The Youngest Country in The World

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In July 2011 South Sudan gained independence from its northern neighbor after suffering decades of civil war. This article will examine the cultural factors that drove these civilizations to war, and how reconciliation might be achieved using Hofstede’s model of the Six Dimensions of Culture. There is no doubt that the challenges facing the two Sudans are enormous. Since the referendum for independence, the conflict has continued in a tragic scene that can only be described as a crisis. The answers to the problem are not clear-cut. This is one of the most complicated political environments on Earth, where only “27% of the adult population is literate,” (SSNBSS, 2018) the challenges to communication are far ranging and severe.

**War in Sudan**

Until 1946 North Sudan and South Sudan were administrated as separate countries under a condominium Anglo-Egyptian government. Like other areas in the region, the Brittish ignored the cultural sensitivities of the lands they were governing while sketching national borders. The two administrative Sudanese districts were to be merged into the single country of Sudan. The South is inhabited primarily by people who are religiously Christian, Dinka, and Nuer who identify culturally as sub-Saharan black Africans. The North, meanwhile, is populated by mostly Afroasiatic Muslim people, who draw their cultural background from Kushitic lineages tracing back to the Horn of Africa.

As the day approached, there was the perception that the leaders in the North were walking back the federalist structure that was agreed upon that would grant substantial autonomy to the South. War followed quickly. The Sudan region has been dominated by conflict and suffering that has yet to relent. South Sudanese were hopeful in 2011 that their newly found independence from the North would help to ease their hardship, but the conflict has continued to rage. The area, (one of the most poverty-stricken on earth) is a fault line where two very different cultures meet.

**The Six Dimensions of National Culture**

Research by Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (n.d.) suggests that six metrics can be studied to get a general understanding of a country’s culture. “Culture is defined as the collective mental programming of the human mind which distinguishes one group of people from another.” (Hofstede et al., n.d.) The six areas are identified as the Power-Distance index (PDI), Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV), Masculinity versus Feminity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI), Long-Term Orientation versus Short-Term Normative Orientation (LTO), and Indulgence versus Restraint (IND.) The researchers are careful to preface their results with the following disclaimer:

This does not imply that everyone in a given society is programmed in the same way; there are considerable differences between individuals. It may well be that the differences among individuals in one country culture are bigger than the differences among all country cultures. We can, nevertheless, still use such country scores based on the law of the big numbers, and on the fact, most of us are strongly influenced by social control. Please realise that statements about just one culture on the level of “values” do not describe “reality”; such statements are generalisations and they ought to be relative. Without comparison, a country score is meaningless. (Hofstede et al., nd)

Further research by Markov (2017) assigns a numerical value score to the indices described. The website hofstede-insights.com has used this research to develop a user-friendly interface to graphically compare Markov scores. Although scores for some of the world’s more turbulent countries have not yet been presented, educated inferences can be made by using the six metrics outlined. Extrapolating these principles to Sudan and South Sudan requires a degree of critical thinking and the realization that these areas are among the least reported on Earth. Information is scarce, incomplete, and often inaccessible to a resident of the United States who has no first-hand experience of the land and its people.

**Applying The Six Dimensions in Sudan**

PDI is a measure of the tendency of the less powerful members of a society to accept their role in the culture versus struggling to gain power. The smaller South has made evident throughout the decades of conflict their willingness to fight and die to provide for their people whereas the North accepts the hierarchal structure that was put in place by the Brittish. IDV is a measure of whether a person identifies more as an individual or as a part-of-a-whole. The Islamic teachings hold that all creations are symbols of Allah and that humans should not focus on individualities, whereas practices of the Dinka faith are known to dramatically express their individualities in the colorful clothing, jewelry, and traditional scaring. MAS measures a cultures propensity to honor the masculine and few religions in the world hold a higher esteem for their men than Islam. UAI is difficult to assess in one of the most poverty-stricken areas of the World. Although the North has more natural resources than their southern neighbors, insecurity is prevalent across both regions. The same difficulty in comparison exists in the LTO metric with war having been waged throughout the area for many decades, it is obvious that both countries are fighting protracted campaigns. IND is a bit easier to compare with the Islamic principle of “haram” or “forbidden,” things or actions that are strictly prohibited for followers of the faith. It is clear that these two societies are far apart culturally. The differences are significant enough that blood has been spilled on both sides for many decades. These differences, while sometimes less saturated, exist across all societies and in all countries. If there is to be reconciliation between the Sudanese people, education and communication must be actively practiced so that the things that make us individuals don’t end up destroying us.

***Applications to The United States***

The United States of America is home to people from nearly every culture that exists on Earth. There has certainly been unequal treatment of religious, cultural, and genders throughout our country’s short history. No society is immune from civil war. It is clear that the biggest gap that exists today is the socioeconomic gap where 1% of the population controls 99% of the wealth. We would be wise to educate ourselves to the nature of human desperation and what it can cause people to do. Education, however, is just one part of the equation. As our capacity for communication grows so does the ability for the disenfranchised to form groups putting power in numbers. These lessons should resonate with every leader, that if dissatisfaction of the population is allowed to fester unresolved, it can deteriorate quickly and leave lasting and seemingly irreparable damages.

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