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The Role of Religion and Educational Imbalance in Juba Conference of 1947: Case Study of the Sudanese Religious Conflicts II

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Abstract:

This article aims to describe the role religion and educational imbalance in an agreement signed between north and the southern Sudan in Juba in 1947. That agreement marked the unity between the two parts of Sudan South and the north for the first time.

The article explains the role of religion motivated by the military uniforms in violation of the unity and conflicts of identity which remained the major cause of setback of the country's social integration, harmony and prosperity.

The article explores the role of religion in peace making initiated by the Sudan Council of Churches in collaboration with General Jaafer Nmeiry's liberal government in 1972.

Keywords: Education, religion, south and northern Sudan, British, juba, Addis Ababa, conflict and peace agreement.

1. Introduction

Religion forms the basic culture for the Sudanese people i.e. Muslims, Christians and the African traditional religion followers. Religion played a major role in transforming the Sudanese society for example in the education sector from basic to the tertiary education and in conflict and peace management. This paper aims to analyse three issues:

1. Impact of religion and education in the unity of Sudan during 1947 conference.
2. Reasons that caused the conflict in 1955 which lasted for 17 years, and.
3. Elements that led to the peace agreement of 1972.

2. Methodology

Nature of this study is qualitative, with both historical and descriptive survey analytical in nature.

2.1. The Impact of Religion and Educational Imbalance on Juba Conference of 1947

The year 1947 in Sudan's history recorded the unity between two parts of Sudan; south and the north which were being governed by two different systems under the British colonial rule. According to the historians (*Yoh 2002, and Thomas 2015*), the conquest of Sudan by the British in 1898 was the beginning of many new black African tribes into the ancient Sudan. But quickly, it was realized that, northern Sudan interests were towards the Middle East and belonging to the Arab world, with Arabic as their basic language and Islam their only religion (*El-Imam 1998, Alier 2003, and Deng 2003*). The British in fear of the Arabs and their culture spreading towards the rest of Africa through Sudan and along the River Nile, they decided to unite the African tribes in southern Sudan by introducing English as the official language (*Werner et-al 2000, and Yoh 2002*).

In that period, four Christian missions: Verona fathers (Catholic), Church Missionary Society (CMS-Episcopal), American Mission (Presbyterian), and Sudan United Mission (SUM) who had started their operations in the area, one year after the British conquest, were accused of having influenced the government. And that influence appeared in four forms: (i) Education was put under the care of the missions (*Werner et-al 2000, and Yoh 2002, and Deng 2003*); (ii) English became the official language; (iii) Christianity was acknowledged and became the substitute religion, and Sunday was introduced as a weekend holiday in 1918 (*Jendia 2002, and Alier 2003*); (iv) boundaries between the south and the north were demarked in 1922, and the name southern Sudan was used officially for the first time. In 1930, the government issued a decree blocking the south from the north under the Act called "Closed Districts". In the Act, south Sudan was to be officially governed by different rules related to the African customary laws and traditions (*Deng, 2003*). Each citizen from the two parts of Sudan was required to have a legal permit from the migration offices. Furthermore, there

was a conference conducted in Rajaf (Juba) in 1928 aiming at developing the local languages. Its outcomes agreed to enrol the learning pupils to study four years of elementary level in native language, followed by six years intermediate level in English (*Sconyers, 1978-2002*), contrary to the north which was focusing on Arabic.

It was later observed that; (i) education was acknowledged to become the tool for the missionaries to recruit their converts, (ii) the standard of the missionaries' schools remained lower than the government schools in the north, (iii) Southern students remained being trained up to intermediate level only, till the first secondary school was established in Rumbek in 1948. These realities were experimentally to have caused educational imbalance between the two parts of Sudan which in turn made the north later on to decide for the south reflectively. For example, the north experienced establishment of University College in 1902, named after the former Governor General, Charles Gordon who was murdered by El-Mahdiyya Islamic movement in January 1885. Though the British government was aiming at raising the level of intellectuality in order to reduce religious extremism, but it was reflected as total neglect of the south.

2.2. Graduates General's Congress

In February 1938 the Khatamiya and Mahdiya Muslim religious movements collaborated in the founding of the Graduates Congress (GC) of Gordon University College ALUMNIs, aimed at promoting the interests of educated Sudanese (Collins 2008, 50). The GC was almost wholly Arab dominated and that through all of its squabbles it gave little expression to the interests and concerns of non Arab Muslims. This assumption of Arab centrality and formativeness' was the outcome of British colonial policy and was uncritically received by the political offspring of the Graduates Congress. Ismail El-Azhary who became the president of GC in 1940, and formed national democratic party (DUP) in 1943 to work for the withdrawal of the British and the unification of Sudan with Egypt (Collins 2008, 61, 62). The Colonial government recognized the need to review its policies and in 1944 created an Advisory Council of the Northern Sudan to co-opt Sudanese intellectuals and traditional leaders into the process of reform.

According to *Yoh (2002)*, GC, and the main religious parties of Umma and National Unionists Party NUP, became the decisive body for Sudan political affairs (*El-Imam 1998, Alier 2003, and Deng 2003*). This intellectual entity was able to read quickly the changes taking place globally particularly the eruption of world wars I and II which had a negative impact on the British economics and reputation where many countries became demanding for independence. Therefore, in the same year 1944, GC approached the British administration for the first time demanding unity between the two parts of Sudan in consideration of the following points: (i) termination of the closed Districts Act of 1930, and opening of the boundaries, (ii) Annulment of passport permits between north and the south in order to enable the Sudanese traders to move freely, (iii) Cancellation of government support to the Christian missions and societies working in the South, and (iv) Unification of the educational curriculum between north and the south (*Collins & Omer 1969, and Yoh 2002*).

However, GC demands were responded to positively by the government and Sir Douglas Neupld the Civil Secretary, conducted authentication conference in Khartoum in 1946. The first signal of conflict was that, the meeting took place without any consultations from the southerners' opinion about the unity. According to *Yoh (2002)*, the commissioner of Bahr El-Ghazal province advised the office of the Governor General to consult the southerners' opinion. Therefore, Sir James Robertson the successor of Neupld scheduled, June 12-13/1947 for the famous Juba conference. Southern Sudanese elders remained telling their following generations that, the unity was imposed on them. In this perspective, though the unity was rejected by the southern delegation totally on the first day of 12/7/1947, but two basic issues remained bothering the southern affairs and the historians claimed to have appeared in the conference minutes later that is;

- I. Educational imbalance between the two delegations. For example, the southern delegation was selected by the British administration from junior politicians who were intermediate school graduates, plus tribal chiefs who never went to school. On the other hand, the north was represented by high profiled delegation headed by Justice Mohamed Shangity and the Coptic Dr, Habib Abdullah (*Yoh 2002, Alier 2003, and Deng 2003*).
- II. The Civil Secretary James Robertson was accused by the historians that, he was implementing what was designed by his government. Therefore, he was just writing his own ideas not what was being said by the southern delegation (*El-Imam 1999, Werner et-al 2000, and Yoh 2002*).

Majority of Southern Sudanese historians believed that, the Southern delegation went under pressure of two things over night: (i) they were bribed to accept the unity; (ii) Key oppositions went under pressure and warning which even could cost them their lives if they continue opposing.

However, chronologically, six years of unity from July 1947 to 1953 passed without clear differences or conflict of interests observed between the two parts of Sudan. According to the observers, the reason could be because there was no direct executive contact. But both meet in legislature houses selected delegations representing their areas only.

The year 1953 witnessed new political developments which were considered to be the beginning of conflicts for the modern Sudan. The three powers of; British, Egypt and the northern Sudanese political parties held a special conference in Cairo in 1953 where they decided self-determination for Sudan without involving the south (*El-Imam 1998, and Yoh 2002*). This was the first signal putting the south in position of indecisive follower. Following the Cairo conference, Sudan conducted the first election in 1954, where Ismail El-Azhary from DUP won the majority of legislature which enabled him to be the first Prime Minister. El-Azhary led the interim period which led the country to independence on 1st/January/ 1956. After the election, three things which remarked the genesis of south-north conflict continued affecting the unity:

- (a) The Prime Minister El-Azhary appointed only three southerners in his Cabinet, each one of them was representing a province.

- (b) In civil servants sector, the whole south was given six posts only, out of 800 positions.
- (c) Constitutional committee which comprised of 46 members, the Prime Minister appointed only three representatives for the south. The unfortunate scenario was that, the 43 northern members insisted to draft an Islamic constitution for the whole country without considering non-Muslims rights, which forces the three southerners to resign from the committee (*Jendia 2002, Yoh 2002, Alier 2003, and Deng 2003*). These practices cause anger of the southerners and led into explosion of the civil war mutinied by the soldiers of southern battalion in Torit town on 18/8/1955.

2.3. General Aboud and Promotion of Religion and Conflict

The critical observation explained by (*Khalid 1990, and Thomas 2015*) that, northern power after inheriting the state of Sudan from the British colonial rule without a fight rejected the possibility of investing in the periphery to correct the regional imbalances. Khalid sees that, they selected idealized versions of Arab culture and Islamic religion as the basic for unified national identity; they began to impose that culture and religion on southern provinces. This was described more by (*Werner et-al 2000*) that, after Torit incidents, the government began to look at the Church and the missionaries as the main source of opposition for the unity of Sudan working with the colonial authorities to divide the country, and restraining advancement of Islam. As a result, key persons of the church leadership became directly targeted; those who survived death were tortured. (*Werner, et-al 2000*) described several incidents; the Catholic Priest Fr. Gabriel Dwatukain Yambio was arrested and tortured. Fr. Paulino Doggale of was arrested in Rumbek with accusation of assisting students to organize a strike against holding off school lessons on Sundays. Pastor Gideon Adwok Deng of Sudan Interior Church and three elders of his Church were killed in Malute, their bodies were dumped in the White Nile River. According to the Church information during those days, many Christians gave up their faith. The entire southern Sudan became under state of emergency; schools were closed for the whole year (*Jendia 2002, and Yoh 2002*).

When average of rebellion was increasing in the south, general feelings from the northern public became interested toward military government as the solution. Therefore, in 1958 the elected Prime Minister Mohamed Ahmed Mahjoub decided to hand over the power to the Defence Minister General Ibrahim Aboudin what became to be known as bloodless military coup.

General Aboud with no hesitation, declared identity of his government as an Islamic country (*Ahmed 2009*). With immediate effect, he issued several decrees, majority of which were in direct conflict with non-Muslims particularly the Christians. For example, in 1959 all the missionary schools were publicized, and educational language was changed from English to Arabic. Bush schools were replaced by *El-Suq* schools (market place). In relationship with the traditional authorities (chiefs) in charge of the rural affairs and its security, they were asked to convert to Islam. Whoever became Muslim was given gifts of a radio and *Jalabiya* an Arab dress (*Yoh 2000*). This policy created other type of internal conflict of interests between the traditional authorities, politicians and the school students. Suddenly, the chiefs found themselves in dilemma being accused by each side that is the government and the rebels for siding with the other. In those circumstances, many chiefs were assassinated by both sides.

In February 1960, General Aboud issued a decree declaring Friday as a weekend Holiday replacing Sunday that was the official weekend Holiday for the South. The decree met an immediate resistance from the southern students, particularly in Rumbek the only secondary school (*Werner, et-al 2000*). In May 1960 the same year, there was an order for closing all the businesses belonging to the missionaries such as; bookshops, printing presses, and flour mills by the end of June, and to hand them over to the government. In May 1962, the government issued other decree of the Missionary Society Act controlling all the Christian activities to be operated within the church compound only, and should be based on annual license granted by the Council of Ministers in Khartoum, which was never granted (*Sanderson, op. cit., pp. 451-6, and Werner et-al 2000*). Another decree that followed was that, no child below age of 18 years shall be brought up in any religious environment without written concern of the child's guardian (*Jendia 2002*). Between 1962 and 1963, the government expelled out 243 missionaries from southern Sudan, and blamed them for the insecurity in the south that, they were using their rural network to gather security information on behalf of the rebels (*The-Image 1999, and Jendia, 2002*). In 1964, more than 300 missionaries were ordered to leave the country totally within two weeks, to make total of 543 missionaries expelled out the country. General Aboud became recognized the first military government with clear religious programme experienced ever by Sudan.

2.4. Formation of Sudan Council of Churches and Peace Initiative

Government's attitude sensitized the national church leaders to speak with one united voice. Therefore, Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) was formed on 29th January 1964 from two Protestant Churches (i) Northern Sudan Christian Council and, (ii) Sudan Evangelical Council in the south. The two Christian entities brought together the Protestant Churches and Missionaries (*Kuku 1997, Werner, et-al 2000, and Mading 2010*). Later on, non-Protestant Churches like; the Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and others joined.

General Aboud's government was overthrown through civil demonstration organized by the civil society composing of; labour union, university of Khartoum and secondary schools student's unions in 1964. And the country experienced several elections, but all the civilian governments failed to address; southern and northern Sudan conflict, and economic recovery. Four and half years were wasted in religious debates between the major religious political parties those of: Umma, Democratic Unionist Party, and the Islamic Charter Front internally among themselves, and all against the Communist party and its alliance the southern parties. These conflicts have opened another chance for the militants to overthrow the civilians. Therefore, on 25th/5/1969 Colonel Jaafer Mohamed Nimeiry came to power, through military coup, as liberal officer in coalition with the communist party. Nimeiry immediately declared his government's interest in peace. Practically, he granted one year period for general amnesty (*Mekawi 2006*). Hence, the Christian agencies believed that the time which was not possible under General Aboud and the civil Islamic governments had now come for

them to mediate. Therefore, period in of 1971-1972, the World Council of Churches (WCC), All African Council of Churches (AACC), and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) contributed to this initiative with a visiting committee. Nimeiry's liberal government began to believe that, Christian institutions might understand the Sudan government's view. These co-feelings brought the two sides of: government and the rebels into a face-to-face meeting on 15th February 1972, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In March of the same year, a peace agreement was signed ending the 17 years of war with acknowledgement of the existing cultural and religious gaps between southern and the northern Sudan.

That peace agreement resulted into formation of the regional autonomous government with status of the High Executive Council (HEC). Most importantly, it created trust, harmony, and social equality feelings in southerners towards the northerners. From there, the Church became known by Nimeiry who promoted himself into rank of general as the peace-making organ. When General Nimeiry issued a decree for establishment of the Ministry for Religious Affairs in the North, the same principle was applied actively in the Southern Regional Government in Juba.

The positive atmosphere gave a room for general revision of educational system especially religious freedom and equality. Christian religion was taught in public schools equally with Islam (*Abdul-Rahim&Zein El-Abdiin2004*). Christian workers in public and private sectors in the north were granted prayer time on Sunday morning, in order to resume their work after 10:00am. The same to Muslims working in the south had to go for Friday prayers at 12:00 pm. But, according to the opposition, (anti-Nimeiry), the period from 1973-1983, Sudanese Churches were considered supporters of Nimeiry military regime (Maki1991:32). Practically, Sudan government signed diplomatic relationship with the Vatican in 1973, and the Vatican played a big role to support the Regional Government in the South, financially (*Ayom 2009*).

In Christian perspectives, the period of first civil war from 1955-1972 was evaluated as useful for Church growth especially among the Sudanese refugees in the neighbouring countries like; Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Zaire. The church had an opportunity for training and ordination of more religious leaders to higher levels of priesthood than it had previously been in Sudan (*The-Image, 1999, and Werner, et-al, 2000*). Practically, project of Bible translation for New Testament was completed into more than 14 languages by the year 1962. Nuer, Dinka Padang, Dinka Bor, Bari, Latuka, Zandi, Muru, Shiluk, Anuak and others in the south. In the Nuba Mountains, similar efforts were done, to five languages of; Kwalib, Heiban, Othuru, Korongo (Tabanya) and Moro (*Kuku 1997*).

3. Conclusion

Basically, religious interests and imbalance of education between the two parts of Sudan, i.e. the South and the North played the major role in the unity in July 1947.

Conflict of interests which occurred within the first six years of unity, was blamed on the British who were accused of betraying the Southerners who were less educated hence the educational imbalance in Sudan.

In conclusion, it was observed that, much as religion played a role of bringing peace through mediation, it also managed to play a role of encouraging other partner entities to involve themselves in providing funds for development.

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