

# Response of Southern Sudanese Intellectuals to African Nationalism

by

Albino Deng Ajuok  
University of Juba, Juba, Southern Sudan  
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Albino Deng Ajuok was born in South Sudan. He is the Assistant to Madam Rebecca Nandeng (the widow of the late John Garang) who is the advisor to His Excellency the President of South Sudan on human rights and gender issues in the Office of the President of South Sudan. Ajuok attended universities in Sudan and Egypt, specializing in human rights protection.

*Editor note:* This paper is based on a lecture series organized by the author, B.F. Bankie and John Pangech, representing the third lecture (the first was delivered by *Journal of Pan African Studies* editorial member Dr. Runoko Rashidi, and the second by Dr. Peter Adwok Nyaba) in the series. IMZ

## Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the journey of the African intellectual within a globalised world community, juxtaposing neo-colonialism in Africa and its inability to achieve self-sustaining development, except for reluctant agreements on the need for economic unity. Next, the presentation correspondingly detail how intellectuals have become part of the national elite, and have thus distancing themselves from the masses when they can provide solutions, beyond their own self interests, by virtue of their education, and suggest that they can/should contribute to national development consistent with the goals of African nationalism and Pan-Africanism.

Lemelle (1992) states in *Pan-Africanism for Beginners* that the struggle of Africans for a place and an ideological frame in the modern world began when Antam Goncalvez took twelve Africans from the continent of Africa as slave labourers in 1441. More has been published about the European-led Atlantic slave trade than Arab-led slavery, which continues to up until today. It is only fairly recently that Africans have begun to research Arab-led slavery and its impact on Africa, from the African perspective. Arab-led slavery of Africans represents the largest and, in time, the longest involuntary removal of any indigenous people in the history of humanity. To understand the impact of this slavery, the victims of that slavery, in this instance, the Black people of Sudan, will have to write their own history. This is the work that research organizations, such as the Kush Institution in Juba, will have to undertake.

## **The Western Hemisphere**

In the Western Hemisphere the enslavement of Africans gave birth to their emancipation in North America and the Caribbean. In that process of some five hundred years, Africans in North America passed from being enslaved to being African Americans. They had to struggle to attain their constitutional rights as citizens in the United States, Canada, Jamaica and other countries. In countries such as Jamaica in the Caribbean it was with Black emancipation, Rastafarianism and reggae in the 1970-80s that power shifted from the 'coloured' as in Sudan today to Black. It was that struggle which created African nationalism; that is a political socio-cultural and philosophical articulation of the rights of the African in the modern world, rights such as liberty, equality and human rights.

Part of the struggle for the dignity of Africans in North America, connected those Africans with the continent of Africa from whence they had been forcibly taken and enslaved. Thus, most enslaved Black people brought to America would gladly have returned to Africa. And through time, the descendants of the enslaved knew little of Africa, but whenever problems in the United States overwhelmed them, some would want to immigrate to their Fatherland.

After slavery was abolished in the United States, in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the period 1880 – 1900 a major question being asked was 'what role should Blacks play in American life'? Hence, enslaved Black Africans supplied their muscle to develop agriculture, especially in the southern part of the United States; they also serviced White households as domestic servants and worked in industries as well as factories in the eastern part of the United States. If their labour was no longer to be free, was there to be a place for them in American society? Many Whites felt that Blacks should be encouraged to leave the United States and return to Africa. Or if they were to remain in the United States, they should be a dependent, non-political and landless labouring class. Such a solution fitted well with the view held by Whites that Africans were uncivilized and marginalized, as happened to Africans in South Africa and as experienced by Africans in the Arab world, such as Khartoum.

Between 1890 and 1910 two prominent Black leaders emerged in the United States, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Washington, a teacher from the south of the US taught his followers to accept rather than protest the segregation, disenfranchisement and inequality enforced by Whites. And that they should work hard, accumulate money and eventually win respect and equality. Du Bois was a northern Black intellectual with degrees from Harvard University and Berlin. Du Bois insisted that Blacks should use education and culture as a bridge between Blacks and Whites. Therefore, Washington promoted accommodation, while Du Bois promoted protest.

It was White America which established the American Colonization Society, which was dedicated to assisting African Americans freed from slavery to immigrate to Liberia for settlement, just as the Abolitionist Movement worked to end slavery, had been led by White Americans, mainly church organizations.

Since the arrival of Africans as enslaved people in North America, there was a movement amongst them wishing to return, hence to repatriate to Africa. Many did return to Africa, settling mainly in Liberia in West Africa, because Liberia was a self-governing state for the formerly enslaved, and the first 'independent' state in West Africa. This movement to return to Africa had its political expression in the name 'African nationalism' which could be defined as:

- Africans and persons of African origin recognize Africa as their homeland
- Solidarity among men and women of African descent
- Belief in a distinct 'African personality'
- Restoration of African history
- Pride in African cultural history
- Africa for Africans in church and state
- The expectation of a united Africa and the restoration of Africa to its former leading role

The words 'African nationalism/black nationalism/Pan-Africanism' used here are interchangeable, and to be more precise, African nationalism is the political theory or definition of the African quest for emancipation, liberty, freedom and equality in the land of birth, whereas Pan-Africanism is the international component of African nationalism.

The self-government period of 1950-2000 in the small states created by the European powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884 was meaningless as none of those states, except perhaps South Africa, was viable in itself. And according to many, Africa would only meaningfully develop if those states united. The ideology for unifying the states of Africa; the states peopled by Africans outside Africa (e.g., Haiti, Jamaica etc.), the African Diaspora; people of African descent in the West (e.g., Americas, Caribbean, Europe etc.) and the East (e.g., Pacific, Australia, Arabia, Gulf and North Africa etc.) represent the quest for Pan-Africanism.

During the five hundred years of Black enslavement and colonialism by the West and its aftermath, in the Caribbean and the Americas – north and south - there was a continuing belief in the destiny of Africans as members of an African Nation. Marcus Garvey, the Black Nationalist from the Caribbean, who lived in both the United States and England, expounded on the concept of the African nation, which unified all people of African descent. In such a nation there was no place for Arabs or the White settlers of Southern Africa. This was a Black project for Black Africans exclusively, which drew its conceptualization from the Black experience in White society, first in the United States, and later in Europe.

The later day expression of the early nationalism from North America spread throughout the world, where there were Africans. It returned to Africa with those who emigrated back to Africa, to places such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. People such as Nkrumah of Ghana and Azikiwe of Nigeria were much influenced, as students in the U.S. by the Black Nationalism they found in North America, long after they had become leading figures in their home countries. Nkrumah continued to admire, respect and emulate Marcus Garvey as his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) established branches all over Africa, and had a positive influence in the conscientisation of African politics in places such as South Africa and Namibia. Here mention is made of Mohamed Ali Duse (1867-1944), the Sudano-Egyptian who was active in Pan Africanism in Europe and America, as well as Nigeria, where he finally passed on. Had he returned to north-west Africa, Africanism would have been more embedded earlier into Sudanese politics?

### **Black Nationalism: Linking North America and Africa**

There is a direct link between the development of Black nationalism in North America and African nationalism on the African continent. Liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, which initially had branches throughout Anglophone southern Africa, being a Pan-African organization in its early formation, and the South West Peoples Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia, were inspired in their early formation by Black Nationalism from North America and the Caribbean, particularly by Garvey's ideas. Both of these two liberation movements are ruling parties today in South Africa and Namibia. Both fought for national liberation.

No exception to this experience was the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM). However the experience of this Movement dealt with the geopolitical realities of another part of Africa, north-east Africa, which had been settled and colonized by different colonialists, in this instance British and Egyptian. Thus, the study of the writings from the Anya-nya guerrilla nationalist war fit within the frame of African nationalism placing the root causes and responses for the initiation of the southern Sudanese liberation struggle, in the same context as the liberation wars seen in southern and central Africa, the difference being, as stated, was that in the Sudan, the historical oppressor had traditionally been Anglo/Arab.

The late Dr. John Garang in his paper, delivered on his behalf by Dr. Barnaba Marial Benjamin, to the 17<sup>th</sup> All Africa Students Conference (AASC) 28-29<sup>th</sup> May 2005, held in Windhoek, Namibia, referred to the SPLM approach to solving the Sudanese civil war. He stated that those modalities 'are based on the Pan-Africanist ideals of fundamental change, unity and national renaissance'. He went on to say 'that the SPLM/A is sincerely and totally committed to the ideals of Pan-Africanism'. He connected the Sudan and the struggle of the Pan-African movement. Thus, it is worth quoting what the late leader had to say:

*'The history of the Sudanese people has been one of continuous struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors, the invaded and the invaders, between the exploited and the exploiters. From our ancient past to the present day, the Sudanese people have always struggled for freedom, justice, and human dignity and for a better life. Our present revolutionary struggle, spearheaded by the SPLM/SPLA, is an integral part and a continuation of these past struggles of our people. The SPLA recourse to armed struggle in 1983 was a resumption of earlier wars before, during and after colonialism. All these wars and struggles were aimed and are aimed at regaining African dignity and nationhood that has been mutilated over the centuries'.*

John Garang went on to contextualize the struggle for liberation of the people of South Sudan with reference to the civilization of Kush, Pharaonic Egypt and the early Christian, Islamic and colonial states which appeared and disappeared in the soils of South Sudan.

Garang also informed us of two additional points:

*'If we visit the corridors of history from the biblical Kush to the present, you will find that the Sudan and the Sudanese have always been there'.*

*'It is necessary to affirm and for the Sudanese to remind themselves that we are a historical People, because there are persistent and concerted efforts to push us off the rails of history'*

In contrast to the Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath, the Afro-Arab experience has been buried and treated as top secret. Muslim academics, both Arab and African, would prefer, for example, to hide the truths of the Arab slave trade, which preceded the Western encounter with Africa by a millennium. If the truth is uncomfortable, it is impossible to move forward towards historical reconciliation through 'holocaust denial' and disingenuous arguments. Arab slavery in Sudan, Niger and Mauritania continues today.

In the three countries the colonial dispensation was to leave in power Arabised and Westernized minorities, to serve as continuing guardians of their interests and in the process block African nationalism obtaining political power in these countries, so effectively making these states buffer states between Arabia in north Africa and Africans south of the Sahara. So once again, the majority of Sudan and Mauritania were to serve as cannon fodder for colonial interest, not their own interests. Consequently, South Sudan had to fight 'Africa's longest war' against Arab hegemony, as represented by the Khartoum ruling Arabised African elite. Sudan is indeed living through a period of incomplete decolonization; a problem of decolonization.

### **Cheikh Anta Diop: The African Origins of Social Development**

Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senegalese nuclear physicist is an icon to many who have studied Africa's place and role in the world. Apart from being a leading Egyptologist, Diop was also active in Senegalese politics and served several terms in prison as a consequence during the rule of Senghor, first President of Senegal and a leader of the francophone assimilationist concept of Negritude.

Diop authored the books *'The African Origins of Civilization, Myth and Reality'* and *'The cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity'*. Despite attempts to deny him a doctoral degree, it was after several presentations that his doctoral thesis was accepted by a leading French university. The thrust of his research was that the Pharonic Egyptian civilization was a Black culture. He based his argument not on speculative historical conclusions, but on scientific analysis secured by carbon dating. The thesis is now generally accepted, but is still in denial in Arabia and Asia.

If Kush is to be established internationally as the antecedent and precursor to Egypt, as a civilization and advanced culture, that will likewise have to be proven by Black Sudanese field researchers. If the history of Pan Africanism, as known in the Western hemisphere, does not include reference to African achievements such as Kush and Egypt, before the arrival of the Arabs in the area, this anomaly will have to be corrected advisedly by the people of the area. The dearth of information has been such that it is only now that the implementation of some of Diop's research findings on issues such as the African origins of social development in north east Africa and the Nile Delta are beginning to be felt as a political and social reality in the social development in this area of Africa.

## **Afro-Arab Borderlands**

Current developments in Darfur are a natural progression of the long war in South Sudan against Arab hegemony. It was the Addis Abba Agreement of 1972 and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 which established that there could be a re-assertion of direct African rule in this contested area of Africa. The lessons were not long in being understood in Darfur and amongst the marginalized in general in Sudan. Indeed the strength of African nationalism in Sudan, in the Afro-Arab borderlands, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century had not been seen since the ancient times of African civilization in the area.

This was an indication of the unraveling of the decolonization model used in both Sudan and in Mauritania, which had set off minority Arabised groups to rule Black Africans, pinning down Africans militarily, economically and culturally. Such a power dispensation was no longer tolerable or practical, and defeated the ends of democracy, of one man/woman, one vote. The colonial dispensation could never have been sustained by peaceful means, and was meant to be secured by blood and guts, being a recipe for protracted war in Sudan and state terror in Mauritania. We are seeing the implications of a chain reaction in Darfur and can expect manifestations further afield in the Afro-Arab borderlands, moving westwards into Chad, Niger, Mali and Mauritania, where despite the appearances of a democratic transition, this is actually cosmetic and will need to be translated into popular democracy at the grassroots level, with equitable power distribution amongst the races, with an end to the suppression of African culture and the marginalization of African self worth.

At some point the issue of reparations will have to be addressed. This issue came up at the Conference on Arab-led Slavery of Africans convened by the Center for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) in Johannesburg on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2003. The issue of reparations emerged at the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related intolerances held in Durban, South Africa from the 28<sup>th</sup> of August to the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2001 conference when its NGO Forum were in favor of reparations for Arab- led slavery

## **Arab Influence/Control: An African Response**

Hunwick in the '*Global Dimension of the African Diaspora*' refers to the vast exodus of enslaved Africans taken to the Mediterranean, the Middle East and South Asia after the establishment of an Islamic World Empire in the seventh and eight centuries AD. Ronald Segal in '*Black Diaspora*' (1995) and '*Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Diaspora*' (2001) explains that the Islamic slave trade provided the enslaved more than domestic work, but also sexual and military service. In the Arab system, some of the enslaved achieved positions of authority and a few even became rulers, and with enslavement came Arabisation and Islamisation. The process of captivity, subjugation and transportation were extremely cruel. Yet, no useful purpose is served by comparing Arabic and Western slavery; both were inhuman, and both were/are crimes against humanity in international law.

Whereas the Western Diaspora was conscientised by Black nationalism and thus enlightened, being able to achieve some integration into the U.S. political system, so that we have a Barrack Obama today, as a Black candidate for the presidency of the USA, the Arab experience, in the Eastern Diaspora, constituted by Arabia, North Africa, the Gulf and other states at points eastwards, allowed for no such political empowerment of Africans, indeed the African identity was forcefully taken away, denied. Due to Arabia's Arabisation and Islamisation policies, in areas of Arab influence Africans were forcefully Arabised and de-nationalised as Africans. No conscious African could attain political office in Arabia and any person of African origin aspiring to political office could only hope to attain such by his zealous adoption of Arab culture. Now this is being challenged at the periphery of the Arab world, such as in Sudan. This would be a matter of concern to the Arab League. African cultural penetration and conscientisation, on a level playing field, will pose challenges to forced invasive cultures intent on effecting popular culture within the continental space.

The ability of Africa to reverse invasive cultures will not depend on economic hegemony, but on conscientisation in the middle strata, representing a re-evaluation of traditional socio/cultural mores and a rejection of previous tendencies towards a wholesale cultural assimilation by elites, as a shortcut to development. Thus the weak link in the challenges posed is the youth, wherein the concept of modernity, in the past, had seen when African youth reject their own cultures in favor of other identities. In South Sudan the underline issues of the conflict created an awareness of an auto-developmental approach from the inside turning outwards; rather than what was the experience in most of Africa, especially the coastal areas, where the youth were adopted as a priority, leading to denationalization and chronic imitation where modes of development are the choices of sovereign governments. The experience here is that we defend our own and that development is auto-centered, being geared to internal needs, and where extraneously driven development has meant development based on fossil fuels and mineral extraction in a zero sum, leading to a race to the bottom, hence:



- The Joint Communiqué issued on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1999 at the conclusion of the seminar on the Cultural and Social Dimensions of Afro-Arab Co-operation convened by the Arab League Education, Culture and Science Organization (ALECSO), with the Arab Research Centre for Afro-Arab Studies (ARCAASD), led by Prof Helmi Sharaway and the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) in Cape Town, resolved that culture is the central pillar in the relations between the peoples of the two regions.
- The Conference on Arab-Led Slavery of Africans convened by CASAS in Johannesburg on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2003, which brought together scholars from the Afro-Arab borderlands, including Dr. Peter Adwok Nyaba from South Sudan and others from Mauritania, concluded with the call for a civilization dialogue between the Arab and African people. In a situation where the African origins of civilization are not taught in schools in North Africa, such a dialogue has yet to begin and could best be located at the African Union (AU), which should have such dialogue as its principal work.
- Dr. John Garang in his contribution to the 17<sup>th</sup> All Africa Students Conference (AASC) called on the conference to put back into the name of Africa its true meaning and content of a nation, the 'African Nation', rather than the 'African continent'. Garang stated that the time has come for Africans to think through what constitutes the African Nation. He asked if all parts of continental Africa are parts of this African Nation. Arabs have their own nation, incorporated into the Arab League. Garang asked if we want in our nation people belonging to another nation. He stated that the time has arrived for African youth to determine who would lead the national movement

Continuing, Garang states:

*'The concept of the African nation must stick and become a living ideological weapon of struggle for the unity of the Africa people. The concept of the African nation with a historical mission and destiny, must be taught in all our schools beginning from childhood, and African students and youth must put pressure, including demonstrations, against African leaders who do not actively promote the cause'.*

Accordingly, Garang at page 206 of the first edition of the proceedings of 17<sup>th</sup> AASC was clear that the African nation must integrate the African Diaspora. At page 196 of Prah's book 'The African Nation', he declares the view that the states, based in part, on the divisions made at the Berlin Conference of 1884, which were sanctioned by the Pope, and which were accorded 'Independence' by the colonial powers are not nations in the making, even though they aspire to be nations. The neo-colonial entities are still borne and have no viable sustainable basis; they are the products of the deliberate balkanization of Africa, chopping it into small pieces, with flags and anthems.

## **From Garvey to South Sudan: Journey of the African Intellectual**

Furthermore, during the five hundred years of Africa's colonial experience with the West the politics of decolonization, and thus African liberation came via Black/African nationalism. The African National Congress (ANC) originally engrossed most of Anglophone Southern Africa, having branches in those countries. The African Nation was originally articulated as a concept by men such as Blyden and Garvey. That nation encompassed all of Africa, including its Diaspora. Cheikh Anta Diop, mentioned earlier, was clear that the cultural unity of Africa could include only Africans, thus by implication excluding Arabs. This point was also made by Dr. Peter Adwok Nyaba in his presentation at the University of Juba on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2007 in Samani Hall, stating that Arabs are not Africans.

Finally to contextualize the term 'intellectual' in the broad African experience. In this part of the continent there were learned men both in Kush and Pharaohic Egypt. These cultures were obliterated subsequently by invading hordes. Having done no research on our literary traditions, we next encounter African intellectuals much later under European colonialism. The Arab world had no place for the African per se, only for the Arab or the Arabised African. The early ones being pressed into European education in West Africa were shipped off to European church institutions. African traditional societies in general were communal and 'whole', not highly stratified. Our earliest recorded groups of intellectuals produced in these circumstances were the Black nationalists in North America.

This paper has given an overview of the journey of African intellectual. In the globalised world of today, where Africa has been unable to end colonialism and is in the era of neo-colonialism, without indication as to how it is to achieve self-sustaining development, except a reluctant agreement on the need for some type of economic unity; hence, our intellectual class educated on scholarships has formed part of the national elite, distancing itself from the 'people', whereas the interim constitution of South Sudan seeks education for all. The question is: are the educated in South Sudan, by virtue of their education positioned as a group, to provide solutions, beyond their own self interests?

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