

## THE SOUTH SUDAN WAR: CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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### Abstract

The cumulative effects of marginalization, the burden of Sharia Law, and rejection of the right to self-government, basically an overall feeling of being second class citizens drove South Sudan to push for self-determination through secession. This strong desire for self-determination saw them through three decades of virulent struggle which finally paid off in 2011 when South Sudan officially gained her independence via a referendum, making her Africa's newest state. However, the peace and joy of freedom did not last long for South Sudan as three years after, a civil war broke out. The new country; South Sudan has been embroiled in conflicts orchestrated by ethnicity and power struggles and these has implications for national integration. The study examined the ethnic undertones in Southern Sudan's conflicts and also considered other factors that are responsible, and then investigates the implications thereof for National Integration. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Greed and grievance theories enunciated by Collier and Hoeffler serve as explanatory tool for the study. The study interrogated the historical background for the purpose of providing a narrative and descriptive analysis of events. It was discovered that the war in South Sudan does not only have ethnic undertones but also economic, political and historical issues appear to be fanning the embers of the war. It was therefore recommended that the leaders of the country at various levels should look beyond their ethnic differences and instead, see the entire country as their constituency irrespective of their ethnic extraction. They should focus on things that unite them rather than things that divide them.

**Keywords:** South Sudan, ethnicity, war, national integration.

## Introduction

The African continent has been fraught with conflicts ranging from political, economic to social and demographic. These various elements have been exhibiting themselves in a number of intra-state clashes, fueled by religious, economic differences and segregations. These conflicts can be partly traced to the menace the colonialist created by splitting states singlehandedly thereby, splitting ethnicities into different states and causing states to have majority and minority ethnic groups. Usually, such minority ethnic groups which are left out from the typical politics, economic, social development, have a tendency to unite due to the similarities in religion, values, belief's and most importantly, the feeling of relegation and neglect. These minority groups come together and push for independence which resulted in nationalism (GSDRC, 2012). Revolutionary actions in Africa are an indication of the unification of minority or those that are seemingly marginalized or oppressed against the government or ruling authorities. This was manifested during the Sierra Leonean civil war which ended in 2002; the conflict in Liberia that came to an end in 2003, an armed rebellion in Côte d'Ivoire in 2002 and the 'liberation' of Libya from Colonel Muammar Gadaffi on 20 October 2011 (Willis, 2012)

## Conceptual Clarification

This study is premised on three major concepts, namely conflict, ethnicity and national integration. The word conflict is derived from a Latin word "*conflictus*" meaning "strike together" as Miller (2005) corroborated this by saying it denotes "clash" or for one to engage in fight with another', or it is a confrontation between one or more parties aspiring towards dissenting goals. Sandole and Merwe (1993) opined that conflict is a situation in which at least two actors, or their respective representatives, try to pursue their opinions of irreconcilable objectives by physically damaging or destroying the property and high value symbols of one another. The last decades has seen terms like ethnicity, ethnic group and ethnic identity develop into common terms and they are progressively used in the mass media and no longer only in academic study of social occurrences (Eriksen, 2010). Ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic groups have had a deficiency of a clear conceptualization since their origin as they are usually used interchangeably when in practicality, though they are much related, there



is a distinction between them. Ethnicity can be seen as the state of being ethnic or fitting into a certain ethnic group or affiliation or identifying with an ethnic group (Kellas, 1998). An ethnic group on the other hand, is a social group based on ancestry, culture, or national origin (Yang, 2000). While ethnic identity is the way individuals interpret their being members in an ethnic community i.e. the characteristics that bind them together and sets them apart from others in their environment (Taras & Ganguly, 2010).

To Yang (2000), if defined narrowly, an ethnic group is a group of people that are distinguished socially either by others or by themselves. This is based on national origin and unique culture. This definition is of the view that ethnicity stems from cultural characteristics like language, customs, and religion or by national origin. Being a member of such group is either by self-realization or external acknowledgement which is founded upon imagined or actual descent (Chandra, 2012). A number of violent wars fought in recent times can be traced to ethnicity where members of different ethnic groups are in a scuffle for a particular resource or for a means to an end. Ethnicity brings a clear separation between in-groups and out-groups enabling each group to organize themselves for collective action (Fearon, 2003; Horowitz, 1985). Ethnic conflicts manifest mostly where there is a scuffle or competition among groups for power, resources, opportunities and status (Esman, 2004). Similarly, Sisay (2007:7) defines ethnic conflicts as:

...clashes among two or more ethnic groups due to demand for power, resources, identity, social status and the like. It refers to situations where people mobilize against others on the basis of ethnic identity. Conflicts increasingly present themselves as ethnic conflicts with ethnic identity serving and instrumentalised as the rallying point or the mobilization agent for the manifestation of the conflicts.

Ethnic conflict is more pervasive in a country where there is no sense of oneness i.e. national integration and in countries that are integrated nationally, ethnic conflict can be a threat to such unity if any of the groups feels schemed out from the scheme of things.

Similarly, national integration is the consciousness of having a mutual identity which citizens of a country share. Meaning even though citizens of a country belong to different social groups or castes, religions, different

regions and speak diverse languages, they still share a sense of oneness. Fakanbi & Raji (2013) view national integration as a joint effort to bring an apparently loosely-structured ethnic society into the federation. This concept depicts a situation in which citizens of a country gradually and increasingly sees themselves as one people, bound by shared historical experiences and common values, and infused by the spirit of patriotism and unity, which transcends traditional and primordial tendencies (Jega, 2002). The concept of integration was formed by Emile Durkhem and gained practicality in the mid18<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as the topmost desire of nation-states became principally mutual surpassing the selfish wants of individuals. Therefore, the wind of political change swept through all the continents including Africa, the phenomenon thereby became applicable in multi-ethnic settings like most of the countries in Africa (Usman and Odeh 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory used for this work is the Greed and Grievance theory by Collier and Hoeffler. The major tenets of the theory are: First, if at least one third of the GDP of a country is generated by its exports of primary products, then the probability of the country being thrown into conflict is high as compared to a country that is rather independent of those exports (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004:580). Second, the rate of male citizens that are educated have an impact on whether or not a country will be thrown into conflict; third, economic growth seems to have a positive impact on the rate of conflict i.e. surplus percentage of growth reduces the risk of conflict in a country; fourth, low cost of conflict related materials e.g. weapons have also been discovered by Collier and Hoeffler to increase the rate of conflict. Advancing from the Collier and Hoeffler model, the motive for greediness is private gain. The availability of "lootable" resource base provides a motivation for rebellion and a facilitating factor (Anyanwu, 2002). In mid-December 2013, South Sudan was on the brink of a gruesome civil war instead of being on the brink of international stardom. Simply explained, it was a matter of political power, the need to rule the newly formed state. According to Oudenaren, what happened on the night of 15<sup>th</sup> December 2013 is just a reflection of the simmering tension already present in the political party (Oudenaren, 2014).



## Historical Background of the War in Sudan

The processes of marginalization and the long-term underdevelopment that characterized South Sudan through its long Civil War came only two and a half years after its independence. So the outcome was a brand new country which did not have much of an opportunity during its long war years and a relatively short transition period to develop its institutions, its infrastructure, the human resources needed to run a country, build an economy and carve out a national identity (Mbaku and Smith, 2012). Dagne (2011) points out that historically; religious, economic and political divisions highlighted the North-South split as there were several differences between the Arabic Muslim North and the Christian and animist south. Right from independence, there were issues of political unrest in the country such that there was a long civil war between Northern and Southern Sudan which ended in 2005 and over two million persons, who were mostly southerners were killed as a result of the carnage and several others rendered homeless, living in several camps in Darfur or having fled the country to refugee camps in neighbouring countries. The Western region of Darfur in 2003 rebelled against the government and what ensued as a result was widespread violence leading to the damage and destruction of hundreds of villages in the region (Polgreen, 2006).

The economy of Sudan for many years was dominated by cotton export. However, with the discovery of oil in the 1980s in the southern part of Sudan, the economy of the entire country was transformed. The production of oil rose from a trickle in the 1990s to almost 500,000 barrels daily as at 2004 such that oil constituted 94% of the country's export revenue (James, 2015). The oil was channelled to the North through Khartoum for export and most of the new wealth generated from oil flowed largely to the centre and capital of the country and fuelling the anger and resentment on the regions against the central government. With all the foregoing issues in mind, it is seen that the South is a highly diverse nation that has been carved out of another nation so what we have really is a country that is in search of a national identity and a unifying concept of what it means not just to be South Sudan but what it means to be South Sudanese but instead, there has not been a bringing together of people into a common identity. And then there is the economy, oil which drives the country's economy and ever since independence it has not been a reliable source. There has been tension between Sudan and South Sudan over oil

flows and revenue. There has been risk of violence between both countries for a very long time and this takes a toll on the stability of South Sudan because the way South Sudan has settled its scores has historically been through violence (Ding, Wyett and Werker, 2012).

At independence, the national army basically observed a 60% increase in their workforces which were former militia, so everyone who fought against them and those who fought with them had to come together as the army. This brought about the necessity for a security sector reform, important for creating that idea of a national armory that is beyond personal identity, your religion, gender or ethnicity. This process is very nascent in South Sudan nowhere close to where it would need to be in order to ensure the kind of discipline that should be seen in the ranks. So the other thing of course is that this has been a very tough process of becoming a nation that has not been without problems of corruption. The revenue generated from oil has been diverted publicly with little efforts to bring them back. And so there are tremendous tensions considering the tremendous youth unemployment and the pervasive poverty and terrible hunger in the country. Thus, the post-conflict development rewards which could have been attained very quickly have been very slow indeed (King and Lawrence, 2005; Nour, 2011).

### **Causes of the War in South Sudan**

Though the focus of the study is ethnicity as it plays out in the war in South Sudan, the root of the war was not exclusively ethnic divisions and strife and for this reason, some other causative factors will be identified in this section. Long before the eruption of the civil war in South Sudan in 2013, there had been longstanding tension within the ruling party. The former Vice President was sacked in July of same year 2013 and some military generals were also dismissed. Some governors of states were sacked and key officials were sent to prison. These were some of the factors which prepared the ground for the civil war in South Sudan. This long tension exploded in Juba on the 15th of December, 2013 and expanded to the other parts of the country, particularly to the Upper Nile and surrounding regions. This basically further disintegrated the national army of the country in which case the Sudan People's Liberation Movement which became a rebel group, was in opposition to the government (Mbaku, 2012). For the purpose of this study, three factors have been identified as



accounting for the war in South Sudan. These will be discussed below:

*Competition over scarce resources:*

This constituted an issue such that historically, there were imbalances with regard to the distribution of services and resources such as economic opportunities, healthcare and education which at the time became a source of grievance among persons. The nature of these imbalances was further worsened by austerity measures, the difficult terrain as well as the deliberate destruction of resources, infrastructure and education facilities during the years of violent conflict (Spittales and Weyns, 2012). Also, oil revenues were distributed in ways considered as inequitable and led to the unhealthy competition for power as well as the concentration and accumulation of wealth and national resources in the state and national capital cities. Worthy of note also, was the mounting pressure on land and water resources. The pressure came as a result of agricultural expansion, urban growth, privatization of water and other natural resources, competition over the control of checkpoints, airstrips ports, and access points. There was intensification of agricultural activities such as increase in labour, time, feed, fertilizer and seed in a bid to increase input and ultimately, the yield and productivity. The increase in agricultural productivity was borne out of the rising urbanization and high rates of internal migration from rural to urban centres. Therefore, as population grew, there was the rising need and pressure for them to be accommodated in cities such as Juba, Yei, Bor, Yambio and so on. The economy struggled with the challenge of using natural resources efficiently as it became increasingly challenging to implement policies regarding farm use, fishing, water use, access to the forests and so on. Overtime, the stake holding of these issues was left to the public but without adequate regulatory policies, issues arose as a result of unequal access to these resources, creating feelings of deprivation in some. There was major competition over access to ports and airstrips, especially in places such as Gaalkayco and these contributed in the fuelling of divisions and conflict. These constituted important generative forces and active drivers of the conflict, causing communal tensions and clashes such that in efforts to gain advantage, commercial interests exacerbated divisions (Caas, 2007; Sullivan and Nasrallah, 2010).

### *Weak governance:*

This manifested as inaccessibility of government because the citizens found it difficult to trust in their governments as the government failed to create the necessary conditions for fundamental fairness and transparency. There was also slow progress in political, economic and human developments which were ultimately barriers to national growth and sustainable peace. Decentralization was only just evolving in the midst of traditional forms of governance. The result was frequent misunderstandings between the local government and indigenous leadership. All these contributed to a state of weakened social contract between the citizens and the State and eventually, the frustration with and ultimately the alienation from the government. Furthermore, social cohesion was undermined by the political and social marginalization of pastoralist cattle societies. The inadequate access to education created further divides in peoples' political voice and representation. There was also pervasive corruption among South Sudanese political leaders and the government officials had negative influence on conflict situations which perpetuated a lack of trust among them. They engaged in the pursuit of their political objectives using violence and divisions which had a heavy toll on the people of South Sudan. Also, several citizens neither had basic knowledge of their political representatives nor the process of constitutional reform (Lyman, 2014).

### *Ethnicity:*

While the war in South Sudan can be seen as a power struggle between powerful political figures, it is important to also consider the fact that there were divisions along ethnic lines among the people and what the leaders did was to merely stir those tensions. Historically, there have been deep ethnic and tribal tensions among the Sudanese, which played out even after the independence of South Sudan in 2011. According to Tounsel (2015), the social fragmentation which came about as a result of several decades of war fostered ethnocentric identities and forced communities to rely on their own wits for economic survival and security and became a key driver of conflict which prevented the emergence of national identity. Also, the rise of the trend of hate speeches and intolerance incited conflict through inflammatory letters and online contents and certain concepts of justice which required clan retaliation resulted in cyclical violence and mass killings. Tit-for-tat killings went on for months with both sides accused of



committing atrocities. The widespread massacre has been described as one of the single deadliest attacks of recent times with hundreds estimated killed, where bodies lay in the streets, houses were burned down and markets and shops looted (Hutchinson and Pendle, 2015; Amnesty International, 2016). This scenario cannot but poses great obstacle to national integration. Hence the next section focuses on the implications of the issues discussed above on the national integration of the country.

### **Explaining the Implications for National Integration**

The nature of the country (South Sudan) as it is today can be seen simply as an aggregation of several diverse nationalities. From time immemorial, even before independence, ethnic identities and affiliations have defined and shaped the scope and patterns of political intercourse in the state because of its heterogeneous and pluralistic nature. As such, there were several inter-ethnic conflicts which occurred "over resources, underscoring the need for well-defined property rights as well as a strategy for conflict anticipation and resolution" (Agbor and Taiwo, 2013). This issue of ethnic identity was addressed by John Garang, the founder of the South Sudan People's Liberation Movement. He stated that "Islam cannot unite us, Christianity cannot unite us, Arabism cannot unite us, and Africanism cannot unite us, only 'Sudanism' can unite us for it is the common factor".

### **The Challenge of National Integration of South Sudan**

#### *The Absence of National Consensus*

National consensus, which is a sense of common loyalty to new national values, institutions, and policies, emerges first among modernized elites, in the new states. When one looks at the South, particularly the three Southern provinces of Upper Nile, Equatoria, and Bahr el Gazal, a split or division between strongly opposed sections or parties, caused by differences in opinion or belief in the national consensus is observed (Shepherd, 1996). South Africa-based law expert, Dr. Remember Miamingi opined that for several decades, ethnic groups co-existed in harmony, but have over the years become distrustful of each other due to several local grievances over land, access to national resources and political representation. In his words,

The Dinkas and Nuers (tribes) that have for centuries considered themselves as cousins became archenemies. The Shulluk and the Dinkas that lived in relative peace for years in the former Upper Nile region now are at each other's throat. The Fertit, Balanda and other ethnic groups that co-existed in the former Bahr el Ghazal region now do not see eye to eye (Xinhua, 2017; 1).

### *Greed and selfishness among political leaders*

The first reason which undoubtedly accounts for disintegration in South Sudan is the greed and selfishness of political figures and leaders. The competition for power and its accompanying benefits has taken a negative toll on the unity of the country, especially with the ethnicization of politics and the culture of demonization of members of other ethnic groups. This naked thirst for power has resulted in the mass brutalization of persons and made others disillusioned with the government. Officials loyal to Salva Kiir on the one hand and those loyal to Reik Machar on the other have been blamed for the mass atrocities in South Sudan with neither of them willing to take responsibility. They have been accused of recklessly squandering the resources and wealth of the nation without regard to, and at the expense of the suffering populace and the country has been turned into a predatory enterprise which only serves the interests of those national leaders who occupy the topmost position of the power pyramid (Dagne, 2011; Blanchard, 2016).

### *The problem of reintegration of refugees*

During the war between North and South Sudan, many persons fled the region. However, the independence of the South in 2011 resulted in the return in large number of persons who had previously fled the country, particularly in the urban areas. The sustainability of their return depended majorly on their ability to have access to resources at their return and secure basic survival and livelihood for themselves. Because of the scarcity of resources in South Sudan resulting from the continued fighting and a collapsing economy, competition over resources between the local communities and the returnees, became common. It is an unprecedented situation because of the difficulties faced by the national government, international actors and organizations regarding the reintegration of



internally and externally displaced persons into the mainstream of society, especially the vulnerable ones such as older people, people with physical challenges and disabilities and other marginalized groups. What ensued as a result was the increase in economic, social and cultural tensions due to factors such as cultural differences between persons and the increased competition over scarce resources. These tensions were further exacerbated by ethnic divisions, easy access to arms and the heightened mistrust between groups (Dusenbury, 2013).

### *Weak State institutions*

Another hurdle to the realization of national integration in South Sudan is the existence of weak state institutions. The institutions are not just weak but appear to be left so deliberately in a bid to feather the economic and political fortunes of the ruling class. State institutions in South Sudan can be characterized as amoral, weak and insensitive, permitting the prevalence of fair justice and accountability in the country. Nepotism and ethnic sentiments in the distribution of resources and opportunities with the erosion and abuse of the fundamental human rights of citizens also characterize South Sudan.

### **Conclusion**

South Sudan is the world's youngest country, having come into existence in 2011. The state emerged from the decades of civil war with Khartoum which came to an end in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This antecedent brought about the increased hopes of the people for the rise of a new nation which was buttressed by the independence experience in 2011. When the Southern Sudanese voted unanimously in 2011 in favour of an independent South Sudan, hardly was it envisaged that in barely three years of its existence, the world's newest nation was going to be plunged into series of violent conflicts and armed confrontations. As a matter of fact, it is no little irony that the South Sudanese Constitution characterizes the country as a multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious entity where such diversities peacefully coexist. On the contrary, the country which is not even up to a decade old has come to be associated with and characterized by war, destruction and human suffering. With time, the hope began to fade away, giving way to despair as the nation gradually disintegrated and

threatened to become a failed state because it had been so gripped by socio-economic and political instability to the point that by 2013, a civil war had broken out. Consequently, citizens lost their faith in the government and hope in the notion that the problems of South Sudan would be solved by its detachment from Sudan but rather has been a troubled state with the conflict truncating its prospects for growth and development. At its inception, it appeared as an ethnic conflict but has long gone beyond ethnic rivalry and conflict between two political leaders President Salva Kiir and his former Vice President Reik Machar to become a nationwide catastrophe creating a myriad of problems not just for the South Sudanese people but for other neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia among others.

It is beyond doubt that the South Sudanese conflict has continued for an extended period of time with grave impacts but it is noteworthy that though external factors play an important role in resolving this conflict, the solution to the conflict lies primarily with the citizens of the country (the South Sudanese themselves). Nevertheless, while violent conflict and insecurity continue, the need to protect the fundamental human rights of civilians and members of the South Sudanese society cannot be overemphasized.

### **Recommendations**

From the discussion so far, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. There is need for the leaders and political elites of the country to look beyond their ethnic loyalties during the process of recruitment of party members and public office holders. Leadership, especially at the national level should act not for the selfish interests but for the collective good of the diverse nations. Ethnic politics should be discouraged.
2. Ethnic diversities in South Sudan should be seen as a resource of immense potential, with the ability to enrich the historical and cultural landscape of the country. The distrust and rivalry between ethnic groups are serious threats to the peace, development and national integration. It should be understood that in a bid to see to the growth and development, and by extension the social cohesion



of South Sudan, there is the need to recognize that none of the ethnic groups share a uniform dream about South Sudan. There must be efforts by the government and international community to sanction those responsible for the conflict and ethnic violence.

3. There should also be legislations to ensure that basic human rights of the South Sudanese people are protected especially the rights of the ethnic minorities and civilians who are often vulnerable and indeed victims of violent attacks.

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