

Book Review

March 2018

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Publisher:

Sycamore Tree Publishers

Place of Publication:

Nairobi, Kenya

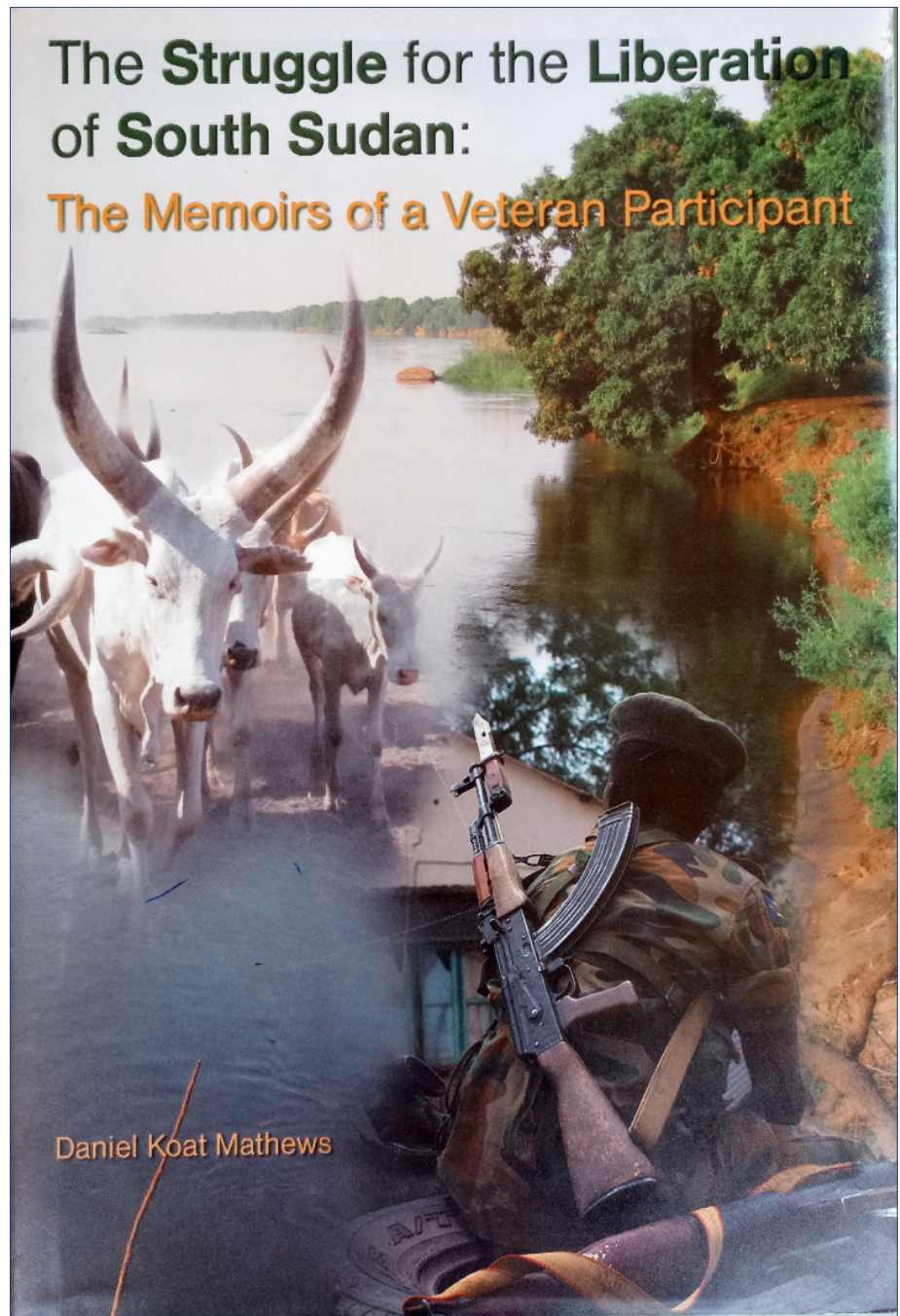
Date of Publication:

June 2015

Number of pages: 132

Reviewed by:

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Introduction

Their best professional efforts notwithstanding, historians would perhaps concede the incompleteness of South Sudan's contemporary history on the account of the conspicuous absence of the contribution from South(ern) Sudanese to that historical narrative. Fortunately some South Sudanese politicians have in the past few years begun to write their own memoirs, detailing eyewitness accounts of some of the major political and social events of the last fifty years as well as the role these politicians might have played in some of those events. Daniel Koat Mathews is the latest South Sudanese politician to publish his memoirs.

Troublesome in his youth, a fierce freedom fighter in adulthood, a rubble-rouser politician in his heydays, an unlikely peacemaker in old-age, and an affable curmudgeon, D.K Mathews tells a persona story that mirrors both the difficult history of South Sudan's liberation struggle and its attendant "contradictions".

The struggle for Liberation of South Sudan: The Memoirs of a Veteran Participant provides a bird's-eye view into both intrigue-filled body politics of post 1972 Southern Sudan and the second civil war that raged from 1983 to 2005. The veteran politician and participant in all South(ern) Sudanese liberation wars does not take prisoners in his battles with political adversaries. He names and shames his foes, and duels with them on the pages of his book with vim and vigor.

Review:

The book consists of a preface/introduction, six chapters, and an appendix. The Preface/Introduction provides a winding overview of the history of both ancient and postcolonial Sudan and South Sudan. Chapter one (My Childhood and My Youth) tells of pleasant African Village life which was disrupted by a serious spinal cord injury that left the young man with lifelong back deformity. Although the deformity would later on in life deprive him of pursuing his dream career, the author developed into an obsessive athlete and an avid tennis player since his intermediate schooldays in the mid-1940s. Although a bloody encounter with his Fine Art teacher almost earned the author a summary dismissal from senior secondary school, the episode combined with the turbulent political events of August 1955 to politically radicalized young D.K Mathews forever. In this chapter, the author also provides a harrowing firsthand account of how a road journey undertaken by his secondary school's sport team came head-on with the forces of the uprising on August 19, 1955. The encounter claimed the lives of two teachers, and almost claimed the life of the Sports teacher. Although the author doesn't mention the name of the teacher, the teacher in question was a quintessential athlete, champion high jumper, footballer, sprinter and tennis champion.

Consisting only of four pages, Chapter Two (My Early Involvement in the Sudan Liberation Movement) is the shortest chapter in the book. However, the chapter heralds the beginning of the author's life-long physical and political involvement in the struggle for the liberation of South Sudan.

Chapter Three (I Get Involved in Government Administration and Politics after the

Addis Ababa Peace Agreement) is the seminal chapter of the book. D.K (as the author is affectionately referred to by both admirers and detractors) is in his element as he narrates, with obvious relish, the intrigues and the shenanigans of the cloak-and-dagger politics which characterized the decade that followed the signing of the peace accord in 1972. The author writes with partisan zeal about the rivalry that saw the rein of power in Juba oscillate between his political grouping and the other faction of the ruling Sudan Socialist Union (SSU). The rivalry culminated in the decentralization (Kokora) of the thereto autonomous region in 1982 before the policy metastasized into the re-division of the region into three centrally controlled states.

Chapter Four (Back to the trenches: Seeking to Reunite the Southern Liberation Movement) provides a concise narrative about the complex politico-military alliances into which various Southern Sudanese leaders were drawn at the twilight of the Addis Ababa Agreement era of the early 1980s. The author is candid about the role he played in supporting the forces of Anyanya II. But after successfully reuniting two warring groups through a combination of Christian faith and patriotism, D.K. returned to arms in the rank of the SPLA in 1987.

Chapter Five (My European Exile: Challenges and Triumphs) is an instructive, albeit brief, insight into the Achilles' heel of South(ern) Sudanese politics or what the author aptly refers to as the twisted contradictions of the struggle for the liberation of South Sudan. Myriad such contradictions have found home in the body politics of South(ern) Sudan since members of the Sudanese parliament from the South allied themselves with sectarian political parties of Northern Sudan in the mid-1950. The parliamentarians would later argue, rather unconvincingly, that their efforts, which to all and sundry appeared to be an "unholy" alliance with the Northerners, were acts of real politics aimed at safeguarding Southern demands, including federalism and/or self-determination. The very same sectarian political parties would shortly thereafter turn their backs on genuine political demands. They raised the slogans of no "federation for one nation; federation equals separation." Furthermore, successive Sudanese governments under the aegis of the sectarian parties or their proxies proceeded to execute or abet Sudan's long civil wars with impunity, sowing the bitter seeds of an enduring legacy of mistrust between northern and southern Sudanese, on one hand, and among south(ern) Sudanese politician on the other. Their intentions notwithstanding, many of these South(ern) Sudanese lawmakers went to their graves with the albatross of real or perceived "collaboration with the enemy" hanging around their necks. There has not been a more efficacious method of ruining the career of a South(ern) Sudanese politician than to accuse him/her of the insidious, but rarely proven, charges of "collaboration with the Arabs."

A veteran of many contradictory military and political alliances in his own right, the author writes about the beginning of the end of his association with Dr. John Garang de Mabior. From his exile in Sweden, D. K. made a stunning revelation to the chairman of the SPLM/A in 1991, alleging that some members in the higher echelons of the liberation movement were agents of the Khartoum regime. Dr. Garang dismissed the allegation, and the author decamped from the movement with immediate effect. But D. K stuck to his guns, so to speak, claiming that he was vindicated a short few weeks later when the persons whom he had accused of being spies were "the very same men who later, on 28 August 1991, made the infamous Nasir Declaration." But to prove his point, the author proceeded to name a female British aid worker as the "spy" and "architect of Nasir Declaration" who he asserts was used by the Khartoum government to persuade her husband to "stage a coup against the C-N-C of the SPLM/A."

While conceding that Dr. Garang “led the SPLM/A in a dictatorial, one-man-rule styles in the spirit of his mentor the Marxist-Leninist Ethiopian President Mengistu Haile Mariam” and that the SPLM/A under Dr. Garang was “decidedly an authoritarian politico-military liberation movement...with no democratic structures,” the veteran politician rationalizes that the movement’s “first and foremost strategy was to liberate territory and communities.....before giving practical realization to the principles it professed-justice, equality, development, democracy, participation and inclusiveness.” Nonetheless, the author proceeded to join the Nasir faction of the liberation movement and its avatar the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) which were lead by the same person he had earlier accused of being spy for Khartoum government. In yet another ‘twisted contradiction,’ the author, who was candid in Chapter Four of this book about his collaboration with the Khartoum regime of the day in arming the Anyanya II forces against the SPLA in early 1980s, abandoned SSIM, accusing political nemesis of having ‘hijacked’ the movement and ‘selling out’ to the Khartoum government by concluding the Khartoum Peace Agreement in 1997.

Before leading the reader into his new role as peacemaker, the author punctuates Chapter Five with a brilliant analysis of the local impact of some regional and international political events in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including the fall of Berlin Wall, the overthrow of the pro-SPLM regime in Ethiopia, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the rise of the call for self-determination in the former states of the Soviet Union. He avers the “SPLM/A Nasir rebellion was partly a consequent of this ideological shift.”

Chapter Six (My political work from Swedish Exile and Beyond) underscores the “weariness of an elderly veteran freedom fighter with the wars, bloodshed and the destruction war occasions” in South Sudan. In spite of his best intensions as a mediator of internecine factional conflicts, the author remains trapped to the very end in the suffocating labyrinth of the notorious ‘contradictions of the struggle for the liberation of South Sudan’. As he pursued his laudable efforts to achieve reconciliation among feuding South(ern) Sudanese actors, not only did the veteran politician exhibit a contradictory visceral reaction to the reconciliation that took place between leaders of warring factions in 2002; but he has also remained uncharitable toward former political foes whom he labeled ‘stooges’ of the ‘Arab North Sudan Government’. Politicians who broke ranks with Dr. John Garang (as the author did in 1991) and later proceeded to form their own political parties were not spared the wrath of the author. He refers to them as politicians who ‘betrayed the cause of South Sudanese liberations.’

Chapter Six concludes the book with the following swearing questions: Shouldn’t we have acknowledged the entrenchment of inter-tribal hatred born of massive acts of ‘genocide’ committed by both opposing parties? Shouldn’t we have acknowledged the entrenchment of militaristic culture in Southern society over those decades of struggle? While the answers to the troubling rhetoric queries must be in the affirmative, each of the two questions solicits a pertinent question that exposes the long-term impact of the ‘twisted contradictions of the struggle for the liberation of South Sudan’ on the culture of the people of South Sudan. Shouldn’t it, therefore, be acknowledged that the entrenched inter-tribal hatred is the inevitable outcome of the tribally-based parochial politics that have informed the politico-military

steps and alliances of South(ern) Sudanese politicians in the past thirty-five years? Shouldn't it be acknowledged also that the entrenched militaristic culture in the society is the inevitable outcome of having relegated fundamental principles (justice, equality, democracy, participation and inclusiveness) to the end rung of the liberation agenda over those decades of struggle?

Conclusion

Having contributed selflessly to the cause of the liberation of South Sudan during the past decades, Daniel Koat Mathews has written a book that will undoubtedly enrich the contemporary history of South Sudan. Schooled in the best public schools during the golden era of African education, Mr. Mathews writes in an impeccable language, adding more luster to *The Struggle for liberation of South Sudan*. The author's Etonnian-like style of writing must have undoubtedly simplified the work of the publishers and the editors, resulting in a well-written book that contains only a couple of insignificant typographical errors.

D.K. Mathews' *The struggle for the Liberation of South Sudan* is a-must-read book not only because of its valuable retrospective, but because it lamentably reveals how crucial political issues, including devolution of power and the fight against tribalism and corruption, remain as illusive today as they were in the 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, it is not every day that one reads firsthand account of how a South Sudanese child hid with other seven-year-olds among water reeds in the Sobat River in remote eastern part of South Sudan during World War II, and watched in awe and bewilderment as Mussolini's warplanes thundered overhead on their way to bomb Allies troops in a nearby village.



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