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THE LANGUAGE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE RHETORIC OF LIBERIAN PRESIDENTS

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Recommended Citation

Odebunmi, Tolulope Aina, "THE LANGUAGE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE RHETORIC OF LIBERIAN PRESIDENTS", Open Access Dissertation, Michigan Technological University, 2022.
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THE LANGUAGE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE RHETORIC OF LIBERIAN
PRESIDENTS

By

Tolulope Odebunmi

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In Rhetoric, Theory and Culture

MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

2022

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This dissertation has been approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Rhetoric, Theory and Culture.

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Dedication

To the Odebunmi, Soremekun and Doody families.

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Acknowledgements

Without the grace of God, I could not have completed this journey, so I am eternally indebted to the Almighty for the strength to finish.

To Dr. Victoria Bergvall for mentoring and guiding me on my research subject, which I knew nothing about initially. For your commitment as a teacher and advisor, I am indeed grateful.

To Dr. Abraham Romney, my co-advisor, thank you for your insights on non-western rhetoric and willingness to help whenever I called on you. I am thankful to my committee members Dr. Craig Waddell for helping and challenging me to become more articulate with my ideas, and Dr. Saheed Aderinto, for your support and mentorship.

The RTC program throughout my studies has enormously supported me, and I thank the department, staff, and my professors for their labor of love.

I appreciate the input of my past and present colleagues in the RTC program, Yunana Ahmed, Stephen Dadugblor, Edzordzi Agbozo, Modupe Yusuf, Bill De-herder, Andrew Gray, Favour Esinam Normeshie.

For your kind words and having faith in me, Dr. Cajetan Iheka, Opeyemi Ajisebutu, Thelma Oluwadero, Dr. Tosin Gbogi, Dr. Adedoyin Ogunfeyimi, Adebisi Olusolape, I say Adupe.

My heart is full of gratitude for the constant prayers and encouragement of family in Nigeria, especially Bola, Tunde, and Dr. Soremekun.

Billie, thanks for your understanding and for being a genuine cheerleader; I love you.

Abstract

This dissertation contests the framing of “development” in Liberian presidential discourse — Inaugural and State of the Nation addresses of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (EJS) and George Weah through Reisigl & Wodak's (2016) Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA) and conceptions of political ideologies (Chilton & Schaffner, 2002; van Dijk, 2006; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Aristotelian rhetoric complements my analysis. I turn to Mohanty (1988), Mama (2001), and other theorists of globalization for theorizing the subjectivity of third world subjects, setting up the complex connections between the periphery and global south. Through a linguistic, historical, and rhetorical analysis, I contest the framing and conception of development by Liberian presidents Sirleaf and Weah, questioning whether it matches the expectation and needs of the everyday Liberian. I interrogate development in Liberia and the implications of such developments on the selected leaders and nation. My central question is whether "development" is construed to the advantage of the speaker (Sirleaf and Weah) or their audience (the people of Liberia). My interest in the concept of development stems from the observation of its ambiguous usage, such that I identified it as a "god term" or "uncontested term" (Weaver, 1953) based on assumptions of its meaning.

Since my data is suffused with neoliberal discourses, the works of Chilcote (2002) and Springer (2012) are helpful for my analysis of the contradictions of globalization, especially with Liberia's positionality as a dependent economy — bound to ex-imperial powers—despite its richness in natural and human resources. My quest for understanding the relationship between language, power, and ideology drives the thematic analysis of education, democracy, empowerment, gender, security, etc. These are all related to how development is conceptualized in the Liberian context. I focus on the semiotic choices of the presidents and their "positionality" to understand issues, events, actions, and the people they legitimize or delegitimize, as well as the values and beliefs they portray in their discourses. My analysis reveals that the discursive practices of Sirleaf and Weah are essentially "performing politics" (Wodak 2012) so that, unfortunately, the masses soon find themselves in the hands of new politicians with old ways of thinking, with non-

inclusive and non-progressive state institutions and structures. Furthermore, by exploring Liberia's history, I problematize the current political structure, especially the neglect of tensions between the different groups due to beliefs and ideologies. Liberia's political actors' unique adoption of neoliberal discourses cannot be explored without investigating their backgrounds and connections, e.g., Sirleaf to America and Weah to Europe, such that their framing of development is linked and dependent on their foreign allies' interests and control. Thus, to achieve significant progress, Liberia must look at alternative means of addressing her historical problems rather than adopting neoliberal rhetoric that is not useful for her political and cultural structure. More importantly, there must be a collaborative effort between the government and the people towards accountability and correcting the ideology of public office equals personal enrichment. Instead, it is necessary to cultivate new ways of ensuring that public offices are used toward the good of all, especially to maintain peace and avoid a repetition of political tensions as Liberia has experienced before.

1 Chapter One - Introduction: Presidential Rhetoric

On January 16, 2006, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was sworn into office as the president of Liberia, making history as the first woman to be democratically elected to the Liberian presidency, and the first democratically-elected woman president in Africa. The Republic of Liberia prides itself on being the oldest modern nation-state in Africa and perhaps it is fitting that Liberia produced Africa's first elected woman president. Liberia was established at Cape Mesurado on the West African coast as an emigration project of the American Colonization Society in 1821 after the abolition of the slave trade in the United States (Staudenraus, 1961). It was meant to be a free land for Black people on the assumption that they would have better opportunities to thrive on the continent. Cape Mesurado became home to settlers from the United States, and the settlers became known as Americo-Liberians, distinct from the indigenous peoples whom they met in Cape Mesurado. The first president of Liberia was an Americo-Liberian, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, elected in 1848 and originally from Norfolk, Virginia. The Americo-Liberians exclusively controlled the government of the territory (Jones, 1974). Up until 1980, the elites of Liberia were Americo-Liberians, and they dominated government to the extent that a "native" Liberian (i.e., person not of American heritage) who worked in government before 1980 was considered highly privileged since there were few of them. After ruling the native Liberians for 133 years, Americo-Liberian domination was forcefully ended in a coup d'état (the assassination of President William Richard Tolbert) in

April 1980. The coup was led by Samuel Doe, who established a military regime called the People's Redemption Council. Doe ruled Liberia for the next decade, the first five years as a military leader and the latter as a civilian president. Liberians did not experience better governance during Doe's administration. They suffered Doe's tyrannic practices, which worsened the political, economic, and social problems that had festered in the preceding 133 years. The country was plunged into the catastrophic First Liberian Civil War and eventually the Second Liberian Civil War (see Steady, 2012; Spatz & Thaler, 2018). The Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2003, commonly referred to as the Accra Peace Talks, is credited with ending Liberia's civil unrest, leading to the democratic elections of 2005 that produced Sirleaf as the first woman president in Africa. thirteen years later, on January 22, 2018, George Manneh Weah was sworn into office as the president of Liberia, taking over in a peaceful transition from Sirleaf.

Many studies have analyzed post-conflict Liberia, such as Harris (2006). Harris focuses on the 2005 elections, which he terms "unusual" due to Liberia being war-stricken yet its masses engaging vigorously in the electoral processes and its elites similarly contesting vigorously for power in the first post-conflict elections. In this dissertation, I approach Liberia's 2006 and 2018 presidential inaugurations as historical events that signaled that the Liberian masses and elites had successfully challenged the political status quo. Indeed, the level of citizens' political engagement is encouraging considering Liberia's recent past of political, economic, and social instability.

Spatz and Thaler (2018) also theorize Liberia's democratic trajectory by examining not only the presidential election of 2005 but also that of 2017. They describe Liberia as a "vibrant yet flawed democracy" (p. 156) due to the legacy of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement in allowing "warring factions to create political parties eligible to contest local and national elections and hold office" (p. 158). These scholars argue that Liberia's peculiar democratic status will be an obstacle to the welfare of her citizens unless institutional and structural changes are implemented by the state. The analyses of Harris, and Spatz and Thaler inform my understanding of leadership practices in Liberia and their implications for Liberia's democratic welfare. Post-conflict Liberia has now been under democratic governance for slightly over 15 years, which is a long enough time to take stock of the welfare of Liberians under democracy.

This dissertation takes a unique approach to democratic stocktaking by providing an interdisciplinary analysis (linguistic and rhetorical) of Liberian presidential discourse, with special attention to the effects of gender, ethnicity, and class on the production and reception of such discourse. For centuries, the quest for the understanding of human systems of social interaction and culture has been heavily dependent on language. Investigating the dialectic relationship between texts and discourse necessitates a focus on how linguistic symbols operate personally, culturally, socially, and epistemologically in Liberian presidential speeches. The semiotic elements of a text can reveal levels of relationship between the speaker, the text and the audience. Zarefsky (2004) argues that a president's leadership hangs on their persuasive abilities to influence

their audience to action. Zarefsky's work informs my rigorous analysis and adoption of the triangulation of the social, cognitive and discursive elements analyzed in my data. The function of language is one aspect of my analysis because linguistic and semiotic symbols are the means of human communication. I borrow concepts from neo-classical rhetoric and Aristotle's conception that humans are political animals to highlight why the quest to understand the human world is primarily carried out through language. Rhetorical studies complement my analysis because of my interest in the communication styles of Presidents Sirleaf and Weah. Scholars who argue that a president's discourse control skills are crucial to their rhetorical leadership include Hart et al. (2005), Teten (2007), and Emrich et al. (2001). We make sense of the world through language and those who are skilled in the art of rhetoric can use this prowess to their advantage in public leadership, especially in politics. Is there a distinct rhetorical style that makes "unlikely figures" like Sirleaf and Weah persuasive and effective leaders in Liberia? I am using the term "unlikely figures" to characterize Sirleaf and Weah because they would not be considered as typical presidential candidates due to their trajectories prior to office. I will map out these trajectories in some detail in Chapter Three. Democratic discourse is also relevant in my analysis as I show the connection between Sirleaf's and Weah's rhetorics of development and democracy.

The language of development abounds in Liberian presidential discourse yet underdevelopment looms all around. I argue that some form of inequality is responsible for Liberia's continuing underdeveloped status. This dissertation will

reveal the privileges of political and social actors and at the same time highlight the unequal power relations that stem from their relationship with citizens. It is however my hope that my work is not viewed as one that blindly criticizes politicians without putting situations in proper perspective. That is why I analyze and theorize how discourse is being produced, reproduced, resisted and negotiated by political actors on developmental issues. My intention for interrogating the discourse of development is to theorize the linguistic and rhetorical practice of Liberian presidents. The appeal to economic development is paramount in both the speeches of Sirleaf and Weah, considering the perennial Liberian economic situation, which has become worse since the country was hit by Ebola in 2014. The use of the term development in Liberian presidential discourse, I argue, is due to the positive connotation of the word. It makes sense that the term is heavily employed in the texts that I analyze. It is important to point out that in this age of democracy and technological advancement, development is perceived as an expression that is overwhelmingly positive. It is no wonder that anything or person linked with advancing development commands respect and is sought after. In the globalization order, certain countries (the global north) are classified as developed while others (the global south) are considered as developing or underdeveloped. To understand how central the language of development is in Liberian presidential discourse, I provide a brief history of Liberia's political sphere in Chapter Three to show that development is not just a transitional rhetoric employed by Sirleaf and Weah but a historical foundational discourse

that the society is still grappling with almost two hundred years after its establishment by the American Colonization Society.

1.1 Research Questions: The Language of Development

The questions guiding my dissertation include:

- How do Liberian presidents conceptualize development considering its frequent use in their speeches?
- What values and ideologies presented in presidential inaugural addresses connote or associate with development?
- What are the contradictions of the forms of development presented in Liberian presidential speeches?
- How does Liberia's foundational history echo the discourse of development?
- How do neoliberal discourses in Liberian presidential rhetoric frame development?

In this dissertation, I focus on the language of development by comparing the discursive strategies—linguistic and rhetorical—employed by former Liberian president, Sirleaf, with those of the current president, Weah, in their key speeches, the Inaugural Address (IA) and the annual State of the Nation Address (SONA). Given that Liberian presidents are mandated to deliver an IA as part of the swearing into office ceremony, the importance of the speech cannot be underestimated. Likewise, the SONA is mandated by the Liberian constitution

(Liberian Const. art. LVIII). Even though these are functional speeches, a routine part of the task of being president, it is in examining their rhetorical function that we can interrogate issues addressed or omitted, the rhetorical response to context. Thus, exploring presidential rhetoric in Liberia helps reveal the values, beliefs, and norms of the speakers and those of their audience since the speeches are meant to persuade. Furthermore, examining these speeches show the shift in a president's discourse a year into office. This change of discourse makes one wonder about the intention behind omissions and whether some issues are dropped because they have served their purpose—to get the candidate voted into the office of president—or if only pressing issues are the ones that make it into the SONA.

In her IA of 2006, Sirleaf's nation-building rhetoric was hinged on an emotional message of healing because Liberia had come out of war just two years before the elections such that the pressing issues the people were still faced with were the impacts of the war. The occasion of these speeches is thus one where the presidents will attempt persuading their audience by employing discursive structures (van Dijk, 2006) that cater to the needs of their audience. The intentionality of employing specific metaphors, words choices or framings of topics are rhetorical choices speakers make while communicating. I examine the discursive structures and rhetorical choices in the speeches analyzed, paying attention to the style of the speaker, the rationale and the implication of the arguments in their speech. It should be noted that “development” is a commonplace that both Sirleaf and Weah employ, I am concerned about how they

argue for the need for development and how they blame certain processes, behaviors and social actors for the current underdeveloped state of the nation. I am not applying linguistic and rhetorical principles merely to tease out how they attempt to persuade—through intertextuality; I make clear linkages between the key addresses analyzed and Liberian foundational discourses, which is only possible after a thorough study of Liberian history.

The discourse of development is my interest in the SONA. The term development is a leitmotif in Presidents Sirleaf's and Weah's SONA a year into their administrations. The frequency of use of the term stands out in their speeches. In Sirleaf's 2006 SONA, "development" comes up 42 times while it is used 45 times in Weah's 2019 SONA. The high frequency of usage indicates that these politicians were strategic in their communication, being aware of the positive connotation that the word development carries. My analysis will include attempts to assess the consistency of appeals to development by way of assessing the effects of this discourse in terms of programs proposed and implemented and the results (to date) of such programs. I also pay attention to how the two presidents construct and position themselves as powerful and credible leaders able to bring progress to Liberia. Beyond the discursive practices, I examine in their speeches the linguistic means of representing objects, actions, people, etc. Furthermore, I tease out objects, actions and people associated with development. In the IAs, I examine values and ideologies the presidents put forward and frame as promoting Liberia.

I adopt Weaver's (1953) notion of an ultimate term or "god term." According to Weaver, god term refers to an "expression about which other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers" (1953, p. 212). Weaver's argument is that in each age and period there are terms that carry such weight that they are ultimately used to validate anything associated with them. My observation that the concept of development is used ambiguously is why I have identified it as "god term" or "uncontested term" based on assumptions of its meaning. My goal is to provide an interdisciplinary analysis (linguistic and rhetorical) of the neoliberal god term, development, in recent Liberian presidential discourse, with special attention to the effects of gender, ethnicity, and class on the production and reception of such discourse. Some of the god terms I have identified in Liberian presidential speeches include "development", "freedom", "democracy", "liberty", "empowerment" etc. My aim is to help citizens understand how language is employed in a manner to influence their thinking, insights gained from my work might help them support the leaders if they agree or resist them if they disagree. I hope that my analysis will help to empower audiences, such as the Liberian people, to hold political leaders accountable for their promises.

Secondly in my analysis, I also touch on the rhetorical use of "empowerment" by both Sirleaf and Weah. The word empowerment resonates with bringing power to the oppressed and underprivileged, so it is commonly used by politicians. Scholars like Dingo (2012) have also identified that there is a close relationship between the term empowerment and neoliberalism. The connection

between these two terms stems from the fact that neoliberalism on the surface seeks to bring about equality in the global order. Neoliberal ideas are thus seen as progressive. Neoliberalism is however a complex and broad concept, and varying meanings are associated with it. At its base, neoliberalism is an economic and social issue since it is tied to the economic global order. Neoliberalism is not just a discourse but an ideology. Harvey's (2006) theory of uneven geographical development is useful in contextualizing the Liberian situation, which is not to say there is a universal standard of development. Similarly, and as I have already observed, neoliberalism is a controversial term that has been critiqued for being contradictory since on the surface it fosters equality, enables connections of economies, cultures, languages, and objects, yet it is said to actually further propagate underdevelopment. I will therefore examine the effects of globalization and neoliberal discourses, which are especially relevant in Liberian politics. I am interested in the contradictions of these discourses in Liberian society. As such, it is pertinent to state my conception of neoliberal discourse in this body of work. I adapt Springer's (2012) conception of "neoliberalism as a discourse." Springer's notion of neoliberalism recognizes that there are two parties involved: those who produce neoliberal discourses and those who are constrained by such discourses. More importantly, we need bear in mind that elements of neoliberalism span different spaces and contexts and that is why problematic manifestations of neoliberalism are inevitable (pp. 134-135). Neoliberalism must then be seen as fluid, a continually evolving process that brings into interaction subjects, the actors and those affected by the course of neoliberalism. The use of

“empowerment” is even more significant in the Liberian context, as my analysis shows, because of how these politicians have positioned themselves. In chapter two, I review relevant literature to support that there is a link between globalization and development. Then in chapter five (section 5.31), I take up neoliberalism as an economic agenda in Liberian presidential discourses.

Sirleaf is championed for highlighting women’s causes in Liberia and beyond. Therefore, analyzing her empowerment discourse is interesting. Dingo (2012) traces the root of “empowerment” to feminists’ grassroots movements, suggesting that it “signals a pro-woman ideology whereby a group of so-called enlightened and already empowered people reveal, mainly through consciousness-raising, how empowerment might be found from within individual people and communities” (p. 175). Dingo is mostly referring to nongovernmental organizations set up in the West for the developing world, which is clearly not the case for Sirleaf in the Liberian context. Sirleaf’s use of the term complicates the notion of empowerment. In some contexts, especially when she addresses international audiences, her message of empowerment is more about showing what Liberia is doing and planning toward empowerment. At the same time, Sirleaf is— ostensibly when addressing a domestic audience—advocating that young girls and women should be given equal opportunities in society (see Amanpour, 2017; Southard, 2017).

Southard, theorizing within the framework of cosmopolitanism, insists that Sirleaf framed herself as an agent for promoting women’s economic, social and

political citizenship. Southard further argues that “Sirleaf’s nation-building rhetoric needed to reimagine Liberia as a participatory democracy, especially for women and girls whose social, political and economic lives had always been dominated by men” (p. 396). What is interesting about Southard’s analysis is her conception of cosmopolitanism as “a set of beliefs or ethics that compels one to act in such a way that reflects belonging to all of humanity in addition to or in spite of one’s local or national belongings” (p. 396). This definition contradicts the exclusiveness that characterized Sirleaf’s speeches and feminist rhetoric. The goal of Sirleaf’s rhetoric however is reasonable because of the patriarchal nature of Liberian society such that Southard submits that Sirleaf’s rhetorical practice “holds the potential not only to fold women into a humanity deserving of love and allegiance but also to shape national policies that enable women to participate in and belong to multiple, interconnected communities, especially in ways that resist oppressive flows of power” (p. 397). From my understanding of the Liberian context, President Sirleaf’s rhetoric was a double-edged sword that inspired women and Liberians to demand more accountability from their leaders, especially Sirleaf, who had projected herself as being devoted to the cause of women. Undoubtedly, Sirleaf’s legacy as president includes a disruption of the cognitive image of the place of women in society and an establishment of their role as agents of change in all works of life even though the feasibility of causing immediate transformations in that regard, as it was presented by her, may have been unrealistic.

As for President Weah, his government has been framed as pro-poor, both during his campaigns and after his inauguration. Coming from a humble background, Weah uses his experience to appeal to a majority of Liberians, especially the youth who see him as a symbol of hope who will be committed to bringing them out of poverty. Here is one excerpt from Weah's 2018 IA: "It is my belief that the most effective way to directly impact the poor, and to narrow the gap between the rich and poor, is to ensure that public resources do not end up in the pockets of government officials" (p. 5). There is an allusion to corruption as the cause of poverty in this text, and the newly elected president was implying that his government would act differently from previous leaders because of his commitment to improving the lives of the masses. Another reason why economic prosperity may work as Weah's selling point is because his personal financial success arose from sports. As such, he is considered to have "clean money." Not having been involved in politics until 2004 worked as a two-edged sword: some thought he would not be a competent leader because he had zero political experience, while his supporters thought he would bring fresh and "uncorrupted" perspectives into Liberian politics since he had no links to old politicians. Furthermore, since he was considered rich, his supporters held that he would not be interested in enriching himself with government funds. On that last point, it seems that line of argument did not consider that Weah's rich lifestyle would need to be sustained and that would likely be from government funds once he got into office. An instance can be drawn from his 2019 SONA, where he made an

argument for upgrading the furniture at the presidential lounge at the country's international airport:

With your approval as members of the national legislature, we used these savings wisely to fund thirteen (13) pro-poor projects. Today, I am pleased to inform you that most of these deliverables, consisting of our first pro-poor programs and projects, have now been successfully completed.

Some of the major successful programs and projects include: digitizing the University of Liberia registration system; sending medical doctors abroad to specialize; feasibility study of the 14th Military Hospital; upgrade of JFK [John F. Kennedy Medical Center] and provision of the roads maintenance, and the payment of the Resettlement Action Plan.

Additionally, a new presidential lounge is being constructed at RIA [Roberts International Airport] to accommodate visiting heads of state.

(paragraph 226-227)

To provide context, the president was accounting for the successes of his first year in office during that SONA in 2019. Acclaimed as the head of a pro-poor government, Weah touches on the fact, in passages preceding the above quote, that he reduced the salaries of his cabinet members from the level of the previous government and that the cuts were put toward the good of the people. It is however interesting to see that building a new presidential lounge is categorized as one of the pro-poor projects, although the strategic placement of it (as the last item) may be an indication that this project is not a reflection that the president

was intending to be regarded as simply “pro-poor.” This dissertation establishes that it is worthwhile taking up an interrogation of Weah’s Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development plan, which he employed to frame himself and his administration as working for the cause of the masses.

Thirdly and in response to the neoliberal theme that is paramount in my data, I question and tease out Liberia’s positionality in the global order as well as the credibility of the presidents’ framings of achieving significant development to improve the lives of Liberians. Contextualizing Liberia’s issues might be helpful in understanding the developmental rhetoric of Sirleaf and Weah, even more if the concepts of development and neoliberal discourse match that of the global north on whom they depend for survival. Relevant in this context is the issue of foreign aid, which acts as a lifeline for some nations in the global south, including Liberia, but which may be doing more harm than good. Globalization theorists such as Chilocte (2006) and Callinicos (2007) have likened globalization to imperialism due to its implication of unequal or uneven development, and it is not hard to see where foreign aid will be placed within that framework. In my analysis, I investigate the rhetorical practice of Liberian presidents as they reveal their plans for aid and support from their foreign development partners.

Harvey’s perspective, already cited above, the critique of the global economic order, works well with the analytical framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (also more recently known as critical discourse studies [CDS]). CDS offers analytical tools for researching unequal power relations. My study of

the rhetoric of development in Liberian presidential speeches is grounded in CDS, within the field of linguistics and closely related fields, since it offers useful ways of theorizing language and politics. CDS is a multidisciplinary analytical methodology born of critical linguistics, borrowing methods and concepts from across the fields of humanities and social sciences. CDS points to implicit assumptions embedded in texts, which are not directly presented (McDougal, 2014). It examines ideologies involved in discourse. This aspect of CDS is critical for analyzing political speeches since politicians have a reputation for using language toward achieving their agenda, which is often not overtly stated. This is why manipulation often comes to mind when people think of politics (see Adegoju, 2013; Edelman, 2001; van Dijk, 2002). CDS scholars have long been interested in the relationship between language, power, and ideology. Chilton (2004), for instance, defines politics as “the struggle for power” (p. 3). Likewise, Fairclough’s (2015) variant of CDA is one that emphasizes “power behind discourse rather than power in discourse” (p. 3). Critiquing power both behind and in discourse touches on how people with power are able to steer the direction of discourse to shape the social order. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue that explicating the dialectical relationship between objects, exigencies, and social structures that frame and shape discourse in a particular discursive event can help us understand the effects of discursive practice (p. 258). For this project, discourse is seen as a form of “social practice.” By social practice, I mean how discourse is framed within a society by social actors and how discourse is produced and negotiated within different situations and institutions, i.e., the

underlying conventions of discourse that make discourse become part of society. Knowing that the term discourse could be ambiguous, for clarification I invoke Hall (1992) in setting up a definition of discourse in my work, “a discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—i.e., a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic” (p. 201).

My contention is that the topics or arguments produced and negotiated in the texts I examine may not necessarily reflect reality, but studying such texts fosters the understanding of how social reality can be discursively constructed and used within the Liberian state in relation to the issue of development and other social, political and cultural values and beliefs that reflect in the texts. The centrality of language in constructing and deconstructing discourse helps situate the research of this study within CDS, using an interdisciplinary approach to gain an understanding of how language functions in composing and “in organizing social institutions or in exercising power” (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 7). According to Bourdieu (1989), language represents, manifests and symbolizes authority (p. 109). This attribute of language alludes to power which has been defined as the “the ability of an entity...to make change or conversely to maintain things as they are” (Bielsa & O’Donnell, n.d.). My concern in this study is to explore the avenue of power for politicians by way of a case study focusing on the rhetorical leadership of post-conflict Liberian Presidents Sirleaf and Weah. I study the relations of power manifested through the discourse they produce, and those surrounding them. The relationship between language and power is what constitutes how these politicians imply that they are steering Liberia toward

development—I tease out these framings through careful examination of selected IAs and SONAs.

1.2 Research Contribution

Language and other semiotic representational systems are significant in producing critical knowledge that may empower people to emancipate themselves from different means of oppression through understanding how diverse discursive practices produce unequal power relations between, for example, social classes, the powerful and the powerless, the ethnic majorities and minorities, women and men (Fairclough & Wodak, 2015). In this light, my analysis produces new knowledge to empower audiences, such as the Liberian people, to hold political leaders accountable for their promises. The accountability of leaders is a core tenet of democracy.

In addition, Bourdieu (1989) noted that although it is commonly believed that technical capacity is the basis for statutory capacity, “Linguistic competence is not a simple technical capacity but a statutory capacity with which the technical capacity is generally paired” (p. 69). What Bourdieu is implying here is that beyond having the required linguistic skills to function in a context, the subject(s) must necessarily possess the reputation that fits the position they are aiming for. This is in line with the principles of classical rhetoric. My dissertation brings together the two ends of this theoretical thread, technical and statutory capacities, linguistic skill and public reputation, by minding the gap between what Sirleaf

and Weah promise and what they deliver. Not only will researchers who consult my work use it as reference of a multidisciplinary study of Liberia's post-civil conflict political sphere, this multidisciplinary study contributes toward a robust theorizing of Liberia's politics.

Furthermore, the studying and theorizing of U.S. presidents' leadership and communication styles in the twentieth century is a fine and long tradition. The works of Tulis (1987) and others in its tradition are crucial to understanding presidential rhetoric in the American context. Tulis' book is groundbreaking research that examines the evolution of presidential rhetorical practices, especially their interaction with the public for support. He highlights presidents' efforts to appeal not just to the arms of government but the masses in policy making. As much as the works in that tradition are informative of how presidential rhetoric is approached in the American context, it is important to investigate African, specifically Liberian, presidential discourse while interrogating the structure of imperialism, which is not necessarily addressed in American presidential rhetoric. For sure, Africa is a continent of many countries, not just one country like the United States is. What is more, Africa's colonial experience complicates her political history. While this dissertation is not a focus on decolonial approaches, it extends the studying and theorizing of presidents' leadership and communication styles to African experiences and perspectives. In that way this study also responds to the call to decolonize knowledge.

In addition, while there is an abundance of work systematically done on American presidents' discourse, that is not yet the case for African presidential discourses, especially from a rhetorical standpoint. My examination of neoliberal themes of development in the speeches of Sirleaf and Weah addresses a paucity in African political discourse. Nevertheless, I do not claim that no work at all has been done on African presidential rhetoric. African presidential rhetoric has been receiving attention, specifically Liberian presidential rhetoric. Studying Liberian presidential discourse is worthwhile due to the asserted richness of president's speeches (see Adegogu, 2012; Ahmed, 2017; Dadugblor, 2016; Ige, 2012; Teten, 2007; 2011; Zarefsky, 2004;) and it is through these speeches that researchers can investigate and theorize the relationship between speaker and text, rhetor choices and audience interactions, visions presented and implementation (or failure to deliver plans). My dissertation contributes to the linguistic and rhetorical body of work on Liberia's presidential discourse.

Adegoju (2013) argues that politicians use their influence and knowledge of their audience's needs to persuade toward specific goals and agendas. His emphasis is on the open interpretation that can be given to topics in political speeches by the audience. Adegoju's work theorizes Sirleaf's 2006 IA through the lens of CDA, emphasizing the manipulative strategies Sirleaf employs to mobilize Liberians for the future. Adegoju's work is useful in explicating Sirleaf's strategies of self-representation as a newly-elected president in Liberia appealing to Liberians through what Adegoju calls "manipulative discourse." He argues that the purpose of this discourse on the surface seems to be serving a common goal,

the good of all. Nevertheless, Adegoju also observes that Sirleaf's subtle manipulation is also "serving her personal interests as the leader saddled with the task of providing leadership" (p. 108). However, Adegoju's focus is limited in the respect that his work merely presents Sirleaf's plans and the discursive strategies she undertakes in her IA, which fall in line with Kovayova's (2005) definition of what inaugurals set out to do. As a point of departure, my work studies the transitional rhetoric between Sirleaf's IA (2006) and her SONA (2007). The two speeches I analyze serve different functions, addressed to different audiences, and I have touched on the kairotic moments of the delivery of these speeches while drawing on the intertextual features between them. In the IA, I focus more on ideologies of self-representation while in the SONA I highlight the rhetoric of development that is linked to Liberia's foundational discourse of freedom.

Other works on Liberian Presidents, specifically on Sirleaf, have focused on her identity as a female politician. In this respect, Southard's (2017) is similar to Adegoju's work in the sense that she analyzes Sirleaf's nation-building rhetoric, but her work analyzes other speeches beyond the 2006 IA. Southard's paper addresses Sirleaf's beliefs and approach to leadership but is not linguistics-centered. My dissertation will address the issue of language, doing a comparative study of Sirleaf and Weah's speeches. Another important perspective that Southard omits in her work is Liberia's positionality in the global order and how this might be an obstacle to the materialization of Sirleaf's hopes for Liberian women. As such, Southard's analysis may be simplistic in regarding Sirleaf as being competent in employing cosmopolitan rhetoric since Sirleaf was still caught

up as the president of one of the poorest nations in the world. A comparison of Sirleaf's and Weah's rhetorical styles in four speeches captures sufficient complexity in grappling with the dynamic nature of post-conflict Liberia. Furthermore, I check their discourse of development against the reality on ground and even touch on their responses to the resistance of the development they had promised.

1.3 Chapter Overview

In this first chapter, I have set out to establish my goal of contesting the rhetoric of development in Liberian presidential speeches, particularly the IAs and SONAs, using linguistic, rhetorical, and globalization theories. I argue that due to the fascinating and unusual transitions that Liberia experienced politically post-civil conflict, studying how Sirleaf and Weah use the term development helps to understand their ideological values, which may reveal the underlying meaning of the term development. I also state why I consider development a good term in Liberian presidential rhetoric.

In Chapter Two, I will further review literature in the relevant fields that my work draws from: CDS, neo-Aristotelian rhetoric, and globalization discourse. I make an argument for a multidisciplinary study considering its rigor as well as its enrichment of knowledge. I highlight the ways in which the triangulation framework of linguistic, historical, and sociological approaches—that the discourse historical approach offers—is useful to understanding Liberia's

rhetorical situation. I stress my focus on language in research and define key terms in order to clarify my conceptions of them. The literature review in different fields helps situate my work within the current conversations of leadership in Africa. I conclude the chapter by presenting my methodology and methods.

Chapter Three offers a critical overview of politics in Africa, addressing issues that affect the positionality of the Liberian state in the global world order. Giving a historical account, I look at the founding of Liberia, colonization and its legacies. I explain the complex social interactions between the settlers and indigenous Liberians from the founding of the country and how some of these social tensions are still apparent in the society as ethnic, religious, gender, and class conflict. I trace development conversations in neoliberal discourses, pointing out how these discourses do not offer much to countries in the periphery like Liberia. Peripheral countries like Liberia are at the receiving end of globalization's impacts, which some scholars have called neo-colonialism. Finally, I examine the Liberian state's structure, the unequal power relations, and contentions for power among the different political actors.

Chapter Four presents how I investigate my research questions through specific linguistic and analytical tools which I have employed to understand the dialectic relations between language and politics in the Liberian context. I will define key terms relevant for my analysis in this chapter, give a rationale for my data choice then explain my methods of analysis. I conclude the chapter with a sample analysis of elements I will be focusing on in main analysis chapter.

Chapter Five focuses on the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed in Sirleaf's and Weah's speeches using thematic analysis to link the speaker's personality and background to their rhetoric. I will elaborate more in Chapter Four on the specific linguistic strategies found in the texts I analyze. I present my data set, the IAs (Sirleaf, 2006; Weah, 2018) and the next year's SONAs (Sirleaf, 2007; Weah, 2019). I highlight the frequency of democratic-related discourse in the four speeches arguing that the language was carefully chosen to appeal to the audience, a form of Kairos considering the state of affairs at each presidential transition. I give a comparative analysis of Sirleaf's and Weah's rhetorics while also presenting the match or mismatch between their discourse of development and reality. The contradiction of neoliberal discourse is another issue that I take up in Chapter Four to pinpoint that it serves more of an ideological value. I connect the rhetoric of development and globalization, pointing out the contradictions thereof as my analysis reveals that development is mainly tied to external forces, which may be an indication that development is beyond the control of the leaders.

Chapter Six summarizes my findings and observations. I revisit the centrality of language to my study, arguing that it is not only beneficial to understand the leadership styles of Sirleaf and Weah but also helpful in connecting the dots between the socio-cognitive values of these leaders and their rhetoric, and the people's attitudes to and beliefs about government and public officials. I highlight the flaws in the rhetoric of development employed by Liberian presidents and offer suggestions for forms of development that could be

implemented to improve the lives of the masses positively. I restate the significance of my work and its unique contributions to the conversations on leadership in Liberia. I address the limitations of my research and give suggestions on how to resolve them in future research.

2 Chapter Two - An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of Politics

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I set up the theories for conceptualizing how language and politics work in Liberia, relying on linguistic and rhetorical approaches. I review the status of research on African presidential discourse from a rhetorical point of view and argue that an interdisciplinary approach is valuable for my research, including the perspective of globalization theory and a focus on neoliberal discourse.

2.2 A Linguistics Perspective

As stated in chapter one, my dissertation studies the discourse of development in Liberian presidential speeches through critical discourse studies (CDS). CDS is multidisciplinary in nature, a key feature characterized by dialogues between linguistics and closely related fields. That makes it attractive as a theoretical and methodological approach to study language, politics and their close relationship in Liberia. Candlin (2013) argues that CDS's interdiscursive nature makes it ideal for the study of political discourse. As Candlin demonstrates and as I also show, we can deconstruct the construal and social construction of power and hegemony in discourses through CDS. However, it should be noted that CDS is not a mere analysis of discourse but the analysis of the complex social relations between discourse and other elements. We are thus able to understand discourse by investigating a set of dialectical relations consisting of "meaning,

and making meaning” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 3). Talking about what is inferred or communicated overtly in an utterance, we can speak of conversational implicature. Again, certain conclusions can be drawn from utterances even when they are not actively articulated by the speaker, while such underlying assumptions can be derived from texts.

However, Sauer (1989) warns about the tendency to over-analyze texts due to the assumptions of multi-layered structures connecting them to other social practices. Such overburdening of texts is made possible through presuppositions of shared ideas that are then employed in making sense of texts. What makes presupposition interesting is that the meanings and assumptions presented in the form of presuppositions are contestable (see Fairclough, 1995a). While I heed Sauer’s warning, I take advantage of the insights of the cognitive movement in linguistics. Chilton (2005) recounts how the cognitive movement in linguistics began in the 1980s as linguists began to argue that mental models are built by social practices and that linguistic abilities may also indicate other influences on the mental capacities of the individual, such as the societal and cultural norms attached to their language. CDS proponents would also later adopt intertextuality, establishing connections among texts. They then went further to include as a tool recontextualization, which refers to taking elements such as arguments and discourses into new contexts and reframing them (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 28). I therefore pay attention to words and intertextual relations between texts to reveal underlying connections in the choice of lexical items, and I establish and analyze the recontextualization observed in my data.

Consistent with leaning on the insights of the cognitive movement in linguistics, my analysis of presidential rhetoric benefits from van Dijk's (2002) work on the relationship between political discourse and political cognition. A salient aspect of cognition is ideology. Van Dijk (2002) describes ideologies as often abstract but involving different attitudes as well as knowledge displayed linguistically in different contexts as a reaction to issues, whether they be social, cultural, economic, or political aspects of human society. I conceptualize ideology along the lines of deeply rooted ways of thinking that influence actions, being "a manifestation of power" (Heywood, 2017, p. 6). Thus, ideologies are the "deep structures" or base upon which social representations, the "surface structure" in texts or discourses, are formed. In applying CDS, my aim is to discover hidden ideologies and resistance to power or its negotiation (in the Liberian context), a tenet of CDS which Wodak and Meyer (2016) readily address: "[p]ower is about relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structure" (p. 12). They further establish the different ways (some of which I adapt) of why language is an underlying factor regarding the complexities in social power:

- a) When and "where there is contention over and a challenge to power such as the domain of politics" (p. 12).
- b) The connection between language and power and how it plays out in a number of ways, therefore, "language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and the long term" (p. 12).

- c) Language has a unique function as a “vehicle for the expression of differences in power in hierarchical social structures” (p. 12).

My purpose for embarking on a CDS research is to achieve some form of change through social constructivism. CDS scholarship is an avenue to be an agent for social change because it offers a reflexive and critical approach to the study of discourse. This point makes CDS stand out as a methodology, and it complements the rhetorical criticisms that I have employed in my analysis. In the domain of politics where power contestation is an ongoing process, analyzing the structure and strategies of communication can improve the awareness of citizens and propel them to engage more with leaders without being intimidated. The deciphering of political structures from scholarly research can be channeled to popular discourse hence providing an avenue for the public to engage with such discourses. Critiquing ideologies in the Liberian social and political structure is another way of checking “the discursive aspects of power relations and inequalities on dialectical relations between discourse and power, and their effects on other relations within the social process and their elements” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 8). My point of entry is then a critique of the strategies employed in the discourse of development since this impacts the current political structure and social reality in Liberia. The strategies I have studied are coded in language, a linguistic and rhetorical tool that social actors employ in making or altering reality. In analyzing language, I am cognizant of the layers of relations embedded in texts, making my analysis rigorous. To further elaborate on the role of language in the framing of social actors, events, processes and actions in understanding

how the political structure in Liberia works, let us consider the argument by philosophers like Habermas who believe that underlying ideologies are driven by texts. As such, “Language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. Insofar as the legitimation of power relations, whose institutionalizations they make possible, are not articulated, insofar as these only express themselves in legitimations, language is also ideological” (1967, p. 259). This claim then makes CDS relevant to scholars in that it offers a discovery of underlying ideologies and clarifies differences in semiotic and textual representations as well as reality (Kress & Hodge, 1979, p. 14).

For instance, analyzing pronouns in political texts may reveal the relationship between the speaker and their audiences as well as the roles of political actors (see Ahmed, 2017; Dadugblor, 2016). In my study of pronouns in the state of the nation addresses (SONAs), I also highlight the ways in which pronouns can be indications of those values and actions speakers wish to be associated with or dissociated from—pronouns are not limited to indicating the person of the speaker or persons the speaker wishes to be associated with or dissociated from, as most research emphasize (Bramley, 2001; Karapetjana, 2011; Pennycook, 1994; Scheibman, 2004). This speaks to ethics, which is covered under epideictic rhetoric (see Aristotle, 2006, for a definition of epideictic rhetoric; Kovalyova, 2005, speaks of inaugural addresses as being epideictic in nature). In one sense, speakers or politicians in this context create cognitive representations (Chilton & Schaffner, 2002; van Dijk, 2016) about certain values

and actions they produce in their speeches but in the other sense some of these discourses never materialize, as if the politician used them only to perform politics and that raises the question of competence (Bourdieu, 1989) as well as other ethical issues of abiding by promises made. For example, when reporting on their trips abroad, there is a difference between Weah's and Sirleaf's reporting styles. In the following excerpts, observe that Sirleaf uses "we" for "the government" in speaking of the travels made by the president and probably other government officials. She does not stop there but legitimizes her travels as being valuable not just to Liberia but the "international and bilateral organizations" that the government interacts with. Lastly, the president projects a self-representation of being valued by different countries and organizations, which results in the reception of important invitations. Sirleaf opens up that section of her 2007 SONA with:

In furtherance of our foreign policy objective, we undertook several travels abroad putting emphasis on our neighboring African states and responding to invitations from several important international and bilateral organizations (para. 193).

Compare that to Weah's 2019 SONA:

During the period under review, I made official and state visits to several countries in the interest of Liberia and consulted with my colleagues on a number of issues of importance to Africa, notably the resolution of conflicts on the African continent and elsewhere (para. 197).

Weah is projecting that he travels only for relevant and useful causes, putting the Liberian people's needs first, probably because he has been criticized for taking luxurious trips at the expense of the nation. His use of "I" indicates him as active in the trips, portraying himself as not just embarking on government trips for the sake of traveling alone but to actively engage with other international leaders on vital issues. This might also be Weah's way of responding to criticisms of him not being articulate, as he was said to have been a docile member of the legislature before he was elected as president. Although we see similarities between how they speak about their travels, highlighting the essence of such trips, Weah's use of "I" presents the travels more like a personal achievement, especially when he speaks of the activities he was involved in while on the trips. He could easily have used the inclusive "we", the way Sirleaf did, yet we see him doing otherwise. This might make one question his "team player" positioning. In contrast, we can say Sirleaf seems to value the "team player" spirit as she references other participants during her official trips abroad. The other interesting point to note is the close association both presidents have with other African countries, as may be expected. A further look into the details of the trips embarked on during the year in review indicate that Weah reported visits to just three African countries: Ethiopia, Senegal and Togo, while Sirleaf traveled more, to eight African countries within her first year in office: Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Senegal and The Gambia. She also visited the United States five times in that same year. Her frequent travels to the US may signal the close ties between her administration and the U.S. government and

highlight the level of support that Liberia received or hoped to receive from the United States.

The role of social practice and social actors is vital in CDS, specifically their representation through thematic roles. Thematic roles may simply be defined as the relations between verbs and nouns that raise the questions how are actions presented? Who are the subjects? And, what are their roles? Are the social actors agents (doers) or passive (patients or receivers)? In other words, the semiotic choices we make in representing social actors—whether through visual, linguistic, or other semiotic resources, for instance—point to certain aspects of their identity. Semiotic choices are used strategically. They emphasize or deemphasize certain elements, depending on the agenda of the communicator. Machin and Mayr (2012) describe such emphasis, or omission, as “positionality,” in the sense that representational choices “have the effects of connoting sets of ideas, values, and sequences of activity that are not necessarily overtly articulated” (p. 103). This quote supports the argument that language is not neutral, and in deconstructing semiotic choices, a researcher connects the relationship of social actors and how they are represented. Beyond looking at the representational strategies of people and actions in the texts, I examine linguistic strategies of concealment, such as presupposition and nominalization, to point out implied meanings that are submerged or presented as taken for granted in speeches. For example, Sirleaf in her 2006 IA represented Liberians in a positive light, urging her compatriots to forget the past, work in unity so that their nation can make progress:

My fellow Liberians: We are moving forward. The best days are coming. The future belongs to us because we have taken charge of it.... We are a *good* [emphasis added] people; we are a *kind* [emphasis added] people. We are *forgiving* [emphasis added] people, and we are a *God-fearing* [emphasis added] people. So let us begin anew, moving forward into a future that is filled with hope! “In Union Strong, Success is Sure! We cannot fail.” God bless you all and save the Republic.

When Sirleaf gave her IA, Liberia was in a rock-bottom state. The people were desperate to live in a normal country, not a war-torn one. The scars of the war (damaged lives, property among others) were very much apparent at this point, but Sirleaf chose to ignore the perpetrators of the war and the wounded people in this excerpt. She symbolized Liberians as “good”, “kind” and even “God-fearing,” people who would work together to move the nation forward. The speaker pushed the ideology of a new beginning, romanticizing her term in office as one that would surely bring success to Liberia and did not acknowledge some of the hinderances. She did all of that using “we” to promote a sense of community and working together toward a shared goal and vision. From the above discussion, it is clear that due to the complexities involved in the identities and ideologies of political actors, accurately interpreting political discourse involves both a micro and macro analysis of lexical items employed in political discourse. It is in this light that van Dijk (1998) stresses the centrality of ideology to political discourse, arguing that discourse analysts employ frameworks that accommodate an interface between micro and macro analysis.

One issue that arises from the above discussion of that excerpt from Sirleaf's IA is that of political propaganda. There are scholars who believe that "political ideas are mere propaganda, a form of words or collection of slogans designed to win votes or attract popular support. Ideas and ideologies are therefore simply "window dressing" used to conceal the deeper realities of political life" (Heywood 2017, p. 2). Ige (2012) also speaks to the contradictions between the speeches of many African politicians and what they actually do, calling it "fallacious deliberative reflexivity by African presidents in their speeches, especially at summits" (p. 39). Ige cites the example of Yoweri Museveni, the president of Uganda who has now been in office for over three decades, yet in his first IA on January 29, 1986, he said, "The problem of Africa in general and Uganda in particular is not the people, but leaders who want to overstay in power" (p. 39). The case of Museveni can be likened to a politician corrupted by power. Scholars of politics are still discussing why leaders fail to fulfil promises. In the African context, Ige is not sure of what to make of the contradictions between speech and action of politicians, asserting that "What is not clear is whether what we hear them read or say are genuine thoughts of these leaders or logographical charade to simply acknowledge the existence of the problem and follow up with inaction" (p. 39). However, it goes without saying that the problem may be more complex than summing it up with such thought. It is still useful to consider that having foundational state doctrines or "guiding principles of the governance structures" (Ige, 2012, p. 30) which African leaders must strictly adhere to is one way to go about addressing these problems.

It is with these contentions about the role of language in discourses that researchers in the field of CDS have argued about the complex interrelationships and connections between language and ideologies. There are scholars with the notion that the ideological groups that politicians belong to influence their role as leaders. Politicians typically belong to political groups and institutions. The intersectionality of an individual politician may then be derived from (but not limited to) their personal beliefs rooted in the mission, attitude and goals of their institution(s). Van Dijk (2008) captures this sort of intersectionality in his discussion of the different levels and dimensions of the political domain:

a representative giving a speech in parliament speaks as an individual and thus expresses his or her personal political beliefs in a unique way and in a unique context. At the same time, that person speaks as a member of parliament or congress, as a member of a party and as a representative of a constituency, thus possibly 'doing' opposition against another party or against the government, and expressing the attitudes or ideologies of the own group. And finally, by doing so he or she is enacting a system of parliamentary democracy, reproducing the discourse order of democracy and democratic ideologies, and presupposing a historically variable common ground of cultural knowledge, norms and values, shared by all other groups of the same culture (p. 156).

Van Dijk also breaks down the levels and dimensions of the political domain into three categories in order to analyze the structure of the relations between

discourse and politics, which he argues is useful for deconstructing political discourse. The three categories are:

- 1) the base level (political actors)
- 2) the intermediate level (political groups), and
- 3) the top level (political institutions).

In analyzing presidential rhetoric, taking the first level into consideration requires understanding a political context in order to accurately interpret the mental representations of political actors in terms of their beliefs, discourses produced and lastly their interactions and its results in political situations. For example, in my analysis of the rhetoric of development in Liberian politics and the discursive styles of both Sirleaf and Weah, I consider their trajectories before assuming office. In addition, analyzing political discourse structures in terms of the discursive strategies used in the framing of social actors, events, processes and actions may show links to how political structure works in a particular context. Following van Dijk's approach, I look at the subjectivity of social actors in my data.

Just as van Dijk has argued for the relationship between the dimensions of political domain with his three-level classification, Irimiea's (2011) proposition follows the same line of thought as she asserts that the complex identities of politicians belong to several "groups" ideologically, socially and politically such that they end up being representatives of their political party, nation, government, ethnicity, and religion among other identities. In the case of my subjects, Sirleaf's

gender complicates her identity as a politician considering the deep levels of patriarchal beliefs in Liberian society and citizens who were arguing that a female leader would fail because of the difficulties of the nation (see Cooper, 2017; Pailey & Williams, 2017; Brown, 2017). Furthermore, her indigenous ethnicity swayed her supporters except that she had lived and enjoyed the privileges of the non-indigenous elites. Weah had more credibility with regards to indigeneity. His Horatio Alger story also appealed to a mass of supporters in a society with many poor people. Thus, political discourse produced by political actors can only be adequately interpreted if we take into consideration the role of the political context which is constituted by the elements outlined by Irimiea.

One other concern of my application of CDS to the politics of Liberia is the issue of gender. Sirleaf's campaign was heavily laden with gender discourse, which some researchers and critics describe as a means of fitting into the global agenda. Although they are not the focus of this study, some of the issues addressed by the subfield of language and gender are also addressed in this dissertation because I theorize the discourses of and discourses about a female president at a time when electing women to the highest office is still rare. I address the issue of gender through CDS-extended frameworks that accommodate issues of gender such as feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) and discourse historical analysis (DHA). Lazar (2007) raises the banner of FCDA by problematizing linguistics methodologies for their lack of diversity of perspectives in knowledge production, implying that the male-dominated nature of the field of linguistics promotes patriarchal assumptions in linguistics-centered

research such as mine. Lazar's call to action is that researchers should tease out the complexity of gender and power relations that are often ignored in traditional linguistics. This involves recognizing the diversity and similarities as well as the differences among men and women. Such recognition directs attention to the "historically and culturally contingent analyses of gender and sexism, and the pervasiveness of subtle, discursive workings of modern power in many societies today" (p. 148). DHA works such as the one by Reisigl and Wodak (2016) can be considered responses to Lazar's call to action since DHA as a method aims "to deconstruct the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that serve to establish, perpetuate or resist dominance" (p. 25).

DHA is an approach of CDS that is equally concerned with social critique (taking up issues of ideology, power). It enhances a researcher's ability to discover irregularities in texts, whether in the form of manipulations or ideological gaps. It also provides possible solutions on how to address social issues, which makes it ideal for analyzing political discourse. Other principles of DHA include its unique historical rootedness. Therefore, I retrace the political history of Liberia to contextualize the political current situation and identify past events that have shaped the political scene of Liberia in chapter three within a DHA framework. For instance, the rice riots of April 14, 1979 (protests against a 50% increase in the cost of the staple rice by the Liberian government) is an important event that set the stage for the 1980 coup. Both the riots and the coup can be read as indications of the huge divide and strife between native Liberians and the Americo-Liberians. They arose as resistance to the Americo-Liberian

domination of over a century. Following those two events were the devastating civil wars, between 1989 and 2003. As such, reconciliation is a major theme in the texts I have studied, especially the inaugural addresses (IAs). As much as Sirleaf has been praised for managing the fragile peace Liberia had at the time she assumed office and throughout her two tenures, reconciliation, unsurprisingly, still arises in Weah's IA, though perhaps directed more toward the opposition and, of course, his critics.

Teasing out the connection between ideology and linguistic practices in the context of Liberia involves understanding the backgrounds of Sirleaf and Weah to determine what experiences and values are implied in their texts. I observe a great number of references to professionalism and efficiency in Sirleaf's speeches, an attitude that Southard (2017) terms as a "nation-building rhetoric" (p. 396) with the sole purpose of reimagining "Liberia as a participatory democracy" (p. 396); this is critical, considering that Liberia was barely functioning as state during the civil-war era. Below is an instance in her SONA 2007 in Sirleaf's remarks to the members of the legislature:

It is in this view that during the fiscal year under review, my Administration submitted, for your consideration several legislations, agreements and treaties for your consideration, intended for the Legislative Branch of the Government to create permanent and durable legal frameworks for governance and the efficient running of our common patrimony (para. 7).

Sirleaf's choice of the adjective "efficient" may be said to be a means of altering the reality on the ground, since the existing frameworks may not have been efficient at all, yet Sirleaf may be addressing the legislative body with the invitation of working together to bring about change as one way of resisting the modes of operation set by the previous government; thus, Sirleaf's administration is conceptualized as one that is responding to the needs of the situation in the nation. The president also uses the collective pronoun "our" and a strong collective phrasing "our common patrimony" as a means of negotiating the direction with the legislature since they would have to be invested in such bills in order to pass them into law. In this way, Sirleaf projects the proposed bills as a common ground between the executive arm and the legislature with both arms of government working toward the good of the nation. Karapetjana (2011, p. 44) has indicated that politicians may use the inclusive "we" to create an interpersonal bond with their audience. This argument ties in with what we see Sirleaf doing in this excerpt, although this strategy does not guarantee that the legislature will eventually buy into the idea. Similarly, Helmbrecht (2002) suggests that the prototypical use of "we" by politicians is a means of boosting their social identity with a given audience. This indicates the slippery nature of "we" as politicians will often have to address a variety of audiences from time to time, such that the use of "we" may either indicate in-groupness or out-groupness even in the same speech to one audience. For example, referring to one's own political party vs one's country). In the same vein, Dadugblor (2016) makes a submission on the "referentially ambiguous" nature of "we", the inclusive "we" and the exclusive

“we” (p. 36). Therefore, the determining factor in identifying the variety of “we” used in a text is the context, which makes him conclude that the SONA is as partisan as other genres of presidential rhetoric because the speaker uses these texts to push their agenda.

Apart from the president charging that the arms of government must work together to ensure that the state runs in good order, introducing “our common patrimony” into the discourse may be another way of establishing that if the proposed bills are turned down, the legislature will be sabotaging the administration’s efforts to ensure that Liberia moves forward toward recovery from the impact of instabilities (governments, civil unrests) that have prevented a well-structured system of governance; hence the new administration was willing to lay a foundation that their successors may adapt. In short, the president’s manner of admonishing the legislature is an indirect way of saying that this is our problem as a nation (not mine alone) and we need to fix it.

It should be noted that not just any analysis qualifies as CDS. That is why I take a cue from Fairclough’s three-step characterization of CDS. It is CDS if the following characteristics are found in the analysis:

- a) It is not just the analysis of discourse (or, more concretely, texts)—it is part of some form of systemic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process.
- b) It is not just general commentary on discourse—it includes some form of systematic analysis of texts.

- c) It is not just descriptive; it is also normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them.

(Fairclough, 2013, p. 10-11).

2.3 Rhetorical Criticism

The rhetorical study of the presidency is not a new field (it has existed for over two centuries) but one that has evolved over time to address different aspects of presidential leadership, spanning works from different fields that include political science, history, journalism, linguistics, and rhetoric. Within the field of rhetorical presidency, works such as Tulis (1987) remain a reference point. He explores and traces the institution of the presidency from foundation to modern times while highlighting some changes in the rhetorical styles of presidents who have television and media interactions (Windt, 1980, also touched on this, arguing for the fluidity of political speeches audience. Change and evolution notwithstanding, public addresses of presidents remain chief among the texts of study in theorizing and understanding presidential rhetoric. Tulis' exploration of the shift in the presidency communication style is informative to me and useful in understanding the approaches to the rhetorical presidency in America. However, in the African context, there is a critical research gap to fill considering that the field of presidential discourse is still emerging such that my rhetoric of good governance and development, for example, is relevant due to Liberia's positionality in the global order compared to the United States. The specificity of Liberia's political history, for example, where issues of class, ethnicity, race, etc. are relevant, makes my approach different from that of presidential rhetoric in the

United States. The Liberian presidents' IAs and SONAs are therefore central in my study. The SONA is a speech required by the constitution while the IA is mandated by democratic norms. Respecting both the constitution and democratic norms is a matter of ethics, read good governance, therefore my examination of development rhetoric in its diverse forms in Liberian presidential discourse situates my research within the contemporary conversations on democracy, good governance and development in African politics.

My study is, in one sense, a response to the editor's note from the *African Journal of Rhetoric* (2017, 7). The rhetoric of good governance was the theme of the articles published in that volume of the *African Journal of Rhetoric*. That is appropriate for studies on Africa due to the prevalence of developing and underdeveloped nations on the continent. Scholarship on the U.S. presidency, for example, is extensive compared to presidency studies in developing nations like Liberia, where it is nascent. What is important is the link between democracy, good governance and development. In that light, there is not a more appropriate site to study the rhetoric of development than Liberia, which fell under a military dictatorship then lost over a decade to civil unrest before returning to democracy. Liberia is therefore a fertile ground for studying presidential rhetorical styles pertaining to ceremonial addresses (IAs) and policy speeches (SONA) due to the dynamism of her political sphere, in terms of democracy, good governance and development.

The editor's note from that seventh volume of the *African Journal of Rhetoric* focuses on the omission of the human factor in African politics scholarship. In this view, the human factor in governance is an engagement with how African politicians behave rhetorically with respect to power. My contestation of Liberian presidents' rhetoric of development is an attempt to critique and understand how Liberian presidents protect the interest of the masses or not. In other words, it is an attempt to critique and understand how they use their presidential power. For instance, much attention has been given to the centrality of persuasion in the exercise of presidential power in the U.S. context, prompting Windt's (1986) definition of presidential rhetoric as "the study of presidential public persuasion as it affects the ability of a president to exercise the powers of the office" (p. 103). Windt goes further to clarify that the three areas of presidential power are:

- a) "constitutional and statutory power" (p. 102),
- b) political party leadership and
- c) persuasion power, which is linked to the public perception of the president.

Windt's work outlines a research agenda toward rigorous analysis of why presidential speeches fail or succeed. I address the gap in African presidential political research by investigating Sirleaf's and Weah's rhetorical strategies while following Windt's agenda. My work contributes to solving the current methodological issue in African political discourse.

Current African scholarship on presidential rhetoric includes Ige (2012), who analyzes some mismatches between conceptions of democracy in the West and on the African continent, in terms of how it is practiced by leaders. Ige problematizes the impecunious conditions of Africans. He calls for a closer study of African political discourse. Referencing Tulis (1987, p. 7), “the rhetorical presidency does not represent a true transformation of the presidency,” Ige makes a case for research studies that will lead to a better understanding of African presidential rhetoric. To illuminate Ige’s point in my own work, U.S. presidents are typically analyzed as presenting public vice and public virtue in ceremonial speeches to project their “values, desires and vision of the future” (Windt, 1986, p. 104). The concept of public vice and public virtue in ceremonial speeches is interesting and practical in a stable state. However, a transfer of such rhetorical practice from a nation like the United States to Liberia may have been problematic back in 2006 when Liberia was only two years into the post-conflict era.

One of the problems being debated in African politics is the question of “ownership” in terms of the crises faced by the continent. Ige asks, “Can Africa actually claim ownership of all the problems that it has had since independence?” (p. 28). Postcolonial scholars continue to point to the interference of the West in Africa’s affairs such that even after independence the leaders of many African states do not seem to have power over their countries but only some lesser form of authority since economic power is still primarily held in western hands. I take Ige’s question a step further by asking: can Africa claim and achieve development

without connections to western institutions and countries? In the SONAs delivered by Sirleaf and Weah, how is development conceptualized or discussed? What are the lexical associations with the term “development” in those speeches? These associations may hint at the conception of development held by these leaders, especially because one of the functions of the SONA is for the president to celebrate past achievements and to propose and declare future plans of progress. Intertextuality, it can be argued, is one of the main linguistic/rhetorical characteristics of SONAs, since it links the discourses of the IAs, of the current state of affairs, of challenges and successes that may already be popular discourse in society. According to Chilton (2004), intertextuality refers to the linking of “assumptions a text makes about its referent, its readers, and its context” (p. 35). The audience for a SONA in Liberia includes but is not limited to the three arms of government (executive, legislative and judiciary), political and business leaders, members of the media, government officials, civil society organizations, labor and trade unions, and fellow Liberians, as well as the international audience, etc. See Appendices A and B for the full texts of the SONAs I analyze.

Windt (1986) presents four categories of research on presidential rhetoric: single speeches, movement studies, genre studies, and miscellaneous research. I develop a comparing and contrasting approach because it is useful for understanding the differences and emerging patterns in the communication of post-conflict Liberian presidents. My approach falls under Windt’s genre studies. For contrast, Adegoju’s works (2012, 2013), which focus on the manipulative tendencies of presidential rhetoric, fall under the single speeches analysis.

Another aspect of my work that complements existing research on presidential rhetoric in Africa and Liberia is the range of the focus of my analysis. In her IA, the focus of Adegoju's analysis, President Sirleaf arguably used her persuasive powers to advance her agenda (or the agenda of the elite). The IA is a ceremonial address. My work does not just examine the IA but I also analyze the only speech mandated by the constitution, the SONA, highlighting the neoliberal discourses and strategies presented there. Furthermore, Sirleaf has been praised for her rhetorical prowess, for her nation-building rhetoric and for helping Liberia to achieve political stability. However, with respect to economic development there has not been a linguistic-discursive study of her rhetoric let alone a comparative study of her and her successor in that regard.

Zarefsky (1987) remarks that presidential rhetoric is a "complex transaction" (p. 607) among the rhetor, text, audience (both supporters and opponents). It is not as simple as if scholars engage with political discourse they can detect and interrogate the issues raised. Nevertheless, the access to presidential discourses both by scholars and everyday citizens is a step in the right direction for engaging broader-based democracy as the form of governance practiced on the African continent. Moreover, one may think of this suggestion in line with Bourdieu's (1989) argument that exclusion of access to discourse is a means of oppression. I am particularly interested in verifying whether Liberian politicians' efforts toward "development" is inclusive of the masses or mostly benefits the elite. In this connection, Campbell's and Jamieson's work (2008) is useful in its examination of the power of the president, the intersectionality of the

presidency when it comes to the interests protected through policies, bipartisan, party or personal interests. I take a cue from Campbell and Jamieson on how to craft rhetorical research toward a broader understanding of presidency. They also address concerns of the functionality of presidential speeches in society and how they should inform better governance or leadership practices. More recently, Stuckey (2010) admonishes rhetorical researchers to take up engaging studies to advance research on the presidency by exploring “underdeveloped notions” (p. 7) within the field such as issues of “class, gender, and sexuality and the circulation of messages in the mass media culture” (p. 7). As much as the study of African presidential rhetoric is less systematic than that of the American presidency, class and gender discourse is inherently present in the Liberian presidential rhetoric due to Liberia’s political history as well as the identities of Sirleaf and Weah.

In the Liberian context, Southard (2012) examines the rhetoric of Sirleaf, beginning from her IA of 2006 as well as other speeches up until 2013. Southard’s work is important since it deals with democratic issues (related to neoliberalism) arguing that Sirleaf reimagined Liberia as a participatory democracy when she took office barely two years after the country got out of ruinous fourteen-year civil wars and helped lead Liberians to exercise their rights in making political decisions. However, in reflecting on Sirleaf’s time in office and on her being championed internationally as a feminist icon, feminists within Liberia have questioned her international reputation because of the significant oppression of women in Liberia that still persisted at the end of her 12-year tenure and after her bold promise in her IA to give “Liberian women prominence in all

affairs of our country ... encourage families to educate all children, particularly the girl child, [and] provide economic programs that enable Liberian women to assume their proper place in our economic revitalization process” (2006, para. 73).

Another work that has uncovered the discursive strategies employed by politicians specifically in the African context is the political discourse analysis by Ahmed (2017). Although his study focuses on campaign strategies—employed by the then incumbent president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, in seeking reelection—by establishing an integrationist approach (a combination of rhetoric, linguistics and decolonial theories) he unravels the complexities of the campaign discourses of the former Nigerian president. That was reassuring with respect to my embarking on an interdisciplinary research path for the study of African political discourse. His analysis further supports the thought that politicians often have to negotiate their identities through their multiple self-representations. Ahmed submits that presidential rhetoric in the African context must be positioned within a decolonial framework, because it helps to trace the hegemonic discourses from the colonial days up to present day Africa, thus centering the specificity of an African context. This approach may be in line with the quest for an Afrocentric means of coordinating and organizing the continent rather than a Eurocentric approach that ignores the diversity of Africa.

2.4 Globalization and Neoliberalism

In my discussion of the development of Liberia, engaging with the theme of globalization and the neoliberal discourses that are present in the political domain are part of my analysis. Indeed, another rationale for my adoption of CDS is the way it illuminates the study of the neoliberal discourse of development in Liberia. CDS is unique in the way it sets up a researcher's ability to open up dialogue as well as critique the strategies of neoliberal systems. Fairclough opines that CDS research is a means to "understand how contemporary capitalism in some respects enables but in other respects prevents or limits human well-being and flourishing, with a view to overcoming or mitigating these obstacles and limits" (2013, p. 11). I analyze the strategies employed in promoting the mechanisms of globalization and neoliberalism, the rhetorical and linguistic practices employed by social actors in Liberia, in my data.

Globalization is a controversial term in the humanities and social sciences because it is, on the one hand, projected in the positive light of connectedness, cross-fertilization of ideas, meeting of peoples, and exchange of commodities while, on the other hand, also described negatively as being an asymmetrical distribution of money, information, and goods (Tripp, 2002). On the surface, with the advancement of technologies, the global south has become more visible for at least three reasons. First, there are the affordances of instantaneous media systems. Second, while promoting the production of commodities, social media has particularly offered communities a platform for online engagement and expression. And third, advocating for a cause (gender, poverty, human rights,

among others) has increasingly become easier. Yet in the context of Liberia, the average citizen lives in abject poverty. This poses serious questions about the effects of globalization. On a deeper level, however, the question of who is heard and who benefits from the forces of globalization in Liberia needs to be explored.

The legacy of the neoliberal system, the forced merging of the world's economies into single systems, explains why Chilocte (2002) contends that globalization must be seen as a "politically motivated concept of ideological rhetoric centered on the notion of the evolution of a harmonious and integrated world order to mitigate the tension and conflict that historically has disrupted the international political economy" (p. 80). Chilocte's assertion is aimed at challenging the often-romanticized idea of globalization as bringing about some level of integration in the world economy. We need to bear in mind the fluidity of globalization and its forces. In other words, we can only understand the current globalization trends within the complex contexts of Africa if we consider that globalization is an offspring of imperialism, a view taken by globalization and postcolonial theorists including Chilocte (2002), Krishnaswamy (2002), and Young (2002). There is a consensus among these scholars about the link between globalization and inequality or uneven development. For instance, Krishnaswamy (2002, p. 106) remarks that the intersection of "imperialism, capitalism and modernity" discourses emerge in globalization theory and postcolonial theory, in the humanities, literary criticism in general, since these fields focus on the "effects of unequal power relations between different geopolitical locations of the globe" (p. 106). Harvey (2006) shares the sentiment of the scholars above with his

theory of uneven geographical development, arguing that globalization seeks to exploit while accumulating wealth for the already rich and well-to-do. Harvey further notes that the neoliberal movement worked in ways that benefited the few at the detriment of the masses since community leaders were able to negotiate with foreign investors about rights to communal land and property so that it eventually belonged to these leaders. The result is thus “uneven geographical developments and strong competitive pressures between a variety of dynamic centers of political-economic power” (p. 41). In other words, globalization is a fundamental reason for the world’s gaping divide between rich and poor countries. For theorizing the neoliberal rhetoric in Liberian presidential discourse, we must therefore diachronically observe and theorize the current world order that has placed a country like Liberia in its position.

Central to the debate of the effects of globalization has been the question of whether flows—be it of people, images, products, and capital, or ideas—produce integration or disintegration. By disintegration, I mean the movement and fluidity of humans due to changing living conditions. The example of how the company Firestone Liberia (a subsidiary of Bridgestone Americas, Inc.) managed to lease about 1 million acres from the government at the cost of six cents per acre (see Cooper, 2017) illustrates the exploitations that inevitably lead to disintegration and the inequality that globalization fosters. While Firestone Liberia may be the largest private employer, they use cheap labor. Even more disturbing are the poor working conditions of their staff. Eventually, they export the rubber that is extracted in Liberia, with little socio-economic benefits, to the

United States and other parts of the world for processing, where significantly greater socio-economic benefits are derived. The power relations allowing such unfair interactions are thus central to political discourse and since development and globalization issues are in themselves political, it is useful to employ critical perspectives to comment on them and their roles in the state of politics in Liberia.

One of the forces of globalization is neoliberalism, which is a complex and broad concept with which varying meanings are associated. As such, it is pertinent to state my conception of neoliberal discourse in this body of work. I follow Springer's (2012) conception of "neoliberalism as a discourse". "This frame of reference focuses on the transfer of ownership from the state or public holdings to the private sector or corporate interests..." (p. 136). Common motifs used in pushing policies and programs associated with neoliberalism are "privatization," "deregulation" and "monetarism." I do not focus on such policies, but it should be noted that such terms were used in the SONAs by Sirleaf and Weah. Speaking to the interrelations involved within the system of neoliberalism, Springer contends that neoliberalism neither operates from the "top down," as projected by the Marxists, nor from the "bottom up," as conceptualized in the Foucauldian governmentality notion. He therefore recommends thinking of it as a "mutable, inconsistent, variegated process that circulates through the discourses it constructs" (p. 135). To understand the language of development in Liberia, we must investigate the societal power relations. Unarguably, language does not only carry social semiotics but must be understood as playing a major role in shaping "the subjectivities and their associated identities" (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 9;

see also Purvis & Hunt, 1993; Wodak, 2012a). In the following passage, Springer argues that understanding levels of power relations is key in the analysis of neoliberalism:

This interpretation of neoliberalism centers on acknowledging a processual character where neoliberalism's articulation with existing circumstances comes through endlessly unfolding failures and successes in the relations between peoples and their socially constructed realities as they are (re)imagined, (re)interpreted, and (re)assembled to influence forms of knowledge through the "conduct of conduct" (p. 137).

Here Springer is referring to signifiers and symbols that constitute neoliberalism. As it has been stressed earlier, the concept exists and is in relation with other entities, peoples and objects. The proponents of neoliberal ideas thus utilize tools (digital and technological among others) to push their agendas. Since there is no formula as such for how neoliberalism works, this amounts to successes in some cases and failures in others. Free market economic policies and educational programs/projects introduced by the Liberian state toward development are good examples here.

A last point on neoliberal discourse is that the conversations about the contradictions of neoliberalism tie into my topic of development. Wallerstein (2007) touches on the fact that liberalism in the 19th century had an agenda of strictly "limiting the group of those who could exercise their human rights to some of the people as well as limiting the peoples who could exercise sovereignty

at all even more strictly” (p. 189). Wallerstein’s submission is true of neoliberalism in the 20th and 21st centuries as well, and it points to an obvious contradiction in the neoliberal propaganda about “human rights”, “freedom”, and “democracy.” He goes on to argue that racism and sexism were constraining forces that liberals used to prevent a universalization of their propaganda. Due to Liberia’s social and political history, neoliberal terms like freedom and democracy are prevalent in the speeches of Sirleaf and Weah. I tease out how these terms are used rhetorically and analyze their functions in my data.

2.5 Conclusion

From a linguistic point of view, this project contributes to the study of language and power as it examines the ideologies involved in selected discourses, which is consistent with a key CDS goal i.e., pointing out implicit assumptions made in texts. Another unique feature of CDS, which Ahmed (2017) elaborates on, is its critical impetus. CDS stems from critical linguistics (Fowler et al., 1979; Kress and Hodge, 1979; Pennycook, 1990). Critical linguistics is related to functional linguistics. The critical apparatus makes linguistics “an instrument of discovery, clarification and insight” (Whorf, 1956 qtd in Kress & Hodge 1979, p. 14) when analyzing discourses and the social construction of reality. Similarly, CDS originated from the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), and it is in accordance with the critical theory school of thought since as an approach it aims to better the understanding of society through discourse analysis: “CDS emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary work in order to gain a proper understanding of how language functions in constituting and transmitting

knowledge, in organizing social institutions or in exercising power” (p. 7). Wodak and Meyer go further to caution researchers employing CDS about their attitude if they are to prioritize bringing about a change of action in society. “CDS researchers have to be aware that their own work is driven by social, economic and political motives like any other academic work and that they are not in any superior position” (p. 7).

My research borrows extensively from linguistics and rhetoric and several studies have asserted the benefit of combining these two perspectives. Barton (2002) speaks to the numerous benefits of the combination of linguistic and rhetorical tools of analysis, arguing that there are “connections between texts and contexts, with a focus on the repeated use of linguistic features ... and the associated conventions that establish their meaning and significance of context” (p. 8). The emphasis on context is useful here, bearing in mind that sociocultural factors may impact the outcome of analyzed discourses.

In the same vein, Vanden Hoven (2016) asserts that for speakers to achieve the purpose of their text, they employ devices that influence the perception and interpretation of the texts and strategically present them to an audience. Two of the devices Vanden Hoven identified are argumentation and contextual framing, and these overlap as linguistic and rhetorical tools. Discourse analysts have long drawn on traditional rhetoric’s tools of analysis, such as the Aristotelian rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos and pathos), which overlap with linguistics. What is new however is that contemporary studies of rhetoric no

longer focus solely on speaker-audience analysis but go further toward other studies of communication processes that are situated in the real world. Zarefsky (2004) in his work on presidential rhetoric speaks to “message-audience relationship—looking for the effects of messages on audiences” (p. 608) as a less productive enterprise. He further argues that texts are simplified with that kind of approach such that they lose their complexities and the characteristics that make them worthwhile for analysis. It is then no mistake that MacDonald (2002) has described discourse studies as the linking bridge for composition studies, rhetoric and the field of applied linguistics due to the flexibility of the framework.

In this chapter, I have reviewed in the field of linguistics, rhetoric, and globalization relevant literature that inform my study and that guide my analysis of Liberian presidential rhetoric. I have argued for the benefits of embarking on interdisciplinary research employing CDS and by combining CDS with rhetorical and globalization theories. Thus, through exploring the conversations on presidential rhetoric in Africa, I situate my research on Liberia as a timely response to the call to African scholars to develop a systematic study of African politics.

3 Chapter Three - Introduction

In chapter two, I set up my theoretical framework and argued for an interdisciplinary approach to political discourse analysis. I have situated my work within linguistics, rhetoric and globalization studies because the theories in these fields support my research agenda of investigating how discourses are produced, negotiated or resisted in the Liberian political sphere. In this chapter, I present a socio-political history of Liberia to help us better understand the current political structure. I also give brief biographies of Sirleaf and Weah to show their trajectories to the presidency. Figure 1 is a map of Liberia. Monrovia, the capital city is located in Montserrado.



Figure 1: Map of the Republic of Liberia with the Counties

3.1 A History of the Liberian Settlement

What is now the Republic of Liberia became a colony of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1821. After its colonization, Liberia supposedly became a melting pot¹ of former American slaves and free people of color who, in conjunction with the American Colonization Society (ACS), were imposed on the land of “native” Liberians. Pailey (2016) argues that other influences in Liberian society could have arisen from the West Indies because Liberia was a converging spot for emigrants from other western places of enslavement, including the West Indies. In summary, Liberia was established as a settlement for free-born and freed blacks from the United States as well as Afro-Caribbeans (Liberty, 1997), and the amalgamation of seven colonies in 1838 marked the official birth of the republic. The bodies facilitating the removal of blacks from America and settling them in Africa gave little or no thought to the future of those free Blacks and ex-slaves and what the relationship between the settlers and the native population might look like. In fact, many seemed more interested in solving the racial relation problems in America because they considered the blacks dangerous, a threat to American society. Liberty (2002) points to issues that were probably ignored by the bodies behind the emigration from the United States to Africa in the pursuit of their agenda. For example, he notes that ACS’s main goal was “the removal from the territorial

¹ However, in the case of Liberia, the “melting pot” obscured the already existing native groups, which is a historical factor in the divisions that persist among Liberians today.

domains of the United States of the entire free black population” (p. 46). In 1833, the mission of the abolitionist American Anti-Slavery Society was to immediately end slavery, a mission that eventually served the ends of the emigration project. Liberty explains the underlying rationale of abolitionist groups: to them, “Emigration was envisaged as part of a long-range program that would liberate white America from the twin scourges of slavery and free blacks” (p. 50). This revelation places the representation of activist groups like the abolitionists in a new light, while shedding light on the fact that the ethnic tensions and attitudes to difference in America were exported to Africa with the emigration project. As for the émigrés themselves, the project of the ACS (Liberia) was supposed to be a solution to the social and legal oppressions that black people faced in the United States. They took up residence in Liberia with their motto being, “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here.”

The settlers formed an elite group in Liberian society that came to be known as the Americo-Liberians due to their relationship with the United States. The Americo-Liberians, despite having left the United States for better opportunities in Africa, carried American culture and traditions with them to Liberia. Even though the Americo-Liberians did not try to wipe out the native Liberians (as was the case with the native Americans in the United States), they literally became lords over the native Liberians, recreating a system similar to the slavery that they had experienced in America. This slavery-like act imported from the new world is surprising as African historians (Liberty, 2002; Nelson, 1984) have documented that there was a nostalgia for Africa among the African Americans. However, they did not bother to understand the native Liberians or the complex relationships among the different groups. Cooper (2017) observed that the

native Liberians were also rudely called “country people” by the Americo-Liberians, as if they were homogenous when in fact “these were complicated people, from twenty-eight ethnicities. The Kru were fishermen who hated slavery. The Krahn brokered deals in the slave markets. The Gio came from a line of Sudanese warriors who never ran away from a fight” (p. 3). The Americo-Liberians also displaced the means of production that was in operation before they arrived. Other problematic attitudes noted by studies of Liberia’s history include the view that anything western or that came from the west was better and that the disposition of the Americo-Liberians was the replication of “American life.” Cooper (2017) argues that it was only a matter of time before the native Liberians themselves started linking the ideas of development and progress with whiteness and western values. The Liberian nation-state is in fact a conglomerate of western aspirations plus persistent Liberian cultural practices. Another example to show that the Liberian state was influenced by the west, especially the United States where the freed ex-slaves came from, was the U. S. citizenship model that was adopted. According to Pailey (2016) the model excluded the native peoples, women (even of settler origin), non-negro peoples (except “white male landed gentry” p. 815) and lastly non-Christians. These practices are not surprising considering that the settlers originally came from the United States. Their affiliation with the United States thus influenced their mode of operation on the African continent.

Liberty (2002) argues that Liberia was set up as a black colony with two main agendas:

- a) to get rid of the increasing blacks in America,

- b) to establish trade in a geopolitical location that gave Americans access to tropical products.

The ACS worked with the settlers to ensure that one of the missions of the new ruling class in Liberia would be to abolish the slave trade. The ACS was affiliated with other abolitionist institutions, and the abolitionist mission articulated with stopping what illegal inflow of black slaves into the United States remained and ultimately with getting rid of the increasing blacks in America. The ACS also strove to “civilize” the native people by converting them to Christianity thus their reasoning for denying citizenship to non-Christians. Upon achieving the first mission, the settlers forged ahead with full force to continuously dominate the native population, disrupting the social systems that were once the means of organizing the nations in pre-colonialist days and reaping the benefits of the natural resources of the land. In line with the second agenda as outlined by Liberty, Liberia was created with the economic benefits of the Americo-Liberians and Americans (represented by the ACS) in mind. David (1989) suggests that since the settlers came from capitalist America, they were interested in creating a similar system in their new country. With minimal support from the ACS, the state after 1839 needed internal revenues so they taxed African laborers sourced to Europeans: “the state worked informally with the local chiefs who supplied the required labor to Europeans and ensured that the state got a commission on African laborers supplied abroad.” Hence, “the state inserted itself as a middleman between the global economic system and the pre-capitalist economies in order to sustain itself as a material entity” (p. 63). This shows the dynamics of international trade relations between Africans and Europeans in the 19th century. However, what was not pointed out in David’s account of the early economy of

Liberia is Aderinto's (2018) contention that African-European trade relations was also a tool for the continued "manipulation of Africa's dependency on Western technology and global trade" (p. 13).

3.2 A History of the Liberian Government

After Liberia declared independence in 1847, Americo-Liberians continued to rule the country. The flag and constitution of independent Liberia were modeled on the U.S. flag and constitution, an indication of the settler's continued imposition of U. S. culture on the native Liberians. The two political parties that governed Liberia during the Americo-Liberian regime between 1848-1980 were the Liberian Party and the True Whig Party (Jones 1974). Figure 2 provides a list of Liberian heads of state and their political parties from independence to date (2021) Figure 3 provides a timeline for each of the heads of state. The attitudes and actions of Liberian leaders toward issues of inequality provide important background for understanding how the Liberian state was governed at least from the 1940s. Most Liberian leaders projected themselves as bringing some form of freedom or development to the people. What that meant in practice can be seen concretely in the example of William Tubman. To address some of the exclusions and inequalities prevalent in Liberia, Tubman, the nation's 19th president, introduced the Unification Policy in 1946 (Cooper, 2017; Pailey, 2016). Even though this policy saw the inclusion of native women and men as citizens, their inclusion as citizens did not necessarily give them access to better lives. Cooper argues that public offices and decent jobs were still reserved for the "Congo people" (Americo-Liberians). The policy failed to address the socio-economic differences between the elite and everyday Liberians. One of the ways Tubman dealt with the economic mess was through political largesse, handing

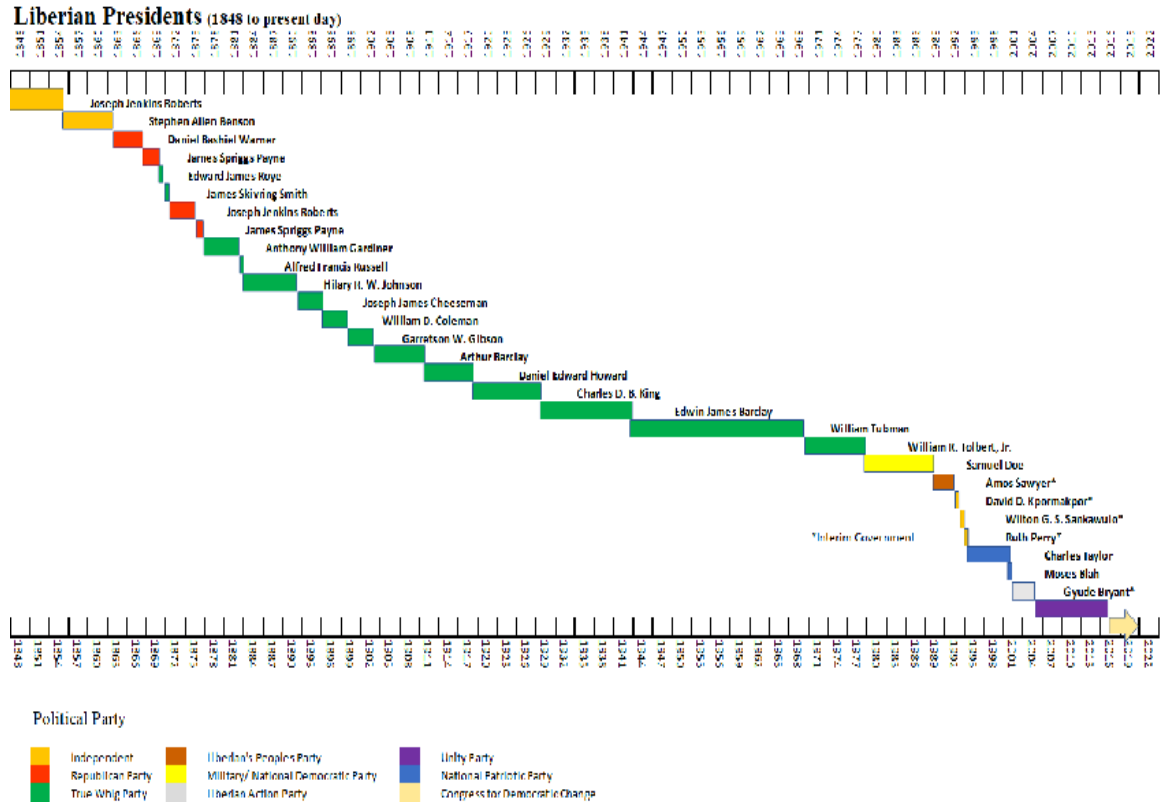
out lavish gifts of money and food to the local chiefs who would then pass on rationed quantities of the presidential donations to their villagers. Meanwhile, the economic situation got worse as Liberia drowned in debt due to government's mismanagement and structural adjustment programs, spurring migration from countryside to the capital city, Monrovia, and its environs. In effect, there was "social dislocation" with the abandoning of villages for cities such that resources became scarce in the urban areas. Liberia began to experience "more crime, more slums, and overall demoralization of the poor" (Cooper 2017, p. 30). Tubman's Unification Policy was only a short-term fix for the problems Liberia was facing in the 1940s. A more effective way of solving the problem would have been concrete actions to ensure all citizens and residents of Liberia had access to social and economic opportunities. In this light, presidential claims of "leading Liberia toward development" might be seen as wishful thinking. Successive heads of state did not confront the historical lack of accountability, disregard for the rule of law by both by the leaders and the governed, and they refused to acknowledge historical class inequalities within the Liberian state. Up until 1980, the elites of Liberia were the Americo-Liberians, who dominated government such that a native Liberian who worked in government before 1980 was considered highly privileged since they were minority.

Figure 2: List of Liberian Heads of State (*Double click to enlarge table*)

President	Took Office	Left Office	Political Party
Joseph Jenkins Roberts	1848	1856	Independent
Stephen Allen Benson	1856	1861	Independent
Daniel Bashiel Warner	1861	1868	Republican Party
James Spriggs Payne	1868	1870	Republican Party
Edward James Roye	1870	1871	True Whig Party
James Skiving Smith	1871	1872	True Whig Party
Joseph Jenkins Roberts	1872	1876	Republican Party
James Spriggs Payne	1876	1878	Republican Party
Anthony William Gardiner	1878	1883	True Whig Party
Alfred Francis Russell	1883	1884	True Whig Party
Hilary R. W. Johnson	1884	1892	True Whig Party
Joseph James Cheeseman	1892	1896	True Whig Party
William D. Coleman	1896	1900	True Whig Party
Garretson W. Gibson	1900	1904	True Whig Party
Arthur Barclay	1904	1912	True Whig Party
Daniel Edward Howard	1912	1920	True Whig Party
Charles D. B. King	1920	1930	True Whig Party
Edwin James Barclay	1930	1944	True Whig Party
William Tubman	1944	1971	True Whig Party
William R. Tolbert, Jr.	1971	1980	True Whig Party
Samuel Doe	1980	1990	Military/ National Democratic Party
Amos Sawyer*	1990	1994	Liberian's Peoples Party
David D. Kpormakpor*	1994	1995	Independent
Wilton G. S. Sankawulo**	1995	1996	Independent
Ruth Perry*	1996	1997	Independent
Charles Taylor	1997	2003	National Patriotic Party
Moses Blah	2003	2003	National Patriotic Party
Gyude Bryant**	2003	2006	Liberian Action Party
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	2006	2018	Unity Party
George Weah	2018	Incumbent	Congress for Democratic Change

*Interim Government

Figure 3: Liberian Heads of State Timeline (Double click to enlarge graph)



After dominating the native Liberians for 133 years, the Americo-Liberian domination was forcefully stopped by an overthrow of government in a coup d'état in April 1980 by Samuel Doe. Doe ruled as a military leader from his seizure of power in 1980, establishing a military regime called the People's Redemption Council. In 1985, he staged a presidential election and declared himself the winner. He was in power until he was killed in 1990. Doe's administration was characterized by bloodshed. There were counterattacks during Doe's administration that have been held up as reasons for his paranoid nature toward his close allies and even party members. He executed anyone who challenged his authority or whom he deemed a threat (Sirleaf, 2009; Cooper, 2017). In

1989, when Liberia was still under the dictatorship of Doe, Charles Taylor formed a rebel group known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Taylor's NPFL launched an attack on some counties and that initiated the first civil war toward the end of 1989 (Spatz & Thaler, 2018). By mid-1990, Taylor had control of most of Liberia. An effort to restore peace by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) proved futile at first because Taylor did not agree to the terms even though Doe, surprisingly, did. However, a visit to the venue of a peace meeting led to Doe's murder by Prince Johnson who was a former ally of Charles Taylor.

In November 1990, an interim government was established, headed by Amos Sawyer. Sawyer struggled to assert his authority over Liberia. The best he could do was control most of Monrovia. Different warlords controlled other parts of the country. In an attempt to restore peace to all of Liberia, David D. Kpormakpor succeeded Sawyer, becoming the chairman of the Council of State in Liberia in March 1994. The council consisted of representatives of the various warring factions. Taylor was a member of the council. By September 1995, there had been another transition that led to Wilton G. S. Sankawulo (who had served as Doe's Special Assistant for Academic Affairs) becoming the head of the Council of State. A year later, September 1996, Ruth Perry took over as chairwoman of the council while the council still retained its previous members. However, the peace agreement that underwrote the status quo had collapsed because of an attack by Taylor on another warlord, Roosevelt Johnson, who was also a member of the Council of State. Elections were eventually held in 1997. Taylor was elected as president of Liberia as a consequence of his intimidation, oppression, and promise to return to war should he lose (Spatz & Thaler, 2018). The international observers declared

the 1997 elections as free and fair. That might have been technically correct but the electoral process did not take place in a decent democratic atmosphere. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf contested that election but lost to Taylor, who with 75.33% of the vote won by a wide margin. Taylor was president of Liberia from 1997 to 2003. Taylor was forced to resign in 2003 due to both internal and external pressure, including violence by rebels in the Second Liberian Civil War (1999-2003), a petition and activism from Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, the demands of other African presidents and the United Nations. Leymah Gbowee, who later received the Nobel Peace Prize along with Sirleaf, presented the signed petition to Taylor on behalf of the women's movement called Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. In the documentary *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, the Liberian journalist Janet Johnson-Bryant recounts how Taylor had a notoriety for viciousness and commends the Liberian women movement's bold step of confronting him. "Even when he's smiling with you, you have to be very careful, you know, because he could be smiling with you and the next minute ordering you killed" (Reticker & Disney, 2008, 30:23-30:34). Gbowee recalls her encounter with Taylor as the moment she had lived for, after being forced during the First Liberian Civil War to become a refugee in Ghana before returning to a shattered Liberia. Gbowee's brave action of confronting Taylor was a strong signal that "the women of Liberia including [Internally Displaced Persons were] tired of war" (31:39-31:44). Gbowee further asserted that:

We are tired of running. We are tired of begging for bulgur wheat. We are tired of our children being raped. We are now taking this stand, to secure the future of our children. Because we believe, as custodians of society, tomorrow our children will ask us, "Mama what was your role during the crisis?" (31:45-32:10).

After Taylor stepped down in 2003, a transitional government was put in place until the elections of 2005. Those elections were significant because the nation was just coming out of 14 years of raging wars, yet the people were ready to take a democratic new turn. Liberians actively participated in determining their own fate in their country's fourth republic. In the next section, I discuss the 2005 and 2017 elections that brought Sirleaf and George Manneh Weah, respectively, to power. I trace their trajectories to public office while I highlight their unique backgrounds.

3.3 The Historic 2005 Presidential Elections in Liberia: Sirleaf's Trajectory to the Presidency

Sirleaf was born into a middle-class family in Liberia. Her father, who was of the Gola ethnic group, was the first-ever native Liberian to work in legislation. Sirleaf's mother was Kru-German. Both her parents were raised by Americo-Liberian families because their families could not afford to care for them. When Sirleaf's parents were children, it was not unusual for Americo-Liberians to help raise underprivileged children as this gave such children a better condition of living and often education. Sometimes, such children served as helps to the family paying for their education, food, and shelter. In some cases, such children were overworked and not given proper care—Sirleaf's mother initially had a bad experience with an Americo-Liberian family that treated her poorly before another family decided to adopt her and look after her properly. Due to her family background, Sirleaf had access to the lifestyle of the Americo-Liberians, also known as the “people of the book” for their access to education.

As a recipient of a government scholarship in 1962, Sirleaf came to study business in the United States. She was a student at the Madison Business School in

Madison, Wisconsin, where she received an associate degree. Upon returning to Liberia in 1964, she landed a government position in the Treasury Department. Her time in the Liberian Treasury Department was key to opening doors for her that would come handy in the 1980s when Liberia underwent economic and political instability. Sirleaf was promoted and became head of the Debt Service Division. Given a fellowship opportunity at Harvard University in 1969, Sirleaf finished with a master's degree in public administration in 1971. Shortly after concluding her program at Harvard and returning to her job, she was again promoted, and she became Liberia's deputy minister of finance in 1972. She would acknowledge in her autobiography (2009) how she had a tough time in that office due to her attitude toward the incompetence of government officials such that she became sidelined in the office because she was seen as not cooperating. She resigned from her position in 1972. On her way to the position of president, she climbed up the ladder over time. For instance, as a loan officer in the World Bank in 1973, she served in Barbados, Brazil, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Having returned to Liberia, she became the finance minister of Liberia in 1979 and remained in that office until the coup of 1980. Her World Bank connections would later come in handy when Sirleaf needed to escape the terror of Doe in November 1980: she asked her former boss in Washington, DC, to recall her to the United States (see Cooper, 2017; Sirleaf, 2009).

Fast forward to the early 2000s, when President Taylor was pressured to step down from office by both internal and external bodies. Taylor's presidency (1997-2003) had provoked instability and violence in Liberia and in neighboring countries like Guinea and Sierra Leone. The Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2003, commonly referred to as the Accra Peace Talks, is credited with ending Liberia's civil

unrest in 2003 and for being a catalyst for Taylor's stepping down. It was during the peace talks that the idea of a transitional government came up. The Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) was set up as well as a Governance Reform Commission. The NTGL's primary purpose was to help Liberia get back on track to democracy, which meant preparation for both legislative and presidential elections in two years (Spatz & Thaler 2018, p. 157). Sirleaf served as the head of the Governance Reform Commission in post-war Liberia and worked on rebuilding peace in Liberia. She used that avenue to connect with the people, especially women, by collecting recommendations on how they would like to be treated by their government (Cooper, p. 142). Those recommendations would become useful in her campaign and in articulating her agenda for women. This is evidence that Sirleaf used knowledge about her audience (the masses she worked with) to her advantage in the competitive arena of politics. A total of twenty-two candidates ran for the Liberian presidency in 2005 of which Sirleaf and Margaret Tor-Thompson were the only women. Weah, representing Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), and Sirleaf, the Unity Party, were the two leading candidates after the first round on October 11, Weah with 28.27% and Sirleaf with 19.75% of the vote. However, on November 8, in the second round of the election, Sirleaf won 59.4 % of the vote with Weah taking 40.6 %. The popular vote was in favor of Sirleaf with a total of 478,526 votes, 151,480 votes more than Weah's 327,046 (National Elections Commission Liberia, 2005). Although Weah contested the result initially, to the extent of filing a lawsuit on election fraud, he eventually dropped the lawsuit a few weeks before the presidential inauguration. Tracking Sirleaf's trajectory to power reveals the vast educational and professional exposure and experiences she gained over the years such that by the time of the elections

in 2005, an article in the *Perspective Newspaper* could not but highlight how much of an advantage she had over other candidates. Despite these competencies, Sirleaf's 12-year administration seems to have failed to meet the expectations of Liberians. Ige (2012) raises a critical issue about performance among African leaders, especially those deemed "qualified." Ige asserts, "The problem with African Presidency is not that presidents themselves do not know what to do. We have seen that they write about it in their speeches and memoirs" (p. 43). Ige's actual question is why citizens deem some aspiring candidates to the presidency as not experienced or qualified enough. There is the argument that knowledge, especially education, does not automatically result in good governance.

Sirleaf was sworn into office on January 16, 2006, making history as the first woman to be democratically elected to the Liberian presidency, and the first democratically-elected woman president in Africa. However, there have been other African women who were leaders in some of Africa's monarchies. One example is Ethiopia's Empress Zewditu, who ruled from 1916-1930. She was the only female Ethiopian monarch, with her official title being "Queen of Kings" or "Negiste Negeste," a modification of the customary "King of Kings" (Negusa Nagast). She succeeded her father, Menelik the Second (Zewde, 2011). In more recent times and under a democratic regime, Joyce Banda of Malawi was appointed president between April 2012 and May 2014 on the sudden death of her predecessor, having been vice president up to that point. However, Banda lost when she contested in the elections thereafter (Olamitoke, 2012).

3.4 More History Is Made in the 2017 Presidential

Elections in Liberia: Weah's trajectory to the Presidency

Weah was born into a working-class family in Clara Town, a poor district of Monrovia. Weah's father was a mechanic while his mother was a market woman (Bonna Mba, 2009; McAllister, 2017). Weah was raised by his grandmother alongside twelve other children (Nkemnacho, 2016). He credits his grandmother for her impact on his upbringing. Weah had his primary and middle school education in Liberia before dropping out (Bonna Mba, 2009). After dropping out of school, Weah worked as a switchboard technician for the Liberian Telecommunications Company (Nkemnacho, 2016). He would later follow his passion for playing soccer, which he had been engaged in from an early age. Weah played for local football clubs in Liberia (1985-1987). Those served as a training ground for him before he moved abroad in 1987. Weah first moved to Cameroon to play for the club Tonnerre Yaounde, ("George Weah: Ex-AC Milan, Chelsea & Man City striker elected Liberia president," 2017) and it was while he played for Tonnerre Yaounde that his astounding abilities as a soccer player gained international interest, spurring Arsene Wenger, the then manager of the soccer club AS Monaco, to visit Cameroon to sign Weah to his club for £12,000 ("George Weah: Ex-AC Milan, Chelsea & Man City striker elected Liberia president," 2017). Only a year after moving to Monaco, Weah's excellent ability as a striker was rewarded with the African Footballer of the Year award for the first time (McAllister, 2017). He would go on to win that award two more times over the course of his soccer career. While still in Monaco, Weah was a key player in helping his club make the finals of the European Cup Winners Cup in 1992. Weah moved from Monaco to Paris Saint Germain (1992-1995) (The

Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). Weah actively played soccer until 2003 with many notable awards including Coupe de France (1993, 1995), the French league in 1994, Coupe de la Ligue in 1995, top scorer in the 1994-1995 UEFA Champions League, and FIFA player of the year in 1995 (also in 1996) (Bonna Mba, 2009, McAllister, 2017). Still in 1995, he received the enviable Ballon d'Or, deemed the most prestigious French individual award for soccer players ("European footballer of the year ("Ballon d'Or")," n.d.). On retiring from a successful soccer career, Weah returned to Liberia in 2003 to pursue a career in politics ("George Weah: Ex-AC Milan, Chelsea & Man City striker elected Liberia president," 2017).

Weah faced some obstacles at the start of his political career, his first attempt being the 2005 presidential elections (Cooper 2017, McAllister 2017, Spatz & Thaler 2018). He definitely had the symbolic power of a star athlete, popularity and indigenous appeal. However, due to his lack of experience and education in politics or public administration, he had to work his way past suggestions that he would be incompetent in office. This he did by getting the necessary education and training to shut down his critics (Spatz & Thaler, 2018). Weah became a senator from January 2015 until he won the presidential elections in 2017 and was sworn in as the 25th president of Liberia on January 22, 2018.

Elections are often a test of a true democracy: the electoral process and the attitude of the losing side may indicate the maturity or tenuousness of a democracy. Liberian election results have frequently been heavily disputed and violently, which might be an indication of the fragility of her democratic status. The stakes of the 2017

elections were high, as it was Sirleaf's 12th year in office and the people were ready for a change. A total of twenty-two candidates vied for the presidential seat. While Sirleaf herself did not run, one of the candidates had been her vice president since 2006, Joseph Boakai, who was a major contender in the elections (Spatz & Thaler, 2018).

With his declaration of intention to run under the umbrella of the CDC, Weah gained the spotlight, not because of his vast political experience but for his determination not to back away from his dreams of leading the nation of Liberia (McAllister, 2017). Among his fellow candidates, he was the most popular and seemed the most appealing to the masses, which should not come as a huge surprise given his background as a sport's hero, locally and internationally. As of 2017, it could be claimed that Liberia had come a long way from the days of a single-party system to one where election candidates came from seventeen different political parties plus others who ran as independents. Yet these changes in Liberia's elections were not cause for much celebration due to the shortcomings of the country's democratic system (Pailey & Williams, 2017; Spatz & Thaler, 2018). One may argue that Liberia is still a young democracy, but it is important to ask whether the young democracy is moving in the right direction, that is, toward maturity, or whether it is regressing. I return to these issues in chapters four and five.

Only Weah and Boakai made it to the second round as the two leading candidates from the first round in which twenty-two candidates had contested (just as in the 2005 election). In fact, the gap in time between the first round (October 10, 2017) and the second round (December 26, 2017) of the elections was prolonged due to a controversy raised by third-place candidate Charles Brumskine, contesting the fairness of the first-

round results (McAllister, 2017). It should be noted that international monitors concluded that the elections were free and fair. Even the CDC, who would later win the elections in the second round, joined Brumskine in raising an alarm about electoral fraud (Spatz & Thaler, 2018). One of the interesting twists observed in the 2017 elections by Spatz and Thaler (2018) was the fact that the Unity Party, which was the party in power and having been in power for 12 years, also made allegations of fraud once Weah was declared winner in the second round. The strange scheduling of the second round of elections for Boxing Day, after Brumskine's charges had been dismissed by the Supreme Court, did not intimidate the 56% of registered voters who turned out. In fact, that event underscored the determination of Liberians to engage in democratic practices and, more specifically, their thirst for change, since they had indicated their disappointment in the Sirleaf government in other ways. Weah with Jewel Howard Taylor (former wife of Taylor and Liberia's former first lady), his running mate, were seen as an alternative to the old government and possibly a better one, at least in the eyes of the masses. His supporters, especially the youth, said as much during the campaigns and after Weah and Taylor won the election in December 2017. One supporter noted, "I'm very excited! I'm overjoyed because we have made *history* [emphasis added]. Ambassador Weah, *the true son of the soil, the man who is loved by the Liberian people* [emphasis added] has just been announced president-elect of Liberia. So, I'm happy" (AFP News Agency, 2017). It should be noted that this person referenced Weah's native identity, "the true son of the soil," as significant to his supporters. In a similar fashion, the youth leader of Weah's party, the CDC voiced jubilation, "*We* [emphasis added] are going to rewrite history like the children of South Africa. I'm feeling overly excited. Seriously because *we* [emphasis

added] have taken our nation back into *our* [emphasis added] hands” (AFP News Agency, 2017). These supporters suggest that the masses (who these speakers represent) were delighted to have exercised their democratic rights. Words such as “we,” “our” indicate that they felt included in such an important event. They were obviously persuaded by Weah’s rhetoric of inclusion, as I will detail in chapter four. From what both speakers above have expressed, we can deduce that the populist appeal and ethnic affiliations of Weah apparently had huge impacts on his electoral victory.

In African political discourse, the ethnicity of a politician is taken seriously when it comes to persuasion in electoral matters. Mama (2001) discusses the complexity of identity in non-western contexts like Africa and points to the power of identity as shown by research in different disciplines including sociology, economics and psychology (p. 68). Her argument about identities is relevant in understanding how this might have played a role in Liberia’s last presidential elections: “All identities have histories, as Freud pointed out quite some time ago, and they all involve questions of power, integrity, and security, questions that have emotional as well as political currency” (p. 68). That is, voters connect with politicians who purportedly share similar experiences to them or have the same ethnic origin, as in the case of Weah. My argument here is that CDC won the elections because of the value of Weah’s identity as a native Liberian rather than an Americo-Liberian, an identity that was perceived as elitist. The massive winning gap between Weah, with 61.5% of the votes, and Boakai, with 38.5%, was a strong indication that the people wanted Weah and they were bent on seeing him become president. I go in depth into the appeals that contributed to the election into the presidency of both Sirleaf and Weah in chapter four.

3.5 Conclusion

In this third chapter, I have presented a political and social history of the Liberian state including a detailed list of Liberia's heads of state and biographies of Sirleaf and Weah. Exploring the foundation of Liberia and the social practices of leadership (from Americo-Liberians to native Liberians) is crucial to a robust analysis of Sirleaf's and Weah's rhetoric of development. This history projects some problems in the social and political structure of Liberia such as exclusionary leadership, inequality and these are alluded to in the rhetoric of development by Sirleaf and Weah.

4 Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I set up how I investigate my research questions and in order to better understand the relationship between language and politics in Liberia. I provide the definitions of key terms in my work. In addition, I present the sources of my data, the rationale for my choice of data and the linguistic and analytical tools that I have employed in my dissertation. I then present the rhetorical situation of my dissertation.

4.2 Analytical Fundamentals

In this section, I provide a discussion of key terms within the interdisciplinary framework of linguistics, rhetoric, and globalization theory that underpin my methods and analysis.

4.2.1 Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)

CDS is a linguistic framework and a multidisciplinary analytical methodology born out of critical linguistics, borrowing methods and concepts from across the fields of humanities and social sciences. Beyond studying discourse as a form of social practice, CDS points out implicit assumptions embedded in texts, which are not directly presented that is it examines ideologies involved in discourse (McDougall, 2014).

To reiterate, my work is interdisciplinary research, and I am studying Liberian political discourse largely from a CDS and rhetoric perspective because of my interest in the linguistic-discursive style of social actors in Liberia. A CDS analysis of politics is neither merely a study of language used to construct political realities, as that could easily be a political science research, nor is it making sporadic connections between language

and discourse. With CDS, I pay attention to the intersectionality of language, political systems and processes in Liberia, which is in line with the three-dimensional approach of discourse historical analysis.

4.2.2 Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA)

DHA is one approach of CDS that aims “to deconstruct the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that serve to establish, perpetuate or resist dominance” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 25). DHA is equally concerned with social critique (taking up issues of ideology and power). Of specific relevance to my analysis is DHA’s usefulness in uncovering irregularities in texts, whether in form of manipulations or ideological gaps. DHA is also useful in that it provides a path to discovering possible solutions to social issues, which makes it ideal for analyzing political discourse. Furthermore, I employ DHA for it offers a transdisciplinary approach of combining linguistic analysis with historical and sociological approaches. Three strategic steps are involved in its application:

- 1) first a researcher must begin by identifying specific discourses in a text;
- 2) second, the discursive strategies employed by social actors must be investigated,
- 3) and last, the linguistic patterns and means of representation (content-specific) must be studied (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 32).

I elaborate more in chapter five on the specific linguistic strategies found in the texts I analyze.

4.2.3 Kairos

Waddell (n.d) in “Some Key Terms in the History of Western Rhetoric”, states that kairos is the “timing, the opportune moment” (p. 5). Kairos may occur as an event or “the immediate social situation within which a solution to a problem must be proposed” (Bizzell & Herzberg 2001, p. 1632).

4.2.4 God Terms

I adopt Weaver’s (1953) notion of an ultimate term or “god term”. According to Weaver, god terms refer to an “expression about which other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers” (p. 212). Weaver’s argument is that in each age and period, there are terms that carry such weight that they are ultimately used to validate anything associated with them. Some of the god terms I have identified in Liberian presidential speeches include development, freedom, democracy, liberty, empowerment etc.

4.2.5 Rhetorical Situation

Context-specific knowledge is useful for an intertextual analysis like I embark on. In that light, it is also worthy to mention the functional and situational aspects of rhetorical discourse. The concept of rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1968) may be defined as:

a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring the significant modification of the exigence (p. 6)

I apply Bitzer's concept to set up not just the relationship between the two Liberian presidents and their speeches, but I also show how they conjure discourses, how they frame issues, events, and people, etc. The benefit of paying attention to the situation that warrants a speaker's rhetorical choices cannot be overstated especially in a context like Liberia with its complex political structure (I make a similar point with respect to gaining an understanding of Liberian metaphors below). Such complexity and the reward of paying attention to situation is evident in the fact that Liberian presidential inaugural addresses (IAs) are based on democratic norms while State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) are required by the constitution. Even though these are functional speeches, a part of the task of being president, yet it is in examining the rhetorical situation of such speeches that we can interrogate issues addressed or omitted, the rhetorical responses to context. Further illustrating the importance of paying attention to situation, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's nation building rhetoric in her IA of 2006 was hinged on an emotional message of healing because Liberia had come out of a war just two years before the elections and the people were still facing the impacts of the war.

4.2.6 Politics and Political Discourse Analysis

For the purpose of this study, it is important to define the controversial term politics. Chilton and Schaffner (2002) define it "as a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it" (p. 5). An important trait of politics is thus the contention for power. My analysis then involves the discovery of the hidden ideologies within Liberian political discourse as well as the contention and negotiation for power. Many scholars have established the role of

ideology in influencing discourse (Chilton & Schaffner, 2002; Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 2006, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

I have noted the role of language in political discourse—another critical point is my focus on social practice, which refers to how discourses are framed within society by social actors and how these discourses are produced, resisted and negotiated within different situations or contexts and institutions, i.e., how the underlying conventions of discourses transition into norms, since practices eventually turn into discourses and discourses into practices. Therefore, it is through studying socially constructed forms of reality that we understand a society. As van Leeuwen (2016) puts it, concisely, discourses are “*context-specific frameworks for making sense of things*” (p. 138). Leeuwen’s argument is that outside of a given context, discourses are meaningless since there will be missing gaps of information or presupposition. Revealing and explicating the linkages between texts are therefore crucial to a successful political analysis.

In light of the above, political discourse analysis then involves the social and political interactions carried out via language. These interactions also reflect the conventions and ideologies of political institutions. Consequently, the representation of the struggles for power is political discourse. Chilton and Schaffner (2002) argue that ideology and political condition are central to an understanding and accurate interpretation of political discourses produced. This means that analyzing political discourse requires interpreting not just the literal “message” but the social information texts convey.

To highlight the complexity of underlying power relations within texts, Wodak and Meyer assert that “[p]ower is about relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structure” (p. 12). It is for the above reasons that I will be focusing on the linguistic representation of people (groups), their actions, events, and objects among others in Liberian presidential discourses. Furthermore, my focus suits the CDS goal of uncovering hidden truths, half-truths or even lies that are embedded in texts. My dissertation follows the steps of Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) in contributing towards “a critical perspective, a perspective which focuses on the reproduction and contestation of political power through political discourse” (p.17).

Since political actors in Liberia make arguments about economic and political gain, let us examine Liberia’s positionality in the global order. Liberia’s political economy is a dependent one, heavily reliant on western institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for loans. Chilcote (2002) classifies a nation like Liberia as “[l]ess developed periphery depend[ing] on advanced capitalist core” (p. 84). In the analysis of neoliberal discourses, we must take into account the unequal power relations between the north and the south. The global economy is such that it continues to boost the enrichment of the core, the north. The periphery, the south, on the surface, might seem to be receiving help, but only a certain class benefits from the “help” provided by the global order (Chilcote, 2002). The power relations allowing such unfair interactions are thus central to political discourse and since development and globalization issues are in themselves political, it is useful to employ critical perspectives to comment on the state of politics, including in Liberia.

4.2.7 The State, the Peripheral State

Having argued that power struggles are a key feature in political discourse, I find it beneficial to define the political institution or the state, where social and political interactions occur. In this light of the conception of a state, I borrow David's (1984) practical definition of a "peripheral state" in its interaction with society: "the context of its involvement within the social formation in the transformation and reproduction of a wide range of social relations including political, ethnic and economic relations" (p. 58). She further elaborates on the functions of the state as an institution of authority that can be conceptualized as an:

institutionalized form of the class struggle, as well as a unit of political reproduction and social control. By acting as a factor of cohesion over the heterogeneous and fragmented forces jostling within any social formation, the peripheral state, like any other forms of the state, plays an ideological function of giving legitimacy to the social order as a whole by appearing to be 'relatively homogeneous' with regard to the dominant class forces, whose interests in nevertheless tends to represent most (p. 58).

Having established some characteristics of the state through the above quotation, it is worth noting that the state ought to seek to bring about transformations and developments in the political, social and economic spheres for the benefit of its broader population, but this presupposition about the state is a faulty assumption as the case is often of power abuse by dominant groups.

4.2.8 Development: Power, Politics, Poverty, and Privilege

Development is, arguably, a broad term used discursively in neoliberal discourse. As such, Appadurai's coinage "megarhetorics" is applicable due to how development is often framed as possible and as beneficial to all and as something that is advanced by globalization, the global interconnectedness of people, ideas, objects, ideals etc. Development can thus be vague in its meaning since "it encompasses uneven, multiple, layered and intertwining threads—economic, technological, geopolitical, social, and cultural ones" (Dingo, 2012, p. 2). While I do not maintain an extensive and sustained focus on policies of development in my dissertation, I address developmental issues such as foreign aid and loans, especially the concealment of the terms for such loans in presidential speeches, and how foreign aid and loans are pitched as enabling development when the evidence shows otherwise. I question the framing that "development always leads to growth, progress, one-way assistance and empowerment" (Scott & Dingo, 2012, p. 3), which is present in Sirleaf's and George Manneh Weah's SONAs.

We can also take an insight from Pailey (2019), a scholar and expert on Liberia's issues of development. She problematizes the imperial relationship between the global north and the global south. In her submission, the discourse of race is too conveniently omitted by scholars and experts alike in the conversations about development. She strongly affirms that race must be included in the conversation for the obvious role it plays in developmental issues, especially on the African continent. She argues:

in its constant negotiation of poverty, power, politics and privilege, development continues to be structured in hierarchies of race and place. It puzzles me how we

talk and theorize about development as if its historical antecedents—slavery, colonialism, imperialism—and its contemporary manifestations—globalization, neoliberalism—have not produced racialized ‘phenotypic others’(p. 730).

The current conversation about development must necessarily privilege race, as Pailey argues. However, what most catches my attention in Pailey’s analysis of Liberia’s developmental situation is the mix of issues: “power,” “politics,” “poverty,” and “privilege.” These tags can be used to distinguish the “actors” and those on the receiving end. Those who have power will be considered privileged, and those associated with poverty are rarely perceived as powerful or privileged. But what about the citizens of a country endowed with natural resources like diamonds, iron ore, timber, gold, rare earth metals, that is home to the largest contiguous rubber plantation in the world, and that has the second largest maritime registry in the world?

Liberia has been frequently ranked among the poorest nations in the world, although the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative’s (OPHDI) 2020 report claims that the country is fast reducing its level of poverty. The OPHDI multidimensional poverty index considers factors like education, health, living standards, and levels of deprivation in determining the intensity of poverty afflicting Liberians. In the OPHDI statistics showing poverty headcount ratios, Liberia was number fifteen among over a hundred countries. Another measure of poverty is the World Bank’s tracking of those living below \$1.90 per day. Six years before the OPHDI report, for 2014, the World Bank (2021) put the percentage of the Liberian population living below \$1.90 per day at 41.7%. In 2013, the percentage of Liberia’s population living in poverty according to its

own national statistics were 56%. That figure was 76.2% if the rate of \$3.10 per day was used instead of \$1.90 per day (Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS), n.d.). These statistics paint a picture of Liberia's situation in recent years and show why political actors are full of the gospel of development.

Going further back in time, Liberia experienced a rubber boom between 1954-1960 that was remarkable in the global economy. That boom was coupled with growth in iron ore production. According to Cooper (2017), Japan was the only country, globally, whose national finances were doing better than Liberia's at that point in time. Unfortunately, the fact that Liberia was financially buoyant in those years did not result in an economic trickledown effect. The opposite was the case. Only the rich and those close to power prospered. The reality was that the natural resources that attracted foreign firms to Liberia got Liberia into more trouble as those firms extracted both profits and resources without bothering to invest in the development of the land they were exploiting. Those foreign firms put some infrastructure in the cities, but those were only accessible to the rich and to wealthy foreigners. We can argue that the loose laws of Liberia permitted a poor level of commitment by those foreign firms that were interacting with Liberia under the global order. The political actors responsible for those laws thought they could get away with ignoring the needs of the rest of the population of Liberia. Factors like those mentioned above clearly contributed to the uneven development of Liberia in terms of industrialization, which then contributed to the deterioration of relations between the different sections of Liberian society that reached a nadir in the civil wars at the end of the 20th century.

4.2.9 Neoliberalism

It is also pertinent to state my conception of neoliberal discourse in this body of work because the texts I analyze feature references to economic development programs, initiatives and policies that have doubled as a means of promoting neoliberal discourses. Neoliberalism is a complex and broad concept and varying meanings are associated with it. Development theorists have talked about neoliberalism as a political and economic consequence of globalization. The economic aspect is central in the neoliberal rhetoric of development since its perpetrators argue that neoliberal policies are a path to economic growth when in fact these policies only secure more profitability for globalization agents. Murithi (2009) arguing about the negative consequences of neoliberalism calls it neocolonialism in the twenty first century due to the exploitative relationship between the developed nations or international financial institutions and the Global South nations. He asserts that “the persistent politics of superiority of nations and races reproduces itself in the 21st century, albeit couched in the language of fiscal discipline, trade and economic liberalization and ultimately aid disbursement, in a manner that clearly benefits a minority of powerful countries at the expense of the poor majority” (pp. 3-4).

In Liberia, some problematic manifestations of neoliberalism include the huge dependency on the economy on foreign aid. In sections 4.2.8 & 4.2.9 below, I go into further details on the relationship between neoliberalism and development. I deconstruct the rhetoric of Sirleaf and Weah that foreign aid for example, will promote development. The contradiction of neoliberal rhetoric abounds therefore, I take up these issues in chapter five to pinpoint that it serves ideological ends. I am interested in the ideological aspect of neoliberal discourse.

4.2.10 Ideology, Identity, and Interest

If we think of the nation-state as both a political and physical entity, then we can further argue that such structures possess shared ideas that bind individuals in such communities. A scholarly reflection on power relations that reminds us not to forget the inequalities that characterize those civic bonds is the claim that “people are not positioned equally among their collectivities just as states are not positioned equally with others” (Davis, 2000, as cited in Pailey, 2016, p. 814). Bearing that in mind, we may then go further into interrogating the shared ideas between the different parties in the Liberian context, including the political actors (on behalf of the state), civil societies (such as social movements and NGOs) and, lastly, external entities with vested interests. In Liberia, there is a common ideology of advancement, which is clearly tied to neoliberal discourses of globalization. The relationship between the various groups (classes, organizations, institutions, ethnic groups, communities) is cemented by that shared ideology, which is the foundation to the social representation connecting them and which represents their primary interest (see van Dijk, 2006, for a detailed explanation of ideological beliefs and their complexities). This dissertation poses the question of how to detect such primary interest in the first place and demonstrates itself as a viable methodology by closely studying the discursive practices of the social actors involved in the context of politics in Liberia. How each of the social actors construct themselves in relation to the state guides us on “what is to count and what is not to count among its satisfactions, what the goods and excellences and values are that ought to be valued” (Hall, 1999, p. 5).

It is important to note that resistance, as well, arises in the form of ideologies. As much as there can be shared beliefs and practices among groups, conflicts occur as well, exposing opposing views and interests. Hall captures this well, talking about tradition as a phenomenon shared by members of a collectivities, cautioning that while tradition involves “‘a common possession’ it does not presuppose uniformity or plain consensus. Rather it depends upon a play of conflict and contention. It is a space of dispute as much a place of consensus, the discord as much as the accord” (Scott, 1999, as cited in Hall, 1999, p. 5). This means that the state, as we know it, depends on the interaction between several parties who have common interests as well as conflicts.

For example, although Sirleaf initially campaigned to serve one term in office, she eventually sought a second term. Her political party, the Unity Party, was in support of the move as it kept them as the ruling party of Liberia. In turn, Sirleaf’s vice president of 12 years, Joseph Boakai, was hoping to replace her as president. Sirleaf did not openly support him perhaps because she wanted to keep to her promise of transferring power to the next generation. Sirleaf’s inaction did not go down well with the Unity Party. After Boakai lost against Weah, she was expelled from the party. We shall further examine below whose interest Liberian political actors protect in relation to their rhetoric of development.

So, for the government of a given society to work, power relations must be contested and re-negotiated, over and over, among the social actors. Relating this concept to political discourse analysis, it means that political actors, through language, have to construct identities that project them as powerful and as possessing the knowledge and

skills relevant for maintaining their status as actors. Some of the strategies employed in constructing their identities are in accordance with shared ideologies of their groups while others may come out as subversive.

4.3 Data and Method

The study of the rhetorical practices of political leaders and how they interact with their audiences (supporters and opposition) through their speeches is a means to understanding and theorizing the political institutions in a given context. For my analysis, I have selected four presidential speeches. They are Sirleaf's IA, delivered on January 16, 2006; her SONA, delivered on January 29, 2007. The other two are Weah's IA, delivered on January 22, 2018; his SONA, delivered on January 28, 2019. The full transcripts of the Liberian presidential speeches can be found at emansion.gov—the official website of the Liberian government. The analyzed speeches have been included in the appendices of this dissertation in the following order:

- 1) Appendix A – Weah's IA
- 2) Appendix B – Sirleaf's IA
- 3) Appendix C – Weah's SONA
- 4) Appendix D – Sirleaf's SONA

For each data excerpt I analyze, I state which speech is its source. I then I indicate its paragraph number for ease of reference. In the places where the IA texts are analyzed, I do a thematic analysis of topics found in the texts. What I uncover includes the ideas and values that Sirleaf and Weah claimed their administrations would contribute or that would improve Liberia as well as ideas that they disapproved of such that they distanced

themselves from. In chapter five, for ease of reference, I bold face the lexical items that have positive attributes, such as democracy, freedom of political assembly, economic buoyancy, an inclusive government, education etc. Furthermore, I underline those that connote negativity, such as corruption, favoritism, tyranny, oppressive practices etc. My argument above that language carries ideologies is why I mark the key words in each excerpt I analyze in chapter five. In the SONA analysis, also in chapter five, I bold face words, phrases and sentences that connote development and underline those that are said to hinder development. I also bold face signifiers of development such as people, organizations, events, processes etc.

It should be noted that the IA and the SONA are distinct from other speeches due to the occasion of their delivery. The occasion for the IA is celebratory while the occasion for the SONA is deliberative. For example, the IA is a traditional opportunity for a new president to thank their supporters and present the vision and agenda for their administration. The SONA, on the other hand, is a constitutional requirement. Unlike the IA, the primary audience of a SONA is the legislature. However, the SONA has evolved from the days where it was read to just the legislature. In recent years, a live broadcast on radio and television and, possibly, live streaming via the internet give the SONA a larger, secondary audience.

As stated earlier, one of the reasons for my focus on the IAs and the SONAs is my interest in deconstructing and understanding the discourses of development. Development is an important term in economics that implicates relations of power (between the executive branch and other arms of government, between government and citizens, etc.)

and, possibly, gendered discourses as well. The significant differences in the occasion of the IAs and the SONAs are some of the reasons why adequate attention should be paid to them, especially in a context where systematic studies of presidential discourses are few. Related to the salience of occasion, Sirleaf and Weah speak at different historical moments. I therefore pay attention to how they address different exigencies (the rhetorical situation), issues at stake (stasis), and timing (kairos). Stasis, one of the rhetorical canons deals with the style employed in presenting arguments as effective or probable (May & Wisse, 2001). Some issues at stake that I have considered in my analysis of the rhetoric of development in Liberia include how do Liberian social actors frame neoliberal policies in relation to development? What evidence in Liberia's current social and economic status support the need for development? What is some evidence in Liberia that support some contradictory effects of neoliberal economic approaches? What are the roles of corruption and defective systems as factors contributing to underdevelopment? Are developed nations and international financial institutions taking advantage of the weak social, economic and political systems of Global South nations like Liberia? It is on these grounds that I problematize the rhetoric of development in Liberian presidential speeches because I argue that the neoliberal agenda fosters more inequality especially in the Global south nations.

If presidential rhetoric reveals the value and worldview of the rhetor, then studying and analyzing such texts is worthwhile as it will yield an interpretation of the multilayered patterns of discourse (micro and macro analysis, context analysis) presented in presidential texts. The patterns in such speeches will then be associated with the

identity (professional and personal) of the presidents. While it is often not explicitly stated, presidents bring to the office their experiences and other qualifications.

Consequently, some of the linguistic or rhetorical tropes I analyze are (professional and personal) metaphors. Machin and Mayr (2012) have observed that scholars (Chilton, 1996; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) view metaphor as a means of persuading with the abstraction of processes, identities and places. Machin and Mayr also point to the fact that metaphor is a fundamental part of human cognitive processing, an everyday part of language, which is crucial to how we grasp reality. Metaphors also reveal how our societies and ideologies are organized. Synecdoche, metaphor, metonymy and irony are the four rhetoric master tropes listed by Burke (1945). Burke holds the view that these rhetorical tropes are useful in the description and the discovery of truth (p. 503). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, as cited in Machin & Mayr, 2012), metaphorical concepts are simply taken beyond literal ways of thinking or talking as such. Ideas structured in metaphors may not be fully realized without context. In other words, their meaning may not be otherwise clear. This supports the view that interpretations of the metaphors employed by Sirleaf and Weah will be shallow if the reader is not familiar with the Liberian political terrain. Employing metaphor implies that the speaker has a cultural competence with respect to the issue(s) in question and is thus able to translate them into metaphorical concepts, is able to conceptualize the events, activities or even actions metaphorically. We see the import of the above discussion concretely in the following quotation, in which Weah used a sports metaphor to capture Liberia's success in the democratic elections, tying positive outcomes to the principle of team effort, "Today, we all wear the jersey of Liberia, and victory belongs to the people,

to peace and to our democracy” (2018, para. 2). Soccer is a predominant sport in many parts of the world and that is true of Liberia, where people participate in soccer both for recreation and for serious competition. Weah’s allusion to sports above reflects his background as one of Africa’s and Liberia’s greatest professional soccer players. More importantly, he was speaking about reconciliation through the worldview of sports. With the metaphorical usage “jersey of Liberia,” the president called to the nation to consider themselves as Liberians first before other factors such as ethnicity, class or religion. As such, Weah attempted to convince his audience that the purpose of gathering on January 22, 2018, was a common goal for everyone (“peace,” or stability, and “democracy”), that Liberia was inaugurating a leader who would represent the entire nation. He was, possibly, attempting to defuse certain aspects of partisan politics that might hinder the necessary cooperation needed to run the country.

Equally important is the fact that political actors are observed to continuously legitimize their styles of leadership and governance in their discourses. I have therefore identified and selected some themes, found in the texts I analyze, that project the rhetors as working for the common interest of all when in fact there might be special interests in the agendas they project as serving everyone. One of such discourses is the idea that a change in administration necessarily signifies progress and positivity. Not everyone is in support of those at the helm of affairs and political actors find subtle ways of delegitimizing their predecessors in office in their speeches. Here is one example from Weah’s SONA, “It is a little over a year since we took on the mantle of leadership to transform your lives for the better. It was a journey of profound opportunities and endless possibilities” (2019, para. 248). Weah was suggesting that Liberians should be happy

with his administration since his administration was focused on bringing into Liberia some of the core elements the lack of which, hitherto, prevented ordinary people from having a dignified life. Weah's sentiment, presented above, may just have been the opinion of partisans of Coalition for Democratic Change, his party. Furthermore, Weah, in that passage, was pushing the idea that his government was exploring all the available options in working for the benefit of every faction of the state. That projection was an attempt to legitimize how Weah had been conducting the affairs of state and possibly to boost his credibility. He went on, after the quoted passage, to praise the "patience," "sacrifices," "collaboration," and "cooperation" of the people. He did so in a way that allowed him speak to the challenges his government had experienced while, at the same time, paint a picture that all Liberians have been quite supportive in the areas of his government's shortcomings. He also downplayed some issues that were unsettling the polity in Liberia at the point in time he gave that SONA. There was a scandal over a missing \$100 million that implicated his government. He merely scratched the surface of that issue in his SONA. Although Weah was very popular when he assumed office, that did not last very long. A few months into his administration, Liberians were planning a protest against his government to show their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the nation even though some of their complaints were a legacy of the Sirleaf administration. Although his SONA implied and thereby projected a different situation, the reality did not indicate that the majority of Liberians considered Weah's performance impressive, especially in dealing with corruption, at the time that SONA was delivered.

4.4 Rationale for Choice of Texts

Sirleaf is a central figure in Liberia's contemporary political discourse for being Liberia's first post-conflict president and the first democratically-elected female president in Africa. Her transition into office is interesting as well due to the absence of an incumbent, which made the 2005 presidential elections an unusual one (see Harris, 2005; Spatz & Thaler, 2018). Sirleaf's articulation of the transformation of Liberia barely three years post-war makes her rhetoric one worthwhile to study. In addition, her track record as an achiever in the economic world is another reason why Sirleaf's leadership and social practice as Liberian president should be studied. I tease out how she managed and struggled to transfer her skills to the task of significantly moving Liberia forward economically.

Weah is an important political figure in Liberia due to the kairotic moment of his election to office. The mantle of leadership was handed to him by Sirleaf thus making history as a peaceful transfer of leadership from one sitting president to another, an event that Liberia had not experienced in about seventy-four years. The 2018 inaugural event is itself a dream come true for Liberians, that is why I investigate the topics Weah presented in his IA and the discursive strategies he employed.

As shown in their biographical trajectories, one of the subjects of chapter three, both Sirleaf and Weah are worth studying for the richness they bring to post-conflict Liberia's political sphere by their rhetoric of development. How do they speak about development? What are the forms of development they advocate for? Beyond the

ceremonial event, what are the linguistic and rhetorical means these political actors employ in communicating development?

4.5 The Rhetorical Situation of the Liberian Presidential Rhetoric of Development

Liberia was founded on the premise of establishing a land of freedom for black Americans (freed slaves and free-born blacks) because of the systemic racism and oppression they faced in the United States. The Liberian coat of arms bears the motto, “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here,” which is an expression of the American Colonization Society’s and the black American settlers’ hope for the new land that became Liberia. It can thus be argued that Liberia was founded on the quest for freedom (social, political, and economic). Sen (1999) argues that freedom advances development. He further asserts that development should be viewed as “the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systemic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states” (p. 3). For the Liberian settlers who became Americo-Liberians, they moved to Liberia to escape discrimination in America that often resulted in “poor economic opportunities” and “systemic social deprivation” so that they could attain development. They mostly did by imposing themselves on the native people and then setting up a ruling system that excluded the natives from progressing. My argument is that the quest for development is a foundational discourse in Liberia’s politics, which has manifested overtime in different forms. The history of Liberia signifies that the repressed freedom of the indigenous Liberians led to the coup d’état of 1980. Unfortunately, Samuel Doe’s administration (1980-1990) brought other forms of unfreedoms—he was a

tyrannic leader. The prosecution of the Dan and Mano ethnic groups during Doe's regime was a major contributing factor to the civil war that erupted in 1989 (Cooper, 2017).

Charles Taylor's administration was no better. He was also a brutal leader. The atmosphere of Doe's and Taylor's regimes was full of fear and intimidation until Taylor's resignation in 2003. Sirleaf's IA was an avenue to respond to Liberia's more than two-decade-long woes, and her SONA was an attempt to restore the hope of development that seemed to have been lost during the civil wars. The transition to Weah's administration was another kairotic moment for Liberia because of Weah's identity as a native Liberian and his humble background. His speeches were an attempt to respond to the renewed hope that his election to office brought. He also attempted to project himself as capable of mitigating the gap between the rich and poor with his Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development.

In light of the situation sketched out above, some constraints in the rhetorical situation of Liberia are the country's positionality in the global order. Global north countries, specifically the G7 group of countries, are noted to be the norm producing ones when it comes to global power. Since Liberia's development is literally controlled by these countries then the promise of development to Liberians by its social actors may be an illusion since policies made by Liberian social actors might not, by themselves, produce the promised outcome. Liberia is a peripheral state. Furthermore, Scott and Dingo (2012) describe debt-accumulation by global south countries as one of the policies of development agencies like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that use approaches presented as "helping poor countries address and prevent further debt, but their real goal, [i]s to secure 'conditions of capitalist profitability' in the Global South

(for the Global North)” (p. 14). The many contradictions of the neoliberal agenda are why Scott and Dingo have charged scholars studying the language of development to deconstruct the ideological underpinnings of mainstream development, the framings and how it is represented as a solution to economic global crises (p. 15). My analysis reveals that the rhetoric of Liberian presidents is absorbed by the neoliberal agenda.

4.6 Linguistic-Discursive Strategies in Liberian Presidential Discourse

Reisigl and Wodak (2016)’s five guiding questions that researchers can adopt for analysis such as mine are:

- a) How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?
- b) What characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?
- c) What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?
- d) From what perspectives are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?
- e) Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, intensified or mitigated?

Having presented some guiding questions for my analysis, I turn to an elaboration of the discursive strategies on which I focus. From a linguistic and rhetorical point of view, I locate the arguments presented in the texts I analyze in their modes of persuasion (ethos, logos, and pathos). According to Reisigl and Wodak (2016), rhetors use argumentation for “justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness” (p. 33). By

paying attention to their argument structures, I am able to detect Sirleaf's and Weah's fallacies or errors of argument.

Another strategy that I analyze is perspectivization—how do Sirleaf and Weah project their viewpoints? Is it in close proximity or at a distance? (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 33). With the strategy of perspectivization, political actors overtly or indirectly express their point of view on issues and it is also an indication of their close association or dissociation to processes. In this regard, I pay attention to the inclusive “we” and exclusive “we” employed in Liberian political discourse. Other focal items of interest, with respect to perspectivization, include the conceptualization of people, events, organizations, and actions etc. Those types of descriptions and references to entities can be done positively or negatively, for political and ideological purposes. For example, Sirleaf, in the excerpt from her IA below, presented herself and her administration as active participants in bringing about a new Liberia. In fact, she projected a vision of the “new Liberia” as a national effort. Her reasoning was simply that electing her to office was a strong signal that the people wanted a different life from what they were used to in the past:

my fellow Liberians, let us acknowledge and honor the sacrifices and contributions of all as we put the past behind us. Let us rejoice that our recent democratic exercise has been a redemptive act of faith and an expression of renewed confidence in ourselves. Let us be proud that we were able to ultimately rise above our intense political and other differences in a renewed determination as a people to foster dialogue instead of violence, promote unity rather than

disharmony, and engender hope rather than disillusionment and despair (2006, para. 35).

The speaker in the above excerpt tried to achieve two goals: the first one was aligning herself with the people who carried out a “redemptive act” by putting her in office; the second was to suggest an alternative government or civil discourse (at least compared to her predecessor) in terms of interactions between the people and the state and local interactions among the people. As such, Sirleaf presented herself to be for democracy and that those not on her side would usually resort to “violence,” “disharmony,” “disillusionment and despair.” Here Sirleaf employed ideological polarization by creating a reputation and the values she wanted to be associated with and those her administration wanted to distance itself from. Most importantly, it was all a way of creating a new mental model for Liberia, moving away from the nation’s past reputation. That was one of Sirleaf’s ways of pushing the idea of a new Liberia as being in the interest of all the people, because they had participated in the elections. She was also suggesting ways to handle and resolve social and governance issues. Although Sirleaf was setting the tone for a new Liberia, she has been criticized for supporting the use of violence for having aligned herself with Charles Taylor. She responded by arguing that Malcolm X’s effective use of violence forced white Americans into paying attention to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr (Cooper, 2017, p. 99).

As shown in the above discussions of excerpts from the speeches of Weah and Sirleaf, numerous contradictions exist in the promises proclaimed by Liberian politicians, who subscribe to neoliberal ideologies by overtly asserting and covertly implying that

political change leads to a better society as long as “the process [i]s rational” (Wallerstein, 1997, p. 190). One of the problems with such an ideology is that there is an assumption that specialists—those with the technical know-how—when given the opportunity to run a state, will do it right or even effortlessly. It is assumed that they work in favor of the people, pushing for human rights, when in fact not all people are able to exercise such rights. What I observe is that neoliberal discourses of development and progress are framed as the antidote for inequalities in a context like Liberia when “the reality for the majority of the world is mostly negative” (Wallerstein, 1997, p. 193). Wallerstein’s contention here is that neoliberal ideas sound better than they actually are especially for global south nations, so the competence of a leader from such a context, unfortunately, is not all that determines their ability to deliver on their promises. The power play with the global north must be carefully considered. The replication of neoliberal ideologies is a feature of the national identity, democracy (which I explore more in chapter five), and human rights issues in the discourses of Weah and Sirleaf. My contention is that due to the world order and the global system of capitalism, Liberia’s position limits the rights her citizens can exercise. Furthermore, neoliberalism perpetuates inequalities, and the political actors who subscribe to neoliberal ideologies help to foster such inequalities within their own context. The local manifestation of the hypocrisy of neoliberal ideals explains why only a few citizens, generally the elite or the ruling class, are able to exercise certain rights and privileges, which are nonetheless projected as available to all without the barriers of ethnicity, gender and social class.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reassert the interdisciplinary nature of my work and how I achieve my research goal in my analysis of development discourse in Liberia. The interdisciplinary nature of my research necessitates that I define some linguistic and rhetorical terms that will make my work easy to follow, especially for readers who are not familiar with these concepts. Furthermore, I present the sources of my data and my methods of data coding and methodology for ease of reference. Lastly, I establish the rhetorical situation of the social actors that I study, and I show examples of the discursive strategies that I analyze in my data in chapter five.

5 Chapter 5 - Data Analysis and Interpretation

Emotional language is effective against a political landscape that is filled with gloom and anxiety, but cool language prevails under conditions of stability and prosperity (Sedivy, 2016, para. 12).

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze the discursive strategies in the presidential speeches of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and George Manneh Weah. I explore their conception of “development,” which I identify as a “god term” in recent Liberian presidential speeches. As mentioned earlier, the occasion of my data, the Inaugural Address (IA) and the State of the Nation Address (SONA) are different and so are the topics in them. For example, policies are not presented in the IA but in the SONAs. However, a careful study of the IA reveals values, processes, ideologies and other representations (some overtly articulated while others are implied) that Sirleaf and Weah subscribe to and these representations in their IAs are connected to some of their strategic uses of “development” in the SONAs. For my analysis, I adopt the five questions of Reisigl and Wodak (2016), presented in chapter four. In the IAs, I examine and analyze the values implied in the politicians’ speeches and the ways in which they reflect on their backgrounds as they assume office. While some themes of development feature in the IAs, the SONAs (delivered a year after being in office) is where I concentrate on development discourses. The SONAs are where issues like education, democracy, external aid and other conceptualizations of development are deconstructed. My argument is that the language of development is subtle in the IA, but it is overtly communicated in the SONA since the occasion for the latter is deliberative so that decisions can be taken, leadership actions and plans can be presented, justified etc. In Liberia, the IA is the president’s first speech, an opportunity to

make a memorable impression on Liberians and the world for the next six years of their term in office. Their SONA, on the other hand, is delivered at the one-year mark of their term in office, a reflection on their accomplishments. When examining the “language of development,” which is specific to the SONAs, I question if the promised forms of development are all for the benefit of the Liberian people. After that, I examine the shifts in discourses between the IA at the beginning of the subject’s first year and the SONA at the beginning of the subject’s 2nd year in office. Lastly, I note the contradictions found between what is being said in the political speeches and social reality.

The themes analyzed in IAs include democratic principles such as inclusion and fairness, which Sirleaf and Weah claim they will be adopting as a way of improving governance in Liberia, and those such as corruption, nepotism, which they claim they will refrain from and take action against due to their negative consequences for the people. That is the rhetoric of good governance. The rhetoric of good governance has been well studied by scholars in the field of political discourse. It is arguably part of neoliberal discourse. Ige (2012) observes that the rhetoric of good governance is jargon in the contemporary discourse of development due to the World Bank’s policies. He further argues (citing Botchway, 2010) that it is a means of “appealing to developing nations to follow the basic procedures of administration and bureaucracy for resource allocation” (p. vii). This means that employing neoliberal discourse is a condition for leaders of developing nations to access loans and funds from forces of globalization like the World Bank. It can thus be argued that good governance is an administrative protocol, a means to an end—foreign aid. It is in this light that Ige submits that “Good governance is strongly both a rhetorical and a moral question” (p. viii)

I focus on rhetorical agency in Liberian presidential discourses, which involves more than recognizing a vocabulary. The overall discourse that reflects or creates rhetorical agency must also be localized and operationalized within a specific rhetorical situation. Rhetorical agency (Cooper, 2017), which is persuasive power, resides not just in language but also in the context of the discourse, in the narratives that are constructed by speakers, and in the stances that are created or reflected within the discourse. It is in this light that I point out rhetorical appeals such as ethos, logos, pathos that contribute to the persuasive effect of the speeches I analyze. This body of work contributes to the understanding of the emerging democratic leadership styles in Liberia and in Africa. I reveal the struggles of Sirleaf and Weah as presidents who employ neoliberal concepts of development and incorporate the neoliberal agenda as their administration's mission for a post-conflict, global south nation. My work offers a critique of Liberian presidential discourse but also an explanation for why such rhetoric is employed by the rhetors. In the section below, I highlight linguistic themes found in the IAs.

5.2 Topics in the IAs of Presidents of Liberia

The IA is an epideictic form of rhetoric, which reveals the values of the speaker delivering praise or blame. On Monday, January 16, 2006, when Sirleaf delivered her IA before the nation and international guests who had come to witness the historic occasion, the air was full of celebration and optimism. The case of Liberia was unique in that the nation had successfully conducted an election barely two years after a long crisis. It was time to face the future and rebuild a new republic. Twelve years after Sirleaf's election into office and on the occasion of her transfer of power to the next government, Weah delivered his IA on Monday, January 22, 2018. Newly-elected presidents try to give

assurances that their administrations are up to the task of leading their countries toward development.

Some rhetorical functions the IA serves, which I demonstrate below, include:

- a) Legitimation
- b) Authority
- c) Connection

Legitimacy is a critical aspect of IAs although many researchers have focused on the epideictic nature or the jubilatory atmosphere often associated with IAs. Kovalyova (2005), in her examination of 53 IAs of U.S. presidents, describes specific features unique to the address such as being delivered at a specific event (ceremonial), recounting past achievements, and praising the people for their resilience and support for the nation (p. 40). For ease of reference, I bold face the lexical items that have positive attributes, such as democracy, freedom of political assembly, economic buoyancy, an inclusive government, education etc. Furthermore, I underline those that connote negativity, such as corruption, favoritism, tyranny, oppressive practices etc. My argument above that language carries ideologies is why I mark the key words in each excerpt I analyze. In the SONA analysis, also, I bold face words, phrases and sentences that connote development and underline those that are said to hinder development. I also bold face signifiers of development such as people, organizations, events, processes etc.

In the case of Liberia in 2006, the praise is centered on the people's desire for peace, stability and democracy, which led to the end of war and active participation in the

elections. This theme of resilience leads to the discussion about healing of the nation's wounds. Sirleaf, opened her speech by praising God. Thereafter, she set the tone of appreciation by acknowledging that Liberians had done a remarkable thing through the election process:

We applaud the **resilience** of our people who, weighed down and dehumanized by poverty and rendered immobile by the shackles of fourteen years of civil war, [yet they] went **courageously** to the polls, to vote—not once but twice. To elect Vice President Joseph Boakai and I to serve them.... We pledge to live up to your expectations of creating a government that is **attentive** and **sensitive** to your needs and concerns, and the development and progress of our country (para. 7).

In the above excerpt, Liberians were presented in a positive light, characterized with the adjectives “resilien[t]” and “courageous[s].” In contrast, the effect of the war “weighed down,” and “poverty” could have prevented the democratic process of elections. What is interesting about Sirleaf's assertion regarding the agonizing impacts of the war is her recognizing them as forces that could have interfered with the elections such that she might not have ended up as president. If the people were not ready, the elections would have been canceled, but their hunger for “a new Liberia” pushed them to become active participants in the process. Apart from thanking Liberians, Sirleaf overtly promised that her government would be one that is “attentive” and “sensitive” to the people, in contrast with a tyrannic government that would be selfish. Her last argument in the excerpt was that attentiveness and sensitivity from a government are traits that are necessary for development. Sirleaf's representation of her administration as one that would be attentive

and sensitive was meant to imply that her government is interested in the development of Liberia.

5.2.1 Sirleaf Appeals to Values of Peace and Reconciliation

One key issue Sirleaf quickly moved to was national healing. That was done after she characterized Liberians as brave and resilient people. Sirleaf connected Liberia's healing to different forms and levels of development in the public sector, including health and education, since Liberia was practically at point zero when she was delivering her speech:

we are humbled and awed by the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead – **to heal our nation's wounds**, redefine and strengthen its purpose, **make democracy a living and effective experiment**, **promote economic growth**, **create jobs**, **revitalize our health and educational facilities and services**, and **quicken the pace of social progress and individual prosperity** in this country (para. 12).

The argument raised above was done through logic appeals. The idea that a wounded person or animal cannot perform well or to the best of their ability was key here. That idea was extended to wounded Liberia. The wound, Sirleaf argued, was impeding "social progress and individual prosperity." The cause of Liberia's wound was known by all to be the two civil wars. Sirleaf did not stop at employing the discursive strategy of cause and effect but proposed "democracy" as a treatment for the wound. She implied in her argument that the practice of democracy by the Liberian state would result in transforming Liberia economically and socially thus resulting in processes of economic advancement, job creation and infrastructural development in the health and education

sectors. The influence of U.S. public discourse can be observed in Sirleaf's theme of binding wounds which can be traced back to Abraham Lincoln's second IA, which was delivered March 4, 1865, two months before the end of the American Civil War. That IA concludes:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the **nation's wounds**, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations (Barnes and Noble Education, 1989, para. 4).

Sirleaf's adoption of Lincoln's rhetoric of "binding wounds" is in line with the remarks that IAs typically borrow discourses "from a collection of so-called commonplaces" (Kovalyova, 2005, p. 47). Liberia's social context in 2006 necessitated Sirleaf addressing deep wounds that Liberians had nursed for so long. Sirleaf made a case for Liberia needing to bind up her wounds through democratic practices. According to her, another factor that would aid the healing process is peace, which is another discourse that Sirleaf employs heavily in her IA. Sirleaf employed the rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos and pathos) in asserting the need for peace if Liberia was to move forward. Aristotle (2006) define the rhetorical appeals as available means of persuasion employed by rhetors in making arguments. The first appeal, ethos deals with the character or authority of the speaker. The rhetor's character can affect the perception of their arguments by the audience to trust them or not. As such trustworthiness and credibility are involved when

we speak of ethos. The second appeal, logos, relates to logical or persuasive arguments made in texts. They can be explicit or implicit facts. The third appeal, pathos, is defined as audiences' emotional reaction to a speaker's argument such as anger, love, pity or fear. Through pathos, rhetors attempt to connect with their audience. Below are excerpts from Sirleaf's IA where she made the argument for peace using pathos. The word peace features 21 times in her IA:

We know that your vote was a vote for change; a vote for **peace**, security and stability; a vote for individual and national prosperity; a vote for healing and leadership. We have heard you loudly, and we humbly accept your vote of confidence and your mandate. We will call upon our development partners to likewise recognize that although they have made significant investments to bring **peace** to our country, this **peace** can only be consolidated and sustained if we bring **development** to our people (para. 8).

This is an instance where Sirleaf employed logic and ethos. Here she used the nation's problematic state, its fragile stability, to make the case that Liberia needed a transformation, which her administration could deliver. The IA did not specifically indicate how her administration planned to combat security issues. The speaker applied logic when she argued that having stability could bring progress to Liberia since a turbulent atmosphere will not be appealing to potential investors (economic progress). Similarly, a turbulent atmosphere will make the conditions of living difficult and chaotic for citizens (social and cultural relationships). Other allusions Sirleaf made included the claim that without sustainable development, especially economically, the fragile peace

could easily become a thing of the past. Therefore, she appealed to Liberia's foreign partners to help make her vision of stability for Liberia a reality. Sirleaf's cry for help to Liberia's international partners may be interpreted to mean that the state would not be able to complete the task of transforming Liberia for good without external help. But her strategy of indirectness meant her appeal to the international partners came after she had made the case to her nation that the need for peace was critical and that she knew how to go about solving the problem. Rhetorically, Sirleaf identified an exigence—an imperfection marked by urgency, and something that needs to be attended to—but after explicating the issue, her rhetoric was aimed at legitimizing herself and her administration as being capable of preventing Liberia from falling back into the violent past.

The more Sirleaf attempted to persuade her audience that she offered Liberia a different future—one that was habitable and peaceful—the more the ghost of the horrific, familiar past haunted the nation. An allusion to Liberia's past (which we might call "the dark times") comes up in many of the attempts the Sirleaf government made to set itself apart. This pattern shows up in Weah's speeches as well. Weah in his 2019 SONA, for instance, argued that not attending to the youths or providing them with adequate resources posed a threat to the security of Liberia. My understanding of the ideologies behind such propositions is that these political actors, in one sense, blamed economic and social inequalities as triggering political clashes. In another sense, their allusions to the fears and anxieties of the nation served to critique the abuse of power by the different parties involved and, more importantly, they reached out to the nation through empathy. Returning to the excerpt from Sirleaf's IA above, by employing lexical items like

“healing,” “we have heard you,” and “we humbly accept your vote,” Sirleaf offered persuasion through inclusion. The appeal of empathy disrupts the hierarchical boundaries between the leader and the people. In this case, there was an emphasis on the power of the people to bring about, by actively participating, democratic change. There was also an emphasis on the capability of the people to influence their leaders. Sirleaf capitalized on using the pathos of empathy to connect to Liberians not only in her IA but in her first few years in office since in that period Liberia was very much still on its way to recovery. Sirleaf’s administration was able to dial back the hostility that was commonplace in Liberia, ensuring the peaceful coexistence of the citizens through law and order. The result of her administration’s efforts towards peace contributed to her winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.

The use of pronouns in the above excerpt matters. It has been established that the first-person inclusive pronoun “we” may signal levels of relationship between a speaker and their audience, while the use of the exclusive “we” can be used to achieve association or distancing. Petersoo (2007) and Íñigo-Mora (2004) agree that “we” may be used to construct communal and national identities. The exclusive community here may well be Sirleaf and her cabinet (the government), who are still a larger part of the Liberian community. As such, the initial use of “we” above may be interpreted as being a reference to her government. In that instance, Sirleaf dissociated from the people, keeping a distance as the leader who is working on their behalf by calling on Liberia’s international partners for help. Sirleaf associated herself and her government with the active efforts to ensure peace and stability for the nation, “if we bring development to our people.” Albeit vaguely referenced, what she did not explicitly say is that without

“development,” the achieved peace could be short-lived. The goal of the speaker was to signal a positive tone about her new administration:

My charge as President is to work to assure the wishes of our people. **We** will therefore encourage our citizens to utilize our system of due process for settling differences whether those differences are within or between ethnic groups, or whether they are within or between religious groups. However, **we** will **forcefully, swiftly and decisively respond** to any acts of lawlessness, threats to our hard-earned peace, or destabilizing actions that could return us to conflict (para. 67).

Considering that the presidency is an institution, there are similar patterns that occur between Sirleaf’s and Weah’s IAs. The emphasis on the type of character that will promote and help the nation heal from its past is present in both IAs. The president, as the custodian of culture, makes an argument for why certain citizens may not be acting in the best interest of the nation and for how important it is that the government ensures negative attitudes—“lawlessness,” “destabilizing actions”—are discouraged by the rule of law. By the same token, the president encourages positive attitudes as well as cooperation by the people to help the government to swiftly carry out its duties. In the above excerpt, Sirleaf stressed her authority as an enforcer of law and order. This is an instance of the government playing on the notion of what is commonsense in a context. The president made the case that the people should change their ways as certain behaviors are detrimental to development and can send the nation back to the dark days. Her stance was that Liberians had to act responsibly for the country to move forward but

if not, the law would take its course as an intermediate step that would forestall a return of the country to the dark days.

5.2.2 Sirleaf Represents Corruption as Underdevelopment

Related instances of appeals to common sense occur in the Liberian presidential discourse of corruption. It can be assumed that many Liberians have experienced the negative consequences of corruption in one form or the other (such as bribery of government officials to get them to do their duties, or simply bribing to avoid complying with official rules and regulations see Cooper 2017 for more discussion of corruption in Liberia) so they can relate to the topic. Yet, there are those who benefit from corruption, who are unlikely to desist from corrupt practices, which is why corruption continues to exist. Both Sirleaf and Weah depend on implicature when stressing the effects of corruption on the nation. They both distance themselves from that negative trait. More importantly, they assure their audience that they are working against corruption. Sirleaf in her 2006 IA called it a “cancer” that would be “the major public enemy” of her administration. However, some of her critics think that she was not that different from past heads of state in terms of indulging in nepotism (Pailey & Williams, 2017). I further analyze Sirleaf’s presidential discourse of corruption below.

However, before presenting Sirleaf’s argument about corruption, it is useful to consider the argument Ige (2012) makes in his editorial note in the *African Journal of Rhetoric*, where he asserts that corruption is a moral issue and that disregarding it has cost the African continent significantly such that:

Corruption is at its highest ever and public leaders violate citizen rights with impunity. [Since the] national treasury has been turned into personal savings account, aid money can be carted away with impunity, and budget allocations for social development can be stashed in Swiss bank accounts without any hope of repatriation (p. viii).

Ige clearly notes that corruption is a challenge in many African nations. He further suggests that that reflects poorly on the character of African leaders who speak about corruption to achieve rhetorical political ends (p. ix). Ige's argument could mean that politicians speak about the issue of corruption just for their public image: their actions say otherwise. After all, actions speak louder than words. I analyze the discourse of corruption in my data, and I later on speak to the practices of Sirleaf and Weah in comparison to their rhetoric.

A key issue that supports the rhetoric of good governance is low tolerance for corruption, so as expected, corruption is addressed in Sirleaf's IA. In the excerpt below, Sirleaf framed corruption as an enemy of the Liberian state. She strongly condemned it and persuaded Liberians that she was going to fight the common enemy that had kept the people from achieving prosperity:

We know that if we are to achieve our **economic and income distribution goals**, we must take on forcibly and effectively the debilitating cancer of corruption. Corruption erodes faith in government because of the mismanagement and misapplication of public resources. It weakens accountability, transparency and justice. Corruption shortchanges and undermines key decision and policy making

processes. It stifles private investments which create jobs and assures support from our partners. Corruption is a national cancer that creates hostility, distrust, and anger (para. 59).

Sirleaf overtly stated her point of view on corruption as she persuaded her audience. Since her ideology about the negative impacts of corruption is most likely shared by Liberians, Sirleaf's act of condemning corruption publicly is a way of distancing herself from corrupt practices, which are projected to be contrary to the features of good governance such as "accountability," "transparency" and "justice." Her act of persuasion is done by positioning the negative traits of corruption, "mismanagement and misapplication of public resources," as being against the values of her administration, "economic and income distribution goals." Her government's objectives were presented as positive actions that could negate the consequences of corruption. Thus, Sirleaf attempted to gain some credibility through her rhetorical act of positive self-representation. Sirleaf portrayed corruption as an illness, a "national cancer," which could be life threatening to Liberia's democracy. While not overtly stated, Sirleaf was appealing to Liberians to join her in fighting against corruption. Later on in her IA, she stated the ways she would lead the people in fighting corrupt practices in Liberian society. Sirleaf also appealed to the logical reasoning of Liberians arguing that the disease of corruption had to be cured to avoid a toxic effect on societal relations, including "hostility," "distrust" and "anger." To buttress her argument, although not explicitly stated, she alluded to the past reactions of Liberians in rebelling against corruption and injustice.

5.2.3 Sirleaf Connects Through the Ideological Square

In her IA, Sirleaf through the ideological square (a discursive strategy of negative representation of the outgroup and the positive emphasis of the ingroup, van Dijk, 1997) connects to the past suffering of the nation. She characterized the event of her imprisonment during the government of Samuel Doe as one of the prerequisites for democracy. She had spoken out against the oppressive practices of the Doe government, which led to her detention. Sirleaf, in recalling her experience, related to Liberians who had had similar or even worse ordeals. She made the case that the good spirits of Liberians served in overcoming such challenges. In other words, while the event and other repressive acts during Doe's regime may be seen as a low moment in Liberia's political history, some good came from it—Sirleaf and others who spoke up as well as those Liberians who supported their actions all fought for democracy:

And in the process of resolving the numerous contradictions that have underpinned this struggle, [for democracy] a high price has been paid by many Liberians of diverse backgrounds and social status. I know of this struggle because I have been a part of it. Without bitterness, anger, or vindictiveness, I recall the inhumanity of confinement, the terror of attempted rape and the ostracism of exile. I also recall the **goodness** and the **kindness** of the many who defied orders and instructions to save my life, and gave food to the hungry and to give water to the thirsty. I recall their **humanity**—and thank them (para. 34).

Sirleaf distanced herself and her government from specific actions, the type of oppressive and tyrannical leadership that the country witnessed in the past. By employing emotional

words, Sirleaf connected with several Liberians who had faced social injustice from previous governments. By speaking of her own experience as a victim of social injustice, she persuaded through ethos. The president's goal was to establish that her government recognized and would abide by the principles of democracy.

In the above excerpt, Sirleaf reminded her nation and the world of the previous regimes of Doe and Charles Taylor, who were notorious as dictators. The acts of those past leaders were inhumane and claimed many lives. Sirleaf praised the “goodness” and “kindness” of some Liberians who disobeyed the orders of Doe and thereby spared her life. Sirleaf discursively argued that the actions of Doe contributed to the underdevelopment of Liberia since those actions were undemocratic. On the other hand, they who challenged such actions despite the brutality they experienced made positive impacts on the nation, leading to the democratic elections of 2005. Two events can be linked to the above excerpt. The accounts are given in detail in Sirleaf (2009) and Cooper (2017). The first was when Sirleaf criticized the Doe government at an event in Philadelphia in the summer of 1983. Sirleaf believed it was not the criticism about corruption and oppression that vexed Doe so much as her referring to his government using words like “terror” and “idiots.” Doe ordered that Sirleaf be placed under house arrest, but she was soon thrown in jail when a letter that she sent to her supporters and political group got intercepted. She was in jail for months but was granted clemency alongside other political prisoners due to local and international pressure. The second event happened after Doe claimed victory in the 1985 presidential elections, declaring himself president. Sirleaf, who had campaigned and won a senate seat, refused to take her position and be a part of Doe's administration. Sirleaf's refusal did not go down well with

Doe, and the situation was exacerbated by an attempted coup by Thomas Quiwonkpa. According to Cooper (2017), the head of Doe's executive mansion guard, Colonel Edward Smith, averted a tragedy that might have cost Sirleaf's life. Smith ordered that she be thrown in jail instead of being taken to Doe, who had sent for her. It was a scary situation as the "soldiers knew they were about to see the execution of a woman" (p. 88). Cooper attributes Smith's action to the horrible belief of the soldiers that "women were for raping, not for killing" (p. 88). Sirleaf eventually spent nine months in jail, and she was even charged with sedition by Doe, but she was eventually released after much pressure from the U.S. government, who threatened to cut off aid to Liberia. Even though Sirleaf did not go into the details of the event being alluded to in that excerpt from her IA, she was counting on the nation's memory of Liberia's political history. Through a recall of her imprisonment, Sirleaf represented herself as having some credibility, having experienced political injustice, thus arguing that such practices as the "inhumanity of confinement," the "terror of rape" and the "ostracism of exile" were detrimental towards Liberia's progress. Sirleaf argued that her administration was going to be different in a positive way.

5.2.4 Weah Connects Through Sport

Weah brings in a different kind of appeal when compared to Sirleaf. The two presidents are generations apart with an almost thirty years age gap between them. Sirleaf's social capital was her education, professional experience, and political experience. However, Weah has what I call an "intrinsic prestige," with his ability to connect easily with the youth through his soccer past and with native Liberians because of his native Liberian background and humble upbringing. It should be mentioned that

President Weah is also remembered as the top scorer of the Liberian national soccer team, dubbed the Lone Stars. One of the ways Weah projected himself in his IA was through the special allegiance he portrayed with Europe (a signifier of development), where he spent most of his career as an accomplished soccer player:

Without **Europe** George Manneh Weah would not be standing here delivering his inaugural address as the 24th President of the Republic of Liberia. It was my **success** in European football that enabled me to give back to my beloved country. Europe will always have a **special place in my heart**, and as President, I intend to strengthen my relationship with the European community for the benefit of all Liberians (para. 55).

Weah's choice of positioning himself in close proximity to Europe reflects that Weah classified Europe as a key player in his transformation from a young, talented, poor man to a world-renowned soccer player. Weah referred to the experience he gained as a European soccer player. Here, Europe is the thematic agent and Weah the patient. Chilton (2004), citing Dowty (1991), argues that entailment clusters are embedded in the thematic roles of arguments. Thus, analyzing participants in discourses or linguistic referents reveals social interactions in such worlds. For instance, who did what to whom, when, and why? One can interpret Weah's message above as Europe (via his playing in three different European countries for soccer clubs such as AS Monaco, AC Milan, Paris Saint-Germain, Chelsea, and Manchester City) helped Weah to gain international prominence in the soccer world between 1988-2002. By making a connection with Europe in his speeches, Weah linguistically implied his point of view about Europe is an agent of good

things which he had experienced as a professional footballer. Weah implies that just as he has benefited from Europe, he claimed that Liberia could also gain from Europe. His 2019 SONA confirmed that Weah meant business when it came to aligning with Europe, specifically France, where he is also a citizen:

I made an official visit to the republic of France where the **French President** committed a **grant of Ten million Euros** to Liberia for road maintenance. I was also given the opportunity, along with **President Macron**, to serve as a co-founder of **Sports for Development**. Modalities are being worked out for a more comprehensive and sustainable **development** assistance to Liberia (para. 201).

Representing Macron as being committed to Liberia presupposes that there is an established relationship between Liberia and France, such that France is considered a close ally. The fact that Weah also got to work with Macron as “a co-founder of Sports for Development” further confirms the level of their relationship. The argument gets interesting when the speaker revealed that more work needed to be done to ensure maximum benefit from relations with France, but how to achieve that was still an ongoing question. Also, Weah did not give a time frame to foster accountability on the process. I will speak more in a separate section below on the SONAs as well as the implication of the word “development,” which is central to Liberian presidential rhetoric.

Another point to note in the above excerpt from his IA is that Weah has the credibility to serve on a sports committee since he was a professional soccer player. This implies that being president will not interfere with him staying true to his identity as a sports person. Yet although this might suggest a conflict of time commitment, Weah

frames it instead as an important linkage to extracting developmental aid from France, and funneling it through sports as a way to reach out to the youth in Liberia—though likely, few Liberian youths will benefit by rising to the level of accomplishment Weah was able to obtain. This supports the argument that it is through sports that many citizens, especially youths, are able to connect with Weah. Weah is also projecting himself as being supportive of youths, considering that the donation made by Macron may not benefit those who do not participate in sports and that the two poles, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, would roughly form along the dimension of age.

One unique aspect of Weah’s linguistic style in his IA are his allusions to sports, which is a means to foreground his personality as the “king” of soccer and strategically use a popular factor as a means of mediating the high level of division in the country. Soccer is a major sport in Liberia. As I stated above, the Lone Stars are the national team that represents Liberia in international games. Although Weah played for different international clubs in Europe, he also played for his home country in the Lone Stars. Weah called the Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Stadium a symbolic monument that secured local and international friendships. The rhetorical act here is referencing the sports field built by the Chinese as commemorating the good relationship between Liberia and China. Weah further argued that sports could help unify the nation. He specifically claimed that the sports stadium that afforded the congregation of Liberians “stands as a symbol of peace”:

The Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex, built by the Chinese, where this
Inaugural ceremony is being held, is where I gained my exposure to the football

world. It does not only stand as a monument of Chinese **friendship** towards Liberians, but it also stands as a symbol of peace and **reconciliation** for the Liberian people (para. 58).

Weah's proposition about how sports bring people together is interesting for many reasons. As a sports icon, he has undoubtedly benefited from the popularity and prestige a successful athlete gains. What is more interesting is his branding the sports stadium as "a monument of friendship" between Liberia and China. The stadium was a contract that the Liberian government awarded to China during President Tolbert's administration but that was only completed during Doe's regime, who named it after himself (Armstrong & Thompson, 2012). The stadium was not built just based on friendship, but on a "fee-for-service" basis. Weah used pathos to appeal to the spirit of friendship and cooperation that Liberia supposedly has with China and he appealed to Liberians to cultivate such attributes in relating among themselves. While on the surface the focus of that excerpt seems to have been sports, it was more about national unity than sports. However, the president was hoping the nation would adapt the attitude they had toward sports to their attitude in relating with one another so that the people would look beyond any sort of differences that could be promoting prejudices and division.

There was a 12-year difference between when Sirleaf initially assumed office and Weah's inauguration, and there were significant changes within those 12 years. For instance, in 2018, before Weah assumed office, the incumbent was Sirleaf, but in 2006 when Sirleaf had assumed office there had been no incumbent since Taylor had stepped down in 2003. One could argue that in January 2018, Liberia had a measure of stability in

governance that had not been available back in 2006, which accounts for why Sirleaf more heavily appealed for peace and reconciliation in her IA. A thorough examination of Weah's IA reveals that even though he also stressed the need for reconciliation nationally, he focused more on emphasizing himself and his election into office as a symbol of "national unity" (with the implicit assumption that there were still opposing sides that needed to be united, which he implies has been achieved in his election).

5.2.5 Weah Connects With the Poor

Weah also asserted that by getting rid of corruption, his government would effectively "impact the poor" for the better. That would result in a smaller "gap between the rich and poor." That line of thought would appeal to a majority of Liberians whose reality is abject poverty and who are aware that corrupt practices and mismanagement of state resources is a major factor in their plight. Weah's argument may sound credible, coming from a man who once lived in poverty, which means the argument might have been another means of connecting to the people since they have similar life experiences. He blamed corruption for being one of the biggest issues affecting Liberia and he reinforced his major electoral promise, to reduce poverty to its barest minimum. In the excerpt below, Weah asserted that the poor in Liberia desperately needed help and he was up to the task:

It is my belief that the **most effective way** to directly impact the poor, and to narrow the gap between rich and poor, is to **ensure that public resources do not end up in the pockets of Government officials** (para. 33).

Weah in the above excerpt implies that the previous government did not take care of the endemic problem of corruption, and thus also embeds a critique of both Sirleaf and her former vice president (Boakai) and Weah's opponent in the elections.

Still representing himself as a problem-solver with his populist rhetoric, Weah further went on to affirm his plans to make ground-breaking achievements in mitigating Liberia's supposed biggest problem, poverty:

My greatest contribution to this country as President may not lie in the eloquence of my speeches but will definitely lie in the quality of the decisions that I will make over the next six years to **advance the lives of poor Liberians**. I intend to **construct the greatest machinery of pro-poor** governance in the history of this country (paras. 64-65).

The case presented above is about the impacts of corruption and the ineffective measures past governments have employed in tackling the issue. There is a recontextualization of the divide in Liberia between the "book people" (who are often the Americo-Liberians) and the others who may not be eloquent in the English language. Weah uses this medium to revisit one of the biggest criticisms against him since he started vying for the presidency in 2005, which was that he lacked both education and adequate political leadership experience. The political opposition to Weah made an argument about his incompetence, which happens to coincide with a long history of economic divide between the educated, who were often the Americo-Liberians, and the illiterate populations, who were often native Liberians. Weah identifies with a majority of the

population, considering his background before his recent educational training. Like many Anglophone countries in Africa, English is the language of upward social mobility in Liberia. That means it is the language of education and the official language of the state. Liberians who are educated and who have a good command of the English language potentially have more opportunities than those who do not. The privileges that come with being educated have provoked resentment since the illiterates are often looked down upon and their opportunities are restricted. Cooper (2017) has described one of the traits of the Americo-Liberians as being fluent in both American English and Liberian English (p. 5). It is then no surprise that they comprise a bulk of the upper and middle class in Liberia.

Some statistics might help shine more light on the literacy situation of Liberia. Of Liberia's population of 4.7 million people, only 48% are educated (Eberhard et al, 2021). A Liberian NGO, CODE, has an ongoing project called Reading Liberia (2020-2022) that is aimed at improving the literacy level among young people. The NGO revealed the "staggeringly low literacy rates among young people aged 15-24 years old—only 65% for males and 45% for females can read" (CODE, 2021). On their website, CODE argues that the poor literacy rate is linked to poverty and "high levels of unemployment and lack of sustainable livelihoods" (2021). It is apparent that a lack of education and a lack of fluency in English contribute toward social inequality in Liberia. Gbessagee (2011) laments the dominance of the English language over the local languages with the rationale of many who are learning English being that it has been "a major requirement for public and private sector jobs in Liberia since independence in 1847 (except for jobs such as paramount chief and tribal governor, which require in-depth knowledge and

proficiency in specific indigenous languages and cultures)” (p. 48). Clearly, English is the language of the educated community, and it is also employed by the government in carrying out its activities and duties. Gbessagee continues, “[English] promotes sociocultural injustices and economic and political inequalities” (p. 49). Gbessagee’s observation about attitudes towards different languages in Liberia confirms the long-held fears that are common enough in Liberia about being politically and socio-economically disadvantaged if one lacks a proper knowledge of the English language. Weah, however, defied such beliefs, being a highly successful athlete turned politician and the current Liberian president. That is one reason he downplays proficiency in English and oratory skills in the excerpt above despite having gone back to school after losing the elections of 2005.

5.2.6 Weah Appeals to Good Governance

President Weah projected character for office in his IA by praising Sirleaf for rebuilding the practices of democracy throughout her administration, specifically freedom of speech. Despite criticisms laid against her government, he positioned himself as being like-minded such that he would tread the same path to foster the continuity of her leadership style:

In the famous words of President Abraham Lincoln of the United States of America “...government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” We could not have arrived at this day without our voices being heard loudly, and all our views, no matter how critical, being freely expressed in an atmosphere void of intimidation and arrest. This was only made possible by the tolerance of my

predecessor, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who protected the right to **Freedom of Speech** as enshrined in our Constitution. Now, in my turn, I will go further to encourage and reinforce not only freedom of speech, but also **freedom of political assembly** (paras. 41-44).

Weah appealed to ethos by quoting Abraham Lincoln, who is known as a strong defender of democracy as well as for freeing the slaves during the U.S. civil war. Apart from making a connection to the former U.S. president, Weah went on to list some elements of democracy such as “freedom of speech” and “freedom of assembly,” whether political or otherwise. Diamond (2004), a U.S. political sociologist, identifies four essential features of democracy, including a free and fair electoral process (which the two Liberian presidents point to as playing a huge role in their coming to office), and the rule of law (which is meant to protect the human rights of a people). Similarly, Omilusi (2019) contends that a free press and an independent judiciary are also key elements of a thriving democracy. He suggests that citizens must be able to make more informed decisions in choosing among the candidates and ideologies that are presented to them. It is questionable to list informed decision-making as a tenet of democracy without stressing that the principle should be about electorates freely making decisions about candidates and ideologies that they deem fit. There are many factors that influence why people vote and support politicians. Omilusi’s claim that people must make “rational choices” will not work in a democracy unless citizens can vote and support their freely chosen representatives regardless of the values such leaders possess. Weah tapped into the common belief held by the people of the importance of democracy for the development of Liberia. Apart from the belief about the role of democracy for the successful running

of a state, Weah alluded to the fact that his election to office was made possible by a democratic process. However, in the past he reacted to losing a previous election (the 2005 election) as being due to electoral fraud, claiming the process was not free and fair because he believed that he was the choice of the people despite the electoral results stating otherwise, which implies a weak democracy that lacks transparency. Spatz and Thaler (2018) speaking to this issue argued that “Many [Liberians] still believe that Weah won in 2005” (p. 160). Returning to Weah’s rhetoric of good governance in the above excerpt, the representation of democracy and its tenets that is used in his IA, and SONA as well as the representation of democracy and its tenets that is used in Sirleaf’s IA and SONA, Table 1 below shows the frequency of the word “democracy” in the speeches I analyze. The asterisk (*) is an indication of close forms of the particular lexical item it appears next to. For example, while I was searching for the frequency of occurrence of “democracy”, included in in my results were democra* (*e.g.*, democratic,) showing me that other forms of the word are used in the text.

Table 1: Usage of Words Connoting Democracy by Sirleaf and Weah

Speaker	Lexical item	Frequency of usage
Sirleaf	Democra*	in IA 12 times
	Freedom	in IA 1 time

	Democracy	in SONA 2007, 10 times
Weah	Democra* Freedom Democracy	in IA 8 times in IA 14 times in SONA 2019 3 times

5.3 Sirleaf and Weah Appeal Through Neoliberal Propaganda in SONAs

In chapters one and four, I point out my rationale for identifying development as a “god term” in Liberian presidential speeches and why it is important to study the rhetorical acts in the discourse of development. Table 2 above shows the frequency of the word “development” and related terms in the SONAs I analyze. The asterisk (*) is an indication of close forms of the particular lexical item it appears next to. For example, while I was searching for the frequency of occurrence of development, included in in my results were develop* (*e.g.*, developed) showing me that other forms of the word are used in the text. In this part of my dissertation, I look at how Sirleaf and Weah talk about development in their SONAs and the justifications they give for their conceptions of development. More importantly, I critique their promises on the basis of the actual delivery on those promises. In what ways do these political actors construe development? Does their idea of development match reality?

Table 2: Lexical Usage of Development by Sirleaf and Weah

Speaker	Lexical Item	Frequency of Usage
Sirleaf	develop*	47 times in SONA 2007
	development	42 times in SONA 2007
Weah	develop*	49 times in SONA 2019
	development	45 times in SONA 2019

Considering its deliberative nature, the SONA is used to appeal to legislators on what the president deems necessary for the nation. Cicero in Book 2 of *De Oratore* [On the Ideal Orator] reveals through his dialogue technique that deliberative and judicial rhetoric are more complex than other forms of oratory, such as epideictic rhetoric (2001). Although SONAs are generally deliberative rhetoric, we can still find elements of epideictic rhetoric in SONAs. Furthermore, in the context of the SONA, the speaker is expected to be highly knowledgeable about governance and politics. Some of the skills and knowledge the orator possesses may come from experiences of other issues and cases. And even greater challenge than the technical difficulty of successfully delivering a SONA also leads to collaborative action, the economic state of Liberia was in shambles when Sirleaf became president. The wars had not only been deadly but costly in terms of economic capital. To create a viable economy, the presidency had to persuade the legislative arm of government to adopt policies, by making laws, that would be beneficial

to the nation. In his Book 1 of *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle lays emphasis on the importance of propositions in orators' speeches, specifically when deliberating on sensitive issues that require careful judgement (2006). The five issues he argued as being most important in deliberative rhetoric include, foreign policies, war and peace, finances, "security" and policy formulations. In the following section, I note how the presidents speak about ensuring that adequate measures are put in place to improve the livelihoods of the people. It goes without saying that for a country to excel in the five areas listed above it must have economic, social and cultural capital, but how does the government go about securing those? How successful are the governments of Sirleaf and Weah? I attempt to answer these questions through my analysis by drawing on intertextuality, recontextualization and other relevant linguistic strategies as I explore issues of development and globalization in the Liberian and African contexts. Understanding the allies enlisted by Liberian presidents to achieve their administration's goals in the areas of economic and social capital will be one focus.

Liberian politicians present themselves in the SONA as not only being aware of pressing national and local issues but also working to address them. It should be noted, also, that on the occasion of the SONA, political actors employ the ideological square (the negative representation of others and positive representation of themselves) to paint themselves in a positive light, against their political opposition. They therefore structure their speech to address the needs of the people and society, and this makes the conception of "development" tricky and interesting. It makes the researcher wonder if "development" discourse is just a performance of deliberative rhetoric. It is in light of the above "performance requirements" that their educational experiences or professional

experiences add to the ethos of political actors, and this is in line with Cicero's argument that orators must be vastly skillful. I argue above that the SONA is a strategic speech due to the complexity of issues it addresses. It therefore makes sense to expect a topic like "development" to be controversial when it comes up in a SONA. Even more generally, the subject of development has been of interest to scholars in different fields especially in languages, economics, history and politics; it is a controversial issue that continues to be contested in all those fields. For those reasons, I choose to examine the different contexts where the rhetoric of development is employed in Liberian presidential speeches.

The social and political history that I explored in chapter three shows that Liberia had once been an economically vibrant nation, despite the gap between the natives and the settlers. However, the rice riots of 1979 revealed that the common people were facing a crisis as they could not afford rice, a staple food in any Liberian home (Cooper, 2017). Between 1979 and 2003, the economic state of the nation was significantly worsened by mismanagement and the civil wars and all those hurt Liberia for decades, as we have seen. Post-conflict presidents like Sirleaf and Weah are thus attempting to build Liberia economically, politically, socially, and culturally. Therefore, in their SONAs, I tease out the concepts, objects, people and organizations associated with development.

Note how Sirleaf associated the actions of the previous government with hindering "development" such that she was elected to help the nation get back on the path of progress. She also alluded to the trust of the people and reminded them that she is determined to fulfill their desires:

I heard them say during the long months of campaigning that they yearned for a complete break with past practices that were responsible for our years of violent conflict and under-development. They wanted fundamental change in all areas of our nation's life. They wanted a **new, free, and democratic Liberia** where **civil liberties**, the **rule of law**, an **accountable and transparent government**, **peace** and **security** would be the norms, and not from the generosity of an imperial president. They wanted a rule rooted firmly in our Constitution, our statutes, and the true Liberian way of life (para. 2).

Here, Sirleaf in her SONA, a year into office, reminds Liberia of the journey to her election as well as the promises she made on being sworn into office. The president is recalling how the nation was and the beliefs as well as the expectations of the Liberian people. According to the people, Liberia was in the state it was because of past conflict, a state that could be described with the word "under-development." Sirleaf's point of view in that SONA was that "under-development" was not the "true Liberian way of life." She was reassuring the people that she would abide by the constitution, the nation's code of conduct, rather than act like previous governments that acted above the law. One would have thought that since the statement of the problem was known before she assumed office, the president should rather focus in her SONA on what has been done in her first year in office. Instead, she employs the discursive strategy of perspectivization, distancing herself from the past problems of Liberia but associating herself with "the true Liberian way of life." In actual fact, Sirleaf was part of previous governments, serving as the finance minister back in 1979 until there was an overthrow of that government in 1980 due to the oppression faced by ordinary Liberians. Thus, she had ties to the old

government. However, she was known for publicly criticizing the government she worked for. Yet, while she might not have agreed with the government's decisions, as a minister she still enjoyed the privileges of being a state official. Nevertheless, revisiting the people's expectations, a year after assuming office indicates that the president:

- a) had not forgotten the desires of the people or their reasons for supporting her election;
- b) was reminding the people and emphasizing how her government was breaking from old corrupt practices that had driven Liberia backwards;
- c) was pointing to previous states of "violent conflict" and "under-development."

She strategically nominalized the perpetrators—stating the features their administration lacked such as "free[dom]," "democra[cy]," the absence of "civil liberties," "transparent government"—to remind her audience that leaders who mismanaged funds as well as their allies, both locally and internationally, were responsible for the transgressions that caused the suffering of the majority of the population. In addition, Sirleaf detailed cultural values that she believed that Liberians wanted a : "democratic Liberia," an "accountable," and "transparent government," "fairness," "peace". The president was, arguably, embracing a culture of peace, something Liberia had been lacking for a long time. Before her SONA, her mention in her IA of displaced citizens and refugees, "thousands of our citizens who continue to live in refugee camps throughout the sub-region and beyond" (para. 29) was an argument for why strategic action should be taken to avoid such history repeating itself. She then furthers that line of argument in her SONA by distancing her administration from the unpleasant past. The alternatives to her

particular line of argument are obvious: a recounting of what had been done to return the displaced persons to their homes, a description of strategic action already taken to avoid such history repeating itself. Nevertheless, the new president projects herself as a progressive, as someone that is committed to working toward the continuance of a democratic Liberia. Note the interesting association of development with democracy: “past practices that were responsible for our years of violent conflict and under-development,” a framing also adopted by President Weah (as I shall show below).

The following is an instance of Weah’s democratic discourse in his 2019 SONA. In the following excerpt, he is observed legitimizing his administration, portraying it as defending democracy while pointing to “challenges” he claims to have overcome in office:

On this auspicious occasion, I must be honest to admit that during the year of 2018, our democracy, society and economy were tested but **our leadership rose above these challenges. We stabilized our economy, protected the fundamental rights of our citizens and preserved our peace** (paras. 6-7).

In his SONA to the legislature above, Weah attempted to gain some credibility and contest the claims that his administration did not perform well in its first year. He employed mitigation as a strategy by acknowledging that there were some issues, “I must be honest to admit,” but he did not go into concrete specifics. Chilton and Schaffner (2002) observe that mitigation is a device commonly employed in political discourse, a strategy of evasion to lessen the effect of a situation. In this case, Weah strategically formulated a face-threatening act (FTA) as a way to mitigate the challenges facing

Liberia. He employed abstraction claiming that his government “stabilized the economy,” “protected the fundamental rights” of Liberians and preserved the national peace. First, we should note the shifting from the “I” to “we” as Weah reported what had been done so far, crediting and representing his government as capable of handling problems. However, he did not state the specifics of the problems he was referring to but abstractly referred to them as testing the nation’s democracy.

Interestingly, from the time he first assumed office, one of the notable allegations against Weah was that his government was a threat to freedom of speech. The reputation of his government was of a government that lacked tolerance for criticism and oppositional voices. At the time of his SONA in January 2019, there were reports of the vandalization of media houses that were not pro-Weah, such as Joy FM and Roots FM. Those stations were closed down and their equipment were seized and taken away from their premises. Such acts of repression and attacks on press freedom may have contributed to the downward spiral of Liberia in the World Press Freedom Index rankings, from number 89, of 180 countries, in 2018 to position 93 in 2019 and 95 in 2020 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

The fact that the president did not publicly condemn the bullying of journalists and the independent media raised suspicions, linking him to the acts. In fact, sometime in April 2018, just a few months into Weah’s new administration, a government official threatened to imprison the publisher of FrontPage Africa, self-styled as Liberia’s leading news magazine, for a report interrogating government spending. The entire staff of the magazine were arrested. Some might argue that Weah’s fanatics caused these problems

but even if that was the case, it would be expected that the president would call them to order if he were not happy with those actions. His silence speaks volumes. Yet, Weah claimed to support press freedom even though his actions clearly stated otherwise. As noted previously, considering his praise for Sirleaf's administration, in the excerpt above, for upholding the tenets of democracy, one might have thought his administration would follow through, as he promised. In the paragraphs preceding the excerpt above, he had already struck the pro-freedom-of-speech tone:

I took an oath before you, and before the Almighty God, to uphold our Constitution and to preside over this Government and this country to the best of my abilities. This includes, among others, ensuring **freedom of speech** and, by extension, **freedom of the press; freedom of assembly**, revitalizing our economy, rebuilding our infrastructures, providing **protection for our people**, and ensuring **respect for the rule of law**. (paras. 4-5)

However, the world received a rude awakening some months after that SONA, on June 6, 2019, during a market dedication event, President Weah publicly threatened civilians who spoke against him:

Those that constantly threaten the state, inciting the people, I want to be clear, we will not tolerate those kinds of citizens. Those that are constantly **insulting the president** [note that not on presidency]. There will be no citizen in this country, and I can defy you, **that will ever insult the president and think he will walk on the streets freely**. Any insults, and any threats, that citizen will be dealt with under the law.

As he continues, Weah was defensive (despite his earlier claims about press and personal freedom of speech), he claimed that:

In our history, **I am the one**, one of the Presidents that signed your law for you to have your Freedom of Speech. Even those that **abuse our rights** are those people that are asking for their human rights. (FrontPage Africa, 2019)

Consistent with his actions, rather than his contradictory words, President Weah shut down social media (WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) and the entire internet to prevent communication during a national anti-Weah protest on June 7, a day after he issued the above threats. That action was revelatory of the fact that the president was willing to go to any length to restrict the people from voicing their frustrations, just barely a year into his term in office. His action is an abuse of power and signals tyrannic tendencies, and it created anxieties and fears in Liberia. It is also ironic that the president paraded himself as supporting freedom of speech while he was castigating human rights activists who opposed his administration. Could it be the case that the president did not fully understand the implications of “freedom of speech,” or what explains his uttering threats publicly?

It is useful to delve a bit further into the context of Weah’s threats. I examine the reactions of Liberians to Weah’s outburst in the comments section of a Johnson (2019) report that went online on the same day as that incident. There are 41 comments at the time, and most of the commenters show that they are not happy with the president. They argue that Weah ought to learn how democracy works from countries like the United States. One comment in favor of the president reveals a fallacy in its argument. The

commenter claims that the president only issued a “WARNING,” not a “THREAT.” The commenter further argues that freedom of speech must be exercised respectfully, so citizens should not be “rude,” concluding with the words “FREEDOM is not FREE.” One issue that is obvious from going through the comments is how differently the language of the president is interpreted by the various commenters. However, the consensus of the majority of the commenters is that the president is intolerant of criticism. Another interesting dynamic is that some commenters were educating others on why the president is right or wrong. Some warned others to be careful lest they go missing like happened to some critics of past governments. This was the political climate in Liberia in 2019 and 2020, consistent with the pattern on the World Press Freedom Index.

Unfortunately, there are other nations where democratic rights are threatened. In the case of Nigeria, for instance, a senator proposed a bill titled “Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulations Bill 2019,” though the bill became popularly known as the “Anti-Social Media Bill” because the original title was deemed misleading. The bill, should it become law, would actually infringe on the free speech of Nigerians on social media, especially as relating to criticizing the government. The supporters of the bill have argued that it will help cut back the circulation of hate speech in the digital sphere. The president was silent about the bill, but his aides and his wife, Aisha Buhari, supported the bill as being necessary. Aisha Buhari claimed that China works fine with regulating their social media and Nigeria could do the same. There was a backlash from ordinary Nigerians as well as human rights activists, who organized for signatures online to counter the bill. Despite the 90,000 signatures gathered within 24 hours, the bill made it to the level of a second reading in the senate, which shows that quite a number of

legislators were in support of the bill such that it moved a step further for consideration. Some people have strongly criticized the bill, especially members of opposition parties, and the bill may never pass. It is interesting to note that the proposed Nigerian law was found to share many similarities with a Singaporean anti-social media law. However, the senator who proposed the law in Nigeria denied having plagiarized the Singaporean law. As of 2020, Singapore ranks 158 out of 180 countries on the World Press Freedom Index, and Nigeria is number 115 compared to Liberia at number 95. The desire of citizens in nations (like Liberia and Nigeria) that call themselves “democracies” is not for freedom of expression over new media to be circumscribed; rather, the people should expect that their government be like those which champion the cause and expression of democratic freedoms, such as Switzerland, Jamaican, the Netherlands, etc.

My examples so far show some facets of the rhetoric of development in Sirleaf and Weah’s speeches. I examine and analyze how they portrayed themselves and their administrations as agents of development in the discourse of democracy and good governance. At the same time, I explore their representation of factors they distanced themselves from, as factors that breed underdevelopment, factors such as corruption and strife among others. In the next section, I look at other aspects of the rhetoric of development in the SONAs, specifically in relation to forces of globalization: institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the countries that are framed as Liberia’s development partners.

5.3.1 Sirleaf, Development, and Foreign Aid

In relation to wishing to solve African problems without depending solely on western solutions, development scholars like Chiheka (1998) revive the old yet crucial question often debated among political scholars, “What is the national interest which realists consider as a guide to the policy decision maker?” This question raises the issues that African leaders still must contend with since it seems that their policy making is heavily influenced by external forces, which in the long run does not support their national interest but the agenda of the global order. Chiheka does not only raise this question but also suggests a solution to the problem. Chiheka insists that African leaders must strive to achieve “an autonomous self-defined independent development strategy, based on locally derived goals, cohesive national economy and a dynamism freed from subordination to external forces” (p. 3). The argument is that an effective leader will focus on these elements in formulating policies rather than simply employing ritualistic language, that is, something that might sound pleasing to the audience though it has little real reference value. Making promises and alluding abstractly to progress and development is ritualistic language if in reality the status quo is maintained despite the numerous policies, values and beliefs that dominate the presidential rhetoric.

Liberian presidential rhetoric alludes to some of the nation’s foundational issues of freedom and equity. Although Liberia was an American Colonization Society colony governed by settlers (who were U.S. Blacks, Caribbean and U.S. slaves), it was not directly colonized by whites like other African countries. However, black settler rule had similar effects as other types of colonization due to the “discriminatory policies and practices [that] excluded their African majorities from political participation” (Chiheka,

1998, p. 3). The unfair treatment of the indigenous Liberians has been a major cause of internal strife and yearning for a more engaging political system, which would be inclusive of people of non-Americo-Liberian origin. Since the masses have for so long felt like second-class citizens in their own country, with “limited rights” due to exclusion, it is not surprising that the theme of economic growth and development is frequently employed in the rhetoric of politicians. We can see that the discourse is relevant to the Liberian dream. The rhetoric of realizing economic growth and development in the new Liberia should be considered as a foundational discourse, because Liberia was established to achieve all of these goals, which were never fully realized in America where the settlers were coming from (consider the nation’s motto, “The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here,” which was the dream of the settlers). The settlers oppressed the indigenous people to achieve their dream and that is why the rhetoric of realizing economic growth and development is still relevant today to the masses. If anything, Liberia has seen better days in terms of economic development, but the problem then was that the profit from the exploitation of the nation’s resources did not circulate as they ought to, due to the discriminatory practices of the Americo-Liberians.

One key issue Sirleaf addressed in her SONA was security. She indicated that a lack of security would foster underdevelopment. In the following passage, we can observe Sirleaf’s claims and salutation to the agents aiding Liberia’s “success”. Note the countries and the international institution involved (for ease of reference, I underline them). In her discussion on security, she notes that:

The United States has been our key partner in the reform of the sector, particularly the training of the new army, while the United Nations assumed major responsibility for the training of the police force. Important assistance has also been provided from our sisterly countries of Nigeria and Ghana and from China in the training of our Special Security Service. We thank each of these partners who have assured us that they will continue to honor their commitment to this important aspect of our national development endeavor (para. 25).

Sirleaf in the above passage acknowledges security to be crucial for a nation's development. The national security of Liberia is depicted as being dependent on the members of the international community mentioned above. The United States appeared first and then the United Nations, which might indicate a hierarchy of the support Liberia has received. The president classified the United States and the United Nations in one category and the second-class assistance from Nigeria and Ghana, whom she referred to as "sisterly" nations, in another. China, she put in a third category. In the last part of the quoted passage, Sirleaf said those security partners would continue to help to strengthen Liberia's national security, but she did not specify the level of help they would give Liberia in the future. Might there be terms and conditions for receiving such help? That information is omitted from the text. What is the reputation of those assisting with Liberia's security? As the African proverb admonishes, "Be careful if a naked man offers you clothes." Apart from being one of the G7, the United States is known for strong economic and military power, which gives them credibility as Liberia's biggest supporter. Considering the history of U.S.-Liberia relations and Sirleaf's history of study

and career in the United States, it would have been odd if Sirleaf had named another nation as Liberia's major backbone for security.

Security support from foreign partners and other forms of foreign aid are a common thread running through the presidential speeches of Sirleaf and Weah. Even though Sirleaf and Weah pitched foreign aid in their speeches as fostering development, there are some negative aspects to receiving such help. The problems associated with African countries receiving aid have gained significant scholarly attention. Murithi (2009) argues that a major downside to African nations receiving aid is that it impacts African leaders' freedom in making decisions that benefit their people. In other words, they take the foreign support which often has preconditions about how to use it and how to pay it back at the expense of the development of their country. Murithi admits that while aid may seem attractive its conditions are insidious, asserting that:

Aid sustains several African countries but in doing so it deprives them of the autonomy necessary to make decisions that are genuinely in the interests of their people. This gives donors the power and leverage to direct key aspects of the government's economic and political agenda. This means that African governments are effectively surrendering economic policy to international donors and financial institutions. In such circumstances, these African governments can be seen as willing participants in the aid colonization process... Aid packages tend to be filled with conditionalities that perpetuate a kind of paternalism towards the recipient and undermine its autonomy (pp. 4-5).

As much as foreign aid might sound attractive in Liberian presidential rhetoric, in reality it does not always foster robust and deep development. Aid has been problematized by many African scholars as causing more harm than good to developing nations. As discussed above, Murithi argues that countries that depend on aid trade in their freedom for such resources. The following excerpt from Sirleaf's SONA which shows the range of contributions and issues foreign donors engage in with their aid, lends credence to Murithi's argument that African leaders give away their power when they rely on foreign aid:

We are pleased to report that our country continues to enjoy the confidence and support of our international partners. Significant contributions have been made by both the **United States** and **European Commission** of over a hundred million dollars each mainly in security, governance, public financial management, infrastructure, energy, basic social services, community development and repatriation and resettlement. The **World Bank** has **provided** over **US\$80 million** in economic management, infrastructure and community-based programs. Increasing support from our security sector, the DDDR program and Infrastructure development has come from the **United Kingdom**, the Peoples Republic of China, Germany, Norway, France and China has been exceptional in providing a moderate level of direct budgetary support (para. 180).

We are presented the list of donors to Liberia, actors that include the United States, the European Union and the World Bank. Sirleaf overtly expressed how their donation affects literally every sector of the economy, from security to community development. If

Liberia needed that much help back in 2007, the fact that 12 years later Liberia still had a dependency status indicates that foreign aid does not bring development as Sirleaf and Weah represent it to do. Foreign aid seems to help achieve the agenda of the neoliberals as Murithi argued above. Still on the consequences of aid, Moyo (2009) points to the economic function of foreign aid and the negative impacts on the development of many African nations, arguing that more people are thrown into poverty as only certain sectors of the society gain from such help, namely bureaucrats, NGOs, and politicians. Moyo, an international economist (in the calibre of Sirleaf, also having been Harvard-trained and served at the World Bank) claims that aid as an industry benefits just some factions of society and only worsens the situations of aid-receiving countries. Indeed, foreign aid is highly problematic, mainly because the external helpers get to state the terms of such support. Liberia's dependence on foreign aid is typical, as Chilcote (2002) argues, the "[l]ess developed periphery depend on advanced capitalist core" (p .84). This dependence is at the heart of Chilcote's argument that the periphery is again subject to globalization as a new form of imperialism. He explains the relationship and similarities between dependency and imperialism. A significant impact that those two produce, Chilcote observes, is the international situation of unequal or uneven development (p. 83). In the same vein, Callinicos (2007) argues that globalization is an ideological construct that disguises the contemporary forms taken by imperialism. Callinicos asserts that globalization is "intentional and contingent, subject to the control of individuals who represent and seek to advance the interests of a new international capitalist class" (p. 64). An example of Liberia being controlled due to the terms of aid is when Liberia's riot police officers wore "hand-me-down uniforms from the New York City Police

Department” (Cooper, 2017, p. 179). Another instance was evident a few months into Sirleaf’s administration, while she was working to restore Liberia as a creditworthy nation and get their \$4.7 billion debt forgiven. She appealed to the United States as the “largest holder of Liberia’s debt” (Copper, 2017, p. 191). Liberia’s debt was written off, but the United States asked her to turn in Taylor (Liberia’s former head of state, who had been accused of war crimes) in exchange for the favor, which she did. In addition to forgiving Liberia’s debt, “an additional \$50 million in supplemental aid [was awarded to Liberia] as a ‘democracy dividend’” (Copper, 2017, p. 191).

In relation to the impacts of foreign aid on African nations like Liberia, Amin (2009), in his response to Moyo, contends that the discourse of the capitalist class ensures the continuous flow of aid and is characterized by the rhetoric of good governance and the condemnation of corruption. Amin claims that such rhetoric only serves to “obfuscate the real issues,” i.e., of power relations. In other words, the aid granted to Liberia for instance from the United States is a temporary fix but not a genuine response to the deep social, cultural and economic wounds that the nation is nursing. Because Liberian leaders do not get to negotiate as equal partners of development, Amin maintains that they have to take whatever help they are being offered. Next, I take on Weah’s rhetoric of foreign aid.

5.3.2 Weah, Youth, and Unemployment

In comparing Weah’s rhetoric to Sirleaf’s, there are clear differences in their styles and agenda for the nation but there are some overlaps in their framing of developmental projects and conceptions. It is interesting to note that some of the projects started by the Sirleaf administration from 2007 came to fruition just after Weah assumed

office, such as the sports facilities for youth development and the improvement of government vocational training centers. President Weah has the reputation that his administration cares about the young people of Liberia, though Sirleaf did the same, but perhaps not as much as Weah does. He refers to youth 32 times in his 2019 SONA, whereas Sirleaf mentions youth 7 times in her 2007 SONA. Sirleaf's talk about youths was mostly in relation to sports development. Perhaps Weah picked up on this before assuming office, though his lived experiences as a sports person is a much stronger argument for why his speeches are often directed to the youth. Further, Weah was a youth himself when he left Liberia to pursue his passion for soccer, due to the limited opportunities available in the country. In other words, he experienced what it feels like to be an unemployed youth in Liberia. Beyond his experience, the argument he puts forward in the following excerpt from his 2019 SONA is that unemployed youths are likely to cause trouble in the society and they will most likely be involved in illegal activities such as theft and thuggery (young people are often used as mercenaries by politicians, especially during political campaigns and elections):

Our government recognizes that the **young people** of Liberia, as the largest component of our population, hold the ultimate key for the **development** and prosperity of Liberia. We recognize that youth unemployment and the lack of opportunities are not only hindrances to **economic development** and **transformation** but are also potential threats to **national security** (paras. 82-83).

A theme that comes up in the above excerpt is the issue of national security in relation to development. The argument seems to be: tame the youth in order to avoid "threats to

national security.” After all, an idle hand is the devil’s workshop, as the saying goes.

Weah strategically mitigates the fact that vast youth unemployment has not been curbed or even managed, so that it still poses a risk to the welfare of Liberia. In his mitigation, he acknowledges, “recognizing,” the problem but does not say how his administration would go about resolving the issue. The president also omitted to say why unemployment has continued to plague the nation. He is constructing his government linguistically as one where the social actors are empathetic, “our government recognizes” the issue of youth unemployment and the potential crisis that may result from it if the youth are not invested in. Considering that Weah campaigned as a pro-youth president, the government should be held accountable as he did not give a clear indication of a solution in his SONA.

Unemployment has persisted for long without a solution in sight. Using expressions like “our government,” “we” in the exclusive sense indicates that the social actors in this context are those in power. Unfortunately, the effect of their inefficiencies or defectiveness in managing the society affects the masses. For example, youth unemployment in Liberia went from 2.17% in 2018 to 2.12% in 2019, a decrease of only 0.05% (Statista, 2019).

5.3.3 Sirleaf’s and Weah’s Rhetoric of Education

One way that might help change the situation for youth in the nation is education and vocational training, which Weah does propose as a target for foreign aid, framing it as “capacity development”. What is important to note is that on the surface, the [But you need to foreshadow here educational goals (which looks so rosy) is a reflection of the problematic reproduction of the class system within Liberian society as I point out below:

Capacity development for our young people remains a matter of high priority for the government. Our [Technical and Vocational Education and Training] TVET institutions graduated about three thousand (3,000) students, with the Monrovia Vocational Training Center accounting for two thousand seven hundred and nine (2,709) graduates. This was the first graduation since the Ebola crisis. Also, the government has successfully completed negotiations with the **European Union** on the terms of a 20 million Euro grant, which is meant for the **modernization** of seven (7) TVET institutions in the country. The execution of this project has begun with the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization** as implementing partner (paras. 97-98).

From the above passage, Weah's orientation toward Europe as a main development partner stands out, compared to Sirleaf's orientation toward the United States. Weah's background as a professional soccer player in Europe accounts for this attitude.

Portraying the commitment of the government toward Liberian youth, the discursive strategy of intensification "about 3000 students" (instead of giving the actual figures) is employed here to remind the nation that the TVET institutions had not graduated students in the past four years or so since the Ebola crisis began in 2014. We are not sure if that was because education was a lesser priority for the government or simply because of a lack of funds or because people stayed home due to the fear of contracting Ebola. Weah praised his government indirectly by raising the milestone achievement of ensuring the graduation events from the TVET institutions, information intended to reassure Liberians of the kinds of things to expect in the future. The president gave further evidence that they have worked with the European Union to commit more money for the

“modernization” of 7 of the TVET institutes. The mental image that the choice word “modernization” creates is one of advancement, which is related to development. This may be Weah’s strategy of contrasting the present-day facilities of the institution, under his administration, with previous underdeveloped facilities of the previous administration.

As good as the educational goals above look yet the issue of the quality and standards of education in Liberia is important since Sirleaf and Weah in their SONAs focus on education as a way to invest in the youth. Unfortunately, one legacy of colonialism is an educational and infrastructural divide in the Liberian context (just as in many other African countries). Families who can afford it send their children to private schools so that they can get higher value for their money. Those who cannot afford it keep their children in public schools. In Liberia, the Americo-Liberians have the economic capital to give their children good education. They even send them abroad. Sirleaf’s mother and father, who were wards of Americo-Liberian families, benefited from such privilege. Many of the well-to-do in the society, especially politicians, never send their children to local schools. They would rather send their children abroad because they want them to have better lives and be competitive globally. Sirleaf’s sons went to private boarding schools. One of her sons, James Sirleaf, was educated in the United States, earning his medical degree from Meharry Medical College, Nashville, Tennessee. He practices as a medical doctor in the United States. Weah’s children were raised abroad, too, and two of his sons were professional soccer players in Europe, just like their father. It is difficult if not impossible for the masses to afford good education due to the weak value of the Liberian dollar. Only those with access to significant social and

economic capital can afford the luxury of having their children in a university in the United Kingdom or the United States, the most popular study destinations for Anglophone Africans.

When the educational and capacity development policies are viewed from a point of view that is not neoliberal, it is more obvious that it looks like the approaches of Presidents Sirleaf and Weah are simply elite projects that maintain the social divide. These leaders are, in a sense, upholding the elite while on the surface they are presenting the actions of the government (accepting foreign aid) as an intervention on the behalf of the masses. It may look good to present the graduation rates from the state-owned vocational centers, considering the high level of illiteracy in the nation. Yet, the rhetoric of education deployed by politicians equates going to school with success and says nothing about facilitating the transition from training into jobs which still remain scarce.

In Liberia, the educated middle class is composed primarily of Americo-Liberians. Their reputation as the educated population, nonetheless, comes with a negative connotation. These “book people” are seen as the oppressors since they take the best jobs and occupy enviable positions in society. The belief about the elites as both highly educated and untrustworthy is still held by the masses. Thus, the appeal to education might be another way for the government to create the illusion that ordinary Liberians can also rise if they become educated. But President Weah did not bother to discuss education in detail for the obvious reasons that he became successful in the area of sports. His recent college education at DeVry University (Miami campus), where he earned a Business Administration degree (2007-2011), is probably a credentialing effort

meant to make him as competitive as other presidential candidates. In other words, it was for political reasons. Hence, his talk about education may not be convincing to many of the youths who believe that education may not be the way to success in the Liberian context. Weah himself does not represent success reached by the pathway of education, which is probably why he is the one talking of alternative skills that youths must possess in order to contribute to the development of the nation.

David (1984) explains how the social divide between the educated elite and the illiterate masses came to be, from the 19th century, in the era of the settlers. David also speaks to a divide within the settler community as not all of them were educated:

Emigrant society consisted, from the foundation of the colony, of distinct social strata which roughly corresponded to education, occupation and to some extent skin color. Free-born emigrants, a large number of whom were mixed race, were usually literate to some extent and mostly worked as traders and artisans in Eastern cities in the United States. A few had accumulated enough money to bring small amounts to Liberia. A small group of West Indians and Creoles from Sierra Leone, who were generally professionally trained, also formed part of the settler elite. Former slaves, (the dark-skinned emigrants), who formed a majority after the 1830's were on the whole illiterate, although some were semi-skilled artisans (p. 61).

David argues that class and ethnic domination started when Liberia was still a colony, before it gained independence. David stresses the role of class hierarchy as a dominant factor in maintaining the inequalities of the Liberian society starting back in the 19th

century. These demographics have largely been maintained over time. These demographics has largely persisted over time although there are indigenous Liberians who have become successful through education and businesses. Yet both local elites and the forces of imperialism contribute to the underdevelopment and inequality that has endured for so long in Liberia. The state became a tool in the hands of elites to push their own agenda. But consideration must also be given to the fact that external forces, the United States, European merchants, neighboring African nations, fostered the exigence that promoted the unequal social relations internally within Liberia.

Sirleaf's priority and strategy of development in the quotations, a and b, below are more instances from her 2007 SONA where she linked education to development and also to foreign aid. Note that Sirleaf's emphasis on the "girl child" and "women" is a language of inclusion strategically used by her throughout her administration. While attempting to push education as a means of empowerment, the president also overtly attacks the idea of favoring the boy child over the girl, which is a huge cultural issue and a mark of how patriarchy has eaten deep into Liberian society. There are many dividing lines on the education of girls around the world, especially in developing countries, and Sirleaf shows her awareness of the issue:

- a) As all of us are aware, our civil conflict left the **educational** infrastructure of our nation in shambles thus creating a situation in which most young people of school-going age were constrained to adopt a distorted logic of the essence of education. As we strive for national reconstruction and renewal, education of all of the children of this country, especially the neglected girl child, must occupy a

place second to no other national priority. This is because our **democracy** cannot be **advanced** when the majority of our citizenry is functionally illiterate, lacks the knowledge, and skills require to lead our national efforts, or unable to compete in an increasingly interconnected and **global community** (para. 7).

- b) Meetings and statements at several universities set entrain a process that will result in scholarships and training opportunities for our people, while visits with private financial institutions and foundations have enabled us to mobilize some US\$5 million to support our girls' **education and market improvement goals** (para. 189).

Sirleaf's argument in passage (a) above is an opportunity for her to push her perception about education and how it should be adopted as a means for moving the nation forward. This idea was pushed to the people while the president blamed the war (an event) and the people who are against educating girls or who see western education as less important than traditional skills as holding Liberia back from development. She identified the social actors responsible for underdevelopment as an event and a set of people. First, Sirleaf made her argument by making use of the deictic "we" and "our" to present the issue as a national one on which citizens must cooperate with the government to foster a change. My assertion is that Sirleaf is trying to change the national orientation about education and thus persuade her audience to join her camp, as the issue affects everyone. She asserted that with "our nation in shambles" "we" need education for "national reconstruction." Thus, the agenda is to push education as a national priority. What is interesting to note about the use of "we" and "our democracy" is that Sirleaf is a highly successful economist who has worked with different international organizations and even

served as a finance minister in the past but now, as president, the people's problem has become hers, hence the use of "we" and "our," which refer to the national Liberian identity. This may be read as a scenario where she sets aside her personal identity and appeals to the people as a Liberian rather than as president who knows it all and must impose on other people the way to go about things. In actuality, the people may have their hands tied if the legislation works in the way government wishes to sideline the "illiterates." This is because indigenous education is not regarded in this context even though that definitely has a role it plays and what it can contribute in matters of national development. The idea being pushed here is that Liberia's common enemies are the war and those who do not believe in the power of education. What she does not say is "I am a living proof," but there is a presupposition that gives her the credibility to make such an argument, not just because of her role as president but because of her lived experience as a career woman, e.g., working for the World Bank. However, as pointed out above, education and class privilege are what seems to work better in a context like Liberia. Sirleaf, for one, is a product of privilege, as seen in her memoir and autobiography. Without good relationships with key people in positions of power, Sirleaf would not have risen as far as she did in life.

Furthermore, Sirleaf shows an awareness of young Liberian's attitude towards education, which she refers to as a "distorted logic." The so-called distorted logic is equally a global phenomenon due to the deteriorating living conditions and impacts of globalization that continually perpetuate uneven development. A problem seems to be how Sirleaf frames education: was she referring to young people who are idle because of a lack of opportunities or those not interested in doing much with their lives? In reality,

young people are beginning to question the logic of education without job opportunities. If we take the case of Liberia, for instance, the state has a long history of mismanagement of funds such that allocations to develop the living conditions of the average people do not seem to trickle down sufficiently to help the people most in need. The discouraging situation contributes to the poor attitudes of youth toward education. In addition, many people resort to local economies of trade and businesses, which do not often require formal education, as a quick means of meeting their daily needs and those of their families. Formal education takes time, money, and energy and there are no guarantees that the graduates will get jobs on completing their education. So, until the government creates the right conditions, the attitude towards education will continue to deteriorate.

Lastly, it is pertinent to ask whether Sirleaf could be absolving her government of failure when she alludes to the inability of Liberian youths to compete globally. In describing the world as “interconnected,” she blamed the lack of education as an enemy. Implicit in such a claim is the view that government was ready to empower the people through education, spending the different funds secured through foreign aid and grants to build the education sector. It would then be possible to argue that it is the ripple effect of illiteracy that is keeping Liberian citizens from achieving higher job success as compared to youths in other African countries and globally. By making such an argument, Sirleaf is promoting the idea of globalization as a means of development.

As discussed in chapter two, political scholars like Young (2002) and Chilcote (2002) have problematized the assumption that globalization helps developing nations to

“catch up” with advanced nations. We need to interrogate which pieces of the puzzle are missing, making education not seem worthwhile to the youth in Liberia. Is it continued dependence on foreign aid, misappropriation of funds, or is it a problematic distribution of formal education opportunities that fails to meet the needs of Liberians? What is needed is a locally-adapted and globally-infused educational system, not a mere copying and pasting of what is being done elsewhere. This is all the more the case because of the jaundiced perception of the educated elites and how education seems to have been a tool of perpetuating social inequalities in the Liberian context. It will take some effort and time to improve literacy levels and the quality of education among the masses but only if the government—not just one administration—is interested and invested in bringing about such a change. For example, although Weah continues with the rhetoric of education, his lack of focus on bringing education to girls may be taken as a case of lack of continuity of “fundamental projects” hampering social development.

Also, one thing that is always relevant is the digital divide: who can afford to buy or use computers and smart phones that can connect to the internet? Who has the sustained electricity to power such devices? Digital technologies can work very well—if one is trained to use them, but access is highly stratified in some contexts. The line that is often pushed is that technological and media advancement are positive because they aid the visibility of the global south, with the use of social media offering communities a platform for online engagement and expression. Instantaneous media systems and social media have made advocating for a cause increasingly easier since information exchange can be disseminated faster. On a deeper level, however, the question of who is heard and

how much subversion of the forces of globalization the subaltern can achieve remains largely unanswered.

While there have been online social movements originating in the global south that rise to the top of the global agenda, such as #BringBackOurGirls, the norm in the digital sphere seems to be movements started in the global north that then flow to the south, such as #MeToo, #WomensMarch. A movement dynamic was activated in Liberia during the June 2019 protests. The outcome of those efforts might make one question the effectiveness of online movements in the developing world. Liberians had been preparing and organizing protests against the government for several months.

Along the way, president Weah threatened his critics. The protesters depended on social media to disseminate information during the protests and show the world what was going on in Liberia. Unfortunately, President Weah Weah's reaction was to shut down the internet to stifle adverse commentary against him. The president's action supports the fact that his administration can barely tolerate criticism. The June 2019 protests received global attention but so far Weah has not been sanctioned or called out by other world leaders for the repressive acts, for undermining human rights. The protest was solely to contest the falling standards of living and economic stagnancy in the nation. The protest efforts were sabotaged by the government who feared the people's complaints. This brings me to question the extent to which online engagement and expressions of grievances through digital media might initiate change, causing the government to rethink their actions.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter is a review of presidential discourses and the rhetorical functions of presidential speeches in the Liberian context. I describe the elements that I am interested in in the speeches of Sirleaf and Weah: their values, ideologies, rhetorical and linguistic representations, their conceptualizations of what development is and what it is not. I attempt to link the discourses they started in their IAs, their self-representation and persuasion strategies, to how they have transitioned or shifted in their SONAs, a year into their administrations. The problem is not the lack of development discourse but the reality of using such discourse for mere rhetorical purposes. Through my analysis, we have seen that in the speeches of Liberian presidents development is synonymous with democratic values, effective infrastructure, education, health facilities etc., while underdevelopment is linked to corruption, imperialism, violence, and injustice etc. My argument in this chapter is that Liberian presidents, for a fact co-opt neoliberal discourses but only to support the agenda of the current global order that ensures that countries like Liberia remain poor. In chapter six, I will discuss the irony of the discourse of development in the texts I analyze and other implications of Liberian presidential rhetoric.

6 Chapter Six - Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I analyze the language of development and offer a thematic analysis of Liberian presidential inaugural addresses (IAs) and state of the nation addresses (SONAs). The in-depth analysis in the previous chapter helps me connect the multilayered discourses, some of which are implicit in my data. I have also been able to contrast the language and rhetoric employed by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and George Manneh Weah with realities within Liberian society. In this chapter, I discuss the implications of my findings and give suggestions for future research in the field of political discourse, presidential rhetoric, especially in the African context.

My research reveals that leadership in the context of Liberia is replete with complexities, some of which have been present since the foundation of the nation. Examining the relationship between language and politics is my primary approach to making sense of the complexities of a post-conflict Liberia. Language is key and cannot be underestimated as a vehicle for solving the puzzle of emerging trends among social actors in Liberia. Olonisakin's concept of an "unromantic context" comes to mind when theorizing the political history of Liberia. The phrase refers to the "realities of the human conditions in places [where] daily survival is not easily predictable" (Olonisakin, 2018, Inaugural lecture online). She argues that an unromantic situation does not just happen, it is often a result of mismanagement, and it escalates into violence. Liberia's recent and current political climate may slowly erode back into an "unromantic context" if the rhetoric of development continues to be employed without careful consideration of its

implications. The reactions of Liberians to their presidential rhetoric indicates that the people are fed up with empty rhetoric, wanting actions to back up political promises.

In my research, I have investigated the values of recent presidents of Liberia after studying the nation's political and social history. Since presidential rhetoric is a window into understanding and critiquing issues of relations of power within the institution of politics and the state, I have employed an interdisciplinary approach which is beneficial in unraveling and understanding not just leadership styles but the cognitive values of the leaders, the people's attitude towards government, and the people's expectations (see Chilton & Schaffner, 2002), which are sometimes realistic and at other times unrealistic. That is why van Dijk (2016) asserts that a sociocognitive lens is necessary to reveal the links between a language user's identity and their society, which is beneficial for dissecting discourse structures and social structures.

The overall goal of my research and analyses has been to interrogate the relationship between identity and leadership, and to understand the concept of development as used by politicians in Liberia, and if politicians are able to deliver the promise of development. By using linguistic and rhetorical tools, Sirleaf and Weah staged themselves and performed in the space "designed for the public" (Wodak, 2012, p. 525) as seeking the best for their nation. Wodak's (2012) theory of "performing politics" is valuable as a tool to examine what politicians do. Equally valuable is Goffman's (1959) critical question, invoked by Wodak, "what happens when politicians do not have an audience, does the discourse on the backstage match the performance on the frontstage?" (p. 525). The perspective of performing politics indicates that reality may be different.

That is why the rhetoric of development in Liberia, for example, is flawed given the actuality of the social context. I argue, relying on globalization theorists, that Liberia's dependency status in the global economy is a strong link between her reality of poverty and natural resources wealth.

6.2 The Significance of Studying the Rhetoric of Development

Sen (1999) argues that development must be thought of in terms of freedom, such that when individuals are constrained by social, cultural, political and economic issues, they cannot achieve the freedom that ultimately leads to development. Development is relational in the sense that the “force of social influence” (p. xii) determines the level of freedom or development an individual or a group can attain. The central leitmotif in the presidential speeches I study and analyze is the promise of progress and development, be that in terms of reconciliation as a society, the practice of democracy, good motorable roads, free education, increases in salaries or even decentralization of government. It all boils down to one form of “development” or the other. However, for such development to materialize, there must be a collective commitment and investment to remove the stumbling blocks of underdevelopment on the part of the state, private institutions, public interest groups and the citizens as a whole. I use the word “collective” because there must be links between the different forms of freedoms or development for a people to exercise their agency to the fullest. Also, there is a misconception that the necessary change that will result in the desired development, that a state like Liberia needs, can only come from the top. In reality, contributions at all levels of society, from top to bottom, are required since many cultural and societal practices hinder freedoms, too.

It should be noted that exclusion has always posed problems for development. In essence, the vague idea of development is thrown at the people by social actors, like the state and civil society, as if all citizens had the same rights and privileges, when in fact there is a multilayered hegemony inherent in the levels of citizenship. Pailey (2019), speaking to the Liberian situation, argues that citizenship does not guarantee equal membership rights. She reveals that practices of exclusion of women, non-settlers, non-Christians and non-Blacks were imposed constitutionally at the creation of Liberia. While only the last group are theoretically still excluded as citizens of Liberia, the practices of the government and those at the helm of affairs reveal a different story. As Cooper (2017) points out, for example, in 1969 Liberia under President Tubman was a two-tiered society:

Most of Liberia's available jobs were low-paid service positions: houseboys and cooks and drivers in the homes of the wealthy foreigners or Congo families, rubber tappers on Firestone's numerous plantations, messengers and hustlers whose daily bread depended they picked up on [the streets of Monrovia] (p. 21).

The strained interactions between the different social strata prevailed until the coup d'état by Samuel Doe in 1980 who promised freedom for the native Liberians. Even if we argue that there has been a disruption to those two-tiered relations, in terms of citizens being more active in how they relate with each other and the state, yet what is obtainable today in Liberia is still unevenly distributed wealth because most high paying jobs require education, and cultural or social connections are still not available to those on the lower end of the economic ladder. In fact, there has been proof that nepotism and favoritism are

still the order of the day in Liberian society: citizens have to lobby for positions and know “the right people” to help them get jobs, contracts and so on.

Pailey and Williams (2017) note that relevant issues of favoritism, which continued to be a problem in the Sirleaf administration, are not new to the state system in Liberia. Sirleaf was accused of openly legitimizing nepotism for appointing three of her sons to strategic government offices and more painfully for the “failure in fighting corruption”. Ironically, in the 70s, while serving as the finance minister, Sirleaf represented the “conscience” of the government while serving as a public servant with the Tubman and Tolbert administrations. Though she enjoyed elite privileges, a beneficiary of “Congo” life, she openly criticized the government she worked for as practicing kleptocracy while paying lip service to native Liberians on the factors excluding them from active participation, politically and economically (see Cooper, 2017; Sirleaf, 2009). Sirleaf was right to choose to support fairness in the interactions between the citizens and the state. That was why it so surprised Liberians that she relapsed into the old politics in some ways, similar to what Cooper (2017) remembers of Liberia in the 1970s. President Tolbert certainly began his tenure saying all the right things about opening up the government. He talked of a new Liberia that was no longer the fief of the wealthy Americo-Liberian elite. But he installed one brother as the minister of finance, another brother was president pro tempore of the senate, a cousin was mayor of Monrovia, another cousin was assistant minister of finance (p. 29). Spouting populist rhetoric continues to be used for political goals. If Tolbert had been true to his promises to make Liberia a more equal society, he would have been remembered differently.

Unfortunately, Tolbert's administration goes down in history for empty populist rhetoric combined with anti-equity practices.

The current Liberian government is similar, with Weah's pro-poor agenda. Weah's actions a few months into his presidency belie his rhetoric of being a pro-poor president. For example, he failed to declare his assets for months and when he could no longer withstand the pressure mounted on him by the public, he released a statement of his assets, but attached a confidentiality clause such that the public could not access the information. It is interesting that he is not comfortable with being transparent with the nation even though he is the one who promised in his IA to "narrow the gap between the poor and the rich" (2018, para. 33). Furthermore, a personal resort project pushed by Weah progressed rapidly, while public housing and healthcare facilities moved at a snail's pace (Fayehun, 2019).

A major factor responsible for underdevelopment is inadequate and poor infrastructure. A key example is the failure to improve healthcare infrastructure despite the experience with Ebola between 2014 and 2016. In 2020, during the COVID pandemic, the vice president of Liberia, Jewel Taylor, contracted COVID and had to be flown to Ghana for treatment due to the lack of adequate health facilities in Liberia. One would have imagined that with the recurrent calls for "development" so prevalent in presidential speeches, much investment would have gone towards improving the health sector, but that is not the case. It was as if the government did not learn from the devastating impacts of Ebola. Since even developed countries were overwhelmed by the COVID pandemic, how much more a struggling economy like Liberia?

Weah's possession of a personal resort in the first place indicates his wealth and stylish lifestyle, which he suppressed so much in his rhetoric just to present himself as being close to the masses. The building of a luxurious presidential lounge which he mentioned in his SONA is another indication of a huge mismatch of priorities. However, while Tolbert was born Americo-Liberian, Weah comes from those humbler native Liberian roots, and "worked and fought" his way into the Congo ruling life. It is therefore not a new thing for politicians to try to persuade the masses by claiming to be a part of them whether by blood or by affiliation. What is also not new was how Sirleaf planted "trusted" people, family and friends, in high government positions.

Furthermore, a careful analysis of political affairs shows that flawed political practices, such as gross mismanagement of state resources and the absence of effective checks and balances, keep countries like Liberia poor (Transparency International, 2020). It is common knowledge that state agents easily get away with grave offences like corruption, to the detriment of the populace. Even when some offenders are removed from office, the money they have managed to syphon off stays theirs, in some offshore account, and never returns to the public purse. In some cases, corrupt government officials get light jail sentences and are quickly released, which leaves them free and wealthy. Seeing such injustice over and over again reinforces the popular conception that government office is a means to steal public resources with little or no consequences.

It is not by coincidence that both Sirleaf and Weah tried to convince Liberians that they would not tolerate corruption in their respective administrations—it is because corruption had become synonymous with systems of government in Liberia and had

eroded mores. Cooper (2017) claims that Sirleaf did not dismantle corruption in her administration. “The contrast between Madame [Sirleaf]’s lofty words of intolerance for corruption and the reality of her officials’ actions was stark, and very quickly the euphoria and high expectations of her election gave way to disappointment and a sense that in Liberia, business as usual would always continue as business as usual” (pp. 184-185). Several members of her cabinet: the Information Minister, Lawrence Bropleh, the Internal Affairs Minister, A. B. Johnson, and the Chief of Police, Beatrice Sieh, were all accused and evidently took hundreds of thousands of dollars of government funds for their personal use. President Weah, in turn, was accused of funding his personal estates and resorts while government projects suffered (Fayehun, 2019). According to the 2020 Corruption Perception Index, Liberia had a score of 28 out of 100, a low score indicating the widespread assumption that the government was corrupt, with a concurrent low ranking of 137 among 187 countries evaluated for transparency of governmental action (Transparency International, 2020).

The details of the Charles Sirleaf scandal might be relevant here. In September 2018 when Weah had taken office after Sirleaf’s presidency, a scandal threatened to tarnish her image. There was news of her son, Charles Sirleaf, being involved in the theft of printed bank notes worth over \$100 million. Charles Sirleaf worked as a deputy governor of Liberia’s Central Bank during his mother’s administration, and he was accused of mishandling public money because he printed three times more money than he was authorized to do. According to a report by Aljazeera (2019), the criminal court in Monrovia charged Charles Sirleaf, along with some others, “with the commission of economic sabotage, misuse of public money, property or records and theft and or illegal

disbursement and expenditure of public money and criminal conspiracy” (para. 5). The corruption scandal rocked Weah’s administration as Liberians vehemently showed their dissatisfaction with the abysmal economic situation in the country by taking to the streets and protesting en masse. One interesting but sad thing to note about the protests was how they revealed that Weah had become unpopular within just a year in office. He was called a “generational traitor” by the youth wing of his political party. That shows their level of disappointment compared to how they had seen him when he was newly elected. One placard in the protest read, “Pres Sirleaf & Weah, bring back our 16 L\$ billions [\$100 million].” How Sirleaf and Weah were categorized together may be a revelation that Liberians had lost faith in their leaders, such that they think they are all corrupt.

President Weah did not succeed in stopping the protests. So, in his 2019 SONA he attempted to pacify Liberians by reporting that his government had employed external bodies to investigate the fraud. In March 2019, Charles Sirleaf was found guilty and jailed but was later released on bail. President Weah expressed some relief with the progression of the case:

I wanted the Liberian people [to] know that we are transparent. Whatever happens from [the] findings, we will follow it because, in the process of getting information, a lot of things do come out. When everything is done, I hope Liberia will be in peace and people will not take to the streets again” (Aljazeera, 2019).

Liberians continued to protest as they wanted to know what happened to the missing money. However, Aljazeera reported that the U.S. agency that investigated the case could not determine what exactly happened to the printed notes.

Beside stealing from the public purse, other oppressive practices had long loomed in Liberia, which made Sirleaf in her 2007 SONA stress that “The days of the imperial presidency, of an intrusive leadership, and of a domineering and threatening Chief Executive are over in Liberia” (para. 68). Sirleaf in her statement painted past practices as not acceptable, speaking from a democratic point of view. She went on to state that her plan was to make sure Liberians experienced peace, living freely without any fear of the government encroaching on their rights. She promised them freedom from oppression and domination of the almighty “Chief Executive,” as had been the case in the past. Though some would argue that those oppressive conditions still held during Sirleaf’s time in office, Liberians freely aired their criticisms without ever being threatened by the government. Unfortunately, the 2020 Democracy Index report, published by the Economist Intelligence Unit shows that from 2019 Liberia slipped into a hybrid regime under President Weah. They define hybrid regimes as nations characterized by gross corruption, political intimidation (of opposition), media oppression and harassment, poor governance (structure and performance) among other issues that threaten a functioning democracy (Democracy Index, 2015). In other words, hybrid regimes characterize political systems that exhibit a mixture of autocracy and democracy.

As shown in chapters two and five, social actors adopt the neoliberal agenda such that the burden of meaningful development (given its varied forms) falls more on the shoulders of leaders or elites. However, citizens have a role to play as well. Often, what has been observed is a resistance to change when a leader takes office: people cry out for change but, too often, they are quick to oppose anything that requires them to step out of their comfort zones. For example, one of the main entrepreneurial sources of income for

native Liberians, historically, has been roadside trading by women. This is still a major enterprise for women today. A few months into Sirleaf's administration, a major effort was put into revamping the capital city, Monrovia, due to its dysfunctional state. Cooper (2017) further notes that apart from the failure to diversify the economy, the talk of improving the quality of lives of the masses was only a sham. No proper system had been put in place at the end of the civil conflict in 2003. Cooper reports that market stores were a serious need because the activities of traders frequently interfered with traffic flow in the city. Market women were simply taking over the roads. But when market stores were eventually built, Monrovia traders refused to move from their old spaces to the new stalls. They persisted in old ways and were not ready to adopt the new system. Cooper confirms that the market women definitely added to Sirleaf's headache by refusing to do the logical thing. After the initial cordial communication from government officials, some force had to be applied before the market women complied with the arrangement. This illustrates the necessity for collective citizen responsibility, which ideally should complement government efforts. If citizens are used to lawlessness, they will find new structures uncomfortable. Even in cases when those structures are logical, citizens may frustrate the government's efforts.

Liberian society is evolving in many ways because not only active social actors are capable of influencing opinions and decisions. Pailey (2019) confirms the multilayered nature of citizenship. She submits that the passivity associated with "Liberian citizenship" from its founding until the early twentieth century, the Liberia that used to exist as an hegemony of the top echelon, has been subverted due to resistance from citizens of Liberia both at home and in diaspora and their descendants. She asserts

that “late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century citizenship has been largely construed as active and reconstructed ‘from below’ by citizens themselves, primarily through processes of contestation” (p. 825). As much as Pailey’s work contends with the old conceptualization of citizenship, the new framework has not given much to Liberians, especially those stuck at home, who do not have the resources and connections to live a decent life. All they have is a slightly changed perception of what it means to belong to or be affiliated with Liberia, supposedly evolved from passivity to activity. What is missing is more concrete resources that will enable the citizens to play active parts in society. I agree with Pailey that the underlying conflicts surrounding the perceptions of identities within Liberia can be traced back to the creation of the nation. The civil unrest of 1989-2003, she argues, transformed Liberia from an immigration state into one of emigration, since citizens needed to flee for security and economic purposes. This further adds to the complex rubrics of Liberian citizenship. It has only been in the post-war years, after 2003, that practices, identities and relationships between people and people, and people and society has attained multiple reconceptualizations, reflecting the active role citizens are currently taking in engaging with their nation, regardless of their diverse locations. This sentiment can be justified by the series of protests that Liberia has witnessed in recent years both during Sirleaf’s time in office and since Weah became president.

Unfortunately, this is threatened by Weah’s administration being less tolerant of criticisms by citizens (as discussed in chapter five). Nevertheless, the peaceful women’s demonstrations in Liberia for several months in 2003 and their open letter to the government (see chapter three) that contributed to Taylor’s resignation from office in 2003, and the resistance of Liberian protesters in June 2019 (despite the shutdown of

social media by Weah) are instances of radical acts of political participation by citizens who might formerly have been passive. These events gained visibility and backing from international agencies because they recognized the strength of such grassroots movements. These two events indicate the potential of grassroots movements to challenge the government and demand their rights, which are important steps in realizing meaningful change.

Development will continue to evolve and be re-negotiated in contexts like Liberia, nonetheless some structures must be put in place to aid the level of progress that Liberian citizens yearn for.

6.3 Neoliberalism and the Implications of the Rhetoric of Development

Liberia in the 21st century has recorded some remarkable achievements, including putting an end to two civil wars, voting into office a female president, subduing Ebola, producing two Nobel Peace Prize recipients, and ensuring the peaceful transition of political power to a younger generation. However, these achievements are marred by political, social and cultural problems.

From studying Liberian society, it is apparent that the socially shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies toward class, ethnicity and western values reveal the thinking of Liberians in relation to the kinds of discourses being produced, reproduced and negotiated by political actors on developmental issues. Be it in political, economic, social or in religious matters, the western model has been the model from which Liberians tend

to draw their inspiration. The internalized western aspirations of the state and the people continue to inform and shape local interactions in contemporary Liberia.

Due to her positionality in the global order, Liberia experiences unequal power relations with countries in the global north. At the same time, the masses in Liberia suffer exclusions and unhealthy domination by the state. These unhealthy factors have been argued to have contributed to the civil unrest experienced in the past. History could repeat itself if things do not improve. In a nutshell, some form of inequality, whether internal or external, is the main factor that is responsible for underdevelopment and crisis.

Since this dissertation is grounded in critical discourse studies (CDS), I have followed the critical aspects of the field, which require addressing social “wrongs,” in other words any forms of oppression, injustice, marginalization (Fairclough, 2013, 2016; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016; Machin & Mayr, 2012). With the investigations and findings in my dissertation, my research contributes to the emancipatory efforts of citizens who dream of true democracy and leaders who mean well for the people; thus, my critique should be viewed as signifying “some of the concepts that are influential in explaining social phenomena are false or ignore something significant. In this sense critical research is oriented towards the reduction of illusion in society itself” (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p. 7). It is critical to shed light on how political language often hides and misconstrues social realities, which means that much is lost on the part of the masses who remain under the sway of the discourses and practices of the elites.

My intention for interrogating the discourse of development has been to reveal the many implicit contradictions and misrepresentations that may underlie the discourse and

rhetoric of politicians as a pathway to help those who are disadvantaged by that rhetoric to see how they might overcome these misrepresentations but ultimately it is my hope that my work is not viewed as one that blindly criticizes politicians without putting situations in proper perspective. There seems to be a lack of political freedom and will among social actors. In theorizing the social practices of Liberian presidents, I cannot help but ask whether it could be the case that the hands of Liberian leaders are tied due to their positionality in the global order. The current dependency structure of Liberia ultimately plays a fundamental role in the limited extent to which social, economic, political and other reforms transform Liberia.

As I argue in this dissertation, especially in my analysis of the last and current Liberian presidential administrations:

- a) Through linguistic analysis, I have revealed issues of power and relational discourses in a young democratic nation. Through a study of the discourses (thematic and specific) employed by Sirleaf and Weah, I have highlighted the evolution of Liberia in the post-conflict era. Through the examination of speeches, I have demonstrated how the trajectories of Sirleaf and Weah all connect the traces of Liberia's growth (fulfilling the contextual information step of discourse historical analysis, see Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).
- b) Through employing a heuristic approach to analyzing the linguistic discursive strategies in Liberian presidential discourse, I recognize the dialectical relationship between issues and discourses presented in my data. I examine the rhetorical situations related to the themes in my data, which helped in locating the

rhetorical agency (of Sirleaf and Weah). This helps contextualize the specific extent of Liberian rhetoric of development rather than making generalizations in analyses.

- c) In examining the relationship between globalization and politics, I have demonstrated that Liberian presidential discourse is heavily laced with themes of globalization, particularly “development,” which I have argued is neoliberal propaganda. The social order and global order impede Liberia’s positionality as a dependent nation to move up the global ladder such that it can attain the kinds of progress that will significantly improve the lives of its citizens. The discourse of development, including that on good governance, seems to largely be a means to an end for the social actors, an incentive to access funds that take away major freedoms from countries like Liberia (Abbas, 2009; Moyo, 2009).

6.4 Gender and Women in Leadership

The historic rise of Sirleaf as Liberia’s first (and Africa’s) first freely elected female democratic president implies that gender is a relevant factor in this discussion. With more success on women’s rights and inclusion in public spaces in society in general, researchers have moved on to interrogating and theorizing the discourses of female leaders around the world especially in the field of politics (see Baxter, 2018; Tripp, 2013). Researchers in the field of language and rhetoric are paying attention to the dialectical relationship between language, power, gender, politics, exigencies, culture etc. While much work has been done on subjects in the western contexts, scholars from the non-western contexts (including the author of this dissertation) are rising to the challenge of not imposing euro-centric theories on their society but rather putting into consideration

the diversity and culture on the African continent, such that the specifics of each African society analyzed must be acknowledged in their research (examples include Atanga et al, 2013; Diabah, 2011; Kammoun, 2015) who all have analyzed political discourse in postcolonial Africa. More recently such scholars are paying more attention to the discourses of female politicians in Africa, due to the increasing number of women in political spaces, coupled with the discourses of social movements such as women's movements, feminist movements and other human rights movements that advocate for inclusion and justice for all.

That being said, we must also be aware that Sirleaf faced opposition to her government from people who were ideological fellow travelers. In their reflections on Sirleaf's legacy, Pailey and Williams (2017) highlighted some of the contradictions that characterized her administration. Pailey and Williams blame Sirleaf's administration for not supporting gender-equity advocate politicians, considering that Sirleaf supposedly stood for women's empowerment. Sirleaf had promised to practice an inclusionary system of government, especially promoting women's participation in public offices. She said, "my administration shall empower Liberian women in all areas of our national life," a declaration that had been internationally celebrated. However, at the end of her two terms, the number of women in government offices had not significantly increased. But more importantly, Sirleaf's supporters were disappointed that "her 12-year presidency has served the interests of a small, elite group of women and men in politics and thus upheld long-standing patriarchal norms in Liberia" (p. 3). While it is true that Sirleaf's campaign and inaugural claims of empowering women created high expectations for her administration to take concrete steps towards aggressively fighting

patriarchy, we must also consider that there are conflicts of interests and disputes that occurs within any ingroup: as much as the women's movements primarily work for the emancipation of women, there are other ideological issues that stand in the way of their mission.

Some of these ideological conflicts in the context of Liberia have been addressed by Gbowee (2011). Gbowee recalls her experience of being attacked by those she had considered as friends and allies within the women's movement. They turned their backs on her. They claimed she was trying to outshine them. Later on, she got a name for the "syndrome" she had experienced: Gloria Steinem, the American feminist called it "pull her down" (p. 199). I do not agree with the claim that all women working together have the same agenda and necessarily agree on the same issues. This aspect should have been addressed by Pailey and Williams rather than projecting an ideological homogeneity among female leaders.

Unfortunately, the Weah government chose not to focus on women's emancipation, except for the office of the first lady that deals with women and children's issues. Perhaps if there was continuity between different government administrations, there might be less frustration about the failures of government.

6.5 Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have argued for an interdisciplinary approach by employing critical discourse studies for its constitutive, problem-oriented nature (see chapter one). Van Dijk (1998) supports the claim that the multidisciplinary nature of critical discourse

studies accommodates both micro and macro phenomena (syntactic elements and linguistic functions) in political discourse.

I have followed through by not only identifying problematics of Liberia's political discourses and presidential rhetoric as analyzed in my data but also revealing the unequal power relations apparent in the global order. With the awareness of the relations between discourse and reality, my work revealed how actors assign and derive knowledge from the discursive contexts in which they are enmeshed. This approach falls in line with the argument of Jager and Maier (2016) that the validity of knowledge includes actors' location in history, class relations, culture, etc. The tense and delicate relations that have existed among different groups in Liberian society are once again revisited and caution is given on how to prevent future civil unrest as the people's quest for freedom is more desperate than ever before.

Based on Searle's (1969) classic work, *Speech Acts*, we are aware that uttering "linguistic communication involves linguistic acts" (p. 16). However, the linguistic act does not just end with the production of words and symbols but in "the performance of the speech act" Searle argues (p. 16). This means the rule of speech act theory is flouted if actions do not follow linguistic utterances. This is true when promises are made and are not fulfilled as in the context of politics. Some political analysts have argued that campaign or political acts have an end goal, which is to get elected into office, and that is why it is a norm for politicians not to bother in striving to push for meaningful development for the people, as in the Liberian context. The contradiction noticed between the linguistic style and strategies at IAs and SONAs is an indication that so much gets

lost and omitted as the years go by in terms of how politicians shift their focus, and what comes to occupy their priority list. There is a sharp contrast between talking about plans, reforms, policies and actually going a step further to realizing them. The question about politics will arise, which is not addressed by Searle's speech act theory, but it must be noted that speech act fallacy includes and is not limited to when there is a lack of consistency with the standard connotation with a word or sentence (p. 138). For example, given that the terms "progress," "development," "freedom" have positive connotations, when the electorates are exposed to discourses filled with such words, they may be persuaded through common sense, thinking that the literal occurrence of the word will lead to its performance.

My intent has been not to examine simply some political speeches, but to interrogate more generally the structures of political discourse in Liberia, using CDS to shed light on the power relations among different social groups in Liberia (indigenous groups, ethnicities, genders etc.), on the ideologies of the elites, and possibly on the underlying intentions of the author of a text. Stuckey (2010) noted that factors like class, ethnicities, genders etc. are typically not addressed in (U.S.) presidential rhetoric but these factors are relevant in the Liberian context as well. What is more, Chilton and Schaffner (2002) rightly pointed out that communication (especially in political discourse) is not just about relating information to an audience. Rather, texts contain social information that discourse analysts must decipher. In addition, employing a triangular approach (considering social, cognitive and discursive elements for my analysis) under CDS means that I have focused on the social and political underlying cognitions which are responsible for producing and reproducing hegemonic ideologies

within Liberia. This means the oblique communication strategies employed by a speaker may be picked up by researchers; for example I show how both Sirleaf and Weah deflect blame. This is a norm in the field of political discourse. Likewise, the field of epideictic rhetoric deals with praise or blame of individuals. Rarely do we find politicians taking full responsibility for their errors or mistakes, no matter how glaring they are to the world. One of the reasons is because the opposition will readily jump on their failures and utilize it as a weapon. Political discourses are set up in such a way that there is a negative labelling of the other (the opposition). The reality is that excessive praise of ‘good things’ is used for ingroups, whereas complete omission or abstraction is employed for bad things, as part as part of the “ideological square” (van Dijk, 1997; 2016). On the other hand, outgroups are blamed excessively, playing up the bad. One of the many rhetorical and linguistic strategies politicians use to project and maintain a good image of themselves may be found in what they decide to say or what might be considered important that they deliberately leave out. Weah projected himself as embracing and advancing democracy in his IA, but only a few months later, he shut down social media so that protesters could not communicate online about the state of oppression in Liberia.

This dissertation has examined at the relationship between language and power. By focusing on the linguistic, rhetorical and ideological strategies observed in Liberian presidential discourse, I have traced the historical map of leadership in Liberia over the last two decades. This examination of processes and linguistic choices by Liberian leaders has guided my understanding of the rationale for the emphasis on development in their country’s context. As I have come to understand, while it is true that development was employed vaguely or more abstractly in the presidential rhetoric, development is

used to refer to not just physical or economic progress but also social and cultural relationships among the different entities of the state. Furthermore, I have teased out the lack of progress in this context and what progress should look like when there is political will on the part of the politicians, engagement on the part of the electorate and a fairer power relation in the global world order. All these factors come together in accounting for the desired political change that the people seek. What my comparison between the rhetoric employed in the frontstage of politics versus the reality shows is that the problem is not a lack of awareness of the needs and solutions to existing problems. However, as Wodak (2011, 2012) clearly argues, we do not know what happens in the backstage due to lack of access. The actual state of affairs in Liberia is full of disparities between what politicians say and what they do. In the case of Liberia, part of what happens backstage will be terms and conditions given by “supporting” international partners like the United States, the European Union and European countries, China and other African countries. Liberia’s position as a dependent economy complicates the neoliberal discourse of politicians who portray freedom as an attribute of democracy while overtly grappling with the challenges posed by globalization in their immediate society.

As much as we point out the loopholes, we must remain cognizant of the nature of politics as a struggle for power. This means that there are actors who seek to affirm and uphold power while there are others who are constantly contending against it. The system of government in Liberia requires that the legislative arm of government must support presidential bills before they can be passed into law. The involvement of the different arms of government in exercising and executing power adds to the complications of a

democratic system. But one might argue that this creates a democracy rather than a dictatorship.

Both Sirleaf and Weah in their SONA appeal to legislators to cooperate with them on passing certain bills. Out of the thirty senators in Liberia, only five of them belong to Weah's political party. However, in the House of Representatives, Weah's party is the simple majority that occupies twenty-one out of seventy-three seats. The opposition holds twenty seats, and the remaining seats are shared between eleven other groups. This means that at least 13 different groups' interests or agendas are represented in the Liberian lower house of parliament, which is good for diversity but it also complicates working toward a common goal for the benefit of the Liberian people. The reality of the multiple visions of leadership present in the Liberian legislation account for some of the social information in the presidential discourses. The increased political participation Liberia has experienced in the post-conflict years, on the one hand, suggests active engagement of citizens but, on a closer look, the multiparty system in Liberia indicates the deep divisions amongst the people. One cannot help but ask whose interests do the different public officers serve? It seems that the more the civilians participate in leadership, the more political tensions increase. A good illustration was when in 2012 then Senator Jewel Taylor (who became Weah's vice president) sponsored a bill proposing that homosexuality be criminalized such that "offenders" would face the death penalty. Luckily, President Sirleaf did not sign the bill. This is an example of powers asserted and refuted. It should be noted that Taylor graduated in December 2011 from the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law in Liberia. Thus, her attempts to push the anti-gay bill was one way of practicing law by pushing a conservative religious agenda. The point here is

to emphasize that social cognition shared by language users relate to the structure of their discourses. Thus, political discourses serve an agenda for the speaker.

The observed pattern of communication in the data analyzed is a noticeable level of distancing in the SONA when compared to the IA just a year before. During the swearing-in ceremony, the attitude from the leaders to the people feels more like the people get a pat on the back for a job well done, i.e., for voting and selecting the party elected to power over the opposition. But soon enough, the government questions or even reprimands the electorate when accountability and transparency are being demanded from the government.

An observation of Liberian political structure is summarized below:

- a) There is a continual contestation for power. The assumption of voters is that when leaders get into office they will automatically do their job, but the masses are learning that they need to make demands. Their passivity will not yield much in such contexts so they must continually demand their rights and push for accountability among their leaders.
- b) Within the political structure, leaders will continually have to negotiate their own place among fellow political actors (internal and external), and the positionality of Liberia in the global space.
- c) In the sphere of politics, the norm is that politicians do not explicitly express or even acknowledge their weaknesses. They are not expected to “plead guilty.”
- d) The rhetoric of democracy and other neoliberal discourses were portrayed as the right path for Liberia. For example, the references to foreign travels and the

reception of foreign leaders support the propagation of western and Asian values, which are obviously contending with African value systems.

In addition to the above observations, I consider that the unpredictability (such unpredictability or even the contradictions between political rhetoric and action is not accommodated by the sociocognitive approach) in a developing nation makes the job of the leaders more demanding (Olonisakin, 2018). Liberia's economic dependency status will be another reason for political uncertainty, as it seems politicians make promises with the hope of getting supported by their international partners and being able to fulfill the terms of conditions of the partners.

Unfortunately for Liberia, governance and public offices continue to be used for mere personal gain and the attainment of political, social and economic power for the individual. Furthermore, former warlords like Yormie Johnson have held senatorial positions since 2015. As surprising as it may seem, part of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in 2003 "allowed the warring factions to create political parties eligible to contest local and national elections and hold office" (Spatz & Thaler 2018, p. 158). While this compromise may not have seemed as the best decision for the democratic trajectory of the nation, it "helped to safeguard peace" (p. 158), which was desperately needed in 2003. At the same time, one of the implications of the decisions was that it opened up political life to all, even those who may be deemed as "not fit to run for office." But if we consider the definition of democracy, citizens who meet the stipulated criteria for vying for office have the right to participate in politics.

Sirleaf's educational and women's empowerment sentiment and Weah's populist rhetoric moved Liberians to vote them into office. From examining their speeches, we can observe the power and strategic use of inclusivity. Both politicians symbolize success, with their achievements, especially internationally, boosting their credibility and inherently swaying their audience.

There is a well-established relationship between language, identity, and power in the field of rhetoric and linguistics and subdisciplines. This relationship may play out differently from context to context. What is clear is that Speakers strategically choose language to construe identity and to advance their goals, which might not always be evident to their audience. In other words, there is a careful selection process involved in an individual's choice of lexical items, topoi or discourses put forward, as well as seeking the most opportune moment for which to produce a text (Chilton & Schaffner, 2012; van Dijk, 2016). The rhetorical devices pointed out among Liberian President's discourse underscore politician's awareness of persuasive strategies when "doing politics." Also, the act of performance often goes down well with an audience until reality ("the dark view of power," see Wodak, 2012) sets in, then the dissatisfaction on the part of the electorate comes to light. For instance, most of the indigenous Liberians believed and argued that Weah was one of them solely because he was born in the slums, but the reality is that he had crossed classes so long ago that it might be difficult to prove that he genuinely felt their plight. A major argument of Weah's supporters is his relatively young age and his disconnect from the old power establishment that governed Liberia. The issue with such a line of thinking is not so much about promoting diversity (of ideas or background) in government by voting for younger politicians or people from a humble

background like Weah. Effective leadership does not solely lie in age but requires some experience and a commitment to serve the people. Thus, Weah's age and background do not necessarily make him a great leader. His background no doubt added to his ethos and persuaded the masses (most of whom still live in abject poverty) who look up to him as an inspiration, perhaps thinking that if Weah could succeed, coming from the lower class, maybe they could too. And as president, they hope he will help to transform their situation.

On a positive note, peaceful transitions to governments with new leaders and new ideas is a key aspect of democracy, and we see that Liberia has fared well in this last transition. However, the interesting aspect is that before elections, voters are projected as powerful because they have something to offer the politicians. But after the leaders take office, the masses realize the limits of their power when their voices fall on the deaf ears of leaders that they have voted into office. With the current patterns of political citizen engagement, it seems that Liberians are more aware of political rhetoric and will be more careful the next time they go to the polls because they have seen all sorts of leaders from a spectrum of society.

6.6 Suggestions for Future Research

My dissertation contributes to an interdisciplinary approach to non-western contexts, as the scholars working on the global south often apply western frames that are not holistic and properly informed of such contexts. In other words, theoretical frames and ideologies are not one-size-fits-all and that is why an interdisciplinary analysis is more effective in understanding and interpreting the situation of Liberia.

For a project grounded in paying attention to language and rhetorical criticism, my reliance on formal speeches as my main data might raise concerns of language bias, it excludes popular opinions and perspectives. Indeed: an ethnographic study would have been useful to check for biases or misrepresentations. Such avenues were regrettably limited by the present times (and the COVID pandemic), but this would be an excellent topic for another major research project following up on my observations here.

Also, an ethnographic study on the other hand would be useful to check biases or misrepresentations possibly contained in the works that I have consulted. Conducting field work is also enriching in terms of the variety of perspectives that one may encounter during interviews and conversations with Liberians.

Another challenge my analysis faces is the availability of copious information about Sirleaf who ended her two terms in office back in 2018. Weah, on the other hand, is only halfway through his first term. The passage of 12 years creates a decent opportunity for judging Sirleaf's claims in her key addresses and her contributions toward the progress of Liberia. As for Weah, he might still fulfill some of his pro-poor agenda in the time left to complete his tenure office, but I am unable to consider that in my current analysis. Given that Weah is still in office, studying his rhetoric until the end of his tenure in office could add some interesting insights for further research. Future research could also compare and contrast his leadership to Sirleaf at the completion of his time in office.

Linguistic and rhetoric research could also study the online presence of politicians in this digital era since it has become a major way to perform politics and be visible to the world. One interesting perspective the digital space might bring is how it offers more

opportunity for direct interaction between leaders and the people, which has not traditionally been the case for the IA and the SONA. Investigating and observing political discourse and engagement in spaces like Facebook, Twitter or even Instagram could enrich our understanding of how political communication is evolving, and how leaders may be adapting to these new tools or exploiting such spaces. There have been a series of bans of social media by politicians (e.g., in Liberia, Nigeria, Ethiopia) or even micromanaging of citizen responses to social and political issues. The complexity of such interactions could be analyzed while pointing out power relations and the apparent fear of “language circulation on the internet” that politicians have been exhibiting in recent times.

However, I hope that my research on Liberian presidential speeches lays an important foundation for future comparisons, and that in the field of African rhetoric, its contribution toward a systematic study of presidential discourse, especially as regards the controversial subject of development, which is specific to developing nations, becomes ever clearer. I also hope that my methods will be relevant to scholars interested in studying leader practices and finding ways of tackling social, historical and cultural problems that inform leadership practices.

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A Appendix A: President George Manneh Weah's Inaugural Speech in Full

- Her Excellency, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
- Excellency Head of States
- Ambassador Joseph Nyumah Boakai
- Hon. Jewel Howard-Taylor
- Vice President of the Republic of Liberia
- The Governing Council of the Tripartite Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC)
- Madam Clar M. Weah
- First Lady of the Republic of Liberia
- His Honor, the Chief Justice, and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Liberia
- Speaker and Members of the House of Representative
- The Honorable Pro-Tempore and Members of the Liberian Senate
- The Dean and Members of the Cabinet
- The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and other Representatives of the United Nations
- The Doyen and Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- International Partners and Political Stakeholders
- Our Religious Community and Traditional Council, Market Women, the Student Body, the fourth Estate
- Special Guests
- Distinguish Ladies and Gentlemen

1. My fellow citizens, I am humbled and thankful for the trust and hope you have put in me. I am filled with joy and pride to see so many friends from across the world joins us in celebrating what is truly an historic moment for our country. To all our citizens and international guests, we thank you for coming.
2. I have spent many years of my life in stadiums, but today is a feeling like no other. I am overwhelmed with the crowd and the energy here today, and I

guarantee you, when we finish, there will not be a winning or a losing side.

Today, we all wear the jersey of Liberia, and the victory belongs to the people, to peace, and to democracy.

3. The tens of thousands of Liberians here today and many more in our communities across the country who are listening gathered together around radios in the palava hut, it is to you we are responsible to deliver the change you deserve. Indeed, we must deliver the change that our people need, in order to transform their lives for the better.
4. I promise to do everything in my power to be the agent of positive change. But I cannot do it alone. First, I call upon the revered institution that host us today and from which the Vice President and I come– The Legislative – our co-equal branch of government, to work with me to create and pass essential laws that are needed to complete the foundation of this nation.
5. Together, we owe our citizens clarity on fundamental issues such as the land beneath their feet, freedom of speech, and how national resources and responsibilities are going to shift from this capital to the counties. The people expect better cooperation and more action from their government. We can do better, together.
6. Today, we Liberians have reached an important milestone in the never-ending journey for freedom, justice, and democracy; a search that has remained central to our history as a nation.
7. Many of those who founded this country left the pain and shame of slavery to establish a society where all would be free and equal. But that vision of freedom, equality, and democracy has not yet been fully realized.
8. That human longing for true and lasting freedom has revealed itself in many ways since Liberia's founding. Sometimes the drive has been divisive and confrontational; and too often violent, bloody, and deadly, as it was in the 14 years of civil conflict, when the absence of equality and unity led us down the path of destroying our own country.

9. Notwithstanding the harshness and immeasurable cost of the lesson, we have learned that equality and freedom are never just a final destination that a people or a nation reaches. These are fundamental human rights that our people deserve and that must be held up and measured against our actions, our policies, our laws, and our purpose as those elected to serve the people.
10. Almost 15 years ago, Liberians laid down their arms and renewed their hope for a better and more equal society. With the help of regional partners and the United Nations, we chose democracy as our path, and elected the first post-war Government, which was led by Her Excellency, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.
11. Your Excellency, I thank you for laying the foundation upon which we can now stand, in peace and to advance progress for our country.
12. But this Inaugural Ceremony signals more than a peaceful transition from one democratic administration to another. It is also a transition from one generation of Liberian leadership to a new generation. It is indeed a confirmation that democracy exists in Liberia, and that, it is here to stay!
13. We have arrived at this transition neither by violence, nor by force of arms. Not a single life was lost in the process. Blood should never be the price tag for democracy. Rather, this transition was achieved by the free and democratic will of the Liberian people, guaranteed by the rule of law.
14. This Inaugural gathering also celebrates an important precedent: that we Liberians can, and will, rely on established institutions and the rule of law to resolve our political disagreements. This demonstrates the maturity of our institutions and that we as a people have learned valuable lessons from our brutal history.
15. My fellow Liberians, let not the splendor of these ceremonies, nor the celebration of electoral victory, make us forget how we arrived at this moment. We have arrived here on the blood, sweat, tears, and suffering of so many of our citizens, too many of whom died, longing for real freedom and equality.
16. Today, we must remember the hundreds of thousands who died, and many more whose lives were up ended and families displaced, because we lost sight of the fact that we can only reach a higher state of equality and freedom by treating each

other with love and respect – not tearing each other down. Truly taking this lesson to heart will bring the dawn of a new Liberia.

17. So that their deaths would not be in vain, I solemnly pledge today, with the help of all of you, my fellow citizens, to build a Liberia of equality, freedom, dignity, and respect for one another.
18. Let us all stand for a moment of silence to remember those who died on our soil, in our conflict, and by our own hands. Let it never be so again.
19. THANK YOU. PLEASE BE SEATED.
20. MY FELLOW CITIZENS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:
21. On this day of inauguration, as we begin to build upon the foundation of this New Liberia, I, George forky klon jlaleh gbah ku gbeh Tarpeh Manneh Weah, your new President, must first give thanks and praises to the Almighty God for the blessings he has bestowed on our country. And I say “my people, thank you, yaaaaaaaa” for entrusting me with the responsibility of leading the effort to build this New and better Liberia.
22. It will be my task, my duty, and my honor, to lead this nation from division to National Unity, and toward a future of hope and prosperity. I have here taken an oath before you, and before the Almighty God, to uphold our constitution and to preside over this Government and this country to the best of my abilities.
23. REST ASSURED, I WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN!!
24. And so, My Fellow Citizens, I want to admonish you, that the foundation of the New Liberia must be reinforced by the steel of integrity. We need men and women, boys and girls, whose integrity provides the foundation of the trust that is required for Liberian society to benefit her people.
25. MY FELLOW CITIZENS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:
26. During my tenure as President of Liberia, the loudest battle cry that must ring from the mountains of Wologisi to the peak of Yekepa; from the ranges of Putu to the hills of Bomi; and from the coast of Harper to the shores of Monrovia, must be the cry of National Unity!

27. We should all strive to put aside our differences and join hands in the task of nation building. We must learn how to celebrate our diversity without drawing lines of divisions in our new Liberia. We belong to Liberia first before we belong to our inherited tribes, or chosen counties.
28. We must not allow political loyalties prevent us from collaborating in the national interest. We must respect each other and act as neighbors, regardless of religious, social and economic differences.
29. In the words of our National Anthem:
30. [Quote] “In union strong, success is sure. We cannot fail.”
[Unquote] United, we are certain to succeed as a Nation.
Divided, we are certain to fail.
31. MY FELLOW CITIZENS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:
32. It is my belief that the most effective way to directly impact the poor, and to narrow the gap between rich and poor, is to ensure that public resources do not end up in the pockets of Government officials.
33. I further believe that the overwhelming mandate I received from the Liberian people is a mandate to end corruption in public service. I promise to deliver on this mandate.
34. As officials of Government, It is time to put the interest of our people above our own selfish interests. It is time to be honest with our people. Though corruption is a habit amongst our people, we must end it. We must pay civil servants a living wage, so that corruption is not an excuse for taking what is not theirs. Those who do not refrain from enriching themselves at the expense of the people – the law will take its course. I say today that you will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.
35. To the private sector, I say to you that Liberia is open for business. We want to be known as a business-friendly government.
36. We will do all that is within our power to provide an environment that will be conducive for the conduct of honest and transparent business. We will remove

unnecessary regulatory constraints that tend to impede the establishment and operation of business in a profitable and predictable manner.

37. As we open our doors to all foreign direct investments, we will not permit Liberian-owned businesses to be marginalized. We cannot remain spectators in our own economy. My government will prioritize the interests of Liberian-owned businesses and offer programs to help them become more competitive and offer services that international investors seek as partners.

38. MY FELLOW CITIZENS:

39. This victory could not have been possible without the support of the youth of this country, the women of this country, especially those who make their living by selling in the markets. To all of you, I want to say a heartfelt thank you. This is your government!!!

40. In the famous words of President Abraham Lincoln of the United States of America

41. "...government of the people; by the people, and for the people."

42. We could not have arrived at this day without our voices been heard loudly, and all our views, no matter how critical, being freely expressed in an atmosphere void of intimidation and arrest.

43. This was only made possible by the tolerance of my predecessor, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who protected the right to Freedom of Speech as enshrined in our Constitution.

44. Now, in my turn, I will go further to encourage and reinforce not only freedom of speech, but also freedom of political assembly.

45. MY FELLOW CITIZENS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

46. To change the structure of the Liberian economy will require huge investments in agriculture, infrastructure, in human capital, and in technology. We hope our international development partners will assist us in this transformation. Meanwhile, on behalf of all Liberians, I would like to thank the international community for the invaluable contributions they have made to our peace and economic development.

47. I thank the ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES, (ECOWAS), for standing with Liberia throughout these years. Many of our West African brothers and sisters shed their blood for Liberians during our conflict. This is a debt Liberians will never be able to repay.
48. We count these fallen West African soldiers among the martyrs of our history. Without their supreme sacrifices, this day would not have been possible. ECOWAS will continue to play a very meaningful role during my presidency.
49. I also thank the UNITED NATIONS for the important role it has played in Liberia. We stood with the United Nations at its founding when it was just an idea driven by ideals. Then, in our darkest days, the UN stood by us.
50. UN peacekeeping missions have ensured unbroken peace within our borders for more than a decade, and will soon demonstrate their confidence in us, by transitioning its task from peacekeeping programs of UN organizations which will continue in key sectors such as education, health, and agriculture.
51. Ending a peacekeeping mission successfully is something in which all Liberians and her partners should take great pride. We thank all member countries of the United Nations for your support and I promise to continue to build on the success that we have achieved together.
52. To the Government and People of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, we thank you for your strong support over the years.
53. The Republic of Liberia has a strong historic relationship with the United State of America, which has manifested itself and that relationship will even be stronger under my administration. To the EUROPEAN UNION, I say thanks to you for your strong partnership with Liberia. European aid has provided critical support for Liberia's recovery from war, and this continuous support will be important as we forge a new path of transformation.
54. Without Europe George Manneh Weah would not be standing here delivering this inaugural address as the 24th President of the Republic of Liberia. It was my success in European football that enabled me to give back to my beloved country. Europe will always have a special place in my heart, and, as President, I intend to

strengthen my relationship with the European community for the benefit of all Liberians

55. To the PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, I say “XIEXIE”. Our administration will continue to support the “One-China Policy”. China has emerged as one of Liberia’s most dependable allies. It is my hope that Chinese-Liberian relationships will grow stronger during my tenure as President.

56. The Samuel Kanyan Doe Sports Complex, built by the Chinese, where this Inaugural Ceremony is being held, is where I gained my exposure to the football world. It does not only stand as a monument of Chinese friendship toward Liberians, but It also stands as a symbol of peace and reconciliation for the Liberian people.

57. During our civil conflict, this was a venue that brought opposing factions together during national matches, effectively reconciling them to a single national purpose, Liberia.

58. And once again today, we stand at this same venue united for one purpose: Liberia. This is time that we put away our political differences to work together in forging a New Liberia, where the affordability of all goods and services will not longer be a luxury to the privileged, but rather a right for all Liberians.

59. To the AFRICAN UNION, I also say thank you for standing with Liberia over the past several years. Liberia has always had an historic relationship with the AU. As a founding member of the African Union, I look forward to participating with my colleagues at forthcoming summits, where we intend to utilize the resources and expertise of the African Union for the benefit of our country.

60. To other bi-lateral and multi-lateral partners, I say a sincere thank you! The World Bank, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Norway, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, to name too few, have also played important roles in Liberia’s emergence from conflict and will remain critical for the transformation we seek.

61. MY FELLOW LIBERIANS:

62. My greatest contribution to this country as President may not lie in the eloquence of my speeches, but will definitely lie in the quality of the decisions that I will make over the next six years to advance the lives of poor Liberians.
63. I intend to construct the greatest machinery of pro-poor governance in the history of this country. I will do more than my fair share to meet your expectations. I ask you to meet mine, for I cannot do it alone.
64. Mine is an expectation that you, fellow citizens, will rise up and take control and responsibility for your destiny. That you will look away from the things that divide us, and draw strength and energy from the things that unite us. Mine is an expectation that you will push yourselves to achieve the possibilities that are within your reach. That you will aim to do more for yourselves and expect other to do less.
65. And mine is a further expectation that you will discover a new sense of fairness and integrity; a new love for country and for each other. A love that will turn public servants and government officials into national champions for change. A love that will bring back home Liberians scattered far and wide across the globe – many of them highly skilled, talented, and experienced – to join us in building a New Liberia.
66. The sooner we all merge our energies toward cementing these new norms and values, the sooner we will transform our beloved country for the better. In doing so, we must also learn the virtue of patience, and learn to lower our expectations, for I do not promise you quick fixes or miracles.
67. Instead, my pledge to you today is that my administration, with your help, will make steady and deliberate progress towards achieving the hopes and aspirations that you cherish in your heart for Mama Liberia.
68. Let me close with these re-assuring words from our National Anthem:
69. “With God above, our
rights to prove, We will
over all prevail!!
70. Long live Liberia, happy land!

71. A home of glorious liberty, by God's command."

72. May God Almighty bless the works of our hands, and
save the State. I THANK YOU.

B Appendix B: Inaugural Address of H.E Ellen Johnson Sirleaf January 16th 2006

Excellencies, Fellow Citizens, Ladies and Gentleman

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1. Let us first praise Almighty God, the Arbiter of all affairs of humankind whose omnipotent Hand guides and steers our nation.
2. Before I begin this address, which signifies the high-noon of this historic occasion, I ask that we bow our heads for a moment of silent prayer in memory of the thousands of our compatriots who have died as a result of years of conflict.
3. Thank you!
4. I also ask your indulgence as I reflect on the memory of my two rural illiterate grandmothers and my mother and father who taught me to be what I am today, and the families who took them in and gave them the opportunity of a better life.
5. Let us also remember in prayers during his affliction, His Grace Archbishop Michael K. Francis, the conscience of our nation.
6. Vice President Joseph N. Boakai and I have just participated in the time-honored constitutional ritual of oath-taking as we embark on our responsibilities to lead this Republic. This ritual is symbolically and politically significant and substantive. It reflects the enduring character of a democratic tradition of the peaceful and orderly transfer of political power and authority. It also affirms the culmination of a commitment to our nation's collective search for a purposeful and responsive national leadership.
7. We applaud the resilience of our people who, weighed down and dehumanized by poverty and rendered immobile by the shackles of fourteen years of civil war, courageously went to the polls, not once but twice, to vote and to elect Vice President Joseph Boakai and me to serve them. We express to you, our people, our deep sense of appreciation and gratitude for the opportunity to serve you and our common Republic. We pledge to live up to your expectations of creating a

government that is attentive and responsive to your needs, your concerns, and the development and progress of our country.

8. We know that your vote was a vote for change; a vote for peace, security and stability; a vote for individual and national prosperity; a vote for healing and leadership. We have heard you loudly, and we humbly accept your vote of confidence and your mandate.
9. This occasion, held under the beautiful Liberian sunshine, marks a celebration of change – and a dedication to our agenda for a socio-economic and political reordering; indeed, a national renewal.
10. Today, we wholeheartedly embrace this change. We recognize that this change is not just for the sake of change, but a fundamental break with the past, thereby requiring that we take bold and decisive steps to address the problems that for decades have stunted our progress, undermined national unity, and kept old and new cleavages in ferment.
11. As we embrace this new commitment to change, it is befitting that for the first time in our country's 158-year history, the inauguration is being held on the Capitol Grounds, one of the three seats of Government. We pledge anew our commitment to transparency, open government, and participatory democracy for all of our citizens.
12. Yet, we are humbled and awed by the enormity of the challenges that lie ahead – to heal our nation's wounds, redefine and strengthen its purpose, make democracy a living and effective experiment, promote economic growth, create jobs, revitalize our health and educational facilities and services, and quicken the pace of social progress and individual prosperity in this country.

My Fellow Liberians:

13. Today, as I speak to you, I wish to state that I am most gratified by the caliber of the delegations of Foreign Governments and our international and local partners who have come to join us to celebrate this triumph of democracy in our country. I am particularly touched by the presence of the African Union Women

Parliamentarians and others of my sisters, who are participating here with us today in solidarity.

14. I wish to pay special recognition to several African Presidents who are here today.

His Excellency Mamadou Tandja, President of the Republic of Niger; His Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; His Excellency John Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana; His Excellency Thabo Mbeki, President of the Republic of South Africa; His Excellency Tejan Kabbah, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone; His Excellency Blaise Compaore, President of the Republic of Burkina Faso; His Excellency Amadou Toumani Toure, President of the Republic of Mali, and His Excellency Faure Gnassingbe, President of the Republic of Togo. All of you, especially the Leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have spent invaluable time, energy, and the resources of your respective countries to help guide and support the process of restoring peace, security, and stability to Liberia.

15. To General Abdu Salam Abubakar and his Team, we thank you. We adore and respect you for your persistence and commitment in the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement which gives closure to 14 years of civil conflict with my taking the Oath of Office today.

My dear Brothers and Sisters of West Africa:

16. You have died for us; you have given refuge to thousands of our citizens; you have denied yourselves by utilizing your scarce resources to assist us; you have agonized for us, and you have prayed for us. We thank you, and may God bless you for your support to Liberia as well as for your continuing commitment to promote peace, security, stability, and bilateral cooperation within our. We thank you, and may God bless you for your support to Liberia as well as for your continuing commitment to promote peace, security, stability, and bilateral cooperation within our sub-region – and beyond.

17. Permit me to take special note of the presence of Her Excellency Mrs. Laura Bush, wife of the President of the United States of America, Her Excellency Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State of the United States, and other members of the American delegation. Mrs. Bush and I share a common passion and commitment to gender equity and the education of the girl child. I salute her for her work in Africa and in the Persian Gulf Region. I also thank her and Secretary of State Rice for their presence – and support. For us, this manifests a renewal and strengthening of the long standing historic special relations which bind our two countries and peoples. It also reflects a new partnership with the United States based on shared values. We are confident that we can continue to count on the assistance of the United States and on our other development partners in the urgent task of rebuilding of our nation.
18. We, note with satisfaction, the presence of Ms. Louise Frechette, the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations; His Excellency Cellou Diallo, Prime Minister of the sisterly Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Li Zhaoxing, Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Hans Dahlgren, Special Representative of the European Union to the Mano River Union; His Excellency Louis Michel, Commissioner of the European Union for Development and Humanitarian Aid; His Excellency Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations in Liberia; His Excellency Dr. Ali Abdu Salam Tiki, Special Representative of the President of Libya and Minister of for the African Union; and all other distinguished delegates to this inaugural ceremony.
19. In acknowledging your presence, permit me to express through you to your respective Governments our deep appreciation for your moral and financial support and contribution that have enhanced the process of restoring peace, security, and stability to Liberia.

20. I wish to acknowledge the stewardship of the National Transitional Government under the leadership of its former Chairman, Mr. Gyude Bryant, for their contribution to peace and to the successful electoral process. I also recognize and thank the former National Transitional Legislative Assembly for their service to the nation. And I welcome the members of the 52nd Legislature who were sworn in a few moments ago, and are here resolved in Joint Assembly. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I congratulate you as you assume your individual responsibilities of representing our people. I look forward to working with each of you as we strive to build a better nation.
21. I thank and applaud our gallant men and women of the Armed Forces of Liberia who have rendered sacrificial service to our nation and are now being willingly retired to facilitate the training and restructuring of the new Armed Forces of Liberia.
22. I also thank the leadership and gallant men and women of the United Nations Military Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) who daily labor with us to keep the peace that we enjoy.
23. Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

No one who has lived in or visited this country in the past fifteen years will deny the physical destruction and the moral decadence that the civil war has left in its wake here in Monrovia and in other cities, towns, and villages across the nation. We have all suffered. The individual sense of deprivation is immense. It is therefore understandable that our people will have high expectations and will demand aggressive solutions to the socioeconomic and societal difficulties that we face. Our record and experience show clearly that we are a strong and resilient people, able to survive; able to rise from the ashes of civil strife and to start anew; able to forge a new beginning, forgiving if not forgetting the past. We are a good and friendly people, braced for hope even as we wipe away the tears of past suffering and despair. Our challenge, therefore, is to transform adversity into opportunity, to renew the promises upon which our nation was founded: freedom, equality, unity and individual progress.

24. In the history of nations, each generation is summoned to define its nation's purpose and character. Now, it is our time to state clearly and unequivocally who we are, as Liberians, – and where we plan to take this country in the next six years.

Political Renewal

25. First, let me declare in our pursuit of political renewal, that the political campaign is over. It is time for us, regardless of our political affiliations and persuasions, to come together to heal and rebuild our nation. For my part, as President of the Republic of Liberia, my Government extends a hand of friendship and solidarity to the leadership and members of all political parties which participated in our recent presidential and legislative elections. I call upon those who have been long in the struggle – those who recently earned their stripes – to play important roles in the rebuilding of our nation.
26. Committed to advance the spirit of inclusion, I assure all Liberians and our international partners and friends that our Government will recognize and support a strong democratic and loyal opposition in Liberia. This is important because we believe that our democratic culture and our nation are best served when the opposition is strong and actively engaged in the process of nation building.
27. Moreover, we call upon our colleagues of all political persuasions now in the Diaspora to return home and join us in meeting this exciting challenge of national renewal.
28. We are aware that we have hundreds of doctors, engineers, and economists, as well as thousands of teachers, nurses, professors, and other Liberians who possess specialized skills currently living abroad. I re-echo my appeal to all of you to please come home!! Please make the sacrifice, for your country needs you and needs you now!!!
29. We make a similar appeal to the thousands of our citizens who continue to live in refugee camps throughout the sub-region and beyond. We recognize and sympathize with your plight and will explore with our development partners ways

and means to facilitate your early return home as a national imperative for our renewal and development.

30. To those who are still internally displaced, we pledge to work with our partners to get you back to your communities to enable you to start the process of rebuilding your lives.
31. We must have a new understanding. Your job, as citizens, is to work for your family and your country. Your country's only job is to work for you. This is the compact that I offer you today.

A New Era of Democracy

32. My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Ours has certainly not been an easy journey to where we are today. Indeed, the road has been tortuous and checkered. From the establishment of our National Politics 158 years ago through the period of integration which helped to shape our society several decades ago, to the long running political fight for the forging and fostering of a viable and cohesive society in the decades that followed, the struggle of many has centered on five core values: peace, liberty, equality, opportunity, and justice for all.

33. The tendencies of intolerance of each other's opinion rooted in parochial and selfish considerations - and greed - have driven us into our descent into recent tragedies and paralysis as a nation and people. These negative national tendencies have, in the past, bred ethnic suspicion and hatred, led to injustice, social and political exclusion. They have also weakened our capacity to peacefully co-exist as a people with diverse sociocultural, economic, and political backgrounds and differences. Consequently, we have witnessed needless generalized conflicts that have profoundly affected the Liberian family, the foundation of our society.
34. And in the process of resolving the numerous contradictions that have underpinned this struggle, a high price has been paid by many Liberians of diverse backgrounds and social status. I know of this struggle because I have been a part of it. Without bitterness, anger, or vindictiveness, I recall the inhumanity of confinement, the terror of attempted rape, and the ostracism of exile. I also recall

the goodness and the kindness of the many who defied orders and instruction to save my life, and give food to the hungry and to give water to the thirsty. I recall their humanity – and thank them.

35. And so, my Fellow Liberians let us acknowledge and honor the sacrifices and contributions of all as we put the past behind us. Let us rejoice that our recent democratic exercise has been a redemptive act of faith and an expression of renewed confidence in ourselves. Let us be proud that we were able to ultimately rise above our intense political and other differences in a renewed determination as a people to foster dialogue instead of violence, promote unity rather than disharmony, and engender hope rather than disillusionment and despair.

36. Today, I urge all of us to commit ourselves to a new era of democracy in Liberia. In our new democracy, we will tolerate even if we disagree; we will co-exist even if we consider our neighbor unfriendly – and we will find common ground on the many vexing issues that face our nation. This is because our shared national values are more important than our individual interests. We must therefore abandon the temptation and inclination to court and engage in violence. Our recent history teaches us that violence diminishes our nation and ourselves, not just within our borders, but more importantly in our dealings with other nations and peoples.

37. My Administration therefore commits itself to the creation of a democracy in which the constitutional and civil liberties and rights of all our people will be advanced - and safeguarded. While ensuring the security of our nation and people, we will work tirelessly to ensure that the writ of democracy is expanded, not constricted in our land.

Economic Renewal

38. In a similar quest for economic renewal, we start on the premise that we are a wealthy people. Our nation is blessed with an endowment rich in natural and human resources. Yet, our economy has collapsed due to the several civil conflicts and economic mismanagement by successive governments. The task of

reconstructing our devastated economy is awesome, for which there will be no quick fix.

39. Yet, we have the potential to promote a healthy economy in which Liberians and international investors can prosper. We can create an investment climate that gives confidence to Liberian and foreign investors. We can promote those activities that add value in the exploitation of our natural resources. We can recognize and give support to our small farmers and our marketers who, through their own efforts over the years, have provided buoyancy and self-sufficiency in economic activity, even during the difficult years of conflict. We can revisit our land tenure system to promote more ownership and free holding for communities. We can expand ongoing programs of economic and social infrastructure rehabilitation.
40. This will call for the translation of our economic vision into economic goals that are consistent with our national endowment and regional and global dynamics. Included in this process is a formulation of the policy framework and identification of the sequential measures of structural change that need to be taken to achieve the overarching goals of sustainable growth and development. We will ensure that allocation of our own resources reflects these priorities. We will call upon our development partners to likewise recognize that although they have made significant investment to bring peace to our country; this peace can only be consolidated and sustained if we bring development to our people.
41. With this in mind, we are working with our partners to identify key objectives and deliverables in the first one hundred and fifty days of our Administration which coincides with the remaining budgetary period of the former government. We must meet our commitment to restore some measure of electricity to our capital city. We must put Liberians back to work again. And we must put our economic and financial house in order. Most of all, we must revive our mindset of courage, hard work, and a can do spirit.

42. Our strategy is to achieve quick and visible progress that reaches significant number of our people, to gain momentum, consolidate support, and establish the foundation for sustained economic development. This will encompass five major pillars: Security, Economic Revitalization, Basic Services, Infrastructure, and Good Governance.
43. In implementing the programs consistent with this strategy, we will ensure broad geographic representation and participation, placing emphasis on those areas that have received less in the distribution of economic benefits. In this regard, we thank the European Union for supporting activities in the power sector, in community development, as well as providing technical assistance in economic management. We thank the United States for supporting the restructuring and training of our security forces, for activities in community development, and for commencing the construction of the Barclayville Bridge in the neglected area of the Southeast. We thank our sisterly countries of Nigeria and Ghana for providing training for our security forces. We thank the United Nations System for supporting community development, technical assistance for economic management, reintegration, and good governance. We thank them also for the strong peace keeping effort, in conjunction with ECOWAS, which has enabled us to have an environment that led us to free and fair elections. We thank the World Bank for support of activities in community development, infrastructure, and technical assistance in economic management. We thank the many foreign and domestic non-governmental organizations for their support for community development, and for peace and capacity building.
44. As we look ahead, we plan to collaborate closely with both the international and national NGO's and the civil society community in order to formulate an appropriate strategy and approach for their engagement with our Government in order to maximize their contributions. For the long term, more will be required from us and our partners. We will formulate a multi-year economic reconstruction plan tied to a Poverty Reduction Strategy Program that relieves our country from a staggering US\$3.5 billion external debt and paves the way for acceleration in

our national effort to make more progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

45. We will seek a strong partnership between the public and private sector, with direct foreign investment and Liberia entrepreneurship at the core. We envision a multi-year commitment in the order of US\$1 billion for this purpose with details to be presented at a partnership meeting planned for May or June of this year.
46. As we seek to engage our youth in our enterprise of nation building, we must recognize the threat that HIV/AIDS pose to our human capital and to our growth and prosperity. With 12% of our population now affected by HIV/AIDS, my administration will tackle this national scourge by updating and reinvigorating our HIV/AIDS policy within our first 150 days. We will also reconstitute and empower, along with our development partners, the National Commission on HIV/AIDS.

Governance

47. We know that our desire for an environment for private sector driven sustainable growth and development cannot be achieved without the political will and a civil service that is efficient, effective and honest. The workforce in our ministries and agencies is seriously bloated. Moreover, many of the ministries and agencies lack clarity in mandate and have little or no linkages to our national priorities, policies, and goals.
48. Our Administration will therefore embark on a process of rationalizing our agencies of government to make them lean, efficient, and responsive to public service delivery. This will require the creation of a meritocracy that places premium on qualification, professionalism, and performance. As a major component of our Civil Service Reform Agenda, we will review our public service wage system with the view to ensuring that those who work in our Civil Service are paid commensurate with their qualifications and performance – and that they are paid on time. It may take us some time to achieve this objective given our inheritance of a bloated and poorly paid civil service for which there are currently salary and benefit arrears totaling some US\$20 million.

49. Our present unemployment situation is a national crisis. We must redeploy some of our current public service employees to areas where they can perform successfully. We will start the process to train and retrain others who lack requisite professional skills. We will empower them through our proposed alternative employment initiatives. We will also provide additional support through our proposed micro-loan program.

Bonding

50. My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Across this country, from Cape Mount in the West to Cape Palmas in the East, from Mount Nimba in the North to Cape Monsterrado in the South, from Mount Wologizi in North central to Mount Gedeh in the Southeast, our citizens at this very moment are listening to my voice by radio – and some are watching by television. I want to speak directly to you. As you know, in our various communities and towns, our children have a way of greeting their fathers when they come home after a long, tiring day of trying to find the means to feed the family that night and send the children to school the next day. They say, “Papa na come.”

51. Well, too many times, for too many families, Papa comes home with nothing, having failed to find a job or to get the help to feed the hungry children. Imagine then the disappointment and the hurt in the mother and children; the frustration and the loss of self-confidence in the father.

52. Through the message of this story, I want you to know that I understand what you, our ordinary citizens, go through each day to make ends meet for yourselves and for your families.

53. Times were hard before. Times are even harder today. But I make this pledge to you: Under my Administration, we will work to change that situation. We will work to ensure that when our children say “papa na come”, papa will come home

joyfully with something, no matter how meager, to sustain his family. In other words, we will create the jobs for our mothers and fathers to be gainfully employed. We will create the social and economic opportunities that will restore our people's dignity and self-worth.

54. We will make the children smile again; the thousands of children who could not present their voting cards, but repeatedly told me whenever I met and shook their hands that they voted for me. Indeed, they voted with their hearts. To those children and to all other Liberian children across this nation, I say to you, I love you very, very much. I shall work, beginning today, to give you hope and a better future.

55. Now, I would like to speak in particular to our youth. You can believe my word that my Administration will do its utmost to respond to your needs. We will build your capacity and empower you to enable you meaningfully participate in the reconstruction of our country. We shall actively pursue the Kakata Declaration resulting from the National Youth Conference held in 2005 and the implementation of a National Youth Policy and Program.

Corruption

56. Fellow Liberians, we know that if we are to achieve our economic and income distribution goals, we must take on forcibly and effectively the debilitating cancer of corruption. Corruption erodes faith in government because of the mismanagement and misapplication of public resources. It weakens accountability, transparency and justice. Corruption short changes and undermines key decision and policy making processes. It stifles private investments which create jobs and assures support from our partners. Corruption is a national cancer that creates hostility, distrust, and anger.

57. Throughout the campaign, I assured our people that, if elected, we would wage war against corruption regardless of where it exists, or by whom it is practiced.

Today, I renew this pledge. Corruption, under my Administration, will be the major public enemy. We will confront it. We will fight it. Any member of my Administration who sees this affirmation as mere posturing, or yet another attempt by yet another Liberian leader to play to the gallery on this grave issue should think twice. Anyone who desires to challenge us in this regard will do so at his or her personal disadvantage.

58. In this respect, I will lead by example. I will expect and demand that everyone serving in my Administration leads by example. The first testament of how my Administration will tackle public service corruption will be that everyone appointed to high positions of public trust such as in the Cabinet and heads of public corporations will be required to declare their assets, not as part of a confirmation requirement, but as a matter of policy. I will be the first to comply by declaring my assets. My Administration will also accord high priority to the formulation and passage into law of a National Code of Conduct, to which all public servants will be subjected.

59. My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

If we are to achieve our development and anti-corruption goals, we must welcome and embrace the Governance and Economic Management Program (GEMAP) which the National Transitional Government of Liberia, working with our international partners, has formulated to deal with the serious economic and financial management deficiencies in our country.

60. We accept and will enforce the terms of GEMAP, recognizing the important assistance which it is expected to provide during the early years of our Government. More importantly, we will ensure competence and integrity in the management of our own resources and insist on an integrated capacity building initiative so as to render GEMAP non-applicable in a reasonable period of time.

Foreign Policy

61. Our nation's foreign policy has historically been rooted in our core values as a nation and people in the practices of good neighborliness, non-interference in the affairs of other nations and peoples, peaceful co-existence, regional cooperation

and integration, and international bilateral and multilateral partnership. These core values will continue to guide the conduct of our foreign policy under my Administration. Our foreign policy will take due cognizance of the sacrifices and contributions that have been made to restore peace, security, and stability to our country. We will therefore work to be a responsible member of sub-regional, regional, and international organizations, including the Mano River Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union, and the United Nations. We will do all that we can to honor our obligations, past and current, and enforce all international treaties to which our country has subscribed.

62. To our sister Republics West, East, and North of our borders, we make this pledge: under my Administration, no inch of Liberian soil will be used to conspire to perpetrate aggression against your countries. In making this commitment, we will work for a new regional security that is based upon economic partnership aimed at enhancing the prospects for regional cooperation and integration. In this regard, we propose to tap into the successful Southeast Asian experiences regarding the promotion of regional integration with a heavy private sector component.

63. I also want to speak specifically to the countries which, from the onset of our civil conflict, have been in the vanguard of peace-making in Liberia. Some have made material and financial contributions. Some have provided moral support. Others have contributed troops that paid the supreme price for peace in our country. To our war-dead, our brother soldiers from West Africa and other regions – as well as to our own, we remember and honor you today. This occasion is owed to your fortitude and to your sacrifices. To every other nation and partner, we thank you for standing by us.

Reconciliation

64. Today, as we usher in a new era of responsibility, accountability, and transparency, we must strive to reawaken our people's faith in their Government. We must also recognize the urgency and imperative of meeting the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction. Yet, no single issue or factor will define our success

or failure in this endeavor more than our willingness and ability to come together as a nation and people. Consequently, no task will be more urgent and more compelling; no cause will require my personal attention and engagement than national reconciliation.

As in the case of the overall challenge of economic reconstruction, there will be no quick fix to national reconciliation and healing. But we can neither flinch from the challenge, nor be overwhelmed by its complexities. After all, some of the underlying factors of our current problems are as deep and old as the history of our country. So, we must begin today to reconcile and heal our nation with deliberate and purposeful commitment, recognizing that we are first and last Liberians - and that our nation's strength, progress, and development are directly impacted by our unity, peace, security, and stability as a people.

65. Therefore, I today pledge my personal involvement in the work of reconciling and healing our country. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has an important role to play in this regard and my Administration will support and strengthen the Commission to enable it to carry out its mandate effectively.

My Fellow Citizens:

66. Let me assure you that my presidency shall remain committed to serve all Liberians without fear or favor. I am President for all of the people of this country. I therefore want to assure all of our people that neither I nor any person serving in my Administration will pursue any vendetta. There will be no vindictiveness. There will be no policies of political, social, and economic exclusion. We will be an inclusive and tolerant Government, ever sensitive to the anxieties, fears, hopes, and aspirations of all of our people irrespective of ethnic, political, religious affiliations, and social status. Let us be clear, however, that we will insist on specified standards of law abiding behavior in the exercise of this tolerance.

My Fellow Liberians, Ladies and Gentlemen:

67. By their votes, the Liberian people have sent a clear message! They want peace; they want to move on with their lives. My charge as President is to work to assure

the wishes of our people. We will therefore encourage our citizens to utilize our system of due process for settling differences whether those differences are within or between ethnic groups, or whether they are within or between religious groups. However, we will forcefully, swiftly and decisively respond to any acts of lawlessness, threats to our hard earned peace, or destabilizing actions that could return us to conflict.

68. As we today savor the new dawn of hope and expectation, I pledge to bring the Government closer to the people. The days of the imperial presidency, of an intrusive leadership, and of a domineering and threatening Chief Executive are over in Liberia. This was my campaign promise which I intend to keep. Yet, my Government will be unflinching and bold in influencing and defending those measures that ensure that our national goals are achieved.
69. In pursuing this policy, our Constitution will remain our source of strength. Its edifying phrase, WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA, and its equally ennobling proclamation that ALL POWER IS INHERENT IN THE PEOPLE, will be given concrete meaning and expression in all of our national life and conduct.
70. The Executive Mansion and Monrovia will no longer be the only centers of power and sources of development policy making. The people and their interests, as defined by them, will be at the very heart of our new dispensation of decentralization and the devolution of power.
71. And now I would like to talk to the women, the women of Liberia, the women of Africa – and the women of the world. Until a few decades ago, Liberian women endured the injustice of being treated as second class citizens. During the years of our civil war, they bore the brunt of inhumanity and terror. They were conscripted into war, gang raped at will, force into domestic slavery. Yet, it is the women, notably those who established themselves as the Mano River Women Network for Peace who labored and advocated for peace throughout our region.
72. It is therefore not surprising that during the period of our elections, Liberian women were galvanized – and demonstrated unmatched passion, enthusiasm, and

support for my candidacy. They stood with me; they defended me; they prayed for me. The same can be said for the women throughout Africa. I want to here and now, gratefully acknowledge the powerful voice of women of all walks of life whose votes significantly contributed to my victory.

73. My Administration shall thus endeavor to give Liberian women prominence in all affairs of our country. My Administration shall empower Liberian women in all areas of our national life. We will support and increase the writ of laws that restore their dignities and deal drastically with crimes that dehumanize them. We will enforce without fear or favor the law against rape recently passed by the National Transitional Legislature. We shall encourage families to educate all children, particularly the girl child. We shall also try to provide economic programs that enable Liberian women to assume their proper place in our economic revitalization process.

74. My Fellow Liberians:

We are moving forward. Our best days are coming. The future belongs to us because we have taken charge of it. We have the resources. We have the resourcefulness. Now, we have the right Government. And we have good friends who want to work with us. Our people are already building our roads, cleaning up our environment, creating jobs, rebuilding schools, bringing back water and electricity.

75. My Government will ensure that the creativity and industry of Liberians is unleashed in this incredible moment of history. We are making our beloved Liberia home once again.

76. We are a good people; we are a kind people. We are a forgiving people – and a Godfearing people.

77. So, let us begin anew, moving forward into a future that is filled with hope and promise!

78. "... In Union Strong, Success is Sure! We cannot fail
..." God bless us all – and save the Republic.
79. I thank you!

C Appendix C: President George Weah Annual Message, January 2019

ANNUAL MESSAGE TO THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FOURTH
NATIONAL LEGISLATURE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. GEORGE MANNEH WEAH, PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

THE CAPITOL BUILDING, CAPITOL HILL, MONROVIA, LIBERIA

28 JANUARY 2019

(FULL TEXT, AS DELIVERED)

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE;

SPEAKER;

PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE;

MADAM FIRST LADY

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE;

YOUR HONOR THE CHIEF JUSTICE, ASSOCIATE JUSTICES OF THE SUPREME
COURT AND MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY;

THE DEAN AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET AND OTHER GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS;

THE DOYEN AND MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR CORPS;

HIS EXCELLENCY, THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-
GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN LIBERIA;

THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS;

THE CHIEF OF STAFF AND MEN AND WOMEN OF THE ARMED FORCES OF
LIBERIA (AFL);

OFFICIALS OF GOVERNMENT EMERITUS;

TRADITIONAL LEADERS;

POLITICAL AND BUSINESS LEADERS;

RELIGIOUS LEADERS;

OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION;

LABOR AND TRADE UNIONS;

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS;

YOUTH AND STUDENTS;

MEMBERS OF THE PRESS;

SPECIAL GUESTS;

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;

FELLOW LIBERIANS:

1. Six days ago, through the Grace of the Almighty God, the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) was blessed to celebrate our first anniversary as an incumbent political party. On that day, we gave God the Glory, and also gave Him thanks and praise for His Guidance; His Goodness; and His Mercy; without which we would not have been here today, and would not have had the cause to rejoice.
2. And as we gather here in fulfillment of my Constitutional Mandate to deliver my Annual Message, may I ask you to rise for a moment of silence for the souls of all the faithful departed who are no longer within our midst, but who made the transition, from earthly labor to eternal rest, during the year under review.

[PAUSE FOR SILENT PRAYER]

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT-PRO
TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

3. As you begin this 2nd Session of the 54th Legislature, let me remind you that, a little over a year ago, during my inauguration,
4. I took an oath before you, and before the Almighty God, to uphold our Constitution and to preside over this Government and this country to the best of my abilities.
5. This includes, among others, ensuring freedom of speech and, by extension, freedom of the press; freedom of assembly, revitalizing our economy, rebuilding our infrastructures, providing protection for our people, and ensuring respect for the rule of law.

6. On this auspicious occasion, I must be honest to admit that during the year of 2018, our democracy, society and economy were tested but our leadership rose above these challenges.
7. We stabilized our economy, protected the fundamental rights of our citizens and preserved our peace.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

8. I would like to thank you for your cooperation in passing into law several pieces of legislation relevant to the Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development during the period under review.
9. The records show that you passed 26 Bills into law during your First Session and submitted them for my approval.

These Bills include (among others):

10. An Act to Ratify the Financing Agreement to provide additional financing for the West African Power Pool.
11. The amount of this additional financing Agreement is \$45.3 Million United States dollars, comprising a grant component of \$22.6 million United States dollars; and a loan component of \$22.7 million United States dollars.
12. The objective is to support Government's effort in providing reduced and affordable cost of electricity, that will be efficient and reliable for the Liberian people in both the rural and urban areas. The West African Power Pool Project also seeks to strengthen Liberia's diplomatic ties and cooperation with our sub-regional counterparts, as the power line runs from Cote d'Ivoire to Liberia and goes to Sierra Leone and Guinea.
13. Two other cardinal legal instruments were passed, that are considered essential to the Government's Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development:
14. The Local Government Act of 2018;
15. Act to Establish the Land Rights Law of 2018
16. These two landmark legislations are in line with current national and international realities, and are important for the stability and development of our country.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE, we also appreciate your passing into law an ACT TO NAME BALI ISLAND AND THE MAHATMA GANDHI CONVENTION CENTER.

17. This has paved the way for the friendly Government of India, to assist the people of Liberia in their infrastructural development drive, by building a Modern Convention Center that will host conventions, conferences, and exhibitions, as well as serving as a major tourist attraction. We want to thank the Government and people of India for this kind gesture.
 18. AN ACT TO RATIFY THE INVESTMENT INCENTIVE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA AND FOUTA CORPORATION.
 19. Under the Fouta Agreement, the Investor will construct and develop a five hundred (500) tons per day cement plant, expandable to one thousand (1,000) tons per day.
 20. This plant represents \$25 million United States dollars of new Foreign Direct Investment into our economy, and will provide additional support for our infrastructural development projects.
 21. Thank you for also passing into law:
 22. AN ACT RATIFYING THE AGREEMENT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EXPORT-IMPORT BANK (AFREXIMBANK);
 23. AN ACT TO AMEND THE REVENUE CODE OF LIBERIA, TO REFORM EXCISE TAX LAW (2018);
 24. AN ACT TO RATIFY THE PARIS AGREEMENT SIGNED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA;
 25. AN ACT TO RATIFY THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON MUTUAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE FOR THE PREVENTION, INVESTIGATION AND REPRESSION OF CUSTOMS OFFENCES;
- HONORABLE LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:
26. You may recall that I have vetoed two Agreements that were forwarded for my approval, including:
 27. AN ACT TO RATIFY THE MINERAL DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA AND HUMMINGBIRD RESOURCES (LIBERIA) INC.; AND
 28. AN ACT TO CREATE ZEYEAMA DISTRICT WITHIN LOFA COUNTY, REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA.
 29. In the case of the Hummingbird Agreement, I am of the firm conviction that we acted in the spirit of ensuring the passage of legislation that will yield the maximum benefits to our Country and People. With regard to the creation of a new district within Lofa County, after careful review and analysis, we came to the

conclusion that new statutory districts should only be created after the conduct of a careful study based on the justification, structure, population density, revenue base and economic viability.

30. This process should also take into consideration the necessity for effective administration and the need to bring services closer to the people.
31. I also believe that the LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT will ensure that new statutory districts are not created solely for political purposes or would not impose undue burdens on the National Budget. I look forward to working closely with you to derive an efficient and effective process regarding these issues.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

32. During the year under review, we have submitted to you several Acts which remain pending and under your kind consideration.

These include:

33. AN ACT TO BE KNOWN AS THE KAMARA ABDULLAH KAMARA ACT OF PRESS FREEDOM.
34. This Bill protects people from crimes such as Criminal Libel against the President; Sedition and Criminal Malevolence.
35. It promotes freedom of speech and expression which are important tenets of our democracy. It also promotes good governance, as well as the rule of law.
36. We therefore respectfully urge you to consider the timely passage of this Bill; as well as other Bills essential to our Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development that have been submitted to you, but remain under deliberations in your Committee Rooms.
37. We refer particularly, to the following:
38. THE DUAL CITIZENSHIP BILL
39. THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT;
40. AN ACT TO NAME CERTAIN ROADS AND BRIDGES WITHIN THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA ;
41. AN ACT TO AMEND THE REVENUE CODE OF LIBERIA, TO ADOPT A MODERNIZED CUSTOMS CODE (2018);

42. AN ACT PROHIBITING THE TENURE OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS WITHIN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT;

43. THE ECOWAS CUSTOMS CODE;

44. INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE SIMPLIFICATION AND HARMONIZATION OF CUSTOMS PROCEDURES;

45. THE NATIONAL LOTTERIES AMENDMENT ACT;

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

46. As we enter our second year of governance, we intend to submit several new bills for your consideration to enable our Administration deliver on its Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity. These will include, among others:

47. AN ACT TO RATIFY AND AUTHORIZE THE PAYMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA OF TUITION FEES FOR ALL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN ALL PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES IN LIBERIA.

48. THE NATIONAL YOUTH ACT

49. LIBERIA TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMISSION ACT

50. REVISED LIBERIAN BANK FOR DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT ACT

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

51. During 2018, we issued one (1) Executive Order to address a national imperative: EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 93: EXTENSION OF EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 87 SUSPENSION OF TARIFF ON RICE.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

52. I was elected into Office upon the four pillars of our Party Manifesto, namely:

53. POWER TO THE PEOPLE:

54. ECONOMY AND JOBS:

55. SUSTAINING THE PEACE:

56. GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPERANCY:

57. These four pillars, which were the core embodiment of my last Annual Message and Legislative Agenda, are now developed into our National Plan, called the Pro-Poor Agenda for Development and Prosperity (PAPD) and was officially launched on 29th October 2018.
58. The overall objective of the PAPD, and its ultimate goal, is to lift our People from poverty to prosperity.
59. As a first step towards achieving this goal, it is our intention, and our determination, to reduce poverty by 23% percent by the end of 2023, by providing greater income security for an additional one million Liberians who now live below the poverty line.
60. Secondly, the PAPD seeks to build more capable state institutions for efficient and effective service delivery. These will require collective efforts toward the pragmatic implementations of programs and projects under the four pillars of our Pro-Poor Agenda.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

61. The Constitution of the Republic of Liberia mandates the government to provide education for all Liberians.
62. During the period under review, we undertook new measures and mechanisms for transforming and sustaining an educational system that is adequate to ensure that the constitutional obligation of the Government is met.
63. The government, through the Ministry of Education, firstly carried out a review process that included: evaluation of the existing legal and administrative framework; nationwide visits to all schools throughout the country; and the hosting of a national stakeholder's summit. As a result of this process, several activities were implemented in a bid to enhance efficiency in the education sector.
64. These activities include:
65. Completion of Curricular revision from early grades through high school. The new curriculum places emphasis on skills delivery, early career pathway and addressing deficiencies in literacy and numeracy.
66. Payroll Cleaning Exercise which netted savings of \$2 Million United States dollars as of November 2018.
67. The savings enabled the government to enroll nearly one thousand one hundred (1,100) out of three thousand seven hundred and sixty-four (3,764) teachers who for nearly nine (9) years have been paid irregularly and substantially below salaries earned by other civil servants.

68. Increase the number of scholarships awarded to more than one thousand one hundred and sixty-five (1,165) students, which included one hundred and twenty-nine (129) foreign scholarships, costing the Government a total of \$2.5 Million United States dollars. The Government of China and Morocco, and several other countries, awarded bilateral scholarships to nearly one hundred (100) Liberians to pursue studies in those countries.
69. This amounts to a total of one hundred and sixty-three (163) students in foreign countries and one thousand three hundred (1,300) on local scholarships in all universities across Liberia. In 2018 the Government also awarded foreign sponsorship to the seven (7) best-performing students on the 2017/2018 WASSCE Examinations.
70. Tuition Waiver for All Public Universities and Colleges
71. Under the 2018 / 2019 Public Sector Investment Project appropriation, the Ministry of Education was allocated \$4 Million United States dollars for infrastructure improvement and expansion, including the renovation of thirty-three (33) public schools and the refurbishment of fifteen (15) science laboratories in public secondary schools. In addition, seventy-eight thousand (78,000) pieces of modern chairs were purchased for public schools across the country.
72. WASSCE Intervention Program. The government of Liberia paid the WASSCE fees for all thirty-three thousand nine hundred and thirty-one (33,931) 12th graders, and seventeen thousand six hundred and seventy-nine (17,679) 9th graders; amounting to the sum of \$2.03 million United States dollars and \$41.5 million Liberian dollars respectively, as a means of relieving parents and students of the financial burden associated with the exams, and improve performance.
73. Additionally, to reduce mass failures among 12th graders in the 2017/2018 WASSCE examinations, the Ministry of Education with support from the national government, launched in November 2018 the "WASSCE Intervention Project", aimed to improve Liberian students' performance on the 2018/2019 examinations. The project provides Saturday tutorials for all 12th graders in the country, free of charge. The cost of the project is a little over three hundred and fifty thousand (\$350,000) United States dollars.
74. HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE, in addition to the interventions made by the government to shift the paradigm for a better education system, we also received strong support from our international partners to the Education component of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity & Development (PAPD).
75. The World Bank IDA made a grant/loan of \$25 Million United States dollars for investment in Public Secondary Schools, including construction, rehabilitation, setting up of laboratories, provision of teachers' residences in rural school

communities, girls retention through secondary school, and a host of other interventions helpful for secondary school children.

76. THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION MADE AN INITIAL INVESTMENT OF \$11.1 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS intervention in Early Childhood Development initially covering six counties. A secondary grant of \$5.9 million United States dollars was also provided to top up the initial amount, making a total of \$17 million United States dollars, all of which have been dedicated to the development of Early Grade Schools.
77. THE EUROPEAN UNION MADE AN INVESTMENT OF 20 MILLION EUROS, dedicated to the development of Technical Vocational Education in Liberia. The project will benefit all youth, whether enrolled in school or out of school, through the Ministries of Education and Youth & Sports. An additional 12.5 million Euros, previously set aside by the European Union for Out-of-School Youth, is being requested by the Ministry of Education to expand and continue the investment in vocational education (formal & informal). That application, when approved and finalized, will bring to 32 million Euros which will be targeting vocational education in several counties.
78. The Swedish Government has also committed itself to investing approximately 5 Million Euros for Vocational and Skills Education in Liberia, designated specifically for reconstructing and equipping the Voinjama Multilateral High School which was destroyed during the war.
79. The current commitment of the USAID to Education aggregates to \$60.9 Million United States dollars. The USAID investment comprises \$27million United States dollars for the READ LIBERIA PROJECT, and \$33.9 Million United States dollars for the ACCELERATED QUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAM.
80. These two amounts, separately designated for education development by USAID, are designed to enhance early grade reading, particularly for Grades 1 & 2, and enrolling out-of-school children into learning programs, which is estimated to benefit forty-eight thousand (48,000) children residing in six (6) counties.
81. 6. INVESTMENT OF \$30 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS IN SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMS FOR 5 YEARS. The School Feeding Program which is ongoing as of 2018, is expected to benefit over one hundred thousand (100,000) school children in 240 primary schools situated in four (4) counties, primarily in the South-Eastern counties of Liberia, because of their special situation.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

82. Our government recognizes that the young people of Liberia, as the largest component of our population, hold the ultimate key for the development and prosperity of Liberia.
83. We recognize that youth unemployment and the lack of opportunities are not only hindrances to economic development and transformation, but are also potential threats to national security.
84. Therefore, the Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Youth & Sports, sees the provision of skills and sustainable employment to young people as matters of strategic importance for transformation of Liberia and placing the country on a path to sustained peace.
85. We have therefore focused on several key strategic interventions to alleviate some of the issues in Youth Employment and Empowerment and Sports Development.
86. We have completed the recruitment of young people who are to be beneficiaries of youth empowerment and employment activities under our YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT PROJECT, YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT, and the NATIONAL CADET PROGRAM. About fifteen thousand (15,000) individuals and households are expected to benefit from these programs, collectively.
87. The Youth Opportunities Project has to date benefited one hundred and twenty-nine (129) communities in all 15 counties.
88. Twenty-eight (28) farming groups comprising a total of three thousand six hundred and twelve (3,612) youths have received the first tranche of labor subsidy cash payments of one hundred and fifty (\$150) United States dollars per youth, to assist with some of their needs while on the farms.
89. Under the HOUSEHOLD ENTERPRISE component, one hundred (100) business groups consisting of 8 members in 10 communities across the country have completed their business plans.
90. These are now being reviewed, and accounts have been opened for each business group to received two thousand four hundred (\$2,400) United States dollars for business start-up.
91. Under the Productive Public Works component of Youth Opportunities Project, an additional three thousand six hundred and twelve (3,612) youths in 128 communities have been recruited across the country for Round Two implementation. The Youth Opportunities Project is also expected to receive additional financing of 3.5 Million Euros from the Swedish Government and 5 Million Euros from French Government.

92. The first batch of 110 cadets under the National Cadet Program were deployed to various Governmental and private institutions to afford them an opportunity to gain some work experience.
93. In addition, over five thousand (5,000) young people have benefitted from our Sexual Reproductive Health Education and Treatment initiatives. Recognizing the importance of literacy in empowerment, the Youth Literacy Program has been revamped and launched in several communities.
94. Because of the importance of sustaining peace in Liberia, the Ministry continues to engage youth and their communities through the Youth Empowerment and Engagement through Social Cohesion program. Under this program, Community Peace Councils dedicated to teaching and practicing conflict resolution and prevention were formed in several communities in Bong, Cape Mount Margibi and Nimba Counties. The Councils conducted community peace dialogues that are meant to enhance the skills of youth, religious and traditional leaders in conflict resolution and the avoidance of negative values.
95. The Government, with support from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) rolled out the YOUTHCONNEKT Liberia Program. This is a socio-entrepreneur youth development program that seeks to develop young Liberians into productive citizens. The program supports youth in innovation, ICT, volunteerism, entrepreneurship, advocacy and leadership.
96. As part of the activities of the rollout, the Ministry of Youth and Sports dedicated a modern multi-purpose Innovation Lab and Digital Learning Room at the S.K.D Sport Complex. The facility is equipped with computers, projectors, and internet connectivity, and serves as a resource center that provides the space for online learning, peer mentorship, networking and training for youth within Montserrado County and its environs. Plans are being worked out by the Ministry and her partners to replicate similar facilities at our youth and community centers across the country.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

97. Capacity development for our young people remains a matter of high priority for the government. Our TVET institutions graduated about three thousand (3,000) students, with the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre accounting for two thousand seven hundred and nine (2,709) graduates. This was the first graduation since the Ebola crisis.
98. Also, the government have successfully completed negotiations with the European Union on the terms of a 20 million Euro grant, which is meant for the modernization of seven (7) TVET institutions in the country. The execution of this program has begun with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization as implementing partner.

99. The Ministry of Youth & Sports has completed assessments for the re-opening of the other TVET institutions - Tumutu Agriculture and Vocational Training Center in Bong County; Klay Agriculture and Vocational Training Center in Bomi County; and Youth Agriculture Training Center in Montserrado County. We are currently partnering with different organizations to improve and enhance TVET delivery across the country.
100. Under these partnerships, The Tumutu Agriculture Training Center, Youth Agriculture Training Center and Klay Agriculture Training Center will be beginning major activities within the next couple of months.
101. The ADEA, a working group on education management and policy support, has a five-year project for the development of the oil palm industry in Liberia, with emphasis in nursery development. Thirty (30) young Liberians from the western region of the Country are to benefit from the three-month intensive training in nursery development for the pilot phase of the project to be carried out in Klay Agriculture Vocational Training Center in Bomi County.
102. Under Chinese Assistance 2018, the Shandong Foreign Trade Vocational College of China, as part of its Overseas Foreign Aid Training Program, is conducting training focused on electricity, auto repair and construction. This intermediate training is expected to benefit 100 youths.
103. The government continues to champion the use of Sports as a tool for youth development and the promotion of social cohesion.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

104. It is important to mention that the broken economy inherited by our administration, caused by the risk associated with the democratic transition in 2017, collapse of the country's major export commodities prices on the global market, the UNMIL withdrawal, and the effect of the Ebola Virus Disease in 2014, is still in a struggling state.
105. Despite these peculiar adverse economic circumstances, growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) recovered at 2.5 percent in 2017 and was projected to rise to 3 percent at the end of 2018. By 2023, we expect the economy to grow by a further 4.7 percent, on account of further expansion in commercial gold production, growth in the agricultural and forestry sectors, formation of Special Economic Zones, and other economic reforms envisage under the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development.
106. Even with these optimistic recovery forecasts, our projected growth rates are still below the pre-Ebola period, when the economy grew on average by 7.5 percent annually.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

107. During the period under review, the Liberian Dollar performed poorly against the United State Dollar.
108. The average Liberian-dollar exchange rate with reference to the United States dollar, depreciated from L\$117 Liberian dollars to \$1.00 United States dollar in 2017; to L\$157.8 Liberian dollars to \$1.00 United States dollar at the end of 2018. At its lowest value before the government intervention, \$1.00 United States dollar was being exchange at L\$180 Liberia dollars.
109. This massive depreciation of the Liberian was primarily driven by the deterioration of the country's terms of trade, and an increase in demand for United States dollars to service imports. Other factors were the legacy of the UNMIL drawdown and the lingering adverse impact of the EBOLA crisis.
110. To help stabilize the situation, I delivered an economic speech in which I mandated the economic management team and the Central Bank of Liberia to find solutions to exchange rate and other macro-economic problems.
111. As a short-term quick fix, the Government approved \$25 million United States dollars to enable the Central Bank to intervene in the foreign exchange market. As of December 2018, a total of \$17 million United States dollars was used for the intervention, which significantly contributed to the general stability in the exchange rate for the past six months (July to December 2018). The balance \$8 million United States dollars is reserved by the CBL as a precautionary intervention fund.
112. As a sustainable remedy to the exchange rate problems, the Central Bank is concluding arrangements on the use of various monetary policy instruments, including the introduction of a Standing Deposit Facility, a Standing Credit Facility, and CBL indexed Bills and Notes, to ensure a more stable macroeconomic environment in 2019.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

113. Liberia's trade deficit stood at \$561.8 million United States dollars for the period January to November 2018.
114. Although this represents a 17.1 percent improvement, as compared to \$677.3 million for the same period in 2017, it is important to note that the weak performance of the real economy has for so long been characterized by low export earnings as compared to payments for imports.
115. Though there has been improvement in the trade balance in 2018, the Liberian dollar still remains under pressure. Performance of two of our key commodities

(iron ore and rubber) showed some level of improvements during the period under review.

116. Receipts from iron ore exports almost doubled, from \$57.8 million United States dollars, to \$106.5 million United States dollars, while rubber exports grew slightly from \$67 million United States dollars to \$68.9 million United States dollars, compared to the same period in 2017.
117. In order to improve the external sector of the economy, there is an urgent need to support domestic production, which requires a major structural transformation of our economy. In this regard, under the Pro-Poor Agenda, agriculture has been considered a matter of priority to achieve this structural reform.
118. The GROSS FOREIGN RESERVES at the end of November 2018 was \$410.2 million United States dollars, reflecting a slight decline of 1.7 percent compared to the end of December 2017. This slight decline in Gross Foreign Reserves can be largely attributed to low export earnings.
119. Despite the challenges faced in the economy, the banking system remained resilient during the year under review. The banking system further experienced improvement in aggregate assets, deposits, loans and capitalization.
120. However, the stock of non-performing loans remains a major challenge for the banking system. The Central Bank is taking steps, including establishing a robust credit reference system, to address the issue of non-performing loans.
121. At the same time, the Government is working to improve the legal and policy environment to improve access to credit and to resolve other challenges in the private sector.
122. Nevertheless, the banking sector continues to play a significant role in providing credit to the economy. Credit to the private sector, which serves as the main engine of growth, rose by over 36.8 percent at the end of October 2018.
123. In addition, total credit as a percentage of GDP increased from 13.1 percent (2017) to 13.4 percent (2018), largely as a result of growth in loans to all major sectors, especially, the extractive sector, oil & gas sector, and the manufacturing sector.
124. We like to assure members of the banking sector that the Government of Liberia is committed to settling Government debt owed to banks from the previous administration.
125. Regarding the insurance sector, the Central Bank and the Government remain focused on implementing reform of the sector. The measures taken to bring stability to the sector has led to some improvement in the regulatory landscape and the sector.

126. Liberia has made progress in deepening the financial system through the national payments system and digital financial space. There has been an uptake in the use of mobile money services across the country as well as the automatic tellers' machines (ATMs), which has helped to increase access to payment.
127. The Government continues to pay civil servants through this mechanism, and there are efforts underway to use such digital platforms for Government revenue collection. These efforts are part of the Government's vision to digitize the Liberian economy and transition to a cash-less society.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR SPEAKER AND HONORABLE MEMBERS
OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

128. During the year under review, the news media in Liberia was saturated with stories alleging that containers of Liberian dollars imported by the Central Bank were missing.
129. Given the gravity of the allegations, our administration took several actions in response, including setting up a Special Presidential Technical Committee to investigate.
130. In addition, the Government requested the assistance of the European Union, the African Union, the United States Government and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to help in conducting a separate external investigation into the alleged missing money. With the assistance and support of USAID, an audit team from Kroll of London, England, was invited to independently investigate and report findings.
131. The Report from the Kroll Audit Team is expected at the end of February 2019, and will be released to the public by USAID.
132. If it is established that there has been any willful act of criminality, negligence, or malfeasance by anyone implicated in the reports, the full weight of the law will be brought to bear.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE:

133. I am pleased to report that, despite the challenges to the economy, our robustness in revenue policy and administration and the support of donor partners resulted into greater revenue receipts in 2018 as compared to 2017.
134. REVENUE COLLECTION FOR 2018, INCLUDING GRANTS, WAS \$480.6 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS, AS COMPARED TO \$454 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS IN 2017, WHICH REPRESENTS GROWTH OF 5.7 PERCENT.

135. This strong performance was driven by higher receipts of tax and non-tax revenues.

136. To this end, our government is especially grateful to our partners for contributing approximately ten (10) times more in budget support grants in 2018 than in 2017 (\$38 million United States dollars in 2018, as compared to \$4.8 million in 2017) Tax revenue increased from \$384.9 million United States dollars in 2017, to \$387.6 million United States dollars in 2018. Non-tax revenue increased from \$55 million United States dollars in 2017, to \$64.7 million in 2018, mainly on account of active collection of the Road Fund Levy.

137. CORRESPONDINGLY, EXPENDITURE FOR 2018 AMOUNTED TO \$502 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS, COMPARED TO \$434.3 MILLION UNITED STATES DOLLARS AT THE END OF NOVEMBER 2017. The increase in government expenditures consistently reminds us about the desire of the Liberian people for meaningful developments, which are in line with our Change for Hope mandate.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR SPEAKER AND HONORABLE MEMBERS
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138. When we came to power, we inherited a debt of \$878.2 million United States dollars at the end of 2017.

139. The debt stock now stands at \$987.8 million in 2018 at the end of 2018. The increase in the debt stock of \$109.6 million during the period under review is mainly on account of disbursements from borrowing external loan portfolios, including the World Bank, African Development Bank, BADEA and Saudi Arabia, which were ratified in 2017.

140. To date, my administration has not added to the debt stock but that does not mean we will not increase the stock of debt. In the interest of our people, we are working on this.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

141. Our administration remains grateful to our development partners for the level of assistance we have received since my ascendancy as President of the Republic of Liberia. Total official development assistance received from January up to September 2018 is about \$399 million United States dollars in support of various programs and activities under our Pro-Poor Agenda.

142. To our partners, we say thank you, merci and obrigado!

143. Of this amount, approximately \$279.2 million United States dollars, represents seventy percent (70%) in grants; while the remaining \$120 million United States dollars represents thirty percent (30%) received as concessional loans.

144. This reflects the commitment of our partners and the international community to support the dream and aspiration of the Liberian people, and their confidence in our fiscal discipline.

145. MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE, it is my singular honor to request this honorable body to join me in expressing our sincere thanks and profound appreciation to our donor partners.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE

146. As the world's second largest shipping registry, we have carried out several programs and activities to strengthen, consolidate and expand our maritime program in the face of competition from new and emerging registries.

147. During the period under review, the Governments of Liberia and the People's Republic of China renewed the favored-nation Maritime Transport Agreement for another five (5) years, thus preserving our access to a vast market in the Far East. Additionally, discussions are in the final stages to conclude a MARITIME TRANSPORT AGREEMENT WITH THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA.

148. The government will continue to explore further opportunities to ensure that the competitive advantage we have as a world class maritime nation is increased to the benefit of the Liberian people.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT MR. SPEAKER AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

149. In my Inaugural Address, I stated that my greatest contribution to this country as President may not lie in the eloquence of my speeches, but will definitely lie in the quality of the decisions that I will make over the next six years to advance the lives of Liberians. And, as I have often said, "I am a man of action".

150. It is against this backdrop that I have set my eyes on Roads as my administration's path to delivering a better living condition for the Liberian people.

151. Good road connectivity will enhance our economic development, our agriculture productivity and reduce travel times to schools and hospitals.

152. In fulfillment of the goal of the PAPD to connect every county to our commercial capital of Monrovia, we have targeted five hundred and seventeen kilometers (517 km) of paved primary roads. At the same time, we are creating community connectivity through the pavement of Community Roads throughout the country.

153. The Government of Liberia is working with the Ecowas Bank Investment and Development, the African Development, the World Bank and the private sector to identify and scale up financing for the Coastal Highway.

154. During the period under review, three (3) new segments of primary road projects were initiated: the SANNIQUELLIE - LOGATUO ROAD project of forty-seven kilometers (47 km) with funding from the African Development Bank and the European Union; the GANTA - TAPPITTA - ZWEDRU ROAD project of two hundred and twenty-five kilometers (225 km) with funding from the Liberia Reconstruction Trust Fund.
155. Similarly, the German Government has contributed \$16 Million United States dollars and the World Bank has also contributed \$29 Million United States dollars to the Ganta - Tappitta - Zwedru Road project and the Gbarnga - Salayea Road project of eighty-one kilometers (81 km) is expected with funding from the Arab Banks.
156. In addition to these gains, the Government of Liberia has secured funding from the Arab Banks, led by the Kuwaiti Fund, for the ongoing Gbarnga to Salayea Road corridor to be extended to Voinjama via Konia in Lofa County, totaling one hundred and ninety-five kilometers (195 km).
157. Our concessionaire, ARCELORMITTAL, has started the GANTA - YEKEPA Road Project of sixty-seven kilometers (67 km), and the World Bank has finalized funding for six kilometers (6 km) of paved road from Coca Cola Factory to ELWA Junction.
158. It is also worthy to mention, that with support from the World Bank, the Government has successfully completed the National Road Inventory, which includes updated data on the current state of the road network in country.
159. The Government is undertaking a total of one hundred and fifty kilometers (150) km of Community Roads in fifty-seven (57) communities in Monrovia and its environs, as well as in Gbarnga, Bong County and in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County. These roads are being paved with funding from domestic revenues generated from taxes.
160. I am pleased to inform you that more than sixty-five percent (65%) of community roads are near completion. DOE COMMUNITY TO CLARA TOWN road and CHUGBOR ROAD are completed and dedicated.
161. Other gains in the road sector during the period under review include a road maintenance funding grant. Projects phase completion includes:
162. 300,000 Euros provided by the German Government through GIZ;
163. People's Republic of China for the Construction of 2 ultra-modern overpass bridges to be constructed at the SKD Boulevard and Ministerial Complex Intersections respectively on Tubman Boulevard;

164. The Japanese Government thirteen point two kilometers (13.2km) Somalia Drive Road Phase I completion and Phase II commencement;

165. The Liberian Swedish 400 km Feeder Road Project;

166. The Government of India 144 Million commitment to build a conference center named in honor of Mahatma Gandhi to be built on Bali Island.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

167. As the Liberia Electricity Cooperation (LEC) has been able to increase its supply out, the demand for electricity also increased. Insufficient transformers and overload led to several communities physically demanding service, sometimes resulting in demonstrations in some communities. The able technicians of LEC were able to mitigate some of the problems by introducing new transformers where needed and replacing damaged overload transformers.

168. There are more than 8000 new household connections, 324 new commercial connections, with 80 new large users added and in the process of being added. However, revenue collected accounts for about 40% of generated load, while power theft accounts for about 49% and technical losses accounts for 12%. There has not been a change in Tariff and that may not change until the problem of power theft is addressed through a policy reform.

169. Statistics showed that 10 % of power theft will cost the Liberia Electricity Corporation \$8 million United States dollars. Today, because of the increase in illegal connections, the LEC is losing in excess of \$35 million United States dollars per year to electricity theft.

170. This huge loss is preventing LEC from extending supply to many areas of the country where citizens are crying out for electricity. It is also preventing LEC from offering connections to many businesses, who in turn could offer much-needed employment opportunities to many Liberians.

171. Power Theft is ILLEGAL, AND SABOTAGES THE ECONOMY OF OUR COUNTRY. I appeal to you, my fellow Liberians, to stop this behavior of power theft NOW!!

172. Let us work together to put an end to this dangerous crime and help LEC generate more revenue to expand its services to other communities and connect more citizens for the greater good of Liberia.

173. Government has already taken the following measures:

174. Provided the Ministry of Justice with additional funding to work in coordination with the Judiciary to fast track power theft cases.

175. Drafted a Bill to be forwarded to the Legislature that would make power theft an economic crime.

176. Began a rigorous implementation of mass disconnections of illegal connections and encouraging homes to legitimize their connections. LEC enhanced community outreach as Joint Stakeholders to protect against illegal connections which result in damage transformers.

Much work has been done, but we acknowledge that there is still more to do.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

177. We made a solemn commitment to protect and uphold the rights and freedoms of our citizens. During the period under review, the government maintained an enabling environment for the exercise of press freedom and freedom of speech.

178. The Liberia media remains vibrant and unfettered. Currently, there are more than seventy privately owned (70) radio and television stations with over 40 newspapers operating in the country. The media is a fundamental pillar of our democracy. While we applaud the plurality of the media, we have also engaged the Press Union of Liberia to devise ways of enhancing professionalism.

179. Because we have an obligation to provide factual information about the development agenda to our citizens, we have ramped up the efficiency and capacity of the government's own national media outlets. The national broadcaster, Liberia Broadcasting Corporation (ELBC & ELTV) has extended its coverage to leeward counties. In an effort to further disseminate information to the populace, the government has signed a \$10 million United States dollar Grant Agreement with the Government of the People's Republic of China as support to the LBS decentralization program.

180. The State-owned media, including the New Liberia publication and the Liberia News Agency, have become a premier disseminator of news and information from all around the country. We as a government will continue to rely on the independent media to compliment the effort of the state-owned media to keep the Liberian people engaged and informed of the activities of the government.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

181. Liberia is a beautiful country with huge tourism potential. Our Government will continue to work to improve the tourism potential.

182. Tourism is largely a private-sector driven industry, but the government, in keeping with our own responsibility, has undertaken to craft the proper regulatory and administrative framework for the sector to thrive, within the framework of National Tourism Trade Export Strategy.

183. We are reviewing the option of seeking legislation to set up an independent national tourism board to regulate the sector and to attract investment in the sector.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

184. I would like to reiterate to you today, what I said at the United Nation General Assembly last year: a nation which has experienced civil war must never take peace for granted, or forget the long shadow that years of conflict still cast over people's lives.

185. We must realize and appreciate that ours is still a fragile peace. As we strive to reconcile our people and consolidate all our resources toward a future of prosperity, we must uphold the rule of law to enable us forge a sustainable peace.

186. The peace that we enjoy today was bestowed upon us with the blood and resources of other countries; its sustainability is now our responsibility. We are constitutionally responsible under the law to protect our hard-won peace.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

187. The Ministry of National Defense continues to ensure professional military training for soldiers and is working with international partners in restructuring a credible defense sector that would maintain the peace and provide the enabling environment for the implementation of the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD).

188. During the period under review several local and international training opportunities were provided by our partners including The United States of America, The People's Republic of China, The Government of Bangladesh, The Republic of Ghana, The Republic of Sierra Leone, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria to improve the administrative, tactical, and operational capabilities of the men and women of the AFL.

189. The Armed Forces of Liberia continues to play significant role in the quest for peace and stability in Mali under the auspices of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Mission in Mali.

190. In February of 2018, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) conducted two successive rotation exercises to reach a total of five rotations since the beginning of the Mission.

191. A total of one hundred personnel have been deployed, bringing the present strength of our troops to 105 personnel. During the period under review, the AFL Engineering Command collaborated with the Ministry of Public Works to undertake numerous road construction projects aimed at improving its civil-

military relationship by engaging in civil works. In 2017, the Engineering Command completed the reconditioning of more than 300 kilometers of feeder roads in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works.

192. As part of post-conflict security sector reforms, the Liberian National Defense Act of 2008 included provisions to re-establish the Liberian Coast Guard. With assistance from the United States government, the Liberian Coast Guard was fully reactivated and partially equipped to conduct maritime security and safety operations.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

193. In an effort to take government closer to the people, The Ministry of Internal Affairs launched the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance. The central goal of this new approach is to provide basic social services to our people.

194. The newly-enacted Local Government Act of 2018 will now guide the national progress of decentralization of power, whereby authority, functions, and responsibilities will shift from central government to local governments.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

195. Liberia continues to foster friendly and mutually beneficial ties with her traditional partners as well as explore new relations with countries sharing similar world views based on friendship, peace and cooperation in pursuit of her national interest.

196. Liberia continues to pursue a foreign policy objective based on the principles of sovereignty, equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The cultivation of friendly ties with member states of the international organizations and the settlement of disputes through dialogue and negotiations took center stage in the international arena.

197. During the period under review, I made Official and State visits to several countries in the interest of Liberia, and consulted with my colleagues on a number of issues of importance to Africa, notably the resolution of conflicts on the African continent and elsewhere.

198. Most notable among my travels were the following:

199. January 28 - 30, 2018: I attended the 30th ordinary summit of Heads of State of the African Union in Addis Abba, Ethiopia. This was my first official travel as President of Liberia and my first attendance at the African Union.

200. February 14 -17, 2018: I paid a State Visit to the Republic of Senegal. This landmark visit to the President of Senegal reinvigorated the bilateral relations between Liberia and Senegal. My counterpart, President Macky Sall, and I discussed various areas of bilateral cooperation, particularly in the areas of fisheries, medicine, carpentry training, investment promotion, as well as Senegalese experience in the implementation of economic and social development programs.
201. February 16 - 20, 2018: I made an Official Visit to the Republic of France where the French President committed a grant of Ten million Euros to Liberia for road maintenance. I was also given the opportunity, along with President Macron, to serve as a co-founder of Sports for Development. Modalities are being worked out for a more comprehensive and sustainable development assistance to Liberia.
202. June 1 - 7, 2018: I attended the 12th edition of the European Development Forum on International Cooperation and Development held in Brussels, Belgium.
203. July 29 - August 1, 2018: I attended the 53rd Summit of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS in Lomé, Togo.
204. August 27 - September 6, 2018: I led a high-powered delegation to attend the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit in Beijing, China. During this visit, the Government of Liberia and China signed a \$54 million United States dollar grant to Liberia to aid the construction of two overhead bridges to ease traffic movement at the Ministerial Complex and the SKD Boulevard respectively.
205. I would like to inform this August body that Liberia has signed a Memorandum of Understanding enabling us to become a member of the One Belt One Road Initiative.
206. All of these indicate the strength of Liberia-China Relations. In this spirit, we reconfirm our commitment to upholding the One China Policy which governs our relations.
207. September 18 - October 4, 2018: I attended the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly for the first time as President of the Republic of Liberia. I had the opportunity to address the General Assembly and also attended a high-level meeting on the world drug problem that was chaired by President Donald Trump of the United States. I also attended a high-level plenary meeting on global peace in honor of the 100th birth anniversary of Nelson Mandela.
208. November 9 - 15, 2018: At the invitation of the President of France, I paid an Official Visit to the Republic of France to attend the Paris Peace Forum which brought together more than Seventy (70) world leaders. During the occasion, had the opportunity to meet other world leaders.

209. While in France, I was invited to attend the Internet Governance Forum organized by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Guest of Honor.

210. In my submission I highlighted the significance of Internet in bridging communication gaps in the world, as well as called attention to the dangers of the misuse of this new technology for both countries and their citizens.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE

211. It is noteworthy to report that Liberia's relation with the United States is cordial, harmonious and mutually fruitful. Both countries enjoy strong relationship which is characterized by mutual respect. America is a traditional ally of Liberia and both countries continue to collaborate at the bilateral and multilateral levels, which led to a recent and significant signing of a \$120 Million United States dollars grant between USAID and Government.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE, HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

212. During the reporting period, several officials, former officials of Government and prominent citizens ended their earthly journey for eternal rest. Among those for whom official Gazettes were issued were:

213. Lemuel E. A. Reeves, Sr.: Former Commissioner General, Acting Commissioner General and Deputy Commissioner for Naturalization, respectively, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, now Liberia Immigration Service

214. Jacob Hilary Mason Sr.: Former Deputy Minister for Administration, Ministry of Agriculture

215. Famatta Rose OSODE: Former Minister and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Minister Counselor, Counselor, Deputy Permanent Representative/Minister Plenipotentiary, Charge d' Affaires

216. Hon Jackson E. Doe: Former Minister of Post and Telecommunications, Transport and Presidential Affairs

217. Sandei A. Cooper, Sr.: Former Deputy Governor, Central Bank of Liberia; Senior Vice President for Operation, Erstwhile Citi Bank; Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer respectively.

218. Francis Y. S. M. Garlawolu: Former Minister and Attorney General, Ministry of Justice, Republic of Liberia; Dean and Former Senator of Bong County

219. A. Francis Kpangbai: Former Representative, 51st Legislature, Bong County; Procurement Officer, Peace Corps; Land Commissioner, Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, Bong County
220. Joseph T. K. Vonleh: Former Paramount Chief, Chief Elder, Clan Chief, Respectively; Ministry of Internal Affairs, Republic of Liberia
221. Alfred Boimah Anderson, Jr.: Former Superintendent, Bomi County; Former Board Member, Bomi Community, College and Radio Bomi, respectively, Educator, Humanitarian, Prominent Citizen
222. Dr. Emmanuel W. Johnson: Superintendent, Monrovia Consolidated School System, President, Cuttington College and Divinity School.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

223. Long before the drafting and completion of the PAPD, our administration started immediate implementation with the Recast Fiscal Year 17/18 National Budget. With the re-balancing, we were able to generate \$9.6 million United States dollars in savings through expenditure cuts, including reductions in the salaries of all top-level government officials.
224. These included cabinet ministers, deputy and assistant ministers, heads of autonomous agencies and their deputies and assistants.
225. I am pleased to inform you, Honorable Members of the 54th Legislature, that today, no member of my cabinet makes above US\$7,200 monthly as compared to monthly earnings of US\$15,000 to US\$20,000 in the past.
226. With your approval as Members of the National Legislature, we used these savings wisely to fund Thirteen (13) Pro-Poor Projects. Today, I am pleased to inform you that most of these deliverables, consisting of our first Pro-Poor programs and projects, have now been successfully completed.
227. Some of the major successful programs and projects include: digitizing the University of Liberia registration system; sending medical doctors abroad to specialize; feasibility study of the 14th Military Hospital; upgrade of JFK and provision of the roads maintenance and the payment of the Resettlement Action Plan. Additionally, a new Presidential Lounge is being constructed at RIA to accommodate visiting Heads of State.
228. In addition, three (3) new dedicated jetty lines were installed at the Petroleum Storage Terminal (PST) on Bushrod Island. Another major milestone in the PST rehabilitation and expansion project was achieved with the completion of Three (3) new storage tanks.

These tanks enable the Government to store more petroleum products.

229. In the face of rising global prices, the government has been able to reduce the basic prices of fuel on the Liberian market. Fuel prices have been reduced as follows: Gas: 3.70 reduce to 3.30 and AGO has been reduced from 3.95 cents to 3.70. Likewise, the price of an ordinary passport has been reduced by 10%, from \$50 to \$45.

MADAM VICE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER, MR. PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE AND HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE 54TH LEGISLATURE:

230. As we kick start the infrastructure portion of the PADP through road construction, we also want to place a new emphasis on agriculture.

231. Our International Partners will agree with me that endless national and foreign resources have been and continue to be poured into Agriculture, yet returns on these investments are almost negligible.

232. THIS WILL HAVE TO CHANGE!!

233. Just as I am doing with the roads, I will directly get involved in the programs and practical implementation of agriculture development.

The sector accounts for more than seventy percent (70%) of household earnings.

234. Therefore, our Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development can only be sustainably achieved through agriculture. We will craft new practical and realistic agriculture policies, incentivize the sector by providing access to credit, reducing tariffs on agriculture implements, and provide small machines, modern seeds and fertilizers.

235. As I said before, and continue to say, Liberia is open for business. Under this administration the private sector will be prioritized. With the passage of the new Special Economic Zone Law, we will create one-stop shop business zones for the private sector.

236. We have for long spoken about adding value to various raw materials to create more jobs, income and livelihood for our citizens. It is time we take practical action to make it happen. As part of our strategies to begin value addition, especially for light manufacturing and processing.

237. Survey of the Buchanan port has already begun on land that is allocated for the establishment of an SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE, and in this fiscal year we work with our international partners to complete the feasibility studies.

238. While we try to roll out these new business opportunities, we will get directly involved in improving the business climate in Liberia.
239. I would like to take this time to thank all the foreign businesses operating in the country. In spite of various constraints, they continue to positively contribute to the economy in terms of revenue generations and job creations.
240. As part of this exercise Government will continue to addresses constraints and challenges faced by our business community and the private sector. In so doing, we intend to explore the possibility of the following:
241. We will shortly place before you, the Legislature, a proposed amendment to extend the time required to renew Resident Permits. In Liberia we have business people who have lived here for 30 to 50 years but have to renew resident permit every year. THIS WILL HAVE TO CHANGE! People who have already resided in Liberia for five years or more, without a criminal record, will be eligible.
242. The amendment will also propose that resident permit holders will no longer be required to obtained permits to re-enter the country. We will also look into revising the requirement for annual renewal of work permits for a longer period. Additionally, we will implement a Visa-upon-Arrival program, as well as the issuance of Tourist Visas.

MADAME VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATURE, MEMBERS OF THE CABINET, MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY, DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY, OUR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS HERE PRESENT, MEMBERS OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, MEMBERS OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY, OUR TRADITIONAL LEADERS, MEMBERS OF THE FOURTH ESTATE, OFFICIALS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT HERE PRESENT, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MY FELLOW LIBERIANS:

243. As I conclude this Report to you on the current State of the Nation, I want to again give thanks and praise to the Almighty God for the many blessings and protection He has accorded us during our first year of service to our People and Nation.
244. Let me use this occasion to commend all of our Cabinet Ministers and their Deputies, Heads of autonomous agencies and their Deputies, the technicians at the various ministries and autonomous agencies, our security forces, Honorable Members of the National Legislature, the Judiciary; and our traditional leaders, for your tireless efforts and support in bringing us thus far.
245. I applaud your great works and I am deeply grateful for all of your sacrifices and immense contribution to our Nation. As we embark upon this new journey of the second year of our tenure, I am looking forward to your total commitment,

unflinching support, and unwavering efforts; as we work collectively in transforming the lives of our people for the better.

246. It will be remiss of me, if I did not recognize and commend our International and Development Partners, for their immense support and contributions to our Government during our first year of leadership.

247. We applaud them for standing with us; and we look forward to a renewed and strengthened partnership in moving our country to higher heights.

FELLOW CITIZENS:

248. It is a little over a year since we took on the mantle of leadership to transform your lives for the better. It was a journey of profound opportunities and endless possibilities. At the same time, it was a Herculean task filled with challenges. But I am grateful that we were able to sail safely through difficult times in our first year of Service to our people. Certainly, this could not have been possible without the help and guidance of the Almighty; but also due to your patience, sacrifices, collaboration and cooperation.

249. When we accepted the challenge to serve our People about a year ago, not only was it the dawn of a new era for our Nation; but an opportunity to right the wrongs, address the plights of our people, heal their wounds; and confront every challenge and obstacle that stood in the way of transforming the lives of the Liberian people for the better. Today, I can state with understandable pride, that we did not disappoint our people; neither did we fail them.

250. With the support from our two other branches of Government and our International Partners during the course of our first year in office, I can confidently state that Liberia is far better today, under our leadership, than it was twelve months ago when we were entrusted with the mandate to serve our people. This is also because of the diligence and tenacity that we brought to the process. We were resolved for change, and we remained committed to that cause during our first year of service to our people.

AND SO TODAY, I STAND BEFORE YOU WITH CONFIDENCE, AND
DECLARE THAT THE STATE OF OUR NATION IS STRONG, PEACEFUL,
UNITED, STABLE, AND PROMISING, WITH GREAT PROSPECTS FOR A
BETTER FUTURE FOR ALL!!

Fellow Citizens:

251. Despite all of these achievements during our first year, we are not oblivious of the many challenges that lie ahead, neither are we concluding that we have reached our peak in addressing the issues that confront your livelihood. But I can assure you that we are more energetic and motivated than we have ever been.

252. We are committed to changing your lives and to leading this Country to a prosperous future of countless opportunities.
253. And that is why we have started our second year with a new mindset... a patriotic mindset geared towards total development, economic growth and empowerment.
254. WE WILL NOT REST UNTIL WE REACH OUR ZENITH.
255. WE WILL NOT REST UNTIL WE PAVE THAT LAST ROAD LEADING TO THE REMOTEST PART OF OUR COUNTRY.
256. We will not rest until prices of basic commodities are made affordable; and the equitable distribution of our national wealth is achieved.
257. We will not rest until we see improvements in every sector of our society.
258. FELLOW LIBERIANS, thank you for standing with us! Thank you for your prayers and support!
259. In closing, permit me to quote the immortal words of our beloved National Anthem:
260. In Union Strong, Success is Sure.
261. We cannot fail!!!
262. With God above, our rights to prove,
263. We will, over all, prevail
264. With heart, and hand, our Country's cause defending,
265. We'll meet the foe, with valor unpretending.
266. LONG LIVE LIBERIA, HAPPY LAND!!
267. A home of Glorious Liberty, By God's command.
268. A home of Glorious Liberty, By God's command.
269. MAY GOD BLESS THE WORKS OF OUR HANDS, AND SAVE THE STATE.
270. I THANK YOU.

D Appendix D: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Annual Message, January 2007

Delivered By
Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
Delivered to the 52nd Legislature of the Republic of Liberia

Unity Conference Center
Virginia, Liberia
Monday, 29th January 2007

**Mr. Vice President,
Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tempore;
Members of the Legislature;
Mr. Chief Justice, Associate Justices of the Supreme Court and
Members of the Judiciary;
Members of the Cabinet and other Government Officials;
Mr. Doyen, Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
His Excellency the Special Representative of the Secretary General
of the United Nations in Liberia;
Officers, Men, Women, and Staff of the United Nations Military
Mission in Liberia;
The Officer in Charge, Men and Women of the Armed Forces of
Liberia (AFL);
Former Government Officials;
Leaders and Members of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia;
Political and Business Leaders;
Traditional Leaders, Chiefs and Elders of Liberia;
Labour and Trade Unions and other Workers Organizations;
Civil Society
Organizations; Members
of the Press;
Distinguished Ladies and
Gentlemen; Fellow
Liberians:**

1. I wish to thank the Almighty God for yet another opportunity to come together at an auspicious occasion as this one. May I request that you join me, Honorable

Members of the Legislature, in rising and observing a moment of silent Thanksgiving to our Omnipotent and Omnipresent father who has guided and steered our nation and its affairs, over the last years. While standing in prayers, let us also remember those from this Honorable legislature and from other works of life who gave the best of themselves in service and have gone to eternal rest.

Thank you.

2. One year ago on January 23, 2006, and only a few days after I appeared before you in fulfillment of the constitutional requirement under Article 58 to “present the administrations...” I did so barely 7 days after I took the oath of office on January 16, as President of the Republic of Liberia. I swore then to uphold and defend our Constitution, to nurture and strengthen our common peace and security, heal our nation’s wounds and lead it to recovery, and reconstruction. An expectant air of euphoria, optimism, and hope enveloped that occasion. Our Nation and people had voted. I heard them say during the long months of campaigning that they yearned for a complete break with past practices that were responsible for our years of violent conflict and under-development. They wanted fundamental change in all areas of our nation’s life. They wanted a new, free, and democratic Liberia where civil liberties, the rule of law, an accountable and transparent government, peace and security would be the norms, and not from the generosity of an imperial president. They wanted a rule rooted firmly in our Constitution, our statutes, and the true Liberia way of life.
3. I declared to our people then that I had heard them loud and clear. But change does not come from the waving of a magic wand or the pushing of a BUTTON! It comes from CONVICTION, from a process of CONSISTENT policies and actions that seek and alter the way we make individual decisions; the way we carry on our activities; and ultimately the way we think. This is not an easy challenge.

4. I promised that with God's help and guidance, I would lead a nation in which we all will put our best efforts and creative energies to work to fulfill our individual and collective expectations. I can say boldly that in just one year, we have made an important beginning even in the face of monumental challenges. That was to be expected. Our national resolve was tested – that was a normal consequence. But, we have prevailed. We have registered many successes.
5. Of significant importance to our initial efforts in this respect, is the fact that we have placed our nation firmly on the road, laying the basis for full recovery and reconstruction for peace, security and healing. As we get on with this monumental national undertaking, as we work to deal with every issue of post conflict reconstruction, all we ask of you and the Liberian people as a whole is PATIENCE.
6. Fellow Liberians, as I stand here to deliver this address covering the State of our nation after the first full year of my Administration, I declare to you our elected representatives, our people here at home and abroad, our local and international partners, and indeed the international community, that our Nation is peaceful, secured, hopeful and strong.
7. **Honorable Members of the Legislature, Fellow Liberians:**
It is in this view that during the fiscal year under review, my Administration submitted, for your consideration several legislations, agreements and treaties for your consideration, intended for the Legislative Branch of the Government to create permanent and durable legal frameworks for governance and the efficient running of our common patrimony.
8. The Acts and Legislations presented to this august body included many international conventions and other instruments for ratification. Clearly, the ratification in line with international best practices will help to restore Liberia's place in the comity of nations

9. We also submitted legislation to enhance the reform of our forestry sector, to revise our revenue laws and harmonize the national custom tariff schedules and coding system; as well as to repeal laws such as Section 1508 of the Labor Practices Law, and PRC Decrees #12 and #88A that grossly infringed on the fundamental rights and liberties of our workers and citizens.
10. These international instruments and proposed Legislations included:
 1. Partnership Agreement between the Member States of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States;
 2. ECOWAS Energy Protocol;
 3. UN Convention Against Corruption & the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption;
 4. An Act Repealing Sections 1508 (3) of the Labor Practices Laws & PRC Decree #12;
 5. An Act Repealing PRC Decree 88A;
 6. ILO Conventions 100, 138 and 185;
 7. An Act Authorizing Legislative Approval of Major Budgetary Transfer;
 8. An Act Adopting the National Forestry Reform Law of 2006;
 9. An Act to Amend Certain Portions of the Revenue Code of Liberia and to Harmonize
 - i. Description and Coding System of the Customs Tariff Schedules;

10 Production Sharing Contracts with Addendums for Blocks LB 11-13 signed between

- i. NOCAL and ORAN Petroleum Limited & Broadway Consolidated PLC; and

Instrument of Ratification of the Maritime Labor Convention (2006) and related Certificate of Deposit;

11. Honorable Members of the Legislature:

12 I wish to thank you for acting on two important instruments. After your careful study, scrutiny and revision in keeping with your constitutional mandate for independence and oversight of the Executive, you passed the FY 06/07 National Budget. We also thank you for passing into law the Forestry Reform Act thus preparing the way for the lifting of international sanctions on our forestry sector. Both of these instruments were duly submitted to me for Executive concurrence and they are now fully operational.

13 While we applaud you for such acts in the national interest, I wish to take this opportunity to call on your Honorable Body to pass into law or forward for Executive action, other instruments pending before you. This will greatly improve our governance process and set us on the road to progress in tackling the people's business.

14 **Honorable Members**, in addition to the legislation, agreements and treaties submitted to your Honorable Body, our Administration also issued a number of Executive Orders as interim regulations, and stop gap legal measures to, among other things, centralize and improve revenue collection, streamline expenditures and expand the fiscal space of the national economy, revamp and reform the Forestry Sector, and improve the overall process of national

governance. Prominent among the ordinances and executive orders issued were:

15 Executive Orders

Executive Order # 1 To Reform the Forestry Sector.

Executive Order # 2 Repositioning the Governance Reform Commission

Executive Order # 3 Creating the Mechanism for proper control of Government Revenues and Obligations

Executive Order # 4 Ensuring Government Support to the RR Component of the National

- i. Commission on Disarmament,
Demobilization, Rehabilitation and
Reconstruction Program

Executive Order # 5 Suspension of Protective Tariff on Cement

Executive Order # 6 Establishing a total Ban on Firearms

Executive Order # 7 Establishment of LIMPAC to provide for The Improvement of Macroeconomic Policy Formulation and Analysis

Executive Establishing Government Policy on Per Diem Allowances Ordinance # 1

Executive Establishing Government Policy on Per Diem Allowances for Domestic Ordinance # 2 Travel By Officials and Employees of Government

16 Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen:

As we enter a new legislative session, I wish to seize this moment to remind all of us that, at this stage in our history, we cannot afford to remain complacent because of the achievements made thus far. The road ahead is long, tough and challenging. But it is, no doubt, the road into the future of restoring our County to sustained peace and prosperity. And we must all take it boldly with the singleminded determination to succeed. In this forward march into the future, turning back is no option; neither is it advisable.

17 So, in this Legislative session and in the years ahead, we are embarking upon a noble but difficult journey to reduce poverty across the nation, reform and strengthen our economic management system, rebuild our infrastructures decimated by years of war, reform our security sector, restore our social services including our health care and educational systems, decentralize national governance, and restore the rule of law that has been undermined by the tragedy of several internal wars. This is the thrust and fulcrum of our legislative agenda during the course of this session. Ours is a plan to propose laws and execute policies within the framework of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (iPRSP).

18 This is our agenda; and this is our challenge. It is a tall order, but it is the mandate of our people. We, therefore, have no choice but to pursue it, and let the judgment of history fall where it may. Acting together, we bear the burden of the collective expectation of an anxious nation, where expectations are high. We look forward to your support and collaboration in this endeavor during this Legislative session as we will be submitting, initially, the following legislations and agreements:

19 Acts and Concessions

- a. Telecommunications Act 2006
- b. Governance Commission Act
- c. National Defense Act
- d. Act Amending Chapter 22 of the Executive Law Repealing the Act establishing the Ministry of Rural Development
- e. Act Amending Title 2, Criminal procedure Law
- f. Act creating the National Bureau of Veterans Affairs
- g. Enactment of a Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest
- h. Anti-Corruption Statute
- i. Mineral Development Agreement with Mittal Steel Company
- j. An Act to establish a Liberia National Commission on Small Arms

Honorable Members of the Legislature, Fellow Liberians:

- 20 One of the first steps in dealing with post-conflict reconstruction is to create a credible goal-oriented, domestic, political and economic agenda – and a foreign policy posture capable of projecting our image as a new democratic nation committed to the guiding principles of sound economic policies, good governance, creditworthiness and partnerships.
- 21 As part of our efforts to achieve this goal, immediately upon our assumption of office, we formulated our vision based upon a development framework anchored on four pillars: *Security Reform, Economic Revitalization, Infrastructure Rehabilitation*, and *Good Governance and the Rule of Law*.

I. Security Sector Reform

Honorable Members of the Legislature, My Fellow Citizens:

- 22 I am pleased to report that during the period under review, the security of our nation witnessed steady and significant reform and improvements through the collaborative efforts of our people, National Security Services and the international community, especially the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).
- 23 Pursuant to provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement reached in Accra in August 2003, we continued from the NTGL and concluded the demobilization, deactivation and restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), the Liberian National Police, and the Special Security Service. This required the retirement of a total of 17,000 persons at an estimated cost of US\$ 20 million with additional costs of US\$ 1,100,100 in benefits to widows. A

reorganization of these institutions and the recruitment and training of new personnel within the framework of a comprehensive security sector reform has begun. The goals are to create a well trained and properly equipped army of **2000**, and police and security forces of some **6,000**, to protect the geographic integrity of our Country and respond to any internal and external threat to our national security. To ensure that these goals are met, we must move quickly to establish the Office of Veteran Affairs and provide the means for full settlement of remaining arrears and payment of pensions to all qualified deactivated security personnel.

- 24** We have also initiated steps to revamp and strengthen the operations of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) with ongoing effort to reactivate offices at all important entry points in the Country thereby strengthening the security of our borders and protecting our economic interest.
- 25** The United States has been our key partner in the reform of the sector, particularly the training of the new army, while the United Nations assumed major responsibility for the training of the police force. Important assistance has also been provided from our sisterly countries of Nigeria and Ghana and from China in the training of our Special Security Service. We thank each of these partners who have assured us that they will continue to honor their commitment to this important aspect of our national development endeavor.

II. Economic Revitalization

Honorable Members of the Legislature, My Fellow Liberians:

- 26** As we all know, our economy is small, open, import-oriented, and dualistic, with modern and traditional, or formal and informal sectors co-existing and functioning reasonably well. The modern or formal sector of our economy continues to be dominated by multinational corporations which import capital,

technology and management – and generally export raw or unprocessed products. The traditional or informal sector on which our economy turns, continues to be rural based, rudimentary in technology with less developed infrastructures – producing largely for domestic consumption.

- 27** Overall, our economy is performing well. According to 2006 estimates, real Gross Domestic Product is expected to grow at a rate of 8 percent. This compares with a 30 percent decline in 2003. This gives recognition to the propelling forces of our revived traditional engines of growth and the boom in construction activities.
- 28** The export-oriented sector made an annual contribution of 47 percent to overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the traditional or informal sector, largely characterized by subsistence farming, accounted for the primary economic activities of our nation.
- 29** After taking office in January, we took important first steps on the long road to economic recovery. We endorsed and made active the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) which provides international experts for deployment in key financial agencies of Government. This provided the basis for a partnership consultation framework, the Economic Governance Steering Committee which I chair.
- 30** We also established the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission (PPCC) which has strengthened public expenditure regulation and led the review of all contracts and concessions agreements, particularly those granted under the National Transitional Government of Liberia. This review process received technical support from our partners through the Contracts and Concession Review Committee. At the end of this exercise, on December 31, 2006, some ninety-five (95) Contracts and Concessions had been reviewed. We

have thus started the process to renegotiate these agreements, wherever better benefits to the country can be obtained, or to terminate for non performance or non compliance with our statutes.

- 31** In this regard, we are pleased to report the conclusion of renegotiation with Arcelor Mittal Steel which will provide stimulus to our economy with a significant investment of US\$1 billion over a seven (7) year period. Your early ratification of the Amendment to the Mineral Development Agreement will enable this important activity to proceed.
- 32** In the course of the year, we also established the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC) as the successor regime to the Results Focused Transition Framework to coordinate the dialogue and the work with international partners on policy issues and program initiatives for economic recovery and growth.
- 33** In order to build a track record of policy implementation that would lead to eventual settlement of our hefty US\$3.7 billion external debt, we formulated and successfully implemented, with support from the International Monetary Fund, a Staff Monitoring Program. This will be followed by an even more rigorous macroeconomic program under an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy program (IPRSP) which has been formulated for a dialogue with our partners at a forum scheduled to be held in Washington D.C., in February, with the co-sponsorship of the U.S. Government, the World Bank and the United Nations. In this regard, we are pleased to note that the preparation of the IPRSP involved the participation of key national stakeholders – the Legislature, civil society, national non-government organizations, and political parties.

- 34 In furtherance of improved budget and fiscal performance, we adopted a realistic, cash-based budget, matching revenue projections with domestic and foreign expenditure commitments.
- 35 Similarly, new critical expenditure measures were introduced including the strengthening of the Cash Management Committee, the introduction of an Interim Commitment Control System, the implementation of Foreign and Domestic Travel Ordinances, the introduction of prioritized cash plan for all line Ministries and Agencies which form the basis for the issuance of allotments by the Bureau of the Budget, and strict adherence to the guidelines of the Procurement Act.
- 36 As a result of these fiscal reform and discipline measures, I am pleased to note that actual revenue collection for the period of January 1 to December 31, 2006, was US\$114 million compared with US\$77 million for the previous year. Expenditure for the same period amounted to US\$93.5 million compared with US\$81.8 million for the previous year. Thus the calendar year's total revenue intake compared with total expenditure resulted in a calendar year excess of US\$ 21 million. It is also important to note that this performance moved us from a deficit to a surplus position propelled by a forty-eight (48) percent growth in revenues.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

- 37 Following the imposition in 2003 of sanctions on timber exports by the United Nations Security Council, the Forestry Sector has successfully undergone major reform. The Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and the Forest Reform Monitoring Committee (FRMC) constituted by Government to oversee and monitor our forest reforms by formulating and implementing measures for the

resumption of forest allocation, have worked in line with guidelines formulated by Government in collaboration with our international partners.

- 38** Moreover, as a result of measures instituted by Government to address international concerns regarding the administration of our forest sector, including the promulgation of Executive Order No. 1, the United Nations Security Council lifted sanctions imposed on this sector.
- 39** Government also made significant progress toward meeting compliance with requirements of the Kimberly Process, a precondition for the lifting of sanctions imposed on our diamond sector. We are continuing to work with our international partners to meet the requirements that will lead to the lifting of the sanctions hopefully during the next review by the Security Council.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

- 40** During this reporting period, the Liberian Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS), once an integral part of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, was granted full autonomy by Act of the Legislature. This decision demonstrates our commitment to accord full recognition and support to the need for reliable statistics to guide our reform effort.
- 41** LISGIS will be given responsibility for undertaking the first national census in 20 years under a program to be submitted for your consideration and approval as required by the Constitution. This will enable us to review and redirect our effort toward progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and the preparation of a structured long term vision that will guide us as a nation and people.

- 42 This process under the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs will be enhanced through the Macro Economic Policy Analysis Program for which the African Capacity Building Foundation has provided US\$1.8 million.
- 43 During the year, our Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs also concluded preparation of a draft policy to guide operations of Non Governmental Organizations, Community Based Organizations, and Private Volunteer Organizations. We expect this to take effect this year following consultations and validation with stakeholders.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

- 44 We are pleased to report that considerable progress was made towards regaining our national authority in the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of European Commission assistance to our country, thereby leading to a removal of the Sanctions imposed on Liberia on account of the failure of previous Governments to meet internationally acceptable practices in fiscal performance and protection of human rights. We are therefore optimistic that we will soon meet all the requirements for the restoration of full National authority status with the Commission.
- 45 We have worked assiduously at the sub-regional and regional levels, to promote cooperation and increased economic integration in West Africa. We actively participated in the work of ECOWAS including transformation of the ECOWAS Secretariat into a Commission with a stronger regional Parliament and a Court of Justice. In addition, we hosted the Ministerial Meetings and assumed the Chairmanship of the Mano River Union.
- 46 In this role we will have a stronger voice to strengthen the role of the Secretariat based in Freetown including activation of the Capacity Development Program

for the three countries which, through our instrumentality, has an allocation of US\$2 million from the Africa Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF).

- 47 Moreover, we are pleased to note that at a Summit in Conakry on December 16, 2006, Liberia was designated to play a mediatory role in the ongoing border dispute between our sisterly Republics of Guinea and Sierra Leone. We will continue to use our best effort to contribute to the peace and stability that our three nations deserve in order to pursue our national and regional development goals.

Honorable Members of the Legislature, My Fellow Citizens:

- 48 During the period under review, under our Maritime program and through our agent, the Liberian International Ship Corporate Registry (LISCR), 2,300 vessels representing 70 million gross tons and 36 million net tons were registered under our Flag. These numbers represent an increase of 135 vessels, or a 6 percent growth over the previous year.
- 49 Despite this, there was a 15 percent decline in overall maritime revenue from US\$10.4 million to US\$8.8 million. According to our agent, the decline in revenue was due to poor incentives for ship owners and fluctuations in vessels movements by smaller vessels replacing larger ones in our registry. This is a matter requiring better examination on our part within the context of a review of GOL/LISCR Agreement this year. We also believe that the performance under our Maritime program will improve when the Ministry of Finance is given more oversight responsibility. Technical assistance has been received from one of our partners to examine this issue and formulate options on the way forward.

50 However, I am pleased to report that the Bureau has made progress in its restructuring and training programs and in the settlement of long standing obligations to the International Maritime Organization. This will enable Liberia to seek membership in the IMO Council. Substantial progress was made in the rehabilitation of the Liberia Maritime Training Institute (LMTI), in Schiefflin, with the assistance of the Global Maritime Academy, the Transport School of the Merchant Marine Academy of the United States of America and the International Maritime Organization. We expect more support for this initiative once the feasibility study for the institute's rehabilitation has been concluded.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

51 The growth of our economy is also reflected in our trade sector. In the area of foreign trade, the nation's total exports in 2006 was US\$163.81 million compared to US\$131.30 million in 2005 an increase of twenty-five (25) percent. Total imports were valued at US\$456.77 million compared with US\$229.83 million in 2005, representing an almost one hundred (100) percent increase. This resulted in significant increase in our nation's balance of trade deficit from US\$98.583 million to US\$ 292.96 million, a reflection in part of the lag in reactivating the productive export sector unmatched by the increase in demand for imports resulting from partnership financed economic activity and an increase in consumer purchasing power.

52 Recognizing, however, that commerce and industry constitute two areas critical to the revitalization of our post-war economy, the Administration has given keen attention to reforming and reinvigorating these two sectors. Our goal is to ensure that our people have continuous, unlimited access to commodities and services that they need for their livelihood – and for national reconstruction.

- 53 Measures were thus taken to address long standing monopolistic practices to ensure that strategic commodities were available on the market in adequate quantities and at affordable prices. These measures were subject to considerable questioning as they exposed deep rooted vested interests and their allies.
- 54 Nevertheless, I am pleased to report to you that the measures taken have largely achieved the objectives so there will be no need for further intervention by the Government in the importation of commodities other than the regulatory function relating to prices. In other words, **Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen**, except for those who have engaged in acts of sabotage in the past, the market will be opened to all importers of all commodities including rice and cement.
- 55 Honorable Legislators, in the area of industrialization, I am especially pleased to report that Liberia has been declared eligible for membership to the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of the United States, thereby laying the basis for the inflow of American Foreign Investment Capital and an entry of Liberia's exports into the U.S. markets. This will enable us to give support to and prepare our artisans and cottage industries to benefit from this potential.

Honorable Members of the Legislature, My Fellow Liberians:

- 56 When we took office, we faced challenges in our efforts to regain investors' confidence due to legitimate concerns about our country's image and post conflict security and stability. However, such challenges, rather than weaken our resolve, spurred us to work even harder to attract foreign investors. A critical part of our efforts has focused on creating an improved investment climate – a strong judiciary, streamlined regulations in the level of corruption, and a more efficient and transparent Government.

57 The “*one stop shop concept*,” initiated by the National Investment Commission, under which the Commission coordinates investment issues, has helped to reduce bureaucratic hurdles that frustrate new foreign investors.

58 With this improvement, Government received many investment inquiries from potential investors out of which 18 were translated into project proposals in manufacturing, service, packaging/processing, and mining sectors. The 18 processed projects have the capacity to create 589 jobs with a total investment size of over US\$42 million. We intend, in all cases where applicable, to ensure that value is added where investment involves the use of our primary products.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

59 When we assumed office one year and a fortnight ago this week, we inherited an agricultural sector that had been devastated by the civil conflict. Agriculture being labor intensive traditionally absorbed more than 70 percent of our nation’s workforce and today remains the prime pillar of our strategy for poverty reduction, food security and economic recovery.

60 In order to start on the long road toward the achievement of this objective, we distributed over 40,000 tools and 20 metric tons of rice seeds to some 33,000 farmers throughout the country. We also reactivated activities at the Central Agriculture Research Institute in Bong County and have completed a plan of action for its complete rehabilitation. In spite of this progress, the sector faces continuing challenges of under-capacity of poor road conditions and lack of agricultural inputs. Subsequently, we devoted major effort toward the formulation of policies and the creation of the environment that would enhance Government’s ability to resuscitate this vital sector of our economy.

- 61 The goal of this effort has been to formulate a Comprehensive Agricultural Development Policy, a National Agricultural Investment Strategy and a 24-month plan of action arising out of the National Food Security and Nutritional Survey for sustainable agricultural development in all sub-sectors, national food security being the overarching objective.
- 62 In furtherance of this objective, we also sought to build strong partnerships between Liberian agricultural institutions and stakeholders at the domestic and international levels. These partnerships have already started to enhance the capacity of our Government to achieve our agricultural development objectives.
- 63 We have also started the process of resuscitating those rubber plantations that were abandoned by investors during the many years of conflict. Our objective in this regard is to ensure that the plantations are operating again under sound interim managements until they are reclaimed by the original investors or given to new investors under a competitive process. The same policy will apply to other large agricultural plantations such as oil palm.
- 64 **Honorable Members of the Legislature**, a major area of concern for our rubber plantations is the increasing level of illegal tapping and the unacceptable violence associated thereto. This has seriously affected production, exports and Government revenues from our two major producers, Firestone and the Liberia Agricultural Corporation and from major national producers as well. We are working with the management of the plantations to establish a strong Government security presence on these plantations and to design systems that identify the sources of rubber purchased through properly licensed non-producing intermediaries thereby addressing the source of rubber bought illegally by unlicensed intermediaries.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

- 65** The Labor Sector remains one of the major casualties of our civil conflict. The negative consequences of the conflict on this sector continues to reverberate in all facets of our national life, particularly in the economic and social spheres, leading to high unemployment, low human capacity, low wages, and poor living standards.
- 66** In our effort to respond to the challenges, we developed a vision “To Humanize and Restore Dignity to the Liberian Labor Force.” This vision is anchored on four major pillars: *Institutional Capacity Building and Development, Promoting the Rule of Law and Labor Standards, Manpower Development, and Restoring Regional Cooperation.*
- 67** In this regard, particular attention was given to job creation and to the safeguarding of the rights, dignity and better remuneration for labor. We also launched the Liberia Emergency Employment Program (LEEP) and the Liberia Employment Action Program (LEAP). These programs grew out of a visit to the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva at which time I addressed the Annual Session of that body, the first time by a Liberian President. The ILO has since provided US\$3 million to support our employment program which has generated short term employment for over 10,000 Liberians and is expected to create more than 50,000 jobs in the next 18 months.
- 68** While we place premium on job creation, we must endeavor to encourage skills improvement across the various sectors. A cursory look, in year 2000 estimates, at the distribution of our labor force across the economy shows that agriculture, being labor intensive, is the largest sector with 70 percent of the workforce; Commerce and Industry has 8 percent, and the service sector has 22 percent.

- 69** Other labor protecting rights were instituted. To safeguard our alien resident and work permit systems, a new measure for their acquisition was operationalized. Let me emphasize that this measure is not intended to discriminate against foreign workers but simply to ensure that preference for our citizens in the workplace is guaranteed under Section 1507-A of the Labor Laws and Practices of Liberia.
- 70** To address the increasing incidence of abuse of child labor, the National Commission on Child Labor was reactivated and the National Task Force on Human Trafficking was established to help combat the menace of human trafficking within the territorial confines of our country – and the wider West Africa sub-region.
- 71** We also established a National Task Force to examine work conditions on rubber plantations throughout the country. This has provided us with substantial insight into the many labor problems exacerbated by years of institutional decay and indifference thereby enabling us to address issues of child labor, contract attestations, and the general state of affairs in our labor sector.
- 72** Moreover, for the first time in twenty-five (25) years, a Minimum Wage Board was established to study and recommend a new wage policy, consistent with our commitment to ensure constructive collective bargaining in our labor market.
- 73** Perhaps more importantly, during the year we initiated unprecedented social dialogue in the labor sector and advocated for unparalleled improvement in the application of labor standards, thereby occasioning a dramatic shift in the resolution of labor disputes from violence and strike actions to peaceful dialogue among tripartite partners comprising workers, employees, and Government.

III. Rehabilitation of Infrastructure and Basic Services

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

- 74** As all of us are aware, our civil conflict left the educational infrastructure of our nation in shambles thus creating a situation in which most young people of school-going age were constrained to adopt a distorted logic of the essence of education. As we strive for national reconstruction and renewal, education of all of the children of this country, especially the neglected girl child, must occupy a place second to no other national priority. This is because our democracy cannot be advanced when the majority of our citizenry is functionally illiterate, lacks the knowledge, and skills require to lead our national efforts, or unable to compete in an increasingly interconnected and global community.
- 75** Consequently, with the assistance of partners, we focused on the rehabilitation of educational facilities and the development of a National Educational System within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals.
- 76** As a demonstration of our commitment to education, an amount of US\$10,356,535.00 was allocated in the National Budget for education representing eight (8) percent of the total budget and a twentyseven (27) percent increase over the previous year's allocation.
- 77** In delivering on our commitment to make education available to all our children, we commenced implementation of the nation's Free and Compulsory Education Policy. Under this program, all tuitions and fees were abolished in public primary schools, and tuitions and fees in public high schools were reduced and standardized to make the cost of secondary education affordable. We also resumed subsidies to private schools by an allocation of US\$502,000.

78 As a result, we witnessed a forty (40) percent increase in enrollment in primary, junior, and senior high schools through out the country. In addition, we commenced adult literacy programs designed to provide educational opportunities lost as a result of our prolonged civil conflict.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

79 Statistics gathered during the year suggested that 60 percent of the more than 20,000 teachers in our nation's classrooms had no formal teacher training. We have thus embarked, with our partners, upon a teacher training initiative that will include renovation of the Kakata and Zorzor Teacher Training Institutes. We also reactivated and improved Government's National Scholarship Program including the settlement of more than LD\$17.0 million local scholarships tuition arrears owed various academic institutions.

80 Additionally, the Ministry of Education awarded 1991 local scholarships to deserving students in all 15 counties to attend secondary and post-secondary institutions. In reverse of previous practice, our foreign scholarships program was deemphasized except for those provided through bilateral grants by friendly nations. A total of 79 students benefited thereby pursuing studies in various academic and professional fields in six countries, including People's Republic of China (PRC), Kingdom of Morocco, Arab Republic of Egypt, Russia, and Cuba.

81 In the area of higher education, Government regularized the operation of the University of Liberia by launching a trimester academic year to enable students, whose academic programs were prolonged by interruptions caused by the civil conflict to complete their studies in reasonable time. Moreover, a 5-year strategic plan was formulated and plans advanced with partners for the relocation of the University to the Fendell campus.

82 We also initiated the National School Survey and Data Collection Program to establish an Education Management Information System (EMIS) that will enhance our education planning capability.

83 Additionally, Government provided 13,000 pieces of school furniture and launched a Pilot Computer Project under which computer laboratories were established in seven public high schools in seven of our political subdivisions. The goal of this program is to make computer education an integral part of public school education curriculum in all counties.

84 In spite of these achievements, several challenges remain in the educational sector, significant of which is the difficulty to attract and retain qualified teachers and professors. This, in large measure is the result of low salaries, poor incentives and the lack of appropriate instructional materials and logistics. This situation is exacerbated by overcrowding in all facilities in light of recent increases in school enrollments.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

85 In response to the broken national health system which we inherited, we concentrated on six key areas to reverse the downward trend in the health sector – *Policy and Planning, Infrastructure Rehabilitation, Human Resources, Health Care Services, Health System Strengthening and Administration, and Resource Mobilization.*

86 With these objectives in mind, a National Health Plan is being formulated to guide our interventions in the health sector in the medium term. We have also witnessed a significant revival of the JFK Hospital under the new Administrator's team, commenced rehabilitation of the Telewoyan Hospital in Voinjama; completed the construction of the Gbarpolu Health Center and the

Maternity Ward of the Government Hospital in Tubmanburg, Bomi County. In addition, 19 clinics in Lofa and Maryland counties have been rehabilitated.

- 87** As part of our effort to encourage Liberians to enter the health sector, we paid the first semester tuition fees for all medical and pharmacy students at the University of Liberia, arranged for the training of ten health workers in China and introduced an emergency hiring package with an incentive allowance for medical doctors assigned outside of Monrovia. Our training program included 3,500 health workers in Malaria Case Management, 48 in Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI), 220 health and media personnel in strategies for the prevention and control of cholera, Lassa fever and HIV/AIDS, 25 persons in Ethical Standards for Social Welfare, 90 as caregivers in orphanage care, and 45 in orphanage management.
- 88** In the area of health services, over 800,000 children were immunized against measles. Services were restored to over 354 health facilities in the country while 83,849 pregnant women benefited from the Intermittent Preventive Treatment (IPT). We also established five drug depots in five rural communities, installed 75 solar refrigerators to store vaccines and distributed 126,865 mosquito nets in all 15 counties to enhance our effort to improve malaria prevention. We are also pleased to note that during this reporting period, we recorded a reduced TB patient defaulter rate from 17 percent to 8 percent.
- 89** To strengthen the health sector and administration, 15 vehicles and 30 computers were procured and delivered to our health teams in the 15 political sub-divisions of our country with a view to establishing viable health information centers.

- 90 In addition, we established and equipped a National Health Resource Center with Internet facilities, provided reference books and established standardized county health management tool kits.
- 91 In the resource mobilization aspect of the our National Health Program, I am pleased to inform you that a US\$44.3M HIV/AIDS five-year agreement was signed with the Bill Clinton Foundation to strengthen our National HIV/AIDS Program.
- 92 Despite these improvements, we remain very concerned about our ability to respond to the health needs of our people. Several NGOs which currently provide the best of such service in our rural areas have indicated an end to their assistance as we move from humanitarian to development status. Surprisingly also, one of our major partners is considering a reduction in their support of the health sector. We must find a way to deal with this problem as our current level of resources will not enable Government to assume these services in the short term.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

- 93 One of the most important aspects of our national reconstruction agenda is the rehabilitation of economic infrastructure – roads, bridges, public buildings, electricity, water supply, and telecommunications. The state of these facilities requires that we prioritize infrastructural rehabilitation as one of the critical pillars of our post-conflict reconstruction agenda.
- 94 Roads, considered one of the most important priorities by our people pose the greatest challenge. Funding and technical assistance provided by the World Bank fell short of our timing and standards expectation causing significant

delays in the start of rehabilitation of selected Monrovia streets, the Monrovia to Buchanan and the Monrovia to Ganta highways.

95 A catch-up effort is underway that should see a start up in mid-February but will likely result in a redesign of the Monrovia-Buchanan road with better standards and a delay in the Monrovia-Ganta segment. The need for enhanced capacity in our Ministry of Public Works was evident during this process.

96 Better success was achieved in the area of primary rural roads through an innovative scheme using the engineering contingents of UNMIL with funding from our partners. By this means the GbarngaKolahun-Varhun, and the Ganta-Zwedru-Fishtown roads are being rehabilitated. Partnership support has enabled us to start the Ganta-Saniquellie, Buchanan-Rivercess/Sinoe and the primary rural roads even as we continue to work with key partners to start the Todee road for which a commitment was made by the United States Government. Similar plans are underway for the Fishtown-Harper road. An attractive job creation aspect of our roadwork involves side brushing on several of our primary rural roads.

97 Road and drainage rehabilitation work was also undertaken in several areas including Free Port of Monrovia to Barnesville, Central Monrovia to Duala, and the VP Road in Sinkor. Work on bridges and drainages include the Matadi Road Bridge, Bensonville, Cheeseman Avenue, and Carey to Gurley Streets. The acquisition of road and construction equipment by Government expected in the country next month will enable us to do even more.

98 Honorable Legislators, to discourage widespread hazardous building construction, we commenced enforcement of national land use planning and zoning regulations. This required demolition of makeshift and other structures whose locations violated existing city ordinances and administrative regulations.

- 99** Although we are mindful of the need for caution in the dislocation of our people, we must also, for their protection, continue to insist that we reduce the level of housing conglomeration by enforcing the regulations.
- 100** We have also taken preliminary steps to address the threat that beach erosion poses to various parts of the country, including West Point, Buchanan, the OAU Village in Virginia, Kendeja, and other investment locations.
- 101** In the area of public buildings, our Ministry of Public Works completed technical assessments for the renovation of the Executive Mansion with renovation work scheduled to begin shortly on the Old Executive Mansion and Pavilion as well as several other structures including the Capitol Building and the Ministry of Public Works complex.
- 102** In addition, with partnership support, we are well advanced in planning for the rehabilitation of several county administrative buildings, schools, hospitals, clinics, roads and bridges.
- 103** Unfortunately, as you know, in November the Vai Town Bridge over the Mesurrado River collapsed resulting in severe traffic congestion on Bushrod Island. We are in active consultations with several partners to ensure a reconstruction of the bridge during the current year.
- 104** As you know, the Executive Mansion suffered an outbreak of fire on July 26 and the Office of the President and the Ministry of State are now temporarily located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building. The maintenance of the Executive Mansion appears to have been seriously neglected over the last two decades and initial inspection has shown that the building may now require a complete and comprehensive renovation likely to cost several million dollars.

An assessment is presently in progress relative to the Executive Mansion so that an informed decision can be taken.

105 Honorable Members of the Legislature, before I took office, based upon plans that were underway, I promised to bring electricity to the city of Monrovia within six months. This proved a difficult undertaking as I could not in good conscience proceed with the plan that existed. Nevertheless, I remained determined to keep that promise even if partially.

106 Thus, on July 26th the first phase of the Emergency Power Project (EPP) was successfully commissioned by me and President Kufour of Ghana whose electricity company, the Volta River Authority, had assisted us to achieve this goal. This phase provided street lights in Sinkor and Congo Town and some electricity to JFK and Catholic Hospitals and to other select institutions. Specifically, with a combined capacity of 2,500 KVA, two hundred (200) street lights were commissioned in the Sinkor and Congo Town areas, while 230 were commissioned in the West Point and Downtown Monrovia areas with additional electricity to some commercial customers. This progress was made possible with the support of our partners, USAID, the European Commission and the World Bank.

107 The second phase (EPP II) intended to expand the first phase and provide light to the Paynesville area will commence shortly. Subsequently, say within eighteen to twenty-four months, it is our plan to move toward privatization of the sector.

Honorable Legislators:

108 I am equally pleased to report that, for the first time in fifteen years, we resumed the supply of pipeborne water to various parts of Monrovia and its environs where 50 percent of our population are now served.

109 Considerable progress has been made to rehabilitate the water treatment plant at White Plains and the transmission lines that will enable us to expand the distribution network. Similar efforts are underway to improve the sewage system in Monrovia. Moreover, assessments have been completed on water systems to be made operative in Kakata and Zwedru.

Honorable Legislators:

110 We are pleased to report impressive progress in the revitalization of our Post and Telecommunications sector. The Ministry reactivated an agreement which led to the printing of 600,500 commemorative postage stamps at a value of US\$359,500. Regular postal service has begun in Monrovia and other parts of the country for the first time in many years. The International Philatelic Corporation of New York supported this effort through the supply of 12 vehicles.

111 On the other hand, because of the massive damage done to our telecommunications infrastructure, Government was constrained to shut down the Liberia Telecommunications Corporation, leaving this sector solely to private, commercial GSM service providers.

112 An interim Board of Directors was established to assess and compose plans for the reactivation of the Corporation. Toward this end, 660 employees with aggregate salary arrears of US\$502,000.00 dating back to 2003 were paid and deactivated. A skeleton staff continues to manage the Corporation under supervision of the Interim Board until the issue relating to a contract with an

Ivorian firm for land line equipment claimed to be valued at US\$3 - 5 million is resolved.

113 The Government's goal is to reactivate LTC to enable it to compete in the sector under a privatization scheme.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

114 In further development of the sector, the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA) became operational following the passing of an Act by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA), and the appointment of an Interim board of Commissioners as required by the Act.

115 With support from the World Bank, a Comprehensive and Permanent National Telecommunications Law has been drafted for submission to your Honorable Body. We ask your early consideration of this act to enable us to reorganize and restructure the agencies covered under the Act.

Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen:

116 During this reporting period, Government reactivated and strengthened the General Services Agency (GSA) with new management to carry out its new role of managing public assets. During the year GSA recovered 115 vehicles in various conditions. Of this number, 70 percent of the vehicles were roadworthy, 9 percent of them were dysfunctional and 21 percent needed repairs. Among the vehicles retrieved, 39 percent was from the Executive, 1 percent from the Judiciary and 60 percent from former members of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA). Sixty-nine (69) vehicles belonging to the NTLA, were recovered and sold to its former members. The remaining vehicles were reassigned to various Government institutions.

IV. Good Governance and the Rule of Law

Honorable Members of the Legislature, Fellow Liberians:

117 Good governance and the Rule of Law constitute a fundamental cornerstone of our reform agenda. Consequently, and in order to meet the expectations of our people, we have vigorously worked to ensure that our Government is administered in a transparent and accountable manner.

118 Thus, immediately upon assuming office, we declared our own assets and required the Cabinet and all commissioned officers serving to do likewise. This requirement will be repeated with judicial action when you have enacted into law the proposed Code of Conduct that has been submitted to you.

119 Also in furtherance of our commitment to accountability, we are in the process of bringing to justice several high level former Government officials who violated the public trust or engaged in serious violation of human rights. The action has no other motive than to bring impunity to an end and set the standards by which this and successive Governments will be guided.

120 Our work in the area of governance and the rule of law is spearheaded by the Governance Reform Commission (GRC) which through Legislation to be submitted to you, will be transformed into a more permanent Governance Commission.

121 I am therefore pleased to report that in the area of establishing a system of public integrity; the GRC has completed and promulgated a national policy against corruption. We have also completed a draft anticorruption strategy and are currently in the process of completing the design of an anticorruption agency, and with it, a set of associated laws designed to strengthen the

performance of our legal and related institutions, the so-called Pillars of Integrity. In this regard we wish to express thanks to your Honorable Body for ratification of the African Union Protocol on the practice and combating of corruption and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

122 The appointment of a Liberian Auditor General in accordance with the Constitution, but with financial independence through European Commission support, will give impetus to our anti-corruption effort. We plead your early confirmation action on this.

123 Moreover, an exercise to review the mandates, mission and organizational structures of ministries and agencies has been undertaken as a first phase of the public service reform effort to revamp the Liberia Public Service.

124 With the cooperation of the Chief Justice and other judicial officials as well as the National Bar Association, the process is well addressed for the establishment of a Law Reform Commission. Similarly, a draft national security policy statement has been prepared and plans are advanced for a stakeholders' conference on land reform with a view to the establishment of a Land Reform Commission.

125 In all of these exercises, the GRC has consulted broadly, not only with government entities and international partners, but also among the range of civil society organizations.

126 In order to deepen legitimacy and ownership of these reform initiatives we have used Liberian expertise and, where such expertise is unavailable, insisted on the recruitment of Liberians as understudies. This has not always been a popular strategy with some of our collaborators but one that is crucial for the building of Liberian capacity.

127 Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen, one of the obstacles that have impeded the development of our country has been the over- centralization of political authority in Monrovia. Monrovia was the answer and was expected to provide the answers and solutions to all of our developmental challenges, even when it was widely know that its formulas were wrong. Local ideas were disregarded and initiatives often stifled. As a result, it was not what our people wanted, but rather what Monrovia said and wanted to see done.

128 When I campaigned for the Presidency in 2005, I committed myself to remove the cult of the imperial presidency – and to return power and decision making to our communities and citizens across the length and breadth of this country.

129 Consequently, since assuming the Presidency, we undertook and have continued our program of frequent visits to the various political sub-divisions of our country, the goals being to take the government to our people and encourage their participation in our democratic process and the administration of the affairs of our common nation.

130 During this reporting period, therefore, we have not only honored the tenets of decentralization; we have given it life and meaning. We have brought a new approach to local government administration, infusing it with a sense of accountability and transparency unheard of in the history of our country. Our goal is to reform local administration with the view of empowering and capacitating our people.

131 However, our initiative in this regard requires a process of education and sensitization of local government officials regarding the need for them and their people to become more participant and active in matters affecting local administration – and the robust enforcement of the mandate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In furtherance of this goal, our international development

partners have provided training and capacity building of local officials to enhance the effective implementation of their respective mandates.

132 Accordingly, vehicles and other logistics were provided for our 15 county Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents for Development. Traditional development committees were also formed to serve as coordinating points for county development projects. Some of these structures are the District Development Committees (DDC) and the National Traditional Council (NTC). These are structures through which the policies of Government regarding national issues and development are now channeled – early results are encouraging.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

133 As you are aware, the issue of inter-ethnic disputes in Liberia remains a source of deep personal concern – and therefore occupied my attention during this reporting period. Consequently, during this reporting year, we constituted a Presidential Task Force to initiate dialogue and mediate in the Nimba County inter-ethnic dispute under the Chairmanship of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the goal being to serve as a facilitating agent to create the space and opportunities for the people of this important county to discuss their differences and find a common, reconcilable ground that creates the enable environment for them to live in peace and security. I am pleased to report that, following months of mediation, significant progress has been made in resolving the dispute. We will continue to keep you informed on this progress through the county Legislative Caucus.

134 Within the framework of rural development and transformation initiatives, Government has also completed the architectural designs of administrative buildings for Gbarpolu, Grand Kru, Rivercess, and River Gee counties and construction is scheduled to commence soon.

135 With regard to the holding of chieftaincy and municipal elections, a Special Joint Stakeholders Consultative Conference (SJSCC) was held in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, in October of this reporting year to pave the way for the holding of these elections. Further arrangements fall under the supervision of the National Elections Commission.

Honorable Members of the Legislature, Fellow Citizens:

136 During this reporting period, Government continued its efforts to find the optimal size for our Civil Service and to make the service more responsive to the needs of our people. In this connection, the Civil Service Agency, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, was able to remove more than 1,700 “ghost” names from the government payroll. The exercise, geared toward creating a lean, efficient and merit service that is adequately paid, is on-going.

137 Our final objective of weeding out ghost names from the payroll is to ensure that all those who collect a government check at the end of the month are *bona fide* employees who are delivering goods and services to our people in an effective and efficient manner.

138 With your cooperation, Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen of the National Legislature, Government was able to raise the minimum salary of civil servants from LD\$850 to LD\$1,720. It is our intent that as the Civil Service reforms take hold, and our revenue collection improves, Government will consider further increases in the salaries of civil servants until we reach a point where conditions of service in the public sector is good enough to attract our best and brightest minds into public service.

139 In November, we were also able to add LD\$1,000 to the monthly pension benefit of our retired senior citizens who have given years of service to our country. This increase was made possible because of some of the savings that have accrued from the reform measures we are putting in place. Our citizens, who give the best years of their lives to serving the public, must be able to retire honorably and with benefits that can sustain them and meet their basic needs. The Civil Service Agency is also working along with the National Social Security and Welfare Corporation to harmonize the pension scheme of Government in keeping with law.

140 Moreover, we have commenced the design of a new program to improve service delivery to civil servants in the rural areas.

141 In this regard, we intend to remain focused on a comprehensive civil service reform program that will clearly define the mandates and functions of government entities and authenticate the true identity of those who collect government salary checks at the end of each pay period.

142 Let me use this opportunity to call on your Honorable Body to cooperate with the Executive in this reform exercise particularly as it relates to civil servants who work in your Branch of Government.

Honorable Members of the Legislature, My Fellow Citizens:

143 Liberia's demographic profile shows that the youth constitute the majority of our population. Tragically, our youth were the worst victims of our civil conflict. Consequently, providing them the environment to heal and resume normal lives must claim the highest priority of our Government.

144 We thus believe that developing the sporting talents of our youth constitute a potential area for developing careers that lead to fame and wealth. Thus, during the reporting year, we spared no effort to give attention to youth development, and sports and vocational training within the framework of our national reconstruction agenda. I am pleased to report that remarkable achievements were made: our National Football Team, the Lone Star, in spite of financial constraints, defeated the Rwanda Football National Team. Similarly, our Female Lone Star Team also overwhelmed their Algerian counterparts in the preliminary round of the Female World Cup Tournament although regrettably, our female Lone Star lost to Nigeria.

145 Within the framework of our Government's decentralization program, the Ministry of Youth and Sports concluded the assessment of all sporting facilities and offices throughout the country. In collaboration with our international development partners, a National Youth Policy Framework Document was drafted and is awaiting Legislative enactment. Once enacted, we will hold consultations with the concerned youth groups to ensure implementation and support for the policies adopted.

PUBLIC CORPORATIONS

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

Liberia Petroleum Refining Company (LPRC)

146 The board of directors of the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company appointed by me in late January 2006 determined that the first item on its agenda would be a restructuring of the company to address significant overstaffing that had been identified in reports of an Ernst & Young team that undertaken a systems review in 2004 financed by the European Commission and Monbo &

Company, a local accounting firm, commissioned by the Auditor General to conduct an audit of LPRC's 2004 and 2005 financial statements.

147 Accordingly, the board and management crafted an ingenious voluntary severance program that was presented to the workforce in April. Over a period of 10 days, 400 employees volunteered to be severed from the company in exchange for generous severance packages. Many of those former employees have now become self-employed, investing their severance money in their own businesses.

148 The LPRC board followed this up with a paring of the unwieldy management structure then in existence, reducing the number of layers by half and the number of departments from 16 to 6. The net result is a company that is today leaner, more efficient and more cost effective, as demonstrated by its recent financial performance. LPRC's operating income jumped from US\$1.5 million in 2005 to US\$6.3 million, an increase of more than 300%. Net income came in at US\$4.8 million, after the deduction of a one-time severance payment of US\$1.5 million. Today, LPRC's financial position is a lot stronger than it was 12 months ago. The company's bank balance has grown from US\$50,000 when the new management took over to almost US\$2 million as of December 31st, despite settling more than US\$1.5 million in inherited debts and paying off a US\$1 million bank loan for its severance program more than 1 ½ years ahead of schedule.

149 Of particular note is the fact that LPRC has taken actions to increase the level of competition in the marketplace such that petroleum supplies are plentiful and at prices 30-40 percent lower than other countries in the region. At the same time, Liberian importers' share of the market for gasoline and diesel has increased from 11 percent in 2005 to 40 percent today.

150 One issue concerning LPRC continues to be the subject of controversy and concern – that is the allocation of oil to Liberia by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The facts of the matter are clear if we but take the time to examine them professionally. In follow up to request made by the previous government and in keeping with similar assistance given to other ECOWAS countries, we requested an allocation of 30,000 barrels. Only 10,000 barrels was approved to be handled on a commercial basis with a contract between LPRC and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company.

151 Accordingly, on June 14, 2006, NNPC offered LPRC a one-year contract, effective August 1, 2006, to purchase 10,000 bpd of crude oil on commercial terms. The offer included the requirement that LPRC deposit US\$1million with NNPC as security for its commitment to commence lifting the crude oil that would be contracted.

152 After looking at several options, a decision was made to monetize the crude allocation by selling it to an oil trading company with the resources to make the US\$1million deposit on LPRC's behalf and raise the letter of credit for each shipment. Addax Limited was selected to play that role on account of its strategic position as a significant player in the Nigerian oil industry in addition to being a major oil trader in Africa. All documentation in this transaction which runs into large volumes is available upon request for your scrutiny.

Roberts International Airport (RIA)

153 Honorable Legislators, Roberts International Airport continues to be fully operational in spite of the need for modern facilities and equipment and human resource capacity development.

154 Overall revenue performance improved, recovering from a considerable negative cash flow and net book value (current assets over current liabilities) to positive cash flow and net book value, with no significant increase in the number of scheduled flights. These positive results are attributable to stringent control measures taken by The Management in adherence to policies and procedures adopted by The Board of Directors.

155 Additionally, some basic capital items were acquired and The World Bank and USAID committed to providing grants for the implementation of emergency works needed to elevate R.I.A. to meet minimum international standards per ICAO requirements. R.I.A. has also been reintegrated into The Airport Council International with all arrears waived.

156 To enable RIA attract more international airlines, the Board and Management are exerting every effort in the short term to elevate RIA to meet minimum internationally accepted standards.

157 Other major objectives going forward include, the renovation and reconfiguration of the existing passenger terminal building; minimizing the bureaucracy to actualize commitments from the World Bank and USAID; and implementation of a comprehensive manpower development program.

158 To correct the situation in which the RIA has been operating as a quasi legal entity we have commenced the process of incorporation, which is expected to be completed in less than a month. Attaining legal status as a corporate entity will enable RIA to seek private sector partnership and the capital investment needed to address long term development needs.

National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (NASSCORP)

159 After years of management and failure to carry out its mandate, the National Social Security and Welfare Corporation (NASSCORP) was reorganized under

new management which has made significant progress to restore credibility to the institution. Ongoing program comprise three schemes – employment injury, national pension and welfare. Total current beneficiaries of the program are 60,000 persons who are covered under the employment and national pension schemes.

160 Funding for the program increased by 200 percent - US\$650,000.00 from February of last year to US\$1,300.000.00 during the current year, while total expenditure, as a result of restructuring and efficiency measures, reduced from 80 percent of collections – 2005 to 67 percent for the period under review. As a result, during the year, the corporation fully settled all claims outstanding for the current and for previous years.

National Housing Authority (NHA)

161 Honorable Legislators, a new Board and Management of the National Housing Authority (NHA) was charged with the responsibility to review the performance and the problems associated with management of existing houses estates, Steven Tolbert, E. Jonathan Goodridge and New Georgia.

This review led to the discovery of certain inequities in the scheme.

162 Therefore we have decided that senior citizens who have continuously resided in units for 20 years and above and those who have attained the age 60 years and above, will be given fee simple Title deeds to the properties which they occupy.

163 Nevertheless, affordable housing continues to be an acute problem due to internal migration and internal displacement of our people throughout the country. Thus our Administration, over a period of five year, will undertake housing program for the construction of 7,000 housing units around the country that will accommodate approximately 70,000 persons.

164 In this regard, the Administration has commenced the portion of the Gbengbar Town Housing Program mainly focusing on phase (1) and (2) of site preparation and construction of (40) housing units at the cost of approximately US\$2million, an amount expected to be provided by Saudi Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Alsaud. At the same time, we will continue efforts to secure funding for the construction of more housing units for our people, thereby reducing our housing problem in the country.

National Port Authority (NPA)

165 Honorable Ladies and Gentlemen, we continue to work with the National Port Authority to resolve the serious problems faced at the one operational Port of Monrovia. Although the Port registered appreciable increase in ship arrivals and cargo handling, it continues to be a grossly underperforming public corporation on account of an excessively over bloated and under capacitated workforce, the lack of marine craft and cargo handling equipment, the loss of warehouse facilities to private users under questionable long term contracts, an over silted entrance channel and poor security resulting in theft, and overall poor financial systems and control.

166 The new management, with the support of GEMAP experts, has tried to address some of these problems through a restructuring and reduction of the workforce, training of staff, improvement in security and compliance with the International Maritime Organization's International ship and Port Facility Code.

167 However, much more needs to be done. The matter relating to the contract with a Ghanaian firm for the leasing of cargo handling equipment at excessive cost and the bidding for management of a container terminal must be solved

taking into account the Administration's position on conflict of interest by long termed major users of the port's facilities. Both of these issues have the expressed concern of partners who have made significant commitment to provide the support for the several works that will make the Port more operationally efficient, thereby minimizing the risk of the port being declared non functional with grave implications for our economic recovery effort.

168 The improvement that must be urgently undertaken by the Port management include the compliance with the ISPS Code would including the installation of fire fighting capacity, perimeter fencing, proper access control systems/procedures, lighting and ability to monitor sensitive areas, the establishment of secured areas to perform "spot checks of containers/scanning", separation of the Port into safety areas, advanced security training and proper equipping of security personnel responsible for ISPS implementation and access control.

169 Moreover, studies undertaken during the reporting period identified a number of priority measures to re-establish efficient port operations. These measures include, but not limited to, capital dredging of the entrance channel and the harbor basin, the refurbishment of the oil jetty and the removal of wrecks and other dangerous materials from the Port sea beds. The World Bank tender for the dredging of the entrance channel has been completed and a dredging contract is being negotiated. Also, Management has concluded a tender for the removal of wrecks. These works are scheduled to commence in February 2007.

Liberian Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)

170 By Act promulgated in January, the Liberian Civil Aviation Authority assigned the responsibility for the Bureau of Civil Aviation now operating from newly constructed modern offices facilities at the Spriggs Airfield. Much progress has been made.

171 Rules and regulations governing the aviation industry in accordance with ICAO standards and requirements have been prepared and staff trained in several countries in the areas of private security, dangerous goods inspection and computer literacy. The authority has also been successful in lifting the sanctions by the European Commission on Liberian aircraft, thereby allowing such aircrafts to fly into European countries.

172 In view of the good performance of the Authority, the U.S. Government has requested that Liberia enter into a new bilateral “Open Skies” Agreement thus replacing the one signed in 1978 more than twenty eight years ago. This will inter alia facilitate the implementation of direct travel between Liberia and the United States.

173 The Authority has also made significant progress in settling Liberia’s outstanding obligations to ICAO.

Honorable Members of the Legislature, My Fellow Liberians:

174 I am pleased to inform you that during the period under review, Liberia maintained very strong, cordial and harmonious relations with countries with which it has diplomatic relations. To do so required twenty-six poorly paid diplomatic missions which have been under equipped as well as several diplomatic and consular missions abroad with representation in Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States of America.

175 Our administration therefore undertook a rationalization of our missions with five embassies to be closed in the Gambia, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel, and Italy. Those to be maintained and strengthened include Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Egypt, Guinea, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, the United States of America, our two Permanent Missions in New York and Geneva, and the two Consulates General in New York and Nezerekore.

176 Here in Monrovia, a total of about 30 Diplomatic Missions of international, regional and sub-regional organizations and countries maintained their representations in Liberia. Out of the 30, resident missions in Liberia, 11 are Embassies – the United States of America, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Lebanon, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the People's Republic of China, Guinea, Egypt, Germany, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo). The remaining 19 are representatives of international, regional and sub-regional organizations, important of which are the African Union, ECOWAS, the IMF, the World Bank and United Nations organizations.

177 Additionally, there are about 23 honorary consular corps in Liberia, representing Pakistan, India, the Philippines, Korea, Syria, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Britain, Spain, Switzerland, Denmark, Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Belgium, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Benin Republic. Moreover, over the past several years, Liberia established several Honorary Consuls abroad. Several continue to provide useful service to our Maritime Program. Others established through questionable arrangements have brought disrepute to our country. We intend to address this by canceling their privileges within the next few months following a review now underway.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

178 As in the case of questionable Honorary Consulates we have inherited a serious problem in the proliferation and abuse of Liberian passports in many areas of the world by non-Liberians and other individuals with dubious and often times criminal backgrounds. This has caused law abiding Liberian citizens to face difficulties in obtaining visas from several countries. In order to address the proliferation and fraudulent sale and acquisition of Liberia passports, we have decided to introduce new passports which will meet international standards of biometric features. This will require action to cancel the agreement under which Liberian passports were previously produced, a matter on which we are working to ensure a speedy resolution of this issue.

179 Additionally, in keeping with the relevant Protocols of the Economic Community of West African States, we have advised you on the production of (Liberia) ECOWAS passports which are now ready for issuance in Liberia to Liberian users.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

180 We are pleased to report that our country continues to enjoy the confidence and support of our international partners. Significant contributions have been made by both the United States and European Commission of over a hundred million dollars each mainly in security, governance, public financial management, infrastructure, energy, basic social services, community development and repatriation and resettlement. The World Bank has provided over US\$80 million in economic management, infrastructure and community based programs. Increasing support from our security sector, the DDRR program and infrastructure development has come from the United Kingdom, the Peoples Republic of China, Germany, Norway, France and China has been exceptional in providing a moderate level of direct budgetary support.

181 From within the region, both Nigeria and Ghana have continued to play significant roles in direct funding support for security and electricity. The African Development Bank has also been instrumental in supporting our public financial management reform efforts. In addition a growing number of international private and non-profit foundations and institutions are also supporting varying aspects of our recovery programs.

182 As in recent years, the United Nations system continued to make the largest financial contribution to Liberia's recovery, with a sizeable proportion of its assistance being dedicated to peacekeeping by UNMIL forces, and the bulk of humanitarian assistance coming from several of its 17 agencies currently operating in Liberia.

183 In general, the support from all our partners, in no small measure, contributed to the significant progress in the delivery of our emerging development agenda and in the already strong record of concrete accomplishments since our Government assumed office one year ago.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

184 In furtherance of our foreign policy objectives, we undertook several travels abroad putting emphasis on our neighboring African states and responding to invitations from several important international and bilateral organizations. These included the Republic of Sierra Leone, Guinea, La Cote d'Ivoire, Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Republic of Senegal, The Gambia, Ghana, and Burkina Faso.

185 The primary goals of these West African visits, undertaken upon invitations of the Presidents of these countries – and upon our own determination, were to reinvigorate the historic and neighborly ties we share with them and to express our country's deep gratitude and appreciation to our fellow African Leaders

and their people for their invaluable and sustained support of the Liberian peace process.

186 Five trips to the United States enabled us to present the vision of a new Liberia to the U.S. Administration with the opportunity of a visit with U.S. President George Bush and Secretary of state, Dr. Condoleeza Rice, Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Henry Paulsen and then Secretary of Defense, Mr. Donald Rumsfeld among others.

187 We consulted equally with the U.S. Congress which granted us the opportunity to speak to a Joint Meeting, the 4th African President to be allowed to do so. The Congress also approved a US\$50 million allocation to Liberia in the FY 2007 supplemental.

188 In a speech delivered at the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly, we called inter alia for more aggressive UN and international intervention in Darfur to prevent a similar situation as the 1994 Rwanda massacre. We continue to join others in this call to our own institution, the African Union, and the international community through the UN Security Council.

189 Meetings and statements at several universities set entrain a process that will result in scholarships and training opportunities for our people, while visits with private financial institutions and foundations have enabled us to mobilize some US\$5 million to support our girls' education and market improvement goals.

190 In March, we paid an official visit to the Republic of France where we had talks with President Chirac and members of his Cabinet. We also called upon the Chairman and the Development and Cooperation Minister of the European Commission, and subsequently delivered a keynote statement at the European

Parliament on September 26 in Strasbourg to continue advocacy for additional and accelerated support for our development effort.

191 In November, we were honored to pay a State Visit to the People's Republic of China to participate in the Summit of the Forum of China-Africa Corporation (FOCAC). These visits are bringing significant benefits to Liberia as evidenced by the return visit of the President of China, His Excellency, Hu Jintao to Liberia on February 1st.

192 Similarly, we were honored to receive in audience in Monrovia, several distinguished world leaders and dignitaries.

193 On January 16, a sterling group of world leaders joined us in celebrating the inauguration of our new government. These included the Presidents of Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Togo, Senegal, Mali, South Africa, as well as First Lady and Secretary of State of the United States, the Foreign Ministers of the Peoples Republic of China and Japan and numerous other high-ranking dignitaries.

194 There were also two separate US Congressional delegations which visited Liberia between the months of February and July. Both delegations held extensive discussions with us and your members of this Legislature on important bilateral issues, including strengthening peace-building and democracy in Liberia.

195 In the United States of America, mid-term congressional elections resulted in the Democratic Party winning control of both Houses of Congress where we enjoy strong bipartisan support. The Administration of President George W. Bush has been supportive and generous toward our country and my Administration. We continue to work with them in the acceleration and the

implementation of programs to which they have made commitment and to stronger interest in finding a solution to resolving our external debt issue.

196 On July 4, 2006, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Dr. Kofi Annan paid a three-day official working visit to Liberia during which he met with us and addressed this very Honorable Body of the National Legislature. We were pleased to honor this great son of Africa with our nation's highest Order.

197 The President of the World Bank, Dr. Paul Wolfowitz, along with the President of the African Development Bank, Mr. Donald Kaberuka, and the British Minister for International Cooperation and Development, Hon. Hilary Benn also visited Liberia on July 18th.

198 We were also gratified to have the former President of the United States of America, Mr. William J. Clinton, visit our country on July 17th, a visit which resulted in the signing of a Memoranda of Understanding between our Administration and the Clinton Foundation for the establishment of the Clinton Global HIV Initiative in Liberia.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

199 As a result of the respect and recognition accorded to our new Administration by the international community, I venture to state here, on the sound domestic and foreign policy direction, particularly our efforts to transform our country and demonstrated commitment to regional peace and security and respect for international law, three West African Heads of State, Presidents John Kuffour of Ghana, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, of Sierra Leone, and Laurent Gbagbo, of Cote d'Ivoire, accepted our invitation to participate in the festivities marking our 159th Independence Day Celebration on July 26. Unfortunately, this event

ended in a disaster on account of an electrical induced fire that destroyed several floors of the Executive Mansion.

Honorable Members of the Legislature:

200 Here in our sub-region, we worked with our institutions, the African Union, ECOWAS and the MRU, to promote a common agenda of collective security, peace, collaboration, consultation, and development.

201 In this regard, we have registered Liberia's request to be included in the West African Gas Pipeline project and, with your ratification of the submitted related protocol, the West Africa Power Pool.

Honorable Members of the Legislature, My Fellow Citizens:

202 Throughout this reporting year, our country has been at peace, growing stronger, and has shown promise for a better and brighter future. We have tried – and in large measure – have remained true to our commitment to be agents and instruments of change. We have pursued a vigorous reform agenda; vigorously fought corruption, run a transparent and accountable Government. We have led by example, demanding of those who serve in our Administration the same standards we demand of ourselves. We have returned Government back to our people. We have given a new lease on democracy and the rule of law.

203 Leadership in our Administration has been by a road map – first our 150-Day Deliverable, now our IPRSP. We have worked tirelessly to create jobs, and have succeeded in sealing an investment agreement that will bring nearly US\$1.0 billion into our economy without compromising the interest of our

people and country. We have restored our country's international image and reclaimed its place among other civilized nations. We are rebuilding our broken infrastructure. We have opened the doors of our schools and are improving them for our children. We have given public voice to the private concerns of our citizens and have worked to keep faith with them. We are creating a military and a police that will be governed by the tenets of such institutions in a democracy. We have used every second of our waking moments to focus on issues of economic revitalization and growth in our country.

204 The majority of our people understand and appreciate the effort we have made and we wish to thank them for their strong and unwavering support.

205 Yet, a few have not brought themselves to accept the peoples will as expressed through the 2005 election results. They are joined by still a few others who benefit from our policy of inclusion by holding high positions of trust in Government. Together they continue to plot and to plan and to strategize with displaced vested interest of the past to return us to conflict and confusion and to bring out institutions of Government into disrepute.

206 We will do all that we can to gather the evidence to expose the detractors even as we make greater effort at reconciliation and unity with the positive political opposition, recognizing that economic recovery and political stability are mutually reinforcing.

Honorable Legislators:

207 We have faced some teething questions and challenges. But we knew that the Presidency is the office where decisions are made. So, we have not shirked

from making the tough decisions for our country and our people – and we shall continue to make them.

208 We also have not brought quick fixes to the monumental challenges that we inherited. We did not promise that we would. But we have made some important beginnings – to heal the wounds, restore our people’s dignity, reconstruct our shattered and fractured nation, restore sanity and respect to our nation, regain our national honor, and give our people hope.

209 Let us together continue the work that Almighty God has given us to do, and let us remember above all else, that our national purpose reigns supreme.

210 May Almighty God Bless and Save the Republic of Liberia!

211 I thank you very much!