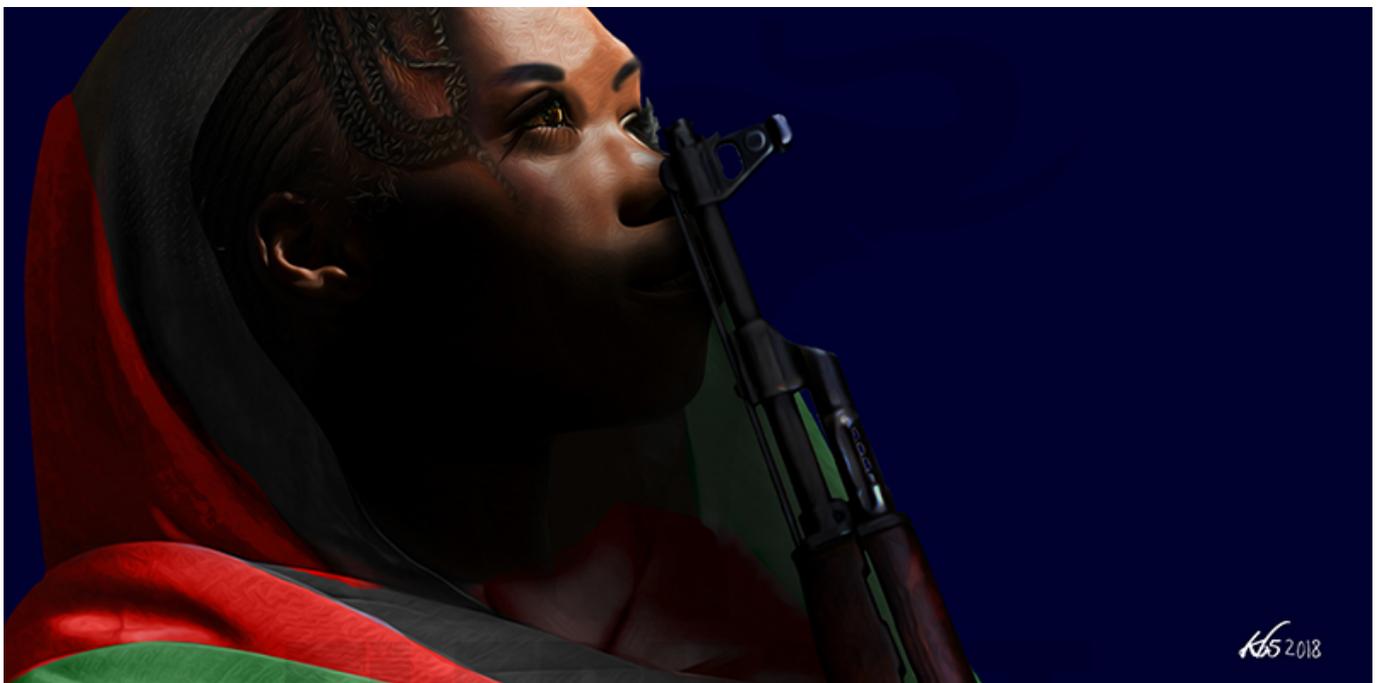




DUPLICITOUS DUALITY: Policies that have hampered South Sudan's transition to statehood

By Peter Adwok Nyaba



I define socio-political duplicity as the attitudes, behaviours and psychological syndromes that emerge from severe conditions of power asymmetry, which play out in political chicanery, backtracking on promises, political exclusion, economic marginalisation and social discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, language or gender, as well as in inferiority and superiority complexes. The socio-political duplicity of the South Sudanese political elite plays out these days as a dichotomised identity that underpins South Sudan's traumatising predicament.

The Republic of South Sudan became independent, or seceded from the rest of the Sudan, in July 2011 after nearly two centuries of common problematic history. To bring the reader to the same level of understanding, it is imperative to shed some light on the history of the Sudan, which started with the Turco-Egyptian invasion and occupation of northern Sudan in 1821. The Turco-Egyptian state in the Sudan, popularly known as Turkiya, thrived on extraction and plunder of its natural resources, such as gold, elephant tusks, ebony, ostrich feathers and African slaves drawn mainly from southern, central and western Sudan. The regime was very corrupt and oppressive to both Muslims and non-Muslims. This provoked and united the Sudanese across racial and ethnic lines in a nationalist revolution led by a Muslim cleric called Mohammed Ahmed el Mahdi. This revolution

started at Abba Island on the Nile south of Khartoum in 1881 and garnered support from parts of the Sudan, especially Kordofan, Dar Fur, Upper Nile and northern Bahr el Ghazal in the south. The Mahdist forces captured Khartoum in 1885.

By that time, the Ottoman Empire started to exhibit weakness in the face of other European imperialist powers and Egypt came under the occupation of Great Britain. It was clear that the beheading of General Charles Gordon during the taking of Khartoum and the loss of the Sudan to an indigenous rebellion profoundly angered Britain. It therefore decided to reconquer the Sudan from the Mahdists. That was the height of the European scramble for the imperialist occupation of Africa following the Berlin Conference in 1884. Britain had ambitions for the Nile Basin following its occupation of Kenya and Uganda. Whitehall decided on the re-conquest of the Sudan, and Herbert Kitchener was appointed to head the expedition. The British expedition, executed jointly with the Egyptians, had three major objectives: to defeat and punish the Mahdists for the death of Charles Gordon; to return the Sudan to the Egyptian Crown and; to stamp out slavery and the slave trade in the Sudan. The Church Missionary Society funded the last objective.

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The expedition started in 1896, fighting its way against the Mahdist army (or Dervishes as the British called them) now under the command of Khalifa Abdullahi el Tahisha, an African from the Tahisha tribe in Dar Fur. He had succeeded el Mahdi who had died of typhoid immediately after his forces had captured Khartoum. The Arabised Nubians [Danagalla, Shaigiya and Jalieen] had rebelled against Khalifa Abdullahi on racial grounds and therefore facilitated Kitchener by providing relevant intelligence. Kitchener finally engaged and defeated Khalifa's main force in the battle of Omdurman in September 1898, heralding the re-conquest and occupation of the Sudan. Britain and Egypt signed the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium Treaty to colonise the Sudan in 1899, which was renamed Anglo-Egyptian Sudan [1899 - 1956]. However, notwithstanding the treaty, Britain refused to return the Sudan to the Egyptian Crown. It led a campaign against slavery and the slave trade and administered the Sudan while Egypt footed the bill.

It was not until early 1930s that the British colonial administration completed the pacification of the whole country. It annexed Dar Fur in 1917 after the defeat of Sultan Ali Dinar. In southern Sudan, the British also fought wars of pacification against the Azande (1901), Lou Nuer (1902), Anyuak (1910), Aliab Dinka (1919), Malual Dinka (1922) and finally the Nuer (1927-1929). Hence, British rule in the Sudan was fraught with difficulties, chief among them the lack of mineral and other resources it could exploit.

The condominium of powers were constantly changing, driven by Egyptian nationalism. In 1924, the Egyptian army in the Sudan, commanded by British officers, rebelled in what the people of Sudan celebrate as the White Flag Revolution led by Ali Abdelatif, an African. This created a radical change in British policy towards Africans in the Sudan. The policy insulated and isolated Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and the Southern Blue Nile from the civilised world and modern ideas through legislation popularly known as Closed District Ordinance, the policy for the southern provinces. Until the reversal of this policy in 1946, the British administered southern and northern parts of the Sudan separately, requiring the citizens on both sides to obtain special travel permits to cross the common borders.

The genesis of socio-political duplicity

The concept of the so-called “problem of Southern Sudan” triggered by the mutiny of the Southern Corps of the Sudan Defence Force (SDF), which heralded the first civil war (1955-1972), was a right-wing construct arising from an inability to conceptualise or understand the socio-economic and political character of the Sudan. The fundamental contradiction that continues to date to afflict the two Sudans [South Sudan and the Sudan] is general, but peculiarised more in the peripheral areas, is the socio-economic and cultural underdevelopment of the South Sudanese people, who live in abject poverty, ignorance and illiteracy. This condition obtained consequent to the colonial policy of uneven social and economic development in the different parts of the country.

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The proximity of Northern Sudan to Egypt and the Middle East enabled its people to access modern education facilities up to the university level. Coupled with social and political awareness linked to the Islamic faith, this proximity enabled social clubs and civil institutions to sprout and laid the socio-political foundations of the nationalist anti-colonial movement therein. Social awareness and political consciousness - foundation stones of nationalist anti-colonial movements - are functions of the development of national productive forces and therefore reflect the people's socio-economic, cultural and political development. Education and knowledge of social and political processes play a pivotal role in the evolution of social awareness and political consciousness.

The most detrimental impact of the Closed District Ordinance was the insulation of the people of Southern Sudan from the civilised world and from modern ideas; this ordinance also surrendered the provision of education to Christian missionaries. The objectives of this limited substandard education was to produce junior clerks, bookkeepers, tailors, village-school teachers and time-keepers to serve the colonial administration. It was an education deliberately tailored to instil in the Southern Sudanese people an extreme hatred of Northern Sudan in general, and Arabs and Islam, in particular. This education efficaciously diverted the attention of the Southern Sudanese from their own backwardness, which the British colonial policy for southern provinces occasioned to instil hatred towards their northern compatriots. It also instilled in the Southern Sudanese an inferiority complex and fear of authority, rendering them apolitical so that their pathetic situation of social and economic backwardness could neither stir in them anti-colonial passions nor inspire nationalist instincts.

The political realities stirred by post-war anti-colonial movements around the world forced a reversal of the British policy in the southern provinces, allowing for the reunification of the country. This was at a time when the level of social awareness and political consciousness in Northern Sudan was high enough to trigger an anti-colonial nationalist movement.

In Southern Sudan, the colonial policy entrenched ethnic autochthony and exclusive tribal life, a condition that hampered the evolution of national awareness and political consciousness in Southern Sudan and the ability of the people to dovetail with the nationalist forces in Northern Sudan. Therefore, it was not out of nothing that nationalist anti-colonial movements did not take root in Southern Sudan. The terrible social, economic and cultural backwardness consequent to the colonial insulation and isolation of Southern Sudan, the tribal autochthony and its exclusiveness and the complete absence of a working bourgeois nationalist class smothered healthy and progressive Southern political thinking, which led to the dichotomisation of the nationalist anti-colonial movement in the Sudan.

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While in Northern Sudan full-fledged, organised political movements had emerged – such as the el Ansar and el Ashigga movements linked respectively to the two religious sects of Mahdiya and Khatimiya, in addition to the intellectual forum, the Graduate Congress, which played an important role in directing the political struggle – in Southern Sudan there were no social or political organisations. The Welfare Committee Movement that fronted for social and economic demands formed only after the Juba Conference of 1947. The frenetic British efforts to unite the two parts of the Sudan after nearly three decades of separate existence were too little too late to allay southern Sudanese fears of their counterparts in the north. The southern representation at the Juba Conference could not match their northern compatriots in terms of education, as well as in political and organisational skills.

Thus, graduates in law, economics and other humanities led the nationalist movement in Northern Sudan while in the South those categorised as a political class were products of substandard Christian missionary education. The Juba Conference exposed to what extent the British policy in the south had left the people of Southern Sudan in socio-economic and cultural backwardness. It is no wonder that some Southern Sudanese conference participants requested the colonial government to let Southern Sudan remain under British rule until such a time it was ready to self-govern; this request seemed driven by genuine concerns.

Therefore, it is difficult to view whatever came out of the Juba Conference as the authentic wish of the people of Southern Sudan. For instance, while graduates of law, economics and other humanities represented Northern Sudan, tribal chiefs, junior clerks and colonial officials, who by virtue of their jobs could not express political opinions, represented the people of Southern Sudan. Sayyed Edward Odhok Didigo, for example, had it minuted that he did not represent the Shilluk people because that was the prerogative of the Shilluk King.

The Juba Conference, though it achieved the objective of the British Civil Secretary, Sir James Robertson, to bring the Sudan to independence as one country, nevertheless entrenched the suspicion of the Southern Sudanese particularly of the ensuing political processes leading towards independence. It did not unify the political movement in Southern Sudan and the nationalist anti-colonial movement in Northern Sudan, notwithstanding the fact that Sudan was on the verge of self-government via the Anglo-Egyptian Cairo Agreement of February 1953.

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The discourse is about the genesis of duplicity, double-talking and duality in the national consciousness – denying humanity to other, and other serious political obfuscations in the Southern Sudanese political thought and action. These definitely were products of uneven socio-economic and political development. They refract from high social and economic standards, which informed Northern Sudan's condescending and paternalistic attitudes towards their southern compatriots.

As a result, it triggered an inferiority complex and a penchant for separateness. Sudan became independent before authentic unity of the two parts had been completely achieved. The dominance of right-wing and neoliberal ideologies distorted, and indeed introduced, the element of reactionary

violence into the political discourse, as gleaned from the Torit mutiny of Southern Corps of the SDF in August 1955 and the subsequent repercussions and vengeance campaign. This mutiny was a reflection of a lack of political sophistication among the southern political groups trying to manoeuvre their way into sharing power with their northern counterparts in the run-up to the independence of the Sudan. There was little organic connection and synergy between the political struggle and the military action undertaken by the officers and soldiers of the Southern Corps. This reflects in the lack of any generalised political mobilisation in the southern provinces to precede or follow the action in Torit.

Although the people of the Republic of South Sudan celebrate 18 August 1955 to mark the beginning of the armed resistance to the Northern Sudan political establishment, nevertheless, it is imperative to place in the right perspective the political developments that triggered the mutiny, particularly when analysing the political fall-outs and later developments in the Sudan. The objective of the mutiny did not link to the nationalist movement in order to accelerate the process leading to the independence of the Sudan; it was a confused power struggle between the different southern Sudanese groups, with the encouragement of some elements of the colonial establishment, which aimed at separating Southern Sudan from the rest of the country, in line with the initial British plan to annex it to British East Africa.

The mutiny, and the politics preceding it, not only polluted North-South relations, it also denied the people of Southern Sudan the patriotic role they would have played in the unanimous vote for Sudan's independence in the Constituent Assembly on 19 December 1955. The greed of the Arab-dominated political elite and their condescending attitudes towards the southerners and other Sudanese of African origin informed the decision to define the Republic of the Sudan along the two parameters of Arab culture and Islam. In essence, they considered Sudanese nationality as a transition to Arab nationhood. This alienated the Southern Sudanese, rendering them unequal partners in the emergent independent Sudan and compounding their sense of inferiority *vis á vis* their northern Sudanese compatriots. Their weakness in political and organisational skills was evident in the ease with which northern politicians tricked their southern counterparts on many occasions - what Abel Alier called "Southern Sudan: Too many agreements dishonoured."

This political chicanery became a characteristic feature of North-South relations, particularly during the democratic political dispensations that governed the country intermittently between 1956 and 1989. The southern politicians often played the role of second class citizens when it came to power-sharing and distribution although they would have participated in the construction of that particular political order. The only exception was during the Transitional Government following the October 1964 popular uprising that overthrew the first military government. For the first time, a southerner occupied a sovereignty portfolio (Ministry of Interior) and two other services portfolios, in addition to a membership of the Supreme Council of the State. Thereafter, southerners occupied, in succession, the ministries of Labour or Animal Resources in the Arab-dominated Northern Sudan governments.

This pathological split personality of being and not being a Sudanese at the same time is what I meant by socio-political duplicity - a condition that inhibits the emergence of, and commitment to, a national political agenda and which perpetuates separateness in the social, economic and political engineering that is the foundation of statehood and nationhood.

It was only in the aftermath of Jaafar Nimeiri's demise in 1985 that southerners, mainly youthful graduate politicians, managed to rub shoulders with their northern compatriots in the power

scrimmage; only that the older politicians, who only contended with what their northern masters offered, short-circuited them with a mean demand from the political coordinator. While the youthful graduate politicians wanted the position of the Prime Minister for Southern Sudan, this was out of the consideration that a northerner was head of state. The older politicians, who believed it was an impossible position, demanded the creation of the post of Deputy Prime Minister, which was readily acceptable. It resolved the struggle among the northern contenders to the position of the prime minister.

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The difficulty of South Sudan's transition to statehood

The numerical dominance of a single ethnic group in a national liberation movement, unless prudently managed, is likely to generate the syndrome of socio-political duplicity, giving rise to the fallacy of hegemony, domination and monopoly of political and economic power. Many African countries are pregnant with this situation, which reversed many victories the people scored against imperialism in the context of anti-colonial struggles and retarded the processes of national integration and cohesion. This stems from a lack of clear ideological underpinnings for the socio-economic and political context; or when ambition for power is completely detached from any ideology linked to the socio-economic and cultural development of the country and its people.

The current political crisis in South Sudan refracts from the socio-political duplicity demonstrated by its political leadership. The upsurge within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) of Dinka ethnic nationalism and its ideology of hegemony and domination started when the political leadership failed to correct a dangerous anomaly at the inception of the SPLM/A in 1983. How could four out of five members of the SPLM/A's political military high command hail from one ethnic group (Dinka) in a national liberation movement comprising sixty-four ethnic groups? This anomaly persisted in 2011 in the first government of the independent Republic of South Sudan as the Dinka nationality constituted more than half of the cabinet of thirty-two ministers. It shows that certain nationalities will never ever be visible at the national level. This results in the formation of ethnic-based political parties - and politics organised and/or power exercised - along ethnic lines. It does not augur well for national cohesion or the principle of unity in diversity if certain sections of society feel alienated or not part of the national centre, feelings that can generate secessionist movements.

The root causes of the civil war are political. Nevertheless, strong ethnic and provincial undercurrents cut across them on account of leadership myopia and lack of sensitivity to the concerns of other citizens who feel alienated by practices of political exclusion, economic marginalisation and social discrimination.

South Sudan emerged as a fragile state after twenty-one years of war with the different governments that came and went in Khartoum. It has drifted from fragility towards failure and eventual collapse. This constitutes the difficulty of transitioning to statehood and nationhood.

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The current social and political engineering in South Sudan is an exact replay of the political processes that plunged the Sudan into the first civil war in 1955. The political attitudes and behaviours of some sections of the Dinka political elite, which borders on the complete monopoly of political and economic power, does not augur well for the country. The loud calls for federalism, smacking of "kokora" (separateness), are matters to consider and take seriously; they could be signs of self-destruction in the style of the biblical Samson's "on me and my enemies". Kokora culminated in 1983 with Nimeiri's abrogation of the Addis Ababa Agreement, the scrapping of regional self-rule and local autonomy and the dismantling of the southern region into its component weak regions of Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile, leading to the eruption of the second civil war.

The dire situation may vindicate those who had doubted the ability of the Southern Sudanese to govern themselves. However, I am convinced that it is not about the people of South Sudan failing to govern themselves; rather, it is the political leadership in South Sudan failing to meet the aspirations of the people. This, in the words of Amilcar Cabral, stems from lack of an ideology to transform the socio-economic and cultural backwardness of the country and its people.

The political elite constitute the drivers of social and political unrest in South Sudan; and the responsibility of stemming this unrest lies with those who have the ultimate authority. In this respect, leadership is not just about the individual at the helm but about the ideology, political objectives, democratic institutions and instruments of public authority and power that the SPLM leadership failed to construct during the phase of national liberation.

The IGAD-sponsored High Level Revitalization Forum, whose third round of talks begins on 26 March 2018, may be the last opportunity to salvage something. However, while the IGAD mediators will be hammering on the question of power-sharing, the security sector and other superficial reforms of the system, the underlying motivation that will be driving the core government delegation will be how to maintain power, not how to mitigate the destruction the civil war in South Sudan has caused. This motivation stems from the social and political syndromes that dichotomise South Sudanese identity and which translate into the country's difficulty in transitioning to statehood and nationhood.

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