

SUDAN

Introduction:

The Sudan of today represents a unique type of “unity in diversity”. It exemplifies the capability of a society to weave a harmonious fabric out of dispersed strands and how to override ethnically and ideologically controversial issues to live in a peaceful oasis. It also demonstrates the difficulties in maintaining a unified nation of diverse ethnic and religious groups – a problem confronted by many contemporary African countries.

Sudan has been repeatedly in headlines news lately. There are two main reasons for that: The question of the Southern Sudan and the conflict in Darfur region. In this paper I'll try to give general information about Sudan concentrating and elaborating on these two problems of Darfur and the South.

Historical Background

The Sudan is a vast country whose North and South are linked by the Nile and its tributaries. It extends 1250 miles from north to south, 1000 miles from east to west. It has 4500 miles of borders, shared with nine countries, and 450 miles of coast-line on the Red Sea. The one million square miles of the Sudan are sparsely populated (more than 17 million) and encompass remarkably varying environments.

On environmental considerations, the Sudan is viewed to comprise two regions, the South and the North. The Southern Sudan occupied about one quarter of the total area of the country, lying between the latitudes of 3.5 N and 10.0 N, and it has mostly a wet

tropical climate. Although these environmental differences are reflected in the lives of the people of the two regions, both communities share the common feature of being tribal, agricultural and pastoral. In addition to the differences in traditions, race, religion and culture, there are some other political and administrative ones which were introduced due to different historical circumstances. All these differences were cunningly exploited by the British colonialists to incite hatred and conflict between the two regions.

Sudan is a multiethnic and multi-religious country. The largest ethnic category (nearly 40 percent of total, nearly 55 percent in north) comprises those considering themselves Arab. Major Muslim (but non-Arab) groups are Nubians in the far north, nomadic Beja in the northeast, and the Fur of the west. Southern non-Muslim groups include Dinka (more than 10 percent of total population and 40 percent in south), Nuer, and numerous smaller Nilotic and other ethnic groups (Library of the congress, 2004). 70% of the population is Sunni Muslim (in north), 25% hold indigenous beliefs, and Christians account for 5% (mostly in south and Khartoum).

Sudan stands out because, unlike most African countries, the western colonization wave of the 18th century was not its first colonization experience and, additionally, it was a condominium. The historical process of dichotomizing the country into the Arab North and African South has its roots back in the 7th century. Arab Muslim Empire invaded the Sudan, and concluded peace accords with northern people that established remote Arab control over the country and opened communication channels with the Arabs. Through intermarriage, trade and settlement, North Sudan underwent Arab-Muslim assimilation. On the other hand, Arab migration and settlement in the South was hindered by the tough geographic nature and the harsh tropical climate. The relationship between the Arabs and

Southerners was highly limited to those who were engaged in the Slave trade (Deng, 1995; Khalid, 2003).

In 1820 joint Turkish-Egyptian forces invaded the northern regions of the Sudan. Promises of gold and slaves to build his empire were the main motives of Mohamed Ali Basha. During this era slave traders used the North as a base to their operations. Resistance to the Turks and Egyptians came from both North and South resulting in a successful revolt that was led by Al Mahdi. In spite of the Islamic nature of the Mahadist revolution, “the south, though it did not convert, saw the religion of the Mahadist as a tool for liberation” (Deng, 1995, p.11). The Mahadist regime, however, greatly disappointed its supporters from the South by continuing, like its ancestor, the slave raids (Deng, 1995; Daly and Sikainga, 1993). As Deng stated “Islam was turned against the South, thus becoming a divisive element” (1995, p.11). The dichotomy of the slave-master relationship the in Mahadist regime instituted between the North and South deeply shaped the development of the political sphere later.

Anglo-Egyptian armies that conquered Sudan in 1898 ended the Mahadist regime and established a condominium dominated by the British. During the 58 years of Anglo-Egyptian administration both Northern and Southern Sudan were administered as separately different states under a Governor General. This policy, however, reinforced Arabism and Islam in the North, while Southern Sudan was ruled as an African colonial territory where African culture, language and Christianity were all encouraged. In addition, the British introduced the concept of the "Closed Districts" which included Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains of Southern Kordofan and the Fung areas of Southern Blue Nile. This British policy, in addition to the heritage of master-enslavement

history, prevented the Sudanese from interacting with each other, and learning from each other (Khalid, 2003). In 1947, the British abruptly reversed their policy of "Closed Districts," and instead determined that the South and North would become an independent as one country. However, the colonial authority failed to allow the people of the "Closed Districts" to exercise their right to self-determination. As the result, this failure became one of the main factors that contributed to the first civil war in the Sudan (1955-1972). The first democratic government after independence failed to manage the country's ethnic diversity and provide the Southerners with their demands of federalism. Furthermore, not only was this demand rejected, but the Northern dominated government, outlawed their federalism claim and considered it as crime (Deng, 1995).

Although the war was successfully resolved in 1972, the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, which was created by the end of the war, was revoked by President Numeiri. He established the Islamic Sharia as the supreme law of the Land in September 1983. Consequently, anti-Sharia groups, mainly in the South, formed the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM/SPLA), in order to rebel against the government.

On June 30 1989, a radical Islamic faction in the army, with the collaboration of the National Islamic Front (NIF) took over power. This new government introduced a new perspective on the Sudanese problem by dividing the country into Muslim and non-Muslim (Kufar) citizens, and transformed the political conflict into a religious one by introducing the concept of Jihad (The holly war). Due to such changes in the central authority and in the religious concept, the war in the South moved northward into non-

Arab areas in Darfur in the Western part, Baja in the East and Ingasana in the Blue Nile area.

Genuine Sudanese Identity

The tribal communities in Northern and Southern Sudan are founded on the chivalrous qualities of courage, patience, hospitality, chastity, devotion to the weak and helpless ect., which is typical of tribal societies. These virtues are wide spread, varying in degree throughout the South and North, in unison with the simplicity and minimal material demands of the inhabitants.

Religion in Sudan

In the Northern Sudan, Tasawof (imitation of the Prophet's personal life) played a major role in developing and refining the noble tribal values by linking them with belief in Allah and paving the way to practically achieve the most exalted human values preached by all of the heavenly religions. Consequently the essence of the Sudanese character has been protected and preserved by Tasawof and/or tribal virtues from any foreign influence.

Islamic Tasawof flourished during the Funji Sultanate to the extent it became the general trend of religion in the Sudan. To reconcile the Islamic Tasawof with the Sudanese African character, which had the attributes of deep passion and devotion to music and dancing, the Sofis (men of Tasawof), in typical liberalism, opted to present their religious practices accompanied by drums and other musical instruments to attract the indigenous people to Islam.

Furthermore to the original African characteristics of deep passion and love for the arts, the Southerners have their own religious beliefs and most of their daily behavior is based on religious and spiritual considerations as they treat everything as comprising a spirit and they observe religious ceremonies for several different natural phenomena.

Most of them believe in a high god whom they call by different names according to their tribes. Some of them believe in the incarnation of the spirits of their ancestors through successive generations as embodied in their spiritual chiefs. This is indicative of the natural tendency of the Southerners to religious adherence.

The above mentioned virtues pertaining to the natural and simple tribal life in the North and South need only be refined and developed to breed a unified Sudanese Nationality that surpasses historical differences and presents a civilized solution to the Southern problem.

Religion and Ethnic Roots:

The tribes of the Southern Sudan are generally of Negroid origin and some are interrelated with tribes in countries bordering the South. Tribes such as Shulluk, Dinka and Nuer have foreign non-negriod elements attributed to the Arabs, as claimed by anthropologists who also like to categorize the people of the North as the Brown Race, which is a product of the intermarriage of the Arabs with the Beja, Nubians or negroids. The numerical insignificance of the true Arabs in the Sudan is supported by the outcome of the 1956 population census which showed that 39% of the population claimed Arab descent and that more than 50% spoke Arabic as their mother tongue. The census recorded a figure of 10.263,000 persons, a quarter of which lived in the Southern Sudan.

The tribes in the South are broadly classified according to their languages, physical types, and historical background into three main groups:-

the Nilotics, eg. The Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk and Anuak.

The Nilo-Hamitic, eg. The Murle, Didinga, and Latuka.

The Sudanic: these are numerous small tribes, the most important of which is the Asandi.

According to the 1956 census there were twelve major languages but Arabic or pidgin Arabic is the most common language today in the South, especially in towns. Only 10% of the population of the South were recorded to be Christian or Muslim while the remaining 90% were animist, according to an estimate made in 1955.²

The South before the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium

Little historical information is known about the South before the Turco-Egyptian conquest in 1820. However, it is held that the Northern Kingdom of Kush (750-300 BC) as well as ancient Egypt had some cultural influences on the South. Although Christianity and Islam penetrated into the Sudan in the sixth and ninth centuries respectively, their spread in the South was impeded by the difficulty of transportation in this rugged region. The fifteenth century witnessed the establishment of the Funj Kingdom of Sennar. At that time the South was engulfed in tribal wars in which the stronger tribes like the Azandi and Dinka used to expand at the expense of the smaller and weaker tribes.

That state of tribal conflict prevailed until it was disrupted by the Turco-Egyptian conquest, marking a new era of North-South relations. The new administration opened the South to outside influences such as explorers who by 1877 had completely traced the course of the White Nile. Through exploration expeditions, the South was made known to traders and missionary societies.

Slave Trade

The Slave trade was one of the most influential factors that contributed to the making of the Southern problem. This trade had existed since ancient times in many parts of the world, but it later took its most disgusting form in the hands of the Europeans who captured millions of black Africans and shipped them in horrible conditions to the New World.

The origin of the slave trade goes back to the tribal warfare when the conquered became slaves to the chief of the victorious tribe, (one of the most famous chiefs who dealt in slave trading was Moopoi, an Azandi chief). Though the domestic slave trade was of a limited scale, it intensified and developed after the Turco-Egyptian conquest as the aim of the rulers was to procure slaves for their armies. Indeed the trade starts to flourish with the expeditions to discover the sources of the Nile. At that time, the Europeans got interested in the slave trade, and for assistance, they appointed Arab and Northern Sudanese agents who later on traded independently. Much later the European countries, in conjunction with Turkey, initiated a movement to fight the slave trade. Prompted by this, the Khedive Ismail, through the appointment of General Gordon as Governor of Equatoria, succeeded to some extent in suppressing the trade.

Though the Europeans were amongst the foremost participants in this repugnant trade, the British Colonialists and missionaries contrived to convince the Southerners that the Arab Northerners were the only dealers, in their pursuit to destroy the North-South relations, and purge the South of any Arab or Islamic influences.

Christian Missionaries.

During the Turco-Egyptian rule European interest in the Sudan escalated and Christian activity started to gain momentum in the South, which was considered strategic position for the diffusion of Christianity into Black Africa and a barrier to the penetration of Islam. This interest is evident from the writing of General Gordon, Governor of Equatoria in 1871, to the Church Missionary Society in England inviting their work to his province.²

After the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the Southern Sudan was more accessible to the Christianity and European Commerce, but that was curtailed by the Mahadist revolution that overthrew the Turks in 1885.

The Mahadist revolution destroyed every trace of administration in the South and relapse into tribal anarchy ensued. Then Southern Sudan became the target of Belgium, France and Britain in their scramble for Africa. The South was re-opened after the Anglo-Egyptian conquest in 1898 for Christian missionaries; this marked the formal birth of the Southern problem.

Darfur Problem:

Darfur is a vast region in western Sudan. It is a very rich region and a lot of ethnicities have lived there for centuries. These groups of people used to live peaceful; however after a severe wave of drought that hit the region in the eighties and nineties of the past century, several tribal conflicts took place. The main reason for these conflicts is the scarcity of pastures and water for cattle. Besides that there are a lot of regional political, economical and social factors that contribute to deepen the conflict in the region. For instance, the discovery of oil in the region and the attempts of some international powers to control the source of this wealth does add to the conflict.

The conflict has heightened recently and several factions in that region started to call for self-governance. These factions started to arm itself and defy the central government in Khartoum. As a result of that millions of people were displaced fro their villages and thousands were killed. The region started to attract the attention of the international community who called for an immediate international intervention in the region in order to save the lives of millions of people.

The Sudanese government welcomed the intervention of the United Nations and thousands of the UN soldiers were sent to Sudan to help in restoring peace for that region. Besides that, aid from different countries has poured into Sudan. Several entities all over the world are still raising funds to help in solving the problem of Darfur.

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