THE MILITARY, THE STATE, AND THE PAN-AFRICAN IDEAL:

A Critical Reflection on South Sudan's Post-Independence Trajectory

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ABSTRACT:

This paper interrogates the role of militarism in post-conflict state-building in South Sudan and its implications for the broader Pan-African vision of people-centered governance and continental unity. Drawing on political analysis and empirical insights, the study explores how militarized statecraft—while instrumental in securing sovereignty—has often undermined democratic consolidation, civic participation, and inclusive nation-building (Jamie, 2015; Bereketeab, 2014). South Sudan's experience reveals the paradox of liberation movements, such as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), transforming into ruling elites that prioritize regime survival over transformative governance (Frahm, 2014). This trajectory reflects a broader pattern in post-liberation African states, where militarism becomes embedded in political institutions, challenging the emancipatory ideals of Pan-Africanism (Mamdani, 2001; Ake, 1996).

Pan-Africanism, historically rooted in anti-imperialism, solidarity, and social emancipation, faces a crisis of relevance when confronted with militarized governance structures that marginalize popular agency (Adi, 2018; Nkrumah, 1963). The persistence of coercive power in African politics underscores the fragility of post-colonial state formation and the failure to institutionalize participatory governance (Jamie, 2015). By situating South Sudan within

broader debates on the state and political movements in Pan-Africanism, this paper calls for a reimagining of Pan-Africanism that centers demilitarization, grassroots empowerment, and regional solidarity as pillars of a renewed liberation agenda.

1. INTRODUCTION

South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, gained independence on 9 July 2011 following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 and a referendum that overwhelmingly endorsed secession from Sudan. Independence was heralded as the culmination of decades of liberation struggle led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Yet, the promise of sovereignty quickly gave way to political instability, militarization, and fragile statehood. Scholars note that the SPLM's transformation from a liberation movement into a ruling party entrenched militarized governance, privileging regime survival over democratic consolidation (Frahm, 2014; Wassara, 2015). The reconstitution of the SPLA into the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF) did not fundamentally alter its politicized character. Instead, military elites maintained dominance over political processes, undermining civilian oversight and perpetuating cycles of violence (Kindersley, 2022; Johnson, 2018). This militarization of governance has eroded public trust, delegitimized state institutions, and obstructed efforts at inclusive nation-building. Comparative African experiences—such as Uganda, Rwanda, and Nigeria—illustrate similar patterns where militarized liberation movements struggled to transition into democratic governance (Mamdani, 2001; Heinecken, 2020).

Alongside this trajectory, the pursuit of Pan-African ideals by South Sudanese leadership remains under-explored, though it occupies a central place in the rhetoric of postcolonial leaders. Multiple forms of official communication in 2011 articulated a distinct South Sudanese vision embedded within broader ideals of African freedom and self-determination defined by continental leaders. The state has sought legitimacy through Pan-African rhetoric in various ways since independence, including framing state failure post-2013 in distinctly Pan-African terms. Yet, the current moment is marked by a disconnection between declared political objectives—nation-building and alignment with Pan-African norms—and the realities on the ground. The unravelling of internal cohesion has transformed South Sudan's armed forces into a political liability rather than an asset for the ruling elite. Armed forces are implicated in the majority of violations documented by monitoring organizations, hindering deliberative processes and reducing negotiations to stalemates rather than meaningful dialogue (Gatehouse, 2017).

South Sudan's trajectory is therefore not an isolated case but part of a broader Pan-African dilemma: the paradox of liberation movements transforming into ruling elites that perpetuate militarized governance. Pan-Africanism, historically rooted in anti-imperialism, solidarity, and people-centered emancipation (Nkrumah, 1963; Adi, 2018), faces a crisis of relevance when confronted with militarized statecraft that marginalizes popular agency. While independence was celebrated as a Pan-African victory against oppression, post-independence militarization reflects the broader challenge of reconciling state-centric Pan-Africanism with people-centric Pan-Africanism (Mamdani, 2001). The persistence of coercive power in African politics underscores the fragility of post-colonial state formation and the failure to institutionalize participatory governance (Jamie, 2015). By situating South Sudan within these debates, this study contributes to reimagining Pan-Africanism as a project that must prioritize demilitarization, grassroots empowerment, and regional solidarity. It underscores the need to

move beyond militarized liberation legacies toward a renewed Pan-African agenda that centers inclusive governance and continental unity.

CONCEPTUAL, THEORETICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Introduction

The study of militarism and state-building in Africa requires both conceptual clarity and historical grounding. South Sudan, as the continent's youngest nation, embodies the paradox of liberation and militarization. Born out of a protracted struggle for independence, its sovereignty was celebrated as a Pan-African victory against oppression. Yet, the persistence of militarized governance has undermined democratic consolidation, eroded institutional legitimacy, and raised questions about the relevance of Pan-African ideals in contexts where coercive power dominates political life. This chapter provides a framework for analyzing the military's role in South Sudan's state-building process, situating it within broader African and Pan-African debates.

2.2 Militarism and State-Building in Africa

Militarism refers to the pervasive influence of military institutions and practices in shaping political authority, governance structures, and societal relations. It extends beyond the use of armed force to encompass the militarization of political culture, where coercion and command hierarchies dominate civilian institutions (Luckham, 1998). In post-conflict contexts, militarism often emerges as both stabilizing and destabilizing: while militaries provide security and territorial integrity, they also undermine democratic consolidation by entrenching elite dominance and suppressing dissent (Ake, 1996; Hutchful, 2000).

State-building, by contrast, is the process of constructing legitimate, resilient institutions capable of delivering public goods, enforcing the rule of law, and fostering national cohesion (Fukuyama, 2004; Rotberg, 2003). In Africa, the challenge lies in reconciling militarized liberation legacies with the demands of inclusive governance. South Sudan exemplifies this dilemma: the military, born out of liberation struggles, remains central to state power but has hindered institutional development and accountability (Johnson, 2018; Wassara, 2015).

2.3 Pan-Africanism and Statehood

Pan-Africanism emerged as an ideology of resistance against colonialism and racial oppression, emphasizing solidarity, emancipation, and continental unity (Nkrumah, 1963; Adi, 2018). Its people-centered vision sought to empower African populations through participatory governance, social justice, and collective sovereignty. Even after independence, Pan-African ideals remain relevant in promoting democracy, prosperity, and equity across Africa (Ake, 1990).

South Sudan's independence in 2011 opened a new chapter within this discourse. Political independence was celebrated as a Pan-African victory, yet militarism contradicted the emancipatory aspirations of Pan-Africanism. Local reflections, such as those articulated in the *Juba al-Mahaba* newspaper (Nelson Moro et al., 2017), emphasized that "true independence" must constitute political, economic, and cultural autonomy—an especially adamant position in the face of elite domination by a "new colonial power."

2.4 Liberation Movements and the Paradox of Militarized Governance

Liberation movements across Africa, from the SPLM in South Sudan to the ANC in South Africa and the RPF in Rwanda, relied on militarized strategies to achieve independence. While these movements succeeded in dismantling colonial or oppressive regimes, their

transformation into ruling parties often entrenched militarized governance structures (Clapham, 1998; Frahm, 2014).

This paradox lies in the dual legacy of liberation: militaries are celebrated as agents of sovereignty yet criticized for perpetuating authoritarianism and elite capture. In South Sudan, the SPLM/A's transition into state leadership illustrates this contradiction. The military, once a symbol of resistance, became a vehicle for ethnic patronage, corruption, and exclusion, undermining the very ideals of liberation (Kindersley, 2022). This trajectory reflects a broader African pattern where militarized liberation movements struggle to reconcile their revolutionary ethos with democratic governance (Mamdani, 2001; Heinecken, 2020).

2.5 The Military in African Political Transformations

Military influence has played a critical role in the political transformations of many post-colonial African states. Armed forces often accumulate authority at the expense of civilian institutions, impeding the emergence of cohesive states (Cock, 2004). In South Sudan, repeated insurgencies and civil war have entrenched military dominance, with political authority assuming a military dimension far more than in other African contexts.

Independence, associated with the Pan-African ideal of integration, raises additional questions about how security and authority are distributed and how military scripts are configured regionally (Esterhuyse & Mokoena, 2018). The persistence of militarized governance underscores the fragility of post-colonial state formation and the difficulty of institutionalizing participatory governance.

2.6 Theoretical Lenses for Analysis

Several theoretical frameworks provide insight into the military's role in state-building in South Sudan:

- **Weberian Authority**: Max Weber (1922) emphasized the state's monopoly on legitimate violence and rational-legal authority as the foundation of institutional legitimacy. In South Sudan, militarization undermines this principle by eroding civilian oversight and weakening bureaucratic structures (Nikolakakis, 2024).

- **Realist Perspectives**: Realist peace theory highlights power dynamics, coercion, and security dilemmas in fragile states. It explains regional variations in South Sudan, where Equatoria has experienced relative stability compared to the militarized instability of Bahr-el-Ghazal and Greater Upper Nile (Jamie, 2015).

- **Pan-African Thought**: Pan-Africanism critiques militarized governance as antithetical to people-centered liberation. Scholars such as Ake (1996) and Adi (2018) argue that militarism undermines democratic participation and continental solidarity. Situating South Sudan within Pan-African debates highlights the need to reimagine liberation beyond militarized statecraft, emphasizing demilitarization, grassroots empowerment, and regional unity.

Together, these lenses provide a multi-dimensional framework for analyzing the paradoxical role of the military in South Sudan's state-building process, while situating the case within broader African and Pan-African debates on governance, legitimacy, and emancipation.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the military's role in South Sudan's state-building process. By defining militarism and state-building, situating South Sudan within Pan-African debates, examining the paradox of liberation movements, and

applying theoretical lenses, the chapter underscores the complexity of militarized governance in post-conflict contexts.

South Sudan's experience is emblematic of broader African dilemmas: the persistence of militarized liberation legacies, the tension between state-centric and people-centric Pan-Africanism, and the struggle to reconcile sovereignty with democratic governance. Understanding these dynamics is essential for reimagining both state-building and Pan-Africanism in ways that prioritize inclusive governance, institutional resilience, and continental unity.

3. SOUTH SUDAN'S PATH TO INDEPENDENCE: PROMISES AND PERILS

Almost sixty years after the Pan-African Congress convened in Accra, Ghana, to reaffirm the urgent need for African unity and solidarity, South Sudan became the continent's youngest state in July 2011. At independence, the country was widely expected to pursue a national agenda consistent with the Pan-African vision. President Salva Kiir Mayardit highlighted three expectations for the new state: provision of basic services to citizens, widespread local participation in nation-building, and observance of human rights. However, the promotion of broad societal aspirations at independence was accompanied by a narrative of elite ambition.

Many South Sudanese considered their country liberated from colonialism, elevating it to full international statehood. However, the new government could not secure the legitimacy associated with the exclusive entitlement to exercise national authority and remain accountable only to those in the territory identified as "the nation." Pan-Africanist principles underscored this predicament: statehood had been attained, yet forms of governance remained contested. Despite Kiir's assertions that South Sudan would be the first state to formulate its post-

independence constitution in an inclusive manner, the government quickly regained a monopoly on constitutional design (Annabel Gatehouse, 2017).

3.1. nationwide Expectations of the Pan-African Vision

On 9 July 2011, South Sudan formally proclaimed its independence from Sudan. Celebratory fervour erupted across the region, infused by widespread hopes that the birth of the world's youngest nation would engender renewed commitment to the dream of a united and prosperous Africa. Overhanging many initial expectations were lofty proclamations from the newly independent government, including the promise to elevate Juba as the "capital of Pan-Africanism." Yet, amid competing assumptions about the meaning of the Pan-African ideal and its application to the newly independent state, not all interpretations were interpreted in an empowering light.

South Sudan marked its independence via the urging of jubilant street festivities, where celebratory moods contrasted the anticipation of potential threats. Pan-African sentiments were evoked among citizens and scholars alike. Those sympathising with this aspiration heralded independence as an opportunity to replace a colonial-imposed identity with one rooted in African values, while others gazed warily at the notion of subjugating a national identity to an all-encompassing continental identity (Adeyemo, 2018).

3.2. Early State-Building and Institutional Fragility

South Sudan embarked on a challenging state-building trajectory in the immediate aftermath of independence, with the ideal of establishment 'of a democratic, united and prosperous nation' strongly articulated (Nelson Moro et al., 2017). Overall governance remained heavily centralized without a clear constitutional framework, while deliberative processes at both political and technical levels did not effectively establish institutional arrangements (Setu

Tafese Desta Tamrat Desta, 2015). Early proposals and legislation reflected an orientation toward a strong presidential regime and weak checks on power. Rapid expansion of the civil service further absorbed the scant domestic capacity, while the ruling party evolved into predominantly an 'infrastructural and personalist state' and a 'hybrid of regime and pathology.' The ability to build an effective state through untouched institutional reservoirs at independence became overestimated, institutional fragility quickly appeared in the governance and security sectors and public administrative system.

4. MILITARISM, CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS, AND STATE-BUILDING IN SOUTH SUDAN

4.1 The Military-State Nexus in the Post-Independence Era

South Sudan's post-independence trajectory has been defined by a persistent military-state nexus. Prolonged violence, a counterproductive peace process, and sustained dependency on external "services" have thwarted the emergence of a durable and capable state, constricting the implementation of promised objectives (Tadesse, 2017). Civil-military relations remain ambivalent amid a lack of progress on significant governance issues. Vague constitutional provisions and governance gaps continue to stymie transparency, civilian oversight, and performance evaluations of the armed forces (Cock, 2004). The allocation of a substantial portion of the national budget to security institutions further amplifies the ambiguity surrounding the military's role in post-independence South Sudan.

4.2 Internal Security Challenges and Military Interventions

South Sudan faces numerous security and economic challenges that threaten state-building and stability. Political instability and armed conflicts among various ethnic groups and rebels, some supported by external actors, have caused wide-scale violence. Despite independence, tribalism

and unresolved security issues persist. Most public services remain dependent on foreign aid, exacerbating poverty. These factors create a difficult environment for developing effective institutions and legitimacy (Setu Tafese Desta Tamrat Desta, 2015).

The military has repeatedly intervened in the political sphere, substantially limiting civilian governance. The July 2016 conflict between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar involved military units, and redeployment decisions by the top brass precipitated government changes (Moses Maikomo & Ngomba, 2018). Such interventions underscore the military's centrality in political decision-making and its capacity to reshape governance outcomes.

4.3 Civil-Military Relations and Governance Gaps

Scholars note a continuum of militarisation characterising SPLM/A governance, linking post-independence arrangements to earlier periods of armed struggle. Pan-African aspirations and narratives were dwarfed by a substantial military institutional footprint underpinning state authority (Tadesse, 2017). The military–state characterisation of South Sudan's post-independence arrangement signalled recurring dilemmas associated with civilian–military relations, governance gaps around transparency, and weak oversight (Annabel Gatehouse, 2017). Academic references to a "military–political complex" and "hypercivilianisation" highlight the dissonance between civilian governance ideals and militarized realities (Nelson Moro et al., 2017).

4.4 Historical Roots of SPLM/A and Militarized Liberation

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) emerged in 1983 as a militarized liberation movement against the Khartoum regime, combining armed struggle with political mobilization. Its military wing, the SPLA, became the dominant institution, embodying both

the aspirations of independence and the coercive structures of war (Johnson, 2016). The SPLM/A's reliance on militarized strategies reflected broader African liberation struggles, where armed resistance was often the only viable path to sovereignty (Clapham, 1998).

This militarized legacy carried significant consequences. The SPLA's hierarchical command structures, ethnic recruitment patterns, and reliance on coercion entrenched a culture of militarism that persisted beyond independence (Rolandsen, 2015). As Mamdani (2001) notes in the Rwandan context, liberation armies often transform into ruling elites that prioritize regime survival, reproducing authoritarian tendencies rather than fostering inclusive governance. South Sudan's liberation trajectory thus laid the foundation for a militarized state-building process.

4.5 Transition to SPLM-led Governance and SSPDF Dominance

Following independence in 2011, the SPLM transitioned into the ruling party, while the SPLA was reconstituted as the South Sudan People's Defence Forces (SSPDF). Despite formal rebranding, the military retained its politicized character, with commanders maintaining strong ties to ruling elites (Wassara, 2015). Instead of subordinating the military to civilian authority, governance structures were subsumed under militarized logics, with the SSPDF acting as both guarantor of sovereignty and political actor.

This dominance reflects a broader pattern in post-liberation African states, where ruling parties struggle to demilitarize politics. In South Sudan, the SSPDF's involvement in political decision-making, resource allocation, and ethnic patronage networks has undermined institutional development and weakened civilian oversight (Kindersley, 2022). The military's centrality in governance has perpetuated cycles of instability and hindered democratic consolidation.

4.6 Militarism as Regime Survival vs. Democratic Consolidation

Militarism in South Sudan has primarily functioned as a mechanism of regime survival rather than democratic consolidation. Ruling elites have relied on the military to suppress dissent, maintain control over resources, and secure political dominance (Ilarious, 2021). This reliance has created a governance system where coercion substitutes for legitimacy, eroding public trust in state institutions.

Comparative African experiences highlight this paradox. In Uganda, militarized governance under the National Resistance Army entrenched elite dominance, while in Rwanda, military reform facilitated national unity but at the cost of political pluralism (Heinecken, 2020). In South Sudan, militarism has consistently undermined democratic processes, shrinking political space and preventing the emergence of accountable institutions. As Huntington (1976) argued, professionalization of the military is essential for democratic consolidation; yet in South Sudan, the SSPDF remains politicized and resistant to reform.

4.7 Ethnic Politics, Elite Capture, and Institutional Fragility

Ethnic politics further complicates the role of militarism in South Sudan's state-building. The SSPDF has been dominated by ethnic recruitment patterns, particularly among the Dinka, exacerbating divisions and fueling mistrust among other groups (Liaga & Wielenga, 2020). This ethnicization of the military has transformed it into a vehicle for elite capture, where ruling elites exploit ethnic loyalties to consolidate power and marginalize rivals.

Institutional fragility is both a cause and consequence of this dynamic. Weak bureaucratic structures, pervasive corruption, and lack of constitutional oversight have allowed militarized elites to operate with impunity (Labuda, 2023). The result is a governance system characterized by exclusion, instability, and recurrent conflict. As Rotberg (2003) emphasizes, state-building

requires strong, accountable institutions; yet in South Sudan, militarism has eroded institutional resilience, perpetuating fragility and undermining nation-building efforts.

4.8 Conclusion

South Sudan's post-independence experience illustrates the paradox of militarized state-building. The SPLM/A's liberation legacy entrenched militarism at the heart of governance, and the reconstitution of the SPLA into the SSPDF did little to alter its politicized character. Civil-military relations remain fraught, with governance gaps, ethnic divisions, and elite capture undermining institutional resilience.

The military has functioned less as a stabilizing institution than as a mechanism of regime survival, perpetuating cycles of instability and obstructing democratic consolidation. Comparative African experiences underscore that militarized liberation movements often struggle to transition into democratic governance, highlighting the need for reforms that prioritize civilian oversight, professionalization of the armed forces, and inclusive state-building.

South Sudan's trajectory demonstrates that without demilitarization and institutional accountability, the promise of independence risks being overshadowed by coercion, exclusion, and fragility. Addressing these challenges is central to reimagining state-building in South Sudan and aligning it with Pan-African ideals of liberation, solidarity, and people-centered governance.

5. INTERNAL FRAGMENTATION, EXTERNAL PRESSURES, AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS

The South Sudanese liberation movement pioneered by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) / Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was characterized by an integrated vision of Pan-Africanism, democracy, national unity, and equitable development. The SPLA propelled the movement to independence in 2011. Emancipation from Khartoum offered unprecedented scope for articulating the implications of the liberation vision, yet successive efforts at national cohesion and development have been compromised by an increasingly fragmented political landscape. Since 2013, a recurrent cycle of competition among elite factions fed armed conflict, displacement, and acute socioeconomic stress. The SPLM- and SPLA-led...

5.1. Ethnic Federations, Power Sharing, and National Cohesion

The Civil War of 2013 fractured the governing coalition founded at independence, leading to the institutionalization of ethnic federations in 2015. The tumultuous trajectory of the post-independence era thus raises critical questions about national cohesion and state legitimacy. Specifically, how do ethnic federations and power-sharing arrangements shape the quest for nation-building in post-independence South Sudan? The broader context of South Sudan's independence from Sudan in 2011 underpinned a nationwide expectation to realize the aspirations embodied in the Pan-African vision. Proclaimed objectives in the nascent phase included unity and democracy, but the aspirational character of these goals permitted competing interpretations across communities. Building upon the autonomy won in the 2005 comprehensive peace agreement and independence from the central state in 2011, a top-down framework of federalism and decentralization governed institutional design. Administrations in Juba adopted extensive devolution measures, formally recognizing efforts to create a more unitary "federal" system contrary to ex ante expectations. Only six months after independence, plans to shift toward greater unification emerged, raising questions regarding non-compliance

with the self-determined agreement. Empirical accounts suggested that federalism and decentralization were pursued in distinct yet non-exclusive manners, thereby internalizing the dilemma of secessionists versus unionists prevailing even during the war of liberation (Fiseha, 1970). Subsequent proposals sought to consolidate this top-down, centralizing interpretation either via federalism itself or through alternative paradigms.

5.2. External Actors, Peace Agreements, and Dependency Risks

The country became independent in 2011 with anticipation of building a united state focused on national reconstruction and Pan-African ideals rather than ethnic or sectarian divisions. Independence presented South Sudan with an opportunity to construct a state without the constraints imposed by external colonial powers during the previous century. Yet the socio-economic conditions constrained this vision, leading instead to fragmentation and entrenchment of these very elements. Such independence without Pharaonic foresight resulted in institutional designs that, instead of promoting cohesion, allowed divisions to fester after the departure of colonial powers. Freedom was gained from externally imposed unity, but independence revealed the lack of national unity. The emergence of the state brought expectations for effective governance, economic transformation, security, and public-service delivery, to which the newly established government was ill-equipped to respond. This disjuncture between aspiration and capability accelerated the erosion of the legitimacy deemed essential for a new state that failed to unite the people and to address their expectations (Tadesse, 2017).

6. THE PAN-AFRICAN IDEAL REVISITED: ASPIRATIONS AND REALITIES

Six years after independence, South Sudan stood at a crossroads. The lofty ideals proclaimed at the moment of national birth — democracy, good governance, human rights, and inclusive

development — resonated deeply with Pan-African norms. Yet the parallel task of building a viable, capable, and legitimate state remained paralyzed, hindered by dependence on external actors for security, economic stability, and political legitimacy (Lykes Washburne, 2013). By July 2016, the absence of cohesive state structures had elevated the Armed Forces, Supplies, and Logistics command into the central pillar of governance, entrenching military power at the very core of the state.

6.1 Democracy, Human Rights, and Inclusive Development

The aspirations of independence encompassed the full spectrum of societal, political, and economic advancement, underpinned by freedoms enshrined in Pan-African constitutional jurisprudence. The African Union (AU), steeped in the pedagogy of Pan-Africanism, articulated these ideals as part of a collective postcolonial vision of freedom (Nelson Moro et al., 2017). South Sudan's accession to the AU symbolized continental endorsement of these freedoms.

Yet, in practice, the nation diverged from this ideal. The secular nationalist model of independence deepened fragility within power-sharing arrangements, while reliance on external sources of security and finance impeded reform. Pan-African freedom, in South Sudan's trajectory, became tethered to questions of legitimacy and resource distribution — freedoms conspicuously absent. Export-led reliance on hydrocarbons reinforced vulnerability and narrowed the horizon of democratic consolidation.

6.2 Economic Diversification, Resource Management, and State Legitimacy

South Sudan's economy rests precariously on oil, which accounts for more than 95% of external income. Reconstruction needs are immense, institutions weak, and infrastructure rudimentary. Austerity and restrictive monetary policies have curtailed investment,

exacerbating vulnerability during oil price slumps. High dependence on hydrocarbons hampers diversification and heightens fragility.

To arrest decline, determined policies aligned with Developmental Economic Governance (DEG) are essential. Political measures must complement economic reforms to enable state formation, provide livelihoods, and advance toward the Pan-African ideal (Nelson Moro et al., 2017).

7. REIMAGINING PAN-AFRICANISM

7.1. Demilitarization as Renewed Liberation

Militarism has long undermined Pan-African emancipatory ideals. Liberation movements institutionalized armed governance, perpetuating authoritarianism and elite capture (Clapham, 1998; Mamdani, 2001). Reimagining Pan-Africanism requires demilitarization: reducing military dominance, strengthening civilian oversight, and professionalizing armed forces (Heinecken, 2020). In South Sudan, curbing militarized statecraft is critical to restoring legitimacy and enabling inclusive governance.

7.2. Grassroots Empowerment and Civic Participation

Pan-Africanism's transformative potential lies in empowering ordinary Africans. Grassroots movements and civil society are essential for participatory governance (Ake, 1996). Militarized regimes suppress civic voices, but reimagined Pan-Africanism must deliberately foster inclusive spaces, support local initiatives, and reflect diverse aspirations. In South Sudan, grassroots empowerment can counterbalance militarized elites and strengthen cohesion.

7.4. Regional Solidarity and Continental Integration

Pan-Africanism envisions continental unity as a pathway to sovereignty and development (Nkrumah, 1963; Adi, 2018). Militarized conflicts and authoritarianism have weakened cooperation, but revitalized solidarity requires strengthening institutions like the AU and IGAD, advancing peacebuilding, and fostering integration. Collective security must underpin continental unity, ensuring it remains people-centered.

7.5. Towards a People-Centered Pan-African Future

The future of Pan-Africanism depends on transcending elite-driven militarism and embracing a genuinely people-centered project. This vision emphasizes participatory governance, social justice, and inclusive development, reclaiming Pan-Africanism's emancipatory ethos (Bereketeab, 2014). For South Sudan and other post-liberation states, confronting militarized governance and empowering grassroots actors is essential. By centering people rather than elites, Pan-Africanism can remain relevant in addressing Africa's contemporary challenges — inequality, authoritarianism, climate change, and global marginalization.

8. POLICY AND SCHOLARLY REFLECTIONS: GOVERNANCE REFORM AND PAN-AFRICAN PATHWAYS IN SOUTH SUDAN

The independence of South Sudan on 9 July 2011 was heralded as a triumph of Pan-African solidarity, celebrated with optimism and regional endorsement. Yet, within a few years, the nation's trajectory revealed deep contradictions between aspirations and realities. Militarized governance, economic fragility, and reliance on external actors undermined the promise of democracy, human rights, and inclusive development. This paper synthesizes policy implications and scholarly debates, situating South Sudan within the broader paradox of militarized liberation movements in Africa, while offering pathways for reform aligned with Pan-African ideals.

8.1 Lessons for Governance Reform in South Sudan

South Sudan's militarized state-building underscores the urgent need for **security sector reform (SSR)** and governance restructuring. Scholars argue that unchecked militarism perpetuates fragility by eroding institutional legitimacy and public trust (Adeba, 2020; Deng et al., 2019). A comprehensive reform agenda must include:

- **Demilitarization and civilian oversight**: Constitutional frameworks must delineate military responsibilities. Oversight mechanisms — parliamentary committees, independent judiciaries, and watchdog institutions — are critical to curbing impunity (Labuda, 2023).

- **Professionalization of the armed forces**: Professional militaries insulated from partisan politics are more likely to support democratic consolidation (Huntington, 1976; Heinecken, 2020). Depoliticizing recruitment and strengthening training standards are essential.

- **Inclusive governance and ethnic balance**: Ethnic dominance within the military exacerbates mistrust. Addressing recruitment imbalances and fostering inclusive leadership can enhance cohesion (Liaga & Wielenga, 2020).

- **Anti-corruption and resource transparency**: Aligning military expenditures with developmental priorities is vital. Corruption in military spending has diverted resources from health and education, weakening legitimacy (Wohlmuth, 2020).

These reforms would stabilize South Sudan while aligning its governance trajectory with Pan-African ideals of participatory democracy and social emancipation.

8.2. Institutional Fragility and Historical Context

Early efforts to build a state revealed weaknesses in governance and public administration. The violence of October 2013, which assumed ethnic dimensions, shook the legitimacy of the new state. Power-sharing arrangements, including the appointment of multiple vice-presidents, failed to resolve fragmentation. Renewed fighting in July 2016 escalated into civil war, with opposition forces seizing key towns and undermining central authority. By 2014, the economy, currency, and banking system had collapsed, while famine and inflation devastated livelihoods (Nelson Moro et al., 2017).

The Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) prioritized militarism without establishing a robust political organization, impeding national unity and societal transformation. The imposition of liberal state-building models on a traditional, illiberal society proved problematic. Insufficient emphasis on reconciliation and political education squandered opportunities for peace. International actors compounded the crisis by enabling elite plunder rather than fostering broad-based empowerment (Tadesse, 2017).

8.3. Implications for Pan-African Unity and Continental Institutions

South Sudan's trajectory reflects broader challenges facing Pan-African unity. Militarism undermines the African Union's (AU) capacity to promote integration and peace. The AU's Peace and Security Council has struggled to enforce accountability in militarized states, weakening legitimacy (Bereketeab, 2014; Adam, 2012).

Key implications include:

- **Strengthening AU and IGAD mechanisms**: Regional bodies must prioritize SSR and civilian-led governance in peace agreements (Adeba, 2020).

- **Reconciling state-centric and people-centric Pan-Africanism**: Pan-Africanism must move beyond elite-driven integration to embrace grassroots participation (Adi, 2018; Nkrumah, 1963).

- **Regional solidarity in fragile states**: South Sudan's instability destabilizes the region, underscoring the need for collective responsibility among African states (Deng et al., 2019).

By confronting militarism, Pan-African institutions can reclaim their emancipatory role, fostering integration that is both state-driven and people-centered.

8.3. Contributions to Scholarly Debates

This study advances academic debates by situating South Sudan within the paradox of militarized liberation movements. Liberation armies, while instrumental in securing independence, often reproduce authoritarian structures when transformed into ruling elites (Clapham, 1998; Mamdani, 2001).

Key contributions include:

- **Expanding Weberian analysis**: Applying Weber's theory of legitimate violence to African post-conflict contexts highlights how militarism undermines rational-legal authority (Weber, 1922; Adeba, 2020).

- **Integrating Pan-African thought**: Demonstrating how militarized governance contradicts Pan-Africanism's emancipatory ideals enriches debates on its contemporary relevance (Ake, 1996; Adi, 2018).

- **Comparative insights**: Rwanda, Uganda, and Nigeria illustrate divergent trajectories — military-led stability, hybrid authoritarianism, and fragile democratization — offering lessons for South Sudan (Tripp, 2010; Rotberg, 2003).

- **Policy-oriented scholarship**: Bridging academic analysis with practical recommendations strengthens the relevance of scholarship to policymakers and continental institutions.

South Sudan's post-independence trajectory reveals the tension between Pan-African aspirations and militarized realities. Entrenched militarism, economic dependence, and fragile governance have hindered progress toward emancipation. Reimagining Pan-Africanism requires demilitarization, institutional reform, grassroots empowerment, and regional solidarity. By centering people rather than elites, Pan-Africanism can reclaim its relevance in addressing Africa's contemporary challenges — inequality, authoritarianism, climate change, and global marginalization.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1. Summary of Findings

This study interrogated the paradoxical role of militarism in South Sudan's post-independence state-building and its implications for the Pan-African project. While militarized statecraft was instrumental in securing sovereignty, its dominance has undermined democratic consolidation, civic participation, and inclusive nation-building (Johnson, 2016; Wassara, 2015). Ethnicized recruitment, elite capture, and corruption have eroded institutional legitimacy and weakened cohesion (Liaga & Wielenga, 2020; Labuda, 2023).

South Sudan's trajectory reflects a broader African paradox: liberation movements such as the SPLM, once heralded as emancipatory, often transform into ruling elites that prioritize regime survival over transformative governance (Frahm, 2014; Mamdani, 2001). Comparative insights from Rwanda, Uganda, and Nigeria demonstrate how militarism, once a tool of liberation,

becomes embedded in political institutions, reproducing authoritarian structures and challenging the emancipatory ideals of Pan-Africanism (Clapham, 1998; Tripp, 2010).

9.2. Reaffirming the Need for Demilitarization and Participatory Governance

The evidence underscores the urgent need for demilitarization and participatory governance in South Sudan and across Africa. Demilitarization requires professionalizing armed forces, subordinating them to civilian authority, and embedding accountability mechanisms to curb impunity (Huntington, 1976; Heinecken, 2020). Participatory governance demands empowering grassroots actors, fostering inclusive institutions, and ensuring that governance reflects the aspirations of diverse communities (Ake, 1996).

Without these reforms, state-building efforts will remain fragile, and Pan-Africanism will continue to face a crisis of relevance in militarized contexts. South Sudan's experience demonstrates that sustainable peace and democratic consolidation depend on reducing military dominance and strengthening civilian institutions.

9.3. Pan-Africanism as a Renewed Liberation Agenda

South Sudan's struggles illuminate the broader crisis confronting Pan-Africanism. Historically rooted in anti-imperialism, solidarity, and social emancipation (Nkrumah, 1963; Adi, 2018), Pan-Africanism falters when confronted with militarized governance structures that marginalize popular agency. The persistence of coercive power in African politics underscores the fragility of post-colonial state formation and the failure to institutionalize participatory governance (Jamie, 2015; Bereketeab, 2014).

Reimagining Pan-Africanism requires a deliberate shift from state-centric frameworks toward people-centered liberation. This entails demilitarization, grassroots empowerment, and

regional solidarity as pillars of a renewed liberation agenda. By reclaiming its emancipatory ethos, Pan-Africanism can remain relevant in addressing Africa's contemporary challenges—inequality, authoritarianism, climate change, and global marginalization.

9.4. Final Reflection

South Sudan's post-independence trajectory is not merely a national challenge but a continental lesson. It demonstrates that militarism, while securing sovereignty, undermines the very ideals of freedom, justice, and unity that Pan-Africanism espouses. The future of Pan-Africanism depends on transcending militarized legacies and building inclusive, democratic states that reflect the will of their people. In this vision, South Sudan's experience becomes a critical reflection on the unfinished project of Pan-African liberation and a call to renew its emancipatory promise for the 21st century.

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