

## Manipulative Rhetoric and Post-war Reconstruction in President Johnson-Sirleaf's First Inaugural Address\*

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### ABSTRACT

*Following the devastating consequences of Liberia's fourteen-year civil war for the people and the country at large, the task of mobilising the people and reinforcing their commitment to the cause of nation (re)building rests not only on the leader's vision but also on how they expressly share the vision with their followers. This paper examines how President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf tailors certain rhetorical strategies in her first inaugural speech of 16th January 2006 to tuning up the Liberian people's mindset to embrace her vision and imbibe the attitude necessary for the attainment of social and political goals in post-war Liberia. Applying the principles of the socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as espoused by van Dijk (2006) to the analysis of the text of the inaugural address, the study interrogates the manipulative nature of the discourse even when it appears that the speaker is mobilising the people for a common goal. The study observes that the asymmetrical relations between the political public speaker and the audience offer the former the latitude to exercise some kind of control on the latter on issues of social representations such as knowledge and ideologies in political processes.*

*Keywords: inaugural address; persuasion; manipulative discourse; post-war rhetoric; propaganda; nation (re)building*

### INTRODUCTION

“Charismatic leaders are meaning makers. They pick and choose from the raw materials of reality and construct pictures of great possibilities. Their persuasion is of the subtlest kind for they interpret reality to offer us images of the future that are irresistible”. - Jay Conger

Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy (2006, p. 107) argue that “some of history's earliest characterisations of leaders concerned their use of power”. According to Brown and Gilman (1972, p. 255), “One person may be said to have power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other”. The exercise of power in this sense could derive from coercion or from the institutionalised role of the leader. Lakoff (2001, p. 310) posits that “power provides its possessors with language authority and language authority in turn provides its possessors with power”. To this end, a leader's access to and control of public discourse is a potent weapon by which s/he can inspire, influence, motivate and convince the followers towards achieving certain social and political goals. Writing on discourse-power relationship, van Dijk (2003, p. 355) posits that access to specific forms of discourse, for

example, political discourse, is itself a power resource and since action is controlled by people's minds, the ability to influence their minds may directly control their actions.

Against this backdrop, manipulative discourse has attracted the attention of scholars who are interested in political discourse analysis. From the fields of linguistics, rhetoric, political science, pragmatics and communication studies, the dominant question revolves around what constitutes a manipulative discourse. One of its properties is the violation of truth conditions and felicity conditions, as Rigotti (2005, p. 68) cited in Maillat & Oswald (2009, p. 350) suggests that in manipulation, "what is negative has to be somehow disguised as something positive", and that manipulation "twists the vision of the world [...] in the mind of the addressee". The issue of cognitive control of the addressee's mind presupposes that the speaker has some goal to attain and this brings to bear the notion of speaker interest. Maillat & Oswald (2009, p. 353) argue that "manipulation is an intrinsically goal-oriented phenomenon designed to satisfy speaker interest".

From this proposition, there are certain social conditions that manipulative communication builds on. Hence, van Dijk (2006, p. 372) defines a manipulative discourse as one which takes into cognizance the "context models of the participants". Maillat & Oswald (2009, p. 357) corroborate van Dijk's (2006) view, saying that "asymmetrical social conditions of interaction are required for manipulation to take place". Aside from the social conditions, there are structures and processes involved in manipulation. However, van Dijk (2006, p. 372) hints that "[...] discourse structures are not manipulative; they only have such functions or effects in specific communicative situations and the way in which these are interpreted by participants in their context models".

In the light of the foregoing, this study seeks to examine the deployment of manipulative rhetorical strategies by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in her first inaugural speech of 16th January 2006 to engage and control the minds of the Liberian people in view of the exigencies of re/building a country that has gone through intense political conflicts. In analysing Johnson-Sirleaf's post-war political rhetoric, this paper attempts to examine the ways by which she deliberately tries to manipulate the discourse to mediate the relations between the three-element interactional framework of leadership (the leader, the follower, and the situation), paying particular attention to how their interdependency relations are re/presented in rhetorical dynamics.

## DATA BACKGROUND

The Liberian civil war, which was one of Africa's bloodiest, had horrific consequences for Liberia as a country and the people. The war, according to reports, claimed the lives of more than 250,000 Liberians and nearly a million were displaced into refugee camps and neighbouring countries. Youths witnessed terrible atrocities and some committed atrocities themselves. Out of the rebel fighters that were recruited by the warlords, most were 'child soldiers', under the age of 17 and most of them remained traumatised, and some of them are still addicted to drugs. The number of street children in Monrovia and the number of abandoned infants increased significantly following disarmament. Still from the human angle, women and girls were reported to have suffered the most: they were raped and murdered with impunity by all the warring factions. With regard to the impact of the war on the country, the war had devastating effect on the economy. Most major businesses were destroyed or heavily damaged and most foreign investors and businessmen left the country, making the country one of the poorest in the world with nationwide unemployment. In terms of infrastructure, houses, schools, clinics, roads and bridges were destroyed. The ravages of the war were also evidenced in the non-availability of pipe-borne water and electricity.

With this horrendous picture, President's Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's taking over the reins of power and seeking to renew the hope of the despondent Liberian people seem an onerous task. Hence, in her first inaugural speech, she attempts to encapsulate what the Liberian society had undergone in about sixteen years before her inauguration as a democratically elected president, her vision for the country and the role she expects that the Liberian people would play in the task of doing the right things to put things right.

## CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study applies the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to unveil the ways in which discourse manipulators constructs versions of reality that favour their interests. Chilton (2005, p.3) states that "CDA has tended to draw [...] on social theory of a particular type and on linguistics of a particular type" but Hart (2005, p. 2) suggests that "cognitive sciences offer ideas significant to the CD analyst [...]. Hart (2005, p. 2), therefore , argues that "[w]ith a cognitive perspective a new methodology for the identification and analysis of linguistic manipulation (a principle objective of CDA) can be constructed, CDA perhaps becoming more revealing than at present and some of its existing claims better attested". Within this theoretical construct, we apply the notion of 'manipulation'. van Dijk (2006) considers manipulation as a communicative and interactional practice which not only involves power but abuse of power, that is, domination. van Dijk (2006, p. 361) argues thus: "[...] manipulation implies the exercise of a form of *illegitimate* influence by means of discourse: manipulators make others believe or do things that are in the interest of the manipulator, and against the best interests of the manipulated [...]".

The issue of 'illegitimate influence' raised in this conception readily conjures up the view that manipulation is often considered as having negative associations because its practice violates social norms. However, van Dijk (2006, p. 361) provides a proviso that "[...] without the negative associations, manipulation could be a form of (legitimate) persuasion" and argues further that the boundary between (illegitimate) manipulation and (legitimate) persuasion is fuzzy and context-dependent. Generally, persuasive speaking more often than not touches on the concept of propaganda which Jowett (1987, p. 103) defines as "the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist". Although negative connotation is usually attached to the concept among scholars in political communication and even lay people, Jowett (1987) contends that it is expedient to consider it a technique rather than a negative concept since it is the goal of the manipulation that has always been a contested site in political discourses. This standpoint is corroborated by Wilson (2003, p. 400) who argues that "it is not simply manipulation that is at issue in the case of political language; it is the goal which is seen as problematic".

So, in the context of the post-war reconstruction bid in Liberia for which Johnson-Sirleaf seeks to mobilise the Liberian people, the persuasion may be formally ethically legitimate but the people may feel manipulated by it or the critical analyst may judge such communication to be manipulating people. van Dijk (2006, p. 362) argues: "We define as illegitimate all forms of interaction, communication, or other social practices that are only in the interests of one party, and against the interests of the recipients". Even when it is assumed that manipulation is illegitimate because it violates the human or social rights of those who are manipulated, van Dijk (2006, p. 363) argues that "it is not easy to formulate the exact norms or values that are violated here". In what appears to be a compromise position between the legitimate-illegitimate dichotomy of manipulative discourse, Akindele (1989, p. 186) posits:

[b]y its very nature, politics or political discourse involves the persuasion of a group or groups of people, largely through the manipulation of language [...]. All recorded history bears witness to attempts by politicians to use all available communication strategies to move people to action, to vote for a candidate, to support a party, and to fight a cause.

The theoretical account of discursive manipulation as postulated by van Dijk (2006) follows the overall multi-disciplinary framework, triangulating a social, cognitive and discursive approach.

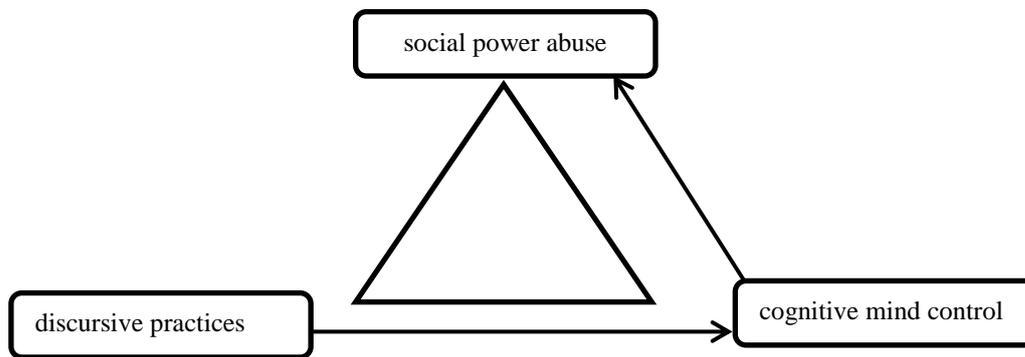


FIGURE 1. A Triangulated Approach to Manipulative Discourse

Manipulation as a social phenomenon involves interaction and power abuse between groups and social actors; it is cognitive because it implies the manipulation of the minds of participants; and discursive-rhetoric because it is being exercised through text, talk and visual messages. As conceived in the figure above, the discursive practices deployed by the manipulator are always geared towards tuning the addressee's minds in the direction(s) desired by the manipulator. And when this goal is achieved, because of the asymmetrical relations between the participants, there is social power abuse; hence the direction of the arrow from the base of the left-hand side of the triangle to the base of the right-hand-side and it then goes to the peak of the triangle where power abuse is ultimately played out.

Therefore, in this analysis I consider the social environment of post-war reconstruction in Liberia where the President is faced with the task of selling her vision of rebuilding the war-ravaged country to the disenchanted Liberia people. And more importantly, as a political leader with access to and control of public discourse, emphasis is on how cognitively, she tries to control the minds of the people, that is, the beliefs of the recipients, and indirectly a control of their actions based on such manipulated beliefs. In doing so, I will work through the discursive strategies of speech acts, positive self-presentation, propaganda techniques, among others, and rhetorical figures such as hyperbole, exemplification, establishing rapport, narration, anecdote and metaphor to unpack how the political rhetor subtly manipulates the discourse to achieve certain goals which the critical analyst could view as delicately serving her personal interests as the leader saddled with the task of providing leadership, on the one hand, and some other goals she presents as being in the general interests of the Liberian people, on the other hand, in the effort to rebuild the war-torn country.

## ‘COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE’: PRESIDENT ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF LULLS LIBERIANS

In this section of the paper, I will examine three major discourse strategies – selective appeals to specific audiences, transitional appraisal, and positive self assessment – and in so doing identify and discuss the manipulative rhetorical strokes which strikingly characterise Johnson Sirleaf’s message of hope to assuage the Liberian people’s post-war disillusionment.

### SELECTIVE APPEALS TO SPECIFIC AUDIENCES

The speaker chooses to establish a bond between leadership and followership, making, in a rather responsive manner, selective appeals to special groups relative to their respective conditions, yearnings and aspirations. In a bid to make the appeals forceful, she tries to narrow down the social distance between her (the leader) and the Liberian people (the followers) by directing her speech to all the citizens beyond the confines of the arena of the inaugural ceremony, saying:

Across this country [...] 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.

This utterance falls under the rhetorical strategy known as rapport which has to do with a speaker’s attempt to create a sense of friendliness and receptivity on the part of the audience. Here, Johnson Sirleaf gives a friendly introduction which shows respect for the audience.

In addressing the problem of unemployment, she focuses on the Liberian men. In a grand design to arouse the emotions of this target audience, she uses a rhetorical strategy known as ‘narration’ by appropriating a strikingly emotive anecdote, recounting the common experience of an average Liberian family where, out of joblessness, the father figure frustratingly returns home without provisions for the upkeep of the family. Using the children’s popular greeting (welcome) formula ‘Papa na come’ which customarily reminds the father of his responsibilities, she contrasts the dependants’ high expectations to the disappointing arrival of the breadwinner with nothing, thereby whipping up sentiments in a number of ways.

Her focusing on the plight of the family unit which is the bedrock of any society is suggestive of her supposed understanding of societal problems. By first proposing to tackle the problem at the home front, she looks good to understanding other societal problems and employing systematic means of providing solutions. As a matter of fact, she expressly states:

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.

This is a propaganda technique referred to as plain folks. It is a device by a propagandist to convince the public that his/her views reflect those of the common person. In this regard, s/he will often use ordinary language and mannerisms to reach the audience and identify with their point of view, hence the use of the ‘Papa na come’ sociolect in this discourse.

Furthermore, her paying attention to ‘the hungry children’ victims appeals to the primordial sentiment of the unsearchable love mothers have for their children. Being a female

president, she appears to distance Liberia's male leaders, especially those that held sway during the country's political conflicts, from the people, portraying them as being insensitive to the cries of the children just like some traditional (African) men would care less for their families where and when mothers would not mind working out their hearts to give the children succour. Therefore, she tries to endear herself to the hearts of the people as a caring and responsive woman leader, an archetype of the female figure that could give the Midas touch that society requires for turnaround.

In her appeal to the youth, she harps on the need to empower them, build their capacity, give them education and the skills training they desire. The speaker, being a woman herself, passionately condemns treating women as second-class citizens and also bemoans conscripting them into war and raping them during the civil war. Her interest in the youth and women of Liberia resonate with the global crusades of respecting child's rights, on the one hand, as championed by the United Nations Children's Funds (UNICEF) with its focus on the areas of health, education, equality and protection for the child, and women's rights, on the other hand, as the Feminist Movement seeks to address the issue of gender inequality by tackling male chauvinism and recognising, protecting, and respecting women's rights in society. These issues which find expression in Johnson Sirleaf's rhetoric fall within the purview of the eight-point Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this sense, the speaker's attempt to sell her virtues of competence (having good sense) and benevolence (her claim of being one with the audience) is rhetorically significant.

Generally, there is a psychological undercurrent to Johnson-Sirleaf's appeals to the specific audiences identified above. According to Hughes et al. (2006, p. 249), "One way to get followers to engage and persist with the behaviours needed to accomplish group goals is to appeal to their needs". Here, Abraham Maslow's popular hierarchy of needs comes into play. According to Maslow, an individual's motivations, priorities, and behaviour are influenced primarily by the needs the person is experiencing. These needs arranged hierarchically from the lowest to the highest are: physiological/survival needs, security/safety needs, belongingness/social needs, esteem/ego-status needs and self-actualisation needs. Maslow further argues that lower-level needs must be satisfied before the next higher level becomes salient in motivating behaviour.

It is strategic, therefore, for Johnson-Sirleaf to use the 'Papa na come' anecdote to motivate the Liberian men, women and children; apparently, no other issue can appeal to a wo/man's mind when hunger is biting hard. For the women specifically, after they might have been able to cook and put food on the table for the family, the next higher-level needs to be satisfied are safety needs, social needs and ego-status needs. The speaker, in line with this hierarchy, promises to protect the women, restore their dignity, and recognise their competence and achievement in development processes. Writing on the rhetorical effect of applying the needs theory to persuasive speaking, O'Hair, Friedrich & Wiemann (1995, p. 587) explain: "The implications of Maslow's hierarchy for persuasive speaking are straightforward. The persuasive speaker must consider the level of the hierarchy that characterises the majority of the audience and adapt the message appropriately".

This is exactly what the speaker tries to do in this discourse. Characteristic of a political campaign discourse, she has a predilection for the illocutionary act of promise evidenced in the utterances: "We will create the jobs for our mothers and fathers [...]"; "We will give you the youth the education that you asked for [...]"; "We will support and increase the writ of laws that restore their (women's) dignity [...]"; and so on. Taken at face value, such promises would give the Liberian people some glimmer of hope for a brighter future. But their experiences about campaign promises in the past and how far past leaders had fulfilled such promises would to a large extent influence their behavioural response in the present circumstance. Of course, we cannot gloss over the fact that making promises is the

hallmark of political speeches and writing, as politicians seeking elective positions use and abuse this illocutionary act by dangling the carrots of promises before the people, only to partially fulfil them or leave them unfulfilled in the end. This is why people generally tend to be skeptical about promises made during political campaigns; for political public speakers, paradoxically, hardly say what they mean and hardly mean what they say. And this is why there have been complaints about political language that politicians are always promising things and that politicians are always (?) lying, among others.

### TRANSITIONAL APPRAISAL

This is a strategy used by Johnson-Sirleaf to take the audience through events in the history of Liberia, emphasising what the situation was during the civil war, (in the past), the devastating effects of the war (at present), what goals are being set by her administration (at present) and the anticipated rewards (in the future). She pursues her interests by tying 'change' and 'vision' to leadership:

Today, we wholeheartedly embrace this change. We recognise that this change is not change for change sake, but a fundamental break with the past, thereby requiring that we take bold and decisive steps that address the problems that for decades have stunted our progress . . .

The reiteration of the lexical item 'change' in the above extract and in the discourse at large deserves to be more closely examined. Although leadership is about change, the word 'change' has been so perverted in ritualistic political discourses that it has virtually become semantically vacuous. What 'change' means to the political public speaker may not be what the audience understands and expects to see as change. From a rhetorical viewpoint, however, we could attempt to situate Johnson-Sirleaf's perception of change as enunciated in her inaugural speech within Beer's (1988, 1999) model of the rational approach to change. According to Beer cited by Hughes et al. (2006, p. 394),

$$C = D \times M \times P > R$$

The **D** in this formula represents followers' dissatisfaction with the current status quo. **M** symbolises the model for change and includes the leader's vision of the future as well as the goals and systems that need to change to support the new vision. **P** represents process: developing and implementing a plan that articulates who, what, when, where and how of the change initiative. **R** stands for resistance, as people resist change because they fear a loss of identity or social contacts. **C** corresponds to the amount of change.

While we may not, within the scope of the present study, be able to carry out a broad-based analysis of the speaker's appropriation of all the variables as they span the entire discourse, it is instructive that we focus on her effort to sway the audience to embrace her change initiative by deliberately attempting to increase the level of the people's dissatisfaction with the status quo and also increase the level of her vision when she says:

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.

Her deployment of the temporal deictic forms ‘before’ (past), ‘today’ (present) and then her projection into the future expressed in the modal ‘will’ is most compelling.

Rhetorically speaking, these are triggering words which are commonly used in cause group rhetoric to get the audience sufficiently aroused and emotionally engaged in order for the spark to ignite the fire. In so doing, Johnson-Sirleaf adopts a dominant propaganda technique, appeal to fear, as evident in the utterance: “Times were hard before. Times are even harder today”. Fear is one of the most primordial human emotions and, therefore, lends itself to effective use by propagandists. An appeal to fear also called *argumentum ad metam* or *argumentum in terrorem* is a logical fallacy in which a rhetor attempts to create support for his/her idea by playing on the audience’s deep-seated fears. In the present circumstance, the speaker raises the fear of economic hardship. The audience would thus be constrained to support her administration in a bid to ameliorate the situation or oppose her and make times the ‘hardest’.

As part of the rhetorical strategies designed to persuade the people, Johnson-Sirleaf invokes some dominant metaphors in political speeches and writing to imaginatively capture her message such that the audience would view the world in the picture desired by her. Writing on the place of metaphors in political discourse, Mihas (2005, p. 10) posits: “Metaphors occupy a central place in the rhetoric of politicians and their minions. The trope generates imagery which invokes targeted associations, and channels our way of thinking”. Thus, while casting the followers’ minds back in history and navigating their thoughts through the present; she uses the metaphor of ‘journey’:

Ours certainly has not been an easy journey to where we are today. Indeed the road has been tortuous and checkered.

Although the journey-road metaphor is popular in political discourses, its rhetorical import may not be readily appreciated until we attempt to situate it within the biblical context where it seems to have been derived from.

The political rhetor appears to allude to the Israelites’ journey from Egypt to Canaan, the Promised Land. The journey which was supposed to have taken them about forty days eventually lasted about forty years. To this end, ‘journey’ has become a signifier in political discourses, especially when used connotatively, to capture delayed expectations occasioned by certain hitches in the course of working towards achieving group goals. In the present discourse, Johnson-Sirleaf identifies some of the mistakes of the past: parochial and selfish considerations, greed, ethnic suspicion, hatred, injustice, social and political exclusion, among others, as the hitches that have made the road ‘tortuous and checkered’.

While trying to portray the past as unpleasant and undesirable, the speaker sees the present as yet another opportunity for setting new agenda and having renewed energy to carry on:

Our record shows that we are a strong and resilient people, able to survive, able to rise from the ashes of civil strife and start anew [...] We are a good and friendly people, braced for hope even as we wipe away the tears of past suffering and despair.

The metaphors of ashes and tears used in the above extract are noteworthy. ‘Ashes’ gives the picture of an irreparable loss or total annihilation. In effect, the speaker’s expression of ‘rising from the ashes’ seems to be a contradiction in terms; for nothing valuable, ordinarily speaking, can emerge from ashes. The speaker here assumes the image of political public speakers who characteristically build illusions of hope in their followers by the gentle stroke of the manipulation of language. However, from a religious dimension, the speaker seems to conjure up in the audience’s minds the image of the valley of dry bones recorded in the book

of Ezekiel 37 in the *Holy Bible* where with the touch of the divine, dry bones rose again. By referring to ashes in this context, the speaker could be using a Bible-based image here, after all, Christians do pray for God's beauty to replace the ashes of their lives, meaning that by faith, ashes could give way for yet another significant transformation. The metaphor of wiping away tears also suggests the imperative of parting with the unpleasant past, as tears are attendant to loss, pains, discomfort, and bitterness of heart, mourning and despair. With these metaphors, the speaker takes the posture of a messiah who has brought a message of comfort to her people.

Finally, the speaker tries to sever the present from the past by using a dominant medical metaphor in her reference to healing: "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". The wound/disease-healing metaphor is quite common in political discourses, as the rhetor would normally configure events and situations prior to his or her taking up the mantle of leadership in the image of wound/disease with no resultant remedy. Wound/disease causes disorderliness or setback and, in effect, inflicts pain both physically and psychologically. Within the context of Johnson-Sirleaf's speech, the wound/disease which the people's vote would heal logically turns out to be those undesirable things in the Liberian society.

By semantic extension, wound becomes a superordinate term for the harrowing experiences of the people such as instability, poverty, war and insecurity. The speaker, however, conceives of her being in the saddle as the much-desired healing that the country and her people itch for. Healing would then encapsulate the people's yearnings for stability, prosperity, peace and security as opposed to the concomitants of wound/disease that I highlighted before. Rhetorically speaking, Johnson-Sirleaf tries to endear herself to the people, seeking to enlist their support, as she frames for herself the image of a physician who has been able to diagnose the problems of the sick Liberian society and would subsequently administer the required antidote. Such a positive and desirable image is naturally irresistible since the wounded or afflicted would long for the attention and touch of a physician. It is in the light of this disposition that the speaker frames for herself that I consider the next dominant strategy in her inaugural speech.

## POSITIVE SELF-PRESENTATION

Reiterating Liberia's "collective search for a purposeful and responsive national leadership", Johnson-Sirleaf strives to build up positive images for herself and her administration in order to renew the confidence of the people in the country's leadership. In view of the fact that serious leadership crisis had engulfed the country in the recent past, the speaker tries to convince the people about the legitimacy of her choice as President, both within and outside Liberia. Within Liberia, she identifies the children "who could not present their voting cards" but "voted with their hearts" as an endorsement group. Here, she attempts to market herself as a popular figure widely accepted even among the disenfranchised children. Her projection of the children here bespeaks of the popular image of children as a class of humans who would give sound judgements and would not be given to any prejudice where adults would be ruled by sentiments.

As to her endorsement by the international community, she acknowledges the delegations of African and foreign governments. In particular, she mentions the delegation from the United States (a country with which Liberia historically had very close ties). Her acknowledgement of the presence of the delegations is not just a note of appreciation of their solidarity with Liberia on the return of democracy but is also suggestive of their endorsement

of her as an acceptable leader, thereby allaying the people's fears about the lack of credible leadership that had hitherto troubled Liberia. This is a propaganda technique called testimonial.

Another leadership image that Johnson Sirleaf establishes for herself in order to engender the trust of the followers is empathy. She claims to have had personal experiences of the people's common experiences in the crisis situation:

I know of this struggle because I have been part of it.  
Without bitterness, or anger, or vindictiveness, I recall the  
inhumanity of confinement, the terror of attempted rape,  
the ostracism of exile.

The speaker's deployment of the first person singular pronoun 'I' in the extract above is interesting. Suffice it to say that the inaugural speech is replete with the first person plural pronoun 'we' used predominantly by the speaker to encode power (asymmetrical relations) and to show solidarity (symmetrical relations). But her sudden shift from the plural 'we' to singular 'I' expresses a change of mood in which she tries to sell herself as a leader who understands the world as seen and experienced by the followers and would, therefore, presumably come up with policies that would ameliorate the pitiable conditions. Her use of exemplification as a rhetorical strategy by providing cases in point which touch on personal experiences is an attempt to convince the audience that she identifies with their point of view.

In a bid to tie integrity to leadership, the speaker demonstrates commitment to ethical considerations in governance. One of the ways by which she pledges to do the right things is in declaring war on the debilitating cancer of corruption, thereby demonstrating the virtue of being trustworthy which is a characteristic feature of election rhetoric. She also promises to lead by example as required of everyone serving in her administration. On the whole, she puts up the image of a national leader, as she declares:

Let me assure you that my Presidency shall remain  
committed to serve all Liberians without fear or favour. I  
am President for all the people of the country. I, therefore,  
want to assure all of our people that neither I, nor any  
person serving 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  
inclusive and tolerant, ever sensitive to the anxieties, fears,  
hopes, and aspirations of all our people irrespective of  
ethnic, political, religious affiliation, and social status.

The posture of having good character that the speaker assumes here is designed to enlist the people's support. She, however, threatens the autonomy face (the want not to be imposed on) of those who might not have supported her candidature or are probably still aggrieved by the election results which were declared in her favour and would, as a result, not wish to identify with her administration. Besides, when one considers the Utopian style of governance that she projects here, one would wonder if she does not sound too idealistic. She may at this point be saying what will normally interest the people to enlist their support but which in real life situations, she may find quite impracticable for personal or ideological considerations.

For instance, right in the inaugural speech where the speaker vows to shun "policies of political, social and economic exclusion", she includes the womenfolk in but excludes the menfolk from the supporting group that gave her victory at the polls:

[...] Liberian women were galvanised – and demonstrated unmatched passion, enthusiasm, and support for my candidacy. They stood with me; they defended me; they worked with 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.

Having broken the jinx of becoming the first democratically elected female president of an African country, she gives the impression that her victory at the polls is a victory for the Liberian women and indeed for African women who hitherto presumably had no voice. In this sense, she seems to suggest that Liberian men were not supportive of her candidature. Even when the men might not have supported her, an illusory affirmation of their support would have portrayed her as a truly dispassionate leader that is willing to enlist the support of both men and women for the common goal of the country.

On a final note, Johnson Sirleaf evokes the image of a visionary leader for herself. It must be noted that a visionary leader does not just assume a prophetic posture without motivating the people about how to work into the future invented by her. It behoves her, therefore, to perform the illocutionary act of inspiring the people:

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 recognise and give support to our small farmers and our marketers [...]. We can revisit our land tenure system [...].

The speaker's reiteration of the first person plural pronoun 'we' in the extract above is a strategy of bonding the audience by appealing to their sense of unity and that of loyalty. Also, the use of the modal 'can' takes us to another dimension of getting the followers motivated. In this regard, she attempts to manipulate the followers' cognitions in respect of goal-setting and self-efficacy theories. As to goal-setting, the leader helps followers to see how a goal might be attained by following a systematic plan to achieve it. In the excerpt above, we see the goals set by the speaker to direct attention and mobilise the people's efforts. Her articulation of high expectations to motivate the followers touches on the next cognitive theory, self-efficacy. It concerns one's core beliefs about being able to successfully perform a task. The kind of self-efficacy theory that the speaker appropriates here is positive self-efficacy. According to Hughes et al. (2006, p. 266), positive self-efficacy is used to note beliefs where people feel confident that they have the power to create the desired effect.

Having inspired the followers well enough to share her vision, she then casts their minds into the future of Liberia they would like to walk into and experience:

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 now 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.

We could see in this extract that there is the use of the propaganda technique known as euphoria. It is the use of an event that generates happiness or the use of an appealing event to boost morale. The overriding effect of the use of the rhetorical strategy of absolute certainty is underlined here, as the speaker expresses great faith which gives her statement an indisputable air. This is a posture usually assumed by rhetors in order to convince the audience that they (the rhetors) can see beyond the immediate.

The speaker also uses the propaganda technique known as bandwagon which is an attempt to persuade the target audience to join in and take the cause of action that everybody else is taking. This is a popular appeal to the people that it is in their best interest to ‘join the crowd’ on the way to ‘inevitable victory’. Beyond the prophetic declarations made above, we could see that the speaker is not just painting the scenario without offering good reasons by which the followers will judge whether or not the dream can come to pass, hence her appeal to the rhetorical strategy of argumentation. For further clarification, I will apply Toulmin’s model of argument. According to English logician Stephen Toulmin, when we give good reasons, we move from data, through warrant to a claim. The claim is the conclusion that the persuader wants the audience to accept; the data support the claim; and the warrant shows how the data do support the claim. The prophetic posture in the above extract could be represented in the figure below:

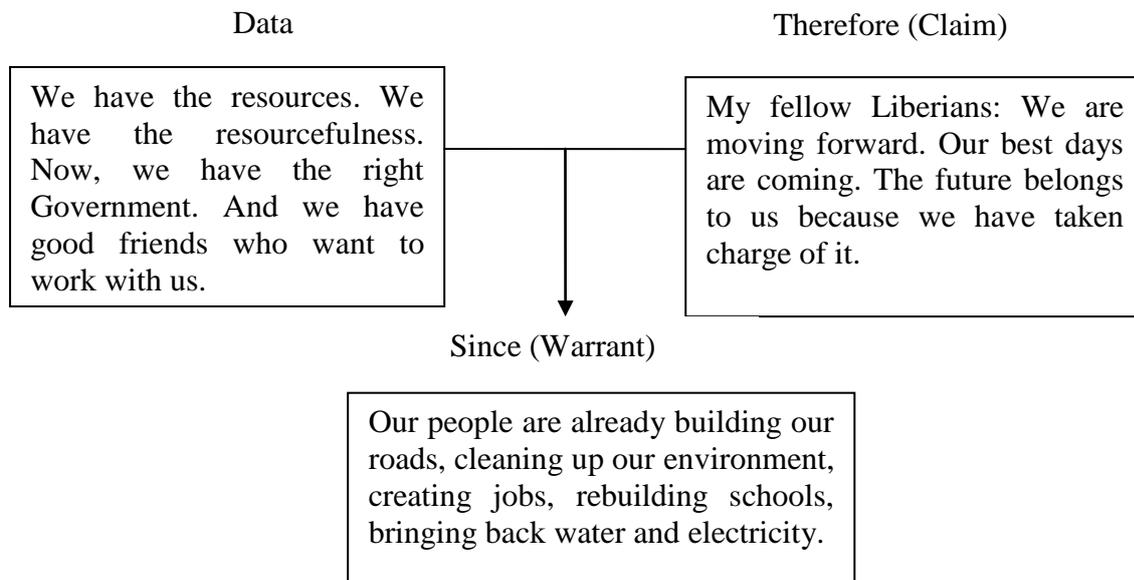


FIGURE 2. A Logical Presentation of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s Dream about New Liberia

Furthermore, she combines the logicity of her prophetic assumption above with an appeal to prejudice by complimenting the people:

We are a good people; we are a kind people. We are a forgiving people – and a God-fearing people. So, let us begin anew, moving forward into a future that is filled with hope and promise . . . “In Union Strong, Success is Sure! We cannot fail [...]”.

Making positive confessions about the followers by minimising blame and maximising praise is a rhetorical strategy of stroking the people's egos. This strategy is what Taflinger (1996, p. 1) calls *argumentum ad populum* (argument to the people). Basically, it is telling people how wonderful they are and since most people would like to be praised, they would agree with the leader who gives them compliments. The strategy is also characteristic of cause group rhetoric, as people working for a cause often increase their own self-image. I have to drop the hint, however, that complementing people has a way of creating illusions of virtues that are not readily inherent in the people, thereby calling up those things which are not as though they were.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our analysis and discussion have revealed that although the discourse produced by Johnson-Sirleaf to inspire the people in the task of national reconstruction appears to be geared towards achieving group cause, trappings of domination in the discourse cannot be mistaken. Cognitively, the way she skews the thinking of the people in the direction of the positive in spite of the stark realities of the ruins of war that stare the people in the face is interesting. This is the kind of figure that visionary leaders cut for themselves when they have to make their followers see beyond the present and dream of an imagined future that may not come expeditiously as wished or may not even come at all. So, in a bid to make the audience form a mental picture of the world painted by the rhetor, restrictions are inexorably placed on their freedom of interpretation, thereby suggesting that the world is understood only in terms of what the manipulator feels, thinks and desires. In this sense, the rhetor's deployment of rhetorical figures and propaganda strategies in the inaugural speech constitutes the discursive practices with which she cognitively controls the audience's minds and ultimately abuse social power with the monologue composition and presentational style of the inaugural speech.

Thus, the manipulative rhetoric, as our analysis and discussion have shown, fits in perfectly into the predictable four-part pattern of the 'Pep Talk' of any cause group: the threat, the bonding, the cause and the response. While invoking the threat variable, Johnson-Sirleaf intensifies the problems of the Liberian society but then appeals to the bonding factor by assuring the people that no matter the threats, the people's ability to stay united and be loyal and have pride would see them through. She appeals to the cause variable by evoking a sense of duty in the audience and finally the response variable finds expression in her identifying specific actions to be taken by using urgency pleas.

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\*The text of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s First Inaugural Speech can be accessed at [www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/inaugural\\_add\\_1.pdf](http://www.emansion.gov.lr/doc/inaugural_add_1.pdf)