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Scripting the nation: extraverted political propaganda from the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement

Cathy A. Wilcock 

School of Geography and Planning, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper examines a series of political propaganda made by the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement (SSLM) between 1970 and 1972. The investigation asks how ‘the nation’ was scripted to achieve various external and domestic aims. The article shows representations of a militarised ‘black African’ nation, which is *against* the Arab governance of the North, and *above* chiefdom systems rooted in the South. The representational analysis demonstrates these are not straightforward depictions of elite ideologies. They are also not symbolic of enduring colonial influences, uneasy Cold War alliances, and regional moral solidarities. In fact, the representations actively destabilise and undermine the long-term diplomatic ambitions of the newspaper’s own contributors. Instead, they serve immediate-term and highly pragmatic goals; namely, securing support from Israel and crushing dissent within the SSLM. The paper therefore complicates understandings of the racialised militarism at the root of Southern Sudanese statebuilding. It clarifies and extends knowledge of postcolonial African political development, in particular, how elite ideas of ‘state’ and ‘nation’ are not necessarily ideological symbols but the contingent products of immediate-term political strategizing.

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This paper examines a magazine series of political propaganda made by the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement (SSLM) between 1970 and 1972. At this time, the SSLM were in open combat with the Arab-aligned President of Sudan Jaffar Nimeiri who promised to solve the ‘Southern problem’ when he came to power via military coup in 1969. In 1972 the two parties signed the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, signalling a new era in North-South relations and with it, the end of the magazine’s publication run. The series, the *Grass Curtain*, is analysed here as part of the political strategy of its elite editorial team. Through this investigation, the paper clarifies and extends knowledge of postcolonial African political development, in particular, how elite representations of ‘state’ and ‘nation’ were shaped by compromises between domestic and external imperatives. To do this, it focuses on print publications as an unexpected yet important interface between Africa and the rest of the world in the postcolonial era.

CONTACT Cathy A. Wilcock  c.wilcock@sheffield.ac.uk  School of Geography and Planning, University of Sheffield, Winter St, Sheffield S3 7ND, UK

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For this study, I analysed the text of all seven issues of the *Grass Curtain* during visits to the archive held in the British Library. The series comprises opinion pieces, editorials and press releases from elite members of the SSLM; most significantly SSLM spokesperson Enoch Mading deGarang, Joseph Lagu, leader of the Anyanya militia, and Lawrence Wol Wol, leading member of the Nile Provisional Government. It also includes journalistic field reporting from both anonymous and named correspondents in Southern Sudan and contributions from Africanist commentators. Some pieces are reprinted fragments from other publications which are furnished with editorial comments. There are also appeals for aid in relation to humanitarian emergencies. The current affairs reportage is supplemented by poetry, letters, book reviews, and cartoons. The analysis of the magazine series itself was supplemented by additional archival and scholarly material about the SSLM and the *Grass Curtain*. When encountering this material, I asked (a) how are the Southern Sudanese nation and state represented in the magazine series; (b) to which external and internal audiences are these representations directed; and (c) what political purposes do they serve?

The paper begins with a contextualisation of the debates on African nation building in the immediately postcolonial era, and the role of representations and print culture therein. Next, the conflict between Northern and Southern Sudan is introduced, and the *Grass Curtain* is contextualised as part of a vibrant print culture among Southern political movements. The following three analytical sections argue that the representations of nation and state in the *Grass Curtain* are not necessarily symbolic of an underlying ideology shaped by various ambivalent extraversions – in fact, the imperial West and new African powers are actively eschewed. Rather, these representations demonstrate elite agency in securing new short-term partnerships – in particular, with Israel – which meet immediate and highly pragmatic goals. This comes at the expense of a true depiction of SSLM ideologies, and to the detriment of the diplomatic efforts of the magazine's own editors and associates. As such, self-representations of 'state' and 'nation' emerge not necessarily as ideological symbols reflecting a historical long *durée* of external influence, but as the contingent products of immediate-term political strategizing which are the results of a delicate balance between both domestic and external imperatives.

Extraverted identities and the representational realm

In the postcolonial era, for elite cadres with aspirations of statehood, building a national identity was a political necessity, success in which would go some way towards delivering them the legitimacy required to lead new states. Anti-colonial movements from which postcolonial elites were drawn, constructed national and proto-statal identities as part of their struggle against colonial regimes which, upon independence, furnished their claims to power.¹ These constructions of identity were not entirely inward facing but were significantly shaped by historically determined encounters between those elites and external global powers, including former colonisers. Like Bayart's 'extraverted' political economy,² political identities were also extraverted to different degrees.³ In this sense, the enduring influence of the old metropolises, strategic Cold War alliances, and new regional coalitions have profoundly shaped the ideological and institutional pathways of many African nation-states. With these externalities to contend with, elite

nation-state builders have been criticised for, at best, compromising and, at worst, neglecting responsibilities to their nascent polities.⁴ The significant external pressure on postcolonial nation building therefore comprises one compelling explanation for the weak and exclusionary nature of many African states.⁵

Representations of nation and statehood in elite discourse are both products and processes of these extraverted nation-building projects.⁶ As such, analysing elite representations is one way to understand the effects of external powers on nation-building elites, and to trace the implications for 'nation' and 'state'.⁷ For example, investigations into Cold War alliances have revealed the interface between the USA and Africa was partially played out in the representational realm. The CIA infiltrated African literary circles to spread anti-communist propaganda. Representations of national identity and ideal forms of statehood appearing in influential African cultural output was decidedly anti-communist for this reason.⁸

Elite representations are, however, not entirely the result of impositions from outside. Rather, there is a balance to be struck by African elites who are looking both outside and inside to advance their nation building projects. Fisher⁹ argues the way that postcolonial East African states represented themselves in political discourse was crucial to (a) securing Western finance and (b) consolidating their sovereignty internally. As such, self-representations are not mere reflections of Western ideals made to appease potential backers but are dialogically 'Africanised' to simultaneously meet domestic goals. Overall, what is to be gained from a focus on representations when understanding African nation building is a figurative point of access to the intricacies of African political entanglements. Elite representations of nation and state are understood here as textual evidence of the web of ideologies and interests in which domestic and external agendas compete and coalesce.

African print culture and the Southern Sudanese struggle

Print publications are well-known tools of nation and state building projects. In Manóeli's terms, nationhood could be 'scripted' by elites in discourse.¹⁰ While the first African newspapers were founded in West Africa in the mid-nineteenth century,¹¹ East African print culture did not start in earnest until the early twentieth.¹² Protestant missionaries imported the printing press and taught the printing trade to Africans in their schools. At the same time, Syrian businessmen were introducing print culture across the Arab world, including in Egypt and Northern Sudan.¹³ In the mid-twentieth century, print culture played an important role in anti-colonial struggles; many nationalist liberation movements founded newspapers and distributed them to increasingly literate publics.¹⁴ Their editors sought to convene constituencies across previously disparate geographical areas, in a perfect illustration of the importance of print culture in the consolidation of 'imagined communities'.¹⁵

The Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement provides a good case study of how African liberation movements deployed print culture to foment national identity, while at the same time presenting themselves to the world as states in waiting. Active in the 1960s and 70s, the SSLM was a culmination of military and civilian groups agitating for the separation of Southern Sudan from the North. When Sudan gained independence from Anglo-Egyptian condominium status in 1957, the first civil war between

North and South was already ongoing. Discontent among Southern elites relating to the underdevelopment of the South, and anxiety about the 'Arabisation' inherent in the process of decolonisation, had culminated in the Torit mutiny in 1955. By the late 50s, Southern movements were fighting for a fairer distribution of resources and political voice. Because these were relatively disparate – even rivalrous – guerrilla bands with little connection to the agricultural communities comprising the Southern mass public,¹⁶ the uprisings were easily quashed by the Sudanese army. Upon independence, Southern elites were denied the federal political structure they had hoped for and were condemned to Khartoum rule.

In 1964 when Mahgoub came to lead the first civilian government after years of military dictatorship under Abboud, some political space opened for educated Southerners to politically organise. Various political parties were founded by Southerners during this time with the purpose of consolidating a sense of nationhood among the communities in the South. Many of them established newspapers, having been trained in printing by Protestant missionaries. The pioneering example is *The Vigilant* which was founded in 1965 by 'the Southern Front', a new political party comprising many Southern civil servants.¹⁷ It was written in English, printed in Khartoum, and distributed throughout the Southern provinces where it would be read aloud to groups. Until then, Southern Sudanese newspapers had been written in vernacular languages: *Ruru Gene* in Zande, *Agamlong* in Dinka and *Lelego* in Ma'di,¹⁸ but English-language papers *The Vigilant*, and others like it: *The Advance*, and *The Explorer*, mark the beginnings of a national newsround.

Not surprisingly, Southern newspapers were routinely charged with sedition by Khartoum. *The Vigilant* was put on trial after reporting army massacres in Juba and Wau. The Northern-led trial found in their favour, but many leading journalists were killed or forced into exile.¹⁹ As Khartoum continued to suppress Southern print culture and with it the spread of Southern nationalism, many periodicals were produced abroad and managed by elites in exile. *The Voice of Southern Sudan* and the *Voice of the Nile Republic* were managed overseas by Southern politicians wishing to drive the liberation struggle from a distance.²⁰ Like the liberation movement itself,²¹ these newspapers became 'extraverted' to various degrees.²² Some were used, not only to convene Southern constituencies, but also to represent the South to global audiences and to seek global allies for their editorial teams.²³ One newspaper was externalised to the point of total foreign capture. *Anyanya*, ostensibly the periodical of Lagu's militia of the same name, was printed and the content supplied by the Israeli Mossad who were using it to spread Anti-Arab propaganda to audiences in Europe and the US.²⁴ For better or worse, and to different degrees, Southern Sudanese newspapers became a key interface between nation-building African elites and the rest of the world.

The Grass Curtain 1970–1972

The *Grass Curtain* is analysed here as an example of this overseas branch of representational nationalist politics. While it is reasonable to suspect that the *Grass Curtain* – like its sister publication *Anyanya* – was a covert Israeli endeavour, evidence suggests that the *Grass Curtain* was the authentic work of Southern Sudanese elites with connections to London. It was printed by Hadlow and James, a well-known British printing

house established in 1955 and financially backed by the Southern Sudanese Association (SSA) chaired by Brian MacDermot, a British-Irish stockbroker and philanthropist. The Association was based in Ludgate Hill in central London just off Fleet Street, a publishing hub where most British newspapers operated. The *Grass Curtain* was edited by London-based Enoch Mading deGarang who led a small team of Southern volunteers including Jacob Akol and Antiok Lual acting as treasurer and distribution manager respectively.²⁵

MacDermot claims the magazine was 'written by Southerners for Southerners'²⁶ and was originally intended as a supplement for the leading Southern publication: *The Voice of Southern Sudan*. The *Voice* was edited from Paris by Lawrence Wol Wol of the NPG, one of the civilian government branches of the SSLM. It was Wol Wol who had introduced MacDermot to fellow SSLM exile Garang with the intention of setting up the SSA in London.²⁷ It is not clear whether Wol Wol also intended for Garang to establish a new newspaper, but Garang was a trained journalist and quickly began operating the *Grass Curtain* with intentions to make it a 'medium for the movement'.²⁸ Wol Wol discontinued the *Voice* after the *Grass Curtain* was established as the definitive 'journal for Southerners'²⁹ and became one of the magazine's key contributors. He was also associate editor for the last two issues. Other key SSLM figures including Jacob Akol, Barri Wanji, Phillip Pedak Leith, Patrick Mogot and Joseph Lagu all make significant contributions to the series. Lagu, leader of the Anyanya militia and commander in chief of the broader SSLM, is the most prolific contributor and has referred to the *Grass Curtain* in his memoir as an 'effective organ for the movement'.³⁰

With the *Voice* discontinued and the *Anyanya* an Israeli front, the *Grass Curtain* is analysed here as the main outlet for the propagandistic efforts of the SSLM elite between 1970 and 1972. The stated aim in the magazine's pages is to 'relentlessly bring to the conscience of the world, within possibility, the situation in Southern Sudan today'.³¹ This signals its self-consciously outward-looking approach. It had a print run of 5000 and around 1,000 subscribers to begin with and was distributed to embassies, charities, international organisations, and foreign offices.³² The magazine had 'considerable political effect',³³ according to Brian MacDermot. In addition to its global readership, it was also circulated in Southern Sudan, as evidenced by photographs of it being read in the bush.³⁴

In the last issue, a hidden motivation is revealed which signals its relevance to internal audiences: 'What we did not tell our readers in clear terms [...] is t]he *Grass Curtain* was essentially born out of a need to consolidate a badly divided camp'.³⁵ Here, reference is made to internal divisions within the SSLM. There were several points of conflict within the liberation movement. Most significant for this study is the dispute over whether the future Southern state should be military or civilian-led. This was partially played out in the dispute between two of the magazine's main contributors Lagu, of the Anyanya militia and Wol Wol, European spokesperson for Gordon Muortat's Nile Provisional Government. The NPG was formally dissolved in 1971 and its members absorbed into the Anyanya forces as reported in the third issue of the *Grass Curtain*.³⁶

In its own terms, the publication's purpose was to 'see that the world hears the truth',³⁷ about the Southern Sudanese struggle, on the one hand, and to consolidate the movement internally on the other. The last issue of the *Grass Curtain* reflects on the Addis Abba peace accords – signed between Lagu and President Nimeiri – and includes a copy of the entire agreement. With this, Garang and MacDermot announce the *Grass*

Curtain has achieved its aims and inform readers that its production will cease. Overall, the journal displays the globally dispersed self-representations of the SSLM during a time when the movement had dual political imperatives to reach out to external partners and to consolidate national solidarities inside the South.

Scripting the Southern Sudanese nation

As is expected from a Southern publication at this time, the representations in the *Grass Curtain* focus sharply on race. Specifically, the movement is represented as the political struggle of black Africans against Arab imperialists. The South, named 'Blackland' by Lagu,³⁸ is described as 'a mauled gangrenous limb [...] still treated as a fractious poisoned patient from whom the old blood is pumped out and a new "Arab" blood is transfused in incessantly'.³⁹ All issues carry references to the historical enslavement of black Africans by Arabs and the threat of cultural and political erasure of 'African' politics and heritage. Importantly, the cultural and political erasure is targeted specifically at the 'African' and not at the 'Southern Sudanese', nor at the numerous ethnic cultures within Southern Sudan such as the Dinka, Nuer, Madi or Azande. This is the case for contributions from both Lagu⁴⁰ and Wol Wol.⁴¹ These threats are made apparent with depictions of gratuitous Arab cruelty, allegedly motivated by 'racial animosity',⁴² including the torture of civilians, often children.⁴³ Reports of castration,⁴⁴ underline the genocidal ambition of the Arab militias whose mission is described by contributor 'P.H.' as 'the sinister spearhead of Arab penetration and subversion into the heart of Africa'.⁴⁵

The 'African as anti-Arab' trope is typical of contemporary Southern Sudanese political discourse and mirrors the 'scripting' of nationhood by earlier Southern elites,⁴⁶ including in the *Voice*.⁴⁷ While a totalising dichotomy is far from a genealogical reality, this racial bifurcation was operationalised by both Northerners and Southerners in their respective nation building projects.⁴⁸ In this context, the nascent Southern Sudanese national identity is commonly understood as 'reactive'⁴⁹ or 'oppositional' in the sense that it was 'against' the Arab-North while not being 'for' a common Southern essence.⁵⁰ The foundations of this oppositional national consciousness can be traced to historical experiences in the early seventeenth century when otherwise warring communities in the South would form security coalitions to protect themselves against Mahdist slave raids.⁵¹ Southern elites in the SSLM and beyond drew on these historical narratives in their attempts to consolidate a racialised Southern nationhood based on opposition to a shared threat and in the absence of a shared culture, language, religion, or any other unifying characteristic.⁵²

That said, it is not self-evident that the SSLM would script their struggle in these visceral and corporeal terms at the time *Grass Curtain* went to print. In fact, the representations actively undermine the contemporary diplomatic work of many of the magazine's contributors. While Garang was curating and publishing the *Grass Curtain*, he was also working diligently for a diplomatic solution to the conflict.⁵³ This involved bringing Northern and Southern factions together in delicate, often secret, dialogues.⁵⁴ He was, by accounts, a skilled mediator⁵⁵ playing a key part in the Southern delegation at the Addis Ababa peace talks, acting as sole intermediary between Nimeiri and Lagu throughout the process.⁵⁶ Following the signing of the accords, Garang was appointed a member of the Southern Executive Council as Commissioner for

Information, Culture and Tourism⁵⁷; a testament to his skilful negotiations in Nimeiri's eyes. The racialised anti-Arab representations in the *Grass Curtain* read against this.

Similarly, associate editor Wol Wol, who was appointed Minister for Planning in the Southern High Executive Committee following the agreement⁵⁸ would have had his own diplomatic efforts undermined by the representations in the *Grass Curtain*. He had been attempting for years to draw financial support from both the USA and the OAU as leader of the Sudan African National Union (SANU). Himself and Patrick Mogot travelled to the USA in 1971 to seek aid at the UN and Washington. Yet the anti-Arab discourse in the *Grass Curtain* would not have appealed to American audiences. The USA had historically been an important aid supplier to the Khartoum government, which it saw as a key player in the fight against the USSR.⁵⁹ The arrival of Nimeiri, a Nasserite socialist, in 1969 presented a logical opportunity for Southerners to persuade the USA to switch allegiance from North to South. The most expedient representational strategy for the SSLM would have been to foreground the socialist commitment of Nimeiri. One published letter to the magazine's editors even suggests this: 'You should emphasise for the blacks in the USA that you are fighting for political and religious independence – you are freedom fighters fighting against communism'.⁶⁰

Contrary to this, the *Grass Curtain* consistently makes clear that Nimeiri's socialist credentials are a 'sham'.⁶¹ Any sense of an ideological dispute about how to govern Sudan – and how those principles apply to the south – are dismissed. Contributor P.H. puts forward the view that 'the labels of left and right' have 'no meaning or shade of difference in regard to a breathing space for Blacks and for Negritude'.⁶² Garang himself scoffs at the internal contradictions within Nimeiri's allegedly socialist policies. He notes that when the University of Khartoum was reduced to a college under Nimeiri's Ministry of Education, the fees were raised to become unaffordable so that 'only the children of the rich would be eligible to enter a Socialist University intended for the enlightenment of the masses!'.⁶³ Overall, the magazine focuses on resistance to Arab expansionism, not socialist expansionism. As shown by their contemporary political choices in Afghanistan, the USA was far less concerned about the former than the latter. Therefore, the Northern-Arab / Southern-African dichotomy in the *Grass Curtain* reads against attempts to appeal to the American state. Far from being evidence of an uneasy alliance in the Cold War, the elite discourse in the *Grass Curtain* actively eschews the imperial West.

As well as his activities in the USA, Wol Wol's diplomatic missions to the OAU would also have been undermined by the representations in the *Grass Curtain*.⁶⁴ Numerous benefits could be accrued from gaining recognition as a pan-African liberation movement.⁶⁵ Support to African rebellions given by the OAU were decided by the Coordination Committee for the Liberation of Africa for which qualification as an 'African' liberation movement was a required condition.⁶⁶ Eligible liberation movements did not challenge colonial borders – something that the SSLM specifically wanted to completely redraw – and the OAU was not prepared to undermine state sovereignty by supporting secessionism. It therefore would not hear the Southern case.⁶⁷ Direct appeals to the OAU in the *Grass Curtain* are even made by Barri Wanji,⁶⁸ 'M.J.J.',⁶⁹ and Philip Abbas Adam and Ibrahim Olelah, including a proposal for an OAU Grievance Commission which would consider cases for secession.⁷⁰

Part of the diplomatic mission of SANU was to critique the OAU's focus on white European coloniality and instead ask them to consider colonial oppressions committed

by a plurality of actors, including and especially Arabs.⁷¹ It was never their intention to dismiss the significance or violence of European colonialism; only to broaden the scope to include what they saw as comparable oppressions by non-whites. However, the magazine consistently downplays the role of European imperialism in the Southern Sudanese struggle. According to Lagu, the North-South war being cast as the results of 'conspiracies by colonial administrators and missionaries' represents a weak analysis existing only in the naive wishes of various Khartoumian authorities who are motivated to place the blame for the Southern problem elsewhere.⁷² This would have irritated the OAU and undermined the solidaristic spirit of its engagement with SANU.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there are internal contradictions between the secessionist aims of the SSLM, and their self-representation as 'black Africans' under threat from Arab imperialists. The SSLM's complex and contingent sense of political belonging expressly excluded 'black Africans' who resided in the north of Sudan. There were hundreds of thousands of Northern citizens residing in the Darfur, Blue Nile and Nuba Mountains regions holding identical threats of erasure by the Arab government and rouge militias.⁷³ Yet William Deng, a founder of the SSLM stated in its founding conference, we are '*not fighting to liberate the whole of Sudan*'.⁷⁴ Consistent with this, SANU were pushing the OAU to adopt a non-universalist version of pan-Africanism, which was less concerned with 'imaginative natural ally-ship' and more with 'contingent political comradeship'.⁷⁵ Yet Lagu and the magazine's secretary and treasurer Jacob Akol continually foreground the 'naturalness' of a universal black African identity through reference to 'the natural bonds binding us to black Africa',⁷⁶ and to 'black Africans, tied by language culture and tradition to the neighbouring nations of black Africa'.⁷⁷

The universalised black versus Arab dichotomy prominent in the *Grass Curtain* clearly undermines SANU's challenge to OAU essentialism, and destabilises the SSLM's core mission of secession. In fact, these tropes lend legitimacy to putative rival movements – which would later culminate in the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) – who were arguing to seize all of Sudan in the name of the negro majority. At the time of the publication of the *Grass Curtain*, representatives of these black universalist movements were inviting the SSLM to join forces, as can even be seen in the *Grass Curtain* itself. In a published letter, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the United Sudanese African Liberation Front asks.

Why do you confine your interests to the African peoples of Southern Sudan? [...] Our brothers in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, and the Fung area are to be abandoned to become part of a Greater Egypt [...] We beg you representatives of Southern Sudan to link your philosophy with ours [...] do not abandon your fellow Africans in the rest of the country.⁷⁸

There are clearly strong arguments for a consolidated struggle of the black margins against the Arab centre. In fact, the SPLM would go on to have far more success with the OAU than SANU in becoming recognised as an African liberation movement.⁷⁹ Yet these arguments are dismissed by the SSLM and by the contributors to the magazine who rebuff such invitations and restate their commitment to Southern separatism.⁸⁰ The self-representations of a universal black identity in the *Grass Curtain* only expose this political choice as logically and morally inconsistent.

Israel as immediate-term pragmatic partner

Persistent attempts by the SSLM to cling to inflexible racial binaries, Manoeli argues, caused the Southern rebels to 'fall hostage to the discourses they crafted'⁸¹ and the *Grass Curtain* confirms this discursive self-entrapment. However, I argue here that one underappreciated reason for this was the need to meet immediate and pragmatic political goals in relation to external partners; in particular, Israel. It is already clear from Gidron's analysis of *Anyanya* that the Mossad were alert to the possibilities of Southern print culture. The representations in the *Grass Curtain* suggest the magazine was part of Lagu's efforts to secure Israeli support, and by extension, his own status as leader of the SSLM.

At the time of the magazine's publication, Lagu was courting Israel for support with arms and medical supplies, for which he was in competition with the NPG.⁸² Israel never had any moral interest in supporting the Southern Sudanese,⁸³ but they were fighting the Egyptians in the Sinai Peninsula, an army which greatly benefitted from Sudanese military backing. Lagu pledged that if Israel would strengthen him, he would 'tie the Sudan army down [so it could] not go to join the Egyptians in the canal zone'.⁸⁴ In other words, Southern Sudan represented an important second front which would divert Arab nationalist armies away from the Suez. This was indeed the perspective eventually taken up by Israel⁸⁵ and an agreement was made in 1968 which secured Israeli medical and military assistance for the Lagu-loyal SSLM.⁸⁶ By pushing the anti-Arab messaging in the *Grass Curtain*, Lagu was able to supplement the Mossad's propagandistic efforts spearheaded in the *Anyanya* magazine, keep Israel on side, and command authority over the NPG.

A Southern army strengthened from outside also makes perverse sense in terms of Lagu's wish to end the conflict. It was important to keep this Israeli support available as the peace talks were in progress in order to incentivise the North to make a deal. If Khartoum thought a military victory was possible against a declining Southern army, they may not have come to the negotiating table. Since Israel's incentive for supporting the SSLM relied on diverting Arab armies away from the Suez,⁸⁷ it was equally important for them to be under the impression that the conflict was intractable. The belligerent anti-Arab messaging could have been foregrounded in the *Grass Curtain* to directly appease Israel and, paradoxically in doing so, meet the aim of making a peace deal more likely. Despite the self-undermining effects of these representations discussed above, they do make sense as a confirmation of partnership with Israel to serve the immediate-term pragmatic goals of Lagu, in particular.

Upon the signing of the Addis Ababa Accords, the need for Israeli support diminishes and with this, the hawkish anti-Arab discourse in the *Grass Curtain* also declines. The role of European colonialism in the conflict is even foregrounded for the first time:

the present settlement [...] is a fine example for other African governments [...] that the political arrangements bequeathed to us by foreign masters, do not always fit. The protracted conflict in the Sudan is at once a proof of this view.⁸⁸

This runs directly against the dismissal of the significance of European colonial interference which the *Grass Curtain* had thus far promoted. Once the agreement is signed, there is no longer any need to keep Israel on side, and there is a new need to soften towards the Arab world, as well as to align with the OAU. As it happened, Israel was forced to withdraw support for the SSLM around this time, in any case. The Ugandan regime had been

instrumental in allowing Israeli planes to land and refuel in East Africa, and for arms to cross into Southern Sudan via Kampala. Idi Amin changed his foreign policy in 1972 and began to normalise relations with the Arab world. This entailed the severing of ties with Israel, and with it the Mossad's access to Southern Sudan.⁸⁹

Overall, scripting a visceral African-Arab dichotomy was self-undermining and destabilising for the SSLM because it exposed the internal contradictions at the root of Southern secessionism, and lent credibility to rival resistance movements who were agitating for a united 'black Sudan'. It also undermined diplomatic attempts to appeal for support from both the USA and the OAU. While the commitment to black African nationhood makes sense as the root of the proto-SPLM's struggle, the SSLM had a more spatially-bounded historical experience at its core which pertained to a more complex and selective Africanism⁹⁰ than the simplistic and idealised tropes which appear in the *Grass Curtain*. It appears the Israeli pressure was too strong to allow this to be part of the script.

Israel and internal ambitions

It is pertinent to question whether appeasing the Israeli state was the sole purpose for this series, and therefore ask whether the *Grass Curtain* was a totally externalised cache of representations. However, I argue below that the *Grass Curtain* was a more complicated project than that, and the editorial team and contributors still had internal ambitions which would need to be balanced with their favours to Israel. This delicate balance is revealed by the specific vision of statehood which appears in the *Grass Curtain*.

With 'black Africanness' the essence of the national identity being projected in the series, it is Lagu's Anyanya militia – not Wol Wol's Nile Provisional Government – which comprises the state to that nation. The Anyanya had only recently come to resemble a coherent entity by the time of the first issue of the *Grass Curtain*. Before that, it was both internally fragmented and in competition with other guerrilla militias such as the Anyidi led by Amadeo Taffeng.⁹¹ By July 1970, Lagu had seen off various threats to his power and was in the process of consolidating the Anyanya forces and establishing himself as the 'undisputed leader of the entire Southern Liberation movement'.⁹² It was not until July 1971 that a conference elected Lagu as the SSLM commander in chief.⁹³ Despite this, from the first issue of the magazine in spring 1970, the Anyanya is presented as already having the organisational capacity and broad-based legitimacy required to lead an independent South Sudan. Much like the nature of the 'Africanness' which it seeks to defend, the Anyanya are depicted as the *de facto* government *against* the Northern Arabs.

On the one hand, the Northern government is depicted as orchestrating a calculated under-development of the South. During a cholera outbreak, the Nimeiri regime is accused of deliberately withholding vaccines to Southern citizens: 'When the army comes to civilian populations, they have no vaccines [...] yet, they are vaccinating their own soldiers!'.⁹⁴ On the other hand, the government is depicted as having no real presence in the South with no capacity to control their military who run riot through villages in pillaging raids:

In both areas [Anuakland and Nuerland] there were no signs that the Arab Sudanese government had any interest in the people or authority over them [...] The soldiers run berserk; they kill in cold blood; loot property; rape women; burn houses – and all this is done in the name of 'Law and Order'.⁹⁵

The descriptions point to an authority-less state unable to command its delinquent armies.

Whether the result of orchestration or negligence, the Anyanya militia are portrayed as the political antidote to Khartoumian (non)governance. Lagu states, the Anyanya 'came to life' as a 'political alternative to Arab domination [and answered] the neglected need of the population'.⁹⁶ Their governmental credentials are demonstrated to prove this. During a cholera outbreak, the SSLM were able to vaccinate the areas under their control by rushing 'vaccines and medical orderlies' to the area,⁹⁷ something Khartoum could not, or would not, do. Incidentally, it was the Mossad who were behind this medical assistance.⁹⁸

As well as providing emergency aid, the Anyanya are depicted as commanding the building of an impressive long-term social and economic infrastructure. Lagu states;

After establishing some security and administrative structures in the countryside, the movement started to attend to the neglected interests of the people. The movement set up school and today there are about 200 elementary schools in Juba and Yei Districts alone. In Zandeland, the movement established cotton industries and today we manufacture our own coal, salt, cooking oil and some textiles in Zandeland. We are now trying to extend these self-reliance programmes to other liberated areas in the South.⁹⁹

And in ethnographic fieldnotes of a rural camp:

The camp is also a centre of the Southern Sudan's own provisional government administration. The civilian governor for the area has his base here. He is currently setting up a school under a tree with areas cleared on the ground as desks where the students can scratch letters or numbers in the dust. It is not only children in the settlement who are students, but so many of the soldiers are also hungry for education denied them by the Arab North [...] some of them write on their arms and legs which are as black as the slates they do not have.¹⁰⁰

As shown here, the Anyanya militia are presented as having the organisational capacity to run large-scale projects which serve the security, social and economic needs of all 'black African' Southern Sudanese. A report by Jacob Akol claims that 95% of people in the South support the Anyanya, who have allegedly enjoyed eight years of sound political administration.¹⁰¹ This is demonstrated by their ability to claim taxes from all Southern communities; often in the form of in-kind supplies such as tins of grain.¹⁰² Thus, the Anyanya are shown to be a direct replacement for the Northern-Arab government, who merely 'masquerade in the name of our people'¹⁰³ and are already functioning as a *de facto* state. Far from being in competition with the NPG, they are presented as the dominant partner in a shared governmental operation; '[t]he loyalties of those civilians rested with the Anyanya and the Nile Provisional Government'.¹⁰⁴ This does not reflect the fraught reality on the ground, which is surprising given that Wol Wol was so close to the editorial team.

This military-led state provision would indeed have chimed with Israel, who's ideal state was military-led. This can be seen in Israel's other development operations in Southern Africa where they supported the military to be the sole providers, not only of security, but also of key social services.¹⁰⁵ However, the specifics of military statehood represented in the *Grass Curtain* read against the unadorned influence of Israel, and instead signal towards an internal battle between Lagu and the broader SSLM.

There is a clear need to dismiss 'tribalism' as a relevant cause of the conflict in the *Grass Curtain*, which delivers a strong defence of tribal-national compatibility. The vehement opposition to analyses found in the British press which figure the Southern Sudanese struggle as 'another Biafra'; a war in which two ethnic identities were pitted against each other for control of the state. In a scathing critique of an article printed in *The Times* to that effect, Garang replies

Our war has nothing in common with the Biafra war. Ours is not a struggle between two groups of black Africans. [...] our war did not erupt as the last stage of a fight for rule over an entire country between opposing tribal groupings. Ours is a struggle of black Africans, tied by language, culture and tradition to the neighbouring nations of black Africa, against the same alien Muslim North which sold us into slavery for hundreds of years. [...] We are not Biafra.¹⁰⁶

The Southern Sudanese contributing to this publication are adamant that their struggle should not be analysed in the same neo-patrimonial lens as Biafra. Readers learn instead that the SSLM has been successful in uniting all people under the black-African national struggle:

The seventy men on this trek were a mixture of the various tribes from this region: Anuaks, Shilluks, Murles, and Nuers [...] the Anyanya have helped to reduce tensions between the many different tribes of the Southern Sudan by elevating the national struggle high above any traditional disagreements.¹⁰⁷

Consistent with this identity foci, the Anyanya are depicted as superior to, but not seeking to replace, the chiefdom systems. Throughout the magazine, ethnographic descriptions of rural life serve as evidence of the Anyanya's necessity for rural survival over and above what traditional authorities can provide, yet nevertheless reliant upon them for the legitimacy required to provide it. 'When the Anyanya band passed through [the village] bringing a brief reminder of the twentieth century, it was modern drugs the people asked for to cure their ageless malaria, pneumonia, dysentery, and the infections'.¹⁰⁸ Here, the Anyanya bring the benefits of what they term 'modernity' which the so-called 'traditional' chiefs simply cannot deliver to their polities. At the same time, the incorporation of the chiefdom system is crucial in demonstrating the Anyanya's administrative capacity and in presenting a convincing case for extra-patrimonial legitimacy.

Descriptions of lines of command demonstrate how the SSLM are incorporated into the native administrative systems. A report from an anonymous political correspondent in Torit states:

There is a single Anyanya command uniting, organising, and expanding the existing systems of civil administration. Former Southern administrators, who have joined the armed forces, combine with the local chiefs to maintain law, communications, a limited amount of trade, taxes and in some areas elementary education.¹⁰⁹

Readers also learn about an arrangement of cattle ownership managed by local chiefs whereby the Anyanya keep cows in various villages. These are herded by the locals and, when the Anyanya passes through the village, they choose one of their own cows to feed on.¹¹⁰ In cases where Anyanya fighters have gone against such arrangements, punishment is dealt with by a combination of the Anyanya leadership and local chiefs. In

one detailed incident report, a group of soldiers who stole some chickens were disciplined harshly by a committee of local chiefs and Anyanya leaders.¹¹¹ Thus a few bad apples are exposed as such in an otherwise harmonious system. Overall, the impression given is one of highly organised lines of authority along which state capacity stretches from the village chiefs out through the NPG and towards the Anyanya at the apex of government. This is, as one would expect, a highly romanticised depiction of a movement which was, in reality, feared by communities and beset with infighting.¹¹²

The representation of neat tribal connections reaching out through a civilian layer of governance towards a military leadership is obviously beneficial for Lagu as he sought to quell dissent from all three institutional spheres. Yet it would not have resonated favourably with the Mossad, who Gidron confirms did read the *Grass Curtain*.¹¹³ Israel was pragmatic towards tribal identities, but was suspicious that Lagu would use their support to fund another tribal war.¹¹⁴ In their operations in Africa, they did not seek to erase the tribe as a form of social organisation, but at the same time, did not see a place for traditional leaders, nor any civilians for that matter, in national governance. It was considered preferable in Israeli development operations for African military leadership to be 'deliberately isolated' from the civilian politicians¹¹⁵ and to be in independent command of service delivery as far as possible.¹¹⁶ The ideal African political realm for Israel would be military from the top to the bottom, yet a more integrated picture is presented in the *Grass Curtain*.

Overall, the *Grass Curtain* represents the Anyanya as the proto-state *against* the Arab state and *above* the local chiefs. This puts it in line with Israeli militarism but at odds with Israeli modernity. The representations of Anyanya proto-statehood can thus be read as a partial divergence from the Israeli ideal. This scripting would have brought personal benefits to Lagu and consolidated the Anyanya's power as the legitimate government of the proto Southern Sudanese state. It therefore suggests a partially introverted representational strategy, rather than a fully extraverted one.

Conclusion

The self-representations in the *Grass Curtain* depict a universal African national identity which is *against* the Arab nationalism of the North, and *above* tribal identities rooted in the South. The Anyanya militia comprising the state to that nation is *against* Khartoumian (non)governance, and *above* the chieftdom system operating in the various localities in the South. These representations are, in many ways, counter-intuitive: the racialised nationalism undermines the key statebuilding vision of the SSLM, namely Southern secessionism; the anti-Arab messaging is unattractive to key potential allies the USA and the OAU, as well as being against the professional ambitions of the editorial team; the extra-tribal nature of the nation-state is not sufficiently aligned with Wol Wol's potential continental ally, the OAU. In summary, the long-term political interests of the SSLM are actively undermined by much of the scripted nationalism in the *Grass Curtain*.

However, they do meet immediate-term and highly pragmatic imperatives for the SSLM leadership. They help to secure Israeli support and to crush internal competition. In this case, the representations suggest immediate and pragmatic needs have been prioritised. Indeed, enduring ideological influences of the old metropole, alliances with new imperial powers, and emerging moral solidarities within the African region have been eschewed to make way for them. It is clear from this investigation that depictions

of nation and state in Southern Sudan – the legacies of which can clearly be seen in contemporary Southern Sudanese statebuilding – cannot be read as uncomplicated depictions of elite ideology: instead, they are the result of multiple and cross-cutting, even contradictory, forms of nation scripting.

The findings of this study contribute to a broader understanding of postcolonial African political development by demonstrating how print culture served as a crucial tool for external and internal political strategy. The *Grass Curtain* demonstrates the complexity of nation-building efforts in postcolonial Africa, where elite actors navigated a delicate balance between domestic ambitions and external pressures. Ultimately, this paper underscores the importance of both the content and context of political propaganda in understanding the historical trajectories of postcolonial nations.

Notes

1. Dorman, "Nationalism in African Politics"; Nugent, Hammett, and Dorman, *Making Nations, Creating Strangers*.
2. Bayart, "Africa in the World."
3. Tornimbeni, "Nationalism and Internationalism."
4. Bayart, "Africa in the World"; Dorman, "Beyond the Gatekeeper State?"
5. Dorman, "Beyond the Gatekeeper State?"; Nugent, Hammett, and Dorman, *Making Nations, Creating Strangers*.
6. Miescher, Rizzo, and Silvester, *Posters in Action*.
7. Thompson, "Visualising FRELIMO's Liberated Zones."
8. Davis, *African Literature and the CIA*.
9. Fisher, "Image Management' in East Africa."
10. Manoeli, "Narrative Battles."
11. Hargrove, *Ghana's Ashanti Pioneer Newspaper*.
12. Scotton, "The First African Press in East Africa."
13. Salih, "The Sudanese Press."
14. Thompson, "Visualising FRELIMO's Liberated Zones."
15. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
16. Willis, "The Southern Problem."
17. Johnson, "The Trial of The Vigilant," 18.
18. Dekert, "The History of the Sudanese Press," 14.
19. Johnson, "The Trial of The Vigilant."
20. Gidron, "One People, One Struggle"; Willis, "The Southern Problem."
21. Willis, "The Southern Problem."
22. Manoeli, *Sudan's "Southern Problem"*.
23. Willis, "The Southern Problem," 292–4.
24. Gidron, "One People, One Struggle'."
25. Akol, *I Will Go the Distance*, 287.
26. Interview – Richard Gray interviewing Mr MacDermot. Transcript, n.d. Richard Gray Papers. Sudan Open Archive, 2. <https://www.sudanarchive.net/?a=d&d=WMRG-21.1.1&e=-----en-20-1--txt-txIN%7ctxTI%7ctxAU----->.
27. Ibid., 3.
28. Tounsel, *Chosen Peoples*, 77.
29. Interview – Richard Gray interviewing Mr MacDermot, Op. Cit.
30. Lagu, *Sudan*, 239.
31. deGarang, "Grass Curtain: Editorial," 1970, 3.
32. Interview – Richard Gray interviewing Mr MacDermot, 3. Op. Cit.
33. Ibid.

34. Anonymous, "The 'Grass Curtain' is Read Everywhere."
35. deGarang, "Grass Curtain: Editorial," 1972.
36. deGarang, "Dissolution of the Nile Provisional Government."
37. deGarang, "The Southern Sudan Association," 23.
38. Lagu, "It is Better to Die than Be the Slaves of Greedy Arabs," 18.
39. PH, "Southern Sudan under Nimeiri: Part I."
40. Anyanya Newsheet, "Southern Sudan is Not Biafra."
41. Mogot and Wol Wol, "An Appeal to the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organisation in Tripoli."
42. deGarang, "Systematic Liquidation of Southern Leadership," 1.
43. Lagu, "The Dynamics of Co-Operation between the Anyanya and the People," 6; Anonymous, "Report of Safari for Souls inside South Sudan," 23; Anonymous, "News Reports," 1971, 5; Reed, "A Journey to War," 20; Akol, "A Year of Revolution," 14.
44. Anonymous, "News Reports," 1971, 4.
45. PH, "Southern Sudan under Nimeiri: Part II," 9.
46. Manoeli, *Sudan's "Southern Problem"*.
47. Willis, "The Southern Problem," 284–5.
48. Manoeli, "'Apartheid' Sudan"; Willis, "The Southern Problem."
49. Frahm, "Defining the Nation," 22.
50. Garang, "Birth of a State."
51. Ibid., 13.
52. Frahm, "Defining the Nation."
53. Pirouet, "The Achievement of Peace in Southern Sudan."
54. Kuyok, *South Sudan*.
55. Pirouet, "The Achievement of Peace in Southern Sudan," 123–6.
56. Ibid.
57. Kramer, Lobban Jr., and Fluehr-Lobban, *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan*, 203.
58. Ibid., 436.
59. Rolandsen, "The Making of the Anya-Nya Insurgency," 216–17.
60. Abelow, "Letter."
61. deGarang, "Socialism in The Sudan – A Sham," 2.
62. PH, "Southern Sudan under Nimeiri: Part II," 11.
63. deGarang, "Editorial: Chronology of the Year's Events," 1.
64. Willis, "The Southern Problem," 293.
65. Rolandsen, "The Making of the Anya-Nya Insurgency," 215.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 217.
68. Wanji, "The Afro-Arab Scene."
69. M.J.J., "OAU and the South Sudan."
70. Adam and Olelah, "Proposed: An OAU Grievance Commission."
71. Mondesire, "On Pan-Africanism and Secession."
72. Lagu, "The Dynamics of Co-Operation Between the Anyanya and the People," 5.
73. Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War*, 15.
74. Ibid., 121. My emphasis.
75. Mondesire, "On Pan-Africanism and Secession," 30.
76. Akol, "What We Are and Are Not Fighting For," 26.
77. Akol, "The Point of No Return."
78. Secretariat of the United Sudanese African Liberation Front, "Opinion."
79. Manoeli, "'Apartheid' Sudan."
80. Mathews, "A Distortion of African Revolution."
81. Manoeli, "Narrative Battles," 4.
82. Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War*, 128.
83. Ibid., 156.
84. Ibid., 156.

85. Pirouet, "The Achievement of Peace in Southern Sudan," 140.
86. Ibid., 122; Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War*, 139.
87. Pirouet, "The Achievement of Peace in Southern Sudan," 140.
88. Uweche, "A Fine Example," 6.
89. Pirouet, "The Achievement of Peace in Southern Sudan," 141; Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War*, 160.
90. Mondesire, "On Pan-Africanism and Secession."
91. Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War*, 141, 120–9.
92. Ibid., 129.
93. Ibid., 143.
94. Anonymous, "News Reports," 1971, 5, 7.
95. Akol, "How Fares South Sudan?"; Reed, "A Journey to War," 17.
96. Lagu, "The Dynamics of Co-Operation between the Anyanya and the People," 7.
97. Anonymous, "News Reports," 1971, 7.
98. Gidron, "One People, One Struggle."
99. Lagu, "The Dynamics of Co-Operation between the Anyanya and the People," 5.
100. Reed, "A Journey to War," 16.
101. Akol, "The Point of No Return."
102. Anonymous, "News Reports," 1970, 9.
103. Lagu, "The Dynamics of Co-Operation Between the Anyanya and the People," 9.
104. Reed, "A Journey to War," 17.
105. Gidron, *Israel in Africa*; Sheffer and Barak, *Militarism and Israeli Society*.
106. deGarang, "A Reply to Anthony Nutting's Article in the Sunday Times," 31.
107. Reed, "A Journey to War," 17.
108. Ibid., 18.
109. Anonymous, "The Present Southern Sudan Military and Political Situation."
110. Reed, "A Journey to War," 17.
111. Ibid., 17.
112. Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War*; Rolandsen, "The Making of the Anya-Nya Insurgency in the Southern Sudan, 1961–64."
113. Gidron, "One People, One Struggle", 14.
114. Ibid., 19.
115. Poggo, *The First Sudanese Civil War*, 158.
116. Gidron, "One People, One Struggle'."

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ORCID

Cathy A. Wilcock  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0622-6815>

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