
The Dynamics of Socio-Political Conflict and National Disintegration in Sudan

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Abstract:

Sociopolitical conflict in Sudan have been prevalent for long time. Most parts of the country have experienced the conflict at different ways, forms and times. These conflicts have arisen primarily as a result of Sudanese political elite's misuse of political power, country diversity and has been the former's continuous economic, political and cultural marginalization. The paper examines the dynamics of sociopolitical conflict on national integration in Sudan. The methodology adopted for this study involved qualitative data that were gathered from secondary sources, such as books, journals, websites and content exploratory. The results of the study revealed that national integration, unity, stability and peaceful coexistence cannot be achieved in an environment where some groups believes that they are different and even they super from others. Also the findings of the study explore the major dynamics that promote the conflict includes politicization of ethnicity and tribalism, political communalism, inequality in a national resources distribution, cultural distinctions as well as some national institutions contributed to national disintegration of the country since independence up to date. Based on the major findings, the paper recommended that Sudanese political leaders and elites including military officers should carefully adopt the process of citizenship instead of focus on sociopolitical and economic exploitation. There is need for introducing comprehensive and proper economic development strategy to reduce marginalization and periphery areas tensions, as well as a fair wealth and resources sharing among Sudanese equally.

Key Words: Conflict, Dynamics. *Disintegration, Ethnicity, Sociopolitical, Sudan*

Introduction

The Republic of Sudan has gained its independence on first January, 1956 and considered as one of the earliest African countries free of European colonialism. Instead of building national state by reflecting Sudanese diversity in terms of ethnic and tribal groups, religious, environment and other social entities, the country witnessed long history of instability and national disintegration. Widespread concern at present with social disintegration can be seen as a call to analyses the reasons behind the breakdown of certain institutions (such as states, religious organizations, agent of family or even economic structure) or moral codes and to understand the kinds of social relations which are gaining prominence instead(UNRISD, 1994). Feelings of marginality and the disruption of existing forms of local solidarity are two elements exacerbating ethnic and religious conflict, and encouraging participation in illicit and illegal activities in many settings around the world today. Political instability linked to a long period of civil war between North and South which led to separation of South Sudan as Independent State on 2011. Also continuation of conflicts between armed opposition groups and central government in Darfur region since 2003 except Juba peace agreement signatories in 2020, in South Kordufan and Blue Nile states are still warning. The conflict in South Kordufan State has been controlled by Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) north and still anti-government, while the case conflict in Blue Nile is leading by SPLM, North but has signed peace agreement in Juba capital of South Sudan on October, 2020 among front Revolution groups including most of Darfur armed movement's. Both two groups of SPLM are initially part SPLM of South Sudan before the separation on 2011. In addition to the several ethnic and tribal conflicts took place in these states, such as recent ethnic conflict in Blue Nile State started on May, 2022 between Hausa people against Hamaj, Funj, El brta and Angasana tribe, and similar

ethnic conflicts are going on in west, south and North Darfur (mainly between Non-Arab ethnic groups via Arab tribal groups as well as the same in South Kordufan State between Nuba and coalition of Masiria and hawazma. All the ethnic conflicts has their different root causes, but all are hindering the national integration of the country.

The deadly current war (August, 2023) which started on 15 April, 2023 between two military leaders Abdul fatah Elburhan and Mohammed Hamdan Doglo chief of Sudan Armed Forces(SAF) and Pre-military Rapid Support Forces (RSF) respectively. The conflict between two sides has started deadly and tough violent even against civilian but it has deep political motivations and ambitions for both of military leaders.

Generally, national disintegration may be caused by poverty, cultural invasion, economic imperialism or social breakdown within the country, and the results of disintegration may be ethnic conflict, violence or apathy, exploitation, and forced assimilation (Young, 2002). In case of Sudan there are several factors led to the national disintegration including the absence of consciousness for Sudanese nationalism and identity, failure of political elites and legacy of British colonialism as well as national division in terms of inter-ethnic conflict and struggle over power. IOM (2011) Reported that Sudan problem has been complicated by deep roots of national division planted by British colonialism and nourished by changing governments in Khartoum by global powers which have used the country for their own ends. Unfortunately, the picture that was drawn by colonial regime has been continued after independence and up-to-date. Moreover, the level of political instability followed by deadly civil wars and ethnic/tribal conflicts as well as national divisions are major features of contemporary Sudanese state. The struggle for national integration in the huge and underdevelopment of Sudan is very difficult, with ethnic and geographical factors weighing heavily (IOM,2011). This paper concentrate deeply on inter communal conflicts as a mirror of struggle over social conflict, as well as

political conflict over political power and wealth are most significant mechanisms hindering national integration and unity in Sudan.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study involved qualitative data that were gathered from secondary sources, such as books, journals and internet websites. Content exploratory and analysis was carried out to review existent literature and evaluate the study's originality.

Conceptual Framework:

1- Socio-Political Conflict:

Conflict and struggle are part and parcel of everyday social and political relations, and it can be good when it leads to more equal redistribution of resources and power, but also conflict can be harmful when it involves loss of people's lives, destroyed properties, violence or other forms of mental and physical abuse. conflict occurs when at least two groups interact with each other and there are differences in objectives, these groups will try to influence or control others by using violence (Alao, 2007: 19). Conflict is a type of behavior among individuals, groups, or even nations that transcends the regular dispute that underlies much of the everyday social, economic, and competitive activity of society (Burton, 1990).Boege and Turner (2006) defined as an activity which takes place when conscious beings (individuals or groups) wish to carry out mutually inconsistent acts concerning their needs or obligations. Socio-political context refers to laws, regulations, practices, values, and beliefs within a community in terms of social and political life. In other words, its interaction and linkage between a political system and its social environment. For instance, the structural socio-political

factors include, security, poverty, national wealth, income inequality, social integration and political conflict (Marchal, 2007).Socio-political issues exist when ideological differences approach social issues from different perspectives and will open to political or even ideological interpretation.

2- Ethnicity and Tribalism

Ethnic group is a set of social group having a common national or cultural tradition, People belonging to one ethnic group can live in several geographical locations. Also ethnic group define as social group which, within a larger cultural and social system, claims or is accorded special status in terms of a complex of traits (ethnic traits) which it exhibits or is believed to exhibit (Young, 2017). Ethnic membership tends to be defined by a shared cultural heritage, ancestry, origin myth, history, homeland, language, dialect, religion, mythology, folklore, ritual, cuisine, dressing style, art, and physical appearance. Ethnicity and ethnic group belonging matters for politics when it becomes the basis for political mobilization, competition, and conflict (Musa, 2022).Ethnicity refers to shared cultural practices, perspectives and distinction that set a part one group of people from another. In this context there are many groups considered as ethnic groups in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile States.

The word tribe is a group of people who share the same customs and language as well as they believe from the same common ancestor and they leave under one chief authority. While term tribalism is a look after people from their tribes and give them preferences in allocation of rights and privileges. Tribe is a social division consisting of families or communities linked by blood ties with a common culture and dialect, having a recognized leader People belonging to a tribe usually live together (Fearon, 2003).Today, tribalism is often seen as putting one's

own group above every other consideration, including kindness or justice. Tribalism can lead to bigotry and racism and, when taken to extremes, even war.

Tribalism implies the possession of a strong cultural or ethnic identity that separates one member of a group from the members of another group. In discussions of African politics and culture, Young, (2002) explained that, tribalism usually appears as the opposite of Nationalism, devotion to the interests and culture of one's entire country, the state of living in a tribe is tribalism as well as this word is also used to describe situations where people are overly loyal to their own group. Considering Young's view of tribe and tribalism, the case of Sudan especially study areas the term has been abused and it's become a center of sociopolitical exploitation by political elites.

3- National Integration:

National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though the individuals belong to different communities, castes, religions, cultures and regions and speak different languages, all of them recognize the fact that they are one. National integration is a process of creating a sense of national consciousness, uniqueness of identity and loyalty among people with different socio-cultural identities (racial, ethnic, language, religion, etc.) into a single territorial political society. Despite the differences in culture, caste, language, and main livelihood, the national integration keeps the entire country together and strong. The objective of national integration is to unite every section of society and to provide equal opportunities to every citizen and a common platform in terms of cultural, social, and economic development. National Integration reduces discrimination, promotes brotherhood, supports national growth and development, and decreases crime on a larger level. National integration as a comprehensive affair

has several dimensions like political, social, economic, cultural, ethical and psychological dimensions. The current reality of Sudanese societies is showing that structural defect and deficiency of political and economic programs contributed to national disintegration of the country (Mohammed, 2023).

4- National Disintegration

The process of losing cohesion or strength and social disintegration leads to the process of coming to pieces. State disintegration is the collapse of a country into two or more smaller independent countries, as a case of Southern Sudan. The integration brings things or people together, while disintegration means things are coming apart. One of the biggest threats to national integration is the narrow mindset that prevails over different political groups, social entities and identities. People in Sudan are primarily held captive by various traditional political groups and what so called native administration system due to politicization of all organizations and institutions. Even several states and local governments were created based on political locality. Sudan is a very diverse country, with many different ethnic and tribal groups, dialects, and religions. On the basis of all these characteristics, different populations in Sudan are distinct from one another. Ethnic and tribal are further divided into clans, languages are further divided into dialects, and religions are further divided into sub-religions in some parts of the country.

Review of Related Literature

Sudan has experienced prolong history of multidimensional conflicts since independence up to date. For purposes of this research it can be categorized in to two types of conflict, first conflict between central Sudanese government and regional opposition groups including south Sudan before separation in 2011, Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile and East Sudan, this type of conflict reflecting the dilemma of center via marginalized areas, ongoing conflict (August, 2023) which started on 15 April, 2023 is a part of this type. Second

type of conflict is inter-communal conflicts based on tribal and ethnic loyalty, this type reflecting the politicization of native administration system and polarization of tribal diversity. Such of this conflict also continuing in all of three areas despite of the first type. Johan (2008) argued that Sudan is characterized by a persistent domination of the center over the marginalized peripheral areas leading to extreme regional imbalances. This periphery-center dimension has been stressed in the armed conflicts within Sudan. Various rebel groups have demanded increased share of resources and political influence for marginalized areas. Since the conflicts in Sudan have this periphery-center dimension, arguably, a solution to these conflicts requires change in the center and policies been adopted since the independence. Subsequently, the consciousness of marginalization in periphery areas increased during 1960s where demanding regional organizations emerged such as Darfur resistance front, 1960 later it becomes Sooni and Red Frame, Nuba mountains Union, 1965 in South Kordofan and Bija Conference, 1965 in East Sudan. The primary demands of all these organizations are lack of political representation, economic imbalance and providing more development resources to these areas. International Crisis Group (2013)exposed that conflict in South Kordofan , Darfur and Blue Nile has returned Sudan to square one. It is part of a spreading war zone, often called the “new South”, extending from the border with Chad in the west to that with Ethiopia in the east. Its roots are in the failure of multiple local peace agreements to end chronic warfare: the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), Cairo Agreement, East Sudan Peace Agreement, Darfur Peace Agreement, and Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. In addition to wars between the peripheries and the center has been the former’s continuous economic, political and cultural marginalization. The main argument is the periphery - center conflict which reflecting struggle over political power and wealth sharing, and inter- communal conflict which reflecting societal

conflict are the main mechanisms of conflict affecting Sudanese national integration.

a- Conflict in Darfur Region

The current conflict in Darfur between some armed opposition groups and Sudanese Government started on February, 2003 when the two main armed groups namely the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM, and the other was the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) took arms against Sudan Government by claiming prominent economic and political marginalization of Darfur. On the other hand inter-communal conflicts in Darfur has a long history, mostly known as farmers-animal herders conflicts (over natural resources) and it has rooted and effective local mechanisms of conflict resolution called reconciliation conferences headed by native administration leaders. But since end of 1980s and earlier of 1990s this type of conflict become more complicated and deadly due to politicization of native administration system and tribal entities by the central government and Darfur political elites. The conflict in Darfur is the product of a complex set of factors, including disputes over access to and control of natural resources; the inequitable distribution of economic and political power; the absence of strong, just governance; militarization; and the proliferation of small arms(Julie, 2010).Violence has continued in Darfur since the transitional government took power, and despite the Sudanese Peace Agreement which was signed in 2020. The ongoing attacks have included unlawful killings, beatings, sexual violence, lootings, and the burning of villages. Adam Azzain (2007) a leading Darfur scholar, argues that the current disaster in Darfur is a result of interlinked communal conflicts, conflicts between different regional elites and periphery-center conflicts. The involvement of ruling parties political leaders, military regime officers are fully engaged in conflict over political power and wealth sharing, while Native administration and community leaders are a part of inter communal conflict. On the other hand both types of conflicts undermining national and social integration of the country.

b- Conflict in South Kordofan

Sudan's South Kordofan state has been the center of armed conflict between the Government of Sudan and opposition groups in the past decades. The region has struggle with poverty, lack of basic services and influx of a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Despite reduced violence and absence of active conflict since 2016, the situation remains volatile in terms of security and humanitarian needs (UNTF, 2017). The current conflict in South Kordofan is a renewal of the years-long conflict centered in the Nuba Mountains during the second Sudanese civil war 1983-2005 (SHSBA, 2012). Initially conflict over political power and wealth sharing in the Sudanese southern states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile is mainly between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), a northern affiliate of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in South Sudan. Since Sudan's independence in 1956, the Nuba have faced aggressive policies from the central government, such as land-grabbing by investors in commercial farming, and attempts to supplant local cultures with the Arab-African culture of the northern Nile Valley. Beside current political conflict between Sudan Armed Forces and Sudan People's Liberation Movement North, there are inter communal conflicts between Nuba ethnic group and other tribal groups such as Hawzma and Messyria since end of 1980s, these local conflicts parties are supported by SPLM- N and SAF respectively. As a part of peripheral areas conflict the tribal conflicts in South Kordofan mobilizes and drive by Central government, South Kordofan political elites and SPLM-N leaders for political ambitious

c- Conflict in Blue Nile

The Sudanese conflict in Blue Nile was an armed conflict in the Sudanese southern states including South Kordofan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), a northern

affiliate of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in South Sudan. The Blue Nile experienced the hardships of civil war that broke out in 1985. Recently the conflict escalated again between the two signatory-groups of the Government of Sudan and the Blue Nile's Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (Mey, 2013) According to El-Sheikh's (2005) classification, the Blue Nile tribes are divided in to indigenous groups: Funj and Ingessana tribes this comprise of Al hamaj. Alberta, Alrqaie and wataweet. The northern tribes: They come from northern, eastern and western Sudan and include tribes such as Gala'an, Nubian, Shaiyia, Kennana, Rufa'a Al-Hoi, Shukriya, Zaghawi and Fur. Arabic nomads: The groups mainly form the Rafea, Kennana tribes. They have a long relationship with the indigenous Blue Nile tribes. West African tribes: Falata Umbroro (the transhumance pastoralists) and the Hausa tribes, who originally came from western Africa, settled in the Blue Nile in the beginning of the 1950s and were permitted by the indigenous tribes to use the natural resources. The mixed people: These are outcomes of intermarriages between northern and other tribes with indigenous Funj groups. Thus they are mixed people called Wataweet as well as other sub tribe. From the 1950s onwards, Blue Nile became the destination of successive waves of settlers, including different ethnic groups from the north as well as the Fulani pastoralist groups of West African origin. Grazing land drew pastoralist groups, while the possibility of developing large-scale agricultural schemes attracted investments from non-indigenous elites and, in more recent times, other countries (Claudio, 2013).The conflict in Blue Nile State till earlier 2020 was purely political conflict between Sudan Armed Forces and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N). Conflict dramatically changed to inter communal conflict when SPLM-N signed Juba Peace agreement among Sudanese Revolutionary group with Sudan government. SPLM-N become a part of local conflict by supporting Hausa tribes against indigenous groups. This quite evidence that most inter communal conflict created and supported by struggle over political conflict

parties for their own interest and this applicable to most of peripheral areas including Darfur and South Kordofan..

Earlier of 2023 the Blue Nile State witnessed prolong tribal conflicts which indicates grate correlation between conflict over political power and social conflict represented by ethnic and tribal conflicts. The inter-communal clashes erupted in Blue Nile State due to the indigenous tribe's rejection to establish a tribal chieftdom for the Hausa. This structure, which would be sanctioned by the regional authority, would enable them to have their own territory in the region and enhance their economic and political influence.

d- Political Conflict of April 2023

Following former President al-Bashir's deposition in 2019, a power-sharing compromise between military and civilian leaders led to the formation of a transitional government.

In December 2022, civilian leaders and the military signed a 'framework agreement' to create a new two-year civilian transitional authority. The agreement establishes accountability for crimes under international law as a general principle, and tasks the transitional authority to launch a new process aimed at providing justice to victims and holding perpetrators of serious crimes to account. Sudanese authorities must also ensure that those responsible for these crimes cannot benefit from immunities, nor amnesties.

As the escalation in violence between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) spreads throughout Sudan, civilians in Darfur continue to suffer due to the country's authority's failure to provide security, and their inability to deliver justice and accountability for war crimes and other violations 20 years after the Darfur conflict began, Amnesty International said today. In recent days, civilians have again been killed due to heavy weapons being used in densely-populated areas. It is shocking that 20 years after the Darfur conflict began, similarly continues conflicts in South Kordofan and Blue

Niles states, the Sudanese authorities are still failing to protect civilians or to investigate and prosecute those allegedly responsible for crimes committed during the conflict. Civilians in Sudan are caught in unending cycles of indiscriminate armed attacks, as well as other serious crimes and abuses (Amnesty International, 2022). Subsequently, the deadly war between Sudan armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces has a serious implications on the unity of Sudanese as one nation in one country, not only national integration.

Dynamics of Conflict Affecting National Integration

- 1- Political Communalism: One of the biggest threats to national integration is the narrow mind-set that prevails over old political identities. Sudanese are primarily held captive by various political communal identities due to politics such as traditional ideological political parties, ethnic and tribal affiliation and native administration system. Even at administration level, several of states and localities were created based on political loyalties. The distinctions between people on the basis of political ideology, ethnicity and tribalism stimulate community based tension and lead to inter-communal confrontations break out as well as feeding national disintegration process.
- 2- Politicization of Ethnic and Tribal Diversity: Sudan is made up of numerous varied ethnic and tribal groups, and as a result, the country's variety offers a hidden threat to its unity. Ethnic and tribal diversity, cultural and language divisions in Sudanese society have existed for a very long time. These were used by British colony administered and controlled the country, but later after independence the national political elites miss-used the Sudanese multi-dimensional diversity, and this consider one of the numerous dynamics driving sociopolitical conflict.
- 3- Inequality in a National Resources Distribution: Economic inequality coexists with social diversity in Sudan. The majority of the poor are finding it more and harder to make ends meet, while the few wealthy

people are getting richer. While the concept of redistribution of resources which reflect the dilemma of imbalance development programs as well as social injustice and deprivation which contributed negatively on raising and continuation of marginalization and conflicts in many parts of Sudan since earlier of 1960s and upto-date (Mohammed, 2023). There is growing hostility between the rich and the poor as a result of this wealth disparity. The feelings of national integration cannot flourish in the absence of all this fraternity and harmony.

- 4- Cultural Distinctions: Cultural differences can occasionally significantly impede national integration. It is already evident in the divisions between the northern and southern Sudan, which frequently lead to interpersonal conflict and hostility since earlier of independence and finally separation of South Sudan as independent country in 2011. That is clear evidence that cultural diversity was miss-used causing unrest and cultural dominants. The debate of cultural exclusion and deprivation by some northern and central dominants cultural has raised earlier among political elites and regional movements with the line of political and economic marginalization discourse. Ferguson, 2008). Considering Ferguson's(2008) explanation of promoting social integration requirements, Mohammed (2023) described in case of Sudan, that many ethnic and tribal groups complained that cultural dominance by few entities in different ways. Cultural devaluation leads to discrimination and inequality when negative ideas about groups become institutionalized, or embedded in accepted social, political and economic norms, official practices, policies and legislation. These institutionalized systems of rules and norms, or rights regimes, allocate different and unequal rights to particular social groups (Moser and Norton 2001).

Conclusion

The paper concluded that Sudan has witnessed prolong history of civil wars, struggle over political power and inter communal conflicts. These conflicts are

interlinked with the dilemma of marginalization and center via peripheral areas conflict. Darfur region, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states are most affected peripheral areas by sociopolitical conflicts. The national integration, unity, stability and peaceful coexistence cannot be achieved in an environment where some groups believes that they are different and even they super from others in terms of ethnicity, tribalism, social and cultural dominance. The major dynamics that promote the conflict and undermine national integration includes politicization of ethnicity and tribalism, political communalism, inequality in a national resources distribution, cultural distinctions as well as some national institutions contributed to national disintegration of the country since independence up to date. The unfair relationship between the states of the Sudanese periphery such as (South Kordofan, Blue Nile, Darfur)and the 'center' has been evident in terms of development and wealth-sharing as well as in the central government's attempt to impose a unique Sudanese identity and the ruling elites unwillingness to recognize and peacefully manage diversity. These factors persuaded the SPLM to cross the boundary from Southern Sudan into Blue Nile (Claudio, 2013). The socio-economic, political, and cultural roots of the conflicts are among the most apparent commonalities, with respect to not only South Kordofan and Blue Nile, but also other Sudanese peripheral states. Arising tribal and ethnic violence and increasing menace to people, mainly scared violence in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan led to death of many people as well coercive internally displaced people. The evidence on ground indicating that, the temporary solutions will not be sustained, unless effective resolve of root causes of conflicts been addressed. With the same line Abdulgadir (2015) noted that poverty prevalence is high in conflict-affected states, bringing the national average of people living below the poverty line to 46.6%. 2 Conflict-ridden states are considered the poorest in Sudan, where the percentages of people living below the poverty line are 69.5% in North Darfur, 56.6% in Blue Nile, 61.2% in South Darfur, 55.6% in West Darfur and 60% in

South Kordofan. Conflicts in Sudan cause losses of cohesion and integration of society, affect people's interrelationships and ignites tribal conflicts. Conflicts have also created hatred, stimulated revenge and caused a lot of misery to people in Darfur. Conflicts have also affected economic development as they have destroyed infrastructure and natural resources, prevented investments and interrupted trade. Therefore, solving one or two of these conflicts will not be sufficient to solve other peripheral areas problems.

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Mohammed A. N. A. Imam, (2023), Reforming Social Order to Enhance Social Integration in Sudan: Conceptual Analysis and the Way Forward, IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), Volume 28, Issue 2, Series 1 (February, 2023) 28-32, e-ISSN: 2279-0837, p-ISSN: 2279-0845. www.iosrjournals.org

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