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Colonial Sudan: The Separate Administration of The South (1920-1933)

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Abstract: *As a matter of fact, many educated Sudanese questioned whether there ever existed a coherent and comprehensive British policy toward the Sudan as a whole and toward its Southern Regions in particular. There was actually no room in Sudanese nationalism for continuing domination of the traditional leaders, and as Native Administration came under increasing attacks by the nationalists, so too did its resultant "Southern Policy", with all its implications for separatism. Ten years after its promulgation, the Southern Policy was regarded by the nationalists as the very symbol of the British imperial dictum of Divide and Rule, intended to continue British control in the Sudan by perpetuating the separation of the country into two regions. Sudanese nationalists viewed the Southern Policy as part of a system which sought to search for the past not to look for the future, and to emphasize diversity not to encourage unity. Moreover, the language policy adopted in the South did not aim specifically at the exclusion of Islam and Arabic but more at the encouragement of English as a lingua franca. This created or intensified linguistic division, which still complicates North – South relations today. Sudanese nationalists continued to condemn the Southern Policy because its implementation, they considered, allowed the ultimate political arrangements of a unified Sudan to be indefinitely postponed. This section is reserved to the birth and execution of the Southern Policy, the factor most responsible for the Sudan's present separation.*
Keywords: *Southern Policy, Nationalists, Britain, Disunity.*
Resumé : *L'élite au Soudan se demandait s'il existait une politique britannique cohérente et logique à l'égard du Soudan, dans son ensemble, et envers ses régions du Sud en particulier. Dix ans après sa promulgation, la « Politique du Sud » était considérée par les nationalistes comme le symbole même de la dictée impériale britannique de 'Diviser pour Reigner', destinée à maintenir le contrôle britannique au Soudan tout en maintenant la séparation du pays en deux régions. Les nationalistes soudanais considéraient la Politique du Sud comme faisant partie d'un système colonial, séparatiste. De plus, la politique adoptée dans le Sud ne visait pas spécifiquement l'exclusion de l'islam et de l'arabe, mais plutôt l'encouragement de l'anglais comme lingua franca. Cela a créé ou intensifié la division linguistique, ce qui a compliqué les relations Nord - Sud. Les nationalistes soudanais ont continué à condamner la Politique du Sud parce que sa mise en œuvre, ont-ils estimé, a permis de retarder indéfiniment les arrangements politiques possibles d'un Soudan unifié. Ce travail est réservé à la naissance et à l'exécution de cette politique coloniale, qui reste une des raisons majeures de la division du soudan.*
Mots Clés : *Politique du Sud, nationalistes, Grande Bretagne, division.*

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1. Introduction

By the end of the First World War, Khartoum viewed the South, when it was forced to view it at all, with bewilderment, even despair. In fact, as mentioned in chapter two, the first two decades of British rule were marked by increasing local opposition and official violence. 'Pacification', not administration, was the inevitable resort of a government ignorant of local languages and cultures and unwilling to expend the financial and human resources needed to consolidate its rule. Locally, the Sudan Government was seen as the latest in a series of foreign intruders who raided and taxed, plundered and killed, promised security and did not provide it. There was very little economic development, and also very little administration. Education was left to missionaries as a bone to a dog. In 1920, British Officials in Khartoum judged administration in the South a 'failure', a conclusion they drew from the frequency of their military operations. What was therefore to be done? The answer was not so simple. After the War it became clear that the system of administration functioning in the North was unworkable in the South. The communications were poor, distances so great, languages unknown, staff insufficient and local hostility always threatening. Reliance on local chiefs was impossible where there were no chiefs, or where leaders seemed to emerge only to organize resistance against the British.

2. Foreign Office Attitude towards the South

The changes in attitude which had affected Anglo – Egyptian relations after 1924 caused the Foreign Office to devote more attention to sub-Egyptian Africa. In fact, British Officials in the Sudan began to enforce policies that they thought suitable and coherent to the Southern Sudan, without Egyptian embarrassments and presence. Thus the Southern Policy, conceived by the Financial Secretary Sir George Schuster in 1924, was a programme of action with specific means to achieve desired ends. At that time, every British Official was concerned with neutralizing increasing Egyptian intrigue and anti – British propaganda throughout the Sudan, including the South .Through his programme, Schuster brought the South into the campaign against the Egyptians: 'if we act now in the South by taking a definite line of action, we may achieve something and leave the government more free to deal with larger problems'[1].

Schuster's policy programme with regard to the 'black savages who inhabit[2]the Southern Provinces (including Mangalla , Bahr-al-Ghazal , and Upper Nile) was still unclear by the early 1920's , but decisions to control the scope of Northern Muslim penetration in the southern areas were already taken. Actually, as a result of the British reaction to the upheavals of Egyptian nationalism complemented by the White Flag League disturbances and capped by Lee Stack's assassination, the beginnings of a distinctly separate approach to the administration of the Southern Sudan emerged. As early as 1922, The Passport and Permits Ordinance declared the entire South 'closed districts'. The enacted Ordinance made the South a huge Closed District, increasingly reserved to the native community and insulated from the world around it. It gave the Governor – General the power to close a district. Thus entire districts could be "absolutely closed" and no Northern Sudanese or foreigners could enter the district without official

[1]Collins R.O., *Shadows in the Grass, Britain in Southern Sudan,1899-1909*, London, Yale University Press, 1968, p.170.
[2]Annual report for 1904, Egypt, no.1 (1905), Cd.2409, p.140

permission. Entry was only permitted subject to conditions and for purposes specified by the Governor – General. These entry permits could be refused without reason or cancelled without notice. Nonrenewal or cancellation obliged the affected persons to close out their affairs and depart the district. That Darfur and parts of Kassala and the White Nile provinces were also thus 'closed' indicated the general concern for security underlying the ordinance, and indeed as great a concern about the movement of Mahdists in the North as about the Northerners in the South.

3. Mac Michael's Southern Policy

Given a commanding position in the Sudan, the doyen of the Sudan Political Service, Harold Mac Michael, realized that the time had come for the "right" definition of administrative policy in the South to support Native Administration. His decisive and unquestioned opinions convinced him that the South should have a separate policy, which he endeavoured to implement, and, anyway, no one in Khartoum was prepared to argue with him[3]. Mac Michael, supported by the Governor General Sir John Maffey, revived then Schuster's programme and promulgated it to implement his conviction. In the following quotation, Mac Michael's policy was to design the development of the Southern Sudan tribes with structure and organization based on the solid rock of local traditions and beliefs. The policy was also to create a solid barrier against the insidious political intrigues of the Muslim North. He wrote his "Memorandum on Southern Policy" in 1928 where he stated:

> The problem is whether to encourage the spread of Arabic in the South as a lingua franca and medium between the governing class and the governed, or to resist it on political grounds. The former alternative appears to be basically unsound, the latter to be demanded as the right aim and object of our policy…. There has been no freedom for the mind and conscience, no intellectual future for this race…. These Arabs of the North and the intelligentsia of the towns would not fail to assume a pose of sympathy and interest which might become a serious embarrassment…. Surely it is wiser and better and safer to take the long view and to encourage our officials by every possible means to acquire a fuller and more intimate knowledge of all that pertains to the great negro tribes and denote a whole- hearted enthusiasm to the cultivation of their languages, conservation and sublimation of all that is of value in their customs and institutions, frank recognition of the measure of truth contained in their religion[4]

Mac Michael's memorandum on Southern Policy was used by the Sudan Government much as the Milner Report (1919) had been. Both commended lines of policy that advanced the principle of developing powers to both trained local staff and traditional rulers. However, in both cases the role of an educated elite was quietly circumscribed, while that of 'native authorities' was emphasized and the functions of British Officials

[3]Collins, op. cit., p. 172

[4]Mac Michael, memorandum, 10 August 1928, FO 141/624/19768. A draft, with Mac Michael's memorandum, is at SAD G/s 469, Daly, M., *Empire on the Nile, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*, U.K. Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.410

were increased. Unlike the North, the South had its own particular problems. The South suffered more because its educated class was only embryonic and the scope of its employment severely restricted. There was nothing in the South that could be compared to the Gezira Scheme, nor were there any concerted attempts at economic development. Some local efforts withered in the blast of world depression and were never revived. As a British Official put it as early as 1924, while the British might in due course be 'in a position to grant' self-government in the North, 'the difficulty' would be 'to safeguard the very large negroid element, which has never progressed, and presumably never will[5]. But the relative economic backwardness of the region was, as most Northern nationalists strongly argued, reinforced by government policy and even extolled by British administrators.

However, the promulgation of the Southern Policy was greeted with great enthusiasm by the governors and District Commissioners in the Southern Sudan. They were asked to implement the Policy with discretion but vigour and to monitor its progress annually[6]. They all clearly understood the instructions which emphasized the importance of everything which, in the smallest degree, may contribute to encourage tribal consciousness, English, and the suppression of Arabic. The British Officials did not seem to be concerned about northern susceptibilities to overt anti-Muslim and anti-Arab measures in the South. Even the sensitive issues –such as the destruction of mosques, the elimination of Muslim traders, and the open discouragement of Arab names, speech and clothing – did not appear to matter to them. The orders of Mac Michael were quite clear: the isolation of the South from harmful Muslim contacts and the elimination of the "unwanted". Furthermore, the administrators in Khartoum did not really care about how official orders for the implementation of the Southern Policy were carried out by the governors of the South, as long as they did it quietly.

British Officials in the South were interventionists in their dealings with Native Courts as the precepts of Indirect Rule were ambiguous. Courts of one type or another had been introduced towards the end of the First World War without Khartoum's knowledge[7]. A resolution of the 1921 Southern Governors' meeting noted the necessity of limiting courts to the administration of 'tribal law', but ignorance of that law left jurisdiction a matter for the district commissioner to settle, as was the composition of the Court itself. Until the late 1920's, no legislation to standardize or even generalize courts' powers was promulgated until The Chiefs' Courts Ordinance of 1931. Although both Maffey and Mac Michael emphasized the importance of the British official's abandoning his role as 'Father of the People', the District Commissioner's effacement was not evident. Still very concerned with establishing law and order and fearing local uprisings against their native authorities, Brock (Wheatley's successor as District Commissioner of Bahr al-Ghazal) argued that 'a very thorough control of Chiefs Courts' would be necessary 'for some time'. Chiefs without 'pre-Government prestige' could not 'exert much authority without considerable assistance from their District Commissioners[8].

[5]Johnston, 'Handing over notes'; Patrick, Residency minute to Notables to GG1, 10 June 1924, FO 141/806/8100, see Daly, op.cit., p.417
[6]Collins, op.cit., p.175
[7]Ibid
[8]Wheatley to CS, 20 April 1927, CIVSEC1/13/43; Brock to CS, 4 July 1929, CIVSEC 1/11/36

The partial co-operation of chiefs into the judicial system, and the full British control of it, naturally tended towards the identification of the courts with the Government rather than with the 'traditional institutions' from which they were supposed to have stemmed. In some places in the Southern Sudan, unofficial courts sprang up in competition with the approved chiefs' courts. Some unofficial chiefs drew popular support away from those recognized by the Government. After disturbances in Bor, the Sudan Government realized that the system of courts prevailing was deeply unpopular. Though it was inconvenient and unrepresentative in propping up a chief who was unsupported by his people, yet, the deposed head chief was succeeded by another who remained in office only with government support.

4. The Separatist Colonial Policy

It is essential to return to the essence of the Southern Policy and how it officially made the North and the South two different regions. It seemed legitimate to the British Administration to enforce restrictions that were thought necessary in all circumstances and particularly in respect of security. The South had to remain safe from Arab, Muslim and Northern Sudanese nationalist influences. It is however difficult to defend the whole of this policy and the way it was executed. The prohibition of Arabic, the abolition of Arab names, the wholesale accusations against all Northerners of being slave dealers, and the advantage given to Christian missionaries over Muslim preachers: all these provisions, in reality, marred the essential merits of the policy which were, as assumed by the British Officials, the attempt to preserve the cultures of the people of the Southern Sudan. Even more important, a boundary between Northern and Southern policy and all that entails was in perspective. As an adopted child, the South was allowed to develop along its own lines, freed from the contamination of Arabic and Islam. This Southern Policy, which became a charter for 'institutionalizing' backwardness as will be discussed later, was a serious failure of the Condominium regime for which the Sudan would pay dearly.

The Southern Policy had several aspects, none more important than education. As referred to earlier, no one in the Political Service worried very much about education in the Southern Sudan during the first two decades of their rule. In fact, the central government still saw southern education as a nuisance as the South as a whole was a mysterious and unexplored region. During that period, the British rulers were too busy establishing and consolidating their authority to inaugurate schemes of education. Money, what little was available from the Northern Sudanese or Egyptians, was required to conquer people not to liberate their minds. Moreover, Native Administration, with its fundamental principle of involving the ruled as rulers, was only an imprecise concept in these years. Thus the educational policy of the Sudan Government in the South was plainly simple: leave it to the missionaries. This seemingly satisfactory and economical solution, however, obscured the fundamental issues of education, which was left in the hands of missionaries urging the conversion of the Southern peoples to Christianity.

The missions and consequently their educational and religious efforts were regulated by the "Sphere System". From the very beginning of the Condominium, Cromer and Wingate had foreseen the possibilities of religious conflict if Christian denominations were turned loose in the Southern Sudan. Thus each missionary society seeking to work in the Southern Sudan – the Italian Catholics, the Verona Fathers, the Anglicans, the

Church Missionary Society, and the American Presbyterians – were given a sphere within which to carry out their educational and evangelistic activities. In general, the British desire for the exclusion of Arabic and Islam from the South, their encouragement of Christianity and English were fully expressed in the mission schools. The Catholic Verona Fathers were the most successful; in the late 1920's they had about 1,900 students in elementary schools, two trade schools at Wau and Rejaf, two intermediate schools at Wau and Okaru, and Torrit. The Church Missionary society taught about 600 students at the elementary level and in a high school and intermediate school at Loka[9]. In all, thirty-two elementary schools functioned under missionary auspices, including the American Presbyterians at Doleib Hill and Nassir, all with some degree of government assistance. Thus by this period, the Sudan Government still saw missionary education as more appropriate for the South than government schools.

Once the administrative objectives of the Sudan Government became more sophisticated than simple security, British officials could no longer regard education in the Southern Sudan with indifference. The policy of Native Administration which began to unfold from the Civil Secretariat under the guidance of Mac Michael predicated the participation of the Southern Sudanese in their own governance. But the Sudan Government was determined to create a distinct Southern Sudanese who would not disturb Khartoum the way the Northern one did. Thus the insulation of the South from Arabic and Islam had become an important political consideration, and the British officials wondered whether mission education alone could be effective in meeting these needs.

Thus the system of education which finally emerged in the South was based on two types of schools – elementary vernacular schools with four-year courses which were simple and directly linked with the practical needs of the people, and intermediate schools, in which English was the language of instruction, and the courses of study, extending for six years, were aimed at producing teachers, clerks, and other minor officials[10]. The problem presented by 'the infinite variety of local languages and their orthography[11] was tackled at the Language Conference held at Rejaf in April 1928, in which the Sudan Government recorded its decision against Arabic as a Lingua Franca. Of course, the missionaries did not want the Sudan Government to encourage Arabic and Islam in the South but they contributed virtually nothing to the decision to adopt English as the official language there. That decision was made in Khartoum, Cairo, and London by secular authorities[12]. By now, Wingate's hesitant beginnings over a decade before were clarified. In the South, English would substitute Arabic as the language of administration, and English-speaking, mission-trained southern clerks would replace those communicating in Arabic[13].

More importantly, recommendations were accepted to develop local languages. Bari, Dinka, Latuka, Nuer, Shilluk, and Azande were chosen as 'group languages' to be fostered. Matthew, then Secretary of Education and Health, viewed the standard of Arabic

[9]Daly, op.cit., p. 409
[10]Annual Report for1927, Sudan, no.1 (1929), Cmd, 3284, p.80
[11]Annual Report for 1927, Sudan, no.1 (1929), Cmd, 3284, p.81
[12]Collins, op.cit., p.218
[13]In addition, every effort was made to encourage the mission schools to train an English-speaking clerical staff to be of more immediate benefit to the government. Ibid., p. 168.

in the South as in any case very low, and he and others evinced a distaste for it quite beyond political objections[14]. After the conference, he wrote, "I saw a good deal of Nilotic So-called Arabic. It was worse even than possible and seemed….to be almost incapable of improvement". He added in objection of the use of Arabic, "It was wrong to adopt a language which is neither that of the ruling or the ruled". Matthew decided and Mac Michael shared this view.

Now that the missionaries were equipped with money, they proceeded with their work under the general guidance of the government. Several schools were opened in subsequent years and, in 1930, there were three intermediate schools with 117 boys (in addition to 15 at the Stack Memorial College at Wau) and 32 elementary vernacular schools with 2,024 pupils[15]. By the mid 1930's, the number of pupils at the intermediate schools rose to 246; and the number of elementary schools for boys was 36 with an attendance of 2,977. In addition, there were 18 girls' schools with 760 pupils and three trade schools with 100 boys[16].Textbooks were already being produced in the vernacular languages as well as in English and the general standard of education was being raised[17]. In the meantime, Islam and Arabic were not only totally excluded from the schools, but were also being systematically erased throughout the Southern Provinces. By the mid thirties, then, the Southern Policy was in full flood and Native Administration, its counterpart in the North, was still thriving.

5. Education for the South

Now one needs to re-examine the most important issue concerning educational objectives advanced by the Southern Policy. The policy of the Government in the South, as Mac Michael stated in his memorandum, was to build up a series of self-contained racial or tribal units with structure and organization based upon traditional customs and beliefs[18]. But in 1930 the pattern of administration prevented the necessity for creating a southern literate class at all, and therefore allowed abandonment of that aspect of Southern Policy that called for educational advance. As one district commissioner put it, by educating boys the missions made them unsuitable for the declared aim of fostering native institutions[19]. Even the Education Department, under Winter (from 1932-1936), reflected in its attitude towards southern education the dominant line of northern administrative policy: an educated class is inevitably hostile to traditional tribal rule (and to the British).

Not entirely hostile to education, British Officials sought to promote education, but education for a separate South. In the Sudan, these officials saw no contradiction in seeking to institute a system of education that was practical, not intended to train minds to rule, but to train subjects to serve loyally and conscientiously. The half-educated Sudanese would be enough. In line with this view, increasing attention was paid to sub-elementary 'bush schools', to practical education in agriculture and to enrolment in

[14]Daly, op.cit., p.410.
[15]Muddathir, A., *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan, a Study in Constitutional and Political Development1899-1956*, London, Oxford University Press, 1969, p.83
[16]Ibid.
[17]Annual Report for 1936, Sudan, no.1 (1937), Cmd, 5575, p.90
[18]Memorandum encl. in CS to Southern Governors, 25 January 1930, repr. In Muddathir, Imperialism, pp. 245-249.
[19]Daly, op.cit., p.414.

intermediate schools, which was tied to an estimate of the government's staff needs. Therefore, at the 1932 and 1933 southern education conferences, the Government forcefully expressed its view that education should emphasize the practical as opposed to the literary and thus avoid tendencies towards detribalization.

Winter, the Director of Education, raised what proved to be an unsolvable problem: how to educate "boys" but keep them integrated into a tribal society which either rejected their new values or found them inappropriate and useless in the tribal context. Winter and his successor were consistently emphasizing to the mission educators the policy aspects of their service. Winter stated: "I raised the question and emphasized the desirability of checking the inevitable tendency of education to disintegrate the tribe and of avoiding the danger of an educated class in rivalry with the accepted rulers of the people"[20].

Winter was one of the more perceptive members of the Political Service who saw instability in the future if more effective policy control over the missions was not maintained. Fear that the British Government might quickly build a class of aggrieved and detribalized Southerners was justified. Thus the whole educational policy developed into an emphasis on separation and conservation. Separate the North from the South, preserve the tribal societies from any modern influences, conserve the Government's resources by educating only those required to replace subordinate staff, and then educate only to the minimum degree necessary for competence – these were the goals. These goals might have been possible, but as will be seen later, none of them was totally achieved.

6. Conclusion

In the South, a more serious issue needs to be revealed. After the reconquest, the South was a wreck: entire tribes had been decimated, enslaved and stripped of all leadership. The Mahdi's revolt had left a vivid and negative impression of reactionary Islam on the English public. The murder of Gordon could not be forgotten. The British missions in the South, therefore, aimed at erasing the horrors of the immediate past and re-establishing the Southern Sudanese image prior to the Mahdiya. The South's chaotic conditions tended to emphasize the Southerner's hatred and fear of the Northerner, and leave a lasting sense of grievance and mistrust. As missionary education was to reinforce the separatist policy of the Sudan Government, it turned its role to perpetuating the differences and strengthening North – South suspicion and hostilities. The seeds of separation, sawn in mission schools, flourished later and were a factor contributing to the North – South conflict that erupted into a civil war in 1955, even before independence was officially declared.

The Northern Sudanese became more suspicious and critical of the Southern Policy and its supporters: the missionaries. They were conscious that the education promoted in the South was giving birth to Christian educated Southerners who would represent a barrier against their own political or cultural influences. Moreover, they thought the whole Southern Policy was designed to divide the cultural, religious and ethnic components of the country and set them against one another to facilitate their subjection.

[20]SGA Equatoria 1/5/19. April 16,1932

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[2] Annual Report for 1927, Sudan, no.1 (1929), Cmd, 3284
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