

15 April Conflict in Sudan: Causes, Process, and Outcomes from a Sociological Perspective

Waleed Mohamed

Assist. Prof., International University of Africa, African Studies and Research Centre, Khartoum-SUDAN,
e-mail: waleedsdn@gmail.com, (ORCID:0000-0001-5747-6622)

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Abstract

This study addresses the ongoing war of April 15, 2023, in Sudan between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces from a sociological perspective. This war has undergone a set of radical transformations in its nature, the actors involved, and their agendas. The study employs a qualitative research design based on a sociological and interpretive approach to analyse the causes, processes, and consequences of the war in Sudan. The research strategy relies on a multi-method data collection process centred on documentary analysis—including academic literature, official reports, media narratives, and primary source documents—to ensure triangulation. The collected data was analysed through thematic analysis, structured around predefined axes of causes, processes, and consequences, and through process tracing to uncover causal mechanisms and event sequences. Throughout, the inquiry is structured and interpreted using key social theories and concepts, such as grievance versus greed, the monopoly of *legitima violence*, the social contract, and symbolic capital. The main argument that this war represents a foundational moment that has placed Sudan on the threshold of a radical transformation in its social and political structure. It may produce a new social entity radically different from pre-conflict Sudan. The central finding of this study that this war represents a foundational moment that has placed Sudan on the threshold of a radical transformation in its social and political structure. It may produce a new social entity radically different from pre-conflict Sudan. Identity has also been sharply redefined from its broad national character to tribal and regional affiliations. The state-based social networks such as parties and unions have been replaced by pre-state social networks of the tribal or ethnical armed military networks.

Keywords: Conflict, Sudan, Rapid Speed Force, Sudanese Army

Introduction

Wars among the people of a single nation have been a distinguishing feature of developing countries. The African continent has taken the lead in the record of these conflicts, to the extent that the term “intra-state armed conflict” has become synonymous with Africa today (Adegbite & Oyelade, 2017). Unfortunately, these internal wars have not led to the formation of strong states; rather, they have had a destructive character for the structure of the state in developing countries and its economy. This condition has hindered the weakened states resulting from such conflict from preventing subsequent rebellions or internal wars (Hoeffler, 2015).

The contemporary state of Sudan is a political product of the wars witnessed in this geographical area of east Africa, starting from the wars establishing the Funj Sultanate in central Sudan (1505-1821), passing through the Egyptian invasion of 1821, then the wars waged by the armies of Zubair Pasha to annex parts of South Sudan and Darfur to Sudan and Mahdisim revolution (1881-1899). Since the mid-twentieth century, Sudan has witnessed a series of internal wars. The war between the central government and rebel groups in South Sudan extended from 1955 to 2005, interspersed with short periods of peace, followed by the war in the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan and Darfur since 2003. It is now witnessing the most dangerous war in the history of the Sudanese state, where fighting is taking place between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces since April 2023. This war has undergone a set of radical transformations in its nature, the actors involved, and their agendas.

The lives of millions have turned into a hell of fear and destruction. But the effects of this war go far beyond material destruction, deaths, and injuries; it strikes at the very core of Sudan’s social structure. This war has created a humanitarian crisis, the worst in its modern history, but it also threatens to tear apart the already fragile social fabric of a multi-ethnic society (Nour, 2024).

The main argument is that the war raging in Sudan since April 15, 2023, is a radical transformation of Sudan's social and political structure as a result of this conflict. The central premise is that this war is not merely a military or political conflict, but a complex social phenomenon that could lead to the disintegration of the social contract among the components of the Sudanese state, the fragmentation of the social sphere, and the transformation of cities into areas of ethnic influence. This is accompanied by the disintegration of intermediary structures such as the family, school, and political parties, along with strong manifestations of a reshaping of identity from a broad national identity to armed tribal and regional identities. In this context, the dismantling of the state's monopoly on the means of violence has led to the proliferation of armed forces, the deepening of ethnic and tribal divisions, and their further arming. Nevertheless, this war represents a foundational moment that could produce a new social entity radically different from the previous Sudan. Reconstruction requires a new social and political vision that addresses the root causes of disintegration and redefines the relationship between the state and society.

This study addresses the ongoing war of April 15, 2023, in Sudan from a sociological perspective, across several topics, including the causes of this war, its processes, its results, and its social repercussions on Sudan.

By answering the key questions of this study:

How did historical processes of state formation, ethnic inequality, economic marginalization, and the establishment of parallel armies contribute to creating the structural conditions for the outbreak of the April 2023 war?

To what extent can the causes of the war be explained by the competition of elite interests, and how does this competition interact with the conflict between military and paramilitary factions for control of economic resources and political power?

How has the social construction of ethnic and regional identities by successive regimes become a tool for mobilizing conflicting parties to ignite violence, and how has this contributed to escalating the conflict and giving it the character of a civil war?

How is large-scale internal displacement based on ethnicity reshaping the social geography and demography of urban and rural areas in Sudan?

In what ways does the war fragment national identity and entrench sub-national (regional and ethnic) identities?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based on a sociological and interpretive approach to analyze the causes, processes, and consequences of the April 15, 2023, war in Sudan. The methodology is designed to provide a deep and contextual understanding of the conflict as a complex social phenomenon, rather than simply a political or military event. The research strategy relies on a substantial case study of the Sudanese conflict, analyzed from the perspective of established social theories of war.

The main sources of data of this study were; Academic references: Scholarly books and journal articles on the sociology of war, civil conflict, state fragility, and social identity, particularly those focusing on Sudan and similar African contexts. Official reports from international organizations and research centers, detailing humanitarian situations, displacement figures, and human rights violations. Primary source documents: Such as public statements, declarations, and policy statements issued by key actors and media sources to trace the narrative and events of the ongoing conflict.

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis and process tracing. In the thematic analysis the predefined research axes (nature of war, causes, process,

and social consequences) formed broad thematic categories. Within these categories, sub-themes were derived. The process tracing was crucial for studying the social processes of the conflict. The study tracing the causal mechanisms and sequence of events linking historical and structural causes to the outbreak of the April 2023 war and its subsequent social dynamics.

In analysis the key social concepts and theories such as grievance versus greed versus opportunity, the monopoly of legitimate coercion, the social contract, and symbolic capital were used as analytical lenses to interpret the data.

The Nature of War: A Sociological Approach

In this section, the researcher reviews the sociological literature concerning the nature of war and the interpretive approaches to its causes, attempting to provide a preliminary sociological reading of the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

Singer and Small (1972) offer one of the simplest definitions of war; they consider it as any armed conflict resulting in the deaths of at least one thousand people in combat (Malešević, 2017). Despite three years having passed since the outbreak of war in Sudan on the morning of Saturday, April 15, 2023, there is no consensus on the definition of the war.

International media sometimes describe it as a civil war, and at other times as an internal conflict. Some prefer to describe it simply as a conflict, while the Sudanese government describes it as an armed rebellion against the legitimate government in Khartoum. Given the clear foreign interventions during the war in Sudan, the prominent Sudanese academic Mohamed Jalal Hashim describes it as a foreign invasion of Su-

dan. Meanwhile, Sudanese communists have adhered to the traditional Marxist interpretation of the war. A statement from the Sudanese Communist Party reads:

“We in the Sudanese Communist Party always affirm that what is happening is not merely a military conflict over power, but a complex scene representing a conflict between the wings of parasitic capitalism within the country over power and resources. These are forces that have accumulated their wealth and privileges through corruption and the exploitation of power to plunder resources, and they use armed conflict and terrorism to reinforce their dominance.” “And it – the war – is, at the same time, a regional/international/imperialist scheme aimed at weakening the Sudanese state and preparing the conditions for disintegration and partition to drain the people’s capabilities and the country’s wealth and violate national sovereignty.” “This political and economic dimension (local, regional, and international) of the conflict places a double responsibility on the international community to intervene immediately to stop this war and those massacres.” (The-Sudanese-Communist-Party, 2025)

In contrast, there are variances in academic definitions of violent conflicts that occur within a state, due to differing perspectives on the context of the conflict, its demand, and the nature of the actors involved. A conflict is defined as a civil war if the armed conflict within a sovereign state is between the established legitimate government and another non-governmental party claiming sovereignty over the state's territories or part thereof, and the goal of the war is political control. Cederman and Vogt, distinguish between two types of civil wars based on the ultimate goal of the non-governmental party. They use the description “governmental civil war” if the goal of the rival party is complete control of the state and the forcible removal of the existing government. However, if the main goal of the non-governmental party is the secession of their region or the land over which they claim sovereignty, then this type of war is called a “regional civil war” (L.-E. Cederman & M. Vogt, 2017).

Sociologist Sinisa Malešević sees war as a social phenomenon, considering it organized violence resulting from two social processes: social organization with its complex structure providing a degree of solidarity, and an ideology with popular acceptance that provides legitimacy for this violence. He believes that war usually ends in social change(Malešević, 2017).Gaston Bouthoul, the proponent of the theory of Polemology (the science of war), asserts that war is a historical social phenomenon, one that gave birth to history and forms the major turning points in societies(Kazem, 2024).

Explanatory Approaches to War

Scholars of wars have presented several explanations for the causes of civil wars. Cederman & Vogt, distinguish between three explanatory approaches: Grievances, Greed, and Opportunities (L. E. Cederman & Vogt, 2017). The approach based on Grievances views internal conflict as a reaction to social, economic, and/or political injustice. In contrast, interpretations focusing on Greed explain civil war from the perspective of individuals' desire to maximize their profits from a narrow material perspective. This interpretation sees motives as less important, while a third logic seeks the causes of civil war in the Opportunities that enable actors to engage in violent mobilization.

Others add ideology as a cause of wars, considering that it provides a direct motive for collective violence, making armed conflicts longer and more bloody. Findings show that although ideology increases the duration of conflict, these effects vary by type and timing (Basedau et al., 2022). Others look at the state's condition of strength and weakness or fragility and stability as a conditional or contextual factor for the likelihood of war outbreak. That is, the (logic of opportunity) here explains how rebel violence is more likely to erupt in weak states. Therefore, we find that semi-democratic regimes are more susceptible to civ-

il violence than stable authoritarian and democratic regimes. Others add the ethnic factor, considering the conflicts that erupted in Rwanda and elsewhere. They see that marginalized ethnic groups, especially those that have undergone transformations in social status, have featured prominently in conflict statistics. They explain this result primarily from the perspective of grievances and the dialectical relationship with the perspective of opportunities; where grievances motivate the ethnic group to rebel and engage in conflict, especially if the size of the ethnic group is large. But paradoxically, some studies indicated that ethnic groups richer than the country's average income are more susceptible to rebellion, just like the poorest ethnic groups(Adegbite & Oyelade, 2017). The Sudanese experience indicated that the relationship of ethnic groups with power (Opportunities) plays a decisive role in the conflict. Elbadawi, confirms that the longest civil wars are caused by ethnically polarized societies, as rebel cohesion is easier and lasts longer under polarization (Elbadawi, 2000).

The researcher prefer to use the term civil war, due to the social division and the participation of a large number of Sudanese tribes in a long war. Despite the importance of the external factor, this does not diminish the social dimension of the war and its legitimacy among local actors.

Researchers' perspectives have varied regarding the causes of the conflict and war between the Sudanese Army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Deng points out that the ongoing conflict in Sudan is not merely ethnic, but rather a conflict of an instrumental character, which found its legitimacy due to the collapse of social contracts concerning access to resources, political participation, and the institutional weakness within Sudanese state institutions. Therefore, Deng views this war as an opportunity to rethink and reach an agreement on these issues and to reimagine governance and power in Sudan (Deng, 2025).

Meanwhile, others argue that the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Janjaweed militia, the precursor to

the Rapid Support Forces, became embroiled in a destructive struggle for control of the state following the fall of President al-Bashir's regime in 2019. As a result of the sustained support from President al-Bashir for the Rapid Support Forces when he used them to suppress rebel movements in Darfur as well as to protect his regime against military coups, this transformation allowed the Rapid Support Forces to expand their influence and turn into a powerful actor with ambitions exceeding their original mandate. This fostered within them coup intentions against the very regime and the seizure of the state, its institutions, and its resources(D'Agoût, 2025).

Konozy and Baleela trace the emergence of the Rapid Support Forces phenomenon back to the Janjaweed militia. The Janjaweed began when successive ruling regimes in Sudan employed fighters from the Misseriya and Rizeigat tribes to fight as their proxies in Bahr al-Ghazal during the 1980s. They point to the role of President Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya in supporting this phenomenon as part of his efforts to create an "Arab Belt" to encircle neighboring Chad, with which Libya was disputing some border areas. Baleela contends that the leaders of the Arab Belt militia forces in the 1980s later became the leaders of the Janjaweed militia in Darfur(Konozy, 2025).

Afriyie (2024) sees the fundamental reason for the outbreak of this conflict between the army and the Rapid Support Forces as the difference in perspectives between the two sides regarding the integration of the Rapid Support Forces into the Sudanese army, control over economic assets, and the nature of the democratic transition in Sudan. Here, the focus is specifically on the broad debate that dominated the public sphere in Sudan after mediators presented a roadmap to settle the dispute between the Sudanese army and some political parties concerning the democratic transition, known as the "Framework Agreement negotiations." These negotiations failed to reach an agreement on the timeframe required for integrating the Rapid Support Forces and to whom these forc-

es would be subordinate throughout the transitional period(Afriyie, 2024).

Finding

1 - Causes from a Sociological Perspective

Disintegration of the Social Contract:

Here two issues are presented: the first is the collapse of the "imagined social fabric" that used to connect various groups within the framework of the national state, and the other issue is the erosion of the state's legitimacy as a guarantor of security and justice and its transformation into a spoil for looting.

The problem of the social contract among Sudanese has remained one of the main dilemmas of the nation-building process in Sudan. According to the Sudanese historian Professor Hassan Mekki, Sudan's dilemma stems from it being a land of migrations. The course of the Nile River, which cuts through Sudan from south to north, played a role as an attraction point for these human migrations. On the other hand, Sudan represented a transit state for Muslim groups from West Africa and the Maghreb on their journey to Mecca to perform the Islamic Hajj pilgrimage. Many of these migrant groups settled in different parts of Sudan in distinct geographical patches, and Sudanese tribes exaggerated their distinction from each other by drawing lines on individuals' faces with a sharp tool to determine tribal lineage with permanent, unchangeable marks. Due to the Egyptian occupation in 1821, then the Mahdist Revolution (1881-1899), and

the British occupation (1899-1956), the contemporary state was formed in Sudan, carrying within it the roots of disparity and difference. The outbreak of the first armed rebellion against the state in Sudan, known as the Torit massacre in 1955, is considered the first manifestation of the weakness of the social contract regulating the relationship between the North and the South. This was followed by the emergence of protest movements such as the Darfur Development Front and the Beja Congress in 1958 in eastern Sudan, and protest movements in the Nuba Mountains, which later developed into armed rebellions against the state during the era of President Gaafar Nimeiry's government (1969-1985) (Alzaylai, 2014), in a practical crystallization of the process of dialectical social dialogue about the social contract governing Sudanese society and the erosion of the state's legitimacy as a guarantor of security and justice.

After the war between the North and the South stopped in 2005, the state and its local opponents in Sudan attempted to build a new social contract by establishing a new legal and political framework (a constitution) to address issues of identity and socio-economic inequality in Sudan, to guarantee Sudan's unity and put an end to the phenomenon of protest wars in the peripheral regions. However, after five years, the Southerners chose to secede from the mother state. Similarly, all peace agreements between the Sudanese government and protest movements in Darfur, the latest of which was the Juba Agreement following the popular revolution that overthrew the regime of Omar al-Bashir (1989-2019), failed to build a new social contract. Tirab argues that this approach to dealing with political and security problems in Sudan has been futile throughout Sudan's political and social history from independence to the present time (Tirab, 2021).

Breaking the State's Monopoly on the Means of Violence

Historically, the Sudanese Army was the monopolist of legitimate violence in Sudan. However, the emergence of armed regional protest movements with an ethnic dimension forced the Sudanese government to negotiate with these movements in Addis Ababa (1973), Nigeria, and Kenya (2005), and in Doha (2013). One of the most important results of this was the integration of these tribal militias into the Sudanese Army with their same tribal composition and different fighting doctrine. These integrated groups remained a renewable seed for new rebel movements taking up arms against the state in Sudan. On the other hand, the state in Sudan resorted to arming tribal groups that were being attacked by those rebel ethnic groups. Soon, these tribes turned into new militias killing on behalf of the state by proxy without formal integration according to known military arrangements. The Rapid Support Forces represent one of the most prominent models in this regard; where the government of President Omar al-Bashir (1989-2018), since the rebellion erupted in Darfur in 2003, worked to recruit some Arab tribes – the Janjaweed or camel herders – to fight the protest movements belonging to non-Arab ethnicities. These tribes enhanced their military participation by recruiting fighters from Chad belonging to the same ethnicity (D'Agoût, 2025; Mamdani, 2009).

Here we find that some Arab tribes that sided with the Sudanese government were not only fighting by proxy for the Sudanese government but were also waging their own battle within the context of the conflict between Arab and non-Arab tribes over land ownership and alleviating the feeling of lack of authenticity in that land. Mamdani, (2009) sees that if Darfur is marginalized in Sudan, then the Arabs of Darfur are marginalized in Darfur. In other words, these groups found an opportunity.

Later, those Arab fighting groups were granted the name Border Guard Forces, and this model was later developed into the Rapid Support Forces, with its command given exclusively to the Dagalo family. They were granted wide political, economic, and military privileges, and doors were opened wide for them to build relationships with external parties, such as Gulf countries and the European Union, and to recruit fighters from abroad, as happened after the 2003 rebellion. Press reports and videos have indicated the participation of military leaders and soldiers from the Chadian FACT movement and groups from the Arabs of Niger (Aljazeera.net, 07/04/2024), groups previously described by Tubiana as "Chadian Janjaweed" (Tubiana & Walmsley, 2008) who obey orders issued by Janjaweed leaders in West Darfur state, Sudan. Here, the third cause emerges, which is the expansion of the Rapid Support Forces and their domination over the traditional social system.

The transformation of the Sudanese economy into a rentier economy influenced by armed alliances

The Sudanese economy has suffered from an imbalance in the relationship between development on one hand and the distribution of services. Professor of Economics at the University of Khartoum, Professor Muhammad Hashim Awad, points out that successive Sudanese governments found it easy to establish development projects in central Sudan or along the Nile River and its two main branches, the Blue Nile and the White Nile, due to the presence of railways, paved roads, and electricity. In return, they used part of the returns from these projects to establish and build ser-

vice projects like schools and universities, without realizing that the graduates of these universities would need employment in development projects, which are lacking in their regions. That is, this economic plan worked on creating generations of educated people who cannot find jobs, forcing them to turn into protest movements (موضع, 1974).

In this context, we study the phenomenon of the Rapid Support Forces' expansion within the context of the war economy in Sudan. We observe that the Sudanese economy transformed from a productive economy to a rentier economy relying on armed alliances since the emergence of armed rebellion movements with the launch of the Anya-Nya movement – meaning black snake venom – in South Sudan, where money began to flow into the hands of the warlords through support from neighboring countries and other countries (Lagu, 2006). The weakness of development in the peripheries previously led the people of those areas to resort to military service in the armed forces. But after the establishment of the Border Guards and later the Rapid Support Forces, and the significant financial support provided by the state to them, and opening the door wide for them to invest in gold mining in some areas rich in the yellow metal, such as the Jebel Amer area.

In addition to participating in the war in Yemen on behalf of Sudan between the Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, and the Houthi group since 2015, affiliation with the Rapid Support Forces became attractive as a source of money and securing livelihoods for large segments of Sudanese, particularly from the Arab tribes in Darfur (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed newspaper, August 30, 2015). This was accompanied by the emergence of a "shadow economy" that creates material interests linked to the Rapid Support Forces. The activities of this economy included gold smuggling, black-market dollar trading, real estate speculation, currency counterfeiting, and the manufacture of chemical drugs.

After the war broke out, the “shadow economy” worked to support the continuation of the conflict. On February 13, 2025, Sudanese authorities revealed the discovery of a factory for producing narcotic pills in the Khartoum North oil refinery area, producing 100,000 Captagon pills per hour, owned by the Rapid Support Forces, and that most of the production went as stimulants for its soldiers. The Sudanese authorities did not rule out that part of the factory's production found its way to neighboring countries and local communities(Aljazeera.net, 13/02/2025).

Conflict over Symbolic Capital and Hegemony

The competition between military and civilian elites to monopolize the “representative legitimacy” of the state is one of the most prominent causes of the war in Sudan. This harmful competition began since the success of the uprising in April 2019 and the accession of some political forces to power through an alliance with the army leadership and the Rapid Support Forces. This is due to the fact that the political forces proceeded from the belief that the Sudanese army was still loyal to the old regime, and to prevent any coup by it against the authority, they resorted to an alliance with the Rapid Support Forces as a military force representing the objective counterweight to the army. Thus, the commander of the Rapid Support Forces gained a high political status alongside his military power. On the other hand, the commander of the Rapid Support Forces began communicating with tribal leaders and mobilizing them politically, and the Rapid Support Forces became an expression of, and a substitute for the traditional system. For this reason, the commander of the Rapid Support Forces rejected all attempts to dissolve his forces and integrate them into the Sudanese army. Thus, the competition between the army and the Rapid Support Forces over hegemony and power ended in war on the morning of April 15.

Native Administrations and Land Ownership

Sudan has witnessed a hybrid administrative system in its peripheral regions, combining formal state institutions with traditional tribal institutions. The Native Administration system consists of three levels, mostly the Nazir and his family, the class of Umdas, and the class of Sheikhs from among the Sheikhs and Umdas. The British colonial authorities established this system in order to administer Sudan at the lowest cost through the previous tribal system of the Mahdist state in Sudan, which established a more national administrative system and did not require tribal backgrounds for the rulers of the regions.

This system has weakened the concept of the state in the minds of the region's inhabitants, strengthening tribal ties instead. It has also undermined the idea of equal citizenship by granting tribes the right to own vast tracts of land without developing them through infrastructure projects or allowing other tribes to own and benefit from them. This hybrid administrative system is a major cause of conflict between local groups in Sudan and has intensified the ongoing war(Abdul-Jalil & Unruh, 2013).

2 - The Process of Sudanese War from a Sociological Perspective

Militarization of Identity

Here, the researcher observes the transformation of tribal and regional affiliations from cultural ties into armed military identities in the ongoing war in Sudan. Although the Rapid Support Forces had an ethnic composition in its original formation, after the war broke out on April 15, 2023, and the Rapid Support Forces failed to achieve complete control over power in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, due to the intervention of the Sudanese Air Force. Thus the Rapid Support Forces began mobilizing the people of Arab tribes in Kordofan and Darfur according to the norms and traditions of traditional tribal wars in those areas, known as Al-Fazaa. Waves of non-professional tribal fighters began flocking to the battlefields in the capital Khartoum and other conflict areas in Sudan. Likewise, local communities in the Darfur and Kordofan regions split between the army and the Rapid Support Forces according to ethnic or racial background. Here, the nature of tribal alignment in the 2023 war differed from that in 2003, where Arab tribes sided with the Rapid Support Forces, while non-Arab tribes sided with the Sudanese army this time.

Here, the war in Sudan entered a new phase, becoming a “multi-layered war” or small local wars within a large national war, where the collective memory of historical conflicts was summoned and reproduced. For example, the traditional conflict between the Arab Hawazma tribes and the black Nuba tribes in South Kordofan was reproduced, as was the conflict be-

tween Arab tribes and the Zaghawa tribe in the city of El Fasher in North Darfur state, and between Arab tribes and the Masalit tribe in the city of El Geneina in West Darfur state, where Rapid Support Forces soldiers committed horrific massacres against the Masalit and Zaghawa tribes. Mamdani, explains the excessive cruelty that characterized the wars in Darfur, which is part of the African Sahel region, as stemming from the crisis of nomadic peoples who have no homeland and are fighting for survival and land (Mamdani, 2009). Among these groups are the Abala tribes (i.e., those who raise camels) (Tubiana & Walmsley, 2008). Members of these tribal groups represent the backbone of the Rapid Support Forces, and the commander of the Rapid Support Forces, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), and the most prominent leaders of the Rapid Support Forces belong to these cross-border tribes. These groups worked to affirm their distinction from the other side in the war by using cultural expressions and war terminology specific to their social components.

Fragmentation of the Social Sphere

The April 15 war in Sudan has resulted in the fragmentation of the public into multiple spheres of influence subject to parallel authorities. Cities and regions have transformed from spaces of coexistence into arenas of social exclusion. As the war shifted from fighting around the Sudanese army's military headquarters in Khartoum to looting citizens' homes and displacing them, and then moved to other cities with the aim of controlling, plundering, and subjugating civilians, Sudan has witnessed massive internal displacement. Amnesty International estimates the number of internally displaced persons at 9 million, with approximately 1.8 million refugees in neighboring countries. The movement of populations from one area to another within Sudan indicates that it occurs based on ethnic and racial backgrounds, and the reason for this is that

aggression against civilians is carried out based on their ethnic and tribal backgrounds, especially by the Rapid Support Forces (Hoeffler, 2015).

At the beginning of the war, the displacement movement began with the departure of members of Arab tribes belonging to northern Sudan from various cities in Darfur. In contrast, following the Sudanese army's liberation of the capital Khartoum and cities in central Sudan, many families and population groups belonging to Arab tribes in Darfur, especially those whose members participated in military operations on the side of the Rapid Support Forces, were displaced.

Comparing this dimension with the previous South Sudan war experience (1955-2005): I noticed that the fighting was exclusively between the regular fighting forces, while the cities were open paths for social communication between citizens from the North and the South through trade and population movement, to the extent that northern Sudan became the main destination for the displacement of Southerners. This phenomenon later contributed to the process of cultural assimilation among the mostly Christian Southerners into the prevailing Arab-Islamic culture in the North. The war also involved a new pattern of conflict, where it is noted that the conflict sometimes takes on the character of a conflict between urban communities and rural communities, as rural people and nomads constitute the vast majority of the soldiers and leadership of the Rapid Support Forces, while the supporters of the Sudanese Armed Forces belong presumably more to urban or settled communities.

Disintegration of Intermediate Structures

A United Nations report reveals that Sudanese women and girls are paying a heavy price and bearing the brunt of the humanitarian crisis of one of the world's largest displacement crises. Women constitute approximately 53% of those displaced by the ongoing war in Sudan since April 15, 2023. In addition to displacement and homelessness, women are facing numerous dangers. Around 7,000 women die from childbirth amidst hunger and the lack of medical and health services. They also face sexual violence, rape, human trafficking, and slavery during their displacement or while searching for livelihoods and food. The UN report indicates that approximately 7 million women have experienced gender-based violence (UNWomen, 2024). The member of the National Committee for Investigating Violations of National and International Humanitarian Law Rawda Abdel Qader, revealed that the committee documented 1,392 cases of sexual violence against women in several states across the country. These cases included gang rapes, sexual slavery, enforced disappearances, as well as forced pregnancies and marriages. Abdel Qader explained that "these figures represent only 2% of the actual violations on the ground," noting that "the Rapid Support Forces used sexual violence as a weapon to humiliate civilians for ethnic reasons and force them into displacement from their homes." Experts say that fear of social stigma and social restrictions prevent Sudanese women from reporting violations and seeking medical, legal, and psychological support (Aljazeera.net, 2025).

The war has shown the dissolution of social institutions that represented spaces for social settlement. The family has transformed from a stable institution for sound social upbringing into an institution suffering from hunger, displacement, fear, and aggression

due to its ethnic or regional background. Schools have closed and their places have turned into prisons or refugee camps for the civilians. Likewise, political parties have transformed from their role in promoting civic values into tools for war propaganda. Armed organizations have emerged as alternatives to traditional state institutions, even in regions where there have been no armed movements since the establishment of the Sudanese state, such as Al Jazirah state in central Sudan.

Transformations in the Social Structure

Wars affect societies and their structures radically. In the case of Sudan, we find that the conflict revolves primarily due to competition over power and wealth (Niblock, 1987; TIRAB, 2016). But internal wars in Sudan usually do not lead to equality; rather, they end up creating a new class within the context of the system of inequality, which the protest movements or groups rebelling against the official authority complained about. This phenomenon has begun to appear in the context of the ongoing war in Sudan, where a new class of war profiteers or those who have climbed the social mobility ladder has emerged. It is a new “warrior class” that monopolizes violence and has begun to acquire wealth, whether through direct benefit from looting public property and banks or due to the war and support from foreign countries. This class includes a group of highway robbers and thieves who previously led local gangs in Kordofan and Darfur and found in this war an opportunity for wealth and social status transition. The local community now mentions prominent names in the ongoing war events. In contrast, intellectuals and civil society leaders are being marginalized.

Change in the Social Values System and Reshaping of Identity

A further consequence of the war is the erosion of national citizenship and coexistence in favor of narrower, primary loyalties to tribe and region. Within this environment, a process of identity restructuring unfolds, whereby local identities—ethnic, racial, or regional—crystallize into dominant and exclusive alternatives to a unifying national identity.

This dynamic is exemplified by the emergence of “Al-Juniadya or Al-Atawa” as a consolidating identity for Arab tribal groups in Kordofan and Darfur. Proponents frame it as the authentic identity of Sudan’s indigenous Arab population. In pursuit of this vision, advocates have sought to establish common ground with Arab tribes in other regions, such as the Shukriya in eastern Sudan’s Butana region (encompassing parts of Al Jazira, Gedaref, and Kassala states) and the Al-Rifa’i tribe in the Blue Nile and Sennar states.

An early manifestation of this trend was a speech by Rapid Support Forces Commander Makin Al-Sadiq, delivered before thousands of Misseriya youth in West Kordofan who declared their allegiance to the RSF (Shatot, 2023).

Contrasting with this discourse is a parallel, exclusionary narrative centered on a distinct Arab identity for northern Sudanese tribes. Some of its proponents have called for secession to form a separate “State of the River and the Sea.” Mirroring this ethnic based identity uprising, certain groups in eastern Sudan have moved to form ethnically based militias, advocating explicitly for autonomous control over their region and its resources. This position was articulated, for instance, by Eastern Sudan Liberation Movement leader Ibrahim Dunia in a statement published on December 25, 2025 (IBRAHIM, 2025).

Running parallel to this profound identity fragmentation, Sudan's societal value system faces a severe crisis. The tolerance once characteristic of Sudanese society has been supplanted by violence, suspicion, and fear of the "other." The enduring civil wars—first in Darfur and now in Khartoum and central Sudan—have formed the backdrop against which a new generation has come of age. Consequently, the institutions responsible for social cohesion now confront fundamental and unprecedented challenges within a society exhausted by poverty and conflict.

Conclusion

Sociologically, this war represents a foundational moment that has placed Sudan on the threshold of a radical transformation in its social and political structure. It may produce a new social entity radically different from pre-conflict Sudan, where infrastructure has been destroyed and Sudanese people have been pushed below the poverty line. The reconstruction process in Sudan must include a social vision for building the new Sudan, where its peoples are united socially and politically, and where economic and social inequalities are eliminated.

The international experiences of healing and reconciliation after genocide or mass killing shows that it is also necessary to launch a serious process of recovery from the war experience at the individual and collective levels (Staub et al., 2005).

Identity has also been sharply redefined from its broad national character to tribal and regional affiliations, and from cultural ties to armed military identities. Social networks such as parties and unions have been replaced by a social network of a tribal or ethnic nature with all its cultural baggage. De Dreu, points to a similar experience in West Africa where the symbolic dimensions of local culture fueled the long-term conflict between the Mandingo and Loma and embodied the metaphor of maternal kinship as a complete political culture for political alliance among lineage groups (De Dreu, 2010).

The study showed that the state's relinquishment of the monopoly on weapons leads to conflict and the fragmentation of authority in the country. Also, the integration processes of rebel groups following peace agreements were unsuccessful, as the integrated groups remained a latent nucleus for a new rebellion. The historical experience in Sudan proved the fallacy of this, as the Anya-Nya forces were integrated into the army in 1973, but they reproduced themselves in the form of a rebellion against the army they were integrated into in 1983. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the Turkish model in dealing with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), where it was agreed that the party would voluntarily announce the dissolution of its formations and hand over its weapons, and its soldiers, who are not accused in a specific private case, would return to live in society.

The competition between civilians and the military over power and legitimacy in Sudan is one of the most important causes of internal wars in the country. The constant demand from civilians was to remove the army from politics and return it to its barracks. However, it seems that Sudan needs a new approach that systematically and constitutionally incorporates the army into politics, making the army's presence within the political process and the democratic system a guarantee for the continuity of democracy and preventing its deviation on one hand, and an acknowledgment of the reality that the army is the skeleton upon which the flesh of the state in Sudan was built. Experiences in South America indicate that some army leaders were the ones who led their countries towards full democratic transformation (Huntington, 1991). Peoples may go through war in their history, but it is important that this war leads to a better future so that the souls of the victims may rest in peace.

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