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SUDAN: THE NORTH-SOUTH CONFLICT FROM A GRIEVANCE PERSPECTIVE

Chidima Achudume

Abstract

The hypothesis that economic agendas have been the causative factors behind present day civil wars has become widely accepted and utilized as a framework for analysing civil wars. Despite the effectiveness and popularity as a tool for understanding most intra-state conflicts in Africa, in the context of the Sudanese civil war, economic agendas are inadequate. Economic perspectives or the Greed framework is lacking the tools to analyse the fundamental factors that have resulted in the Sudanese conflict. Rather, this paper argues that an appropriate tool will be the Grievance theory which pertinently links the civil war in Sudan to the historical, systematic and violent marginalization of South Sudan by the British colonial administration and eventually the Sudanese administration led by the Northern elites. The failure to rescind longstanding prejudices as well as discriminatory policies against South Sudan, the unwillingness of successive Sudanese administrations to ensure the development of South Sudan and integrate the population into the political landscape of a unified Sudan led to the build-up of grievances which eventually found expression in a civil conflict in 1955 that lasted over 17 years.

Introduction

The conflict in Sudan is usually presented as a product of the coalescing of long standing ethnic differences and religious sectarianism. Furthermore, it is argued that the irrationality and primordial qualities of human beings were the root causes of civil warsⁱ. This perspective is owed to the apparent divides in a country consisting of the Arab Muslim North and the contrasting African Animist and Christian South. However, as a basis of analysis, this perspective is flawed as it does not possess the necessary qualities to help explain what provides the impetus for belligerent mobilisation as well explain the role of existent political and economic factors in the conflictⁱⁱ. It is against this background that this paper commences. This paper is an attempt to understand the foundations of the Sudanese civil wars as well as the precipitating factors. In this attempt, this paper shall examine two schools of thoughts and their appropriateness as frameworks for analysis.

The *economic or greed* perspective explains civil wars as products of economic agendas, that is, belligerents in the war are solely motivated by economic gains for self-enrichment. Rebels find this opportunity achievable by control of goods, natural resources and power in the state. Greed as a motivator of conflict is especially common in states that are undeveloped and experience systemic poverty. This theoretical framework further belittles the importance of factors such as inequality, political rights, ethnic polarisation, and religious fractionalisation as weak explanations for the origins of civil wars.

Nevertheless, as this paper shall argue and as the evidence shall show, in the context of Sudan, the Greed framework for analysis is questionable at best. It is imperative to note that the importance of socio-economic grievances as foundations of the conflict is irreducible. To assert that only 'rebel economic opportunism' influenced the origins of the civil war is an oversimplification and it cannot abide.

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The objective of this paper which shall consequently inform the structure is to review the argument which states that Greed is an appropriate framework for analysis. Following this, the second objective is to uncover evidence of the existence of underlying political, economic, and social factors which contributed to the Sudanese civil war, thus proving the ‘Grievance’ framework as an apt analytical tool in the Sudanese context.

An Exploration of the ‘Greed’ Framework

In contemporary civil wars, there has been a recorded experience of the influence of economic agendas as an imperative for fighting. This assumption although widely criticised is given impetus with its manifestation in civil conflicts such as that of Sierra-Leone and Liberiaⁱⁱⁱ. Both countries had valuable natural resources that warring factions could loot during warring periods and enrich themselves. Sierra-Leone had diamonds while Liberia possessed resources in the form of diamonds, timber, rubber and gold etc.^{iv}. These conflicts are understood via the concepts of ‘war economies’ where the continuation of war is largely preferred to peace due to the profitability of wars. This turns civil conflicts into a venture, profitable in its continuation^v. Thus, civil wars have been rationalized as a venture which leads to the creation of opportunity for looting through natural resource capture and exploitation.

In other words, the financial viability and profitability of civil conflicts for rebel factions through looting is the primary factor underlying civil conflicts, thus reducing the origins of civil conflicts to simply ‘economic opportunity’. This perspective has been given further impetus as a result of studies conducted by Collier and Hoeffler on the economic imperatives of civil conflicts. Their most famous study which involved a case study of 99 countries concluded that in countries with high per capita income, there is less likely to be a civil conflict as it would not be rational – cost wise^{vi}. However, in low-income countries combined with factors such as heterogenous community and existence of natural resources, there is a greater probability for civil conflict. In further studies, they disparage the formation of civil conflicts based on grievance as factors such as inequality, repression, ethnic nationalism and religious sectarianism are not only inadequate but are largely confusing and framework for analysis^{vii}.

Having understood what the greed perspective entails, an historical account of the origins of the First Sudanese Civil War will be provided to offer a context through which the applicability of the greed framework can be ascertained.

Historical Divides: Political Marginalisation and the First Sudanese Civil War

It is difficult to trace the origins of the North-South civil war that has ravaged Sudan for decades. Naturally, there have been various theories and suggestions that have sprung up to explain the causative factors. Some reasons include: ‘exclusion of South Sudan from political power and development; the racial and ethnic divide between the north and south since colonial times; Islamization policies by different leaders of Sudan; radicalization of the South Sudanese, who are animists and Christians’. It is noteworthy that through the years, there has been ‘a historical consistency of oppressive regime from Khartoum discriminating and exploiting the South’^{viii}.

Historically, in Sudan, there has been a disparity in power between the North and South and this manifested itself in pre-colonial Sudan. During the 19th century, most of the riverine North developed as the administrative and economic centre while the South were subjected to violent

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resource extractivism and resource grabs in the form of livestock and ivory. Northern prejudices against the south were pervasive and they identified them as the inferior race and the traditional source for slavery^{ix}.

In the pre-independence era of Sudan, the relationship between the north and south region of the country was based on the extraction of southern resources to feed the north as both groups were relatively undeveloped. The region was governed by the British colonial administration who promoted economic and educational development primarily in the north. The reflection of this dynamic was the ‘Southern Policy’ instituted by the British which severed any relationship between the North and South in pre-independence Sudan. Northern Sudanese including Arab merchants were barred from living in the South and likewise, Southern Sudanese could not gain entrance or reside in the North. This detachment served no other purpose than Colonial Britain’s aggrandizement. This way, Arab-Muslim influence could not spread and the British were preparing the southern region for its ‘eventual integration with British East African’ Federation^x.

This explains the historical feature of a Northern Arab-Muslim domination in Sudan. Thus, later on people not identified with Arabism and Islam faced political and economic exclusionary policies. This led Deng (1995) to assert that:

Northern prejudices against the South are pervasive and easily revealed in their collective identification of the Negro as an inferior race, the traditional source for the slave. While the Arabs have had the power to assert their political dominance and material superiority, southerners deeply despise them and look down on them. This mutual disdain, coupled with geographical and territorial separation, makes coexistence extremely difficult^{xi}.

Southern grievances were further crystalized with the onset of independence. In preparation for the declaration of an independent Sudan, the British colonial masters were inclined to listen to the demands of the Khartoum Graduate College of educated nationalists who advanced its Arab-Muslim character as the basis of national identity for the self-governed southern region^{xii}.

As the British began relinquishing colonial power, there was a replacement of British colonial officers with Sudanese personnel. However, this process of ‘Sudanization’ would favour Northern Sudanese elites, a corollary of their better educational attainments. By 1946, both regions were unified and there were widespread fears that the violent resource extractions of the 19th century colonial Sudan would continue, only this time it will be advanced by Northern Sudanese interests^{xiii}. These fears could be justified on the basis of two happenings: first the ‘Sudanization’ process provided opportunities for Northern merchants to occupy local administrative positions. Second, Northern merchants now had free access to South Sudan as a result of the abolition of trade restrictions^{xiv}. Thus, with the Sudanization and with the end of the Southern policy, the North had access to the South and their presence and supremacy overwhelmed Southern Sudanese.

The perilous persistence of this dynamic caused Southerners to question the suitability of the unification given that South Sudan hardly had a say in the process. Warnings were expressed that this domineering relationship would elicit violent responses from disenfranchised Southerners. This would lead to the 1947 Juba conference aimed at convincing Southerners of the need for unification. Issues brought up during the conference included wage gap differentiations between the two regions,

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religious discrimination and the political as well as religious rights of Southern Sudanese. The South Sudanese, although averse to the unification process accepted it as an ongoing development. Following this, in 1948, the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) was formed to guide Sudan independence. This assembly followed the existent pattern with it being largely controlled by the Northern elite and this was irrespective of the thirteen Southern representatives within the assembly. What followed was the creation and adoption of a timetable for independence at the 1953 Cairo conference. It was agreed through negotiations by Northern elites that Sudan would attain independence following conclusion of a three-year transitional period wherein the public administration positions already being vacated by the British would be completely Sudanized and all colonial troops would be withdrawn^{xv}.

It was hoped that the unification of the North and South as well as the plan of transition leading up to the attainment of independence would have heralded peace. However, that was not the case, rather, that period of transition saw a deeper entrenchment of Southern grievances, regional instability and eventual eruption of violence. By 1954, following the Cairo conference, the Sudanization of former colonial administrative offices was simply a synonym for the Northernization of political power. Further consolidating the power of the Northern elites was the subsequent parliamentary elections in the country. It was in 1955 that tensions reached its zenith, leading to violent eruptions in several regions. The precipitation factor of what would start the First Sudanese Civil War lasting seventeen years (1955-1972) was the mutiny of members of the British-administered [Sudan Defence Force](#) Equatorial Corps (SEC) [mutinied](#) in [Torit](#)^{xvi}.

The mutiny was based on rumours that the SEC was to be disarmed and transferred to the North. Consequently, this action represented another instance of the violent dispossession of South Sudan of any power of resistance in the face of increasing Northern supremacy. The mutinies were eventually suppressed, leading survivors to flee to the rural areas, thus beginning uncoordinated guerrilla activities in the rural regions. Nevertheless, it was not until 1962 that a full-fledged armed insurrection manifested. This occurred when the Sudan African National Union organized a guerrilla army known as the Anyanya^{xvii}.

Criticism of Greed based Analytical Framework in the Sudanese Context

From the above account, it is observable that there were no economic imperatives underlying the civil conflict formation. Rather, it has been centuries of accumulated grievances that led to the start of the conflict. Hence, the greed theory fails to function as a framework for analysis as it focuses only on economic opportunity and profitability as motivators for conflict. In the case of Sudan, the only economic activities of the rebels during the first rebellion were restricted to attempts for survival and banditry for food^{xviii}.

Furthermore, proponents of the greed framework, overemphasizes the importance of rebel organisations. While they are important actors in civil war formation as well as its continuation, the role of a government should not be ignored. Government indiscretions have played a major role in civil war formation in contemporary times and in this case of Sudan, this factor is particularly pertinent. An emphasis on economic opportunity as the motivator for the rebellion closes a door and erroneously fails to acknowledge the existent repressive government policies in Sudan. Indeed, the government of Sudan first headed by the British colonialist administration and then by the Northern elites played a significant role in provoking an uprising. Civil violence was a precursor to what was

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perceived as growing Northern supremacy and oppression and rebel opportunity for profit does not properly capture this.

Thus, unsurprisingly, the inherent reductionism of the Greed framework has garnered criticism for its inability to recognise the existence of complex and intricate factors at play leading up to a civil war. Although, economic agenda's play a role, the importance of grievances should not be belittled as it was the same authors who recognises that most conflicts although fuelled and sustained by greed, they were born of grievance. For instance, 'political entrepreneurs' in their attempt to instigate insurrections may solicit start-up funds from aggrieved factions who hold long standing grudges against another faction or the present administration^{xxix}.

It must be acknowledged that there were economic factors at play leading up to this conflict but they do not interact and influence the conflict like the proponents of the Greed model propose. For instance, one of the causative factors of the rebellion was the increasing discontent at the attempts of the Northern elites to marginalise the Southerners leading to economic turmoil and poverty. The natural resources fundamental to the development of the Southern part of Sudan has consistently been violently grabbed, first by the British colonial state and subsequently by Northern elites for the purpose of developing the North and in consequence, depriving the South of the opportunity to be developed. This deprivation and resource grabs facilitates an understanding of the economic conditions behind the conflict^{xx}.

At this point, the greed model in the context of Sudan falls apart and falls short as an analytical tool. Hence, there is a need for a complimentary framework for analysis because while it cannot be discarded as a tool for analysis, it does not have the prerequisite qualities to analyse the Sudanese civil war. Offering a solution is the grievance perspective which gives an understanding of the role of politics as well as insight into the inherent complexities of the civil conflict^{xxi}.

Analysis of the Civil Conflict from a Grievance Perspective

Grievance can be understood in the context of civil conflicts as justice seeking behaviour. Theories of grievance can be sub-divided into three: first, relative deprivation describes a situation wherein there is a discrepancy and disparity between aspiration and achievement. That is, what people think they deserve is incongruent to what they know they will get. Second, polarization refers to when two groups which experience intra-group homogeneity exercise inter-group diversity. There is a polarity in interest as well as desired achievement. Third, horizontal inequality refers to the inequalities existent within a homogeneous society as a result of factors such as discrimination in public spending and taxation, high asset inequality, economic mismanagement and recession, and grievances related to resource rents^{xxii}.

From the above, several factors can be picked which would inform a justice seeking behaviour inherent in grievances, they include: hatred between groups, political exclusion, economic inequality, lack of opportunity, desire for self-determination etc.^{xxiii}. However, an important one is identity. Identity in a social context can be defined as

set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by implicit or explicit rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristics, such as beliefs, desires, moral commitments, or physical attributes thought typical of members of the category such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture^{xxiv}.

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Identity is the most important factor pertinent to actualisation of grievances as well as group formation. This is because, it is through group identification and formation (ethno-nationalism) that grievances are crystalized and find expression. One's identity in a personal or social context works as a moral code for an individual, guiding one's interests and actions. In other words, it provides an individual with a sense of being and through this, it is understandable that any factor perceived to be a threat to one's identity is rejected almost immediately without focus on the consequences of that action^{xxv}.

The above account of the continuous marginalization of the Southern region of Sudan by the Northern in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era gives a context in which we can understand and observe how grievance developed and has resulted in ethno-nationalism that has led to the civil war. South Sudan experienced relative deprivation; they understood that with the attainment of independence from Britain, they would be perceived as the minority group in Sudan. They had political rights to partake in the government of Sudan as well as religious rights as free and equal members of the state. However, all these aspirations were unachievable in the face of Northern supremacy. Indeed, what South Sudan experienced was a continuation of age old oppression and resource looting not by foreign powers but by internal interests.

As shown in the historical account of pre-First Civil war Sudan, there was evidence of severe political marginalisation of the South before and after independence. The people of Southern Sudan had suffered this marginalisation for nearly two centuries under the 'Turko-Egyptian, the Mahdiya, the Anglo-Egyptian, and the post-independence northern regimes'^{xxvi}. This historical situation fed the fears of the Southerners that after the transition to independence, the domination of the North would only resume and this will deprive the Southerners of potential economic development. Indeed, after the transition to independence and unification, there was the resumption of Arab-Muslim Northern supremacy where Northern elites occupied the upper echelons of power while the Southerners occupied the lower societal positions or had no positions at all.

This was further worsened by a polarized society in ethnic groupings as well as religious affiliations. While this apparent diversity should not ordinarily be grounds for grievance and conflict formation, decades of deep seated ethnic hatred spurred by obscene policies implemented by the British only help consolidate existing differences. The Arab-Muslim North regarded themselves as superior to the Christian-Animist South. Disputes between ethnic groups are often on the issues of distribution of goods or power, a sense of insecurity or limitations on the free exercise of cultural distinction. States which have homogenous ruling group are more prone to war because there is a reaction from the minority or excluded group^{xxvii}. The increase in the local power of one ethnic group creates a feeling of exclusion, insecurity and diminished influence which engenders violent response. Unequal distribution of resources, which includes industrialisation, can generate incentives for a minority group to seize control of the state.

Thus, the civil war was the 'product of the underlying tensions and mistrust among South Sudanese leaders and ethnic groups'^{xxviii}. Frances Stewart (2000) a stalwart in the belief that grievance is of great consequence states that the condition experienced by South Sudan were precipitating factors behind group identification and mobilization (ethno-nationalism)^{xxix}. Ethno-nationalism denotes loyalty to a nation deprived of its own state and loyalty to an ethnic group. It is rooted in a sense of common origins seen in language, religion and race^{xxx}. It was this formed identity and the need to escape the marginalization that led to the fight for independence from South Sudan.

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Indeed, as several authors have noted, it was the desire to achieve representation and more regional autonomy that led to the conflict^{xxxii}. Eltigani and Ateem (2007) noted that ‘the war intensified after independence of the country when the promise to grant a ‘Federal System of government’ to the South of the country was denied by the ruling elites in Khartoum’^{xxxiii}.

While ethnic diversity does not cause war, and is natural in a state with different groups, how these divergences are managed and the separation, differentiation and ill treatment of an ethnic group causes war^{xxxiii}. Ethnic boundaries represent potentially potent cleavages for conflict. Ethnic conflicts are rooted in the social and psychology of group entitlements that evoked passions, anxieties and apprehensions as rival groups contested their relative superiority within a state^{xxxiv}. Grievances in ethnicity is linked to contestation over state based indiscrimination and characterised by factors such as ethnic dominance and minority, exclusion from political rule, escalation of ethnic differences, economic factors, religious differences, the inability to reach agreements and historical differences.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the greed framework is lacking as a tool needed to adequately elucidate the origins of South Sudan’s rebellion and the eventual civil war. It is further argued in this paper that because the origins of the civil conflict in Sudan is founded on cultural and regionally based political marginalisation, the employment of the grievance framework for analysis is appropriate. A perusal of the sequence of relations between North and South Sudan will reveal that grievances within the Southern Sudanese population has established roots that has been in formation before the colonial era. However, it was not until decades later that the expression of this grievance was achieved in the form of the first Sudan civil war. Regan and Norton (2005) posit that grievance based issues are at the core of the process that leads to civil conflict but greed becomes salient when the rebel leadership begins to face a difficult task of motivating soldiers^{xxxv}. Agreeing with them, as seen in the case study, grievance within a state contributes tremendously to civil wars.

Irrespective of the benefits of the grievance framework, it has its limitations. As a theory that aims to explain the formation of civil conflicts, it does not acknowledge external influences that may provoke belligerence. In the case of Sudan, the external factor was the British colonial legacy. It can be argued that one of the key factors influencing Sudan’s First Civil War which was the polarization of Sudanese society was as a result of colonial policies prior to independence. Although prior to colonialism, the North and the South were not homogenous, it was the brutal legacy that exacerbated the differences that existed. The British colonial administration made no attempt to bridge the gap before withdrawing from Sudan and granting the state independence. Therefore, while the grievance theory is applicable as a framework for analysing civil conflicts in Africa, it falls short as a wholesome theory highlighting all complexities and intricacies of a civil war.

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ENDNOTES

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- ⁱ Berdel, 2005: 688
ⁱⁱ Ylönen 2005: 101
ⁱⁱⁱ Ross 2004: 52-53
^{iv} Ibid. 48
^v Jackson 2006: 21
^{vi} Collier and Hoeffler, 2000
^{vii} Ylönen, 2005: 104
^{viii} Haile, 2012
^{ix} Deng, 1995
^x Kebede 1997: 17
^{xi} Deng 1995: 488
^{xii} Ibrahim, 2001
^{xiii} Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Stewart, 2000
^{xiv} Sconyers, 1978
^{xv} Markakis, 1998: 111; Ylönen, 2005: 109-110
^{xvi} Markakis 1998: 112; Rolandsen and Leonardi, 2014: 1-2
^{xvii} Kebede 1997: 18
^{xviii} Bechtold, 1991
^{xix} Collier, 2000: 853
^{xx} Ylönen 2005: 132
^{xxi} Ibid.
^{xxii} Murshed, 2006: 7, 15
^{xxiii} Collier and Hoeffler, 2000; Macleans, 2012
^{xxiv} Deng, 1995:1
^{xxv} Fearon, 1999
^{xxvi} Kebede 1997: 15
^{xxvii} Cunningham and Weidman, 2010
^{xxviii} Blanchard 2016: 6
^{xxix} Stewart, 2000
^{xxx} Conner, 2015
^{xxxi} Gatundu, 2015, 48
^{xxxii} Eltigani and Ateem, 2007
^{xxxiii} Macleans, 2012
^{xxxiv} Horowitz, 1985
^{xxxv} Regan and Norton, 2005