African Journal of Economics, Politics and Social Studies (1/2022)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15804/ajepss.2022.1.06

Ethnic Politics in Sudan: Dynamics of Instability

Abdu Mukhtar Musa
Islamic University of Omdurman (Sudan)
https://orcid.org/0000-000-5927-8344

ABSTRACT: This paper explains how multiple identities have been formed in this highly diversified country through a historical and descriptive approach. The main objective of this paper is to probe the depth of the root causes of instability and civil wars in Sudan and examine the major factors of conflicts in the country since its independence from Britain in 1956. It also aims at explaining the dynamics that are interacting in Sudan's political scene and perpetuating instability. The paper is based on the hypothesis that Ethnic identities and tribal politics – practised by the ruling elite – hinder stabilisation and democratisation. It notes that the failure of the political elite to create a 'melting pot' for the diverse society resulted in a crisis of identity and conflicts and jeopardised national unity. The outcome of this is the secession of the South (in 2011) and the continuation of tensions in other "marginalised areas such as Darfur, South Kordofan, and the Blue Nile State. The absence of adequate and sound democracy, a lack of rational governance, and equitable socio-economic development aggravated grievances and led to wars in the country's south, west, and east. The paper believes that it is not only diversity that matters but that many other factors do – notably the failure of the elite to adopt sound policies for properly managing diversity. The paper suggests some sort of consociationalism along with proportional representation to put an end to military interventions and civil wars.

KEYWORDS: diversity, ethnic identities, tribal conflicts, (in)stability, marginalisation, democracy

Introduction

■ Sudan – a previous British colony in east Africa – has been in quest for stability since independence in 1956. It is a highly divided state with respect to its relatively small population (only 32 million after the secession of the South in 2011), occupying the land of one million square miles (prior to the secession of the South – now 1.8 million km). However, this article believes that the lack of stability refers more to the political elite's failure than other factors. It can be empirically supported as many developing countries of similar circumstances established a 'melting pot' entity and built a coherent society and a stable country.

This article is based on the **hypothesis** that: Elites' Mismanagement of ethnic diversity in Sudan is a major factor of crises, civil wars, and instability.

Corresponding author:
Prof. Abdu Mukhtar Musa, Islamic University of Omdurman, P.O. Box 382, 14415 Ondurman, Sudan.
E-mail: drmukhtar60@gmail.com

Background to Diversity

In order to study how far Sudan is diversified, it is significant to look briefly into the historical and anthropological background that gave birth to this multiplicity that some scholars describe as a "microcosm of Africa".

Generally, the term Sudan refers to the Savannah belt, which comprises a mixture of Semitic and Hamitic groups. Regions to the west of the Red Sea and south of Sahara to central Africa and westwards to West Africa and the shores of the Atlantic they call the land of the blacks (*Bilad al-Sudan*) (Abdel-Gadir, 1995, p. 86).

Sudan blends Arab culture, Islamic religion, and the African environment. It is a complex of diverse cultural trends. It is a product of Islamisation, carried out by missionary activities of a "wide spectrum of popular religious fraternity, or sufi *tariqas* (mysticism) which have cut across tribal boundaries … and achieved a remarkable degree of unity of purpose and outlook among their adherents" (Mudathir, 1985, p. 232). However, this national unity fostered by Islamisation and Arabisation did not extend to the South, which has maintained 'African', non-Arab identity.

The present diverse identity of Sudan can be viewed as an outcome of a long process of socialisation and acculturation developed through a process of historical, political and socio-economic adaptation. The most notable of this diverse socio-cultural fabric of Sudan was a product of peaceful mutual co-existence and religious tolerance between Muslim Arabs and Sudanese indigenous groups. "This process has always been the backbone and social fabric of the Sudanese culture and identity because it enabled different groups to mix and merge wishfully, thus forming wider groupings" (Hassan, 1993, p. 26). Islam had first entered northern Sudan (known as eastern Sudan) in the mid-seventh century through the emigrant Muslim merchants. Other waves of influx followed in mid the fourteenth century as the political influence of the Nubia began to decline. With the increase of the Arab-Islamic influence, the ruling family gradually became Muslim with Arab blood (Abu Saq, 1998, p. 150).

"Under the Funj Muslim kingdom (1504–1820) the active process of Islamization in the Sudan was spearheaded by the religious orders [*sufism* – mysticism]" (Hassan, 1993b, p. 75). The Turko-Egyptian period in the Sudan (1821–1885) marked the first signs of modernisation where the Turkish ruling elite constituted a colonialist instrument in Sudan and all over the Islamic world. However, this early phase of modernisation promulgated the western style without any spiritual content. It sought to "integrate Sudan in the European modernity and opened the country for slave trade, Christianization and alien rule" (Mekki, 1995, p. 12). This process was obstructed by the Mahdist revolution and state (1885–1898), which managed to restore the continuity and revival of the Islamic dimension of the country's cultural identity. The British rule (1898–1956) also failed to block the flow of this current of the Arab-Islamic culture, though they hindered it from going deep into the South by adopting the policy of 'closed districts'.

Given such ethnic overlapping in Sudan, it is not surprising that there are 115 languages. So, ethnic heterogeneity is paralleled by linguistic diversity. This heterogeneity dates back to early times. Sudan has been dominated by two types of people: a "darker negro people and a relatively lighter population referred to in the literature as 'Caucasian', 'Hamitic', 'red', Nubian', 'North African', Mediterranean or 'north-east African/West Asia'. This is enhanced by cultural variations and differences, especially languages which is a major parameter in the issue of identity" (Evans-Pritchard, 1935, p. 88).

Ali Mazrui sees Sudan as a "bridge between Arabic-speaking Africa and English-speaking Africa; between Christian Africa and Muslim Africa; between Africa of homogenised mass nation-states of the future and the Africa of the deep ethnic cleavages of the present; and finally, between Africa as a cultural unit and Eastern Africa" (Mazrui, 1985, p. 252).

This intermediacy "gives the Sudan a double identity as in her capacity as both African country in a racial sense and an Arab country in a cultural sense… the racial mixture and inter-marriage in the northern parts of the Sudan coupled with fact that a large portion of Arab Sudanese are in fact Arabised Negroes, rather than ethnically Semitic. For many of them Arabness is a cultural acquisition, rather than a racial heredity". This is not to negate that a considerable portion of Sudanese is (or claim to be) Arabs. It is for this dichotomous duality some maintain that the Sudanese "more than any other group of Arabs that have given the Arabs a decisive Negro dimension in this racial sense… The Sudan has made the biggest single contribution to the fact that Arabism includes a Negro dimension" (Mazrui, 1985b, p. 252). This also indicates that Arabs, "as a race, vary in colour from white Arabs as in Syria and Lebanon, brown Arabs of Hadramaut, to the black Arabs in Sudan" (Mazrui, 1985c, p. 242).

Formation of Ethnic Identities in Sudan

Since ethnicity implies distinctions based on race, religion, language, and other cultural attributes, it constitutes the underpinning of 'identity'. Therefore, ethnic conflicts in Sudan are somewhat of a conflict of identities. It was evident in Sudan that the civil war between the South and North (prior to secession) was an apparent manifestation of conflict of identities – between the Muslim/partly Arab North and the 'African', non-Arab, non-Muslim South. The people of the South (known as Southerners) differ from those of the North (Northerners) in terms of language, religion, race and culture (Musa, 2009, p. 165); hence, they have a distinct identity.

Of course, a melting pot mechanism depends on other factors; to single out one is the pace and intensity of assimilation. This process may take place through education and urbanisation. However, in Sudan, it is influenced by the Arab/Islamic dominant or core culture. Regardless of the path it had taken to do so, this core culture domination succeeded in melting the North of Sudan into one Arab/Islamic identity. The South remained intact because of the British colonial policy of 'closed districts', which aimed at blocking the flow of Arabisation and Islamisation to the South, which was already ethnically different from the North. It was part of the presumed competition between Islamic culture and British civilisation in this area of Africa: "We the British, who, whatever our failings, are better qualified than any other race, by tradition and taste and training, to lead primitives up the path of civic progress, are going to stand guard till the South can dispense with a guard, and I am not going to see the South dominated by an Arab civilisation in Khartoum, which is more alien to them than our own" (Mazrui, 1985d, p. 252).

Accordingly, a different identity had developed in the South. Thus, when the ruling elite in Khartoum tried for years to keep the southerners united in one country with the northerners of Sudan, the Southerners resisted and took arms to gain independence (Musa, 2009b, p. 180).

Nevertheless, some ethnic minorities have persistently maintained ethnic distinctions even in the North. They believe they are underprivileged on ethnic/racial bases as the ruling elite in the capital Khartoum, who belong to certain 'dominant' ethnicities, monopolise wealth and power, which are channelled along with ethnic lines. These marginalised or excluded ethnic groups are primarily of non-Arab origin. The educated class of these groups has always been complaining of 'Arab racial supremacy', along with the "racially biased hegemony" (Abdelsalam, 1989, p. 41). However, the late John Garang, the ex-leader of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), made a distinction between Arabism as a culture and ethnic superiority: the "SPLM does not reject Arabism as a cultural identity but rejects it when the concept is used to convey a sense of political supremacy based on racial heredity" (Abdelsalam, 1989b). Therefore, the whole question is related to conflict of identities which is, in turn, an outcome of the ruling (Northern) elites' ethnic political behaviour, especially with respect to mismanagement of ethnic diversity.

Structural inequalities, disparities between the Centre and the peripheries and domination of a certain limited number of tribes over the power and wealth of the country – while depriving the majority – are responsible for stirring up ethnic radicalism and separatism. The so-called "growth pole strategy" adopted by the Anglo-Egyptian administration in Sudan was taken over by the national elites after independence which reflected the concentration of all the socio-economic activities in the central region – Khartoum province, the Northern and riverbank provinces – whereas neglecting the rest of the country (Roden, 1974, p. 506). Of course, this constitutes a setback to nation-building.

The elite of the marginalised regions believes that Al-Beshir Islamic government, through its ideological approach, instead of establishing the state of the rule of law and justice, pursued policies that produced the state of classes and identities: the "social stratification and class structure in Sudan took – through the reign of Al-Beshir's government – the shape of organic overlapping between ethnicity and class structure. It has developed a false sense of superiority to some ethnic groups, whereas motivated a feeling of injustice and persecution of others" (Ebrahim, 2007).

Land: A Factor of Conflicts

Generally, access to land and land acquisition may not be an issue for the advanced world because this is primarily (or rudimentarily) settled by laws. However, land ownership has always been a sensitive and complicated issue in the Third World.

In developing countries, the land is a source of wealth, power, influence, and pride (social prestige) at the individual and communal (family or tribes) levels. It is typically the case in Sudan, where land is also loaded with a sense of belonging – a question of existence and identity. Sultanates and kingdoms – such as Darfur – held lands over centuries and even named them after the name of the tribe ('Dar' means land – the land of the Fur tribe). Darfur occupies a region as big as France.

Consequently, as a source of all these values, land acquisition in Sudan has also been a source of conflicts. It is because land acquisition – especially in rural areas – occurs on an ethnic basis. Hence, it constitutes one reason for tribal conflicts and, therefore, a major dynamic of instability in the country.

In the past, there was no problem with land acquisition in Sudan as very few people lived in a large country. The land was common among people. Every person gets as much land as she likes or needs, particularly in primitive agricultural and pastoral communities. Then it became common to the people of a region. Then it was confined to a tribe – protected by a sword. Then ownership went down to the family level, preserved by customs, and finally, individual ownership governed by legislation (Al-Siddiq, 2019, p. 9).

The introduction of laws coincided with the increase in the population and the rise of land use for different purposes – including investment. In Sudan, in 1971, the local People's Councils were vested with the power of land registration – to legalise the de facto acquisition of land. However, this resulted in conflicts as the federal authority allocated land for investors. Also, disputes erupted by the contradiction between the *de facto* and the *de jure* ownership of land. Accordingly, in 2007 a law was issued which stripped the local councils from the power of granting and registering land ownership – obtained by the acquisition on the base of 'historical' rights recognised by customs. This law – further amended in 2013 – prohibits any local authority from issuing any certificate of land acquisition. This law repealed the Law of 1984 (amended 1994), which considered the land registered to the person who uses (resides on) it. So, the 'actual' acquisition should not be legal only if the land is registered at the Ministry.

One good example of the violent and bloody conflicts over land among tribes is between the two nomad tribes: Al-Rizeigat and Al-Ma'aliya. Both claim an Arab origin. They live in the eastern part of the Darfur Region – in 2013, it became a separate state (East Darfur). Al-Rezeigat claims they are the land's original inhabitants, and Al-Ma'aliya came from other parts of Sudan. Both claim historical rights to the land (similar to the dispute between Israel and Palestine). Al-Rezeigat said they allowed the Ma'aliya to settle with them and granted them "Nazara" (an administrative unit under Nazir – a post or title above Omda: mayor). However, Al-Ma'aliya claims that they had arrived from northern Kordofan to eastern Darfur in 1776 before the arrival of Rezeigat, and other tribes, from Chad.

Two categories of conflicts are noticed here: (Egemi, 2014) (i) local level conflict: This is the most common type and includes local conflicts between pastoralists or nomads on the one hand and farmers on the other, or among pastoralist communities, over land, water, grazing and forest resources. They also include competition within and between tribal groups over community boundaries, mining resources and livestock routes that become major zones of conflict; (ii) conflicts over Investment Capital: large-scale investments in land, water, and natural resources – especially involving dam construction, mechanised agriculture, oil exploration and drilling have fuelled a wide range of conflicts in Sudan, besides the recently discovered gold fields in many parts of the country.

Concerning environmental factors (to take Darfur as an example), the region was hit by severe desertification and drought in the mid-1980s – as part of climatic changes throughout this belt of Sub-Sahara Africa. It had led to the displacement of many people in Darfur – from the desert areas in the north to the rainy savannah areas in the South – pushing people of different ethnic groups to a limited green area. It put more pressure on the available pasture for grazing and limited water sources – for both people and animals. Tension erupted between the local farmers and the in-coming nomads whose herds invaded the farms. These problems used to be peacefully settled by the Native Administration, which enjoyed supreme status among the nomads and the rural areas. Non-official courts also existed in urban areas – side by side with the courts of civil/modern courts. Norms and customs act on a par with law.

These traditional courts (popular or informal courts) function effectively in remote areas where government institutions do not exist or reach. That is why the dissolution of the Native Administration without filling the resultant vacuum with official institutions of security and law generated instability as tribal conflicts were triggered by drought, desertification, grazing areas, water resources, and land (see Figure 1).

So, when the educated class of Darfur took arms against the central government of Khartoum – by the late 1990s and early 2000s – for injustice and marginalisation, one of the two major armed movements: the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), was dominated by a Zaghawa majority; the other – the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM) – was mostly fleshed by the Fur, also a big tribe. Those who came to Sudan, escaping tension in Chad, brought arms and sold them to Darfurians. Now tribes in Darfur had modern weapons as well as the opposition movements. Hence, modern weapons were used instead of the traditional ones (knives, swords, spears), raising the number of victims in tribal clashes – particularly since the 1990s.

Generally, tribal disputes in Sudan are linked to multiple causes and factors such as disputes over land, water resources, the pastures that intersect with the cultivated land, and animal abuse on farms, as well as environmental degradation, drought and desertification, theft and reprisal, and the flow of weapons from neighbouring countries – including the new one. All triggered the tribal and ethnic strife (Arabs versus non-Arabs/Africans) (Musa, 2018, p. 3).

With regard to land as a factor of conflict, it is notable that land was traditionally owned on an ethnic/tribal basis. The land tenure on such form is known as "Hakura" – for singular – and "Hawakeer" – for plural (i.e., landholding). It is also called *Dar* (tribal land). The region is named after the major tribe (Fur). Thus "Dar Fur" (Darfur) means the land of the Fur tribe.

Land in Darfur is a cause and consequence of communal conflicts. "The warfare in Darfur is essentially an attempt by the drought-stricken livestock herders to drive the Fur out of their fertile wet region. The Arabs are trying to capture the entire region and drive away the Fur who, in turn, are fighting to retain their land for themselves" (Suleiman, 1994, p. 11). Some areas of Darfur from which the Fur, Massalit, Zaghawa, and a host of other African tribes were displaced are now occupied by nomads across Sudan's borders. Unofficial estimates put the number of such migrants in Darfur at about 500,000. In July 2007, an internal UN report showed that up to 30,000 Arabs from Chad and Niger crossed the border of Darfur in May and June 2007 alone. Most of these people arrived with all their belongings and were greeted by Sudanese Arabs who took them to empty villages cleared by the *Janjaweed* forces. It is noticed that the newly migrant nomads systematically reject offers from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to register and provide them with humanitarian assistance and protection (Jibril, 1985). The new arrivals have been issued with official "Sudanese identity cards and awarded citizenship" (Bloomfield, 2007). According to an ex-US Special Envoy to Sudan, Mr. Andrea Natsios, "there is evidence the Sudanese are doing a population resettlement programme where they are bringing Arabs from Niger and Chad into western Darfur, giving them land and citizenship papers so they can vote in election" (Natsios, 2007).

Thus, as already discussed, communal (non-state) conflicts in Sudan were partly triggered by conflicts over land – such as between herders and farmers. However, the essence of the problem is not a matter of 'scarce resources' as some theories suggest. Darfur is very rich in natural resources. The underlying cause here is the failure of the ruling elite to exploit the region's potential. The northern part of the region indeed suffers from an acute problem with water, especially in dry seasons. However, it is also true that the region floats on underground water sufficient to tackle the problem if it is exploited. It is besides various types of minerals – including gold and oil.

Because the central government does not allocate adequate (equal share) of finance to the region to dig wells and provide other services, the region maintained a 'relative' backwardness. This negligence and uneven development (or marginalisation) is the real cause for the mutiny against the central government of Khartoum. It was generally believed that the cause of communal or inter-tribal conflicts in Darfur was drought and desertification that hit the region in the mid-1980s. However, the bare fact reveals that the lack of water and poor services pre-existed prior to those ecological factors and persisted thereafter. It proves that environmental or natural disasters were short-lived, and the suffering continued to be 'man-made' (de Waal & Glint, 2008).

Consequently, with the spread of education – since the late decades of the twentieth century – a new generation of an educated class in Darfur emerged and began to voice their people's grievances. In the beginning, they made a peaceful outcry. Nevertheless, the government turned a deaf ear to their claims. They supported their case (of injustice and marginalisation) with solid data supported by accurate statistics. However, the government described those who raised the claims as a "racist movement". It decided to crush them by force. When they took arms to defend themselves, the government described them as "outlaws". Consequently, the problem became an international crisis (Musa, 2009b, p. 65).

The situation was further aggravated when the educated elite of Darfur began to voice their people's grievances – peacefully in the beginning. Then, by the mid-1990s, when the central government turned a blind eye to their claims, some of the educated elite of Darfur wrote a book (in Arabic) titled "Al-Kitab Al-Aswad" (the Black Book) on the "imbalance of the share of power and wealth" (Musa, 2018b, p. 2). The book, whose authors are not identified, is supported with figures – factual evidence – that prove deprivation, inequitable development and marginalisation practised by the central government against certain regions on an ethnic basis. These ethnic-based policies shifted the conflict from communal (inter-tribal) to state-violence. The new factor was that the region's elites had come to be aware that the issue was not here – among them – rather the central government responsible for their suffering, conflicting over 'limited' resources, and excluding them on an ethnic basis. Therefore, they united to submit their claims to the central government.

Some Tribal Conflicts (Empirical Explanations)

Disputes and conflicts erupt in traditional tribal-based societies from time to time due to overgrazing or tribal reprisal, but they are usually limited and contained by tribal customs. Since the rates of conflict, the casualties, and the magnitude of losses have increased over a short time, with higher frequency, this has become a phenomenon affecting the social structure and political stability. These conflicts and disputes are not only worthy of being studied but also reflect the failure of policies. For instance, in the third millennium's first decade, bloody tribal conflicts in Sudan resulted in 2,500 deaths (Musa, 2015).

Throughout the successive decades of tribal conflicts, the curve has been showing an upward trend. Although the tribal conflicts increased from the mid-1970s from 7 to 9 in the second half of the 1980s, the shift in the curve occurred in 1989/1990 (the eve of Al-Beshir rule), which witnessed 17 tribal disputes. It was followed by 25 in 2000–2009, a higher rate than the two previous decades (six disputes in 1991for example). So, if we consider the year of independence (1956) as the base year, it can be seen that the rate began to rise every decade (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

In the first decade of Al-Beshir (1989–1999), there were 25 tribal conflicts (see Table 1). So, this means that the disputes and conflicts are more than three times of the decade of the 1980s (6 disputes/conflicts only). It is noted that in 2000, for example, there were 8 tribal wars in Darfur; 5 in 2006 and 4 in 2005, and the same in 2008. But the most important observation is that about 20 bloody conflicts occurred in one year (2013) – of which 15 were between January and May of the same year and repeated between two tribes – attacks from the Bani Halba tribe on the Qimir tribe.

If the tribal disputes increased during the rule period of Nimeiri in the 1970s because of the dissolution of the Native Administration, but the number of conflicts during the Al-Beshir/Islamist era doubled due to the politicisation of the Native Administration after its reinstatement. Therefore, if we take the first 16 years – total years of Nimeiri rule (1969–1985) compared with the 16 years

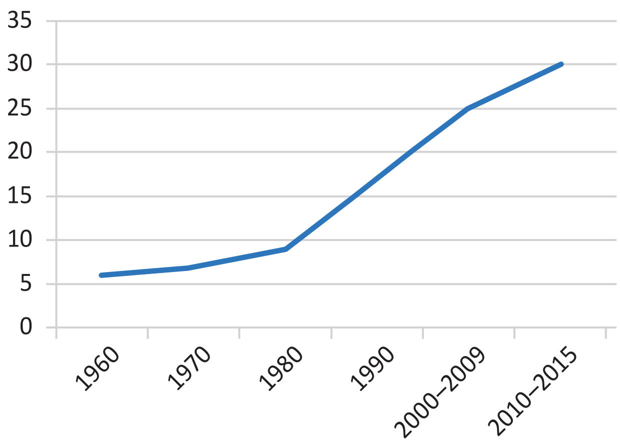
Table 1. Number of tribal (bloody) conflicts in each decade since independence

The decade (the period)	Number of disputes (Conflicts)
1960s (20th century)	6
1970s	7
1980s	9
1990s	17
First deciles of the second millennium (2000–2009)	25
First half of the second deciles of the third millennium (2010–2015)	31
Total	**95**

Source: Musa, 2009, p. 13.

of the Islamists' rule (1989–2005) – we find that the total conflicts in the Nimeiri period were 12 while in the 16 years of the Islamists were 36 conflicts/ incidents – almost three times. The great paradox is that during the 85 years – the period of monitoring tribal conflicts in Sudan (1930–2015) – one observes that the total of conflicts in the period of the Al-Beshir Government (25 years: 1989–2015) has outnumbered all of the previous periods, in which the Al-Beshir period has witnessed 75 tribal conflicts (Bloody violence) compared to 23 cases during 60 years – which has preceded the Islamists' Government (Musa, 2018c, p. 12).

Figure 1



Source: Musa, 2009, p. 13.

The Role of Elites' Ethnic Political Behaviour

It may be argued that the new ruling (ethnic) elite inherited the centralised state power from the Turko-Egyptian period (1820–1885), which produced a periphery-centre phenomenon. With the spread of education in independent Sudan and with the rise of general awareness, paradoxically, ethnicity increased. Since the early years of independent Sudan, the northern elite, who represented only a few ethnic groups out of 572 Sudanese tribes, continued to monopolise the country's resources and power.

Instability and conflicts have been triggered by the irrational political behaviour of the ruling elite since independence, where only three major tribes have dominated the country's central power. These are: the Shaigiyya, Danagla, and Ja'aliyyin (see Table 2).

Table 2 indicates that:

1. The top three tribes of North Sudan (Danagla, Ja'aliyyin and Shaigiya) had participated in all cabinets since independence.
1. The volume of participation of these three tribes topped the power structure of 18 participant tribes.
2. The Ja'aliyyin, for instance, formed 25% during the 2nd military regime (of General Numair, which lasted for 16 years (1969–1985). For this apparent discrepancy, the educated class of the other marginalised tribes and areas has always complained of injustice and exclusion. It seems unfair to give a quarter of the cabinet to one tribe against 17 – particularly when compared to more than 500 tribes of the country (572 tribes constitute 50 ethnic groups).
3. Also, it is notable that three presidents who governed the country for 63 years of independent Sudan belong to two of the major three tribes of the Northern region: General Ibrahim Abboud (Shaigiya), General Nimairi (Danagla), Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi (Dnagla), and General Al-Beshir (Ja'aliyyin).
4. Regarding the tribes of the South of Sudan (the Dinka, Nuer, and Zande), it is a tradition or a matter of courtesy that the South of Sudan is to be represented in the cabinet – to give sense or impression that the composition of the cabinet is "national" and to alleviate the feeling of injustice on the part of southerners as well as other minorities (the Nuba of South Kordofan, Darfur, and the Blue Nile state). Though this might shutter the claim of being excluded, it asserts the claim of being underrepresented.

These marginalised regions and ethnic groups also believe that this poor representation is also further weakened by the fact that they are given the least important ministries, such as sports and animal resources. They argue that they are not taking part effectively in the inner clique of policy-making and decision-taking. It is to be noted that these figures were compiled prior to the secession of the South.

For the Ababeda, it is noticed that they also belong to the tribes of the Northern region (formed of two states – the Northern state and the River Nile state). They were represented by 12.50%, 2.8%, and 0.5% in the three military regimes. Actually, the three leaders of the three regimes (Generals: Abboud, Nimairi, and Al-Beshir) belong to the Northern region (to the north of Khartoum, the capital).

The Nuer tribe in the South (the second to the Dinka) was represented only twice in the first and second democratic governments (the mid-1950s and 1965–1969). Shukriya is also a marginalised tribe in the east of Sudan. It was under-represented (by

Table 2. The tribal affiliation of ministers in all Sudanese governments from independence (1956) to 1998

Name of tribe	The first democratic govt.	The first military regime (1958–'64)	The second democracy (1965–'69)	The second military regime 1969–'85	The third democracy 1986–1989)	The third military (of al-Beshir 1989–)
Danagla	16%	8.33%	10.20%	8.86%	8.59%	16.11%
Jaaliyyin	3%	12.5%	6.12%	25.32%	8.59%	15.17%
Shaigiya	3%	16.67%	12.24%	4.34%	9.38%	12.80%
Mahass	10%	4.17%	4.8%	8.10%	–	5.795
Mawalid	12%	25%	–	4.81%	1%	2.84%
Bederiya	10%	–	6.12%	2.3%	6.25%	2.36%
Nubians	8%	4.17%	–	1%	1.56%	–
Dinka	9%	–	6.12%	4.56%	7.81%	7.11%
Nuer	5%	–	4.8%	–	–	–
Halfawin	4%	4.17%	–	1.52%	1.56%	–
Merafab	3%	–	8.16%	–	1%	,.5%
Shukriya	3%	–	–	–	–	,.5%
Zandi	3%	–	–	–	2.34%	2.37%
Funj	1%	–	–	1.1%	–	–
Ababeda	–	12.50%	–	2.78%	–	,.5%
Jwama'a	–	8.33%	–	1.77%	1%	–
Rekabiyya	–	–	–	4.81%	1%	–
Rebatab	–	–	–	3.4%	1%	2.84%

Note: values are given in percentages.

Source: The Republican Palace (the Presidency), Khartoum, 1998 after: Musa, 2009, p. 558.

3%) in the first democratic government and 0.5% in the last (Al-Beshir's) government. The same applies to the (Funj non-Arab) tribe of the Blue Nile state. This Blue Nile state – along with South Kordofan and South Darfur – constitutes the greater part of the (new) South after the secession of the South in 2011. This new South includes a majority of non-Arab tribes. To give a few examples: The Funj (of the Blue Nile), The Nuba (of South Kordofan) and many tribes in the Darfur region.

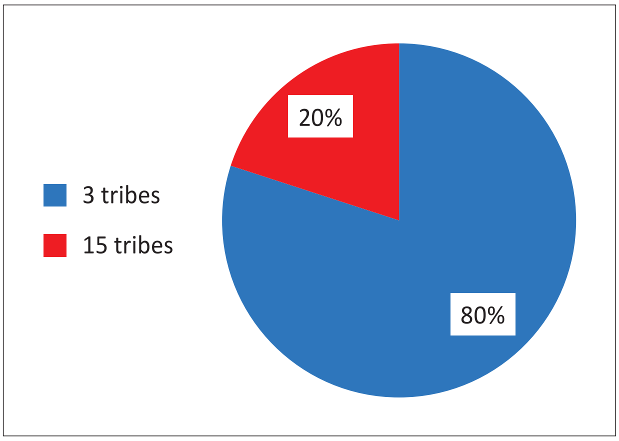
Again, with regard to the three 'Northern' tribes' (Ja'alyiin et al., n.d.) share in the cabinet of the central government over four decades, we find that they had taken nearly an average of two-thirds (65%) of the seats – at one term of office the Ja'aliyyin took 70%, the Danagla at a different one enjoyed 68% and at another period the Shaigiyya took 57%. However, Shaigiyya's participation is qualitatively more effective in influencing decision-making institutions. They always form the core of the centres of power.

In further detail, these top three tribes, which were not absent from any cabinet since independence, it is notable that they formed 22% of the first democracy (1956–1958), 37.5% of the 1st military regime (1958–1964), 29% of the 2nd democracy (1965–1969), 39% of the 2nd military regime (1969–1985), 26.5% in the 3rd democracy (1986–1989) and 44% of Al-Turabi/Al-Beshir Islamic government (1989–2019). The three military leaders, who governed Sudan for 52 out of 63 years of independence, belong to these three tribes. These percentages of the three tribes are counted against the 18 tribes that have been participating in the Executive since independence.

Thus, these three influential tribes which dominate the average of the power sharing against 15 other tribes, and as compared to over 500 tribes of the country it will be questionable. Moreover, when one considers the tribes of the two Northern states (Shaigiyya, Ja'aliyyin, Danagla, Mahas, Merafab, Halfawiyin, Bederiya, Mawalid, Rekambiyya, Ababeda, and Rebatab) collectively we find that they form an overwhelming majority – actually domination – over the central government of Sudan. The case will be further obvious when one excludes the three tribes of the South (Dinka, Nuer, and Zande).

When we exclude the three tribes of the South, 15 tribes remain. Then there are the tribes which belong to other parts of Sudan apart from the Northern region of Sudan (Funj, Jwamaa, and Nubians). We have 12 tribes from one region (two states) against 3 from the rest of Sudan – 18 states. It is also notable that three tribes (from two states) are monopolising 80% of power in Sudan (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ethnic imbalance of power structure in Sudan



The same observation of tribal affiliation applies to the regional affiliation of ministers in the cabinet (table 3). If we take the centre of Sudan – along with the River Nile banks, we have the regions of Khartoum, Northern region (two states), Central region and White Nile. Their participation was as follows:

1. At some periods, Khartoum had the lion's share: 41% in the first military regime and 44% in the 2nd democratic regime. This share dropped to 17% in the reign of Al-Beshir's military/Islamic regime (1989–2019) because it tried to broaden the participation base, appealing to popular support for its undemocratic system (it assumed power by a military coup on June 30, 1989).
2. Notably, Khartoum and the Northern states have had the most ministerial posts in all governments since independence. At some time, Khartoum took nearly half of the cabinet and the Northern region one-quarter, leaving the rest to be shared by other regions. It means that two regions take more than half of the seats against 9 regions.
3. Some note that the percentage of the Khartoum state is also dominated, in reality, by those who belong to the Northern region – namely the Shaigiyya, Danagla, Jaaliyyin, and Mahas – are resident in Khartoum.
4. Certain regions are poorly represented, such as the east, the South, Kordofan, and Darfur. However, those are bigger in terms of population and area (Abdelsalam, 1988c, pp. 33–37). The three tribes of the Northern region (the Northern and Nile states) – Shaigiyya, Danagla, and Ja'aliyin – have taken part in all national governments in Sudan since independence. They were not absent from any cabinet. It is also notable that they have enjoyed the greatest share (the highest percentage) compared to other tribes that happened to be represented (Musa, 2010, p. 558).
5. The educated class of the Darfur region sees that their region (three states by 1994 and five after 2013) has been underrepresented because it constitutes one-fifth of Sudan's population and 20% of the country's area (as big as France). They think that the old percentage is being maintained – favouring the tribes of the northern region – despite the greatest number of tribes that took part in Al-Beshir's government. It gave other marginalised regions and tribes only 'marginal' ministries (Musa, 2009b, p. 39).

This tribal prejudice triggered a conflict of identities among the different ethnic groups in North Sudan (Sudan has about 570 tribes which constitute 50 major ethnic groups). This racial/ethnic discrimination was the major cause of the secession of the South in 2011.

It is generally noted that power and wealth are monopolised by the northern region and the middle or the "centre" of Sudan, known by the elites of the marginalised areas as the "Nile Centre" or the "Riverian Centre" (*al-wassat al-neeli*) which denotes the tribes that reside on the two banks of the River Nile (or the "Riverian North"); also known as the central northern belt. The remaining people who dwell off the river banks are denied equal development opportunities. Those peripheries are disadvantaged in terms of the share of power, wealth and services. So, they have remained relatively backward, underdeveloped and impoverished.

Table 3. Regional affiliation of ministers in Sudanese governments since independence (1956–1998)

Name of region	The first democratic govt.	The first military regime (1958–'64)	The second democracy (1965–'69)	The second military regime 1969–'85	The third democracy 1986–1989)	The third military (of al-Beshir 1989–…)
Khartoum	31.17%	41.67%	44.90%	32.15%	21.9%	17.54%
Northern	25.97%	25%	16.33%	11.65%	11.72%	35.55%q
Eastern	3.90%	8.33%	2.4%	3.45	5.475	1.9%
Upper Nile (south Sudan)	10.39%	–	6.12%	2.78%	7.81%	7.58%
Equatoria (south)	5.19%	–	2.4%	1.1%	6.25%	4.27%
Bahr al–Ghazal (south)	3.90%	4.17%	4.8%	1%	–	5.21%
Darfur		–	4.8%	1%	7.81%	5.64%
Kordufan	–	4.17%	6.12%	8.61%	14.6%	11.85%
Blue Nile	2.60%	–	–	4.30%	1.56%	1.42%
White Nile	2.60%	–	8.16%	5.32%	4.69%	7.11%
Central region	14.29%	16.66%	204%	7.9%	5.47%	3.79%

Note: Values are given in percentage.

Source: The Republican Palace (the Presidency), Khartoum, 1998 after: Musa, 2009, p. 559.

This situation constitutes the basic drive for mutiny and civil wars in Sudan. These disadvantaged areas include The South (seceded in 2011), Darfur in the West, Kordofan in the Middle West (particularly the Nuba ethnic groups in South Kordofan), the state of the Blue Nile (Musa, 2009c) and the Eastern region (with some Arab tribes such as Al-Reshaida who claim to belong to Saudi Arabia). Darfur, Nuba Mountains (of South Kordofan), and the Beja (in the East) have formed their own regional/ethnic movements since the early 1960s as channels to voice their grievances and get a share in equitable and comprehensive development. These movements developed into armed opposition and led to a mutiny against the successive central governments of Khartoum.

The Question of Diversity (some examples)

Thus, Sudan could be envisaged as a poly-ethnic country. Scholars believe that Polyethnicity "divides nations, complicating the politics as local and national governments attempt to satisfy all ethnic groups. Many politicians in poly-ethnic countries attempt to find a balance between ethnic identities within their country and the identity of the nation as a whole" (McNeil, 1986). Many have succeeded, but others have not. Sudan is one of the latter cases.

Pure Arab tribes are a minority in Sudan. The majority are the non-Arab, or those known as "African" in ethnic and cultural terms – not geographical. However, on average, one may maintain that the majority are those who are a hybrid between the two – Arabs and non-Arabs or Afro-Arabs. In terms of colour, the black outnumbers the brown and the semi-white groups. However, in terms of culture, language, and religion, the Arab Islamic identity dominates – particularly after the secession of the South.

Generally, the emigrant Arabs – who settled in Sudan – have been 'Africanised' over centuries, and the Africans, or Negroes (in Sudan), have been Arabised, and both are Islamised. Only a few ethnic groups can be distinguished as of 'pure Arab' origin. So that many Sudanese scholars and intellectuals suggest that Sudanese are not to talk about Arabism, Africanism, or even Afro-Arabism, but rather of "Sudanism" or describe themselves as "Sudanese" – as a distinct identity to avoid conflict of identities or disintegration of the country.

Table 4. Ethnographic and anthropological studies categorised the inhabitants of Sudan into the following ethnic groups

The Ethnic group	Percentage to population
The Arabs	39%
The southerners (Nilotic and other tribes)	30%
The Africans (of Western Sudan)	13%
The Nuba (S. Kordofan)	6%
The Beja (East Sudan)	6%
The Nubians (the far North of Sudan)	3%
Other various groups	3%
Total	100%

Note: This table was designed before the secession of the South of Sudan – which is pure non-Arab. After secession, the Arabs may constitute more than (50%) of the population of the 'Republic of the Sudan'. However, a considerable portion of those 'Sudanese Arabs' – or who claim to be Arab – are not purely Arabs. Until now, there is no accurate data or statistics about this claim.

Source: Haider, 2002, p. 140 after: Musa, 2009, p. 134.

However, it may be argued that linguistic, religious, ethnic, or national diversity does not endanger political stability in a state but rather the politicisation of diversity. Sudan provides a typical example for this thesis.

This hypothesis could be proven by looking into some diversified countries whose elites managed to build a coherent society and stable country in situations that are even far more diversified than Sudan – notably the United States of America, India and Nigeria.

In reality, ethnic-based identification overrides the cultural (religion and language) identity. It is also notable that ethnic groups and castes are far bigger in number in other countries than in Sudan. For instance, there are 3000 castes, 780 languages, 7 religions, and 1.1 milliard of the population in India. Despite the great diversity of India – particularly the number of castes and languages – this semi-continent enjoys a relatively stable political order and is described as the largest democracy in developing countries. It also applies to the USA, where the elite created a 'melting pot' out of multiple identities. Moreover, in Nigeria, which accounts for more than five folds of Sudan's population and is multi-religious, it managed to build a relatively stable state. It reveals that the question of identity melting pot and stability is a product of – and so depends on – the political behaviour of the ruling elite.

Conclusion

Thus, the chemistry of the problem of instability and civil wars in Sudan is obvious. It is an outcome of discrimination and exclusion on an ethnic basis, ethnicisation of politics, conflicts of identities, and tribal conflicts, are all tied to – or revolve around – one major drive: the failure of the ruling elite to deal objectively and neutrally with the mosaic of the ethno-cultural multiplicity of Sudan.

Also, deprivation and disadvantage, as products of the lack of comprehensive and equitable development that gave birth to such concepts as the "marginalised areas", and the "cultural superiority" of the tribes of the Riverbank areas (of the middle and north Sudan on both banks of the River Nile) are, in the final analysis, an outcome of the ruling elite's behaviour and policies. This racially motivated behaviour of the ruling elite and the related discourse in dealing with certain regions – on an ethnic basis – have accumulated over the years producing a negative psychological impact and framing a negative image of the ruling elite (who belongs to certain ethnicities/tribes).

So, for this political elite's failure to manage the ethno-cultural diversity to bring about social cohesion and establish a coherent state, Sudan has been embracing different types of disputes and intra-state conflicts: communal conflicts, inter- and intra-tribal conflicts, conflict of identities, insurgency and civil wars.

One of the solutions to help in overcoming the deep-rooted racial behaviour in Sudan is the rule of law under a proper democratic system. It is what is lacking in Sudan – as in many developing countries. The term "rule of law" may not be worrisome to a "Westerner" or a person of a democratic state because this is already settled. However, for most (if not all) developing countries, it is a big issue. The matter may not be related to the 'rule of law' *per se* but more to culture as well as political will. It is because laws are more respected in democratic systems than in underdeveloped and undemocratic countries. So, it may be broadly related to ethics as well as to commitment, behaviour and culture. To tackle these levers of instability and civil war in Sudan, one may suggest the adoption of consociationalism. Suppose a consociation type of democracy is properly applied in Sudan. In that case, it might help in averting conflicts caused by injustice, exclusion or marginalisation as the power-sharing formula will effectively redress the grievances and claims of minorities and the underrepresented deprived groups in the country.

References

Abudlrahim, M. (1985). Arabism, Africanism and Self-identification. In Y. F. Hassan, *Sudan in Africa*, part two: the Sudan Today. Studies presented to the First International Conference Sponsored by the Sudan Research Unit, 7–12 February 1968). Khartoum University Press.

Al Beshir, E. H. (2017, December 5). *Marginalization and The Crime of Ethnicity* (in Arabic). Al-Sudani.

Al-Siddiq, N. A. (2019, February 23). *Acquisition of Lands between the Administrative Authorities and Ministry of Housing: Conflict between D' facto and D' jure Ownership* (in Arabic). Al-Sudani.

de Waal, A., & Flint, J. (2008). *Darfur – a New History of Long War.* International African Institute, the Royal African Society & Social Science Research Council.

El-Fatih, A. (1989). Ethnic Politics in Sudan. In S. H. Hurreiz, & A. El-Fatih, *Ethnicity, Conflict and National Integration in the Sudan.* Khartoum University Press.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1935). *Ethnological Survey of the Sudan from within*. Faber and Faber.

Hassan, Y. F. (1993). External Islamic Influences and the Progress of Islamization in the Eastern Sudan between the Fifteenth and the Nineteenth Centuries. In Y. F. Hassan, *Sudan in Africa*, part two: the Sudan Today. Studies presented to the First International Conference Sponsored by the Sudan Research Unit, 7–12 February 1968). Khartoum University Press.

Hassan, Y. F. (1993, December). Some Aspects of the Relationships Between Central and Eastern Bilad al-Sudan. *Dirasat Ifriqiyya*, *10*.

Jibril, A. (n.d.). *The Rebellion in Darfur: An Incarnation of Sudan Identity Crisis* (a paper presented to the International Studies Conference).

Mazrui, A. A. (1985). The Multiple Marginality of Sudan. In Y. F. Hassan, *Sudan in Africa*, part two: the Sudan Today. Studies presented to the First International Conference Sponsored by the Sudan Research Unit, 7–12 February 1968). Khartoum University Press.

Mohammad Ahmed, H. M. (1995). Al-Shakhsiyya al-Sudaniyya bein Dhuqut al-Hadatha wa Masharie' al-Tajdid. *Dirasat Ifriqiyya*, *13*.

Musa, A. M. (2009). *Darfur from a State Crisis to Superpowers Clash* (in Arabic). Al-Jazeera Studies Centre.

Musa, A. M. (2009). *The Question of Southern Sudan: Looming Threats on Sudan Unity* (in Arabic). Centre of Arab Unity Studies.

Musa, A. M. (2010). Marginalization and Ethnicization in Sudan: how the elite failed to stabilize a diverse country. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, *3*(4), October–December.

Musa, A. M. (2018). The Tribal Impact on Political Stability in Sudan. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, *11*(1–2), March–June.

Natsios, A. (2007, September 14). Sudan Undertaking Arab Resettlement Programme in Darfur. *Sudan Tribune*. http://www.sudantribune.com/spsip.php?article23738

Omer, A. (2014). *Egemi, land Ust Transformation, Conflict and Rural Poverty on the Rain lands of Sudan*. A paper presented at a workshop on "Understanding Tribal Conflicts in Darfur", organized by Peace Studies Institute of the University of Khartoum, in collaboration with the UN, UNAMID (United Nation Hybrid Operation in Darfur), and the African Unity. Khartoum: February 9–10, 2014.

Osman, M., Abu Saq. (n.d.). Islamic Ideation in Eastern Sudan. *Sudan Notes and Records*, *2*(1).

Roden, D. (2008). Regional Inequality and Rebellion in the Sudan. *Geographical Review*, *64*(1974).

Suleiman, M. (1994). *Warfare in Darfur, The Desert Versus the Oasis Syndrome*. Institute for African Alternatives (IFAA). http://www.ifaanet.org wardar.htm