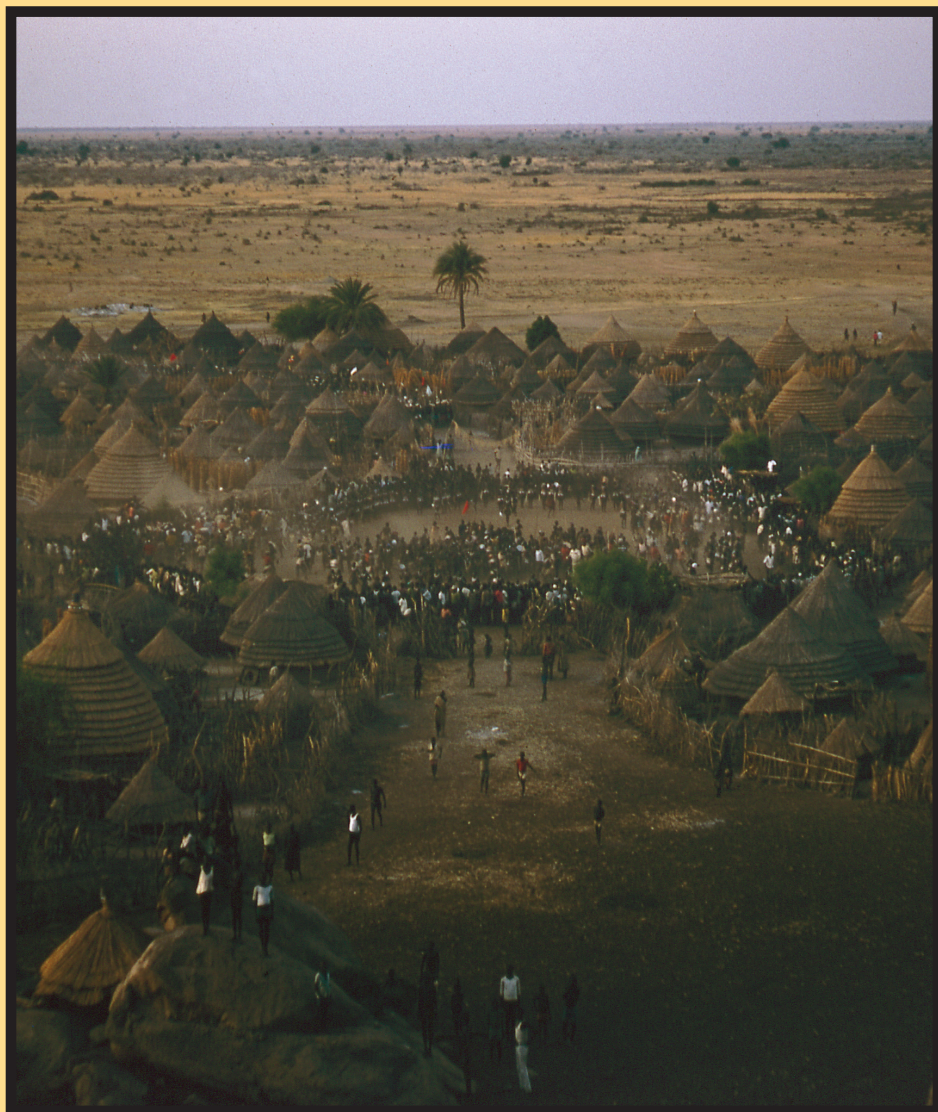


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Front cover photograph: Wiatuo village, Lafon, Equatoria in 1974 (Credit: Sudan Archive, Durham, W. T. W. Morgan Collection, SAD.955/16/20).

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The Sudanese Revolution Through a South Sudanese Lens

Mawan Muortat*

In South Sudan, public concern about the unfolding events in Sudan is lower than expected, considering the shared history between the two countries. More surprisingly, if not disappointingly, sympathies tend to lie with the military rather than the pro-democracy revolutionaries.

Sudan is still viewed as a hostile entity. The current popular uprising against military rule is not the first in Sudan. The election of civilians to power following similar past pro-democracy revolutions did not lead to breaks in military suppression in the South nor did it stimulate a desire to seek peaceful resolution of the South's demands. If anything, things worsened repeatedly on both counts. The two major breakthroughs to the problem, the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement and the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, occurred when the army was in charge in Sudan. This is not to say that the military rulers are not as ruthless as their civilian counterparts but it may explain why the South Sudanese are not holding their breath over the unfolding civil uprising in Sudan and the prospects for a civilian takeover.

As well as being shaped by known historical grievances, South Sudanese attitudes toward Sudan are also being influenced by future hopes and fears. As the power struggle continues in Khartoum, the sympathies of some South Sudanese are with the most pro-South or Juba-friendly groups – be they military or civilian. They want an end to the alleged entrenched harbouring by Sudan of anti-Juba insurgencies. Conversely, the insurgents themselves and their many supporters want groups that would continue such support to take over in Khartoum.

It is these fears for the future that shadow South Sudanese perspectives and prevent people from viewing the precarious state of Sudan more objectively. Wider and clearer media coverage of the struggle in Sudan, by English-language Sudanese media and local media in South Sudan, is needed to help raise awareness in the country.

There are, however, South Sudanese activist groups, though very small, which are not only supportive of their Sudanese counterparts but are inspired by them. They feel undaunted by the current lack of public support and are thus willing to do the groundwork and wait.

This brings us to the next point, which is the wider meaning of the Sudanese revolution, particularly if it were to take its course and the obstructive junta is removed. Will it usher in a new and sustainable era of stability and

economic development? Will it deliver on its promises? History, both in Sudan and in the region, tells us otherwise.

While this does not mean that the Sudanese revolution or other similar civil actions in the region are worthless, it suggests that they, alone, are insufficient to bring about the desired outcomes. A revolution might set us off on the right path but it won't per se take us to the promised land.

Sudan is 66 years old this year. It has changed leaders at least twelve times, counting the current incumbent, Lieutenant General El Burhan. Despite this, and the fanfare that accompanied most of these transitions, the living conditions of the average Sudanese have not improved since independence in 1956, and in some cases, have deteriorated.

A South Sudanese making a quick survey of the surrounding countries would see only failure. From lawless Libya to forgotten Chad, Central African Republic and Congo-Kinshasa, to Uganda, whose post-Museveni future looks ominous. Genocide might be unfolding in Ethiopia. There is a risk the country might disintegrate, while the investors who were lured by its recent economic success are now deserting it. Sudan, which has been plagued by strife and misrule since its independence, is again staring into the abyss. This leaves Kenya but it, too, is not completely out of the woods. Each of these countries is at least 60 years older than South Sudan – and was, even that long ago, in a better shape than South Sudan currently. Given its turbulent neighbourhood and considering the unpleasant face its own leaders have already revealed, nothing short of a miracle could usher South Sudan on a different path.

Revolutions in such conditions are inevitable, if not necessary, notwithstanding their potential to bring about bloodletting and untold suffering, together with social ills which may define the nature of the post-revolution society. South Sudan itself is a case in point.

For the revolutionaries, therefore, to end up on the right side of history by delivering on what is promised, they must be mindful of all these ground facts. They must understand the unstudied causes of the recurrent failures, be equipped with their solutions, have plans for effecting those solutions and be aware that much of the revolution's work would be to implement the lesson-learned inspired structural changes – over a long-allotted period. Even after all this, success might elude them.

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