Policy Brief

March 1, 2015

South Sudan's National Identity Challenge: The Interplay between Fragmented Social Structure and Elite's Negative Role[1]

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Summary

- *This paper argues that, although a fragile South Sudanese national identity started to form as a result of oppression and marginalization by Khartoum based regimes, it seems to have stagnated. This apparent decline came as a result of the political elite's lack of strategic sense of direction for the country and uncritical allocation of power and resources along ethnic lines. Given this, it can be presumed therefore, that the elite who control the state see their access to power as a function of the strength of support from their ethnic groups, making ethnic solidarity their primary political preoccupation.*

- *Though this power is accessed using ethnic loyalties, the political spoils and resultant economic benefits do not really accrue to the majority of the ethnic populations—often such benefits are reserved for the upper and sub-tier elite.*

- *The paper postulates that one of the contributing factors to the current conflict, especially its ethnic dimension, results from utter failure of the elite to consolidate the fledgling national identity inherited at independence to replace the multiplicity of identity and ethnic rivalries inherent in the historical South Sudanese social structure. The absence of a sense of collective belonging that transcends ethnic bounds essentially provided a fuel that propelled the conflict beyond the confines of politics. Consequently, South Sudanese seem to have retreated to the conserves of ethnic sunders and have seemingly abandoned longstanding investments to forge a national unity.*

- *The current crisis provides a critical opportunity to renegotiate and reconstitute the state on a new basis, which has the potential to see an end to this spiraling decline of state legitimacy.*

- *To do so would reinvigorate South Sudan's national identity and help return the country to a more solid union and development path it needs.*

I. Introduction

The current conflict, which has raged on in South Sudan since December 15, 2013, has shocked many across the world because of the speed, the brutality and the destructive nature that characterize it. A number of analysts have put forth varying views on both the immediate causes and the mediating factors[2], but none so far has looked at the interplay between the social structure of the nation and the behavior of the country's elite as an explanation for the violence.

This paper explores the link between South Sudanese social structure and the behavior of political military elites as an attempt to explain the brutality and the speed with which the current conflict has been fought and what implications this may have in the long term on national identity formation. The main point is that although a South Sudanese national identity had formed for over six decades during the liberation struggles, it was fragile and this fragility worsened during the CPA and after independence. The paper identifies a number of elements that seemingly weakened identity formation including, but not limited to adversarial elite's competitions over resources and state power. To stake their claims to power, the elite use regional and ethnic identity cards and social identity structures that are historically wrought with rivalry and violent competition. Factors that provide debilitating ammunitions fueling the said competition include claims to territorial control, natural resources, historical events emanating primarily from the legacy of liberation struggle, state structure, militarization of culture and traditional leadership.

These factors collectively contributed to a weakening national cohesion, partly explaining the quick speed at which the on-going conflict nearly engulfed the whole country in just days. The role of the elites is given a considerable attention in this analysis because their leading role in the liberation process and their influence in shaping the direction of the country. The point is that when the politico-military elites captured state power after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, they made a number of mistakes that might have seriously weakened national identity formation. For example, power was divided on the basis of ethnic and regional identities. That is, people were given power because they come from such and such

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[2] See Alex De Wall. When Kleptocracy Becomes Insolvent: Brute Causes of the Civil War in South Sudan. Oxford University Press on behalf of Royal African Society 2014.

ethnic groups and from such and such region. Certainly, nothing is wrong with power being shared this way, but the broader question is, to what end?

The most obvious outcome of this approach in the short term is that people will use their ethnicities to try to get to power, which they did, taking away the element of political competition as well as the merit that is a necessary and desirable ingredient for holding public office. The most serious problem with how South Sudanese elite divided power was that access to power was predicated on an unwritten power equation—allocated on ethnic and regional basis. This power equation was not drawn consensually within the wider public; the elite exclusively negotiated it behind closed doors. Since it was an elite pact, it did not necessarily factor in the concerns of ordinary citizens. Even those who lost elections in 2010 were able to write themselves into the equation. When state affairs are decided in this manner, the state seemingly becomes an exclusive possession of the elite, from which they can extract resources both to anchor and consolidate their ethnic support base and in return be rewarded with the legitimacy to stay in power. This seemingly rational political calculus so entrenched in the South Sudanese politics, the paper argues, is antithetical to the formation of a healthy national identity as it perpetuates sectarian predilections. By extension, such a political calculus unravels the very essence of a nation state.

Informed by their experiences with various Sudanese governments, the citizens whose hopes and expectations were heightened by the lofty promises of a liberation struggle that was expected to deliver justice, equality and prosperity are justified to feel blatantly cheated, as they saw none of these promises. Given the fact that elite's actions manifest the very things they fought so hard against, South Sudanese are struggling to come to terms with the reality that the new nation is increasingly becoming more and more like the rump Sudanese state. Disillusioned by the elite's attitude, the people begun to question their relation with the state and are retreating into their ethnic circles. This retreat is of course informed by the realization that the project of nation building has largely failed as evidenced by the crisis the country is witnessing today. In a sense, the dream of building a robust democratic state has been shown by the actions of the elite to be primarily a pretense for state pillage.

The South Sudanese projects of nation building and national identity formation greatly suffer such a setback precisely because the elite have resorted to self-service programs that essentially weakened the state and rendered it incapable of delivering on its core functions. It is this deviation from nation-building and national identity formation that manifestly explains the unparalleled level of corruption and apathy of the ruling elite towards the needs of ordinary South Sudanese. Knowing that their actions are breeding violence or lack of development, the elite have been wise to keep their families outside the country. These actions essentially bred fear and apprehension, a situation that might have magnified state fragility.

The elite's pact as discussed previously was also fragile as it was built around personalities and so to keep it in tact meant that the personalities that built it had to be kept. This is also the reason many politicians have been repeatedly reappointed to public offices despite having consistently failed on their jobs. They have been able to entrench themselves in power because one's continued stay in power is not conditioned on delivery of any particular political goods and services; but rather is dependent upon perceived continued support from one's ethnicity. In other words, it is inconsequential how corrupt or incompetent one is; as long as he or she is on good terms with his tribe, continued stay in power is expected.

This also meant that each of the main actors had to build a patronage network to sustain political lifeline. This partially explains the strange phenomenon in the South Sudanese political culture whereby communities celebrate the appointment of their sons and daughters to political office. The understanding is that a community must come out in celebration of this appointment to show the size of the patronage of the appointed and to cement the contract for the appointee to deliver the goods of loyalty to his community. Although the community is disproportionately elitist, it is made to appear very inclusive.

Since the patronage system grew out of control, it became expensive or insolvent, as Alex De Waal would argue. Struggling to maintain the patronage, the elites could not deliver on major national programs such as roads and other development projects. Instead, what they find worthwhile is the need to dish handouts here and there to keep their ethnic supporters and patrons hooked in order to fan their political ambitions. This is perhaps the reason public offices have been turned into fiefdoms, such that when a common citizen enters a public office, they will know at the entrance the clans that control such institutions through language or tribal marks. To ensure one's continued access to power, political and military elite see no real reason to pay their allegiances to the state, because by definition, the state and its power are given as rewards for one's loyalty to one's ethnic community and a network of patrons.

The current violence erupted when a number of these elite lost power, a scenario that threatened to extricate their patronized networks and render their political future bleak. In such a system, when one loses power, access to resources is also lost, making it difficult to sustain the patronage network. The patronage network is of course the vehicle on which the elite rides to power. The group that lost power yearns to return to power in order to save its political future and the group that is in power assumes that the return of the out-of-power groups would mean their exit from the same. No wonder there was political stalemate and subsequent violence.

To put it succinctly, South Sudan suffers from a crisis of identity because the elite, who are supposedly the custodians or stewards of the nation state, pay no allegiance to the state. The citizens have since uncovered their deception and are largely ambivalent

about their relations with the state. The actions of the elite embody nepotism and patronage and thus encourage sectarian politics. Hence, South Sudan's launch to nationhood stunted; it failed to properly come into existence. Perhaps this crisis will become a real opportunity for renegotiating the state formation on a new basis and bring about solid national identity.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The second section looks at the state of nationalism and identity formation in South Sudan. The third section looks at how nationalism should be deconstructed in South Sudan following the violence, the fourth section proposes the renegotiation of the state and the last section concludes.

II. Nationalism and Identity Formation in South Sudan

Both the political elites and scholars have attempted to define South Sudan as a nation in a number of ways. First, South Sudan is defined racially and linguistically as a nation of black African tribes comprised mainly of Nilotic, Central Sudanic and Bantu people. Second, South Sudan is defined in terms of the collective suffering of its marginalized people under various Khartoum-based oppressive regimes. Third, over the course of the two civil wars with the Sudan, the people of South Sudan have also been described in religious terms, as a nation of Christians and African traditional believers. These definitions collective define South Sudanese identity.

Since independence, South Sudan has been defined constitutionally as a civic nation, which is "sovereign and independent". The same constitution identifies its boundaries as a geographical entity that falls south of the Sudan covering the area of the former three regions of Bahr el Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile, plus Abyei[3]. In terms of diversity of its people and how it is governed, "South Sudan is governed on the basis of a quasi-federally decentralized democratic system and is an all-embracing homeland for its people—making it multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-racial entity where such diversities peacefully co-exist" (South Sudan Transitional Constitution, 2011).

A number of historical instances could be cited as forming the origin of the South Sudanese national identity and consciousness. Notwithstanding various uprisings against colonial and external aggressions by different South Sudanese communities, the first, well-documented act of nationalism is the 1947 Juba conference, which brought South Sudanese chiefs and a handful politicians together with the British and North Sudanese to talk about the planned unification of the country under one colonial

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[3] See the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan 2011, Article 1, section (1, 2, 3)

government (Marwood 1947)[4]. The South Sudanese had serious reservations about this plan, yet the plan went ahead against their will.

Aggrieved by the apparent inequality and domination by northern Arabs, the Equatoria Corps, led by Father Saturnino Lohure and Emile Tefeng, mutinied on August 18, 1955 and began the first civil war commonly known as Anya-Nya One[5]. This first civil war lasted for 17 years and ended with the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972. Upon realizing that the 1972 agreement did not resolve the grievances of the people entirely, former Anyanya-One officers who had been absorbed into the Sudanese army mutinied in several uncoordinated occasions between 1974 and 1982, forming a group commonly referred to as the Anya-Nya Two. A full-scale civil war resumed in 1983 with the formation of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). The SPLM/A-led second civil war was fought predominantly in the South and a few select regions in the north, and ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, which ultimately paved the way for the conduct of the January 2011 referendum and subsequently the independence of South Sudan in July 2011.

The stretch of time between 1947, the year of the first national conference and 2011, the year of the declaration of independence, is 64 years of common struggle for recognition, dignity, and equal rights for the people of South Sudan. This is how long it has taken South Sudanese to develop a common identity. The period, during which the people of South Sudan had been subjected to harsh external oppression, beginning with the 1821 Mohammad Ali conquest up to the year of independence, marks 190 years of shared experience, heritage and identity.

However, the events of December 15, 2013 have seemingly shattered this common heritage and identity. Although the crisis fed on a number of historical incidents related to the long liberation war, it is largely a result of elite competition that has used ethnicity detrimentally as a major playing card in their power struggles. This elitist strategy has created deep ethnic sentiments and has apparently diminished nationalism among South Sudanese; it poses a serious challenge to the nation-building project. What follows is an in-depth discussion of the many factors beyond the current crisis that have cumulatively contributed to the apparent decline of South Sudanese national identity.

III. Diminishing Nationalism and a New Identity Crisis

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[4]Marwood, B. W. (1947, June). Juba Conference 1947.In Juba Conference Minutes by the Governor of Equatoria EP/SCR/1.A (Vol. 5, No. 1, p. 21).
[5]http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?mot1989

Dr. John Garang de Mabior was correct when he characterized the conflict in the Sudan as "a crisis of identity". This was because the identity of the Sudan was contested between the Africans and Arabs. Although the identity crisis in the old Sudan was a result of a falsified nationhood where Arabic and Islamic culture was superimposed on a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-religious nation, this was not the making of ordinary Sudanese people. It was a strategy of Arab Sudanese elite to exclude the vast majority of Sudanese from power and benefits of the state. This falsified nationhood was fiercely protested and fought against and continues to be challenged today in Sudan. It is in fact this situation that caused the South Sudanese to secede and establish their own independent, sovereign nation.

The South Sudanese identity crisis is nearly identical with that of the Sudan, yet slightly different in that race and religion are not the defining features of the problem, although ethnicity and regionalism are. The similarity is that nationhood is built in both cases on a false foundation as an exclusionary strategy of the elite. The identity problem in South Sudan results from the elite imposing their will and their interest above the interest of building a more solid nation. There were so many promises made by the leaders of the liberation struggle, but the failure of the elite to deliver on these promises is at the core of what is causing people to identify less with the state. Although the need to unite the people of South Sudan was successfully used as bait for achieving independence, this was subordinated, during the CPA era, to elite's self-glory and the urge to build an ethnicized patronage system that fundamentally negated the quest for national cohesion.

It is an identity crisis in a sense that the South Sudanese people were called to put aside their ethnic and other identities during the long and arduous struggle for freedom, in the interest of building a more inclusive and accommodating nation. However, the manner in which the elite have managed political competition, and how they have administered justice and distributed resources, quite contradicts this national vision. Perplexed by elite's conduct, citizens' nationalism is diminishing and people's ability to identify with the state is declining. This is even more evident given the eruption of the ongoing violent crisis.

This is not to say that people no longer consider themselves South Sudanese; people will always unquestionably do so. But do they feel a sense of ownership, a sense of inclusion and a sense of belonging and benefiting from the state? A country where people feel that only a few groups are benefiting from the state and that state power is controlled by a special group of people is certainly not a cohesive nation. The example of Sudan remains salient in this context. When the people of South Sudan were fighting against Khartoum-based regimes, they strongly believed they were Sudanese, but they did not identify with the state and its government because they felt excluded; they were not treated as equal Sudanese citizens.

Superficially, the South Sudanese identity problem seems oxymoronic, because unlike the Sudanese state that was built by the political elite (informed by Arab and Islamic-centric idealism) to the exclusion of the vast majority in the marginalized peripheries, the South Sudanese state is one that the people themselves created and embraced through a mass liberation movement. Particularly, the masses in the formerly marginalized peripheries joined the liberation wars with the intent to either dismantle the old Sudanese state to be reincarnated as New Sudan, or in the case of Southern Sudan, the struggle culminated in the referendum results that gave birth to the new Republic. By partaking in the liberation struggle and voting in the referendum, the South Sudanese masses participated in the creation of the new nation-state. This, of course, gives rise to a question: why do the people struggle to identify with a community they created? The answer lies with what the elite did with the state after taking it over.

While the 2013 crisis is the biggest explosion since the CPA, there were small-scale conflicts characterized by groups fighting against the government or communities fighting each other. The affected communities felt that the state was not helping in keeping them secure, both from physical harm and the resultant poverty. This situation seemingly created a sense of disillusionment and detachment of citizens from the state. The growing dispassion of the South Sudanese from the state seems attributable to the elite's capture of the state. As highlighted above, the elite aroused the consciousness of the South Sudanese people to confront what were then considered oppressive regimes. After waging successful wars against oppressive regimes, the people of South Sudan achieved independence. It would seem illogical for people who suffered so much together and achieved a common objective—an independent state—to fail to identify with their achievement. The reasons that issues of identity and loyalty to the South Sudanese state remain precarious have to do with the behavior of the South Sudanese elite, the history of liberation struggle, as well as the social structure of the South Sudanese society.

While the people of South Sudan had a strong sense of nationalism and somewhat fragile identity with the state at independence, a number of elements during the liberation struggle led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) clearly encumbered the movement's efforts to consolidate a common identity. First, since its inception, the SPLM was seen as a unionists' organization fighting for the unity of the Sudan and its reincarnation as New Sudan with its corollary as the achievement of equal rights for the people of Southern Sudan and other marginalized peripheries. This strategy, though a useful approach given the geopolitical circumstances then, did not allow for an open campaign to consolidate southern nationalism and identity. Rather, it seemingly disillusioned the population in the South.

Second, although the SPLA through its doctrines trained its soldiers to subscribe to nationalistic ideals in their orientation, a number of divisions within the movement

along ethnic lines weakened the identity formation within the territories of the then Southern Sudan. Instead, these divisions strengthened ethnic sentiments, leading to a sense of ethnic rivalry, which is antithetical to national identity. The divisions were not necessarily the making of Southern politico-military elite, but were rather externally induced as a counter-insurgency stratagem of the Khartoum-based regimes. A number of breakaway factions of the SPLM/A, especially in the Upper Nile region, splintered into many more factions cracking along ethnic and clan fissures. The result of this fragmentation led to the failure of the society to achieve what Dominic Helling (2009)[6]calls socio-cognitive standardization and central administration. This partly explains why so many rebellions sprang up in the Upper Nile region. The Equatoria and Bahr el Ghazal regions were largely controlled by the SPLA and they have seemingly achieved significant levels of socio-cognitive standardization, as they were administered under the civil-military administration (CMA) during the days of liberation and then under the Civil Authority of New Sudan (CANS).

Third, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) granted an autonomous government to the people of Southern Sudan. The formation of national identity took a serious hit during the formation of the national government because the accommodation doctrine of the government has meant that people received appointments to various positions to please different ethnic and regional interests. This accommodation doctrine also meant that warlords who had caused so much suffering to the people of South Sudan were forgiven and rewarded with positions. This benign and well-intended accommodation policy has had serious drawbacks for national identity formation. Instead of creating harmony and unity and draw people closer to the state, it has actually exacerbated tribalism, nepotism, and heightened negative political competition and ethnic rivalry. Consequently, tribalized insurgencies have become a cornerstone of entering national politics and leadership. The appeasement policy is largely seen as a subsidy of bad behavior of the elite. In other words, it is seen as entrepreneurial to rebel and wage armed rebellion against the state, because the result, if one survives, is always a higher political gain.

The fourth element contributing to a diminishing sense of national identity formation in South Sudan has to do with elite's misallocation of priorities. When the people of South Sudan took up arms for the second time in 1983, they did so after the elite inflamed their frustrations with the central government in Khartoum. They sold the idea of liberation struggle to the masses, a proposition they willingly accepted. People responded to the liberation call because they were yearning for a better system and the SPLM/A was promising freedom, justice, equality and prosperity for all. After the

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[6]Helling, Dominik. "Anatomy of a 'Political Chameleon': Re-Examining Fluid Shapes and Solid Constants of Nationalism and Nation-Building." Crisis States Research Centre Working Paper 2 (2009): 17.

signing of the CPA (2005), the elite unfortunately failed to deliver justice, equality or prosperity. Quite the contrary happened; prosperity and justice were actually put out of the reach of the ordinary South Sudanese. And while they watch the elite becoming richer and becoming less equal with the rest of the citizenry through seemingly sanctioned corruption, they have been left yearning, while their expectations are dismissed as just too high.

The heroes of the liberation struggle, now turned politicians, forgot one solemn duty—service to the people that liberated the nation. They gave in to temptation too easily after the CPA, focusing so much on the personal acquisition of material things, driven primarily by greed and an insatiable wealth race. In just under a decade, they embarked on a grand scheme of immeasurable scale to loot and unquestionably bankrupt the state. Instead of delivering the most basic promises of the state and the liberation struggle, such as security, education, infrastructure, and good life, they found it worthwhile to prey upon the very things that form the core of nation building and state formation.

Upon realizing that they had failed to create a cohesive and functional nation-state and their continued stay in power is seriously in question, instead of reforming and refocusing on the liberation vision, they ran to their ethnic forts and began pointing fingers at each other. Since the state was unable to provide adequate security, the core of its mission, some opportunistic political elite made it their cause to hide behind the voices of legitimately concerned citizens. The very people who plundered and bankrupted the state changed their work jackets. Instead of maintaining their positions as national leaders who bear responsibility for failing the nation, they are now tribal leaders—an obvious strategy to escape accountability.

Apparently, these elite believe that the masses are unable to discern their treachery and they are promising yet again the same things they have failed to deliver, if only they are kept or returned to power. The very power, which they are fighting over, is essentially void, because the power is vested in the people they have repeatedly duped, people who have withdrawn from the state and retreated to their ethnic enclaves.

IV. Incoherent State Structure

Besides mutilating their fiduciary and constitutional responsibilities, the elite rushed into the creation of a new state structure that has no resemblance to its people. Instead, they maintained basically the same structures as the predatory state abhorred by the South Sudanese masses throughout the colonial period and during the reigns of many Khartoum-based regimes. For all intents and purposes, the state structures were created parallel to the pre-existing social structures and the so-called separate system of traditional authority was left to supposedly run in its own parallel realm. This is similar to the colonial approach to governance, which was to relate to the people through a

group of men handpicked for the purposes of resource extraction rather than for the purpose of good governance.

The long war of liberation has done a great damage to the institution of traditional authority. First, the formation of the SPLM/A shifted the traditional power center away from the local leaders. After the formation of the SPLM/A, it became a de facto military government in Southern Sudan, and in this process, the power of the traditional leaders was subordinated to the SPLA military leadership. This essentially eroded both the authority and the legitimacy of the traditional leaders. Second, the militarization of the society meant that the traditional leaders who had ruled and governed by consensus could no longer preside effectively over an armed civil population; henceforward, coercive power was needed to rein in an unruly, armed youth population, which was beyond the normal powers of chiefs and kings. The institution of traditional authority came to rely more and more on the SPLA to maintain law and order.

In the short-term, the SPLM/A local commanders took over both judicial and executive powers from the traditional leadership. Over the long-term however, the traditional leadership itself was militarized when a number of chiefs joined the SPLM/A, got trained and given military ranks, and then returned to their previous positions. This was an effort by the SPLM/A leadership to mitigate the impact of military leadership over the traditional authority. The population came to accept this arrangement because it fitted the circumstances of the time.

Yet, this situation, necessitated by the dictates of a long liberation war, weakened the institution of traditional authority, seemingly permanently. This explains the collapse of the system immediately after the CPA. The abrupt withdrawal of the SPLA from many rural villages left so many traditional leaders without power, yet presiding over a militarized and armed population.

Collapsed as it is, the institution of traditional leadership was left to do the impossible task of placating a militarized population; somehow, it was hoped that the institution would return to its pre-war state. This collapsed system is still expected to govern, and it is the level where most of governance happens. Since this is the level of government that is interacting with people on day-to-day basis, it should be the most effective level of government. In fact, the widespread intra- and inter-communal violence is a result of a system that is completely collapsed and dysfunctional. When the institution of traditional authority is dysfunctional, it tends to shake the nation to its core and it catalyzes and expedites state fragility. What is more, in an ethnically diverse and predominantly traditional society like South Sudan, national identity seems to hinge on a properly functioning institution of traditional authority. When this institution malfunctions, the state and the nation become dysfunctional as well.

The elite are squarely to blame for this anomaly in the country's traditional system. There is no justification whatsoever to continue or institute a system, which is not

linked or rooted in the South Sudanese traditional value system and anchored directly on the people. It may seem like a contradiction to ask for the state to be anchored on the shaky foundation of a traditional society, but the reality is that it remains the only existing and widely accepted system, even though it needs major rebuilding to work properly. The elite naively accepted the Sudanese state structures that are foreign and uninformed by the traditions and cultures of the South Sudanese people.

Keeping colonial governance structures intact seems premised on the assumption that chiefs are illiterate and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future, and so they should not be allowed to participate in the running of the affairs of a modern state. The modern state in their understanding is an artificial institution that is created and formed by the elite; hence, it would be too sophisticated for the traditional authority to run. Yet, states are not artificial; they are built on existing social structures and traditional value systems. Any state formed superficially and not anchored on pre-existing social structures is destined to collapse.

While the elites may not clearly see the link between the current crisis and the inappropriateness of the structures of governance they have chosen, it is a serious situation. If not addressed, it will continue to be a source of instability. In the current arrangement, all the state powers are given to the elite, including at the county, payam, and boma levels. The excuse given is that traditional leaders are not educated and do not have the capacity to run a modern state infrastructure. This excuse is falsely grounded, of course; not only are traditional leaders capable of running modern state institutions, it is also the case that not all traditional leaders are illiterate. In fact, in the near future, most chiefs will be of an educated class. So, the decision to give county, payam, and boma powers to civil servants is a decision that favors elite. If the South Sudanese accept the traditional authority as an institution of governance that is interacting with the people on regular basis, why is it subordinated to the elite's form of statehood? Why don't the elite give these powers to the traditional leaders who govern people at these levels of government on a day-to-day basis? Who gives the elite the power to decide on these matters alone? Who decides the institutional hierarchy and in whose interest is such a hierarchy instituted? Asking these questions is not by any measure an attempt to draw a wedge between the elite and everyone else, but rather to help refocus the attention where it surely belongs. Managing public affairs is undertaken to promote collective interests not just those of the well-positioned individuals as this certainly creates a debilitating conflict – one that can lead to paralysis of law and order in the society.

V. South Sudanese Social Structure

What is disturbing is not only that South Sudan's current state structures are arbitrary; they also fail to recognize the value of pre-existing social structures. When South Sudan

declared independence, it did not build the state on tabula rasa—it did not start on a clean slate. The society had existed and it was structured in a certain way and the state was born into that social structure. These social structures develop out of people's desire for collective welfare and to cope with exploitative foreign regimes that have come and go in the Sudan. South Sudanese organized themselves to live in circles normally assembled along ethnic lines characterized by common heritage and lineage, culture, language and distinct geographical territories. Sometimes these groups further fragmented along bloodlines, often as patrilineal in the form of clans or sub-clans.

A state born into a social structure as described above is bound to have challenges forging a common identity. This situation is not peculiarly South Sudanese, but something that is seemingly out of man's nature. Thomas Hobbes' (1651)[7] theory of state; "state of nature", suggests that without a government or authority to regulate man's behavior, three things are likely to happen: first, by nature, people would compete violently for resources to meet their basic needs of life and material gain. Second, people would challenge others to fight out of fear of difference so as to ensure personal safety. Third, people have a tendency to seek reputation or glory, both for its own sake and for its protective effects so others will be afraid to challenge them. To prevent this, according to Hobbes, people need to organize and form a "leviathan" or a government that has the authority to regulate and police members' behaviors and provide common security—hence, the need for the nation state. This is what forms the basis for social contract between the state and society.

Seth Kaplan (2009)[8] and Kriesberg (2003) have both forcefully argued that, although each individual's identity is 'constructed on the basis of various traits and experiences' and often encompasses membership in multiple identity groups whose 'relative importance and compatibility differs in various times and circumstances' (Kriesberg, 2003)[9], "fluid, unstable environments encourage polities to split along the most profound cleavages: ethnicity, religion, tribe, clan, and so forth"(Kaplan, 2009). This implies that, although the state is created, it does not necessarily inherit a cohesive nation.

The tendency of the South Sudanese polity to gravitate towards ethnic and regional cleavages is precisely the chronic illness from which it inopportunely suffers. South Sudan is a state made up of many ethnic groups whose basic social organizations were established to ensure the physical and economic security of their members, either from rival groups or intruding and predatory external forces. It is no fault of the society to

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[7]Hobbes, Thomas. "1651/2004." Leviathan or the matter, form and power of a common wealth ecclesiastical and civil. Reprint. Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing.
[8]Kaplan, Seth. "Identity in Fragile States: Social cohesion and state building." Development 52.4 (2009): 466-472.
[9]Kriesberg, Louis. "Identity issues." Beyond Intractability (2003).

organize itself this way, because human social instincts drive people towards forming social alliances with others to widen social benefits. If one were to borrow economists' concept of marginal utility, one would see the need for circles of existence in poor rural communities as driven by the need to maximize social marginal utility. People will continuously form these expansive circles until they arrive at an equilibrium whereby their desire for better life and security intersects with the appropriate level of social organization. These desires understandably can sometimes drive societies also towards conflict and disastrous social outcomes.

One inherent problem with the way the South Sudanese nation is socially structured is that, although a common identity had been formed during the liberation struggle and existed until the declaration of independence, it was certainly fragile, having been built on the shaky foundation of the union of ethnic groups against perceived collective existential threats. It was not necessarily driven by the need to form a solid union to maximize social benefit outcomes, but a union to confront a common external existential threat. This does not necessarily mean that it is not an identity; it is, but a weak and fragile one. Hence, the new state had the responsibility to turn this unstable union into something solid. However, the elite actually exacerbated its fragility by introducing competition into politics along regional and ethnic lines, with negative results.

The independence of the South Sudanese state was conceived to put an end to perpetual multiple-identity problems, and to curtail the negative impact of competition over resources and state power by deliberately making the state the mother of all circles of identities. This implies that the elite should have consciously worked on molding a common culture that is supportive of an inclusive political system (Ortmann, 2009)[10]. Although many scholars challenge the elite's role in the formation of nationalism or national identity, it is undeniable that their role remains critical. As Gellner (1983) would argue: "a mere category of persons becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it" (Gellner 1983: 7)[11].

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has argued that although South Sudan at independence inherited a formed national identity, it has been fragile. This fragility has worsened as a result of elite's competition for power and resources. The crisis, which is eroding the South Sudanese social fabric, is partly a result of elite's failure to embark on meaningful social

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[10]Ortmann, Stephan. "Singapore: the politics of inventing national identity." Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs 28.4 (2010): 23-46.
[11]Gellner, Ernest. Nations and Nationalism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

transformation, both to consolidate national unity (identity) and to provide qualitative improvement in people's economic lives, given that the elites had all the resources and political freedom to change the society. The current South Sudanese social structure and the multiplicity of identities present a daunting challenge for building national cohesion. This situation is exacerbated by ethnicization of politics and the adoption of incoherent government structures that are divorced from the reality of the society. What is more, the elite have failed to deliver on the promises of the new state and their involvement in the state looting schemes essentially disillusioned the South Sudanese, so they have retreated to their tribal circles. Tribal or ethnic identity, which is subject to elite's manipulation, poses a serious challenge to building a solid national identity.

To end ethnic manipulation and resolve the multiplicity of identity problem, the following measures are recommended.

- The country needs to embark on a deliberative social transformation exercise by building a pluralistic political society. This process should include reforming power institutions such as the political parties, military, judiciary and intelligence agencies as well as reconstituting the state through a broad based consensus.
- Political contests should be given serious consideration in terms of reforms to avoid a recurrence of December 15, 2013 violence.
- The institution of traditional authority should be reviewed, reinvigorated and recognized as an important element in building a more stable and cohesive society.
- The link between the central government and the local government must be intelligibly crafted in order to eliminate arbitrary and redundant institutions and to remove the unwarranted duality between traditional authority and modern state authority.
- Should the nation decide to adopt full pledged federalism, states and regions should be eliminated as redundant, and the next tier of the federal units be much closer to people.
- To regain its legitimacy, the government should draw a new economic strategy that ensures fair distribution and redistribution of resources. A perceived fairness in resource distribution is one key instrument for building a cohesive society and promoting peaceful coexistence.
- South Sudan has to learn about the dangers of an elite-centric economic policy. Corruption kills nations and so new, robust anti-corruption efforts should be exerted, and mechanisms to successfully wage this campaign enshrined in all government institutions. Corruption must be treated as a national security issue that needs serious confrontation.

- Lastly, education is an important sector through which social transformation can be achieved. South Sudan needs to embark on a well-thought out educational program both to transform the society and to bring about social cohesion and economic prosperity.
- The country's political class needs to invest resources, political will and establish a clear constitutional requirement for the development of the national identity, through a variety of programs spanning the sports, national youth service, a national language policy and a national civil service that moves officials across the country regardless of their birth states.

About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute's intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

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