

Juba Report

3 – 12 August 2011

Given the short time frame, this report is necessarily impressionistic, exploratory and provisional. Besides interviews and observation, it owes a great deal to discussions with CB. All errors and exaggerations, however, are my own.

There are two contrasting views of the Republic of Southern Sudan (RSS). What could be called the 'aid view' is associated with paternalistic ideas of a fledgling state that, despite having immense obstacles to overcome, is slowly and hesitantly moving in right direction. Contradicting this view, is a perspective which sees RSS – for want of a better term – as a military-business complex that has displayed a ruthless determination and continuity in attaining and maintaining power. It has held together a fractious ethnic alliance, or series of alliances, through its skill in what de Waal would call the 'political market place'. This includes operating a system of individual rewards and collective punishments. Importantly, the aid industry is an integral part of this political market place with the signs and privileges of the 'international' acting as a surrogate ethic marker.

Plural society

The idea of RSS – or more accurately the SPLA/M – as a military-business complex helps explain the marked pluralism of Juba society. As a predatory, extractive and non-productive force, the Dinka-dominated military-business complex, with help from the international aid industry, has emerged to effectively dominate indigenous commercial activity. As a consequence of cultural values, post-war stasis and three decades without formal education, however, the RSS is dependent upon Ethiopians, Eritreans, Ugandans, Kenyans, Somalis, northern Sudanese, Americans, Europeans and, not least, Asians to support the productive economy, extract the mineral wealth and supply essential services. Since 1989, for example, the aid industry has effectively built and maintained South Sudan's only effective transport infrastructure – the UN air service. At the same time, it has provided the food aid that that, since the 1970s, has been an essential tool of internal security – being able to both reward and punish rural communities.

Since colonial times¹, a key feature of plural society – where key areas of the economy and service-sector are under foreign control – is that indigenous peoples are reduced to spectators at the feast. This situation is aptly reflected in Juba. Within the primary commercial, hotel and aid sectors, few Southerners – even in unskilled positions – are employed. The main exceptions are the now ubiquitous security-guards that man their gates. As we know, these guards are an entrepreneurial off-shoot of SPLA/M militarism.

Juba society reflects an ambiguous and fractious pluralism. While the military-business complex needs foreigners – otherwise it would have no infrastructure or services – it seeks at the same time to extract maximum rents from these groups. It's a pluralism that excites a state of constant uncertainty. Reflecting the textbook definition of totalitarianism², governance is effected through constantly changing the rules, continually keeping people guessing where the boundaries lie, and keeping the location of sovereignty vague, only to have it suddenly appear in the most unexpected places and times. Independence, like the CPA before, is the latest in string of 'year zeros' in which rules are reset and limits renegotiated. It is a form of governance in which the most complex of tasks can sometimes be achieved effortlessly, whereas a routine procedure can prove impossible to complete. One effect of this mode of governance is to discourage permanence and encourage foreign service-providers to export as much money as possible. Aid workers are similar. For many, South Sudan has become little more than a useful addition to the CV to be achieved as quickly as is reasonably possible.

A post-modern urbanism

The plural nature of society, and the tension between the productive and the unproductive, finds an expression in the spatial diagram of Juba. Until 2005, Juba was, effectively, a large village. Besides the airstrip and barracks, a small commercial and administrative centre was surrounded by a ring of *tukls*. With the ending of the war, Juba has expanded rapidly with influx of money, returnees, aid workers and foreign speculators. Even in countries where the UN has had full control, such as Kosovo, it has shown itself oblivious to the existence of urban planning regulations or the need to enforce them³. In Juba,

¹ Furnivall, J.S. 1948. *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Fraenkel, Ernst. 2006 [1941]. *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship*. London: Lawbook Exchange Ltd.

³ Vöckler, Kai. *Prishtina is Everywhere - Turbo Urbanism: the Aftermath of a Crisis*. Berlin: Erste Foundation/Archis Interventions; 2008.

where the UN mission operates in an advisory capacity, the aid industry has directly fuelled a rapid and deregulated process of fragmented urbanism. This disjointed urbanism has compounded the fact that land ownership in and around much of Juba is disputed.

Juba can best be described as a series of privately guarded gated-communities that provide refuge for its plural elites. These defended spaces vary in their size and degree of autonomy from the rest of the city. In the spaces between these fortified compounds and residential complexes – where the majority of the Sudanese live – there is little in the way of public infrastructure. Having their own generators and guards, and sometimes their own wells, like the agency vehicles that ply between them, these resources are privately owned and managed. Over the past three years the UN has, quite literally, built its walls higher and increased the density of the razor-wire with which it surrounds itself. Contractors, consultants, World Bank officials and international NGO live and work in gated offices and team houses. It is rare to find international NGOs that do not employ a private security company to guard their gates. In a move away from the more open and accessible colonial architecture, what new government buildings have been erected, now mimic the fortified aid compound. While sometimes eschewing razor wire for more aesthetically pleasing walls that are topped with decorative railings, they are nevertheless following the current neo-liberal ethos for global elites to fence themselves in.

This atmosphere of uncertainty that the gated-compound exudes is also reflected in the building materials and techniques being used. While clearly evident in the construction of the office and residential complexes within aid's spreading Green Zones, the foreign-owned 'hotel' sector is a good example. Within the economic sphere, uncertainty is transformed into impermanence. Responding to the need for accommodation, Asian, American, Eritrean and Ethiopian investors have built a series of prefabricated hotel compounds. Resembling trailer parks – container-like rooms with an a/c unit bolted on – these hotels have been built as cheaply as possible from plastic and light-alloy prefabricated sections. With payment on cash-only basis, these structures are clearly meant to extract the maximum profit, with the smallest outlay, in the shortest time. While some are only a few years old, they are already in a state of visible deterioration. Given the plural nature of Juba society, this transient infrastructure provides relatively little employment for Southerners.

Juba is a global city. It has expanded rapidly since 2005 in the absence of any pre-existing and limiting modernist infrastructure. Lacking any restraint and encouraged by a huge aid presence, Juba exhibits in graphic detail, and in what is still a relatively small space, all the pathologies of neoliberal urbanism. The polarisation between valued private and devalued public space is marked. The uncertainty that drives its bunkerisation and the impermanence of its construction are the hallmarks of the post-modern. There is nothing 'underdeveloped' about Juba. In terms of the direction of travel in our globalised world, it is positively futuristic. Evidence suggests that Goma, in the DRC, closely resembles the urban form of Juba.

The culture of security

Juba is not risk-free, especially from theft, burglary and harassment by drunken men. One has to exercise discretion in terms of when and where to travel. However, by common consent, Nairobi is more dangerous and crime there more violent. According to long-serving UN workers, the striking levels of aid bunkerisation, for example, have been largely determined by outside organisational requirements rather than a response to high levels of real and persistent danger in Juba. They are more the result of centralised decision making, standard security procedures and insurance requirements reflecting global concerns that have been bureaucratically rolled-out in South Sudan. At the same time, however, the ongoing perception of risk and uncertainty that such architecture itself generates is clearly important for the expansion of the security sector itself. The private security companies catering for the aid and consultancy industry, for example, the risk-management and training outfits like RedR and Armadillo that have recently appeared, benefit from such perceptions – whether real, imagined or exaggerated – to sell their security products. They have a vested interest in the uncertainty and apprehension that the architecture of urban fragmentation itself generates.

While doing little about it, it is widely acknowledged among aid workers that bunkerisation and restrictive security protocols governing movement have increased the distance between them and their target populations. The UN has placed South Sudan at a Level 4 security rating. While not the highest level, it still requires, for example, prior security clearance for all trips outside Juba and, if travelling by road having a minimum of two vehicles with radios, and an armed escort. Such protocols discourage movement and interaction. A recent development is for some UN agencies and international NGOs, to suspend their own survey work. This is being sub-contracted to market

research-type organisations working outside aid agency security protocols. Whether this represents an improvement in quality is doubtful.

There are a number of implications of this culture of security. The international aid presence is heavily concentrated in Juba. This has also been helped by the need for agencies and companies headquartered in Khartoum and Nairobi to open offices in Juba following the July 9th creation of the Republic of South Sudan. At the same time – partly the result of funding difficulties – some suggest that today there are fewer aid programmes and resources on the ground in South Sudan than during the war. Reflecting the position of Khartoum in relation to rest of the North, Juba has rapidly emerged as a centre of hyper-urbanism relative to the rest of the South. It is a point of an overwhelming and unbalanced concentration of all forms of commercial, government and aid recourses. One can, with some justification, talk of a distinct ‘Juba society’ in the context of South Sudan. Outside of Juba, with the exception of the road improvement programme, there is very little material infrastructure on the ground. Because of existing security protocols surrounding internationals, those programmes that do exist are mainly managed by local and regional staff.

The Juba narrative

Interconnected by secure means of road and air transport, the aid industry’s fortified compounds and guarded residential complexes are strategic nodes in an archipelago of international space that magically joins HQs in the global North with their deep-field sites in the global South. Supported by an internal flow of endless coordination meetings, security briefings, shared leisure facilities and preferred restaurants, most international aid workers mainly talk to themselves – and when they are not, they are therapeutically surfing the net or maintaining their Facebook pages. This inward-looking culture, together with the constant churning of aid workers (contracts are often measured in months rather than years), has produced what can be called a self-referential ‘Juba narrative’. This narrative cuts across donors, UN agencies and the larger international NGOs. After a few interviews you soon begin to hear the same ideas and turns of phrase being repeated. This shared narrative has a functional importance in that it provides a coherent world-view in an otherwise isolated and fragmented terrain and, at the same time, furnishes a ‘regime of truth’ that is consistent with the interests of the aid industry. Chief among these is the necessity of maintaining good business relations with RSS. That is, of remaining a player within the political market place.

Given that it purports to explain the outside, what is interesting about the Juba narrative is that it is often articulated by people who, either on their own admission or their short time in the job, have rarely, if ever, travelled outside of the city. The Juba narrative develops the aid view of RSS as a fledgling government, as mentioned at the beginning of this report. While problems exist, they are normalised as things to be expected at this stage of development. After all, it was only six years ago when "...these people were still in the bush". Still basking in the 'Clooney effect' – "...they like us here...unlike other places we can fly the flag" – among the most closed-down with regard to the Juba narrative are the Americans. Here only those aspects of the Juba narrative that relate to risk and humanitarian space will be described.

There is a shared perception among many aid workers that, in terms of humanitarian space, a key issue, especially, outside Equatoria, is the 'harassment' of NGOs by the SPLA. Some even hold that humanitarian space is shrinking compared to a few years ago. This harassment is argued to have occurred either as an unintended consequence of the otherwise positively endorsed 'community disarmament campaigns' or, alternatively, in the deployment of the SPLA in the legitimate defence of the new Republic's borders against Northern aggression. The narrative presents SPLA exactions mainly in terms of the commandeering of vehicles while downplaying that, on the ground, this is inseparable from wider patterns of collective punishment involving looting and extreme violence.

Moreover, in the narrative's sanitized view of SPLA behaviour, vehicle commandeering is not seen as a direct or conscious attack on the agencies themselves. It's more an incidental result of NGOs being in the wrong place at the wrong time. While not helped by the lack of information being fed into the UN system by the SPLA, thus preventing the forewarning of agencies, violent and targeted predation is not regarded as inherent to the *modus operandi* of SPLA. To the contrary, vehicle commandeering becomes the work of ill-disciplined 'rogue' units in an organisation that is otherwise struggling to meet new responsibilities. The disappearance of the 'common enemy' (ie, Khartoum), for example, has placed the SPLA under a spotlight at a time when it needs to legitimately defend its borders. UN agencies and the larger international NGOs contend that the real issue underlying these attacks is the SPLA's lack of resources. When it is given orders to deploy, since the military lack vehicles and fuel, they are liable take whatever is at hand. While SPLA

harassment of aid agencies is important, the narrative holds that the price is acceptable when set against the overall good of the aid programmes being supported.

There is much to object to in this shared narrative. The concept of 'community disarmament campaigns', for example, is aid-speak for what, in reality, are usually violent collective punishments dealt out to ethnically defined populations. The suggestion that the main issue is the SPLA's lack of resources, is a useful justification for the ongoing training and capacity-building programmes with the SPLA that the international community is supporting. Such programmes are going ahead when, if pushed, many aid veterans will agree that the SPLA is part of the problem. For this report, however, the main concern is the idea that the violence directed against aid agencies is somehow incidental and, by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, to some extent is the fault of the agency itself. This view tells us a great deal about the fractious dynamic between national/regional and international aid workers in South Sudan. The numbers of international staff are relatively few compared to those from the region, predominantly Kenyans, Ugandans and Ethiopians. If it were not for the Sudanese NGOs, the overall number of Southerners in the aid industry would be small. When international agencies characterise harassment as being only incidental, they are doing so in a context where not only is the interaction between Juba and the rest of the country limited, the majority of people on the receiving end of this violence are regional aid workers. Understanding the exposure of local and regional staff to increased risk – which the Juba narrative normalises – requires a brief excursion into the history of humanitarian space in South Sudan.

The debasement of negotiated access

In its heyday, Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) was a classic humanitarian negotiated access programme. With UNICEF as the lead agency, a formal agreement was reached between the GoS and the SPLA (together with several other rebel factions) regarding access to war-affected civilians. This access was eventually formalised as a set of Ground Rules that codified the expectations and obligations of each party. The humanitarian agencies, for example, were expected to provide assistance according to need in an impartial manner. The SPLA was expected to facilitate the aid agencies and protect aid workers and their property. UNICEF had a team of people supporting the Ground Rules, including monitoring and acting on their violation. With a credible threat of suspending the aid programme, and with donor governments dealing with a

rebel movement rather a government *per se*, the Ground Rules are credited with working reasonably well.

With the creation of the CPA in 2005 and the shift of the UN from a humanitarian programme to an integrated mission, the geo-politics of aid tilted significantly towards the interests of the erstwhile warring parties. The Ground Rules and their associated monitoring and negotiating resources were disbanded. Today, UNOCHA, for example, no longer has the resources to do this job. Donor governments shifted their emphasis from maintaining humanitarian access to assisting a government-in-waiting. The UN also moved from managing that humanitarian space to helping, advising and working with that same government-in-waiting. The access afforded UNMIS – as with the new mission – was hedged with restrictions. Building on the changes under the CPA, with independence, the Juba narrative has morphed directly into support for the fledgling government. The effect of this changing geopolitics of aid – which requires further research – is to expose aid agencies to more rather than less risk. Compared to the OLS days, NGOs, for example, now find themselves on their own. The overarching framework of the humanitarian programme has gone. Negotiated access has degenerated into whatever arrangements can be made at the local level with the men with guns. The result has been counter-intuitive. Some veterans of the 1990s, now feel that the South is more unsafe than during the war. In terms of the built environment, rather than imposing or ambitious public structures, the peace-dividend has been the dismal aspect of the gated-community.

The national/regional-international dynamic

The integrated mission's exposure of aid workers to more risk has to be seen in the relation to Juba's hyper-urbanism and, with the rise of the security culture, the growing bunkerisation of international aid workers. In accepting SPLA harassment as an affordable price to pay, the Juba narrative conceals that it is local and regional workers that bear the brunt of this increased exposure to risk. This pattern of exposure underlies a growing tension between national/regional and international staff in Juba and outside. This is heightened by the tendency of international NGOs not only to normalise risk but also to under-report attacks on their property and personnel. In other words, the vulnerability of local/regional staff are minimised and ignored. Most international aid agencies claim that they operate an 'acceptance' approach to risk in the field. That is, they commonly claim that they are protected by the community because of the value placed on the services that

they provide (eg, primary health care). One aid worker, who had only been in Juba several weeks, spoke with sense-certain authority on this point. As part of the secular religion of international aid, it is a factor in the under-reporting of security incidents. It also resonates with ideas that the SPLA simply carrying out 'community disarmament programmes' that sometimes go wrong; or that NGOs lose their vehicles as an incidental consequence of otherwise necessary actions. What it really speaks to, however, is the profoundly unequal relationship between national/regional and international staff.

Owing to the exclusionary nature of pluralism in the South, regional aid workers – notably Ugandans, Kenyans and Ethiopians – frequently find themselves the deliberate targets of violence. Rather than facing this problem, some NGOs are attempting to reduce their reliance on regional staff in favour, for example, of bringing in other foreigners, including Asian workers who are held to fare better. Within Juba itself, given that actual risks are compared favourably with, for example, Nairobi, there is an opinion that the recourse of international NGOs to employing private security guards is more connected with fractious personnel issues rather than a fear of external threats. The main 'security' work of the guards is keeping out sacked and disgruntled former Southerner employees, many of which are themselves undisclosed SPLA soldiers. Many agencies agree that problems emanating from this quarter – apart from the issue of looting discussed above – are one of the main areas of risk associated with South Sudan.

This issue is being accentuated following independence. As part of the process of increasing rents, the military-business complex has embarked on a process of Sudanisation. Besides a new NGO law being prepared (in some states governors are acting unilaterally to get more oversight of NGO budgets) there is a growing demand for the Sudanisation of aid personnel. That is, all but the most senior or skilled of aid posts should be filled by Southerners. NGOs are coming under growing pressure to justify their staffing decisions especially when, as the authorities claim, appropriate skills exist locally. Such claims are rejected by many of the international NGOs. There is a common refrain that the required skills do not exist. If you employ a Sudanese mechanic "...things just keep on breaking down". Whether such claims are true or not, the national/regional-international dynamic is an important factor in South Sudan's risk terrain.

Endnote

A key issue is whether RSS – as the outward manifestation of the SPLA/M – will continue to dominate the political market place. Will it be able to avoid – or does it even want to encourage – another Dinker-Nuer split? Does it want to share or, to the contrary, reduce the number of claimants? Given the new resource flows opened up by independence, the means to maintain this market place, at least in the medium term, do exist. Perhaps the real question is what the military-business complex will look like ten years from now. Will Juba be a Nairobi or a Mogadishu? Given that none of the present aid workers and donor representatives will be around, does anyone actually care?

MD

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