

ACAS Bulletin #86 – The Sudans: Which Way?

Introduction

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South Sudan became a member of the African Union and the 193rd member of United Nations after it gained its independence on July 9, 2011. The new situation in the Sudan and in Africa was a real test for rethinking old categories in politics.

In this issue of the *ACAS Bulletin*, the editors bring six different perspectives on the possible paths for the peoples of the Sudan both in the South and in the North. Sudan (or, as some people are now saying, “Sudans”) is a microcosm of Africa with the richness of the cultural, ethnic, religious, racial and linguistic differences. The democratic management of these differences awaits the peoples of the Sudan and Africa as it becomes clearer that there are forces inside and outside of Africa who want a military management of these differences. It is in this sense that the peoples of the Sudan stand at the crossroads of the Africa of wars, conquest and enslavement and a future of peace and reconstruction. Complex historical legacies – slavery, Arabization and Islamization – weigh heavily on all Sudanese, especially the Southerners. The wealth of Sudan attracted invaders into a region and for centuries precipitated resource wars.

In this, as in many edited collections, there is some unevenness due to different foci, but as editors, we believe that the diversity of views of the Sudan should be encouraged. The contribution by Daniel Large, “South Sudan Looks East: Between the CPA and Independence”, brings out clearly the pitfalls of

being stuck in old paradigms without an understanding of the changing political environment in Africa. Because of its own myopia on the question of minority rights, the government of the Peoples Republic of China had adopted a formula for engagement with the Sudan that privileged the Bashir National Congress Party (NCP) regime in Khartoum. As Large explained:

The extension of full diplomatic relations and recognition of South Sudan’s new sovereignty represented an immense change in China’s Sudan engagement from 9 January 2005. Between January 2005 and July 2011, China’s relations with South Sudan underwent a dramatic evolution. A sequence of phases led China from supporting the unity of Sudan to recognizing the new Republic of South Sudan. At first, China firmly supported unity; later, it then began to hedge its bets on the South’s political future and to develop relations with the South and the “one Sudan, two systems” framework created by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

This was clearly a case where the levels of understanding of the complex issues had been subsumed under a simplistic rubric of opposing secession movements. Pan Africanists have always opposed secession, but the principle of the right to self-determination is as important as the question of the unity of the peoples of Africa. The conclusion

by Daniel Large holds true not only for the peoples of the Sudan, but also for Africa. He argues that:

The major question is not whether but how China can best contribute after Southern independence and the extent to which the Republic of South Sudan can best manage Chinese partnership to its own, sustainable and more broad-based lasting advantages.

Caroline Faria deepens the analysis of the challenges for the new state of the South Sudan in her contribution on “Gendering War and Peace in South Sudan: The Elision and Emergence of Women”. This article confronts a long neglected subject, the role of women in the search for peace in Sudan. Caroline Faria sums up her argument by saying that with women

... representing 60% of the population of the south, the Government has carefully sought to mobilize their support. Bi- and multi-lateral organizations have also targeted women with funding to conduct referendum literacy efforts and to support them in their own political campaigns. And women themselves have been organizing, leading, funding and participating in large conferences, meetings and projects on women’s political participation in and beyond the referendum.

She concludes on a sobering note, that “in these early days of autonomy women ... represent a valuable resource” to build a “strong and politically sustainable nation-state. However, although women’s groups ... have flourished since the signing of the peace agreement in 2005 they have had to balance both feminist and nationalist struggles. This continues to be a difficult path”.

Elena Vezzadini in her contribution on “Genealogies of Racial Relations: The Independence of South Sudan, Citizenship and the Racial State in the Modern History of Sudan” brings her historical skills and experience to bear to lay the foundations for a new thinking that opposes racism and chauvinism in the Sudan. After providing

readers with a grounding in the complex historical causes of today’s problems of citizenship, she concludes that:

It is urgent that the new State of Sudan should not only rethink the importance and role of racial relations in its past, but also acknowledge the necessity for collective debate, in which the dialectic between Northerners as conscious and unconscious perpetrators of racist acts and Southerners as victims resorting to violence may finally be discussed.

Ahmad Sikainga in “Citizenship and Identity in Post-Secession Northern Sudan” also addresses these burning issues of citizenship. He brings a fresh sense of engagement with the history of the Sudan by delving into the past to grasp questions of identity and citizenship. Ahmad Sikainga is not shy to spell out the complex historical legacies – slavery, Arabization and Islamization – that now weigh heavily on all Sudanese. From this historical base, Ahmad brings out the challenges for the peoples of both the North and the South. He argues:

Indeed, as in the case of the new state in the South, northern Sudan itself is going to face numerous challenges, including the loss of vital oil resources, a potential conflict with the South over the unresolved issues, internal struggle within the ruling clique, the ongoing conflict in Darfur, and the possibility of a proliferation of civil wars in the rest of the country. However, one of the most critical issues that will shape the future of northern Sudan and whether it remains a single entity or disintegrates is the struggle over the old issues of the country’s national identity and the definition of citizenship.

Sikainga reinforces the theme that runs through this edition that oversimplified categories have tended to frame Sudanese conflicts within the context of an Arab-Muslim North versus an African-Christian South. However, this oversimplified dichotomy lost currency for a number of reasons. In the first place, it is an inaccurate description of the ethnic, social,

and cultural composition of the two regions and the remarkable diversity of the North itself. Sikainga holds that:

Northern Sudan is a site of deeply entrenched social hierarchies, ethnic cleavages, and subcultures. As mentioned previously, the region's makeup was shaped by a long history of slavery, miscegenation, and migration. Its inhabitants include a large number of former slaves and their descendants, people of West African origins such as Hausa, Fulani, and Borno, and millions of migrant workers and displaced people from southern and western Sudan. ...

Even the northern groups that claim an Arab identity are in fact a hybrid of African and Arab blood. However, the claim of an Arab descent was a byproduct of major historical transformations in the region, including increased links with the Middle East particularly after the rise of Islam, population migration and intermarriage, the pattern of state formation in the Sudan, commerce, and social transformation. These processes became more prevalent in the central and the northern parts of the Sudan, where some immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East settled and intermarried with the indigenous population.

He concludes by nothing that, "If the Sudan is to be salvaged, the NCP's project must be challenged on all levels, with a new democratic vision of identity and citizenship that recognizes and celebrates the country's multiple diversities."

The contribution by Abdullahi Gallab on "The State of South Sudan: The Change is about the New Sudan", takes the reader through the maze of Northern Sudanese politics and also some of the maze of the foreign policy establishment in the USA. Reflecting on lost opportunities and past and present struggles, he suggest that, perhaps, there may be

... a new opportunity for building a new Sudan out of the Sudanese collective order and its emerging good society. By that time, surely, the Sudanese "habits of the heart" that ameliorated and molded the Sudanese character and its deeper sense of civility (not the state or its regimes) would help them examine themselves, create new political communities, produce a new social contract and thus ultimately support and maintain conditions of democracy, freedom, equality and dignity.

Horace Campbell in his contribution does not retreat from raising questions of future war in the Sudan over oil resources. The news that President Bashir was supporting one faction of the National Transitional Council in Libya brought home the militaristic proclivities of this leadership and the provocations that can be engineered for future military triggers in the Sudan. Drawing from the experience of the independence of Eritrea, Campbell notes that:

Twenty years after independence, the peoples of Eritrea are now fighting against the government that was supposed to be a leading force for liberation. Eritrea and Ethiopia have fought wars senselessly over strips of land, mainly Badme. Both societies have diverted scarce resources to military projects instead of concentrating on the health and wellbeing of the people.

Today the remilitarization of Africa has deepened with the new deployment of US military forces to fight the Lord's Resistance Army and the stationing of American military drones in Ethiopia. There have also been military forays of Kenya into Somalia. In the face of all this dangerous intensified militarism, it is the task of concerned African scholars to work to expose this new militarism and to support those intellectuals and policy makers who want to work for peace.