

HISTORY

FATEFUL FUTURES IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST: EPOCHALIST HOPES AT SOUTH SUDAN'S INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract. Hope, understood as a “temporal reorientation of knowledge” (Miyazaki 2004, 5), enacts and changes the future as a precipitate of interaction (Crapanzano 2003, 6). During South Sudan’s independence, an epochalist hope was directed towards an end of the miseries associated with Sudanese rule and government officials of the new state tried to inscribe this hope into symbols. Their idea was to create a strong relation between those symbols of hope and a new national identity, in order to bridge the epochalist anticlimax that necessarily followed the initial moment of independence. Via the examination of two examples of hope from South Sudan, and through scrutiny of the symbols of the flag and the anthem, I describe that hope in the future of South Sudan as it existed in 2011, the symbols and the nation building attempts. I conclude by returning to Frantz Fanon’s warnings against European models and an analysis of how those who follow them fall in the old trap of nationalism, an identity construction that necessarily includes and excludes. In the case of South Sudan this collapsed the country back into an old nightmare of ethnic factionalism, long-standing forms of exploitation with new beneficiaries, and new, violent, forms and acts of exclusion.

Keywords: Future, Hope, Despair, Nation, South Sudan, Independence, State building, nation-state

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2019-47-2-68-85

Introduction

Hope is a space in-between, between pragmatism and utopia, between misery and democracy, between now-due social change and technocratic solution, between punishment and sociality, and, especially, between the sombre present and an exhilarating future. It links past experiences, fears, and possibly alters the future. Hope is even exhilarating the present by seeing alternatives in the sombre future. As the latter, in South Sudan in 2011, it has been used by channelling hope into national symbols as a tool for nation building and thereby – allegedly – supporting state formation. In this article,¹ I will look at the hope that existed in South

¹ Thanks to Tabea Scharrer, Richard Rottenburg, Günther Schlee, Katrin Seidel, David O’Kane, Dmitri Bondarenko, endless support and trust during fieldwork, colleagues from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (MPI) and from the Law, Organisation, Science and Technology Net-

Sudan² during the moments of its separation and independence from Sudan in 2011. I will look, also, at the sombre future that was foreseeable even at the moment of hope, and the fears that people tried to prevent by hoping and acting upon their hope. That their fears and hope were justified is, by 2019, unfortunately clear. Since the end of 2013, several years of civil war have brought hundreds of thousands of death, and displaced so many more. In 2011, however, while this was still a sombre threat, it was only one possible future, and a possibly preventable one. In 2011, people in South Sudan were still hoping that things might change in their new state, and that they would be able to achieve “freedom and liberty and the end of oppression, to become first class citizens, as slogans throughout South Sudan were promoting. Those were expressions of hope for a change in the future, a change towards “popular rule” and “social equality” as Clifford Geertz (1973, 234) had theorised for moments of independence in the 1960s. In this paper, I begin by providing some personal accounts of that moment of hope in South Sudan. These accounts come from the returnee station and a church in Malakal, while reflecting a broader picture that I encountered during my fieldwork. Next, I will theorise the concept of hope and its individual and collective power, and I will provide some accounts of such hope towards the new independent South Sudan. Some government officials of South Sudan saw a potential for national unity through hope, and tried to grasp that sense of hope in national symbols and a national anthem, so as to create a feeling of national identity that support state formation in South Sudan. Ultimately, these officials failed to actually steer their actions towards the hope that people actually had. Instead of bridging the gap between the content of the hope and its actualisation by casting hope into national symbols, they turned hope into nationalism, an identity construction that necessarily includes and excludes, and back into an old South Sudanese nightmare of ethnic factionalisms, old forms of exploitations with new beneficiaries, and new, violent, forms of exclusions. Achille Mbembe, working with the intellectual legacy of Frantz Fanon, has explained the danger of reliance on European models, of which the concept of the “nation-state” is one. He writes that:

“[d]ecolonization is not about design, tinkering with the margins. It is about reshaping, turning human beings once again into craftsmen and craftswomen who, in reshaping matters and forms, need not to look at the pre-existing models and need not use them as paradigms” (Mbembe 2015).

With that in mind, the final section of this paper will look at the inherent dangers of the nation-state model.³

Hope

The initial hope in South Sudan was directed towards the new state, a turn which is apparently rare. As Stefan Jansen (2013) writes in his article “Hope for/against the state: Grid-ding in a besieged Sarajevo suburb.” According to him, many anthropological accounts on

work (LOST) that was my wonderful work environment. The research was funded by the MPI for Social Anthropology.

² Before independence of South Sudan in July 2011, the region was correctly called southern Sudan. For simplicity, I will mostly use the term South Sudan for the state, as well as for the region that it had been as part of Sudan before its independence.

³ This text explicitly focusses on the application of the nation-state model inside of South Sudan. And therein bears a significant omission: The international set-up that has supported this kind of state building, a state that continues to extract resources, to the interest of the internal elites, but also to the interest of external receivers of those resources. This text rather looks at one tiny aspect of postcolonial knowledge, and not at the impact of, for example, neoliberal trade policies.

state focus on hope being directed against, not for, the state. David Graeber (2007) and James Scott (1990, 1987, 2009) for example, have analysed this ‘hope against the state’ in ways that mostly reflect their own hopes for people evading the states’ standardisations. Jansen argues that in the city of Sarajevo that had seen lots of violence, people were looking for a normal life and for a process that he called ‘gridding’, or the standardization and the implied predictability and stability of life. Without getting a glimpse of that hope that was prevailing in southern Sudan at that particular moment, it is harder to understand the initial tolerance towards corruption,⁴ the lack of functional Disarmament and Reintegration programmes (T. Sureau 2013), and towards the allegation that some army-generals personally owned fleets of Hummers (perceived by some generals as prestigious), *et cetera*.

By showing the expressions of hope and of politics of hope, I do not want to imply that all the hopes that were perceptible at the dawn of independence were produced by propaganda through banners, anthems, speeches or other means of communication. It would be misleading to reduce this hope to a construction of the ruling party or other active political entities. I argue, rather, that the propaganda was trying to use and channel this hope, and was not leading but following it. It was, in other words, trying to get onto the wave of hope and trying, if possible to steer it. Hope made people generous and lenient towards the new government before, during and (for a while after) independence. The cases in this chapter show that people were indulgent and patient with the government, hoping for that better future that they connected to their idea of the newly independent South Sudanese state.

Hope in South Sudan’s independence

The investment of hope the people of South Sudan made in their new state was an overwhelming one. In January 2011, I started to pass every day at the stadium of Malakal, at the time a regional capital of one of eleven states of southern Sudan. Malakal had become a major hub for returnees from northern Sudan, from where it is accessible by bus on comparatively decent streets and by boat on the Nile. The local government had agreed to transform the stadium of Malakal into a “returnee way station” (IOM South Sudan 2011, 4) for southern Sudanese to be “transport[ed] to their hometowns and villages” (UNMIS 2010). Many so-called “returnees” who are brought to their “home” had never been to southern Sudan or left when they were too young to remember. The term “return” is therefore often unsuitable to their cases. Consequently, many of those who had “returned” had neither (local) knowledge of agricultural work (how to prepare a field, how to keep cattle, how to fetch water), nor any knowledge of the ways to deal with the (possibly drunken) soldiers of the SPLM/A. Their bodies, also, lacked immune systems attuned to local water-borne diseases.

Nonetheless, there were many returnees waiting in the stadium, including Martha and Angelina, whom I visited daily for about 20 days during my stay in Malakal. They had both left Khartoum some months before, and had stayed in the stadium since their arrival. Martha gave birth to a girl on 18th of January and named her “Istifta” (إستفتاء). The name means “Referendum”. Martha and Angelina insisted that I bring a camera and gave me an interview that reflected well the hope that is projected towards the independence. As you will see, Martha used the word “baladna” (بلادنا) meaning “our country” very often:

Martha: “We came in November [2010], on the 27th. And we came, because this is our country. We came to our country, because our country is beautiful. We will be in our country, when freedom will come to our country.”

⁴ Compare President Salva Kiir’s letter on <http://www.channel4.com/media/c4-news/pdf/presidentletter.pdf> (see also Twijnstra 2015).

Angelina: “This is our country, because the people who are here are brothers, all of them are together.



Figure 1: Shacks of people coming to southern Sudan at Malakal stadium
By Timm Sureau, 28.1.2011, Malakal, Stadium

Martha: “In order not to go to any other country. We stay together. [laughing, and a pause] He wants us to talk. [Pause] We came from Khartoum. We came here to Upper Nile State, because this is our country. We are not sick, thank god, we have everything here. [...] They give us food every day. We are poor. If someone says: ‘Is there a problem?’ We say: ‘there is no problem because this is our country.’ We came to our country to live comfortably again. We do not have to clean in the house of the Arabs [bait ‘arab] anymore. Because when we clean, what are we doing? [...] Anyone who lives here is happy. That’s why we came here. Ok!”

Timm: “How is the current situation here in the stadium?”

Martha: “In the stadium life is good for us. We have a hospital. The hospital is open □ 24 hours. They stay with us. And they give us clothes and food. Food is here, 24 hours a day. We can eat anything. There are really no worries.”

Timm: ‘And how is Istifta’?’ [her baby]

Martha: “Istifta’ is fine, thanks to God, we came peacefully, and we gave birth to children safely, these children are born in the stadium. Istifta’ is fine”.⁵

Martha and Angelina’s hopes for South Sudan were not to clean anymore for the Arabs – i.e. to do jobs that implicate a lower status – and they also appreciated food, a health care system, comfort, development and freedom. At this time, the situation of the people in the stadium was rather difficult; there were shortages of food and health equipment, according to a member of the Red Cross who spoke to me. I am not able to assess the situation myself, since I left Malakal shortly after, for reasons I will describe below.

Hope in independence as a turn towards peace

My second case was Tom, a pastor in a Presbyterian church whom I saw a week after the referendum over unity of Sudan, or separation of South Sudan. After we had sung several gospel songs, Tom took the stage and presented a different to hope, one that expressed a full awareness that the danger of new outbreaks of violence was likely:

⁵ Interview: Martha and Angelina, returnees, Malakal stadium, 2011-01-27.

“South Sudan has seen a lot of bullets, but the last bullets were shot last week. One of them I have in my hand here [and hold up the registration card for the referendum. It is perforated, meaning that he casted his vote]. It is the first peaceful bullet. Our last bullet for independence is a peaceful one. And 97% of the registered voters took out their bullet and used it. And in my district [...] more than 99.7% voted for separation. And this bullet, I will keep it, and I will show it to my children and it will become part of my heritage. They will save it as well and give it to their children and they will tell them, that this was the last bullet used in South Sudan to become independent. They will give it from father to son, from father to son and they will keep telling the story of independence.”⁶



Figure 2: Perforated referendum card, 9 of January 2011



Figure 3: Signpost in Malakal, 8th of January 2011. Photos taken by Timm Sureau

Figure 2 shows a perforated referendum card that – according to Tom – should be of the kind of the last bullets ‘shot’ in South Sudan. Figure 3 shows a signpost on which in Arabic and English the usage of guns is discouraged during the election and the referendum. The mere existence of this signpost, and the fact that it is necessary to promote the ban on guns, demonstrates the sheer prevalence of guns in South Sudan. That the referendum and the independence itself passed peacefully also revealed a lot about many of the actors that are usually not very accessible (such as generals and/or rebel leaders). It likely shows that the armed and influential actors who favoured the secession of southern Sudan from Sudan, probably also had hope towards independence or at least saw personal gain in an independent South Sudan. Unfortunately, a week after the interview with Martha and Angelina, two weeks after the speech of Tom on the last bullet, clashes started – again – in Malakal. During these violent incidents about 70 people were shot dead. This happened in the vicinity of my place of residence, and went up to the stadium turned “returnee way station”. During these shootings, Martha, Istiftah and Angelina left the stadium. One of the male nurses working for Red Crescent arranged that I could talk to them once by phone. They told me: “it was bad, but people came with pick-ups and brought us here, now we are safe again and it will become alright in our country.”⁷

Having had witnessed parts of that violence, I left Malakal as quickly as possible on the first bookable flight, while my friends were nicely laughing at me, saying that they were used to it: they stayed. In order to make this intelligible, let me cite Mary Zournazi, to whom I will

⁶ Fieldwork diary entry: Tom, priest, Presbyterian Church in Malakal, 2011-01-23.

⁷ Phone call around 10th of February 2011

come back below: “Hope can be what sustains life in the face of despair” (Zournazi 2002, 14) and an old woman in a novel of the science-fiction writer Matt Ruff: “Hope's a choice, not a sum; you can have as much of it as you damn well feel like having, regardless of actual circumstances” (Ruff 1997, 153).

After returning, and witnessing a second violent incident in Malakal, I changed fieldwork site. In the new place, people were as enthusiastic and hopeful about South Sudan's independence, while at the same time being well-aware of the situation in the country, the situation that potentially could endanger them as well. Despite the new borders that had just been put in place, despite new clashes at borders with Sudan, people started building up a life based on hope. They had longed for independence in order to start businesses: now they could, and did. Two of my research partners in the second field site started long-term plans with only long-term revenues. Both of them invested in agriculture. One planted avocado trees that apparently yield a crop only after three years. Another acquired land outside of the town, and planted trees that grow extremely straight, consist of hardwood, and are apparently often used to build electricity pylons. According to him, they need seven years before they can be used as pylons. His plan was to sell them for the distribution lines when electrification would reach the town. And he was excited to be the only one with this particular long-term vision that would both help him financially and support the electrification of the town.

Theorising hope

These hopes in South Sudan were not naïve at all. A number of social scientists such as Arjun Appadurai, Vincent Crapanzano, Hirokazu Miyazaki, Morten Axel Pedersen, and Mary Zournazi – as I will explain in the following – share the notion that hope is “about possibilities rather than about probabilities” (Appadurai 2007, 30). In this logic, hope is not utopian or impossible to achieve: a person who is hoping is also not naïve in thinking that their hopes are probable outcomes. Hope, instead, is a method of altering the future to one's own preferences. As one writer argues, hope is a “temporal reorientation of knowledge” (Miyazaki 2004, 5) and to examine the meaning of hope is to address “the most fundamental philosophical problem – what knowledge is for” (Miyazaki 2004, 9). Morten Axel Pedersen (2012) combined Miyazaki's ideas with the concept of *la durée*, and explained that hope reverses temporal order, since it includes a version of the future in our actions, making this future more probable. In “A Day in the Cadillac” (2012), Pedersen describes some young men in post-socialist Ulaanbaatar, where the chances for economic prosperity were rather grim. And it is not *despite* their grim situation, but *because of* their grim situation, that those young men exhibited a great amount of hope: “hope is what people do when they have no firm ground, in the form of a stable economic, religious, or political cosmos, on which to build their ideas of the future” (Pedersen 2012, 6). The hope that they exhibit is also not a misunderstanding of their chances, but a different sense of temporality. By glimpsing at the chaos of the possible futures before them and by selecting a possible but not probable future as their leading drive for action, they improve the likelihood that the possible and improbable will happen, or is happening. The future thus influences the present in a way similar to that we are used to from the past: it shapes our actions in the present. Pedersen argues that this somehow reversed temporality is an enacting and transformative agent, since acting on improbable possibilities instead of probable likelihoods enables one, firstly, to evade the “risk [of] being imprisoned by the present” (Pedersen 2012, 11), and secondly, it allows for the continuation of networks that provide social cohesion to small groups – groups that may be unlikely to pay back the social and economic investment that have been made in them, but the hope for this happening, keeps the relations alive.

Vincent Crapanzano in his text “Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis” (Crapanzano 2003) follows a similar argument, and adds that “hope and desire have to be understood as precipitates of interaction or interlocution” (Crapanzano 2003, 6). That means that hope is on, an individual level, something supporting social cohesion, and something participates in the enactment of individual and collective futures in the face of despair. Hope is also more likely to appear when the present situation looks grim: it is also a reaction to fear and despair.

Arjun Appadurai, in a way, takes up this thought and looks at the position of hope in democratic systems and transformations. In other words, he looks at hope as a factor for the collective, for the social, and not only for the individual. For him, the politics of hope are a central element of democracy, at least since the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The hope of individuals who direct their actions towards an unlikely but possible outcome are crucial for the continuation of democracy, Appadurai argues, since their direction of that action is a “response to the realization that democracy without full popular participation is a form of oligarchy” (Appadurai 2007, 30). Here, the politics of hope create the link, or close the gap, between popular participation and oligarchy, and “between the poor and the wealthy in all societies” (Appadurai 2007, 31). One could therefore say that the politics of hope create the image of future equality and thus create a different time perception, one where democracy is the hope and the engagement for a future equality. It thereby shapes the citizenry, the active citizens who engage themselves in order to build that hoped for system. Appadurai analyses that hope, or rather the politics of hope which can be seen as a method and a strategy in the creation of democracy, (and, if I may add, a state), and can be situated between the “temptations of utopia and the arrogance of technocratic solutions to change” (Appadurai 2007, 33). The politics of hope can thus be situated between the impossibility of reaching the utopia and technocratic solutions that are unappealing, unemotional, and dry. This shift, from hope analysed as a personal and inter-personal feeling, towards hope as a method and strategy is crucial to the understanding of nationalism and the extensive deployment of national symbols.

This point is underscored by Mary Zournazi, who analyses extreme forms of nationalism by looking at right wing movements and their usage of the politics of hope. She carves out how hope is used by these movements, which rework the negative side of the feelings of hope, namely the despair, insecurity and fear that is necessary for the creation of hope. Right wing movements offer a way out of those feelings by calling for national unity and identity. She calls this “a ‘fantastic hope’ for national unity [which is] charged by a static vision of life and the exclusion of difference” (Zournazi 2002, 15). Similar to Crapanzano, she sees two origins of hope: first fear and insecurity; second “belief and faith, and the trust that there is a life worth living in uncertain times” (Zournazi 2002: 16).

That means hope can be either a personal feeling towards the future, which brings with it possible positive results by choosing the most favourable and not impossible option and shaping action accordingly, or a communal sentiment that creates and keeps relations between people that would otherwise have every reason to mistrust their social partners. However, it can also become part of political interaction and propaganda of right wing governments or governments as such, with marginalising consequences for those who find that they are not part of the hoped-for national group. However, the same national hope that can be an element of right-wing propaganda can also become a semiotic and solidifying element of independence movements, such as the ones of Clifford Geertz presented. Although Geertz was referring to other, mostly African, transitions from colonialism to independence in the 1950s and 60s, and called this kind of hope epochalist. Despite the seeming exaggeration of the term ‘epochalist’, the term is justified since the hope that people were expressing before and after

independence was directed towards changes in *all* their spheres of live, the personal, social, economic, and political alike. He said:

“The images, metaphors, and rhetorical turns from which nationalist ideologies are built are essentially devices, cultural devices designed to render one or another aspect of the broad process of collective self-redefinition explicit, to cast essentialist pride or *epochalist hope* into specific *symbolic forms*...” (Geertz 1973, 252).

The nationalism of the independence movements of the 1950s and 60s was cast into symbolic forms. In case of South Sudan and as I describe in the following, the main symbol of the counter-state nationalistic hope was the flag of the rebel movement that, after 2005, became the main state party, the Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A, an acronym that you should keep in mind). With the coming of statehood that rebel movement’s flag became the state-framed South Sudanese flag, and the anthem that was song all-over. I will now discuss this process of the creation of the flag and of the anthem, and the conversion of the flag into one of the main symbols of independence.

Shaping hope into nationalism

Following the often criticised logic “that a strong sense of a shared national identity is a *sine qua non* for a viable modern state“ (Spencer and Wollman 2005, 3)⁸, which implies that only a national identity allows the rulers to legitimately rule, Jok Madut Jok – undersecretary in the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and professor of history at Loyola Marymount University – started a program to create a national identity for the South Sudanese. Jok Madut Jok foresaw that popular support for the current system would quickly vanish, and wanted to support the regime by building a state-framed nationalism. He feared that the wave of hope that supported the referendum and independence would quickly disappear. He might have read Clifford Geertz, who pointed out that hope for independence carries a real risk of disappointment and dissipation:

“Considering all that independence seemed to promise - popular rule, rapid economic growth, social equality, cultural regeneration, national greatness and, above all, an end to the ascendancy of the West – it is not surprising that its actual advent has been anticlimactic. It is not that nothing has happened, that a new era has not been entered. Rather, that era having been entered, it is necessary now to live in it rather than merely imagine it, and that is inevitably a deflating experience. The signs of this darkened mood are everywhere: in nostalgia for the emphatic personalities [...] in disenchantment with party politics, parliamentarianism, bureaucracy[...]; in uncertainty of direction, ideological weariness, and the steady spread of random violence; and, not the least, in a dawning realization that things are more complicated than they look, that social, economic, and political problems, once thought to be mere reflexes of colonial rule, to disappear when it disappeared, have less superficial roots” (Geertz 1973, 234 – 35).

Although these words were written in the 1970s, they are almost prophetic for South Sudan today, especially since the government from Sudan was seen by some of my informants as colonial rulers as “the West” had been seen by others. Well-versed in history, Jok Madut Jok was aware of this problematic and planned to act against the anticlimactic and deflating realization that the problems that South Sudan was facing were greater than many assumed. In other words, it was foreseeable that the people’s hope for a positive economic and political change would be, and was about to be, disappointed by their non-eventuation. Geertz also pointed out that the main source of appeal of the independence movement was its counter-

⁸ Spencer and Wollman do argue against this in their text.

state national identity rhetoric, a rhetoric that based itself on a construction of collective identity that would prove fragile:

“Indeed, the very success of the independence movements in rousing the enthusiasm of the masses and directing it against foreign domination tended to obscure the frailty and narrowness of the cultural foundations upon which those movements rested, because it led to the notion that anticolonialism and collective redefinition are the same thing. But for all the intimacy (and complexity) of their interconnections, they are not. Most Tamils, Karens, Brahmins, Malays, Sikhs, Ibos, Muslims, Chinese, Nilotes, Bengalis, or Ashantis found it a good deal easier to grasp the idea that they were not Englishmen than that they were Indians, Burmese, Malayans, Ghanaians, Pakistanis, Nigerians, or Sudanese” (Geertz 1973, 239).

A newly independent state, therefore, faces the possible disappearance of two major uniting and cohesive solidifying elements of the society. The first is the anticlimactic experience of politics and actions, and the second is the lack of a common unifying enemy and the resulting loss of a counter-state identitarian reference.

Jok Madut Jok and other officials also identified this double threat in a South Sudan that was at independence only a “slightly more than a mere geographical fact” (Jok 2012, 58), one where nationalism meant a desire for freedom. To counter those processes of dissipation, he saw two possible options: to use coercion for social cohesion, or to achieve such cohesion via the creation of a South Sudanese national identity. Jok urged the avoidance of “[t]he strategy of subsequent governments in Khartoum [that] was one of unity through coercion” (Jok 2012, 60). Unfortunately, to the detriment of hundreds of thousands of lives, this project for national unity through a national identity failed. Jok concluded that this failure was rooted in the two major challenges facing state-formation in South Sudan. The first was the “construction of a viable state under extremely difficult conditions” and the second was the need to “create a sense of national unity and shared identity [through] a programme of nation-building” in order to gain legitimacy. Jok was not alone with this view: among others, Bol Makueng, the then-SPLM Secretary for Information, Culture and Communication, also promoted the idea of a creation of a South Sudanese nationalism and said that all citizens “have duties and responsibilities. One of them is learning our anthem, believing in it and doing what the nation requires of us. [O]ur anthem, our constitution and our flag together form the face of unity of the South Sudanese” (cited in Dimo 2011).

In order to succeed, Jok claimed that nation- and state-building have to go together and the focus should be not exclusively on state-building, meaning its technical and bureaucratic infrastructure, but also on the creation of a common national identity.

Although bearing similarities with the ideas of nation-building that emerged in the first wave of independence in Africa, the concept of nation that Jok brings forward is not the same as the ones implemented for example in the fifties and sixties, as he was able to build on the legacy of the long-term civil war in southern Sudan, that could easily be reframed as independence struggle. Jok’s concept of the nation was based on “shared historical experiences; the preservation and celebration of cultural diversity; the promotion of a vibrant civil and political society; [and focuses on] an inclusive concept of citizenship” (Jok 2012, 59–60). Since in his opinion, “[n]ations are made, not born” (Jok 2012, 67), he proposed to actively create that nation, employing words such as “planned, forged, and crafted”, “vision” and “plan” (Jok 2012, 59). He has developed several ideas of how to make that nation, some of which had already been implemented. The main elements are, first, standard state symbols such as, a flag, an anthem, and similar symbols; second, the construction of national monuments for “heroes and heroines of the liberation struggle” (Jok 2012, 62), and war memorials with a strong focus

on martyrs, and also museums and a national archive⁹; third, the adoption of one (English) or several national languages (five major local languages plus English), or the creation of an artificial language; and fourth, the inclusion of diversity, for example in the fields of religious diversity and in the field of land rights, and perceptions of those rights. They used old symbols and redefined them, created new ones and tried to associate those symbols with positive feelings towards the new independent state. Additionally to that, they build a statue of John Garang, the former SPLM/A leader, created a martyrs day, built museums and memorials, used propaganda, organised pro-government demonstrations, ceremonies and dances, and did many other things to create the feeling of a South Sudanese nation. Here, I will develop on the first two (flag, anthem, language, war heroes). The flag, the anthem, monuments, memorials are all symbols which convey meanings, and can also be filled with meanings.

South Sudan's flag

I will skip here the history of the colours of the flag and only provide its current usage.¹⁰ In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the main rebel army SPLM/A and the Government of Sudan (GoS). It ended the war between both parties, and gave the Government of Southern Sudan the right to choose its own flag (SPLM/A and GOS 2005, Part V, Schedule B, 15). The then-SPLM/A flag was then adapted as the interim flag of Southern Sudan. On videos of the SPLA entering Juba in the year 2005, one can see the flag, often on the tanks, and once or twice in public (*SPLA Entry to Juba, South Sudan 2007*). This is in stark contrast to the ceremony of independence six and half years later, where it was really hard to take photos without having the flag in the picture. By the time of that ceremony, the flag had become the symbol for independence, for South Sudan as a new independent state, and for lots of hope.

According to a newspaper article, “[t]he [then-]minister of Peace and CPA Implementation, Pagan Amum, also added that the party [SPLM] preferred the SPLM flag, which has already been serving as an interim flag for the Government of Southern Sudan, to remain as the national flag of the new independent state“ (Sudan Tribune 2011). That means that since 2005, the former flag of the SPLM/A symbolizes not only the SPLM/A, but also first Southern and then, after July 2011, South Sudan. The flag of the ruling party is the flag of the Republic of South Sudan. A blog writer on the well-frequented website ‘Gurtong Trust’ commented on this in the following way:

“[T]he flag we have was designed for our movement turned political party, the SPLM. We would still maintain that flag for our party, the SPLM. But we are not and will not be a one party state. Therefore, as advocates of democracy we have to provide equal opportunity to all individuals who will be part of that nation and who may not necessarily share the same political opinions with some of us. Keeping the current flag for the SPLM will make SPLM stronger as the only party that owns the symbol of the struggle” (Gurtong Trust 2010).

He questions the double-usage of the symbol, well aware of the consequences for democracy that such an action might have.

This process is not surprising as the SPLM tries to stay the main party of South Sudan. The blogger is opposing a common process that was described by Elgenius: “Elites in pursuit of power have played an essential role in the selection process [of symbols] throughout history” (Elgenius 2011, 27). In the case of South Sudan, those elites - parts of the SPLM/A -

⁹ The order of these elements does not reflect their importance.

¹⁰ For further details on the flag's history, please see Sureau (2019, forthcoming) and Bruce Berry entry on flags (2011).

provide an interpretation of the meanings of the colours that differ little from the description of John Garang in 1996, and profit from the already-known symbolism. Their website sets out the colours of the flag and their meaning:

“Red: Blood that was shed by the liberation struggle martyrs.

White: Peace attained after many years of the liberation struggle.

Blue: Waters of the Nile River, a source of life for the country.

Green: The countries natural resources.

Black: Black African skin.

Yellow: Star guiding the country and its citizens” (Government of South Sudan n.d.).

There are at least two reasons for using the flag as the symbol of both the SPLM/A and South Sudan. The first is to solidify and codify the SPLM/A in the symbolic sphere. Concerning the possibilities of symbolic expressions, as a South Sudanese it became difficult to be in favour of the new state but against the ruling party. This supported the symbolic hope in the new government, but also hindered the creation of a multiparty system, which is perceived as crucial for democracy, as hinted at by the above-cited Gurtong blogger. The second reason is to unite people behind that flag and, through this shifting of the symbol from a counter-state symbol to a state-framed symbol, support the “nation”-building process of South Sudanese. Multivocal symbols, especially flags, can unite people and “in order to unite people who are otherwise very different, must be capable of making them feel similar before the flag ... should ideally ‘be all things to all people, anytime, anywhere’” (Eriksen 2007, 5). The flag now should represent peace, war, water, resources and life. This combination of meanings presented by the flag of South Sudan comes pretty close to being “all things to all people any-time anywhere” (Eriksen 2007, 5).

A new symbol - the creation of a national anthem

Unlike the flag, the creation of the anthem was a genuine cultural innovation in the advent of the independence of South Sudan. The story of its creation thus shows even better the involvement of different actors, who explicitly wanted to catch the existing hope in the future of South Sudanese and create a state-framed nation.

In August 2010, a technical committee of the SPLM¹¹ started a competition for the creation of a national anthem. They created concise guidelines stating the name of the anthem as “Land of Cush”, as a reference to a historical state mentioned in the Bible and believed to have been situated in North-East Africa including current South Sudan and extending up to Egypt. Further, the guidelines stipulated following components: “history, land, people, struggle, sacrifices, destiny and flag” (Martell 2010), which were themselves specified further.¹²

¹¹ “Gen. Kuol was the overall supervisor [...] and Brig. Gen. Malaak was the direct team leader of the technical group [which] included Mr. Joseph Abuk, Rev. Peter Deng, Mr. Mayom Bull, Ms. Apal Toby Madout and the author of this column, Dr. Thuou Loi. This team was led directly by Brig. Gen. Malaak Ayuen Ajok with Lt. Gen. Kuol Deim as an overall supervisor” (Cingoth 2012). For further details on the production, I also refer to the same author.

¹² The subcategories were: For History: a) Praise God, b) Civilization (we are the architects of the ancient world civilization), c) Rich culture, ethics and values, d) Glory and victories. For Land: a) Garden of Eden, Origin of Mankind, the pride of Africa, blessed with many riches; rivers, mountains, valleys, and brave people. b) Love for South Sudan. For People: a) Biblical Africans (Isaiah 18), b) Unity and diversity, c) Peace loving, d) determination, e) Commitment to hard work and nation building. For Struggle: a) Freedom, Justice and dignity, b) Peace, prosperity, equality, humanity, c) Black

After some months, and three selection rounds, a committee of judges stated the winner and approved the anthem. Mido Samuel, one of the composers of the winning tune *South Sudan Oyee!* gave high esteem to the new national anthem by saying: “The national anthem for me means I declare for everybody that I am free,” (Martell 2011). Despite the competition and the declaration of a winner, a ‘technical committee’ (Government of South Sudan n.d.) rearranged the lyrics and made substantial changes to the original text. The full extent of these changes may be seen in bold here:

Proposed version before rearrangement

(Differences to final version in bold)

Oh God!
We praise and glorify you
For your grace **upon Cush,**
The land of great warriors
And origin of world’s civilization.

Oh **Cush!**
Arise, shine, raise your flag with the guiding star
And sing songs of freedom with joy,
For **peace,** liberty and **justice**
Shall forever more reign.
So Lord bless South Sudan!

Oh **black warriors!**
Let’s stand up in silence and respect,
Saluting **millions of** martyrs whose
Blood cemented our national foundation.
We vow to protect our nation.

Oh **Eden!**
Land of milk and honey and hardworking people,
Uphold us united in peace and harmony.
The Nile, valleys, forests and mountains

(Government of South Sudan n.d.)

Final version

Oh God
We praise and glorify you
For your grace on South Sudan,
Land of great abundance
Uphold us united in peace and harmony.

Oh motherland
We rise raising flag with the guiding star
And sing songs of freedom with joy,
For justice, liberty and prosperity
Shall forever more reign.

Oh great patriots
Let us stand up in silence and respect,
Saluting our martyrs whose blood
Cemented our national foundation,
We vow to protect our nation

(Okuk 2010)

Among the most significant of the changes to the anthem made by the members of the committee was the deletion of one stanza comparing South Sudan to Eden, although at the same time one line of this stanza was retained (“Uphold us united in peace and harmony”), and it was moved to a more prominent position in the anthem’s text. Other parts of the original were only retained in summary, as in the case of those concepts summed up as “great abundance” and “prosperity”. Also deleted were the references to the ancient kingdom of Cush, and to the claimed origin of world civilization, as were the evocations of the great and black warriors of the past. The concepts of motherland and patriots were added, perfectly aligned with idea to use the anthem for framing the national sentiment.

warrior committed to defend the land. For Sacrifices: a) Heroism of our martyrs, b) Price for our freedom. For Destiny: a) Freedom, peace, equality and prosperity, b) Unity in diversity, c) Glorious nation. For Flag: a) Symbol of our sovereignty, unity and dignity. b) Our sacrifices will keep the flag higher among the nations, guided by the shining star, c) And so God bless South Sudan.

These deletions and additions must be put in context. During my research, there was an on-going discussion in the South Sudanese media about the name of the new independent country. One option among others¹³ was “Cush”, finally abandoned due to possible multiple interpretations of the word and the historical region it designated. The slogan “justice, liberty and prosperity” are, in that specific order, the three words that one can find on the coat of arms of South Sudan, together with the words “Republic of South Sudan”, and an African Fish Eagle behind a shield, a spear and a spade. I can just speculate about the reasons for the omission of the ‘black’ and ‘great warriors’ and the ‘origin of world’s civilization’, they might have been considered too extreme or even delusional, and perhaps even too brutal, which would also fit for the ‘millions’ in ‘millions of martyrs’. The committee altered the religious connotation from ‘God’ and ‘Lord’ to ‘God’ only. The reason could be that the term *God* has a broader semantic field than *Lord* and would thus be more inclusive for non-Christians in South Sudan. This explanation would also work for the omission of the stanza on Eden: although it is a concept existing in all Abrahamic religions, it has different connotations in Christianity/Judaism (where Eden was on earth) and Islam (where Eden was/is not on earth) and closes the possibility of reference to another God, or other gods.

Whether this analysis is correct in every detail or not, the analysis of the creation and alteration of the anthem shows two things. First, although it is a recent creation, the anthem follows the same ideas that John Garang set out when speaking of the meanings of the colours of the flag of the then-SPLM/A. The main elements of the flag and the anthem are a) peace and liberty, b) the struggle of martyrs, c) the abundance of resources, d) prosperity and development, e) the (Christian) religion, f) and the unity of the nation. Second, considering the deletions and additions that were made, together with the prior postulation of guidelines for the anthem, the creation of the anthem shows how much influence governmental actors – the committee – had on the content of the anthem. The words expressed in the anthem are almost a vocalisation of the flag’s intended meaning. While those with a computer and internet can find Garang’s explanation of the flag on the internet, many more people are reached by the anthem. In the months between referendum and independence, I could hear the anthem every time I passed a school in the morning.

As I showed in the preceding discussion of two of the many examples (memorials, museums, etc.), the government of South Sudan has carefully crafted its symbols for the nation and did succeed in linking South Sudan with those hopes and symbols. Many that have read the news on South Sudan since 2013 will now of course question the success of the nation building process, given the grave violence that has occurred since then. Given that South Sudan did fall in a cruel civil war after 2013, the attempt at building a common national identity in order to support state formation seems to have failed. On the other hand, I would argue, however, that the flag and the anthem actually did become symbols of the new state, and were also successfully linked to the hope and aspirations that people had invested in that new state.

¹³ Other names discussed in the media were

I) New Sudan, reflecting the original aim of the SPLM/A to create a “new, secular, multi-ethnic Sudan” (“What’s in a Name? For South Sudanese Quite a Lot” 2011);

II) Nile Republic, because of the importance of the White Nile passing through and finally rejected because of the existence of several republics along the Niles;

III) *Azania*, based on the Azande kingdom;

IV) *Equatoria*, based on the names of the three southern most states of South Sudan;

V) *Wunjubacel*, created out of the first letters of all states and the capital;

VI) *Juwama* - an acronym for Juba, Wau and Malakal (see “South Sudan Name Change?” 2011)

The dangers of nation states

In a way, people in South Sudan were identifying with the new state. And even since the start of the civil war, the idea of a common state has rarely been questioned. For example, on the few occasions when the flag was burned for symbolic purposes, the internet outcry was considerable. Further, although the opposition party and its army did call themselves SPLM-IO (with IO standing for “in opposition”), they still used the same flag. Their fight was directed against the current government, its army and its military generals, the president, but not against the idea of a common state of South Sudan. Some national symbols thus have been successfully established. I rather question the nature of nation building. Building a nation in order to create a state has never (or rarely) worked anywhere (including Europe) without a considerable amount of violence, involuntary inclusion, forced exclusion, and all sorts of terrifying techniques of homogenization such as genocide and ethnic cleansing. Using hope, as described in this text, and attempting state building through nation building could have been questioned from the beginning. Spencer and Wollman describe national projects “as a collectivist ideology inimical to individual freedom and as an inherently authoritarian menace to both liberty and democracy [that] serve the interests of centralised state power” (Spencer and Wollman 2005, 7). Günther Schlee (2004, 148) reminds us that the idea of nationalism might also develop a life of one’s own, since “[i]t may well be possible to dream up ethnic groups and nations, but when these turn out to be nightmares it is very difficult to dream them away again.” The concepts nation and state are classified as mere instruments of power, or as domination of men over men (Weber 2009, 78). In this view, the domination of humans over humans is executed through coercive means and masked behind legitimacy (Abrams 1988, 82) since one is doing this in support of the common good. The creation of national identities is part of that mask of legitimacy, it is a pretence that creates legitimacy and allows the domination of humans over humans to be hidden. This view is also supported by Anderson who looks historically on this question and writes that the relation between legitimacy, state and nation is not at all a historical necessity and “[...]had nothing to do with nationalness. Romanovs ruled over Tatars and Letts, Germans and Armenians, Russians and Finns” (Anderson 1983, 83). And Sudan itself has experience with this. Not only did the SPLM/A in 1983 oppose the nation building project of the Sudanese government – major elements of this were the Arabic language and Islam as religion – but that project was even one important reason for the very creation of the SPLM/A. Those current nation building politics are consequently in stark contrast to the content of the first SPLM/A Manifest from 1983 (SPLM 1983). It was opposing the nation building project of the central government in Khartoum, and was stating the existence of many nations of Sudan. In 1989, John Garang, its long term leader, proposed to bring a communality that stood above the idea of nations. Garang’s communality was a meta-concept that stood over the concept of the nation, and would not have been modelled on nation-states.

Frantz Fanon discussed this as well and warned against using the models of Europe. The concept of the necessity of a nation for a state is originally an inherently European model, yet another of the models that have travelled from Europe to Africa (Behrends, Park, and Rottenburg 2014; Rottenburg 2009). In “The Wretched of the Earth”, originally written in 1961, Fanon wrote that

“[I]t is very true that we need a model, and that we want blueprints and examples. For many among us the European model is the most inspiring. We have therefore seen in the preceding pages to what mortifying setbacks such an imitation has led us. European achievements, European techniques, and the European style ought no longer to tempt us and to throw us off our balance. When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe,

I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders” (Fanon 2002, 312).

He also criticised the new postcolonial leaders and the new economic elites of reproducing the forms of colonial domination, permitting foreign companies to extract and export resources, and thereby turning into the business agents of Western bourgeoisies, thus “being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism” (Fanon 2002, 152). The new state leaders used the tool of nation for new forms of domination. To understand the role of domination in nation, I turn to Hannah Arendt. She explains in detail the terms “Macht, Stärke, Kraft, Autorität, Gewalt” (Arendt 1975, 45), which are all means used by other humans in order to dominate. She argues that even a totalitarian domination that uses violence extensively needs a *Machtbasis* (base of power), since even they cannot rely exclusively on *Stärke, Kraft* and *Gewalt*. The concept of nation fulfils two of the elements that Hannah Arendt (1975, 53) described for power (and therefore an important element of domination). First, a nation is usually built by reference to the past, in the case of South Sudan, a common struggle and common suffering. Second, it provides a justification lying in the future, since the actions undertaken in the name of the nation are for the common good of that perceived body of a nation whose members are collectively striving for the future fulfilment of the hope that was present during the struggle for independence and the moment of independence, as was the case in South Sudan. The hope and the nation was used either for the gain of few and to increase their domination, and they were trying to keep up the idea in order to close the gap “between popular participation and oligarchy” (Appadurai 2007, 31). Fanon could have written this for South Sudan:

“There exists inside the new regime, however, an inequality in the acquisition of wealth and in monopolization. [...] Privileges multiply and corruption triumphs, while morality declines. Today the vultures are too numerous and too voracious in proportion to the lean spoils of the national wealth. The party, a true instrument of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie, reinforces the machine, and ensures that the people are hemmed in and immobilized. The party helps the government to hold the people down. It becomes more and more clearly anti-democratic, an implement of coercion” (Fanon 2002, 171–72).

In South Sudan, that hope was formed into symbols, but its actual content was not really taken up. To all sadness, the hopes of the mother Martha in South Sudan, the hopes of the priest in the church talking about the last bullet, the hoped for electricity pylons and avocados, all the slogans and attempts at a healthy nation building (if that term is not ironic as such) could not rise to their potentials. Hope, that can have an enabling aspect, that might alter the future towards the improbable, had been forced into a model and could not flourish. It has been destroyed by reality and by the eventuation of the worst fears of the people who uttered those hopes, not naively, as I mentioned before, but because they were aware of possibility of the grim alternatives that are now lived in South Sudan and the greater region.

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РОКОВОЕ БУДУЩЕЕ ПРИ СОХРАНЕНИИ ПРОШЛОГО: ЭПОХАЛЬНЫЕ НАДЕЖДЫ ПРИ ПОЛУЧЕНИИ НЕЗАВИСИМОСТИ ЮЖНЫМ СУДАНОМ

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Аннотация. Надежда, понимаемая как «временная переориентация знания» (Miyazaki 2004: 5), определяет и меняет будущее как «последствие взаимодействия» (Staranzano 2003: 6). При получении Южным Суданом независимости эпохальная надежда была связана с окончанием несчастий, ассоциировавшихся с суданским правлением, и правительственные чиновники нового государства постарались выразить эту надежду в символах. Их идея заключалась в создании сильной связи между этими символами надежды и новой национальной идентичностью, чтобы нивелировать неизбежный после получения независимости спад ожиданий. Рассматривая два примера проявления надежды в Южном Судане и анализируя его государственные символы – флаг и герб, – автор показывает, какими были надежда на будущее в Южном Судане в 2011 г., государственные символы и попытки строительства нации. Автор обращается к предупреждению Франца Фанона о неприменимости в Африке европейских моделей и его анализу того, как те, кто им следует, попадают в ловушку национализма – конструирования идентичности, при котором неизбежно кто-то включается в нацию, а кто-то исключается из нее. В случае Южного Судана это привело к возвращению страны к кошмарам межэтнической вражды, прежних форм эксплуатации при новых бенефициариях и к новым, насильственным формам исключения из нации.

Ключевые слова: будущее, надежда, отчаяние, нация, Южный Судан, независимость, строительство государства, национальное государство

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2019-47-2-68-85