

# **Regional Identity and the Politics of Dominance in Sudan, the Cause of Disintegration**

Ghazali Bello Abubakar

---

## **ABSTRACT**

Like many countries in the world, Sudan had finally succumbed to the fate of disintegration in 2011. Looking at the fact of religion and tribal mismatching, this was never a newly unexpected event. Because it had already shaped a story of several other countries from different parts and continents of the world. Identities and regionalism forced themselves in domestic politics of Sudan, and thrived for so long. Throughout its modern history, neither religious nor tribal sentiments abstained off their notorious popularity in shaping the future Sudan. This paper concludes that the asymmetrical background of the two regions in one hand, and the overarching power to control by the Northern region, account for disparity, wider gaps, political and economic marginalization.

**Keywords:** Political dominance, marginalization, North and South Sudans, Regional identity, Ethnicity, Religious adherences

---

Date of Submission: 05-05-2022

Date of Acceptance: 19-05-2022

---

## **I. BACKGROUND**

Like many other countries in Africa, Sudan is not exceptional, as throughout the process of her growth, it came across several catastrophic issues triggered by different causes; be it multiple identities, religion, tribalism, or language, which alongside other minor bugbears, contributed to the succession of the newly born country in the southern part of the former Sudan (African Rights, 1995). The marriage between the south and northern region, which come through amalgamation, was an effort underwritten by the British to unify those two different entities and form the Republic of Sudan (Jaffery, 1987).

Sudan is a Muslim country with dominant Arabic speaking population, and differs from the south Sudan, which is African and dominantly Christian region. Since when the two regions have united forming one nation followed by the independence in 1956, disparities started playing a key role and significant influence in the administration between north and south (Alier, 1990).

However, the unity was seen in very much diversity internally. Traditional, cultural and regional identities have been a realm of troublesome, and therefore, were able to hamper a peaceful coexistence between the diversified adherences of north and south. These tensions have continued for long. Moreover, Sudan's oil is another factor that holds only to prolong civil war for several decades. The sequential nature of these conflicts has, until independence of the South, claimed nearly four million lives (Abd Al-Rahim, 2012).

In 2011, the amalgamation was no more, just to announce the succession of south Sudan as the 193<sup>rd</sup> new member of the United Nations, with Juba as the capital of administration. Even after separation, the crises are not yet overcome all, but the issue of oil transition through Sudan remains another headache to both countries. As a result, the South Sudan halts exporting her oil to external market to appease.

## **THE REPUBLIC OF SUDAN**

Till the time of disintegration in 2011, Sudan or Republic of Sudan, is an Arabic speaking country straddles in northeast of the African continent. Bordering Egypt to the north, Red sea in the northeast, to the northwest Sudan touches Central African Republic; Chad in the west, Eritrea and Ethiopia in the east, Democratic Republic of Congo from the south, Uganda from the southeast and Libya to the northwest. In terms of size, the Republic of Sudan is one of the largest country; not only in Africa but in the world. It has an area of nearly 2,505,813 square km. Sudan has had around 37 million people for both north and south combined together.

Economically, due to the oil and rich land for agricultural products, Sudan considered the 17<sup>th</sup> fastest growing economy in the world, and among the world unequal living community, socially. Politically, since when British renounce Egyptian presence in the country because it could not win an agreement with the government of Egypt, Sudan had become realm of quarrel between the two protectorates. The Sudanese nationalists sided with the Egyptian government likely because they think Egyptians more or less stood as step-

brothers and sisters to them. That because of the unity in language they speak, religion they practice and geographic proximity (Baldwin, 1986).

Moreover, the support of Sudanese nationalists to the Egyptian presence in one hand and assassination of Sir Lee Stack in 1924 in Cairo in the other instigated more tension, which made Britain to withdraw all Egyptian armies and replace them with the Sudan Defense Force (SDF), civil servants, and public employees from the mainstream Sudan (Bass, 1987).

Sudan, as colony, witnessed political upheavals at the hands of imperialists, and division along the religious line, internally (Beeman, 2001). Nearly 26 years prior to the independence, the British closed the door link to the south against northerners. It ruled the country through its typical style of indirect ruling apparatus, which was at that point in time, through traditional *Sheikh* in the north; while in the south through tribal chiefs (Beswick, 2004).

More or so, the Christian missionaries were allowed to run schools and medical-care centers, but entrance was highly restricted to Arab northerners. That had been the early impression, which had also been implanted in the minds of the Sudanese community, therein. Simultaneously, it was the normal foundation and legacy of the British in the country (Bok and Tivnan, 2003). It wasn't to remain longer until the two groups, with huge cleavage of differences, engage in bloodbath, the catastrophic incidence that consumed more 70% of their post-independent time. The unity between the two utterly disparate Sudans perhaps was not more than tools used by the colonial masters to hand over country to the indigenous people (Bourdieu, 1977).

### **SOCIAL ASYMMETRIC DISCREPANCY**

It's beyond doubt that both north and south Sudan were rich in culture, tradition and norms of life styles prior to the independence and unity as well. Throughout the histories: medieval and contemporarily, north and south were seen just diverse. The division is not only between the north and south at larger consideration, but each of the two regions has other cultural cleavages, internally. Yes, it was previously mentioned that the northern region is Arabic-speaking area, while southerners are largely black Africans. That does not mean cultural unity cements particular people in particular region. For example, in the north, there is division between the *Juhayna*, *Jaali/Jaalayin* and *Baqqara* tribes. They encompass deep different cultural sentiments (Brown, 1996).

Similarly, in the south there is Nilotic community who is divided into three segments: Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk. These groups, as per 1990, constituted nearly 60% of the southern population. Each of these groups maintains different orientation and living style, which more or less differ from another. "The Dinka live in a wide swath over the northern portion of the southern region. While the Nuer, the largest group after Dinka. Shilluk is the third largest group after Nuer", (Fearon and Laitin, 2005).

Despite the various communalities these groups have, yet the place where they live couldn't be able to root unity between them, rather, it was interregional pressure compelled them to seek common ground among themselves. According to Allan Reed (1972) it was the northern oppression concentered Dinka and Nuer to cultivate common identity as "southerners", Apart from Nilotic, there are other tribal groups, the so-called non-Nilotes segment, such as Azande, who entered to the region somewhere in the sixteenth century; Avungara, etc. (Reed, 1972).

### **CONFLAGRATION OF IDENTITY**

Since 1958 until today, owing to the mismatch in the societal identities between north and south Sudan, is it religious or ethical tribalism, political constitutionalism fall victim. For instance, in the north, the Islamic political parties like Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), National Islamic Front, latterly cracked into National Congress Party (NCP), under the leadership of Omer al-Basher, the president of Sudan from 1989 until 2019, and Popular Congress Party (PCP) led by Hassan Abdullah al-Turabi, demanded implementation of the Islamic *Shariah* law. Whereupon the Christian animists, and to some extent, secular Muslim parties from south and Nuba mountain respectively, back consideration of the entire religions of the nation while forming legislative assembly based on the different sets of customary laws across the country, instead of adopting a particularly individual set of belief from the diversified ethnic groups (Al-Shahi, 1991).

This goes back to what Peter K. Bech told when he argued that, having all support from the central government, resulted in undermined the southern parties, which was fragmentation of the southern bloc in parliament into sub-regional groupings and also in the inability of their parties to garner all southern constituencies. In fact, they have lost some handsome seats that have gone to NUP affiliated political grouping (Alier, 1992, 1973).

### **REGIONALISM AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY**

Noah Bassil (2013), Fancis M. Deng (1984) centralize their arguments on the Sudanese politics that have, since been combined alongside militarism, which very much helped in establishing tribal militias. Addition to that, the politics of regionalism however, come clear especially during the Addis Ababa Agreement,

the anti-Dinka movement for re-division of the region led by the Equatorians, and the increasing internal fragmentation within the South and the North. Hence, the political behavior of Sudanese parties showed that the parties were not only dependent on the perpetuation of tribalism, but had deepened its values. The authors unanimously justified that the long war in Sudan had a profound effect not only on ethnic groups but also on political action and attitudes.

Alsir Sidahmed (2014), suggest that, after 1985, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) appeared as the most outspoken of the cause of marginalized groups. In fact, it was the SPLA/M appealed to the urban poor, who mostly originated from the marginalized areas. The SPLA/M nevertheless, tried to recruit supporters from the Nuba Mountains, southern Blue Nile, and Darfur and even to launch war against these areas.

Till the time of dismantling of the South from the North, the political Independence of the Republic of Sudan open a Pandora Box for South-North relation. Numerous allegations including failure to evolve policies that would have consolidated national unity and stability by the North Sudanese elites. As a result, the Sudan has been plunged into continuous state of political, constitutional, economic and military crisis. Various governments and regimes in Khartoum were charged with waging war and denying the Southerners equality, social justice, freedom and effective participation in running affairs of the State (YIonen, 2005).

### **NORTH-SOUTH 'SUDAN', THE AMALGAMATION OF UNCERTAINTY**

Mawut Achiecque Mach Guarak (2011) in *Integration and Fragmentation of Sudan* explained that the South Sudan people since from the beginning began to understand that their national or tribal identities were nothing but an identifiable signs. In any place there is a system to differentiate one person from the other. That is exactly what tribal names and languages are. The author however, tongue out that, despite constant efforts by many educated South Sudanese to form a unified South Sudan nation within the British Empire, many factors affected the initiative.

History clarifies that the accidental incident was behind the very cause of amalgamation between the two disparately asymmetrical tribes in the Sudan for a long time. In pre-Turko-Egyptian invasion of 1821, different kingdoms and tribal communities gave the name to what is known Sudan in modern days. Of course, there were no such kind of modern forms of government as exist today. The Turko-Egyptian occupation was a combination of Islamic Empire and Arabic civilization. But this exercise, till its end – for about sixty years – haven't expanded it is full control to the South Sudan. In fact, South Sudan region was not fully brought under the administration of the Turko-Egyptian power. Similarly, the Mahdist administration of 1883 - 1898 did not succeed to impose its full authority on the whole of South Sudan (YIonen, 2005). This chanced the Southern Sudan communities to remain with no Arabo-Islamic influence, unlike Northern Sudan region.

Even though Egypt regained control over South Sudan in 1898, but it was a joint administration between British and Egyptian forces resulting in the signing of the Condominium Agreement between the British and the Egyptian to administer the Sudan in its present shapes. Therefore, Egypt couldn't anyway be able to establish Arabic language or Islam in the region as it was not sole administrator, therein (Bauman, 1990). During the Administrative Conference held in Khartoum somewhere in 1946 concluded that the power should be handed over to North Sudan. However, the conference might have took this decision, which of course was unexpected by the South Sudan due to some reasons including lack of representation in the conference neither by the indigenous South Sudanese nor by the British administrators in South Sudan those were not in attendance. Consequently, this unexpected outcome revealed what South Sudan elites as a conspiracy between the British and the North Sudanese and of course supported by Egypt to hand over South Sudan to North Sudan as a colonial territory. Certainly, this plan provoked bitter reaction from the South Sudanese and their sympathizers (YIonen, 2005).

### **POLITICAL DOMINATION**

Anders Breidlid (2011), Gabriel Achoth Deng (2005), Richard Barltrop (2011), L. B. Lokosang (2010) and Diana Childress (2010) identify South Sudanese, no matter what ethnic groups they come from, regardless of whether they lived in any part of Sudan, mince no words in articulating their differences within the North and the stress they are enduring to try to coexist in a nation state with Northerners. It's however, clear that, when a parliament was elected in 1953 to carry out the transition to independence, the Southern Party won only nine of the ninety-seven seats. Although more than one-quarter of the population lives in the south, less than one-tenth of the parliament represent their interests. Nevertheless, an incident of 1955 revealed the deep mistrust southerners felt for northern Sudanese. More or so, this effected not only parliamentary issues, but also sparse to the multi-party system of the Sudan, therein.

Multiparty was ultimately banned after the 1989 coup d'état, and restored after some consecutive ten years, which was in 1999. But the Islamic National Front (NIF) latterly, National Congress Party allowed to legally operate. This party reigned to survive for two decades. Like other Political groups as mentioned above,

the National Congress Party was also marked as illegal in 2019 by another military coup d'état that dethroned Omar al-Bashir, and brought to an end to his three decades administration in Sudan.

Political domination and marginalization was seen in risen in the Sudan between the Arab Muslim-North and Animists, Christian-South. This, according to YIonen, accounted for wider Civil War, and prolonged mistrust and misconstrue between the two regions for a long period of time. Dogmatic and tribal sentimentalism often provide people in power with a rhetoric motivation to apply precaution as part of strategies use in order to avoid any potential threats or pressure of destabilization of an administration (YIonen, 2005).

As a result, southern region has never in a political influence as was less developed compared to the north. Perhaps, this is also in turn galvanized some sort of rebellion from the south. This rebellion was soon seen as a kind of liberation movement in order to attain social justice and inclusion. Over decades since independence, political segregation champion affairs between the two regions. Dominant constitutional posts were occupied by the northern Arabs, cultural and religious subjugation, negligence of the southern socio-economic development were among other painful background of the crisis. However, this picture was only to pave the way and bolster southern region to launch a campaign seeking for Self-Determination (Teny-Dhurgon, 1995).

## II. CONCLUSION

Owing to number of historical peculiarities, especially those have been enacted by the colonial occupiers in Sudan, the two regions – till separation – destined to live an unforgettable experience. More or less, stereotypes and speculations, to some extent, have somehow contributed in maximizing the already existing gaps that have soon escalated to form prejudices and hated between among the North and South Sudanese.

Similarly, in yet another example, the then Sudan's internal affairs including politics and economic policies have also brought about a lot of tension. Language, religion, tradition, race, background as well as upbringing were among the major challenges faced the Republic of Sudan. Southerners developed a synthesis feeling of exclusion over the course of who they are. In the same vein, the Northerners, it is very easy to understand that egocentric of human nature as adduced by 'Thomas Hobbes', seldom suggest power transition to other side than the North after it was concluded to be surrendered to the Northerners in Juba Conference of 1947.

Ideally, South Sudan can't accept marginalization seemed to be offered to them as the only option. Strategically, North Sudan will never welcome the idea that calls for equal responsibilities and sharing the powers with non-Arab Christians, however. Hence, the long unity between the two heterogeneous regions was considered by South Sudan as an act of betrayal from the British colonialists. Simply because it gave a room for more oppression and wider discrimination of the Southern indigenous Africans.

## REFERENCE

- [1]. Abd Al-Rahim, Muddathir (2012), "Arabism, Africanism, and Self-identification in the Sudan", in Dunstan M. Wai (ed.), *The Southern Sudan the Problem of National Integration*.
- [2]. African Rights (1995), *Facing Genocide: The Nuba of Sudan*, London: African Rights Publication.
- [3]. Alexander, C. Jaffery (1987), *Sociological Theory since 1945*, London: Columbia University Press.
- [4]. Alier, Abel (1990), *Southern Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonored*, Reading: Ithaca Press.
- [5]. Alier, Abel (1973), "The Southern Sudan Question" in Dunstan M. Wai (ed.), *The Southern Sudan the Problem of National Integration*, London: Frank Cass.
- [6]. Alier, Abel (1992), "What is the Solution to the Constant Conflict in Sudan?" In Martin Doornbos, et al. (eds.) *Beyond Conflict in the Horn, the Prospect for Peace, Recovery & Development in Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, & Sudan*, The Hague: Institute for Social Sciences.
- [7]. Al-Shahi, Ahmed (1991), "The Distinctiveness of the Shaiqqyyia Tribe of Northern Sudan: Complexity and Continuity" in Herve Bleuchot Hopwood (ed.), *Sudan History, Identity, Ideology*, Oxford: Ithaca Press.
- [8]. Baldwin, John D. (1986), *George Herbert Mead: A Unifying Theory for Sociology*, California: Sage.
- [9]. Bass, Alan (1987), *Jacques Derrida Writing and Difference*, Chicago:
- [10]. Chicago University Press.
- [11]. Bassil, Noah (2013), *The Post-Colonial State and Civil War in Sudan: The Origin of Conflict in Darfur*, London: Bloomsbury Publishers.
- [12]. Bauman, Zygmunt (1990), *Thinking Sociologically*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- [13]. Beeman, William O (2001), "Fundamentalism --- Origins. Fighting the Good Fight: Fundamentalism and Religious Revival" in J Mac Clancy (ed.) *Anthropology for the Real World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [14]. Beswick, Stephanie F. (2004), *Sudan's Blood Memory, the Legacy of War Ethnicity, Slavery in Early South Sudan*, New York: University of Rochester.

- [15]. Bok, Francis and Tivnan, Edward (2003), *Escape from Slavery, the True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity and My Journey to Freedom*, New York: St Martin's Press.
- [16]. Bourdieu, Pierre (1977), *A Theory and Practice*, London: Cambridge University.
- [17]. Brown, Daniel (1996), *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [18]. Deng, Fancis M. (1984), *The Dinka of the Sudan*, Illinois: Waveland Press.
- [19]. Sidahmed, Alsir (2014), *Oil Years in Sudan: The Quest for Political Power and Economic Breakthrough*, Toronto: The Key Publishing House Inc.
- [20]. Teny-Dhurgon, Riek Machar (1995), "South Sudan: A History of Political Domination, A Case of Self-Determination", [Online: web] Accessed 04 May 2022 URL: [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/sd\\_machar.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/sd_machar.html)
- [21]. Ylonen, Aleksi (2005), "Grievances and the Roots of Insurgencies: Southern Sudan and Darfur", [Online: web] Accessed 03 May 2022 URL: <http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk>

Ghazali Bello Abubakar. "Regional Identity and Politics of Dominance in Sudan, the Cause of Disintegration." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 27(05), 2022, pp. 52-56.