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M. Jalāl Hāshim, *To Be or Not to Be – Sudan at Crossroads: A Pan-African Perspective*. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: Mkuki Na Nyota Publishers, 2019. 168 pages. ISBN: 978-9987083763.

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Since the attainment of independence, Sudanese thinkers and intellectuals have been tirelessly battling with the problematic question of national identity and nation building. Literary works and political activism on national identity and nation building have abounded, centering mainly on whether Sudan is an Arab or an African country. While the intellectuals plied rough sea currents in their search for a middle course that binds the different Sudanese milieu together, protagonists of "identity politics" espoused a radical, and at times violent, discourse. It is undeniable fact that the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the Sudanese society has relentlessly militated against a solution agreeable to all. Failing to achieve their demands through peaceful negotiations, the aggrieved people of the margin resorted to military actions, plunging Sudan in a continuous civil war for more than five decades.

Many factors had contributed to the bloody conflicts in the Sudan, not least among them were the ethnic and religious differences. While some attribute the Sudanese prolonged crisis to mismanagement, maladministration and corruption practiced by successive governments, which led to the marginalization of the people of the periphery, others ascribe it to the widening gap of mistrust that characterized the relations between the north and the south even before independence. Others, however, justified the continuation of the conflict on the racial and religious policies adopted by the Islamic regime after 1989.

Sudan's civil war was the longest in history; it started in 1955 and continued up to 2019, though intermittently. The toppling of the Islamic regime in December 2019 through a popular revolution brought an end to the miserable and agonizing civil war. One of the popular slogans of the December revolution was "We are all Darfurians", meaning the Sudanese are all one, regardless of ethnicity. Yet, it is still to be seen whether the principles of the revolution (freedom, peace and justice) will wipe out what Hashim calls "the Centro-marginalization" ideology that was responsible for all the ills of Sudan. Many schools emerged, each with its own perspective of national identity. The most distinguished of which was the "Jungle and the Desert" group, which appeared in the 1970's. It advocated a middle course striking a balance between Arabism and Africanism. Yet Hashim sarcastically criticizes it proponents as "they came riding their camels through the jungle," dismissing their efforts as integrative and assimilative. Another group, however, cynically sees the whole issue of identity as wishful thinking and an intellectual luxury hardly related to reality, arguing that ordinary Sudanese people rarely associate their daily unending problems with the issue of identity as much as mismanagement, corruption and indiscreet politicians. Yet, others look to the problem of national identity as cardinal to the continuation of Sudan as one nation, proposing an African perspective that sees Sudan as an African nation. Muhammad Jalal Hashim's book *To Be or Not to Be,"* which was published months before the occurrence of the December Revolution, belongs to the latter group.

Muhammad Jalal is a Sudanese thinker, theorizer, controversial political activist and a prolific writer whose writing, mainly in Arabic, revolves around the issues of national identity, national building and statehood. He was one of the founders of CUSH (Congress of United Sudan Homeland) and is currently a member of the Sudanese Liberation Movement as part of Abdelaziz Alhelo's wing, which vehemently demands a non-religious secular state in the Sudan, threatening secession if its demands are not met. His recent views on the issue of secularism have caused uproar in social media.

Intelligently and meticulously written, Hashim's book offers a new roadmap for the "new" Sudan. It looks to the problem of Sudanese identity and nation building from a cultural perspective, arguing that the issue is strongly associated with statehood and can only be understood through cultural analysis. In analyzing the Sudanese problem, Hashim employs the methodology of cultural analysis pioneered by Jurgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Peter Burger, Mary Douglas and others in the 1980's to dissect the Sudanese crisis. And although he draws a lot from dependency theory (Centre vs Periphery) espoused by Robert Ezra Park, Ali Mazrui , Immanuel Wallerstein, and Samir Amin, he nonetheless coins his own theory of Centre vs Margin arguing that "the problem of Sudanese identity and nation building has largely been due to the conflict between the Centre and the Margin" or, as he calls it, the prestigma vs the stigma. The latter theory was a development of a serious discussion begun in the 1970's by Hashim and his colleagues in the Congress of United Sudan Homeland (CUSH) movement in their efforts to dissect the problem of nation building in the Sudan.

Hashim reduces the whole problem of the Sudan to the hegemony of the Arabized Africans of the centre over the marginalized black Africans of the margin. It was the denial of the Arabized Africans, or the pseudo Arabs of the Middle Sudan, to being Africans and blacks, which was responsible for all the ills that have befallen Sudan since its emergence as a nation in the sixteenth century, and might eventually bring its demise. It was the ideology of Islamo-Arabism, the self-deceptive feeling of Arabism and the assimilative theory of the melting pot adopted by the centre, against the non-Muslim and African people of the margin which in Hashim's opinion crippled the Sudan for the last five centuries of its history. Only after recognizing itself as an Arabophone, not an Arab, nation that Sudan can prosper, Hashim asserts. This will be brought about by the dismantling of centralization and the adoption of federalism, plural democracy and unity in diversity.

Hashim's thesis of Islamo-Arabism seems very controversial and contradictory. Emphasizing the Islamo-Arabism concept in analyzing the conflict between the centre and the margin gives it a racial overtone, forgetting that the centre–periphery conflict is a universal one regardless of religious denomination. Many examples in history attest to this, such as in post-colonial Nigeria where the Ibo depicted the north domination of the centre as a Hausa domination. The same is true in the USA where the whites dominate or as in Rwanda where the Tutsi hold the reign of power. Can we call the latter Christian-Tutsi domination? The domination of the centre is exclusively a denomination of power not associated with a certain culture. As Justaf Loboon demonstrates in his book '*the Spirit of Politics,'* it can also be ideological, as in the case when the socialists ruled France in the early twentieth century. Conversely, there is no guarantee that when the forces of the margin hold the reins of power and wealth in the centre they will not appropriate it to their interests.

Moreover, Hashim's discourse is a replica of that adopted by the late John Garang , leader of the SPLA/SPLM during his political and military struggle against the Khartoum governments. Addressing the 1994 Pan-African Congress in Kampala, Uganda, Garang labeled the Sudanese

state as the "Jalabba state", that is the Arabs' state, accusing the northern Sudanese as slavers and demanding that they should be asked to pay reparation for their involvement in enslaving the Africans. Garang also called for a "new Sudan." Considering its political discourse, the book seems to be more a political manifesto than an academic one.

The concept of 'centre' used by the book has neither geographical nor ethnic nor cultural connotations. Rather, it is a term which refers to an ideology used by people in the middle or the centre of the country to consolidate their power and wealth. In examining the conflict between the centre and the margin, Hashim uses the model of ideological polarization, arguing that as a circular one, the model is representative of the reality of "a centre working hard to assimilate the margin, and a margin fighting hard to dismantle the centre." These terms, "reflect the ideological manipulation of the reality." However, the centre is very complex in that it consists of elites who originally came from the margin, and rose through power and wealth to a status of hegemony, and whose cardinal objective was the consolidation of power and wealth at the expense of the marginalized Africans, or the stigma. Thus, the Centro-marginalization conflict.

The book recognizes Four degrees of stigma for the marginalized Africans: the jet blacks of the south being the most stigmatized, followed by the people of the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile regions. The Darfurians came in the third place while the Beja of the Red Sea and the Nubians of the north not yet prestigma. The genesis of the Centro-marginalization conflict goes back to the time of the Funj sultanate and continued throughout the Turco-Egyptian rule, the Mahdi state and up to the British-Egyptian colonial rule. A number of tools were used to subjugate the people of the margin, namely education, army recruitment and corruption.

In asking: "Who are the Sudanese?" the book describes how the successive Sudanese governments since independence used the question of nationality to their own ends. Only the pure Arabs were considered real Sudanese. This was demonstrated both during 1976 when a Libyan backed movement of armed Sudanese and in 2008 when the forces of the revolutionary Justice and Equality movement invaded Khartoum to topple the existing governments. In both cases, the members of the opposing groups were labeled as foreign mercenaries instead of Sudanese militants.

In discussing the role of education in the Sudanese crisis, the author remarks how the modern education system, designed during the colonial rule and continued during national governments with very little change, contributed to the disparity between the Arabized north and the rest of the country by giving priority to the Arabic language and Arab culture to the negligence of African languages and culture. The Institute of Bakht al-Ruḍa, established by the British, which shouldered the responsibility of designing educational curricula for elementary and intermediate schools until the 1970s, never cared to acknowledge the multi-cultural nature that characterized the Sudanese society. It was the education system which was responsible for the civil war that engulfed the Sudan in modern time, Hashim argues.

Examining the causes of the civil war that started in 1955 and continued to 2005 in the south, and up to the time of this book publication in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains, though intermittently, the book puts the failure of the Arab successive governments as the most important factor. The governments led by the Sudanese right wing were administratively and politically weak, using corruption as a political tool for subjugating the opposed groups. It describes the civil war in the south and the peace agreement of 1972 as linear because it viewed the conflict as one between the north and the south rather than between the centre and the margin. The most singular factor underlying the war "was the structural racism deeply embedded in the psyche of the pseudo Arabs of the middle–North riverian Sudan against the marginalized black Africans of Sudan who

had not yet been Arabized." The end result was an emergence of a separatist Sudanese left which worked for the separation of the south.

While it is difficult to rule out outright the veneer of racism among certain politicians of the north, it is completely superficial to generalize that northerners are racists. In reading the documents of the Round Table Conference that took place in 1965, one comes to the conclusion that it was the fear of the northern politicians that meeting the demands of the southerners for federation would set a precedent for other regions that would eventually lead to the fracture of the whole Sudan. It was mistrust, not racism, that underlined the war, giving the fact that the war was started by the Southerners.

Hashim argues that the southerners who fought first for self-rule and later for separation represented the "real Sudanese left." However, he neither defines this left nor identifies it. It was only after their fall out with the Nimeri regime, after the foiled communist-backed coup of 1971, that the communists came to take on a supporting position toward the southerners' demand. The documents further show that the Southerners had even before 1969 threatened separation if their demand for self-rule was not met.

Chapter 3 discusses the emergence of Sudanese nationalism. The book remarks that "By being multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious," Sudan has seriously posed a challenge for nation building and national integration. This has led to the prevalence of ethno-linguistic pluralism up to the present. The term "nationalism" is used in the book to denote "the growing awareness of national integration of various Sudanese ethnic groups in regard to the exercise of power and of wealth sharing." Unlike the two religious sects created by the followers of the Mahdi, Ansar, and the Khatimya, the White Flag Movement, which instigated the 1924 revolution, was characterized by its secular nature and the role played by the people of the margin in it. The anti-colonial nationalism led by the stigma frightened both the British and the prestigma of the middle.

Chapter four surveys the historical development of the civil war in the Sudan that started in 1955, the evolution of the SPLA movement and the role of CIS in crystallizing the ideology of identity and nation building. It shows how the war between the South and the North was influenced by mistrust resulting from the meager job share given to the Southerners after independence, how the Southerners' demand for self-rule was purposefully ignored and how the government restored to heavy handed measures to silence them. Whatever may have been the causes of the war, the main singular factor underlying it, the book asserts, 'was the structural racism deeply embedded in the psyche of the pseudo Arabs of the Middle-North riverian Sudan against the marginalized black African of Sudan who had not yet been Arabized."

The first civil war began in 1955 and was shortly halted after the Addis Ababa Accord in 1972, only to be resumed after the abrogation of the accord in 1983. While the first civil war was "linear" since it was characterized by local demands, the second war after 1983 was "plural" since it involved all the marginalized Sudanese calling for a "New Sudan." At first, the Sudanese intellectuals and political parties took lightly the SPLA/SPLM's declaration for liberating the whole Sudan. Only after the refusal of Garang to put down arms after the fall of Nimeri and the spread of the fighting to other areas did they recognize his leadership and join him. In praising the charisma and the visionary genius of Garang, the book compared him to The Muslim Brothers' leader Hassan Turabi whom it dubes as an "opportunist" who failed to fulfill his life-long dream of becoming the president of the Sudan. It shows how Turabi masterminded the 1989 Coup; how the Islamic regime failed in its efforts to defeat Garang and how Turabi after falling Bashir joined Garang. Garang was accredited for bringing to the public stage the awareness of circular polarization against the linear polarization adopted by the prestigma since the Funj sultanate.

In denouncing the heinous American designs in the Sudan, Hashim believes that the 2005 Peace Accord would lead to the American colonization of the South and eventually the disintegration of the whole Sudan "selling it piece by piece for the benefit of the new-imperialism of western globalization ...." As to the north, it will become easy prey to the covetous designs of Egypt, which had been FOR LONG casting her eyes for the fertile arable land of Serra and Alyab in the far north. This was attested by the negotiations between Egypt and the Sudanese government in 2000 for the settlement of thousands of Egyptian farmers in the Nubian triangle.

Chapter 5 is a roadmap for 'True Peace' in which the author is calling for the people of the margin to unite, to coordinate the military war they were waging against the institution of the prestigma and Centro-marginalization with a political one. This call for unity and alliance has materialized in the emergence of CUSH (Congress of United Sudan Homeland), the birth child of Darfurian activists. The Congress, as we are told, advocated the principles of freedom, justice and peace. As Hashim affirms the Congress's roadmap for Sudan and proposes a "federalism based on the perspective of unity in diversity, not that of the melting pot," as well as plural democracy. Although he advocates for democracy as a governing system, Hashim rejects liberal democracy and that of Westminster as unsuitable for the Sudanese people because Liberalism is associated with individualism and there is no individualism in Sudan. Real democracy should be based on the people's culture; hence, plural democracy for Sudan.

Only when, as chapter 6 demonstrates, Sudan becomes an "Arabphone not an Arab, nation that Sudan will prosper." But how is this prosperity to be achieved? As Sudan is part of Africa, it should follow that an African perspective is needed to do this. The book argues that history shows that all prosperity worldwide has been done through exploitation that is through slave labor. And all civilizations had had their share in this exploitation. Only Africans, however, have not exploited others; they have only been exploited. Thus, Africans are destined to prosper without exploiting anyone. This is what we Africans were left with when colonialism nominally left our African soil: we were left with no culture, no institution of governance. Our semi-national systems of governance were long since scrapped by colonialism.

It is no doubt that this book is a stimulating book. It is a book in which its author diligently and aptly demonstrates his grasp of political theories and his knowledge of the Sudanese tangling problems. Though marked by a good style and easy language, it is a book which is difficult to absorb the *first* time. It is full of philosophical, anthropological and sociological terms that require a good understanding of these disciplines. Furthermore, the many sections a chapter contains jump from one point to another without properly nettling the knot. Yet it is engaging and stimulating and undeniably an essential reading for any student of Sudanese studies. Lastly, whatever might have been its shortcomings, the book is indeed to be acclaimed as a bold and daring attempt at dissecting the Sudanese crisis.

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