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Trends. The Liberian Elections and Reflections on Political Love

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Some political observers have noted that survivors of wars, purges, massacres, and terror, survivors who have lost loved ones, all their worldly goods, even portions of their own bodies, minds, and spirits, often may be the biggest supporters of the perpetrators of evil. In the 20th century examples seems to include some inmates of Nazi concentration camps; survivors of Stalin's purges or the ravages of Pol Pot; captives of terrorists; and most recently a woman claiming to love Charles Taylor, Liberian warlord, apparent victor of the recent Liberian elections, and--according to the woman--murderer of both her parents (McNeil, July 21, 1997.)

Many psychological hypotheses have been advanced to provide meaning for such seemingly illogical and irrational behavior. These hypotheses--e.g., identification with the aggressor, satisfaction of masochistic tendencies, and fulfillment of Oedipal fantasies, usually involve equally hypothetical unconscious processes and afford a perspective that is more comfortably logical and rational. Other hypotheses may be just as easily viewed as involving conscious processes--the attributions that a perpetrator of evil can bring order to chaos, that a perpetrator is fulfilling a common myth or archetype as the Destroyer or Avenging Angel, that a close to death experience is the most significant and intense approach to savor life, that support may ward off one's own mortal demise.

All, some, or none of these variants of political love may be related to the surprisingly easy win for Charles Taylor, political support for tyrants, and other phenomena as diverse as an attraction to pen pals who are convicted felons--especially serial and binge murderers. One of political psychology's tasks is to discover the individual differences that are associated with supporting or not supporting the perpetrator. For example, why was one woman against Charles Taylor because his soldiers hacked her stepfather to death, another for him because Mr. Taylor "spoiled this country, so he's the best man to fix it" (McNeil, July 20, 1997)? (See Bloom, R. (Spring 1989.) The pro-Stalinist population segment in the USSR. *Perspectives*, 10; McNeil, D.G. (July 20, 1997.) Under scrutiny, postwar Liberia goes to polls. *The New York Times*, p. 5; McNeil, D.G. (July 21, 1997.) Early returns in Liberia put rebel leader far ahead. *The New York Times*. (<http://www.nytimes.com>.)