

SPLA/SPLM: Breaking the Totemic Taboo

Atem Garang Dekuek

From historical perspective, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA) has for long shied away and avoided self-criticism as a method of self-correction, a process which has been lacking and perceived as if it was a totemic taboo in the Movement since its inception in 1983. In the light of this perceived fear of self-criticism there were counter accusations between the leadership of the Movement, the Army and the intelligentsia of the organization each trying to justify why discussions on ideology and programs of the Movement were not opened to different layers of the Movement. In order to understand the origins of this totemic taboo it is important to ask when was this taboo created and institutionalized in the SPLM and why it was condoned? Who were the high priests guarding the sacred shrine of this taboo within the Movement? To answer these questions, it is important to briefly examine the thirty years of the historical evolution of the SPLM/A.

Mr. Dekuek is currently the SPLM Chief Whip, Former Deputy Speaker representing SPLM in Sudan National Legislative Assembly

SPLA/M was founded in 1983 as an outcome and response to a long political education/enlightenment and social orientation by the people of South Sudan, against bad governance of the Arabised rulers of Sudan. It was basically formed as socialist oriented movement according to the SPLM Manifesto (31st July 1983).

The main objectives of the Movement were defined as follows: "The SPLA/SPLM is convinced of the correctness of its socialist orientation. The SPLA/SPLM program is based on objective realities of the Sudan and provides a correct solution to the nationality and religious questions within the context of a United Socialist Sudan, thereby preventing the country from otherwise inevitable disintegration".

Based on the stated objectives, the SPLA/SPLM was established as a socialist oriented organization; however it was not clear as to who was tasked to be the vanguard of this socialist organization. While the Manifesto has provided an answer to this question by categorizing the people of Southern Sudan into different categories, it seems that this categorization sowed the seeds of disharmony with in the Movement and fault lines were drawn as the

SPLM members were grouped into segments. This categorization is conspicuous in terms stated in the Manifesto. The Manifesto is talking about perceived Internal Real and Potential Enemies of the SPLA/SPLM. For example, in chapter nine, paragraph 24.I (b) under sub-title: “The Southern Sudanese Bourgeoisified and Bureaucratic elite”; it says:

“This elite falls in two main categories, those who were and those who were not associated with Anya-nya I. their interest is the same, although they have internal differences as to who should be dominant politically in the South. Their real interest, like that of Northern elite, is self-enrichment including the building of multi-storey buildings and amassment of other forms of wealth. Under the circumstances, either of these categories of the Southern elite will try to hi-jack the SPLA/SPLM by infiltrating its leadership and taking it over for their own advantage, or failing to hi-jack the SPLA/SPLM they will try to organize their own political parties similar to those of the 1960s with likely assistance from international reactionaries”.

From this classification of Southern Sudanese the SPLM Manifesto has also made no distinction between the Southern and Northern elites. This is made clearer in the same paragraph mentioned above which says :

“The Southern and Northern bourgeoisified and bureaucratic elites will sometimes be in conflict with each other as they were during the 17 years war, and at times in collusion as they were in 1972 when they concluded the Addis Ababa Agreement. Both will always try to deceive the people by using the nationality and religious questions to further their own advantage and keep the Sudanese people in both Southern and Northern Sudan and divided and weak.”

Similarly the SPLM Manifesto has perceived the leadership of Anya-nya II as reactionary commanders a perception or description that makes them a category separate from the one referred to above.

In article 24.1 (d) we read that:

“These commanders will try to protect their warlord interests as these will be threatened by a people’s revolutionary war, which necessarily prohibits any acts of banditry. It is also likely that reactionary political parties posing in some form as South Sudanese Liberation Movement will spring up and try to collude with Anya-nya II bandits.”

From the quotations provided above it is possible to deduce that the SPLM was SPLA thus in essence it was fully a military oriented organization that never had platforms for other views even within the framework of one organization that was declared as socialist oriented organization, meant as people’s based-movement.

SPLM/Historical Groups

From onset it appeared that all aspects of the Movement were militarized including intellect contributions or any other non-military professions. The militarist-oriented management that was adopted by the Movement had varying acceptance by three

distinct groups that profess different political background, ideological orientation and social outlook. Those varying positions within the SPLA/M since 1983, which latently persisted on, through 1991, the Nassir split, up to this era of independence. The groups with their varying views were:

1. The first section amongst the SPLA/M membership was composed of students of various standards, Anya-Nya two fighters, soldiers of all ranks from Sudan organised forces and magnitude of people from rural areas; this section believed that militarization of all aspects of the liberation was the right method and will enhance and achieve SPLA/M objectives in the possible shortest time as well as a means that would bring tight centralized management and discipline that leads to a cohesive united Movement. This section constituted the majority of the manpower of the Movement; they accepted the Movement’s program of re-socialization (regardless of who designed it or formulated its substance), which the SPLA/M was implementing throughout its all-military training and political orientation centers. This group was ready for this re-socialization without any resistance or reservations. This group was, led by Dr. John Garang de Mabior, Karabino Kuanyin Bol, William Nyuon Bany, Salva Kiir Mayardit and somehow, Arok Thon Arok. All were former officers in the Sudanese army.

2. The second group of the Movement membership was mainly composed of politicians and political activists with different political backgrounds, orientations, and ideological beliefs. This category saw to it that there should exist two parallel complementary wings of the Movement namely: military wing (SPLA) and political wing (SPLM); each one with specified detailed tasks and activities while both effectively coordinated by one military-politico leadership. They thought this would give a room for plural opinions within the Movement and that will strengthen and unite the file and rank of the Movement. This group was not ready for any new ideological political orientation or re-socialization save only a professional military training. This group was, spearheaded by veteran politicians, Joseph Odohu, Akuot Atem de Mayen, Samuel Gai Tut, Martin Majier Gai and Benjamin Bol Akok. All were professional politicians and former ministers in Southern Sudan Regional Government in Juba between 1972 -1983. None of them survived the war.

3. While the last segment of the Movement membership was mainly composed of intellectuals and former civil servants in government of Sudan; whom the Manifesto refers to them as, “The Southern Sudanese Bourgeoisified and Bureaucratic Elite.” This group thought and propagated for an organization that should have recognized, and utilized, experiences, specializations and knowledge of the intellectuals in war effort; being politically, administratively or in management of civil affairs as well as in psychological warfare. This group was swinging between the other two powerful groups and chose to adopt self-censorship throughout the whole period of the war. This group was not favoring re-socialization or subjecting people to an ideological political orientation, however; they underwent military training and ideologically framed political orientation based on socialist philosophy. This group did not have clear leaders though the socialist oriented elements known later as Progressive Officers were in the lead.

From the above discussion, it seems that the SPLM as it is today has not discarded the militarism spirit and still has not embraced principles of participatory democracy in decision-making processes. The Chukudum SPLM First National Convention tried to reconcile and integrate the political views, ideological stance and opinions of the second and third groups of the SPLM of the early years of the Movement, therefore it

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The SPLM of the early years of the Movement, therefore it was resolved by the Chukudum Convention that there should exist three entities in liberated areas under SPLA/M namely: SPLA as absolutely concerned with military affairs, SPLM to deal with political and diplomatic issues while CANS i.e. Civil Administration of the New Sudan, to handle civil administration issues such as: recruitment, provision of food to the SPLA, education, health, relief and maintenance of peaceful coexistence among the war-affected communities etc. This was hoped to have been the starting of three distinct institutions of the Movement

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From 1994 CANS embarked on establishing civil administration institutions but there were no laws or rules that regulate and unify the work in all the SPLA/M controlled areas! But the SPLM and SPLA continued to be organically linked like joined-twins or Siam-twins. This was where the Movement missed a golden opportunity to build a strong institutionalized political party that is rooted in rural areas and led by well-trained and committed cadres from among the freedom fighters. It seems that it was this mistake that is haunting the party today and it has resulted in three types of party paralysis or party inability in bracing institutionalism leading for sure to its future disintegration and fragmentation.

There is ample time to rectify this weakness before the next third convention. For the party to be revived throughout the country, it has to adapt institutionalism in next Convention.

The Post CPA New Grouping Trend

Apart from the the three catagories mentioned above, there is another new grouping trend that had developed and built up within the SPLM, whether intended or a continuation of the old contradictions in SPLM political orientation that was preached during the last 30 years; the causes are not crystal yet. The new political faults will lead to party quake when these faults collide if the party does not rejuvenate and reactivates its political setup from the grass-root to the highest organs.

The new political fault lines that are surfacing upon the old differences in the party (ideological, perceptual, organizational and even tribal) are emanating from three camps that have evolved and built up in the party during the period of the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) implementation 2005 - 2011. During that period the SPLM opened its doors to whoever would express his or her intention to join the party; there were no due processes to scrutinize for obtaining membership of the party. It seems that the SPLM adopted guerilla method of recruitment that was practiced by the SPLA. It was normal that when individuals decide to join the SPLA, they were just grouped and sent to training centers without any criteria of even physical fitness, and many people with physical disabilities were trained and issued with rifles and military equipment! This disorganized and unprofessional handling of recruitment of new members into SPLA was copied by the SPLM in 2005 in admitting new members into the party without political scrutiny. This carried with it seeds for further disharmony and disunity in the SPLM.

Before explaining the three new groupings it is legitimate to ask what happened to the SPLM/A previous groupings? What was the fate of each group during the two decades of the liberation war?

To answer these questions, it is important to trace each group without any necessity of

mentioning names at this stage of our history. The first category led by Dr. John Garang, was the largest; composed of former students from various educational levels plus former Sudanese ‘soldiers’ of different ranks and training, and additionally those who came from rural areas in their thousands. As stated earlier this category was the main fighting force that was meant to be the core and vanguard of the liberation movement and to lead transformation of the old Sudan and create New Sudan that was visionalised to bring justice, equality, prosperity, democracy, unity and progress. The multitude of the villagers that flogged the SPLA/M were to be commanded by the SPLM molded elites who were free from allegiance to any previous political organisation in Sudan and disciplined soldiers whom were assumed to be professional military experts, which was not the case. This group was the main SPLM and occupied the most senior positions in the Party and the government since 2005 following the signing of the CPA.

The second group that was led by professional politicians was defeated in 1984, when they were dislodged from Ethiopia.

The elements of the third group composed of demoralized former experienced and knowledgeable civil servants were pulled along with the rest and participated in physical war effort but with limited intellect contribution, though some later on, when negotiations became imperative, were pulled to the center of decision-making and contributed immensely in negotiating the CPA.

The new three groups, which have already demarcated their borders and sphere of political operations, each one is targeting monopoly of the SPLM’s historical legacy that would be used as a vehicle to secure the support of the grass-root particularly in the rural areas are:

1. The first group under the leadership of Salva Kiir Mayardit, is well organized and looks to have even chosen its methods and tools to use to achieve its goals. This group is composed from some of SPLM former front line commanders and new members who came from other parties that were operating inside Sudan during the period of the liberation war. The new members are highly organized and they know how to maneuver and move forward.

2. The second group is led by those who are christened as Garang’s Boys, mainly Garang’s molded cadres and war veterans who were in the front lines, all former combatants whom are discharged from the SPLA and became party cadres who have good rural-based support while this group is disorganized, it has not identified its tools and methods to utilize in this new front. They lack the necessary organizational capacity but have strong relations with Western centers.

3. The third group is, led by Dr. Riek Machar, this group has its roots in 1991 split and looks at the other two groups as being led by incompetent individuals. It has strong linkages with Western centers.

However, the question remains, what political ideology does each camp profess? What is new with each group or is it old wine in new bottles? What methodology will each group use to mobilize the masses?

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each other, but it is only competition for leadership and positions, while each group assumes that it is the orthodox SPLM. The possible trend for future and potential mobilization of supporters will be based on ethnicities from which the leaders of each group originate. This trend will be possible simply because there is organizational inability in the SPLM that has led to lack of institutionalism, and paralyzed the party and consequently rendered it dysfunctional. This situation if goes the way it is progressing, will lead to disintegration of the SPLM.

If the leadership of the SPLM party does not make arrangements to rejuvenate the Party through retreat and self-criticism; the SPLM will disintegrate before the National Convention and before the next general elections in the country.



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P.O.BOX 619, Hai Jeberona next to Sunshine Hospital
Juba, South Sudan
Tel: +211 (0) 920 310 415 | +211 (0) 915 652 847
www.ss-csps.org