

Gender Identity and the Search for Peace in Sudan: A View from the Lense of Feminist Theory of International Relation

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Abstract:- The Issue of gender identity has elicited intriguing debates within the international relations scholarship. While the apologists of ‘masculine’ dominance in world affairs derive their strength of argument from the God-given and traditional leadership role given to man from creation, the feminists on the other hand posits that in practice, there is on the average, no significant difference in the capacities or capabilities of men and women. It is in the light of the foregoing that this paper interrogates the gender identity question in relation to the debacle in the Sudanese peace process occasioned by the protracted nature of the conflict in the area. Adopting the feminist theoretical construct, the paper relies on mostly secondary sources of historical information, subjected to content analysis in examining the Sudanese conflict in historical terms. It emphasizes on the prolonged peace process that has defied all solutions. Feminism as an international relations theory is conceptually clarified, its postulations and predictions explained, and its prescriptions suggested as antidotes for the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Sudan.

Keywords;- Gender, Peace, Feminism, Theory, Conflict, Resolution.

I. INTRODUCTION

Wars all over the world leave behind wanton destructions and unquantifiable degrees of human lost. That of Sudan is not an exception. By way of historical background, the area known as Sudan has a history that is grateful influenced by the Arab world. Infact, in the middle ages, Arabs named the area that is present-day Sudan “Bilad al-Sudan”, which literarily mean “land of the black people”. Before the influx of arabs, the aborigines made up of various ethnic groups had lived peacefully among one another. Overtime, the Arab migrants dominated the north with their Islamic doctrines and orientation, while the south is largely occupied by African Christians. Puglia recorded that by 651 BC, Muslim Egyptians invaded Sudan and signed a peace treaty with the Christian state of Makuria ruled by the Nubians who were the first inhabitants of the country. While the Christian communities in the north conceded defeat, efforts by the invading Arabs to extent their influence by imposition of Arabic orientations and Islamic doctrines to

the Southern part of Sudan was met with stiff resistance. Soon, the Arabs and the aboriginal ethnic groups, particularly the Nubians became linked by frequent intermarriages and other socio-economic activities. Similarly, constant warfare also defined to a large extent, Afro-Arab relations in the Sudan.

II. HISTORICIZING THE SUDANESE CONFLICT

Evidence abound that Sudan has been a vortex of violent conflicts arising from territorial expansion, imperial subjugations, and resistance to foreign domination. For instance, in 1820, Egypt, at the time part of the Ottoman Empire, invaded the Sudan, and ruled for about sixty years until the Sudanese leader Muhammad Ahmed (also called the Mahdi for “promised one”) took over in 1881. Thus, between 1820 and 1881, Sudan was under the suppressive imperial subjugation of Turko-Egyptian domination. When the Mahdi took over after defeating the Egyptians in 1881, several wars of resistance to foreign domination were also fought until the death of the Mahdi in 1885. In 1896, the British and the Egyptians again invaded Sudan and defeated the Sudanese in 1898 at the battle of Omdurman. What followed was a colonial government dubbed Anglo-Egyptian condominium between 1899 and 1954.

If the relationship between the Arabs and the aboriginal ethic groups in Sudan had been frosty, the colonial policies of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium government simply aggravated the situation. This is so because deliberate attempts by the condominium government to favour the Arabs of north, while the south was exploited and marginalized created tension between north and south. According to Anders, the lack of economic development of the southern people, as compared with the riverins and urban northerners, was a hindrance to the rapid integration of the two regions. In essence, the condominium government implemented indirect rule in Sudan and enacted a policy of separation under which north Sudan enjoyed a comparative advantage in terms of socio-political, economic and educational reforms over their southern counterparts who were administered under a closed district ordinance.

With the disparity in socio-economic and educational reforms policies of colonial authorities in Sudan, the elites of northern extraction appeared more prepared for self rule

far ahead of their southern counterparts. This explains why the southern Sudanese were excluded in the pre-independence negotiations and agreements that gave rise to Sudan's independence. Although the Southerners were represented in the legislative assembly, the seats allotted to them were quite infinitesimal due largely to colonial bias and manipulations. The above situation gave birth to deep-rooted discontent in the mind of the southerners. The southern region was made up of mostly non-Arab farmers who regularly strived to repel the northern Arab nomads in their seasonal push for additional grazing land for their herds. This is a major factor in the constant violent clashes between the southern non-Arab farmers and the northern Arab herdsmen over farming and grazing land.

In the midst of these constant disagreements, Sudan was granted independence in 1956, and the post-independence Sudanese government, for obvious reasons fell into the hands of the Arabs of north Sudan. Thus, the already crises-ridden situation in Sudan became more complicated. It is in the light of the above that the post-independence existence of Sudan was marked by heightened tension occasioned by internal strifes as promises to offer a federal-state arrangement in order to mitigate obvious imbalances between north and South were not kept by successive Sudanese government. The conflict pitched the government against a group of southerners, the *anyanya* which served as a precursor to the Sudanese People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Over time, parties to the conflict began to multiply remarkably. Although, the two major protagonists (SPLM/A versus the Government of Sudan), remain the most significant, a number of groups like Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the *Jamjaweed* were also involved. A fundamental difference among these groups is that some seek to secede, while others support Sudan's territorial integrity (Monica, 2003).

As events unfold, the north-south conflict narrative began to snowball into a complex conflict situation underpinned by varying elements of religion, race, geographical as well as strategic interests. Thus, Francis (2002) posits that the identity of the nation became acutely contested. Whereas, the north draws its identity from Islam and *Arabization*, the southern identity is best understood as one of resistance to the north. The rebels in the south stood against Islamic identity and assimilation. Subsequently, apart from the identity question which no doubt, is core and critical in the series of other factors that have aroused the contagions circles of conflict in the Sudan, the nature and characters of the conflict have also reflected a shift from mere ethno-religious conflict to one laden with the factor of resource control. The ensuing civil wars therefore, reflected a complicating configuration which is both ethno-religiously coloured and at the same time having economic undertone as its driving force.

The economic factor to the conflict became heightened in the early 1990s when oil was discovered in mostly the southern part of Sudan. The enormous revenue from oil provided the government of Sudan with adequate means for the acquisition of arms and ammunitions with which they

fought and sought to silence the opposition groups. It was indeed a major boost and motivation that accelerated continuous government assaults and offensives against the opposition which they labeled rebels. It is therefore, not surprising that the Sudanese conflict assumed the horrendous and protracted nature and character while it lasted. This is so, because, the apparent awareness of the level of resources at its disposal, the government of Sudan became more determined to crush the rebellious opposition groups both militarily and otherwise. These developments made the peace process pretty more difficult as the government of Sudan dealt more ruthlessly with the opposition by force of arm.

III. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE SUDANESE CONFLICT

The escalation of conflict in Sudan reached a monumental proportion from 1983 following the outbreak of the second civil war in Sudan. Anders et al (2010) observed that the ensuing violent conflict resulted in humanitarian consequences, including the killing of thousands of civilians. Ethnic groups and specific communities were targeted and there were mass displacement of populations and widespread violation of international humanitarian law and human right.

Upon the discovery of oil in Sudan, western nations seeking to protect their economic interest in Sudan began meddling into the conflict. It was from this point that the conflict in Sudan began to assume international dimension. External forces then became contributory factors to the protracted nature of the Sudanese conflict. A case in point is the fact that China considered it economically expedient to aid Khartoum government in maintaining stability in government in order to secure and protect her oil pipelines. It is in the light of the above that China gave both military and monetary support to Khartoum government in their fight against rebel militia and opposition groups. Thus Anderson (2015) records that a Chinese army truck was tracked down in Sudan and that China was training fighter pilots who fly Chinese A5 Fantan fighter jets in Darfur.

Aside China, other western powers were, and are still prospecting for oil exploration in Sudan. Such economic adventures in the region has played significant role in both the escalation and exacerbation of the conflict in the area. This is so because the huge revenue derived from the exportation of crude oil enabled the Khartoum government to procure weapons with which they carried out continued military operations against their perceived or real opposition and rebellious militia. Similarly, other western powers that engage in elaborate arms deal with Sudan provide the government of Sudan with arms, ammunitions and other military hardwares in exchange for oil and gas.

Soon the conflict in Sudan became a subject of international diplomacy. Both western nations and neighboring African countries began to allow their respective national interests to determine their reactions in the Sudanese conflict. Firstly, the U.S bitter experience of

9/11 attack perpetuated by Osama Bin Laden, who was suspected to be hiding in Khartoum, caused a strained in Sudan- US relations, including that of other western nations who in collaboration with US have mapped out counter-terrorism measures against Bin Laden and other terrorists around the world. Thus, America had to review her foreign relations with Khartoum by recognizing the SPLM/A. This made SPLM/A to gain international recognition (Biswaro, 2018).

Also, as a way of retaliating Sudan's support for Eritrea's secessionist war against Ethiopia, the later did not blink an eye before declaring total support for the South Sudanese war against Khartoum government under president Numeiri. Apart from providing the SPLA with a settlement base, Ethiopian government provided them with arms, ammunitions, vehicles and military training to prepare them for war against the Khartoum government. A similar gesture was extended to Darfur by her neighbouring Republic of Chad. It could be recalled that Chad shares her northern boundary with Sudan. As such, Chad was accused of providing the Darfurian refugees with assistance against the desire of Khartoum government. Such surreptitious assistance was seen as aiding rebel groups against the Sudan government. All of these actions and inactions of Sudan's neighbouring countries and by extension, western powers, in one way or the other, brought the Sudanese conflict into international limelight and focus.

It was also from this point that the Sudanese conflict began to attract the attention of the international community. In the light of the above therefore, local, national, and international state, and non-state actors began to intervene for peaceful resolution of the Sudanese conflict. In specific terms, the attention of Organization of African Unity (OAU) was drawn to the ravaging conflict in Sudan, through an invitation from the then Sudan's president Omar Al-Bashir at its Heads of State meeting at Namibia in 1991. Following the invitation, the then OAU chairman and Nigeria's then president called for a peace talk in May 1992 in Abuja, Nigeria. Similar gestures were undertaken by the sub-regional organization under the auspices of Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). International foreign partners, humanitarian aid organizations, faith-based organizations and other Non-governmental organization became attracted to mediate in the Sudanese peace process.

Despite the committed efforts of various stakeholders towards the peaceful resolution of the Sudanese conflict, the conflict seemed to have defied all solutions given its protracted nature and horrendous consequences. The eventual signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, culminated in the referendum of 2011 that clearly defined the separation of South from north Sudan. However, despite the independence status of South Sudan since 2011, Peace has eluded both Sudan and the newly independent South Sudan. This development has posed real challenge to scholars, leading to the opening of a new front of inquiry on possible ways of ensuring lasting peace in the Sudan. To this end, this paper focuses on the Feminist

Theory of International Relations as a possible panacea towards rescuing the Sudanese debacle.

IV. FEMINIST THEORY EXPLAINED

By way of conceptual clarification, Feminism as an international relations theory holds a doctrine that believes that women throughout the world suffer sex-based discrimination. The definition of the components of international relations as espoused in most scholarly works written by men, according to Feminist scholars, are but figments of male view points, which are grossly devoid of the roles, concerns and perspectives of the female gender of the Homo Sapien. The problem, the feminists argue is that the roles and perspective of women are so ignored to the extent that the scholarly definition of international relations has excluded from that conception, the lives of most women who experience the world differently than men do.

The divergent views of men and women is aptly noticeable within the context of peace and security. Rourke (1997) avered that from the masculine perspective, peace is taken to mean the absence of war and the prevention of armed conflict. However, the feminists view the above perspective as 'Negative Peace', which can be turned to positive peace if and when women rule politically. The perceived or actual marginalization of women in global politics according to the feminists, can be situated within the prevailing minority status of women in their respective national politics. While very few of them have served as presidents of their countries, quit insignificant number of them have made it to their respective national parliaments. Similarly, the world apex body, the United nations, and by extension other international organizations have as low as 11% to 13% senior management positions reserved for women.

Apparently doubtful of the validity of the male-dominated state as an agent of change, the feminists postulates that such states, and by extension the international system will remain anarchic in the light of their assumption that men by nature are more prone to succumb to violence or aggressive behaviours and tendencies. So long as the men continue to dominate national and global political landscapes, anarchy, violence conflicts, and wars will remain the order of the day. Because, according to the Feminists, aggression and violent behaviours are innate attributes of men which they exhibit at the slightest provocation. Put differently, the feminists situate the current or prevailing global tumoit or anarchy, characterized by wars and violent conflicts on the premise of ever increasing domination of men in both national and global political landscapes. Thus, Tickner (2010, p.38) urges that we must search deeper to find ways in which gender hierarchies serve to reinforce these socially constructed boundaries which perpetuate inequalities between men and women.

The Feminists therefore, seek to reform the international system through their prescriptions. Feminists believe that a more gender-neutral political process has the potential of ensuring sustainable peace within the

international system. This assertion anchored on the believe that women are naturally disposed to caring in a motherly pattern. In this way, the peace and security of the world will be preserved more if women rule politically. Exponents of the feminist theory believe that justice requires the elimination of gender discrimination, and that this will improve the state of the world. This theory contend, that an increased role of women in national and global political decision-making will ultimately create a more peaceful world because the drive for power and dominance is an exclusive attribute of maleness.

V. APPLICATION OF FEMINIST THEORY ON SUDANESE CONFLICT AND PEACE PROCESS

There is no doubt that the Sudanese conflict and the peace process in Sudan have excluded women participation owing majorly to certain religious and cultural restriction on women. Obviously, arbitrary cultural construct has significantly hindered socio-political and even economic potentials of African women. All over Africa, harmful practices of gender segregation, preference of male children over female children, female genital mutilation, patriarchic system in many African societies, all combine to undermine women active participation in decision-making process.

In the light of the above factors, the Sudanese conflict and the peace process have experience male dominance to the neglect of the Sudanese women. Whereas it remains an obvious fact that women and children are the most vulnerable victims of the conflict is Sudan, their inputs and opinions are grossly neglected in the search for peaceful solution of the problems. While emphasizing on the horrendous consequences of the Sudanese war, major observes that the conflict in Sudan produces one of the most serious humanitarian and refugee problems ever recorded in history. Not less than 300,000 civilians and military men have lost their lives in the conflict. And two million people were internally displaced in Sudan. Houses and entire villages have been burnt down. Even farms, plants and animals have been destroyed, children were molested and abducted. Men and pregnant women were murdered, while young girls and married women alike were raped.

Unfortunately, the cultural Meleiu into which the Sudanese woman finds herself does not guarantee her voice being heard in the society. This is a culture wherein a woman's marriage negotiations are conducted and consummated between her parents and a suitor without her consent being sought. She is only to be sent to her husbands house willy nilly, without her objections. A Sudanese woman is only to be seen and not to be heard. Every stracter of the Sudanese society is dominated by men, negating women's God-given potentials. This explains why the peace process in Sudan has excluded the role of women in peace-making and conflict management.

However, within the realm of the feminist theory of international relations, it has been argued that women like

their men counterpart have the potential and capacity to play peace role in conflict management.

It is in the light of the above that Kolb (1996) argues that as a product of their traditional social roles, the tendency of women to have interdependent self-schemas and a nurturing orientation provides them with valuable perspectives that are an asset to conflict negotiation and mediation. How women frame and conduct negotiations is influenced by a relational view of others, an embedded view of agency, an understanding of control through empowerment, and problem solving through dialogue.

Indeed, evidence abound regarding the role of women in not only peace negotiation or conflict management, but on nation building generally. This calls to mind the noble role of some women who found themselves in positions of authority at certain periods in history. It could be recalled that Margeret Thatcher who served as British Prime Minister left certain landmark achievements in the sand of time. According to James Ball; Thatcher made changes to the UK's tax system, some changes to welfare, and many to the nature of British jobs, both through privatization and economic liberalization. Though, she left office unceremonly with battered image, her legacies and policies still speak volumes till date.

With particular reference to the African region, president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is a personality to be reckoned with in terms of her ability to rebuilding Liberia after years of civil war. As Africa's first democratically-elected female head of state, she led Liberia through reconciliation and recovery following the nation's protracted civil war. She distinguished herself as a leading promoter of freedom, peace, justice, women's empowerment and democratic rule. It is in the light of the above that Shirley Brownell quoted the former US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton as saying that "This last decade has been a success story for Liberia. The people of Liberia have emerged from a time of violence and lawlessness, and have made tremendous commitments towards economic and political reform". To further buttress President Ellen John Sirleaf's strong capacity and good leadership qualities, Hillary Clinton was again quoted as saying; "But I think it is also more than fair to say that it was aided considerably by the leadership, the determination of a woman who understood, with every fiber of her being, what was at stake". These encomiums and eulogies coming from no less a personality as the US secretary of state, underscores the fact that president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf left indelible footprints in the sand of time.

From the foregoing, it is abundantly clear that women have the potentials, not only of good leadership role, but possess the capacity for the promotion of peace and conflict resolution. These underscore the need to include the Sudanese women in the Sudanese peace process. It is worthy of note that since the escalation of the crises into a shooting war in 1983, women were, and still not given their due consideration in the peace process. This is against the backdrop of the fact that women and their children

constitute the most vulnerable groups in any conflict situation.

Sudan, like every other African society, is a patriarchal society where women are generally constrained by a number of inhibiting cultural practices. Typically, a Sudanese woman is only to be seen and not to be heard, both at the family or community level. One of the major discriminatory practices that has far-reaching implication on women in Sudan is the preference accorded to the boy child over the girl child. This practice naturally poses great impediments to the girl child's access to good health, education, recreation, economic opportunity, and even right to choose her life partner. A Sudanese woman, irrespective of her age, is offered to prospective suitors by her father without her consent. The marriage formalities would be observed and officially consummated without her participation, only to be instructed by her father to accept a husband she had not spoken with all her life. After marriage, the woman is expected to perform all domestic tasks, including child rearing, and farm work. Those in the town are not treated better, as they are also traditionally restricted. It is still the case that only 29% of the paid workforce in the cities are female.

In the light of the above socio-political and economic discriminations imposed on Sudanese women by cultural and traditional restrictions, it is not surprising that the women of Sudan were neither featured nor factored into the Sudanese peace process. This explains why the Sudanese conflict has remained so protracted, and the search for peace in the region has not yielded the desired result. Women being the most vulnerable in any conflict or war situation, any effort towards conflict resolution without recourse to the role of women would most likely not achieve the desired result.

Evidently, the male dominated socio-cultural and political landscape in Sudan have been overwhelmed by the very nature and intensity of the conflict in the region. If the postulations of the feminist theory are anything to come by, its inclination to the materialist hypothesis which believes that the act of aggression is mostly associated with maleness is apt in describing the Sudanese wars. Much as the conflict in Sudan can not be said to be a gender-based violent conflict in its entirety, one can not take away the fact that women and children are the most vulnerable categories of individuals affected by the Sudanese conflict. Neither can anyone deny the fact that the conflict situation and peace efforts in Sudan would have been battle handed if women are accorded their pride of place in the scheme of things.

Obviously, women whose children were forcefully conscripted as child-soldiers, and who themselves are sexually assaulted and physically maimed in the course of the war, would have had a better approach to the peace process than their male counterparts who are naturally aggressive and warlike. Aside the civil service where only few women can be found as career civil servants, the top governmental positions, and policy making bodies of Sudanese government is dominated by men. Same applies to

the military, police, and other paramilitary bodies. This explains why the Sudanese peace process is lacking the motherly touch required in conflict management and preservation of peace. Such male-dominated approach has inherently weakened the capacity of state institutions and structures in stemming the tide of conflict escalations in Sudan.

As a panacea therefore, conscious efforts should be made by critical stakeholders in Sudan to begin to incorporate female groups and NGOs into the Sudanese peace process. The issue of gender-bias in Sudan's socio-cultural and political configuration should be addressed in such a way that the lopsidedness against women would be amended through legislations that gives legal backing to higher percentage of women participation in government. All the socio-cultural factors that have inhibited the active participation of women in socio-economic and political spheres of Sudanese society should be effectively addressed. This would engender increased interaction among women across ethnic divides, and with national interest in focus. In so doing, the concerns being expressed by women, their fears, and issues that threatens their existence as mother would form the fulcrum of the peace process. This is so because, any peace process that negates the concerns and fears of women in any conflict situation, is bound to be counter productive.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the gender identity question in international politics with specific reference to the search for peace in Sudan. The choice of Sudan is predicated on the protracted nature of the conflict which has rendered the entire peace process a mere exercise in futility. The study is situated within the feminist theoretical framework. While explaining in details what feminism as an international relations theory entails, its postulations and prescriptions were juxtaposed against the protracted Sudanese conflict and the peace process in the region. The paper described the socio-cultural factors that have hindered women's active participation in the day-to-day running of the Sudanese society, as the major reason why the peace process in Sudan has not yielded the desired results. In tandem with the feminist theoretical construct therefore, the paper posits that women in Sudan possess the capacity and potentials to bring about the needed peace in Sudan. And peace in Sudan could be better achieved if women are incorporated into the entire peace process.

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