

The Jonglei Canal Project: South Sudan Students' Protest, 1974

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ABSTRACT

In the northern part of South Sudan, due to the flatness of the terrain, the flow of the White Nile has been greatly slowed down resulting in the formation of vast swamps called sudd (barrier) in Arabic. The Dinka, Nuer and the Shilluk refer to this flood plain as toich. It is central to their livelihoods. In 1974 Egypt and Sudan agreed to construct a canal to divert the water of the White Nile away from the sudd area. This canal, referred to as the Jonglei Canal, was to run between Bor and Sobat River. Many people in South Sudan were opposed to the construction of this canal. Using rumours, they mobilized students to oppose the construction of the canal through strikes which resulted unfortunately in the killing of two students, closure of schools, and arrests or exiling of some politicians.

INTRODUCTION

The riparian peoples of South Sudan have proverbs or sayings about the importance of the White Nile and its water; Bari say *kari a kinyo* (river is food); Dinka say *piu nhialic* (water is a gift from God), Madi say *eyi ni lidri* (water is life), Nuer say *pi kuoth* (water is god), and Shilluk say *pi ba munyi jwok* (water is the gift of God). Being riparian people of River Nile, the Bari, Dinka, Madi, Nuer and Shilluk know the central part water plays in agriculture, environment, food processing, transport, health, and industry. Perhaps as god, the Nuer are also referring to the destructive force of water – flooding/inundation, landslides, erosion, diseases, and drowning. These proverbs epitomize the Nile with its natural barriers at Fola and Bedden rapids, and the *sudd* (barrier) area where the Nile is slowed down greatly due to the flatness of the area and floating vegetation. According to the Dinka occupants of the *sudd* area, the River Nile water is nothing but a gift from God. It is legendary in its origin. It is a natural resource and engineering its waters, which results in the removal or diversion from the *sudd*, has costs.¹

When the Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt, he saw the irrigation system and eleven fathoms of mud that showed how far the silt from the river extended, leading him to conclude that Egypt was the Gift of the Nile.² Further south, the Shilluk also say the Nile is their gift from God (*pi ba munyi jwok*). The Bari people say the Nile is food (*kare kinyo*). The swamps and flood basins of the *sudd* are a rich ecosystem essential to the pastoral economy of the local inhabitants.³ The ethnic groups that live in the *sudd* area are the Dinka, Mundari (a section of Bari), Nuer and Shilluk. The *sudd* area has poor rainfall: rains occur between May and September. The poor quality

¹ Guell, Robert (2008). *Issues in Economics Today*, 4th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, Inc.

² Marozzi, Justin (2006). "Herodotus". In: *The Seventy Great Journeys in History*. London: Thames & Hudson.

³ Y. A. Mohamed *et al.* (2005). Impact of the Sudd Wetland on the Nile hydroclimatology, *Water Resources Research*, pp. 1–14.

of the soil combined with the flatness of the territory creates large floods.⁴ In the long dry season the soil becomes hard and impossible to cultivate.⁵ The people therefore lead a transhumant life which has been repeated for centuries. During the dry season, when water and pasture become scarce, people and livestock first move to the intermediate lands, and then to the flood plains (*toich*) following the receding water and pastures. In the rainy season, the *toich* is flooded, and the people and livestock move first to the intermediate lands and then to higher lands.⁶ Each ethnic group or clan is an economic unit with its own defined land over which it has grazing, cultivating, and fishing and hunting rights.⁷ The chiefs, gods and ancestors are the custodians of the land.

The planned construction of the Jonglei canal for the draining and rapid onward transportation of the Nile water from the *sudd* to increase flow northwards was not taken lightly in Southern Region of the Sudan.⁸ The riparian people of South Sudan have depended on the White Nile for their livelihoods from time immemorial. The people who were to bear the primary ecological and political effects of the canal were the present inhabitants of the canal area – Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk.⁹ For centuries, they have been cattle keepers, subsistence farmers, fish mongers and game hunters. The increasing demand for water in Egypt and Sudan — now the Republic of South Sudan with effect from 9th July 2011— made the authorities to construe that the *sudd* area was wasting water through evapotranspiration. Before proclaiming itself independent, South Sudan had been fighting to secede from Sudan since 1954.¹⁰ The canalization plan was to achieve the purpose of reducing the losses of water in the *sudd* area in South Sudan in order to increase the amount water reaching Egypt and Sudan.¹¹ The canal was a sudden intrusion by Egypt and Sudan into the physical, economic and institutional interrelationships within the traditional economies of the Jonglei canal area.¹²

This paper describes the South Sudanese students' protest in October 1974 against the digging of the Jonglei Canal. At the time of this protest, the Republic of South Sudan was a region in Sudan but was continually struggling for independence in order to control its own resources. Water was one of those resources which were thought to be benefiting Egypt and Sudan at the expense of the people of South Sudan. Data for the paper was collected from books, journal articles, archival documents and interviews of key informers. The authors of this paper were excited to discover new papers on the Jonglei canal at the National Archive of South Sudan.

⁴ Doran, Daniel (2009). *The Jonglei Canal Project: A Case Study on Water Security in Southern Sudan*. A thesis submitted for the certification of United Nations Peace Operations Training Institute.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ De Mabior, John G. (1981). *Identifying, selecting, and implementing rural development strategies for socio-economic development in the Jonglei Projects Area, Southern Region, Sudan*. A Ph.D dissertation submitted to Iowa State University.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The paper will use South Sudan rather than Southern Sudan because the aspiration was the protection of resources of a country.

⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰ Wawa, Yosa H. (2005). *Southern Sudanese Pursuits for Self-Determination*. Kampala: Marianum Press.

¹¹ Okoth-Owiro, Arthur (2004). *The Nile treaty: state succession and international treaty commitments: a case study of the Nile water treaties*. Nairobi: Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

¹² Ibid., 6.

THE JONGLEI CANAL PROJECT

The Nile River represents one of the most important and complex sources of water in Africa and the world.¹³ The branch of the Nile along which the *sudd* is situated is called the White Nile. There are nine riparian states along its basin – Burundi, DR Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The water of the Nile is useful to all these riparian states. It is used for irrigation, hydro-power generation, fishing, transport, tourism and food supply. Agriculture is the mainstay in this basin. For countries like Egypt and Sudan, being located in the Sahara desert, the Nile's key purpose is to feed these countries with water.¹⁴ Owing to this, Egypt and Sudan's concerns have risen over the ever decreasing annual flow of the Nile water since 1870.¹⁵ Factors such as population increases and urbanisation, hydroelectric power, industrialization and agricultural expansion over the years have contributed to a rising demand for water resources from the Nile.¹⁶

The water of the White Nile flows steadily from various lakes, rivers and streams until it reaches about 100 miles north of Juba, the capital city of the Republic of South Sudan. Between Juba and Bor the river drops by 33 metres, a distance of 100 kilometres, but between Bor and Malakal, a distance of 773 kilometres, it drops by 37 metres.¹⁷ The *sudd* area is where the river reaches the flat bottom of its drainage basin and spills over its banks forming the barrier.¹⁸ The *sudd* wetland is one of the longest wetland areas worldwide.¹⁹ It lies between latitude 6.5° N and 9.5° N and longitude 30.167° E and 31.75° E.²⁰ It is estimated as 500 kilometres long and 200 kilometres wide south-north and east-west respectively. It is characterized by permanent swamps (60%) and seasonal swamps (40%). It is called the *sudd* (the Arabic word for barrier) because of the thick layer of floating vegetation that hinders navigation. The *sudd* is the region from which the White Nile loses water through evapotranspiration. It is estimated that about 56% of the White Nile water discharge of 28bcm³ in an average year is lost through evapotranspiration in the *sudd* region.²¹ These losses could be reduced through the channelization projects to bypass the *sudd* area. This canal was first proposed in 1901 by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium colonial government and was revived in 1974.

To reclaim water from *sudd* area, in 1974 Egypt and Sudan agreed to construct the Jonglei canal (*see map below*) which was to run 80 miles north of Bor at a village called Jonglei to the confluence

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵ Chesire, David K. (2010). Control over the Nile: Implications across nations. MA thesis. Submitted to Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

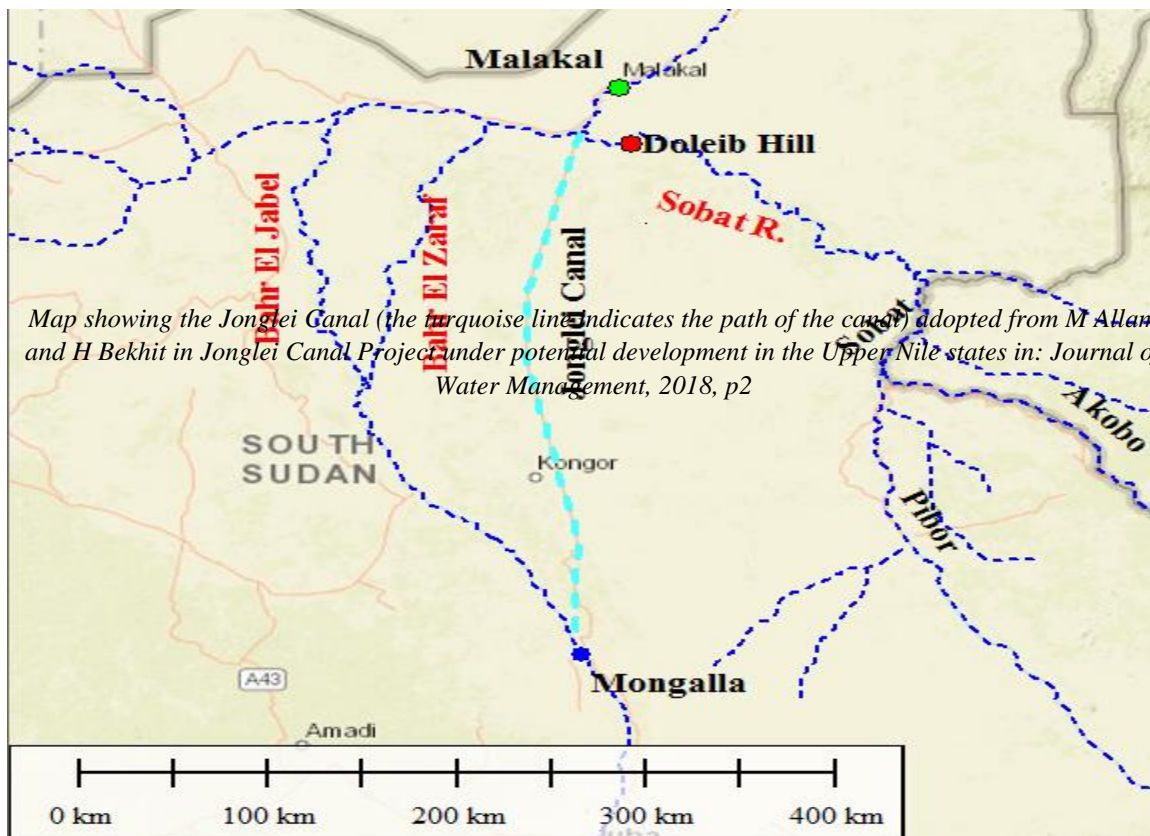
¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Lamberts, Erwin (2009). *The effects of Jonglei Canal operation scenarios on the Sudd swamps in Southern Sudan*. A thesis submitted to Twente University.

²⁰ Allam, Mariam M. *et al* (2018). Jonglei Canal Project Under Potential Developments in the Upper Nile States, *Journal of Water Management Modeling*, pp. 1–9.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

of Sobat River at Doleib hill, just south of Malakal.²² This canal would divert the water from passing slowly through its natural path through the marshes of the *sudd*. It was to be 38 metres wide for the first 40 kilometres downstream from Jonglei, 50 metres wide for the last 50 kilometres upstream from the junction of the Sobat and the Nile, and 30 metres wide in the intermediate 270 kilometres.²³ It was to be 4 metres deep.²⁴ The canal was designed to take a maximum amount of 25 million cubic metres of water per day.²⁵ This means the Jonglei Canal would increase the Nile discharge at Aswan by an estimated 4bcm³ and Egypt and Sudan was to get 2bcm each.³ Construction work on the canal started in 1978 and was brought to a halt in 1984 by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.²⁶ The Jonglei Canal was seen by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, a South Sudan guerrilla group, as an example of South Sudan's lack of control over its political and economic resources.²⁷ Egypt and Sudan prioritized the perceived needs of their two countries to the detriment of the needs of those within the *sudd* area, contributing to local discontent.²⁸



²² Ibid., 19.

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 19.

²⁵ Alier, Abel (1990). *Southern Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonoured*. Exeter: Ithaca.

²⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁷ A Special Correspondent (Sept/Oct 1985). *Khartoum's Greatest Challenge: Report from the South*. Middle East Research and Information Project.

²⁸ Johnson, Douglas (2004). *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*. Oxford: James Currey.

CIRCUMVENTING THE *SUDD* AND SOUTH SUDANESE STUDENTS' PROTESTS, OCTOBER 1974

In November 1959, Egypt and Sudan signed an agreement for the full utilization of the waters of the Nile. In 1960, a Permanent Joint Technical Committee was formed with four members from each country. Sudan's members were from the Ministry of Irrigation and there was no representative from Southern Sudan.²⁹ The Technical Committee had several projects on its drawing board – draining the Machar marshes, a bypass scheme for draining the tributaries west of the Nile, and the Jonglei Canal.³⁰ Its other activities included taking the river's readings, regulating each dam against actual withdrawal and evaporation.³¹ In February 1974 the Permanent Joint Technical Committee agreed on the project of circumventing the *sudd* area by digging the Jonglei Canal. There was no one to reassure the South Sudanese that the projects would not negatively affect their water resources. Water from its many rivers and streams is a vital resource in South Sudan beyond the *sudd*.³² The *toich* (swamp) is the critical component of the grazing cycle for cattle and wildlife in dry season.³³ Through the River Nile, the Dinka and Nuer are able to combat famines through dependence on milk, grain and fish. The social bias of the people in favour of cattle is partly a result of these environmental conditions.³⁴

In February 1974, Sudan Government Ministers of Irrigation and Agriculture, Yahya Abdel Magid and Wadie Habashie respectively, came to Juba and met Abel Alier, President of the High Executive Council (Regional Government of Southern Sudan) and a special meeting of the High Executive Council was arranged during which the ministers explained the Jonglei Canal Project³⁵. Besides Egypt and Sudan's needs for water, they talked of the socio-economic development of the canal area, diversion of only one-fifth of the *sudd* water, and generous compensation to citizens whose farms and homes would be affected by the canal totaling 18,000,000 Sudanese pounds.³⁶ The cabinet of the Southern Sudan Regional Government led by Abel Alier was informed that appropriate socio-economic development strategies would be implemented in the Jonglei Canal area. These included the construction of all-weather roads, navigable canals, cash crop schemes, clean drinking water and drainage to stop seasonal floods.³⁷ Besides supporting Egypt and Sudan with water, the canal was partly intended to support large scale sugarcane growing and processing in Mongalla, Melut, and Galhak (Jalak) in South Sudan.³⁸

²⁹ Sudan–United Arab Republic Agreement between the United Arab Republic and the Republic of Sudan for the full utilization of the Nile waters, Signed at Cairo, November 8, 1959 and Protocol Concerning the Establishment of Permanent Joint Technical Committee signed at Cairo, January 17, 1960.

³⁰ Hodges, Richard C. (2013). The Egypt-Sudan Permanent Joint Technical Commission for Nile Water, *Canadian Water Resources Journal*, pp. 71–83.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 28.

³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

When the Jonglei Canal Project was made public in a press release, rumours started circulating in South Sudan that two million Egyptians were going to settle in the canal area.³⁹ It was rumoured that a total of 132,000 Egyptian soldiers, 6000 for each district, would be moved to South Sudan to guide the canal.⁴⁰ This rumour had its base partly in similar military support for canal schemes by the British and French governments for the Suez Canal and the Americans for the Panama Canal.⁴¹ It also reflected local understandings of Rai el Misri, the Egyptian camp in Malakal, which was highly segregated from the local community.⁴² The rumours of a transfer of about 2.5 million Egyptians to South Sudan to settle were understood as the creation of a state within a state.⁴³ Five Egyptian teachers and eleven British engineers who were in South Sudan at that time were mistaken for the Egyptian officers' corps.⁴⁴ Also, the canal was rumoured to drain all of the water, fish and other aquatic life for the benefit of Egypt.⁴⁵ A paper by an anonymous author referring to himself or herself as a "Stout Nationalist" alleged that there should be two canals running parallel as a single canal will increase the speed of the flow of water and drive all the fish to Lake Nasir in Egypt.⁴⁶ The intended plan of the canal was also rumoured to make wildlife in South Sudan immigrate to neighboring countries or become extinct due to lack of water.⁴⁷ The tribes along the canal feared being poorly resettled like the people of Wadi Halfa during the construction of the Aswan Dam in 1960.⁴⁸ Other allegations include the turning of South Sudan into a desert because evaporation in the *sudd* region is what brings rain to the area.⁴⁹ There were rumours that Paul Howell, the Chair of the 1952 Jonglei Canal Team had said that the current money earmarked for compensating the Dinka and Nuer for alternative livelihoods was practically nothing.⁵⁰ In response to these rumours, school children exploded into massive demonstrations in Juba, Malakal, Bor, Torit, Yambio, Yei and Wau.

On 13th October, five Juba Commercial Students' representatives – Stephen Gwang, John Juliano Luak, Aluk Akok, Kawach Anei, and Isaac Baby – took a letter to the Minister of Education Philip Obang and to the Deputy Commander of the Sudan Armed Forces Southern Division Andrew Maker requesting permission to demonstrate against the Jonglei Canal.⁵¹ Andrew Maker asked whether it was going to be a peaceful demonstration and the students' representatives replied in the affirmative. Maker then asked Major Kamilo Adong to see to it that the demonstration was peaceful. On 14th October 1974, students from Buluk Junior Secondary School, Juba Commercial Senior Secondary School, Juba Girls Intermediate Secondary School, Addis Ababa Girls Intermediate School, Juba One Intermediate, and all primary schools in Juba assembled at Juba

³⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁴¹ South Sudan National Archives. SR.36.G.1.414

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Interview with Stephen Mummeido Amum Mido in Juba, South Sudan on February 13, 2022.

Commercial Secondary School. Tartisio Philip Lado⁵² was between nine and eleven years old and in primary four at Kator Primary School. He recalled how he actively participated in mobilizing Kator Girls and Boys primary schools for the strike. As they left their schools at 6.30am they shouted ‘Down, down Jonglei canal, away with Egyptians’; at Buluk slogans such as ‘Down, down with Jonglei canal, down, down with Egyptian policy’ were written on the walls of school buildings in both Arabic and English.⁵³ From Juba Commercial Senior Secondary School, students walked to Mobil petrol station and then to the High Executive Council. A total of 22 representatives including junior and primary school children were chosen to present the petition to the Council of Ministers. The Minister of Information informed the students’ representatives that the Sudan Socialist Union (SSU), the ruling political party during the reign of President Nimeiri, will brief the students the following day. According to Stephen Gwang, Secretary General of Juba Commercial Senior Secondary Students’ Union, students dispersed peacefully in anticipation of the SSU briefing the following day.⁵⁴

The next day, 15th October, students refused to go to class, saying they were preparing for the meeting at the SSU centre, opposite the present Central Bank of South Sudan, at 5pm. but at 3.30pm the Acting President of the High Executive Council sent a message that the 5pm meeting was cancelled. All the same, by 4.00pm students were on their way to the SSU centre.⁵⁵ When neither Abel Alier nor Hilary Paul Logali came to address them, the students made their own speeches. Nyiker Okoth Awin, then Secretary General of Rumbek Senior Secondary School Students’ Union, talked against the digging of the Jonglei Canal.⁵⁶ He argued that Egypt and Sudan did not care about the people of South Sudan, only its water, and by allowing the construction of the canal, the people in the canal area in South Sudan were bound to suffer. All the speeches at the SSU centre repeated the rumours about the canal; other speakers linked the Nasir area in Upper Nile with Egypt’s Gamal el Nasser and claimed that Egypt had long plans to take over part of South Sudan’s soil.⁵⁷

After many speeches, students dispersed in a disorderly manner and vented their anger on vehicles and buildings. Buluk Junior Secondary School students returned towards Buluk shouting loudly, throwing stones at houses, and beat up a teacher called George from Juba One Intermediate School.⁵⁸ Some of the students went into the streets of Juba and caused more destruction of property and assaulted the police.

Pasquale Teiberius Moilinga was in primary two at Juba One Primary School when the students’ strike took place.⁵⁹ He recalled how he was carried on the shoulders of bigger boys to the demonstration ground and placed in front to carry placards denouncing the Jonglei Canal. He recalled how students were warned that an Egyptian could eat up to 20 loaves of bread a day. In the absence of enough food, they would turn into cannibals. That was the first time he heard the

⁵² Interview with Tartisio Philip Lado in Juba, South Sudan on March 22, 2022.

⁵³ Valeriano O Orrege, Director, Buluk Junior Secondary School, report, SR.36.G1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁵ Stephen Bucay Francis, Director Juba Commercial Senior Secondary School, report, SR.36.G1.

⁵⁶ Interview with Nyiker Okoth Awin in Juba, South Sudan on March 11, 2022.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁹ Interview with Pasquale Tiberius Moilinga in Juba, South Sudan on March 25, 2022.

word *kulabantu* (*Luganda* word in Uganda for cannibals). After five years, they were also told, the two million Egyptians settled in the canal area would outnumber the South Sudanese. They were also reminded of the Egyptian enslavement of South Sudan during the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha in the nineteenth century. So, it was resolved that the Jonglei Canal Project be rejected by the people of South Sudan.

The next day on 16th October 1974 at about 5.30am, the rioting schools were surrounded by police and prison warders. Students were stopped from leaving and nobody was allowed to enter. As Buluk Junior Secondary school was not fenced, students were able to break through the police and prison warders' lines, and they ran towards Juba Commercial Secondary School. When they reached the Juba Secondary Senior School playground, they were met by many more police and prison warders. As the students were accompanied by many other civilians, the security forces were outnumbered. In the process a fracas broke out and police First Lieutenant shot William Pancol, a second year student of Buluk Intermediate Junior Secondary School.⁶⁰ Students took Pancol's body and marched shouting to Juba Teaching Hospital, then on to Malakia, Atlabara, Yei Park, and the Check Point. The aim was to go with Pancol's body to the High Executive Council but when they reached the John Garang Mausoleum, armed forces had hidden in the grass and started shooting in the air. Students and civilians ran in different directions, abandoning the body of Pancol. Another boy was shot by a stray bullet and became the second fatality.⁶¹ At 12 noon that same day, all the schools were closed indefinitely. The captain and commander of the operation declared a state of emergency and a curfew from 6.00pm to 6.00am.⁶² Albino Mungu, a contractor of the Ministry of Education, was asked by the Minister of Communication Ezboni Mundiri to transport all students back to their homes. By 19th October all students had left their schools except those who were under police custody.⁶³ In Juba, 22 students were detained at Buluk Police station for seven days, and then were released but made to report to Buluk police station once a week for one month.⁶⁴

Two days later, on 18th October, there were demonstrations in Torit, Yei, Bor, Malakal and other towns in South Sudan.⁶⁵ In Malakal the Regional Government was accused by demonstrators of being an Egyptian stooge, and a Regional Minister sent to calm the situation was booed and taunted.⁶⁶ Martin Marial Takpiny, Vice Principal of Malakal Institute of Education, reported that on 19th October students of Malakal Senior Secondary School demonstrated and were joined by students of Malakal Institute of Education. They moved towards Dangar Shuffu village, probably to collect students of Jonglei Intermediate Secondary School, where they were dispersed. Authorities then arrested 41 students, eight of them girls.⁶⁷ All schools were closed and a state of emergency and curfew were declared.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁶¹ Ibid., 25.

⁶² Ibid., 53.

⁶³ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 41.

When Juba students from Yambio returned home, Yambio Junior Secondary School students learned about the Juba strike. They immediately called for a strike. Led by Arabic-language pattern students, they refused to go to class.⁶⁸ On 23rd October at 6.30 am, students marched to town shouting slogans. They broke into the school canteen and took away food. They called on Yambio Girls Primary School and two other primary schools to join them in the demonstrations and classes were interrupted in all schools. The children walked to the Local Government office and made general demonstrations. This prompted the Inspector of Local Government to close all schools in Yambio and Nzara and declare a state of emergency.⁶⁹

In a democratic state, the allegations about the Jonglei Canal should have been countered by empirical evidence. This is because in democracies there is often more than one source of information.⁷⁰ The essence of liberal democracy is the right to challenge the incumbent government, through contestation, participation and within the confines of human rights.⁷¹ The Regional Government of Abel Alier took the students' demonstrations seriously. According to Stephen Gwang (now Stephen Mummeido Amum Mido), who was the Secretary General of Juba Commercial Secondary School Students' Union, students knew the Jonglei Canal's advantages and disadvantages through their geography teachers.⁷² They knew that the canal was going to benefit Egypt and Sudan as they drove to expand their agricultural sectors.⁷³

Many South Sudanese politicians took the Regional Government's silence seriously, knowing that the history of canals had already caused many issues in the contemporary world.⁷⁴ A little known political organization called The African Revolutionary Movement in Sudan wrote a letter to Abel Alier condemning the killing of the two students in Juba and threatened to kill some South Sudanese politicians.⁷⁵ Besides the closure of schools and declaration of states of emergencies, arrests were made in Juba and Malakal: some Members of the Regional Assembly such as Stephen Ciec and Simon Mori were detained until 6th December 1974 when Abel Alier asked Natale Olwak, the Minister of Regional Administration, Police, Prisons and Legal Affairs, to release them.⁷⁶ Other detainees were Tarcisio Ahmed and Gabriel Awoth.⁷⁷ According to Tartisio Philip Lado,⁷⁸ Clement Mboro, a veteran South Sudanese politician was behind the students' strike but escaped arrest. Some Members of Parliament went into exile.⁷⁹ Abel Alier then sent some members of his cabinet to the provinces to explain the history and benefits of the canal. On 19th October 1974, Abel Alier held meetings with religious leaders and a delegate of Women, Youth

⁶⁸ Yambio Junior Secondary School, Director, report, SR.36.G1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Morlino, Leonardo (2006). 'Good' and 'bad' democracies: How to conduct research into the quality of democracy, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, pp. 5–27.

⁷¹ Landman, Todd (2007). *Developing Democracy: Concepts, Measures, and Empirical Relationships*. Background paper prepared for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, May 2007.

⁷² Ibid., 51.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁵ The Secretariat, African Revolutionary Movement in the Sudan, letter to Abel Alier, SR.36.G1

⁷⁶ Ibid., 41.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 25.

and Workers groups to explain the genesis of the students' strikes. He instituted a commission of inquiry led by Sabino Saverio which found the police innocent given that they had no crowd controlling machines – tear gas, water hoses, and so on – but were shooting in the air⁸⁰.

CONCLUSION

Water is a fundamental building block for survival on this planet, second only to breathable air.⁸¹ It is therefore little wonder that the riparian South Sudanese people associate water, and the Nile, with food, life, God and gift from God. The students' strike of October 1974 was not unique to South Sudan: history is dotted with many water conflicts, from the Old Testament story in Genesis 26 of Isaac's struggle over Isek well to Turkey's 1990s diversion of the Euphrates water away from Syria and Iraq. Water is a source of conflict among users, particularly when it crosses international boundaries.⁸² The South Sudanese people and students knew the history of their struggle for independence and expected their leaders to not compromise by giving away their God-given natural resources without any gain.

The dictatorship of President Nimeiri (1969-1985) did not allow opposition, including to the Jonglei Canal Project. The October 1974 riots were against a project that was going to access, store and regulate the *sudd* resources of South Sudan for the benefit of Egypt and Sudan. Any politicians who opposed him was either arrested or forced to flee the country.⁸³ This is what Abel Alier's Regional Government in South Sudan carried out, resulting in the deaths of two students and arrests and exiling of some parliamentarians. Perhaps due to the absence of concrete scientific evidence coupled with their exclusion from Permanent Joint Technical Committee, the people of South Sudan relied on rumours to justify their opposition for the construction of the Jonglei Canal. Politicians and technocrats opposed to the idea of the canal circumvented the dictatorship of Nimeiri by inciting the students to protest.

The White Nile was “engineered” by nature. With climate change and population growth, its water has become increasingly valuable to all riparian peoples. The people of South Sudan may only be assured of their continued dependence on the *sudd* when there is an international multidisciplinary research, where possible, including South Sudanese scientists about any anticipated effects of the canal on their lives or the *sudd*.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 4.

⁸² Grey, David & Sadoff, Claudia W. (2007) Sink or Swim? Water Security for Growth and Development, *Water Policy*, 9, pp. 545–571.

⁸³ Ibid., 28.