



# SUDAN STUDIES

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

PAUL WILSON

The current situation in the Sudan, and possible future developments, were discussed at two recent gatherings in London. On the 28th November a one-day conference entitled 'The Horn of Africa: Its Political and Economic Future' was held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, when some 170 people attended. The programme was organised by Charles Gurdon and Jake Lloyd-Smith of the School's Geopolitics & International Boundaries Research Centre, in association with the Centre of African Studies, and included papers and discussion on events in Ethiopia and Somalia as well as the Sudan. After the opening addresses, the first seminar, 'The Break-up of the Nation State' included a paper by Bona Malwal entitled 'Unity or Secession — The Case of the Sudan, with John Luk of the SPLA as discussant. The panel on Foreign Relations, chaired by Dr. Peter Woodward, included a talk by a Sudanese Minister of State, Dr. Atabani, on 'Sudan's Foreign Policy since June 1989.' The afternoon seminar on the economy featured a paper by Dr. Richard Brown of Queensland University (presented by Dr. Charles Gurdon) entitled 'Expatriate Remittances, Capital Flight and the IMF: Sudan's Hidden Economy 1978-1987. The final panel of the day, dealing with domestic politics, included Dr. Peter Woodward's paper 'Sudan: A New Political Character?'

Some of the more disturbing aspects of recent times in Sudan were featured in an Exhibition and Seminar held at Friends' House, Euston Road, on 18th January. These were held to mark the seventh anniversary of the execution of Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, and the relaunch of the Sudan Human Rights Organisation. The seminar included speakers from Amnesty International and Africa Watch, among others, with discussion following. An evening programme was arranged at Conway Hall, featuring a concert by the leading Sudanese musicians and singers Mohammed Wardi and Yousif al-Mousali.

This issue of *Sudan Studies* is somewhat longer than recent numbers; it could, in fact, have been longer still, but increased printing and postage costs made this prohibitive. Because of this, the long article on Baggara history and culture mentioned in the previous editorial note has not been included in this issue; instead, it may either be included in parts, or issued as a separate occasional paper. Nevertheless, this eleventh number does include a broad range of news items, notices, articles and reviews, together with regular features such as the list of recent publications (to which additions are always appreciated) and Dr. Gurdon's summary of 'Current Affairs in the Sudan.' However, contributions — whether in the form of articles, reviews, letters or comments — are always sought, the principal criterion being relevance to the Sudan. These should be sent to me at 73 Monkmoor Road, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY2 5AT, England. Alternatively, I may be reached on Shrewsbury (0743) 352575.



## **SOCIETY NEWS**

### **BY SIMON BUSH, HONORARY SECRETARY SSSUK**

On behalf of the SSSUK Committee I am delighted to welcome all new members of the Society. I hope that you find this issue of *Sudan Studies* interesting and that you will be willing and able to contribute your expertise to the Society.

I am pleased to inform members of the Society that our membership remains fairly steady, although with the implications of the Second International Sudan Studies Conference our financial situation is a little shaky. I urge all members of the Society to renew their subscription. We always welcome new members. I am doing my best to recruit new members, but as ever I need your kind help.

About 80 members of the Society attended the AGM and Symposium in September at London House. We were treated to four most interesting sessions, including a preview of the film "Nuba Wrestling". I would like to thank all those who attended and in particular the speakers who made the day such a success.

We will meet for our next AGM and Symposium on Saturday 26th September 1992. A programme will be sent with your next issue of *Sudan Studies*. In the meantime if you are willing to present a short paper on a topic of your choice please let me have a title along with a brief outline of the content.

Having only two mailings a year it is difficult to keep members in touch with Sudan-related events. I would, however, be very grateful if members could keep me informed of any event related to Sudanese affairs.

Finally I would like to thank all members for their generous support of SSSUK. Over the last five years the Society has progressed only with your interest and help. If you have any proposals or comments about SSSUK I would be grateful if you would contact me.

[Please note the Secretary's address: 34 Bemsted Road, London E17 5JZ Telephone: 071-389 4366]



## **AN ANNOUNCEMENT FOR EX-SUDAN TEACHERS FROM SIMON BUSH**

A number of Sudan Teachers have suggested that it is now time to compile a book of experiences of our years in the Sudan.

I hope that as many Sudan Teachers as possible will be willing and able to contribute some thoughts of the Sudan. You perhaps have a story that you tell all your friends, some views of yourself (or colleagues) as a teacher, some thoughts of your school or posting, travelling, Sudan in general, particular characters - in fact anything that interests you. When published the book would give a unique insight to the Sudan.

I would be grateful if you would let me know if you are interested in contributing something, however brief, by writing to me at:

Simon Bush  
34 Bemsted Road  
Walthamstow  
London E17 5JZ

Please indicate the nature of your contribution in advance and then return your contribution to me by April 1992 (or sooner if possible).

I would hope that the book would be sold in aid of Sudanese charities. If you have any idea of suitable recipients please let me know. I would be very grateful if you would let your friends know of this request in the hope that they will also be able to contribute.

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## **SUDAN CHURCH ASSOCIATION**

In spite of all the problems in the Sudan there are many who have faithfully served the country and who have shared worship with the Sudanese in their cathedrals and village churches, who still have a deep interest in the trials through which they are passing. The Sudan Church Association provides a link for such folk, and there is a very active membership who support the Church through interest, financially and in prayer. Membership is £3 annually, though many generously give much more. The Treasurer is Mr. John Hunter (9, Ennismore Avenue, Guildford, Surrey GU1 1SP — 0483 66755). It is helpful if you request a Banker's Order from him, but best of all is by taking out a Covenant for then the Association can reclaim the Income Tax. Mr. Hunter can supply these forms



## CURRENT AFFAIRS IN SUDAN

*Dr Charles Gurdon continues his series on contemporary political and economic issues in the Sudan. The column is particularly based on reports prepared for the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), but the author stresses that this column presents a personal viewpoint and does not necessarily reflect the views of the EIU, SSSUK or anyone else.*

There is no doubt that the ability of Sudan's Islamic fundamentalist regime, which is led by Lt.-Gen. Omar Hassan al-Bashir, to remain in power has been under-estimated by most analysts. The combination of a number of factors — its repression and human rights violations against all of its perceived opponents; the emasculation of the conventional armed forces and the establishment of ideologically motivated parallel security forces which owe their allegiance to the regime rather than the country or people; the ineffectual opposition in northern Sudan and the recent splits within the rebel Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA); and its well organised, highly motivated, efficient, albeit ruthless, fundamentalist cadres — have all contributed to its surprising longevity.

Despite this, however, it faces the increasingly vociferous opposition not only of most Sudanese but also of all but a handful of Sudan's former allies. Indeed there are reasonably reliable reports that a well planned and potentially successful coup attempt has already been planned and could be imminent. At the same time, however, it has to be noted that both the northern opposition and the southern SPLA are probably weaker than at any time since the regime came to power in June 1989.

Because of its willingness to spill as much blood as is necessary in order to cling to power — thus making a peoples' uprising modelled on those in 1964 and 1985 a futile and impossible sacrifice — it will currently have to be the army which takes the initiative. It could just be that the regime's continuing emasculation of the conventional security forces, and its arming of the Islamic fundamentalist Peoples' Defence Force militia and the thugs of Revolution Security as parallel forces which owe their allegiance to the regime and not the state, will spur the armed forces into action. Indeed, unless action is taken in the near future, it could be too late because the regime will be too strong and the conventional armed forces too emasculated to mount a successful coup.

Unfortunately there is little doubt that having little or nothing to lose, and recognising that this could be their last opportunity to radically change Sudanese society, the Islamic fundamentalists will go down fighting. Whenever it happens, the next change of government will be far more bloody than any in Sudan's post-independence history. However, whether it lasts another six months, year or more the survival of the regime remains in serious doubt because of its alienation of the vast majority of Sudanese and it is only a matter of time before it is overthrown.

Unless there is a successful coup the prospects for Sudan's immediate political future appears to be very bleak. The opposition is split and in a state of turmoil and there are few prospects of any immediate improvement. The major northern political parties, who seem more interested in gaining power than in the welfare of the country, will continue to squabble amongst



themselves and thereby lose what little credibility they still have left. The splits within the SPLA, which have already seriously weakened what was, with the possible exception of the left wing parties, seemingly the only consistent and credible opposition, are likely to escalate. While John Garang is undoubtedly respected and feared he is not necessarily loved by most southerners. An increasing number now favour the secession of the south, which is already *de facto* independent, rather than continuing a seemingly endless and unwinnable war.

The result of this opposition weakness is that, unless there is a successful coup, the regime is likely to have a free hand in the coming months. This will mean the continuation and possible escalation of the current armed campaign in Darfur which is allegedly only against armed robbers but which has also resulted in destruction and depopulation of many non-Arab villages. The similar campaigns in other non-Arab regions, such as the Nuba Mountains, where the regime wants to destroy the non-Arab cultures will be escalated. The regime will use and encourage the SPLA's current internal fratricide to weaken the southern opposition and will mount a major military campaign now that the dry season has arrived. Meanwhile in Khartoum and other northern cities the repression and abuse of human rights are likely to escalate — particularly if the regime believes that a coup attempt is indeed imminent. The Islamisation of society will, as illustrated by the recent decision that all women must now be veiled, also continue apace.

Because of the regime's decision to replace a significant irrigated area under cotton with wheat while expanding cotton production in the rainfed areas it is estimated that the production of cotton, which accounts for about half of total exports, fell by 45% in 1990/91 and will then only increase by 23% in 1991/92. At the same time the combination of the drought and famine, transport problems, and the loss of important markets such as Saudi Arabia because of political problems will severely reduce the other major exports — sesame, sorghum and gum arabic — which are grown in the rainfed areas. The overall result is that exports will fall from around \$555 mn in 1990 to about \$425 mn in 1991 before recovering to around \$500 in 1992.

Despite the apparent lack of foreign exchange and the loss of important supplies of cheap oil the overall level of imports is likely to continue to increase by around 10-15% per year thereby reaching around \$1,325 mn in 1991 and \$1,400 mn in 1992. The resultant visible trade deficit is therefore likely to increase from \$661 mn in 1990 to a forecast \$900 mn in 1991 and possibly \$950 mn in 1992.

After the dramatic increase in the level of private transfers through official channels in the second half of 1989, which increased the net figure from £216 mn in 1988 to \$412 mn in 1989 as the result of the regime's campaign of intimidation, the level of expatriate remittances fell to an estimated \$320 mn in 1990. Sudan's political and economic instability and the ever-increasing disenchantment with the regime has probably reduced this significantly to around \$200 mn in 1991. The recent devaluation will have come too late to effect the 1991 total and the escalating black market rate will do little to encourage expatriates to remit their hard currency through official channels.



At the same time there has been a significant reduction in all but emergency food aid with many former donors reducing or curtailing their development aid and balance of payments support. The result is that the current account deficit, which had fallen from \$358 mn to \$152 mn in between 1988 and 1989, probably increased to around \$390 mn in 1990 and possibly over \$500 mn in 1991 before recovering to around \$475 mn in 1992.

There are, however, many alternative estimates for these figures. The EIU's Economic Risk Service forecasts that merchandise exports will fall from \$400 mn to \$350 mn between 1990 and 1991 before rising to \$400 in 1992. It expects that imports will fall from \$1,081 mn to \$1,070 mn and then rise again to \$1,090 mn so that the visible trade deficit will rise from \$681 mn to \$720 mn and then fall to \$690 mn in 1992. With expatriate remittances estimated to have fallen from \$412 mn in 1989 to \$320 mn in 1990 and only \$150 mn in 1991, the current account deficit is forecast to rise from \$152 mn to \$392 mn and \$515 mn in the same period and then fall to \$465 mn in 1992.

The US embassy in Khartoum prepared alternative figures which were published by the US Department of Commerce in September 1991. These forecast that exports will fall from \$325 mn to \$250 mn between 1990/91 and 1991/92 while imports will only fall from \$1,397 mn to \$1,100 mn so that the visible trade deficit will fall from \$1,072 mn to \$850 mn. The US embassy forecasts that, after having risen from \$1,218 mn in 1989/90 to \$1,836 mn in 1990/91 the current account deficit will actually fall to \$1,826 in the same period.

<b>Forecast Summary</b>	<b>1989</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1991a</b>	<b>1992b</b>
Real GDP growth (%)	7.4	-6.0	-12.0	-5.0
Consumer price inflation (%)	64	80	150	175
Exports fob (\$ mn)	545	555	425	500
Imports fob (\$ mn)	1,051	1,216	1,325	1,450
Current A/c balance (\$ mn)	-152	-390	-500	-475
Total external debt (\$ bn)	13.0	13.2	13.4	13.6

a = Estimates, b = forecasts



## NUBIAN MASSAGE BY IAIN MARSHALL

I would have felt no worse if an adult camel had taken a notion to couch its full weight on my chest. I had been running around ineffectually on a patch of sand on the Nubian island of Nulwetta playing football, when one of the island's sturdier sons barrelled into me. As the tiny point of pain somewhere to the left of my heart radiated outwards like a dark stain developing on a white 'gallabiya', my appreciation of the Nubian sunset slid behind an all obscuring horizon of pure agony. Convinced that breathing was about to cease, I steeled myself for the worst as each rasping inhalation of twilight dust sent shockwaves through my body.

Nulwetta is situated in the heart of Nubia between the villages of Abri to the north and Delgo to the south. It is several hours away from the most rudimentary hospital and its inhabitants rely for medical help, both by necessity and preference on a traditional 'folk' doctor which the more melodramatic would take great relish in referring to (quite inaccurately) as a 'witch' doctor.

My predicament came to the attention of a Nulwetta school boy called Fatih and he took me to the local 'doctor' who very quickly satisfied himself that none of my ribs was broken before producing a jar of 'dilka', a type of oil, with which he proceeded to give my ribcage a vigorous massage. Despite the supposed soothing effects of the oil, his fingers felt like a fleet of tiny steam rollers. This treatment over I was instructed to meet the 'doctor' in his house after a couple of hours for more of the same.

Fatih and I walked the sandy streets of Nulwetta towards the 'doctor', Abdel Fadil's house in the dying moments of sunset. Fatih informed me that Abdel Fadil was famous as a 'baseer' in the area and that people came from up and down the Nile to seek his consultations rather than go to the modern doctor in Abri Hospital. At the house we drank the obligatory cup of sweet milky sunset tea, ate local 'meenain' biscuits and waited for Abdel Fadil who duly arrived and wasted no time in setting his steam roller to work on me again. After this second massage, the 'baseer' produced an empty jam jar and some paper. He tore the paper into five strips which he then fashioned into small cones. With his cigarette lighter he lit the first twist of paper and when it was fairly blazing, dropped it into the jar through whose mouth it spat bright energetic flames. When the business end of this fire-breathing implement was pressed hard against the damaged ribs I started involuntarily letting a breathless supplication escape from my lips. I needn't have worried. The flames soon expired as the oxygen sealed into the jar by my chest was consumed and my flesh was sucked in tightly around the rim of the jar, so that when Abdel Fadil let go, the jar did not fall to the ground but stuck fast to my ribcage, protruding improbably at right angles. After a pause during which the inhabitants of the room admired the effect Abdel Fadil's vacuum had created, the jam jar was dragged slowly across the surface of my chest without the seal being broken. This new technique caused me to utter several gasps of pain and displeasure which unseemly display of weakness elicited peals of laughter from the assembled horde of Fadil children. The entire process was repeated five times before I was allowed to ease my



gallabiya back up over my chest and shoulder, wincing as I did so, in far greater agony than I'd been in before I'd sought assistance.

Limping home I was assured by Fatih that he'd received the same treatment for a leg badly kicked by a donkey and bruising had been prevented. Filled with scepticism, I was surprised to find that no discoloration had occurred and that the pain which had been brought on by the simple act of breathing, had abated sufficiently after one day, to allow me to make the bumpy bicycle trip to archaeological ruins at Sadanga on the west bank of the Nile.

'Baseer' which is defined in Hans Wehr's Arab English Dictionary as: 'endowed with eyesight' and 'having insight' (or 'possessing knowledge') was the name used by islanders to describe Abdel Fadil's calling. Two years later in El Ghaba I was to witness an old blind 'baseer' treat a footballer's wrenched knee by applying the red hot head of a six inch nail to the damaged area. The boy had submitted to the 'mismaar' without displaying a hint of fear and swore later that his injury had been healed. Abdel Fadil's amused reaction to my unheroic inability to refrain from flinching during his jam jar operation, had been to comment (not unkindly) that I was the first 'khawaja' he'd seen who was a coward.



## ROCKETS

ROBIN A. HODGKIN

Well aimed rockets were an important part in a young man's training in the Sudan's Education Service; and other services, too, no doubt. I remember at least four and can still feel their sting.

**Rocket No. 1, 1939.** From Nasri Hamza - fellow teacher, but twenty years older; at the old Gordon College (secondary).

"Mr. Hodgkin, please sit down. You are quite new here. Mr. Scott has had a complaint about your having *kicked* a boy while you were supervising a bathe and has asked me to have a word with you. Is it true?"

"Well, yes, the boy was fooling around when he should have been getting dressed. It was done in a friendly way."

"Mr. Hodgkin, even if that boy *hadn't* been the grandson of Khalifa Abdullahi and son of an important Sheriff you should *never* have kicked him, or anyone. It's an INSULT. Even to show the sole of your foot is to imply that someone is a slave. Haven't you read *Sudan Courtesy Customs*? The matter is very serious. I don't think you meant any harm. Would you like to see the boy? He is still very angry. If you apologise it might help."

**Rocket No. 2, 1940.** It's Friday evening at G.C.Scott's rather shabby bungalow in Omdurman. The Gordon College has just been evacuated from its posh Khartoum campus to the old Intermediate School. Wadi Seidna, where we had hoped to go, is being prepared for the Air Force. So we are all mucking in as best we can. G.C.S. "We were all heaving to this morning - most of the staff and some of the boys - all helping to shift desks and get classrooms ready. We missed you. What happened?"

"No, sorry, I didn't come. After all it *was* Friday." "H'm ... but what were you doing?" "Well, yes, actually I was swimming and sunbathing at the Club." Black, black mark; but not long "remembered", by G.C.S.

[Scott, the fairly new Warden of the College had been in the Political Service. He was regarded as being too radical, too pro-Sudanese. He had even greatly reduced corporal punishment in the College and always left his door open!]

**Rocket No. 3, 1940.** Before joining a bachelor teachers' 'mess' in Omdurman I stayed as a guest for two months with Douglas Newbold (the Civil Secretary). He almost always had a young trainee (Political Service or Education) under his wing. One learnt a great deal: about the Sudan, desert explorations, the worrying nitty gritty of the war, poetry, what the *New Statesman* was saying. I had just acquired an old Ford with fat desert tyres. One night I



unfortunately knocked over a Sudanese cyclist as I drove through the crowds towards the station. Damage: dislocated shoulder and broken collar bone. I took him to the Civil Hospital.

Breakfast. Grapefruit and fried Nile perch. "Did you sleep well, Robin?" "Yes, thanks, splendidly." "No worries?" "No, thanks." Douglas put down his spoon. "No worries. Why not? Wouldn't you have been just a bit worried if you'd knocked down an English official, say, and not a poor Sudanese worker? Wouldn't you?" The fried fish didn't taste quite as good as usual.

**Rocket No. 4, 1944.** Douglas had died. John Willie Robertson was the new Civil Secretary. Rather fiercer. I occasionally wrote semi-geographical articles for the old *Sudan Star* - the war time English newspaper in Khartoum. A group of geography students (from the embryo University of Khartoum) and I had been visiting the Gezira. We finished by going round the ginning factory at Sennar. (I'd never really understood 'ginning' before.) The safety precautions round the machines struck the students and me as totally inadequate. "Can't you *do* something, sir?" I wrote a sharp little piece for the *Sudan Star*, making a few points.

A week later I got a long envelope from the Assistant Director of Education (John Hartley). On the outside he had scribbled a message: "Robin, have a strong gin before opening." I opened it: a scorching rocket about civil servants being discreet and not publicly criticising government agencies. "Yours, J. W. Robertson." Very strong gin justified.

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## LONDON'S FIRST SUDANESE RESTAURANT

The "Sellout" Cheap Eating Guide section of the October 16th 1991 issue of *Time Out* carried the following notice about London's first Sudanese restaurant:

**The Mandola** 139 Westbourne Grove, W2 (071 229 4734). Notting Hill Gate tube/15 bus. Open Monday-Saturday 5pm-12 midnight. Average £6. Unlicensed. London's only Sudanese restaurant is an estimable little café and takeaway. The selection of salads (£4.50 for two people) made with aubergines, tomatoes, yoghurt and cucumber (salatat in Sudanese) will be familiar to the those who know Middle Eastern Food. Broadbenas mashed with sesame oil and lime juice are delicious, but some of the Sudanese meat dishes are an acquired taste, being somewhat slippery and bitter (main dishes are about £3.50). Drink gorgeously refreshing hibiscus of fresh lime juice or take your own booze.



## **SOUTHERN SUDAN: TOO MANY AGREEMENTS DISHONoured ABEL ALIER**

LONDON: ITHACA PRESS 1990

This book is a contribution to the literature on the politics and history of the Southern Sudan and especially South-North relations, from the perspective of a leading actor on the political stage. Most Southern Sudanese politicians have been reluctant to put their experiences into print, thus denying their contemporaries and posterity a wealth of inside information. Abel Alier's book is a commendable exception. It is important for several reasons. First, the author was involved (in various capacities) in the search for a political settlement of the war in the Southern Sudan, including the Round Table Conference of 1965, the Twelve-Man Committee (1965-66), and during the May regime up to the time of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972. Second, he was subsequently leader of the post-war South from April 1972 to December 1977 and again from May 1980 to October 1981: seven of the eleven years the Addis Ababa Agreement functioned. He therefore boasts more experience in governing the Southern Sudan than any other politician. Third, on the national level Abel Alier is the only person apart from Nimeiri himself to have stayed in government throughout the life of the May regime, from its beginning in 1969 until its overthrow in 1985, somehow surviving the twists and turns of his mercurial boss. This in itself is a feat worth studying.

The book is mainly about the Addis Ababa Agreement and its implementation. It poses two questions: how was the agreement achieved, and what led to its demise? The author's answer to the first question is unlikely to be as controversial as his answer to the second. Others who took part in or closely followed events in the post-war Southern Sudan may see things differently, notably on the important issues of parliamentary practice, government appointments, and the fateful division of the South into three "regions". Regarding parliamentary practice, the Regional Assembly had an inauspicious start when Abel Alier was named sole candidate of the Sudan Socialist Union (S.S.U.) for the Presidency of the High Executive Council in 1973, before the results of elections to the Assembly were known. Whether the Assembly would have elected him anyway is beside the point: democratic institutions in the South were interfered with from day one. The author's account (p. 177) is unlikely to convince many Southerners; the sensitivity of the issue could not have escaped the principal architect of the Addis Ababa Agreement. Thus, the idea that Abel hijacked the Presidency of the H.E.C. (p. 176) should be seen in this context.

Relations between the H.E.C. and the first Regional Assembly were far from harmonious. The H.E.C. was frequently accused of condoning corruption, of repression, and of using state-security organs to gag opposition. One might expect a response to such allegations in a book by the then President of the H.E.C. For example, why did Abel Alier, as President, retain Ministers widely reputed to be corrupt? Why did he bend the rules to appoint close associates to ministerial positions after they had failed to win election to the Assembly? What explains the meteoric rise of a lowly bureaucrat to the Director-Generalship of a Regional Ministry in



Juba? What of the Commissioner of Police who selected 80% of police cadets from his own small sub-tribe? And why was that official reinstated in 1980 after being dismissed by Joseph Lagu's government in 1978? What are the details of the H.E.C.'s role in the trial of Benjamin Bol? And so forth.

Toward the end of its term in 1977 discontent with Abel Alier's government was real and widespread; people clamoured for change. The author leaves no doubt (p. 175) that Lagu's candidacy for President of the H.E.C. was based on or at least influenced by false hopes about his (Lagu's) remaining head of the Southern Command and about his possible appointment as First Vice President of the Republic. Such ideas must have been mooted in high circles. The first First Vice President, Babiker Awadallah, was a civilian, and there is no evidence that he was elbowed out because of that. As a matter of fact, those who know him well confirm that Babiker resigned because he felt redundant in a powerless post. Southerners knew that Abel Alier's failure to become First Vice President had nothing to do with his civilian status but stemmed from an unjust system that discriminated against Southerners and barred them from the highest positions of State. As much as they blamed Khartoum for perpetuating such a policy, they also blamed Abel for tolerating it. Furthermore the case of retired Brigadier Samuel Abu John, whom Abel had earlier appointed as a Regional Minister, was a precedent for Lagu's having to retire from the army. The choice of Lagu was made by a sophisticated group of Southerners who reasoned that, given Abel's entrenched support in Khartoum, the only way to unseat him was to propose the only person who enjoyed similar support. Lagu was meant to be an interim figure, to be discarded at the right time. The trouble with such leaders is that once in power they may be difficult to control: Nimieri in 1969 was meant to be an "interim" figure! Whether Lagu knew it or not, most of the heavyweights behind his nomination had this main consideration in mind.

As for the contest between Abel and Lagu for the Presidency of the H.E.C. in 1978, all signs pointed to an overwhelming majority for Lagu. The enormous desire for change was manifest. The author boldly admits (p. 203), for instance, that "Jonglei canal demonstrations were outward manifestations of the government's declining credibility". It was this that prompted change, for at the end of the day someone had to be held responsible for the government's performance. Without qualms Abel states (p. 205) that his government had been prepared to drive people along the path of economic "development" even if they were unwilling. It is no wonder, then, that as early as 1973 some elements in the South expressed doubt about Abel's commitment to democracy.

When Abel Alier returned to power in 1980 he did not appear to have learned much respect for public opinion. He made a most serious and damaging error of judgement when he backed down on the Bentiu-refinery issue and tried to bring Southern Sudanese with him. It will be recalled that Southerners closed ranks on this issue, in a rare display of unity. The Regional Assembly, popular organizations, students (or were they children?), all and sundry had resolved to stand with the H.E.C. in support for the political and technical arguments they presented to Nimieri for locating the refinery at Bentiu, where the oil had been discovered. Following his decision to back down, Abel Alier sent delegations under senior Ministers to talk to



Southerners in Wau, Malakal, and Khartoum. The leader of the Khartoum delegation held a meeting of Southern M.P.s and others at the National Assembly. I had been invited by a friend. After listening to a bizarre presentation, which contradicted every argument the H.E.C. had previously made, I suggested to the speaker that, give the gravity of the matter, they might not do better by resigning. To this the Minister angrily retorted: "How can we resign when others are polishing their shoes to step in?" Similarly, in Wau, Dr. Raphael Koba Badal, a lecturer in political science at the University of Khartoum, took on the leader of the delegation for saying that the President's decision on the refinery was a bitter pill the South simply had to swallow. Dr. Badal asked how long the South must go on swallowing unpalatable pills; the honourable Minister replied: "For as long as the doctor prescribes". In Malakal an irate student put it straight to the delegation: "This pipeline taking Bentiu's crude to Kosti will be built on our dead bodies"; the delegation dismissed the comment as an emotional bluff. Everywhere the delegations were taunted, ridiculed, and rejected. Thus Nimieri, a skilful manipulator, had succeeded in driving a wedge between the H.E.C. and the Southern people it claimed to represent. How his transparently mischievous intentions could escape the eminent politicians of the H.E.C. remains unexplained. This book does not give a clue. Public opinion notwithstanding, informed observers had expected Abel Alier to resign. The least he could have done was to invite the Minister of Energy in Khartoum to do the explaining; after all it was his view on the issue that prevailed. Little wonder that the dismissal of Abel's government in October 1981 would have been almost a non-event had it not been for the confusion created by Lagu's successor to the Presidency of the H.E.C., General Gismalla Abdalla Rasas.

An issue with very serious repercussions in the South was the manner in which Lagu himself was dismissed in February 1980. The author distances himself from the events that led to this, referring only to some members of the Regional Assembly who had petitioned President Nimieri to dismiss Lagu (p. 179). By then Abel was in Khartoum as Vice President of the Republic and in the top echelon of the S.S.U. One expected him to fight (as he did in the case of Lubari Ramba (p. 165)), in defence of the democratic institutions of the Regional Government he had helped to create. The book is silent about any such efforts. Furthermore, when the so-called High Executive Council and Regional Assembly Act (1980) - the law the author refers to as enacted by the central government (p. 185) - was promulgated and used to dismiss Lagu, not only did its unconstitutionality go unquestioned but there was jubilation in Abel's camp. In fairness to him, no evidence has ever been produced that he personally rejoiced; but there were inferences drawn in the other camp that lawyers close to Abel had helped to draft this infamous Act! The same Act would be used in October 1981 to dismiss Abel Alier's second government. After enactment of that law the Self-Government Act of 1972 was, for all practical purposes, dead and buried.

The zeal shown by Lagu and others for division of the South in 1981 and the snowballing support this got thereafter are explained in part by Lagu's personal frustrations and by general disgust at the degeneration of Southern politics, which had become cynical in every respect. But Lagu himself was part and parcel of this state of affairs, and his subsequent actions did not prove any less unscrupulous. "Dinka domination" was expediently picked as an issue and



found receptive ears. This domination, real or imagined, could not alone justify division of the South. But Big Brother, in Khartoum, was pulling the strings.

Whereas divisionists were united in their aims and methods, their opponents were a divided lot. Why, for instance, was it that some unionists joined the division lobby in the 1982 elections for the Regional government? The answer lies in the fate that befell the so-called Council for the Unity of Southern Sudan (C.U.S.S.). Abel Alier does not mention this body in his book, referring only (p. 234) to the fact that "in December 1981 Nimieri had imprisoned 24 Southern leaders who stood in support of unity". That is all: what a tribute to those who stood their ground and went to jail for it! Abel thus down-plays the wide support C.U.S.S. enjoyed among those who genuinely believed in the unity of the people of the Southern Sudan.

It was assumed at the time that C.U.S.S. would lead the unity group in the battles ahead, including the 1982 elections to the Regional Assembly. But this was not to be, because of the position taken by Abel's group. Unity to them was synonymous with the status quo. They resisted the objective reality that what was needed for the South to remain united was a new leadership and a fresh start. The leader of C.U.S.S., Clemont Mboro, who many assumed would be the sole unity candidate for the Presidency of the H.E.C., was shunned. Abel Alier allowed his own name to go forward. When it later became clear that the tide was running against him he withdrew, but some of his close associates thereupon nominated themselves. The wheeling and dealing continued. Meanwhile the divisionists were not sleeping. They exploited the confusion on the unity side and struck a deal with a disgruntled faction to form a government. The change of mind in Abel's camp - to endorse Clement Mboro - came too late to unite the disunited unionists. The events leading to the 1982 elections, as well as the election process itself, are thus a crucial signpost deserving close study by all concerned.

Another important point on which Abel Alier's book is silent is his appointment as Minister of Housing and Public Works in the central government immediately after the attack on Bor in May 1983. In fact he took the oath of office on the very day Nimieri announced the division of the South - 5 June 1983. That evening, national television not only showed Nimieri with Lagu at his side announcing the division of the South, but it also displayed Abel Alier, principal architect of the Addis Ababa Agreement and staunch supporter of the unity of the South, taking the oath of office before the same Nimieri! Nimieri was wily and unscrupulous, but what was the author's view?

Finally, Abel's account of Nimieri's so-called Peace Committee, under the chairmanship of Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa (p. 238) deserves elaboration. In 1985 Dr. Peter Nyot and I were appointed to this committee without prior consultation, and were at a loss as to who might have proposed our names. (I did not know Nimieri or even remember ever having met him.) In any case, we both decided not to sit on the committee but resolved that our decision should be expressed in such a way as to deny Nimieri the propaganda value he wanted from this bogus committee. Our plan was to bring together most of the leading Southern politicians in Khartoum and write a joint letter to Nimieri analyzing the situation and suggesting how best to approach a solution to the problem he had created. With the exceptions of the three Southern



Governors and a few others, we approached all who mattered and agreed to hold a meeting at Abel's house on El Zubeir Pasha Street. At this meeting it was further agreed to write a joint letter; an outline of its contents was worked out. The meeting resolved that Abel would draft the letter, which would be ready for all participants to sign two days later. We left the house happy about yet another opportunity to show Nimieri that the South was still united in its rejection of his machinations. When the appointed time came, however, Abel told the re-convened meeting that the letter was ready but - much to the surprise of everyone - he alone would sign it. He gave no reason for this unilateral decision. Needless to say, this was unacceptable, since it defeated the very purpose of collective action. All the same, nothing could be done and we dispersed. Days later, on the evening of 27 March, we saw Abel Alier and Isaiah Kulang, on national television, attending the opening session of the Peace Committee, which Nimieri had addressed that morning before taking off for Washington. In his wisdom, Abel drew a distinction between his refusing to serve on the committee and his attending its opening session!

In North-South relations "too many agreements" certainly have been "dishonoured". But in the case of the Addis Ababa Agreement the Southern Sudan had a hand in the dishonouring. Leaders of the post-civil-war South, wittingly or unwittingly, played into the hands of the Khartoum government. When the Agreement was signed, Southerners never agreed among themselves on the rules of the game in the democratic regime they were about to embark upon. Red lines that could not be crossed in the intramural Southern struggle for power should have been clearly drawn. Democracy, by necessity, presupposes a number of political organizations competing for the confidence of the people. In the absence of such organizations people will naturally look to other forms of association or groupings. In most cases, such groupings lack wider general interests and long-term objectives. It is a pity that leaders of the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement did not see this in 1972, and, by omission, dissolved the organization into an as yet undefined S.S.U. The result of all this was that Southern leaders, despite the Addis Ababa Agreement, continued to look to the North for survival. This much comes out, in various ways, in Abel Alier's book.

(Dr.) Lam Akol

Southern Sudan



## SOME RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON SUDAN

Adelberger, Jörg (1989) Kommandos für Tiere bei den Fur. *Frankfurter Afrikanistische Blätter* 1, 135-140.

Adelberger, Jörg (1990) Vom Sultanat zur Republik: Veränderungen in der Sozialorganisation der Fur (Sudan). Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag (*Studien zur Kulturkunde*, Bd. 96). DM 58. pp. 246, map. ISBN 3-515-05512-6.

Adelberger, Jörg (1991) Salzherstellung und Salzhandel im Gebiet des Jebel Marra (Darfur/Sudan): der Rückgang eines lokalen Gewerbes. *Paideuma*, 37.

Bell, G.W. & A.H.M. Kirk-Greene (Compilers) (1989) The Sudan Political Service 1902-1952: A Preliminary Register of Second Careers. Oxford [Privately Published]. pp. 39. £5 [Available from the Editor].

Biles, Timothy (1991) Windows on the Sudan: A Story of Pain and Pride. The Rectory, Barnes Lane, Beaminster, Dorset [for the author]. ISBN 0-9517915-0-8. £4.99 "The only claim I make for the book is that it tells the untold story of the Sudanese Church; the Archbishop under siege in Juba; the Bishops liberated by the `rebels'; the refugees persecuted in Khartoum and neglected in Ethiopia" [letter from the author].

Bleuchot, Herve, Christian Delmet & Derek Hopwood (Eds.) (1991) Sudan: History, Identity, Ideology — Histoire, Identités, Idéologies. Reading: Ithaca Press. pp. 320. ISBN 0-86372-149-4. £25.

Craig, G.M. (Ed.) (1991) The Agriculture of the Sudan. Oxford: Oxford University Press (*Centre for Agricultural Strategy Series* No. 1). pp. xiv, 468, numerous maps and figures. ISBN 0-19-859210-8. £55.

Cruickshank, Alexander (1991) Itchy Feet: A Doctor's Tale. Ilfracombe, Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd. pp. 168, illus. ISBN 0-7223-2541-X. £8.50. A sequel to the author's *The Kindling Fire: Medical Adventures in the Southern Sudan* (1962).

Kenyon, Susan M. (1991) Five Women of Sennar: Culture and Change in Central Sudan. Oxford: Clarendon Press (*Oxford Studies in African Affairs*) pp. 272, illus., 2 maps. ISBN 0-19-827832-2. £35. "Susan Kenyon looks at developments in Sudanese society through the eyes and words of five women from the town of Sennar in Blue Nile Province. They talk about their families and homes, their hopes and aspirations, their work, and their social lives. Their

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accounts offer insight into contemporary life in a major developing country and the changing role of women within its society." (Publisher's note).

Vail, J.R. & J.P. Duggua (Compilers) (1991) *Bibliography of Geological Literature for the Republic of the Sudan 1986-1990*. Portsmouth: Portsmouth Polytechnic Central Production Unit. pp. 64, 6, 8, 4. ISBN 0-900234-55-5. "During the past five years since our first Bibliography was published approximately 500 new titles have become available. These we have listed according to authorship, year, title, and place of publication." [From the Abstract].

Note: It is hoped that some of these titles will be reviewed in the next issue of *Sudan Studies*.



## **The Sudan's Ex-Slaves: A Study of Tayeb Salih's The Wedding of Zein**

**Heather J. Sharkey**

Tayeb Salih's novella, The Wedding of Zein (1966), tells the enchanting story of the gawky village boy called Zein. Silly behavior and light-hearted antics were among the boy's trademarks. He had an odd, almost misshapen figure, and a laugh that perpetually rang out like a donkey's braying to reveal the two yellowed fang-like teeth protruding from his gums; together this made Zein the target of much good-natured teasing within the community.

Yet Zein's silliness occasionally fell aside, giving the villagers glimpses of another facet to the youth's personality which left them touched and amazed. Zein befriended those who lived on the fringes of the village society--the sick, the destitute, and the isolated, displaying both profound compassion and generosity towards them. Haneen, the itinerant Sufi holy man, Deaf Ashmana, Mousa the Lame, and Bekheit "who was born with no left lip and a paralyzed left side<sup>1</sup>" were all among his friends. In the end, as Haneen predicts, blessings pour down on Zein, who marries the best girl in the village, while the entire community experiences a period of unprecedented prosperity.

Beneath its beautiful narrative structure, however, the novella contains a powerful social commentary. On one level it reflects the customs and values of a local village culture, Zein's community, against a background of social change at a time when Sudanese society as a whole was still adjusting to newly-acquired independence. Yet perhaps its most incisive social commentary surrounds the ex-slaves in Zein's village--Mousa the Lame and the whores living at the 'Oasis' on the edge of the desert--for it was these characters who arguably fared the worst in the climate of rapid social change. That is, they were the ones who had the hardest time both supporting themselves in the nascent wage labor economy and finding social acceptance. Utilizing the fictional (though historically accurate) ex-slave characters in The Wedding of Zein as models, this essay will comment on the difficulty which these ex-

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<sup>1</sup> Tayeb Salih, The Wedding of Zein. Trans. Denys Johnson-Davies. London: Heinemann, 1968. 1978 edition, p. 45.



slaves faced in carving out a place for themselves in the post-abolition, post-independence period of Sudanese history.

Although slavery officially came to an end in the Sudan in 1898, decades passed before administrators succeeded in stamping out all vestiges of the practice. McLoughlin notes that slave raids (on however small a scale) were taking place in the late 1930's, and contends that some forms of domestic slavery persisted as late as 1962<sup>2</sup>. Thus it is not unreasonable to assume that The Wedding of Zein, written in 1966, could reflect the contemporary experience of those ex-slaves for whom slavery remained a vivid memory, at a time when the, culture and economy of the Sudan was still adapting to the formal abolition of slavery.

Very many ex-slaves in the Sudan embraced their freedom and successfully established livelihoods for themselves against the context of a developing economy. The Makwar Dam, the Gezira scheme, the Nile/Red Sea Railway, the Gash and Tokar irrigation works, and the docks of Port Sudan were just some of the government works projects that provided employment to ex-slaves and others<sup>3</sup>. The military, too, continued to employ large numbers from the former servile population. Meanwhile, even many demobilized ex-slave soldiers had become self-sufficient and successful in small-scale farming by World War II, thanks to the army's "battalion gardens" settlement schemes<sup>4</sup>.

Although there were very many success stories among the ex- slave population, still others did not fare so well. Some found the abolition of slavery to be an overwhelming experience. Mousa the Lame, whom Zein befriended, was one such dislocated ex-slave, "a man advanced in years, the mere sight of whom was enough to rend one's heart because of the great effort he had to make to walk, a man for whom life was an irksome and arduous roads<sup>5</sup>."

Badawi the Jeweller, one of the village's wealthier men, had originally owned Mousa. When the government granted slaves their freedom, the loyal Mousa chose to remain with his

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<sup>2</sup> Peter F.M. McLoughlin, "Economic Development and the Heritage of Slavery in the Sudan Republic," *Africa*, vol. 32, no. 4, October 1962, pp. 372, 383.

<sup>3</sup> P.F.M. McLoughlin, "Labour Market Conditions and Wages in the Three Towns, 1900-1950," *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. 51, 1970, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> Taj Hargey, The Suppression of Slavery in the Sudan, 1898-1939. Oxford DPhil dissertation, 1981, pp. 248-262.

<sup>5</sup> The Wedding of Zein, p. 45-46



master, who treated him like his own son. But then Badawi died, and his good-for-nothing son Seif al-Din inherited his wealth, squandered much of the fortune, and kicked Mousa out onto the streets.

And so, “Overtaken by old age, Mousa had found himself destitute, without a family or anyone to look after him. He therefore lived on the fringe of life in the village, just like the old stray dogs that howled in the waste plots of land at night and, harassed by boys, spent their days scavenging hither and thither for food<sup>6</sup>.” It is Zein who assumes social responsibility for Mousa, by building him a simple hut, by visiting him in the mornings to inquire about his health, and by bringing him food at the end of each day.

Mousa’s case must have been unusual, though not unheard of. Few families would have had so few scruples and such a lack of social responsibility as to abandon a loyal old servant. On the one hand, there were the dictates of Islamic law, which had theoretically regulated Sudanese slavery. For while Islamic law and jurisprudence sanctioned slavery, it had also ameliorated the slave’s condition by stipulating the proper treatment of slaves. The master had a legal obligation to provide his slaves with food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention, and to support them in old age<sup>7</sup>. With the status of slavery no longer recognized, however, and with all issues relating to slavery having been declared outside the jurisdiction of the shari’a law courts<sup>8</sup>, it is doubtful whether a man like Mousa could have had any legal recourse against a negligent former owner.

Even aside from Islamic law, there was also and had always been a common Sudanese social ethic towards the treatment of loyal slaves, as well as a system of social reciprocity between the owners and the owned, and between former owners and their former, freed slaves<sup>9</sup>. Community members helped each other; this was an unwritten and unspoken code. Moral

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<sup>6</sup> The Wedding of Zein, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> See Bernard Lewis, Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> See for example “Draft memorandum from the Civil Secretary (J.W. Robertson) on the Status of Slavery in Islamic Law,” circa 1952. Sudan Archives Durham, (D.M.H. Evans) 710/11/23.

<sup>9</sup> See Ahmad al-Shahi, “Proverbs and Social Values in a Northern Sudanese Village,” in Essays in Sudan Ethnography. Ed. Ian Cunnison and Wendy James. London: C. Hurst & Co., 1972, pp. 91, 103. Also see Hargey, 1981, p. 116



obligation if not legal obligation should have guaranteed that no faithfully serving man or women would be cast away helpless as Mousa had been.

All this meant that Seif al-Din, that good-for-nothing son of Mousa's former owner, Badawi the Jeweller, could legally-if not ethically-shrug off all responsibility towards the feeble, loyal old man with impunity. Mousa had his freedom, but that gave him precious little comfort.

In the eyes of many British administrators, Mousa would have represented the model of the faithful ex-slave domestic servant. After all, there were administrators like Slatin Pasha who merely gave lip service to notions of abolition and freedom while actually exerting great efforts to maintain domestic slavery. It was Slatin who went as far as to say in 1897 that the blacks "were godforsaken swine who do not deserve to be treated like free and independent men... the blacks should be made to remain under the protection of their former masters who were forced to treat them well....."<sup>10</sup>

Later administrators continued to grapple with this same problem. Slavery had been abolished and all slaves declared free. Still, administrators did not want ex-slaves to feel so "free" as to leave their masters and move to other regions, partially out of fear of the repercussions that such an exodus of farm labourers would have on the country's agricultural output. The government even went so far as to devise elaborate laws, such as the vagabond ordinance and labour registration schemes, to keep ex-slaves on the land<sup>11</sup>. Ironically, by staying with his master Mousa was behaving exactly as government policy encouraged.

Yet if Mousa represented the model ex-slave, then the women at the edge of the desert were the Anglo-Egyptian government's worst nightmare. Indeed, a confidential Sudan government circular of 1919 set forth a policy towards what it euphemistically called "Sudanese servants." This circular advised all officials to do their utmost, probably just short of force, to convince so-called domestic servants to remain with their former owners even after abolition-just as Mousa the Lame did. Otherwise they feared that vast numbers of ex-slaves would

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<sup>10</sup> Slatin to Bigge, 6 September 1897, Sudan Archives Durham 438/653/3.

<sup>11</sup> This is a recurring theme in the Condominium years. Hargey deals with this extensively in his thesis [The Suppression of Slavery in the Sudan. 1898-1939.](#)



succumb to prostitution, thievery, and overall delinquency. Frequent reports from government provinces did, in fact, mention the problem of “public women”<sup>12</sup>. Their fears were not entirely unfounded. In 1903, for example, about eighty percent of all crimes in Kassala alone had been committed by ex-slaves. Meanwhile, out of all the convictions under the Sudan Penal Code from 1923 to 1925, seventy-six percent were ex-slaves-sixteen percent males and a whopping sixty percent females (mainly prostitutes)<sup>13</sup>.

The incorrigible Seif al-Din frittered away many hours in the company of the local “public women,” known by the villagers as “the sluts,” who lived near the desert’s edge. “These girls were slaves who had been given their freedom, some of them having migrated from the village and married far away from the locality of their bondage; others had married freed slaves in the village and led a respectable life, a continuing affection existing between them and their former masters. Some of them, however, not finding a settled life easy, had stayed on the perimeter of life in the village, a place of call for those bent on pleasure and sensual enjoyment<sup>14</sup>.”

These “Oasis” girls had acquired their freedom, but their freedom undoubtedly gave them very few real social or economic options. How could freedom change their lives when continuing to work as domestic servants for their old masters, and getting very little, if any, financial remuneration in return, was virtually their only other career option? Opportunities for women were limited, to say the least. The government had sponsored no educational or settlement schemes (such as the battalion gardens for former soldiers) for women, and no rehabilitation centres. Neither did women have the same options as men did for migrating to cities for wage-paying work. In the strongly patriarchal Sudanese society, ex-slave women without husbands or masters to provide for them often resorted to commoditizing their own bodies for income. In fact, prostitution and beer-brewing (or both at the same time) were often the two most viable options for social and economic survival available to some female ex-slaves who had no desire to remain bound as before to their former owners.

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<sup>12</sup> See Gabriel Warburg, “Slavery and Labour in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan,” *Asian and African Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1978, p. 237.

<sup>13</sup> Hargey, 1981, pp. 139, 416.

<sup>14</sup> *The Wedding of Zein*, p. 68



Thus the whores in The Wedding of Zein chose to live in the grass huts on the desert's edge, selling liquor and selling themselves, with their night-time laughter filtering through the darkness. "In their displeasure the inhabitants of the village burned [their huts] down, but they returned to life like the alfa plant that will not die. Though the villagers drove away those who inhabited these houses, tormenting them in a variety of ways, they soon got together again, like flies alighting upon a dead cow<sup>15</sup>."

Freedom brought few miraculous transformations to the lives of many ex-slaves. Some, like Mousa the Lame, carried on as they had before, faithfully serving their masters. The lucky ones were rewarded with the care and concern which Islamic law had traditionally advocated. The unlucky ones found themselves destitute and empty-handed. For better or for worse, many female ex-slaves fell into prostitution, like the "Oasis" whores, thereby refusing to follow the path of continued servitude which the government officials encouraged.

By explaining the plights of ex-slaves such as Mousa the Lame and the local prostitutes, The Wedding of Zein gives insights into Sudanese society in a state of flux. Zein's village is just one place where ex-slaves were struggling to find their niche in the changing social and economic landscape of the post-independence Sudan. Civil laws prescribing the proper treatment of and obligations toward loyal "domestic servants" had not developed in pace with the relatively rapid elimination of slavery. Female ex-slaves in particular had to cope with a very circumscribed set of socio-economic options at a time when wage-paying labour was mainly limited to the male sphere. Thus, like Mousa the Lame and the Oasis prostitutes, many real-life ex-slaves must have fallen through the cracks of the changing social structure as well, spending the rest of their free lives on the fringes of Sudanese society.

Heather J. Sharkey is currently studying at the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, on a Marshall Scholarship. After completing her MPhil degree next summer, she hopes to pursue a PhD.

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<sup>15</sup> The Wedding of Zein, p. 69.



## THE TRAIN JOURNEY

*Paul Adams spent one year teaching English at the Sennar Higher Secondary School for Boys. At present he is a youth worker in Maine, USA. The journey which he describes happened on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1987.*

With schools closed until further notice following the riots in Sennar, myself and the two other teachers from England decided to use this time to visit Damazine, a town located one hundred and twenty miles south of Sennar. While our preference would have been for road transport, the tarmac road ran only as far as Singa (thirty miles away); the rainy season having washed away the mud tracks further south. Fortunately there was a twice weekly train that ran from Sennar to Damazine stopping only once at Singa, and while we could have reached Singa easily by road and caught the train there, we felt that in order to get a good seat it was worth boarding in Sennar and enduring a few extra hours of train travel. The train was due to leave at nine o'clock in the morning, and by eight-thirty we were seated and ready for a journey expected to last between ten and twenty hours.

In contrast to the horror stories that we had heard the train looked in reasonable condition despite its obvious age. It had a centre isle with seating for groups of four on either side. The seats were wooden, some having a covering of vinyl which absorbed the heat of the sun. The shutters and the windows which had existed at one time were no longer in place to prevent this. The floor had been swept, and although it was hot this was only to be expected it was always hot. The fans on the ceiling were out of order. When nine o'clock came and the train hadn't departed we were not surprised. We smiled inwardly in the knowledge that we knew what to expect in Sudan. The train was gradually filling up and we took advantage of the variety of foods which became available; hard boiled eggs, corn on the cob, peanuts, bananas, biscuits, tea and coffee. Since 'tessallia' seeds were also on sale it was not long before the clean swept floor was no longer, as people followed the customary practice and spat the husks wherever they chose.

Ten o'clock came and went but this was in line with our expectations. To pass the time I recounted how Younis our Sudanese landlord and friend had returned the previous night with blood all over his 'jelabiya'. He had been eating supper at Osman's 'ful' shop when a drunken man had come in and been refused service. When the drunk persisted Osman hit him over the head with a large metal serving spoon which resulted in a serious gash. Younis had helped the bleeding man to a seat and returned home while those involved had set out for the police station. We joked about the potential for newspaper headlines; "Local ful baron in spoon attack". By eleven o'clock we were less jovial, and by noon the train was three hours late departing. By one o'clock we were hot and bored. I watched the children outside trying to sell their goods - a few eggs or a pot of tea - and tried to understand the implications of this for the economic development of Sudan. I was struck by the inefficiency of it all, a number of people trying to sell the same product in the same place, and so much effort going into the sale of the product rather than its production. I wondered about the implications of this



competition on prices and generally pondered a while. At two o'clock in the afternoon, after a five and a half hour wait, we left for Damazine.

The journey itself was slow, and there were frequent stops. Some of these seemed to be a result of problems with the engine, others were for prayers, and there were a few stops for refreshments. Since the train toilets were out of order people made good use of all these stops to scamper into the fields and squat where they felt comfortable. I was relieved that my giardia was under control and remembered stories of travellers who were less fortunate. By nightfall we had reached Singa. After being on the train for twelve hours we had travelled a total of thirty miles. It was rumoured -no one seemed to know the facts - that we had stopped there for the night. The story circulating was that there was a mechanical problem with the engine and that the driver was going to take it back to Sennar and get another one in order to complete the journey. Secure in the knowledge that the train wasn't going anywhere the majority of the passengers took up sleeping positions on the ground outside, and I decided to join them. A gathering storm in the early hours of the morning interrupted a surprisingly pleasant sleep and we were all forced back onto the train. The waiting began again, my clothes soaked in sweat and with mosquitoes buzzing around my ears. The hours passed slowly.

Morning came and people were as cheerful as ever, greeting each other in the usual jovial fashion. The fact that we had spent twenty-four hours on a train that had travelled only thirty miles did not seem reason for despondency. The rain of the previous night had turned the whole area into a muddy swamp and the local tea selling children squelched shoeless through the mud. There was no sign nor word of the engine that had left for Sennar the previous evening. We all waited. A layer of mud now joined the tessallia seeds and banana skins that covered the floor. We waited some more. One group of Sudanese began to sing, another played some cards, but mostly we all just waited. The soldier sitting next to us opened a huge bag of bananas and invited us to share them.

Nine o'clock came ... ten o'clock came ... eleven o'clock. Soon it was noon and still no sign of the engine. As the hours went by we got more and more frustrated. At times like this it was hard to accept that such inefficiency was really necessary. While I deeply admired the patience and serenity of the Sudanese, I also wondered whether their easy-going 'inshalla' (god willing) approach in fact contributed to the appalling service that people seemed happy to accept. There may well have been good reasons for the delay, but after thirty hours on a train I was in no mood to consider them. Finally we admitted defeat and took the forty-five minute bus ride back to Sennar. In a train journey lasting thirty hours we had travelled a total distance of thirty miles. In theory at least we could have walked to Damazine in that time! As we got up to leave the train the soldier asked in surprise where we were going. "Home" we replied "we've waited too long". One man was in a state of total disbelief; "But you can't go - the train will be here at one o'clock". John looked at his watch, "It's two o'clock now".



# TRIBAL ADMINISTRATION OR NO ADMINISTRATION THE CHOICE IN WESTERN SUDAN

James Morton

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 THE AFRICA WATCH VIEW

A quotation:

‘THE FORGOTTEN WAR IN DARFUR FLARES AGAIN

For more than two years, an intense civil war has been raging in Sudan’s western-most region of Darfur. This is a civil war without rebels: it was started when militias supported by the Sudanese and Libyan governments began attacking villages inhabited by members of the Fur tribe. After a brief respite brought about by a peace conference in June 1989, government-backed militias have inflamed the war again in recent weeks, turning this once-peaceful region of Sudan into a battleground. A new and particularly ominous development has been the involvement of the Sudanese army, which has destroyed Fur villages and detained leading Fur chiefs.

“While the war is linked to tribal conflicts and the activities of Chadian opposition groups, the main responsibility lies with successive governments of Sudan, which have conspired with Libya to inflame the conflict. “.....bloody civil war”.... “full-scale civil war” “Arabs give a day’s warning to the villagers, telling them to vacate their village to make way for the Arabs” .....”The army gives no protection” ....”Other raids take place without warning: the militiamen attack at dawn, burning houses and crops, stealing animals and valuables, and killing. The raiders search the village, poking the ground with sticks; when they located an underground grain store, they open it and burn the contents. The raiders poison wells, using high concentrations of Aldrex T (a highly poisonous pesticide which is banned in most countries, but which is widely-available in Sudan. only having been banned in February 1990).

“... (recent) army involvement suggests a new and dangerous turn: until recently, while the government had abetted the Darfur conflict, the army itself had been neutral.

“Another worrying development of recent weeks has been deliberate government intervention against the Fur. The current military government broke with tradition by appointing a non-native of Darfur, Maj-Gen Abul Gassim Ahmed Ibrahim to the governorship. In March he moved his headquarters from El Fasher to Zalingei, which lies in the centre of the disputed area, and has begun to arrest prominent Fur leaders, and detain them in the high security prison of Shalla.

This long quotation highlights the common view that the Government of Sudan (GOS) is oppressive and at war with all of its people, in the north of the country as much as the south: especially so since the 1989 coup and the establishment of a military regime with strong



Islamic tendencies. It also expresses the equally common view that these events reflect the intrigues of realpolitik among the nations of the eastern Sahara: Libya, Chad and Sudan itself.

Recent events linked to the Gulf have led to a hardening of both GOS's position and of western attitudes towards Sudan. This may make what I have to say difficult to believe, even unpopular. Which is that far from being the driving force behind events in Darfur, government is responsible only by virtue of its abject inability to do anything at all in the area, be it for good or evil. Furthermore, the Omar El Bashir regime deserves at least some credit for its efforts to resolve the problems of Darfur, for having tried to overcome that abject inability. These efforts were by no means intensive and they may not succeed. Nevertheless, they put the indifference and inertia of the preceding democratic regime of Sadiq El Mahdi to shame.

The deteriorating security situation in Darfur, and by extension possibly in the rest of Western Sudan, is best understood within a rather out-of-date framework; tribalism. Even though there are modern elements in the situation they are expressed primarily on a tribal basis and, more importantly, the best hope for a lasting solution probably lies with what I shall term the Tribal Administration. Similar arguments may well apply to the situation in Chad. The international press discusses the Chadian situation in terms of the Islamic legion, of Government and Opposition, of Libyan backed forces. The people of Darfur, who are more than a little involved in Chadian affairs, take a more simple view. They talk of the Qura'an and Bidayat tribes, not of the Chadian government and opposition.

These views have been formed during six years of work in Darfur during the 1980s; work which involved continuous contact with the people of the area, from both sides, most especially with middle ranking senior government employees, many of whom were drawn from the very communities involved in the troubles. Reported facts were never clear and what follows depends, inevitably, on rumours and on second-hand reports. On the other hand the rumours came from many different directions and were all discussed with people well qualified to judge: some of them were directly involved in efforts to deal with what was happening, quite a few of them lost relatives and some of them were gaoled on suspicion of involvement. If not correct in detail this is certainly a correct interpretation of what the people of the area thought was happening.

## TRIBES

This paper is entitled 'Tribal Administration or No Administration' to highlight the fact that all the other factors which are blamed for the increasing level of inter-tribal fighting in Darfur are merely symptoms of an underlying failure of administration. The Libyans and Chadians may be fishing in troubled waters. The democratic politicians of Sudan have certainly been doing that. Neither of them actually disturbed the water in the first place.

Similarly, disputes over land, grazing and water rights are fairly frequent in Darfur, as much between Arab and Arab as between Arab and Fur, if not more so. Despite a great deal of



theorising, there is no hard evidence that such disputes are any more prevalent now than they were, for example, in 1948/49 when “The premature entry of Western Baggara into Zalingei district before the Fur crops were harvested and the subsequent seizure by the Fur shartais of large numbers of cattle threatened a major clash” and the ‘peace of Southern District was threatened by unnecessary and vexatious boundary disputes between Habbania and Rizeiqat, Habbania and Beigo, and Taaisha and Gimr”. In the same year “two big tribal fights were tried by special courts’.

The critical difference, between the 1940’s and the 1980’s lies in the fact that in those earlier years the administration put considerable if not first importance on strengthening the mechanisms necessary to deal with disputes: the police, the tribal administration and the judiciary. In the 1980’s by contrast, the various administrations have looked upon the maintenance of law and order as a residual: something to be dealt with only when it forces itself on their attention as a result of major clashes.

The attitude towards understanding the tribes is a case in point. To the Condominium authorities intelligence about the tribes had considerable importance: for good reason as much of their problems came from that direction. Perhaps it was inevitable that the post-independence regimes should see tribalism as a relic of colonialism, of something best ignored in a modern state. They are now paying the price of their own weakness in the face of traditional structures that are more flexible and more powerful than many are willing to accept. This is not to say that there are not strong modern pressures on the tribes but rather that those pressures still find their expression within the tribal framework and, more surprisingly, may still be most effectively dealt with in that framework.

The easiest key to the complex of ethnic and tribal groups that make up Darfur is language. The most important divide runs between the tribes who consider themselves Arab and who speak nothing but Arabic and the tribes who either speak a non-Arabic language or who have a clear memory of doing so. I shall refer to them as Arabs and Non-Arabs. Very roughly, South Darfur is the territory of the Arabs and West and North Darfur are predominantly Non-Arab.

Tribal boundaries in Darfur are as porous as anywhere else. Individuals, groups, even whole clans drift from one tribe to another as best suits their circumstances. Despite the strong preference for cousin-marriage, cross tribal marriages are very frequent. In this sense the division between Arab and Non-Arab is a tribal boundary, no different from that between one Arab tribe and another, In times of peace, for example, social relations between the Fur and neighbouring Arab tribes are close and marriages between them common. Nevertheless, the Arab/Non-Arab divide is an~ important political fact. Much of what has happened centres on a struggle for political power at the regional and even the national level between politicians representing the two groups. The use by the Arabs of the somewhat pejorative term ‘zarqa’, the blues for the darker non-Arab peoples indicates that a racial element is also present, although not perhaps strong.



There are six major Arab tribes, running from the eastern side of S. Darfur they are the Rizeiqat and north of them the Ma'aliya, the Habbania, the Fellata, the Bani Halba and the Ta'aisha. There are smaller Arab groups in North as well as South Darfur: Messiriya and others in the south, Beni Husein and various camel-owning tribes in the north.

The Fur are by far the largest single tribe, Arab or Non-Arab. After them, among the latter group, come the Masalit in the far west, the Zaghawa, the Tama and the Gimr in the north-west. The Berti stretch over most of the north-east while the Meidob occupy Jebel Meidob in the far north-east. Smaller groups include the Daju, the Beigo and the Birgid all of whom are based in the area between Jebel Marra and the Kordofan boundary while there are offshoots of the Masalit and the Gimr in the Arab heartland of South Darfur.

Two key points must be made. It is false to equate Arab with nomad and Non-Arab with settled farmer. Even though Baggara means cattlemen, at least one of the major Baggara tribes, the Habbania, were described as principally farmers as early as 1905. More recently some Fur have taken up nomadic cattle management while the Zaghawa in particular are large camel-owners. Second, everyone is Muslim and has been for a long time: the Fur were by tradition converted as early as the 16th century.

## 2. THE EVOLUTION OF TRIBAL ADMINISTRATION

The Arabic term 'Idara Ahlia' is variously translated as Native Administration or Tribal Administration. The most correct translation might be Civil Administration. As most of my discussion revolves around tribes and the way they work I shall stick with the second term: tribal administration. This was the system of devolved powers that represented the Condominium authorities' solution to the problem of local administration, in a country with almost no state structure.

### 2.1 PRE-CONDOMINIUM 'WARLORDS'

It is sometimes suggested that the Condominium created tribal administration in its entirety and that the power of its leading figures was a creation of the colonial state. While this may have been true in some cases, it is not the whole story by any means. It is difficult to judge to what extent the institutions that went to make up the tribal administration had their roots in the Mahdia, in the Turco-Egyptian regime after 1821 or even before that, but roots they certainly had. Some British writers, following the standard line of the early condominium, suggest that tribal structures were "highly developed and organised" even before the Turco-Egyptian conquest of 1821 but that these had collapsed under the Mahdia.

Certainly the Fur state had some developed structures, if only to ensure that the state could put armies in the field. The term Maqdamate used by the British in Darfur derives from the Fur title Maqdam for example. Similarly, the position of Nazir, the supreme head of an Arab tribe was recognised and possibly strengthened during the Turco-Egyptian period. And some



of the major actors who became leading figures within the tribal administration were influential well before. The Madibbu family, at the head of the Rizeiqat, appear in virtually every period from the days when they were harrying Slatin Pasha around South Darfur in the 19th century up until their presence in the Sudanese cabinets of Sadiq El Mahdi. Similarly. Ali Senusi, Nazir of the Ta'aisha was a Malik and brother-in-law to the Sultan Ali Diner before the conquest of Darfur in 1916, when it was he who reportedly betrayed him to the British at the end.

## 2.2 THE CONDOMINIUM

It is worth remembering that it was not a foregone conclusion that the British administrators of Sudan would adopt a system like the Tribal Administration even though it paralleled similar models elsewhere. In the early years of the Condominium, the government was concerned about the possibility of tribal or religious uprisings above all else. For that reason, it did not initially encourage the reestablishment of the large tribal federations which had collapsed during the Mahdia because they might pose a military or political threat. Only the Kababish and Shukria were favoured exceptions, presumably because of their opposition to the Mahdia.

Instead of tribal administration, the policy at this early stage was to establish a more bureaucratic system with British, Egyptian and selected Sudanese officials managing smaller units. The tribal shaykhs were only involved at the lowest levels but they were poorly paid and “unpopular and ineffective”.

There were three reasons for the change away from this policy once the government had more confidence in its military and political control: cost, the need to dispense with Egyptian administrators for political reasons and a more theoretical shift in policy. The latter sprang from the Milner report of 1921 which laid down the principle of leaving administration in the hands of “native authorities” for “economy and efficiency”. Even then, there was also some recognition of a need to contemplate the approach of independence and to develop local institutions towards that day.

Between 1921 and 1931, various ordinances were issued both extending the areas covered and the powers of the tribal leaders. It is clear that, as far as the British were concerned, tribal administration based on these ordinances was a considerable success. The series of extensions granted during that decade reflected their wish to exploit that success rather than any preconceived plan. They had not expected to go so far in the beginning but “Experience of the working of the limited native machinery permitted by the (1921) Ordinance had engendered a widespread conviction that its scope should be greatly extended.” By the end they felt, to quote, that “Native Administration has proved infinitely adaptable and not merely an interesting survival convenient for dealing with backward areas.”

Although described as an Administration, the basis for the system was in fact judicial. “The ordinances dealt with the judicial side only; but their increasing elasticity and the augmented



powers of punishment were expressly designed to rebuild and strengthen the whole structure of native administration.” Nevertheless, executive devolution followed rapidly, especially in the west of Sudan, even though it was “not expressly authorised by any enactments”. The result was that “In Western Kordofan it has been possible to dispense completely with three sub-district headquarters and their whole classified staff.”

This question of sub-district headquarters it may be noted is, like many other issues of tribal administration, still critical today. One of the most depressing features of travelling rural Darfur is arriving at semi-derelict and understaffed rural administrative centres and meeting their lonely and demoralised officials, if they have not managed to escape.

Because the whole exercise was very ad hoc, there were almost no rules. The ordinances set the maximum powers allowable but the individual tribal courts differed widely “according to their capacity and local needs, both in powers and procedure.” Similarly, there was no firm division between tribal courts and the Sharia courts. “Some of (the Mohammedan Law Courts) have been closed in places where the success and prestige of the native court had rendered them necessary.” Due credit was given to the “sympathetic attitude of the Government qadi’s” who helped to ease problems over divided jurisdictions and raise the standards of native courts.

Most important of all, however, the government was surprised by the extent to which the introduction of tribal administration led to the formation, or reformation of the larger tribal confederations. The principle of letting the tribal courts win what can only be described as their customers, both from other tribal courts and from the government courts, was recognised from the beginning. However, it was found that there was “insufficient allowance for the tendency of small units to coalesce”. In effect this meant that courts with the ability to command respect for their judgements attracted customers who became, in due course, affiliated to or even members of the tribe the court represented. The Hadendowa were a particularly strong example of this; as were the “Hamar tribe of Kordofan (who) had been a byword for the feebleness of their section chiefs and the inertia of the tribesmen in general. Its federation under a Nazir from the hereditary ruling house produced an almost instantaneous effect.”

The British were not unaware of the drawbacks to tribal administration, in particular the need for some check to the Nazir’s power. “We have made one vital change by introducing Omdas. The previous scheme was a Nazir, supported by his relatives as Mana dib, forming an executive entirely under his control and directly under the Nazir, Sheikhs of the smaller Khasum baits.” The omdas ‘provided a class better able to control a headstrong Nazir than numerous sheikhs’ ... and act as “a barrier against the break up of a tribe under a weak Nazir.”

Emphasis was laid on trying to “maintain the collective responsibility” of the tribe and also on avoiding excessive codification. “It is not necessarily desirable at once to regularise unobjectionable customs” which might, if left alone, evolve to something better. “The sanction of custom itself permits of greater elasticity.



That tribal administration was viewed as a success did not mean that all was peaceful and serene. Regional Governor's reports from the Condominium era abound in major tribal disputes, at least until the end of the second world war. Nor was it equally successful with all tribes: the most notorious case being the Ma'aliya whose Nazir was deposed by the British and who were subordinated to the Rizeiqat. The success lay not in the fact that there were no disputes but rather in the fact that they were controlled and settled in a manner that lasted and that appears to have been generally acceptable. Many of the more recent troubles have reflected the breakdown of decisions arbitrated by the British as long ago as the 1920 s. They have probably lasted better than anyone could reasonably expect.

I have mentioned that at least some colonial administrators saw tribal administration as a first step towards establishing institutions for an independent Sudan. Most would now say that such an evolutionary approach to this end was patronising and demeaning. The colonial power should instead have aimed to establish more modern forms of social organisation that would not have left Sudan so far behind at independence. It was also clear from the beginning that although it was a success in Western Sudan, Tribal Administration was not suited to the more settled, urban societies of riverain Sudan.

Rather belatedly, the British did start to make moves towards more modern structures after the second world war. Since independence there have been several more radical attempts to establish more direct and democratic forms of local administration in Sudan. It has to be admitted, however, that after 36 years of independence the more modern systems have withered away to almost nothing while the tribal administration remains, somewhat battered but still functional. The Fur-Arab dispute I shall be describing later is a good example of that.

### 2.3 INDEPENDENCE

Attempts to find a more modern alternative to tribal administration began well before independence. Elected representative councils were first introduced in the late 1930s as part of an attempt to widen popular participation in local government. However, the colonial emphasis on what was termed the "inevitability of gradualness", on an evolutionary approach, meant that these were run in parallel with the tribal administration and the decision as to which form was encouraged and where depended entirely on a practical decision as to which was the more effective. It was inevitable that the Tribal Administration, which was tainted both as a colonial relic and as an essentially unmodern structure, would come under direct attack after independence and the search for a more democratic form would be stepped up.

J. Howell has described this as the wish for "administration no longer according to the tribe a man belonged to but according to the place in which he lived."

I have not so far mentioned the role of the official Government Service, the District Commissioners and so on. They were however critically important. I shall be arguing that Tribal Administration, for all its strengths, cannot function without some higher authority to



hold the ring, especially to mediate between two different tribal administrations and to ensure that irreconcilable differences within one administration can be dealt with. However, the government administrative service, which was extremely powerful under the colonial regime was, for that very reason vulnerable to attack after independence.

The first strong attack on the tribal administration and the supporting government service came after the October Revolution of 1964. In theory the post of Nazir was abolished and Native Courts were placed under the central judiciary. Inevitably, however the political power of the Nazirs and the ability of the tribal leadership to capture places in the new elected systems meant that these reforms were not fully implemented.

Similarly, after the May revolution of 1969, the tribal administration was finally abolished although in Howell's words once again the 'final death sentence was delayed'. A much more complex representative political structure was also introduced involving village, rural and provincial councils together with the parallel political network of the Sudan Socialist Union.

It would be easy to get lost in the various permutations of councils that have followed. District councils introduced and abolished again. Regional assemblies substituted for provincial councils and so on. Disregarding the details, however, it is clear that the biggest single reason that a system of elected councils failed to take over effectively from the Tribal Administration the frequency with which the system was changed for basically ideological reasons. Had they been allowed to develop in the evolutionary manner preferred by the colonial power and had they been provided with the strong backing the colonial administrators gave the tribal administration they might have performed just as well.

Nevertheless, the most critical weakness lay in a change of emphasis away from the judicial to the administrative. The councils were, during good periods, given clear executive functions over raising local taxes, running local services and so on. The critical judicial area was given far less attention. The Councils did not have judicial powers and the tribal courts continued to function under various different titles. Sometimes the judges were elected, sometimes nominated. Even more critically, their policing powers were not replaced. Additional rural police stations were established but government did not, and probably could not, provide anything like the coverage necessary to deal with so large an area arid so mobile a population.

The result of all this was that by 1982, the possibility of reviving the tribal administration, which would have been unthinkable a few years earlier, was being actively considered. It was not long before various formal measures to do this had been passed. I shall be discussing whether such a revival is feasible in my conclusion but I want to discuss the way tribes work first. For the moment it suffices to say that the tribal leaders tended to discount the moves to a revival, mainly because these were too limited. Their judicial powers were not fully restored and, above all, their policing powers were not restored at all. The levels of pay being offered were far too small to interest energetic and successful leaders, since they were set at around the same levels as government salaries.



### 3. MODERN TRIBAL DISPUTES

If the correct way to interpret what is happening in Darfur today is within the tribal framework, after due allowance for the way modern elements are expressed in that framework, then it is necessary to consider the way tribes work, specifically tribes within the Arabic and Islamic tradition. To an outsider tribes seem to be constantly at war with one another and many would argue that the entire reason people form themselves into tribes is for mutual defence against outside enemies, and to strengthen their ability to compete for resources. There is an alternative view which is that it is dispute mediation which is the be-all and end-all of tribalism, or very near to it.

#### 3.1 THE WAY TRIBES WORK

A brief digression to the Yemen helps explain these ideas. For the ordinary citizen, Yemen is one of the most heavily armed places in the world outside the rougher American cities and Afghanistan. In the 1970's every man carried an automatic rifle in the street, on social visits or when travelling. By reputation the major tribal sheikhs had heavy artillery and tanks. One village I visited during a tribal dispute informed me that they had five artillery pieces, the largest of 108 millimetres, and 16 heavy machine guns. This for a village which had at most two thousand inhabitants.

Yet there were several characteristics that did not make sense. First, the guns were used rather rarely. Perhaps because they were so familiar with them, those who carried them were cautious in their use. Second, the tribesmen were not conspicuously loyal to their tribe. Whole villages would change tribes. Assassinating the sheikh was a popular sport. (The village I mentioned was never attacked because the opposition decided they would rather kill their own sheikh.) Most puzzling of all however was the motivation behind the disputes themselves. In a number of cases, they arose because of a domestic incident within one tribe. A typical example would be where two brothers fell out. One would get killed and the murderer would run to another tribe, who would welcome him in, and furthermore, guarantee him against retribution from his own family. This guarantee would be valid too. If the dead man's family succeeded in killing him, a tribal war would start. This seemed ridiculous. Why should the second tribe get involved at all? They got nothing out of it except problems.

The answer lies in the fact that this is the whole purpose of the tribal system. To offer sanctuary so that parties to a dispute can cool off and to offer the threat of serious escalation if the dispute is not resolved, if not amicably at least finally. The tribe is more important as a mechanism for the resolution of domestic, interpersonal disputes than it is as a means of generating group solidarity against outside threats. And this is the secret of Tribal Administration. By backing the tribal system at its most crucial point, as a judicial system designed to mediate disputes, the colonial power allowed it to develop quite strongly.

Conversely, the post-independence system, informed by democratic ideas, has tended to pervert that and to turn the tribes into competing groups: competing for political status, for



allocations of rationed goods and so on. The allocation of power by democratic election is almost bound to have that effect. Majority tribes will, inevitably, wish to exploit their greater voting power while minority tribes will want to resist.

In the Sudanese context, all these patterns are comprehensively described in Cunnison's book the Baggara Arabs.

### 3.2 LAND AND WATER?

The logical connection between competition for resources, land, water and grazing, and tribal tensions seems so obvious that it is not worth discussing. Nevertheless, I would suggest that it is largely false, at least in Darfur. Firstly, Darfur is relatively abundant in crop land and, in a good year, in grazing. The question of excessive pressure on the range-land is a complex topic. I shall merely say that I regard it as unproven. Second, there are widespread intertribal arrangements to allow the integration of livestock and crop activities. These arrangements are mutually beneficial and their collapse at a time of tribal conflict is probably the largest single cause of economic loss. Typically these arrangements involve farming groups, like the Fur and the Gimr, hiring Arabs to manage their cattle. Thirdly, the continued unplanned drift from North Darfur to South Darfur and the fact that this has happened quite peacefully indicates quite strongly that land is not an issue. When a group of north Darfuris moves south and settles an area within Fur or Arab territory there is little or nothing to pay and arrangements are simple. Similarly, there are many small groups of Baggara Arabs settled and farming in the middle of Fur territory, at least there were until the recent fighting drove them apart.

None of this means that exclusion from land, water or grazing will not be used as a weapon once a tribal war gets under way. Burning of the rangeland is a frequent weapon. What it does mean, however, is that competition for land and water is not the driving force it is usually assumed to be.

### 3.3 TA'AISHA v SALAMAT

Before turning to the Fur-Arab war, two other tribal disputes that took place during the 1980s illustrate the way they develop. The first of these was that between the Ta'aisha and the Salamat around 1982/83. It is a good example of the way an inter-personal dispute can escalate and, at the same time become an expression of old and new tensions.

The Ta'aisha are one of the original Arab tribes of Darfur while the Salamat are usually described as Chadian. A large group of them had been amicably settled in Ta'aisha territory for a considerable time. It appears that the newcomers, the Salamat, were mainly farmers while the Ta'aisha were more involved with cattle, as is the common pattern but the earlier cautions against making too much of this kind of distinction still apply.



The dispute itself started with a single murder. I cannot remember which way round: let us say that a Ta'aishi murdered a Salamat. He duly reported himself to gaol for so doing, as was right and proper. The Salamat were not prepared to accept this and carried out a retaliatory raid killing about eleven Ta'aisha. The final retaliation by the Ta'aisha left more than 40 dead. At this stage government moved in. Some Salamat villages moved away from the area where they were likely to be attacked and the fighting stopped. It was, however, several years before a truce was agreed and for several years there was no local council or administration and a troop of Sudanese army in Rahad El Berdi kept control.

Why did a single murder between two tribes living closely together lead to such a vicious fight? The answer is politics. In essence, the Salamat appear to have seen the introduction of elected councils as an opportunity to escape from their subordinate position as clients of the Ta'aisha. This they did by winning the elections to the local council. They then tried to build on this by demanding the right to their own cattle Damins. In a cattle market the damin stands as guarantor that cattle being sold by members of his tribe are truly theirs and not stolen. For this he receives a fee. The Salamat resented the fact that their cattle were sold under the guarantee of the Ta'aisha damins. Lastly, of course, there was the matter of sugar, that fundamental indicator of political power in Sudan. As controllers of the local council, the Salamat controlled the sugar allocation.

### 3.4 FELLATA v GIMR

Ostensibly, the Fellata-Gimr dispute was about land. An old boundary dispute dating back to the 1920's was resurrected, once again as the result of a series of tit-for-tat raids stemming from an individual murder in about 1984. Government staff commented at the time that it was an indication of government's weakness that the initial murder had not been dealt with swiftly enough to prevent what happened. I have heard similar remarks in Yemen, underlining the point that government's first duty is to step in fast and deal with this kind of incident before it becomes a Casus Belli.

Once again the relationship between the Gimr and the Fellata was a close one. However, it was not one of patron and client like the Ta'aisha and Salamat. The Gimr were principally farmers and many of them had cattle hired out to the Fellata, a major nomadic herding tribe. The Fellata's principal route to the dry season grazing of Central Africa lay straight across the Gimr territory. Both sides therefore lost from the dispute. The Gimr had to repossess their cattle and probably sell most of them as it would have been impossible to keep them locally, while the Fellata had to take a long roundabout route to Central Africa.

So why did they fight? Once again the answer lay in electoral politics. The land under dispute belonged, at least since the 1920s settlement, to the Gimr but it was farmed by Fellata. The question was which rural council did they vote for and, probably more important, which council was going to get their sugar ration: the Gimr council at Katila or the Fellata at Tullus.



#### 4. FUR VERSUS ARAB OR GOVERNMENT VERSUS PEOPLE

The Fur-Arab war of the late 1980's was far more similar to the tribal disputes of the Ta'aisha-Salamat and Gimr-Fellata writ large than it was to the war in south Sudan; critically so in that government was by and large genuinely neutral. There were, however, two differences between the situation in 1987 and that in the earlier 1980s. First there was a democratic government in Khartoum. Second there had been a considerable worsening of public security; both cattle raiding and armed truck-robberies were becoming commonplace. Although there were some other ramifications, this banditry was the main way in which Chadian problems overflowed into Darfur.

##### 4.1 MAHDIA AND CONDOMINIUM

Although relations between Fur and Arab were good for most of the Condominium and independence periods, tensions between the two groups have strong historical roots. The Fur Sultanate was not able to impose its will on the Arab tribes for long but it was not for want of trying. Both the Bani Halba and the Ma'aliya have traditions which tell of their having to leave Darfur in order to escape the Fur.

However, it was not until the Mahdia that the Arabs saw the possibility of facing the Fur on equal terms rather than merely avoiding their pressure, of actually aspiring to control of the region as a whole. The leading role played by the Baggara Arabs in the Mahdia inevitably gave them opportunities they had not seen before. Various Nazirs tried to exploit this, most notably Madibbu of the Rizeiqat and Senussi of the Tasisha.

However, the Mahdia period also saw the first occurrence of what has been a recurring problem for the Arabs: an inability to unite. Instead of remaining loyal to the Mahdist governors and so consolidating Arab control of the region, many of them came to treat the Mahdist regime as they had done the Sultanate: resisting when possible and only submitting when necessary.

The result was that Ali Dinar had relatively little difficulty re-establishing the Fur sultanate despite the fact that he had rival contenders among the Fur to deal with as well as the Arabs.

In the modern era when the Mahdist movement has developed into the largest single political party in Sudan the Darfur Arabs have gained the advantage over the Fur in terms of their influence on the central political scene, or at least they have tried to exploit such an advantage. The modern era has also handed another advantage to the Arabs. Economically, the opportunities created by trade and development in Sudan have tended to favour South rather than North Darfur. This is best seen in the rapidity with which Nyala has outstripped El Fasher as the trading centre of the region.



## 4.2 THE DEREIJ ERA

Many of these tendencies came to a head at the time of the Numeiri regionalisation in 1981. Until then North and South Darfur were treated as more or less independent provinces. Now they are joined as one region, with a regional assembly and a regional governor based in El Fasher. Numeiri's first appointment as Regional Governor was rejected by the Darfuris and in his place he appointed Sd/ Ahmad Dereij, a very senior and influential Fur politician who had been a minister in pre-Numeiri governments. Since the May 1969 revolution he had spent most of his time overseas and by repute making a considerable fortune.

Many Darfuris from the Arab side and even some from the Fur side date the start of the problems from the rule of Ahmad Dereij. At first, his administration was reasonably well balanced in tribal terms: Sd/ Yusuf Takana, his Regional Minister of Agriculture was a Habbania and the Provincial Commissioner for South Darfur was a Rizeiqi Ex-General and there were several other Arabs in prominent places. The problems started from the elections for Regional Governor held in 1982, which appeared to an outsider to be a classic example of the fatal Arab tendency to compete with the Fur individually, not as a group. Instead of one Arab candidate to face Dereij, there were three or four and their vote was split. Among those candidates were members of Dereij's earlier administration which meant that the tribal balance of the administration was broken. Non-Arab groups, not just the Fur but notably the Zaghawa as well were more prominent in latter ministerial appointments.

As an outsider it would be quite wrong to try and judge who was in the right and who in the wrong over this. There were undoubtedly provocations from both sides. On the one occasion I heard Dereij speak it seemed to me that he was making at least some attempt to be conciliatory but this was late in his governorship, shortly before he disappeared into exile under rather mysterious circumstances. The key point is that the major cleavage between Arab and Non-Arab, between North Darfur and South became a live issue once again. Local people put it more bluntly, saying that Ahmad Dereij reintroduced the tribal issue to Darfur.

However, it was not until democratic politics revived at the national level, after the 1985 coup, that the full effect of this began to be felt. Various prominent Arab Darfuris won national ministries. This was not enough to satisfy Arab aspirations in Darfur itself, where the government seems to have attempted to ensure some degree of balance in the administration. The result was the famous 'Arab Letter' of 1987. This letter was addressed to Sadiq El Mahdi as prime minister and was a topic of much discussion at the time. It purported to be signed by a large number of Darfuri Arab leaders, including some who claimed not to have actually signed it. It appears that the letter represented a fairly straightforward claim on Sadiq as an Arab and as leader of the Ansar to redress the balance in Darfur in favour of the Arabs. This was summed up in the sentence "You are our brother and one expects more from a brother than from other people".

It was not apparent that this appeal had any direct effect. The Fur continued to be well represented in the Regional Ministry, most notably by Tijani Seisei, who was Regional Minister of Finance and ultimately became Regional Governor until he was imprisoned in the



1989 coup. Sadiq became so unpopular in the Arab parts of South Darfur that he was more or less driven out of Nyala when he visited it in 1987. By contrast, the visit of Omar Nur El Daim, when Minister of Agriculture in Sadiq's government, to the Fur town of Zalingei was politely, if fairly unenthusiastically received.

The indirect effect of the letter was considerable. It created an atmosphere of distrust between Fur and Arab. Most important of all, it made it difficult if not impossible for the democratic politicians of Sadiq's ministry to act effectively as arbitrators of the dispute between the two groups. Not, it has to be said that they showed much sign of wishing to do so.

#### 4.3 THE WAR

To tell the history of the fighting between the Arab and the Fur, raid by raid or village burnt by village burnt would take too long because this was a very lengthy, bitter and wide ranging dispute. It was not a civil war but that is not to deny that it was quite vicious and very damaging. It would, in any case be impossible to list every incident. They were very numerous, especially the smaller ones, and there was a considerable amount of fighting in remote areas. What follows consists of a fairly brief history and a discussion of a number of the significant major events in an attempt to use these to explain what was happening.

It is difficult to know where to start because there is no doubt that things had been building up at least since early 1987 and possibly even earlier and also because it is difficult to identify where straightforward banditry changed into something more serious. The Jebel Marra Project was involved in promoting camel ploughing and an early indication of deteriorating conditions was the fact that the farmers lost interest in this because the risk of having the camel rustled, or the cost of making sure it was not, became too great. Similarly, one or two villages were abandoned in more remote and vulnerable areas quite early on: Keibi, for example, on the lowlands west of Jebel Marra.

The first big attack was on villages on the northern highlands of the Jebel itself, North of Golo. Some nine Fur villages were burnt and abandoned in this area. This happened in mid-1987 and there were almost certainly a series of tit-for-tat incidents leading up to it.

The 1987/88 dry season saw a number of incidents. Some of these were cattle raids but direct tribal clashes were becoming frequent. As far as the cattle raids were concerned, I should perhaps again emphasise the point that it is false to regard the Fur as farmers pure and simple and the Arabs as stock owning nomads. The Fur own considerable numbers of cattle and this was where they were most vulnerable. A very great deal of what happened sprang out of raids on Fur cattle and their attempts to get them back. Similarly, the Arabs were most vulnerable to the Fur where they were settled and farming.

Perhaps the firmest indicator of a major escalation was the start of extensive commandeering of vehicles from the large development projects in the region. This began to happen frequently in May and June 1988. At this stage it still appeared to be mainly in response to banditry. Nevertheless, more serious incidents were also occurring, especially in the direction



of Kas, and most significantly of all perhaps, a major Fur attack on an Arab Fariq, an attack which appeared to be quite closely linked to the Shartai of Nyertete, who was arrested.

After an interval for the rainy season, the dry season at the end of 1988 started very tense and the situation rapidly deteriorated. The Jebel Marra project had to close some extension stations. For example, Tibi south of Jebel Marra, was not attacked but the people fled to larger villages nearby where they felt safer although they were still returning to harvest their crops. At other places, outlying villages were abandoned although the larger central village was not. At Umm Haraz west of Jebel Marra an Extension Agent who was supposed to cover six villages had only three. The other three had been abandoned. Although the majority of these abandoned hamlets were Fur, there were also some Arab ones, Goz Mitti near Gurnei for example.

Most of these movements in autumn 1988 were around the Jebel itself, reflecting the fact that it was the stretch between Kabkabiya and Kas, including the high Jebel where the dispute had its longest history. In November everything escalated and spread quite rapidly. Artalla and Wustani, two large villages on the south-eastern boundary between the Fur and the Bani Halba, were burnt. Kabar, further west was attacked and the Shartai killed, and several other villages in this southern belt were attacked. By January 1989, areas to the west of Garsila were also being attacked: Amar Jadid, Kujubari and others.

February saw perhaps the first acknowledgement from the authorities that there was a major problem, when they arrested a number of leading members of both sides. That the arrests were symbolic was shown by the fact that exactly 10 Fur and 10 Arabs were arrested in Zalingei. It is also worth noting that those arrested were not, by and large, the senior tribal leaders but rather those members of each group who were known to have political aspirations and that they were townspeople. This reflected an increasing belief that the trouble was being incited by the more educated, more modernising members of each side.

Although the weight of the destruction seemed to be very much in the Arab's favour. Arab fariqs were also being attacked. Shortly after the arrests, a Bani Halba fariq was attacked near Uyur and it was widely reported that merchant's landrovers from Zalingei were involved: confirming the suspected link with the towns.

Perhaps the most vicious incident of the whole war, one of the few that appeared to have no motive apart from outright terrorism, took place on 13 February 1989, when four lorries travelling to the big markets at Guldo and Golo were attacked and burnt. 67 passengers were burnt on their lorries. It was reported that this attack was carried out by only 8 men on camels dressed in Army uniform. Surprisingly, it was generally accepted that they were not actually from the army but rather were deliberately masquerading as such.

The next incident which illustrates how difficult it is to interpret what was happening would appear to be very similar to the Guldo lorry attack. This was on 3 March when a bus on the Nyala-Zalingei road was stopped and some Arab passengers beaten up. The Arab wife of one government official was one but it illustrates the close relations between all groups that she was saved by the intervention of another Fur member of government staff. It would be easy to



interpret this as another deliberate terror attack. In fact, it was reported that the bus had merely got caught in a running fight between local Arab and Fur which happened to spill over the road at just the wrong time.

March saw one of the first major army involvements when they intervened in yet another clash between Arab and Fur. The Fur resisted more strongly and more than forty were killed.

It was May, however, that saw the final and most widespread series of attacks. These started near Umm Shalaya in the west and two days later Gin and Kargula, two important villages very near to Zalingei were attacked and the Fur Shartai at Kurgula killed. At around the same time there were some heavy attacks in the far south of the area as well.

The importance of these latest attacks was underlined by the fact the Regional Governor had spend the Id with the Shartai of Kargula. Central Government finally took an interest, to the extent that the Minister of Interior, at the time Sadiq El Mahdi's nephew and the Minister of Housing. Ismail Abakr, a Darfuri Arab flew in fairly rapidly although their visit was very short and it was generally felt that they had not bothered seeing anyone except a few officials.

By this time, both sides seemed to have concluded that the situation was irretrievable. Arab groups who had been settled in the Fur areas for many years in Wadi Salih had left or were leaving, while the Fur and Arab leaders were negotiating over the 'repatriation' of the fairly large Fur populations in the Bani Halba towns like Kubbum and Idd El Ghanam.

Despite its inertia in the field, Government did start the process of a truce conference in El Fasher in June. Reports seemed to indicate that the conference was not making much progress, although the fighting itself stopped, possibly because the farming season was underway again.

On 30 June the National Salvation Coup overthrew Sadiq El Mahdi's regime and the Regional Government was imprisoned along with the central ministry. Nevertheless, the truce conference continued and reached an agreement, partly because the new government applied pressure and partly because the Fur, in particular, could now accept a truce without loss of face.

In the sense that the number of attacks on villages was greatly reduced the truce was a success. Nevertheless, there remained great tensions especially so after the resumption of large scale cattle raiding in January. The local people were increasingly critical of the Army's inability to catch the raiders. More frequently, it seemed, they merely prevented the owners from doing the job themselves. It seemed highly likely that the Fur would once again assume that the raiders were being assisted by the Arabs and take the appropriate steps. This came to a head on 6 February 1990, when the Fur started a major attack on Arab fariqs around Jebel Gallabat, just south of Zalingei. What prompted them to do this in earshot of the only substantial Army force in the area is a mystery but it did mean that for once the Army was on the spot and a fairly large battle was fought, at least it sounded large in Zalingei.

At about the same time there was a widespread rumour that Ahmad Dereij was in the area undercover, presumably to coordinate the Fur, maybe even to start an uprising. Possibly



because of this the new government's response was swift. The people on the standard, balanced list of Fur and Arab politicians had been released some months previously. They were rearrested and the military governor of Darfur moved to Zalingei and, in effect, reconvened the Truce Conference. As the quote at the beginning of this paper shows, this move has been interpreted as the last stage of governments involvement on the Arab side but it was not. It was a serious and, from all that anyone could see or hear, an entirely genuine attempt to make the truce stick. It was generally agreed that so far insufficient effort had been put into selling the truce to the people and that this was the principal reason behind the renewed violence.

A number of what were termed Truce Committees with both Fur and Arab members were formed which "crossed the length and breadth of the area, passing through the villages and nomad camps, seeking to learn the reasons which had led to the breakdown of the peace agreement and to assess the extent of the damage which had occurred." After nearly a month of the Truce Committees' work and endless discussions and meetings in Zalingei, a final public meeting was held in Zalingei town square in the presence of Tijani Adam Tahir, a senior member of the Khartoum junta, and a final conference meeting was held long after dark in a garden on the Zalingei wadi.

The upshot was a "Report of The Popular Committee for Salvation on the Conference to Secure the Tribal Peace Agreement." This summarised the causes of the breakdown of the peace as follows:

1. The presence of what are called 'militia' on the Fur side and 'Janjawid' on the side of some Arab tribes.
2. Armed robbery in areas of contact between the tribes.
3. Clashes between herders and farmers in areas where there was dissension.
4. The fact that some conditions of the Peace Agreement were not carried out.
5. The closing of the cattle routes and some markets and watering points.
6. The spread of both light and heavy weapons, in the hands of both sides to the conflict.
7. Lack of transport for the security forces and, in some places, their lack of numbers.
8. The presence of foreign elements in the Wadi Salih area.
9. Religious and social unawareness in the districts.
10. The fact that the decisions and recommendations of the Peace Agreement were not communicated to the ordinary people in a convincing fashion.
11. A failure on the part of Government to enforce respect and to impose its authority in the areas of conflict. This was a conspicuous factor leading to the violation of the Peace Agreement.



The Report went on to make 26 detailed recommendations. What is striking about these recommendations is the emphasis on the machinery of law and order and on administration generally:

1. 31 new police stations with better transport and communications and specific patrolling duties.
2. Regular meetings of security committees.
3. A purge of “individuals from the regular forces and from among the officials and workers in the civil service who were in the areas of tribal conflict at the time of the incidents.”
4. “Completion of the organisational pyramid for the regional Tribal Administration, in at most one month”
5. Empty civil service posts to be filled
6. Redefinition of administrative units and re-registration of people in them, especially where refugee Sudanese tribes have settled in new areas. These shall have their own units at the level of Shaykh and omda but be attached to the tribe to which the land belongs at higher levels. Arabs in Fur areas to be counted and the non-Sudanese among them identified. New administrative units to be created where necessary.
7. An increase in the membership of courts in the region to properly represent the tribes.
8. Members of the Tribal Administration to treat all Sudanese citizens on an equal basis without regard to their tribal origin.
9. Six more resident judges
10. A review of the quotas of rationed goods and coordination over the rationed goods for the nomads
11. Regular tribal shows and conferences to stimulate peaceful relations
12. Regular tours by the Regional Popular Committees
13. A regional information service
14. A Peoples Defence force for the Region
15. Chad government forces to be removed from the Tisi area.

These recommendations, which clearly represented the local people’s wishes, seem to place almost the entire emphasis on a need for more effective government power. They reflect almost exactly the same concerns as those of the Colonial power forty years ago: tribal shows, tribal administration, defining of boundaries and justice. Even the idea of regular touring by People’s Committees represents no more than a modernisation of the District Commissioner’s tours of earlier years.

#### 4.4 SPECIFIC EVENTS

The report of the truce conference shows that the local people believe that the major part of the problems between tribes in Darfur spring from relatively minor incidents which become inflated because of an inability to resolve them quickly and which, once inflated, are taken over by tribal, political and other interests. These other pressures will always exist, the goal should be to deprive them of the opportunity to exploit the minor incident by ensuring adequate policing and rapid arbitration.



Three of the Fur-Arab attacks illustrate how this works: Kabar, Mirei and Gin. In all three cases it was acts of commission or omission by the government authorities that set the Fur and Arab against each other. Kabar was attacked and burnt and the Omda was killed not merely because he was a Fur omda but as the upshot of a series of linked events. These arose out of the presence of a group of armed Chadians in the Kabar area, probably part of Ibn Omar's Arab opposition to the then Chadian government. The omda of Kaban was asked by the Sudanese Army to mediate with this Chadian group which he duly did. At the meeting between the Chadians and the Army, it is claimed, the Army betrayed and murdered the Chadians. The destruction of Kabar was in retaliation for this.

At Mirei the story was not dissimilar. The attack was a retaliation for the killing of a Rizeigat-Mahria Sheikh. This man himself was wanted by the government for his involvement in attacks on the Fur on the north side of Jebel Nanra. The story was that he visited the Fur Sheikh in the Mirei area specifically to agree with him that they should not allow the problem on the Jebel, which was some way away, to upset their relations locally. The Fur Sheikh accepted this but the younger Fur, possibly members of the Fur militia; did not. They followed the Rizeigi out of the village and murdered him. Mirei and other villages in the area were burnt in retaliation. Had the authorities made any effort to catch and try the Rizeigi sheikh in the first place none of the events that followed need have happened.

It was probably, inevitable that Gin and Kargula would be attacked as it was at the very worst time of the whole war. Nevertheless, the authorities knew well in advance that there was likely to be an attack and that there had been an incident that would be enough to set the attack off. In that sense it was certainly preventable. The incident, as always, involved cattle theft. In this case the Arabs had lost some animals and had tracked them to the middle of the village. The police had, however, been unable to find a culprit so the situation was just left to develop.

#### 4.5 FUR POLITICS

The Fur appeared to have lost materially considerably more than the Arabs. The terms of the Truce Agreement under, which they were to be paid more, also seemed to show that. Nevertheless, the tone of the Truce Conference in Zalingei seemed to be that the Fur were the most to blame. All along, they were reported as the more reluctant participants in the conference.

On the other hand, many senior Fur appeared willing to take considerable political risks by joining the government before the 1989 coup or the people's committees after the coup. They seemed to be trying to represent the Fur through legitimate channels rather than as an underground resistance. One of my friends for example went to jail three times in under a year: twice for being a suspected Fur ring-leader and once for being Regional Minister at the time of the coup.



Nevertheless, there were undoubtedly Fur who wanted to fight. Presumably they were the younger, more politically active ones who may have wished to undermine the old Fur establishment as well as fight the Arabs. The extremists in this group were the Fur militia. Much has been said about the Arab militias and it has even been suggested that the Arab attacks on the Fur were by government backed militia. Nevertheless, in Zalingei in 1988 and 1989, the word 'militia' meant the Fur. Various senior Fur politicians, notably one regional minister, were reported to be supplying the weapons. The militia also imposed a surcharge on the sugar quotas for the Fur to finance arms purchases and even cut off sugar supplies to non-Fur in their areas to bolster the funds collected. Direct collections were also made, in at least some cases by force. There were murders of Fur by Fur linked to this kind of activity.

Government staff stationed in the countryside could describe nights when the whole village was invited to a meeting apart from himself, as a non-Fur government official and two policemen. Fieldworkers also described training with the militia, not very optionally, or found that the village in which they were stationed was a base for a Fur militia group. This meant that it was duly attacked by the Arabs but also that the attack was beaten off without great loss.

At one stage Fur political resistance became more open with the imposition of boycotts on the roads of Jebel Marra. The Fur were forbidden from selling crops out of the area. This naive and counterproductive measure did not last too long but it was indicative of the forces building up in the Fur community.

#### 4.6 THE SECURITY FORCES

It is normal to think of the military in Sudan, indeed in Africa generally, as rapacious and oppressive and to see any civil disturbance as a popular attempt to resist the military. The sad fact is that as far as the Sudanese army in Zalingei is concerned, it lacks the capability to oppress anyone very much outside its own miserable recruits. It is desperately short of transport and more importantly of the facilities to keep the transport on the road.

For this reason, the security forces depended heavily on development projects in the area for transport throughout the Fur-Arab fighting. It is revealing to look at the way this worked because it says so much about the inability of the local authorities and the security force to provide the people of the area with the service they desperately need: rapid pursuit and apprehension of bandits.

The chain of events was typically as follows: raiders steal Fur cattle and drive them off towards a mountainous area. The Fur villagers set off in pursuit but also send to Zalingei for help from the police or army. The police come to the project to ask for the loan of a car, if they cannot catch one in the street to commandeer. The project reluctantly agrees. The car is fuelled up, picks up the soldiers and goes to the suq to buy supplies. It finally leaves. It arrives at the raiders starting point at least 24 hours after the raid. Nevertheless, they set off in pursuit and overtake the Fur posse if it has not already attacked the first Arab fariq it found. It then follows on the trail of the raiders, sometimes for days but it almost never catches them



before they reach a mountainous area where it becomes too steep for vehicles and they must stop. At which point they all turn round and come home again.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the security forces ability to be where the action was not was the fact that although they had at one point over twenty commandeered vehicles they were all returned undamaged except by crashes. Not once did they get a bullet hole.

The management of the development projects faced a considerable dilemma. This was not merely because they were, as a government organisations, obliged to cooperate with the security forces but also because they needed the security forces to succeed. Project staff were in the field and project success depended on there being peace in the area. Although outsiders found this very difficult to believe, the army was not, in this case, the oppressor and the people of the area were grateful rather than otherwise for project assistance to them; not unfortunately that it made a great deal of difference.

## 5. CONCLUSION

What can one conclude from all of this? Three points stand out:

1. That there is no conspiracy to oppress the Fur, to take their land for the Arabs and so on. Instead there is a very substantial mess of different interests which are not actually unmanageable but that are not being managed because of the near collapse of governments ability to do anything more than the wholly routine.
2. That there is a mixture of old and new elements being expressed in the old tribal framework. That framework is also capable of generating an acceptable solution but only if it is backed up by an energetic and acceptably unbiased administration.
3. Given this, the question arises of whether the Tribal Administration can be revived? There is no simple answer to this. The threats to the Tribal Administration are obvious: urbanisation, commercialisation and the growing force of the educated young. On the other hand it appears to be more alive than any other institution in Darfur at the moment and the constraints that led the British to support and develop it remain: a lack of resources to impose a more modern approach and the absence of any other viable forms developing naturally.

For all its relative vitality compared to the other institutions of administration in Darfur, the fact remains that the Tribal Administration cannot function without some central, overriding power which can give it direction and mediate between its different parts. In the end; the problem comes back to central government. There seems, unfortunately, little reason to hope for a central government, be it democratic or military, that has the drive and ability to take on that role. The sad conclusion is that there is little or no choice in Western Sudan. The most likely outcome is No Administration.

*The author of this article, James Morton, worked for much of the 1980's in Western Sudan, in a variety of capacities.*