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Ruptured imaginings amid emerging nationhood: The unsettled narrative of "unity in resistance" in South Sudanese history textbooks

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Abstract

This article explores the place of history education in state-sponsored nation-building in war-torn South Sudan, the world's youngest country. It examines discourses around nationhood transmitted via the first history curricula, textbooks and teacher guides issued in the midst of civil war, after the country's secession from Sudan to its north. The analysis uncovers a central memory of violence and an ostensibly unifying narrative of the South's historical victimisation and struggle. An emerging emotionally charged discourse of "unity in resistance" illustrates the construction of a "usable past" through silencing and othering. Its offshoot is an unsettled narrative whose key focus on unity undergoes repeated rupture.

KEYWORDS

historical narrative, history education, nation-building, South Sudan, textbooks

1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2021, South Sudan marked the tenth anniversary of its birth as Africa's 54th independent nation and the world's youngest country, following its secession in 2011 from Sudan to its north. What preceded these events was Africa's longest ever civil war, fought between 1955 and 2005 with an interlude of peace between 1972 and 1983. The conflict was sparked by historical injustice and exclusion committed against the population of what is now South

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Sudan within a Sudanese nation forcibly defined as Arab and Islamic. Researchers have highlighted resistance and opposition to a North Sudanese Other as instrumental to the emergence of a unified, collective sense of self among a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse population (Breidlid, 2005; Lesch, 1998; Sharkey, 2008). During this arduous road to nationhood, internal conflicts culminated in a new civil war in 2013 as South Sudan's various ethnic groups and communities sought to position themselves within the new nation. Central actors in this ongoing conflict are the former rebel group and dominant political party, Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) led by (Dinka) President Salva Kiir Mayardit, and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO), led by the (Nuer) Vice-President Riek Machar (Stamnes & de Coning, 2022). In this context, scholars have noted the loss of the North–South divide as a coalescing force and the lack of a focal concept to replace it (Deng, 2005; Frahm, 2012; Jok & Hutchinson, 1999).

This article explores the place of history education in state-sponsored nation-building in war-torn post-independence South Sudan through what is, to our knowledge, the first systematic analysis of the history curricula, textbooks and teacher guides issued after the country's foundation. It is part of broader ongoing research into current teaching and learning materials in South Sudan (Skårås & Bentrovato, 2022) and adds a textbook-centred perspective to recent research on historical narratives in the country's classrooms prior to these materials' introduction (Skårås, 2022). Acknowledging the increasingly multifaceted and complex nature of the media that citizenries access and that may influence their perceptions, our analysis examines the national historical narratives around nationhood transmitted in these official educational media, emphasising their representations of the national self and the (internal and external) Other. In uncovering "efforts to create a usable past [to] serve political and identity needs" (Wertsch, 2002: 35) and illuminating the aspiration to a specific "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006) through history education, the study builds particularly on research into formal education as a constituent part of state-led, top-down nation-building processes (Carretero et al., 2013). It complements work that has explored old and new manifestations of these processes in the Global North, most notably Europe as "the birthplace of the nation-state and modern nationalism" (Brubaker, 1996: 1), and, more specifically, an expanding body of research on the experiences of relatively young states in the Global South, many of which have recently emerged from or continue to experience violent conflict (e.g. Bentrovato, 2021a, 2021b; Bentrovato & Chakawa, 2022). Via South Sudan's distinct experience, the article offers insights into the historical-rhetorical repertoires history education provides for promoting national identification in a societally highly diverse, deeply divided post-colonial and post-liberation setting.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Academic research broadly acknowledges the significance of national historical narratives in processes of identity formation, as "cultural tools" (Wertsch, 2000) that carry and transmit official discourses "produced to make sense of past events and to create cohesion in the present with a view to the future" (Grever & van der Vlies, 2017; see also Brescó de Luna & van Alphen, 2021; Carretero, 2011). Education and its media and materials constitute some of the prime channels for the dissemination of such discourses. Since the nineteenth century, official school history has traditionally "been geared to […] generating an identification with [the national past]" (Berghahn & Schissler, 1987: 1), or, more specifically, of a romanticised, teleological account of it that exalts an in-group and distinguishes it from significant "others" through selective memorialisation (Apple, 2000; Berger et al., 1999; Foster & Crawford, 2006; VanSledright, 2008). The accuracy of such narratives has frequently been regarded as secondary to their service of a "usable past." In this respect, history as taught in schools supplies an exemplar of Renan (1896: 66)'s proposition that "[f]orgetfulness, and I would even say historical error, are essential in the creation of a nation." This may entail, and has entailed, the exclusion of elements of the national past whose presence would destabilise its grand narrative from the intended curriculum.

While the 1960s saw the emergence of challenges, particularly in Europe, to the central status of the national narrative in history (Symcox & Wilschut, 2009), national (ist) historiographies and history curricula have come to the

fore in countries that have gained independence from colonial regimes, with "'resistance history' and 'nation building' [displacing] 'empire building' as dominant themes" (Johnson, 2012: 1). Recent research on history education in Africa (Bentrovato & Wassermann, 2020) has pointed to the significance attributed—at least in principle—to the teaching of such national (ist) histories in post-independence African countries, to legitimise the new status quo and promote national unity and patriotism. In a degree of tension with this centrality of the national, scholarship has revealed a widespread perception, based in a Western view of identification with a nation, of the supposed weakness of national identities in Africa. Researchers have claimed inhibitors to national identification and nation-building lie in an "embryonic" state of African nations at the point of independence (Nugent et al., 2007). They have similarly posited, as factors for these allegedly deficient identities, the dominance of artificial, colonial state borders (Young, 1985), the absence of external foci for hostility as a force to galvanise cohesion (Herbst, 2000), a lack of shared cultural components (Smith, 1986), and the supposed "underdevelopment" of African states (Herbst, 2000). Recent studies have begun to challenge much of these presumptions, demonstrating widespread attachment to national identities across Africa notwithstanding the social salience of ethnicity (Koter, 2021; Robinson, 2014). This article adds to this discussion by examining the possible role, in the new state of South Sudan, of history education and specifically history textbooks in establishing or consolidating the "common glories in the past," with a sense of unity often founded in memories of suffering, "and a will to continue them in the present"—cited by Renan (1896) as essential conditions for nation-building.

South Sudan is a state only a little over a decade old, the outcome of a rare redrawing of colonial borders following civil war against a hostile "Other," yet still encompassing "extreme diversity" (LeRiche & Arnold, 2012: 4), and categorised among the world's "least developed" countries (UN, 2022). For most of its existence as an independent country, it has endured bitter, sectarianised civil war between government forces and rebel factions. At the conflict's height between 2014 and 2018, following Machar's alleged plot against President Kiir in 2013, it headed indices of the world's most fragile states, and currently ranks third in this regard (The Fund for Peace, 2022). A peace agreement (R-ARCSS) signed in 2018 to renew the short-lived accords of 2015 is currently in a slow process of implementation; the democratic elections the agreement mandates following a three-year transitional period are yet to take place (Stamnes & de Coning, 2022). This historical and political context has inevitably affected national historiography, which has distinctly lagged behind similar decolonisation processes across African countries. Among other things, war-induced constraints have induced a long-standing "fixed focus on the colonial period, [an] over-reliance on colonial administrative records, and [an] almost total exclusion of southern Sudanese from their own history" (Johnson, 2012: 3).[1] Decrying a "national history rapidly manufactured in time for Independence Day" by the now ruling SPLM, Johnson (2012: 5) further noted the "single party line," the "seamless thread of 'liberation' [...] woven into the national historical consciousness, while the sharper edges of that struggle are smoothed over." This phenomenon solidifies in "symbols of nationhood" (Jok, 2011: 13) that include monuments, street names, holidays, and a national anthem "saluting our martyrs whose blood cemented our national foundation."

The little extant work on history education (and its history) in Sudan/South Sudan refers to a homogenising past education policy of Arabisation and Islamisation in Sudan, which culminated in the imposition, in 1990, of an Islamic curriculum and related textbooks that disregarded cultural diversity in favour of an exclusionary Northern, Arabic, Muslim national identity (Breidlid, 2010; Oyenak, 2006; for a detailed and nuanced historical analysis, see Seri-Hersch, 2015, 2018). Schools became "sites of cultural and political struggle" (Breidlid, 2010: 566). In 1996, after an initial period of reliance on curricula and textbooks from neighbouring countries, the SPLM introduced a local, secular, primarily Anglophone curriculum in the areas in southern Sudan under its military control. Following the signing of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended civil war in Sudan, the syllabus for the Southern Sudan Certificate of Secondary Education (SSCSE) (GoSS, 2007) was nominally introduced at secondary level, while no official history textbooks were produced. Duany, Lorins and Thomas (2021:14–5, citing Deng, 2003: 15) refer to the "hopeful" vision of an education "oriented towards peace and inclusion" in the war's aftermath – a hope partially fulfilled, according to Wawa (2021), in a new curriculum embodying "civicness" and foregrounding critical thinking, tolerance, cooperation, peace and patriotism. Research conducted prior to the current curriculum's

introduction found contrasting evidence of education reproducing and reinforcing "a dominant narrative of a shared English-speaking, Christian, and African South Sudanese nation contrasted to the Arabic and Islamic North Sudanese" (Vanner et al., 2020: 209) in social studies textbooks, and a silencing of internecine conflicts in secondary school classrooms (Skårås & Breidlid, 2016). Others (Kuyok Abol Kuyok, 2018), in reviewing the current curriculum, have noted the potential of its emphasis on "localism and South Sudanese and African history" (p. 45) to have a deleterious impact on "future relations between the Sudanese peoples" (p. 41).

3 | METHODOLOGY AND SOURCE MATERIAL

Building on existing research, this study undertakes a narrative and discourse analysis of current educational media, exploring the state-sanctioned imagining of South Sudan's historical trajectory as a nation-in-the-making. The analysis' inductive coding retraces attributions of historical significance, causality and agency, examines tropes and discursive gaps, and considers temporal demarcations, with particular attention to key junctures and turning points. Alongside identifying the "chosen glories" and "chosen traumas" (Volkan, 2001) of the official South Sudanese narrative, it will uncover exemplary moments of omission and silencing. The analysis will thus illuminate official representations of social identities and intergroup relations that feed into the state-mandated definition of national identity that ordinary young South Sudanese people are expected to embrace. Complementing broader international scholarship on history education and nation-building processes, particularly in war-torn societies in the Global South, the article centres official perspectives on what it means to be South Sudanese today, rather than the "subjective or internalized sense of belonging to the nation" as which Huddy and Khatib (2007: 6) define national identity.

The study's primary sources are the country's first official history curricula and the related series of four student textbooks and accompanying teacher guides for years 1 to 4 of secondary schooling (MoGEI, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g, 2018h). The analysis will refer to the textbooks for each year, from 1 to 4, as Books 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively, and to the corresponding teacher guides as TG 1, 2, 3 and 4. These sources were designed and made available during the civil war. The current history curriculum to which these materials align was issued in 2015. Covering both national and international history, it aims to promote "twenty-first-century competencies" including critical thinking, communication, cooperation, and problem-solving skills, and support culture, identity, and respect for diversity; it explicitly links historical learning to the subjects of citizenship and peace education in the context of educating "good citizens" (MoEST, 2015). The textbooks and guides, published in English in 2018 with international support and generically titled *Secondary History*, were developed by South Sudan's Ministry of General Education and Instruction and Curriculum Development Centre, in collaboration with a subject panel of curriculum experts, historians and teachers. Generally characterised by poor referencing, the textbooks contain passages plagiarised, often verbatim, from various sources, including printed and easily accessible online material, notably Wikipedia, and websites of international organisations. When we cite an instance of plagiarism of which we are aware, we indicate its source. One publication of which the authors have evidently made liberal, unacknowledged use is Breidlid et al., *A Concise History of South Sudan* (2014), published in cooperation with the country's education ministry. Recent research suggests that only a small number of schools and teachers had access to this work (Kuyok, 2018); it seems that the textbooks' authors, whose names the books do not give, will have been familiar with it. The shortage of professionally trained historians and history teachers in South Sudan makes it likely that some of the South Sudanese authors contributing to *A Concise History of South Sudan* may have also sat on the subject panels involved in textbook writing.

Distribution and classroom use of the textbooks, intended for adoption by all schools from February 2019, had commenced at the time of writing in 2022. Enrolment rates for secondary education stand at 7.9% (MoGEI, 2021); the books' anticipated readership, theoretically aged 14–18, may therefore not be large, yet the materials will arguably inform the most educated segment of society and thus its potential future civil servants and decision-makers. In the twenty-first century, and in societies that highly value oral histories and traditions, textbooks may not be

the non plus ultra; this notwithstanding, these materials remain of considerable significance in a context of scarce resources and often under-qualified teachers. In the foreword to each book, the education minister of South Sudan exhorts teachers "to put th[ese] textbook[s] to good use" with a view to "enhanc[ing] the quality of education in the country" and "[p]romot[ing] peace, justice, liberty and prosperity for all" (p. iii). The teacher guides urge teachers to work with the students' textbooks and encourage students "to research from more sources like the people who were there during that time" (TG1: 80). This opening up of classrooms to valuable oral histories shows openness, through student activities, towards locally circulating alternative, unofficial histories that may challenge grand narratives (Skårås, 2022; Skårås & Bentrovato, forthcoming). Significantly, however, the discursive political landscape surrounding the production and intended use of these books encompasses impactful restrictions on freedom of expression. Reporters Without Borders (2021) note practices of "[c]lose surveillance and intimidation" and "[h]arassment, arbitrary detention, torture or execution-style murder" of journalists for failing to self-censor, notably in relation to criticism of the SPLM or government-associated individuals in the context of "issues linked to the conflict."

Bearing this complex context in mind, the analysis focuses on the sections of the books that cover the history of South Sudan from the pre- to post-independence periods, and additionally considers national references occurring in textbook units on world history.[2] Most of the themes included in our analysis feature in Books 1 and 2, covering the two compulsory years of secondary education.

4 | THE TEXTBOOK NARRATIVE: AN EMOTIONALLY CHARGED DISCOURSE OF UNITY IN RESISTANCE

A review of the curriculum's and textbooks' content indicates the significance policymakers attribute to national history and the centrality of conflict and violence, a significance aligning with political priorities. The speech given by President Kiir (2011) at the inaugural Independence Day celebrations reminded its audience that, "for many generations this land has seen untold suffering and death. We have been bombed, maimed, enslaved [...]. We may forgive but we will not forget." Concomitantly, the president issued a call to internal national unity before and beyond ethnic identity: "We may be a Zande, Kakwa, Nuer, Toposa, Dinka, Lotuko, Anywak, Bari, and Shilluk, but remember you are South Sudanese first." Echoing President Kiir's exhortation to South Sudan's people to remember the painful past, Nadia Arop Dudi (cited in Xinhua, 2019), Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, recently pointed to the peace dividends of violent histories, arguing that "[w]e will change the future for the better if we continue to recall the past." Book 2 appears in line with this view, commencing a unit on "Post colonial Africa" (including a section on post-independence South Sudan) with a poem by the Tanzanian contemporary poet Zuhura Seng'enge which, in highlighting the importance of learning one's own national history, no matter how "ugly" and painful, encapsulates the messaging foregrounded in the textbooks.

Do not fear the past,
It is ugly but it is ours,
[...]
Blood was spilt and people died,
but love and unity had survived,
[...]
Find the knowledge that was stolen,
Find the life that was robbed from us,
[...]
Let it [the past] teach you the wisdom of your race,
Take its lessons and live by them,
Own the identity that was erased (Book 2: 120).

In the textbooks' account of South Sudan's past, this central, emotionally charged place accorded to painful memories meets a nationalist, anti-colonial history of resistance. The upshot is a unifying narrative of the historical victimisation of the South and its struggle against Sudan's central state, embodying a discourse of "unity in resistance" that illustrates the construction of a "usable past" in the service of South Sudan's nation-building endeavour. This discourse reflects and embodies an official—albeit, from academic historians' point of view, controversial—"history from the perspective of victimhood" that foregrounds "one continuum of colonization," encompassing the "Turkiyya (1820–81), the Mahdiyya (1881–98), the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1898–1956), and the state of independent Sudan (1956–2011)" (Jok, 2011: 7). Conversely, it largely obscures past internecine violence within South Sudan. Several key themes, comprising various discursive tropes, emerge, as set out in the analysis that follows.

4.1 | Arab/Muslim versus African/Christian Sudan: A disrupted unity

A first emerging theme identifiable in the textbooks' historical narrative is the rupture of an erstwhile Sudanese unity through the imposition of colonial forces, giving rise to Arab/Muslim and African/Christian divides. This account generates considerable tension between a whole-Sudan narrative of unity and the prominence of suffering visited upon South(ern) Sudanese specifically. Ascribing victimhood to both Sudan and today's South Sudan, and in line with the arguments by Deng (1995), the textbooks assert that the "[p]eople of Sudan […] have been oppressed by different regimes" (Book 1: 73). They note that the "region of modern time Sudan" had enjoyed a "strong identity as the eastern end of the great trade route stretching along the open Savannah south of the Sahara" (Book 1: 67).[3] In line with the official chronology, the textbooks blame successive Turco-Egyptian, Mahdia, Anglo-Egyptian and Northern Sudanese rulers for the deepening divide and conflict between North and South, a position students practise in an activity requiring them to engage with the effects of colonialism on national identity (Book 3: 54).

Specifying and partially rupturing this unifying narrative, the books depict the people of South (ern) Sudan more specifically as victims of a "long history" of slavery, going back to "the ancient Nubian and ancient Egyptian times" (652 CE) and of colonialism (Book 1: 102). Discursive tropes around Turco-Egyptian rulers as "invaders," "aggressors" and "masters" and around their "brutal" and "inhumane" regime (Book 3: 70) echo the content of a 1950s Sudanese history teacher guide containing a unifying-nationalist, anti-colonial account of shared Sudanese suffering and heroic resistance against "cruel [Turco-Egyptian] oppressors [who] capture us so that we become their slaves" (Seri-Hersch, 2010: 224). While referring generically to "the Sudanese" as victims of Turco-Egyptian rule (Book 3: 74), the textbooks now primarily emphasise the exploitation of South Sudan's human and natural resources, notably "slaves […] gold, ivory and timber" (Book 1: 68–9), and point to the consequent increasing divergence in the fortunes of, and the growing tensions between, northern and southern Sudan. The authors assert that the "[s]lave trade enhanced the position of these northerners yet slaves came from the south" and point to "north Sudanese collaborat[ion] against those of the south [who were] exploited […] into slavery" (Book 1: 70), while also acknowledging, albeit briefly, the complicity of some southerners (Book 1: 15). One textbook unit particularly emphasises the "Arab African slave trade," presenting it as a practice that endured on account of an Islamic view of the Koran "clearly sanction[ing]" it (Book 1: 107).[4] The authors' inclusion of a testimony by the British explorer Samuel Baker, dated 1862, serves the discursive purpose of pointing, through a student research task, to "the winners and losers" (Book 1: 15) of the slave trade in the words of a figure standing for the colonists; Baker describes the trade as "the industry that kept Khartoum going as a bustling town" and gives an account of the contrasting fate of African villages, with "burning huts," "shooting" and slaves bound with "forked poles on their shoulders" (Book 1: 107).

Slavery in particular appears in the textbooks as a continuous historical strand of the national community's experience, drawing on discourses of the erasure and reclamation of a specifically African identity and using methods that seek to induce students' emotional identification with victims. A section on modern-day slavery in Book 1 focuses strongly on the practice's weaponisation in the recent war by the Sudanese government and "Northern Sudanese '*Arabs*'" against "'African' Sudanese[,] mainly the Dinka, Nuer and Nuba"; it refers most notably to the context of a

"Jihad" declared in 1989 (Book 1: 119)—a term very present in (Northern) Sudanese discourses of the 1990s and 2000s that were also manifest in textbooks and songs sung in the classroom (Seri-Hersch, 2015). The authors specifically describe "[t]he Arab enslavement of the Dinka people" as "one of the most brutal and well-documented examples of the [sic] late 20th Century slavery" (Book 1: 118). They illustrate this through two extensive, heart-wrenching testimonies of victimisation, and defiance of forced Arabisation and Islamisation, by former domestic child-slaves—a Shilluk boy and a Dinka girl respectively—in northern Sudanese families (Book 1: 104, 120–1). The arousal of emotions is key to the student activities, which encourage students to take the victims' perspective, instructing teachers to ask them "how they would feel if they are separated from their loved ones like their parents" (TG1: 77) and calling on students to consider victims' difficulties in testifying about their experience (Book 1: 106). The teachers' guide recommends that teachers draw on oral histories, "[e]ncourag[ing] students to share stories they may have heard about slavery in South Sudan" and thus, through these second-hand testimonies, add further narratives of victimisation to the sources in the book (TG1: 81).

One of Book 1's units centres on Christian missionaries in South Sudan, whom it treats in broadly positive terms, leaving students' reflection on "any negative effects" to a suggested group activity; this sets up an implicit discursive opposition between Islam and Christianity, despite the latter's colonial associations. In the textbook's narrative, the missionaries spread Christianity and thus countered Islam, "stopped" the (primarily Arab) slave trade, and promoted "western civilisation" by establishing education and health services (Book 1: 127). Essentially, Christian missionary activities appear here as a constituent component of the South Sudanese identity. Two missionary sources cited in the textbook serve to illustrate missionaries' challenges and perseverance; one of these refers to the locals as "primitive and ignorant" and as holding "prejudices against foreigners" (Book 1: 131), a trope that once circulated in British and Northern Sudanese discourses on South Sudanese people during the colonial (Condominium) era (Seri-Hersch, 2018) and which the textbook leaves unremarked upon. Noteworthily, a section titled "Positive impact of Christian missionaries in South Sudan" maintains that "African[s had] abandoned their traditional ways of living" and that missionaries "helped some communities get rid of bad traditional practices like early marriages, witchcraft and raiding" (Book 1: 134). Highlighting a degree of historical continuity in support of the overall narrative, the textbook asserts that the modern-day successors of these "men and women of God" (Book 1: 133) "still hope to make life better for the people they serve" (Book 1: 128). A broader unit on "Colonialism and African response," however, places Christian missionaries in a more equivocal light, suggesting that "Christianity discredited African traditional practices" (Book 3: 47). While emphasising South Sudan's Christian (frequently associated with "African") moorings, the textbooks obscure the presence of South Sudanese Muslim populations and the continued practice of local religions. This silencing exacerbates the discursive opposition set up between Christianity and Islam, evidencing notable influences on the textbook discourse of the Christian militant rhetoric that has been central to South Sudanese nationalism (Fath, 2013; Tounsel, 2021).

4.2 | Anti-colonial (all-)Sudanese nationalism and South Sudanese identity through resistance

A second emerging theme is that of revolt against externally imposing powers and its, again ambiguous, generation of both Sudanese nationalism per se and, eventually, a national identification as South Sudanese. Reprising the trope of "Arab" versus "African" Sudan, the textbooks include the narrative of the "stiff" and successful South Sudanese resistance to the "Arab invaders," that is, the Turco-Egyptian rulers, and their forcible acculturation, emphasising that "[m]any local rulers [...] encouraged the tribes to resist the invaders and protect their African culture and way of life" (Book 1: 73). The depiction of these "invaders" differs markedly from that of the encounter with the Christian missionaries and their acculturation practices. The evident authorial approval of revolt per se remains in the textbooks' subsequent depiction of the Islamic Mahdist Revolution as an anti-colonial rebellion against the Turco-Egyptians, "[j]ust like the African resistances towards colonialism" (Book 3: 78)[5]— an equation grounded in the textbooks' silence on

the politically and academically contested colonial nature of the "Turkiyya" (Warburg, 1992). Introducing reflection on factors "that have always proved to bring people together and unite them under one goal" (TG1: 50), the textbooks effectively undermine their stated intent to promote an understanding of both "the unifying and divisive potential of religion" (TG1: 44) by one-sidedly emphasising its unifying and mobilising power. In this case, the unifying moment, described in Book 1, is the notion of "Jihad" that drove "[m]any Arab tribes" in their support for the revolt (p. 77). Similarly, Book 3 notes the ability of charismatic leaders to unite a large and diverse following around a common cause and the "high spirit and morale" of followers who "thought that they were fighting a holy war" and therefore "fought their enemies with a lot zeal [sic] to finish them" (p. 74). This discourse evinces an attribution of religion-driven fanaticism, specifically in the referencing of a presumed "holy war," which cuts across—or undermines—the valorisation of the act of rebellion per se that permeates this passage. While acknowledging the loss of life and destruction the revolution brought, Book 3 exalts it as a turning point through which "[t]he people of Sudan"—no longer the Arab or Muslim population alone, but the national community—"learnt the importance of unity because they were able to fight their enemies when they were united" (p. 76) and which "laid the foundation of nationalism in the whole Sudan region" (p. 78). Notably, the textbook does not directly address the specific role of the South Sudanese in the Mahdist Revolution, raising it instead in a proposed research task. Book 1, apparently taking a more critical position, refers to the Mahdist imposition of Sharia laws and Islamic radicalism, supposedly to promote unity, by what its leadership believed was "a genuine Sudanese nationalist government," and to the new rulers' continued dependence on "black," "non Arabic, non Muslim" "South Sudanese slave labour," which continued to "form [...] the productive base of [Sudan's] society" (pp. 79–80).

While positing Sudanese nationalism per se as originating with the Mahdist Revolution—a matter of debate among scholars of modern Sudan—the textbooks consider South Sudan to "now trac[e] its history back to the days of Anglo-Egyptian occupation of Sudan in the 20th Century" (Book 2: 65) that violently put an end to Mahdist rule in a war whose front-line troops were black Sudanese "slaves of fortune," according to recent research that finds no echo in the textbooks (Lamothe, 2011).[6] In echoing the "perception that the British were the root cause of Sudan's political ills" (Jok, 2011: 15), the books discursively construct British colonial actions as driving forward the tensions initiated under Turco-Egyptian dominion. Reflecting pre-2011 (Northern) Sudanese textbook discourses (Seri-Hersch, 2015), they figure them as centrally divisive in disconnecting, and restricting cross-border movement between, Sudan's two regions following its Southern Policy of imposed separate development (Book 2: 67). An alternative interpretation of this policy, which the textbooks mention (Book 2: 68),[7] might figure it as an attempt to preserve non-Arab indigenous languages, culture and heritage in southern Sudan by aligning it more closely with East Africa while preventing Islam from spreading (Johnson, 2003); the textbooks do not foreground this idea, emphasising instead the deleterious effects of colonial measures.[8] The textbooks assert that "the British turned the Northern region against the Southern region" (Book 1: 41), disadvantaging the latter socio-economically and generating "tensions and mistrust between North and South Sudan culminating into [sic] armed conflict in the 1950s" (Book 1: 33). They likewise argue that British colonial rule further weakened the South internally, "creat[ing] tribalism [... and] disunity" by "divid[ing] South Sudan into hundreds of informal chiefdoms" governed "through tribal leaders [to] whom they gave 'powers'" to the end of preventing African nationalist resistance (Book 1: 33). Remarkably, we note an apparent attempt to downplay existing divisions in the omission from current curricula and textbooks of the "different [ethnically-based] Southern Sudanese resistance to Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudan" (by the Dinka Agar, Dinka Aliab, Dinka Malual, Nuer, Azande, and Anyuak) that had featured in the pre-independence SSCSE history syllabus (GoSS, 2007: 172) and that Breidlid et al. (2014) and recent specialised scholarship (Akol, 2008) have documented. This removal appears intended to create a narrative of unity in resistance, maintain the focus of blame for ethnic divisions on the colonisers, and reinforce the narrative of the South Sudanese as victims of oppression.

In the context of widening divides, the textbooks highlight the historical significance of the 1947 Juba Conference as the first incorporation of southern Sudanese views, notably about "the propos[al] [by the British] [of] unity between the North and South." They regard it as the moment when "[t]he Southerners came together and South Sudan was identified [*nota bene*, by the British] as a region" which "in turn resulted in the birth of nationalism in

Southern Sudan." The textbooks present this view despite noting the biased delegate selection process and implying the South was unready for political action towards the region's distinct autonomy (Book 2: 69–70).[9] This is a flagrant example of the internal contradictions characterising the textbooks' grand narrative of unity, possibly resulting in part from the use or plagiarism of divergent sources with little attention to consistency.

4.3 | Internal colonialism and the irresistible South Sudanese national liberation struggle

A third key theme emerging from the textbook analysis relates to the culmination of South Sudanese nationalism in its irresistible struggle for liberation from a condition of internal colonialism imposed by the northern Arab regime within Sudan following the long-standing neglect and marginalisation of the South. The textbooks describe the civil wars that had afflicted Sudan since independence in 1956 as the manifestation of a "rift between the Arab North (the seat of government) and the black African Christians of the South" (Book 2: 128–9). Indeed, they describe the latter region as having been a "a mere colony" of Sudan from 1956 to 2005 in that "[p]olitically, socially and economically South Sudanese were controlled by Sudan" (Book 3: 52–3). The conflict with "the Northern regime" stemmed, in this account, from cultural differences—"in language, religion, ethnicity"—and from a power imbalance and a "lack of autonomy" endured by the South (Book 2: 133). A unit on post-colonial Africa reinforces this view by suggesting that "[t]he biggest cause of conflict in Africa" stems from colonial "[b]oundaries [which] brought together many different ethnic people within a nation that did not reflect nor have ability to accommodate or provide for cultural and ethnic diversity" (Book 2: 125). Largely silencing the plethora of internal cultural differences within South Sudan itself as—following the textbook's own argument—a potential stumbling block to nationhood, the books' emphasis on an "African" and "Christian" identity as a unifying force for the country legitimises its distinctness as a nation from the remainder of erstwhile Sudan.

The textbooks' narrative of the struggle for liberation appears in line with one of the stated curricular purposes of learning about the civil wars in South Sudan today, which is to ensure that young South Sudanese "[v]alue nationalism and peace." More specifically, this objective consists in encouraging students to "[v]alue the reasons for armed struggle for independence," "[a]ppreciate the efforts of the key leaders in the armed struggle" and "[s]how care for [the] independence of South Sudan," while simultaneously "valu[ing] the present need for peace" (History Syllabus, Senior 1). In a unit on world history, Book 2 embraces nationalism as "exalting one nation above all others and putting primary emphasis on the promotion of its culture and interests [...] especially in terms of gaining and maintaining self-government or full sovereignty [... and] a national identity" (p. 89).[10] The teacher guide suggests explaining the meaning of nationalism by "using the example of patriots in the country whose devotion to their nation made them act in ways that were extremely good" and "of political leaders who fought tooth and nail for them" (TG2: 64).

The textbooks describe the war launched by the separatist Anya-Nya rebel movement in 1955 as a revolution of uncontainable, irresistible progress, driven by the momentum of a national destiny whose "tide could not be stopped"; a struggle launched "almost empty handed[ly]" with nothing but "knives and sticks" (Book 2: 71). There is particular praise for Lieutenant Joseph Lagu, whose establishment of the South Sudan Liberation Front in 1970 provided an effective response to "infighting" and to the "difficult[y] for the Southerners to unite under one leader" (Book 2: 72); the desirability of unity subordinate to a single authority appears in the discourse as a recurrent trope. There is, despite initial appearances, limited room for equivocation in the textbook's account of the mixed feelings that greeted the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement which put an end to the first civil war and "laid the foundation of regional autonomy in Southern Sudan" (Book 2: 74). While some welcomed it "because of war fatigue," others, who in the South included "many of [the] Anya-Nya fighters, politicians and the enlightened population," rejected it as a precipitous outcome and as "a repetition of the 1947 Juba Conference" because it did not lead to secession, the outcome preferred and considered ultimately inevitable by the discourse in action here (Book 2: 74–5). This discourse gives greater weight to the "enlightened" concerns than to the "war fatigue" that caused others to welcome the Agreement and that stands in implicit contrast to the revolutionary notion that "the struggle continues" until the ideal is won.

The textbooks glorify the current ruling party and its role in the struggle as the leading force behind a united mass movement whose actions culminated in the desired outcome of "total liberation," i.e. secession, during the second civil war (1983–2005). Book 2 celebrates the SPLM/A as a movement that, in the face of continued inequality and unsatisfactory implementation of the Addis Ababa Agreement, mobilised "thousands of Southern Sudanese student, peasant [sic], civil servants, police, prison officers and game army units [who] flocked to join the rebel training centres [... and] fight for the total liberation of Southern Sudan" (Book 2: 76).[11] The book specifically exalts the movement's leader, Garang, and his ability to assemble a "formidable force" (Book 2: 77) that eventually put an end, in 2002, to internal divisions that had weakened the resistance. Again, internal South Sudanese unity of purpose takes an important role; Book 2 argues that "[m]ost Southern Sudanese were united in their pursuit of total freedom from Northern domination" and recognises the "resistance against the Arabs" as the "glue that bound people together" at that time (Book 2: 73).

Book 2 sustains this romanticised narrative of "national unity in resistance" through a number of expedient silences and omissions. One relates to the experiences of thousands of children forcibly recruited by the SPLA (Røed, 2009); many of these erstwhile child soldiers are likely to be teachers expected to use these textbooks today. More generally, the textbooks do not mention the SPLM/A's "often-brutal relationship with the civilian population" (Cormack, 2017: 124). Another silence covers the scope and nature of internal rivalries within the SPLA during the struggle (Madut-Arop, 2012), a complex and sensitive issue only briefly touched upon, while a suggested activity asks students to use the textbook and stories circulating in their communities to "discuss the internal problems that the SPLM/A faced" (Book 2: 78). The only specific, very brief mention of such divisions refers to "the SPLM/A['s] split into the Torit and the Nasir Faction" of 1991 (Book 2: 78). The Nasir Faction, led by the current opposition leader Riek Machar, had strong support among Nuer and remnants of Anya-Nya 2, which had been a predominantly Nuer secessionist movement founded around 1976 by discontented Anya-Nya fighters following the Addis Ababa Agreement (Johnson, 2003) and finds no mention in the textbooks. The textbook omits the Faction's complicity with the Khartoum government in the attempt to remove Garang as the SPLA's leader (Johnson, 2003: 69) and its responsibility for the 1991 Bor Massacre, primarily targeting Dinka, a violent event that does feature in the textbook authors' key reference work by Breidlid et al. (2014). The nationalist historiography of South Sudan espoused by the textbook and its positing of "total liberation" as the struggle's inevitable outcome is notable in view of Garang's vision of confederation rather than secession. As De Waal (2021: 88) observes, "[t]oday, [Garang] is revered as the father of an independent South Sudan, but he himself espoused, variously, a united socialist Sudan, a united democratic Sudan, and a 'New Sudan'—a concept immune to precise definition."

In drawing discursively on notions of unity through suffering and of the emergence of charismatic, unifying, somewhat messianic figures, the textbooks create a narrative of the birth of a nation out of sacrifice and a struggle that, while bloody and destructive, was "able to give rise to charming leaders who [...] enlightened the Southerners" (Book 2: 82) and eventually brought South Sudan to peaceful secession and independence sanctioned by unanimous popular vote. Within this context, the books include a discussion of the protocols of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that laid the foundations for independence via a popular referendum. They list the Agreement's achievements, including the creation of an Autonomous Government of Southern Sudan, increased security, human rights, basic services and economic recovery, while also drawing attention to the "many" challenges to its implementation, including rampant corruption and tribalism (Book 2: 80–1).

4.4 | A young nation "on the brink of collapse": The threat of disunity post-independence

In addressing "South Sudan since 2011," the textbooks focus on its "post-independence challenges," depicting it as a young state "on the brink of collapse" (Book 2: 135) through "a lot of negative factors threatening [...] independence" (TG2: 96). Peculiarly, in view of the restrictive political landscape, the textbooks do not shy away from accusing "top government officials" of contributing to this state of affairs. They note their "possess[ing] dictatorship characters" and

engaging in "unprecedented levels" of corruption and identity-based "leadership wrangles," with disputes between President Kiir and Machar having led to civil war in 2013 (Book 2: 82; TG2: 96). The textbooks further refer to the country's "huge development needs" as its economy remains "one of the world's weakest and most underdeveloped" (Book 2: 132, 134).

"[T]ribalism" and identity-based competition for resources and power, particularly between the Nuer and Dinka, and associated widespread "[v]iolence and massacres" also receive mention (TG2: 96). Book 1 in particular provides background on ethnic identities and domestic inter-group relations; an introductory unit on history and its sources encourages students to identify and explain similarities in languages and traditional artefacts among the different "communities" they come from, categorised into Nilotes, Bantus and Cushites (p. 5). A subsequent unit on "Early societies in South Sudan" (Book 2: 48–65) has students learn about, and draw comparisons between, the Shilluk, the Azande and the Anyuak kingdoms as examples of centralised societies, as well as the Dinka (recognised as South Sudan's "largest ethnic group" [Book 2: 61]) and the Nuer as non-centralised societies. The latter two groups did not feature as such in the previous curriculum. The textbook further asks students to share their inside knowledge about the origins and histories of "their people" with the class and sing songs about their culture, and sets a suggested task of researching other communities by interviewing their members inside and outside of school (TG1: 34).

The aforementioned textbook unit draws special attention to Nuer-Dinka relations, described as hostile despite the groups' assumed kinship as "believed to be related […] by blood" and as supposed descendants of "children of the same father" (Book 1: 59). The Nuer, to which the current opposition leader belongs, appear posited as the primary wrongdoers against the Dinka, the community of the current president. The focal status of unity to much of the textbooks' narrative undergoes distinct destabilisation in this regard. Colonial-era sources are intended to inspire discussion on "why the Nuer people hate the Dinka despite all what [sic] they have undergone together," and why they "should live like brothers" instead (TG1: 39–41). The textbook asserts: "The Nuer feel closer to the Dinka than to other groups of strangers. They fought together in the SPLA and often speak of each other as cousins. At the same time the Nuer show greater hostility toward the Dinka than toward other strangers" (Book 1: 59).[12] There is silence on the two groups' opposition to one another within the SPLA, in line with Renan's (1896) suggestion that forgetfulness is useful in nation-building. Further, alongside historical trade relations, the textbook, contradicting historical sources that describe a common tradition of mutual cattle raiding (Hutchinson & Pendle, 2015), references past Nuer practices of carrying out raids against Dinka: "To them raiding the Dinka was normal and a duty. Every Nuer tribe raided the Dinka" (Book 1: 60). This sits somewhat uneasily alongside another (plagiarised) online source, authored by a South Sudanese blogger, which advocates for unity and peace and against "tribalism"—again we witness the textbook apparently rupturing the discourse it has constructed:

> "You are a Dinka, I am a Nuer, Kiir is the President, Dr. Riek is opposition Leader. […] Both of them are wealthy and call one another brother. […] I and you [sic] have one thing in common, poverty. […] We both have to struggle to survive. The day we will start thinking beyond our tribes, we shall make this country a better place. […] It's time for peace to prevail. Do not wait for Leaders, it start [sic] with us. One South Sudan and One Nation!" (Book 1: 63)[13]

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: THE UNSETTLED AND UNSETTLING CHARACTER OF A HISTORY IN THE MAKING

The themes identified in our analysis present an overall picture of an unsettled narrative whose key focus on unity undergoes repeated rupture. In their account of the violent history of slavery and colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and of the ensuing civil war, the textbooks stress the distinction between the "Arab" and the "African" Sudan; their primarily negative attitude towards the Arab north takes on some ambiguity when it claims Sudan's colonially disrupted historical unity. In terms of the histories of local communities and societies

within South Sudan, the emphasis is on their contact with the outside world, depicted as largely deleterious. The textbooks speak relatively little of these societies' many commonalities, such as culture and heritage, as foregrounded in the curriculum (MoEST, 2015: 9). Instead, they take as their focal points a shared past experience of victimisation and defiance. Around the central concept of the South Sudanese nation, the memory of past suffering and the "common glory" of liberation flow into a fundamental narrative of "unity in resistance," underlaid with emotion and raising a civic identity that ostensibly neutralises ethnic distinctions — a finding in line with recent classroom research (Skårås, 2019). The discourse that emerges from the analysis thus seeks to generate what Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 19) call an "overriding oneness" whose unifying moment is a national and nationalist identity forged in a history of victimisation (primarily by Muslim Arabs) and a revolutionary triumph over oppression. The foundation of this "oneness" is an opposition to the northern Sudanese Other, which simultaneously defines the highly diverse—and deeply divided—South Sudanese nation. This discursive pattern reflects the observation by Barth ([1969]1998) that a boundary between members of an in- and out-group can constitute a source of identity.

The historical continuity and shared national experience of victimisation, specifically of colonisation, is a primary and inaugural moment of the "groupness" (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000: 20) of South Sudan's nationhood. Conflict is a central moment of the narrative, which, unlike other national and nationalist narratives, contains no concept of a mythical golden age and no notion of a primordial national essence. The narrative of victimisation draws discursively on the arousal of emotion and empathy, encouraging identification with historical sufferings and via this a "groupness" that transcends chronology.

In advancing its regime of unity and a new post-independence grand narrative and "monumental history" (Nietzsche, 2010), the textbooks' discourse presents a succession of oppressive colonial Others—Turco-Egyptian, Mahdist, Anglo-Egyptian, and Sudanese rule—and limits discussion of historical and current internal identity-based conflict and of intergroup dynamics more generally, which would disrupt the grand narrative of unity in resistance. This minimisation of the topic is reminiscent of the manner in which history and military instruction textbooks produced in Khartoum before 2011 omitted Sudan's civil wars (Seri-Hersch, 2023). It may be possible to interpret this partial silence in current South Sudanese history textbooks as an incipient opening for classroom engagement with such sensitive questions in a conflict-ridden context. In the textbooks, however, despite their acknowledgement of cultural/ethnic diversity, national identity takes precedence, pushing towards a concept of citizenship that locates its essence in the nation rather than the "tribe" and could be developing parallels with the "discourse of hegemony, exclusion, and assumptions of homogeneity" (Jok, 2011: 4–5) held by the Khartoum government prior to South Sudanese independence. In view of the discourse we have identified, this would represent a keen irony of history. We note in this context a narrative that largely presents the Dinka as primary historical victims when discussing South–South, i.e. Dinka/Nuer relations. The cover of Book 2 features an image of two Dinka, possibly encapsulating potential perceptions of the books as a "Dinka history" written at a time when tensions remain live and a widespread view of "Dinka domination" exists. We did not find any indication of a Dinka preponderance in the authorial team.

Because the discourses analysed in this study centre on official, external identifications, the caveat is that, as Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 26–7) suggest, "[t]he formal institutionalization and codification of ethnic and national categories implies nothing about the *depth*, *resonance*, or *power* of such categories in the lived experience of the persons so categorized." There is a potential opening here for further research around the degree to which these narratives and related national sentiments are reaching their envisaged audiences both within and outside schools. Noting Renan's (1896) view that a nation "is a daily plebiscite," relying for its existence on continuous affirmation by its population, and aware that South Sudan is a nation literally born by plebiscite, the field of educational media and memory studies could gain much insight from empirically establishing the impact exerted by the discourses analysed here.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The term Southern Sudan is used across the text to refer to the territory of South Sudan prior to its secession from the north.

[2] The topics discussed include early societies in South Sudan, Turco-Egyptian rule and the Mahdist Revolution, the slave trade, Christian missionaries, and South Sudan in the twentieth century. This last-mentioned unit addresses British policy from 1920 to 1948 and the 1947 Juba Conference, before progressing to the two "civil wars"—the Anya-Nya Wars of 1955–1972 and the SPLM/A war of 1983–2005. Students also encounter the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 and the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), and the country's post-independence.

[3] Plagiarised from http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/plaintexthistories.asp?historyid=aa86. (Accessed 14 April 2022).

[4] Part of the section on slave trade in Africa is taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_slave_trade, quoting the Congolese historian Elikia M'Bokolo.

[5] This section is partly plagiarised from Breidlid et al. (2014), p. 122.

[6] Book 3's chapter on Anglo-Egyptian rule is partly plagiarised from Wikipedia, "Anglo-Egyptian Sudan", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Egyptian_Sudan#:~:text=From%201924%20onwards%2C%20the%20British,whose%20main%20role%20was%20instructional. (Accessed 14 April 2022).

[7] Plagiarised from Breidlid et al. (2014), p. 159.

[8] Plagiarised from Breidlid et al. (2014), pp. 151–3.

[9] Plagiarised from Breidlid et al. (2014), pp. 170–4.

[10] The textbook (Book 2: 94) also outlines nationalism's less benign side, with specific reference to the Western world, which, albeit having "liberated European nations from exploitative and oppressive rule […] contributed to societal evils such as colonialism [committed] by European countries, the holocaust […] and [the] 1st and 2nd world war."

[11] Plagiarised from Breidlid et al. (2014), p. 280.

[12] Plagiarised from https://www.slideshare.net/AllanDawson/the-meaning-of-violence. (Accessed 14 April 2022).

[13] Plagiarised from https://paanluelwel.com/2016/03/05/dinka-and-nuer-one-nation-one-people/. (Accessed 14 April 2022).

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