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Conflict of National Identity in Sudan

Introduction

Sudan remains an unstable state with cycles of ruthless civil wars¹ that devastate its infrastructure², threaten its territorial integrity³, flaw its economic growth and engender woeful humanitarian destitution⁴ and catastrophes.⁵ The objectives of these wars emanate from religious, economic and cultural settings. In the Northern Sudan, the Islamic religion is associated with the Arabic language, culture and race, due to its association with the Middle East. On the other hand, the concerns of the population of the South consist of economic deprivation of its region, limited participation in power sharing and the systematic threats to its Christian, Animist and African cultural identity.⁶

This research explores how decision-makers in Sudan address these complex objectives in a national constitution for the citizens. Since, 1958 to present day, major political parties in Sudan fail several times to reach a consensus to legislate a unified constitutional system. The Islamic political parties of Umma with its sect, Ansar, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) with its al-Khatimyyia sect and the National Islamic Front (NIF), which has rifted into the National Congress Party (NCP) and currently leads by the President Omer Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir and the Popular Congress Party (PCP), under the leadership

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- 1 Johnson, Douglas Hamilton. "The Sudan People's liberation Army & the Problem of Factionalism" in Christopher Clamham (ed.) (1998). *African Guerrillas*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 60-61. Civil violence in Sudan started in 1955 and ended in 1972 and resumed in 1983.
 - 2 Leopold, Mark (2005). *Inside West Nile, Violence, History & Representation on an African Frontier*, Oxford: James Currey p. 23. Heavy tank tracks of the SPLA towards Yei in South Sudan chewed the tarmac road of Arua and the Government of Sudan long range artillery shelled the town of Koboko.
 - 3 The Machakos Protocol signed between the SPLM and the Government of Sudan in 2003, p. 8. Machakos provides self determination to the people of Southern Sudan to choose between separation and unity with Sudan.
 - 4 Prunier, Gerard (2007). *Darfur the Ambiguous Genocide*, London: Hurst & Company, p. 54.
 - 5 Meyer, Gabriel (20059). *War and Faith in Sudan*, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p. 25. A report published by the US Committee for Refugees states that over all the Sudanese war-related death toll for those years is more than 2.5 million.
 - 6 Iyob, Ruth and Khadiagala, Gilbert M (2007). *Sudan the Elusive Quest for Peace*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 178. The Northern Sudan monopolises power, wealth including oil that is mostly produced from the South and strives to assimilate the African population of the country into the Islamic Arab image.

of Hassan Abdullah Turabi all from the North of Sudan urge the adoption of *Sharia*, (Islamic law) to be a source of legislation and Arabic an official language in a national constitution⁷ On the other hand, the political parties of secular Muslims from Nuba Mountains and ‘Christian Animist’ of the South, especially the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) with its military wing, the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) support the legislation of religious and ethnic diversities which must be derived from the diverse set of customary laws.⁸ (See appendix 3 for more information about the historical background of this conflict). ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ is an ideology, which claims that a just society must base its constitution on *Sharia*. National laws for such a society are derived from three sources: Holy Quran, *Hadith* refers to all examples of the Prophet Muhammed and the precedents, which the recognised Islamic scholars interpret in consensus.⁹ The followers of Animism, however, believe that the social structure of society is compatible with powers, which live in natural phenomena, such as animals, trees, mountains and rivers. These beings affect people for both good and bad, but believers refrain from recognising them as God, and hence, they are not worshiped, but respected.¹⁰

There is no consensus among scholars over what term best describes these beliefs in Sudan. Some call them ‘Animism’ and others call them traditional or ‘theistic’ religions. For instance, Nikkel defines the Dinka ethnic group of South Sudan, as followers of “Powers”¹¹; An-Na’im describes them as mainly Animists¹² and Johnson rejects all these descriptions defining them as ‘pejorative’ and asserts that the population in the South adheres to “theistic religions.”¹³

With all the platitude and pejorative descriptions to the term Animist, this study adopts it, because its definition best suits with the existing religious prac-

7 Prunier, Gerard op. cit., President Al-Bashir heads the National Congress Party and Turabi heads the Popular Congress, p. 84.

8 Deng, Francis Mading (1995). War of Visions Conflict of Identities in the Sudan, Washington D.C: Brookings Institution, p. 21.

9 Brown, Daniel (1996). Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-3.

10 Voll, John Obert and Voll, Sarah Potts (1985). The Sudan, Unity and Diversity in Multicultural State, London: Boulder Co., pp. 22-3.

11 Nikkel, Marc R (2001). Dinka Christianity the Origin and Development of Christianity among the Dinka of Sudan with Special Reference to the Song of Dinka Christians, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, p. 20.

12 An-Na’im, Abdullahi Ahmed (ed.) (1993). Proselytization and Communal Self- Determination in Africa, New York: Maryknoll, p. 12.

13 Johnson, Douglas Hamilton (2003). The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil Wars, Oxford: James Currey, p. xviii.

tices in South Sudan¹⁴, Nuba Mountains¹⁵ and Darfur¹⁶ and it argues that such diversity of religious beliefs constitutes the essence of identity and the institutions created after independence of Sudan from Great Britain on 1 January 1956, have neglected to incorporate it into a national constitution of the state. Muslim scholar¹⁷ T Abdou Maliqalim Simone points out that the legislative power in Sudan does not represent the prevailing religious and cultural diversity in national institutions. It aims to transform the whole country towards one religious character based on Islam. For instance, in September 1983, the former President Ja'afar Muhammad Nimeiri imposed *Sharia* that applies *hudud*, a formal legal code that stones to death a married woman proved guilty of adultery, amputates cross limbs of a thief found guilty of stealing and whips any person found drinking alcohol. Simone concludes that such a law proves 'unpopular' and intensifies the civil violence in the country between its opponents, the Christians and Animists and its advocates, the Muslim fundamentalists.¹⁸ For Hassan Makki Mohammad, a Sudanese "Islamist"¹⁹ scholar, introduction of *Sharia* in national institutions of Sudan is a significant decision. He claims that the Christian missionaries have not given sufficient opportunity to Islamic Arab culture in the South to be legislated as a unifying factor for Sudan's national identity. Mohammad concludes that it is time now to allow Islam to take its course in transforming Sudan's national identity.²⁰

Two scholars, however, consider the transformation of Sudan into the Islamic and Arab cultural identity as an exclusion of other parameters of peculiar cultures in the country. First, Abdullahi Ahmed An'Naim, a Sudanese Professor of

14 Evans-Pritchard, Evans (1940). *The Nuer a Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic Peoples*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 46.

15 Meyer, Gabriel (2005). *War and Faith in Sudan*, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p.67.

16 Kebbede, Girma (1999). *Sudan's Predicament Civil War, Displacement and Ecological Degradation*, Aldershot: Ashgate, p. p. 4.

17 Simone, T Abdou Maliqalim (1994). In *Whose Image? Political Islam and Urban Practices in Sudan*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 24. Simone states "I was sent to Sudan as a Muslim academic".

18 Op. cit., p. 26.

19 Middle East (Spring 2003). "Sudanese Muslims, Christians Discuss 'Co-living and a Culture of Peace'", the Middle East Council of Churches News Report, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 3. "Dr. Hassan Makki Mohammad, a Sudanese professor argues that globalisation of culture; politics and economic impoverishment of the marginalised and helpless community have had a disturbing effect on social peace in Sudan".

20 Mohammad, Hassan Makki (1989). *Sudan: The Christian Design*, London: Islamic Foundation, p. 76.

Islamic Law at Emory University School of Law in Atlanta²¹ argues that the ideological concept of the NIF party, which intends to transform all public institutions of Sudan, towards 'Islamic fundamentalism' is a difficult legislative task to pass without counterforce of a serious resistance from the Christians and the Animists of the South. This group has derived its modern national identity from the secular Christian West. An'Naim concludes that therefore, it is not easy to address the question of a national constitutional system within the status quo of the NIF definition.²² Second, Francis Mading Deng, former Professor of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA and currently the United Nations (UN) Secretary General Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide argues that the adoption of 'Islamic fundamentalism' in Sudan aggravates the crisis of national identity in the country. The SPLM, which is a radical organisation, where the majority of its members are Christians and Animists from the South considers it as assimilation and adopts an unwavering position in resisting it. Deng concludes that the ideological assimilation of 'Arabisation and Islamisation' that favours the Arab religion and culture over the African, religions and cultures in a national constitution of state is the basic issue that causes political crisis between the Arabised Muslims of the North and the African Christians and Animists of the South.²³

The legislation of 'Arabisation and Islamisation' with intent to unify ethnic and religious diversities in Sudan implies coercion to assimilation of other cultures into Islamism and Arabism. This legal approach does not evolve the essential diverse religious and racial identities of Sudan. Instead, it represents a racial discrimination to the followers of Christianity, Animism and Muslims from the non-Arabs in national institutions of Sudan. Its implementation in public institutions causes inexorable rebellion and resistance from the indigenous non-Arab ethnic groups of Darfur, Beja along the Red Sea, Nuba in Nuba Mountains and South Sudan. According to de Waal, the NIF party endeavours to construct a system that is entirely based on Islam, which is transformed into Arab racism. This racial transformation has caused a departure of some Muslim politicians of the non-Arab origin from the NIF such as Daud Bolad from the Fur of Darfur. Bolad served this party, since his student's career and developed consciousness of systematic Muslim-Arabs racial practices against the non-Arabs' Muslims and

21 An'Naim, Abdullahi Ahmed (Summer 2003). Re-affirming Secularism for Islamic Societies, New. Perspective Quarterly, Vol. 7. An'Naim, a Sudanese Islamic Jurist at Emory University in New York, USA, pp. 1-2.

22 An'Naim, Abdullahi Ahmed (ed.) (1999). Proselytization and Communal Self-Determination in Africa, New York: Maryknoll, p. 13.

23 Deng, Francis Mading (1995). War of Visions Conflict of Identities in the Sudan, Brookings Institution: Washington: D C, p. 12.

the non-Muslims in the distribution of power and wealth in the state. At last, he rebelled and joined the SPLM, a radical political organisation largely composed of Christians and Animists from the South, which rejects Islamisation and Arabisation and from there, Bolad promulgated that Islam is not free from the traditional racism of Muslim Arabs in Sudan.²⁴

The phenomenon of racial discrimination in Islamic religion to the Muslim Africans and non-Muslim Africans in sharing power and wealth in national institutions in Sudan is the case study for this research. The study is composed of six chapters and a conclusion. The empirical foundation of the research commences at chapter one, where the analysis based on the theoretical framework rejects the claim that the colonial British policy of the 'Closed District Ordinance' of 1922 is the essential cause of the successive civil wars in Sudan. During that time, the colonial power prevented Muslim Arabs from entering the South, unless a visitor first obtained a permit from the colonial authority. The study argues that the civil violence in Sudan is a conflict of dynamic discrimination and racism based on the inter-independent ideological 'Arabisation and Islamisation' of Sudan's national structures. This ideology discriminates against the assimilated non-Arabs to Islam equally with the non-Muslims in favour of Muslim Arabs in the distribution of power and national wealth. Thus, the victims of discrimination collectively resort to violence as a form of resistance. The research adopts the theory of Benedict Anderson of 'imagined community' as an alternative model in explaining the diverse religious and ethnic composition of Sudan. This theory helps the diverse religious and ethnic groups of Sudan to imagine themselves in the way they think of themselves. In this chapter, the emergence of two conflicting ideological schools of thought among the decision-makers in Sudan is plausibly discussed. The first school is the Islamic ideological one and its adherents are defined as ethnic territorial nationalists and the second is the secularist school and its adherents are labeled as ethnic territorial national pluralists. The former asserts un-wavering position for the adoption of *Sharia* and Arabic as fundamental sources of laws for a national constitution. The latter places a perpetual resistance against these sources and urges the adoption of a secular constitution free from religious canon law and *Sharia*.

Chapter two shows that the present ideological schools were initially established at the first setting of Sudan, under the basis of social and political inclusion and exclusion. The current pluralists' populations in South Sudan, Nuba Mountains and Darfur at the west were excluded from building the national institutions of state. Successive powers from the nationalist ideological school constructed

24 de Waal, Alex (2004). *Islamism and Its Enemies in Horn of Africa*, Addis Ababa: Shama Books, p. 98.

these regions as economic sources, where slaves were accessed. This phenomenon has built mistrust between the centre and the periphery populations and makes it impossible to reach a consensus in common economic plan for the state, except for the racial stereotype of the 'lost brothers'. The school of ethnic territorial nationalism mainly from the centre of Sudan labels the non-Muslims in the South of Sudan as 'lost brothers', because of their resistance to Islam and they remain largely Animists and Christians, until today, and for this reason, the nationalists described them as 'lost' people on the way to heaven.

Chapter three provides the historical continuity of racial categories of the construction of Sudan into 'Islamic Arab North Region' and the African 'Pagans and Slaves' of the South. Power applied intertwined Islam and Arab as a model of making ethnic and religious uniformity. Under this circumstance, the regions of the African Muslims of the Nuba Mountains, Darfur and Beja, centre far north and east became the 'Northern Sudan of Muslim Arab Region' to the exclusion of the Christian and Animist South. Currently, this unified region is experiencing political fragmentation. The non-Arabs' Muslim regions rebelled, under the allegation that the nationalists' school in dominant of power discriminates against them in religion, Islam. It drops Islam as an inclusive model in distribution of power and wealth and applies race, Arab as an alternative. At present, the region is undergoing a series of racial divisions leading to the current deadly and unsettled violence in the vast region of Darfur.

Nonetheless, the chapter discusses further discrimination as new opinions urge the change of the territorial name Sudan to *Thudan* emerge from the majority of the Nilotic-speaking community from the South. The Nilotic students argue that the name Sudan represents discrimination, since its origin comes from the Arabic word, 'black', a perpetual downtrodden slave in the classical ideological interpretation of the Muslim Arabs. Others claim that, it promotes an assimilation to the model of Arabisation, since the initial 'S' in 'Sudan' is a missing sound in their environmental linguistic forms.

Chapter four deals with the dilemmas of Muslim Arabs in South Sudan between the wealth derived from trafficking in the native populations as slaves and the conversion of these Animists to the Islamic religion. Alternatively, Muslim Arabs chose to become slavers, rather than, missionaries to propagate Islam to convert the non-Muslim natives in the South to Islam. They chose so, because conversion would have emancipated the Animists from slavery bondage, because Islam sanctions enslavement of a Muslim by another Muslim. Such experiences of the past interactions have only created a wrong image of Islam, and hence, the Animists remain aggressive to the Islamic religion, until the present time.

Chapter five focuses on the attempt of the adherents of ethnic territorial nationalism to impose the model of assimilation on these resisting non-Mus-

lims and non-Arabs into Islam through a unified national constitution, where its laws are derived from *Sharia* and Arab language. The group, however, has already adopted Christianity and Animism as its religions and radically urges the adoption of secular laws. At this juncture, the objective dichotomy between the ideological discourses of these schools develops parallel and in turn, the Islamic group in power resorts to 'anomia' assimilation, while its opponents, the secularists urge for the 'gradable' assimilation. The former is referred to a form of an assimilation that totally eradicates cultural, ethnic and religious differences and inserts Islamic uniformity through different methods, including legal ones and violence against the dissidents. The latter is an assimilation that does not remove fully the existing diversity; instead, it makes it possible for the ethnic Muslim Africans, the Animist Africans and the Christian Africans to live in the country with the Muslim Arabs and Christians, where each group takes a 'gradable' culture of another. In comparative study of 'gradable antonyms', the opposite of big is not necessarily to be small, it can be medium. In this context, the assimilation of the non-Muslims to the Islamic culture does not necessarily reflect a complete assimilation, instead a free interaction of non-Muslims with Muslims at the public spaces allow each one to take a part of cultural identity from the other.

Chapter six discusses the climax of this assimilation between the two schools of thought leading to the armed violence and the production of new political ideologies of 'New Sudan' and *tawajha al-hathari* (orientation project). New Sudan is an ideological ideal that aims to transform Sudan towards secularism in opposition to *tawajha al-hathari* strives to transform Sudan's national identity into a monolithic Islamic identity. Adherents of both ideologies tried to find alternative resolutions to their opposing ideologies and signed the 'Comprehensive Peace Agreement' (CPA) in Naivasha, Kenya in January 2005.

The agreement, however, divided the territorial state of Sudan into two parts. The Northern jurisdiction applies *Sharia* in civil and criminal judiciaries and the Southern jurisdiction applies secular laws derived from customs in its judiciary system. The agreement also includes an internationally supervised referendum for the people of South Sudan to decide between unity with the North or separation in January 2011. The CPA also grants 'Popular Consultation to the regions of the Nuba Mountains and the Southern Blue Nile known as Ingessana Hill in which the elected legislature decides the appropriate system for their regions. The CPA does not address the prevailing violence in Darfur region; however, the findings at the conclusion indicate that Islam has been adopted for political objective of constructing a majority population in Sudan, which became the unified 'North Sudan of Arab Muslims'. This political practice has changed the religion to a political ideology, where its adherents pursue violence in the name of religion against their opponents, the moderate Muslims, the Christians and the

Animists from the marginal areas of the Nuba Mountains, the Ingessana Hill and South Sudan. Muslims' opposition to the adoption of this model are categorised as *murtadeen* (apostates) and many of them have been killed in the name of *Jihad*. The adoption of *Jihad* against Muslim opposition has aroused different interpretations among the divided Sudanese *imams* (Islamic clerics). Those who allied with the current government in power approved the organised attacks against the opposition in the name of *Jihad*. On the other hand, those who allied with the opposition(s) reject it and remain in opposition to the government at the marginal populace.

Currently, *Jihad* which was used as a justification for war in the South, Nuba Mountains and Ingessana Hill has been suspended in the violence waging on in Darfur, instead, racism surfaces between Arab Muslims, *janjaweed* fighting against the other non-Arab Muslims in the region. The war has escalated and claimed, unknown figure of the death toll. The United Nations (UN) agencies, however, have estimated that more than ten thousands members of the indigenous ethnic groups have lost their lives, since the starting of the violence in February 2003 and more than four million have been displaced. Such numbers are difficult to prove, but the fundamental reality is that the violence has affected the people at all socio-economic aspects causing humanitarian disaster which the United States of America (USA), the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the indigenous people of Darfur themselves label as 'genocide'.