The Politicization of the Education System: Implications for Peace in Sudan

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Abstract

This article takes a closer look at the education system in Sudan and its role in social cohesion/division. It analyzes themes run in approved textbooks. The findings of this article can be summarized around three main points: the curriculum constructs an exclusionary version of Sudanese identity that is practically the same as Northern Arabic Muslim identity; heroism is associated with war and history lessons are centred on the history of wars; and, war and violence are always linked and consequently legitimized. The article argues that educational institutions in Sudan fail to create harmony and acceptance among different ethnic groups and perpetuate prejudice and violence. An urgent reform in the curriculum is needed.

Key Terms: Sudan, education, violence, conflict, identity.

Résumé

Cet article jette un regard profond sur le système éducatif au Soudan et son rôle dans la cohésion/division sociale. Il analyse les thèmes qui ont été approuvés pour les livres enseignés à l'école. Les résultats de l'étude peuvent être résumés autour de trois points principaux : le curriculum encourage une version exclusiviste de l'identité soudanaise qui est pratiquement la même que celle des musulmans de l'Arabie du Nord ; l'héroïsme est associé à la guerre pendant que les leçons d'histoire concernent l'histoire des guerres. Le troisième résultat consiste au fait que la guerre et la violence sont toujours liées et par conséquent légitimées. L'article défend que les institutions de l'éducation au Soudan n'ont pas réussi à créer une harmonie et une cohésion entre les différents groupes ethniques. Au contraire, elles contribuent à la perpétuation des préjudices et de la violence. La réforme urgente du curriculum est une nécessité.

Mots clés : Soudan, éducation, violence, conflit, identité.

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Introduction

The UNESCO Constitution states: 'Since wars begin in the minds of men [and women], it is in the minds of men [and women] that the defences of peace must be constructed'. This statement articulates clearly that in post-conflict societies, the pursuit for peace is the pursuit of hearts and minds. The transition from violent conflict to peace needs more than political changes. It is true that peace agreements bring violent conflicts to a halt; yet, sustainable peace needs more than a cease-fire. Sustainable peace requires that the culture of peace and coexistence be a way of life and a shared philosophy among all segments of society. Yet, it remains alarming that 31 percent of civil wars in the world resume within the first ten years of the end of the conflict, and makes this search for sustainable peace, not just peace, more pressing (Bigombe, Collier and Sambanis 2000). Conflicts, especially those along ethnic and religious lines, leave societies deeply polarized even after reaching a peace agreement. Therefore, for sustainable peace to be a reality in societies emerging from violent conflicts, it is fundamental that the history of prejudice as a component of individual mindset and attitudes be addressed and overcome. The factors underlining conflict that relate to structural imbalances also need to be analyzed and addressed. Similarly, socio-economic and cultural inequalities inherent in social institutions require political goodwill to chart new ways for peace in post-conflict setting. Peace communication lends itself well to such a vital mission.

This article envisions peace communication as a process that takes place not only through traditional mass communication channels (electronic and print media) but also in all aspects of societal institutions (educational, religious and communal/traditional institutions). Specifically, this article takes a closer look at the educational system in Sudan and its role in social cohesion or division. It argues that educational institutions in Sudan have failed to create harmony and acceptance among different ethnic groups by adopting a univocal expression of Sudanese identity and excluding all other segments of the Sudanese population.

Sudan's Conflict: History of a Polarized Society

Sudan stands out in the twenty-first century as a country that was embroiled in one of history's longest civil wars, a war that stole more than two million lives. Although the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Government of Sudan (GOS) on January 9, 2005 marked a moment of historic importance and brought to an end the civil war between Southern

and Northern Sudan, another conflict continues in Darfur in the western part of the country. The war has pitted Northern Sudanese who are culturally Arabs and mainly Muslims, against other ethnic groups who are seen as Africans. Although many scholars hold that the conflict was rooted in the domination of the Northern Sudanese over other ethnic groups, the Sudanese conflict is more complicated and multidimensional. This conflict had an economic dimension that put a more-developed North against less-developed peripheries. At one level, it was an ethnic conflict, as the civil war was between Arabized Northerners and what might loosely be called the black population. On another level, it was a religious conflict between Islam, on one side, and Christianity and traditional religions, on the other. Both the ethnic and religious conflicts combined to form a cultural conflict (Loisa 2005).

Sudan's past is closely bound up with its current challenges. The historical process of dichotomizing the country into the Arabized North and African South dates back to the seventh century. At the time, the Arab-Muslim empire invaded the Sudan and concluded peace accords with Northern people that established remote Arab control over the country and opened communication channels with the Arabs. Through conquest, intermarriage, trade and settlement, Northern Sudan underwent Arab-Muslim assimilation. Arab migration and settlement toward the South were hindered by the difficult geographical terrain and harsh tropical climate. The relationship between the Arabs and Southerners was limited to those who were engaged in the slave trade (Daly and Sikainga 1993; Deng 1995; Khalid 2003).

This division was further enforced during the 58 years of colonization under an Anglo-Egyptian administration (1898-1956). During colonization, both Northern and Southern Sudan were administered as separate colonies under a governor general. This separation of administration, however, reinforced Arabism and Islam in the North, while Southern Sudan was ruled as an African colonial territory, where African culture and Christianity were encouraged. In addition, the British introduced the concept of 'Closed Districts' by which the British closed the South to all Northerners, including Northern government officials (Sarkesian 1973). Closed Districts included Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains of Southern Kordofan and the Funj areas of the Southern Blue Nile. Along with this, British colonizers formalized a language policy that allowed vernacular languages to be taught in primary schools in Southern Sudan, where English was designated as the official language. Consequently, Arabic was not used in schools and government offices in Southern Sudan (Biong 2003; Collins 1983).

Northerners had undergone centuries of assimilation into Arabic-Islamic culture. Since independence, Northern-dominated governments often made, and continue to make, attempts to extend this process of assimilation to the other regions of the country, including the South and the West. Successive post-independence central governments have adopted different policies aimed at nationalization in an effort to construct a united Sudan with Arabic-Islamic culture as the key determinant for national unity (Khalid 1990; Sarkesian 1973).

All these factors – the heritage of master-enslavement history, the British separation policy, pattern of exclusion by successive post-independence governments – prevented Sudanese from the North and South from interacting and identifying with each other and resulted in deep polarization among ethnic, religious, and regional lines (Khalid 2003). The role of an imposed Arabic culture is an issue of great concern to all segments of the Sudanese population. However, its influence on education has far-reaching implications for the way Sudanese view themselves and each other. It is not uncommon to hear Northerners cry out 'abid!' (slave) to Southerners as fights break out between people from different ethnic groups (Jok 2001). Thus, it is essential that social institutions in Sudan, such as media, education and religious organizations, engage in deconstructing the cultural aspects of Sudanese life that legitimize prejudices and eventually lead to violence.

Politics of Official Knowledge and Education

In this section, we review literature that contextualizes the role educational institutions play in imparting knowledge that defines how members of a society interact with each other. It is this backdrop that sets the context in which we build the argument to use educational institutions as avenues for peace, not as perpetrators of prejudiced and violent acts in Sudan.

Education can be thought of as a dynamic process that is rooted in a sociocultural context. No form of education, as a source of knowledge, is politically neutral (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991; Shor 1992). Schools, among other societal institutions, can play an essential role in promoting peace (or hatred). The importance of schools arises from the fact that they make what is considered the 'official knowledge' available. Schools 'participate in creating what society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They help set the canons of truthfulness and, as such, also help re-create a major reference point of what knowledge, culture, belief, and morality really are' (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991:4). Since the knowledge that is disseminated throughout schools is selected from a much

larger pool of knowledge, 'what counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of the complex power relations and struggle among identifiable class, race, gender/sex and religious groups' (Apple1992:2). The content that is included or excluded; the frames that are portrayed; the groups that are represented, underrepresented, or misrepresented; and the themes that are emphasized are all politically loaded aspects of education.

Scholars argue that 'ethnic attitudes' are formed early and that once positive or negative prejudices are formed, they tend to increase with time (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). Half a century of civil war has left Sudanese society suffering from a deep ethnic polarization. With this polarization and the high number of internally displaced persons, mainly from the South and Darfur and moving to the North and Central Sudan, educational institutions (especially primary schools) can play a fundamental role in promoting intercultural, interethnic, and interreligious understanding, leading to peace and tolerance. Critical analysis of the curriculum provides for a better understanding of the relationship between education, social divisions, and conflict (Tawil and Harley 2004). Similarly, this analysis offers better insight into how to develop a tolerant and balanced curriculum, which is fundamental to healing and reconciling a country ravaged by war. An analytical understanding of factors that underpin, shape and influence the design and delivery of education as outlined in the current curriculum is needed. The question at hand is, how then, do we use educational institutions to support sustainable peace in Sudan? How do we educate for peaceful coexistence of diverse ethnic groups and religions in Sudan? The next section is an analysis of textbooks used in primary schools in Sudan. The intention of this analysis is to show how the content determines how schools can become sites where respect of differences and acceptance are fostered or sites of producing hatred and prejudice.

Themes in Text Books

This section of the article presents themes identified in textbooks used in primary schools that have implications for the peace-building process in post conflict Sudan. For this article, textbooks officially approved by the Federal Ministry of Education and the National Center for Curriculum Development and Educational Research as the primary source of data were analyzed. Eleven textbooks used for the analysis are those used to teach Arabic language, religion (Islamic Studies), and social science in 1st, 4th, 6th and 8th grades. These textbooks were published in 2001 in accordance with the recommendations of the 1990 Conference on Educational Policy in Sudan. Since the curriculum is standardized in Sudan,

all textbooks for primary and secondary education are developed by the National Centre of Curriculum Development and Educational Research and published by Publication Bureau unit of the Sudanese Federal Ministry of Education. As mentioned earlier, Arabic is the official language of instruction in Sudan, so all textbooks are in Arabic. The author undertook translations of the content of the texts, including the quotes cited in this article.

Specifically, the analysis focused on themes running through the textbooks. Nevertheless, special attention was paid to issues of representation, given that politics of representation is closely tied to politics of power. A significant observation emerging from the content analysis suggests that the way groups are represented, underrepresented, or misrepresented may reveal the politicisation of the educational system and identity construction in Sudan. The analysis revealed that 96.95 per cent of characters with an identified religion are Muslims. An equally significant observation was that 98.41 per cent of the references to religion were to Islam. From these findings and more to be discussed later in the article, it is apparent that religion is synonymous with Islam. In order to demonstrate the impact of religiosity and Islamization of the education system, some themes identified in the analysis of the textbooks are discussed. Six major themes were identified, but for the purpose of this article, three themes will be discussed: patriotism, resolving conflict through violence, and collectivism and co-operation.

Patriotism

Patriotism appears frequently in the textbooks analyzed. Sudan as a state and as a nation is portrayed in a positive light throughout the books, which all are intended to promote a sense of pride in citizens of Sudan. The country is described as 'the world's paradise' in the fourth grade Arabic language textbook (p. 221). A good citizen is characterized as one who is working for the common good and for the country's prosperity. In the fourth grade text, the poem 'The Trees of My Country' (p.32) indicates that an attachment to the country is highly valued; and the country and its trees are seen positively:

> Since my childhood I loved the trees, I loved the victorious nation, for its love I recite poetry, I guard it in the day and in the night, I draw it in the art lessons, I am happy about it and sing my praise of it (p.32).

The theme of patriotism complements one of the declared aims of education in Sudan. According to the Educational System and Institution Conference of 1990, the education curriculum aims at 'the strengthening of the spirit

of national unity amongst youngsters, the promotion of their feelings of loyalty and love to their homeland, and to everything for its development' (Selman et al., 2003). However, it is worth noting that the 'homeland', which refers to Sudan, is defined as an Arab Islamic state according to symbols portraying Arabic Islamic values. One of the lessons in the fourth grade Arabic language textbook refers to Osman Dighna, one of the national leaders in the Mahdiya revolution during the struggle against colonialism. This war is summarized as a jihad (holy war). An exercise on the 'national poem' in the sixth grade Arabic language textbook states: 'People shout 'takbeer' [God is great] and 'tahleel' [no god but Allah] as they rejoice over Independence' (p. 19). Such statements underline the assumption that the term 'people' is equivalent to Muslims who have secured their political independence through God as conceptualized in Islam. In the same textbook, another statement is made to establish a link between a victorious nation and jihad: 'The nation will never be defeated if jihad will enliven' (sixth grade Arabic language textbook, p. 37). The implication here is that Sudan is an Islamic nation, for only an Islamic nation can carry on jihad. Patriotism is thus equated to commitment, not so much to a country but more to Islam, for it is the latter through jihad that guarantees victory to the former. Patriotism is exemplified by involvement in jihad. The authors define 'us' according to Islamic values. Declaring 'our' principles, they state:

> Allah is our goal. Is there any greater goal than God's affection? Our leader is the prophet, and we do not have any other than the prophet Mohamed. Quran is our constitution. It is holy. Justice, and all justice is in the Quran. Our way is jihad; if it is lost, our nation will be lost. I swear I will never leave my goal. As long as I carry my holy book [Quran] and my gun (Sixth grade Arabic language textbook, p. 42).

One of the few examples of the portrayal of a multiethnic and multireligious Sudan is in the eighth grade Mankind and Environment textbook. However, at the end of the book, it is clearly stated that Sudan is at the forefront of the Islamic Nation in its mission to revive the lost civilization of the Islamic empire (p. 110).

Resolving Conflict Through Violence

Although there are many ways to resolve conflict, the textbooks reviewed consistently advocate violent acts as the means to resolve conflict. In the fourth grade Arabic language textbook, for example, there are 13 lessons out of 53 in which war appears as the main theme. In this textbook (p.47), war and violence are encouraged as acts of bravery and heroism:

I am a brave fighter

Knowledge increased my ambitions

I have no fear when it comes to defending my homeland

My flowing song is the tank and the gun

Shout loudly: welcome death. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Resolving Conflict Through Violence Theme. Example from
Fourth Grade Arabic Language Textbook

War is also exalted as part of Islamic history, as exemplified in lessons
about Badr battle and Uhud battle. These are battles between Muslims
and non-Muslims during the life of the prophet of Islam and as part of
national history. The fourth grade Arabic language textbook, (p.36, 42, 83
and 121) represent war as a legitimate method of resolving conflicts. At
the same time, war and violence are considered holy and are associated
with faith in many incidents throughout the textbook. A good example is an
excerpt that reads as follows:

God is great, greater than enemies are

God is the best supporter for the oppressed

I, with my faith and my weapon, will rescue my motherland

And the light of Truth will be with me (p. 135).

In the sixth grade Arabic language textbook, war is presented as a sacred
duty, one that will confer divine rewards: 'You know what excellent
rewards Allah prepares for Muslims for fighting Kufar [non-Muslims/
infidels]' (p.14). In the same textbook, students are asked to write an

essay on how to support the Sudanese government army in its 'war', referring to the civil conflict in the country (p.139). These textbooks are used to legitimate the conflict and present it as a national war.

History textbooks are the 'primary lens through which [students] incorporate historical knowledge for the rest of their lives that in turn, shapes their future capacities for active citizenship' (Evans and Rosenzweig, 1992:1377). The selection of history narratives in the Mankind and Environment textbook makes the war theme more prominent. In this eighth grade textbook, three out of four chapters deal mainly with the history of wars. The first chapter focuses on the Islamic world and Europe. It deals with what is referred to as Christian wars, wars between the Islamic Empire and the Roman Empire in the eleventh century. The second chapter focuses on colonization and the First and Second World Wars. Although the third chapter is about the history of modern Sudan and its independence, the war theme appears constantly. In this chapter, the struggle against colonization is represented as an Islamic struggle against Christian colonizers, noting that 'religion [Islam] was a key factor that inspired Sudanese to declare jihad against Turk-Egyptian colonizers'. Another paragraph states that 'reasons for Mahdiya revolution were... work of Christian missionaries who enjoyed the ruler's [colonialists] support' (p. 55). The content emphasizes that the 'reasons of success of Mahdiya revolution were ... Muslims [Sudanese] dissatisfaction because of the work of missionaries among Muslims and animist communities' (p. 56). The indication in these two passages is that the Mahdiya was not just a national revolt against outside colonizers, but an 'Islamic' revolution against missionaries and Christian invaders. Ironically, the Turks of the Ottoman Empire as well as the Egyptians, whom the Mahdiya revolted against, are all Muslims. It is not clear why the passage refers to the two as Christian colonizers, and the revolt against them as fighting Christians.

Collectivism and Co-operation

The Sudanese community is a collective society. Although many of traditional family responsibilities for care of the old and sick have been eroded by urbanization, the extended family is still the primary social service provider in Sudan. The theme of portraying Sudan as a collective society and encouraging collectivism among students is apparent in the frequent use of the pronoun 'we', as in 'we go to school' (first grade Arabic language textbook, p.102), 'we clean' (first grade Arabic language textbook, p.120), 'we pray' (first grade Arabic language textbook, pp.134, 139). The use of positive examples of co-operation and collectivism, such as the collective nature of bees, is another manifestation of this theme (fourth grade Arabic

language textbook, p.111). In Islamic studies textbooks, the importance of maintaining strong social networks is stressed as one of the significant rules of Islam (sixth grade Islamic studies textbook, p.37), along with collaboration and co-operation (p. 84).

The theme of collective identity, especially in religion textbooks, is presented as Islamic collective identity. Consequently, the concepts of brotherhood/sisterhood are limited to Muslims, rather than embracing the whole of humanity, as in the 'Islamic Brotherhood Poem', in which the call is to those who share the Islamic faith (eighth grade Islamic studies textbook, p.37). In the same textbook, it is made clear that 'it is not allowed for a Muslim to treat another Muslim badly' (p.34). It would seem that the duty to kindness and good treatment is reserved exclusively for Muslims. By implication, hostility can be allowed or is permissible against 'others'.

Discussion

Never a neutral endeavour, education is always a dynamic process, rooted in a sociocultural and political context. Elites and dominant groups, to advance their hegemonic ideas, have often manipulated education as a terrain of struggle over control of knowledge. The educational system in Sudan is not an exception. The Sudanese education system has always been a victim of political interference. Different regimes have used education and educational institutions to advance their political agendas, with a new curriculum policy resulting from every major political change. The first conference was the National Education Conference (1969). This conference followed the 1969 military coup that seized power from the second democratic government. The second conference took place in 1984, after the declaration of sharia as the supreme law of the country. After the overthrow of the Numeiri regime in the popular uprising of April 1985, elites sought to promote the new democratic era by way of influencing curriculum development actualized through the 1987 education conference. More changes in the curriculum were inevitable when the current ruling party took over power in the 1989 military coup. In 1990, another educational conference took, place whose outcome includes the textbooks used for this study.

A closer look at the different curriculum conference recommendations reveals a clear association between ruling class ideology and official knowl-edge presented in the curriculum. In the last two decades, three educa-tional conferences have recommended changes in the educational system in a span of six years (1984-1990). During this period, institutionalization of Arabic and Islam were accorded cardinal importance in the national

curriculum. The 1984 conference sought to advance education, based on an Islamic orientation as well as entrenching the role of Khalawi (Quranic/ Islamic schools). In 1987, conference recom-mendation made gave Arabic a more prominent role in the educational system. Thereafter, this prominence was elevated even higher, with Arabic regarded as the holy language alongside Islam, the religion. The National Center for Curriculum Development and Educational Research document titled 'Elements of Basic Education Curriculum' (undated) stated that the 'Arabic language is a holy language, being the Qur'an's tool to convey the Truth' (p.1). The political system further advanced the Islamic agenda when, during the 1990 conference, the consolidation of religious thought and the teachings of the heavens was advocated. Although these teachings of heavens have not been explicitly defined, it is important to recognize that sharia had already been unilaterally declared in Sudan. Accordingly, all the recommendations touching on religion implied the religion of Islam, and the reference to the 'heavens' means heaven as defined and understood in Islam.

In view of the foregoing, it is evident that education has never been a neutral enterprise in Sudan. It is used as a tool of religious, social and cultural domination by Northern dominated political regimes and Islamic zealots. The ideological principles that guide the development of the current curriculum reflect those ideologies. At the same time, it is these ideological standings that provoke the need to demand a shift in thinking about how to use the education system to address ways to unite Sudan. As the system stands, it does not fulfil the quest for peace in Sudan. Many Sudanese have not experienced peace, harmony and other aspects of human development that the current curriculum purports to promote. It is clear from the analysis that the political structure continues to manipulate what knowledge is imparted to Sudanese students.

When the current ruling party, the National Congress Party (formerly known as National Islamic Front), came to power in 1989, it sought to revive the Islamic nation with Sudan at the forefront (Al Mubarak 2001; Al Turabi 1994). Control over knowledge, therefore, has been of great concern for the current regime. Islamic zealots within the ruling party have viewed education as a suitable platform to impose their dream of reviving the Islamic Empire. One of these government officials, Abdul Rahman Ahmed, explained how the control over knowledge is an important tool for domination: 'A vision for life, which is based on the Islamization of knowledge, is a vision for the Sudanese and Muslim excelling in and dominating the world' (quoted in Al Mubabark 2001:10). Hence, Islamization of knowledge is declared as a means and weapon in the struggle to

dominate the world. To achieve this goal, the education system has been manipulated to condition young minds to be soldiers with a 'holy mission' as defined by the ruling party. The 1990 conference declared the aim of Sudanese education as 'to work for the consolidation of religious belief in young people'. It was also declared that the aim of education is to instil values and behaviour 'which are based on the teachings of Heavens' (Selman et al. 2003). From the textbook analysis, it is apparent that religion is synonymous with Islam and heaven is defined according to the Islamic version of heaven. The conference recommendation and curriculum reform happened at the same time that the Islamization of knowledge project was declared by the ruling elite. This project is manifested in many areas, but the major manifestation was in identity representation and national history. The findings indicate that the representation of an official version of Sudanese identity that is associated with Islam is not inclusive of other religions in Sudan. To understand how this new version of Sudanese identity works, it is useful to refer to the citizenship and passport law of 1994. In 1994, a new law was issued which gave the president the right to grant citizenship to any foreigner. It was declared by the head of legal affairs in the Transitional National Council that 'the citizenship and passports which are recognized in our sharia state are the words "la ilaha illa Allah" there is no God except Allah and thus Sudan is open for all Muslims' (quoted in Al Mubarak 2001:100). Although there are no definite figures for how many non-Sudanese Muslims had been granted citizenship according to this law, the overflow of Osama Bin Laden and his followers from the Arab Afghans to Sudan in the 1990s was a clear manifestation of these stipulations. This new definition of Sudanese identity, as much as it coincides with the ruling class ideology, is in opposition to the constitutional stipulation, which states: '[Sudan] is a democratic, decentralized, multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country where such diversities co-exist' (Sudan Constitution 2005). However, the version of Sudanese identity that is defined according to the Islamic symbols excludes non-Muslims from being Sudanese, and it is reflected throughout the educational curriculum.

As discussed earlier, the homeland, which in textbooks refers to Sudan, is defined as an Islamic Arabic state according to symbols portraying Arabic Islamic values. Patriotism is, in reality, a call for nationalism disguised as patriotism. Patriotism is defined as synonymous with Islamist nationalism. Statements such as 'Our leader is the prophet, and we do not have any other than the prophet Mohamed. The Quran is our constitution' appear in the fourth grade Arabic textbook (p.42). This official univocal expression

of national identity implies that the norms, which govern the concept of citizenship, are identified with Arabic Islamic culture as the key determinant. This is a materialization of exclusionary Othering, which excludes all that do not share the Arabic Islamic cultural symbols, regardless of whether they are Sudanese by birth. The legitimization of Arabic and Islam in the curriculum is represented as the identity markers of what it means to be a Sudanese. Arabic is not only considered as the means of conversation between different groups or the nation's lingua franca but also as the holy language alongside Islam. The National Centre for Curriculum Development and Educational Research identifies Arabic as the tool to convey the truth via the Qur'an. Thus, being a Muslim is not enough for inclusion. It would seem that identifying with the Arabic Islamic symbols is the prerequisite for inclusion.

The findings of this study reveal that the curriculum perpetuates this construction of exclusive identity. The basic education curriculum constructs, through representation, images and values, a version of Sudanese identity that is practically the same as Northern Arab Muslim identity. This is manifested in the images, names and religious affiliation of characters depicted in the textbooks. The absence of any element of the marginalized groups' cultures, value systems and meaning establishes a 'selective version of a national culture... installed as an absolute condition for any social identity' (Johnson 1990:71). A mono-cultural national curriculum of this kind 'deals with diversity by centring the always ideological "we" and leaves out the marginalized groups with limited choices' (Apple 1993:233). Marginalized groups have to accommodate themselves within the dominant discourse and accept assimilation; otherwise, they are alienated and excluded. Therefore, as Johnson (1990) articulates, the choices of the marginalized in Sudan are narrowed down to two options: 'national culture or no culture at all' (p. 71). The textbook analysis reveals that out of 128 named characters, there are only four non-Arabic names. These results say a lot about whose image should be seen through this national curriculum.

Implications for Peace and Reconciliation in Post-conflict Sudan

This exclusionary version of Sudanese identity has far-reaching implications for the possibility of healing and reconciliation in post-conflict Sudan. Deng (1995) made a significant statement on the relationship between the official policies and conflict in Sudan. He asserted that a crucial factor in determining the critical turning point in Sudan's conflict has always been 'the extent to which policies or actions of the central government have promoted or

diminished a sense of belonging or identification with the country on more or less equitable footing with the North'. He further explained that official policies, including educational policies, have 'delineated the margin, the dividing line between peace and war, co-operation and conflict, unity and polarization' (p.177).

History is another significant terrain of inclusion and exclusion. According to Graham-Brown (1994), state policies tend to define the national history in favour of the dominant groups by constructing 'a version of history, particularly of the recent past, which heightens the role of that group at the expense of the others' (p. 28). The official current version of Sudan's national history substantially demonstrates the manipulation of national history to reflect the ideal of the Islamic state. This is manifested in the representation of the history of Sudan as a history of Islamic kingdoms. For example, the 8th grade social studies textbook, *Mankind and Environment*, in a lesson outline titled 'Sudan Kingdoms', references only Funj and Fur, the two Islamic kingdoms. None of the non-Islamic kingdoms that existed in ancient Sudan are mentioned. The official version of Sudan's history is centred on the events that happened during the rise and spread of Islam. The curriculum divides Sudan's history before colonization into certain periods: arrival of the Arabs, Turk-Egyptian and Mahdiya. The preference given to specific historical periods reflects the decision about which historical events receive prominence and, therefore, are more meaningful and memorable. Entman (1993) states that the way facts are selected, organized and presented can 'promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (p. 52). The highly selective presentation of Sudanese national history as a history of an Islamic state is another indicator of the role that official knowledge, as disseminated in the curriculum, plays in promoting Islamic Arabic national identity. Yet, domination breeds resistance. This can take many forms, from passive resistance, such as refusing to attend history classes (teacher, personal communication, December 2005), to violent reactions. It can also manifest itself in extremely catastrophic situations such as the half-century of civil war and loss of two million human lives.

In their study of the role Radio Rwanda played in inciting violence during Rwanda's genocide, Kellow and Steeves (1998) state that one of the frames that the radio perpetuated is the 'risk and danger frame', which puts citizens in a defensive situation and provokes horror against a real or perceived enemy. The ruling elite, through different social institutions, notably the schools media, and religious organizations, aim to reinforce the

theme of a 'nation at war'. As evidenced throughout the textbooks, there are enormous images and poetry of war. Heroism is associated with war, and history lessons are centred on the history of wars. Islamic history is summarized as a history of wars against *kufar* (non-Muslims/infidels). Inflammatory statements, such as 'enemies' armies', 'enemies' 'conspiracy', and 'enemies' 'abhorrence', are diffused throughout the textbooks. 'Enemies' take many forms; sometimes they are *kufar*, other times they are Jews, and many times they are not specified, allowing the students the option to identify whoever they consider as their enemy. But the relentless message is that there are always enemies.

The community collective identity, especially in religion textbooks, is presented solely as Islamic collective identity. Thus, the concepts of brotherhood/sisterhood are limited to Muslims and do not embrace the whole of humanity. Accordingly, this exclusive collective identity denies any calls for national unity in a multi-religious country like Sudan. The message that is inculcated in primary school pupils is that whoever does not share our faith does not belong to us. With this univocal construction of collective identity, it is more likely that children will identify 'others', who are not Muslims, as their enemies. War has always been fuelled by the myth of an evil enemy:

> We first kill people with our minds, before we kill them with weapons. Whatever the conflict, the enemy is always the destroyer. We're on God's side; they're barbaric. We're good; they're evil (Keen 1991:18).

It is evident that the curriculum ties violence to religion in order to legitimize exclusion and othering. Statements such as 'with my faith and my weapon' (fourth grade Arabic book, p.121) and 'I swear I will never leave my goal as long as I carry my holy book and my gun' (sixth grade Arabic language textbook, p.42) are divisive. The language of these texts bears witness to the culture of violence fostered through the curriculum.

Conclusion

The education system exposes Sudanese students to ideologies that endanger prospects for peace in Sudan. An apparent manifestation of these ideologies is the xenophobic violence by *mujahedeen* (fighters) of Popular Defence Army. Mostly university and high school students in the South performed these violent acts during the 1990s. As revealed in narratives cited in the textbooks analyzed, the curriculum and education system in Sudan is a catalyst of violence, rather than acting as an agent of cohesion. In this regard, there is a critical need for radical curriculum reform in Sudan.

To attain a society that is inclusive at all levels, notably in as far as religious and linguistic diversity is concerned, a radical reform of the education system is inevitable. More importantly, the hegemonic ideology that guides curriculum development must be re-examined to counter hegemonic actions that favour the interests of the powerful. The people who have been historically marginalized and under/misrepresented must be empowered to question the status quo by raising fundamental and reflective questions about their circumstances. Conferences that involve all stakeholders (teachers, parents, educational scholars and activists) would be possible avenues to challenge the status quo. However, non-mainstream and marginalized groups such as people of South Sudan, Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Nubians just to name a few must be involved in providing solutions through the articulation of their concerns. This approach is guided by Freirean philosophy asserting that 'attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects' (Freire 1993:64). Any reform in the current curriculum policy should engage all Sudanese voices, especially those who have been denied representation throughout the history of independent Sudan. Such participation by the non-mainstream, marginalized groups should not be seen as a favour bestowed on them by some external party, but rather as the result of their conscientization (Freire 1993). Ultimately, the univocal expression of Sudanese identity needs to be questioned and stopped if Sudan's national unity is ever to be achieved.

Kabano Rutayisire, a key education stakeholder in Rwanda, stated that 'a closer look at the education system before the 1994 genocide reveals that the education system – and specifically the school curriculum – failed the nation' (Tawil and Harley 2004:18). Sudan has to learn from Rwanda's genocide. The kind of education and the culture it perpetuates failed, and will continue to fail the Sudanese nation, if no serious attention is paid to it.

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