The (in)visibilities of War and Peace: A Critical Analysis of Dominant Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Strategies in the Case of Sudan

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Abstract

In the current study of conflicts, priority is often given to interpretations that underline the crucial, if not decisive, role of primordial ethnic or religious identities. However, a more multidimensional type of response is characterized by specific tools and priorities geared to conflict and post-conflict scenarios in order to achieve long-lasting peace. Despite helping create awareness for the multiple and more complex causes of conflict, these strategies and models ended up crystallizing a very unbalanced agenda of priorities, clearly favouring civil and political rights and institutions over economic, social and cultural guarantees. Focusing on the case of Sudan's North-South conflict, the aim of this paper is twofold: to identify and discuss the dominant explanations on the origins of Sudan's violent armed conflict; and to critically analyze the changes in the dominant peacebuilding models, by stressing their limited agenda and priorities and the way in which they tend to obscure much more complex dynamics that sustain and reproduce conflict. With this analysis, we aim to argue that effective and sustainable strategies in Sudan (and elsewhere) imply addressing the more structural inequalities at stake, suggesting the need for deconstructing simplistic views of conflict.

> *"When you leave a person in his or her place, there is peace, but when you displace a person from his or her place, problems will start. When a person is not in his place, has no food, has no shelter, has no school, has no health service, there are looming problems and this is the beginning of war"*
>
> (Cardinal Zubeir Wako, Catholic Archbishop of Khartoum)

I.   Introduction

In current research, the analysis and interpretation of violent conflicts has become a somehow dangerously simplistic exercise. Looking mainly from the distance and from a western, developed and relatively comfortable socio-economic perspective, one's capacity to fully understand and explain conflict in the so-called Third World can be appallingly limited and perverse. In fact, it seems much easier to look at such conflicts as inevitable barbarian struggles between groups that cannot coexist due to their ancestral and primordial ethnic, religious or cultural differences. At the same time, such an interpretation can be a comfortable one, since it gives us the idea that there is not much we can do to prevent or solve them, or at least that our capacity to get involved should be a very limited one. In this context, all actions from external actors tend to simply artificially contain tensions that, according the dominant views, will sooner or later give place to violence and conflict. Our

analysis, however, departs from a very different position and calls for a significantly different approach to conflict prevention and/or resolution in multi-ethnic and/or multi-religious societies. In fact, even if a great number of contemporary armed conflicts are characterized by important ethnic, religious and cultural dimensions, it must also be acknowledged that they incorporate indisputable underlying political, economic and social causes. As referred to by Jeong:

> "Differences in perceived interests, values, and needs are perhaps the most basic elements in the motivations behind social conflict. Inter-group conflict often represents different ways of life and ideologies with implications for incongruent views about relationships with others. Feelings of injustice emerge from the suppression of inherent social needs and values that have existential meanings and which cannot be compromised. […] Inter-group relations are constrained by a superimposed political structure in addition to their own internal dynamics. Thus the analysis of social conflict needs to focus on how group processes are linked to structural conditions such as oppressive social relations and exploitative economic systems". (Jeong, 2008: 9)

The progressive perception of the threat to regional and international security and stability posed by these violent conflicts located mainly in Africa, led the developed world to some awareness of how important it was to help contain and solve internal violence abroad (Duffield, 2001).

In fact, since the end of the Cold-War, there was an important push towards various forms of international intervention in scenarios increasingly – or at least more visibly-characterized by violent and enduring internal conflict. This 'new interventionism' was basically characterized by a new, simplistic and perverse representation of the periphery of the world system as a sort of failure of the modernity project (Duffield, 2001). According to this view, the result has been the multiplication of the so-called 'failed states' which create the conditions for the emergence of 'new wars', mainly internal and characterized by new actors and forms of violence (Kaldor, 1999). The external diagnosis of these 'new wars' gave way to an also inevitably external therapeutic, aimed at containing instability and violence in that same periphery. The definition and implementation of models and strategies for conflict prevention and peace building has thus been a feature ever since the 1990s but it has also undergone significant change and developments, according to the needs and priorities of the main external actors.

Despite recognizing the importance of these developments in response to violent and long-lasting internal conflicts, this paper presents a critical analysis and evaluation of such approaches to peace and conflict and which have often been characterized by rushing post-conflict societies towards liberal democracy and market economy and thus resulting in a very limited strategy for preventing a return to violence in countries that experienced protracted internal conflict (Dodson, 2006:245). In fact, in dominant literature and practice of conflict prevention and peace building, for example, the effective consideration of the role of socio-economic inequalities and, consequently, of the fundamental character of economic and social rights, is frequently undermined and it usually results in an almost exclusive emphasis on the democratization approach based on civil and political rights and/or on counterproductive economic conditionality imposed by external actors. Contrary to some approaches that question if the root causes of internal conflict truly matter in the efforts to prevent or resolve conflicts, we here underline the importance of such causes. By presenting dominant prevention and peace building approaches as limited and insufficient both in identifying the deeper causes of conflict and underdevelopment in divided countries and in tackling the deeper needs of the population, this paper thus departs from the assumption that

to better and most effectively prevent conflicts and build sustainable peace in such contexts it is crucial to make a rigorous diagnosis of a conflicts' multiple and complex causes.

In such contexts, this includes, above all, a thorough assessment of the economic and social rights situation of the population in general and of certain groups in particular. The empirical analysis of this paper will be focused on the long lasting North-South conflict in Sudan – which opposed the Muslim government of Khartoum and the Christian rebels in the South (Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army- SPLM/A)- where the traditional narratives focused on simplistic interpretations of conflict based on religious differences between a Muslim North and a Christian South and where resolution efforts ended with the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. The analysis of this case-study will first attempt to contribute to a broader and deeper understanding of the multiple origins of this country's recurring civil wars, by focusing on the underlying variables and factors that are not usually addressed, such as socio-economic inequality and marginalization among different groups, and which may undermine the achievement of a definitive and lasting peace in the country. Secondly, we'll also try to understand if and how economic and social rights have been effectively included and implemented as a part of the CPA. According to our analysis, however, the peace strategies promoted and implemented by those involved in the peace process were based on general and flawed assumptions that ended up reproducing and perpetuating more invisible and complex group inequalities in the South and thus rendering peace in Southern Sudan extremely fragile.

II.   Responding to conflict and building peace: addressing socio-economic inequalities as an alternative approach to violent conflict?

One of the main justifications for this research lies in the lack of systematic research on the most adequate and effective strategies for dealing peacefully with conflicts which include not only religious and ethnic dimensions, but also and above all deep socio-economic fractures. The role of these dimensions in conflict is often misunderstood, frequently leading to largely ineffective responses based on distorted assumptions of the conflict reality. In fact, although the literature on the underlying causes and factors of internal conflicts in ethnically and/or religiously divided societies is relatively well-developed, the majority of the analysis of current violent conflicts taking place in such contexts tends to focus mainly on the primordial role that those existing ethnic or religious divisions play in the emergence and perpetuation of violence. Since many groups of people fight together perceiving themselves as belonging to a common culture (ethnic or religious) there is a tendency to attribute wars to 'primordial' ethnic passions, which makes them seem intractable. However, this is, in our view, a flawed view of such conflicts, attempting to divert attention from crucial underlying economic, social and political causes (Stewart, 2002: 342). As a consequence, dominant prevention and reconstruction models and strategies tend to focus on responses that privilege the civil and political inclusion and participation of specific groups in society and government, thus undermining the importance of structures for full economic and social participation. These strategies are also often marked by a tendency to ignore or at least obscure more invisible forms of inequality that may become potential sources of violent conflict in the future and under certain conditions. Nevertheless, some scholars in the peace and conflict research field have attempted to uncover the sources of what were variously termed 'deep- rooted conflicts', 'intractable conflicts' or 'protracted social conflicts' (Ramsbotham, 2005a: 110), by focusing on an in-depth analysis of human behaviour and its surrounding environment (Jeong, 2008: 3), which is crucial for a more solid and complete knowledge about violent internal conflict, especially in divided societies.

In this context, Edward Azar's theory of protracted social conflict is one that can be useful for the purposes of better understanding conflict dynamics and one that, despite being considered outdated (since it was written in the early 1990s), still offers useful pointers for an understanding of the sources of major armed conflict in the post-Cold War era (Ramsbotham, 2005a: 109). Edward Azar was a conflict research pioneer, who drew on John Burton's approach to the centrality of 'basic human needs' in conflict theory, considering that basic needs such as distributive justice, security and communal recognition are fundamental to a peaceful and stable society (Porto, 2008: 61). According to Azar, the critical factor in protracted social conflicts, such as the ones that persisted in Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Ethiopia or Sudan was

> "[…] the prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation." (Ramsbotham, 2005a: 113)

The traditional concern with relations between States was seen to have obscured a proper understanding of these conflict dynamics, thus undermining and limiting one's real capacity to solve and overcome them. In this sense, the suggested term of '*protracted social conflict*' emphasizes that the sources of such conflicts lay predominantly within and across a given society rather than exclusively between States, with four clusters of variables identified as potential preconditions for their transformation into high levels of intensity (Ramsbotham, 2005a: 114).

The first pre-condition identified by Azar is the communal content of a given society, which points to the importance of identity groups –racial, ethnic or religious in relation to conflict. According to this view, if a society is characterized by multi-communal composition, protracted social conflicts are more likely to occur. The interplay between this characteristic and the colonial legacy of the country, as well as with the historical pattern of rivalry and contest among different groups renders groups more politically active and these countries more prone to internal instability (Azar, 1990:7).

Secondly, and drawing from John Burton's theory of unmet human needs, Azar considers that individual or communal survival depends on the satisfaction of material needs (Azar, 1990:7); therefore, the deprivation of human needs becomes a crucial underlying source of protracted social conflict. Unlike interests, needs are ontological and non-negotiable, (Ramsbotham: 2005a:115) but are not always evenly or fairly met. As a consequence, grievances resulting from the non-satisfaction of certain needs may be, as they usually are, expressed collectively. Due to unequal distribution of resources and development, many groups are marginalized and in such circumstances, these groups create a menu of responses designed to redress their grievances, which may include, and it often does, resort to violence. In this context, social and economic factors are also crucial for the understanding of conflict. As Miall et al. point out:

> 'in the economic sphere once again would dispute Azar's contention that protracted social conflict tends to be associated with patterns of underdevelopment or uneven development.' (Miall et al., 1999 apud Porto, 2008: 65)

By emphasizing security, development, political access and identity as the most fundamental types of needs, this scholar also calls for a broader understanding of that same security, development and political access:

> 'Reducing conflict requires reduction in levels of underdevelopment. Groups which seek to satisfy their identity and security needs through conflict are in effect seeking change in the structure of the society. Conflict resolution can truly occur and last if satisfactory amelioration of underdevelopment occurs as well. Studying protracted social conflicts leads one to conclude that peace is development in the broadest sense of the term.' (Azar, 1985: 69)

Edward Azar does stress that the denial of basic material needs *per se* does not directly give rise to conflicts (Azar, 1990: 9), but failure to redress these grievances by the central authority contributed to the emergence of 'protracted social conflict'. In this sense, negotiation, mediation and resolution techniques become important to achieve short-term breakthroughs, but addressing fundamental causes of conflict require long-term development strategies (Ramsbotham, 2005a: 120).

The third pre-condition identified is the governance model and the role of State, the political authority responsible for the satisfaction or deprivation of such needs. In this sense, a fair and equitable government would be able to satisfy all human needs regardless of communal or identity cleavages, promoting development and stability (Azar, 1990: 10). In relation to the role of State as a critical factor in the satisfaction or frustration of individual and identity group needs, Azar underlines the tendency of countries that experience protracted social conflicts to be ruled by incompetent, parochial and authoritarian governments, who do not fulfil their responsibilities.

However, and since it is also recognised that the role of the State in promoting and/or preventing protracted social conflict is not determined solely by endogenous factors, the fourth and final pre-condition identified by Azar are the international linkages of a given state. These are here defined as the political-economic relations of dependency with the international economic system, and/or the political-military relations through regional or global patterns of clientage (Ramsbotham, 2005a: 116), which often exacerbate the denial of needs of certain groups, distorting domestic political and economic systems through the realignment of subtle coalitions of international capital, domestic capital and the State (Azar, 1990: 11).

In sum, 'protracted social conflict' tends to occur when communities are deprived of their basic needs on the basis of their communal identity and as a result of the interplay with other internal and external factors. It is clear then that the deprivation is the result of a complex causal chain involving the role of the State and the pattern of international linkages. Initial conditions, such as colonial legacy, domestic historical setting, and the multi-communal nature of a society play important roles in shaping the genesis of protracted social conflicts (Azar, 1990: 12). Given this complex and multiple dynamics, these entrenched conflicts tend to pose the most severe challenges to those involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The apparent intractability of these violent conflicts suggests that conventional approaches attempting to interpret and solve them are usually too narrowly conceived, failing to address the underlying dynamics that drive and sustain conflicts. Until now, we have mainly tried to argue against the general assumption that a greater degree of ethnic or religious heterogeneity in a given country is, by itself, a factor of increased risk of conflict due to ancient and natural tensions and antagonisms. By doing this we do not intend, however, to make *tabula rasa* of the potential influence of a diverse ethnic or religious fabric in a given society's stability or instability, but rather to stress that it does not work as an exclusive variable. By doing this we wish to open the debate in search for deeper analysis and understandings of complex conflicts such as those occurring in certain societies and of the necessary comprehensive and sustainable preventive strategies. Therefore, one of the fundamental lessons that can be drawn is that the causes of conflicts are often highly

complex, with processes in which religious or ethnic factors, although present, tend to assume a more subordinated role as sources of conflict (Hasenclever and Rittberger, 2000: 673). The competition over scarce resources between social groups, the need to fulfil needs that the State itself cannot or does not want to guarantee, the conditions of poverty and social collapse and asymmetries of power, all contribute to the reinforcement of the division between ethnic and religious groups (Ferreira, 2005b: 69).

Since ethnic and religious identities are dynamic both in their salience and in their character, even when social violence and armed conflict have deepened divisions between groups, important opportunities for peacebuilding may be lost if one fails to acknowledge this dynamic nature of group identities (ethnic, religious) and chooses to promote policies that institutionalize and eventually aggravate and deepen those same differences.

The contribution of alternative interpretations and approaches, such as the ones advanced by Edward Azar, John Burton or Johan Galtung, based on a more structural interpretation of the causes and factors that can lead to conflict is thus of fundamental importance to overcome simplistic and dangerous assumptions that relate the ethnic or religious diversity of a country to an inevitable tendency for violent conflict. Although never easy due to their inherent complexity, the task of understanding and preventing armed conflicts becomes particularly difficult in the case of internal conflicts in societies where visible, and often instrumentalized, ethnic and religious divisions, give place to simplistic interpretations that can easily render solutions and prevention an almost impossible mission.

In response, and after the end of the Cold War, preventing and resolving conflicts, as well as restoring and building peace in complex scenarios, became a sort of new '*mission civilisatrice*' (Paris, 2002) in the hands of the international community, with many peripheral regions of the world undergoing violent internal conflict and requiring various forms of curative interventions. In practice, this meant that international actors began pursuing a broadly common strategy for dealing with states experiencing civil violence based on the principles of the liberal peace idea. The particularity of this strategy was that it was defined on the assumption that liberalization was the key to promote internal peace and stability in such contexts (Paris, 2001: 766) and that liberal forms of government, as well as a radical development discourse, should be part of a hybridized response to conflict (Richmond, 2007: 56).

The aim of the liberal peace project was thus to transform 'dysfunctional' and war-torn countries situated on the borderlands of the international system into cooperative, representative and stable states (Duffield, 2001: 11). Therefore, a particular vision of how States should organize themselves internally was put forward, mainly based on the principles of liberal democracy and market-oriented economics. Politically this meant democratization, whereas economically the strategy was one of creating the conditions for a clearly market-oriented economic structure. According to Duffield, the concern has thus been to establish a liberal peace on the international system's troubled borders: to resolve conflicts, reconstruct societies and establish functioning market economies as a way to avoid future wars (Duffield, 2008). However, despite efforts in designing several instruments and policies to resolve and prevent internal armed conflicts, results have not always been successful (Nkundabagenzi, 1999: 280). Although helping create awareness for the multiple and more complex causes of conflict, these strategies and models ended up crystallizing a very unbalanced and limited agenda of priorities, clearly favoring civil and political rights and institutions and neglecting economic, social and cultural guarantees. However, the so-called 'peacebuilding consensus' (Richmond, 2004) that somehow emerged is here considered as highly contested and flawed, as well as based on a limited interpretation and evaluation of both the causes of conflict and the necessary measures to prevent or tackle it. This becomes very clear in the repeated failures and limitations related both to the model itself (and the assumptions and priorities

underlying it) and to its implementation, mainly concerning the true capacity developed by the international community to understand violent conflict and to support and develop sustainable political, economic and social community structures in many countries experiencing violence.

More importantly and concerning is the fact that this is done at the expense of a deliberate blurring of economic and social rights and often ignoring the more complex and structural causes of conflict. Continuous crises in Africa and Latin America, for example, showed that internal violent conflict was more frequent in countries with low socio-economic development and inclusiveness levels (Ellingsen, 2000: 238). If a given country suffers from severe political problems such as discriminatory political and socio-economic institutions, exclusionary ideologies, inter-group and elite-based politics that create and fuel inequality and exclusion, violent conflict is usually more likely to occur (Brown, 1997: 9). Therefore, focusing on political and military stabilization and order is clearly not enough to end 'protracted social conflicts' where ethnic or religious rivalries are sustained and/or aggravated by deep political and economic interests and inequalities (Jeong, 2005: xi). The institutions and actors involved in conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts who are also responsible for contributing to the fulfilment of these rights, often fail in their role or are even counterproductive, causing further harm when they should be providing assistance (Tigerstrom, 2001: 139).

To a certain extent this reflects an important gap between theory and practice concerning human rights and the still existing multiple "flaws" of the current prevention and peacebuilding models, both conceptually and in practice. The perverse tendency to draw a rigid distinction between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights thus ignores and undermines the need for a global and joint action in the field and the fundamental place and role of all human rights in the whole process. As Pugh mentions, the neo-liberal economic policies, which are usually associated with the liberal peace ideology, have been barely contested assumptions underlying external economic reconstruction assistance and management in war-torn societies (Pugh, 2005: 1).

As a consequence, these models of international assistance in conflict and post-conflict scenarios tend to reproduce and perpetuate the flaws of already weak political and economic structures, further obscuring the potential causes for violent conflict existing in certain conflict-prone societies, namely in those where socio-economic inequalities are rooted and structural.

As Jeong refers, the idea of a sustainable peace based simply on justice can be an illusive goal in the absence of longer-term perspective of structural change and may not be enough to end a conflict of this nature and with these characteristics (Jeong, 2005: 18). The acknowledgment and recognition of the existence of various types of underlying factors, of a more material and structural nature (such as political and socio-economic inequalities), which are important to fully understand the emergence and/or perpetuation of violent conflicts in these societies, become fundamental elements for the definition of alternative strategies to prevent or resolve conflicts of such complex nature.

According to this perspective, it is clear that the lack of socio-economic development and equitable structures of distribution of resources can become a powerful source of violence in society. The absence or denial of access to basic infrastructure, employment opportunities, access to education or health services can generate frictions in a society and ultimately manifest itself in the form of violent conflicts. Avoiding this thus requires real change not only at the political level, but above all in the economic and social structures that may tackle the most structural forms of oppression (Richmond, 2007: 88).

Although apparently obvious, these approaches to violent conflict are not [usually] part of the current conflict prevention and peace building agendas, which tend to consider poverty

and inequality only at the level of the individual, not as a group phenomenon (Stewart, 2002a: 3), and much less as a potential cause of violent conflict.

While there has been sufficient emphasis on research and practice on cultural and psychological issues, adequate attention has not been paid to questions of social justice and economic inequality as sources of conflict. In most analysis, structure has been considered as given rather than as conditions to be rectified. However, various structural concerns need to be understood and taken into account in the examination of overall conditions of group behavior and social processes relevant to managing tensions and animosities (Jeong, 2010: 104). While we recognize that the existence of many different types of conflicts and the fact that each one has its own specific context and dynamics, makes it impossible (and not desirable) to define universally applicable formulas aimed at explaining them, we do share Jeong's argument that when mistrust among groups is derived from system domination and insecurity felt by marginalized groups, it is clear that structural change is essential for the constructive accommodation of conflict (Burton *apud* Jeong, 2010: 106). Any sustainable peace strategies aimed at resolving violent internal conflict thus demands overcoming many of the structural challenges impairing the achievement of sustainable peace. As mentioned by Daley:

> "an expanded definition of peace, which includes social justice, can only be made operational through policies […] that tackle issues of equality of access of all citizens to the resources of the state […]. (Daley, 2006: 316)

The underlying argument of this paper is that such underlying and structural social and economic factors and forms of inequality among groups are crucial to the emergence of violence in a society, as the following case-study will attempt to demonstrate.

III.   The case of Sudan: rendering invisibilities visible and addressing complex inequalities as a crucial step for peace

More than a history of violent internal conflict, Sudan has been marked by a history of profound exclusion of significant parts of the population and of which various episodes of violent conflict have become a tragic illustration. In fact, throughout Sudanese history several groups have been repeatedly and systematically excluded from the social, economic, cultural and political life of the country, a trend that was perpetuated and reshaped since the colonial periods in the nineteenth and twentieth century and that continued after independence in 1956. There are important economic and political patterns of inequality that have historically affected the development and exercise of state power in Sudan since at least the nineteenth century. That helps understand the process and consequences of regional underdevelopment, as well as the distorted perceptions of religion and ethnicity in Sudan, as well as its real conflict potential. Sudan is a clearly heterogeneous territory, both ethnically – 52 percent Blacks, 39 percent Arabs, 6 percent Beja, foreigners 2 percent, others 1 percent- and religiously- 70 percent Sunit Muslims, 25 percent Animist, 5 percent Christians (Sosa, 2004: 125). These ethnic and religious divisions are also very well reflected geographically: Muslim Arabs situated predominantly in the North, and African Christians and other traditional religious mainly located in the South. Given this diversity, the historical roots of the conflict between the Northern and Southern Sudan have often been misrepresented (Johnson, 2003: 1) due to superficial and primordial interpretations and explanations based on the primary role of ethnicity and religion.

However, Sudan's history and conflicts are far more complex and diverse than it seems. The extraordinary diversity of the country makes it very difficult to explain the North-South conflict in simple cultural, ethnic or racial terms. In fact, what had been considered as a war between Muslims and Christians in the 1980s was progressively widening fractures throughout Sudanese society, way beyond the old divisions between North and South, Arab and African, Muslim and Christian or non-Muslim (Johnson, 2003), accentuating and deepening socio-economic inequalities. In fact, the deeply unbalanced development agenda that was put forward in Sudan has been one of the most important causes of the Sudanese North-South conflict. At the same time, the traditional and dominant models applied to resolve the conflicts and build peace especially since independence, have tended to obscure the much more complex dynamics and inequalities that have sustained and reproduced conflict. Furthermore, and according to our analysis, these peace strategies have been and, to a large extent, still are based on general and flawed assumptions that end up reproducing and perpetuating more invisible and complex group inequalities in Sudan and that render peace in Southern Sudan extremely fragile. In this context, and since the deep socio-economic inequalities and difficult living conditions of the population have not always been considered and addressed in prevention and peacebuilding strategies, it is part of our argument that these unresolved disputes and patterns of exclusion seriously undermine the successful implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

The CPA is undoubtedly a step forward in the struggle for peace in Sudan, but there are still reasons to be sceptical about Sudan's peace prospects since it did not lead, in our view, to a real and actual capacity to tackle the root causes of conflict, namely the continuous lack of fulfilment and respect for the economic and social rights of the Southern population. Furthermore, peacemaking in Sudan, rather than being based on complementary and coordinated processes that promote the inclusion of a full range of groups in the Sudanese society, has served divisiveness, based on the government's 'sequencing policy' of tackling 'rebellions' piece by piece, and armed groups' failure to look beyond their own factional interests and commit to a national democratic project. The resulting arrangements are hard to manage since Sudan is, as Matus affirms, one country with many systems (Matus apud Simmons and Dixon, 2006). Therefore, it is our assumption that compartmentalizing and treating interlinked issues separately is never a good strategy for peace, since it reinforces the existing although invisible inequalities and problems. This has clearly been the case of Sudan[1].

There was also a clear lack of understanding – or at least an unwillingness to understand – that the conflict in Sudan was never only a matter of political rivalry but it was rather triggered by many forms of [social and economic] marginalization (Itto, 2006) that affected and cross-cut several groups and sectors of the population. In this sense, the process leading to the CPA itself has been characterized by important elements of exclusion - the exclusion of certain regions, interests, constituencies, concepts and themes and the result is that there is no sense of ownership on the part of the population. As a consequence, poverty in Sudan today is widespread and the overall economic, social and human is far from satisfying[2], a scenario that has been well illustrated in the recent Human Development Reports, in which Sudan figures in the countries with some of the lowest human development index. The UNDP Human Development Report in 2009 ranked the country 150th among 18269 countries compared to position 147 in 2010 among 169 countries. In 2011, Sudan's Human Development record decreased drastically and the country was listed in the 169th place in a total of 187 countries, which clearly shows how the social, economic and political of the country deteriorated significantly even in the midst of the peace implementation process. Although the national situation is far from the ideal, the situation in Southern Sudan is even worse with decades of violent armed conflict and marginalization contributing to a

dark picture when it comes to economic, social and human development, even after the signing of the CPA in 2005 and especially after the referendum in 2011 that opened the way to the South's independence. Levels of poverty and inequality remain extremely high, with economic and social policies that do not respond to the actual needs and expectations, and with a political reality in the South marked by a governing structure that true political leadership and increasingly permeable to corruption, rendering prospects of structural socioeconomic change and sustainable peace very limited. In a post-independent South Sudan scenario, the situation is aggravated by a considerable level of uncertainty related to the political and economic viability of a territory that, despite its richness in fundamental resources for development (oil, in particular), lacks not only the necessary infrastructures to explore and potentiate them, but also a strong government capable of dealing with the various internal, regional and external pressures that have helped perpetuate inequalities and uneven growth. These structural problems in the South are reinforced since both parties have not yet been able to resolve their dispute over oil transit fees despite efforts made by various external and regional actors, such as the African Union (Sudan Tribune, 2012). Although the South took around three-quarters of the oil production it needs to pay for using northern export facilities and the Red Sea port of Port Sudan but the incapacity of both parties to reach an agreement as too how much the South should pay has raised significant tension in the territory. This tension deteriorated significantly the security and economic situation of the South and have already raised rumors of a possible return to violence between both countries (Sudan Tribune, 2012).

Furthermore, the increasing perception of poverty and inequality amongst the population affects the ordinary citizens and can also have a role in breeding conflict. In fact, the fragile and precarious condition of Southern socioeconomic structures has widened the inequality gap in the country and has already led to several episodes of violence and tension as groups feel continuing marginalization and neglect. Therefore, following the CPA, the immediate challenges meant carefully meeting and balancing immediate needs with structural change and long-term programs. In this sense, and since poverty and inequality sustained after internal violent conflict continues to undermine peace by breeding discontent and anger, sustainable and conscious development policies should have been part of the peace process. Consolidating such a fragile peace like the one characterizing the Sudanese territory today, and even though recently divided, would require a rapid, effective and visible redress of the underlying and structural causes of conflict, poverty and underdevelopment. Recognizing and guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities to all peoples in Sudan, as well as respecting the multiple identities of all groups, both in the North and in the South is thus a fundamental step to achieve sustainable and durable peace in the territory, especially after the South's secession and independence as a new state that now faces numerous difficulties and tremendous challenges at the political, economic and social level.

IV. Conclusion

The multiplicity of violent armed conflicts especially after the end of the Cold War has made the study and practice of conflict resolution and peacebuilding particularly important fields. This is especially true in the context of the increasing intra-state violent conflicts that characterized the international system after 1989, both between different socio-ethnic and cultural groups within a national territory, and between groups who feel excluded and marginalized from both the central authority and the existing power structures (Omeje, 2008: 68).

The result has been a recurrent, simplistic and acritical classification of violent internal conflicts as 'ethnic' or 'religious wars, with the consequence that they will ultimately limit the development of more accurate and effective conflict resolution or peacebuilding options (Porto, 2008: 57). And it is a fact that in the current study of conflicts, priority is often given to interpretations that underline the crucial, if not decisive, role of primordial ethnic or religious identities. However, what comes clear from this analysis - and specifically of the case of Sudan- is that there is no single and isolated cause for the North-South conflict, since a complex set of interrelated factors drove the war for more than two decades. Furthermore, and as Sambanis wisely puts it, not all civil wars are the same and that each war is as different as the society that produced it (Sambanis, 2001: 259).

There are different types of internal conflict and such difference must be taken into account when serious analysis of their causes is to be undertaken. In this sense, understanding conflict implies examining the various causes of discontent and illuminating the escalation of the struggles and the eventual recession of violence to the peaceful resolution of differences (Jeong, 2008: 4). Quoting Michael Brown's famous and wise idea:

> "The search for a single factor (…) that explains everything is comparable to the search of the Holy Grail- noble, but futile" (Brown, 1997: 4)

Historical grievances, feelings of exclusion and marginalization, demands for an equitable and fair sharing of power between different groups, inequitable distribution of economic resources and benefits, underdevelopment, the absence of a genuine democratic process and other governance issues are all interlinked factors in conflict, but none of them can be seen as a sole or primary cause.

Nevertheless, in this multiplicity of factors, our argument is that social and economic factors play a crucial triggering role in the emergence of violent conflict, especially when these are associated with continued patterns of horizontal discrimination between groups. In fact, and as it has been demonstrated above with the case of Sudan, unequal access to resources and services and disparities in resource distribution, which have been exacerbated by the long standing failure of national leaders to address the grievances stemming from the South ever since independence, played a crucial role in feeding and aggravating Sudan´s conflict (Pantuliano, 2006).

Furthermore, the perception by some groups that there are strong inequalities of economic opportunities and access to resources, as well as significant differences in the living standards and conditions between groups does in fact contribute to some sense of grievance (Porto, 2008: 64) and to the potential deterioration of inter-group relations, thus increasing the propensity for [violent] conflict (Porto, 2008: 65). According to some authors, the CPA did attempt both to heal a deeply divided and unequal society by addressing the root causes of violent armed conflict and to resolve issues that could not be decided by military means (Stiansen, 2005: 24). However, and despite the fact that it did put a formal end to the conflict, it is clear that the fundamental issues of socio-economic inclusion and equality have not been effectively tackled and/or incorporated in the external and internal peace efforts in Sudan.

There has been a focus on short-term crisis management rather than long-term development and insufficient attention to building capacity. Simultaneously, there has also been an almost complete lack of long-term economic investment for development in the South. Such weaknesses will need to be eliminated or minimized if peace is to be successfully implemented in Sudan (S¢rb¢, 2005: 14). Despite the many expectation, and according to people directly or indirectly involved in the peace process, the CPA is not really comprehensive in the way that it does not include the perceptions and reality of all the Sudanese population, its different sectors and groups and it does not take into account the rest

of the national peace and conflict dynamics (for example in the East or in Darfur) (Abdelgadir, 2008). Also it seems that no significant efforts have been made in order to transcend the existent (and often constructed and instrumentalized) racial identities in a way that could have institutionalized equal and universal citizenship guarantees instead of ethnic, racial or religious entitlements (Idris, 2005: 111).

For all this reasons, and especially after the South's independence, the current scenario in Sudan is one of an extremely fragile peace sustained in very weak pillars. Therefore, and as argued by Iyob and Khadiagala, peace agreements that are comprehensive in name but only partial in their [provisions] and applicability, like the CPA, will never be enough to tackle the deep-rooted causes of conflict and the grievances of Sudan's multiple communities (Iyob and Khadiagala, 2006: 16).

As mentioned before, the situation in the South is not very different, having to respond now and in the future to the various and complex fragilities and challenges related not only to politics and to the need to find a solid leadership that can overcome corruption dynamics and elitist policies, but also and above all to economic and social obstacles that have been preventing effective poverty reduction policies as well as the creation of physical and material conditions to respond to the most basic needs of the population, such as health, education or employment. Despite its richness in oil, Southern Sudan is now confronted with problems related to the absence of infrastructures to export those resources, since all the existent pipelines are concentrated in the North of the territory, which will require a very careful negotiation with Khartoum in order to have access to the sole exit to sea in the eastern part of the country, Port Sudan. There is already information on possible negotiations with Kenya for the construction of a new pipeline in the South but for now access through North is the only, but less easy, option.

Bearing this in mind, and taking Sudan as the case-study, this analysis attempted to contribute to a broader and deeper understanding of the origins of the country's multiple and recurring civil wars. Throughout this analysis, we have not only shed some light on the true impact of ethnic diversity on the emergence conflict, but also and above all on the crucial role played by other variables, such as socio-economic inequality and discrimination of particular groups and on the crucial task of addressing them effectively. Our focus was clearly on the underlying causes and factors that are not usually addressed, such as socio-economic inequality and marginalization among different groups, and which may undermine the achievement of a definitive and lasting peace in the country.

The goal was not to develop another general and universal panacea for conflicts sharing some of these characteristics, but rather to draw attention to the need for a better and deeper understanding of the complex and multiple dynamic causes behind apparently indisputable 'ethnic wars', an understanding that goes beyond simplistic and limited approaches to conflict. In our view, one of the most fundamental tasks in building sustainable peace in any violent context consists in re-establishing, reforming or structurally transforming its social and economic institutions and policies in order to achieve a long-term recovery of economic activity, stability and sustainable development, as well as a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources (Romeva, 2003). Political and economic transformation within conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies should then include social structural change to tackle political and/or economic injustice as well as reconstruction programs designed to help communities affected by conflict revitalize their economies. As mentioned by Jeong,

> "structural concerns are important for understanding conflict and its resolution, since the deeper causes of violent conflict can be relegated to the structural features of antagonistic relationships arising from illegitimate institutions (that prohibit fair distribution of power and wealth) […]." (Jeong, 2010: 104).

The multiple conflicts that have ridden Sudan have been triggered by the demands for equal citizenship, social justice and economic and social rights (Iyob and Khadiagala, 2006: 15) and not simply because there were Muslims and Christians involved. In this sense, in the case of Sudan, unless these socio-economic injustices are fully addressed and tackled and all Sudanese are guaranteed equal social and economic rights, as well as civil and political, the prospects of peace will always be vague and limited. As they may well be in many other cases.

Notes

[1] Another common and frequent mistake and misunderstanding in the context of peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes is the assumption that settling conflicts and building peace basically means agreement on mechanisms for sharing power and resources. This was an assumption that also characterized the various and more recent negotiations between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), namely in Machakos and Naivasha - but also in other conflict scenarios such as Angola, Mozambique, Kenya, Burundi, Liberia or Sierra Leone, where power-sharing mechanisms were put into practice as the main institutional arrangements aimed at reducing the threat of conflict by giving the belligerents a stake in positive cooperation and a set of mutual guarantees of security and basic interests.

[2] At independence in 1956, Sudan's GDP was estimated as amounting to US $795 million. Per capita GDP amounted to about US $78, classifying Sudan among the poorest countries in the world. The South fared much worse than the Northern regions with a per capita GDP of about US $39, reflecting years of neglect and marginalization ever since the colonial period. Also at independence, educational attainment in Sudan was very low, even by African standards, with average years of schooling at just 0.4 years; educational attainment in the South was significantly lower than the national average (Ali et al, 2005:204). In 2008, the GDP was of around US $US $ 57.9 billion and is expected to be around US$ 52.2 billion in 2009. Past growth was not sufficiently broad-based. Investments and services are concentrated in and around Khartoum state and to a lesser extent Juba. The significant disparities between urban and rural areas and between regions contributed to growing inequalities (UNDP, 2008).

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