THE IMPACT OF TRIBALISM ON POLITICAL STABILITY IN SUDAN, THE CASE OF SUDAN WAR 2023

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ABDELLATIF ABDELWAHAB MOHAMED ZIBEIR

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THE IMPACT OF TRIBALISM ON POLITICAL STABILITY IN SUDAN, THE CASE OF SUDAN WAR 2023

Abdellatif Abdelwahab Mohamed Zibeir
121605020

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ozan Kuyumcuoğlu
İstanbul Bilgi University _____

Assist. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Ali Tuğtan
İstanbul Bilgi University _____

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Volkan İpek
Yeditepe University _____

Date of Approval: 09/30/2024

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Name Surname: Abdellatif Abdelwahab Mohamed Zibeir

Signature:

ABSTRACT

My research is based on how Sudanese tribalism is critically related to political stability, narrowing it down to how the 2003 Darfur War has been linked to the Sudanese War of 2023. The basis of this research questions how historical context such as the formation of RSF by the previous Sudanese government relates to the current tribal dynamics and political instability in Sudan.

The dissertation begins by considering the 2003 Darfur War and the leading role taken by the RSF, heavily composed of Arabic tribes from Darfur, in its violent attacks against the non-Arab tribes. The racial dimensions of this conflict, which have carried through even to the present, are then discussed. The ways in which actions taken by the RSF have incited further tensions, informing the course of the 2023 Sudanese War, are assessed.

In this regard, using integrated qualitative research approaches, I attempt to tease out the complex interplay between tribalism, racial tensions, and political stability in Sudan by drawing on case studies and content analyses. More precisely, I shall closely analyze how the history of the Darfur War and the rise of the RSF have configured the current conflict: the exclusion of communities from power and ethnic-based violence.

This research is based on an essential hypothesis that tribalism and tribal alliances played a significant, determining role in the current Sudanese war.

The dissertation, therefore, concludes with an attempt at an incisive analysis of how past tribal conflicts-like those in Darfur-merged with state-sponsored violence to have a lingering effect on the political stability of Sudan today.

Keywords: Rapid Support Force (RSF); Tribalism; Darfur; Political Instability; Tribal Alliance

ÖZ

Tezim, Sudan'daki kabilecilik ve siyasi istikrar arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi, 2003 Darfur Savaşı ile 2023 Sudan Savaşı arasındaki bağlantılara odaklanarak incelemektedir. Ana soruya yanıt aramaktadır: Darfur Savaşı'nın tarihi arka planı, önceki Sudan hükümeti tarafından oluşturulan Hızlı Destek Kuvvetleri'nin (HDK) oluşumu da dahil olmak üzere, Sudan'daki güncel kabile dinamiklerini ve siyasi istikrarsızlığı nasıl şekillendirmektedir?

2003 Darfur Savaşı'nın incelenmesiyle başlayan ve büyük ölçüde Darfur'un Arap kabilelerinden oluşan RSF'nin Arap olmayan topluluklara karşı şiddeti sürdürmedeki baskın rolünü ele alan tez, çatışmanın kalıcı ırksal boyutlarını ayrıntılı olarak analiz etmektedir. RSF'nin eylemlerinin devam eden gerilimleri nasıl körüklediğini ve böylece 2023 Sudan Savaşı'nın seyrini nasıl etkilediğini araştırmaktadır.

Nitel araştırma yöntemleri, vaka çalışmaları ve içerik analizi gibi yöntemlerin bir karışımını kullanarak, Sudan'daki kabilecilik, ırksal gerilimler ve siyasi istikrar arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi çözmeyi amaçlıyorum. Özellikle, Darfur Savaşı'nın tarihi mirasının ve RSF'nin ortaya çıkışının mevcut çatışmanın, belirli toplulukların marjinalizasyonu ve etnik çizgiler boyunca şiddetin sürdürülmesi gibi, nasıl şekillendiğini inceleyeceğim.

Bu araştırma, kabileciliğin ve kabile ittifaklarının mevcut Sudan savaşında önemli bir rol oynadığı temel varsayımına dayanmaktadır.

Sonuç bölümünde, Darfur gibi geçmiş kabile çatışmalarının ve devlet destekli şiddetin Sudan'ın bugünkü siyasi istikrarı üzerindeki kalıcı etkilerine dair derinlemesine bir analiz sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hızlı Destek Kuvvetleri (HDK); Darfur; Kabilecilik; Siyasi İstikrarsızlık; Kabile İttifakları

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DDF:	Darfur Development Front
DDPD:	Doha Document for Peace in Darfur
FFC:	Forces of Freedom and Change
ICC:	Internation Criminal Court
ICRC:	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP:	Internally displaced person
IGAD:	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IOM:	International Organization for Migration
JEM:	Justice and Equality Movement
JPA:	Juba Peace Agreement
NCP:	National Congress Party
NISS:	National Intelligence and Security Service
RSF:	Rapid Support Forces
SAF:	Sudanese Armed Forces
SPA:	Sudanese Professionals Association
SPLA:	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLA-N:	Sudan People's Liberation Army North
TMC:	Transitional Military Council
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
UN:	United Nations

“Nations with many tribes and factions, are rarely controlled by the state.”

Ibn Khaldun

INTRODUCTION

In Sudan's ancient and modern history, the tribe has remained an important actor which the political, religious, security, economic and cultural sphere derives its strength.

The fabric of Sudanese society has long been woven with the threads of tribal affiliations, defining the political and social of the country for centuries. The ongoing conflict in Sudan that started in 2023 is one such evidence. This dissertation argues that tribalism has affected the level of Sudan's stability over the ages, and it further provides evidence that tribalism is one of the many factors that can help us to explain the genesis of the current war in the country especially concerning the role of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), taking into consideration that the Arab tribes of Sudan mainly Darfur region, are the main component of these forces (Ahmed, 2022).

This dissertation also shows how the current war in Sudan is a continuation to the violent actions of the RSF which occurred in early 2000 by the Janjaweed militias in Darfur, where tensions between Arab and non-Arab tribes have occurred for decades. These tensions erupted into open conflict in the early 2000s, as Arab tribes banded together to create the Janjaweed militia, a group famous for its brutal tactics against non-Arab tribes, which would later become the RSF, a key player in Sudan's current ongoing war.

This transformation of the Janjaweed militia into a formal paramilitary force highlights the impact of tribal dynamics on Sudan's military and politics, providing an example of how historical tribal conflicts have paved the way to today's Sudan modern crises.

While Sudan's political instability stems from a complex interplay of factors including economic challenges, military involvement in politics, and historical colonial legacies, this thesis will primarily focus on the impact of tribalism and ethnic divisions. The central hypothesis of this study is that tribalism has been a fundamental, yet often underexplored, driver of political instability in Sudan, directly contributing to the current conflict**.** This paper indeed recognizes the role played by other determinants that have contributed to the political instability in Sudan. However, it will put more focuses on the tribal dynamics particularly the ones involving the Arab tribes of Darfur and the transformation from the

Janjaweed to the RSF as an essential perspective that can be used to understand one of the motives behind the ongoing war. By highlighting this aspect, the thesis also aims to provide a discussion to an important but often overlooked aspect of Sudan's political problem, while contributing to a better understanding of the roots of the current conflict and the possibilities for its resolution.

Sudanese tribalism is often linked to identity crises, which stem from diversity and the unequal distribution of resources needed for fair and inclusive development, this lack of development paved the way for tribal disputed over resources, Ignorance, limited allegiances, and a feeling of attachment to smaller or regional identities (Musa M. , 2019). Tribal conflicts in Sudan, emerged from a different of factors such as rivalry between different tribes over farming land and animals grazing, lack of water resources, environmental issues like drying up of land and soil degradation, theft followed by retaliation, and the movement of arms and weapons from surrounding countries.

The absence of a state system that handle tribes and ethnicity related issues from an impartial perspective has largely contributed to Sudan’s ongoing tribal issues, this can be particularly seen in the case of Darfur where ethnic groups perceived the government's intervention as favoring one side (Musa A. M., 2018).

The lack of democracy also contributed to fuelling tribalism and conflict (ibid). The weakness of the democratic machinery in Sudan has greatly contributed to increasing tribal tensions and continuing conflict in the country (Al-Nur, 2021). In the absence of a strong democratic framework, power remained consolidated within the ruling elite, which often manipulates tribal loyalty for its own self-serving interest in authority, which has led to this democratic deficit, where opportunities for peaceful political participation and conflict resolution have become so limited that the only way for marginal groups to attain representation and resources is through their tribal affiliations. Besides, the exclusionary governance has impeded a universal nation-wide identity from evolving across tribal divides. Successive authoritarian regimes often use the entrenched tribal divide to their advantage by pursing divide-and-rule tactics. This has not only exacerbated traditional tribal enmities but also militarized tribal identities, as testified by the state's co-option of Arab militias in Darfur (ibid).

The roots of the tribal conflict go back to previous historical circumstances that have accumulated to form the bleak picture of the reality of the situation in Sudan. Tribes and their structures still play a major role in shaping behaviour and influencing politics in Sudan.

Sudan's history has witnessed several stages that were pivotal in shaping tribal dynamics, beginning with the Funj Kingdom, as tribal alliances were initiated between the Funj and Arabs. However, it was the following periods that set the structure of tribal dynamics in Sudan, such as the Ottoman rule period, British colonization, and various national regimes particularly the National Congress Party (NCP) since this period was characterized by crucial politicization of tribes, particularly in Darfur, a topic that this thesis will explore in greater detail.

Over the past thirty years, particularly under the rule of the National Islamic Movement (NCP) or as it known in Sudan by the 'Ingaz' which mean 'Salvation' regime, this influence has grown stronger as tribes are more politicized, and the ethnic divisions have become clearer (Musa A. M., 2018).The relationship between the tribe and the political stability in Sudan represented a serious challenge regarding the level of the influence that tribes could have on the security of the country, especially that tribes constitute a major component of the Sudan political systems, despite the difference in the degree of its political, economic and social influence, which raises a problem about the nature of the relationship between the state and the tribe.

The importance of the study is highlighted by the fact that it attempts to clarify the political role of tribalism in shaping the Sudanese political stability. The study aims to examine the future role of the tribalism in Sudan in light of the challenges facing the state. More specifically, the importance of this study is highlighted through, providing an up to date material that helps researchers and specialists understand the role of the tribalism in the Sudanese context as well as understanding its impact on the current war, contributing to the field of studies the subject concerning tribalism and political stability in Sudan, and contributing to the understanding of the role of the tribes in the Sudan during 2023 war.

Sudan is bound to be predisposed toward tribal configurations that might be a main determinant in shaping the country's political and social dynamics. Tribal violence has

manifested across the diverse regions of Sudan, underlining its pervasive impact on stability in the country.

All these conflicts have changed in intensity and nature over the years. According to a 2009 report by Swiss researcher Julie Flint, while inter-Arab tribal conflict was nothing new, its ferocity dramatically rose with the wide-ranging armament, improved training, and use of government resources in tribal battles. Flint's report underlined accusations by human rights organizations that the Sudanese government pursued what they called 'designed chaos'. In real life, this meant deliberately encouraging tribal fighting and proliferation of weapons. This was accompanied "by the emergence of armed rebel movements in Darfur, eastern Sudan, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, which did not declare themselves as political parties, but announced an armed rebellion calling for the elimination of marginalization in regional areas. The emergence of the rebel movements transformed the political scene in Sudan into a complex political tribal conflict in which the tribe might not be present with its famous traditions, but with its high leadership.

The disputes between herders from one tribe and farmers from another tribe were often the spark that ignited tribal conflicts since clashes were faced whenever the livestock of the first group encroached upon the crops and property of the second group, not to mention when drought and famine hit. However, these conflicts evolved after the outbreak of the Darfur crisis starting in 2003. Such tribes, supported by the government, got involved in armed robbery. With the heavy machine guns and rocket launchers used in the tribal conflicts accompanying this crisis, casualties were high, along with unprecedented numbers of displaced and refugees. During the same period, weapons spread in the states of eastern Sudan, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, influenced by tribal-based rebel movements.

These examples, from across the geography and recent history of the country, demonstrate how deeply entrenched tribal conflicts are within the sociopolitical fabric of Sudan. They provide important context for the current war that involves the RSF by highlighting how tribal affiliations have been weaponized and politicized to contribute massively to Sudan's ongoing instability.

With 570 tribes from 57 different ethnic groups across the 18 states of Sudan (Aljazeera, 2024), Sudan's complex tribal landscape has contributed much to shaping its political and social dynamics. The violence that erupted among its different tribes altogether marks the presence of Sudan's comprehensive impact on its stability. In the west, Darfur has been the theatre of protracted conflict between the Arab tribes and non-Arab groups, such as the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa, especially with the Janjaweed militia, since 2003. The eastern Sudan has also been a witness to conflicts between Beja and Rashaida tribes in the Red Sea State.

Before South Sudan's independence, most conflicts were between Dinka and Nuer tribes, with this dynamic continuing after secession. Central Sudan has also continued to see conflict, most notably over the Abyei region between nomadic Arab tribes, such as the Misseriya, and the Ngok Dinka.The North-South Sudan conflict, spanning nearly five decades (1955-1972 and 1983-2005), exemplifies the profound impact of tribal dynamics on Sudan's political landscape. This war, often simplified as a struggle between the Arab Muslim north and the predominantly Christian and animist south, had deep tribal underpinnings. Generally, the Dinka and Nuer were leading the Southern rebellion, the two largest ethnic groups of the south, against the northern government dominated by Arab tribes (Hutchinson, 1999). Attempting to impose Arabic as a language and Islamic law on the south, northern government activities further contributed to the conflict since such moves threatened the tribal identities and traditions of southern groups. It also dramatized the complex inter-tribal dynamics of the south itself, with the continuous shifting of rivalries and alliances. Factors such as these influenced military strategy and political alliance in respect to the distribution of resources during the war. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, which gave birth to and later on led to the independence of South Sudan in 2011, tried to balance these tribal imbalances, but the unending tribal conflicts in Sudan and South Sudan today are testimonies to the depths of these divisions.

Defining the concepts of tribalism is significant to understand the underlying factors in conflicts, as well as for recognizing the influence of various identities in civil wars in Sudan and within other countries as well. The term tribe has its origins from the Latin

term ‘tribus’, the administrative divisions and voting units of ancient Rome (Cornell, 1995). It later appeared in biblical texts to describe the divisions of the early Israelites and entered Middle English with this meaning in the thirteenth century. In later centuries, it began to be used outside of biblical contexts and started to resemble concepts like race and lineage (Murray, 1928), According to Musa Mukhtar, tribe indicates to a social entity with values that bonds the group and preserves their interests, while Tribalism serves as a foundation for identity and implies a feeling of belonging. (Musa A. M., 2018).

During the 19th century, anthropology, which was mainly influenced by expansive concepts of historical advancement and social development, integrated the term "tribe" into its portrayal of early societies guided by principles of 'kinship'. Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881), a leading anthropological theorist at that time, developed a general scheme for human societal evolution through three stages: from ‘savagery,’ to ‘barbarism’, and then to ‘civilization’. In Morgan’s model, the 'tribe' (the Greek phylon) was a political unit formed by kinship units called phratries each comprised several 'clans' (gens) which were composed of families sharing descent from a common ancestor (Morgan, 1877).

Social anthropologist argued that this system was a general model for tribal societies without a central government where the branching family lines of a single ancestry created political and territorial units. These units were made up of descendants from common ancestors, who grouped together based on how closely related they were to form increasingly larger political units.

Anthologists approach in criticizing tribes and tribalism stems from its evolutionary connotation (Vismara, 2018). Tribe was seen as primitive organization that comes before the state, and it describes a social system which lacks political institution centralization undergoing continuous processes of fusion and fission (ibid).

Although anthropologists’ tendencies have always been focused on studying complex societies instead of focusing only on what they considered simple societies, like tribes. However, being part of a tribe was an important part of the identity for many people in the Middle East and Africa. So, even though scholars criticize the idea of tribes, it is still used to describe social organization and reflects how people see their changing group identities (Maisel, 2014)

Social anthropologist elaborated the term ‘tribal’ within a distinct model of ‘stateless societies’ inspired by the work on Evans Pritchard on the Nuer social structure where he suggested two categories of African polities. The first group as he refers to as Group A, it involves societies with a centralized government, and group B which involves of societies with absence of centralized government ‘stateless societies’, both groups share similarities in terms of status and wealth. Pritchard argued that Those who consider state should be defined by the presence of governmental institutions will regard the first group as primitive states and the second group as stateless societies where political relations were regulated through a system of a ‘Segmentary system’ (Evans-Pritchard, 1940).

In the postcolonial context, anthropologists began to renounce the remains of colonial ideology and its vocabulary. Historical research soon revealed that many 'tribes' were colonial-period creations. Usually, the names were generic outsider terms that had been crystallized in administrative categories. For instance, Southall shows how the 'tribes' of the Nyamwezi and Sukuma in Tanganyika and the Hausa in West Africa were colonial-period congealment’s.

Starting in the 1990s, the study field of tribes and tribalism started get less attention due to the criticisms of the postcolonial intellectuals who criticized terms like tribe and caste which were used by colonial and national governments as a tool to justify their own administration and control people (Vismara, 2018) The concept of the tribe played a distinct role during the period of colonial expansion, serving as the social unit and a characteristic form of social organization for peoples perceived as less advanced than the European and American colonizers. As Malcolm Yapp points out:

It was only with the sixteenth-century expansion of Europe into the Americas and Africa that the association of tribes with a more primitive order of mankind began, and only with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century that this was formalized into that concept of progress which set tribal people outside the pale of civil society. It was then supposed that the natural course of human development was a progression to higher levels of social, economic and political organization, which could be equated with civilization; and that those people who remained grouped in tribes represented an earlier, lower form of life, left behind by the march of history and destined to be redeemed and refashioned by the

intervention of superior forces. The epithet most commonly found in association with the word tribe was savage. (Yapp, 2012)

Tribalism has been viewed negatively, it has been considered as a sign of backwardness as in the context of Africa, or, in the context of Arab nationalism, as a colonial legacy (Vismara, 2018). The shift from using the term "tribe" to "tribalism" highlights the continuation of behaviours and institutions linked with tribal structures even as these structures weaken or disappear (ibid). This includes examples of arbitration and conflict resolution, often tied to "tribal law." In Palestine, for instance, tribal law was institutionalized during the British mandate and continued for various reasons (Khalil, 2015), which resulted in creating a situation of legal pluralism (De lauri, 2012) where traditional tribal practices coexist with modern legal frameworks and operate beside and/or in conformity with “formal justice” (Bonte, 2009).

Appiah define Tribe as a as a group of people who are descended from common ancestors and ruled by a hereditary leader, sharing a common unified culture encompassing language, religion, and dwell in a clearly defined geographic area (Appiah, 1999). Deka also touch upon the communality as a main feature of defining a tribe as he argues that there must be continuous traditional organization and reciprocity. This is characterized by a strong sense of common identity that creates a feeling of tribal belonging (Ḍekā, 1993).

Paglia rejects the concept of tribe in modern usage, as he believes it a product of colonialism and it doesn’t relate to any homogeneous identity. Further, he believes that the term "tribe" is usually used to carry racist implications, related to the perceived notions of primitiveness of one group in comparison to the advancement of another, he mentions that the nineteenth century European colonial concept of tribe oversimplified the pluralist nature of African identities, by focusing solely on tribes while disregarding other social forms of people’s identification such as villages, community, clans, and lineages (Paglia, 2007). Aidan Southall share the same views as he has heavily criticized the concept of tribe describing it as a tool of colonial ideology, and he referred to modern tribalism as a product of colonial governance in Africa (Southall, 1970). The Africa

Policy Information Centre described tribalism as a “byword for ethnic strife, as invoking negative stereotypes of Africa as a land of primitive and territorial peoples” (Lowe, 1997).

A tribe was a group made up of several clans or subclans, with each clan being like a family tree of people related through a common ancestor (Davies, 1995). In African villages, different clans or family lines lived together. According to Appiah (1999), tribes shared daily activities with their village neighbors but were politically loyal to rulers in other places, especially in precolonial African states and empires. Tribes also connected with people in other villages through trade and secret societies. So, tribes were not all the same, and they were not the only type of political unit in Africa. There were also larger political groups like sultanates, kingdoms, and empires that included many diverse people. This means that today's use of the word "tribe" doesn't match what African identities were like in the past.

During the colonial period, urbanization and civil wars caused people to move around, mixing former tribal identities. Appiah says that village identities became less important as urbanization increased in Africa. Some social organizations were destroyed by colonial powers because their rituals and religious beliefs did not align with Christianity or European norms. As a result, the importance of living in the same place and sharing common ancestry, which was central to the idea of a tribe, became less significant.

Appiah (ibid., p. 703) explains that the term "tribe" today does not primarily refer to the historical aspects of a specific group, but rather serves as an “ethnonym.” Ethnonyms, or ethnic names, are a result of the interplay between the concepts developed by European colonial officials and anthropologists and existing methods of categorizing people in Africa’s numerous precolonial societies (ibid, p. 703).

Wiley (1981), expresses his concern over the longstanding misidentification of African ethnicity as tribalism which has greatly impacted United States’ foreign policy in Africa. He argues that this misclassification has led to inaccurate assessments and errors in judgement. When individuals view a political entity simply through a tribal lens, they risk inaccurately evaluating its strength, potential organization, or widespread support. This became evident when three political liberation movements in Angola were mistakenly labeled as tribal groups.

1.1. The Evolution of Tribalism in Sudan

The Funj Sultanate was established around 1504 following a coalition between the Funj and the Arabs. The historical representation of this coalition highlights the power of 'tribalism' represented in negotiating and competing within Sudan's current political landscape (Zain, 1996).

Mahmud El Zain, writes:

> Tribalism in Sudan derives its existence from that essentialization, and the process of reproduction related to it. The tribe and its ideology are perceived as permanent and unchanging. The tribe is not seen as a structure affected by other structures in the same way as it affects them. The ideological reading of this history attributes an eternal nature to the 'tribe', which coincides with the eternity of religion and God. (Zain, 1996)

The coalition of the the Funj and the Arabs created a political system shaped by the separation of authority between the Funj kings and the Arab tribes' leaders where each tribes represented a local self-governing entity. Thus, kingdom of Funj was seen as a confederal, rather than a centralized state where within this confederalism the ideology of Sufism emerged and fostered a new relationship beyond tribal and geographical boundaries (ibid).

Sufiism played a pivotal role in establishing stability and fostering cohesion and unity which lasted for three centuries within. Sufism was gradually filling the place of the tribal ideologies especially that the Sufi shaykhs started taking over the roles of tribal leaders in addressing local concerns. Sufism got improved in relation to its own principles and in its relation to the tribal belief as well.

This improvement was interrupted by the Turkish rule beginning in 1821 as Turkish rule's centrist approach left a negative impact on the progress of Sufi sects by ending their autonomy and compelling them to comply with the requirements of efficient administration. The Sufi establishment was impacted by this political centrism, which positioned it inside the state apparatus and used it to pursue its objectives. Some tribes were even forced into slavery because of the centralized process, which also removed noncooperative tribal leaders (Al-Gaddal, 1985)

According to O'Brien:

> Under the greater central authority of the late Funj Kingdom (eighteenth century) and the Turko-Egyptian regime (1822-1884), the position of the shaykhs changed in ways that fundamentally altered the structure of the relations between the power centres. Shaykhs took on the added role of representative of an outside power - the central government authority in the 'tribe'. Their tribal authority and power thereby gained a limited degree of freedom from the consent of the governed. In other words, the structure and the nature of the groupings (tribes) were modified, distorted and transformed. Instead of an 'original' flexible organization of a core group that represented a 'power centre' to which followers were attracted, there started to emerge more stable power centres to which attachment became involuntary. (O'Brien ,1979)

Culturally different communities have been subject to discriminatory policies by the centralized state which supported certain groups over the others, this finally led to the end of confederalism in the Kingdome of Funj (Al-Gaddal, 1985).

The British colonization practices can be seen as an extension to the Turkish ones. It was even described by the British as the 'reconquest of the Sudan' (Abdel Rahim, 1986). One contrast between Turkish and British governance is that the latter accelerated the practices that were initiated by the former. During the British colonial era, tribal affiliations became more pronounced, sectarian identities became increasingly defined, and culture emerged as a tool for domination and discrimination and racism (Zain, 1996). Tribal leaders were assigned as counterbalance to the sectarian leaders. They were given that duties protecting rural residents from the political influences of urban dwellers. The aim was also to make some tribal leaders as national figures who could represent Sudanese people. These actions encouraged and solidified tribalism within the colonial power system. The policy of 'divide and rule' succeeded to create a geographical and psychological limitation and barriers which separated the various Sudanese tribes. This division wasn't limited to tribes but also extended to their clans and lineages (ibid).

Table 1.1. Main Sudanese Ethnic Groups (Prior to the Independence of South Sudan in 2011)

Main Sudanese Ethnic Groups		In %
Arabs	21,000,000	55.0
Dinka	3,000,000	8.0
Nuba	2,100,000	6.0
Nuer	1,400,000	4.0
Fur	1,000,000	2.7
Zande	660,000	1.8
Shilluk	600,000	1.6
Bari or Zaghawa	480,000	1.3
Nubians	200,000	0.5
Others	6,300,000	17.0

(Source: *Chigudu, D. Demystifying the root causes of conflict in old "greater" Sudan: Ethnicity and tribalism Journal of Developing Societies 2019.*)

Table 1.2. Tribal Affiliation of Ministers in All Sudanese Governments from Independence to 1998

Tribe	First democratic government	First military regime (1958–64)	Second democracy (1965–69)	Second military regime (1969–85)	Third democracy (1986–1989)	Third military regime (of Omar al-Bashir, 1989–present)
Danagla	16	8.33	10.2	8.86	8.59	16.11
Mawalid	12	25	—	—	—	2.84
Mahass	10	4.17	4.8	4.81	—	5.79
Bederiya	10	6.12	2.3	2.65	—	2.36
Nubians	8	4.17	—	1.56	—	—
Dinka	9	—	6.12	4.56	7.81	7.11
Nuer	5	—	4.8	—	—	—
Halfawiyin	4	4.17	1.52	1.56	—	—
Merafab	3	—	8.16	—	—	—
Shukriya	3	—	—	2.3	—	—

Ja'aliyin	3	12.5	6.12	25.32	8.47	12.32
Shaigiyya	3	16.67	12.24	4.34	4.82	3.54
Zandi	—	—	4.17	—	—	—
Funj	—	—	—	4.34	—	3.84
Ababeda	—	12.5	—	2.78	—	0.5
Jwama'a	—	8.33	—	1.77	1	1
Rekabiyya	—	—	4.81	4.81	—	2.84
Rebatab	—	—	—	3.4	—	2.84

(Source: *Abdu Mukhtar Musa, "Marginalization and Ethnicization in the Sudan: How the Elite Failed to Stabilize a Diverse Country," Contemporary Arab Affairs, Vol. 3, No. 4 ,2010*.)

As a result of these long-standing practices, tribalism became an integral and influential pillar of the Sudanese political system. There were several significant occasions when attempts to eliminate tribalism in 1965 and 1971 (Zain, 1996), though serious, failed because they did not fully consider the intricate political economy of the tribe. These efforts were also hindered by a limited perception of the tribe as an isolated entity and the assumption that abolishing tribal rule (native administration) alone would suffice to eradicate tribalism from its pervasive network within power structures. However, it became apparent that tribalism had permeated all levels of authority; its influence on politics persisted even after the dissolution of the native administration system.

1.2. Tribal Politicization During Omar-Al-Bashir Era

Sudan has witnessed an increase in the severity of the tribal conflicts. Among the reasons that led to this growth is the corruption of successive political regimes and the complexity of the period following the overthrow of the regime of former Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

The 1989 coup by the National Islamic Front can be a clear example of halting democracy in Sudan, particularly Darfur, which was previously democratic in the sense of practicing politics through modern political party system, they were entities focused on programs rather than tribe. (Al-Midan 2013), this absence of democracy in Darfur, turned the conflict in Darfur and made it completely tribal one, as this was reflected in many dimensions, for example the local elections become tribal as people from specific tribes

were not allowed to be candidates and run for the *Hakoura* of the tribe that owns the land (Hakkar, 2003).

Tribal polarization has encouraged the allocation of the positions within the local government, by favouring some tribes over others. The National Islamic Front led by Hassan Al-Turabi has supported some tribes and by giving them advance weaponry, they also manipulated the Native Administration in a way to serve pro-government tribes while neglecting those who do not align with them (Hakkar, 2003). This ended in deprivation for people who did no longer align with the authorities, leading to a one-sided tribalism.

Anyone who looks at the formations of political parties in Sudan finds that the tribes played a major role in their formation, and this is evident in large and historical parties. It is also common knowledge that there are areas with tribal weight that have paid historical loyalty to specific political parties or entities. Compared to countries in the region, the tribe has never left the political arena, but rather has often turned into a tool to pressure the state and twist its arm (Hakkar, 2003).

This proves the effective role of the tribe during the years of Sudan's modern history. As much as the tribe contributed to political life and had an indirect role in the emergence of modern entities, the tribal conflicts over political influence led to the state's political instability. To a greater extent, the conflict and tribal rivalry during the era of Al-Bashir's government contributed to its overthrow, as state institutions were weakened, and tribal influence expanded as can be seen in the case of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Al-Bashir left a very complex legacy in this regard, which now resulted in a crucial war that led to the killing and displacement of thousands as he left a tribal militia that is equal to the army in quantity and equipment, that is now responsible for the devastation of whole nation.

The tribe's position in the political scene changed significantly during the years of Al-Bashir's rule, especially during recent years in which the political conflict intensified which resulted in international pressure on country (Musa A. M., 2018). Al-Bashir's regime resorted to using the influence of some tribes to perform political roles whose purposes did not deviate from how to maintain the seat of power no matter what the cost

was. In any government formation or ministerial change, Al-Bashir's government deliberately considered tribal balances at the expense of institutionalism, efficiency, and qualification wealth (Musa A. M., 2018).

Al-Bashir's policy was based on gaining the loyalty of the tribe through its members sitting in the seats of power, and not based on the principle of finding solutions and treatments for the issues of these areas. This was a malicious manipulation of the concept of 'sharing power and wealth' (Musa A. M., 2018).

The Bashir regime established a fully armed militia descending from specific tribes. On the other hand, the opposing armed movements arose on a purely tribal basis, and although the masses of these movements included multiple tribes, the leadership, effectiveness, and influence within these entities were limited to a specific tribe, and sometimes to specific houses within the tribe. Al-Bashir's governments took the tribe as a winning card once, however some tribes turned into states within the Sudanese state, and broke the chain of institutions, the constitution, and the law many times. Even the Bashir regime itself lost control of the tribal game, and it became the keys and locks in political settlements, using the leaders of these tribes to use their influence among their tribal enclaves, to reap the greatest number of privileges granted by the government or, on the other hand, to blackmail it.

1.3. Historical Periods in Sudan

1.3.1. Funj Sultanate 1504-1821

The modern Sudanese state is shaped by a unique configuration of political distinction and rule. To understand the modern political structure of Sudan, it is necessary to consider the historical precedents of the Funj Sultanate, or more specifically, the Blue Sultanate. It signifies the first main initiative towards setting up a unified state on the land of contemporary Sudan.

Professor Abdulbasit Saeed, expert in Ethnology and Anthropology from the University of Khartoum, affirms that "the Funj Sultanate was established on the ruins of the Christian

Kingdom of Alodia, which was destroyed by the alliance of Amara Dunqas, the leader of the Funj tribe, and Abdullah Jamaa, the leader of the Arab Qawasma (the Abdallab tribe). This foundational narrative underlines the complex interplay of ethnic and religious variables that have long shaped Sudanese politics.

The Funj Sultanate exhibited a diverse and intricate tribal composition, reflecting the region's ethnic and cultural plurality. Prominent tribal groups included the Funj themselves, who formed the ruling elite, alongside other significant tribes such as the Abdallab, Ja'alin, Shukriyya, and Hamaj. Each of these groups maintained distinct leadership structures and traditions, contributing to the sultanate's multifaceted social landscape (Holt & Daly, 2010).

The sultanate's governance model was based on a tributary system, whereby local tribes were required to pay tribute in the form of agricultural produce, livestock, or other resources. In return, the Funj provided protection and political stability. This system of mutual benefit facilitated the integration of diverse tribes into the sultanate's economic and political framework without directly imposing on their internal affairs (Shillington, 2018).

One of the most remarkable features of the Funj state was the fact that different tribes were included under its military command. In addition to strengthening its military potential, this approach was able to develop inter-tribal cooperation and a sense of mutual welfare. The merger of tribal fighters into the Funj army successfully combined two objectives: the enforcement of a state defense apparatus and the control over the emergence of a rival group (O'Fahey & Spaulding, 1974).

The concept of "nazirates" emerged as an important administrative unit to manage tribal groups. Every nazirate, headed by a nazir-who was usually a high-ranking leader in his tribe-enjoyed autonomy in the management of internal affairs according to native custom and tradition. In fact, such a system played an important role in the maintenance of tribal loyalty towards the central authority a practice that was continued through successive periods of rule down to colonial governance.

The nazirate system is very much alive today in the land of Sudan, as a number of tribal leaders and structures still play vital roles. While the scale of political and social changes has been immense in many regions, local governance and social relations are still significantly centered on tribal identity and affiliation. The nazirate system thereby epitomizes how traditional tribal structures were adapted and utilized to promote effective governance in such a varied and complex society.

The coup led by Abu Likaylik marked the beginning of the end of the Funj dynasty, as it introduced a system for a new cultural and tribal entity that favoured the supremacy of Arab tribes at the expense of the Funj. As argued by Spaulding (1985), this coup allowed the creation of this new identity, through which the supremacy of the Arab tribes was able to surpass the power of the previous ruling factions of the Funj. Contemporaries viewed Abu Likaylik's coup as a victory for the "Hamaj," a term that Spaulding (1985) notes likely held both geographical and ethnic connotations. He suggests that the coup can be seen as an uprising of marginalized, peripheral regions against the central government and the regions near the capital, which had been under the direct control of the Funj ruling family (Spaulding, 1985).

Abu Likaylik's later years were marked by a set of reforms based on "familial" loyalty within his kin group Spaulding (1985). These reforms assumed the superiority of his military faction, thus threatening the traditional power structures of the Funj dynasty. This, in effect, facilitated the collapse of the Funj's control over trade and the gold sector, thus terminating the hereditary rule typical of the Sennar state Spaulding (1985).

The case of the Funj Sultanate is a very important one, providing insight into Sudan's contemporary political and social dynamics. The method through which the sultanate integrated such a wide array of tribal elements, the administrative innovations it carried out, and the shifting balance between central authority and local autonomy set precedents for Sudanese governance to this day. Being able to understand these historical patterns means gaining a realistic perspective on modern Sudan's complex politics and its continuing problems in state formation and national integration.

1.3.2. Sudan During the Ottoman Period 1820–1885

Throughout Islamic history, the habitable geographical region located in the south of the Sahara Desert and stretching between the Red Sea and the Atlantic Ocean has been known as Bilad Al-Sudan 'Land of the Blacks' (Collins, 2008). The historical ties of the Ottoman Empire with Sudan date back to the 16th century. Yavuz Sultan Selim's conquest of Egypt started a new era in terms of Ottoman domination in Africa. Interest in the continent continued during the time of Suleiman the Magnificent, the military and administrative power of the Ottoman Empire in Africa increased with the successful expeditions to Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Abyssinia (Ethiopia).

Sudan's Red Sea coast was included in the Abyssinia province established by the Ottoman Empire and came under Ottoman rule (Nour, 2005). However, the inner parts of the country continued to be governed as small kingdoms outside the central government. Mehmet Ali Pasha of Kavala, the governor of the Ottoman Empire, who managed to establish a strong dominance in Egypt, wanted to completely dominate the region known as the Sudan as he wanted to have a strong army because of the European ambitions aimed at seizing Egypt, especially after the French campaign against Egypt led by Napoleon Bonaparte, also as Sudan was famous with its richness in gold, Mehmet Ali wanted the gold to spend on his country's military, industry, and agriculture.

In July 1820, the forces of Mehmet Ali Pasha, led by his so Ismail Pasha along with approximately 4,000 soldiers left from Egypt, heading towards Sudan. On their way they did not find any significant resistance from the Sudanese due to limited advancement in weaponry, so they were able to enter Sudan through Nubia in the North. The first act of resistance to Mehmet Ali's forces in Sudan came from the Shaigiyya tribe. However, their attack was repelled with firearms, marking their defeat on 4 November at the Battle of Korti. It's worth noting that during this battle, the Shaigiyya used spears and swords as weapons (Rolandsen, 2013). After this victory, the troops of Mehmet Ali continued their way south through the White Nile until they reached Sinnar, the capital of the Funj Kingdome. When they approached the borders of the city of Sinnar, Sultan Badi VI went out to him pledging allegiance on June 12, 1821, AD, and Ismail Pasha entered Sinnar

the next day without resistance, thus declaring the end of the Islamic Sultanate of Sinnar, the greatest of the Islamic kingdoms that flourished in Sudan.

The term "Turkish-Egyptian" is generally used for the administration carried out in Sudan by Egyptian governors on behalf of the Ottoman Empire (Collins, 2008). Although the influence of Egyptian culture in Sudan is mentioned, the traces of the Ottoman administrative structure in terms of administration are more noteworthy. Sudan has not been truly ruled by Egyptians since the Middle Ages, but Egyptian rule is associated with the country's dependence on the Ottoman province of Egypt. While Egyptian Arabs were generally appointed to lower-level positions in the administration and the army, Turkish-speaking elites formed the ruling group. As a result, these Turkish-speaking rulers were defined as "Turks" regardless of their ethnic origin (Hasan, 2005). Mehmet Ali Pasha, who consolidated his rule in Egypt, had the opportunity to know the region very well and noticed that caravans coming from the interior of Africa loaded their cargo onto ships from the Sudanese port to avoid paying taxes to Egypt (Topuz, 1971). For this reason, with the capture of Sudan, the first aim was to control the trade routes. On the other hand, the idea of benefiting from Sudan's human and economic resources was another important reason why the Egyptian governor Mehmet Ali Pasha wanted to establish dominance in the country (Hamilton, 2003). This administration, which aimed to meet the need for soldiers for the Ottoman army and to provide gold for the state treasury, achieved its goals.

The foundations of Sudan's current borders were laid during the Turkish-Egyptian administration. The capital, which was Sinnar during the Funj period, was moved to the city of Khartoum, which was founded during the Ottoman period, and Kordofon, Kasala, Bahr Al Ghazal and Darfur were included in the borders of the Khartoum-centered country.

In addition, the foundations of modernization were laid in this period, and Sudan was introduced to political and economic organization methods, product transportation techniques and communication tools (Collins, 2008).

The transition to modern agriculture began with the advanced irrigation system, and great importance was given to cotton production in some regions. Sudan entered a new

administrative structuring process similar to the Ottoman model. With this administrative structure, the government gained a centralized structure under the leadership of the governor, who also received the support of the provincial administrators (Collins, 2008). In the field of law, a new system bearing the traces of the Ottoman Empire, consisting of judges and muftis affiliated with the government, was put into practice. All of these developments were based on the old traditional social structure which had an impact on the country and played a major role in shaping the modern Sudanese State. On the other hand, in the period after the death of the Egyptian governor Mehmet Ali Pasha, witnessed weakening in the central government in Sudan, as in Egypt.

During the reign of Abbas I, minimal budget allocation for Sudan's administration beside practicing wrong policies by the governors of the Ottoman Empire led to the dissatisfaction of the Sudanese people against the Turkish-Egyptian administration.

Mehmet Said Pasha, influenced by Western ideals, made many deals with Europeans for major projects like the Suez Canal. This caused heavy borrowing from European banks and applying high taxes to the point of confiscating gold, livestock, and slaves because of his extravagant spending. This eventually led to rebellion and the killing of his Mehmet pasha's son Ismail. But the rebels lacked leadership and coordination, and their rebellion was brutally suppressed.

Said Pasha, who established a structure similar to the state system instead of a central government, took a radical decision and appointed Arakil Bey, a Christian Armenian, as the governor of Khartoum in Sudan in 1856. This situation worsened reactions among the Sudanese, who had adopted Islamic values since the time of the Funj Sultanate, which was established as an Islamic kingdom. Although the sudden death of Arakil Bey prevented a possible further chaos, the appointment made by Said Pasha is considered an important setback as it sets challenges that will have devastating consequences for the period of Khedive Ismail Pasha (Collins, 2008).

Khedive Ismail Pasha became a governor of Egypt 1863. Since taking the office, he focused on reestablishing the central government in Sudan and improving the economic structure. However, due to the investments made to develop the state in Egypt and Sudan, a large debt was incurred to England and France. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869

accelerated the intense interest in Egypt as both England and France followed a policy of tying the governors of Egypt and Sudan to themselves economically by using the debts as a threat to the administration.

While the first years of the Turkish-Egyptian administration witnessed institutional, administrative, and technological improvement in Sudan, the unsuccessful policies of the governors appointed to Egypt and Sudan following the death of Mehmet Ali, witnessed gradual weakening of the central government and the deterioration in the economic structure which resulted in reactions against the government (Collins, 2008).

Khedive Ismail Pasha, who bowed to the pressures of England and France, appointed three Europeans consecutively to the governorship of Sudan between 1869 and 1880, which further increased the opposition voices among the people. This dissatisfaction with the Turkish-Egyptian administration resulted in the Mahdist uprising (N.Rossi, 1980).

Local-level arrangements carried out through intermediaries allowed for continuity of local authority while requiring appropriate concessions be made toward compliance with central authority. This dual system of governance simply reinforced the positions of tribal leadership even allowing as much, in the words of O'Fahey and Spaulding (1974), that "cooperation between the local heads of the tribe and the central administration was a vital adaption to the socio-political realities of the region".

The rather arbitrary administrative divisions and heavy pressure for taxation and conscription were left to fester, without recognition of these populations as ethnically homogeneous entities. Grievances were thus deeply generated, a fact that would surface in later conflict, to contribute to the ever-volatile situation which came to typify, well into the 20th century, the history of Sudan. Holt and Daly (2010) explain that many of the heavy-handed policies of the Ottoman-Egyptian rulers resulted in resistance and rebellion, where tribes fought against the severe demands placed on their collective entity. These grievances were historicized and embedded in the collective memory of the tribes to inform future friction and conflict.

Such developments even more complicated the plurality of tribal dynamics within Sudan since tribes, already accustomed to new economic realities, tried to hold onto traditional

identities and means of life. The new agricultural practices and the exploitation of natural resources bring a constant shift, displacing the traditional economic activities, a change in power balance among the tribes, and a mix-up as stated by Shillington (2005).

Such administrative practices and divisions of the Ottoman-Egyptian rulers were instrumental in influencing later structures of governance in Sudan. The British, on taking over Sudan a century later, built upon the framework laid by the Ottomans, where tribal leaders would participate even more in the colonial administration. This carried the role of the tribes as one factor keeping tribal dynamics at the core of Sudanese politics and society. Holt and Daly (2010) indicate that much of the administration by British colonial administrators was done through existing tribal structures, which, as such, perpetuated systems set up during the Ottoman period. This reliance on traditional leadership-maintained stability but entrenched the divisions that would later give a challenge to national unity.

1.3.3. Sudan During the Mahdist Period 1885-1898

The appointment of Christian Europeans to administrative positions in the last periods of the Turkish-Egyptian administration was a serious source of discomfort for the Sudanese who had adopted Islamic values. While criticism against the administration increased among the public, the most influential voice came from Muhammad Ahmed Bin Abdullah. Muhammad Ahmed declared himself "Mahdi" in March 1881, telling those around him that he was appointed by God to preserve the essence of Islam and eliminate the governments that tried to distance it from its original state (Murad, 1978). He said that the ruling class, which was under the influence of the Christian Western world, could not rule the Muslim Sudanese people so, he decided to fight against the Turkish-Egyptian administration.

Born in Dongola in 1848, Muhammad Ahmed grew up under the influence of Sufi belief and shaped his life within the religious rules. Muhammad Ahmed al-Mahdi took action from Aba Island with his followers in June 1881 and started the rebellion, which he

described as the "Ansar movement", against the administration that had begun to degenerate during the Ottoman period (Collins, 2008).

Mahdi's messages quickly reached large masses and the uprising grew in a short time, gaining the support of the people. Muhammad Ahmed tried to put aside the hostilities between tribes and managed to unite groups with different problems around a single movement (Harrir, 1997). Thus, the Ansar movement spread over a wide area in a short time. The increasing influence of the popular movement in Sudan, which started under the leadership of Mahdi, made it inevitable for the British government to take precautions.

The Mahdist movement greatly altered the dynamics between tribes in Sudan. The original ability of Muhammad Ahmed al-Mahdi to unite tribes of different persuasions was a core factor for the success of the movement. He called on the settled tribes as well as the nomadic ones, breaking long-standing rivalries. For example, he drew support from the Baqqara cattle nomads of Kordofan and Darfur, together with the riverine tribes of the Nile Valley (Abu Alam).

The Mahdi's approach to tribal integration was multi-layered. There was a focus on the puritanical interpretation of Islam, which somehow provided a common ideological ground that trumped tribal affiliations. The Mahdist army was comprised of warriors from different tribes, thereby providing the sense of common purpose and destroying the traditional boundaries between the tribes (Warburg, 2003). The Mahdi replaced the existing tribal leadership structure with a new hierarchy based on loyalty to the movement, which helped to weaken traditional tribal power structures. His economic policies, including the redistribution of wealth and land, helped to address some of the economic grievances that had fueled inter-tribal conflicts. However, these tribal alliances were often fragile. After the Mahdi's death, his successor, the Khalifa Abdullahi, faced challenges in maintaining tribal unity. His favoritism towards his own Ta'aisha tribe led to resentment among other tribal groups (ibid).

The weakening of the central government in Sudan and Egypt during the reign of Khedive Ismail Pasha, as well as the loss of financial independence as a result of the debts received from England and France, caused great reactions among the Egyptian people as well, and an uprising began, which England turned into an opportunity by taking advantage of the

turmoil that broke out in the country after the soldiers took over the government as a result of the uprising led by Ahmet Arabi Pasha, England occupied Egypt in 1882 and gained an important base. The British administration saw the superiority it gained in the region with the invasion of Egypt as a great gain in stopping the Mahdi resistance, whose influence was rapidly increasing with the support of the people in Sudan and took immediate action. A large army under British command, including Egyptian forces, was sent to the Sudan in 1882 to suppress the resistance, however, the Mahdi army inflicted a heavy defeat on the Anglo-Egyptian forces, and subsequently the Ansar movement established a separate administration over the lands it dominated.

The Mahdi armies proceeded toward the capital Khartoum which was protected by the British-Egyptian army under the command of British General Gordon. The Mahdi loyal forces besieged the city which led to the fall of Khartoum on January 26, 1885, as the Ansar movement declared their greatest victory with their sovereignty of the lands under Turkish-Egyptian rule. Afterwards, Mahdi focused on consolidating his dominance in Sudan, but he died on June 22, 1885, due to the disease he caught, leaving some work unfinished.

Taking advantage of the gap that arose in the country after the death of the Mahdi, the British forces acted again in 1889, defeating the Mahdi army under the leadership of Abdullah Bin Muhammad and dealing a heavy blow to the Ansar movement. The collapse of the Mahdist state had significant implications for tribal dynamics in Sudan. The power vacuum left by the defeat of the Ansar movement led to a resurgence of traditional tribal loyalties and conflicts. The British colonial administration that followed would face the challenge of managing these complex tribal relationships, often adopting a policy of indirect rule that reinforced tribal identities and power structures (Daly, 1986).

Following the defeat of the Ansar in 1898, an army led by the command of British General Kitchener invaded Sudan claiming that they aimed to correct the wrong practices of the old administration, accordingly the movement initiated by the Mahdi was completely disbanded.

1.3.4. Colonial Period and the Nation Building Process 1898-1955

When Britain's interests in Egypt and the Suez Canal were protected, the sovereignty of Sudan was shared between Britain and Egypt with the Condominium Treaty signed in 1899. Sudan, under the administration of British governors-general, existed as a British colony for 56 years under the name of British-Egyptian joint administration.

Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 and then sought to secure the sources of the Nile, so Britain government reached deals with the Italians and Germans to prevent their involvement off Nile Valley.

France wanted the British to withdraw from Egypt, which led the British to think about invading Sudan to protect the sources of the Nile from the French, especially in 1896 when a French scouting campaign moved through the African continent from its West coast to Fashoda. British officials tried desperately to dissuade the French from Fashoda, but to no avail. By the fall of 1897, British authorities had concluded that an invasion of Sudan was priority to keep the Nile out of reach from the Frensh. After the English troops defeated the Mahadist in Omdurman battle, the French were forced to withdraw from Fashoda under British pressure, and an Anglo-French treaty in March 1899 stopped French expansion towards the sources of the Nile.

Egypt and Britain signed a bilateral rule agreement for Sudan on January 19, 1899. The agreement was signed on the Egyptian side by Boutros Pasha Ghali, the Foreign Minister of Egypt, and on the British side by Lord Cromer. Thus, sovereignty over Sudan was shared between the Khedive of Egypt and the British followed by the Egyptian and British flags being raised over the Sudanese territories (Collins, 2008). Sudan had a governor-general with military and civil authority, appointed by the Khedive of Egypt.

The first Governor-General was Lord Kitchener himself, but in 1899 his former aide, Sir Reginald Wingate, was appointed as his successor. Wingate knew Sudan well as his long term of office extended between 1899 and 1916. The modernization of Sudan under the British was slow at first, but gradually railway, telegraph and steamship services were expanded, especially in the Al-Gezira region, to build the large cotton cultivation project that today represented the infrastructure of Sudan’s economy (Abdelkarim, 2013).

Furthermore, there were the founding of technical and elementary schools, such as Gordon College, which was launched in 1902, It swiftly started to educate a Western-influenced upper class who gradually transitioned away from the traditional political and social structure.

Sudanese nationalism was later born as its first official representation was witnessed in 1921(Collins, 1984). Through the foundation of the 'United Tribes Association' led by Ali Abdullatif who was later jailed on charges of nationalist incitement. In 1924 he established the 'White Flag League', with the aim of removing the British from Sudan. Here where public protests took place in Khartoum in June and August, which were forcefully dispersed.

Following the assassination of Governor-General Sir Lee Stack in Cairo on November 19, 1924, the British compelled Egypt to withdraw from Sudan and quashed a rebellion by a Sudanese group supporting the Egyptians. The Sudanese revolution ended, and British rule remained unchallenged until after World War II.

In 1936, a treaty between Britain and Egypt allowed Egyptian officials to return to Sudan. The educated Sudanese elite were upset about not being consulted in the negotiations over this treaty and formed The Graduates Conference. This organization initially focused on social and educational activities but later demanded British recognition as a spokesman for Sudanese nationalism with Egyptian support. By 1943, Ismail Al-Azhari and his supporters had organized the first real political party in Sudan while moderates formed the Umma Party under Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi's leadership.

The establishment of a legislative council that included southern Sudan was agitated for by nationalists, leading Britain to abandon its policy of separating northern and southern regions. In response to denouncing joint sovereignty agreements by the Sudanese legislature, Egypt unilaterally cancelled treaties with Britain in 1951. Following Egypt's agreement with Britain granting autonomy to Sudan, independence was declared by Ismail Al-Azhari on December 19, 1955, and marked officially on January 1st.

English colonialism had various impacts on the process of nation-building within Sudan and its tribal dynamics. Oftentimes, British colonial policy entailed the rule of "indirect

rule" whereby preexisting tribal organization was utilized for governmental purposes (Daly, 1991). Though this granted an efficiency for colonial management, this unintentionally strengthened tribal identity along with strong tribal power relations.

According to Woodward (1990), this policy "tended to freeze ethnic divisions and identities". The colonial system created a new class of tribal leaders who were loyal to the British administration, disrupting traditional power structures within tribes and creating new hierarchies based on collaboration with colonial authorities (Sharkey, 2003).

Moreover, colonial policies often favoured certain regions or tribes more than others in terms of education and economic development. For instance, the British put more emphasis on the development of the Nile Valley, which led to disparities that were at the root of later conflicts (Johnson, 2003). The British administration ruled northern and southern Sudan as separate entities, with different policies for each entity. Thus, it exacerbated differences that had existed before and encouraged new ones, thereby setting the stage for post-independence conflicts (Deng, 1995). Although the colonial period introduced modern state structures, this was usually at loggerheads with the traditional tribal governance systems, thereby creating a dual system of authority that was to be salient even after independence (Woodward, 1990). While the colonial experience tended to complicate the making of a singular Sudanese national identity, it reinforced preexisting identities such as Arab or African and created new categories like "Sudanese," which made some complex and often contradictory notions of national belonging possible (Sharkey 2008). The Mahdist revolt against Turco-Egyptian rule-which in time British forces would break-proved a potent symbol for anti-colonial resistance. This legacy influenced later nationalist movements but also complicated relationships between tribes that had different historical relationships with colonial powers (Holt & Daly, 2019). Many of the British land policies in general, and particularly in areas like Darfur, altered traditional land use and ownership patterns, often favouring certain tribes over others and setting the stage for post-colonial conflicts to erupt (O'Fahey, 2008). Tribal relations and power equilibrium were also affected and long affected through the introduction of English-language education and the promotion of Arabic in other regions by making new elites and dividing those who had access to colonial education from those who had not

(Sharkey, 2003). Lastly, the borders drawn by colonial powers often cut across tribal territories, creating new tensions and complicating traditional migration patterns and arrangements of sharing resources.

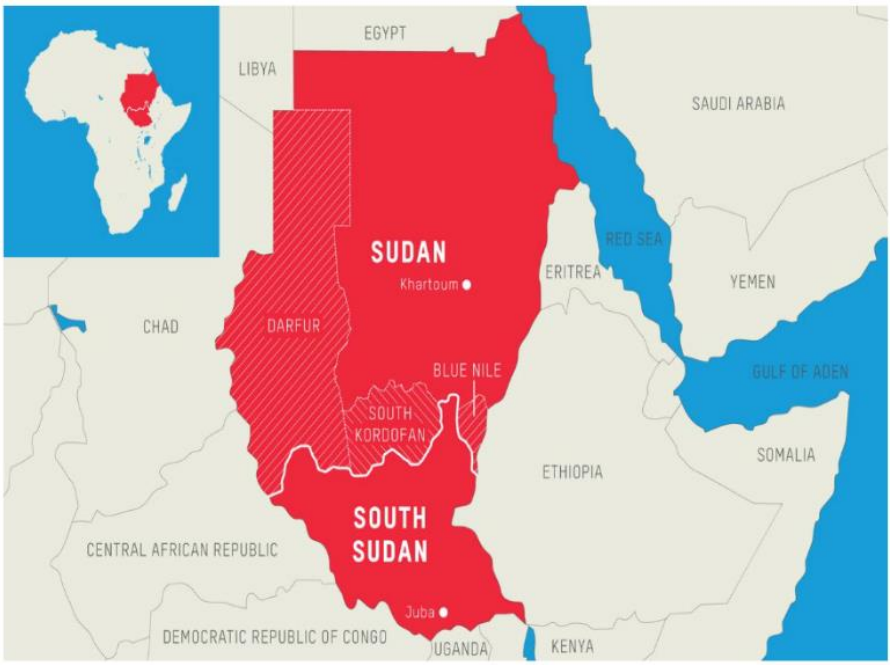
DARFUR CRISIS

2.1. The Darfur Region, Its Nature, and Tribal Composition

Darfur, which means "Land of the Fur" (Jok, 2015), in reference to the Fur tribe residing in this western region of Sudan, has an area of 440,000 square kilometers, equivalent to 20% of Sudan's total area (Kamara, 2016). Darfur connects North Africa with South Saharan Africa and the Niger Basin in West Africa

Darfur is bordered by the Libyan Sahara from the north, by Chad and the Central African Republic from the west, by South Sudan and the Central African Republic to the south and by the Kordofan region to the east. The estimated number of Darfur's population is around 9 million inhabitants according to 2010 estimations according to the African Development Bank statistics.

Figure 2.1. Darfur's Region Within Sudan



(Source: *Oxfam. What's the difference between Sudan and South Sudan?, 2021*)

The population of Darfur is divided into two main groups: Arabs and Non-Arabs. The main non-Arab tribes are the Fur, Zaghawa, and Massalit. Other tribes include the Meidob, Dajo, Berti, Kanein, Mima, Bargo, Barno, Gimir, Tama, Mararit, Fellata, Jebel, Sambat and Tunjur.

The Arab tribes, who are further divided into two grups which are Baggara (heifer herder) This group includes the Zurgayat, Al-Habaniyah, and Al-Taaisha, Al-Messiria, followed by the tribes responsible for cattle herding in South Darfur, and the other group is Aballa (Camel herders). This group includes include the Al-Rezeigat Al-Aballa, Ziyadiyah, Mahamid, Awlad Zeid, Awlad Tako, Al-Shuqeirat, Al-Nuwayba, and Al-Bani Halba tribes.

2.2. Darfur, A Historical Profile

For many centuries, the Fur were the dominant ethnic power in Darfur, especially before the English colonization. The Fur Kingdome remained in supremacy until 1874 when it was raged by a Sudanese slave trader and adventurer named Al-Zubayr Rahma Mansur Pasha, following its defeat, the kingdom fell under the control of the Turco-Egyptian administration which ruled from 1820 to 1885 (Takana, 2016).

During the 19th century, Turco-Egyptian rule in Sudan introduced modern state frameworks, centralized governance, and a strict taxation system. Religion, notably orthodox Sunni Islam, became a tool for governance solidifying its position as the state religion (Ahmad,1980). Modernization initiatives included advancements in technology and infrastructure (Niblock, 1987). Collaborations with indigenous social entities, notably Sufi orders like the Khatmiyya, bolstered the regime's authority.

However, faced with Islamist nationalist inspired rebellion in 1884, the Turco-Egyptian rule was toppled by the Mahdiyya, an Islamic revivalist movement led by Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdalla, who declared himself as the guided one. Numerous Darfurians rallied behind the Mahdiyya and became its staunch supporters, with the Khalifa Abdullahi, who succeeded the Mahdi, hailing from Darfur himself. The Mahdist era set

the stage for ongoing political rivalry between two primary sectarian Arab-Muslim religious factions: the Mahdists and the Khatmiyya (Ylönen, 2009).

The historical developments of the 19th century, originating from the pre-colonial era, established the groundwork for what can be described as the 'marginalizing state' in Sudan (Ylönen, 2009). This was facilitated by the adoption of an Arab-Muslim dominated social hierarchy as a prevailing socio-economic structure within the nascent state (ibid).

The Mahdist regime governed Sudan until 1898, then it was defeated by Anglo-Egyptian forces. Subsequently, under the Anglo-Egyptian administration, Ali Dinar, a member of the royal lineage of the previous Darfur kingdom and a prominent general in the Mahdist army, resurrected the kingdom of Darfur which maintained its independence until World War I. Nevertheless, due to Ali Dinar's ties with the Ottoman Empire during the conflict, the British intervened and incorporated Darfur into the Anglo-Egyptian sphere in 1916 (Sikainga, 2009).

The Anglo-Egyptian annexation of Darfur primarily aimed at pacification and preventing further territorial expansion, particularly by the advancing French, who were also seeking to expand eastward (Daly, 2010)

The colonial 'marginalizing state' integrated southern Sudan and Darfur into the Sudanese nation-state. However, akin to previous regimes, it privileged certain Arab-Muslim factions from central Sudan while marginalizing populations from the periphery. Furthermore, its influence in the periphery was primarily exercised through indirect governance, hindering the acknowledgment of central state authority at the grassroots level, where a tradition of resisting external control persisted. This allowed for the orchestration of challenges to the state (Ylönen, 2009).

The annexation of Darfur into Anglo-Egyptian Sudan not only failed to improve the region's conditions but also laid the groundwork for future conflicts. British administrators introduced a racial hierarchy that privileged Arabs over non-Arabs, intensifying tensions within Darfur.

Additionally, a growth-pole strategy (Wilis, 2003), was implemented, aiming to centralize economic development and social services around focal points such as

Khartoum and the primary agricultural export zone in the Blue Nile region. Meanwhile, the state's periphery was largely marginalized from these initiatives.

According to Alex de Waal and Julie Flint (2008) the treatment of the region in terms of education, healthcare, and economic development during the 40-year colonial rule was "worse than neglect."

2.3. Factors Leading to the Darfur War

Darfur continued to be an essential component of modern Sudan from 1916 to 1956, characterized by its underdevelopment and governance by British officials who heavily leaned on the native administration system (Musa A. M., 2018). Following Sudan's independence, political and economic authority was given primarily to the predominantly Muslim northern Arabs, known as the dominant Nile Arab group. Conflicts plagued the region, these conflicts were marked by clashes between local tribal factions, often waged with traditional weaponry (Musa M. , 2019)

Many residents of Darfur hold the belief that the conflict which led to the war in 2003 originated in 1982 and escalated further in 1986, a period that described as a "Localized Civil War" (Mamdani, 2010).

Beneath the tragic events unfolding in Darfur, there exists a multifaceted history marked by, and environmental degradation and competition for natural resources and land Ownership related issues. Later, the conflict evolved into its current form because of political involvement and resulting in ethnic marginalization (Musa M. , 2019).

2.3.1. Environmental Conflict

Throughout history, climate variability has dictated the grazing patterns of diverse tribes, often leading to prolonged disputes, environmental degradation and competition for natural resources is highly argued to be among the reasons the ignited the crisis in Darfur.

Mamdani (2010), asserts that the severe droughts experienced in the 1980s heightened local conflicts over land access, crop destruction, and water sources among both farmers

and pastoralists, irrespective of their ethnic affiliations. The intense droughts during this era exacerbated contentious debates in Darfur concerning land ownership, agricultural losses, water reserves and pitting farming.

With the drought disaster in 1983-84, water resources decreased significantly, and decertified lands caused a great competition between the tribes. As a result, the relocation of affected tribes southward became inevitable, resulting in heightened competition for animal and agricultural resources in southern Darfur as these movements and migrations towards the southern region directly triggered clashes between various tribal factions in Darfur due to reduced resource availability (Musa M. , 2019).It is significant to observe that the environmental disputes in Darfur have not always been solely rooted in ethnic differences and were not consistently politicized. In the past, these conflicts arose between tribes of the same ethnic group, such as Arabs against other Arabs and non-Arabs against non-Arabs (Musa M. , 2019).

2.3.2. Land Tenure and the Weakening of the Administration System

Land rights in Darfur stand as a focal point of the conflict, commonly recognized as the core of the war. Among the six acknowledged 'root causes' of the war, as outlined in the 2011 peace agreement between the government and one faction of the primary rebel groups, three specifically address land rights issues. land rights for the different groups involved are highly complex, emotive, contentious, and volatile (Julie Flint, 2008).

Historically, the Fur sultanate employed the "Hakura" system from the Arabic "Hikr," (Musa A. M., 2018) signifying ownership, where land was allocated to communities, called "Dar," viewed as collective property. Local leaders safeguarded these lands, distributing them among group members for farming, turning land affiliation into a key element of one's identity in Darfur. Additionally, leaders granted lands to individuals such as high-ranking officials for private ownership.

British colonization altered the land tenure to adapt to their indirect rule system, often known as native administration by which chiefs administered their tribes on behalf of the government, colonial authorities preferred to deal with clearly defined ethnic territories,

each overseen by local chiefs with the power to allocate land. This approach reinforced the association between ethnic identity and territorial rights. (Julie Flint, 2008)

The British implemented the Native Administration system to govern rural areas and some small towns in Sudan efficiently and cost-effectively. It is worth mentioning that for a significant period, the Native Administration was the sole authority responsible for resolving disputes, having independently settled eight conflicts between 1932 and 1970 before government intervention took_place. However, in the post-colonial era, Sudan's new governments considered the existing systems outdated relics of colonialism, leading to the gradual removal of the native administration.

The abolition of local administration in Darfur in 1969 marked a pivotal moment in the region's governance, with profound consequences for its populace, particularly marginalized communities (Madibbo, 2012). This shift centralized power and decision-making authority previously held by local leaders, diminishing the control of Darfurians over their own affairs (Waal, 2005). Consequently, traditional conflict resolution mechanisms faltered, eroding trust and legitimacy in the government (Madibbo, 2012). The severance of ties between Darfur's people and their local leaders disrupted effective governance and responsiveness to community needs, fueling conflicts and violence (Waal, 2005). These unresolved grievances and escalating tensions among ethnic and tribal groups have perpetuated the enduring conflict and humanitarian crisis in Darfur, characterized by widespread violence, displacement, and atrocities.

These tensions escalated and became hard to resolve due to the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms within the Native Administration. The government's failure to establish alternative legitimate dispute resolution processes based on statutory law worsened this situation. Compounding these issues, the Unregistered Land Act declared government ownership over lands already claimed by the Hakura system, allowing external parties to take control of large areas without involving the Hakura system. This interaction between the law and the Hakura system led to clashes among the Fur, Zaghawa, Arab pastoralists, and governmental authorities as the lack of a functional Native Administration directly impacted land dispute resolution between tribes as well as between pastoralist and agriculturalist groups.

2.3.3. Ethnic Marginalization and the Politicization of the Tribes

The Arabic-speaking elites from the central and northern parts of the country dominated the post-colonial governments. They focused on economic development in their own regions and tried to create a national identity based on Arabism and Islam which led to strong opposition from non-Arab and non-Muslim groups in the marginalized areas of the South, Nuba Mountains, and Red Sea region. These groups formed rebel movements in the 1950s and 1960s, leading to a civil war in the South that lasted for decades. The Darfur Development Front (DDF) was created in the mid-1960s to fight for economic development and autonomy in Darfur but remained a small movement. Despite this, Darfurians still felt a strong sense of deprivation and their relationship with Khartoum governments was shaped by this.

During the leadership of former President Alsadig Almahadi, the Darfur conflict expanded as multiple Arabic tribes formed the "Arab Alliance," with support from the Umma Party. This alliance aimed to promote supremacist beliefs in western Sudan and showed strong disdain for non-Arab communities in the region. (Harrir, 1997)

Their propaganda asserted that Arabic speaking communities in western Sudan faced political and economic marginalization, despite being the region's majority. This narrative, combined with central government policies, significantly influenced inter-communal dynamics in Darfur (Musa M. , 2019)

On the other hand, the escalation of clashes in Darfur reached to higher sever dimension as National Conference Party “Islamic Salvation Movement” came to power led by the former president Omar Al Bashir. Many Darfurians believe that the “Salvation” party fostered ethnic polarization in Darfur, which rapidly intensified after they came to power in June 1989. The salvation government had a direct impact on fueling conflict through racial ideologies aimed at ethnic polarization in Darfur as in the period before 1989, the main cause of tribal conflict centered on disputes over pastures, water, and land between shepherds and farmers. However, following 1989 the period of Islamic Salvation, new elements emerged including racial bias, political maneuvering, and insurgency. (Musa M. , 2019)

Table 2.1. Reasons Behind Conflicts in Darfur

Date of the reconciliation conference	Conflicting tribes	Reasons behind the conflict
1980	Ta'aysha against Salamat	Grazing, water, and animal theft
1982	Al-Messiria Against Al-Rezegat	Grazing, water, and animal theft and land occupation
1987	Gumur against Fallata	Grazing, water, and animal theft
1989	Fur against 27 Arab Tribes	Occupation of lands of racial prejudice and political subjugation
2001	Rezegat gainst Zaghawa	of racial prejudice and political subjugation
2005	Daju and Al-Messiria	Racial prejudice and Rebellion
2006	Fallata and Al-Rezeigat	Rebellion and land

(Source: *دارفور من ازمة دولة الى صراع القوة العظمى (Musa M. , 2019)*)

As shown in the table that the political factor and the racial dimension began to enter as an element in the conflict in Darfur since 1989.

It is documented that during the initial decade of the Salvation Rule (1989-1999), there were twenty-one tribal disputes as this indicates that conflicts happened at a significantly higher frequency compared to the 1980s, which only saw six disputes (Musa A. M., 2018). For instance, there were eight tribal wars in Darfur in 2000, five in 2006, four in both 2005 and 2008. However, the most notable point is that around twenty cases of violent conflicts occurred within a single year specifically in 2013 with fifteen of these recurring between January and May such as attacks from the Bani Helba tribe on the Qimir tribe (Ibid).

It is evident that there was a rise in tribal disputes during Nimeiri's regime in the 1970s following the disbandment of the Native Administration. The number of conflicts doubled during the Salvation era due to political involvement after its reinstatement. Comparing the sixteen-year periods, there were twelve conflicts during Nimeiri's rule (1969-1985) and thirty-six during Al-Beshir's government (1989–2005), almost three times as many. Surprisingly, over eighty-five years from 1930-2015, there were seventy-five tribal conflicts during the twenty-five years of Salvation government compared to only twenty-three incidents in the previous sixty years combined.

2.2. Number of Conflicts in Sudan Since Independence

Time period	Number of conflicts
1960s	6
1970s	7
1980s	9
1990s	17
First decile of the second millennium (2000–2009)	25
First half of the second decile of the third millennium (2010–2015)	31
Total	95

(Source: *MUSA, A. M. The Tribal Impact on Political Stability in Sudan. Contemporary Arab Affairs, 2018*)

2.4. Role of the Neighboring Countries in Fulling the Conflict

Darfur has faced additional challenges due to the instability and conflicts in neighboring countries, notably Chad and Libya. The political border with Chad from the west has further complicated tribal conflicts in Darfur, as it facilitated tribal incursions. Political instability in Chad, coupled with a drought in 1985, resulted in multiple relocations of Chadian tribes like the Zaghawa, Masalit, and Mahiriyya which made it easier for conflicts to cross borders (Sikainga, 2009).

Internal conflicts in Chad have had far-reaching effects on Sudan, affecting different aspects of security which spread to Darfur impacting various security dimensions. Firstly, it has led to the infiltration of Chadian opposition elements into Sudanese territory.

Secondly, it has triggered internal displacement, particularly in border states, as citizens seek refuge from the turmoil.

When facing pressure from the Chadian government, opposition forces have sought sanctuary in Sudan, often disposing of their weapons within Sudanese borders. This has resulted in the proliferation of arms among civilians at reduced prices, fueling a cycle of violence. The porous nature of the border has facilitated the formation of opportunistic groups engaged in looting and armed conflict, escalating tensions and leading to clashes ranging from conventional to modern weaponry, including firearms, machine guns, and anti-aircraft weapons.

In addition, Darfur was impacted by the civil wars in Chad during the 1980s, drawing significant involvement from Libya. Besides engaging in military actions within Chad, Libya provided support to different Chadian groups that operated from Darfur as a rear base, leading to the plundering of local farmers and cattle herders while supplying substantial amounts of weapons into the area (Sikainga, 2009).

The previous president of Libya Muammar Gaddafi had an ambitious plan in the region, that aimed at establishing of what he named an "Arab Belt" across Sahelian Africa With the aim of securing Libya's dominance in the region. The plan included enlisting and arming dissatisfied Arabic-speaking and Tuareg groups in the Sahel to form the "Islamic Legion," which was at the forefront of Libya's campaign in Chad. Additionally, some members of the legion were recruited from Arabic-speaking pastoralists in Darfur (Sikainga, 2009).

Many Sudanese members of the legion, who were followers of the Madhist sect, participated in subversive activities against President Ja'far Nimeiri's regime in the 1970s. After being defeated following a failed coup in 1976, remnants of the Mahdists dispersed across the border region between Sudan, Chad, and Libya. Ultimately, Gaddafi's aspirations were shattered when Chadian factions defeated the legion forces in 1988.

Many of the well-trained and armed soldiers of the legion continued to support Arab supremacist ideologies even after it was dissolved. Members of the legion included some of the famous Janjaweed, who are today responsible for many of the crimes in Darfur.

2.5. The Darfur Conflict

Over the last two decades, Darfur has witnessed violent conflicts resulting in the loss of thousands of lives and the displacement of million individuals. This crisis has been labeled by the United Nations as "the world's worst humanitarian crisis" [1]

The conflicts in Darfur took on another dimension as rebel organizations emerged in 2002, escalating the situation. The Sudan Liberation Army SLA and the Justice and Equality Movement. Khalil Ibrahim leads JEM, having previously been associated with the Islamicist movement, leading to suggestions that JEM may have Islamicist inclinations. In contrast, SLA is perceived as more secular in its stance. Both factions' agendas advocate increased self-governance for Darfur and a fairer allocation of economic resources and political authority (Julie Flint, 2008).

These factions arose in reaction to Arab militia violence targeting the civilian population, a tactic employed by Khartoum since 1989 to suppress dissent in outlying regions while furthering its political and economic agenda of expanding Arab-Muslim influence and gaining control over resources like oil fields through violent displacement of local communities. This approach was justified through propaganda aimed at dehumanizing the marginalized groups on the periphery. In the case of Darfur, the government intentionally propagated doctrinal distinctions alleging that Islamic practices in Darfur were impure and labeling Darfurians as 'Africans,' not truly Arabs or Muslims, thus making them eligible for jihad. As a result, rebel groups in Darfur evolved from ethnic militias into organizations seeking to safeguard local populations from attacks by Arab militias and advocating for more equitable distribution of political and economic power.

The pivotal moment in the unfolding conflict occurred in April 2003 when a combined force from both groups launched an attack on Fashir Airport, resulting in significant damage to the Sudanese army's resources and aircraft. This attack inflicted substantial losses on the Sudanese army arguably its most damaging blow yet during almost two decades of conflict with the Sudan People's Liberation Army fundamentally altering their

[1] https://news.un.org/en/story/2004/03/97792

ongoing struggle. It showcased the effectiveness of the Sudan People's Liberation Army on field operations which gained them credibility while also attracting Darfurian youth to join its forces.

Khartoum initially struggled to launch a successful counter-attack due to its overextended military, especially in the Southern region. Instead, the government employed unethical strategies of proxy warfare which included exploiting ethnic divisions, arming specific ethnic groups, and turning them against others.

President Al-Bashir leveraged existing regional animosities to quell the emergent insurrection in Darfur. Through strategic alliances with specific local Arab tribes such as the Rezegat, he garnered support by offering land, authority, and financial incentives (Osman, 2014).

The Janjaweed militia, a proxy force composed of fighters from these allied tribes, conducted operations in sync with the Sudanese Armed Forces against insurgent factions. These combined governmental and militia activities were marked by systematic assaults against entire ethnic communities—prominently the Massalit, Fur, and Zaghawa groups—with the objective of ethnically cleansing these areas. This resulted in extensive arson of territories, devastation of settlements and destruction of means of subsistence, alongside the enforced exodus of non-Arab populations from these regions, causing internal displacement and refugee flow to Chad. Furthermore, these forces engaged in widespread sexual violence targeting women and girls (Osman, 2014).

Teaming up with the Sudanese army, the Janjaweed conducted a widespread campaign of violence and looting targeting non-Arab communities. The result was a devastating loss of 300,000 lives among Darfurians and an upheaval displacing 2 million people.[2]

[2] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC
https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/darfur

2.6. Reaction from the International Criminal Court (ICC)

In 2009, the International Criminal Court declared that it had issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, accusing him of orchestrating genocide, committing crimes against humanity, and perpetrating war crimes in the Darfur region.

The Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. Omar al-Bashir was alleged to be criminally responsible, as an indirect perpetrator or indirect accomplice, for intentionally directing attacks against a large portion of the civilian population in Darfur, Sudan, and for the murder, extermination, rape, torture and forcible transfer of large numbers of civilians and the looting of their property (Van der Vyver, 2010). This is the first time that the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant against a head of state while he is still in power (Williams & Sherif, 2009).

The Trial Chamber observed that being a head of state does not absolve Al-Bashir from criminal accountability, nor does it give him immunity from prosecution at the International Criminal Court. The judges stated that the alleged crimes took place during a five-year government counter-insurgency campaign against the Sudan Liberation Army in Sudan (SLA), Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and other rebel movements opposed to the Government.

This campaign supposedly started right after the assault on El Fasher airport in April 2003, based on a coordinated plan endorsed by top Sudanese officials including Omar al-Bashir and other influential political and military figures. The campaign continued until at least July 14, 2008, the date on which the prosecution requested an arrest warrant for Omar al-Bashir. A key element of that it that has been the assault on the civilian population of Darfur, most of whom belong to the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa groups, which the Government of Sudan is said to consider to be affiliated with armed rebel movements in Sudan.

The Chamber found that Omar al-Bashir, suspected of coordinating the development and implementation of the counter-insurgency campaign plan. In addition, the Chamber also

found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that he controlled all branches of the Sudanese state "apparatus," and that he used this control to ensure the implementation of the counter-insurgency campaign.

THE RAPID SUPPORT FORCES (RSF)

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), are military groups formed from the so-called Janjaweed militia and officially recognized by the state in 2013, led by Mohammad Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti. The RSF forces were entrusted with various tasks including eliminating the rebellious movements in Darfur Western Sudan, guarding the borders, and eliminating smuggling operations (Tubiana, 2014)

A series of battles and successes led the former President Al-Bashir to develop a strong admiration for the RSF. He praised their achievements and assured their important role in maintaining national security, promoting stability, and defeating rebellious activities within the country. This was evident during his speech at the formal graduation of a new cohort of the RSF consisting of 11,000 fighters in May 2017 when Al-Bashir clearly stated his strong support for creating the RSF, describing them as crucial defenders of the national security of Sudan (Abadawi, 2021).

Later in 2017, during Al-Bashir's rule, the Sudanese parliament passed a Law, making the RSF an independent security force affiliated with the armed forces, the law stipulates that "The Rapid Support Forces are nationally composed military forces that adhere to the general principles of the Sudanese Armed Forces" (Abadawi, 2021).

The Rapid Support Forces define themselves as nationally formed military forces that operate under the command of the Commander-in-Chief and aim to uphold the values of loyalty to God and the nation and adhere to the general principles of the Sudanese Armed Forces.

Although the RSF are officially integrated into the country's regular military in December 2019, they remain largely independent operationally from the rest of the country's armed forces (Radio Dabanga 2019).

After the overthrow of Al-Bashir regime, negotiations were led to fully integrate these forces into the Sudanese army. However, due to disagreements between the leader of the RSF Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, and the army commander and head of the Sovereignty

Council, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, centered on the integration of these forces into the army, armed clashes broke out in mid-April 2023 between the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Army Forces (SAF), which sees them as rebel forces.

3.1. Historical Context of the RSF Tribal Alliance

The Rapid Support Force (RSF) is mainly comprised of fighters originating from the Arab tribes of Darfur, with a notable number originating from the Rizeigat tribe (De Waal, 2019). This tribal affiliation has often taken supremacy over state loyalty, which resulted in creating a complicated dynamics of power in Sudan. In the early 2000s, the UN declared the Janjaweed militia, the forerunner of the RSF, to have committed genocide in Darfur when it waged armed assaults against non-Arab tribes (Flint, 2009). Deep-seated animosity and mistrust were sowed by these acts of violence, which were mostly directed towards the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa tribes (Tubiana & Gramizzi, 2017). The RSF core composition and tribal allegiances were not much altered by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, or "Hemedti," who led the Janjaweed's transformation into a paramilitary group, instead he institutionalized a tribal militia within the state's security structure which further worsened the political landscape in Sudan (Gallopin, 2020). One can argue that the violent history of in Darfur, together with the strong tribal alliance combined with the rapid political and economic growth that the RSF forces have witnessed since 2003, were some of the factors that paved the way to the current conflict. The RSF's tribal affiliations and their history of operating outside the formal state structures have made it resistant to full integration into one single national military, contributing to the power struggle that led to the eruption of the war in 2023 (alhurra, 2024) . The RSF's core, mainly made up of fighters from Arab tribes in Darfur, which have fostered a strong sense of loyalty and unity among its members that was very crucial in maintaining their cohesion and unity against the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) (The New Arab , 2023). This allegiance of various Arab tribes was very essential to the RSF in the sense that it facilitated rapid mobilization and recruitment during the conflict, with Commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who utilized his strong tribal influence and relation to expand his forces, particularly from Darfur and Kordofan regions, as tribal relations played an important

role in gaining territorial control, particularly in Darfur, representing the RSF bases of support, these tribal ties shaped their alliances and rivalries with other groups, with some non-Arab tribes siding with the SAF or staying out of it (Swissinfo, 2023)

Economically, the tribal networks controlled key resources, such as gold mines, which were crucial in funding RSF military operations (The New Arab, 2023). in 2023, the RSF successfully leveraged tribal narratives for propaganda, framing its struggle as defending the rights of marginalized tribes against a centralized government. Furthermore, international tribal links especially the ones in Chad and Libya, allowed external support and resources to be granted to the RSF and further complicated the dynamic of the conflict (Al-Rezegi, 2023).

The RSF, together with its allied Arab militias, carried out ethnic cleansing against the non-Arab communities, among whom were most notably the Massalit, during the 2023 conflict in Darfur, this act of violence, which was driven by long-standing rivalries between tribes, with the RSF acting not only as some sort of paramilitary organization but also as a protector of Arab tribal interests. Hence, ingrained tribalism has played a significant role in this violence, whereby RSF seeks supremacy through violence against the non-Arab communities.

3.2. The RSF, and the Marginalization Rhetoric

Historically, the RSF militia applied all types of violence on the non-Arab tribes of Darfur, claiming tribal and ethnic superiority over them. This was done in collaboration with the central government in Khartoum, represented by the ousted president Omar Al-Bashir. During the current war, the scenario has repeated itself as the conflict spread to the region of Darfur, with the RSF controlling over 80% of the area (Younis, 2024). Violence has been inflicted on the non-Arab tribes, especially the Massalit tribe, with many thousands killed and many displaced (HRW, 2024).

Many RSF fighters and supporters have appeared in videos circulated on different social media platforms, stating that they are in Khartoum because it is now their turn to become the privileged population, having been marginalized for many years by the northern

tribes. They refer to these northern tribes as “Jallaba” or the Sons of the River, which include the Ja’alin, Shaiqiya, Danagla, and Mahas tribes of the north (Sudaninthenews, 2024).

RSF supporters claim that the northern tribes have unfairly ruled Sudan since the country’s independence in 1956 and deserve collective punishment. Destroying the '56 state,' and the 'Jallaba state' is a key part of RSF propaganda. Issa Musa Himedan, a pro-RSF influencer who gained fame after the 2018 revolution, argues that the British empowered the northern Sudanese, calling them "slaves of colonialism." RSF supporters portray their goal to destroy the '56 state,' as an anti-colonial mission, which they use to justify targeting the northern Sudanese "Jallaba", (Ibid).

The base of the RSF is made mostly of Darfur Arabs, who are the traditional foes of the Khartoum ruling class, mainly comprising the influential northern Nile-based Arab tribes of Sudan in power since the country's 1956 independence: the Ja'alin, the Danagla, and the Sha'iqiya. In turn, the riverine Arabs regard the Darfur Arabs as backward and "Africanised." Like many people from Darfur, Hemeti-who has only an education from Quranic school-is likely aware that he will never be accepted into the military and political elite of the riverine community (McGregor, 2023). On the other hand, In Darfur, however, Al-Burhan is viewed as the brains behind the genocide yet to be perpetuated against the non-Arab Muslims and best remembered for the threatening statements regarding the annihilation of the Fur people, who had long ruled over the land.

In a workshop entitled “Security and Military Reform,” held in Khartoum in March 2023, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) alluded to the enduring conflict between the Arab tribes located in western Sudan and those situated in the Nile region (McGregor, 2023). By characterizing the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) as “an army composed of a specific militia belonging to certain tribes,” the RSF evoked a historical struggle that traces its origins back to the period of Mahdist governance (1885-1899). During that period, the western Arabs, especially the Ta’aisha tribe, assumed control following the untimely demise of the Mahdi in 1885 and the ensuing marginalization of his riverine kin by Khalifa ‘Abd Allahi, the Mahdi’s Ta’aishi successor.

It is obvious that, the tribal rhetoric of the RSF in the 2023 conflict was directed not only against the non-Arab group but also against the Arab ruling class of the north. The tribal dynamics at the heart of Sudan's current conflict are much more intricate and complex than the mere marginalization and subjugation of non-Arab tribes. As identified earlier, the RSF is also inimical towards northern Arabs-what are otherwise described as riverine Arabs. Suffice it to say, however, that it is the non-Arab tribes who have borne the brunt of more systematic persecution at the hands of RSF, starting indeed in 2003 and with the current conflict.

Alrabea Abdelmoneim, a well-known RSF spokesperson, has called for attacks on northern Sudan's riverine Arab tribes. Abdelmoneim, who has significant influence among RSF militants, has appeared on regional Arab news stations and interviewed the RSF's deputy commander, Abdulrahim Dagalo. Orders to kill West Darfur governor Khamis Abakar were carried out on the same day as Abdelmoneim's interview with Dagalo. Additionally, an RSF militant has called for the extermination of northern Sudanese, insisting that the country should be ruled only by the tribes within the RSF. These messages often romanticize RSF militants entering Shendi, the center of the Ja'alin tribe in Sudan's northern River Nile state. These threats are alarming, considering Sudan's history. In the late 19th century, the Mahdist state's army, mainly composed of the same Darfur Arab tribes now in the RSF, killed thousands of Ja'alin in the Metemmeh Massacre. Women jumped into the Nile to avoid being raped by the Mahdist army. This has a chilling parallel today, with women in areas taken by the RSF asking for religious permission to commit suicide out of fear of being raped by RSF militants.

THE SUDANESE REVOLUTION OF 2018 AND ITS AFTERMATH

The 2018 Sudanese Revolution can be considered as an instrumental turning point through the history of the country. The widespread protests which began in December 2018, resulted in the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019, after nearly 30 as a president.

The revolution stemmed by a desire for several reforms and demands which includes economic reform, better living circumstances, and an end to corrupt government and authoritarian regime.

At first, the protesters protested issues such as the high living costs and lack of economic opportunities. However, as the protests continued and grew, the demands of the demonstrators included the removal of President Omar al-Bashir and his government represented in the National Congress Party (NCP).

The protests reached a climax on April 6, aligning with the anniversary of a historic uprising in 1985. On this day, protesters filled the squares outside the military headquarters in Khartoum, demanding military intervention to remove President Omar al-Bashir. Following four months of protests, including the Khartoum sit-in, nationwide strikes, and acts of civil disobedience, the military declared on April 11, 2019, that Al-Bashir had been ousted from power. The unity across tribal lines was reflected in slogans and chants calling for the end of ethnic and regional marginalization, emphasizing that Sudan's struggle was not just against a dictator but against the divisions that had long been used to suppress parts of its population.

The Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a crucial revolutionary organization that arose to coordinate the demonstrations, demanded a transitional government headed by civilians and reflecting the goals and demands of the revolutionaries. This period highlighted the potential to overcome the deep-seated tribal and regional tensions that the Bashir regime had long exploited. Many saw the revolution as an opportunity to address these inequalities and build a more united Sudan.

After al-Bashir was removed from power, the military group of officers who orchestrated the coup established the Transitional Military Council (TMC). They initiated negotiations with the opposition group that had emerged from the protests, known as the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), to outline a roadmap for the country's transition to civilian rule. By late August, the two groups agreed to sign a constitutional declaration, which further led to a new transitional government and a civilian prime minister (Hassan and Kodouda, 2019). However, the complex tribal dynamics, including the RSF's strong tribal roots, soon resurfaced, influencing the political landscape during this transitional period and foreshadowing the challenges that would later arise in the 2023 conflict.

4.1. The Revolution, as a Way of Rejecting Tribal Polarization

The protests initially started in an already unsteady volatile regions such as Darfur and Blue Nile, particularly the Damazin city, the capital of the historically neglected Blue Nile state on December 17, 2018. This was followed by protests in Al-Fashir, the capital of North Darfur state and northeast Sudan's Atbara on December 19 when local citizens set fire to the headquarters of the ruling National Congress Party (Elsheikh, 2019). In the following days, protests spread all around Sudan, as protesters called for an end to Bashir's military leadership and demanded a shift towards civilian rule.

The protests were ignited by the high cost of living and the removal of subsidies on essential goods, Inflation reached 70 percent in 2018 and unemployment ranked as the fifth worst in the world (Elnaiem, 2019). Demonstrators attributed these economic challenges to the leadership of long-serving president Omar al-Bashir and his autocratic NCP regime. However, the people's motive behind protesting wasn't solely driven by the economic crisis, as it represented through the people's slogans chanted during the revolution: "Freedom, peace, justice", "The revolution is the people's choice", or "The fall, that's all!" Its notable economic crisis related slogans did not impose themselves as slogans of the December Revolution. Demonstrators attributed these economic challenges to the leadership of long-serving president Omar al-Bashir and his autocratic NCP regime. (Bach et al, 2022)

Moreover, from its outset, the protests emphasized an anti-racist stance, which hindered the regime's efforts to blame Darfuris for the unrest (Engeler et al, 2020). Slogans such as “you arrogant racist Al-Bashir, the whole country is Darfur” gave a positive image on the revolution as such chants brought greater public support and solidarity with a region which had historically been subject to ethnic, economic, and political marginalization, beside discrimination which later resulted in the ethnic cleansing and genocide. These chants also represented Sudanese youth's clear rejection of the regime's strategy of ethnic polarization used in previous decades with varying levels of success (Muhammad and Bearak 2019). This was crucial in the sense that the during the course of the revolution, people all of Sudan and Khartoum in specific, showed that the fate of the marginalized areas such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile, and that of the popular struggle in the center (Khartoum) are now inseparable (Yoshiko, 2018)

For three decades, Al Bashir government oppressed all the opposing movements in the center and, also brutally oppressed the people of marginalized and underdeveloped regions such as the South, the Nuba Mountains and Darfur, through warfare and genocidal actions. This was behind the solidarity that happened between the marginalized and the demonstrators in the center as they became inseparable since both groups are now being oppressed and killed by the same forces that applied these practices in Sudan’s marginalized areas.

The revolution's unwavering commitment to the nonviolent concept and the lack of theft or damage of private property was of its most notable characteristics. Unlike previous uprisings in Sudan, such as the one that occurred in 2013 and resulted in riots and other acts of sabotage (BBC 2013).

Through the period of the 2018 nonviolent revolution, protester gained support from the public especially those at risk of losing their properties. This wasn’t the case in the previous revolts attempts as many of the property owners were reluctant to support the revolution as they feared potential damages of their properties. During this time, protests even got financially funded by significant Sudanese businesspeople to support its logistics. (De Waal 2019).

It's significant to mention that the revolutionary dynamic stemmed from grassroots and organized at the neighborhoods level where mostly composed of young people especially women who were reportedly represented up to 70 percent of the protesters in various parts of the country, although the exact origin of this figure is uncertain (Engeler et al, 2020). Women played a pivotal role not only in participating in the protests, but also in taking leadership and organizational responsibilities during the 2018 Sudanese Revolution (ibid).

It's critical to emphasize that the revolutionary drive originated by neighborhood-level mobilization and grassroots activities. In this regard, the resistance committees—which were at first clandestine and mainly unknown—were important. These committees played a significant role in organizing and planning protests, frequently surprising the authorities. Made up of youths from various neighborhoods and socioeconomic backgrounds, they functioned according to mobilization tactics, heavily influenced by the Communist Party (Bach et al, 2022). These committees operated independently and were not subject to any party's control or authority. As the revolution grew, the resistance committees increased as well and got established in different part of the city and they were crucial as they were designed in a way to replace the ones arrested. Up until today, these committees continue to exert significant political influence from within their neighborhoods. Understanding the existence and their work is necessary to grasp the extent of mobilization during periods when large numbers of partisan political figures got detained (Bach et al, 2022).

4.2. Sudan Professionals Association (SPA)

As the protests intensified in Khartoum, there was a noticeable shift in the demographic makeup of the protesters towards a more affluent and elite population (Engeler et al, 2020). This demographic change led to the emergence of the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a political dynamic which aimed to coordinate efforts and organize more ambitious demonstrations. It was initially established in 2016 after signing a charter between three professionals unions (the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, the Sudanese Journalists Network, and the Democratic Association of Lawyers) the

organization did not emerge newly with the uprising and definitely took advantage of various forms of political movements (such as among different parties, unions, and non-partisan groups) to solidify its position as the primary leader of the revolt (Yoshiko, 2018).

During the revolution, The SPA introduced itself as a labor organization with no political affiliations taking the responsibility of coordination, planning procession routes, and announcing demonstrations according to predetermined schedules. It also led in calling for strikes and organizing civil disobedience. These actions brought political change at the national and made the revolution more institutionalized. (Engeler et al, 2020)

The call for protest by SPA was received by high support from the public, especially in the capital Khartoum. The people trust for the SPA grew day after day and the Sudanese people named them “the voice of the urban working middle class” (Bach, 2022).

Although the SPA was not sufficiently reflective of the range of grievances in Sudan, particularly the marginalized ones, it was still the most well-organized organization among the many others, and it managed to successfully supervise the protests starting in January 2019 (Abbas 2019). Neighborhood Resistance Committees, who would put the SPA's commands into practice locally, provided support for the SPA's mobilization efforts in several locations.

In January 2019, the SPA and twenty-one other entities, ranging from a coalition of opposition parties to civil society organizations to rebel groups operating in the country’s peripheries, jointly formed the Forces of Freedom and Change Coalition (FFC) which later took on the role of representing the opposition during transition negotiations.

The coalition signed a document termed the Forces Freedom and Change Coalition declaration which targeted several main points, including the immediate removal of President Omar al-Bashir and his cabinet, the formation of a transitional government comprised of qualified civilians to govern for a period of four years, an immediate end to conflict in the various regions, the formation of a National Constitutional Committee, the

restructuring of the administration, the army, and the judiciary, and an end to oppression and discrimination.[3]

Following the establishment of the FFC, the revolution gained another political dimension as opposition to Omar Al-Bahir's regime grew. Starting at the grassroots and neighborhood levels represented by the Resistance Committees, followed by the formation of the Sudanese Professional Association, which institutionalized this movement. Finally, with the formation of Forces of Freedom and Change coalition, there was a major political gain for public support as backing for the revolution increased.

Faced with these mobilizations, the regime seemed incapable of offering a political reaction to these protests. In the following weeks, the protests were met with a brutal violent which resulted in several victims were shot dead beside the arrest and torture of many others in the infamous "Ghost Houses"[4]. More than sixty people were killed, and over thousands injured during the course of the revolution. Police targeted civilian protesters by live shot bullets and tear gas (Elnaiem, 2019).

In a televised speech on February 22, 2019, the president declared a state of emergency, which was later prolonged until the 2020 general elections. The cabinet was disbanded, general close to the president took over as province governors, and the 2020 election preparations was initiated. Security forces displayed their presence in the streets on February 23 through parading in the streets of Khartoum. It was obvious that Al-Bashir was attempting to gather his remaining supporters despite the fact that he was receiving less support from both domestic and foreign sources. On the other hand, the protests seemed to be losing momentum, which made many believe that everything would soon return to normal, and that Bashir and his inner circle would continue to rule.

[3] Declaration of Freedom and Change', 1 January 2019, available at: http://www.sudaneseprofessionals.org/en/declaration-of-freedom-andchange/ 33

[4] Anonymous addresses used by Sudanese security forces as informal prisons.

4.3. The Turning Point

On April 6, the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) called for protesters to gather in front of the Military Headquarters for what they termed as the "million marches." Historically, April 6th has been celebrated by Sudanese people as it marks the anniversary of the 1985 revolution. The decision to choose the Military Headquarters as a gathering location was driven by a desire to demand the support from the army. Accordingly, many protestors gathered outside the army headquarters in what became a turning point in the revolution.

Soldiers and officers allowed the demonstrators to gather peacefully in front of the Military Headquarters and promised them to provide protection. The military successfully defended against attacks by armed militias loyal to the regime during the initial nights. The gathering continued the following days with army keeping their promise to protect the crowd which started to grow day after day.

On April 10, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) announced that they will not stay by the side of the regime, and they will not engage in hostilities or any attack against protesters. Originating from the infamous Janjaweed involved in the Darfur Genocide, RSF had been a key pillar of al-Bashir's regime. With their withdrawal, the regime became at risk (Elnaiem, 2019).

On very early hours of April 11, military marches played on the national radio channel as well as the TV, the streets were occupied with millions of Sudanese greeting and cheering for the military and Rapid Support Forces (RSF). It was all in the news that a coup has been executed, and Omar al-Bashir had been removed. Few hours later, General Ibn Auf (until then Minister of Defense) confirmed the fall and the establishment of a Transitional Military Council (TMC).

Sudanese didn’t not celebrate the news of ousting Omar Al-Bashir especially knowing that his right arm and the Minister of Defense then, General Ibn Auf will be his successor, The mobilization matched the public's dissatisfaction, leading to even larger crowds in the streets.

General Auf himself fell the next day. He was replaced by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who appeared to be more ‘acceptable’ (Bach et al, 2022). The Rapid Support Forces leader and the former militia man Mohamad Hamdan Dagalo “Hemedti” was assigned as interim vice president.

4.4. The End of the NCP/Salvation Era

During the 30 years of the salvation rule, the regime faced many challenges from the opposition represented in several attempts to throw the government such as coups, wars, disobedience, and demonstrations. However, the regime managed to remain in power through applying very crucial measures and via practicing skillful divide-and-rule tactics (Elbadawi and Alhello, 2023). Among the many atrocities, examples of the summary execution of 28 officers involved in the failed coup of 1991 and the extreme brutality of the measures used to put an end to the nonviolent revolt in 2013 that resulted in the shooting deaths of over 170 young demonstrators (ibid).

The Salvation regime’s committed massacres and ignited civil wars in regions as Darfur which is considered among the harshest examples of the regime’s violent and bloody rule, which in the end resulted in international condemnation and legal action by the International Criminal Court (ICC). This regime resorted to using severe force to prevent coup attempts, deter future coups, and suppress peaceful civilian uprisings.

The regime successfully created divisions among political parties and armed insurgencies as the National Congress Party (NCP) played a leading role in creating "bogus" power sharing reconciliation initiatives, fostered by the well-funded political marketplace during the oil era (ibid). Furthermore, to protect himself from coups, al-Bashir worked on achieving the “balance of terror” within the Sudanese armed forces by empowering and maintaining three independent bodies: the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The Salvation regime-imposed restrictions on the freedom of the Sudanese people, through adopting laws derived from Islamic Sharia as they claimed. This law brought restrictions which affected the social and political lives of Sudanese individuals,

particularly impacting the younger generation. Women bore the brunt of stringent regulations and experienced gender imbalances within Sudanese society as this regime put in place several laws that restricted women's rights during their three decades of rule which included unclear defined moral and penal codes, notably the Public Order Laws set of regulations issued in 1991, governed women's attire in public, constrained their freedom of movement, regulated their involvement in public affairs, and allowed for physical punishments like lashings and stoning (Engeler et al, 2020).

By 2019, nearly half of Sudanese women lacked access to formal education due to restrictive government policies and violence, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), which was justified under the veil of local and religious customs (Gaafar and Shawkat 2019).

4.5. From Revolution to Negotiations

Despite the fall of the Salvation regime, the demonstrations continued in a shape of a sit-in Infront of the Military Headquarters. People refused to leave the sit-in square unless their demands which majorly was about forming a civil transitional government that would pave the way for free and fair elections.

The sit-in was unique in the sense it unified all Sudanese together, young people, families, elderly people and even street children and homeless people who found a welcoming place that accepted all the Sudanese regardless their tribal and political background. The sit-in also brought people from the marginalized regions of Sudan, such as Darfur, Blue Nile, Nuba mountains and others from the east who took all the road from their reasons to show solidarity and talk about the violence they faced under the old regime. Khartoum witnessed shows that display the genocide, mixed with nice chants and poems read out by the protestors. It was a strong show of unity and standing up against the bloody past (Bach, 2022).

While the sit-in was ongoing in harmony, this wasn't the case outside during the negotiation between the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the civilians led by the Forces of Freedom and change (FFC) who enjoyed a great support from the public. This

tension was reflected on the slogans emerged during the sit-in as the chants became more focused toward handing the entire power of rule to the civilians. On the other side, the demands of the Transitional Military Council (TMC) increased, as they began to threat the protesters to disband their sit-in at the camp.

On the 3 June, a violent dismantling to the sit-in was carried out by the Sudanese forces mainly by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). According to Human Right Watch, more than 200 civilian was brutally killed. Dead bodies were weighted with rocks and thrown in the Nile River so they would sink. Corpses were buried in one mass grave, and unprecedented levels of sexual assault targeting both males and females occurred.

The Sudanese people showed a strong reaction to the massacre reflected in campaigns civil disobedience and renewed waves of revolt activities that directed people to the streets again. These actions exerted great pressure on the country's Transitional Military Council (TMC). Mediation efforts sponsored by the African Union and Ethiopia resulted in resuming the negotiation in July 2019.

After few days of the negotiation, a preliminary power sharing agreement was reached, although the military did not pass the power to the civilians fully, they agreed to compromise on some of the main disputed topics and that due to their weakened position after violent dispersal of the sit-in. Both parties agreed on the structure of a Sovereignty Council consisting of five members from the civilians and five from the military, with a rotating presidency. This arrangement entails one and a half years being led by a soldier followed by another one and a half years under civilian leadership until general elections are conducted in 2022. The agreement was officially signed on 17 August 2019 and some its main components included nominating a civilian Prime Minister by the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) ultimately leading to the appointment of Dr. Abdalla Hamdok, besides the formation of an interim civilian cabinet. headed by a prime minister, who formed his government in September.

While the agreement stands a significant accomplishment for the revolutionaries, it still grants a considerable space for the military leaders who were part of the ousted regime. This particularly referes to Mohammed Hamdan Daglo, known as "Hemedti," the head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that is widely involved in the ethnic cleansing in

Darfur as the recent 3 June massacre. Hemeti has significant influence in Sudan's current political scene, as he signed the Transitional Agreement and serving as a member of the Sovereign Council. He also owns most of Sudan's gold mines and he is probably not likely to give up control of his force (Berridge 2019).

4.6. Juba Peace Agreement, A Step Toward Inclusive Tribal Representation

In October 2020, the government signed the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) with the country's rebel groups aiming at practice of federalism in Sudan. The signing of the JPA on marked an important attempt to solve tribal conflicts in Sudan during the transition period after the 2018-2019 Revolution. This was an agreement to solve some of the arising outstanding issues that provided grounds for tribal conflicts, especially in the marginalized areas of Sudan. It included many armed groups from various regions and tribal backgrounds, in particular, from Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. All this was meant to cover the grievances that were being faced by different tribal groups (Al-Ali, 2021). There were provisions around better resource sharing, which had been considered one of the underpinnings of tribal conflict dynamics, that had allocations in specific percentages of national revenue to conflict-prone areas (ibid). The most contentious issue dealt with in the agreement was land rights, a big source of tribal conflict, especially in Darfur. It put a commission to be established and mandated to review disputes where people claim ownership of lands.

4.7. Abdullah Hamdok Government

The government formed by Abdallah Hamdok in the following the declaration of August 2019 declaration faced a several serious challenges, at the core was the relationship with the military branch of the Sovereignty Council and the sharing of powers. However, a notable success has been witnessed both in the domestic and foreign levels.

At the domestic level, the committee responsible for dismantling the old regime has successfully taken over numerous properties and funds that was owned by the old regime officials. Additionally, following long period of negotiation, 18 new governors were

appointed by the new cabinet replaced the old ones assigned by Omar Al-Bashir in 2018, prior to the revolution. Administrative changes were also applied to the Ministries of Health and Education, the changes also reached other significant institutions such as the Central Bank of Sudan.

These waves of reforms reached The National Intelligence Security Service (NISS), an important body that was developed under the former regime, this may highly explain the attempted assassination of Abdallah Hamdok by a car bomb in March 2020 (Bach, 2022).

Furthermore, important reforms have been made to the Judicial system particularly, the crime of apostasy was abolished, as well as the Public Order laws, while the Fundamental Rights and Freedom Acts passed (Bach, 2022). As a result, public floggings are no longer allowed, production and sale of alcohol is decriminalized, and both the death penalty for minors and for same-sex sexual activities has been lifted (Ban Barkawi, 2020).

This was followed by the imprisonment of previous regime members of whom were convicted of corruption, leading to the seize of their assets among them the former president Omar Al-Bashir.

The transitional period saw attempts to address Sudan's longstanding conflicts in regions such as Darfur.

4.8. Tribal Tensions Continue During the Transitional Government Period

In October 2020, the transitional Prime Minister, Abdullah Hamdok, was forced to dismiss the newly appointed governor of Kassala State, under pressure from the leader of another tribe hostile to the tribal incubator of the Kassala governor (Radio Dabanga, 2020). The new governor was unable to implement the decision to appoint him, and he remained in Khartoum for about four months until a decision was issued to relieve him as a result of the tribal mobilization led by one of the tribes' supervisors. The matter ended in clashes between the two parties that resulted in deaths and injuries, and the clashes moved to include other cities in eastern Sudan, in which tribalism plays an influential role. There was no reason to reject the new governor other than the fact that he was descended from a specific tribe. These tribal events continued for months, until the tribal

leader prevailed by imposing what he wanted, but the conflict in eastern Sudan is still renewed for many reasons (Al-Nur, 2023).

The Prime Minister's acquiescence to the pressure of the tribal leader was a blessing and support for the role of the tribe, even though the intentions were that the situation in the east of the country would not explode. However, the direct result was an enhancement of the role of tribal leaders. The tribal leader himself protested a few days ago, mobilized his tribe and closed the national road linking Khartoum to eastern Sudan.

What was happening in eastern Sudan is a model that occurs in many regions with different reasons and circumstances. But the common denominator is that the tribe has influence at the expense of institutions on the one hand, and at the expense of modern powers on the other hand.

This scene is, in addition to being a natural product of the complex legacy left by Al-Bashir, on the other hand, it is supported in some way by the military components involved in the transitional government.

After the removal of Al-Bashir in April 2019, part of the military component tended to ally with the tribes. In light of the military component’s search for social incubators, it resorted - as a natural result - to exploiting the traditional incubators of the previous regime, and in its belief that it held a winning card against the forces of the revolution, most of which it took (Al-Nur, 2023). The tribal leaders themselves, who had enjoyed privileges from the previous regime, felt the danger of disappearing as the modern powers took control of the scene after the revolution. Perhaps this is what motivated them to scramble in search of a formula that would preserve and maintain their status for them. This is on the one hand, but on the other hand, there is an incentive that makes these traditional forces return to dominate political and social action, which is the inability of the modern forces to complete what they started during the revolution, and the decline of their role and influence in a terrible way. The modern forces and political parties disappeared after the revolution. They stopped engaging in any civil activity and no longer communicated with societies, as was the case in the past. They repeatedly failed to make an impact in many situations that occurred after the revolution, most notably the renewal of tribal conflicts in Darfur (Al-Nur, 2023).

It is possible to identify some of the reasons for this decline of modern forces with the rise of the tribe, perhaps the most prominent of which is that these forces, as a result of thirty years of dictatorial rule, are still fragile information. The result of this fragility is divisions and fragmentation, which makes it unable to form a cohesive unit with leadership that keeps pace with the great changes that have occurred. Consequently, this situation left a wide void that was filled by the traditional social systems represented by the tribe. In addition to this, the inability of state institutions to function, especially those concerned with enforcing the law, grants the tribe, intentionally or not, the legitimacy to make or reject decisions.

The expected modern civil state in Sudan remains hostage to the rise of modern forces, led by parties, unions, and civil society organizations active in societal issues. There is still a good opportunity if political parties begin to change from within, as some of them have still maintained their leadership without change for decades. The opportunity is still good if the divided professional group devotes itself to building unions. Otherwise, the opportunity provided by the "December Revolution" will dissipate.

Throughout the transitional governance period in Sudan, various incidents of tribal conflict and violence repeatedly derailed peace efforts. In Darfur, fighting between 2019 and 2021 escalated dramatically in July 2020 in El Geneina, West Darfur, where clashes between the Arab and Masalit tribes resulted in significant casualties and the displacement of thousands (ACAPS, 2021).

Meanwhile, in Eastern Sudan, tribal groups, particularly the Beja tribe, staged protests and blockades at Port Sudan from 2020 to 2021. The Beja demanded greater representation in the transition government and shares of resources, heightening tensions with the central government and other tribes (Africanews, 2021) .

Worst of all, violence in the Nuba Mountains area of South Kordofan labeled periodic fighting through 2019 and 2020 between military government forces and those of the emblematic SPLM-N best showed complete tribal and political division through 2020 (Sudan Tribune , 2020).

From July 2020 up to later 2022, violent clashes between the Hausa ethnic group and the other local tribes killed a number of people and displaced many in the state of the Blue Nile (Amin, 2022). Conflicts emerged between the Beni Amer and Nuba tribes in Kassala State (Sudan In The News, 2020). This saw the government declare a state of emergency due to the fact that it brought upon deaths.

These recurring tribal conflicts highlight the enormous challenge faced by the transitional government in addressing long-standing tribal issues. More importantly, the ongoing nature of these conflicts underscores how deeply entrenched these problems are in Sudan's social fabric. This persistence demonstrates the immense difficulty in achieving lasting peace and stability in the country.

4.9. The Coup Against the Civilian Government

On October 2021, The Sudanese Military represented by Transitional Military Council (TMC) executed a coup that halted the democratization process. The coup was led by General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan and the leader of the RSF Hemedti described by them as a ‘corrective action of the revolution” with the purpose to safeguard stability (Serdar, 2021). Following the declaration of the coup by the Military Council, the head of the transitional government Abdullah Hamadok was sent to jail. Few days later, Al-Burhan reinstated the previously jailed civilian Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok (Abdelaziz, 2021) However, as January 2022 Hamdok officially resigned (Dabanga, 2022).

Following the coup at the beginning of July 2022, Al-Burhan, declared the army’s withdrawal from the political scene as he mentioned that he wants to “allow the political and revolutionary forces and other national components to sit down and form a government of independent national competencies to complete the requirements of the transitional period,” He added ,“After the formation of the executive government, the Sovereignty Council will be dissolved and a higher council of armed forces, formed from the (Sudan) Armed Forces and Rapid Support (Forces), will take over the high command of the regular forces” (Sudan tribune, 2022).

Following the coup, the African Union suspended Sudan's membership, while the United Nations and the United States urged the military leaders of Sudan to reinstate a government led by civilians. Later, on November 11, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who has been effectively leading Sudan since al-Bashir's removal from power, established a new governing council in which as he claims its leadership and assigns the (RSF) leader as his deputy with excluding the civilians.

This move resulted in a wide range of anti-military protests stating the rejection the military coup and emphasizing resistance to reverting to the previous status quo. The protests believe that their opposition to the coup as a form of continuation of the 2018 revolution, against the same actors: the military and the Islamists (Khair, 2021). Unfortunately, these demonstrations have been met with harsh police brutality, leading to over 120 pro-democracy activists being killed since al-Burhan's takeover (Hendawi, 2022). The Public mobilization as well as foreign response compelled the Military Council to reinitiate the negotiation with civilians as a result, Sudan's military, paramilitary, and civilians reached an interim agreement on December 5 with the goal of reinstating civilian rule within a two-year period, accordingly, Military, and civilian officials met again in January 2023 to address significant contentious agendas, including transitional justice, accountability, and security reforms. This involves considering the integration of the feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into the Sudanese army which brought high level of tension, especially the leader of the (RSF) began to realize that the coup didn't serve his own agendas with his plans to strengthen his forces and pursue a presidential in 2023. However, he realized that the president Al-Burhan was sliding him consolidate power for himself and revive previous figures from the Islamic regime. Hemedti even went publicly and apologized for being part of the coup by admitting that it was a "mistake" (Olewe, 2023). The comments were part of a growing rift between him and army leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

The people of Sudan knew they would likely face a resistance from the Islamist regime in response to the fall of Al-Bashir as he had left behind a highly centralized and heavily securitized state. This was an important element that allowed members of the military to gain significant influence over both state and private institutions in Sudan, enabling them

to resist the democratic reforms and prepare for the coup (Berridge 2023). Another factor was the extent of their authority, which granted them a significant veto over the transitional process. This became clear during the October 2021 military coup and was repeated in April 2023 when the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Army forces (SAF) clashed over proposed security sector reforms aimed at reinitiating the transition process which was the spark that ignited the recent war in Sudan.

4.10. Unity Over Division: The 2018 Revolution's Fight Against Tribalism

The Sudanese Revolution of 2018-2019, frequently referred to as the December Revolution, truly was a strong push against tribalism, striving for national unity. This movement tried to transcend the traditional tribal and regional differences that have been effectively responsible for bewitching the politics of Sudan for some decades. Inclusive slogans and chants characteristic of the revolution included, among the most famous, "We are all Darfur" to show solidarity with this most marginalized region and its people (Kadoda & Hale, 2020). This slogan directly challenged the historical marginalization of Darfur and other peripheral regions. On the contrary, the protests have demonstrated the inclusion of a multitude of Sudanese from different tribal and regional backgrounds-from Darfur to the Nuba Mountains, among other traditionally peripheral regions (Berridge, 2020).

Protesters were united in an expression of a collective Sudanese identity and directed slogans, including "Just fall, that's all", throughout the country; they were visible to everyone and went beyond tribal and regional divisions as well as dimensions (de Waal, 2019). Exploitation of tribal division was a long-standing strategy of the government, which through using tribalism, the previous regimes used to preserve their power; hence, the protest movements went against this tactic (Abdelaziz et al., 2021). The movement focused on shared grievances affecting all Sudanese, such as economic hardship, lack of

political freedoms, and corruption, which helped unite people across tribal lines (Abdel-Magied, 2021).

They heavily used symbolism and images most of the demonstration saw the public display of the national flag alongside other works of art representing a Sudanese countenance in its diversity (Kadoda & Hale, 2020). Social media platforms formed an essential tool in the campaigns for unity slogans that would subdue tribalism; hence, through hashtags such as #SudanUprising and #SudanRevolts, they achieved creating a national identity.

The opposition was led largely by youth who would be most likely to identify with a national Sudanese identity rather than a traditional tribal affiliation (El-Battahani, 2022)

The revolution's demands included calls for a more inclusive political system representing all of Sudan's diverse population, including marginalized groups from Darfur and other regions (de Waal, 2019). Cultural expressions during the revolution, such as musicality, poetry, and art, tended to celebrate Sudan's diversity while underlining unity. All this served to instill in the people a feeling of collective identity (Kadoda & Hale, 2020). The stance of the revolution against tribalism and emphasis on national unity had fairly turned over the political debate in Sudan.

On the other hand, by explicit inclusions and demonstrations of solidarity with marginalized groups among them Darfuris the movement sought to redefine conceptually national identity in Sudan in more inclusive terms.

SUDAN WAR 2023

A war between the RSF, headed by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, and the SAF, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, was inevitable at some point (Horton, 2023). Both leaders were competing for power, with the SAF pushing for the RSF's integration into its ranks within two years and demanding that Hemedti answer to Burhan as the armed forces commander.

The war that has been raging since April 15 in Sudan is primarily driven by the personal agenda of Al-Burhan and Hemedti, the agenda of the complete seizure of power and their attempt to block other's path. After years of their joint ability to peacefully address the contradictory and conflicting ambitions between them, today their contradictory ambitions have reached a point of no return, which seems to have left them with no choice but to ignite a war of survival in which there is no room for maneuver, truce, or retreat. However, beside this clear and direct self-serving agenda of the war, the October 2021 coup combined with foreign interventions from several countries, and the lurking of the former regime's agents, have all constituted other major reasons that lead to the war and accelerated its possibility, and may constitute an obstacle to any future solutions to end it.

5.1. The Battle of Khartoum

The conflict begun with a heavy gunfire and explosions in the Capital Khartoum, causing panic and fear among civilians. The clashes erupt between the Sudanese army (SAF) and the Rapid Support Force (RSF), each accusing the other of initiating the violence (Aljazeera, 2023).

On 15 April 2023, armed clashes erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in multiple cities across Sudan, including Khartoum, Al Fasher, Merowe, Nyala, Ag Geneina, and El Obeid – among others.

The first hours seemed to have almost complete control of the Rapid Support Forces RSF over the media space, as they took the initiative to broadcast images confirming their control over many sites, including the Khartoum and Merawi international airports. This was followed by statements by Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) confirming his forces' control over the situation on land and in the air and demanding that Al-Burhan surrender. Hemedti also claimed that his war is against the Islamists, who wants to retrieve the former regime, presenting himself as a champion of democracy.

Factions of RSF were pre-located in critical areas in and around Khartoum, as well as in areas near critical airfields which the RSF attacked later. In response, the Sudanese Army Forces attacked them using their air force.

Prior to the conflict, the RSF located its forces in residential areas, particularly in Khartoum and its surroundings. The SAF's number of fighters is estimated to be around 120,000 fighters while the RSF's number of fighters estimated to be 70,000 at the beginning of the conflict. The numbers of fighter in both sides grew as the conflict continued with no accurate estimation (Aljazeera, 2023).

The RSF had an advantage over the SAF in urban settings because of its decentralized force structure, equipment, and expertise. To avoid the air attack by the SAF, the RSF extended its forces into highly populated residential areas, making them difficult targets. This strategy allowed the RSF to acquire necessary supplies through looting the houses in residential areas without relying on vulnerable supply lines across Sudan's open terrain. On the other hand, due its bureaucratic inefficiencies and reliant on heavy weaponry, the SAF adaptation to the urban warfare and the counter insurgency was poor (Horton, 2023).

Several ceasefire fire attempts failed to halt the ongoing conflict in Khartoum, the first attempt of ceasefire was suggested to be held on 18 April, however the fighting continued in Khartoum and its major cities Omdurman and Bahri, with both sides trying to reach control over conflicted zones such as the Army headquarters when Al-Buran is sieged as well as the republican palace. Further ceasefire was proposed during Eid Al-Fitr between 21-26 April as large number of foreigner expats and diplomats were stuck in the middle of the conflict.

On 22 April, several citizens of different nations were evacuated, around 100 US special forces flew from Djibouti and evacuated the American embassy in Khartoum, The UK, Germany, Netherland, and Türkiye beside other nations also began the initial stages of evacuating diplomats to Port Sudan on the Red Sea, which lies about 650 kilometers (400 mi) northeast of Khartoum (Usaid Siddiqui, 2023).

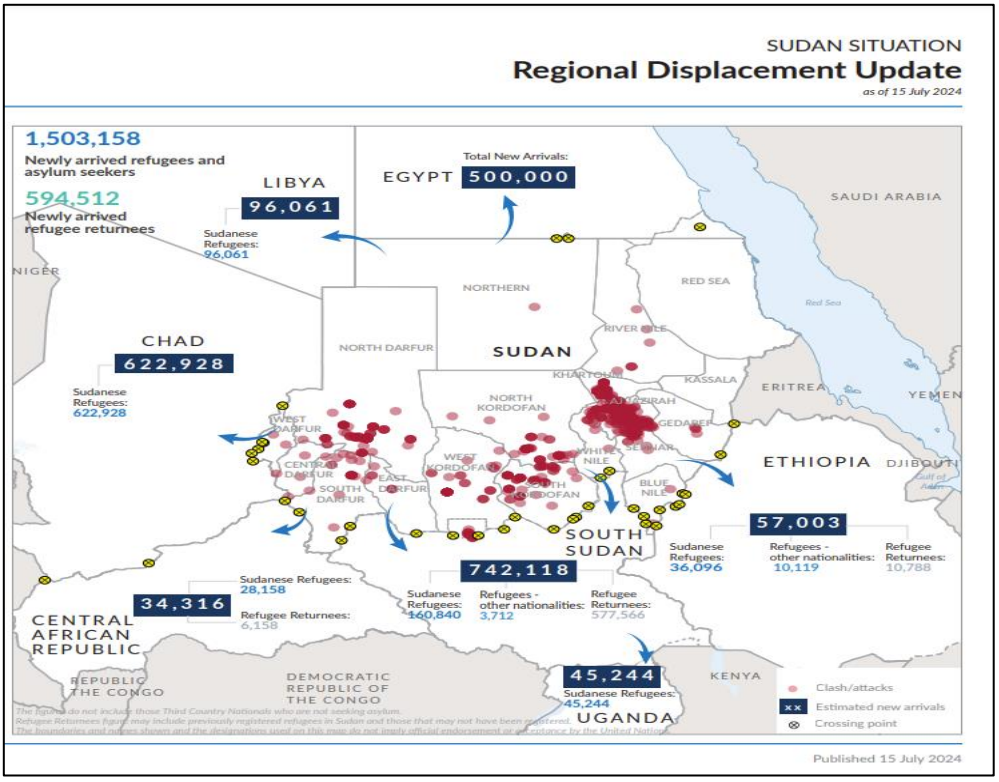
On May 20, the SAF and RSF agreed on committing to a week-long ceasefire after talks in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, following an attempt from the Gulf country to contain the situation in Sudan through conducting peace talks.

The ceasefire was set to start on May 22 and last until May 29. Initially, Khartoum and the surrounding areas remined calm during the ceasefire period. However, small skirmishes occurred. On May 22, two hundred twenty-nine people were declared missing in Khartoum with efforts made for their search and rescue through the ceasefire. The ceasefire broke down on the night of May 23 as clashes erupted in Khartoum, Omdurman, and Bahri.

The conflict between SAF and RSF with both sides refusing any kind of initiatives for putting guns aside and accepting to negotiate despite the efforts made by several countries such Saudi Arabia through Jeddah talks or through the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) countries that was previously involved in the 2005 peace process that ended a 22-year war in Sudan.

According to a report by the UN agency International Organization for Migration IOM, the conflict in Khartoum led to the displacement of around 8.7 million people who either settled internally in other states or fled to neighboring countries (Chad Egypt, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Central African Republic).

Figure 5.1. Map Showing the Displacement Routes Internally and Externally



(Source: *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), July 2024*.)

As the conflict escalated in Khartoum, the RSF managed to take control over larger parts of the city beside winning several battles over critical key locations in the major big cities of Bahri and parts of Omdurman. Following their control over most of the capital, the RSF aimed at expanding their territories and gain control over the city of Wad Madani, the capital city of El-Gezira state which they attacked on the December 15.

Until then, Wad Madani was hosting large number of the internally displaced IDPs who fled Khartoum because of the conflict between. The city which located 170 km southeast of the capital Khartoum was also the nearest aid hub during the current conflict.

The RSF attacked Wad Madni on the December 15, this attack was repelled by SAF with heavy artillery and air strikes. The fight over Wad Madani lasted for three day witnessing progress for SAF over the RSF which led people to celebrate on the streets. However, it was subsequently discovered that these assaults did not succeed in halting the RSF's progress. After three days of conflict, the RSF took control of Wad Madani.

Wad Madani, has strategic dimensions to the RSF, it first would grant them free movement within El-Gezira State and offer a gateway to other strategic cities in the Butana region, including El-Gadarif, Kosti, and Sennar, which would create a challenge for the SAF to concentrate its forces. Secondly, capturing Wad Madani would cut off the regions of Darfur and Kordofan, and the states of Khartoum and White Nile from the army (Hourled, 2023).

The fall of Wad Madani created another wave of displacement in Sudan, according to IOM at least 250,000-300,000 people from the city.

5.2. Fueling the Conflict Through External Factors

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) support for RSF and their leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo “Hemedti” has been an essential during the current conflict. The UAE provides support to the RSF militia in a range of ways, including financial and logistical support, and provision of military equipment (Gallopin, 2020)

The ties between the UAE’s president bin Zayed and the RSF can be tracked back to 2015 when the Hemedti provided for the Saudi Emirati intervention in Yemen as the Sudanese troops deployed to Yemen reached over 30,000 soldiers at the peak of the Yemen war in 2016-2017.

Hemedti, who holds significant control over Sudan's profitable gold mining industry, in an interview with Aljazeera, Alex De Waal (2023) mentioned the Hemedti has also been engaged in mutually beneficial gold trade with the UAE. The trade relation between the two leaders doesn’t only involve gold, even prior to the 2023 conflict with the SAF, it was reported that Hemedti bought 1,000 military machine gun-carrying from the UAE.

The United Arab Emirates' involvements in the Sudanese affairs trough their support to the RSF during the conflict elicited a strong response from the leaders of Sudan's army SAF. Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, commander of the Sudanese army, took decisive measures by expelling 15 Emirati diplomats in December as a result of their ongoing support for the Rapid Support Forces.

Chad is also one of the countries that have contributed to the complicating of the conflict as it plays a pivotal role in the logistical arrangement to facilitate the arrival of the guns to RSF. The United Nations team has identified 3 main routes - which are still active now - for supplies to the RSF, the first of which is through Om Jars Airport in eastern Chad, where military support planes coming from Abu Dhabi International Airport land before stopping in countries such as Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda (Alnur, 2024). Military support also flows from East Central Africa, in addition to supply lines through South Sudan and southern Libya.

Russia is reported to be among the countries that played an important role in providing support to the RSF. Several platforms reported that the Russian mercenary group Wagner has been supplying RSF with missiles to aid their fight against Sudan’s army.

Hemedti and Wagner have developed a close relation in recent years due to their common trade of gold mining and smuggling from Sudan’s to outside of the country, Hemedti's role in this business has contributed significantly to his wealth and made him on of Sudan's richest (Nima Elbagir, 2023). Meanwhile, the profits obtained by Wagner from gold smuggling are reported to be utilized to support Russia's invasion into Ukraine. In 2022, just before Russia initiated its large-scale invasion of Ukraine, Hemedti led a delegation from Sudan to Moscow with the purpose of “advance relations” between the two nations (ibid).

On the other hand, several Western sources reported that Ukrainian special forces participated alongside the Sudanese army, as part of a strategy aimed to disrupt Russian military and economic activities abroad. The American Wall Street Journal reported that Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan contacted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky asking for support after Sudan secretly supplied weapons to Ukraine in 2022 (Alnur, 2024).

The Guardian reported that the Kyiv Post posted a video which it said filmed by an anonymous inside the Ukrainian military intelligence, displaying a Russian captive being interrogated along with two African men. During the interrogation, the Russian soldier admits that he is from “PMC Wagner” and came into Sudan from Central African Republic, where Russians fighters are based, “to overthrow the local government”. Several other videos were circulated of Ukrainian kamikaze drones striking groups RSF. In September 2023, the two presidents met to address shared security concerns specifically focusing on the operations of illegal armed organizations funded by Russia (Sabbagh, 2024).

Another significant country is Iran, Military cooperation between Sudan and Iran returned to normal after the official resumption of relations between them in October 2023, following 7 years of estrangement.

This cooperation was accompanied by the Sudanese army continuing its war with the Rapid Support Forces, and observers believe that this step will raise the concerns of some Gulf states and the United States, in light of Iran’s search for a foothold in the Red Sea, and to penetrate the Horn and the African coast from Sudan.

According to Aljazeera’s interview with one of the SAF officials, he stated: "the army sought to strengthen its capabilities during the past months to confront the armed rebellion of the Rapid Support militia and purchased weapons and marches through official channels from several countries, including Iran."

5.3. War Spreads to Darfur Region

The violence in El Geneina began nine days after war broke out in Sudan on April 15, between the Sudanese army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti.

Although the Sudanese state of West Darfur was among the least effected states in the region by the brutal war that broke out in 2003 which left more than three hundred thousand dead, according to the United Nations, it now appears to be the state of Sudan

most affected by the raging war between the army and the Rapid Support Forces, since Mid of last April.

UN and human rights organizations counted violations, which they described as horrific, in the city of El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur State, and revealed killing based on ethnic basis, including in the Ardamta region, which includes the main garrison of the Sudanese army.

According to a statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in mid-November, the escalation of fighting in the Ardamta region led to the killing of more than 15,000 people by the RSF and allied Arab militias. On just one day in June, Red Crescent staff counted 2,000 bodies on the city's streets. The ongoing fighting has led to a mass exodus to neighboring Chad, which the United Nations says it hosts more than 745,000 Sudanese.

The conflict in West Darfur state transformed from direct conflict between the army and the Rapid Support Forces, into fighting of a tribal nature, fueled by the intersections of geography and history, between the Arab tribes and the non-Arab tribes in Darfur which goes back to 2003. The RSF and its allied Arab militias have been responsible for committing rape and ethnically motivated killings, specifically targeting the African Masalit population.

The commander of the Rapid Support Forces, Hemedti, who is from the Arab Rizeigat tribe said that the violence which occurred this year in Darfur was the result of a tribal conflict and that his forces had no role in that. On the other hand, Masalit leaders accused Arab forces of gradually expelling them from their lands. They said the Rapid Support Forces are now trying to finish the job that was started by Omar Al-Bashir and expel them entirely.

Ali Mansour Hasballah, a researcher focusing on Darfur affairs, suggests that the RSF is reportedly considering separating Darfur to establish a de facto government, following their failed attempt to seize power in Khartoum. In his opinion, it is difficult to implement this plan after the armed movements decided to fight alongside the army, in addition to the popular resistance and the announcement by Sheikh Musa Hilal, the leader of the Arab

Mahamid tribe, of his support for the armed forces which he expectes that Hilal's position would lead to the split of influential groups from the Rapid Support, as he leads an active faction from the Rizeigat tribe, to which the leader of the Rapid Support, Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti", belongs, and thousands of fighters stand behind him. In the same context, the head of the Shura Council of the Zaghawa tribe, Saleh Abdullah Ahmed, declared war on the Rapid Support, calling on the people of Sudan - and the Zaghawa in particular - to work “side by side with the armed and joint forces, to defeat diaspora Arab mercenaries,” drawing inspiration from the tribe’s history of defending unity. The people of Sudan and their heroic history of fighting traitors and occupiers. The Zaghawa are considered one of the most prominent tribes in Darfur, and the majority of the leaders of the armed movements belong to them since the outbreak of war in the region in 2013. Their presence is concentrated in the far northwestern region of Darfur and in the northeastern regions of neighboring Chad.

The Zaghawa’s support to the SAF was reaction to some Darfur Arabs tribes who signed a joint statement in the city of Nyala, the capital of South Darfur State, last July in which they announced their support for the RSF. These tribes included the Rizeigat and the overseers of the Beni Halba, Tarjam, Habbaniya, Ta'aisha, Misseriya, and Fallata tribes (Alnur, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Transforming the Janjaweed militia into the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) was an attempt to contain the tribe within the state. However, the integration of the RSF did not change the logic of the militia, but rather strengthened it even from within the institution, so forces remained with an almost unified ethnic and tribal affiliation belonging to the Arab tribes of Darfur, which contradicts the logic of the state that offers national loyalty over ethnic and tribal affiliation. The integration of an armed militia with all its affiliations, its tribal doctrine, and its relations of control and loyalties was the first bullet that the Sudanese state fired at its feet while granting the militia economic and political independence from the state was the second one. If the state fails to control the tribe, the tribe will overpower it, and this is exactly what we are witnessing now with the recent escalation of events.

One key lesson from Sudan is that the most effective way to quell rebellion is to address its root causes, rather than co-opting one faction to fight your opponents, only to have them turn against you in the future. "What you allow will continue.". Another lesson is that a state cannot be governed by militia logic. If it attempts to do so, collapse is inevitable, and the militia will ultimately prevail. The RSF victory means that the SAF will be replaced by an ethnically, tribally, and family-constituted militia known for their violent history in Darfur as well as other parts of Sudan. The takeover by the RSF would lead to an open civil war, with unpredictable outcomes.

The tribe, with its multiple connotations, has become a challenge to the political stability of Sudan due to the role it has played in creating political entities which lead to new tribal affiliations that is above the state level. These tribal affiliations have begun to strengthen their internal relations, confirming their existence, and influencing the policies of governments, and in specific cases the presence Governments are linked to the political orientations of these tribal groups, as it could be seen in the Nuba Mountains regions in Sudan, and in Darfur, as well as the tribes in eastern Sudan.

Sudanese society has been characterized by its preservation of the tribal structure in one way or another, to the extent that tribal structures are intertwined with political structures that take the tribes as a basis for their political and military influence, as it could be seen in Western Sudan where the previous ruling regime used some Arab tribes as special militia such as the 'Janjaweed' to fight the rebel movements in western Sudan.

Throughout the history, tribal conflicts in Sudan have represented one of main threats to the stability and the security of the country. These conflicts have had various roots and causes, with most of them being related to dispute over land and tenure, the absence of fair and comprehensive development which led to tribal conflicts arising from competition over limited resources, the abolition of the native administration system, political marginalization based on ethnicity, the recruitment and arming of specific tribes which led to a sharp polarization of the tribal dynamics.

Sudan's history and present has been highly shaped by the influence of its tribal affiliations and conflicts, impacting its political stability and social landscape.

The history of tribalism in Sudan begun at the early stages of the Funj kingdom where confederal political system emerged as local tribes self-governed their territories. However, the Turkish rule followed by the British colonialism exacerbated tribal affiliations which later set foundation for tribal conflicts.

The ruling of the National Congress Party (NCP) in 1989, known by the salvation regime led by the former president Omar Al-Bashir, was an important milestone in the Sudanese history. The polarization of tribes became clear as the Islamist regime played big role in politicizing the tribes in West Sudan especially in Darfur through arming Arab tribes turning them into armed militias to deal with the insurgencies and the rebel groups of West Sudan could be one of the worst decisions taken by Al-Bashir. These militias committed crucial crimes based on tribe and ethnicities against the people of Darfur and the west since 2003.

The December revolution of Sudan was a hopeful sign of restoring democracy that was after the rule of the NCP between 1989-2018. One the main demands and messages that this revolution presented was to put an end to the ethnic division in Sudan, a demand that

seemed to be happening as all Sudanese from all regions gathered under the same slogans that cheered for ousting the regime who set the apart for years. The uprising was concluded, and the public achieved their demands, however as it seemed to be a happy ending for the Sudanese public, they were not aware that the upcoming period will be worst in terms of ethnic and tribal division.

The Military counsel that was established after the revolution, gave no chance for democratic change as the transitional government was removed by a military coup, with most of its members being jailed.

The Military leaders couldn't agree on the specifics of ruling Sudan after ousting the civilian government which led to a military escalation between the head of the military Abdelfattah Al-Burhan and his deputy Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo 'Hemeti' the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) whom their fighters maintained strong tribal affiliations, which played a major role in the Sudanese war of 2023 as their violence expanded beyond Darfur, targeting the people of the North, particularly the inhabitants of Khartoum and Al-Gezira. The RSF's involvement in the conflict marked the deep tribal motivation that have plagued Sudan for decades, worsening violence the instability of the country.

The RSF have always claimed since the beginning that the war is not targeting civilians but is a fight for democracy against the old regime members who want to reclaim power. However, their actions contradict their words. Despite this war being described as a conflict between two generals seeking to rule by force, it also carries underlying plans to change the demographics of major cities by relocating Arab tribes from Darfur of Western Sudan to the Central and Northern parts of the country. This could be intended to make it easier to rule these areas under the guise of their tribal identity.

The division of Sudan is one of the possible scenarios of the current ongoing war, especially considering a complex reality in a country that witnessed wars that lasted 40 years in its South, West, and East. The option of the separation of the Western region of Sudan is possible, especially since it was achieved with the separation of South Sudan in 2011 after a conflict that lasted over 20 years.Also, the war between the SAF and the RSF may tempt many parties to see the separation of the West as the solution to ending the war that has been going on for years in the states of Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue

Nile. What increases the possibility of this scenario is the presence of armed movements that control large territories fighting in South Kordofan (south) and Blue Nile (southeast), and the Sudan Liberation Army North SLA-N.

Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti's" speech on October 9, 2024, was filled with tribal and ethnic undertones that had significant implications for the political landscape in Sudan. It marked the first time that the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) explicitly addressed the tribal dimensions of the current war in Sudan. In contrast to Burhan's speech at the United Nations the previous year, where he referred to specific tribes rebelling against the state, Hemedti's address was more precise in framing the conflict along ethnic and tribal lines.

Hemedti used rhetoric related to tribal relations, stating that the army targeted specific tribes because they were affiliated with the RSF, while the armed forces ignored targeting areas in Sudan inhabited by tribes loyal to the current government. As an example, he referred to the villages of "Qary" and "Hajar Al-Asal," which are the hometowns of Ali Karti, a former minister in Omar al-Bashir's government. Hemedti accused Karti of being one of the key figures from the former regime responsible for fuelling the current war. Hemedti emphasized that the army avoids attacking these areas, despite the presence of RSF forces there, simply because the tribes residing there are loyal to the current regime.

Hemedti also highlighted the army's racial discrimination in targeting villages and regions such as Darfur, Sennar, Al-Hasahisa, and Nyala, areas where the tribes that make up most of the RSF fighters reside. This speech clearly underscores that the current conflict in Sudan is not only political but also deeply rooted in tribal and ethnic divisions.

In addition, Hemedti directly criticized the post-Bashir government, pointing out that it is controlled by the Shaigiya tribe. He claimed that after the fall of Bashir, the government turned into a tribal one dominated by the Shaigiya, a charge that fuels further tribal tensions in the country.

Hemedti also emphasized that RSF fighters are not limited to one tribe alone, and he criticized the use of the term "Arab Shatat" (scattered Arabs), which was used by some leaders like Yasser Al-Atta, Assistant Commander-in-Chief of the Sudan Armed Forces

to describe the RSF fighters. Hemedti stated that for the RSF, the current war is a battle to eliminate the Islamic movement and reclaim power, condemning the rhetoric against them as purely racist and tribal.

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