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Published online: 16 Jul 2023.

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In May 1988, Northwestern University's African Studies Program hosted a one-day seminar. According to John Hunwick, a Professor of History and of the History and Literature of Religions at Northwestern, the event focused on Sudan and Nigeria because those countries most clearly illustrated "the problems facing African countries trying to weld together peoples of diverse cultures and histories into nation-states in the late twentieth century, a time when … a primary identification as Muslim or Christian often seems to override other loyalties."[1] Participants included, but were not limited to: Francis Deng, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and 1972 recipient of the African Studies Association's Best Book Award; Lamin Sanneh, Professor of Missions and World Christianity at the Yale Divinity School; Mohamed Omer Beshir, Director of Ahliyya University in Omdurman, Sudan; and Lemuel Johnson, Professor of English and Director of the Black and African Studies Program at the University of Michigan.[2] Professor Hunwick prepared the papers, commentaries, and discussions for publication, and the volume *Religion and National Integration in Africa: Islam, Christianity, and Politics in the Sudan and Nigeria* was published in 1992.

In the autumn of 2009, I entered the doctoral program in History at the University of Michigan. While I entered the program with a general interest on race, religion, and state-sponsored violence in the British Empire, in time, I became completely enthralled with the Sudan. In South Sudan – the world's newest nation – History and Religion occupy paramount roles in the popular nationalist account. Rapacious, northern Sudanese "Arabs" are understood to have historically wrought destruction upon "black" and "African" southern Sudanese. The northern Sudanese oppressor was typically Muslim, while oppressed southerners followed the Christian God. Thus, the chronicle of southern Sudanese nationalism was buttressed by an historically rooted and religiously fraught landscape, in which an ancient God was beseeched to intercede on behalf of a modern chosen people. In this postcolonial ecosystem, God was political, providential, and deeply concerned with the matter of Black life. But who wrote this history, spiritualized its characters, and defined the Promised Land? And to what effect?

As I baptized myself in Sudanese historiography, I stumbled upon *Religion and National Integration*. One of the most interesting elements of that field is the significant presence of work concerning Nigeria – a nation that shares no borders with Sudan. Several realities can explain this phenomenon. In both nations, Islam and Christianity

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[1]Hunwick, "Preface," xi (quote from this page) and "Participants," x.
[2]"Participants," ix–x; Austen, "The Herskovits Awards," 186; Hunwick, "Preface," xii.

represent the largest faith communities. In both nations, this religious binary can be generally mapped onto an Islamic North and Christian South. After achieving independence from their respective British colonizers, both countries faced devastating civil wars involving separatist regional entities. The published Northwestern seminar proceedings are just one part of a wider body scholarship that analyzes Sudan and Nigeria together.[3] In truth, however, there are several fissures that distinguish Nigeria and Sudan from one another. While Nigeria was a crown colony, Sudan occupied a singular position Britain's Empire as a "Condominium" jointly ruled with Egypt. While Nigeria has a centuries-long history in the transatlantic slave economy, Sudanese slavery has been intimately linked with North Africa and the Arab-Islamic world. While Biafra secession attempt failed, South Sudan – at long last – successfully broke away. Even though Nigeria may provide a useful point of comparison when thinking about Sudanese politics, it is necessary to recognize these other distinctions. That point notwithstanding, this forum on "Religion and the Question of Sovereignty" has compelled me to consider another national context that could be useful for grappling with the relationship between religious diversity, politics, and violence in Sudan and elsewhere – India.

Shail Mayaram's *The Secret Life of Another Indian Nationalism: Transitions from the Pax Britannica to the Pax Americana* is a welcome revelation. *The Secret Life* chronicles "the making of the modern ultra-nationalist Hindu self" and concerns three transitory moments in Indian nationalism: the first involves vernacular orientalism that helped comprise the field of vernacular nationalism; the second produces a new analytic distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva; and the third is the growth of Hindu nationalism as a social movement and its decline in the Merwara cultural region. Mayaram argues that ultra-nationalism did not spontaneously emerge in the 1980s; rather, the publication of works such as Colonel James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han* (1829–1832) had a stimulating effect on vernacular nationalism. "In its aftermath," she contends, "the fields of literature and history both became sites of national devotion."[4] While wartime postcolonial Sudan was largely framed as a Muslim–Christian oppositional binary, Mayaram writes that one of the concerns in the discussion of interreligious conflict in India concerns the origin of images of the Hindu Self and Muslim Other. According to Mayaram, during the colonial period a small elite, influenced by European and colonial writing, crafted popular history in the forms of historical novels, caste histories, and brave accounts of Indians who confronted foreign invaders.[5] Three figures that Colonel James Tod wrote about – Prithviraj, Padmini, and Pratap – captured the nationalist imaginary and became "Hindu" figures confronting three "Muslim" ones (twelfth-century Ghurid Sultan Muhammad Ghuri, fourteenth-century Delhi Sultan Alauddin Khalji, and sixteenth-century Mughal emperor Akbar).[6]

As I read *The Secret Life*, I was admittedly embarrassed at how long I had failed to pause and consider the historical similarities linking Sudan and India. As the British Empire "played a diabolical role resorting to partition in four troubled regions,

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[3]Examples include Smith, "Historical impact of Islam"; Frahm, "Corruption"; Ylonen, "Institutions and Instability"; Akinyele, "Power Sharing"

[4]Mayaram, *Secret Life*, xiii (quotes from this page), 37.

[5]Mayaram, *Secret Life*, 32, 48.

[6]Ibid., 45.

Ireland, India, Palestine and Cyprus and fostered identity politics,"[7] the British can also be (and have been) blamed for bifurcating Sudan and artificially encouraging a non-Muslim and non-Arab culture in southern Sudan. One can frame the narratives of both Indian nationalism and southern Sudanese nationalism as freedom struggles against external colonizers (whether British or Northern Sudanese, respectively), both contexts have witnessed a diversity of nationalisms subject to different logics. There have been a variety of Indian nationalisms ranging from the anti-religious Dravidian nationalism to the theological (Christian) Naga nationalism.[8] In the Sudan, anti-government Sudanese nationalist movements included the socialist "New Sudan" strand and theologically-infused liberationist political thought. If Gandhi's assassination represented the confrontation of "two competing values of loyalty and truth to the nation,"[9] the First Sudanese Civil War similarly witnessed competing understandings among Protestants and Catholics of what dutiful Christian citizenship meant within the context of an Islamizing government. Should citizens render to Caesar (the Protestant line), or follow God by defying the state like Catholic priests-turned-soldiers Saturnino Lohure and Angelo Tutuo?[10] Finally, India's postcolonial history has – like Sudan's – been drawn along religious and regional fractures. India's 1947 independence resulted in the Partition, i.e., the creation of the Muslim-majority Pakistan to India's northwest and northeast borders. Relations between those two postcolonial states have been tense, with three wars waged between the two countries in 1947–1948, 1965 and 1971.[11] After Sudan achieved independence in 1956, the country experienced two devastating civil wars largely drawn along the regional lines that the former British administration had established and enforced. The belligerents were largely divided by race (Arab and Black) and religion (Islam and Christianity/indigenous religions).

Given the historical dynamics shared by Sudan and India, there are several elements from Mayaram's text that compel me to pause and reflect. How, for instance, can the politicized Muslim-Hindu binary in India be placed in conversation with the Christian–Muslim dichotomy in Sudan? By comparing the experiences of post-Partition Pakistani Hindus with post-independence South Sudanese Muslims, one could begin such inquiry with an approach that immediately challenges national identities that are seemingly inseparable from faith communities. How can political actors use and misuse the "facts" of history to rally constituencies to their side (and against one another), facilitate transfers of power, and legislate policies that unevenly impact different communities under the guise of corrective work? Here candidates' invocations of history, elementary and secondary school curriculums, and public discourse concerning monuments and memorials can provide particularly useful fodder (see recent American history, for example). And – perhaps most importantly for this forum – how can religious diversity be reconciled with healthy, pluralistic democracies? A question of this magnitude warrants an interdisciplinary approach that is comprehensive and nuance, integrating methodologies that are historical, sociological, and anthropological

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[7]Ibid., xiii.
[8]Ibid., xiv, 3.
[9]Ibid., 86.
[10]For more on contrasting Catholic and Protestant approaches to the Sudanese state during the First Sudanese Civil War, see Werner, Anderson, and Wheeler, *Day of Devastation*, 370–372 and Tounsel, "Render to Caesar".
[11]Rogers, Castree, and Kitchin, "India"; Candland, "India".

(not to mention tools from other disciplines). The source base needed to pursue this line of questioning would demand sources that are human and inanimate, historical and contemporary, secular and religious.

One element that runs across both my book and Mayaram's is the diversity of sources used to craft each analysis. Mayaram, who used both British and Indian archives, as well as the cultural and oral archives to which she also had access, wrote that "both official archives and local non-institutional 'archives' house collections with a wherewithal of local histories and pamphlets, newsletters and magazines that tell us much about the shaping of vernacular nationalism and popular history."[12] Similarly, in investigating the ways that thinkers in Sudan reconciled the Bible with their evolving political contexts, my research methodology included interviewing lay and ecclesiastical figures and visits to university, Church, and government archives on three continents. Both *Indian Nationalism* and *Chosen Peoples* show the benefits – nay, the necessity – of engaging a wide swath of primary sources to comprehensively chart the range of religious politics in formerly colonized spaces. Furthermore, such research methodology is needed if future studies in historical political theology will be untethered to the limitations of metropolitan archives. Diverse sources are needed in order to understand how people who are marginalized in institutional archives – namely women, racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and/or uneducated – have animated their political expressions with religious power, defined state sovereignty with an eye to spiritual subjectivity, and challenged the terms of the modern world order with epistemologies that transcend the bounds of the nation-state.

Another element linking our Indian and Sudanese contexts under study concerns the implications of popular history. Correctly noting that "popular history has many uses," Mayaram posits that in India two such uses include (1) that it creates belonging by constituting a unified Hindu political community divided by caste, language, religious and regional diversity by ascertaining a Muslim/Christian Other and (2) that it supports the notion of a glamorous, pre-conquest past.[13] And yet, if popular history has proven to have such constructive purposes, others have arguably had a deleterious effect. After referring to the problem of the colonization of the Indian mind, Mayaram asserts that "two ideas, in particular, played havoc in the subcontinent. The idea of History and of Religion, both in the upper case."[14] Together, these two statements have forced me to reconsider the utility and harm of the political theology that I have investigated in southern Sudan.

My book *Chosen Peoples: Christianity and Political Imagination in South Sudan*, investigates how Christian worldviews, organizational work, and theology informed the ideological construction of the South Sudanese nation-state. In that East African context, theological knowledge production involved lay and ecclesiastical thinkers who placed themselves into Biblical archetypes. Southern Sudanese envisioned themselves as a chosen people destined for liberation while Arabs and Muslims were likened to oppressors in the Biblical tradition of Babylon, Egypt, and the Philistines. By doing so, these thinkers blurred the lines between secular and sacred in South Sudanese political

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[12]Mayaram, *Secret Life*, xix.
[13]Ibid., 123.
[14]Ibid., xiii.

thought. In 2011, after decades of conflict, South Sudan seceded and became the world's newest nation.

In southern Sudan, History and Religion are two of the primary pillars buttressing the nationalist narrative. According to the History, predatory "Arabs" from the North oppressed – namely through slavery – "black" and "African" people in the south. The History had such a palatable impact that some figures in the twentieth century infused anti-Northern discourse with the threat of renewed enslavement. Modern southern Sudanese nationalism, in this sense, was principally a fight for liberation against a familiar, Historical nemesis. Added to this fraught version of History was Religion's principal feature as a marker of the oppressor and liberatory instrument for the oppressed. Judeo-Christian Scriptures offered ready Historical precedents like the Israelites in Egypt as inspiration that freedom was nigh. A salve for wounds and fuel for the fight, nationalism's engagement with Religion approached God as a Providential agent moving in the Present, literally fighting for and protecting southerners on the battlefield and in refuge. Like in the Indian context, such approaches to Religion transcended ethnic boundaries to serve as a collective unifying agent for otherwise disparate peoples. These dynamics collectively make for a romantic and tragic version of History, and an intimate – if essentially partisan – concept of God. But what, then, is the other side of this equation? What is falsified, what is sacrificed, and how do such ideologies ultimately relate to the question of religion and sovereignty?

Let us first address the difficulty that can arise with overlapping sovereignties. If a community primarily identifies its people as subjects of an other-worldly deity, such self-conceptualizations can be problematic if states attempt to create an order that is incompatible with one's spiritual paradigm. The coupling of religious binaries and liberatory nationalisms in Sudan and India also point to the difficulties of forging futures where religious and/or ethnic Others divided into antagonists or protagonists can peacefully coexist as citizens. What communities are deified and which are demonized? Who is afforded reparations to address past wrongs done in the name of religion? Whose histories are allowed to gain traction, and what political capital do such tales bestow? What political futures are possible because of – or in spite of – the uses and abuses of religious identity in public sphere?

In addition to these questions, one must consider nationalism's teleological dimension. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon argued that "nationalism, that magnificent hymn which roused the masses against the oppressor, disintegrates in the aftermath of independence."[15] Arguing that nationalism is not a political doctrine, Fanon added that "if we really want to safeguard our countries from regression, paralysis, or collapse, we must rapidly switch from a national consciousness to a social and political consciousness."[16] In considering the relationship between religion and sovereignty, both *Chosen Peoples* and *The Secret Life of Another Indian Nationalism* offer insights about the future of nationalisms in India and South Sudan. Both nations, to be sure, have their difficulties. According to Mayaram, "India faces numerous challenges globally and nationally and needs to move forward with a nationalism confident of itself and which builds on the trust, loyalty and participation of all its citizens, its many communities."[17]

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[15]Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 142.
[16]Ibid., 142.
[17]Mayaram, *Secret Life*, 260.

South Sudan faces a similar challenge. After reaching the figurative Promised Land of independence (and ostensibly ridding itself of its age-old nemesis), South Sudan devolved into a civil war drawn along ethnic lines. If a religious nationalism based on liberation was found to be useful during its previous civil wars, it is evident that a different type of nationalism is needed in the ethnically diverse land of milk and honey. Like the Indian government – with its management of over a billion citizens – the South Sudanese state will only have its sovereignty respected by its peoples if they believe that their full participation in public life is encouraged and defended regardless of their faith, race or ethnicity. If religious nationalism helped to win South Sudan's sovereignty, a different type of religious nationalism – one based on community – is needed.

In closing, I am grateful for the opportunity to engage with Shail Mayaram's compelling and deeply researched study. While I hope that this brief write-up is beneficial to students and scholars of religious politics in Sudan and India, I hope that it can be a launching pad to more substantive discussions on what each context might reveal about the meanings of faith and sovereignty in those two countries and beyond. Following in the vein of that gathering in Evanston over thirty years ago, it would be wonderful to hold another symposium on the subject "Religion and National Integration in Sudan and India." Such a conference could analyze questions of sovereignty, religious politics, and violence in each country and – like the earlier gathering – have its proceedings published so that its fruits could be digested for years to come. Both fields, no doubt, would benefit from such cross-pollination.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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