Camus's concept of rebellion and the conflict in Darfur's region of the Sudan

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary social philosophers have tried to explain the reason behind revolt. But the debate surrounding the term rebellion in modern world politics has been controversial. This is due to the fact that self-interest has interfered with moral choices in which the rebellion should be examined. This dimension of rebellion in international politics and national level has led me to write this article and the argument is that rebellion can bring right and wrong results at the same time. It is obvious that we judge what is wrong when it is not in the interest of our concerns. And also, we judge about what is right when it is consistent with what we want. In these controversial circumstances, everything surrounding us may be right or wrong. And this is why I thought that writing about Albert Camus's concept of rebellion and how it could be related to current rebellion in the Darfur's region of Sudan would be a good idea. In this review article, I am not attempting to judge one side, but just pointing out the reasons that led to rebellion in that region.

Key words: Sudan, Darfur, data analysis, Camus, conflict, Sudanese government, Darfur's rebel, concept of rebellion, research methodology.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary social philosophers have tried to explain the reason behind revolt. Indeed, the debate concerning rebellion in modern world politics is still going on and it is hard to explain why people revolt. But some creative literature writers like Alberta Camus have given us some clarification of why we human beings revolt. This was my motive and a reason of why I thought that writing about Camus's concept of rebellion and related his idea to what had happened in the Darfur's region of Sudan in 2003 may give us an explanation of why we human beings revolt.

It is my view that in examining Camus's concept of rebellion, more could be discovered from his explanation than what we have learned when conflicts erupted at any point. It is very clear that when rebellion occurs, the innocent civilians are always the victims of conflict in any circumstance because rebellion does carry many variables. The dimension of rebellion in international politics and national levels

has led me to write this article by using Camus's concept of rebellion and the argument in this article is that a rebellion can indeed bring right or wrong results as we have seen from many civil wars worldwide.

Research methodology

After considering various approaches to methodology, I decided that data analysis would be the best for this research since its concentration was based on the facts and comparison with existing literature on the subject being pursued. Working with data simplified and organized the studies into traceable information when compared to the data of the studied area by breaking data into manageable units and discrete patterns. Therefore, the data for the research was collected from various forms such as journal articles, internet sources, books, International Agencies' documents and my own experiences as a Sudanese national. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) claimed that data are both evidence and clues for assessing a situation that is being studied. Data is referred to as rough materials that researchers collected from the world researchers for studying. So, various sources and my life experiences as a Sudanese national were the focus of this study to provide evidence to readers and researchers, who have little knowledge on the rebellion in the region of Darfur and how some contemporary thinkers have viewed rebellion in our world.

Camus's concept of rebellion

In the world of Camus, rebellion is caused by the response of no to the system of injustice that people are under. Camus saw a rebellion through the lens of expression to which people can say no, meaning that people had enough and no more inequality would be tolerated (1960). Camus claimed that from this movement the rebels find their voices and even though they say nothing but just no, people usually begin to desire and to judge their treatments. Rebellion in Camus's sense begins with recognition of boundaries, of limits that define one's essential selfhood to act out (Cruickshank, 1960). The part of people that cannot be reduced to mere ideas should be taken into consideration because passionate sides of their nature that served no other purpose than to be the act of living must be viewed carefully. Camus noted that rebellion could not exist without the feeling that, somewhere and somehow, one is right. To this extent, the movement of rebellion is founded on the categorical rejection of an intrusion that is considered intolerable and on conviction of absolute rights, which in the rebellion mind is self-sacrifice to the cause of their suffering (Camus, 1961). Camus believed that when people say no, they are affirming that there are limits and also that they are suspecting and wishing to preserve the existence of certain things on their sides of the borderline which always forced them to demand their share of joy within the main stream.

Camus believed that when people rebelled, they were confronted with an order of things that oppressed them which are inconsistent with the kinds of rights that exist. Therefore, people do assume that oppression beyond the limit is unacceptable because they cannot tolerate it any longer (Todd, 2000). Camus said clearly that revolution is not revolt; because revolt is at first a matter of the heart. Indeed, Camus was greatly motivated by the fact that people's feelings are always denied and therefore revolt is a way of expressing anger. Camus explained this, but there comes a time when it passes into the mind, where feelings become ideas, and spontaneous outbursts end in concerted action. Camus also described his feeling about the rebellion during the fighting in Paris this way:

> Yes, their reasons were overwhelming. They are as big as hope and as deep as revolt. They are the reasons of the future for a country that others tried for so long to limit to the gloomy rumination of her past. Paris is fighting today so that France may speak up tomorrow. The people are under arms tonight because they hope for justice for tomorrow. Some go about saying that it is not worthwhile and that with a little patience Paris will be liberated without effort. But this is because they vaguely sense that this insurrection threatens many things that would continue to stand if all took place otherwise (1960, pp. 35-36).

Indeed, there are number of reasons why people rebel against their government or their oppressors. Thus, reasons for rebellion do seem to change, in fact, with periods and civilization. Camus claimed that rebellion does not arise only and necessarily among the oppressed, but that it can also be caused by the mere spectacle of oppression of which someone else is the victim (Onimus, 1970). In tying the Camus's concept of rebellion for answering no to a system or injustice that caused rebellion; this answer was apparent in Darfur's conflict when it began seven years ago. This is a short insight on Camus's philosophical discourse on literature and how it has been applied in the world's space. Based on the philosophy of Camus, the conflict in Darfur will be examined whether this rebellion constitutes the reason for revolt in that region. Camus noted that metaphysical rebellion is the movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. This is metaphysical because it contests the ends of man and creation as this has been shown by the Sudan Darfur's rebellion.

Brief History of Sudan

Historically, Sudan's name comes from the Arabic word, which is 'Bilad al-sudan' or 'land of the blacks.' Sudan is known as the kingdom of Cush that was first ruled by the kingdom of Napata from 1000 to 270 BC. The second rule was by the kingdom of Meroe from 270 BC to 350 AD, which attained global historical significance (Beshir, 1968). However, in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, Cush conquered Egypt and in the 25th dynasty ruled a kingdom stretching from the Mediterranean to the sources of the Nile. The rulers

of Napata called themselves pharaohs and had their own written language (Duncan, 1957). Sudan is located in northeastern Africa. Sudan is bordered on the north by Egypt; on the east by the Red Sea, Eritrea, and Ethiopia; on the south by Kenya, Uganda, and Congo; on the west by the Central African Republic and Chad; and on the northwest by Libya (Beshir, 1968). Sudan is the largest country in Africa with an area of 966,757 square miles or 2,503,890 square kilometers. The general census of 1956 has recorded 597 ethnic groups and about 400 languages spoken in Sudan; however, some ethnic groups have similar languages (Voll, 1991).

A geographical location often gives us a way to understand what is going on in other parts of the world (Hill, 1984). Sudan is very clear about its location, but its borders are complicated because of the ethnic groups' locations, which often move to the other side of its borders. Darfur is a territory composed of three states: North, South, and West Darfur. Darfur is located in the northwestern region of Sudan, bordering Chad to the west, Libya to the northwest, and Central African Republic to the southwest (Global Security Organization, 2004). The people living on both sides of the 1,000 kilometer-long borders between Chad and Sudan have much in common. This border region is divided into three ecological bands: desert in the north, which is part of the Sahara and the least densely populated and most ecologically fragile zone; a central, fertile belt which includes the Jebel Marra mountains and is the richest agriculturally; and the southern zone, which although more stable than the north, is also prone to drought and sensitive to fluctuations in rainfall (Barnett & Abdelkarim, 1991).

On December 19, 1955, the British Parliament voted unanimously that Sudan should become a fully independent sovereign state. British and Egyptian troops left the country on January 1, 1956; the same day a five man Council of State was appointed to take over the powers of the governor general until a new constitution was agreed (Duncan, 1957). However, two years later on 17 November 1958, a bloodless army coup led by General Ibrahim Abboud toppled the Government of al-Azhari. On assuming power, General Abboud declared that he would rule through a thirteen-member army junta and that democracy was being suspended throughout Sudan in the name of honesty and integrity. Abboud was thinking that the country would be ruled as a secular state which would accommodate all ethnicities in the country, but in 1983 the Numieri's regime introduced the Islamic Sharia Law to Sudan that led to a new breakout of civil war in the Christian South. In the South, Dr. John Garang de Mabior led the rebellion forces and these forces were named the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) (Woodward, 1991).

Analysis of Darfur's rebellion

In order to gain a proper understanding of the reasons for the rebellion in Darfur region, there is a need to look briefly at the region's background. Clashes between the non-Arabs and Arabs have been going on in the region for centuries. These differences could be summed up as the ethnic groups' struggle for natural resources in the region. There have been several cases of regional ethnic groups' straddling both sides of the frontier between Chad and Sudan (Badal, 1986). Historically, there has been significant migration and trade across the border. While the regional peoples are mostly Muslims, there are also diverse groups based on differences of ethnically, linguistically, and culturally and this has played a significant role in border crossing (Sudan net press, 2005).

Sudan has two distinct major cultures, the Arab and Black-African, with hundreds of tribal divisions and language groups, which makes effective collaboration among them a major problem (Global Security Organization, 2002). And even by climate itself, Sudan is divided between the Arab and the Black-African, in that Arabs live in desert areas while Black-Africans live in tropical areas. There are two methods often used to describe the ethnicities in Darfur such as language and occupation; each has been used for some time to distinguish between indigenous groups. There is a sense that indigenous non-Arabs or African peoples historically do not speak Arabic at home and came to Sudan from the Lake Chad area centuries ago (Ehret, 2001). Those claiming Arab descent are Arabic speakers. Another classification that distinguishes each group from the others is agriculturalists versus pastoralists. Pastoralists are people who make a living from herding animals and selling their products, such as animal skins, meat, and milk. Agriculturalists are those who use industrial intensive technologies to produce food and market crops within a metropolitan area (Mohamad, 2004).

Despite the fact that there is some overlapping between the two descriptions, there are also important nuances. It has been asserted that Darfur's agriculturalists are generally composed of non-Arab or African ethnic groups known as 'Zurga,' or blacks, and include groups such as the Fur, Masaalit, Tama, Tunjur, Bergid, and Berti, who have lived and farmed in the central zone (The United States Department of States, 2004). As a result of diverse ethnicities in the region, Darfur has been affected by intermittent periods of conflict for several decades. Pastoralists from the north, including the northern Rizeigat, Mahariya, Zaghawa, and others, typically migrate south in search of water sources and grazing in the dry season which usually occurs in November to April of each year, since the mid-1980s, when much of the Sahel region was hit by recurrent episodes of drought and increasing desertification (Global Security Organization, 2002). There was no doubt that the southern migration of the Arab pastoralists provoked land disputes with agricultural communities. These disputes generally started when the camels and cattle of Arab nomads trampled the fields of the non-Arab farmers living in the central and southern areas of Darfur (Ehret, 2001). Some scholars

have mentioned that the disputes were resolved through negotiation between traditional leaders on both sides, but compensation for lost crops, and agreements on the timing and routes for the annual migration were not resolved.

In the late 1980s, however, clashes became progressively bloodier through the introduction of modern weapons. By 1987, many of the incidents involved not only the Arab tribes, but also Zaghawa pastoralists who tried to claim land from Fur farmers; some Fur leaders were killed (Human Rights Watch, 2004). The increase in armed banditry in the region also dates from this period, partly because many pastoralists lost all their animals in the devastating drought in Darfur of 1984-1985 and they in turn, raided others to re-stock their herds. There were also contentious political issues in the region. In Darfur, Arab tribes considered themselves not sufficiently represented in the Fur-dominated local administration and in 1986 a number of Arab tribes formed what became known as the "Arab alliance" (*Tujammo al Arabi*) aimed at establishing their political dominance and control of the region (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Meanwhile, Fur leaders distrusted the increasing tendency of the federal government to favor the Arabs. As a result of this mutual distrust, political detention of people who were non-Arabs began, because they were suspected of being rebel supporters. A good example of this is a claim made by the delegations from the Nuba Mountains that:

> Inmates are kept there against their will, they are forced to work for low wages or no wages, men are forced to become members of the People's Defense Forces (PDF), women are raped, and children have their identities changed. It is all part of the program for dismembering Nuba society. … It is also widely held that the peace camps are kept as a human shield' to discourage SPLA attacks (Ruiz 1998: 167).

There is no doubt that Arabs were furious because the people whom they believed deserve no rights at all had attacked them. Arabs from the northern Nile Valley had controlled the central government since independence in 1956. The Sudanese government was suspicious that the local people would force the Arabs away in most areas if they did not do more to protect Arabs (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2004). Regardless of last year's peace agreement between the Southern rebels and the Northern government which called for unity, there is a great skepticism if this peace will hold for long.

Furthermore, the fear of Arab domination was exacerbated by the Sadiq El Mahdi government (1986-1989) policy of arming Arab Baggara militias from Darfur and Kordofan known as 'murahileen' (Ruiz, 1998). Murahileen were similar to the militias currently involved in the Darfur conflict. Murahileen were a militia based in Darfur, employed by the El Mahdi government and its military successors for almost twenty years as a counterinsurgency force against the southern-based rebels, the SPLA (Verney, 2004). Murahileen were primarily concerned with raiding, looting, displacing, enslaving, and punishing the Dinka

and Nuer civilians living in SPLA territory from which the SPLA forces were in part drawn. One of the differences in the fighting was that the Sudanese government recruited volunteers to fight in the south on the basis of jihad, or a religiously sanctioned war, against the largely non-Muslim southerners (Ruiz, 1998). In Darfur, in contrast, the communities under assault were Muslim, but that did not serve to protect them from the same abusive tactics employed by the government of Sudan against the southern rebels.

In 1988-1989, the intermittent clashes in Darfur evolved into full-scale conflict between the Fur and Arab communities. The situation also developed a more political character, a pattern that was to be repeated numerous times throughout the 1990s (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Rather than working to defuse the tensions and implement peace agreements which would have resolved the problem, the opposite occurred. The Khartoum government inflamed tensions by arming the Arab tribes and neglecting the core issues underlying the conflict over resources. The Khartoum government ignored the need for the rule of law and problems with socio-economic development in the region. By ignoring this region, the Khartoum government encouraged many Darfurians to take arms against the Khartoum's control of the region. Since the conflict in Darfur intensified, the communities under attack, namely the Fur, Masaalit and Zaghawa, have begun to identify themselves as both African and marginalized. This new identity is in contrast to earlier then self-definitions as Sudanese or Darfurian (Human Rights Watch, 2004). They have increasingly seen the attacks on their communities by the Sudanese government as racially and ethnically motivated ones that need to be addressed by the international community. This means that the rebels have intensified their rebellion against the government troops so that their cases could be heard internationally.

The intensified conflict in Darfur between the government troops and the rebels could be related to the struggle in natural resources in the region. The conflict escalated in early 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebels attacked government forces and imposed their authority over Darfurians (Plaut, 2004). The government of Sudan was caught by surprise and had very few troops in the region, because the majority of troops were in war torn southern Sudan. There were a substantial numbers of troops around in Darfur, but they did not respond effectively. A contributing complication was that large proportions of the Sudanese soldiers in the region of Darfur were Darfurians and the governments distrusted them and were suspicious that they might be involved in the rebellion (Mulama, 2004). As a result, the Sudanese government response was to mount a campaign of aerial bombardment supporting ground attacks by an Arab militia, the so-called Janjaweed, who were recruited from local tribes and armed by the Sudanese government. The British Broadcasting Corporation (2005) has indicated that more than 180,000 people were killed during that rebellion alone.

Analysis of war and Camus's concept of rebellion

The conflicts in Sudan have a long history and all could be related to each others in one way or another. But there is a sense that all conflicts in the country have a political basis which has also acquired an ethnic dimension, with civilians being deliberately targeted on the basis of their ethnicity, as well as an economic dimension related to the competition between pastoralist Arabs and non-Arab farmers for land and water uses (Human Rights Watch, 2004). To this extent, one would claim that Sudan is on the verge of civil collapse, because it has failed to deal with the diversity of ethnicity. As a result of rebellions in Darfur, the Arab government reacted with strategies aimed at eliminating the non-Arabs in the region (Sudan net press, 2004). Even though most Darfurians are Muslim and could be considered as being Arabs, this has not been considered. Given these circumstances, it could be argued that the government of Sudan wanted to get rid of non-Arabs anywhere in Sudan, despite any affiliations to Islam (Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, 2004).

War often has no limits as to the extent of atrocities committed. However, Darfurians were rebelling to systematic actions which have marginalized them in their region. Their rebellion was aimed at demanding that the government of Sudan treat all its citizens with equal opportunity that every person needs for their well-being and economic prosperity. It is obvious that the rebellion in Darfur would not have occurred if there was proper treatment of all citizens based on equality. This is due to the fact most Darfurians are Muslim, but being Muslim did not prevent them from rebelling against the government when they see everything in the sense of marginalization. Camus believed that we people always rebelled against the injustice done to ourselves and to humankind (1960). Therefore, Darfurians' rebellion was to show that they needed the same fair treatment which is also enjoyed by the Northerners.

According to Camus's philosophy of revolt, the rebellion in the Sudan Darfur region was not based on the concept of revolution. However, the rebellion was simply rejection of a systematic injustice for which the Darfurians have been under for a period of times. This means that rebellion has limits because it aims at specific actions. The Darfurians' rebellion was indeed a matter of the heart crying because rebels were considering that their people had been oppressed and therefore they wanted to let the Sudanese government know that they were not happy with the way in which their people were being treated (Sudan net press, 2004). What they have not anticipated was the death which would follow when the opponent responded with overwhelming force to suppress the rebels. Moreover, the rebels were driven by their hearts and not the consequences that might come after rebellion. Camus observed that: "The human heart advances from nature

to violence, from violence to morality" (1960, p. 122). No rebels in Darfur ever anticipated that a great massacre of innocents would occur when they revolted against the government of Sudan.

The rebels were kept by their strong belief that the treatment of their people will be ended and as such equality will be applied in favour of everyone's needs in the region. For example, Camus pointed out that: "Our aim is to create an order of things which establishes a universal tendency toward good" (1960, p. 122). It is very clear that everyone who strives to revolt looks at many ways by which they could achieve what they want but this often does not go as planned. It is because people who are holding power do not want to listen to those who do not have any power. Power is defined by the capacity to influence others based on one's own will even though it is against those who are being influenced. However, there are reasons to believe that human life is more important than anything else and therefore taking the life of human beings out of greed makes the gain of power irrational (Camus, 1960). According to Camus's philosophy of rebellion, the conflict in Darfur region was well justified because it was based on the perception of making equality accessible to all citizens. Even though the rebellion has caused great massacres in the region, the concept of revolt still remained in the context of demanding justice for all.

Conclusion

Based on philosophy of Camus, the rebellion in the Sudan Darfur region was an expression of saying no to persistent injustice that had dragged on in the region. Indeed, Darfurians were convinced that the injustice that had been endured by their people for decades must be dealt with and the solution to it was rebellion against the Sudanese government. Camus believed that rebellion is born of the spectacle of irrationality, confronted with an unjust and incomprehensible condition when people do not see any further solution. This indicates that rebellion does not mean the murdering of people, but to just say that enough is enough. Rebellion is a way of saying that one cannot live any longer under these conditions if there are no alternatives to what exists at the present. This allows one to conclude that Darfur's rebellion was based on the idea of calling for equality and a fair justice in the region and not necessarily the idea of murder. However, death is likely when people have taken up guns even though it was not intended to happen.

This would allow me to suggest that nobody in this conflict will be cleaned from the abuses committed against civilians. Indeed, both parties could find a solution if they were working hard. Finding a solution would lead to forgiveness among themselves which is what Camus believed to be the healing approach in society. Forgiveness brings joy and not hatred and because human nature is filled with fallibility, there is need of forgiveness. This means that if the warring parties start with the recognition of their own

fallibility, it extends not only to their mental constructs, but also to their institutions so that there would be room for forgiveness which is the ultimate solution in society.

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