

South Sudanese nationalism in post independence era

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July 27, 2012 - South Sudanese did not struggle for a nation of their own but were forced to do so in conditions beyond their control. This assertion may not go down well with those who believed that from day one South Sudanese aspirations were totally a nation of their own. Arguably if that was the case South Sudanese would have to exert every effort in nation building. This is because South Sudanese are of diverse tribes, languages, cultures, states and outlook that may easily polarize them. They may be people of one race but this is not enough to instill nationalism as more often loyalty seems to be to one's tribe or clan rather than to nation building for prosperity to all. There is therefore not yet such a thing as South Sudanese nationalism but it can be cultivated.

Southern Sudanese in pre-independence era

We may need to know more in-depth about Southern Sudan from historians. However, in brief the history of Southern Sudan has been about slavery and domination, and resistance of the people to be freemen in the land of their birth. The modern history of Southern Sudan is therefore a history of struggle for freedom, equality and justice. The struggle was against Northern Sudan with its notorious Arab component that was terrorizing the people of Southern Sudan. The struggle was also against foreign rule and occupation of Southern Sudan by the Turks, Mahdists and the British. People of Southern Sudan had a long history of struggle for freedom but as people of separate tribes without coordination in their struggle until lately. The Arabs of Northern Sudan exploited and plundered resources in Southern Sudan with impunity. However, this was not received submissively. Despite poor weaponry the people of Southern Sudan put up heroic resistance against northern Arab slave traders. Heroism was the characteristic of Southern Sudan in the struggle throughout the pre-independence era.

Juba Conference of 1947

As though to pacify Southern Sudan for submission and exploitation a hasty conference was convened in Juba by the British colonial administration. The main objective of what became known as the Juba Conference of 1947 was to gain the support of the unsuspecting people of Southern Sudan for the realization of one united independent Sudan. Northern Sudan agitated for the conference to be convened. The conference, obviously serving the interest of Northern Sudan, urgently wanted Southern Sudan to agree immediately on the unification of Southern and Northern Sudan.

The British colonial administration erroneously concluded that Southern Sudan was inextricably bound for future development to the Middle East, Arabia and Northern Sudan. In its erroneous conclusion and naivety the British colonial administration merely hoped that Southern Sudan would be equipped to take its place in future as socially and economically the equal of Northern Sudan in the Sudan of future. It was to take Southern Sudan 64 (1947-2011) costly years to correct the British colonial administration erroneous conclusion and naivety about the unity of Sudan. It was of interest that Britain was among the first to recognize the independence of Southern Sudan as the Republic of South Sudan on the day independence was attained.

In the Juba Conference of 1947 southern participants made an eloquent argument against a hasty unity with Northern Sudan. However, one northern participant was so persuasive that southern participants swallowed the bait for unity without perceiving what would become of Southern Sudan, which was once a hunting ground for slaves, in a united Sudan. However, at any rate the decision on unity of Sudan had already been taken by the British colonial administration in favour of Northern Sudan.

Torit uprising of 1955

The erroneous conclusion and naivety of the British colonial administration that Southern Sudan would be socially and economically the equal of Northern Sudan in the Sudan of future was confirmed when the British left. Also, the persuasion of the northern participants in the Juba Conference of 1947 that southerners would be treated as equals to their northern counterparts was nothing but a deception. When Sudanisation of the civil and public service was made, out of 800 posts Sudanised less than 1 per cent of the posts went to southerners. How could the British colonial administration and the northern participants in the Juba Conference of 1947 explain this gross marginalization of the people of Southern Sudan? On their part southerners saw this as the substitution of hostile Arab colonialism for a limited and benevolent British colonial rule.

The hostility of southerners for the northern domination surfaced violently when southern soldiers in the Equatoria Corp based at Torit mutinied in 1955 marking the first armed uprising for fair treatment in modern history of Southern Sudan. The cause of the mutiny was clearly dissatisfaction when southerners saw that the Arabs were going to install themselves as new colonial masters in Southern Sudan. What southerners saw was the complete transfer of the colonial structures intact from

Britain to the northern Sudanese to colonise Southern Sudan. Southerners were left with no influence on the future of Southern Sudan. A choice had to be made either submission or resistance. The latter was chosen.

Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972

The uprising at Torit in 1955 marked the start of a protracted armed struggle against domination by Northern Sudan. The armed struggle intensified when in 1958 a military coup took place where the military regime enthusiastically embarked on a vigorous programme of Arabisation and Islamisation which led to increased repression in Southern Sudan. This in turn made occasional skirmishes to escalate into a full-fledged civil war. Southerners saw no peaceful solution in sight except an intensified protracted armed struggle for freedom, equality and justice. However, in 1969 another military coup took place but this time the second military regime took a different approach, that of resolving the problem through a negotiated settlement. In 1972 a peace agreement was signed in the Ethiopian capital and the agreement came to be known as the Addis Ababa Agreement.

The Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 granted Southern Sudan a local autonomy. With the agreement in place economic development and the establishment of political and administrative institutions became a priority in Southern Sudan. Arguably one of the most important results of the Addis Ababa Agreement was the establishment of Southern Sudan as an autonomous region with its parliament and a high executive council. However, manipulation of southern politics and interference from Northern Sudan caused the regional government to lose effectiveness. Leniency in dealing with corruption and rampant tribalism contributed to the negative perception of the regional government. Eventually the Addis Ababa Agreement was abrogated arguably because of the ugliest face of tribalism taken advantage of by Northern Sudan.

Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005

The abrogation of the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 was a blessing in disguise. The liberation struggle in Southern Sudan gathered unprecedented momentum that Southern Sudan was ultimately to become independent in its own right. After a 22-year war a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) was reached in 2005 that, unlike the Addis Ababa Agreement, granted Southern Sudan the right to self-determination with an interim period of 6 years after which a referendum would take place for Southern Sudan to choose either to remain united with Northern Sudan or to secede and become an independent country.

The experience of Juba Conference of 1947 was quite enough for people to have learned about the unity of Sudan. This was also reinforced by a message from none other than Dr John Garang de Mabior, the charismatic leader of the second revolutionary armed struggle, who said, "I and those who joined me in the bush and fought for more than twenty years have brought to you CPA on a golden plate. Our mission is accomplished. It is now your turn, especially those who did not have a chance to experience bush life. When time comes to vote at referendum, it is your golden choice to determine your fate. Would you like to vote to be second class citizen in your own country? It is absolutely your choice".

Who would really be a fool to vote for unity of Sudan that was racially and religiously discriminative? However, some southerners who ignored how their brethren were treated in a united Sudan shamefully voted for unity of Sudan. Fortunately they were a very tiny minority that the southerners who voted for secession and independence had sweet dreams the day the one result of the referendum was announced. The cherished result was a massive 98.43 per cent for secession and independence of Southern Sudan.

Meaning of independence

The more than 98 per cent of people of all tribes in Southern Sudan did not vote for independence for fun. The overwhelming vote for independence precisely meant people earnestly wanted freedom from human rights violations and services for a decent standard of living. In short people wanted a life different from the one before independence. Southern Sudanese did not need a lecture on problems with Northern Sudan in order to vote for secession and independence. They were already self-taught and experienced firsthand Arab's arrogance of treating southerners as second class citizens. The experience gained in living with northerners, especially the Arabs, should have made southerners experts in nation building. However, southerners seem to be extremely slow learners and practitioners in putting something for the common good into practice in promoting unity.

South Sudanese nationalism

After attaining independence are South Sudanese nationalistic? Some may answer in the affirmative that indeed South Sudanese are nationalistic for they couldn't have overwhelmingly voted for secession and independence. On the other hand it can be argued that South Sudanese are not nationalistic but tribalistic. They voted for secession and independence because of the equal suffering endured under the heavy handed Arab colonialism that was utterly dehumanizing and unbearable. After removing the Arab mean colonial actions there is very little that binds South Sudanese together. Unless some visionary revolutionaries produce concepts that are practically unifying, it is difficult to see how South Sudan will not be disunited.

Victims of crime do not get justice as their loved ones are murdered in cold blood. The constitution is violated with impunity, for example, when land grabbers violate and commit criminal offense by depriving legitimate land owners of their property.

Worse still land grabbers beat up and threaten to kill legitimate owners of the grabbed property. The law seems to be hardly enforced. In all this tribalism appears to play a part. There is no way one can conclude with absolute certainty that South Sudanese are nationalistic. The predominant culture seems to be that of greed and tribalism with lip service as part of a careful public relations exercise. Nationalism if any is abstractly remote from the reality on the ground.

Conclusion

In conclusion, South Sudanese nationalism in post independence era is still abstract and remote. The overwhelming vote for secession and independence was an expression of aggregate rejection of Arab colonialism. There is hardly any evidence that nationalism played a part. Rampant corruption, insecurity, tribalism and nepotism, and tribal conflicts seem to confirm this.

Nationalists put the country first with equitable access to resources and services but not self-enrichment and tribal appointment of officials. However, nationalism can be cultivated and sustained, and the sooner nationalism is cultivated the better for the unity of South Sudan. It is to avoid all the negatives that may contribute to disunity.

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