

AFRICA AND THE CRISIS OF STATE-BUILDING: ENGAGING THE COLONIAL LINKAGE TO SOUTH SUDAN CONFLICT

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Abstract

As the conflict in South Sudan continues, so have several attempts been made to unravel the real cause of the conflict besetting the world's newest nation. Some of the academic discourses on the conflict have situated it within the context of a resource curse which has come to plague multi-ethnic societies in Africa, especially those endowed with natural resources while others see it as a fall out of intolerance among the competing social formations constituting the country. In order to fill in the gap in existing literatures on South Sudan conflict, this paper examines the colonial linkage to South Sudan conflict which eventually influenced the trajectory of social relations in the country. The argument in this paper is that, the long years of oppression under Turko-Egyptian, British and Arab rules sowed the seeds of conflict that would later conflagrate the country. Thus, a major overhaul of the country's socio-political institutions needs to be done so as to ensure that the interests of all groups are adequately represented. The qualitative research method of secondary data collection was adopted in this paper with an historical and analytical approach to the study.

Keywords: State-building, conflict, colonial linkage, colonialism, social formations

Introduction

Africa's multi-ethnic societies have been associated with a high prevalence of conflict and this is often times attributed to the ethnic diversity of the continent (Fawole, 2004). On the surface, this assumption may sound logical to many, giving that African rebel movements are in most cases ethnically defined. Thus, ethnic identities and hatred are seen as the cause of violent conflict (Anyanwu, 2004). However, a quick glance at the continent's conflicts suggest that its civil wars are in tandem with global trend which is better understood by an examination of the political and economic configurations underpinning these societies. As a matter of fact, the history of post-colonial Africa has been characterized by intense intra-state conflict, violent crisis, political instability and anarchic state failure (Fawole, 2004).

Africa has had to contend with many violent conflicts which have exerted a heavy toll on the continents societies, politics and economies, depriving them of their development potential and democratic possibilities (Zezeza and Alfred, 2008). These violent conflicts as Anyanwu (2004) noted, pose a serious threat to the development of emerging nations because of their cataclysmic effect, as they can overturn large scale economic development that took decades to achieve. More so, they have a great effect on the capacity of these countries to mobilize their human and material resources for effective social transformation. Thus, Ake (1996) is of the opinion that this reality prevents the pursuit of development and the emergence of relevant and effective development paradigms and programs. In other words, violent conflicts can certainly pose fundamental challenges to regional and international peace and development (Dessalegn, 2017).

Sometimes, these conflicts can be so complex and intertwined such that the causative factors may not be easily discernible. This precarious situation has been the case in the horn of Africa where political stability remains bleak owing to the protracted state collapse of Somalia, deep hostility between Ethiopia-Eritrea, a fragile peace agreement between North and South Sudan (David, 2008), as well as continuing instability in South Sudan which is the focal point of this research work. Indeed, South Sudan has been enmeshed in a whirlpool of conflict that currently threatens its corporate existence as a nation. The euphoria and ecstasy generated by political freedom and independence have indeed dissipated, raising serious doubts as to the viability of the new nation. It is in a bid to unravel the root causes of this conflict and its implication for regional peace and development that this paper tries to explore how colonial factors sowed the seeds of discord among the competing socio-ethnic formations all of which would eventually threaten the stability of the new nation. To achieve this research objective, this paper has systematically been arranged with the following sub-headings – conceptual clarification, statement of the problem, literature review, the historical antecedence of South Sudan conflict, exploring the colonial linkage to South Sudan conflict, prospects for peace and security in South Sudan and lastly, conclusion.

1. Conceptual Clarification

There are six major concepts that were often used in this paper. Clarifying each of them at this juncture is needed for a proper understanding of this study.

i) State-building

Simply put, state-building is the holistic transformation of a country's socio-political institutions such that they are able to bring about development and stability as well as mediate among the competing social groups constituting the state.

ii) Conflict

Conflict connotes a divergence of interest between at least two parties which often times is expressed in a violent struggle over values, power, scarce resources etc. In such a struggle, the aim of each party is either to neutralize, injure or eliminate its opponent.

iii) Intra-state Conflict

This refers to a conflict that occurs within the borders of a sovereign nation or state, usually between the government and organized rebel group(s).

iv) Ethnic Group

An ethnic group is a set of people with common identity owing to kingship ties, origin, tradition, cultural uniqueness, history and possibly a shared language.

v) Colonization

This refers to the process of conquest, domination, administration and exploitation of a territory distant to a powerful country.

vi) Decolonization

By decolonization, reference is being made to all the activities and processes that led to the independence and political freedom of territories formerly subjugated to foreign imperial powers.

2. Statement of the Problem

Having gained independence from Sudan, one would have expected new levels of transformation to be undertaken by the political elite in South Sudan. Contrary to this reality, the country has been embroiled in an intense internecine conflict currently undermining its corporate existence as a nation with a grave implication on state-building. Several analyses have been undertaken by scholars in a bid to unravel the real cause of the crisis, some have attributed it to some resource curse which has come to plague the politics of developing nations (De Waal, 2014). While others see it as phase in the path to nation-building (Garang, 2015), yet to some, it can only be explained within the context of the country's social pluralism (Knopf, 2016). Just a few attempts have been made to situate the conflict within the colonial heritage that birthed the new nation. In view of these lapses, this paper tries to examine and engage the colonial factor and its concomitant effect on the state-building process in South Sudan.

3. Literature Review

Many scholars have been able to come up with different arguments in an attempt to explain the conflict that has engulfed the South Sudanese nation. Silva (2014:78) argues that the basic problem stems from the disparate 'tribal' societies that constitute the country's population. It is estimated that the country is comprised of more than sixty distinct cultural and linguistic groups, each of which have strong tribal loyalties (Deng, 2016). These tribal groups as he argued acted in unison whilst opposing the North during their struggle for self-determination. However, in the post-secessionist state, this key element has been removed with no other unifying issue to fill the gap. To Rolandsen *et al* (2015), the conflict in South Sudan is nothing but a manifestation of the tensions and fissures within the governing party which only resurfaced as a result of lack of internal cohesion within the South Sudan People's Liberation Movement (the rebel movement which wrestled power from the Government of Sudan), intense contest for leadership within the political elite, and a genuine political disagreement over, *inter alia*, relations with Sudan and constitutional arrangements. Thus in the absence of gross cohesion among party members, a power struggle became inevitable (2015:79).

Still in this regard, Johnson (2014) situates the crisis on internal divisions within the party. He argues that the parallel problem within the South Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) is that it finds it difficult to recover from the split it experienced in the 1990s over leadership tussle led by Riek Machar, Lam Akol, and others. During this period as it were, the Khartoum government supported various anti-SPLA factions with arms and money. In fact, some of the dissident leaders such as Riek Machar, Taban Deng Gai, and Lam Akol, returned to the SPLM/A before 2002 and were even reincorporated into the party due to their intellectual standing (Silva, 2014).

Warner (2013) contends that the root of South Sudan's ongoing crisis rests squarely on the issue of military integration and as well as in the disintegration of the southern resistance movement in the 1990s and the subsequent proliferation of other armed groups in Southern Sudan opposed to the SPLM/A which was never a revolutionary Army but a separatist movement aimed at the replacement of the ruling National Islamic Front (NIF) regime in Khartoum with a secular, democratically elected government (Onyango, 2012). The struggle is only explicable within the context of a power struggle which had polarized the nation all along, with some factions aligning with President Salva Kiir and others pitching their tent with Riek Machar (Fleischer, 2014). In another submission, Garang (2015:1) argues that the conflict is anchored on the weak institutional capacity of the State and its inability to evolve a conflict prevention mechanism. De Waal (2014) places the conflict on a tripod of corruption, political patronage and impunity. Some other scholars Sorbo (2014), have argued that the current crisis is woven around a lack of commitment to nation-building, this is because the post-independence period was more concerned with state formation, establishing power structure and authority, as opposed to nation-building which would require addressing the underlying drivers of conflict with a view to establishing a united South Sudan built on a common idea of national identity.

Johnson (2014), reveals that political parties in South Sudan are found to be the foci for rewarding the warlords dubbed as freedom fighters at the expense of participatory civilian structures, the nerves of ethnic factionalism over nationalism, exercise of centralized nomination system, all of which breeds disaffection and tensions among the citizenry. The International Crisis Group (2014) explains the conflict within the context of a long standing ethnic identity which has become a feature of most African politics, with ethnicity being a commonality at the present time which has only been invoked to defend political, social and cultural positions because it carries authority, beyond rationality, preference and choice. Koos and Gutschke (2014) pointed out that while much of the conflict is political, there are also ethnic drivers to the escalating violence and the two are often difficult to distinguish. Dinka and Nuer ethnic identities were deliberately politicized during the second civil war with militarized structures existing within communities.

Mehari and Abel (2013) have placed the conflict around a resource curse. Flowing from this argument is the belief that long before atrocious conflict erupted in December 2013, South Sudan was already demonstrating all the indicators of the resource curse. Ninety-eight percent of the government annual operating budget and 80 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is derived from oil, making South Sudan the most oil reliant country in the World (Nyathon et al, 2016), rather than use this revenue to invest in public service and infrastructure to improve livelihoods, the government financed a military and security apparatus. On the top of this, SPLA government officials had embezzled much of the revenues from this sector and deposited the money in foreign countries. In addition, Juba was benefiting a lot from oil money at the expense of other states in South Sudan (Tiitmamer and Awolich, 2015). Going further, Deng (2016) analyzes the conflict using a linkage approach and dealing with both domestic and external factors. He argues that at the national level, the “curse” of oil and “curse” of liberation orchestrated by weak institutions and poor policies were the primary production factors of the current war in South Sudan. At the regional level, unfriendly neighbours such as Sudan with narrow national security interest coupled with politics of the Nile Water, and politics of alternative pipeline for the oil of South Sudan all contributed indirectly in igniting the current crisis and dictated its regional dimension. At the global level, the politics of oil, post-Cold War politics and extractive operations of oil by multinational corporations have contributed indirectly in triggering the conflict in South Sudan (Lunn, 2016).

Kiranda *et al* (2016:2) highlighted the role of oil revenues in shaping the dynamics of elite bargains. Although oil provided the incentives among warring military elites to coalesce into a single organization and thereby enhance their strength to demand an independent South Sudan, oil revenues at the same time created perverse incentives that forestalled the implementation of principled reconciliation and the much needed political reforms, thus, effectively undermining any possibility of creating institutions for good governance. Hutton (2014) contends that the civil war in South Sudan is nothing but a transitory process in the politics of the SPLM/A, a group which is struggling to transform itself from an armed rebellion into a liberation movement and then a popular government.

Ottaway and El-Sadany (2011) have argued that the present conflict is a fall out of the sour relationship that existed between the Nuers and the Dinka during the wars of liberation. Flowing from this analogy, Morrow (2014:38) argues that the SPLM leadership as well as the SPLA has been largely held together by political necessity and sometimes, a desire for peace rather than a real common affinity or similar goal. Thus, the structural disunity only came to fore.

(De Waal, 2014) contends that President Salva Kiir's ideological and diplomatic weakness has continued to fan the embers of the violence that began as a military skirmish in December, 2013. Some such as Adwok (2014) have argued that the dissipation of the euphoria generated by independence is largely attributable to the potentially unrealistic and hurried independence granted to South Sudan. As far back as 2005, when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed, the international community optimistically assumed that this would lead to peace and stability in the region. It was even thought that peace could only become a possibility if Sudan was restrained militarily. However, recent events from the world's newest state has proved otherwise as the country has been locked in a vortex of crisis. In the light of this reality, what further explanation can be offered regarding the complexities and dynamics of the present South Sudan conflict? It is in this regard that the conflict needs to be historicized by engaging the colonial cum neo-colonial factors as our levels of analyses.

4. The Historical Antecedence of South Sudan Conflict

From the foregoing thus, any attempt to understand the present crisis in the world's newest nation must begin with a historical analysis of the socio-political circumstances and situations that birthed the country. Egyptian rule in South Sudan began as far back as the nineteenth century. Egypt under the rule of Khedive Ismail Pasha, first attempted to control the region in the 1870s thus establishing the province of Equatoria in the Southern portion (CIA, 2013). However, the Mahdist revolt of the 1880s destabilized the nascent province, and Equatoria ceased to exist as an Egyptian outpost in 1889. These revolutionaries overran the region in 1885. But in 1889, a British force overthrew the Mahdist regime (CIA, 2013). Consequently, an Anglo-Egyptian Sudan was established the following year, with Equatoria being the southern-most part of its eight provinces. The isolated region was largely left to itself over the following decades, but Christian missionaries converted much of the population and facilitated the spread of English language (Collins, 2013:45). During the British and Egyptians rule, there was an implicit divide and rule policy whereby the North and the South were administered separately and were treated differently (Kibret, 2015; 3). However, the Northern and Southern regions became integrated into a single administrative region following the British decision to grant independence to Sudan in 1956. Hence, a line of demarcation was drawn on 1st of January, 1956, which gave exclusive governmental control to the North.

Johnson (2003:24) explains that Sudanese independence was thrust upon Sudan by a colonial power eager to extricate itself from its residual responsibilities. It was not achieved by a

national consensus expressed through constitutional means. Little wonder after independence, two contentious issues arose which eventually created a fissure in the country's stability – the type of government to be adopted i.e. federalism or unitarism and, the nature of government – a secular one or one predicated on Islamic constitution.

While Southern politicians supported federalism as a way of protecting the Southern provinces from being completely subordinated and subsumed under a Northern dominated central government (Malwal, 1981:14), most Northerners rejected its logic, thus, seeing it as a first step towards separation, a dichotomy that would come to characterize modern Sudan. For the Southerners, failure to achieve a federal constitution was termed the 'Arabization and Islamization' of the country. On the whole, the colonial regime left behind a style of governance which was characterized by individualism and rigidity. This inevitably left Sudan to Arab Muslim rulers who lacked both the requisite ability to govern a modern state and the capability for solving political problems from a rational scientific manner, all of which were needed to keep the country intact. This eventually led to a situation of mistrust and intense animosity. It was during this period that the Dinkas and the Nuers were pitted against each other by the central government in Khartoum. When the Arab Khartoum government reneged on its promises as well as her adoption of policies of 'Islamization and Arabization', a mutiny began that led to two prolonged periods of conflict (1955-1972 and 1983 -2005) in which perhaps 2.5 million people died mostly civilians due to starvation and drought. In fact, a large number of people were displaced internally while some became refugees in neighbouring states (Varma, 2011:1).

This conflict only came to an end through the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). However in the CPA, there was a minute interest in guaranteeing political stability in the new nation about to be born. It only dealt with security, power distribution and wealth issues (Ahmad, 2010:7). The power agreement was geared towards creating an autonomous Government of South Sudan for a period of six years, and after the expiration of such period, there would be a referendum, scheduled for the year 2011, which was to be supervised by international monitors (De Waal, 2014).

Despite fears of a failed agreement, the terms were fulfilled and in 2010, national elections were held, followed by a referendum in 2011 which marked the end of a six year interim period agreement in the CPA. A new country had been born and was graciously received in the international community. It became the 193rd country to be recognized by the United Nations and the 54th member of the African Union (Debay, 2012). Today, the gains of independence are currently being undermined by grave political instability which began shortly after independence.

5. Exploring the Colonial Linkage to South Sudan Conflict

Several scholars – Okoyo (1977), Duala-M'Bedy (1984), Ake (1985) and Cohen (1995), regard the numerous conflicts in Africa as a corollary of the continent's colonial past. Okoyo (1977:93) argues that Africa's violent conflict is rooted in the very structure of its society

which is explainable within her colonial past. Even Africa's post-colonial situations can be said to have been fashioned for Africa by her colonial past. Cohen (1995) reveals that the sources and consequences of Africa's internal conflicts are traceable to colonialism, the subsequent processes of de-colonisation, patterns of state formation, as well as the ensuing crisis of nation-building.

The modern African states were created by colonial powers out of ethnic and regional diversities, and rendered conflictual by inequities in power relations, and in the uneven distribution of national wealth and development opportunities (Cohen 1995:11). It is on this basis that Duala-M'Bedy (1984:10), asserts that the problems being experienced by modern African States are based on their colonial experience. Cohen (1995:11) also faulted the de-colonisation process when he revealed that in many countries the contradictions of the colonial state were passed on to the independent states through a flawed process of de-colonisation. He argued that 'conflict, recurring instability, and bad governance in Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi can be traced back to the hasty and unprepared granting of independence by Belgium in 1960'. He also considered the major wars in Angola and Mozambique as arising out of 'panic de-colonisation from an unstable Portugal in 1974-7. This being the case, any argument which regards the colonial factor as irrelevant today may be misplaced. In addition, the need for a colonial analysis remains pertinent because the workings of colonialism are still with us because, post-coloniality is highly engaged with colonialism (Thomas 1994).

As he argues, if Africa had transcended colonial images and narratives more comprehensively, perhaps there would not be any need for a posthumous reflection on the subject (Thomas 1994). For instance, in the case of British Southern Cameroons, the United Kingdom (UK) failed to nurture a United Nations (UN) Trust Territory to Statehood in accordance with the UN Trusteeship Agreement. Rather, the UK lobbied the UN to hastily lump together British Southern Cameroons and a Trust Territory of France without constitutional guarantees for the disadvantaged former British Territory of Southern Cameroons (Achankeng, 2013).

As a matter of fact, insofar as the war in South Sudan is concerned, it seeds can be traced to the manner in which the Anglo-Egyptian administration brought the North and the different multi-ethnic societies in the South together, kept them apart under a separatist policy for most of the Condominium rule (Silva, 2014) and then, left them in a centralized unitary state without constitutional guarantees for the disadvantaged South. In this regard, Cohen's submission has a fundamental implication for understanding the various conflicts and the attempts to resolve such conflicts on the continent. If the causes and consequences of the conflicts have their roots in colonialism, the processes of de-colonisation and state formation, and the ensuing crisis of nation-building, then any bid to resolve the conflict must necessarily encompass the concepts of 'new institutions that will increase participation, legitimacy, and redistribution' and 'good governance' (Cohen 1993).

From the foregoing thus, the ‘crises of state building’ and ‘internal governance’ in Africa generally and South Sudan in particular can be traced to the colonisation and the de-colonisation of the country. Any discussion on internal governance and political stability cannot in any way extricate the structure of the state and the political leadership from its colonial inheritance, given that the basis for African states and political leadership in most part of the continent is colonial rule. Colonial rule was essentially military rule and by a simple transference, the new political class which inherited the mantle of the colonial masters also inherited the latter’s concept of leadership role that was structured in authoritarian terms (Okoyo, 1977). Indeed as Ake (1996) observes, the exclusivity of the competing political formations increases the premium on political power and the intensity of political competition.

By manipulating primordial loyalties, the Anglo-Egyptian rule sowed the seeds of hatred in what would later become South Sudan, and these seeds are what are responsible for the present conflagration being experienced in the new nation. Scarcely did the colonial government prepare Africans for self rule. In fact, an eventual independence was never anticipated which was merely the ‘deradicalization by accomodation’ (Ake, 1996). A majority of African leaders and the people in leadership positions at independence were handpicked by the colonial masters from the subservient educated elites who had played auxillary roles that facilitated capital transfers to the west during the heyday of colonialism. The circumstances of African history conspired to produce a ruling elite which could not function because it had no sense of identity or integrity and no confidence. It did not know where it was coming from nor where it was going (Ake, 1985:12). Whatever legitimacy colonialism possessed was derived not from any set of agreed rules or consensus, but from the monopoly of the means of coercion and violence, and by its divide-and-rule strategies aimed at intensifying the cleavages (class, tribal, and religious) inherent in the social structure and at prolonging its rule (Okoyo, 1977 cited in Achankeng, 2013:16). Colonial rule never placed emphasis on good governance. The only issue was power, power and more power.

Thus, blaming the institutional weaknesses of South Sudan on its current government may be an injustice if the country’s socio-economic and political history is not taken into account. The country suffered two centuries of economic and political exploitation under Turko-Egyptian rule, British colonialism and North Sudan administration. This was further aggravated by the neocolonial relations the country had to undergo while in the larger Sudan, the extractive nature of the relationship between the North and South (Kiranda et al. 2016:31) and, the master-servant relationship engendered by long years of oppression in Sudan. All of these left an indelible injury on the South from which the country is yet to heal.

6. Prospects for Peace and Security in South Sudan

As long as conflicts continue to break out in different parts of the world, so will efforts at resolving it. In view of this, I propose the following in order to ensure relative peace in South Sudan and guarantee regional stability.

Firstly, the most promising road in the nearest future is international arms control. Certainly, adversaries preparing for a fight do not need ground-to-air missiles to start a war. A number of African states are already embroiled in civil conflict. In view of this, arms control remains one of the possible ways to reduce the debilitating effect of war. It may not totally rid the world of conflict, but it sure would reduce the lethality of these wars.

Secondly, a representative and inclusive political order must be built in South Sudan's plural society. It is estimated that the country is comprised of more than sixty distinct cultural and linguistic groups with divergent political leanings (Silva, 2014). Thus, the present crisis may not be unconnected to the centrifugal interests of the competing social formations inhabiting the territory. A representative political order therefore will help mitigate the incidences of conflict in South Sudan and in Africa's plural societies since it will ensure that the interests of all social groups are adequately catered for.

Furthermore, given the way and manner in which South Sudan was hurriedly contrived by the international community, strong institutions will have to be created in order to help keep future conflict in check as well as to mediate between the disputants in the present conflict. In addition, democratization and good governance must be vigorously pursued and incorporated into the politics of developing nations as it will enhance pluralism, multi-partyism and guarantee constitutionalism while mitigating the entrenchment of state capture, sit-tight-syndrome and patrimonialism that characterize Africa's politics.

Conclusion

That South Sudan is presently embroiled in conflict is not a new thing, the region has been associated with crisis right from the Anglo-Egyptian conquest. However, what is of utmost importance to us, which this paper has demonstrated is that, the present conflict in South Sudan can better be understood if situated within the socio-historical processes which dictated the trajectory of the new nation and set in motion the acrimonious relationship which has come to condition the country's politics. By engaging the colonial factor in the present conflict, this paper showed that the long years of oppression under Anglo-Egyptian administration and subsequent neo-colonization by Sudan undermined the capacity of the state to build a critical mass of elite that would have undertaken the task of social transformation once independence had been achieved. Yet all hope in guaranteeing and consolidating peace and stability is not lost, as a level playing ground can be reached through a holistic reformation and reconstitution of the country's political institutions in order to ensure that no single individual would monopolize state power and the paraphernalia that comes with it.

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