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Weekly Review

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How the British Colonial Rule Contributed to Contemporary Underdevelopment in South Sudan: A Review of a Ph.D. Dissertation on the “Dinka Responses to the Early British Colonial Rule, 1900-1922,” by Mark Mijak Abiem

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1. Introduction

In the history of every society, there is always a generation that takes the lead to define and determine that society's destiny. This could, for example, be (a) a generation that stands and lives up to the promise of greater good or common interest; (b) a generation driven by the sheer power of will, skills, patriotism and determination to fight for liberty and, thus, free their people from the yoke of internal domination or external aggression; or (c) an enlightened generation that produces the most relevant, even consequential, stock of human knowledge from which all subsequent generations tend to draw inspiration

It is against the backdrop of the latest context that we must appreciate the contributions of the South Sudanese generation of intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s. Among the most notable ones are/were but not limited to Francis Mading Deng, Taban Lo Liyong, late Nyot Kook, late Akolde Ma'an Tier, late Dunstan Wai, late John Garang de Mabior, late Damazo Dut Majak Kocjok, late Lazarus Leek Mawut and late Mark Mijak Abiem.

Other prominent scholars of that generation included late Dr. James Dhab, late Dr. Paul Wani, late Ambrose Ahang Beny, and late Dr. Raphael Koba, to mention but a few. These academics braved and brazed the trail of South Sudan's intellectual history, having not only charted a new way forward but also fleshed out some of the most significant contributions of those who came before them and, therefore, shaped South Sudanese academic landscape in monumental ways. This, in my view, accords them the title of “academic giants” to whom the subsequent generations of South Sudan intellectuals are eternally indebted.

In this review, I examine the work of one of these giants: the late Dr. Mark Mijak Abiem's 1976 Ph.D. dissertation on the “Dinka Responses to the Early British Colonial Rule, 1900-1922.”

Born in today's South Sudan's Abyei State¹ in northern South Sudan, Abiem completed his bachelor's degree in 1973 at the University of Khartoum's History Department where he graduated with high honors. And although he ranked first in his class, the second ranked student, an "Arab," was immediately appointed as a Teaching Assistant, a prestigious position at the time. He was subsequently sent to England for both his master's and Ph.D. studies. In the meantime, Abiem took up a job as an Administrative Officer while his appeal for scholarship was under review. Eighteen months after graduation, however, Abiem became a Teaching Assistant at his alma mater's History Department. He would later be sent to the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in England, where he obtained an MPhil under the supervision of a renowned English historian, Professor Richard Gray. Upon completing his master's degree, Mark immediately enrolled for a Ph.D. program at the same university and, supervised, again, by Professor Gray.

Dr. Gray would later remark that Abiem was, arguably, the best and brightest student that SOAS had ever had during the course of his time as a professor at SOAS. Unfortunately, while on his way from Khartoum to South Sudan as part of his Ph.D. fieldwork, Abiem fell in an ambush in which he was killed by "bandits," along with tens of others. Together with these other victims, the alleged culprits' hurriedly buried him in an unknown mass grave. His Ph.D. would later be awarded posthumously.²

While this review is part memorial of Abiem's untimely departure, it is, more importantly, part commemorative celebration and appreciation of his magnificent contribution to the history of South Sudan's struggle for liberty and independence. The review specifically underscores Abiem's work on the Dinka "responses" to the British colonial rule in southern Sudan in the first half of the 20th century.

For this reason, I first examine what Abiem sees—and rightly so—as a cavalierly condescending British approach to colonial rule in Southern Sudan during this period. Second, I examine and analyze the nature of the Dinka "reactions" to British occupation of South Sudan in the same time period. Finally, I outline and discuss both the, (a)

¹ It is worth noting that at the time this paper went to the press, Abyei Area was still in limbo. That is because pursuant to the 2005

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Sudanese military junta and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement

(SPLM), the residents of Abyei were stipulated to conduct a referendum in which they were entitled to decide whether the area

would be part of the north or of South Sudan. Although this referendum was conducted in 2012, and the outcome was

overwhelmingly in favor of Abyei joining South Sudan, both countries were yet to recognize that outcome. This left Abyei in a

situation in which it did not, *de jure*, belong to either of the two countries. Yet in *de facto* terms, Abyei is ethnically, culturally and

politically part and parcel of South Sudanese territory, hence the 33rd State of South Sudan.

² According to his family, the vehicle in which Abiem and his fellow passengers were travelling from Kadugli to Abyei was fired at,

allegedly by bandits on May 15, 1977, killing most of them instantly, including him.

strengths; and (b) limitations, of Abiem’s thesis in the context of what I refer to as *deficient colonial literature*.

2. How An *Ad Hoc* British Colonial Occupation Led to Underdevelopment in South Sudan

2.1. The British View of Southern Sudan as a Territory without “Reward”

While the motivations for the late 19th century scramble for Africa by Western European nations were both economic and political in nature, many scholars agree that economic interests were the overriding factor in their competitive and strategic relations with one another and with Africa.³ That is because in the wake of the Industrial Revolution that saw a burgeoning of demand for raw materials to feed hungry industries in Western Europe, imperialist nations such as Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, Spain and Portugal set out to not only expand their territorial reach across the globe. They also, and more strategically, sought to increase the share of their economic pie in the global market as part of economic supremacy. Relentless cutthroat competitions among these powers, however, led them to reach a compromise on partitioning the African continent in accordance with the resolutions of the 1884-5 Berlin Conference.⁴ That also meant that if a given African territory did not, from an economic or military viewpoint, hold any promise for military or material reward—actual or potential—for the putative colonizing nation, that territory was not worth occupying.⁵ This is the background against which Abiem’s work helps us understand and appreciate the manner with which Great Britain approached, reluctantly occupied and, ultimately, colonized the then southern region of the Sudan, now the modern day Republic of South Sudan.

In his dissertation Abiem highlights the idea that during the initial occupation, the British viewed Southern Sudan as a territory without potential or actual utility to the British

³ See Ieuan Griffiths, “Inherited Political Boundaries” (1986) 152 *The Geographical Journal*, 204-216; Juthani Koponen, “The Petition of Africa: Scramble for a Mirage?” (1993) 2 *NJAS*, 117-135; Barry M. Ratcliffe, “The Economics of the Partition of Africa: Methods and Recent Research Trends” (1981) 15 *The Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 3-31; Joshua Dwayne Settles “The Impact of Colonialism on African Economic Development” (1996) *University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects*. http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/182 (accessed on Oct. 15, 2018); and Bill Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of African Society Since 1800, 2nd Edition* (London: Boulder, 1998).

⁴ For more discussion on the Berlin Conference, see Matthew Craven, “Between Law and History: the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and the Logic of Free Trade” (2015) 3 *London Rev.Int’l L.*, 31-59; Munene Macharia, “The United States and the Berlin Conference on the Partition of Africa, 1884-1885” (1990) 19 *TAJH.*, 73-79; and Juthani Koponen, “The Petition of Africa: A Scramble for a Mirage” (1993) *NJAS.*, 117-135.

⁵ Jonas Fossli Gjersø, “The Scramble for East Africa: British Motives Reconsidered, 1884–95” (2015) 43 *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 831-860.

public. That is because when the idea of occupying the region as a British colony came to be accorded serious considerations, Evelyn Baring Kromer, who was at the time the British Consul-General for Egypt (and, thus, of the Sudan by default) claimed that Southern Sudan was “a useless territory whose occupation was unlikely to be a satisfactory reward for the British public opinion for financial and military participation.”⁶

Kromer’s personal condescension towards Southern Sudan was even more bolstered when two British officers, namely Lieutenants H. L. H. Fell and Bimbashi Boulnoi, died of fever while on a temporary mission to the defunct regional Bhar el Ghazel Province (now divided into 10 states). The misfortune that befell Fell and Boulnoi in Bhar el Ghazel prompted Kromer to voice strong concerns and even “despair about the whole thing [colonial occupation],” leading him to declare that “the beastly country is not worth occupying at the cost of more “Fells” and “Boulnois.”⁷

What ultimately led to Britain’s long-term presence, occupation and, therefore, colonization of South Sudan was Britain’s strategic interest to secure full control of the Nile valley region, from Uganda to Egypt through the Sudan.⁸ This interest arose out of Britain’s concerns that other European nations, especially France and Belgium, were interested in taking over the region as a colonial territory. Indeed, France had already taken positive steps toward occupying the region, having at the time settled at the Fashoda Area, now located in the northeastern part of South Sudan, and was then the Seat of the Chollo Kingdom. It was, therefore, the strategic importance of the Nile valley to Britain that induced it “to stay in Southern Sudan for the purposes of holding rather than administering the country.”⁹ As it would later turn out, however, that *ad hoc* occupation transformed itself into a full-fledged colonization of the region as part of the Sudan, which was jointly colonized by Great Britain and Egypt, pursuant to the 1898 agreement between the two countries. This joint colonization was known as *condominium rule*.¹⁰

From reading Abiem’s description of the economic marginality of Southern Sudan to Great Britain during the colonial era, one can draw at least three major inferences as regards the impacts of such an attitude, not only during the colonial era but also to the

⁶ Mark M. Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule, 1900-1922” (1976) *Dissertation Submitted to the School of*

Oriental and African Studies, at 4. See also L. M. Sanderson, “Some Problem of Colonial Rule and Local Responses in the Southern Sudan” (1965) *Paper Read at S.O.A.S. Seminar on Colonial Rule and Local Response, Col. R./76/8* at 12; and LM.

Sanderson, “Conflict, Education, and New Awareness in the Southern Sudan,” in Godfrey N. Brown and Mervyn Hiskett, Eds.,

Conflict and Harmony in Education in Tropical Africa (London: AUP, 1975) at 104.

⁷ Robert O. Collins, *Land Beyond the Rivers: The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918* (New Haven: YUP, 1971) at 124.

⁸ Gjersø, “The Scramble for East Africa...,” *supra* note 5.

⁹ Collins, *Land Beyond the Rivers...*, *supra* note 7 at 94.

¹⁰ See, Ahmed Ibrahim Abushouk, “The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan: From Collaboration Mechanism to Party Politics, 1898–1956” (2010)

38 *JICWH.*, 207 at 214-216.

present day. First, the presence of the British in the region clearly undermined spontaneous regional progress and development. That is because the *ad hoc* British presence largely distracted the people of Southern Sudan from investing in their own economic and political structures that could have seen them develop into a nation or nations on their own. Such a view is not surprising, considering that Abiem was a close friend of Walter Rodney who was a household name among Pan-Africanists, especially for his theory on how stated and unstated policies of European colonial powers that sliced and diced up Africa underdeveloped the continent.¹¹ Second, this cavalier British view adversely played a major role in making the British colonial administration more reluctant to develop institutions of governance at the time. Yet in so doing, the British did not just willfully or inadvertently thwart South Sudan's spontaneous development into nationhood, as underlined above. It also served to stifle or undermine the development of institutions of governance under British tutelage. In the meantime, Britain had taken affirmative steps to build governance institutions in the northern part of the country.

To further the disparity between northern Sudan and Southern Sudan, the British moved to restrict free mobility between the two regions, pursuant to the dictates of a colonial statute referred to as *Closed District Ordinance*. While the British initial policy was to develop the north and the south as two separate countries, that position was suddenly reversed, just shortly before independence.¹² This bifurcated British approach to development in southern and northern Sudan ensured that the northern part of the country was prepared and ready to govern after independence, having been able to produce competent (trained personnel and) technocrats to whom Britain ultimately bequeathed the country at independence, at the expense of southern Sudanese.

Third, this willful or subconscious neglect of Southern Sudan by the British explains why northern Sudanese had been dominant in determining the destiny and political affairs of the Sudan since independence. The northern dominance, in fact, started to be visible just as the British were preparing to pave way for independence. The 1947 Juba Conference in which northern Sudanese appeared to have outwitted their southern counterparts is a good example of how adequately prepared the northern Sudanese were, much to the detriment of Southern Sudanese and the future of Southern Sudan.¹³

Dissatisfied with the outcome of the Juba Conference and, generally, the way things were unfolding in the country as a whole, South Sudanese resorted to armed resistance against northern Sudanese in August of 1955, just a four months before the Sudan gained independence on January 1, 1956. This resistance would later eventuate in the birth of the liberation movement known as Anya-Nya One (I). The *Anya-Nyas*, which stood for the total independence of the Southern Sudan, would later sign a peace agreement with the Sudanese military junta of Jaffar Muhammed Ahmed el Nimeiri in 1972 in Addis

¹¹ See Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Pub., 1972).

¹² For an illuminating discussion on the *Closed District Ordinance*, see David Nailo N. Mayo, "The British Southern Policy in Sudan:

An Inquiry into the Closed District Ordinances (1914-1946)" (1993) 1 *Northeast African Studies*, 165-185.

¹³ For more on the 1947 Conference, see Kenneth Okeny, "The 1947 Juba Conference" (1991) 13 *NEAS*, 39-58; and George A.

Shepherd Jr., "National Integration and the Southern Sudan" (1966) 4 *JMAS.*, 193-212.

Ababa, Ethiopia. The accord gave Southern Sudanese a limited form of regional self-government.¹⁴

Ten years later, however, the Sudanese government failed to keep up its end of the bargain, pursuant to that agreement. Instead, it introduced *sharia law* in the country in 1983, making Islam not only the source of legislation but also the state religion. The ensuing discontent in Southern Sudan, once again, culminated in an outbreak of the Second Civil War between Southern Sudanese, under the banner of the Sudan People's Liberation Army and movement (SPLA/M) and the Sudanese government under el-Nimeiri, in 1983.¹⁵ The war ended in 2005 when the two sides signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA gave the people of Southern Sudan the right of self-determination in the form of an internationally supervised referendum. Pursuant to the terms of CPA, South Sudanese voted overwhelmingly for independence in January 2011, resulting in the division of the Sudan into two sovereign countries namely, South Sudan and the Sudan.¹⁶

Against this background, it stands to reason that the ongoing civil war in South Sudan is directly attributable to that willful or subconscious neglect of Southern Sudan by the British during the colonial era. Indeed, according to Abiem, much of the British attitude towards South Sudanese at the time was not just in relation to the economic marginality of South Sudan to the Britain public. Rather, the British condescension was largely animated by racial prejudice, the seeds of which were sown by earlier foreigners whose cavalier presence in the region is further discussed below.

2.2. Racial Prejudice that Undergirded British Willful or Subconscious Neglect of Southern Sudan

Another important characteristic of the British approach that appears to have significantly contributed to the present-day underdevelopment in South Sudan was, according to Abiem's work, the extreme level of racial prejudice towards Southern Sudanese by British officers.¹⁷ The precedent for this prejudice which, in turn, bred brutality, was first developed and executed by Turco-Egyptians who were the first foreigners to visit the region in their hunt for slaves in 1821. The odious practice of slave

¹⁴ Øystein H. Rolandsen, "A False Start: Between War and Peace in the Southern Sudan, 1956-62" (2011) 52 *Journal of African History*, 105-123; esp. 107.

¹⁵ Abel Alier, *Southern Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonored, Second Edition* (Ithaca: Ithaca Press, 1999)

¹⁶ Jure Vidmar, "South Sudan and the International Legal Framework Governing the Emergence and Delimitation of New States"

(2012) 47 *TILJ*, 541-559; and Marc Well, "Settling Self-determination Conflicts: Recent Developments" (2009) 20 *EJIL*, 111-165;

Lotje de Vries, "Fettered Self-determination: South Sudan's Narrowed Path to Secession" (2017) 19 *JCW*, 26-45; and Scott Peer

Sheeran, "International Law, Peace Agreement, and Self-Determination: The Case of the Sudan" (2011) 60 *ICLQ*, 423-458.

¹⁷ See for example, a classic text on the theory and practice of racial prejudice in the Sudan by Francis M. Deng, *The War of*

Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995) especially at 1-68.

trade in which African were sold and bought like commodities, essentially signified lack of respect for the humanity of people of African descent. It was this wanton disregard for the humanity of Africans that animated the resolve of slave traders to descend upon the natives of Southern Sudan with an unprecedented level of ruthlessness.

In their first encounter with the natives, however, Abiem observes that the battle-hardened people of the region terrified these slave traders.¹⁸ Thus, in order to succeed in their hunt for slaves, they made use of terror as a strategic policy towards the natives. This blueprint, which would later be adopted by the British, manifested itself in the form of maiming, killing and butchering of the natives, as well as destruction of indigenous socio-politico-economic structures. In this sense, slave traders reckoned that sowing extreme terror among the locals would ensure that their routes from and to the Mediterranean region would be relatively smooth.¹⁹

South Sudanese, however, did not endure this monstrosity hands down. They responded with as much ferocity as such destructive invasions deserved. Thus, in addition to the Dinka responses (which I discuss later herein) to such invasions and destruction, Abiem also discusses the valor, adaptability and strategic maneuver of the present day Azande people of South Sudan's Gbudwe State.

According to Abiem, the army of the Azande Kingdom was trained on how to encounter foreign invasions, having "the capacity to acquire and assimilate foreign material culture, quickly enabling many enterprising Azande Princes to employ firearms and the military discipline that this entails."²⁰ These formidable military capabilities enabled the Azande Kingdom to keep at bay the Turco-Egyptian slave expeditions. These same capabilities would subsequently serve the Kingdom well, remaining largely invincible throughout its encounter with the northern Mahdi State²¹ army that later arose and sought to restore, even promote, slave trade, despite the fact that slave trade had been banned in the West, especially in the British Empire at the time.²²

As regards the Dinka reactions to Turco-Egyptian slave expeditions, Abiem contends that while the Dinka people were not as adaptable to assimilate foreign material culture or adopt foreign military strategies as Zandes were, they were, nevertheless, quite formidable, hence able to resist these expeditions with remarkable zeal and valor. This strong resistance enabled the Dinka to shield the rest of Southern Sudanese communities from

¹⁸ Abiem, "Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule, 1900-1922...", *supra* note 6 at 4-16.

¹⁹ R. Gray, *A History of the Southern Sudan, 1839-1889* (London: OUP, 1961) at 17.

²⁰ Abiem, "Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...", *supra* note 6 at 1; and E. E. Evans-Pritchards, *The Azande: History and Political Institutions* (Oxford: OUP, 1971) at 239.

²¹ The Mahdi Regime was a government established by an Islamic leader, Muhammed Ahmed, who rebelled against the British in

1881, killed the British Commanding Office, Charles Gordon, in 1885 and then conquered Khartoum. Ahmed considered himself

an "all Mahdi," meaning "an Islamic Savior." The Mahdi State later fell back to the British in 1898. See, Deng, *The War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995) especially at 49-50.

²² Girma Kebede, "Sudan: The North-South Conflict in Historical Perspective" (1997) 15 *CBS.*, 15-45.

coming into direct conflict with slave traders. That is because, with the exception of a small portion occupied by the Chollo Kingdom and Maban, the Dinka straddles and inhabits the entire frontier region between today's South Sudan and the Sudan. In this way, the Dinka were able to effectively shield the rest of Southern Sudanese communities from slave trade. This is reasonable in light of the fact that slave expeditions principally came through the northern border with the Sudan. Since the Nuer country is completely engulfed by the Dinka region from the northern side of the border with the Sudan, Abiem observes that the Nuer community hardly came into direct contact with slave traders, hence affected marginally, if any, by slave trade and its incidental wars.²³

The Dinka communities that broke the back of the Turco-Egyptian slave trade wars were the Ngok/Ngog Dinka (the Jog in Abyei as well as Alor, Awed and Kwel in Ruweng) and Twij Dinka in the northwest as well as Malwal Dinka in the far northwest. Meanwhile, the Abeliang Dinka, along with the Chollo Kingdom, waged similar resistance in the far northeast. The fact that these northern Dinka communities were able to keep slave trade in check also meant that the entire Dinka heartland remained untouched for much of the period of the 19th century and early 20th centuries, Abiem notes.²⁴

Not only was this invidious and dehumanizing prescription of terror strategy by Turco-Egyptian slave traders followed in letter and spirit by successive foreign invaders and rulers in northern Sudan from 1821 to 1920. Abiem also contends that the British, especially, surpassed it. The British, he argues, brutalized southern Sudanese in a manner that remains unparalleled and unique in the history of colonialism in Tropical Africa.²⁵

Besides neglect and racial prejudice that defined the British approach to colonial rule in southern Sudan, part of the uniqueness of the British colonial administration arose from the fact that the overriding objective for the British occupation of the region was, as underlined earlier, based on the British manifest intent to counteract other Western colonial projects on the Nile River—especially the French. The British presence in the region, thus, had little, if anything, to do with common explanations for colonialism such as philanthropy; “civilizing mission;” commercial interests or economic potentialities. These explanations were often touted wherever such trifling projects were taking place. That explains, as well, why the colonial government spent much of its time doing nothing in support for activities that would enhance regional progress and nation building. Indeed, there were not any plans for building institutions of governance and training of local personnel in Southern Sudan until well at the end of the Second World War.²⁶

This racial prejudice and all kinds of cruel and inhuman treatment in Southern Sudan by the British were not, however, to be tolerated by the Dinka people who responded not just in jest and satire but confrontationally.

²³ Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule, 1900-1922...,” *supra* note 6 at 2-3.

²⁴ *Ibid*, at 2.

²⁵ *Ibid*, at 1-3.

²⁶ Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule, 1900-1922...,” *supra* note 6 at 4.

2.3. The Dinka Confrontational Responses to the British Colonial Rule

The Dinka are people of African descent. Their oral history situates them along the Nile valley, stretching as far as the coast of Mediterranean Sea, Ancient Egypt, northern Sudan and Ethiopia.²⁷ A number of scholars observe that the most accurate population census in the Sudan was the one undertaken by the colonial government in 1956. That census puts the Dinka population at 2 million,²⁸ placing the Dinka's numerical weight well over 50% of the entire population of Southern Sudan at the time.

According to the 2008 National Census data, however, the numerical strength of the Dinka has significantly dwindled, having dropped to about 41% of the national population.²⁹ This numerical weight, however, still makes the Dinka the single largest ethnic group, both in South Sudan and the Sudan before the latter split into the Sudan and South Sudan.³⁰ Abiem further notes that, by any standard, the Dinka people are a single nation,³¹ based on a variety of anthropological characteristics that speak to their single peoplehood.

Generally, the Dinka consists of five main groups, all of which share similar customs, language and culture, with some regional variations brought about by their expansive geographical settlements across the country. Their geographical settlement stretches from as far in the east (of the Nile River) as Wunthou Awan Ayom (in Central Upper Nile State) to the far west at Marial baai (in Wau State) and as far north as Lake Jau (in Ruweng State) to the southern tip of Pariak in Bor (Jonglei State).

While some scholars have described the Dinka as an *acephalous*—or stateless people,³² Abiem is prepared to dispute this claim. That is because, although the Dinka did not—until the creation of the Sudan as a sovereign country—constitute a single nation-State with a centralized authority, they still had several states, each of which had its own centralized authority. That is, the Dinka nation consisted of several body politics, each of

²⁷ Although much of his work seems to carry some embellishments, the recent book by Lewis Anei Madut-Kuendit is somehow consistent with oral Dinka traditions about their origins. See Lewis Madut-Kuendit, *The Dinka History: The Ancients of Sudan: From Abuk and Garang at creation to the Present Day Dinka, Second Edition* (Osborne Par: Africa World Book, 2015).

²⁸ Francis Deng, *Tradition and Modernization: Challenge for Law Among the Dinka of the Sudan* (New Haven: YUP, 1971) at XXV.

²⁹ See Population Census Council, “5th Sudan Population and Housing Census--2008” (2009) available online at: <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=9&ved=2ahUKEwjSIPuPqpPeAhWOTN8KHchHBBIQFjAIegQIARAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcatalog.ihesn.org%2Findex.php%2Fcatalog%2F4216%2Fdownload%2F55706&usg=AOvVaw1KChUnWp4Hq3yHbqp2hQhj> (accessed on October 19th, 2018).

³⁰ Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...” *supra* note 6 at 7; and Deng, *Tradition and Modernization...*, *supra* note 27.

³¹ Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...” *supra* note 6 at 1; and G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience* (Oxford: OUP, 1961) at 1.

³² See William Twining, “Francis Deng on Dinka Culture and Human Rights” (2013) 46 *Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America, 197-214*; and Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou Pre-colonial Ethnic Institutions and Contemporary African Development “(2013) 81 *Econometrica*, 113–152.

which was organized into several sections called *wuod* (*wud* for singular). The term *wud* is coterminous with “state” within the meaning of confederacy in contemporary phraseology.³³ Each sub-Dinka group had a government run by a council of chiefs led by one supreme chief or “the Chief of chiefs.” Chiefs’ positions were, for the most part, hereditary.

Yet the British approach to governance during its colonial rule of the region displayed a very high level of wanton disregard for internal dynamics that should have dictated some form of partnership with indigenous governments and in a way that would have fostered long term development and nation-building. The adverse position taken by the British seemed to have, in fact and in law, “shaped the kind and methods of administration in the country.”³⁴ This consequently set the British and the Dinka on an inevitable collision course. The British knew of this and, therefore, proactively deployed brutal military officers across the region.

To establish dominion over the Dinka heartland, these officers first sought cooperation from the Dinka. When that cooperation, which they found elsewhere, was not forthcoming, they opted to deploy the use of brutal force to induce it. Means deployed included but were not limited to punitive sanctions against uncooperative leaders and individuals or use of lethal weapons to subdue any protests. Other compliance measures included confiscation of land or cattle. Applicable judicial standards were often British. Such high handedness clearly resulted in indignation, resentment and open hostility among the proud and war-like Nilotic Dinka.³⁵ The ensuing tensions precipitated and culminated in the 1902 Agar Dinka revolt, the 1917 Aliab Dinka insurrection as well as the rise of the 1921 Ariadh-Makuendid’s liberation movement. That is because “inasmuch as the violence of pacification did damage life and property in Dinkaland, some peaceful policies to promote docility among the Dinka often defeated their own cause they were oriented to....”³⁶

These Dinka revolts were, in turn, informed by prior Dinka experience with Turco-Egyptians whose intention was that of hunting the natives as slaves. Thus, even though the Turks had long gone by the time the British established dominion over Southern Sudan, the Dinka still viewed the British and everyone who looked more or less like the Turco-Egyptians as an epitome of violent invasions that often destroyed economic and political structures of Dinka societies. The Dinka referred to such violent destruction as *riang [d]e piny*. The coming of the British and their brutal authority was, thus, an episode too familiar to ignore, a premonition of another phase of *riang [d]e piny*. Circumstances were further compounded by the fact that the British sought to coopt men Dinka into involuntary services, such as domestic servants or agents of transport. For example, in order to move about in Dinkaland, the British, under the leadership of Col. W.S. Sparks in 1901, conscripted Dinka men to serve as “human carriers,” forcing them to carry

³³ Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...,” *supra* note 6 at 7; and G. Lienhardt, “The Western Dinka,” in J. Middleton and D. Tait, Eds., *Tribes Without Rulers: Studies in African Segmentary Systems*, Vol. 18 (London: Psychology Press, 1967) at 114.

³⁴ Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...,” *supra* note 6 at 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, at 6.

British officers and their property on their shoulders. This meant transforming Dinka men into transport mules. To the Dinka, however, this was clearly a violation of the fundamental Dinka moral code—the Dinka value-system. Porterage, Abiem asserts, is traditionally a women’s duty in Dinka culture. The paradigm shift in the division of labor angered the Dinkas like never before. Worse still, the British decided to settle at the exact stations that were once occupied by Turco-Egyptians whose varying episodes of violence had ravaged, especially the northern, Dinkaland.³⁷

Having violated the Dinka moral ethnics as well as deployed force of extremity in order to exact compliance and assert dominion over the Dinka people and their affairs, the British had clearly provoked the Dinkas beyond tolerable.³⁸ This precipitated the 1902 Agar Dinka revolt, followed later by the 1917 Aliab Dinka insurrection under the general command of Chief Kon Anok/g Nyingeer. The Aliab Dinka rebellion was allegedly ignited by the British attempt to usurp Dinka customary authority, including jurisdiction over conflicts resolution among Dinka disputants. This empowered the British to impose and exact severe punitive measures, including fines, as well as detaining individuals convicted of violating British laws. The usurpation of centuries-old Dinka judicial powers, the insurgents claimed, violated in every respect the Aliab Dinka customary rules of justice and procedures in resolving disputes. This state of affairs was exacerbated by the British attempt to count the number of children and cows in each family. Yet, counting the number of children is not just a taboo. It is frowned upon in Dinka culture. This is based on a sheer belief that (except in the case of marriage) counting children, especially, is associated with evil intentions, having the effect of casting evil spells on the counted subjects.³⁹

Elsewhere in the Dinka heartland, Abiem notes that the British continued to make considerable attempts to assert complete dominion in all spheres of life, including introducing the idea of forcing every head of a Dinka family to pay taxes to the colonial government. This sent shock waves throughout the Dinka world, except in the so-called “administered Dinka”⁴⁰ Areas.

Finally, the Dinkas were allegedly discontented with the British rule, which they considered to be insensitive to centuries-old Dinka division of labor among Dinka clans. Within each Dinka sub-tribe, for instance, certain clans were customarily designated as spear-master clans (bany [*k[e bidh]*) or priestly clans. These clans were given spiritual duties of the Dinka nation, or *wud*. Other clans were designated as commoners. Some of the commoners constituted the warrior clans, thus, defended the larger community from

³⁷ H.C. Jackson, *Behind the Sudan* (New York: MacMillan, 1955) at 143; and H.C. Jackson, *Pastor on the Nile* (London: S.P.C.K, 1960) at 93; 95.

³⁸ Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...,” *supra* note 6 17; 20; and Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience...*, *supra* note 31 at 22-23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ According to Abiem, “administered Dinka communities” were those communities that had reasonable semblance of political governance and were, thus, considered to be less contentious by the British. They were relatively more accepting of British authority than other Dinka groups. These included the Western Ngog Dinka (Ruweng and Jog), Abeliang, Twi, Ciej, Hol, Agar and Eastern Luaj (of Khor Flus). See Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...,” *supra* note 6 at 23, 26; and P.R.O.: *Sudan Gazette* (February 1907), No. 106, at 601.

foreign invasions. Among the Ngok/g Dinka (mainly Ruweng and Jog), for example, this group was referred to as *koj kij*. Some clans were also designated as people of the crop (*bany [k]e rab*) while yet others were designated as leaders of rains (*bany [k]e deng*), etc. Yet, the British colonial authorities blatantly ignored these specialty designations. They elected, instead, to arbitrarily pick administrative chiefs from any clan, thus failed to recognize the significance of traditional political structures and social hierarchies, much of which was hereditary in nature. Disharmony, discords and confusion followed. Everyone now wanted to be a chief of some sort. The ensuing resentment for the British manifested itself in the form of a new liberation movement known as *Akud Arianhdid*, under the leadership of one charismatic young man called “Ariadh-Makuendid.”⁴¹

2.3.1. The *Akud Arianhdid* Liberation Movement

Born as Bol Yool in the northern part of the then colonial Aweil district in today’s South Sudan’s Lol State, “Ariadh Makuendid” assumed the latter name following the occurrence of an event that Abiem variably describes as “restoration,” “the fall of divinity”—or *lony [d]e yadh*—on the person of Bol Yool. According to Abiem, “restoration” occurs when a specific spiritual power or divinity (*yadh*) possesses and speaks through any adult member from the *Spear-Master* (priestly) clan. As a member of a priestly clan, Ariadh-Makuendid claimed to have been chosen by the divine spirit—*yadh*, who instructed him to lead and bring spiritual renewal to the Dinka world. The principal objective of his movement was, thus, one of liberating the Dinka from the yoke of British colonial rule and foreign spirituality. That is because, in Arianhdid’s view, the British had brought disgrace and desecration to the Dinka homeland (*paan e Jieeng*). Besides the oppressive nature of the British imposition of taxes on the Dinka people, thus, Arianhdid viewed the assertion of British dominion over the Dinka as tantamount to total disregard for the Dinka spirituality and way of life.⁴²

Although Abiem neither gives any details in respect of whether there was any widespread violence against the British in the Dinka heartland nor the magnitude of such violence spearheaded by the *Akud Arianhdid* movement, if any, he observes that the movement became a symbol of the Dinka defiance against the British rule. Attempts by the British to use violence to suppress it only made matters worse, having the effect of boosting the movement’s anti-colonial spirits.

However, much of the standoff between *Akud Arianhdid* movement and the British came to an end when Captain Fergusson, the then Commissioner for the Eastern District of Bhar el Ghazel, decided one morning to visit a river and do something that was, according to the Dinka, unthinkable. Fergusson allegedly walked straight into a river, and in front of thousands of Dinkas, dived deep into the water but astonishingly came out from under the water dry as if he never dived. What was unthinkable was not so much his communion with the Dinka spirituality as it was the fact that he came out from under the water dry. Not even an ordinary Dinka citizen, much less a foreigner, would come out

⁴¹ Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...,” *supra* note 6 at 27-29.

⁴² Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience...*, *supra* note 31 at 77; and Abiem, “Dinka Responses...,” *supra* note 6 at 33-35.

from under the water dry. Such a spiritual phenomenon was reserved for Dinka spear-masters. Fergusson subsequently offered his homage and sacrifices—*mioj*—to *Nhialij* (the universal Dinka God) in the traditional Dinka sense.⁴³

According to Abiem, the fact that Fergusson showed utmost respect towards Dinka deities demonstrated to the on-looking Dinka generally and Ariadh-Makuendid in particular that the Dinka gods were at peace and harmony with Fergusson and his administration. This, they believed, called for cooperation between the Dinka and the British as equals before *Nhialij*. That also meant that *Nhialij* and foreign divinities had merged. Who could negate what the divine had willed? This as well reaffirmed the transcendental power and nature of *Nhialij*. Subsequent to this historic event, Fergusson chose a more collegial approach to resolving Dinka issues. He is also said to have demonstrated enormous respect towards Dinka elders and judicial authorities. This was evident from the fact that whenever disputes arose between Dinka individuals or communities, Fergusson would, for instance, deliberate with and solve them alongside Dinka elders, judicial officers or spiritual leaders as equal judges, depending on who customarily exercised jurisdiction over a given matter at issue.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, other British officers and administrators elsewhere did not change their tact. They continued with the same old style of colonial contempt towards local authorities and communities. Consequently, pockets of violence and unrests sprang up elsewhere *Paan e Jieeng*, leading to the British having to arrest and detain Ariadh-Makuendid in 1922.⁴⁵ Whether this charismatic young leader was later released from detention or how he eventually died is far from clear in Abiem's excellent dissertation. Yet there is little debate that the *Akud Arianhdid* movement, together with Agar and Aliab Dinka rebellions clearly put a bright mark on the arc of history of the struggle for liberty and independence among the Dinkas. It underscored that it was not going to be business as usual for the British. These episodes are some of the historic symbols of Dinka resistance to colonial domination in the region.

2.4. Strengths and Limitations of the Thesis

2.4.1. Strengths

One of the greatest insights that Abiem's thesis brings to light is not just the question of racial consciousness but the resilience with which the Dinka (and Azande) fought against foreign domination in the 19th and 20th centuries. The leader of the Aliab Dinka revolt, Kon Anok/g Nyingeer, is, for example, a revered warrior figure throughout the Dinkaland for his courage and valor against the British. Despite the fact that he ultimately lost the battle, including his own life after British colonial forces encircled and besieged him for months, leading to the loss of more than 500 of his men in that battle, his valor and bravery are unforgettable.⁴⁶ Abiem's work clearly reminds us that these heroes should

⁴³ Abiem, "Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...", *supra* note 6 at 33-38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, at 37-38.

⁴⁵ Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience...*, *supra* note 31 at 76-77.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Chauncey Stigand, "Fighting the Aliab Dinka Southern Sudan, November 1919 – May 1920" (2018), available online at: <http://peterbaxterhistory.com/2011/02/25/fighting-the-aliab-dinka->

not be forgotten. Although Ariadh-Makuendid is more popular than Kon Anok/g because of the former's legendary spiritual powers to perform miracles, Kon Anok/g did more to resist foreign invasions than his inexperienced army and the lack of equal arms between his force and the British colonial army would have enabled him to achieve right from the outset. This excellent treatise reminds us why we must not forget how far we have come and what we need to do in order to create a more equitable and inclusive South Sudan. Creating such a country would be our appreciation for the immense sacrifices made by those who came before us.

2.4.2. Limitations

Despite its magnificent contribution to our knowledge of the historical events that took place in the Dinka world in the 19th and 20th centuries, Abiem's thesis suffers from what I call *deficient colonial literature*. Christian missionaries, Turco-Egyptian slave traders, and British colonial administrators generally documented much of the printed historical knowledge we have on South Sudan. The most important contributors to this literature, however, were Western anthropologists and historians. That is why most of the written literary materials about the Dinka are attributable to scholars such as Godfrey Lienhardt, Evans-Pritchard,⁴⁷ and Douglas Johnson,⁴⁸ among others.

Nevertheless, while this literature is truly enriching, it also suffers from major flaws. That is because, with utmost respect and acclamation to their positive contributions, so much of this literature was either mischaracterized in good faith⁴⁹ or misconceived for scholarly expediency, rendering it defective in certain cases. The defects inherent in this literature prompt me to characterize it as *deficient colonial literature*. That is because most of the founding tenets and framework of this literature were established during the colonial era. Yet, since the 1960s onwards, most Dinka scholars tend to take this literature at face value despite its glaring deficiencies. To make right what was characterized incorrectly, it is incumbent upon us, the native scholars, to embark upon re-characterizing or filling up the lacuna therein.

In my view, the most important job of intellectuals, especially those who hail from the native communities in which much of the earliest scholarly works and documentation were undertaken by foreigners, is to filter and re-characterize this literature or address its deficiencies. That is because while the working theories of foreign scholars may oftentimes be correct, the facts upon which they depend tend to be largely inexact. This is the case, for example, with respect to the classification of the Dinka nation into 4 main

[southern-sudan/](#) (accessed on October 18, 2018); *London Gazette Supplements (London: British Library, 1921)* 17 June 1921, at 4888-4889; 22 April 1921 at 3186; 23; May 1922 at 3960; 8 August 1922 at 5958; and Captain C.H. Stigand, *Administration in Tropical Africa: Chapter XXIII, Armed Forces (London: Constable and Co., 1914)* available at: <http://www.archive.org/stream/administrationin00stigrich#page/n5/mode/2up>.

⁴⁷ The works of Lienhardt and Pritchard have been cited throughout this paper.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Douglas Johnson, "Decolonizing the Borders in Sudan: Ethnic Territories and National Development," in Mark R. Duffield and Vernon Hewitt, Eds., *Empire, Development and Colonialism: The Past in the Present* (London: James Currey, 2009); and *South Sudan: A New History for a New Nation* (Ohio: OUP, 2016).

⁴⁹ For example, while the word "Muonyjang" is an equivalent of an "Englishman," some foreigners tend to claim that "Muonyjang" refers to "husband of all people." This is a total mischaracterization of the Dinka use of the term.

groups, namely Reg (Rek), Agar, Padang and Bor. This classification is, however, flawed in several ways.

Generally, depending on where each sub-community is located in relation to the Nile River, the Dinka nation can be classified into Western and Eastern dichotomy. Western Dinka include Malwal, Rek/g, Twij, Ngog (Ruweng and Jog), Luaj (Luanyjang), Agar, Gog, Ciej, Atuod(?), and Aliab.

Eastern Dinka includes Bor (Twi, Athoj, Gog, Hol, and Nyarweng), Ngog (Eastern Ruweng/Paweny, and Lual Yag), Padang (Abeliang, Ageer, Dongjol, and Nyiel) and Marbeg (Rud, Thoi, and Luaj).

Furthermore, depending on their geographical locations, Dinka can further be classified into 5 main groups.⁵⁰

- Far Western Dinka: Rek/g, Luaj (Luanyjang), Malwal and Twij;
- Northwestern Dinka or Western Ngog Dinka: Ruweng (Kwel, Awed and Alor) and Jok/g
- Southwestern Dinka: Aliab, Agar, Western Gok/g, Ciej and Atuod (Reel and Apaag)
- Northeastern Dinka: Eastern Ngok/g (Paweny/Eastern Ruweng) and Lual Yag), Padang (Abeliang, Ageer, Dongjol and Nyiel) and Marbeg (Eastern Luaj, Rud and Thoi/Thoy), and
- Southeastern Dinka (Bor): Athooj, Eastern Gok/g, Twi, Hol, and Nyarweng.

Contemporary Dinka scholars, however, tend to uncritically copy and paste the flawed classification of the Dinka by Western scholars without verifying its factual accuracy. This lock, stock and barrel adoption of even defective works of foreigners tends to find currency in political circles in which entrenched political interests often supersede facts and intellectual honesty. Domestic scholars must rise to the occasion and correctly recharacterize this literature, even as they appreciate the works of foreign scholars. Only in this way can they frontally deal with defective colonial literature.

It is against this backdrop that one must understand the nature of the defects with which Abiem's thesis suffers: inherited deficiencies. In so claiming, I am also cognizant of the fact that no scholarly work is ever perfect.⁵¹

Abiem, for instance, describes the 1902 Agar Dinka rebellion in Rumbek as having taken place in the Equatoria Province. While it was true that today's South Sudan's Eastern and Western Lakes as well as southern part of Jonglei States were part of Equatoria province in 1902, Abiem's dissertation should have underscored that Rumbek (the capital of Western Lakes State which is mainly inhabited by the Agar Dinka) had become part of

⁵⁰ See, for example, the work of Lazarus Leek Mawut, *Dinka Resistance to Condominium Rule, 1900-1922* (London: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1984)

⁵¹ I, therefore, view Abiem's scholarly limitations as part of his scholarly strength. Only a person who strives to do something can get it wrong. One can never be wrong if he or she does not toil to get it right.

Bhar el Ghazel Province by the time this thesis was put to the press in 1976. Similarly, Abiem describes the Northwestern Ngog Dinka (Ruweng and Jog) as “Dinka of southwestern Kordofan.” Yet at the time his work was published, only the Dinka of Abyei (the Jog Ngog Dinka) was, *de jure*, part of Kordofan. That is because the Ruweng had, by 1931, been returned from northern Sudan to South Sudan. Ruweng officially became part of Western Upper Nile as per the decision of Chief Biem-Bilkwei (often simply referred to as “Bilkwei”) who famously said in Dinka “xen ee raan wiir” or “I am a person of the river.” Taken in its proper context, Bilkwei meant to say that the Ruweng Ngog Dinka would be administered in Upper Nile Province, when he was asked where his people should be administered. Yet Abiem’s dissertation suggests to the readers that the Ruweng Ngog Dinka is still part of Southern Kordofan. An author should ensure that the reader understands where the area of a specific historical incident is located in contemporary context.

As well, Abiem should have corrected the spelling errors of the names of different Dinka subgroups. For instance, he spells Malwal Giernyang as “Gerinyang,” Reg (Rek) as “Raik,” Awed (or Awet) as “Wait,” “Panaruu” (or Pan-Ruweng) as “Fanaru,” Nyarweng as “Nyaraweng,” Thoi (Thoy) as “Thai,” etc.⁵²

Finally, in describing the British recognition of Chiefs Biem-Bilkwei of Ruweng and Kwol Arob of Abyei for their successful efforts to promote peace between their Northwestern Dinka and their northern Arab Baggara neighbors, efforts for which the two received *Robes of Honor* as members of the Sudan’s *Ulama* and *Notables* in 1908,⁵³ Abiem addresses Chief Biem-Bilkwei as “Fadl al-Mula Bilkwai.” Not only would Chief Bilkwei have not wished to be addressed by such an Islamic title, since he was on record as opposed to all things Arabic. Abiem should have de-emphasized any foreign elements, including titles, which tend to alienate one from his or her culture. Abiem was not, however, the first to address Chief Bilkwei as such. British authorities as well as Arabs addressed him in the same way on many occasions. So, to his credit, Abiem did not invent the title. His error lies in the fact that he heavily relied on a characterization that he ought to have corrected.

2.5. Conclusion

This excellent dissertation clearly helps one understand in perspective the struggles and efforts of the Dinka people in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, despite its limitations, Abiem’s dissertation is quite illuminating. It helps us replenish the stock of our knowledge about the Dinka people and their consistent determination to free themselves from the yoke of colonial domination. Abiem, a precious talent of which the country has forever been deprived, departed at the time he was needed the most. All that notwithstanding, he has left a bright mark on the arc of South Sudan’s history. We are eternally indebted to the work of such a bright mind.

What can also be gleaned from Abiem’s informative work is that the British policy of containing other Western nations from taking control of strategic areas along the Nile did

⁵² Abiem, “Dinka Responses to Early British Colonial Rule...,” *supra* note 6 at 23.

⁵³ *Ibid*, at 23-24.

not only prevent South Sudanese from spontaneously developing into a nation or nations on their own. It also underdeveloped South Sudan, both during the colonial and post-colonial eras. This underdevelopment partly explains the precarious state South Sudan is still locked in today.

It is worth emphasizing that while Mark Mijak Abiem will forever be missed, we can still fulfill his wishes about the kind of society he would have wanted South Sudan to be: an inclusive society in which all citizens are equal stakeholders in running the affairs of their government. To be an inclusive society, South Sudan must recognize its diverse ethnic and cultural riches and, thus, adopt the principle of unity in diversity. This implies that our public institutions must be structured in a way that appreciates the richness of ethnicity as well as gender. To be that kind of society also means that South Sudan must observe, protect and promote fundamental human rights and freedoms. Such a country is imperatively premised on the rule of law, constitutionalism, and good governance, a country in which minorities such as Jie, Kachipo, Anywak, etc., are not left to fend for themselves on the margins. This way, we can create a society of shared and equitable governance, one in which the concerns of ordinary people and their choice of leaders are respected. That is the kind of South Sudan that would make Abiem smile widely from his resting place in heaven.

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