

# Deconstructing Race and Ethnicity in the Sudanese Separatist War: Lessons for Nigeria and Africa's Peace and Development

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**Abstract:** *The Sudan crisis lasted several decades, from the rebellion of the south (over resource control) led by Garang, who became the leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) to the settlement of 2004. The settlement between Garang and Omar Bashir of northern Sudan, however, gave birth to a fresh crisis and rebellion by the western section of Sudan, popularly called Dafur. Racial ideology, stirred up among landless nomadic Arabs in Dafur against non-Arab farmers in the 1980s laid the groundwork for the conflict over land, resources and identity in Dafur. Resolution to the Sudan crisis was evasive for years but finally resolved by the United Nations in the peaceful coexistence of marginalised tribes with notable considerations for religious tolerance. A consideration of the twin problem of race and ethnic relations is in this paper assessed from various dimensions and methods of resolutions and suggestions are made. Some of these suggestions were implemented as solutions in the creation of the new South Sudan but are herein reiterated to assist in solving similar problems that might result into conflict and given towards finding solutions to arising Nigeria's similar emerging crisis. It is further given as solution to Africa's endemic conflicts and crisis and purported as an important solution to Nigeria and Africa's development problems.*

**Keywords:** Race, Ethnicity, Sudan, African, Nigeria, Peace, Development.

## 1. The Sudan Crisis in Retrospect

Sudan is situated in the north eastern part of Africa. The Sudan crisis had its origin in 1983, when Garang, an American trained economist with a doctorate degree (Ph.D.) in Agricultural Development of the South was sent to crush a mutiny in Bor by five hundred (500) southern government soldiers who did not want to be posted to the north. This group of soldiers became his mutinous army forming the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLM), a vanguard of opposition against the military government in Khartoum and the Islamic dominance of the country.

John Garang was a Christian, who insisted on self-government for his southern kindred, who practiced Christianity and traditional African religion. The rebels soon gained the backing of Libya, Uganda and Ethiopia. This can be attributed to the fact that much of Sudan's wealth laid in the oil rich south. The war lasted till 2004, and claimed an estimate of two million lives. Garang and his army gained a large part of the southern region of the country named new Sudan. The peace momentum gave birth to the comprehensive peace accord in January 2005 and Garang was sworn in as Sudan's first Vice President, thus becoming the administrative head of a Southern Sudan with limited autonomy for six years before a scheduled referendum by theregion to either stay apart or reunite with the south. The power and wealth sharing agreement also restricted the Sharia practice to the North (Guardian, 2005:1 and 10).

There was a condemnation of the new constitution and prediction of further crisis by opposition parties. An Islamic leader, Hassan al Turabi condemned the new constitution saying 'it represented the northern and southern parties in

the country and warned of eventual breakup' (Guardian, 2005:10). This was no surprise as native African resistance attack against government prompted President Omar Bashir's government in Kartoum with strong Arab support of the north to use a militia group called the jajaweed: recruited from Arab extraction of basically white, the jajaweed's main objective was to wipe out all the native Africans in Dafur. The operation was tagged operation 'ethnic cleansing'. The United Nations referred to the humanitarian crisis as the worst in human history. Over three hundred thousand people, mainly blacks were killed and more than two million displaced. Sudan was a contiguous border country with nine neighbours. The crisis had spread to eastern Chad and there was palpable fear that Dafur's troubles could ignite a broader conflict between nomadic Arab tribes and non-Arab tribes across the broad swath of sub Saharan region leading to a regional conflict, though this was later averted and Sudan has been separated to create two internationally recognized states of Sudan and Southern Sudan.

The above pre settlement scenario provided the environment and motivation for this research which addressed race and ethnic implications of the Sudan crisis as prototype bane to Africa's development, with suggested solutions for a similar arising situation in Nigeria. Contextualised upon the behemoth issues of ethnic nationalism, terrorism and religious unacceptance, factors which this research opine are clogs in the wheel of developmental progress, the author prospects a jettisoning of ethnic and religious unacceptance as solution to Africa and Nigeria's unity and developmental challenges. The paper is subsequently divided into subsections of Conceptual Considerations of Race and Ethnicity, Race and Ethnic Generated Conflicts in

Retrospect, The Sudan Crisis: Lessons for Nigeria and Africa's Peace and Development, the Way forward and Conclusion.

## 2. Conceptual Considerations of Race and Ethnicity

### Race and Ethnicity: A Consideration

Jongman et al (1994) noted that race is the plague of civilizations. According to the encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Race' is a group of people with common culture, frequently with common characteristics, group identity and distinction. It connotes cultural and ethnic superiority and desire for preservation of the group. It could be biological, social, psychological, and spiritual. For example, the Israelites described the biblical children of Canaan as giants (ibid). O'Neil (www2.palomar.edu...) argued that the ways in which we personally acquire group identities to both others and ourselves are complex.

Ethnicity, however, is narrowed to a group with affinities such as blood linkages, and family traits, cultural similarities, and biological linkages (ibid). Racial linkages go beyond ethnic consciousness as the instinct to describe the 'other' is stronger and the desire to get rid of the 'other' or treat such with the consciousness of racial differentiation is always very strong. Some of the sociological facets of race and ethnicity include minority grouping, inter marriage, stereotyping and Diasporic interventions, international migrations and ethnic relations (ibid).

Minority group is a group numerically smaller to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members, being nationals of the state, possess ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics distinguishing them from the rest of the population (Jongman et al, ibid). Jongman et al (1994) insists typically that members of a minority group share a sense of solidarity and a desire to preserve their culture, traditions, religion, or language. A minority group can sometimes be a numerical majority in a minority position, hence minority group status is not a matter of number: It is determined by the presence of distinguishing features such as discrimination (also see O'Neil, 2006).

In a second paper, O'Neil (Nature of Ethnicity, www2.palomar.edu) asserted that, around the world, members of ethnic and so-called "racial" groups use ethnic symbols as badges of identity of distinctiveness, e.g. language, religion, and style of dress are common. O'Neil (ibid) further argued that, ethnic group unity is reinforced by constant emphasis on traits that set the members apart from others, rather than what they share in common with non-members. This was referred to as a universal means of boundary maintenance, or defence, between ethnic groups. Ethnic symbols are referred to as markers, "we-they" distinctions and become focal points for racism and other unpleasant manifestations of ethnocentrism which mark in-group differences (ibid). This tendency is diluted with nation building tendencies i.e. they will de-emphasise the things that make them different, if they wish to assimilate into dominant ethnic groups (ibid). Intermarriage is a factor that is claimed to speed up this assimilation, thus progressively

blurring ethno/racial differences. It is particularly interesting, as noted by O'Neil that many ethnic/racial group organizations are opposed to intermarriage-perceiving it as ethnocide after several generations (ibid). The peculiar success in the reduction in discrimination of American Jews as a result of marriage to non-Jews between the early 1960s and mid 1990s (i.e over four decades) largely disappeared discriminatory barriers to Jews in America (ibid). Though other factors are enlisted in this success and though a lot lower, the African American intermarriage is equally a growing process (this is attributed to the fact that they are subject to more persistent stereotyping and discrimination) (ibid).

One would agree with O'Neil's argument that when ethnic differences are strongly emphasized, as in the case of "black" and "white" Americans, it inevitably leads to increased polarization (ibid). He noted further that polarized people easily fall into the trap of justifying an interpretation of history that favours their group and demonizes others. (e.g. Bosnia and Kosovo, in the 1990s. after the breakup of Yugoslavia). The most pervasive contemporary racist act have been in such places as Yugoslavia, Israel, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Rwanda, South Africa, and Sudan. In this instances, it is noted that ethnic identities were strongly emphasised as government policy, increasing tribalism, and even genocide (strangers are often thought of as being not quite human—(O'Neil, ibid).

The central features of minority as identified by Jongman and Schmid (1994) are:

- The members of a minority group suffer various disadvantages at the hand of another group.
- A minority group is identified by group characteristics that are socially visible.
- Minority is a self-conscious group with a strong sense of 'oneness'.
- People usually do not become members of a minority group voluntarily: they are born into it.
- By choice or necessity, members of a minority group tend to marry within the group (ibid).

Inter marriage creates a new set of minority that can feel closeness to one or both of the groups originated from, it is asserted (ibid). Children from this source can also have a high feeling of belonging to one or both of the original ethnic groups source (ibid). It also has an effect of diluting ethnic tensions. Public attitudes and state laws have not historically promoted biracial marriages but (emotions) love does not have geographical limitations (ibid).

There are religious and scholarly believe that, there is only one species of human race which cannot be broken into biological units such as race (Jongman, ibid). Most people, however, hold pre-conceived theories about attributes of those in various groups and view others through their stereotypes (ibid). This creates the idea in the upcoming generation that a group would react/ behave in certain ways. Diasporic interventions also ensure international support for one group as against another (especially in times of crisis) (ibid). Sentiments of racial affinity and cultural linkages across the borders of a given state are major factors fuelling both divisive problems and racially originated problems in

societies, it is scholarly asserted (ibid). Civil wars are allowed to last so long because of external support and influences, particularly in situations of cross border identity linkages created by colonial partitioning.

Ethno-national conflicts are usually traced to conflict over land and strategic resources. In some cases, ethnicity and nationalism are harnessed to rally combatants in wars (Wikipedia, 2006). Examples are the Liberian and Sierra - Leone crisis. Notions of race and racism often have played central roles in such ethnic conflicts. When an adversary is identified as 'other' based on notions of race or ethnicity, especially when 'other' represents inferior status, the method of appropriation of territory, human chattel, or material wealth, are usually more ruthless, more brutal, or less constrained by moral or ethical considerations (ibid). (Cases of the Rwandan crisis and the Dafur crisis come to view here). Interestingly the ugly incidence is now being played out in Nigeria, between the Fulani herdsmen and other Nigerian tribes. This notion ('other') is intensified by the idea that all on one side must unite to destroy the 'other' (Wikipedia 7-20-2006: p 4-14 updated version).

A race is a biological subspecies or variety of a specie, consisting of a more or less distinct population with anatomical traits that distinguish it clearly from other races (www2.palomar.edu) (Wikipedia, 2006). This definition, however, is at variance with reality. To scholars, there is no distinction, man comprise of all humans today are 99.9% genetically identical (Wikipedia, 2006) and most of the variations that occur is in the difference between males and females and other unique personal traits (www.paloma.edu). It follows thus that human 'races' are primarily cultural and historical creations and not biological realities (The case of Adolf Hitler's Arian race in the Jewish holocaust can be cited here) (ibid).

There is research conclusion that historically and especially in the western world, human 'races' have been defined on the basis of a small number of superficial anatomical characteristics that can be readily identified at a distance, thereby making discrimination easier (www2.palomar.edu). Focusing on such deceptive distinguishing traits as skin colour, body shape, and hair texture causes us to magnify difference and ignore similarities between people argued O'Neil (www2.palomar.edu). O'Neil further insisted that ethnic categorization implies a connection between biological inheritance and culture, i.e biological inheritance determines much of cultural identity, but he further insisted this was untrue, noting that cultural traits are entirely a learned process.

From the foregoing therefore, it is clear that not nature but people create the identities and recognized differences. Ethnicity and supposed 'racial' groups are largely cultural and historical constructs, it is further emphasized (ibid). They are primarily social phenomenon (not Biological). Culture and social interaction thus provide an explanation for its complexity (and not biology) (ibid).

Racial considerations have been a problem of man since the dark ages and created unacceptance leading to conflicts and wars. Religious wars, ethnic conflicts, tribal differences and

other social problems usually have racial undertones. In recent times, terrorist activities have also been blamed on racial considerations. In Africa, racism predated colonialism at a very mild level. Racial tribes existed separately from 'others' and contact was limited to intermarriages, wars and trading. Civilization and the need for expansion due to population growth was intensified by colonial geographical redefinitions, which further intensified the outbreak of civil and ethnic wars among close and far apart racial groups (ibid). Arising tensions often resulted in ethnic cleansing. Such situations have resulted in decades of wars. Examples abound in Africa, the Egba-Owu wars in south western Nigeria and Ekiti-Parapo wars in pre-colonial era. In more recent decades we have the Sudanese crisis, the Ogaden crisis in the horn of Africa, the Somali crisis, the Liberian and Sierra Leone civil wars, the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war etc.

### **Sample African race and Ethnic Generated Conflicts**

In recent decades, racial ideology has become more important as it laid the groundwork for the conflict over land, resources and identity across and within countries, and particularly in Africa. Ethnicity becomes indistinct because of trade and intermarriage but this also could lead to border conflict on the long run or political interventions resulting in conflict outbreak. The spread of racial ideology as noted by David Buchbinder (Guardian, July, 2005:10) has a wildfire effect. In line with this, he emphasised that; the result is destruction, arson and loss of the most virile members of the population. A long run effect of conflict is disruption of the social ethos and stagnation of development (Guardian, ibid). Buchbinder (ibid) further suggests that a spread of the violence in the Sudan, if not curbed could presage further regional conflict (though this was not the case as the country had successfully broken into two). It is necessary therefore to contain, prevent or totally and if possible eradicate racial wars.

Africa has been bedevilled with ethnically generated civil wars. The term racism is not believed to be obvious in these conflicts, but it is argued by this author that unacceptance and purported racism was the foundation of such conflicts in Africa. Such are as earlier listed; the Liberian and Sierra - Leone crisis. Cases of the Rwandan crisis and the Dafur crisis further come to view here. In more recent decades we have the Sudanese crisis, the Ogaden crisis in the horn of Africa, the Somali crisis, and the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war etc. Interestingly such ugly incidence is now being played out in Nigeria, between the Fulani herdsmen and other Nigerian tribes. This notion ('other') is intensified by the idea that all on one side must unite to destroy the 'other' (Wikipedia 7-20-2006: p 4-14 updated version). Excuses notwithstanding, attacks on other ethnic groups under any guise (religious differences, ranching opportunism, banditry etc.) are purely cases of unacceptance, and therefore must be discouraged and totally discredited.

### **Sudan Crisis: Lessons for Nigeria and Africa's Peace and Development**

The Sudan crisis was settled, creating a new country, South Sudan on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011. The refugee problem created a

volatile situation which might have resulted into a regional problem for Africa, if not for the United Nations intervention and the creation of a new South Sudan. A long run diplomatic manoeuvring brought solutions to the over three decade crisis. Critics were of the opinion that materialistic motives spurred Garang's rebellion, as much of Sudan's oil wealth lies in the south of the country. Garang refused to participate in the 1985 interim government or the 1986 elections in Sudan. In 2004, the SPLM and Khartoum government of President Omar El Bashir finally signed a landmark peace agreement in Kenya (Guardian, 2005).

The peace momentum gave birth to the comprehensive peace accord of January 2005 and Garang became Sudan's first Vice president. Garang became the administrative head of a Southern Sudan with limited autonomy for six years before a scheduled referendum for unity or otherwise (ibid). This power and wealth sharing agreement restricted sharia practice to the North. There was a condemnation of the new constitution and prediction of further crisis by opposition parties, the Islamic leader, Hassan al Turabi condemned the new constitution saying it represented the northern and southern parties and warned of an eventual breakup. This division was further complicated by the strife in the Western Dafur region. The referendum issue became a point of contention as Garange epitomised the concept of unity, while Salva Kiir represented the separate South. The chief mediator for the Sudanese peace talks (Kenyan General Lizara Sumbeiywa) told the voice of America that;

The referendum issue was Kirr's main point of contention (as he wanted the southern Sudanese to decide for themselves whether they wanted to break away from the north (Guardian, August 5, 2005: 24-25: 70).

In the agreement between the government of Omar Bashir and Garang's SPLM, a new constitution was signed with little participation of the east and west (ibid). It thus became a new bone of contention. The former Prime Minister Sadiq Al Maudi, criticized it as largely bilateral. He concluded that 'the constitution laid a ceiling in terms of participation in power, in wealth etc. without East-west representation (ibid). Garang later died in a plane accident sparking communal clashes where northern Arab traders were attacked and their goods looted by angry southerners (Ibid). This culminated into a new discord and intensification in refugee problem spreading as far as Chad in the northern borders of Nigeria (ibid). The Sudan crisis is not unique, if we consider it from the cause and duration. Examples abound across Africa (as earlier listed). In recent years, Nigeria has faced similar situations with the old Sudan. Nigeria's oil wealth is in the south south geo political zone, the northern oligarchy comprises of the Fulani as historically excused for power hegemony. The tribal differences and land desertification (within Nigeria) has resulted into a 21<sup>st</sup> century unacceptable migrations and land grabbing in the name of cattle ranching and other abnormalities with the support of a Fulani leadership. In the historically affiliated similitude therefore, there is an important reasoning in coveting of important lessons from the Sudan crisis in finding solutions to Nigeria's crisis.

### 3. The Way Forward and Conclusion

Pertinent questions to be answered include, what is the solution to ethno-racial crisis in African states? How can a multi-ethnic state resolve the problem of unacceptance? In what ways can repeated conflicts resultant of ethno racial perceptions be eradicated? This are the major crust of this research interrogation. The most important solution is tolerance and an adoption of a spirit of brotherhood. It is necessary to realise that we are created by one God and despite genealogical tree, we can achieve almost the same things when put under similar advantages. The idea of racial superiority should be jettisoned and an open door attitude with fair treatment for others should become a universally accepted mode of conduct. A notice of conflictual tendencies should be addressed with equal seriousness as the real conflict situation. International institutional interventions and domestic governmental attitude should be immediate in resolution finding in case of conflict outbreak. Methods of arbitration should be sought with an interest for a mop-up diplomacy.

The United State of America is a potpourri of races; blacks, Hispanics, Indians, Japanese, Palestinians (Asians), Jews and several other immigrants, each of whom had begun life anew on an equal footing and have, to a reasonable extent, learnt to live together in peace. African states should learn from such societies. Post conflict settlements should take cognizance of a spirit of forgiveness. To forgive is to forget and put off the pains. Time it is said, heals all wounds. African and Nigeria's development can only be achieved when there is peace and harmony amongst its various ethnic groups.

The problem in Sudan is atypical of Africa, where colonial powers had amalgamated several African states into a problematic unity. A unity in diversity where internal ethnic dimensions are fuelled by external Diasporas' relationships. This situation is noticed in the crisis of Somalia, Eritrea, and other African nations. It is also a case in view with the Nigerian civil war. It is the background to the Liberian crisis, the Sierra Leone imbroglio, and the theme of Apartheid in South Africa. In the light of these situations, this research interrogation becomes necessary as unabated conflict has continued to hinder the development of African nations. Development cannot be possible in a situation of endemic conflicts, as war destroys the ethos of societies, the able bodied population (youth) in the society are killed. War is an antithesis to development.

The process of rebuilding cannot be achieved in a day and the population of youth killed during conflicts cannot be replaced in decades. In the light of these, solution to endemic conflicts in Africa becomes necessary, there is need for peaceful coexistence which can only be a product of mutual agreement in ethnic acceptance within the purview of mutual sacrifice. A spirit of give and take, and acceptance of the uncomfortable union that colonial partitioning has forced on Africans with the realization that, geographical redress/redefinitions cannot breed unity for the continent. Constitutional conferences should address issues based on representation of all parties and ethnic groups within the

nation and not address current grievances because a new party of grievances can evolve from the settlements.

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Religious tolerance is another factor which underlies the ethnic militia formation in most cases. Religious tolerance becomes a bitter pill to be swallowed to cure the deadly ailment of discord. Most African states are a religious triumvirate comprising traditional religionists, Christians and Muslims. In recent times, there is the importation of new religions from various parts of the world. It, therefore, becomes necessary for each of us to tolerate and allow mutual coexistence with respect for other peoples religious beliefs, as matters of faith require life commitment. There should be a codification of legal rules discouraging and sanctioning offences based on ethno racial and religious tolerance. This should be inculcated into international and domestic laws with sanctions attached for violation. It should be remembered that the world is a homogenous society and we are members of the same family, created through a process that perfected intellectual, physical and psychological features with very little differences. It is important to suspend cultural biases and take a cultural relativity approach that is opening up to understanding the lives of other people. Increased communication and intermarriage will go a long way to promote the necessary brotherliness relevant to eradicate racial sentiments.

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