufficient condition for democracy.

¹⁴¹ USAID. "Democracy and Governance in Liberia." http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/regions/afr/liberia.html. Retrieved August 2007.

¹⁴² European Commission. "EU Relations with Liberia." http://ec.europa.eu/development/geographical/regionscountries/countries/country_profile.cfm?cid=lr&lng=en&CFID=1370036&CFTOKEN=60620097&jsessionid=2430ba3771e0656f1658. Retrieved March 2008.

¹⁴³ Gompert et al. Making Liberia Safer: Transformation of the National Security Sector. p 9.

The Conditions for Democracy

Liberia provides an excellent study of how conflict prevention and reconstruction programs can have positive, negative or neutral effects on the conditions necessary for democracy.

One model by which the conditions essential for democracy can be assessed is The Perlin Model,¹⁴⁴ which includes a number of essential and integral conditions for democracy, as well as a list of secondary conditions that are understood to facilitate democracy. Although it is far too early to convincingly argue that many of these conditions have been met, there are positive (if heavily caveated) signs that some of both the essential and facilitating conditions of democracy are developing in Liberia.

Assessing Conditions for Democracy In a Post-War State

A thorough analysis of the political conditions in a post-conflict state is extraordinarily difficult. Competing paradigms of conflict-prevention, peace-building, economic development, human security, and good governance may each produce competing, seemingly dissimilar versions of a post-conflict country's conditions. Improvements in one field of development, though often linked to others, will not necessarily lead to the achievement of other goals. Some indicators, such as the absence of violence, may be falsely understood to represent an increasingly liberal and democratic populace. In Liberia, positive results in terms of conflict-prevention and improved economic governance should not necessarily be taken as indicators of improving conditions for democratic development, when sheer "battle fatigue" itself might account for much cessation of violence.

Perlin's criteria of conditions needed for democratic development enable local developers/aid donors terms by which to perceive a more accurate picture of both the successes and continued needs in a recipient country. Seen through the Perlin lens, it seems clear that some

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix II.

of the conditions to achieve and sustain liberal democracy have been met in Liberia, and others clearly not. The impact of donor money and a large peacekeeping force will also colour conditions somewhat inaccurately. The political engagement of citizens, at the very least in election participation, seems assured. The current set of state elites and the general mood of the citizenry support liberal and democratic values, and a general agreement on the legitimacy of the government seems to exist. Laws and policies to protect market transactions and preserve competition exist theoretically, and the GEMAP program is continuing to ensure legitimate use of government funds.

Unfortunately, several other conditions for democratic development might not survive a withdrawal of peacekeepers and a reduction in international aid. Political engagement of citizens, particularly the distribution of information on public affairs, has been spread by UNMIL and other agencies. Civil society organizations, though rooted in Liberian tradition, are deeply reliant on international funds. The limits of the state authority, both in hard terms (such as the use of force) and in soft terms (such as accountability and spending) are reinforced by a large number of external troops and significant integration of international experts within the governance structure. A cohesive political community, seemingly built on a desire for peace, is protected and ensured by the bulwark of 15,000 peacekeepers.

There are some conditions clearly lacking in Liberia, particularly the absence of a large middle class, and the corresponding appropriately sized market economy.

Through the application of the Perlin Model, the democratic developer can easily identify some major concerns remaining in Liberia, primarily the staggering lack of employment. Also identifiable through the Perlin model is the need for greater analysis of the political engagement of citizens, the limits on state authority, and the development of a cohesive political community. Finally, those conditions that have been identified as existing, such as Liberians' incredible enthusiasm for participating in elections, should indicate a basis for both future democratic developments and a sure sign of hope for Liberians and their international friends.

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Appendix I: Perlin's Theory of Change Model

1. Propositions About the Nature of Liberal Democracy

Operating Principle A:

LIBERAL-CONSTITUTIONALISM

Element A1: Constitutional Government

- a) Constitution establishing clear rules for the exercise of authority is relatively settled with amending procedures that do not permit arbitrary changes by incumbent elites.
- b) Constitution is based on the principle of limited government with well-defined & effective limits on the general scope of government authority.
- c) Constitution establishes independence of the judiciary.
- d) Elites in other governmental institutions accept the judiciary's right to interpret & safeguard the constitution.

Element A2: A Framework of Entrenched & Enforceable Rights

- a) Constitutional entrenchment of rights.
- b) Enumeration of rights includes the protection of the basic freedoms (conscience, associations, speech,) political rights (to vote & seek office,) & legal rights (due process protections for persons suspected or accused of crimes.)
- c) Substantive rights to protect & promote equality (e.g. for women, minorities, persons with disabilities.)
- d) Mechanisms for giving effect to entrenched rights, including human rights codes & procedures for enforcing them, as well as government policies to give effect to rights through such mechanisms as support to affirmative action.

Element A3: The rule of law incorporating the principles of the supremacy of the law, equality before the law, & the impartial & fair administration of the law

- a) Constitution clearly establishes the supremacy of the law & the principle that all persons, regardless of their role or status in society, are subject to the law.
- b) All persons are assured of equal protection from the law.
- c) All persons are entitled to equal treatment in the administration of the law.
- d) Investigative & prosecutorial functions of law enforcement are exercised impartially & fairly.
- e) Impartial & fair adjudication of the law occurs through an independent judiciary.
- f) Exercise of due process in criminal proceedings recognizes the right of persons accused of a crime to protection against arbitrary acts & the means to provide an adequate defense.

- g) Agents of state security are insulated from arbitrary use by elites in other governmental institutions.
- h) There exist mechanisms of independent review & appeal for protecting citizens against abuses by law enforcement agencies & personnel.

Element A4: Democratic control of internal & external security institutions

- a) There exist clearly defined & enforceable legal protections against the political use of military, intelligence, & law enforcement agencies & personnel.
- b) There exist clearly defined lines of accountability of military, intelligence services, & law enforcement agencies to democratic institutions.
- c) There exist clearly defined limits on authority of all agencies of law enforcement.
- d) Independent mechanisms exist for reviewing & controlling the activities of intelligence agencies.
- e) State security agents understand & act in a manner consistent with their responsibilities under a regime of entrenched rights.

Operating Principle B:

POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY EXPRESSED THROUGH INSTITUTIONS & PROCESSES OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Element B1: Governing institutions that are effective, responsive, & accountable to citizens.

The allocation of authority among different orders of government provides for governance that is effective, responsive & accountable to citizens.

- a) Central, regional, & local organs of government have appropriate levels of authority to exercise their responsibilities in a manner consistent with these objectives.
- b) Central, regional, & local organs of government have appropriate levels of fiscal capacity to exercise their responsibilities in a manner consistent with these objectives.

The organization of executive-legislative relations within governing institutions provides for governance that is effective, responsive & accountable to citizens.

- a) The organization of executive-legislative relations is based on settled principles that limit the possibility of inter-institutional or intra-institutional conflict.
- b) The principle of the legitimacy of opposition in the legislature is recognized, institutionalized & provided adequate resources to be effective.
- c) Legislature has appropriate procedures & resources for exercising scrutiny of the executive.
- d) Legislature has appropriate resources to be effective in representing citizen interests in policy-making.

e) Members of the legislature are effectively connected to citizens.

Administrative structures, procedures, & practices within governing institutions provide for governance that is effective, responsive & accountable to citizens.

a) Competent, professional public service.

b) Appointments & promotions within administrative organs of government are based on the merit principle.

c) Policy-making procedures within the executive incorporating consultative mechanisms are designed to ensure representation of public opinion.

d) There is transparency & impartiality in administration of public spending.

e) There are institutions & processes to protect citizens from arbitrary actions by the executive (for example, freedom of information & privacy laws administered by officers accountable to legislature.)

f) There are processes to provide citizens with the means to appeal administrative decisions.

g) There are effective conflict of interest & other “anti-corruption” laws.

Element B2: Political elites chosen through, regular, free & fair elections

a) Universal franchise exists.

b) Formal rules & institutions exist to ensure independence of administration of elections.

c) Mechanisms are in place to ensure equality & fairness in system of voter registration.

d) Protections for secret ballot exist.

e) There exist mechanisms for ensuring equality & fairness in tabulation & reporting of election results.

f) Regulation of party & electoral campaign finance operates to ensure reasonable fairness in competition & to establish confidence in the integrity of the system.

Element B3: A genuinely competitive system of party politics effectively representing a broad spectrum of societal interests & contributing to accommodation of diverse interests.

a) There is an absence of barriers to forming parties & competing.

b) Internal party processes provide for open access to, & fairness in, nomination of candidates for office & selection of leaders.

b) Systems of Internal party governance are transparent & encourage citizen participation.

c) Election campaigns provide sufficient information to facilitate informed choice.

d) Regulation of party & electoral campaign finance ensures reasonable fairness in competition & establishes confidence in the integrity of the system.

- e) Electoral system produces outcomes that fairly represent the distribution of party support.
- f) There is an acceptance by all participants of the integrity & legitimacy of processes of party politics.

Element B4: A system of political communication that ensures a free flow of information about public affairs.

- a) News media are politically independent whether state or privately owned.
- b) The media accept that they have a responsibility to contribute to the public interest in a democracy.
- c) In this regard, the media work constructively to inform citizens about public affairs in a free & impartial way.
- d) Democratic values are embedded in the professional norms of journalism.
- e) There are high standards of professional competence among journalists.
- f) The legitimacy of independent media's role is accepted by political actors.
- g). There are effective legal protections for independent journalism.
- h) The media are free of political manipulation.
- i) All significant political interests are accorded access to the media & can freely express their views.

Element B5: A system of group politics that ensures the representation of citizen interests based on the principles of pluralist theory.

- a) There is an absence of barriers to interest group formation.
- b) Government policy-makers & administrators recognize the legitimacy of advocacy.
- c) There is open & equal access to decision-makers for advocacy groups.
- d) Lobbying is regulated to ensure transparency & fairness in competition among groups.
- e) Support is provided to disadvantaged or diffuse groups with weak financial & organizational resources to enable them to compete effectively.

2. Conditions Necessary to Achieve & Sustain Liberal Democracy

The information below distinguishes between conditions that are widely agreed to be an essential & integral part of a stable, self-sustaining, functioning democracy & those that facilitate the realization & sustainability of a functioning democracy. The importance of these “facilitating” conditions is more contentious.

Widely Agreed Condition 1: Political engagement of citizens

- a) Citizens participate in politics (minimum requirement is that those who are eligible will vote.)
- b) Citizens are interested in, attentive to, & informed about public affairs.

Widely Agreed Condition 2: Democratic Political Culture

- a) State elites & citizens are committed to liberal values:
 - Individual autonomy
 - The “freedoms”
 - Equality before the law
 - Political equality
 - Equality of opportunity
 - Justice
- b) State elites & citizen are committed to democratic values:
 - Decisions through discussion & debate
 - Tolerance of dissenting opinion
 - Acceptance of necessity to make decisions through accommodation & compromise
- c) State elites & personnel know & respect the limits on their authority, understand their duties under a liberal-democratic constitution, & are committed to the legitimacy of the system.
- d) Citizens are committed to the legitimacy of the system: they accept decisions with which they disagree because they recognize the legitimacy of the processes by which the decisions have been made.

Widely Agreed Condition 3: Civil Society

- a) There exists a substantial network of active, autonomous, organized groups pursuing a multiplicity of diverse individual interests outside the sphere of state authority.
- b) Group participation is voluntary.
- c) Groups are free to form around any set of social, economic, or cultural interests.
- b) There is widespread citizen participation in group activity.
- c) Individuals have multiple group memberships reflecting differing aspects of their individuality.

Facilitating Condition 1: Open, non-polarized, system of social stratification

- a) Large middle class.
- b) Social mobility based on achievement.
- c) Government policies promote equality of opportunity.
- d) Government policies provide some measure of social justice: for example, equal access to adequate health services & social support for disadvantaged members of society.

Facilitating Condition 2: A functioning market economy regulated to prevent disproportionate aggregations of power & ensure fairness in economic relations

- a) There are state policies & laws to establish the conditions necessary to ensure the integrity of market transactions, to preserve competition, & to maintain the stability of the monetary system.
- b) There is state regulation to protect collective bargaining rights for labour.
- c) There is state regulation of workplace conditions.
- d) There is state regulation to protect consumer interest.

Facilitating Condition 3: An internally cohesive political community

- a) In societies where there are significant ethno-cultural &/or linguistic cleavages there are effective state policies to promote tolerance & protect cultural minorities.
- b) In culturally diverse societies government policies effectively promote commitment to shared values that underpin social cohesion.
- c) In societies where there are distinctive regional sub-communities, based on a strong sense of regional identity & interests, state structures are designed & function effectively to give representation to & accommodate regional sub-community differences through:
 - Adoption of the federal principle or devolution of significant powers on regional governments, &;
 - National institutions that incorporate the principle of regional representation; informal practices to ensure that the principle of regional representation is observed in the national government.

Appendix II: Liberia through the Perlin Model Lens

Conditions Necessary to Achieve and Sustain Liberal Democracy

Essential Conditions

Essential Condition 1: Political engagement of citizens

With over 75% of registered voters casting ballots in the 2005 election, clearly citizens are eager to participate in politics, at least through voting. There is a strong feeling among the electorate indicated by a recent survey (See Appendix) that the election was a worthwhile process. There continues to be enthusiasm for participation in future elections. Perlin notes, however, that citizen participation in voting is but a minimum requirement to consider an electorate politically engaged.

In an attempt to ensure citizen participation in the 2005 election, UNMIL and other international elements in Liberia made a concerted effort to keep Liberians apprised of their rights and informed about public affairs. Whether Liberians will find themselves “interested in, attentive to, and informed about public affairs” without a major international effort will be a true test of the sustainability of Liberian political engagement.

Essential Condition 2: Democratic political culture

The National Democratic Institute notes that Liberians have “little experience in genuine democratic practices or open citizen participation in politics.” Their enthusiasm for the 2005 elections, however, seems to mark progress. Nonetheless, Peter Pahlm warns observers not to fall prey to the “election fetish” whereby a national government is assumed complete after a successful election.

Perlin’s explanation of a democratic political culture includes reference to a need for state elites and citizens to be committed to both liberal and democratic values. Thus far, Liberian elites, particularly the President and her appointees in government, have paid homage to the importance of both liberal and democratic values as key principles of a reconstructed Liberia. Citizens have abandoned riots, strikes, or other forms of violence

that would belie commitment to these values. Likely the best indicator that citizens are committed to the legitimacy of the system is the acceptance of Johnson-Sirleaf as President, despite the fact that she did not garner the greatest number of votes in the first round of elections.

Essential Condition 3: Civil society

Liberia maintained a vibrant civil society prior to Charles Taylor's co-optation of, and violence against, citizen organizations. The Accra Agreement elevated Liberian civil society to an unprecedented position in Liberian government, granting civil society groups formal positions in the transitional government. This decision has severely confused civil society's role in Liberia. Rather than serving as an advisor to the government, some Liberians have interpreted different civil society groups as having political ambitions grander than simple advocacy or advice.

The current legal regime allows for the formation of civil society groups, and it is expected that widespread citizen participation, as seen in the middle of the twentieth century, will return. Of great concern, however, is that most NGOs are entirely dependent on donor support. It is essential to democracy in Liberia that its citizens develop a domestic, sustainable civil society. Obviously, there is international donor interest in supporting initiatives in Liberia, but these must be carefully planned so civil society will survive the departure of international aid money.

Facilitating Conditions

Facilitating Condition 1: Open, non-polarized system of social stratification

As noted above, Liberia suffered from a significantly polarized social system for much of its existence – whether under the Americo-Liberian oligarchy or the later Presidents who supported their own kin. The civil war, too, saw different elements of society pitted against each other.

Government policies currently exist to promote equality of opportunity; in particular, the security forces are now structured to thwart any condensation of power within a single ethnic group.

A large middle class does not currently exist in Liberia because of massive unemployment. Further, social mobility is reduced not by clan loyalty but by too few jobs to make mobility relevant. Although access to health and social services is theoretically equal, the capacity for such services is only beginning to be rebuilt with massive infusions of money from international donors.

Facilitating Condition 2: A functioning market economy regulated to prevent disproportionate aggregations of power and ensure fairness in economic relations

The major anti-corruption plan, GEMAP, has been designed to establish conditions necessary for market transactions and to preserve competition at various levels of government spending. Fully-trained customs and port officers have been deployed to aid in ensuring fair competition at ports and borders.

Natural resources such as timber and diamonds, once a key source of wealth for corrupt politicians and militias, are being regulated. Liberia has agreed to abide by international standards on natural resources, including participating in the Kimberley Process on diamonds. This regulation of natural resources has been designed specifically to ensure that wealth— and power — from the illegal sale of these resources are not again disproportionately gained by a few elite.

Although rules exist to govern a market economy, state regulations to protect collective bargaining rights for labour and workplace conditions are largely irrelevant given the massive unemployment in Liberia.

Facilitating Condition 3: An internal cohesive political community

Thus far, Liberia has emerged from its war era with a tolerant population whose cultural minorities have been protected. The cause of this positive sign is difficult to identify. Some would argue that Liberians, tired from war, are no longer interested in making violence against their neighbours. It may be disingenuous to attribute this new pacificism solely to tolerance-promoting state policies, however; the impact of 15,000 foreign peacekeepers is no doubt a supporting factor.

The war does seem to have established a commitment to shared values underpinning social cohesion, even if the values are as simple as reconstruction and peace. Again, the

overwhelming support for the election process demonstrated a base level of shared values throughout Liberia.

The design and function of the state structures is a major concern for the future of democracy in Liberia. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is a popular figure, committed to democracy in Liberia, although her constitutional office is the head of an extremely centralized government structure. According to one observer, the Liberian constitution provides “few safeguards against the tyranny of the majority and almost no check on the all-powerful chief executive.” “Everything,” it is argued, “is effectively gambled on the personal integrity of the winner.” It remains unclear whether the powers of the Liberian presidency can be kept in check without international pressures and the support of a large donor community focused on reconstruction.

Appendix III

THE POWER OF THE DIASPORA: A TEACHING CASE ON ELLEN JOHNSON-SIRLEAF'S 2005 PRESIDENTIAL VICTORY IN LIBERIA

By Valerie Ashford

January 2009

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Introduction

Twice imprisoned, held without access to family or lawyers, death threats from high-ranking government officials, a sentence of ten years' hard labour... and she'd never committed a crime.

This is home. It's Liberia, where:

Approximately 250,000 died as a result of the war and more than one million Liberians became refugees or internally displaced persons... 75% of Liberians live on less than one US dollar a day, and 85% are unemployed... education and health facilities are almost non-existent... over 40% of the population have no access to safe and clean drinking water and the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is among the highest in the West Africa region.¹⁴⁵

Life *out* of Liberia might seem very good indeed, especially if it includes a Harvard education followed by respected work with the World Bank and the United Nations. Does one leave all this behind to return to a country where 'political party,' 'armed militia,' and 'murderous gang' were, a short time ago, synonymous? Further, does one aim to take on perhaps the most difficult job imaginable, president of a devastated Liberia?

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf no doubt struggled with this decision in 2004 when, as a member of the Liberian Diaspora only recently returned from the US, she contemplated running for the Liberian presidency. She'd run in Liberia, in 1997, and lost against a landslide of votes for Charles Taylor, whose win can be largely attributed to intimidation.¹⁴⁶ Although the UN and US military intervened in the civil war that erupted anew during Taylor's regime and exiled Taylor to Nigeria, there were still an overwhelming number of factors to quash Johnson-

¹⁴⁵ Pajibo (2007) 'Civil Society and Transitional Justice in Liberia: A Practitioner's Reflection from the Field' *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 1, p 288

¹⁴⁶ Moran (2006) Liberia p 106

Sirleaf's contemplation of a presidential victory, as well as the hope of others who wished to see her take the presidency:

- She had already lost one election, albeit not a genuinely free and fair one.
- 87% of Liberian voters were illiterate, meaning that getting her message out required accommodation for this fact.¹⁴⁷
- Johnson-Sirleaf, although born in Monrovia, Liberia, had become identified by many with the Americo-Liberian elite, who had, since the country's inception, excluded the indigenous population from civil participation.
- She was a woman, a grandmother, and divorced, in a historically Christian nation broadly untouched by feminist activity.
- Her primary opponent, George Weah, was a wildly popular international football star, whose mass appeal was daunting.
- Johnson-Sirleaf had lived intermittently in Liberia, which could be negatively construed by other candidates.

On the question of whether she could win, the logical answer would be 'no' and while much of the watching world wished to see her win,¹⁴⁸ the consensus was that Weah would.¹⁴⁹ On the question of whether she should even have returned to Liberia, having experienced such terror there, again, many would say 'no'. But history is full of cases where the victimized and exiled citizen returns to a homeland.¹⁵⁰ Members of a Diaspora may leave to find relative security, may indeed embrace the countries to which they have come to build lives, raise

¹⁴⁷ One of the operating principles of Perlin's taxonomy of democratic conditions (See Sayle and Sua, 2008, *Creating an International Network of Democracy Builders*, Vol. 2, p 41) is that "Election campaigns provide sufficient information to facilitate informed choice." In a largely illiterate population (itself a fairly undemocratic condition) the dispersal of information is more challenging than in a generally literate population.

¹⁴⁸ "Johnson-Sirleaf was viewed as the preferred candidate in many Western circles." Harris (1999) 'From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president: how Charles Taylor won the 1997 Liberian elections' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37, 3 p 444

¹⁴⁹ "...there is already a consensus throughout the impoverished west African state that by this time next year, Weah, 38, will have made the transition from lethal striker to fully fledged statesman." Retrieved on 12/30/08 from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/george-weah-favourite-to-win-biggest-battle-leading-his-country-off-the-field-679006.html>

¹⁵⁰ Soljenytsen, for instance, who after a lifetime of persecution in the USSR, was deported in 1974 but returned in 1994, and remained there until his death in 2008. Salman Rushdie returned to India ten years after being exiled for his controversial *The Satanic Verses*. Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan with tragic results, after almost ten years in exile.

families, and often resoundingly impact their new communities, and in Johnson-Sirleaf's case, the global community.

Over the course of her 12-year exile, she distinguished herself as an economist for a number of international financial institutions, including the World Bank, and was also director of the Regional Bureau for Africa of the United Nations Development Programme. In short, Johnson-Sirleaf had more power and prestige than many, in a context of physical, professional, and political security. And yet...

Johnson-Sirleaf did run, and won. In the context of understanding the power of Diaspora, the intriguing questions include:

- Why did she choose to run?
- How is it possible that she won?
- What does Johnson-Sirleaf's victory tell us about Diasporas, about citizenship, and democracy?

A cursory understanding of the country and its history is essential to these questions.

Liberia, Past and Present

Liberia has been plagued by paradox from its natal moment. Often described in vaguely magical terms as a country “founded by freed slaves...initially imagined as a haven for ‘free people of colour’”¹⁵¹ the invention of Liberia was instead a “response to the paroxysm of racism in the post-emancipation era in the United States.”¹⁵² It was a far more pragmatic project, undertaken by the American Colonization Society:

Slave-owners saw repatriation as a means of removing unwelcome examples of independent, self-supporting free blacks from the view of their slaves. Some white abolitionists were nevertheless uncomfortable with the prospect of actually living in a multiracial society. Evangelical Christians envisioned a divine plan to ‘redeem’ African heathens through the example of black missionaries and Christian

¹⁵¹ Moran (2006) *Liberia* p 2

¹⁵² Mgbeoji (2003) Collective insecurity: the Liberian crisis, unilateralism, and the global order p 2

communities. American merchants... welcomed a secure landing place on the African coast [for]...the emerging 'legitimate trade' in palm oil, coffee [etc.].¹⁵³

Liberia's trajectory since this Janus-faced conception was fraught with conflicting ideologies, but the most devastating and long-lasting internal conflict arose on the matter of who was 'a Liberian,' in terms of civil participation: those distinct and dispersed communities who had long occupied the region, or that 5% of the new nation's population who came from North America? From its beginnings, 'Liberian' referred in practice to freed Black Americans. It may seem ironic that black settlers from America were reluctant to enfranchise the region's indigenous population once the nation declared independence, but it is not unusual for culturally diminished groups, as this group had been in the US, to adopt a colonizing position themselves if a suitable context for doing so arises.¹⁵⁴ Sawyer describes Liberia's early leaders as facing choice between outright control and subordination of the many indigenous communities in the pre-Liberian region, versus "the extension of prerogatives of citizenship"¹⁵⁵ to these disparate indigenous communities:

For half a century this question was at the core of the debate about the mission and vision of Liberia...Most settler-leaders struggled to implement a third option, which was to establish relationships of tutelage with surrounding indigenous communities with the view to gradually incorporating individuals from those communities into the Liberian body politic, as such individuals from those communities would have been seen to have acquired the qualities to be considered "civilized."¹⁵⁶

In President William V.S. Tubman's mid-20th century reign, universal suffrage and education increased, and with these came increasing expectations of greater democracy. As noted by

¹⁵³ Moran (2006) *Liberia* p 2

¹⁵⁴ A cultural phenomenon identified by Stalleybrass and White in 1986, known as "displaced abjection", wherein a 'low' social group turns what literal or figurative power it may achieve not against the dominant group, but against 'lower' groups. Liberia's history appears to be a textbook of displaced abjection; the phenomenon is noted by Mgbeoji.

¹⁵⁵ Sawyer (2005) *Beyond Plunder* p 14

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

Sayle and Sua,¹⁵⁷ the experience of such development quickly exceeded the nation's capacity to deliver, (a case of 'the theory of relative deprivation') and under President Tolbert's heavy-handed rule, indigenous Liberians and their in-country allies eventually resorted to violence in their quest for greater democracy and economic fairness. Tolbert was killed in a coup orchestrated by the indigenous warlord Samuel Doe, which saw "some of the worst human rights atrocities in Africa during the 1980s"¹⁵⁸ and created fertile grounds for Charles Taylor's supersession, which became an even greater catastrophe for the country. In 1990, the Economic Community of West African States established a military monitoring group (ECOMOG), which, although it largely failed to bring peace to Liberia, did bring the country (with US aid) to the point where an election could be held. Sayle and Sua¹⁵⁹ point to the fundamental problem with this election:

Despite Carter's glowing accolades and the UN's myopic review of the situation, [there were] astounding irregularities manifest in the election process: ... voters were not faced with a choice between candidates for office, but between more war or a desperately needed reprieve from violence.... Observers...did not recognize systemic pressures on Liberians, or that human security is an essential precondition of genuinely democratic choice.

Johnson-Sirleaf of the Unity Party (UP) was one of twelve candidates running against Taylor, and she came in second. Her platform was built on her non-affiliation with Liberia's wars, having been in exile, but this profile could also look like disengagement with the nation's politics. Worse,

While her history of brave opposition to the Doe government was well known, she was also seen as a former minister of the Tolbert government and, despite Gola and Kru ancestry, a member of the old urban elite. In an attempt to combat any notions that she might not have the political strength of a male former warlord, the nickname, 'Iron

¹⁵⁷ Sayle and Sua (2008) *Creating an International Network of Democracy Builders*, Vol. 2, p 12

¹⁵⁸ Kandeh (2004) *Coups from Below: Armed Subalterns and State Power in West Africa* p 107

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid* p 22

Lady,'¹⁶⁰ was created.¹⁶¹

When Taylor declared victory, Johnson-Sirleaf was the only one of the contending candidates to file a protest for the records, but the UP did not pursue this.¹⁶²

At the polls, Johnson-Sirleaf stated that ECOMOG soldiers had voted or told people how to vote (IRIN-WA, 21 July 1997), and the donation of US\$1million to IECOM [the Independent Electoral Commission] by the Taylor-friendly government of Taiwan was seen by some as indicative of IECOM bias. Allegations were made that counts of zero were registered for both Boley and George Toe Washington at the very polling stations in which they had cast their own votes (Daily Observer, 28 July 1997), and the UP claimed that party representatives had been under duress to sign the tally sheets at the polling stations (The Inquirer, 23 July 1997).¹⁶³

It is telling that Johnson-Sirleaf and her party went on record with their protests, given that she had been already been imprisoned once, by Doe, for announcing her intention to run against him. And again, she was charged with treason in 1997 by Taylor's government, and went into exile. She returned in 2003 after Taylor had been removed, to chair the *Commission on Good Governance*, which had been mandated to assist and monitor the preparation for the next elections.

The 2005 Election

Liberia was governed under the principles of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) since October 2003. The CPA established the National Transitional Government of Liberia

¹⁶⁰ Unfortunately, Johnson-Sirleaf shares this title with women in power generally, suggesting a global lack of imagination or specificity in the application of sobriquets for the ruling female. Others once or currently known as 'The Iron Lady' include Golda Meir, Barbara Castle, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, Eugenia Charles, and Angela Merkel.

¹⁶¹ Harris (1999) 'From 'warlord' to 'democratic' president: how Charles Taylor won the 1997 Liberian elections' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37, 3 p 444

¹⁶² Ibid p 439

¹⁶³ Ibid

(NTOC) to implement its provisions and lay the groundwork for a return to democracy. In February 2005, the National Elections Commission announced that October 11, 2005, would be the date for the election, and that if a run-off was necessary, this would be held on November 5, 2005. The House of Representatives of the new legislature would have 64 seats (each of Liberia's 15 counties has at least two seats with the remaining 34 apportioned by population), while the senate was to have 30 seats, two for each County, with both representatives and senators directly elected. The Presidency would be decided by a majority of the popular vote. If no one succeeded in obtaining over 50% of the votes on the first ballot, a run-off would be held between the two leading candidates.

The Carter Centre of the National Democracy Institute, which observed the two elections, concluded in a post-election report that

[w]hile the CPA brought an end to the war, transitional leaders ultimately did little to address its root causes. As a consequence, the campaign brought many unresolved issues into focus, particularly in the increasingly tense period before the November 8 run-off election.

Competition for political office at all levels exposed longstanding differences between Liberia's educated elites and the impoverished majority, gender divisions exacerbated by the high incidence of rape and mistreatment of women and girls during the war, the generational divide between elders and a burgeoning young population with limited access to education, employment and land resources, and conflict over the control of revenues derived from Liberia's natural resources.¹⁶⁴

Twenty two candidates stood for the Presidency. This group included Roland Massaquoi, a protégé of Charles Taylor, Sekou Conneh, a former rebel leader, as well as Weah and Johnson-Sirleaf, who emerged as the early leaders. Where Weah appealed to Liberia's younger, poorer citizens, Johnson-Sirleaf was supported by the middle classes.¹⁶⁵ On the first

¹⁶⁴ The Carter Center (2005) 'Preliminary Statement of the NDI / Carter Center – International Observer Delegation to the Liberian Presidential Runoff Election' *News Release by the Carter Center*, p 4-5. Available Online: <www.cartercenter.org/documents/2245.pdf>.

¹⁶⁵ Katharine Houreld (14 September 2005) "A taste of freedom" *openDemocracy News Analysis*. Available Online: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa_democracy/liberia_2838.jsp>.

ballot, Weah finished first with 28.3% of the vote, with Johnson-Sirleaf coming second with 19.8%. As predicted, both advanced to the run-off. The remaining votes were spread between the remaining candidates, with three attracting over 5%. Charles Brumskine, the most prominent of four Christian fundamentalist candidates, finished a strong third place with 13.9% of the vote.¹⁶⁶

The run-off did not initially look promising for Johnson-Sirleaf. Weah received endorsements from many of the losing presidential candidates and victorious legislators while Johnson-Sirleaf's most prominent endorsement was from Joseph Korto, who had placed only seventh in the first round. Brumskine refused to publicly support either candidate. Many of the losing candidates ultimately proved incapable of bringing their supporters to their preferred candidates, though Johnson-Sirleaf's key endorsements seemed to be somewhat more effective. Campaigning for the run-off revealed many shortcomings of Weah's campaign. Speaking to supporters in one County, Weah seemed to ignore the implications of his words on neighbouring counties. Where Johnson-Sirleaf traveled by helicopter, Weah traveled by road. Harris refers to the "increasingly paranoid and potentially dangerous statements" made by officials of Weah's party. Ultimately, Harris suggests that Johnson-Sirleaf "ran one of the most political of all campaigns, referring to policy and previous political experience, and Weah conducted one of the least political, in that it focused on his celebrity and his lack of a political past," and which was undermined by those surrounding Weah, many of whom were political and were tainted by their political past. Ultimately, Liberia bought into Johnson-Sirleaf's educated political position.¹⁶⁷

Johnson-Sirleaf won the run-off with 59.4% of the vote, an impressive result given her 8-point deficit after the first round. Both the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States declared the election to be transparent, but the success of the election

¹⁶⁶ David Harris (2006) 'Liberia 2005: an unusual African post-conflict election' *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44, 3, p 383; Amos Sawyer (2008) 'Emerging Patterns in Liberia's Post-Conflict Politics: Observations from the 2005 Elections' *African Affairs*, 107, p 177-199.

¹⁶⁷ Harris (2006) p 388-391

was jeopardized by claims from Weah and his supporters that Johnson-Sirleaf could have only overtaken Weah's lead through fraud. Incidents of violence raised the specter that Liberia could descend back into chaos, but after the National Electoral Commission rejected the allegations of fraud, Weah abandoned his case in late December. As a result, Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated as President of Liberia on January 16, 2006.

David Harris cautions, however, that Liberia's election should not necessarily be seen as a typical post-conflict election, and that its utility as an example for democratizations elsewhere is limited in the absence of similar circumstances. In particular, Harris notes that

[t]he absence of transformed rebel forces in the political process was just as unusual a factor in the conduct and outcome of the elections as the lack of an incumbent. This was, to all intents and purposes, an election amongst civilians on a playing field, if not level, at least not dramatically tilted. The elections thus, from the perspective of insecurity and its electoral uses, resembled African peacetime polls more than other post-conflict elections. From another perspective, the Liberian polls resembled few other African elections in peace or after war, in that there was no incumbent party with vastly superior resources at its disposal. These features impacted positively on the conduct of the elections, even enabling a final scenario involving a woman and a footballer...¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Ibid p 393

Degrees of Statehood, Democracy and Citizenship

Statehood

The idea of statehood in Africa begins with Liberia, the continent's oldest 'nation.'¹⁶⁹ Mgbeoji argues that Liberia's initial pretensions to statehood were flawed in part by being fully premised on pigmentation; the lighter one's skin (through US miscegenation), the greater one's rights to access, participation, and 'civilizing' leadership in the state:

It is no surprise that, having been fed on a diet of racism and notions of racial superiority on the basis of skin pigmentation, the state of Liberia was founded upon and sustained on the supposed superiority of the light-skinned Americo-Liberian (the elite) over the darker-skinned natives.¹⁷⁰

The notion of statehood, if including such definitional criteria as above, is obviously problematic. A further difficulty with configuring Liberia as a state lies in the fact that, excepting the initial settlers, who constituted less than 5% of Liberia's population, the region was and has largely remained a geography inhabited by various distinct ethnicities, among whom alliances and feuds would have always developed and evolved or devolved, but at no time would have understood their communities as being a ruled 'part' of a larger body until they collectively found themselves precisely where they had always been, but which was suddenly 'Liberia.'

In effect, rather than becoming an effective mechanism for the articulation of the means and framework in which life, liberty, and happiness may be enjoyed by its citizens, the African state, from its conception by the Europeans and its checkered life thereafter, has largely been a hostage of manufactured history, foreign or disconnected elitism, and clientelism.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Mgbeoji (2003) *Collective insecurity: the Liberian crisis, unilateralism, and the global order* p 2

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid* p 5

¹⁷¹ *Ibid* p 34

The challenge of democratization in a context where the structures and principles of the philosophy are themselves foreign and where ‘national’ history is a myth, is Herculean. If the state itself has grown from a “precolonial African nation mutilated into an ahistorical unit run by self-indulgent elites, [creating] a time bomb waiting to explode”¹⁷² and “cartographically and culturally disoriented,” then the very legitimacy of governance is a vexing issue, even the possibility of a democratic one. But by the time of Liberia’s 2005 election, it was especially critical that leadership at least break with the country’s long tradition in which:

Direct and uncritical successors of the colonialist contraptions insisted on absolute loyalty to a fictitious nation-state. As Hansen Laments, “though they were African themselves, the leaders ignored African identities, territories, and boundaries in favour of a European defined one.”

Democracy

The problem with defining democracy lies in the complexity of the term’s referents. Postmodernist thinker Jacques Derrida argues that we can never define any term with any finality, in part because what defines a term are other terms whose definitions depend on yet more terms, and so on. ‘Democracy’ might be the best example of this, given how many interpretable variables go into any effort to pin down its meaning. Elections alone do not constitute democracy, however; Perlin rightly notes “citizen participation in voting is but a minimum requirement to consider an electorate politically engaged.”¹⁷³ The 1997 election in Liberia was no indication of democracy, despite the applause of observers. The incumbent Taylor’s commercial empire had “its own currency, TV, radio, newspaper, international airport and deepwater port...A US official estimated that Taylor may have had access to US \$75 million per year.”¹⁷⁴ These resources infinitely outstripped those available to any other

¹⁷² Ibid 26, 31

¹⁷³ Sayle and Sua (2008) *Creating an International Network of Democracy Builders*, Vol. 2, p 45

¹⁷⁴ Harris (1999) ‘From ‘warlord’ to ‘democratic’ president: how Charles Taylor won the 1997 Liberian elections’ *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37, 3 p 434

candidates. Further, Lyons notes “many Liberians believed that if Taylor lost the election the country would return to war.”¹⁷⁵ These are clearly not ideal democratic conditions.

Another of Perlin’s criteria for the facilitation of democracy is that there be a large middle class, which poses an interesting complication in the case of Johnson-Sirleaf’s 2005 victory. Given that the majority of Liberia’s population is anything but middle class, it could be argued that Johnson-Sirleaf’s victory was less than democratic, according to the Perlin taxonomy. But we will be looking at the role played by the Diaspora in that victory, whose lives are likely to be, relative to their fellow citizens at home, more middle class. Without data to support this supposition, we cannot say definitively that Liberia has an active middle class *in absentia*, but if this is true, the election of Johnson-Sirleaf may indeed have occurred within Perlin’s facilitating condition of a middle class; we know that Diasporas have considerable influence on the countries they adopt, but what is less understood thus far is the likelihood that Diasporan influence may be profound in the home country as well.

Citizenship and Representation

The final element in Perlin’s taxonomy of democratic operating principles is that there be “A system of group politics that ensures the representation of citizen interests based on the principles of pluralist theory.” One of the indicators of this element is recognition by government and policy makers of the legitimacy of advocacy, and that there be free space for advocacy groups. This element takes on interesting proportions in relation to the notion of a Diasporic citizenship. Citizenship refers to “a legally recognized subject or national of a state or commonwealth, either *native or naturalized*”¹⁷⁶ which implies residency as criteria of citizenship. But in an increasingly globalized world, ‘citizenship’ is complicated by the value

¹⁷⁵ Lyons (1999) *Voting for Peace: Postconflict Elections in Liberia* p 59. Perversely, Lyons defends this election on a number of fronts, the most logically egregious of which is that “Taylor [was] perceived as the candidate most capable of preventing a return to war.” This is akin to suggesting that I am the best of all neighbors because when I finish banging my neighbor’s head against the fence, he seems to feel great.

¹⁷⁶ New Oxford American Dictionary, my emphasis

of fluid mobility of goods, services, and people. The nation-state itself has been under critical scrutiny for some time: “The projected demise of the nation-state has been a central aspect of many different kinds of debates about the nature of contemporary society.”¹⁷⁷ With an increasing questionability of the concept of nation-state must occur an increasing question of citizenship. In the case of Diaspora, Liberia’s Diaspora is especially interesting, given that this (non)nation’s origins are themselves both recent and artificial, in a historical sense. Ergo, its citizenship is in some ways artificial. But this notion is unacceptable in terms of current governance, and too abstract to be of any value. Or is it?

If Liberia’s constitution is that of an initially small, foreign, degraded body (accepting that returning slaves become foreign to their ancestral homes) imposing its will upon a regional collective of communities historically unfamiliar and evidently uninterested in becoming units of a whole, then it can be argued that it has *always been* an essentially ‘citizen-less’ state. Perhaps it is this particular kind of liminal identity that permeates the Liberian ethos. The utterly human compulsion to literally or figuratively locate and affix ‘home,’ beyond dwelling, drives us to identify ourselves through place. It has surely been the Liberian experience from its origins to struggle with this urge, on the part of its settlers, those unsettled, and ultimately, by its Diaspora. The old question of ‘who’ is Liberian takes on new significance in a modern context. At one time, the answer was an ugly one; ‘Liberians’ were lighter-skinned American transplants. Now, the Liberian citizen may well be, as are an increasing number of citizens, geographically globalized. In this sense, the Liberian Diaspora should be no less fully entitled to full participation in the political matters of their country of birth or ancestry.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s lifelong commitment to seeing democracy in Liberia is not unique among the country’s Diaspora, which has been actively engaged in the matter of its own participation in Liberia’s development for many years. The question of why Johnson-Sirleaf

¹⁷⁷ Bhabra (2006) ‘Beginnings: Edward Said and Questions of Nationalism’ *interventions*, Vol. 8 (1) p 3

would choose to run as president, if framed by questions of ambition or psychology, is one only she could answer.¹⁷⁸ She does offer a brief response to this question in an interview:

I want to change the country. We have a small country with ample resources and a small population, and we remain undeveloped compared with so many African countries. The potential is so large. Good leadership can make Liberia a model country, both in terms of development and democracy. We need to come out of these elections with a good leader who has the capacity and the experience to lead the team that overtakes the processes of reconciliation and development.

But if framed as a matter of right, meaning her right as a member of the country's Diaspora to undertake such a role, the question is somewhat moot if we accept all the evidence¹⁷⁹ that Diasporas do not often, in the most meaningful sense, ever 'leave' their home countries. That she can truly be understood to represent her nation's peoples is without doubt, despite having parted company from them for a good many years. In fact, the mix of longstanding and deep patriotism with years of highly cosmopolitan experience, her native and Americo-Liberian ancestry, the contradiction of close familiarity with previous regimes and brutal treatment from them, all make her an exceptionally appropriate representative. In a 2006 speech to the U.S. Congress, Johnson-Sirleaf emphasized this relationship when she stated that

I came face to face with the human devastation of war, which killed a quarter of a million of our three million people and displaced most of the rest. Hundreds of thousands escaped across borders. More - who could not - fled into the bush, constantly running from one militia or another, often surviving by eating rodents and wild plants that made them sick and even killed them. Our precious children died of malaria, parasites and mal-nourishments. Our boys, full of potential, were forced to be child soldiers, to kill or be killed. Our girls, capable of being anything they could imagine, were made into sex slaves, gang-raped by men with guns, made mothers while they were still children themselves.

¹⁷⁸ Retrieved on 01/02/09 from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200508100001.html>

¹⁷⁹ Diasporas are typically primary knowledge sources of their cultures in their adopted countries; the most striking examples of this are found in Holocaust memoirs (Elie Weisel,) literature (I.B. Singer,) and philosophy (Hannah Arendt.) More recently, Rohinton Mistry's literary masterpieces, written in Canada about India, indicate the Diasporic capacity to carry one's past geography into a present one.

But listening to the hopes and dreams of our people, I recall the words of a Mozambican poet who said, "Our dream has the size of freedom." My people, like your people, believe deeply in freedom - and, in their dreams, they reach for the heavens. I represent those dreams. I represent their hope and their aspirations. I ran for president because I am determined to see good governance in Liberia in my lifetime. But I also ran because I am the mother of four, and I wanted to see our children smile again.¹⁸⁰

Yet the paradoxes of Johnson-Sirleaf's past could count against her among an electorate unwilling to trust in any form of historical elitism. So how did she win?

How Did Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf Become President of Liberia?

Of course there are infinite conjectures to make on how Johnson-Sirleaf won the 2005 election; that for most of her life she had worked tirelessly for her country and had worked even harder to win the election is only part of the answer. A review of her speeches, strategies, organization, and bases of support internally provides a clear picture of knowledge, experience, determination and credibility.¹⁸¹ Ultimately, our focus is on what role the Liberian Diaspora, in the context of globalization, played in her success, but there is also the matter of gender, which played a not insignificant part in her success.

Gender

In the same way that citizenship in Liberia is complicated by legacy and now globalization, so is gender. Sirleaf's status as a woman is alternately glorified and refuted in the media, and

¹⁸⁰ Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Speech to a U.S. Joint Session of Congress, 15 March 2006 available from http://www.embassyofliberia.org/news/item_congressspeech.html.

¹⁸¹ See articles describing the Johnson-Sirleaf campaign at *The Free Library* (<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Liberia%3a+a+new+beginning%3b+After+158+years+of+%22imperial%22+male+rule%2c...-a0142575258>), the *All Africa* site (<http://allafrica.com/stories/200512110034.html>) at *PBS.org* (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/africa/liberia/johnson-sirleaf-bio.html>) at *KRL International* (<http://www.krlinternational.com/press/121405.html>) and *CBS* (www.cbc.ca/news/background/liberia/sirleaf.html).

she herself alternately points to or away from it, depending on rhetorical purpose. Consider the media excerpts below:

“Ellen is our man!” was the refrain that rang through the streets of Monrovia during Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s campaign to be Africa’s first elected woman president. Despite the slogan, many of Johnson Sirleaf’s supporters attribute her victory to the fact that she is not a man. Liberians often blame men for destroying the country and many see Johnson Sirleaf as the woman who will set things right. Johnson Sirleaf herself has vowed to bring “motherly sensitivity and emotion to the presidency.”¹⁸²

and

Stella Tamale, dean of law at Makerere University in Uganda, is equally pleased: “No one can tell us any more that Africa is not ready for a woman president,” she says. “But Ellen’s not a woman,” another colleague objects. “She’s... Well, she is a woman, but ...”

The gender of someone already in their late 60s is not usually in doubt – except, apparently, in the case of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the newly elected president of Liberia.¹⁸³

and

I have read numerous commentaries on Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s victory in the Liberian Presidential elections. Many have dubbed her “A Woman of Substance.” Others call her the “Iron Lady”. Yet others portray her as the one beacon of hope in “the worst place to be a woman on earth.” A campaign slogan in Monrovia is reported to have read: “Ellen, She’s Our Man”; another urged people to “Vote for the Old Ma”– a sign of deference and respect for the elder status and consequent wisdom Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is assumed to have garnered over the years. Having won the most votes in Liberia’s run-off election for President, Ms. Sirleaf-Johnson stands on the threshold of becoming the first woman head of state in Africa. She has turned the tide of male-dominated control over the commanding heights of African politics, opening up the possibility that the 21st Century is the century of the African woman in politics.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Retrieved on 12/30/08 from http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/399_ellen_johnson_sirleaf.cfm

¹⁸³ Retrieved on 12/30/08 from http://www.howardwrench.com/archives/2005/11/15/ellen_johnsonsirleaf_less_of_the_iron_lady/

¹⁸⁴ Okome, Mojúbàolú Olúfúnké (2005) ‘Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson (sic): A Tribute’ *JENDA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* Issue 7

The calculated strategy of fostering an image in which one is a ‘man,’ but not a man, and a woman, but not a ‘woman,’ is hundreds of years old. It is a trope first known to be employed by Queen Elizabeth I, who claimed “I have the heart of a man, not a woman, and I am not afraid of anything” in a speech to her army at Tilbury in 1588.¹⁸⁵ In the same speech, she argued

I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king-and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn . . . that . . . any should dare to invade the borders of my realm . . . I myself will be your general.

A great deal of attention was paid, during the Johnson-Sirleaf campaign and since, to the fact that Johnson-Sirleaf is a woman. This should be construed as a bit archaic, given that little interest is evident in the media to the sex or gender of male leaders. It is not necessary to know what Johnson-Sirleaf’s personal views on feminism or the rights of women to power might be; these would be personal, but it is noteworthy that in the 21st century, the matter is still an issue, and that the strategy of calculated ambiguity is still apparently necessary. But it seems that Johnson-Sirleaf’s need to draw the support of women at home and abroad relied finally on a rather essentializing brand of femininity:

Johnson-Sirleaf was quoted as saying during her campaign, “Women are the ones who truly have heart to care and to serve, perhaps because of the role that nature has bestowed on us. A woman is naturally crafted to take care of the children and keep the home together, and our constitution is patterned toward selfless service.”¹⁸⁶

These are no feminist sentiments, but must be understood as strategically constructed positions by which women’s support in Liberia and elsewhere could be enlisted without the threat of supporters being seen as unfeminine, feminist, or worse.

There is somewhat exceptional justification for Johnson-Sirleaf to play the gender card, however she chose to play it. In a study on presidential power, regime type, and democracy in

¹⁸⁵ Retrieved on 12/30/08 from http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/elizabeth_tilbury.htm

¹⁸⁶ Retrieved on 12/31/08 from http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=93c365f944b7adecb0410351c5890bd6

30 African countries, Van Cranenberg¹⁸⁷ points to the democracy-withering effects of highly centralized governments in Africa, referring to these as ‘Big Men Rule.’ (Sayle and Sua note that Liberia’s constitutional office is “head of an extremely centralized government structure.”¹⁸⁸) Johnson-Sirleaf had already lost one presidential election in her lifetime, to voters who quite reasonably chose their own safety and security in choosing Taylor, knowing that his defeat would no doubt mean continued bloodshed. Playing the gender card in 2005, she quite shrewdly worked the broader threat of masculinity itself as a reason to vote for her. This is the subtext of the presentation of gender in her campaign and in her presidency:

Gender representation across the continent is heavily stacked in favour of men, and although the causes of Africa's problems are many, the track record of the "Big Men" has been questionable to say the least. At the beginning of a new century, perhaps the time of the African woman has finally come.¹⁸⁹

Johnson-Sirleaf acknowledges this herself: “Gender played an important role because my appeal went to grassroots people – women marketers, women traders – and they really mobilized on my behalf.”¹⁹⁰

Liberia’s Diaspora and Globalization

Liberia’s relationship with its Diaspora was, in the first part of the 20th century, complicated first by the government’s interest in drawing Black Americans and Black Caribbeans wishing to ‘return’ to Africa, followed quickly by governmental reluctance and then outright rejection of Black Americans in particular after the Marcus Garvey affair. Garvey’s intent to “liberate Africa from European rule” and to transfer 20,000 to 30,000 Black families a year was

¹⁸⁷ Van Cranenberg (2008) ‘Big Men’ Rule: Presidential Power, Regime Type, and Democracy in 30 African Countries’ *Democratization* Vol. 15, No. 5

¹⁸⁸ Sayle and Sua (2008) *Creating an International Network of Democracy Builders*, Vol. 2, p 48

¹⁸⁹ Retrieved on 12/31/08 from [http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Liberia%3a+a+lesson+for+Africa's+big+men.\(Around+Africa\)-a0140071324](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Liberia%3a+a+lesson+for+Africa's+big+men.(Around+Africa)-a0140071324)

¹⁹⁰ Roehrkasse (Dec. 10 2008) ‘Interview with Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’ *The Brown Daily Herald*

ultimately seen as a troublesome prospect that could threaten Liberia's elites.¹⁹¹ But this chapter in the country's history refers more to migrants than an actual Diaspora, although Sawyer defines Garveyites as a Diaspora.

There remains much debate over what exactly defines a Diaspora, but if theories of postmodernism have anything to teach us, it is that the whole is not more, but *different* than the sum of its parts; thus the more global citizen, including members of a Diaspora, are often reluctant to define themselves as mere amalgams of two or more identities, as, for instance, an *Americo-Liberian* or an *Indo-Canadian*. Instead, Diaspora are often defined or self-defined as beyond the binary. Walsh suggests that Diasporas generally are "repositioning themselves in relation to postcolonial and neocolonial regimes and in relation to a nation-state-dominated global order" and argues that this positioning creates collective potential to ally politically in with a home country from abroad.¹⁹² However defined, there is little doubt that they wield extraordinary clout.

Although each of the leading candidates in the presidential race received backing from U.S.-based support groups, Sirleaf's supporters were among the most active. A group called "Family, Friends and Well-Wishers of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf" raised funds, organized rallies, and, last week after her victory became official, held a thanksgiving service in Washington, DC.

Johnson-Sirleaf took care to engage with Diaspora groups throughout the US in her campaign, particularly with the sizeable Liberian Diaspora in Minnesota.

What Do Out-of-Country Liberians Matter to an Election?

The year before campaigning was allowed within Liberia, a group called 'Liberians for Ellen' established a website to mobilize support for her from the US. The group was

¹⁹¹ Sundiata (1980) *Black Scandal: America and the Liberian Labour Crisis, 1929-1936* Philadelphia: ISHI p 112

¹⁹² Walsh (2003) *Global Diasporas interventions* Vol. 5(1), p 4, 8

spearheaded by Amara Konneh, a member of the Liberian Diaspora who became an information specialist, and who studied James Carville and Karl Rove to help orchestrate a US-based Johnson-Sirleaf campaign. This work was instrumental in her victory, as Konneh worked with ongoing polling data and political consultants in the US to shape and redefine Johnson-Sirleaf's message in accordance with his group's data. In fact, the networking undertaken by the Liberian Diaspora in the US in particular included Larry Gibson, who "managed the 1992 Clinton/Gore campaign in Maryland and three successful campaigns for Baltimore's first black mayor."¹⁹³ Johnson-Sirleaf's own connectivity in her period as a member of Liberia's Diaspora brought her to, among other key figures, Jesse Jackson, who "was instrumental in obtaining \$50 million in US federal aid for Liberia."¹⁹⁴ Further, Richard Tolbert, the son of Liberia's former president and a Wall Street-based international banker "supported Sirleaf's candidacy and joined her on her West African tour." He stated that "Sirleaf's victory has elicited tremendous goodwill from around the world. 'We saw it everywhere we went,' he said."¹⁹⁵ These are fairly concrete instances of Diasporic activity, including Johnson-Sirleaf's, in which the direct impact of such activity can be seen. But there are broader, more phenomenally entrenched factors associated with the Liberian Diaspora that testify their role in Johnson-Sirleaf's victory.

There are three interconnected ways in which the Liberian Diaspora now has, if not a determinant effect on the outcome of an election, enough power to seriously sway the electorate back home. Financial remittances, influence within and the creation of global networks, and the development of a highly participatory ethos, amounting to patriotism, which permeates the Liberian Diaspora.

¹⁹³ Kramer (2005) 'Liberia: Showered with Enthusiasm, Liberia's President-Elect Receives High-Level Reception in Washington' *All-Africa.com*. Retrieved on 12/31/08.

¹⁹⁴ Dukule (May 2006) 'The War is Over – But We Must Remain Vigilant,' says President Sirleaf to Liberians in Chicago, Illinois *The Perspective* Retrieved on 01/01/09 from www.theperspective.org

¹⁹⁵ Retrieved on 01/02/09 from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200512110034.html?page=3>

Remittance

Sawyer asserts that Liberia's Diaspora remits significant capital, "hundreds of thousands of dollars monthly in cash to relatives and causes in Liberia."¹⁹⁶ In such a poverty-stricken nation, this activity has important influence on both lives and views in the home country. Further,

Almost all community-related organizations extant in Liberia have branch extensions or affiliated networks in the United States. There are scores of township, clan, district and county organizations; alumni associations, professional groups; and religious bodies organized to advance the welfare of their members in the United States and to support parent or related communities in Liberia. The Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas has seventeen chapters around the United States...An organization of Liberian physicians in the United States currently has a membership of more than 125 physicians and is currently planning to restore the standards of the medical school of the University of Liberia.¹⁹⁷

In the context of globalization Nathaniel Barnes, a permanent representative of the Mission of Liberia to the UN and Bennett M. Yalartai, a policy advisor to this same body, argue that the Diaspora takes on new significance, especially concerning their real and potential economic impact:

What is the Diaspora? Contrary to popular perception, the Diaspora is not just the latest buzzword for expatriate networks. The Diaspora is an emerging global economic and political phenomenon informally complementing Foreign Direct Investment with the potential of becoming a major influence, if not the new and true "North", in future North/South cooperation... The impact of remittances as a global economic force for developing countries over the last three decades is incredible. In 1980, the officially recorded remittance flows to developing countries equated to about \$15 billion; by 2002, flows had ballooned to \$80 billion. In 2007, the annual flow of remittances from members of the global Diaspora to their home countries is

¹⁹⁶ Sawyer (2005) *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia* London: Reinner Publishers p 78

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

estimated at \$300 billion or more. This makes the global Diaspora a major emerging alternative funding source for Third World development.¹⁹⁸

While this indicates the importance of Diaspora generally, it is especially important in Liberia, given its infrastructural damage after 14 years of civil war and outright plundering by Taylor:

The Diaspora is a major source of investment funding, expertise and an important confidence building measure. Financial flows from the global African Diaspora contribute on the average of 5-10% GDP of many African countries and in a few cases over 20%. For example, shares of GDP from remittances for Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea, and Liberia are 48%, 38%, and 26%, respectively. This factor is significant especially for a country such as Liberia. Remittances accounting for 26% of Liberia's annual GDP of \$574.5 million and a growth rate of 7.9% translate into an inward capital flow of about \$149 million per annum. This only accounts for the formal sector. With the informal sector, the estimated total remittance flow to Liberia is \$300 million or more.¹⁹⁹

Giuliano and Ruiz-Arranz have developed an empirical analysis that shows how remittances can promote growth in less financially developed countries.²⁰⁰ So if between the often increased educations and financial capital of those sending money home, whether to families, NGOs, or in campaign contributions, there is little doubt that this activity will have effects on voter behaviour. Johnson-Sirleaf's opponent, George Weah, was certainly a star of sorts in his own country, but Johnson-Sirleaf would no doubt appeal more to the Liberian Diaspora, first for the fact that she could more honestly represent their own interests in Liberia, having been a Diaspora member herself for many years, and furthermore for her extensive economic experience and expertise. But financial remittances are not the only kind; social

¹⁹⁸ Barnes and Yalartai (2007) Engaging the Liberian Diaspora: Mobilization of Domestic Resources and Partnership Building for Development

An Alternative Development Model Retrieved on 01/02/09 from <http://www.phoenixamericapital.com/files/pdf.pdf>. p 1, 2

¹⁹⁹ Ibid p 6

²⁰⁰ Giuliano and Ruiz-Arranz (2006) 'Remittances, Financial Development, and Growth' IMF Working Paper No. 05/234; IZA Discussion Paper No. 2160. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=888103>

remittances²⁰¹ have significant impact on those at home, according to Levitt, who states that although social remittances are often “unsystematic and unintentional,”²⁰² they nonetheless typically “engender demands for a different type of politics.”²⁰³

Global Networks and Participation

However powerful or powerless Diasporas existed before the Internet, the advent of global communications platforms has created a potent tool by which Diasporas influence their home countries. The Liberian Diaspora’s US-based online forum, *The Perspective*, provides a rich source of material for understanding the commitment and capacity of Diasporas to both see themselves as citizens of an adopted land and yet always Liberian enough to want influence an outcome halfway across the world from them. It also enables families, communities, and districts within the country to understand the role democracy plays in the lives of expatriates and exiles.

The Perspective is an online magazine that provides an active bilateral forum for Liberians and the Liberian Diaspora to publicly debate political, socio-cultural and economic issues together. It has been active since 1998, and draws material from Liberian intellectuals as well as the general Liberian or Liberian Diasporic public. *The Perspective* was founded by the Liberian Democratic Future (LDF) which is:

A group of Liberians from different ethnic backgrounds, genders, religious beliefs and political persuasions who are dedicated to pluralistic, democratic Liberia. The Liberian Democratic Future has great passion for democracy, peace with justice and equal opportunity for all Liberians, which are not only necessary but in deed critically imperative if we are to transcend the wounds and deep division of our civil conflict.

²⁰¹ “...the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital” that flow between populations at home and abroad. Levitt (1998) ‘Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-level Forms of Cultural Diffusion’ *International Migration Review* Vol. 32, No. 4 p 927

²⁰² Ibid p 936, 942

²⁰³ Ibid p 942

In recognition of this national need, LDF has decided to launch a medium of dialogue - The Perspective.²⁰⁴

There is no data available on its or other Liberian online forum readership, but the variety of contributors and themes, along with these sites' relative longevity online, suggests that they are extremely popular. Networks include *AllAfrica*, *liberianonline.com*, *westafricadirectory.com*, *unitedliberia.com*, *liberiabroadcastingsystem.com*, *www.analystliberia.com*, and many more.

Contributors to The Perspective include Dr. Chinua Akukwe,²⁰⁵ a member of the US Liberian Diaspora, who argues that

Liberians in the Diaspora should become strategic partners in Government's individual and private sector initiative to accelerate development. As one of the most distinguished African immigrants in the West in the last two decades, the president knows a thing or two about the strengths of her compatriots in the Diaspora. Creating opportunities for Liberians in the Diaspora to complete individual projects, safeguard personal investments in the country, create private sector generating jobs and bring major corporations to Liberia to set up factories and service delivery facilities should be an important focus of the new government. The key is to create conducive environments for Liberians in the Diaspora to maximize their potential in the urgent task of nation building.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Retrieved on 12/31/08 from <http://www.theperspective.org/editorial.html>

²⁰⁵ "An expert on HIV/AIDS strategies, policies and programs, with special focus on Africa; global health; maternal and child health; and, international development partnerships. He is a Fellow of the American College of Epidemiology; a Fellow of the United Kingdom Royal Society of Medicine, London; a Fellow of the United States National Academy of Public Administration, Washington, DC; a Member of the New York Academy of Sciences; a former Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee and Governing Board of the National Council for International Health (NCIH) now known as the Global Health Council, Washington, DC; a former Senior Visiting Fellow at the National Medical Association, Washington, DC; a former Senior Visiting Fellow at the American Council for Voluntary International Action (InterAction), Washington, DC; a former member of the International Human Rights Committee of the American Public Health Association; a former member of the editorial board of the American Journal of Public Health, where he served for five years; and, a former member of the board of directors of the Christian Connections for International Health, an international ecumenical organization. Dr. Akukwe is presently a member of the Board of Directors of the Constituency for Africa, Washington, DC. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Physicians and Scientists of African Descent (ASPAD), Silver Spring, Maryland, USA." Retrieved on 01/01/09 from <http://www.worldpress.org/freelancers/index.cfm/hurl/page=freelancerDetails/id=41>

²⁰⁶ Retrieved on 01/01/09 from <http://www.theperspective.org/articles/0119200602.html>

These arguments indicate the growing recognition of the importance of the Diaspora now, but even before her election, Johnson-Sirleaf made it clear that she was thoroughly aware of their role. She was asked in an interview “What role do you see the Liberian Diaspora playing in the election?” and answered:

They're playing an important role already, even pre-election. Liberians abroad provide significant resources to the country – huge amounts to take care of their family and friends. In these elections, they are much more involved than they have been in other elections. They are enthusiastic, they are aggressive, they are participatory with the candidates or party of their choice, they are having rallies, they are supporting with ideas, with money.²⁰⁷

One of the biggest current debates among Liberians at home and abroad has to do with the matter of dual citizenship. In the same interview as above, Johnson-Sirleaf said that:

To all of our disappointment, they [the Liberian Diaspora] have not been allowed to vote, simply because the Election Commission didn't feel they had the capacity to manage a vote externally. But many went home to register, and many will try to go home to vote. Many of them that cannot vote are working in support of candidates. I know that I'm enjoying support from Liberians in this country and in other countries to ensure that we win.

Arguments rage back and forth on the matter of dual citizenship in The Perspective in particular, and are of an intensity that bespeaks the passion exiles and expatriates of Liberia retain for the country of origin. But most persuasive on the matter of why Liberia needs to amend its constitution in favour of dual citizenship is the fact that a free flow of skilled, professional, academic, legal and medical expertise through the country, its infrastructure can

²⁰⁷ Retrieved on 01/02/09 from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200508100001.html>

only benefit.²⁰⁸ As well, Diasporas from Liberia who have experienced the advantages of life in a more stabilized, less corrupt democracy, wherever that may be, are more likely to push for greater governmental transparency, fairness, and populism.

Conclusion

With Barack Obama's presidential victory in 2008, much of the world was overjoyed to see not only a black American elected president, but one whose intelligence evokes a time when education and intelligence were thought basic prerequisites for holding high office. There are parallels in these firsts, a woman president of Africa's oldest republic in 2006 and a black president of the US in 2008, at least in one important respect. Obama and Johnson-Sirleaf each embody the erstwhile contradiction of being visible minorities (black and a woman, respectively) chosen by a majority to lead their respective democratic nations in the context of globalization, where 'citizenship' has become increasingly porous and protean. Obama's cosmopolitan background (which includes residency or genealogy in Hawaii, Kenya, Kansas, and Indonesia) is interesting, but Johnson-Sirleaf's 'cultural' genealogy, and in particular, her experience as a member of Liberia's considerable Diaspora point directly to paradigm shift attending globalization. Understanding the importance of Johnson-Sirleaf's trajectory requires a re-conceptualization of past notions and assumptions about citizenship, and a recognition of the importance of a Diaspora's real and potential effects on democratic and economic development. Failing awareness of these conditions, we would remain baffled by the fact that a Harvard-educated divorced grandmother, twice imprisoned, briefly an ally of the infamous Liberian warlord Charles Taylor and long-time resident of the US, was freely

²⁰⁸ "Professionals and highly qualified individuals such as doctors, nurses, engineers, accountants and all those whose services are indispensable for the process of reconstruction in the native countries may be reluctant to return home since as temporary workers they lack security of work in their host countries. In this case, too, the potential contribution of these highly skilled migrants to their home countries is lost. As globalisation creates virtual borders, serious thought has to be given to the question of dual citizenship to enable these previously war and coup-ravaged countries to maximise benefits from international migration." Akokpari & Azevedo (2007) 'Post-Conflict Elections in Liberia and Guinea Bissau' *African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1&2, 2007, p 89

and fairly elected president of Liberia. More intriguing than this is the possibility that Liberia's president was chosen in part because she was *of* a Diaspora, and in part by virtue of the strength of Diasporic influence on the election.

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Appendix IV: Liberia Opinion Survey - The 2005 Elections & Repatriation

Research Partners: Sua Foundation, Inc. Primary Investigator
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Summary

In 2005, the people of Liberia went to the polls after fourteen years of bitter civil war. Vicious fighting had left 200,000 dead, countless others forced from their homes and seeking refuge in neighboring and distant countries, and a national infrastructure in ruins. Nonetheless, a presidential election took place with minimal violence, resulting in the fair election of Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

The opinion survey below of Liberian voters, expatriate residents in the business community, members of the diplomatic corps, and non-governmental organizations explores the factors that influenced Liberian voters to elect a member of the Liberian Diaspora, Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, rather than any of the local candidates who contested the election.

The findings provide a point of reference for improving future elections in Liberia and will help Liberian politicians cultivate those traits that Liberian people seek when choosing their elected officials. The study shows Liberians value education and experience as core qualifications in those contesting. The survey results will enable institutions such as Queen's University's Centre for the Study of Democracy to identify important elements for inclusion

in curriculums for students of democratic development in Africa and elsewhere. Of particular importance, the survey demonstrates the will of a population to partake in an election set amidst post-conflict reconstruction. Liberia's recent history has much to teach us about the development of democracy in a nation re-assembling itself after a major exodus and the subsequent return of qualified expatriates.

The study provides strong evidence of an internally cohesive political community in the process of developing in Liberia, one willing to choose its leaders without fear of ethnic stratification or violence. Such cohesion is one of the essential conditions for democratic development as described in the Perlin model. The study has already provided useful training for graduate students in Liberia, where students in the Department of Political Science of the University of Liberia undertook data collection and studied methods for research in a real-life environment, both exercises requiring careful attention to detail, respect for participants and maintenance of the integrity of data collected.

Methodology

The Sua Foundation undertook the role of principal investigator for this study, and assembled a research team comprised of Dr. Dangbe W. Sua, Mr. Thomas Weber and Rev. D. LeRoy Sua. Partners included the Dean of the University of Liberia, graduate students from the faculty of Political Science, and a County Superintendent.

The survey was developed on the advice of the research team's Liberian partners. To ensure participants did not perceive the survey as politically motivated or as a threat to their privacy, data regarding age, gender, level of education, political party affiliation and names were not collected. A sample of residents from six of Liberia's fourteen counties (Monserrado, Grand Bassa, Gibi, Bong, Nimba and Lofa) was interviewed for this survey. The counties were chosen based largely on accessibility, and were limited by Liberia's war-ravaged transportation system. Overall, 432 sets of responses to 20-question survey were collected.

The research team identified several concerns before choosing to undertake this project. First, there are no independent researchers in Liberia able to conduct such a study without facing a charge of political bias. Likewise, the Elections Commissions of Liberia would not have been seen by Liberians as an honest broker to investigate itself, while most Non-Governmental Organizations shy away from sensitive political issues. During Liberia's shift from a Patron-Client method of governance to democracy, politicians are particularly sensitive to information that could undermine the new system.

Rural Liberians met the survey with mixed reactions. Some viewed the research team with suspicion, thinking that the researchers were government agents trying to assess their loyalty to and support for the new president. Others saw the visits as an opportunity to participate in the process of democracy that President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had promised during her campaign. Still others saw this as an opportunity to be critical of the National Elections Commission and its role in the administration of the elections.

A protocol was developed to preserve the integrity of the study and to ensure respondents did not feel pressured or manipulated by data collectors. This protocol was reinforced by a one-hour training session that all data collectors were obliged to attend. Surveys were filled out in private to avoid the perception of intimidation. Data collectors were allowed to answer questions from respondents to clarify uncertainty in directions, but could not hint at a preferred answer to any question. The primary focus of the data collectors was the protection of the participant's privacy. All data collectors received a stipend for their services.

To participate in the survey, a respondent was required to be a Liberian national of voting age, with an ability to read and write in the official language of commerce in Liberia (English). The respondent must have volunteered without demand or expectation of compensation or favor.

Findings & Analyses

The Respondents (Questions 1 – 3)

The first three questions of the survey provide a broad outline of the survey groups' experience with elections and their personal situations. The survey asked how many times each respondent had voted in a Liberian presidential election. Over 97% of respondents had voted in at least one election, with 26% having voted in one election, 20% having voted in three elections, and the majority having voted in two elections. These results are consistent with reports that voter turnout was high in the recent election. Such turnout is attributed to voter enthusiasm and improved security in the country, provided by a 14,000 strong UN peacekeeping presence in the country. Of those who participated in the survey, 58% were single when they last voted, while 37% were married. Sadly, the number of single voters may be attributed to the number of Liberians killed during the war. Despite the large number of single respondents, over 83% have more than three people in their household.

Liberians and the Liberian Diaspora (Questions 4 – 9)

About 59% of respondents remained in Liberia during the war. 38% of those polled had migrated to other African countries, while only 2% traveled to America, and 1% traveled to Europe. Nonetheless, Liberians returning from the Diaspora represented the top two presidential contenders, a fact which has implications for the rebuilding of Liberian society. The survey found 62% of respondents identified “freedom and democracy” as the main reason Liberians traveled to Europe or America during the war. Fewer percentages, 16% and 8%, attributed the migration to pursuing education or money, respectively.

Interestingly, the same percentage of respondents (62%) who believe Liberians left in search of freedom and democracy believed that those who traveled to America or Europe had a positive learning experience outside of Liberia. A third of respondents felt there was no real impact or did not imagine what the impact of emigration was for the migrants. These results are not surprising. Historically, any Liberian who has traveled to America or Europe was

considered a member of the economic and political elite. Even persons of indigenous ancestry who were fortunate enough to travel to America for brief periods used their travel experience to elevate their status and compete for political appointments.

The respect for Diaspora experience has shifted during the war. Only 2% of respondents believe that expatriates should be appointed to government positions because they traveled abroad. 62% of Liberians believe that returnees to Liberia should be appointed to government positions, but only if properly qualified. A significant minority of 32% argues that returning expatriates should not be appointed to government positions because there are qualified Liberians who never left the country. Only 3% of respondents believe that expatriates should not be appointed to government positions because they were away too long. There is a distinct preference from respondents for qualified individuals to hold government positions, regardless of where their qualifications were obtained.

Opinions of Diaspora experience played a role in the selection of the two presidential contenders. During the civil war, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf lived in America while George Weah lived in Europe. Respondents were asked about differences between America and Europe that may have influenced their presidential choice. A majority of 76% answered that America was Liberia's traditional ally while 14% noted it was the only global superpower. About 4% reported that Europe was more diverse and inclusive, while 6% were influenced by the belief that Europeans are more reliable. Despite these answers, 67% of respondents claim that the difference between where the contenders lived did not influence their vote. A minority, 23%, did report they were influenced by the contenders' previous choice of location. When combined with evidence that voting was not influenced significantly by ethnic or geographic concerns, these findings demonstrate the beginnings of an open system of politics in Liberia.

The 2005 Election (Questions 10 – 18)

73% of respondents believe the National Elections Commission (NEC) made the best preparations possible to support the elections. About 1 in 5 respondents, or 20%, did not

agree the Commission had made the best preparations. When asked if there are changes the NEC could make to improve the next election cycle, 78% of respondents saw room for improvement, while only 13% believe the system had been perfected. These sets of responses seem to indicate that for a post-war election, things went pretty well, but that improvements will be expected as elections continue in Liberia.

During the election, 78% of respondents felt free of intimidation. 9% reported feeling intimidated by members of political parties, 8% felt intimidated by interim government officials, and 5% felt intimidated by the United Nations peacekeeping force. Some evidence of intimidation was noted by international observers and brought to the attention of election officials. Despite some attempts at intimidation, the elections were deemed free, fair and peaceful. More than three-quarters (77%) of respondents believed peace has come simply because Liberians are exhausted by decades of brutal violence. About 15% attributed peace to the UN troops' presence, with small percentages, under 5%, believing that the presidential contenders of the presidential campaign itself provided hope strong enough to limit violence.

Following the general election, a second round of voting was held between the top two candidates, Ellen Sirleaf Johnson and George Weah. 86% of respondents voted in this second round. (Possibly due to the counties surveyed, an overwhelming number of respondents – 77% – voted for Sirleaf-Johnson.) Respondents were asked to report what factor most influenced their vote for President. 55% of respondents claimed experience was the prime factor in their choice, while a close second, at 41%, cited the candidate's education. A small percentage (4%) selected "Ethnicity/Tribe" while a tiny number (1.45%) chose the candidate's travel abroad as most influential. The short shrift given to ethnicity or tribe is significant in Liberia, suggesting that the appeal to ethnic groups of previous Liberian leaders like Samuel Due has dissipated considerably.

Overall, 84% of respondents believed their votes made a difference in choosing the new president, and only about 9% felt their vote made no difference in the election. This positive response demonstrates that respondents believe that participation in elections is a source of

real political power. Furthermore, complaints about the NEC combined with an expectation of improvement suggest that Liberians believe their governing institutions are responsible and accountable, if not immediately effective.

The Future of Democracy in Liberia (Questions 19 – 20)

An overwhelming 96% of respondents plan to vote in the next election, suggesting respondents had a positive experience in the last election. The percentage suggests that many respondents whose favoured candidate did not win in the 2005 election are still eager to participate in another election. This is clear evidence of the legitimacy the elections process gained in 2005.

Looking forward, Liberian politicians should know that some of the old expectations for a leader have changed. Only 2% of respondents think that traveling abroad makes a good Liberian leader. About 17% of respondents see the benefits of those who have worked in America or Europe, but by far the greatest attribute for a potential leader is the level of education they earn prior to the electoral race.

Conclusion

Overall, this survey demonstrated a high level of enthusiasm for democratic elections in Liberia. The strong desire on the part of respondents to vote in the upcoming election, combined with their conviction that their vote made a difference in the last election is particularly encouraging. It is obvious, however, that the enthusiasm for elections is based on an understanding that the National Elections Commission will continue to improve its efficiency and will better protect individuals against intimidation as the country moves further away from the horrors of war. Liberia must take advantage of its population's ardor for peaceful political engagement and must work to ensure the next election builds on the success of 2005 contest.

Liberia Opinion Survey: 2005 Elections & Repatriation - Data

Question 1: "How many times have you voted in a Liberian Presidential Election?"

A	None	10	2.36%
B	One Election	112	26.48%
C	Two Elections	215	50.83%
D	Three Elections	86	20.33%
Total		423	100.00%

Question 2: Did you vote as:

A	Single	246	58.71%
B	Married	153	36.52%
C	Divorced	12	2.86%
D	Did Not Vote	8	1.91%
Total		419	100.00%

Question 3: "How many persons are in your household including yourself?"

A	One Person	11	2.61%
B	Two Persons	22	5.23%
C	Three Persons	38	9.03%
D	More Than Three Person	350	83.14%
Total		421	100.00%

Question 4: "Where did you travel during the Liberian Civil War?"

A	America	9	2.12%
B	Europe	5	1.18%
C	Other African Nation	162	38.21%
D	Remained in Liberia	248	58.49%
Total		424	100.00%

Question 5: "What do you think was the main reason Liberians traveled to Europe or America during the Civil War?"

A	Freedom and Democracy	252	62.07%
B	Money	32	7.88%
C	Education	66	16.26%
D	I Do Not Know	56	13.79%
Total		406	100.00%

Question 6: "What do you think happened to those Liberian who traveled to America or Europe during the Civil War?"

A	Learned the Good Things	252	61.31%
B	Learned the Bad Things	24	5.84%
C	Nothing Happened	48	11.68%
D	I Do Not Know	87	21.17%
Total		411	100.00%

Question 7: "Since the elections, many expatriate Liberians have returned home from Diaspora Communities to serve in the new government. Do you think they should be appointed to government positions because they have been overseas?"

A	Yes, if they are qualified	262	62.68%
B	Yes, because they traveled abroad	10	2.39%

C	No, they stayed abroad too long	11	2.63%
D	No, there are qualified Liberians who never left	135	32.30%
Total		418	100.00%

Question 8: “What differences between America and Europe do you think may have influenced your vote?”

A	America is our traditional ally	352	75.21%
B	Europe is more diverse and inclusive	19	4.06%
C	America is the only super power	67	14.32%
D	Europeans are more reliable	30	6.41%
Total		468	100.00%

Question 9: “Before returning to Liberia to contest the elections, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf lived in the US and George Weah lived in Europe, two different Diaspora communities. Did the geographic difference influence your vote?”

A	Yes	97	22.99%
B	No	283	67.06%
C	I Do Not Know	16	3.79%
D	No opinion	26	6.16%
Total		422	100.00%

Question 10: “Do you agree that the National Elections Commissions made the best preparations for the elections?”

A	Yes	323	73.24%
B	No	86	19.50%
C	I do not know	14	3.17%
D	No opinion	18	4.08%
Total		441	100.00%

Question 11: “Are there changes you wish the National Elections Commissions could make to improve the next election cycle?”

A	Yes	325	78.13%
B	No	55	13.22%
C	I Do Not Know	15	3.61%
D	No opinion	21	5.05%
Total		416	100.00%

Question 12: “During the elections, I....”

A	Felt Intimidated by Interim Government Officials	32	7.66%
B	Felt Intimidated by Members of Political Parties	36	8.61%
C	Felt Intimidated by Peace-Keeping Forces	20	4.78%
D	Did Not Feel Intimidated	330	78.95%
Total		418	100.00%

Question 13: The 2005 election was considered generally peaceful. Which of the following will you attribute for the success?”

A	Liberians were tired of killing each other	323	77.09%
B	Peace-keepers were effective in their duties	62	14.80%
C	Presidential campaign gave hope	16	3.82%
D	Two presidential front-runners gave hope	18	4.30%
Total		419	100.00%

Question 14: “Did you vote during the second round of the 2005 elections?”

A	Yes	359	86.09%
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B	No, voting was too time consuming	19	4.56%
C	No, feared persecution for voting	6	1.44%
D	No, not registered to vote	33	7.91%
Total		417	100.00%

Question 15: “If you voted in the second round of the presidential elections, who was your choice for president?”

A	Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf	325	76.47%
B	George Weah	56	13.18%
C	Don't remember	2	0.47%
D	No opinion	42	9.88%
Total		425	100.00%

Question 16: “When voting for your choice of President, which of the following influenced your vote?”

A	The Candidate Traveled Abroad	6	1.45%
B	Experience	228	55.21%
C	Ethnicity/Tribe	15	3.63%
D	Education	164	39.71%
Total		413	100.00%

Question 17: “During the second round of elections for president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and George Weah were persons from Liberian Diaspora communities. Please select the qualities that attracted your vote for them.”

A	Political Party	30	7.33%
B	Education	167	40.83%
C	Personal Wealth	10	2.44%
D	Experience	202	49.39%
Total		409	100.00%

Question 18: “Do you believe that your vote made any difference in choosing your new leaders?”

A	Yes	354	84.49%
B	No	37	8.83%
C	I Do Not Know	7	1.67%
D	No opinion	21	5.01%
Total		419	100.00%

Question 19: “Do you plan to vote in the next election?”

A	Yes	394	95.17%
B	No	6	1.45%
C	I Do Not Know	9	2.17%
D	No opinion	5	1.21%
Total		414	100.00%

Question 20: “What do you think makes a good Liberian Leader?”

A	Travel Abroad	8	1.96%
B	Knowledge From Reading	257	62.84%
C	Work in America or Europe	69	16.87%
D	I Do Not Know	75	18.34%
Total		409	100.00%

