Marginalization and ethnicization in the Sudan: how the elite failed to stabilize a diverse country

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This paper is based on the hypothesis that the crisis of the Sudan has resulted from the failure of the elite to establish just and rational governance in this multicultural, multi-ethnic, Afro-Arab state, as well as their failure to harmonize a heterogeneous entity which embraces approximately 572 tribes. The country's crisis of identity is a product not only of colonial policies, but also of the partisan/sectarian and ethnic-oriented behaviour of the ruling elite that have governed the country since its independence in 1956.

Keywords:

The Sudan is a blend of Arab culture, Islamic religion and African environment. It is a complex of diverse cultural trends that need to be harmonized in order to yield strength, where failure to do so endangers national cohesion. The Sudan is also a product of the Islamization carried out through missionary activities of a 'wide spectrum of popular religious fraternities, or Sufi *ṭarīqas* [which] have cut across tribal boundaries … and achieved a remarkable degree of unity of purpose and outlook among their adherents' (Muddathir Abudlrahim 1985, p. 232). However, this national unity fostered by Islamization and Arabization did not extend to the South. Modern nationalism and the nationalist movement in the Sudan 'originated and developed in the northern parts of the country among northern Sudanese' (Muhammad Omer Beshir 1980, p. 5). This sectional formation of Sudanese nationalism, along with the British policy of 'closed districts', kept the South neglected and marginalized, which has had a negative impact on South–North relations to the present.

Background to the making of modern Sudan

The link to the Middle East

Present-day Sudan has been linked to the Middle East since ancient times; and while deeply entrenched in Africa, it has a long history of close contacts with the Mediterranean and the Middle East, particularly Egypt and Asia minor.

Archaeological excavation of sites on the Nile above Aswan has confirmed human habitation in the river valley during the Paleolithic period or early Stone Age, over two million years ago. The earliest inhabitants of the Sudan can be traced back to black African peoples who lived in the vicinity of Khartoum in Neolithic (middle Stone Age) times as hunters and gatherers and who made combed pottery and later

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stone grinders (Collins 1967). Towards the end of the Neolithic period they had domesticated animals and settled to a sedentary way of life in fortified mud-brick villages.

These early African peoples were clearly in contact with the pre-dynastic civilization to the North of Egypt. Skeletal remains suggest a blending of black African and Mediterranean populations during the Neolithic period (eighth to third millennia BC) that has remained relatively stable until the present, despite gradual infiltration by other elements (Collins 1967). At the end of the fourth millennium BC kings of the First Dynasty conquered Upper Nubia beyond Aswan, introducing Egyptian influence to life along the river bank.

Scholars admit that, at the height of Meroitic power, there was a northward orientation of the culture of the Sudan, which began in the Karma period, then endured in the ninth and tenth centuries BCE and survived into Napatan times, the influence of which reached as far south as Karima (in the north of Northern Sudan) (Collins 1967, p. 41). After the seventh century, Arabic gained importance in the Nubian kingdoms, especially as a *lingua franca* of commerce (Haycock 1985, p. 36).

Egypt's succeeding dynasty failed to assert control over Cush. In 590 B.C., however, an Egyptian army sacked Napata, compelling the Cushitic court to move to a more secure location at Meroe near the sixth cataract. For several centuries thereafter, the Meroitic kingdom developed independently from Egypt, which passed successively under Persian, Greek and, finally, Roman domination. During the height of its power in the second and third centuries B.C., Meroe extended over a region from the third cataract in the north to Soba, near present-day Khartoum, in the south.

The Pharaonic tradition persisted among a line of rulers at Meroe. They developed a strong centralized political system and a Meroitic script. Northern Cush eventually fell into disorder as it came under pressure from the Blemmyes. However, the Nile continued to give the region access to the Mediterranean world. Meroe maintained contact with Arab and Indian regions. The use of Greek in liturgy eventually gave way to the Nubian language, which was written using an indigenous alphabet that combined elements of the old Meroitic and Coptic scripts. Moreover, early inscriptions have indicated a continuing knowledge of colloquial Greek in Nubia as late as the twelfth century. After the seventh century, Arabic gained importance in the Nubian kingdoms, especially as a medium for commerce (Collins 1967).

The Christian Nubian kingdoms achieved their peak of prosperity and power in the ninth and tenth centuries. However, Muslim Arab invaders, who conquered Egypt in 640 CE, posed a threat to the Christian Nubian kingdoms. The structure of Pharonic and Nubian extraction of African resources encouraged Arab traders to explore mineral resources, promote distant trade and share in the trade between Asia and Europe.

Late prospectors roamed as far south as Fazugli and Hufrat Al-Nihas for gold and copper respectively. Other valued trading items included slaves, ivory, ebony, incense, oils, fanny skins and livestock (Abu Saq 2002).

The peaceful Arab infiltration into Nubia was facilitated by the Baqt Truce, which governed the relations between the two sides for over six centuries. The Arabs gained commercial advantages from those peaceful relations, and they used the treaty to ensure that travel and trade proceeded unhindered across the frontier – trade which included horses, ivory, gold, gum arabic and cattle along with other commodities.

The Near Eastern dimension in the Sudan was strengthened by the advent of Islam, the coming of which eventually transformed the nature of Sudanese society. Islam

also fostered political unity, economic growth and cultural development in the Sudanic belt.

The link to Africa

European writers tend to reduce African history to that of the colonial period. This cultural bias ignores the influence of the Arab–Islamic culture in Africa which had 'constituted the most important component of African indigenous culture for centuries' (Collins 1967, p. 43). Islam penetrated into North Africa in its early phase and spread along the eastern and western coasts, extending also along the waterways of the interior. This gave birth to Islamic African culture in East Africa (the Swahili) as well as totally Arab vernaculars and African-oriented Islamic practice.

Early Arab geographers and cartographers used the term '*bilad al-Sudan*' (the land of the black people) to include the transcontinental savannah belt stretching from the Red Sea coast west to the Atlantic Ocean, and lying between the Sahara Desert and the tropical forests. Some scholars made a further distinction between the Sudan in general and the Nubian and the Beja of the Nilotic Sudan in particular. The term '*Bilad al-Takrur*' was used to describe the region between Darfur and the Atlantic.

In recent times, other scholars have divided the Sudanic belt into two zones, namely the Western and Eastern Bilad al-Sudan where the first zone comprises the lands west of Darfur and the second Nilotic or Eastern Sudan. Other writers prefer to divide it into three regions: Western, Central and Eastern (Al-Tigani Abd Al-Gadir 1995, p. 86).

However, consensus is that cultural ties have existed among the people of Bilad al-Sudan for thousands of years and considerable interaction and influence radiated from Meroe into Africa, notably through iron-making in this metal age. Whatever the role of Meroe may have been in the spread of culture amongst its neighbours of ancient Africa, 'Meroe was an African civilization firmly based on African soil, and developed by an African population' (Trimingham 1977, p. 14).

Hassan (1993) believes that it is very possible that knowledge of iron-metallurgy spread through Meroe to considerable areas of north-eastern Africa. He notes that like the later cultures of the Sudan, medieval Nubia, the Funj state of Sennar, and indeed modern Sudan were 'an interesting example of a fruitful cross-fertilization of cultural elements native to this part of Africa, Egyptian, Mediterranean or Asiatic' (Trimingham 1962, p. 188). Nevertheless, scholars have embraced Arkell's argument that Meroe formed a cultural bridge between Pharonic Egypt and inner Africa.

This interaction reflects early cultural contact between Central and Eastern Bilad al-Sudan. Beside this link with the Funj and Darfur – which was penetrated by Islam, large number of Arab tribes and the *sufi tariqas* (orders) – a profound Arabization and Islamization process emanated from the Islamized and Arabized Nubians, namely the Danaqla and the Ja'aliyyin. Trade routes carried slaves from central Bilad al-Sudan to Egypt through Christian Nubia (Hassan 1993, p. 190).

Thus, trade supported the mobility of students and teachers through the Sudanic belt. Subsequently, when the Nilotic Sudan was extensively Islamized, it produced a number of *fakis* or *fugara* (junior *ulamas* who teach at *khalwa*) and also produced *shaykh of tariqas* (sufi missionaries) whose centres of learning attracted students.

While generally the term 'Sudan' refers to the savannah belt that comprises a mixture of Semitic and Hametic groups, Arab historians and geographers were actually the first to use precise terms to designate African ethnic groups known to them.

They called Bantu black Africans of East Africa extending to Central Africa (Burundi) 'the brown colour'. Those to the north they called Habash, who include present-day Abyssinians, Eritreans, and riverine Sudanese between Atbara and the Blue Nile. Further to the north were those termed the Beja and Bishariyyin. Regions west of the Red Sea and south of the Sahara to Central Africa and westwards to West Africa and the shores of the Atlantic they called Bilad al-Sudan: land of the blacks (Hassan 1993, p. 28).

So, the Arabization and Islamization of Sudanese communities were the direct result of links and interaction with the Middle East and Africa.

The question of identity

The present diverse identity of the Sudan can be viewed as an outcome of a long process of socialization and acculturation developed through a process of historical, political and socio-economic adaptation. The most notable of this diverse socio-cultural fabric of the 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).

However, the roots of the Sudanic culture can potentially be traced further back to ancient times, to the culture which came into existence in the land lying between Aswan and Khartoum. 'This area is the centre of the Sudanese civilization and the cradle of human civilization. The Nubian civilization interacted with the civilization of Egypt since the time of Abraham' (Hassan 1973, p. 190).

Islam first entered the northern Sudan (known as Eastern Sudan) in the mid-seventh century through emigrant Muslim merchants. Other waves of influx followed in the mid-fourteenth century as the political influence of Nubia began to wane. With the increase of Arab–Islamic influence, the ruling family gradually became Muslim and infused with Arab blood (Muhammad al-Nur b. Dayf Allah 1971, pp. 137–138).

Under the Funj Kingdom (1504–1820), the active process of Islamization in the Sudan was spearheaded by the religious orders. The Funj and Abdallab rulers welcomed and encouraged 'holy men' who came from the Islamic heartlands: Egypt, the Hijaz, the Yemen and, later, Morocco. Islamized Funj gave the country 'a measure of unity and political stability that paved the way and marked the beginning of the proper Islamization' (Muhammad Osman Abu Saq 2002, p. 150). This process was carried out by individual scholars who brought Islamic learning and propagated Sufi mysticism as well as by traders and nomadic tribes which accelerated the spread of Islam.

The Turko-Egyptian period in the Sudan marked the first signs of modernization where the Turkish ruling elite constituted a colonialist instrument not only in the Sudan, but also all over the Islamic world. However, this early phase of modernization promulgated Western style devoid of any spiritual content. It sought to 'integrate the Sudan into the European modernity and opened the country for slave trade, Christianization and alien rule' (Hassan Mekki Mohammad Ahmed 1995, p. 13). This process was obstructed by the Mahdist revolution that managed to restore the continuity and revival of the Islamic dimension of the country's cultural identity. British rule also failed to block the flow of this Arab–Islamic culture, though it did manage to hinder deep penetration into the South by adopting the policy of 'closed-districts'.

According to the 1955–56 population census, there were 56 separate ethnic groups, further divided into 597 subgroups. About 115 languages are still spoken; Arabic is spoken by the majority and is at the same time the *lingua franca* of others. About 70% of Sudanese are Muslims, 5% are Christians and 25% are of traditional African religions. In both the North and the South individuals and groups have multiple identities: 'it is not uncommon to identify oneself in terms of an ethnic group and the nation and the wider Arab and African groupings' (Hassan 1968, p. 75) This multiplicity of identities intermixing in the Sudan over a long period produced an overwhelming ethnic complexity that has put this vast country at a crossroads: either positively to interweave these through national integration in a 'melting pot' (meant to harmonize the culturally and ethnically different groups into one identity to create a stable country based on this sense of belonging to one nation – though diversified in anthropological context), or otherwise weaken the country and jeopardize its national cohesion.

This ethnic multiplicity may be behind the claim of scholars that even the North of the Sudan is held together by Islam and Arab ties as this region is significantly influenced by the pre-existing tribal cultures further north. In the South, the people 'are not pure Negro, [as] Hamitic influences have also been said to exist (Muhammad al-Nur b. Dayf Allah 1971, p. 2); although Southerners are among the darkest in the world. There is a complex admixture between the brown and the black African races: 'the Nilotics have Hamitic Caucasian elements in their admixture' (Hassan 1968, p. 75). Evans-Pritchard (1935) has observed that 'It is doubtful whether any peoples in the Sudan can be regarded as true negroes, and their non-negroid characters, their pastoral pursuits and to a certain degree the structure of their language, are attributed to Hamitic admixture and influence' (p. 88). Mazrui (1985) notes that

> One can see Sudan as a bridge between Arabic-speaking Africa and English-speaking Africa; between the Africa of the homogenized mass nation-states of the future and the Africa of the deep ethnic cleavage of the present; and finally between West Africa, as a cultural unit, and Eastern Africa.   (p. 242)

So, by virtue of such an intermediary position, the Sudanese constitute the most important point of contact between Arab and black Africa. It is a crossroads of racial mixture and intermarriage. However, some anthropologists maintain that 'a large proportion of Arab Sudanese are in fact Arabized Negroes, rather than ethnically Semitic. For many of them Arabness is a cultural acquisition, rather than a racial hereditary [trait]' (Arkell 1966, pp. 79–80).

Given such ethnic overlapping in the Sudan, it is not surprising that there are 115 languages where ethnic heterogeneity is paralleled by linguistic diversity. This heterogeneity dates back to early times (as has been indicated above). Sudan has been basically dominated by two types of people:

> a darker negroid 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 constitutes a major parameter in the issue of identity.   (Evans-Pritchard 1935, p. 88)

The changes brought about during the period of the Islamic states produced a new kind of Sudanese people with their own cultural and ethnic religious identity. They are basically 'African Muslims … [who] assimilated and professed Islam but not Arabism.

They are culturally (religiously and linguistically) related to Arabised Muslim neighbours in the North and East, and ethnically related to African non-Arabised neighbours in the South' (Deng 1973, p. 3).

Given that the penetration and settlement of Muslim Arabs into the Sudan resulted in major cultural change – especially in language and religion, it may be supposed that if the Sudan had not been subject to this Arabic supremacy, it might have become a multilingual state possibly united only by the language of the colonizer (i.e., English), just like many former British colonies such as Nigeria, Uganda and India.

It may be that for the *lingua franca* of Arabic as well as Islamic culture, gradual ethnic, social and religious interaction within the context of mutual tolerance and co-existence have ensured that cultural continuity has been maintained and this has succeeded in sustaining the basis for common identity. The interaction of these multi-ethnic groups in the Sudan suggests the thesis of the Sudan as a melting pot wherein the socio-cultural system is 'a unique blend of the multifarious groups that compose it' (Mazrui 1985, p. 240). But this depends on the extent to which unifying factors, such as language, are activated to contribute to a harmonizing process. Such a process, however, may not take place except in the long-term where a high rate of assimilation might incorporate distinct and/or marginal groups into the larger Sudanese cultural totality (Mazrui 1985, p. 242).

What is cause for concern here is not the scope and rapidity of assimilation, but rather the persistence of unassimilated ethnic identities of the Sudan (Hurreiz 1988, p. 72). Hence, the Sudan, it may be argued, is not *yet* a melting pot; and that despite the dominance of the Islamic Afro-Arab culture, the existence of a great plurality of cultures, sub-communities and a variety of nationalities should not be underestimated. Generally, these Sudanese communities live in toleration and peaceful co-existence – a trait that has been inherited from previous generations up to the present and which holds this mosaic of peoples together, despite sporadic inter-tribal conflicts.

To summarize, Bilad al-Sudan, of which the present Sudan occupies the Eastern part, has evidenced great dynamism of ethnic and cultural interaction. The Sudan is a product of intermingling between Nubians, Arab, Beja and black Africans. This characteristic has qualified the Sudan to be a corridor of Islamic and Arabic culture into Africa. It has also become something of a *de facto* melting pot of multi-ethnic and multicultural groups of both Arab and black African origin.

Marginalization and ethnicization

The dynamics of the crisis

This paper maintains that one of the main root causes of mutiny, instability and civil war in the Sudan is marginalization and ethnicization practised by the Northern ruling class for more than half a century since the independence of Sudan.

With the absence of any comprehensive vision for development, majorities have become alienated and small ethnic groups have monopolized power and wealth. Consequently, many voices began to call for justice and equity – giving birth to new concepts describing the phenomenon such as 'marginalization', 'deprivation' and 'exclusion'.

The new ruling (ethnic) elite acquired centralized state power, which produced a periphery–centre phenomenon. With the spread of education in the independent Sudan and the rise of general awareness, ethnicity – paradoxically – increased. This is the

case not only in Sudan or backward states, but also in other parts in the world. Some scholars believe that the entire world is undergoing a transient stage. At a time when the major contemporary ideologies predicted the demise of tribalism or ethnicity in modern times – with the spread of development and consciousness – the case of Darfur has challenged these premises.

The tribe is still dominant in the social fabric and influences Sudan's political intellect. It constitutes a major channel for political participation. Even the main (traditional) political parties – namely, the *Umma* and Democratic Unionist parties – draw their supporters on tribal and sectarian bases.

Historically, the northern part of North Sudan had privileged status, being a neighbour to Egypt where the wave of education and enlightenment flowed from Egypt southwards. The major tribes of the present northern state – particularly the Shaigiyya, Danagla and Ja'aliyyin – were the first to benefit from this cultural current. Subsequently, they were the first to assume power from colonial rule. Gradually, those (northern) ethnic groups came to control not only the state machinery, but also trade, the civil service, economic activities, military institutions and the wealth of the nation.

This may have been logical on purely historical grounds, but after the spread of education all tribes now have their own educated elements, so traditional ethnic hegemony by the few has become unacceptable, where these elements have turned critical of the monopoly. Nevertheless, the northern elite, who represent only a few ethnic groups out of the 572 Sudanese tribes, have continued to monopolize the resources and power of the country.

Table 1 reveals that three tribes of the Northern region (the Northern and Nile states) – the Shaigiyya, Danagla and Ja'aliyyin – have taken part in all national governments in Sudan since independence. They were never absent from any Cabinet. It is also noteworthy that they have enjoyed the highest percentage when compared with other tribes that happened to be represented (Hurreiz 1988, p. 73).

Also significant is that out of tens of Southern tribes, only two were represented – the Dinka and Nuer – and even those were allowed to take part for the purpose of according opportunity to the South, making a government appear 'national', or avoiding further mutiny against the central government. Ministers of such tribes and other 'marginalized' ethnic groups, mostly African or black African, were given charge only in Ministries such as Sports, Youth and Animal Resources. They sporadically raise these issues and consider their participation in all central governments of the country as nominal or symbolic.

Table 1 also indicates that in the first military government of Gen. Ibrahim Abboud, from the North (1958–64) the major tribes of the Northern region (Shaigiyya, Ababeda, Ja'aliyyin, Danagla, Mahass, Halfawiyin and Nubians) had the greatest share therein, amounting to 86.51%.

In the second democratic government (1965–69), where approximately eighteen tribes participated, the Shaigiyya tribe took 12.24%, Danagla 10.20%, Merafab 8.16%, Ashraf 8.16% and Ja'aliyyin 6.12%. These Northern tribes dominated 45% of the central government.

In the third democratic government (1986–89) where 39 tribes participated at the ministerial level, the highest share went to the Shaigiyya at 9.6%, followed by Ja'aliyyin and Danagla at 8.8% each. The Danagla, who participated in all governments, took 16% of the first national government and the same percentage in the present National Salvation government of Omar al-Bashir. The Shaigiyya took over

Table 1. Tribal affiliation of ministers in all Sudanese governments from Independence (1956) to 1998.

Tribe	First democratic government	First military regime (1958–64)	Second democracy (1965–69)	Second military regime (1969–85)	Third democracy (1986–1989)	Third military regime (of Omar al-Bashir, 1989–present)
Danagla	16	8.33	10.20	8.86	8.59	16.11
Mawalid	12	25	–	4.81	1	2.84
Mahass	10	4.17	4.8	8.10	–	5.795
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	–	–	–
Halfawiyin	4	4.17	–	1.52	1.56	–
Merafab	3	–	8.16	–	1	0.5
Shukriya	3	–	–	–	–	0.5
Ja'aliyyin	3	12.5	6.12	25.32	8.59	15.17
Shaigiyya	3	16.67	12.24	4.34	9.38	12.80
Zandi	3	–	–	–	2.34	2.37
Funj	1	–	–	1.1	–	–
Ababeda	–	12.50	–	2.78	–	0.5
Jwama'a	–	8.33	–	1.77	1	–
Rekabiyya	–	–	–	4.81	1	–
Rebatab	–	–	–	3.4	1	2.84

Note: Values are given as percentages.
Source: The Republican Palace (the Presidency), Khartoum, 1998.

16% of the first military government and 12.8% of the present government. The Ja'aliyyin (one of the three dominant northern tribes) took 12.5% of the first military rule, over 25% of the second military and over 15% of al-Bashir's government (Hurreiz 1988, p. 81).

Table 2, which explains ministerial distribution on a regional basis, reveals that Khartoum state (the capital) and the Northern region have taken the majority of 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.

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, Ja'aliyyin and Mahass. Since the late 1990s, critics have remarked that the Shaigiyya in particular dominates the most crucial posts in the central government as well as in vital institutions. Some have criticized the bias in nominations to financial and oil institutions, which are run by those from the northern tribes. The matter was taken to Parliament a few years ago where the then Minister of Energy appeared to defend himself against accusations of filling the majority of posts in the oil sector with those belonging to his own tribe (Shaigiyya). The Minister threatened to resign, but did not fulfil his promise. Certain regions are poorly represented such as the East, South,

Table 2. Regional affiliation of ministers in Sudanese governments since Independence (1956–98).

Region	First democratic government	First military regime (1958–64)	Second democracy (1965–69)	Second military regime (1969–85)	Third democracy (1986–1989)	Third military regime (of Omar al-Bashir, 1989–present)
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
Eastern	3.90	8.33	2.4	3.45	5.475	1.9
Upper Nile (south)	10.39	–	6.12	2.78	7.81	7.58
Equatoria (south Sudan)	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 as percentages.
Source: the Republican Palace (the Presidency), Khartoum, 1998.

Kurdofan and Darfur, though these are bigger both in terms of population as well as area (Al-Fatih Abd Al-Salam 1988, pp. 33–37).

The educated class of Darfur region sees that the three states which comprise it have been underrepresented, especially since these constitute one-fifth of Sudan's population and 20% of the country's area (one similar to that of France). They think that in spite of the greatest number of tribes to date that have taken part in the al-Bashir government, the old percentage is being maintained – favouring the tribes of the Northern region. It gave other marginalized regions and tribes only 'marginal' ministries (Musa 2009, p. 39).

In the mid-1990s, some of the Darfurian elites expressed their discontent and grievances in the face of this 'injustice' and published a book on the *Imbalanced in the Share of Wealth and Power*, which described the elite of the centre as the 'black book'.[1] Dr Khalil Ibrahim who defected from the ruling Islamic movement on ethnic bases and led the militant Justice and Equality Movement noted that 'since independence 12 presidents have governed the country – all of them from the Northern region. No president has come from Darfur, the East, or the South' (Musa 2009, p. 40). The 'black book' cites a number of developmental projects in the West (Darfur and Kordufan regions) that have failed due to neglect by the central government dominated by the '*Jallaba*' (a nickname for the northern elite).

The outcome of this feeling of injustice and marginalization was the emergence of regional and ethnic movements. The first, in North Sudan, was the Beja Congress, which was established in 1958 in the East of Sudan, followed by the Union of the Nuba Mountains (in the south Kordufan state) in early 1960s, and the Darfur Development Front. In the mid-1980s, the Nuba mountain rebels joined John Garang's Sudanese People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

In the 1990s, the Darfurians began criticizing the central government for neglecting its backward region and not according it a fair share of power and wealth. In 2002, they took up arms against the government of Khartoum on the grounds that it did not listen to their demands. Consequently, and subsequently, many rebel movements emerged. The most powerful were the Sudan Liberation Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement, which invaded Khartoum on 10 May 2008 in an attempt to assume power in Sudan.

Moreover, other regions of the margin started to organize themselves in order to rebel against Khartoum. A few examples of these are those in west Kordufan and north Kordufan state, which lies between Khartoum and Darfur, and which include: Shahama (2004), Shimum (2006) and the Kordufan Alliance for Development (KAD). The first two retreated as the al-Bashir central government promised to provide services for their areas and launch new developmental schemes. The KAD, however, is still determined to escalate opposition, by all means, against Khartoum if its state of northern Kodufan continues to suffer from backwardness, neglect and injustice. Their leaders are still active in some countries such as Germany.

It is to be noted that these regional and ethnic movements – political or militant – have taken the same opposing stance towards *all* national governments since independence, be they military or democratic. They share one principle in common: to fight against injustice being practised on an ethnic basis.

The elite of these marginalized regions (Darfur, Kordufan, East, Nuba mountains, the South, and southeast of the Blue Nile region) called for justice and comprehensive development. They noted that their areas are lagging far behind in comparison with the Northern and Central regions. Even though they voiced their grievance peacefully, the Khartoum government neglected their outcry. Subsequently, they took up arms to pressure the government into realizing an equitable distribution of wealth and a just share in power, taking into consideration the fact that the Southerners have not achieved their just demands for decades, so they rebelled against Khartoum.

The outcome of this situation is the existence and perseverance of violent rebel movements in different parts of the country – South and North – indicating an evident failure of the elite to redress the acute chronic problems of the country until they become exacerbated to the point of crises. The issue of marginalization and ethnicization is best depicted by Darfur syndrome. Of course, a great deal of literature has already been produced on the crisis, which has been internationalized and become an international issue, so nothing will be added here in regard of it.

Conclusion

It is time that Sudan's political elite draw lessons accruing from the crises of state. This because the country is now at a turning point: if the elite are to succeed in implementing the three major agreements with the rebel movements – the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) with the South; the Abuja Agreement with some of the Darfurian rebel factions; and the Asmara Agreement with the Eastern movement – then they may not only bring peace, security and stability through such agreements, but also may set a good example for many African states that suffer similar problems.

All national governments have contributed to the country's problem – including the present government of Omar al-Bashir. However, the latter differs from the previous government in that it has admitted committing mistakes and has taken practical steps to end the crisis. From this standpoint, the African Union, the Arab League and

the United Nations should exert more pressure on the Darfurian rebel movements to sit at the negotiation table and solve the crisis peacefully so that development projects can be implemented.

Irrespective of local or foreign pressures, the al-Bashir government signed the CPA with the SPLM/A (in Kenya, on 9 January 2005) and has set the political scene for democratization. It signed the Abuja Agreement with the SLM–Menaw's faction in May 2006 and with rebels of the Eastern region with the Asmara Agreement in October 2009. It signed protocols for the three areas of dispute between the two governing partners (the NCP and the SPLM): the Nuba Mountains, the Blue Nile and Abiey, the case of which was taken to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for arbitration. The ICJ issued its judgment in July 2009, and the two sides welcomed the decision.

However, even if the South is to secede from the North by the 2011 referendum, the North might not remain stable, but only if the northern elite fails to adopt a just power-and-wealth-sharing formula to put an end to grievances and rebellions that were, are and always have been ignited by injustice, marginalization and ethnicization.

Note

1. This book was written in Arabic and known as *Al-Kitab Al-Aswad* [*The black book*] and gave figures which indicated the absence of justice in Sudan. The book was anonymous and secretly distributed.

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