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Beyond Threat and Ammunitions: The Transformation of
Liberian Warlords into Statesmen

Abstract

In Liberia, many warlords have risen against authoritarian, oligarchy, and dictatorship rules that have repressed the masses and subjected them to widespread abuses. Despite their claim that their rebellions were staged to liberate the people, many followed in the footsteps of the very regime they ousted from power. For this reason, Liberians recognize that if the long-standing chain of impunity and human rights abuses must end, the people most responsible must be held criminally liable. Paradoxically, while the citizenry pushes for the prosecution of some warlords, they have voted them into positions that empower them to obstruct justice. Because of the contradiction, this study seeks to understand factors that motivate Liberians to vote warlords into power. I propose that in order to understand the phenomenon, one must first acknowledge that not all warlords have succeeded at winning elections and that some have been victorious at winning local while failing at all attempts to win presidential elections. Accepting these facts serve as the basis to evaluate what those who have won had done to appease the masses at specific times and what strategies must have been successful at appeasing the people on local but not national levels. Drawing in on theories that have been used to explain specific warlords' victories such as threat of war and most promising discourses used to explain Charles Taylor's 1997 win, I argue that Liberians vote warlords into power regardless of their atrocities committed if they are able to embody a charismatic leader persona and present themselves as provider of the people and unifier of the nation...

Introduction

In 1997, Charles Taylor, former head of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) warring faction, won a 75 percent landslide victory in Liberia's presidential elections (Nelson & Neack; 2002; 43;). In 2005 also, Prince Johnson, retired head of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) rebel group, won popular vote in the Nimba County Senatorial elections (NEC, 2005). In that same county, Aldolphus Dolo, retired general of the NPFL, INPFL and United Liberation Independent-Kromah(ULIMO-K) rebel forces, was elected as senator in the 2011 elections (NEC, 2011). Again in 2005, Isaac Nyenabo, founding secretary of the Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)

warring group, was successfully voted as senator of Grand Gedeh County (NEC, 2005).

These individuals represent a fraction of perpetrators of Liberia's fourteen-year civil conflicts who lodge and have lodged in political offices as a result of assuming victories in democratic elections. To the best of my knowledge, no study has been done to provide numerical data pointing to the precise number of like culprits who have emerged as political elites. However, indicating key figures and their specific roles in directly fueling the crises provides some evidence denoting the frequency at which the phenomenon occurs. This focus on the most liable individuals also helps set the stage to articulate its magnitude as well as the need to investigate.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to lay bare the dynamics that influence the election of considerable number of warlords into Liberian political sectors. After extensive research, it is also safe to declare that no comprehensive study has been undertaken towards this end. Much of the works that have come close has focused on explaining factors that influence election outcomes in Africa or more specifically, that which led to Taylor's historic win. For example, one commonly referenced argument concerning the latter, which has been synthesized

into Threat of War (TOW) discourse in this paper, contends that Taylor became president because the citizenry feared that had they not elected him, he would have retaliated with another episode of violent war. Indeed, if we consider that his win came after the first seven-year long civil war, which his NPFL began through an invasion of the country and helped prolong through refusal to abide by several peace agreements, it is undeniable that fear was a salient motivator for many. However, the argument cannot be taken in whole, as it particularly overlooks the non-violent efforts he used to conjure the masses. One such example is his massive donation of the country's staple, rice, to the starving post-war nation. Truly, it is not unreasonable to imagine that people would be drawn to a candidate who promises hope to provide their basic necessities especially in a dire state of desperation. That the TOW proves inadequate to explain an event for which it was specifically tailored, should come as no surprise that it is deficient in accounting for the broader phenomenon for which this paper is concerned.

In fact, I prove throughout this paper that no one theory can altogether illuminate why Liberians vote warlords into power, although I contend that the embodiment of a charismatic leader, often projected through a candidates' ability to assure that he or she would prioritize the

citizenry's economic wellbeing and security, is a recurring dynamic that sways electorates. I further argue that in moving beyond a single theory framework and recognizing that many issues influence voters, one is bound to find that the plethora of reasons which stimulate people to vote for ordinary candidates are no different than that which move them to elect warlords. Many issues, including differences in political climates, campaign strategies, partisan biases, all affects the masses in varying ways. For example, if we consider that not all warlords have been successful at winning popular votes and that some have won at local but not national levels, it becomes clearer that a single account cannot suffice in showing what sways Liberians to elect certain perpetrators but not others. Recognizing the successes of some alongside the failures of others then sets the foundation to ask perhaps obvious but stimulating questions. One, why have some perpetrators failed at appeasing the masses while others have succeeded? A sub question to this is why have some flopped in certain instances but succeeded at others? Two, why have some powerful and well-known perpetrators won senatorial elections but failed at presidential races? The first question necessitates taking an extensive look at individual candidates to understand what the victorious did at specific time periods to appease electorates, and on the other

hand, what the unsuccessful failed to do towards that end. By taking such approach, we create room to reveal how specific cases apply to specific theories.

In this paper, I provide thorough reviews on two of the most compelling theories used to explain Taylor's 1997 victory and general elections culture in Africa. Using them as a framework, I show how one of each theory proves the inadequacy of the other in accounting for the election of warlords in Liberia. That is to say, in demonstrating how a particular discourse applies to specific cases, I affirm that a multiple theory approach is the most thorough way to account for the general phenomenon. In my analysis, I reveal that although the masses have been drawn to different warlords for many reasons, it is mostly in pursue of economic stability that electorates choose certain warlords. I argue that those perpetrators who are able to use ethnicity, religion, threat of war, and other tactics along side a charismatic leader image are those who are most likely to become victorious.

I begin my analysis by defining a warlord based on Falola and Oyebade's (2010) definition of warlordism. Grounded on my delineation, I choose warlords to be studied and provide thorough explanations on how their individual cases are most relevant in showing the weaknesses of

relying on a single theory. More comprehensive explanation on this issue is provided throughout the paper. For now, it is important to pause and offer extensive overview of Liberia's years of civil crises, as the explanation is important for understanding the bases of the theoretical as well as methodological frameworks. The background is also relevant for comprehending the wide-range of civilian abuses during armed conflict and how it fits into the reason many criticize warlords despite the fact that their revolutions brought an end to longstanding anarchic regimes.

Historical Framework

Liberia's collapse into its first civil war in 1990 after Taylor's invasion in 1989 was an inevitable end. One hundred and fifty years of political tumult had long planted a seed of annihilation to the point where it would be astonishing if the outcome were otherwise. In this sense, Taylor's revolution was merely an eruption of the pillars of self-destruction that had been sown from the time the country became a nation state.

The story begins with the arrival of the founders, emancipated slaves from America, who settled there in 1821 and established themselves as superiors to the indigenous peoples they met on ground. The freed-slaves coined themselves as "Americo-Liberians" or the

“Congos (Kongos),” the latter becoming a making of an ethnic group (Lamin, 232). Although minority, they successfully created an empire of dominance that was sustained with financial and political support from overseas particularly the United States. Supremacy was achieved through alienation of indigenous people: barring of citizenship, prohibition from voting, as well as denial from admissions to Liberia’s College (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2010; 55). Although the natives received miniature public benefits, in instances where they did at all, they were compelled to pay taxes including the infamous “hut tax”(Ellis, 2006; 54). So grave was these repressions that many scholars equate the natives maltreatment at the hands of the Congos to that which other African countries suffered under the rule of colonial masters (Lamin, 232). By 1979, it was clear that years of degradation of human dignity had created grievances that would later manifest into violence.

Historians regard the year 1979 as a turning point in the history of Liberia, for it was the first time the masses rose up against the standing authority. On April 14, Liberians marched the streets of Monrovia to protest a proposal by then Agricultural Minister to increase the price of rice from \$22 to \$26 (Adebajo; 2002; 24). Her rationale was that the hack would lure the population to produce rice locally instead of migrating

to the urban areas in search for industrial jobs that were already scarce in a city, which was becoming increasingly overpopulated (The Global Security). However, many viewed this as a concealment of the intent to deprive indigenous peoples from having access to the capital and skilled jobs (The Global Security). In any case, the peaceful and constitutional march was disturbed by the government's decree to the police to 'shoot to kill' anyone who refused to leave the streets. The people retaliated. By the time the mayhem elapsed, more than forty persons were left dead and over 500 injured (The Global Security). The citizenry revolt against the scandalous response by the government further created disgust for the regime – making it clear that any rebellion to completely uproot it would be widely supported.

And so, it came to pass. In 1980, former president Samuel K. Doe at the time known as Master Sergeant Doe led a coup that successfully overthrew what became the last Americo-Liberian regime. Unfortunately, however, Doe followed in the pathways of his predecessors and even worse, created a bloody dictatorship rule. First, he crowned himself as head of state under military diktat although he had publicly announced to turn over power to the people of the republic so that they exercise their constitutional rights to vote for a leader. Subsequent his military regime,

he staged national elections in which he overtly rigged and used the fraudulent results to assume presidency. By the second term, Doe completely submerged himself in creating ethnic tensions. On the one hand, he ensured that his Krahn ethnic group received most of the public goods and were overly represented in civil service. On the other hand, he placed specific tribes, the Manos and Gios, at the forefront of his repression. His administration became engulfed in widespread and indiscriminate killings of the two groups, as it was believed they were plotting coups against him. By the end of 1980, Doe's end began to look much like those who he overthrew. It was Taylor's incursion that paved the way for the ultimate downfall of the administration and collapse of the state (Europa Publications; 2004; 601-603).

When Taylor invaded the hinterland, he immediately received backing from the Manos and Gios, who subsequently became the predominant members of his NPFL. His attack escalated into a civil war that saw three complex phases. The first was characterized by violent exchanges between Doe's national AFL and the NPFL. Because the AFL was predominantly Krahns and Mandingos, the war shifted from an attack against the incumbent regime to another phase of ethnic rivalry – where the Manos and Gios united against the Krahns and Mandingos. By the time

Johnson broke away from the NPFL and formed his Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), in the midst of other emerging factions, the battle completely diverged from its initial focus to a scramble for power and wealth, “where each group fought for the control of the state and exploitable resources.” In the first stage, victims were largely members of Doe’s government (including the AFL and cabinet) and the NPFL. In the second and third, however, civilians became the primary sufferers of torture, rape, murder, and other forms of gross human rights abuses. The violations in the latter were so grave that “the Human Rights advocacy group Africa Watch described it as near-genocidal” (Europa Publications; Page 603; 2004). Greed and power coupled with distrust for one another caused the warring groups to boycott several peace agreements. The failure of the NPFL in particular to abide by the accords led to a prolongation in which the civilian population again suffered the most.

By 1996, the war came to an end under the Abuja III agreement. And in 1997, Taylor was elected president. But the Americo-Liberian and Doe’s regimes had already stained Liberian political sphere with marks of impunity and patterns of human rights abuses that it was no anomaly that a greed-driven leader like Taylor would tread the paths of his

predecessors. As history repeated itself in the workings of the new administration so did it in a quest of the citizenry to rebel. In 2003, LURD and MODEL dissident forces invaded Liberia to end Taylor's rule of repression, but much like Taylor, Doe and the others, they proved no different in their mishandling of citizens.

Due to these factors and warlords' lack of remorse, many advocate that they be held criminally liable in order to break the chain of impunity. Citizens advocate for the establishment of a Special Court like that of Sierra Leone to prosecute those who bear the greatest responsibilities for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed. Civil groups like Impunity Watch contend that such move would promote justice and the rule of law and thereby serve as a deterrent. Interestingly, however, this desire is arguably a paradox when placed alongside the tendency of Liberians to empower men of arm conflict with the most power-intensive positions. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to conceive of the predisposition of elected warlords to suppress the establishment of any system with potential to expose them to prosecution. This has already proved true, evidenced by the recent undermining of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) recommendations to try those accused of human rights violations and crimes against humanity (James-Allen et al, 2010;

10-12). It is in this context that this paper endeavor to understand why Liberians, despite their cry to end political impunity, continue to elect some of the most prominent warlords.

Methodological Framework

With the plethora of research methodologies available, there are indeed several ways to satisfactorily endeavor in the discovery of factors propelling Liberians to aid warlords' transformation into political elites. For example, one could take a mass study approach by studying every warlord who has contested for political office and conducting comparative analyses on each of their campaign strategies as well as the political climates of each time period. While this promises potential in yielding more in-depth results than a case study, for instance, it is superfluous and less feasible as far as this paper is concerned. The logic behind focusing on specific individuals and instances rather than a mass group is to take advantage of the fact that individual cases can have "wider implications" and give insights in similar manner that a large survey can (Denscombe, 2010; 36). In any case, what really should be the focus is how best to employ strategies that would harvest exhaustive explanations on the inquiry, whether the sample group is large or small.

This then diverts attention from the size of the subjects to their potentials in helping uncover the desired information.

The first step in deciding which warlord is most appropriate to assess is to establish who a warlord is. Falola and Oyebade define warlordism as a “phenomenon by which a leader of a rebel armed movement, driven often by personal ambition seeks to overthrow the central authority of the state or exercise control over parts of its territories” (51). Against this description, I define warlords more narrowly as those who led rebel factions in the two wars or who were essentially responsible for controlling their militias’ advances and retreats on the battlefield. Any reference to the term for the purpose of this paper refers back to this narrowly tailored definition. The significance of taking such approach lies in the fact that a broader characterization is of little importance in the quest to understand why people have counter-intuitively voted for candidates who wore the war vests, shot the bullets, and transformed the country into a land of bloodbath. Put another way, if we take for instance, a warlord to mean anyone who directly or indirectly fueled the war – either through financial endorsement or actual participation on the battlefield – we still do not solve the enigma of why Liberians have chosen not to vote for the outliers who did neither of the

two. In this sense, including anyone other than the most vicious is a non-feasible approach that draws in superfluous subjects for something that can be understood more simply by having a focused group.

With this focus at hand, I proceed with an explanation on how I selected warlords who cases are most relevant and stimulating for the inquiry. I began the process by assessing lists of candidates from the 1997, 2005, and 2011 general and presidential elections provided by The Carter Center and the Liberian National Elections Commission (NEC). In my inspection of the data, I paid keen attention to successful and unsuccessful contestants but in particular, perpetrators who have been identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), The Carter Center, and other investigative bodies as those who meet the definition of a warlord. At this point, I also documented their parties, positions for which they contested, votes obtained, counties of birth, counties of ethnicity, their opponents and the total number of votes they received in their respective counties and that of their opponents. To further validate their affiliations with warring parties, I examined the 1996 and 2003 peace accords signed between rebel leaders, civil society, and the international community. Of the many warlords who have contested for political offices, I selected Taylor, Johnson, and Kromah as the subjects to

be studied. This is because unlike several of the others, the campaigns of each have been covered substantially or somewhat thoroughly by news agencies and international election monitoring groups. Since my evaluation rests profoundly on those strategies, it only makes sense to focus on perpetrators with the necessary data. Moreover, each sufficiently represents recurring cases that evaluating theirs alone suffice for obtaining the information needed. For example, Johnson and Conneh are similar in that both failed at efforts at becoming president but triumphed at senatorial levels. Although factors contributing to their victory and loss may be different, there is still a lot to learn from examining Johnson alone. This is to say that it is not compelling to investigate Conneh to comprehend why Liberians deem some warlords fit for senatorial positions as opposed to the presidential.

Theoretical Framework

In the preceding sections, I have provided lucid explanations on Liberia's descent into anarchy and the factors responsible for such. In my presentation, I pointed to specific liable individuals and labeled those who controlled military armies during the first and second civil wars as warlords. I also made claims, which suggest that in order to understand why those perpetrators have been elected into power despite their

involvements in war crimes and crimes against humanity, one must consider multiple factors. In light of this, the remaining portions of this paper draws in on several theories to illuminate how together, we can grasp a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand.

Theories Regarding the Case of Taylor

Several scholars have constructed compelling arguments to make sense of the above-stated paradox, although the contributions are tailored towards explaining Taylor's case specifically. Despite this limitation, they can be used as pillars to develop an understanding or otherwise discover a theory to explain the phenomenon on a general level. Having thoroughly read numerous scholarly journals and historical texts on the subject, I have found two arguments the most common and compelling in accounting for Taylor's landslide victory. Below, I have synthesized and grouped them based on the similarities in the opinions expressed by scholars.

Threat Of War (TOW)

Henry (2000) notes that many "Liberian political observers and activists during and after the [1997] elections" support the notion that Liberians voted for Taylor out of fear of reprisal (148). As he puts it, they believe a "more appropriate interpretation of the elections outcome was

that the Liberian people were voting for peace” not exercising democracy (148). Indeed, by 1992, Taylor had kept his name resounding among the population and international community through increased insurgencies (Adebajo; 2002; 101), which perhaps gave people ample reasons to fear he would retaliate in instance of his loss. One of such infamous uprisings was *Operation Octopus* of 1992 that his NPFL single-handedly launched against the West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) peacekeeping force - involving a “twelve-hour shelling of Monrovia” that left some three thousand persons dead by the time it came to an end two months later in December (Adebajo; 2002;109-110;).

Hoozie and Hartzell (2005) further suggest that such performance led to an election characterized by “fear induced voting,” in which voters went to the polls to ‘vote for peace’ in response to Charles Taylor’s unsubtle campaign of resuming armed conflict in case he lost the elections(92).

Although they do not offer an in-depth explanation on the “unsubtle campaign,” we can draw assumptions from several incidences during the period. For instance, in June, Taylor’s National Patriotic Party (NPP) campaigned in the same zone as the Unity Party (UP), the political group of his strongest competitor, in which the NPP reportedly attacked the UP

convoy (The Carter Center; 1997; page 29). The incidence however did not boycott the campaign process. But Hoozell and Hartzell contend that Taylor's "maintenance of a fully operational militia during the elections" and control of large territories of the country had a more profound effect on citizens more so than competitors. But a plausible contention is that Taylor was not the only key warring head who maintained a functioning armed force at the time. Even though perhaps not as powerful or fearful as he, ULIMO-K's leader, Kromah, who much like Taylor was responsible for thousand of civilian casualties, did as well (Lehtinen, 2). The fact that many scholars have ignored this fact questions the strength of such claim.

But even if we take the TOW as the most thorough account for Taylor's case and pretend as though there are no substantial delinquencies in relying on it singlehandedly, we still run into the issue of its inability to account for other warlords' victories as well as losses. For example, following his defeat to Taylor in 1997, rebel leader of the Ulimo-K, Kromah, contested in the 2005 presidential elections and again lost but this time to candidates who had not fought in any capacity on the battlefronts. Another assessment is to consider Johnson who too was well known and feared during and after the war. Despite Taylor's military

might, Johnson did what Taylor failed to do – assassinate Doe. In addition to his own numerous revolts, it was the torture and murder of the then incumbent president that made Johnson a household name even till this day. Three weeks after signing “a peace fire agreement with the AFL in which he agreed to fight together against ...Taylor [‘s] NPFL,” (Husband; 1998;193) Johnson invaded Doe’s AFL blockade, captured, tortured and brutally murdered Doe. The film, “which has since been a best-selling video throughout West Africa,” (Husband; 193; 1998) features Johnson sipping on Budweiser while cutting off the ears of Doe and watching his men carelessly slice off Doe’s private part. Indeed, a person with such character who had boycotted several of the peace agreements should have been voted as president in 2011 if electing warlords relied solely on fear of the threat of war. That he, like Kromah, lost to other candidates who had no presence on the battlefield proves a problem in alluding entirely to this fear account.

If insurgencies and military might are what push people to the poll to vote for those who exposed and subjected them to inhumane treatments, it is without doubt that Kromah and Johnson would have triumphed the ballots. The fact that the former, for instance, only secured 2.8% of the 100 votes as compared to retired soccer star, George Weah (28.3%) and

Charles Brumskine (13.9%) (NEC, 2005) speaks volume of the level at which political climates and other factors influence electorates' choices. What seems to be the missing link from the TOW analysis is that the farther people are from war, the least likely they are to feel threatened by another episode and the least likely they are to feel pressured by the repercussions of not voting for a warlord. Thus the problem with granting the TOW as an explanation on the general level is the risk of sweepingly generalizing and oversimplifying a complex issue. TOW only suffices as an account in times when people have reason to believe they are at danger of war. For example, it makes more sense to argue (to some extent) based on TOW principles that Taylor won because the country had just experienced years of brutal conflicts and that people were afraid to return to such. However, in applying it to other cases, the theory holds little to no grounds, which is understandable since it was tailored for Taylor specifically. Perhaps, if scholars had intended to apply it more generally, they would have, by now, noted that being fierce on the battlefield is not an automatic ticket to the presidential seat. In 2011, this proved true. People had no legitimate reason to fear Johnson would rage war since the election took place seven years after the last war, fourteen after the first in which Johnson was involved, and many years after his standing army

had been dissolved. With a fully operational United Nations peacekeeping mission during both the 2005 and 2011 elections, as opposed to the absence of such security in 1997, people had little incentive to elect a warlord based on fear of descent into war. This is to say, Johnson military background against that of other candidates' non-military background could not suffice in the political and civil climate at the time.

A more compelling issue to consider is the fact that Johnson won Nimba County senatorial seats in 2005 and 2011 but not the presidency in the latter year. By alluding to the TOW framework in this case, it seems to be that the only logical explanation is to say that people of Nimba have or have had a different perception of the threat Johnson poses to society as compared to the larger population. However, as scholars have shown with Taylor's case, this would be misleading as Johnson himself worked substantially hard, beyond nonviolent means, to prove himself a worthy candidate to the people of Nimba. As is revealed in the ethnic appeal section, Johnson use of ethnicity to project himself as a liberator and provider of the people was only impactful to the people of Nimba but not Liberians as a whole.

The Most Promising Argument (MP)

Ellis (1999) provides one of the alternative explanations which move the explanation of Taylor's win beyond the TOW framework. His and other scholars' account in this category also introduce another way of conceptualizing the general phenomenon. He states that although Taylor was the best hope for peace since his loss would have resulted into war, many voted for him because his "very determination made him appear strong." He did not simply destabilize the lives of Liberians under the banner of liberating the citizenry from Doe's years of repression. He also presented himself as the best hope to move the country beyond six years of absolute descent into savagery, which was incited by his revolution.

Pewu(2000) writes,

Taylor made himself over in a crowded field of presidential wannabes and projected an image as the one person who had a sustained connection to the ordinary household of Liberia.

He further explains that Taylor's strategy was accompanied by numerous promises to restore the lives of Liberians, backed by "procurement" of butter-rice* from Taiwain and large-scale distribution among Liberians.

Williams (2002) adds that the lack of education and "low consciousness" of voters significantly influenced the success of the rice strategy. He further describes,

[A]ll Taylor did was order some rice from Taiwan and had it distributed to the near-starving population and passed out “cold water,” financial offer in the form of a tip or bribe. And the next thing, people were dancing, singing and chanting in the streets what became popular election song: “He kill my ma, He kill my pa, I will vote for him”(207).

While Williams’ accounts diverge from the dominant discourse and broaden the possibilities, his arguments, taken together, run the risk of being a flawed reasoning. Consider that in the first part, he contends low consciousness and minimal education influenced voters’ choice. Yet in the second, he attributes Taylor’s win to electorates’ desperation. One has to wonder then whether the people’s choice was persuaded more by low consciousness or rather strong awareness of their state of desperation and the promise Taylor was conveying through his provision of food in a time of dire need. Truly, it is not illogical to imagine that even the most educated would make a superficially irrational choice to protect their economic wellbeing in a fraught and helpless state. That they choose to act in such a fashion does not necessarily follow that they are unconscious of the conditions at hand. In fact, it shows to some extent,

the thought process that went into calculating and selecting the candidate that most convincingly posed to be the one to improve living conditions. It seems to be that the most logical thing to do is to accept one or the other explanation – in which case, I argue for the latter. That is, people chose Taylor not because they were uneducated or unconscious but because he convincingly projected the provider and father image, an image that they needed to hold onto at that point in time.

Low Consciousness Theory (LCT)

Siahyonkron Nyanseor, like Williams, shares the view that the lack of education was what led to the election of Taylor. Nyanseor takes the argument further by asserting that people “voted for a repetition of the carnage, theft and stupidity,” that had pervaded Liberian politics. He states specifically,

People win elections on the basis of what they have done in their societies, on the basis of their past. Thus, a political program becomes an instrument to tell voters what they should expect. Based on their deeds, the electorate can decide to reject them or endorse them. Taylor’s political program [he killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will vote for him], so zealously sung by his disciples, was that he killed the parents of those who elected him.

The first issue with this argument is that it overlooks perhaps several but certainly two essential points. First, while it is true that a prudent approach is to look at a politician's past in deciding whether to elect him or her, it is not imprudent to look beyond it if the now is reassuring and redeeming. Nyanseor needed to recognize that Taylor's tactics sufficed because of the social and civil climate. Second, the slogan in contention should not be a basis upon which to judge the rationality of people's actions, as it is uncertain if those chanting the song were actually those whose parents were killed by mister Taylor. In truth, the song is severely disturbing that it, in the end, does not matter if it were those offspring of the victimized. The profound point being made here is that the voices signing the slogan on radio frequency or chanting down the streets could have been anyone Taylor had chosen either through bribery or some other means. While it is perchance no data documenting the composition of the crowd, one cannot overlook that most of Taylor's loyalists – during, before, and after his election – were young men, often children who had fought for him, who were illegible to vote. Furthermore, that he owned and controlled the country's only radio station at the time and that other networks only emerged towards the end of the campaign period (The

Carter Center; 1997; pg 27) speaks volume of the level of manipulation that possibly took place.

General Theories

Moving away from the arguments fitted entirely for Taylor, I provide two other explanations that scholars have used to explain factors that influence elections outcome in Africa. The arguments are important in helping to theorize the paradox beyond a limited scope.

Ethic Appeal

Press (1999) informs that ever since Africans began participating in democratic elections, they have often done so along ethnic lines, although, in citing Monga, he asserts that this justification is “overused” in explaining “political strife in Africa”(51). But worn out or not, ethnicity does have a strong hold on electorates’ choice and a significant role in political friction in Africa. Especially in a nation like Liberia, where resources have been historically allocated on ethnic basis, the argument cannot be easily dismissed or overlooked because of its overuse perhaps in other parts of Africa. One such example is Johnson’s performance in the 2011 presidential elections. Although he lost the presidency in third place, he won a landslide victory in Nimba County, capturing 110, 735 (67.7 percent) of the votes, next to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf with 41, 269

(25.2 percent) votes (NEC). His victory in Nimba but no other region is no coincidence. In his work, *Ethnic Tensions in Liberia's National Identity Crisis: Problems and Possibilities*, Emmanuel Dolo provides a historical and social analysis to explain why Liberians vote based on ethnicity. Citing James Fearon, he writes

ethnicity is socially relevant when people notice and condition their actions distinctions in everyday life. Ethnicity is politicized when conditions are organized along ethnic lines or when access to political or economic benefits depends on ethnicity (Dolo; 2007;104).

What this suggests is that people vote for members of their ethnic groups not merely because of tribal affiliation, but because historical happenings have conditioned them to believe it is the most expedient approach to take if they must seek their own interest. In other words, people elect perpetrators based on ethnicity only if warlords are able to use ethnic appeal to prove in whatever way that the needs of the people would be met upon assuming power. Thus, no matter the tribal background, what really concerns the population is a candidate's ability to project some form of comfort. Whether they calculate such assurance prudently is another subject outside of what sways their choices. This

explanation provides understanding on why Johnson campaign pronounces were aimed at convincing the people of Nimba that incumbent President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's 2005 regime had deprived them of their economic benefits based on long-standing animosity of past presidents towards the Manos and Gios. Johnson have been quoted to state:

For example you have Nimba that was the target of the Doe regime those days, the war is over now and 80-85% of the combatants are from Nimba and you have Mittal Steel and BHP Biliton operating in Nimba, but you do not even have the sons and daughters of Nimba on the board. They are not employing our people; they imported people to employ them”(Wade and Azango, 2011).

The use of the language, “our people” shows that Johnson made substantial efforts to prove that he was part of them not only because he hailed from there but also because he supposedly empathized with their alleged marginalization. This therefore sets the background to convince them that the problem could be dealt with only by electing a Nimbanian president who cares greatly for their welfare. But insofar as the strategy is strong on the local level so is it weak on the national level, if we factor that Nimbaians make up only about 500, 000 of the five million people of Liberia.

In this sense, the ethnic appeal offers a degree of legitimate explanation on Johnson's wins and losses. It also helps in comprehending Kromah's loss in his county of birth during the 1997 and 2005 presidential elections. In the former year, the Lofa native only captured 8,846 votes in that county, after Taylor who soared with 36,078 votes – and in the latter year, he accumulated 9,059 after Sirleaf with 13,161. In both years, Kromah's campaign was characterized by promises to provide electricity and other basic infrastructure, but these were not backed by substantial tangible assurance as in the case of Taylor or Sirleaf, a non-warlord who Kromah lost to in the 2005 elections. Unlike he, Sirleaf's had sustained contact and good relationship with the international community that give people reasons to believe that upon election into office, she would have the capacity or resources to accomplish the things outlined in her platform.

Religious Appeal

Along the lines of the above school of thought is the appeal to religion argument. Abernethy (1995) traces the use of religion in politics in much of Africa to missionary activities on the continent. He explains that when missionaries went there to promote their religion, they took with them messages of prejudice against other faiths, creating a divide

between Muslims and Christians as well as Catholics and Protestants (53). The end result is a legacy of religious rivalry that continues to live with the people. Cognizant, politicians pry on the division and stereotypes that have been developed through the rifts to advance their political ambitions (53). He points to the 1957 and 1961 elections in Nigeria's Eastern Region as an event that saw "bloc voting along religious lines," which led to "the defeat of certain candidates in the House of Assembly" (53).

Align with Abernethy's accounts, Ranger (2008) reveals that the use of religion and "religious identities" to "establish difference" and "justify inclusion and exclusion" during colonialism is a tactic still employed by politicians in Mozambique to "legitimize political power" (186). Citing campaign speeches, he provides evidences pointing to politicians' advocacy during the 1994 elections to return to "retraditionalization" through the promotion of traditional religion. On the other hand, he notes other politicians' use of the church during that same period. Despite these facts, Ranger informs interestingly that according to reports from groups monitoring the elections, there were no patterns of religious voting (186-187).

Indeed, his instance and that of Abernethy, provide two stimulating insights on the issue. In the first case, we are told of a successful use of

appeal to religion in winning elections. In the second, we see the opposite. The difference in the outcomes, however, should not stray away from the underlying point of contention. Although all the intricate details regarding the campaign strategies were not provided, it can be speculated that the use of religion on its own does not guarantee votes in most instances. In fact, using religion as a pathway for political office sometimes creates the playing field for tension, which many fear and desist. As Dolo puts it perfectly, “when religion differences is dormant there is no need to stress it and evoke harm where the need does not exist.”

In the case of Liberia, there is a mal tension between Christians and Muslims, which has persisted for decades. Known to many Liberians is the fact that such premature rift could escalate into a full-blown civil war or national conflict if people are incited to think of it as that of paramount concern. The issue primarily takes its root in the flawed notion that Liberia is a “Christian nation.” Some Liberians, who are mostly Christians, argue fallaciously that because the founding or forefathers were Protestants, the nation is therefore a one “founded on Christian principles.” In their arguments, they cite that Mr. Findely, a Presbyterian clergyman and founder of the American Colonization society who sponsor the return of freed slaves to Liberia, originally named the capital

“Christopolis,” meaning “city of Christ” (The New Dawn Liberia, 2012).

They further contend that it is tradition that the country be ran by a Christian head of state, in keeping with the fact that no other religious group had ever occupied the presidency.

Despite such faulty marginalizing notions being overwhelming, one ought to recognize they are just that – spoken friction. This is not to oversimplify and downplay that for instance, some Liberians have taken the initiative to petition the legislature to “restore the country to its Christian heritage.” This is to point out that such actions and believes have not been nurtured by the state. Till this day, there is minimal, if any, institutionalized ostracism of Muslims, appearing in whatever form including separation of facilities, marriage restrictions, or barring from political spaces. In fact, if any exist particularly in terms of marriage restriction, it is often as a result of Muslims tendency to marry within their religious order. Thus, the fact that Kromah, have repeatedly emphasize the suppression of Muslims, even though they have successfully circumnavigated into different aspects of society and achieved high level of success, has been a huge contributor to his loss in both the 1997 and 2005 presidential elections. In the first place, his insurgent movement, the Ulimo-K was pervaded with Muslim “fanaticism.”

And like Johnson, it was this message of the promotion of the rights of the suppressed that he upheld throughout his campaigns and even in his political career outside of contestation. In 2006, a group known as Muslim Youth for Development and Reconciliation (MYDR), cautioned Kromah to “retract his statement to the effect that President Sirleaf was not appointing Muslims in the current administration” and was instead occupying public spaces with Christians (Jabateh; 2006; All Africa). MYDR argued that such statement was misleading in that candidates were chosen based on qualifications and other factors outside of religion. Their concern is a common fear expressed in electing Kromah as a head of state. It is believed that allowing Kromah to become president would be a pathway to destruction in that his regime would focus on revenging for the alleged subjugation of Muslims and transforming Liberia into an Islamic state ruled by Sharia laws. Under his administration, public policies stand the risk of being consumed with religious prejudice as have been done in the past on ethnic grounds.

In this sense, what sets Kromah at a disadvantage from someone like Taylor was Taylor’s ability to detach himself from ethnic and religious affiliations. Although Taylor’s NPFL was primarily made up of the Manos and Gios ethnic group respectively, he was able to transcend beyond such

association and pursue a charismatic leader – father of the nation – persona. Taylor’s strategy during and after his election became more of securing loyalist to protect and further his interests, no matter their religious or ethnic order.

Findings and Conclusions

From the detailed analysis above, there is an overarching conclusion to be drawn. As have been stated and developed throughout this paper, there appears to be a primary concern, which drives people to elect certain candidates, warlord or not. The recurring theme is that Liberians have the propensity to favor politicians who promise potential in promoting their needs. Such potential must come in several forms but particularly the following: a charismatic leader – father or mother of the nation and the protector of the people. The issue of whether they evaluate candidates’ characteristics against the standards prudently is another subject that should not distract from the fact that the forms are what direct their votes towards specific warlords.

Charismatic leadership is not a characteristic attractive to Liberians alone nor is it a theory used to illuminate the support for dictators and warlords in Liberia only. The complex concept has been explored by many behavioral scientists to understand factors that make some leaders more

successful than others and that which make people loyal to men responsible for human rights abuses and crimes against humanity (such as Hitler). Daft (1978) defines charisma as “a seeming innate ability to inspire enthusiasm and affection from followers” (359). He explains that a Charismatic leader has the ability to “instill submission” into his followers, and that their source of power originates more from “personal traits rather than a position of power” (361). More profoundly, they have “the emotional impact on people because they appeal both to the heart and mind. They can speak emotionally about putting themselves on the line for the sake of a mission.” Such leaders often surface in troubled times and are supported because their strong and empowering personalities can put people at ease and provide reassurance.

Certainly, many have referenced Taylor’s “innate trait” in forming and controlling loyalist. But such issue is too abstract and complex to be explored at this point. Thus, in recapturing Taylor and other warlords’ charisma, I emphasize the tangibles. Taylor projected the charismatic image in several ways from the time of his invasion up until his elections into office and arguably throughout his regime. First, he invaded Liberia under the propaganda that he was the savior of the nation and the guarantor of national unity. The unity was based on the defeat and

overthrow of Doe's regime, which had caused years of human rights abuses and further pushed Liberia into political turmoil as well as moral degradation. He professed an image as the only person who could sustain peace and tranquility - as a security provider. Next, through his massive donation of food and water, he assured that he had the capability to provide the basics beyond what any administration had done and beyond what mere ammunitions could. In this sense, he acknowledged that his revolution had severely upset the relative stability and the people's ability to somewhat attend to their own needs. By using his connections with the international community particularly other African presidents, Taylor espoused a message that essentially said I brought this destruction upon you; I am able to fix it. Through these means he was able to appeal both to the "minds and emotions" of the population.

His tactic is unmatched in contrast to that of Kromah and Johnson, whose messages were largely in contradiction of a unifier and father of the nation embodiment. Although both somewhat succeeded in portraying the savior of the people image by joining forces to oust Doe from power, it was their alignment with specific religious and ethnic groups that perhaps gave people reason to question their intentions.

The point of reemphasizing these factors is to show that one cannot simply use one of the theories discussed to account for all warlords in Liberia. Candidates must be assessed individually to fully comprehend their victories and losses. By sampling three of the most prominent warlords who have both failed and lost, I have shown neither religion, nor ethnicity, nor, TOW, nor, LCT, nor MP can alone suffice in explaining why people vote for warlords in Liberia. Rather, they should be viewed as a conglomeration of tactics that have been used successfully and successfully by various warlords and non-warlords in their quest to further their political interests. The successful ones, as it appears, are those who have been able to play them out in a charismatic manner.

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