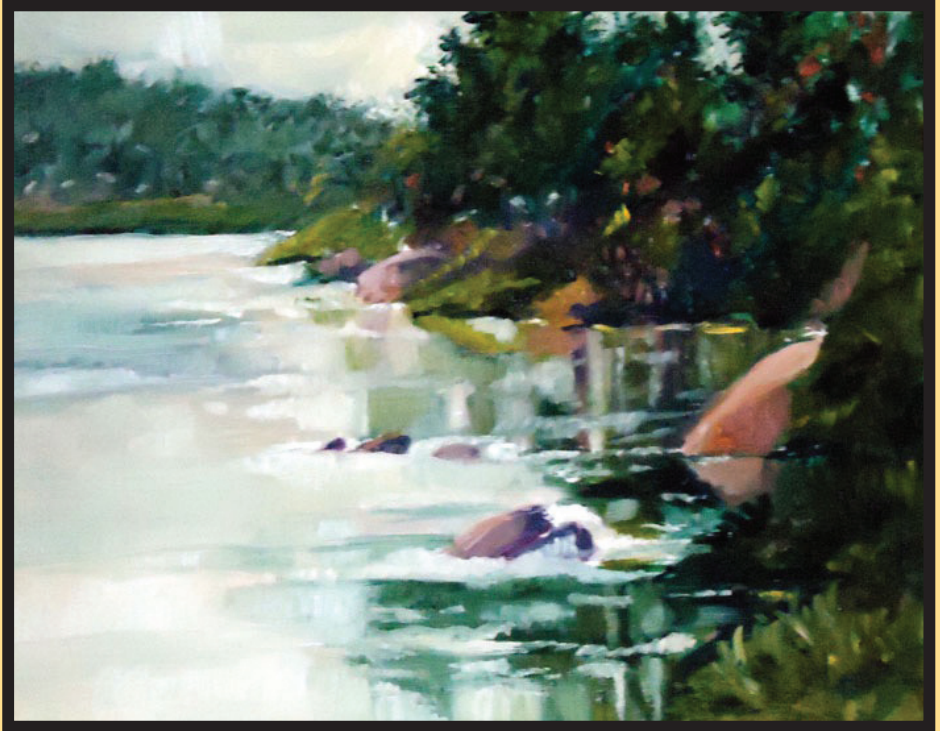


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Front cover photograph: 'The Nile in Juba' a painting by Iman Shaggag.

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Some of South Sudan's Historical Figures

Aru Muortat*

Introduction

South Sudan entered the international arena when it gained independence in 2011 but the region and its myriad peoples have a long and rich history. Most of that past is characterised by violence, notably its long liberation wars against the northern political elites that monopolised power in the old united Sudan.

Hopes that the partition would lessen the bitterness and the mistrust between the two new neighbouring countries – perhaps even usher in a new era of cooperation – were quickly dashed. Differences over borders, oil and other entanglements spawned new hostilities. The post-separation period is one in which each country has tended to charge the other with harbouring insurgencies, with South Sudan bearing the brunt of these proxy confrontations.

These threats, coupled with rampant corruption and tribalism in the government, pushed the already fragile new state to the brink. Subsequent wrangling over power, which the ruling elite failed to contain, led to a vicious and violent confrontation in December 2013 as the army split in half. This marked South Sudan's descent into civil war only 15 months after it had gained its independence. The war has since increasingly taken a marked ethnic form, threatening the very notion of South Sudan as a nation state.

Although the burgeoning state had been expected to struggle to find its feet, the extent of corruption and the poor conduct of officials dismayed South Sudan's allies, and shook and disappointed the South Sudanese, who had pinned great hopes on the governing revolutionaries.

The state has never established itself in South Sudan and has always been regarded by the various ethnic communities that live within its borders as a predatory foreign entity. While 98.6% of the South Sudanese people voted for independence, highlighting their determination to have home rule, the country remained one where people's fundamental allegiance is to their ethnic group. Government, civil society and community leaders should have prioritised the concept of nation-building from the outset.

When the current war comes to an end, South Sudanese will embark on a new period of post-war reconstruction and strong emphasis will need to be placed on fostering an inclusive state. That means trying to harmonise ethnic interest with national interest.

New revolutionaries, old revolutionaries

There is a tendency within the South Sudanese government's literature and media to

emphasise the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) era (1983-2005) and to downplay that of the Anya Nya war (1955-72). For various complex reasons, some regions featured more prominently than others in the different periods. This disparity has caused conflicting narratives to grow. Who liberated South Sudan? Who, therefore, should receive more credit? Which regions, ethnic groups, communities?

By idolising the SPLM/A's role, the Government of South Sudan has become embroiled in these raging, conflicting narratives and it has opened itself to the accusation of trying to isolate certain political and ethnic groups. Bitter resentment has grown among some who feel that their contributions are not valued or are being erased from history altogether.

While the causes of the current war, which broke out in 2013, are numerous, the issue of competing historical narratives must feature prominently among those causes. Few disagreements among South Sudanese are more emotive than the wrangling over who has contributed more to the liberation, who contributed less, who did not contribute at all or – most bitterly – who betrayed the cause?

I believe that the struggle of the people of South Sudan for freedom cannot be confined to the SPLM/A era or even to the Anya Nya and SPLM/A eras combined. Communities and leaders are known to have arisen against foreign invaders from as long ago as the early 19th century. A better understanding of these earlier stories of the struggle and the Herculean stance of those first heroes, and how they had risen among different communities, could hopefully help South Sudanese accept that almost all regions and communities have played a role in liberating the country – that it was truly a national struggle.

This article seeks to provide some balance by including prominent leaders from earlier periods, with brief accounts of historical leaders who are revered by their communities.

King Gbudwe

King Gbudwe (1825-1905) was a powerful Zande king who fought successive battles in defence of his kingdom against invaders. He is remembered as an embodiment of the nation's determination to practice their traditional customs and way of life free from oppression.

Born in Yambio to the Zande King Bazingbi in 1825, as he grew up Gbudwe displayed many leadership characteristics, which led to him becoming his father's closest confidant and leading his military campaigns (Edward Evans-Pritchard, 1957). He inherited his father's kingdom in 1869, albeit not without powerful resistance from his elder brothers. However, it was external factors that shaped most of his leadership. His reign coincided with the Mahdist expansion from Northern Sudan into parts of the South and the European scramble for control of the region and the Nile Basin.

In 1882, Gbudwe was captured by agents of the Turco-Egyptian regime in Bahr el Ghazal and imprisoned. He was unexpectedly released by the Mahdists, who in 1885 defeated the Turco-Egyptians, on the condition that he kept the Zande from actively opposing the Mahdists (Emmanuel K. Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates, Jr, 2012). However his captivity hardened his resolve against foreigners (Abol Kuyok, 2016).

Gbudwe subsequently established a strong centralised leadership and mobilised the kingdom's resources to fight off foreign invasion. In 1898, the Mahdists sent an army under Arabi Dafallah to attack the kingdom but they were firmly crushed by the Zande forces at Bilikiwe (Yambio).

These invasions from the North coincided with Belgian expansion from the South. King Leopold II sent military expeditions into Zandeland but most ended in defeat (Redie Bereketiab, 2014). Belgium made a military pact with Italy in 1905 and sent a huge force from neighbouring Congo to pacify King Gbudwe's forces. In ferocious fighting at the Battle of Mayawa, the Zande incurred heavy losses as a result of the Europeans' advanced weaponry. Prior to this defeat, Gbudwe had resisted British expeditions from Khartoum in 1903-1904, refusing to establish friendly relations. British forces arrived in Gbudwe's compound in February 1905. His weakened army was unable to mount any significant resistance but he refused to surrender. He was fatally shot on the 10th February 1905. King Gbudwe is lauded for his unprecedented success against imperial powers. In his honour, one of South Sudan's new 28 states was named after him in October 2015.

Buth Diu

Buth Diu (1917-1975) was a prominent politician noted for demanding that the people of Southern Sudan be given equal rights at the 1947 Juba Conference. He also co-founded the first party that represented the interests of peoples from the Southern Region, the Liberal Party.

Born into the Nuer tribe in Fangak in 1917, Buth received no formal education, yet he taught himself to become literate in both Nuer and English. He worked as a translator and interpreter for the District Commissioner and by 1946, he was active in the civil administration, where he worked as a magistrate (Kuyok, 2015). In 1947, Britain convened the Juba Conference to determine the political future of the two regions of Sudan. Buth Diu was one of the Southern representatives at the meeting and demanded that if the two regions were to remain a single country, legal safeguards must be put in place to protect Southern Sudanese. These included land rights, the right to govern local politics independently and laws against verbal discrimination (BV Marwood, 1947). Shortly after the Juba Conference, he became a parliamentarian in the Legislative Assembly in Khartoum and was the sole Southern member of the Constitutional Amendment Commission (CAC), set up

to increase the efficiency of the Assembly and Executive Council. He pushed for a federal government in the South and for a Southerner to be Minister of Southern Affairs (Kuyok, 2015). He subsequently resigned from the CAC as his Northern counterparts rejected his demands.

In 1951, Buth Diu co-founded the Liberal Party, the country's first Southern party, and served as Secretary General. In this capacity, he appealed to the United Nations regarding the unjust treatment of the Southern Sudanese and the agreement reached by the CAC (John Gai Nyuot Yoh, 2005). He was also said to have coordinated with leading mutineers in Torit in 1955, which marked the start of the First Sudanese civil war. In the late 1950s, his staunch stance on Southern nationalism softened; he split from the Liberal Party and became an independent member of parliament (Kuyok, 2005). Throughout his later life, he remained an MP and served in the Sudanese cabinet in numerous positions. He died in Khartoum in 1975.

Gordon Muortat

Gordon Muortat Mayen (1922-2008) was a veteran politician and an early leader of the Anya Nya in Sudan's first civil war. He was one of the first leaders to articulate the demand for Southern Sudanese to be given a referendum to determine their future. He's also remembered for rejecting the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, which ended the first liberation war and pushing instead for continued resistance against the Khartoum government.

Born in 1922 just outside Rumbek, he was the first member of his family to receive an education. In 1951, he was amongst the first Southern Sudanese to graduate from the Sudan Police College and he eventually rose to become Chief Inspector of Police. While serving in Wau in 1955, he was responsible for keeping relative peace after Southern soldiers mutinied at Torit in Equatoria, marking the beginning of the Sudanese civil war. In 1957, he joined the Sudanese civil administration, where he was appointed Assistant District Commissioner, serving in many places across the Sudan. In 1964, Gordon co-founded the Southern Front (SF). The SF and the Sudan African National Union (SANU) were to become the South's dominant political parties.

In that same year, protests and strikes took place across the Sudan against the unpopular military regime of General Ibrahim Abboud. This uprising, which later became known as the 'October Revolution', resulted in the return of the country to civilian rule. In an attempt to address the 'problem of the South', the new Prime Minister, Sir el Khatim el Khalifa, who headed an interim civilian coalition, called for a Round Table Conference, with Southern politicians and Northern party representatives. Gordon Muortat headed the SF delegation to the talks and in a memorable speech, tabled his party's position, calling for the South to have the right to self-determination through a referendum.

Under the transitional government, he was appointed national Minister of Works and Mineral Resources but this was short lived. After the massacres of civilians in Juba and Wau in 1965 at the hands of the Sudanese army, Muortat was convinced that there could be no peaceful solution to the Southern Sudan problem. In 1967, he left Khartoum to join the Anya Nya resistance movement in the liberated territories of Yei River. Aggrey Jaden Ladu, the head of Anya Nya's political wing, appointed him its Foreign Minister. In this position, Muortat successfully led meetings with a sympathetic Israeli government which promised to provide military support to the insurgents.

After Aggrey Jaden left Anya Nya the following year, Muortat was elected to succeed him, renaming the movement the Nile Provisional Government (NPG). His short tenure was riddled with instability as he was unable to fulfil the promise of delivering Israeli arms to his forces. Backed by Israel, which favoured a stricter military leadership, the movement's military head, Joseph Lagu Yanga, whom Muortat had earlier dispatched to Israel to follow up on the promised military assistance, declared a coup against Muortat's government. Muortat refused to be drawn into a fight with the dissenting Lagu and his forces. Instead, he encouraged the forces still loyal to him to join Lagu. He reasoned that the newly acquired Israeli weaponry, which Lagu now held and which was expected to increase the effectiveness of the fight against Khartoum, should be immediately put to use, irrespective of who led the Anya Nya.

Two years later, the Addis Ababa Agreement was signed with the Khartoum government, by then under Colonel Jaafar Mohamed Nimeiri. Muortat vehemently opposed this agreement, calling it a sell-out. Joseph Lagu and his deputies set out to implement the Agreement, eventually returning to Khartoum and integrating the Anya Nya forces into the Sudanese army. Muortat remained in exile and continued to campaign for armed resistance to achieve a just solution for the people of South Sudan. After being expelled from Zaïre (previously Congo) by Gen. Mobutu Sese Seko and refused political asylum by several African countries, Muortat was granted asylum in the United Kingdom in 1973.

In 1975, elements of the former Anya Nya, comprising mainly Nuer soldiers, mutinied in Upper Nile and fled back into the bush, near the Ethiopian border. Muortat joined them and organised them into the Anya Nya Patriotic Front, becoming its political leader. Unable to secure financial and logistical support, however, the APF never rose to prominence. He returned to South Sudan in 2006, after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, and joined the newly formed Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly, representing the constituency of Rumbek East. During the long years of the SPLM/A-led war and while in the UK, Muortat had served as Personal Advisor to the SPLM/A Chairman, Dr. John

Garang de Mabior, and was a member of the National Liberation Council. In 2008, he passed away in Rumbek after a short illness.

Joseph Oduho

Joseph Oduho Haworu (1927-1993) led Southern Sudan's call for independence and helped to found the SPLM/A.

Born to the Latuka tribe near Torit in Eastern Equatoria, he undertook his primary and secondary education in South Sudan and went on to qualify as a head teacher, serving in several schools. He first displayed his political awareness of the injustices in Sudan when in 1953, he took part in demonstrations against the lack of involvement of Southern politicians in the negotiations for Sudan's independence. Two years later, he was arrested and sentenced to death, accused of conspiring with the mutinous Southern soldiers in Torit. He was released on Sudan's independence in 1956 and quickly embraced politics. In the following year, he was elected to the first post-independence Parliament, where he pushed for federalism for the South. In 1960, he fled into exile in Uganda, where he and other prominent politicians founded SANU.

SANU, notably Oduho and William Deng Nhial, worked to provide political leadership to the Anya Nya rebels and articulate the cause of the Southern Sudanese people. Deng and Oduho published a small book in 1963 called *The Problem of Southern Sudan*, in which they called for Southern independence. After regaining the leadership of the Southern movement in 1965, he renamed it the Azania Liberation Front (ALF), however internal political wrangling continued to dog his leadership. He remained a prominent leader in exile throughout the 1960s and although briefly splitting with the Anya Nya when Joseph Lagu assumed the leadership, he participated in the Addis Ababa negotiations.

Oduho served as the Southern Region's minister of both Housing and Public Utilities and of Education during the years of peace following the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972. His key achievements in office included helping to procure funds for the regional government buildings in Juba and the establishment of the University of Juba, both of which are still in use today.

Oduho is widely praised for his opposition to the 'Redivision' of the South (Kokora) into three regions in 1983, which many saw as an attempt by the Khartoum government to weaken South Sudan. That year, Oduho left Sudan to join the SPLM/A in Itang, Ethiopia. When he arrived, he encouraged people to join John Garang's camp as opposed to that of Samuel Gai Tut and was later appointed Chairman of the Movement's Political Committee. He fell out with Garang in 1985 and was imprisoned for seven years; following his release, he joined the SPLM-United faction. He was tragically killed in 1993 at an SPLM-

United meeting in Panyagor, Upper Nile, in an ambush by Garang's SPLM/A Mainstream forces.

Luigi Adwok

Luigi Adwok Bong (1929-2010) was a politician, educationalist and civil servant. In both Sudan and South Sudan, he is remembered for serving briefly as Sudan's head of state – the only South Sudanese ever to do so – and for his achievements as a minister in the Southern Regional Government in the 1970s.

Adwok was born in the Shilluk Kingdom in Agodo, Upper Nile. After completing his secondary education in Rumbek in 1950, he qualified as a teacher and taught for four years before being elected to Parliament in 1958 while serving as Secretary General of the Liberal Party. After a brief return to teaching during Gen. Ibrahim Abboud's rule, he joined the Southern Front party. After the fall of Abboud's regime in 1964, the transitional civilian government established a five-man Supreme Council of State which had ultimate authority (Robert O. Collins, 1970) and later that year, Adwok was chosen to be the SF's representative on the Supreme Council (Robert S. Kramer, 2013). The rotating chairmanship of the Council meant that he was head of state during a state visit by Queen Elizabeth II of the UK and her husband, Prince Philip. The fact that a Southern Sudanese had been granted the responsibility of formally welcoming the royal couple offended some Northern Sudanese, prompting a constitutional amendment that made the Supreme Council chairmanship a permanent post. In 1965, after massacres in Wau and Juba by the Sudanese army, Adwok stood down from the Council.

Two years later, Adwok split from the SF after disagreeing with his party as to whether it should participate in the 1967 elections. He stood as an independent candidate and won in Shilluk North. After the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972, he served in the Southern Regional Government. With Joseph Oduho, one of his main achievements during this period was to be instrumental in setting up the University of Juba (Kuyok, 2015). He briefly served as Commissioner of Upper Nile after Kokora in 1983 but retired from politics in 1985. He is remembered as a patriot and intellectual. He died in 2010 and was buried in his hometown, Kodok.

Samuel Gai Tut

Samuel Gai Tut (1939-1984) was a Nuer commander who fought in both the First and Second Sudanese civil wars. He was prominent in the negotiations which led to the foundation of the SPLM/A. The suspicious circumstances of his death in 1984 still have a profound impact on the tension between Nuer and Dinka peoples in modern-day South Sudan.

Gai Tut was born in Kurmayom village, Upper Nile, and enrolled in primary school in 1948. His secondary education was cut short as he chose to join the

Anya Nya in 1962. He quickly distinguished himself as a competent soldier and by the late 60s, he was a leading commander (Daniel Wuor Joak, 2016). Along with other commanders such as John Garang, he opposed the terms of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement. Eventually, though, he was convinced to accept them and this resulted in his integration into the national army, the Sudan Armed Forces. He was soon discharged, however, suspected of colluding with Nuer mutineers in Upper Nile. He subsequently stood for the Regional Assembly, winning the Lou Nuer West seat.

Although Gai Tut served as a regional minister in the South during this period, he remained convinced that independence was the only solution and therefore while in government, he procured weapons for the Southern rebels that were growing in numbers along the Ethiopian border (Gérard Prunier, 1986). In 1982, he was arrested and held responsible for a cargo of arms that were heading to the rebels, but with legal assistance, he was released and himself joined the fighters in Upper Nile (Kuyok, 2015). In the following year, he reached Itang, where the rebel forces were stationed and later rose to become a potential leader of the new movement, the SPLM/A.

Differences arose with John Garang, the other potential leader, when they disagreed over the Movement's proposed manifesto. Garang wanted to fight for a 'New Sudan', partly to garner more international support, while Gai Tut believed staunchly that they should fight for the complete independence of South Sudan – a debate that was to continue to divide the Movement. Samuel Gai Tut went on the lead Anya Nya II and died in 1984 in an SPLA ambush at Adura, Ethiopia.

William Deng

William Deng Nhial (1929-1968) was a pan-Africanist and one of the most popular Dinka leaders of South Sudan. He put forward a vision of a united, secular Sudan that respected the rights of all groups within the Sudan regardless of ethnicity or religious belief. His ideology was driven by the fact that the country's indigenous African groups outnumbered the Arabised ruling elite and his belief that if these marginalised groups united, they could democratically defeat the elite and bring proportional development to all regions of the Sudan. Based on his experience in Southern Sudan while fighting with the Anya Nya against the Khartoum government, he was adamant that the South was not ready for separation. The lack of development in the region and prevalent tribalism led him to believe that it would benefit more from the vision he proposed. Deng's ideology had a huge influence on John Garang's 'New Sudan' philosophy.

William Deng was born in Tonj, Bahr el Ghazal, in 1929. He excelled at school, completing his secondary education in Rumbek in 1953 and going on to attain a certificate at the School of Public Administration, Khartoum University College

(Kuyok, 2015). He joined the civil administration and rose to Assistant District Commissioner but fled to Uganda in 1961, where he and others formed the Sudan African National Union. SANU's name was designed to show solidarity with other African nationalist movements of the period (Francis Mading Deng, 1995). It provided much needed political leadership for the Southern Sudanese rebels and with Joseph Oduho, he published the book *The Problem of Southern Sudan* in 1963. Deng travelled widely in Africa and Europe to spread awareness of the Southern cause.

The Anya Nya forces, revitalised by the leadership of SANU, inflicted increasingly serious attacks on government-held towns, intensifying pressure on Gen. Abboud's military regime. In 1964, the regime fell and Sir el Khatim el Khalifa became Prime Minister of a transitional civilian government. He issued a general amnesty which coincided with political wrangling inside SANU. William Deng then decided to return to Sudan, which caused a split in the party's ranks. He formally registered the SANU (Inside) party on 11th April 1965 in Omdurman and led its delegation to the Round Table Conference (RTC) on Southern Sudan. The politicians who stayed in exile condemned his decision, with Aggrey Jaden leading the SANU (Outside) faction. After the split, William Deng's faction decided to accept peace and operate legally and democratically, while Aggrey's vowed to continue fighting the government for complete separation of the South.

Deng took a more pragmatic stance than he had previously, advocating at the RTC that South Sudan be given an autonomous status in a federated Sudan (LB Lokosang, 2010). Based on his pan-Africanist views, he aimed for political partnership with other indigenous African Sudanese people from across the Sudan, such as the Nuba, Fur and Beja. William Deng was convinced that a peaceful settlement with the North could be achieved through dialogue and working within the democratic framework of the state (Kuyok, 2015). He was elected as an MP in 1967 and stood again in the 1968 general elections. However, as the results were being announced, in Cueibet County, he was assassinated by what was assumed to be a government army unit. He is buried in his hometown of Tonj and is viewed as one of South Sudan's national heroes.

More leaders remembered

There is no space here to go into detail about other South Sudanese 'notables' (Kuyok, 2015) of recent history but it is important to at least mention some. They include Ariath Makuei, a spiritual leader of the Malual Dinka who fought tirelessly to unite the Dinka clans to resist British Rule; Father Saturnino Lohure, a Catholic priest from the Lotuho people of Equatoria who became one of the most prominent and respected leaders of South Sudan's struggle for independence; Ngundeng Bong, a 19th century Nuer prophet who preached peace and unity amongst the Dinka and

Nuer and whose prophecies are still highly influential in South Sudan; and Aggrey Jaden, one of the first South Sudanese university graduates and a selfless fighter for independence. More recent additions might include the founder and Chairman of the SPLM/A, John Garang, and co-founders Kerubino Kuanyin Bol, William Nyuon Bany and Arok Thon Arok, as well as countless others who fought in both wars to win the independence of South Sudan for future generations.

People cling to their ethnic communities, at least in part, because they find the community a more reliable source of support than the state. If South Sudan is to build a strong national identity and unite its divided peoples, the government should, among other measures, attempt to reverse this situation. Recognising and honouring the country's many heroes – a hugely diverse group – could help to create that much needed inclusive environment.

* Aru Muortat is an Economics graduate who is currently working in this sector. He has a keen interest in global politics, particularly of South Sudan and other developing economies.

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