

THE VISION IS NOT DEAD
By Captain Mabior Garang de Mabior
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The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) ought to consider reexamining the vision of the new Sudan in order to regain the direction that was lost when it was neglected. The assertion by Comrades that the *vision is dead* and no longer relevant to the current reality of an independent Republic of South Sudan is not correct; *the vision is not dead!* This assertion comes from lack of concrete understanding of the history, principles and objectives of the Liberation Movement from its inception in May 1983, and the subsequent revolutionary corrections that have occurred throughout its history, up to 2005 when the principles began to be ignored.

The most notable of these events being the first SPLM National Convention held in April 1994, in which the 1983 Manifesto was revised and expanded. The Movement carried out reforms in organizational structure that helped it redefine its objectives within the context of the changing geo-political realities (of that time). The (1994) SPLM *first* National Convention marked the start of the period of recovery for the movement after the 1991 split; which marked the period of greatest weakness for the movement.

The reality is that the movement has been divided since its inception, and these divisions have hitherto been exploited by "the real and potential enemies of the Movement" as described in the SPLM Manifesto of 1983. The enemies of peace, stability and development will use any opportunity to divide the leadership of the people's movement. This is why it is of utmost importance for every cadre of the movement to study and understand concretely the history, principles and objectives of the movement. This will allow us to have a "...correct leadership of the SPLM so that the Movement is not hijacked by counter-revolutionaries" (SPLM Manifesto, July 1983).

It has been the policy of the Movement to look into itself throughout its existence in order to make revolutionary correction (necessary) for its survival. And in such an endeavor it is imperative to be completely honest and dispassionate, as the Liberation Movement brings together members from various walks of life. It is true; we all claim that we share the same aim: "The restoration of the dignity of our people." It is, however, a broad objective and at times we may find that we are in a quandary when it comes to concrete understanding and implementation of this objective (and the God is in the detail, as it is said).

The SPLM is in a similar position today as it has been throughout its history; we are faced with the daunting task of answering the old questions that have divided the movement while adapting to a new geopolitical reality. There are forces that are beyond our control and for the movement to survive we must be able to harmonize these changing realities (beyond our control) with our objectives. The struggle of the marginalized people of Sudan has led to an independent Republic of South Sudan and North Sudan, with the SPLM being split in two. This current reality has led some Comrades to be misled by the false premise that, the independence of South Sudan is in contradiction to the vision of a new Sudan (the guiding vision of the Movement from 1983 – 2005).

This is not true!

In order to have an improved appreciation of this, it would be expedient to revisit briefly the history of the liberation struggle in the Sudan.

Historical Background

The Sudan People's Liberation Army was an armed political movement that was established in 1983 by a group of officers from the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). These young officers had participated in the first Sudanese civil conflict popularly known as the Anyanya, and had been absorbed into the SAF as part of an agreement signed in Addis Ababa (1972). These cadres of the Anyanya movement were opposed to the Addis Ababa Agreement (AAA) as it later came to be known; however, their low rank made their voices insignificant and they would be of no consequence.

These officers included the likes of the late Dr. John Garang, the late Francis Ngor, the late Kerubino Kuanyin, the late William Nyuon; and others that are still with us, like Salva Kiir. The dissatisfaction of these former Anyanya cadres is reflected in a letter the late Dr. John sent to his Commander in Chief in 1972 (and copied to his colleagues), in which he stated:

There is no objective indication that the Khartoum-based Arab nationalist administration is capable of concluding a consistent social democratic solution to the National Question in the Sudan. Arab Nationalism in the Sudan, consistent with its predatory nature, proposes and declares solutions such as 'local autonomy' within the context of a United Arab Sudan. Such muddle-headedness returns us back to 1963 and 1955 and is an objective indication that the necessary mutation which would enable ruling Northerners to face up to the objective realities of the Sudan has not yet taken root"

He then continues:

There are only two possible ways for resolving the Sudanese crises: The birth of two nation-states out of the present (geographical) Sudan or political autonomy for both the South and the North (and/or any other part that so demands) in a federated, united, new Sudan. Political Autonomy in this usage means that the autonomous regions have adequate political power, in terms of armed forces, to protect the region against the encroachment by the federation or by one of the regions in the federation, and, furthermore, that a region retains the right to secede from the federation if its interests are not adequately served by the federation. (It must be clear to Southerners that the retention of the right to secede from such a federation must be guaranteed by the federal constitution and by the existence of a physical Southern Armed Forces.

These cadres believed the enemy was weak and could be defeated, they argued that the government had only accepted negotiations due to this weakness. They anticipated that in future, the government, after effectively demobilizing the Anyanya units would surely violate the agreement.

In addition to those that had been absorbed against their will, there were many cadres of the Anyanya that rejected the agreement altogether, and refused to be absorbed into the SAF, this group later came to be known as Anyanya II. The Anyanya II cadres would later become instrumental in the birth and formation of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA); the armed political movement that would eventually rise out of the gross violations of the Addis Ababa Agreement. This unity with Anyanya II was part of the strategic objectives of the SPLA/SPLM according to the Manifesto of the SPLM, July 1983 - Paragraph 25 d) and e) respectively which states:

- d) *The SPLA must regroup the scattered fighting forces in Southern Sudan, win their confidence, give them further military and political training and through war and correct conduct, win the confidence and support of the masses of the people.*
- e) *In order to be able to regroup and politicize the fighting forces effectively, the SPLA shall need to establish its own progressive camps apart from those of Anyanya II, which are more or less tribal and sectional camps. The SPLA will then work to win the confidence of the Anyanya II forces and bring them under SPLA Command. (Manifesto: Sudan People's Liberation Movement, 1983)*

The 1972 Agreement had lasted eleven years, ending in its abrogation by then president, Jaffar Nimeri. "The Addis Ababa Agreement is neither the Bible nor the Koran," he stated and he tore it to pieces in a final symbolic gesture. Islamic Sharia Law (known in our history as the September laws) soon became the supreme law of the land, in violation of every conceivable liberty of the Sudanese people. What followed was the bloodiest and longest running conflict that the African continent had ever known.

The SPLA was, however, a unique armed political movement in that it broke from the norms of the traditional movements that had emerged in the country (the south in particular). The fundamental difference between the SPLA and the traditional movements was that it proclaimed to be a socialist oriented movement, struggling for a united, secular Sudan. According to the Manifesto of the SPLM, July 1983- Paragraph 21:

The immediate task of the SPLA/SPLM is to transform the Southern Movement from a reactionary movement led by reactionaries and concerned only with the South, and self-interests to a progressive movement led by revolutionaries and dedicated to socialist transformation of the whole country. It must be reiterated that the principle objective of the SPLA/SPLM is not separation for the South. The South is an integral and inseparable part of the Sudan. Africa has been fragmented sufficiently enough by colonialism and neo-colonialism and her further fragmentation can only be in the interests of her enemies. (Manifesto: Sudan People's Liberation Movement, July 1983)

The SPLA/SPLM espoused a new socio-political dispensation the *new Sudan vision*; which was difficult for most citizens to understand. In the South it was perceived (by the Southern intelligentsia) as a tactical maneuver, while in the north of the country it was regarded with suspicion. In addition to this obstacle, another divisive factor that arose at the inception of the movement was the primacy of the political element over the military: "was the SPLA primary or was the SPLM primary?" This was the question.

The argument that won the day was the primacy of the military element of the movement. These comrades argued that the military had to be primary; because in the absence of true representation of the people, there was no basis for building the political element of the movement. The military element would thus assume primacy and through the course of the struggle the armed element would create the necessary conditions for building the political element (it would be a dialectic relationship). The answers to these questions have divided the people's movement since its inception, and we have struggled with them hitherto.

The other main divisive issue has been the independence of South Sudan vis-à-vis the Unity of the Sudan. This issue has not been correctly understood by many in the movement, and it has kept the movement divided for the greater part of the struggle. There are two main reasons for this division, and they stem from the way self-determination is understood. The SPLM clarified this point in the Resolutions of the SPLM/SPLA First National Convention, April 1994. Resolution no # 7.2.1 and 7.2.2 respectively which state:

- 7.2.1. *The objective of the SPLM is the complete destruction of the oppressive regime of the Old Sudan and the building of a free, just, democratic, secular New Sudan.*
- 7.2.2. *The SPLM is committed to fight and achieve the right and exercise of self-determination for the oppressed people of the New Sudan following the demise of the regime of the Old Sudan, or in any peace talks with the Government of the day in Khartoum. (Resolutions Of The SPLM/SPLA First National Convention, April 1994)*

The right of self-determination is not an exclusive right of the people of South Sudan; it is a universal human right. It is in following with this truth that it is stated as “self-determination for the oppressed people of the New Sudan” as opposed to South Sudan.

The SPLM succeeded in transforming the struggle (traditionally) of South Sudan into a revolution of the marginalized people of the whole Sudan, who all suffered from the same oppressive policies of governments that had come and gone in Khartoum since independence. The struggle of these marginalized peoples has always been divided and thus weak, unable to deliver a strong blow to the ruling elite. This blow was finally achieved through the unity of these marginalized people, which would afford them the best opportunity to take power in the center and restructure it according to their interest.

The mainstream of the SPLM held the view that the independence of South would not resolve the real problem, which was imposition of one culture to define the nation state (it was regarded as a temporary solution). It is this exclusion of the majority, the movement argued, that caused socioeconomic marginalization of the Sudanese people. The only practical solution would be the complete dismantling of the power in Khartoum after which the marginalized people would effectively exercise and achieve their human right of self-determination.

The independence of South Sudan was an accident of history, it was not part of the policies nor the principal objective set out by the movement in its Manifesto. There are some that may argue that there is no such thing as “an accident of history”, that there is reason behind every occurrence (one may call it the law of cause and effect). The fact remains that the SPLM/SPLA has never been a secessionist movement, in fact it was the National Islamic Front (NIF) that have been secessionist. The vision of the new Sudan is “*a cancer that needs to be stopped*” as it was once described by Abdul Gassim Haj Ahmed, an NIF Scholar.

The fact that today we have an independent Republic of South Sudan does not contradict the vision of the SPLA – SPLM of a new Sudan. The SPLM/SPLA, in its policy of negotiating with the government of the day in Khartoum had reached a deadlock on the question of separation of religion and state; and on interim arrangements during the interim period of the agreement. This is what would eventually lead to the breakup of the country, and it is the reason war persists in North Sudan.

The SPLM have traditionally been the defenders of the unity of the country, within the context of a new Sudan that is “*voluntary united in diversity*” as declared by the late Dr. John on the occasion of the signing of the CPA. The vision of Sudan within the context of a united Arab Sudan, which ignores the reality and the great diversity in the country, is not unity. This is in truth, exclusion. It is nothing short of apartheid and is what has led (as already mentioned) to the breakup of the Sudan.

It was the position of the SPLM that in order for the Sudan to remain united, a theocratic state should not be imposed on the people (religion and state should be separate). The NIF/NCP government’s counter argument was that secularism should also not be imposed on them. The solution to this is to have two states. This is the two-state solution referred to in the 1972 letter; it came about due to the NIF/NCP rejection of secularism as opposed to the SPLA/SPLM desire for secession.

The new Sudan (though it may have geographical references) is not a place on a map, it is (primarily) a socio-political philosophy and vision, and the Southerner and the Northerner are all Sudanese (as much as the citizens of both Koreas are all Koreans). The crisis as already cited, arose from a crisis in Sudanese identity (manifested) through the imposition of Arab culture on the diverse nationalities of the Sudan. The name Sudan which comes from the Arabic phrase *bilad el-Sudan*, means: *country of the Blacks* (in other words Africans) and is part of our identity. And the vision of the new Sudan still applies as a philosophy and vision with which Sudanese (North and South) can solve the problems both states have inherited from the old Sudan.

The Current Reality

It is doleful that today the Republic of South Sudan is being governed by old Sudan philosophies, lack of vision and privilege for the few. Furthermore, the bigoted imposition of one culture to define the new nation continues to be practiced by those that had set out to end it. There have been enough reports in the media of arbitrary arrests, extra judicial killings, not to mention gross violations of human rights as is the case in Jong’lei State; I needn’t overwhelm the reader with these statistics. There are an innumerable number of South Sudanese individuals and communities that are denied their civil rights and liberties based on profiling, they are harassed and often times labeled as foreigners, as if to suggest there is a phenotype that fits the criteria for South Sudanese.

The current state of collapse in all sectors in the Republic of South Sudan is nothing short of a betrayal of the noble aspirations of our people, the great victory that was the independence of the South has been squandered. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) marked a time in our history when there was a real opportunity for our people to move away from the cycle of war and the evils that accompany it. The CPA was the last chance for the *old Sudan* to be saved from breaking apart. However, the internal contradictions had proven substantial. Dr. John (speaking in 2003) put it thus:

When I am asked whether self-determination can lead to separation I always say yes...if in the interim period we fail to create a new Sudan which embraces all, because no one will opt to stay in a country where he is called Abid (slave)...Therefore we must take the bull by the horns and transform this country fundamentally...Only the Vision and Program of the new Sudan can stop this country from disintegrating...It is a program and challenge that must be taken up very seriously not only by the SPLM but all other political forces in the country including the National Congress Party. (Speaking in 2003 to NDA delegates)

The right of Southern Sudanese to self-determination as resolved in the 1994 SPLM National Convention and (enshrined in the CPA) has led to the establishment of the newest nation state in the world. This historical fact ought to have provided a better opportunity to carry the vision forward, as opposed to the current state of confusion. The Republic of South Sudan is a territorial space recognized internationally within which the vision of a new Sudan could be made a reality.

This vision and philosophy has been dismissed by some in our leadership and has been labeled as "Garang" ideas and these "Garang" ideas have become taboo within the current political reality. This propaganda goes as far as suggesting that the late Dr. John Garang was a "unionist" and unity has been presented (within the context of a united Arab Sudan) as a threat to the existence of the Republic of South Sudan. This is false, they are not "Garang" ideas; instead, they are objective ideas, they are correct ideas. And in the absence of these ideas and theories, the new Republic has turned to the policies of the old Sudan and the SPLM literally has no vision.

The SPLM has forsaken its founding philosophy; the cornerstone of which was the vision of the new Sudan. We have failed to articulate the vision within the context of the new geopolitical reality. It is true that during the course of the armed struggle the new Sudan vision was articulated within the context of a united, democratic and secular Sudan. However, as stated, the failure of the two parties to agree on the nature of the state (secular vs. theocratic state) has led to a two state solution through the exercise of their right to self-determination.

The vision of the new Sudan and the independence of the South are not mutually exclusive; the vision of the new Sudan can still be pursued within the territorial boundaries of what is now the Republic of South Sudan. The new Sudan is not a place on the map; it is a vision and political philosophy comparable to the Magna Carta, or the Declaration on the Rights of Man. To say that the independence of South Sudan is in contradiction to the vision of the new Sudan is to (either) have a shallow understanding of what the vision of the new Sudan is about, or to betray the aspirations of our people to be free from all the constraints that keep them trapped in abject poverty.

This course of events can only lead to one outcome, and it would be wise to the SPLM leadership and all the Comrades in the struggle to heed the words of the late Dr. John Garang (in his letter to Gen. Lagu in 1972), in which he warned:

It is historically a universal law that in whatever multi-nationality country where one of the nationalities is economically and politically (and therefore socially and culturally) dominant over other nationalities, that country is pregnant with instability, discontent and crisis eventually erupting in warfare. (Letter to General Joseph Lagu, 1972)

In order to arrest this situation, it would be prudent for the Movement to revisit the vision of the new Sudan, as this is what the conflict was about, conflicting visions of Sudan.

The Background of the New Sudan Vision

In order to understand concretely the vision of the new Sudan, it is essential to understand the history of the inception of the liberation movements in Africa. The quest for a *new society!*

The founding fathers and mothers of the African liberation struggle realized that the old African society, having been destroyed by the Arab and European slave trade, and the colonization that followed, was no longer viable in a rapidly industrializing world. In addition, the nascent society that was being evolved was not one that could possibly serve the interests of the masses of the African people, as it was not reflective of the realities faced by majority of the people in their cattle camps and villages.

The rational solution was a *new society* that would take the positive from the old (pre-colonial Africa) and the contemporary (colonial Africa) leaving the negative, in order to form a new society. This would be a modern and new African society that could best serve the interests of the masses of the African people; and makes them take their rightful place in the world.

The idea of the new society lost favor over the new colonial society and over the years it has become entrenched in the process of classical neo-colonialism. There came to be two camps in the struggle against colonial domination, the Independence Movement, and the Liberation Movement. The former was only concerned with achieving independence, while the later was concerned with liberation in the overall sense.

It is deplorable that today the economic indicators in most African countries are far worse than the period immediately following African independence (in the mid 1950's and 1960's), as if to suggest that the African masses were better off under the yoke of foreign oppressors. The failure across Africa to implement the vision of a new society has left the masses of African people trapped in humiliating poverty.

In the pre-independence period the two camps had a common enemy so they worked together. However, when independence is achieved their interests rapidly diverge. The interest of those in the independence movement becomes maintaining political power at all costs (in order to maintain their privileged positions), while those in the liberation movement continue to have the same objective of social change, *the restoration of the greatness of our people and the modernization of our societies* (George Orwell described it best in his 1945 book - *Animal Farm*).

The truth is there need not be a contradiction between the vision of a new Society and African independence, not unless the intention is condemning our people to abject poverty for eternity. The vision of the new Sudan is how this struggle (*Independence vs. Liberation*) is being played out in our corner of Africa. The SPLA/SPLM has followed in the tradition of the African Liberation Movements from the PAIGC to FRELIMO; the late Chairman (John Garang) followed in the tradition of the leadership style of the revolutionary leaders of these movements.

The vision of a new Sudan is one that calls for unity in diversity (something we very much need in the South Sudan) and as cited above, should not be the sole responsibility of the SPLM. This vision should be the responsibility of every revolutionary organization and individual citizen. To have a new nation in which there is no anti-Bantu speakers, no anti-Semitic Speakers or anti-Nilotic Speakers; no anti this region or that region, no anti this tribe or that tribe; no anti Christianity or Anti Islam or anti Traditional African Religion; no male nor female chauvinism; but, a new synthesis where all these diversities are respected. That is what the vision of the new Sudan calls for.

Conclusion

There are many Comrades that have found it difficult to be consistent with the objectives of the movement because they are genuinely confused. This is reflected in the manner by which they attempt to reconcile the vision to the changing geopolitical realities. There are some Comrades that believe it is only a matter of editing the words “new Sudan” out and inserting “new South Sudan” and it is solved.

There are those; however, who in spite of understanding the vision are against it. They feel threatened by this vision (of liberating the masses); and in an attempt to maintain their privileged positions in Juba, they have set out to misinform the citizens of our Republic that *unity* and the vision of *new Sudan* are a threat to national security. That we should abandon the idea, because “...we are now South Sudan...*new Sudan* is a dead ideology...” as they often frame the argument.

They fear the vision of the new Sudan because it would result in the restructuring of power in Juba. The people would be in control as opposed to a few families that are loyal to their own self interests. This is why there has been no constitutional conference, the constitutional process has been compromised giving the head of state absolute power and “...power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men...” as expressed so eloquently by Lord Acton. The vision of the new Sudan is also not in the interests of the Khartoum regime and so ironically the interests of Juba and Khartoum at the moment coincide.

This is where we are today as a movement!

This author would like to assure all that the vision is not dead; this is only true for those who have achieved their objective (flag independence). These comrades did not want the independence of South Sudan for the same reason as the masses of the people in South Sudan. Their dissatisfaction with successive Khartoum regimes was their exclusion from the division of the national pie (in Khartoum), it was not out of indignation at the suffering and marginalization that Arabism and forced Islamisation was causing to the masses of Sudanese people. These Comrades yearned for a new nation state in which they would divide the national pie themselves.

These Comrades are not separatists due to their enthusiasm regarding the rights of people to self-determination as is evidenced by the current mismanagement of the economy. These Comrades in essence have accepted Sharia, because separation of the South has come within the context of compromise with a system of (double) Apartheid, which not only continues to harass us in the South (Western Upper Nile, Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Abyei), but continues to oppress our Comrades in the struggle in Darfur, in Southern Khordofan, in Southern Blue Nile, Beja Country and other marginalized areas of the Sudan.

The movement has abandoned the vision and objectives of the movement under the false premise that it is no longer relevant to the current reality of an independent Southern Sudan. It is with such reasoning that we have forsaken the cause of the SPLM/SPLA North; a sister movement with which we share a common objective (the destruction of the old Sudan exclusivity replacing it with the new Sudan of inclusivity as stipulated in the Resolution of the SPLM/SPLA First National Convention, April 1994). Instead we are now working with the NIF, which is holding the economy of South Sudan hostage through the oil pipeline the Republic needs to export its crude. This is not self-determination by any standard; it is not the self-determination we defined during the struggle.

To these Comrades the vision might as well be dead; however, in the hearts and minds of the masses of our people, who continue to live in marginalization, abject poverty and still yearn for liberation from the real enemy which is poverty, disease, hunger and ignorance; I can assure you that: "...*the vision of new Sudan is not dead!*" It is just on hiatus, it will be back with the force of a tsunami as was predicted by the late Chairman (Speaking on the occasion of the signing of the CPA on January 9th, 2005).

It would be worthwhile in conclusion, to ponder on the words of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere who once said:

"...for we have both proclaimed our belief that poverty, in which the majority of our people now exist, is intolerable in the twentieth century. We are both aiming at the fundamental change of our respective societies so that they should be organized in the interest of human dignity...a world in which race is irrelevant, and no one, whether they are black or white, suffers from racial prejudice..."

~ Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere (Kingston, Jamaica: September 1974)

A Luta Continua!