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Ethno-communal Conflict in Sudan and South Sudan*

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses ethno-communal conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan, which gained independence in 2011. In these two countries, ethno-communal rivalries have primarily manifested in three different types of violent conflicts: communal conflicts, rebel-rebel fighting and civil wars. The study consist of three core parts. First, the chapter provides some empirical information about center-periphery relations (in both Sudan and South Sudan elites in the center enjoys outmost political and economic power while other regions are severely marginalized) and the major violent conflicts in the two countries. Second, the chapter focuses on ethno-communal conflicts in Sudan's westernmost region, Darfur. This section illustrates that an intricate web of ethno-communal conflicts exist in Darfur. It also emphasizes the importance of land and examines the government's role in these different conflicts. Third, the chapter studies the civil war that has devastated South Sudan since December 2013. It shows that legacies from Sudan's North-South war (particularly the Sudanese government's strategy of divide-and-rule) are important for how the war in South Sudan has manifested.

KEY WORDS AND KEY PHRASES

Sudan, South Sudan, Darfur, Conflict Complexity, Communal Conflict, Civil War, Conflict Interlinkages

INTRODUCTION

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Located in northeast Africa, separated from the Arab Peninsula by the Red Sea, and split in half by the Nile River, Sudan occupies a particularly conflict-torn region of the world. Although all parts of Sudan are ethnically heterogeneous, Muslims with an Arab culture primarily inhabit the north while an African identification is more common in the south and its inhabitants generally follow Christianity or animist religions. Yet, this simplified dichotomy disguises a wide variety of ethnic groups living in both the north and the south (Johnson 2006). On 9 July 2011, Sudan split and South Sudan became independent after Africa's longest war, and this chapter analyzes ethno-communal conflicts in both Sudan and South Sudan. In this chapter, Sudan generally refers to the united country before it split and the text will clearly indicate when referring to Sudan after the division. Furthermore, South Sudan refers to the independent country and southern Sudan to this part of Sudan before the split.

Ethno-communal rivalries have been a central part of Sudan's history for a long time and resulted in different violent, and non-violent, conflicts. This chapter focuses on violent conflicts. Violent ethno-communal conflicts in Sudan have manifested in primarily three different types of conflict. First, *communal conflicts*, which here means conflicts between non-formally organized non-state groups organized along a shared communal identification that engage in fighting over issues like scarce resources and political influence. In Sudan, these conflicts, typically, pit farmer against herders, or take place between various pastoralist groups. Both Darfur (Sudan's westernmost region) and South Sudan have experienced numerous violent conflicts of this type. Second, *rebel-rebel conflicts*, comprising fighting between rebel groups with different ethno-communal support bases. Many opposition movements have split along ethnic lines and this category captures violence between such factions. Third, ethno-communal rivalries can also constitute a central part of *civil wars* where rebel groups fight against the government. These different types of conflicts are intertwined and this chapter elucidates different interlinkages between these conflicts. While this chapter emphasizes the ethno-communal component of these various conflicts, it is important to remember that all these types of conflicts are complex and caused by a multiple set of political, economic and environmental (to name just a few) factors.

The analysis consists of three sections. First, to situate the ethno-communal conflicts, the chapter provides some empirical information focusing on center-periphery relations and violent conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan. Second, the focus is on Darfur and probing how different types of ethno-communal conflicts have combined into the disastrous situation that has shattered Darfur for the last 15 years. Third, the chapter focuses on the civil war that has devastated South Sudan since December 2013. This part starts with analyzing some of the roots to this war and

thereafter it examines how the war has manifested (often along ethno-communal lines). The chapter ends with some conclusions.

[Figure 1 ‘Map of Sudan and South Sudan’ about here]

CENTER-PERIPHERY DYNAMICS AND CIVIL WARS IN SUDAN

Sudan is very heterogeneous when it comes to ethnicity, language, and religion. This diversity is, however, not reflected in the leadership of the country (Thomas 2009). Instead, Sudan is characterized by unequal power relations where the elites at the center retain a privileged position, and people living in peripheral areas are marginalized (El-Tom 2009). These elites have ruled Sudan in ways that have reinforced the existing power inequities between the center and the disparate ethnic communities at the margin. **Elites** originating from the Nile Valley, north of Khartoum, has controlled the reigns of political power since Sudan’s independence in 1956. At times, unstable parliamentary governments have ruled Sudan, and at other times, military regimes have governed the country. Yet, regardless of the type of government, the elites from the Nile Valley have been at the country’s helm, controlling the channels of power, blocking access to power for other groups, and strongly dominating the national political scene (el-Din 2007; Hassan 2009). The central elites in Khartoum also dominate Sudan’s economy and resources from peripheral areas are taken to Khartoum (de Waal 2007).

The elites utterly dominating Sudanese politics do not constitute a united group but contain different factions that compete for power (de Waal 2007). While often fighting each other fiercely, the various elites in Khartoum have since independence endorsed efforts to create a national Sudanese identity around Islam and Arabism (Sørbo and Ahmed 2013). While these elites’ attempt to endorse an Arab–Islamic project that portrays Sudan as an outright Islamic and Arabic country, it often excludes both Muslims and people with legitimate claims to an Arab identity. The prime purpose of this ideology is thus to promote the interest of the riverine elites (El-Tom 2009). Nevertheless, this project has strongly favored the Arab religion, ethnicity, and culture that dominate in northern Sudan over the African religious and cultural identity more prevalent in the south (Deng 1995). Since 1989, the National Congress Party (NCP), until 1998 called the National Islamic Front (NIF), has dominated the center. In a key historical event, this party took power in Sudan through a military coup on June 30, 1989. The coup placed Omar el-Bashir as Sudan’s President, a position that he still holds 30 years later. As head of state, President Bashir oversees a cadre of elite officials and his political power is primarily derived from close ties with the military (Temin and Murphy 2011).

For the marginalized peripheral groups, the paralyzing domination enjoyed by the center of Sudan has had devastating effects. Not only have these groups been the prime victims for Sudan's wars, they have also been subject to hardships due to the inadequate distribution of essential services and resources, such as roads, education, healthcare, food, and housing. The political and economic domination of the center has caused frustration among the people in the marginalized areas. This resentment is evident among resistance movements in various regions of Sudan that all have redistribution of power from the center to the regions as a fundamental part of their political agenda (Mohamed 2007).

Sudan's unequal center-periphery relations has been a key driver for the numerous civil wars that have shattered Sudan for decades. The antagonism against the regime in Khartoum has been particularly strong in southern Sudan. The North-South tensions partly originates from the colonial period. Between 1821 and 1885, Sudan was part of the Ottoman Empire and called Turco-Egyptian Sudan. During this period, the colonialists used Southern Sudan (one third of Sudan) only to collect slaves. Under British colonial rule (1898-1956), Sudan was called Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and despite being part of the same country, the south and the north was ruled as different entities, which created an intricate situation. Since independence, consecutive governments in Khartoum has exacerbated north-south divisions (Jok, 2007). Sudan has been embroiled in a North-South war for long periods since its independence. The initial period of conflict was from 1962 to 1972 and then again from 1983 when Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) took up arms against the regime in Khartoum. In January 2005, this war ended after 22 years of fighting – and an estimated two million casualties – through the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA stipulated that Southern Sudan should be an autonomous part of Sudan until a referendum in 2011 should decide the region's final status (Johnson 2006). In January 2011, close to 99% voted for independence, and the world's newest nation was born six months later (Rolandsen and Daly 2016). In relation to South Sudan's secession, a new rebel group called SPLM/A-North launched an insurgency in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, two states located in Sudan but close to the border with South Sudan. Besides these intrastate conflicts, Sudan and South Sudan also fought each other in a relatively brief interstate conflict over oil resources and demarcation of the contested border in 2012 (UCDP 2018).

The Government of South Sudan, which has ruled South Sudan since 2005, shares several characteristics with its counterpart in Sudan. The regime in Juba (the capital of South Sudan), is primarily made up of former SPLM/A-rebels, which means that both governments largely consist of military men (Brosché and Höglund 2016). A core aspect of SPLM/A's political program was ending marginalization. Yet, even though SPLM/A has been in power for over a decade, South

Sudan remains characterized by an imbalanced periphery-center relation where most of the resources are allocated to Juba, leaving other parts of South Sudan deprived. Hence, both Sudan and South Sudan are deeply unequal where elites at the center have a privileged position, while people on the peripheries suffer from enduring poverty and prevailing violence (Thomas 2015).

Since its independence, the Republic of South Sudan has experienced numerous rebellions where different insurgent groups have challenged the government. These rebellions were relatively minor during the first two and a half years after independence. In December 2013, however, a full-fledged civil war emerged in South Sudan (Brosché and Höglund 2016). The intense fighting has caused tens of thousands of fatalities and more than 4 million – over a third of South Sudan's population – have been displaced. Around two million have fled to bordering countries and about two million remains internally displaced in South Sudan. In August 2015, the warring parties signed a peace agreement, but this did not stop the fighting. The belligerents signed a new peace deal in the end of July 2018 (UN News 2018). However, at the time of writing, August 2018, it remains unclear if this agreement will succeed to bring peace to South Sudan. The third section elaborates on the history and dynamics of **ethno-communal conflict** in South Sudan. First, the next section will cover developments in Darfur, which in some regards have intertwined with the development of the North-South divide.

DARFUR: AN INTRICATE WEB OF ETHNO-COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

In 2003, as negotiations to end the North-South war were ongoing, a new civil war started in Sudan when Darfurian insurgents launched a rebellion against the regime in Khartoum. After more than 15 years of fighting, this conflict is still active and the United Nations estimates that it has killed more than 300 000. Darfur came on the international radar after the Sudanese government answered to the rebellion with a **counterinsurgency** that involved extensive human rights violations. However, Darfur has experienced violent conflicts, primarily over scarce resources such as **land**, for several decades. The pages below illustrate some of the core dynamics of Darfur's different ethno-communal conflicts and some of their inherent intricacy.

Land and Identity in Darfur

Media often portrays the conflict in Darfur as a conflict between Africans and Arabs. Such a description is unsophisticated. There are around 40 to 90 ethnic groups in Darfur (Flint and de Waal 2008) and dividing them along an Arab-African line constitute an oversimplification. In fact, the division between Arabs and Africans (or non-Arabs) is not based on language, skin-color, religion (all Darfur's communities are Muslim), culture, or way of life. Instead, its basis is claims to an Arab identity, which is vital for those who adhere to it (Tubiana 2007). The distinction between

Arab and Africans is also a fairly new. In fact, Darfurians customarily referred to people by using their tribal identity, such as Zaghawa or Misseria. However, in the 1970s the Fur – the largest community in Darfur that has given the region its name Dar Fur (homeland of the Fur) and one of several ‘African’ groups – increasingly started to refer to themselves as Africans, which contributed to create the highly polarized and political Arab-African dichotomy (Mamdani 2009). Hence, although concealing the complexity of the situation, the distinction are important for some of the dynamics in Darfur.

An essential element of Darfur’s various conflicts is land. Not only is land crucial for livelihood, it is also vital for identity, collective action and political representation. In fact, land is so important that it often is inseparable from political power (Unruh and Abdul-Jalil 2014). The traditional tenure system in Darfur divides the region in different *Dars* (homelands) and each Dar consists of smaller land units called *Hawakir* (*Hakura* in singular). This system – created during the Fur sultanate that ruled the region from the seventeenth century until the British destroyed it in 1916 – remains important until today. Each *Dar* is normally associated with a major ethnic group, but also include groups from smaller communities. This system favors larger communities over smaller. For example, while the large cattle-herding (*Baggara*) Arab groups in southern Darfur had their own *Dar*, the smaller camel-herding (*Abbala*) Arab groups (mainly from north and western Darfur) were left without any *Dar* (Tubiana 2007; Unruh and Abdul-Jalil 2014). This had grave consequences for Darfur’s future. In fact, landless Abbala Arab communities, largely see their involvement in the war in Darfur as part of a 250-years old quest for land (Flint and de Waal 2008).

In Darfur, there exist two principal competing narratives over land. The Arab/pastoralist narrative accentuates injustices regarding land that dates back to the Fur sultanate but is ongoing today. The rival sedentary narrative emphasizes that the system of *Dar* and *Hakura* are crucial for administration of land in Darfur. Furthermore, *Dars* and *Hawakir* constitute crucial parts of the communal memory. This narrative also holds that Arab pastoralists, and the government, attempt to conquer their historical land (Unruh and Abdul-Jalil 2014). When reflecting on these narratives, one should keep in mind that they disguise a lot of complexity. For instance, not all Arab communities are pastoralists and it exist important non-Arab groups (like the Zaghawa) that primarily are herders. Moreover, some pastoralists see herding as a crucial component of their identity (and perceive their nomadic culture being under threat), but other pastoralists prefer settlement as it would increase opportunities for their children to access education. Land remains critical for both positions, as pastoralism requires grazing pastures and settlement land for cultivation (Flint 2010).

During the last decades, Darfur's communities have fought each other fiercely. This constitutes a sharp contrast to a long tradition of relatively tranquil inter-communal relations. In fact, an effective system to settle disputes between Darfur's communities had resulted in a situation where nomads and farmers had managed to coexist in relative peace for centuries (Burr and Collins 2008). In the mid-1980s, however, both farming and herding activities were gradually expanding. At the time, Darfur had experienced significant population growth and many traditional migratory routes for herders had disappeared. This caused the interactions between pastoralists and agriculturalists to become increasingly contentious (Abdul-Jalil and Unruh 2013; Unruh and Abdul-Jalil 2014).

Furthermore, the Sudanese government introduced policies that manipulated ethnicity in their (and their regional allies) interest (ICG 2004). As part of this strategy, the government took an increasingly partial position in Darfur and favored some groups over others. This **bias** contributed to intensifying communal conflicts in Darfur. Not only did this partiality increase the grievances among non-favored groups, it also undermined local institutions, most importantly the *Judiya* (a customary system for traditional justice and reconciliation). Traditionally, the government has a facilitator role in *Judiya*, but the current regime has interfered extensively with this system to promote its own interests. The government's intrusion has undermined this crucial institution (Tubiana, et al. 2012; Brosché 2014). Together, the increased **herder-farmer** tensions and the government's exceedingly partial policies deteriorated inter-communal relations in Darfur. Previously, communal conflicts in Darfur had been sporadic and at a low level of violence, but the conflicts that emerged in the late 1980s were persistent and extraordinarily fierce (ICG 2004).

To get an overview of these conflicts, this chapter uses the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) non-state conflict dataset (Sundberg, et al. 2012). The table below summarizes the violent communal conflicts recorded by UCDP for the 1989-2017 period. The table shows ethnic identification, main livelihood, active years (for UCDP a conflict is active if it has caused at least 25 fatalities in a calendar year). When interpreting this data, it is important to remember that ethnicity is fluid, livelihood often mixed, and data on number of deaths are often hard to confirm. Hence, the table constitute a summary, rather than a complete delineation, of violent communal conflicts in Darfur.

[Table 1: about here]

The table shows that UCDP has recorded 21 communal conflicts in Darfur, causing between 7 300 and 8 500 fatalities, from 1989 until 2017. Given estimations of 300 000 killed in Darfur since 2003, this seems like a low figure. Much of the violence in Darfur, however, are part

of other UCDP categories like one-sided violence (deliberate targeting of civilians) and state-based violence (UCDP 2018). In addition, while UCDP only include direct deaths, i.e. people killed in combat, the 300 000 estimation include both direct and indirect deaths (such as fatalities from conflict-related diseases and starvation). Two thirds of the conflicts stood between pastoralists group, while one third pitted farmers against herders. Regarding the Arab-African dichotomy, 13 of the 21 conflicts stood between groups that both identify as Arabs while eight conflicts pitted **Arabs** against **Africans**. While the data does not include any conflict between two non-Arab groups, there exist tensions also between non-Arab communities, such as between the Fur and the Zaghawa. The Fur alleges that the Zaghawa desires a “Greater Zaghawa” that would oust other groups from vast areas. In contrast, the Zaghawa argues that the Fur unfairly denies their legitimate right to settle on new land (Unruh and Abdul-Jalil 2014). The table also reveals an important shift in regards to whom fighting whom. Before the 2003 rebellion, a clear majority of the conflicts were Arab-African while most of the conflicts thereafter have stood between Arab groups. The chapter returns to the reason for this shift below.

From Communal Conflicts to Civil War and Ethnic Cleansing

Darfur’s first major conflict in modern times was the ‘Arab-Fur war’ of 1987-1989 that pitted the Fur community against numerous Arab groups and killed at least 2 500 **Fur** and 500 Arabs (Harir 1994; de Waal 2005). While being referred to as a war, it was an exceedingly intense communal conflict in the terminology used in this chapter. The Sudanese government was not neutral in this conflict but strongly favored the Arabs. This partiality caused Daud Bolad, an Islamist from the Fur community that had worked close to the government, to leave the regime and join the SPLM/A-rebellion. In December 1991, Daud Bolad led a unit of SPLM/A when it attacked government positions in Darfur. A combined force of regular army and Beni Halba Arabs annihilated the unit and killed Bolad. Following this attack, the government came to perceive the Fur as their main enemy in Darfur and therefore sought to cement its alliances with various Arab tribes (Flint 2007).

A prime example of the government’s anti-Fur policy was its decision to split Darfur (that traditionally had been one state) in three states in 1994. The administrative change was politically motivated and sought to weaken the power of the Fur community by dividing their traditional stronghold into three new states (ICG 2004). Previously, the Fur had been a majority group in Darfur but the government designed the partition so this community became minorities in all three new states: South Darfur, West Darfur and North Darfur (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011). In addition to weaken the Fur’s power, the split was motivated by an agenda to promote Arabization and it empowered Arab groups but decreased the power of non-Arabs. The division of Darfur into

three states had grave consequences for Darfur and was “perhaps the most crucial decision” (Burr and Collins 2008:287) for the disastrous developments that followed. The government’s partiality against the Fur, and support for the Arabs in several conflicts incited the Fur to start targeting government positions rather than its rival communities (Flint and de Waal 2008).

During the 1990s, two other significant non-Arab groups, Zaghawa and Masalit, also fought fierce conflicts against various Arab communities. The Sudanese government favored the Arab groups also in these conflicts. As a result, also the Zaghawa and Masalit communities came increasingly to perceive the regime in Khartoum as their prime enemy (Tubiana 2007). An illustrative case of such dynamics is the conflict between the Zaghawa and the Awlad Zeid Arabs over an important waterhole in 2001. When the fighting ceased, the Zaghawa discovered that the government had armed their enemies. The Zaghawa’s resentment against the government increased further when government soldiers prohibited them from using the waterhole. Following this incident, the Zaghawa came to perceive the government as the main threat to their security. The Masalit community fought a conflict against several Arab groups in mid-1990s. The conflict started when Arab raiders attacked a group of villages around Mejmerie, east of al-Genina in Western Darfur. Although these attacks destroyed numerous villages and the attackers killed many people, the government did nothing to punish the raiders because it sided strongly with these communities. This enraged the Masalit and intensified the conflict (Flint and de Waal 2008). The government’s bias was also evident in an administrative adjustment of West Darfur in 1995. This change divided the Masalit’s customary homeland in 13 domains and the government allocated five of these to Arabs. This partition is widely perceived as the main trigger for the Masalit-Arab conflict (ICG 2004).

To increase its protection from attacks from various Arab groups, and to strengthen their position against the government that they increasingly saw as the main enemy, the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit all formed self-defense forces. In 2001, the Fur and Zaghawa groups joined forces in their struggle against the government and rivaling communities. After being defeated by different Arab communities, the Masalit joined the Fur-Zaghawa alliance. By the early 2000s, this alliance (which first took the name Darfur Liberation Front) constituted a serious military threat to the government. In February 2003, after an attack in which this group had overrun an army outpost, the group declared that it had changed its name to Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A). Soon, another Darfurian rebel group, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), launched a rebellion against the Sudanese government. The roots of the two Darfurian rebel groups were different. While the origin of SLM/A is in the peripheries, JEM came more from the center and most JEM leaders had held significant positions in Khartoum. In addition, while Khalil Ibrahim (a Zaghawa

from Darfur) was the official leader, Hassan al-Turabi (who had been the architect behind the 1989-coup that put el-Bashir in power) was, allegedly, the real founder and leader. The former alliance between el-Bashir and al-Turabi had dissolved and it is widely believed that al-Turabi, in order to decrease el-Bashir's power, contributed significantly to the creation of JEM (Prunier 2007; Burr and Collins 2008).

The Darfurian rebel groups were, partly due their knowledge about the local terrain, successful on the battlefield in the initial phase of the war. As a response, the regime in Khartoum recruited militias (primarily from landless Arab groups from northern Darfur) that came to be known as *Janjaweed*. To entice recruits, the Sudanese government promised to provide land to the groups that joined the militias. The strong desire for land among these groups meant that such assurances was a fundamental reason for joining these militias (Prunier 2007). In fact, while defeating the rebels was the prime aim of the government, controlling land was the prime purpose of the war for these militias (Flint 2009). Forceful displacement of certain communities was thus not just a consequence of the war, but a prime purpose for some of the armed actors (Tubiana 2007). Hence, while non-Arabs in possession of a *Dar* constitute the backbone of the resistance movements, landless Arab communities contributed largely to the government's militias. The two main belligerents in the communal conflicts that preceded the war, thus, stood on opposing side in the civil war. Together, the army and the militias implemented a scorched-earth campaign that primarily targeted the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit communities and included human rights violations, such as killing of civilians and *ethnic cleansing* (Brosché and Sundberg 2019). This chapter does not thoroughly assess these atrocities because other studies cover them in detail (c.f. Daly 2007; Prunier 2007).

In 2005, Mini Minawi (chief of staff of SLM/A from the Zaghawa community) challenged Abdul Wahid (SLM/A's chairman from the Fur community) over leadership of SLM/A and the movement split in two factions (SLM/A-Wahid and SLM/A-Minawi). The two factions fought each other for the first time in November 2005, a battle that caused at least 45 fatalities (Prunier 2007). Six months later, Mini Minawi and the Sudanese government signed a peace agreement called Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). However, the leaders of the other two main rebel movements, Abdul Wahid (SLM/A-Wahid) and Khalil Ibrahim (JEM) refused to sign the agreement (Brosché and Rothbart, 2013). The focus of DPA was to terminate fighting between Minawi and the government but the agreement did not address many of the prime problems in Darfur (such as land). Thereby, the agreement failed to acknowledge the complexity of the war and recognizing that the situation in Darfur composed of several interlinked types of conflicts. As a

result, rather than leading to peace, the DPA intensified fighting and led to further fragmentation of the opposition movements (Mohammed 2007).

A few years into the government's counterinsurgency, it had resulted in the displacement of millions of Darfurians, primarily from non-Arab communities like the Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit. This left large areas of fertile land abandoned and several Arab communities started to fight each other over who should control these areas (ICG 2007, 2015). Control over land, is hence the main driver of the shift (indicated in the table above) from communal conflicts primarily standing between Africans and Arabs to mainly be fought between various Arab communities (Brosché and Rothbart, 2013). Not only had the relation between various Arab communities shifted starkly, many Arab communities had also changed its relation to the Sudanese government. Although some Arabs remained neutral, and others joined the resistance movements, the regime in Khartoum had good relations with many Arab communities when the Darfurian rebellion started in 2003 (Flint 2010). The government, however, did not keep its promises to allocate land to the communities that had contributed to the militias, which caused extensive bitterness among these groups. Tensions mounted when the rulers in Khartoum, as part of the DPA, declared that they would disarm the Janjaweed. The communities contributing to the militias felt that the government who wanted to scapegoat the Janjaweed to escape its own responsibility (de Waal 2007) had betrayed them. Quite ironically, Musa Hilal – the most notorious *Janjaweed* leader who had receive extensive support from the regime in Khartoum – launched a new rebel group (Sudanese Awakening Revolutionary Council, SARC) in 2014 to fight the Sudanese government (UCDP 2018).

As illustrated in the pages above, Darfur has experienced an intricate web of ethno-communal conflicts for the last decades. In the mid-1980s, communal conflicts, primarily over land and largely pitting Arab groups against non-Arabs, started to become increasingly intense. In these conflicts, the Sudanese government took a partial stance, favoring Arabs over non-Arabs, which was a key motivation for the Darfurian rebellion launched in 2003. The government responded by recruiting the notorious Janjaweed militia, which (together with the army) evicted millions of non-Arabs. Thereafter, various Arab communities started to fight each other to control this land and later some of these organized in insurgent movements to fight the government because unmet promises of land. Thus, while some factors (such as the importance of land) remain constant in Darfur's ethno-communal conflicts, who is fighting whom is constantly shifting. This has generated a situation with a plurality of grievances and extensive resentments between many groups, where a peaceful resolution seems elusive.

SOUTH SUDAN: ETHNO-COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN THE WORLD'S NEWEST NATION

Since December 2013, South Sudan has been shattered by a civil war that has caused tens of thousands of deaths, displaced a third of the population, and created starvation in parts of the country. This war has clear ethno-communal manifestations and sometimes described as a Dinka-Nuer conflict. As in Darfur, however, the crisis in South Sudan is complex and consist of several types of conflicts that together creates an intricate situation. Below, this chapter analyses this devastating situation by probing some of the roots to war and some of its manifestations.

The Painful Path to Independence

In 1983, SPLM/A launched a rebellion in Southern Sudan. The political goal for the movement's leader, John Garang, was "to establish a united socialist democratic Sudan" (Garang 1987) while other elements within the movement sought independence for South Sudan. The SPLM/A took control over several towns in the late 1980s and the government started to recruit militias, primarily from the Misseriya and Reizegat communities in Darfur and Kordofan, to increase its military power. Promises to land, similar to tactics later used in Darfur, was essential to entice these militias (HRW 2003; Johnson 2006). To counter the SPLM/A insurgency, the Sudanese government extensively used a Machiavellian divide-and-rule tactic, resurrecting the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" and used ethnic tensions to increase divisions in Southern Sudan (Brosché and Rothbart 2013). John Garang came from Southern Sudan's largest ethnic group, the Dinka, and people from other communities sometimes perceived the SPLM/A as a Dinka movement (Young 2006).

In 1991, two SPLM/A commanders – Riek Machar and Lam Akol, from the Nuer and Shilluk community respectively – instigated a coup against Garang who they accused of being a dictator of the movement. The coup failed and Machar and Akol launched a new rebel group called SPLM/A-Nasir, which had session of South Sudan as its prime political goal. The Sudanese government saw the mainstream SPLM/A as their main threat, and therefore heavily supported the Nasir faction both militarily and economically. While stating that it fought for independence, the SPLM/A-Nasir never clashed against the Sudanese government (UCDP 2018). Instead, the rival SPLM/A factions fought each other fiercely. Actually, in the first half of the 1990s, fighting between these groups killed more people than the war between insurgencies and the government. Both factions carried out human rights violations, including burning of villages, killing of civilians, and forced displacement. While SPLM/A was predominantly a Dinka movement, the Nasir faction recruited primarily from non-Dinka groups, particularly the Nuer. The leaders of these factions fueled the flames of ethnic hatred and intensified civil unrest for their own political ambitions. This accentuated the ethnic dimension of the struggle and the fighting (as well as atrocities) largely pitted

various communities against each other. Although numerous communities were involved in this rebel-rebel fighting, most violence pitted southern Sudan's two largest ethnic group, Dinka and Nuer against each other (Young 2006; LeRiche and Arnold 2012).

In 2002, the two factions reconciled and Machar returned to SPLM/A. This strengthened the movement's military power and changed power balance between the rebels and the regime. At the same time, efforts to end the North-South war had been ongoing for many years without finding a solution. In 2005, however, conditions at the local, national and international level were more conducive and the antagonists reached an agreement. A key reason for the Sudanese government to sign the [Comprehensive Peace Agreement \(CPA\)](#) was the enhanced military threat that the united SPLM/A composed (Brosché and Duursma 2018).

The Interim Period (2005-2011)

The CPA meant that Southern Sudan should be an autonomous part of Sudan between 2005 and 2011. The Government of South Sudan ruled this area and John Garang became the first President of Southern Sudan. After fighting a war for 22 years, however, John Garang died in a helicopter crash only six months after signing the CPA. [Salva Kiir](#), a commander in SPLM/A who had fought alongside Garang throughout the war, and been his deputy since 1997, replaced him (LeRiche and Arnold 2012). While Kiir became President, Riek Machar became Vice President. However, this arrangement was not an indication of genuine friendship between the two; instead, Kiir and Machar were wary about each other and competed for influence. In essence, this was a power-sharing agreement that gave the highest position to a Dinka (the largest community) and the second highest position to a Nuer (the second largest community).

At times of its installment, the government of South Sudan faced severe threat from numerous armed groups. Former militias that previously had fought for the regime in Khartoum constituted the strongest challenge. Salva Kiir took on a drastically different strategy than his predecessor to deal with such contenders. While Garang usually fought against his competitor, Kiir tried to incorporate them into the SPLM/A. In this 'big-tent' policy, leaders of different armed groups received prominent positions in the military (and sometimes government) and the rank-and-file of these groups were included in the army. On 8 January 2006, many former militias integrated in the SPLM/A structures, when Kiir and Paulino Matib (who controlled many of the former militias) signed the Juba Declaration. Analysts saw this agreement as crucial for the security situation in Southern Sudan (some even held it as more important than the CPA) and hailed it as a big diplomatic victory for Kiir (Young 2007).

Yet, soon it became evident that Kiir's integration strategy also prompted many problems. A core part of this procedure was to give amnesties to leaders and soldiers in the insurgency groups that challenged the regime in Juba. As a result, violence and threat of violence constituted powerful methods for gaining influence and concessions, in the political landscape that followed the signing of the CPA (LeRiche 2014). Sudan and South Sudan expert Alex de Waal has illustratively labeled these insurgencies as 'rent-seeking rebellions' in which:

A commander or a provincial leader can lay claim to a stake of state resources (rents) through a mutiny or rebellion. The government then attacks the leader and his constituency to press him to accept a lower price. After a number of people have been killed, raped, and displaced, and their property looted or destroyed, as an exercise in ascertaining the relative bargaining strengths of the two parties, a deal will be reached. In South Sudan, these cycles have become known as "rent-seeking rebellions". Such conflicts follow a material logic but have ethnic manifestations (de Waal 2014) De Waal, 2014:350).

Therefore, while the 'big-tent' policy successfully dealt with some of the government's threats, this policy also encouraged armed rebellion as the government regularly rewarded, rather than punished, people who revolted against the regime. In addition, this policy was exceedingly expensive and created a deeply divided army (Brosché and Höglund 2016).

When the CPA was signed, it was widely believed that fighting between Juba and Khartoum would soon restart. Yet, while there were some clashes between the former belligerents close to the contested border, the north-south war did not restart. This, however, did not mean that armed conflict ended in Southern Sudan. Instead, a few, relatively limited, insurgencies challenged the regime in Juba and numerous communal conflicts caused severe problems in the region. Various cattle herding communities (like the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, and Murle) primarily inhabit the northern part of Southern Sudan and communal conflicts largely stood between different pastoralist groups. Some of the conflicts were very intense. The Lou Nuer-Murle conflict, for example, resulted in more than 1000 fatalities in 2009 alone (UCDP 2018). Competition over land and cattle constitute important components of these conflicts. Another crucial aspect of these conflicts are politics. Indeed, both local and central elites have fanned inter-ethnic violence to increase their influence. These communal conflicts are furthermore often highly influenced by governmental decision. Uneven disarmament, where the regime prioritizes to take the weapons from the communities seen as most anti-government, has for instance spurred several of Southern Sudan's communal conflicts (Brosché 2014).

From Peaceful Independence to Full-fledged Civil War

As stipulated in the CPA, Southern Sudan held a referendum 9 January 2011. Close to 99% voted for independence and the Republic of South Sudan was born six months later, 9 July 2011. The

transition to independence was relatively peaceful, especially in relation to what many analysts anticipated at the time, and armed conflicts during South Sudan's two and a half first years as an independent nation resembled the situation during the interim period. Thus, insurgents challenged the regime and some intense communal conflicts occurred. While these various conflicts caused death and devastation, the magnitude of these conflicts was relatively minor in relation to what should follow in December 2013 (UCDP 2018).

When John Garang died, his vision of a 'New Sudan' also died and almost all South Sudanese aspired independence. This shared desire for independence created some unity and the rivalry between various elites was less strong until independence was secured. In fact, a "remarkable display of unity by southern Sudanese of all tribes and political persuasions" characterized the period preceding the referendum (Young 2012:291). Yet, with independence secured, longstanding power struggles between different political leaders intensified. Positioning within the SPLM ahead of elections scheduled for 2015 (later postponed) were particularly important as this party completely dominated South Sudanese politics. In fact, SPLM's position means that the leader of the party are almost certain to win elections. In March 2013, Riek Machar declared that he intended to challenge Salva Kiir over the leadership of SPLM at a convention supposed to take place two months later. Yet, Kiir canceled this gathering and many other important meetings (ICG 2014).

To maintain his power, Kiir took a drastic move in July 2013 and sacked the entire government. When Kiir reinstalled the government, he had replaced people who he perceived as threats with persons he perceived as more loyal. Yet, the challenges against Kiir continued and intensified. On 6 December 2013, many of the people who had been fired from the government held a press conference in Juba where they accused Kiir of 'dictatorial tendencies' and outlined a political program that challenged the incumbent President (Sudan Tribune 6 December 2013). The group took the name [SPLM/A-In Opposition \(SPLM/A-IO\)](#). While Riek Machar led this group, it also included prominent politicians from numerous other communities (including Dinka) and this broad coalition constituted an extensive threat to Kiir. To curtail this threat, Kiir removed some of his critics at a SPLM/A meeting on 14 December. Several officials boycotted the second day of the meeting in protest to Kiir's actions (ICG 2014; Small Arms Survey 2014).

On the evening of 15 December 2013, fighting erupted within the South Sudan's Presidential Guard where one faction (primarily Dinka) which supported President Kiir fought against another faction (primarily Nuer) that supported Vice President Machar. The following day, Kiir announced on state television that he successfully had put down a [coup attempt](#), led by Riek Machar (Johnson 2014). Machar denied these accusations and it is widely believed that there was no coup attempt but that efforts by Dinka presidential guards to disarm their Nuer counterpart

sparked the fighting (ICG, 2014). More important than the details about what generated the combat, is to understand that the tensions between Kiir and Machar had, during the preceding nine months, escalated to a level where largely any hostile event could ignite clashes. The fighting spread quickly, first to different parts of Juba but later to other areas of South Sudan, and were very intense. A core reason for how quickly things spiraled out of control was that the South Sudanese army split, with about half of it (primarily Nuer) joining the SPLM/A-IO and the rest staying with the government. In fact, “within two days the whole edifice of government, party, and army was blown apart. The 2006 Juba Agreement, the basis of internal stability in South Sudan, was dead” (de Waal 2014:366).

In the days that followed the alleged coup, government soldiers killed hundreds of Nuer civilians in Juba (HRW 2016). This sparked outrage in the Nuer community and many Dinka were killed in revenge attacks. The government’s *atrocities* also became a core motivation for Nuer to join the anti-government forces. For the Nuer, the ‘Juba Massacre’ constitutes a significant trauma and many felt targeted by genocidal tactics (Young, 2016). Hence, much of the fighting clearly had an ethnic dimension, with Dinka-Nuer being the main dividing line, and many people were targeted because of their ethnicity.

Yet, to label this as a Dinka-Nuer war leaves out crucial dimensions of the conflict. First, rather than being driven by ethnic animosities, the 2013-war followed the logic of rent-seeking rebellions described above. Second, such description omits an institutional perspective. Not only were weak institutionalization of important organizations (like the army, government and party) pivotal for the dynamics in the war, South Sudan’s institutional structures were also too weak to handle political struggles peacefully. Third, throughout the war there has been Dinka elements fighting with the opposition and Nuer elements battling on the government’s side. Fourth, some of the most intense fighting in the war has pitted Nuer against other Nuer. Fifth, the war has taken place in almost all parts of South Sudan and thereby influenced all the country’s communities. Not only have other communities been victimized, they have also fought on both sides of the war and in some cases formed their own insurgencies.

Hence, the war in South Sudan resembles the one in Darfur with numerous, intertwined, types of conflict taking place at the same time. This create a complex situation that becomes exceedingly difficult to resolve. If one type of conflict is ripe for resolution, another might not be, and since the conflict types influence each other, this might derail the potentials for solving also the conflict that was ripe.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter deals with ethno-communal conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan. A core finding from the chapter is that such conflicts can manifest in various forms and that the different types of conflict are intertwined. This has ramifications for policy. If connections between different types of collective violence are overlooked, efforts to manage and prevent conflicts might be futile. The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) exemplifies how a focus on one type of conflict – instead of acknowledging that the situation consisted of several parallel but interlinked types of conflict – can intensify fighting rather than be a path to peace. In order to grasp this complexity, outside actors need to make greater efforts to increase the understanding of the local dynamics in general and the effects of international interventions on this dynamics in particular. If not, there is a risk that such efforts do more harm than good.

Another central finding revealed by this study is the key role various elites often play in fermenting ethno-communal conflicts. Hence, while conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan often have ethnic manifestations, they are often spurred by various elites' that – in their aspiration to increase their political and economic power – use ethnic divisions. South Sudan's most recent civil war constitute as a prime example. Although much of the fighting has followed ethnic lines, the prime causes to the war were a deepening crisis of governance in South Sudan and an escalating power-struggle between Salva Kiir and Riek Machar.

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