

The State of South Sudan: The Change is about the New Sudan

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July 9, 2011, will go down in history not only as a momentous day for the newest state of South Sudan, but also as a significant signpost in the lives of millions of people in that state, in the greater Sudan, in Africa and in the world at large. So it does in “time future”: in the words of T. S. Eliot, “Time present and time past, / Are both perhaps present in time future.”¹ True, it was a day of euphoria, self-actualization and high hopes for many Sudanese; but at the same time, it was a day of tears, feelings of failure and disenchantment for others in the two Sudans—or, for the time being, the greater Sudan. Hopes, tears and fears all depend, of course, on expectations and on gained and/or

missed opportunities.

In appreciation for and recognition of what the men and women of the new Republic of South Sudan have gained, all good wishers from the greater Sudan, Africa and other parts of the world congregated and wholeheartedly congratulated them. Everyone expressed their respect and support to the decision that the Southern Sudanese made according to their free will.

But, if there has been a potential for social change and nation and state building for a new Sudan, then it behooves us to envisage how such an opportunity came to exist. Yes, history has vacillated from such a lateral of opportunity to the other. This is not said lightly. Like all events of scale, a historic moment made itself available for the Sudanese people to grasp and to use to rebuild a new country, a nation and a state. It was an opportunity for the world—and for especially concerned entities such as the United States—to help facilitate the emergence of the new Sudan as they played a major role in securing the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Whatever some may think of the merit of the CPA, its achievement and content corresponded with the three main influences on President George W. Bush’s policy toward Sudan: the American evangelicals, the war on terror, and oil interests. It will not be a hasty assumption to conclude that, intransigence of the Khartoum regime notwithstanding, President Barack Obama will go in history as person who missed capturing the

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¹ T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton” (no. 1 of *Four Quartets*), in Anthony David Moody (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 207.

historical moment for encouraging a new model for rebuilding newer African states and nations through negotiating a social contract based on citizenship. The latent potential for that availed itself at that critical juncture, marked a missed opportunity for President Obama to midwife the birth of a new model for rebuilding such a new country, a nation and a state. Such a model, in principle, would represent one of the most prominent endorsements—citizenry—of Obama’s choice as an American president. This step was to some extent empowered by and empowering to a vibrant virtual global civil society. His election re-energized a citizenry impulse eager to actively and effectively transform the world into that direction and he was widely expected to offer “hope” and “change.”

That is, the change dimensions that availed themselves and stood head and shoulder above all other issues could have brought the Sudanese together to make the CPA a comprehensive peace plan or to make possible a new social contract for Sudan; or as I say elsewhere, for “Sudan the possible”.² This social contract would be in essence the changing whole of the political terms, conduct and philosophy on which the colonial and post-colonial states were made. That means, the Sudanese themselves have to seek, write down and endorse a system that could work under the aegis of citizenry and not the ghost of the old Sudan colonial and post-colonial-state. Since the early time of Sir Francis Reginald Wingate (1861–1953), Governor of the Anglo-Egyptian colonized Sudan to time Omer al-Bashir it was the visible hand of that ghost that has been functioning and regulating things to satisfaction of the immoral sentiments of the old Sudan but not to the welfare of the Sudanese citizens, growth and power of their civil society,

² See articles under the same title, “The Possible Sudan”, by Abdullahi Gallab published in Arabic in Sudanese newspapers and a number of websites such as: <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=300&msg=1278983504>

and a state that would create the conditions where all citizens could experience their life chances as worthy human beings who has control over their fate.

The Sudan has recently been singled out as an example of internal strife, especially as stereotyped by different regional and Western journalists. Others categorize the Sudan as an example of a failed state. However, many Sudanese and non-Sudanese rue such impositions because they do not produce “objective, positive knowledge” upon which a program of action can be built. It is true that the Sudanese state is a product of a unique and complicated encounter between imperial designs of exploitation, hegemony, ideology and control,³ which acted violently as an anathema to civil society, inhibiting its discourses and repressing its liberating forces. But it is also true that the Sudanese struggle for a possible new Sudan is noteworthy for the range and depth of this program of action. Underlying that program of action is an embedded multi-faceted chain of events of different forms of rejection of the entire system of ‘old Sudan’ and its edifice of intellectual, ideological, governance and their system of power and its dark consequences for the Sudanese themselves. That chain of events has not only reproduced conflict but it also prompted other experiences that made their appearance in the Sudanese practice and materialized in a significant relationship to the twilight and the intellectual and political edifice of a foundation of a civil society deferred that could have led to the transformation of the old Sudan and its system and state of power structures. Here, three important developments merit further attention.

First, the October 1964 Revolution that launched a general civil disobedience movement lead by unarmed civilians that spread throughout the country and was consciously pursued for the first

³ See Abdullahi Gallab, *A Civil Society Deferred: The Tertiary Grip of Violence in the Sudan* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011).

time in Africa and the Middle East a discourse and a strategy of organized fields of power relations to a successful end by forcing a dictatorial military regime out. The Ibrahim 'Abbud's regime (1958—1964) was chased out of power by the same organizations and groups (professionals, workers, students, farmers and political parties) the regime impinged upon to dominate and control the affairs of the country and its citizens. The civil disobedience as a collective social and political practice and the successful execution of this revolutionary process, added to the value and power and the political capital of the Sudanese civil sphere. Like as in any and every time and place there are those who are less fascinated by such narrations and the type of predictions that could come of it. Nevertheless, although progress is not an automatic or stance of a historical determinism, there are continuous forms and forces collective and “quit non-collective encroachment”⁴ have been working. These forces are embedded in and inspired by that civil imagination. It is true that “history of modern nations shows that segmentary rational politics is not enough. No one has changed a great nation without appealing to its soul.”⁵

Second, the complexity of the construction of such a political discourses and movements representing the forces of the civil sphere as a counter-power that disputes and even sometimes nullifies the institutional power of the ‘old Sudan’ and its state represents and defines one of the most profound developments in the Sudanese political experience in itself. Those lessons gained from this experience confirm the general Sudanese belief that the military can take power by force, but there is no way for them to remain in power indefinitely. Similarly, this belief has been confirmed by the

⁴ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p. 45.

⁵ Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 162.

successful execution of the April 1985 intifada against the Ja'far Nimairi dictatorship (May 1969—April 85). This belief is nowhere more apparent than in the understanding that has grown into a form of dual political imagination that has been persistent in the Sudanese collective mind and political culture. Out of this dual political imagination, what could be described as a Sudanese civil religion has emerged. This civil religion has its rituals that commemorate the October 1964 Revolution and April 1985 Uprising and renew the nation's commitment to their ideals. Moreover, this Sudanese civil religion has its shrines, such as the University of Khartoum, the birthplace of the October revolution. It has its poets, entertainers and artists who contributed to the national discourse and the articulation of the values of that existential experience; examples of such artists, entertainers and poets include Mohamed al-Makki Ibrahim, Fadl Allah Mohamed, Hashim Sidiq, Mahjub Sharif, Mohammed Wardi, 'Abd al-Karim al-Kabli, and Mohammed al-Amin to name a few. The dual nature of the Sudanese political imagination reflects itself in the considerable nationwide appeal and motivating power of collective action and in the enormous fear military regimes on the other side would feel as an outcome of their breach of social, political and constitutional contracts. This unique Sudanese political experience, however, has given many groups within the political and intellectual sectors in the country a deterministic presumption that an expected uprising or intifada to overthrow the Islamists' regime is inevitable as long as these modern forces could be organized and mobilized the same way as times before. In an interview with al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, the leader of the Umma Party and the Imam of the Ansar sect, he explained that he and his party are promoting what he calls *al-jihad al-midani* or a civil jihad to unseat the Islamist regime through civil disobedience. Similar attitudes have been reflected in most of the Sudanese political literature published or delivered by groups opposing the Islamists regime, in political and media forums, for the last seventeen years. On the other hand, and for a considerable period of

time, all the lessons learned from fighting this Islamist regime seem to indicate that the ruling regime is not only aware of that but has been taking measures to avoid a new uprising against its hold on power.

Third, through the October Revolution the country witnessed the rise of a new generation of politicians and a new and younger leadership in most of the political parties and associations. This new leadership was eventually to take over from the old generation, whether by default or by design. Chief among this new generation of leadership was Dr. Hasan al-Turabi of the Islamist movement, 'Abd al-Khaliq Mahjub of the Sudanese Communist Party, al-Sadiq al-Mahdi and Imam al-Hadi al-Mahdi of the Umma Party, Muhammad 'Uthman al-Mirghani and al-Sharif Hussein al-Hindi of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Wiliam Deng of the Sudan African National Union (SANU), Abel Alier of the Southern Front, Philip Abbas Ghaboush of the , Ahmad Ibrahim Diraij of Darfur Front, al-Shafi' Ahmed al-Shaikh of Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation (SWTUF), Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim of Women's Union, Ja'far Nimairi the army officer, and Babikir 'Awad Allah of the judiciary. This new generation of politicians and leaders entered the Sudanese political scene with competing interests and a tendency toward resolving political conflicts through different forms of violence exercised on each other. Yet, above and together with this has been the continued war of attrition between rival political entities and self-contained models of political representations. This impulse of self-regard has created a culture of an external power based around the military coup as a mode as a mode of change and the regime that emerges around it as system of an uneven distribution of rewards, oppression and inequalities that in one way or another reinforces the authority of the state as a coercive force.

This multi-faceted chain of events—including the collective grievances and the hierarchies of discontent within their violent and non-violent

forms that have been reflecting themselves for half a century—is in its essence a quest for change. An opportunity availed itself for a negotiated comprehensive peace agreement that would incorporate the different visions for the new Sudan and the collective demands of the Sudanese for rebuilding their nation, state and socio-political order. But, he Sudanese can only succeed if they can see now, in this unhappy hour that their long and complex experiences of failure and success do point to matters of considerable weight. These things can also enable them to draw upon a deep repertoire to make sense of a history of experiences, values, and complex inheritances. All of this has yielded a variety of responses that shaped their life-world and endeavored to constrain their social sphere. These have been combined with violent actions and reactions, which the State, along with the enterprises they involved themselves in, caused either to further certain agendas or to use the State's power to subjugate each other. Yet, they can see through the thin line separating things; they have the potential to reconstruct a civil society. A new generation of Sudanese citizens and a new order are emerging. They can see them “emerging from the outer shadows of these ‘zones of waiting’ unprecedented”⁶ social life within which they can create a space where active and peaceful engagement is vital over the long term. This could be achieved by building up their inner resources to construct their State within their all-encompassing self-definition.⁷

Hence, these multi-faceted chain of events—the collective grievances and the hierarchies of discontent that have been reflecting themselves for half a century—is in its essence a quest for change. An opportunity availed itself for a negotiated

⁶ Jean-Francois Bayart, *Global Subject, A Political Critique of Globalization* (Malden: Polity Press, 2007), p. 268.

⁷ See Abdullahi Gallab, *The First Islamist Republic: Development and Disintegration of Islamism in the Sudan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008)

comprehensive peace agreement that would incorporate the collective demands of the Sudanese for rebuilding their nation, state and socio-political order.

Yet, as the Indian epic poem *Shri Ramcharitmanas* says “the chariot that leads to [such] victory is of another kind.”⁸ Had Naivasha—the Kenyan town where much of the negotiation over the CPA took place—been the starting point for a sovereign citizen system—one that would have endorsed a vision of a new social contract—it would have refashioned the old regime into a nation-state that promotes, protects and maintains communal harmony and welfare. This is the vision of the new Sudan, where collective propensities, all-embracing responsibility and long-awaited democracy, freedom, equality and dignity will be observed. This new approach could have been negotiated and supported by the Sudanese experience of past and ongoing struggle for a comprehensive peace agreement; it could have shaped the Sudanese future. The citizens themselves could have set a model—through all the Sudanese parties and the civil entities in a round-table conference—for a stable, free and equitable future to be shared by all the Sudanese people. If the CPA of 2005 (which has been criticized by many Sudanese as a non-comprehensive arrangement)⁹ is considered a seminal peace-building attainment of the United States, then an abundant opportunity has availed a significant shift of direction with profound social and political change that could have provided for a new model for nation building. For President Obama and the United States to continue to steward such an ongoing process would have provided a model for others to follow to peacefully resolve similar situations. That was the missed opportunity

⁸ A creative rendering of the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* by 16th-century Indian poet Goswami Tulsidas.

⁹ On the CPA see, for example, Elke Grawert (ed.), *After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2010).

within the grasp of a historical moment.

The aftermath of the signing of the CPA was “a race to the bottom” as the orphans of the late John Garang’s¹⁰ vision compromised with the Islamists of the regime—Hasan al-Turabi’s children of divorce—and hence underbid and parted company with the grand ideals of the new Sudan. For many Sudanese from a different generation, political affiliations and intellectual orientations, the new Sudan is an idea and a dream for which too much blood and mental and physical resources have been devoted. The idea of the Sudan is mainly concerned with both the surface issues and the underlying realities of Sudanese life. Such thoughtfulness reveals the honest concerns of millions of Sudanese individuals and communities who have been engaged in all aspects of Sudanese life from the social, to the intellectual, religious and political. It includes freedom of religion, separation of religion and state, democracy, human rights and—over and above the formation of a democratic and legitimate order—a new social contract and a state where citizens can attain and exercise their human rights.

Had the CPA or the Naivasha agreement been taken as the starting point for reconstructing a new Sudan—of which John Garang was one champion—one where civil society could be revitalized and the state rebuilt by changing the environment of public discourse to accommodate and adopt to the inner resources, the historical resentments and the self-definition of a new Sudan—these and other conditions could have produced a new social contract out of the collective aspiration of the Sudanese people for a good society. This could have also provided for the much-needed subversion of the vicious cycles of totalitarian rule and could have paved the way for the reconstruction of a new state built on citizenry,

¹⁰ John Garang (1945–2005), leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM), died in a plane crash six months after the signing of the peace agreement.

justice, inclusive social and political life and a solid foundation for the repair of the social sphere. The Sudan could have provided and presented to itself and the world a new model for creating a nationality, a state and a country. For these entities are neither simply there nor God sent; they are creations and processes of action that people build according to their fortitude and imagination. It is this fact that those who believe and work for a new Sudan regard as their dream that motivates their past, present and future involvement.

Yet things took a different turn. People of the Southern Sudan decided to liberate themselves from an oppressive regime and a state that had a long track record of violence and an uneven distribution of power and material resources that resulted in inequalities; a state that only brought to the Sudanese people dictators and misery, starting with its grand manufacturer, General Sir Francis Reginald Wingate (1861–1953), Governor of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan between 1899 and 1916, and continuing to its existing one, Omer Hasan al-Bashir, who came to power through a military coup in 1989. There are clear indications that there has been progressive deterioration, from the walkout process of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) as a partner to the ruling National Congress Party (NCP), to the runaway world of the Islamists and their regime.

Many have argued, and would argue still, that the Islamists' hostile attitude toward the South is a complex reality that defies simple explanation. Each wave of change accepting this attitude, in the end, has reconstituted the South in the eyes of the Islamists as the categorical enemy of their ideological pursuit and political designs. Even before assuming power, through a military coup in 1989, the Islamists perceived the South as an idea that was born out of an opposition and antagonism to Islam and Arabism in the country. Against such a background, the Islamists' hostility towards the South ignited one of the most vicious cultural and real military wars in the history of the Sudan.

Meanwhile, their call was: let the South go if it is going to be the obstacle against the implementation of Shari'a in the Sudan.

During the Numeiri Era (1969-85), the Islamists other involvements were clearly in support of separation, and during the early days of the Islamist state, they launched Jihad against what they described as an unholy alliance of crusaders and communists under the leadership of John Garang in the South. Through the long negotiations in Kenya, first at Machakos (a town in Kenya where a protocol on principles of government and governance was reached between the NCP and SPLM) in 2002 and then at Naivasha producing the CPA in 2005, the Islamists were forced to seek negotiations after their regime was weakened by a number of internal and external factors. Chief among these factors were the inability to achieve a decisive victory against John Garang and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in the South through Jihad, the encroachment and the progression of the regime's incessant unpopularity and the split (the uneasy divorce) within the Islamists ranks that led to the downfall of Hasan al-Turabi in 2000.

At a more profound level, however, the National Unity Government (2005–2011, between the SPLM and the NCP after the signing of the CPA) was a sort of control of the SPLM from without by the NCP. Aggressive rhetoric, suspension of participation in the government and even military posturing were the main characteristics of that agonizing relationship between the two partners. Given this pattern of conduct, it was not surprising at all to see the cultural divide going far beyond disagreement among them. The man of the moment, Al-Tayib Mustafa (Omer al-Bashir's uncle), whom journalistic sarcasm describes as *al-Khal al-Riasi* (the presidential uncle), completely devoted himself and his paper *al-Intibahah* to the ugliest form of hate speech against everything that related to the South Sudan and southerners before, during and after the official separation of the two partners on

July 9 2011.

Although the debate over the aftereffects of peril facing the Sudan as a country stretches and sidesteps forward by the minute, one might say that, although the Southern Sudanese have walked away from the regime and its state, they have not walked away from the Sudan.

Instead, it could be the idea of the Sudan that they scrambled to—and to an extent, that is true; they named their country the Republic of South Sudan. One would agree with many that when an understanding of the Sudanese consciousness influences their walk out of the regime and its oppressive state is realized at this plane, a new and a trustworthy debate might become a starting point to initiate and evoke the virtue of a new Sudan, bigger than what the colonial borders mapped out in *their* day. Was there a missed opportunity? Yes; but nonetheless, the wind of change is blowing all over the Middle East and Africa. The street's chant for freedom is *al-sha'b yurid isqāt al-nizām* ("The people want to change the regime".)

The Sudanese, who are experienced in leading successful uprisings and civil disobedience movements against dictatorial rule (which they did in 1964 and again in 1985), are certainly able to do it for a third time to finally liberate themselves from the tyranny and totalitarianism of the inherited state and its current and similar regimes. Then, perhaps, there would be a new opportunity for building a new Sudan out of the Sudanese collective order and its emerging good society. By that time, surely, the Sudanese "habits of the heart" that ameliorated and molded the Sudanese character and its deeper sense of civility (not the state or its regimes) would help them examine themselves, create new political communities, produce a new social contract and thus ultimately support and maintain conditions of democracy, freedom, equality and dignity. Then, the gentler side of the Sudanese life, and the people's propensity for it, will, as Alexis de Tocqueville describes, "spontaneously [help create] the bonds of friendship, trust and cooperation that lie at the heart

of civil society."¹¹ The dominant impulse by that time, I would say, will be that a change for the State of South Sudan will also be a change for the new Sudan. Let us keep our fingers crossed.

¹¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, paraphrased by Charles Deber, "Resurrecting a Civil Society" in Joel M. Charon (ed.), *Social Problems: Reading with Four Questions* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), p. 185.